The Business of Blogging

- The balancing act of social and commercial aspects

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Executive Summary

As there has been an increase in the commercialization of blogs in recent years and an increased focus on lifestyle tendencies, our study investigates whether the commercial focus will diminish the effect of blogging, that is, the personal recommendation aspect. Consequently, the purpose of the study is to assess the success criteria of blogging when balancing social and commercial aspects.

The study is based on qualitative and quantitative data collection, through interviews with bloggers and experts within the industry, as well as an online consumer survey. By means of two main theories, one within social psychology by Susan T. Fiske (2010) and second, a template to assess the business components of a blog by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010), we evaluate the balance between social and commercial aspects.

Through our analysis, we found that the personality of a blogger is key in order to appear credible and authentic which is essential in order to attract both readers and key partners. Our study concludes that it is the interplay between all key players which provides the basis for a successful blog balancing social and commercial aspects, and thus, the essential success criteria of a blog are based on each of the key players benefits and outcomes.
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Introduction: Motivation Behind our Study

In recent years, there has been an increasing commercialization of blogs; therefore, we find it interesting to look at the blogging industry in Denmark. Our study will focus solely on blogs connected to the lifestyle industry, as these types of blogs have the highest commercial potential (Finnedal, 2011). The potential is caused by tendencies of an increasing interest within the fields of design, interior design, food, travel, health, beauty, fitness and fashion (Dansk Erhverv, 2014).

Due to the rising interest in lifestyle tendencies in Denmark (Dansk Erhverv, 2014), an increasing number of companies and PR agencies have slowly realized the power of using blogs as a way of communicating and enhancing a brand’s visibility and consumer awareness (Danmarks Statistik, 2015: It-anvendelse i virksomheder 2014). As a result of the great commercial potential, we wonder whether the commercial aspect with time will ruin the attraction that has drawn people to blogs in the first place. Is it possible to maintain the social aspect derived from the feeling of the personal and authentic, and simultaneously make a profit? Provided that this is successfully managed, how is this achieved?

Field of study

The problem statement of this study derive from an already existing number of studies on the business of blogging. The focus of these studies has been on the economic aspects of commercial blogging in recent years. We have noticed two things, which are: 1) The lack of focus on the fundamental reason behind the interaction of blogs, that is, the social aspect. 2) The majority of the existing academic studies on blogging determine the success criteria of blogs before investigating the validity of these claims (Arnardóttir, 2013) (Løken & Haugen, 2013).

This inspired us to further investigate the statements in online articles about the success of blogging. In doing so, we found it crucial to consider the social aspects, and not just the business opportunities that follow (the commercial aspects). In other words, it is crucial to understand the motives behind blogging and business before assessing the overall success criteria of commercial aspects within blogging.
Based on our field of study and data presented, we will work with the following research question:

**Which success criteria are essential in order to create a successful blog when including the balancing of social and commercial aspects?**

**Brief overview of the structure**

This study is structured as follows: In the first chapter, we will introduce the blog phenomenon, in order to understand the concept behind blogging. The second chapter will introduce our methodological approach, focusing on hermeneutic understanding and how our research is interpreted through the principle of the hermeneutic circle. The third chapter consists of the *Methodology* behind our study, including the process of collecting data, data analysis and the overall validation and reliability of such. The fourth chapter, *Theory*, has the purpose of defining the theories we will apply when analyzing the social and commercial aspects of blogging. Based on the theories selected, the fifth chapter, *Analysis*, will be divided into three separate parts; Social, Commerce and Balancing Social & Commerce, and end with a partial conclusion of our findings. This leads us to the sixth and concluding chapter, which summarizes the main findings throughout our analyses. As our conclusion reflects back on the findings from the analyses, the final two chapters present a *discussion* based on issues emerged from our analyses, and *Future Prospects* concerning the future challenges and opportunities within the blogosphere.
Chapter 1: Background of The Blog Phenomenon

Human beings have always had the need for being heard; therefore, it is assumed that the human being naturally manifests itself when the opportunity arises (Labrecquea, Markosb, & Milnec, 2011). However, it is not merely due to human beings’ need for self-expression that the blog phenomenon came into existence. Another reason is a result of the technological developments, which lead to the emergence of the Internet and social media platforms. Without these developments the blogosphere would not have come into existence.

As a result, we find it relevant to establish the background of the blog phenomenon by answering three questions: How did the phenomenon of blogging arise? What is the definition of a blog? And how has blogging evolved over time?

How did the phenomenon of blogging arise?

Web 2.0 emerged in 2004, which is termed “the new digital democracy”, referring to a collaboration of ideas on a global reach. There has been an extreme transformation of the Internet structure resulting in a fundamental shift from information reception to information production and sharing. (Grossman, 2006 as cited in Han, 2012) For instance, for many years, newspapers were the only way for people to receive news from around the world, and therefore people willingly paid and waited for their daily newspaper. Today, the concept of information reception and journalism has changed; news is easily obtainable online for free and everyone can be their own and everyone else’s journalist via social media. (DR, 2009) Thus, the way in which people like to receive their news has changed, from professional journalism to personal recommendations by ordinary people. As such, web 2.0 has changed the way we communicate. It allows us to communicate beyond borders and across time in a global framework, which the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells terms the network society. The network society is initiated in the Information Age that is characterized by clusters of people constituting networks and information flows, which is a consequence of globalization. (Siapera, 2012: 13-16, 41-44) Hence, a common factor of the network society is that it is user generated. An explosion of user generated content resulting in user generated platforms meets a rising need for self-expression, individual creativity and connections between like-minded people (Siapera, 2012: 53). The conditions described by Castells bring on the birth of the blog phenomenon as we know it today (Rettberg, 2008), resulting in the blogosphere. As such, a
definition of the blogosphere is a collection of all blogs clustered in online networks (Fieseler, Fleck & Meckel, 2010: 1).

What is the definition of a blog?

'Blog' is an abbreviation of ‘weblog’, which is a contraction of the words ‘web’ and ‘log’. There is no final definition of a blog; however, certain characteristics may be used to describe a blog. Firstly, the tone and style are generally more informal than for other media, as it reflects a diary-like style. Secondly, the blogger takes on a persona which suggests intimacy and personal style, making each blog unique. Finally, blogs can range from the personal to the political and can focus on one narrow subject or a whole range of subjects. (Goldstein, 2009)

How has blogging evolved over time?

The range of blogs has evolved significantly since its inception with the invention of the first personal blog Links.net by Justin Hall in 1994. In 1997 Jorn Barger introduced the term ‘weblog’ and blogging has changed immensely since then (Thompson, 2006).

Blog numbers have grown explosively since the inception of blogging. The number of personal blogs intensified in the years between 2001 and 2005, as most of the widely read blogs were introduced during this time. (Kabadayi, 2014)

The platform Technorati, which provides daily analytics of the blogosphere, reports that the “State of the Blogosphere Research” conducted in 2009, proves that 72 percent of all bloggers start as amateurs or hobbyists, mainly blogging for fun. Nonetheless, in recent years, there has been a switch back to professional blogging focusing on brand advertising. (Technorati 2009 as cited in Siapera, 2012: 53) In this context, a relatively new form of commerce, which combines social interactions and user contributions with commercial activities, has emerged in today’s notion of social commerce (Wang & Zhang, 2012). Thus, blogging is moving from being a primarily social platform to having a more commercial focus.

Social commerce was first introduced in 2005, converging social networking and shopping activities through social media. Social commerce is refered to as the upgraded version of e-commerce or the "referral economy". (Harkin, 2007 as cited in Wang & Zhang, 2012: 3) Inspiration and product discovery are the keywords within social commerce. As such, the Internet allows consumers to browse and connect to other people that are interested in the same products and services; and companies are eager to turn this interest into sales. (Smith,
The understanding and insight of the blog phenomenon, will enable us to obtain an understanding of our field of study that will be reflected throughout the subsequent chapters.
Chapter 2: Theory of Science - Hermeneutics

In our study, we find it useful to make our preferences clear, as we all have diverse views of what is real, what can be known, and how facts can be presented. As a result, our basic approach to our field of study can be characterized as hermeneutics (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 4). In the following, we will introduce our focus on the hermeneutic understanding and how our research is interpreted through the principle of the hermeneutic circle. Our hermeneutics understanding is based on two main theorists, who are, Steiner Kvale & Svend Brinkmann (2008) and Matthew B. Miles & Michael Huberman (1994). Further, we apply Lars Fuglsang & Poul B. Olsen (2009), as a general work of reference.

**Hermeneutic methodology**

Hermeneutics is the main form of interpretivism, which is the discipline of interpretation. An interpretivist’s approach is the opposite of the positivistic approach used in the natural sciences (Miles et al. 1994: 8). According to Miles & Huberman (1994), interpretivists argue that positivistic approaches, which attempt to identify universal and law-like features of humanhood, society and history in order to provide context-independent causal explanations, are not suited for the social sciences. The reason behind this statement is that the world of social behavior can quite simply not be explained by invariant causal laws and must rather be understood (not explained) through human understanding and the lenses of a hermeneutic method (Miles et al. 1994). Thus, human activity and human behavior must be considered individually with connection to the relevant context and not as a generalization of the human condition. One must understand each individual separately in order to get valuable insight into contextual social settings (Miles et al. 1994). As such, we will apply a hermeneutic and interpretivist approach in order to seek practical meaning and understanding (Miles et al. 1994), and thus, not to conclude a law-like explanation, but rather attempt to achieve a contextual understanding of a particular phenomenon through the analysis of interpretation and construction of meaning.

Methodologically and philosophically, interpretivism also entails what might be called subjectivism. According to Miles & Huberman (1994: 8), this means that we, as researchers, have our own understandings, convictions and conceptual orientations, which will affect how we interpret and observe the field. (Miles et al. 1994) In epistemological terms, this means
that we are part of what is being researched, and therefore cannot be separated from this, consequently leaving us subjective. We therefore need to take an empathetic position in order to enter the world of our research subjects and to understand this world from their perspectives, but also being aware of our own bias and how this influences the interpretations we make. In short, hermeneutics commits us to the realization that we are bound by our initial understanding, but also to go beyond this initial standpoint by actively seeking to understand the world as it appears in the eyes of others (Henriette Højbjerg as cited in Fuglsang et al. 2009: 338-339). According to Miles & Huberman (1994: 8), it becomes an analytical problem if researchers only base their research on few informants, as it will be more difficult to separate the information from our own initial understanding of the field. For that reason, our study is based on a variation of ten different informants and a consumer survey with the purpose of challenging our biases of the field; however, this will be further elaborated in our sampling process in the next chapter, Methodology. These biases are to some extend helpful, as they give us an empirical starting point, but must also be challenged by actively trying to understand something new, that is, giving us insight into the balancing act of social and commercial aspects in blogging, as will be further explained in the next chapter. Thus, seeking to achieve such understanding, even if incomplete, is the ideal of hermeneutics (Miles et al. 1994).

The hermeneutical circle
The hermeneutical circle denotes the effect in which the individual parts of something contribute to a new understanding of the whole, which again contributes to new understanding of the individual parts. Thus, it is the connection between the parts and the whole that creates meaning. (Henriette Højbjerg as cited in Fuglsang et al. 2009: 312) As Fuglsang & Olsen (2009) describes hermeneutics from a philosophical point of view, we will approach our field of study armed with principles of the hermeneutical circle, combined with the methodological and practical approach, by means of Kvale & Brinkmann (2008).

In ontological terms, Fuglsang & Olsen (2009) describes the hermeneutical circle as a never-ending process. The complete understanding of other individuals and of a particular set of social circumstances always remains, to some degree, incomplete. In practice, however, Kvale & Brinkmann (2008: 233) state that it ends by the time a reasonable interpretation is reached without any rational contradictions and when the texts are self-sufficient within their own
frame of reference. Meaning that, in our case, a reasonable interpretation occurs when we are able to understand the balancing act of social and commercial aspect in blogs.

In the next chapter, we will apply the principles of hermeneutics to our methodological approach of our research design, in order to utilize it in practice with the aim of answering our research question.
Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, we will outline the methodology behind our study, that is, how we have collected primary and secondary data throughout our research and how this data has been sampled and processed. After having gone through our data collection process, we will discuss the ethical limits when presenting economic issues. Furthermore, we will introduce our key informants based on two main criteria: validity and quality. Also, this chapter will elaborate on the method used to further interpret and analyze our qualitative and quantitative data, hereunder, using meaning condensation and theories. Finally, we will sum up the methodology of our study by an evaluation of validation and reliability.

Theoretical approach to our methodology

In this methodological chapter, we will mainly apply two theoretical approaches by Steiner Kvale & Svend Brinkmann (2008) and Matthew B. Miles & Michael Huberman (1994), respectively. We will apply Kvale & Brinkmann (2008) when illustrating how we have collected our qualitative data through interviews, and Miles & Huberman (1994) when clarifying our analytical approach of our data collection. When identifying our analytical approach through interviews, however, we will also combine principles by Kvale & Brinkman’s (1994), as our treatment of the interviews is better explained using Kvale & Brinkmans principles of meanings condensation. Further, as Kvale & Brinkmann (2008) merely focus on qualitative research through interviews, we will apply Andrea Fontana & Anastasia H. Prokos (2007) and Robert Groves et al. (2009) when explaining our approach to electronic interviews and consumer survey, respectively.

Presumptions when entering the field

Based on secondary data collected through various articles, books and video links, we went to the field with three different hypotheses on the blog phenomenon.

1) The commercial aspects in blogs will diminish the blogs’ potential of prospering.

2) Bloggers who choose to be independent have a higher likelihood of creating a successful blog than those who are part of a blog network.
3) Bloggers who blog to fulfill own purposes are more likely to attract consumers and business partners.

As illustrated above, we as researchers went to the field of study with presumptions of what a successful blog entails. As such, the hypotheses represent the presumptions which we enter our study, and should therefore not be confused with a positivistic approach (Fuglsang et al. 2009: 17). Having said that, we are highly aware that presumptions can be concealed and unconscious to our knowledge. However, the hypotheses are applied to enhance our understanding of our primary data, to help us stay within our conceptual framework, and thus, direct us towards answering our research question.

In order to challenge our original understanding of our hypotheses, we found it necessary to collect primary data from bloggers, experts within the industry and consumers within lifestyle blogging. Before describing our approach to collecting primary and secondary data, we will describe the sampling process, which lead to our data collection.

The sampling process

Sampling is crucial in all research, simply because it is not possible to examine everyone, everywhere doing everything (Miles et al. 1994: 27). To ensure that our samples were purposive and thought-through, we set up a sampling frame, prior to our data collection, guided by our research question and conceptual framework. As such, our selected sampling is focused around design, interior, food, health, fitness and fashion. Furthermore, our sampling consists of a broad range of informants including both novice and experienced bloggers, as well as people who blog mostly as a part time occupation and people who make a living out of it. All informants were selected with the purpose of giving a representative illustration of a successful blog within the lifestyle domain. A more detailed description of the informants will be given later in this chapter.

In this study, our sample consists of qualitative data, representing a multiple case sample strategy. We found ten samples to be a reasonable amount, as 15 samples or more would become too complex and unwieldy according to Miles & Huberman (1994: 30). The ten samples include informants such as bloggers and experts within lifestyle. We purposely
selected a variation, allowing us to better compare the informants, which is termed a *stratified purposeful* sampling strategy; combined with a *criterion* sampling strategy, that is, ensuring that we meet certain criteria in our sampling selection process. (Miles et al. 1994: 28) For example, we selected bloggers who were all making a profit and blog readers who read blogs within the selected subject areas. In other words, by looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand the success criteria of a blog.

According to Miles & Huberman (1994), we can enter the field with a *deductive* approach or an *inductive* approach. Our data collecting method and our data analysis has moved back and forth between the two approaches in order to reach understanding. In practice this means that after having conducted the initial fieldwork and analyzed it, we realized that we had to collect even more data. The findings from the preliminary data led to new questions, and because of that we needed to gather additional data in order to have enough data to answer our research question. As such, a new set of sample strategies were applied within the case sampling process, hereunder, using *confirming and disconfirming case* strategies, which allowed us to elaborate on our initial analysis. (Miles et al. 1994: 29) This also emphasized the need to start analyzing data early in the process in order to have the possibility of collecting new data to fill in the gaps (Miles et al. 1994). Thus, we argue that the earlier the data analysis is performed, the stronger data, it is possible to produce.

**Data collection of secondary & primary data**

Our data consists of *primary* and *secondary* data. However, before elaborating on the types of data collected, we wish to clarify our intentions. The primary data has been important for our study, as we want to understand the aspects of establishing a successful blog; however, such aspects cannot be explored only by using secondary data, as this specific study has not been made. Further, because of how quickly online material becomes out of date, we find it relevant to collect the data ourselves, as we want to collect the most recent information. Nevertheless, secondary data is used to support our knowledge about the blog phenomenon, and likewise, to investigate our research question from a more academic angle. The gathering of secondary data has also led to our preconception of the field, which is expressed through our three hypotheses aforementioned.
We will in the following two sections elaborate in details, how our primary and secondary data has been collected.

**Secondary data**

The secondary data for our study can be divided into four different stages. As the first stage encouraged the starting point of our study, the second stage introduces a more theory-based knowledge in order to solve our problem statement. During the analysis of our primary data, we argue that a third stage of secondary data comes into play, as we use it to further interpret the statements from our informants. Lastly, we use secondary data to discuss our findings from our analysis. In the following text, we will elaborate on these four stages.

As first mentioned in this chapter, secondary data collected through articles, books and video gave us the understanding of the blogging industry. Moreover, the data also enabled us to prepare relevant questions for our informants, based on information gained from online articles, blogs and so forth. Meanwhile, as the first stage represents the foundation of our study, the second stage of data was collected through our selection of theories in order to support our arguments during the analysis of our primary data. However, a critical assessment of the theories will be discussed in the next chapter, *Theory*. As our study reaches the stage of analysis, we enter the third stage of our secondary data, as we challenge our hypotheses against our primary data. Finally, we will in the fourth stage apply secondary data in a discussion derived from the findings in our analysis. Thus, the secondary data will be the primary source to reach an understanding of the issues discussed.

**Primary data**

The primary data has been gathered through three approaches; *face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews* and *e-mail correspondences*. The difference in our approach to data collection is based on two things. Firstly, due to specific requests from the informants, and secondly, due to geographic distance. After having interviewed the majority of our informants, additional questions were sent out via e-mail.

As we activate the qualitative data of the three approaches, we realized that in order to validate and invalidate our findings, we needed to juxtapose the bloggers’ statements with the consumers’, in order see whether there were similarities. In other words, to see whether they
agree upon the success criteria of a successful blog. We therefore added a final approach to our primary data collection through a consumer survey.

In the following section we will elaborate on all four approaches.

**Interviews face-to-face**

According to Kvale & Brinkmann (1994: 129), the purpose of a qualitative research interview is to collect in-depth descriptions of the interviewees’ life-world with the intention to interpret their meaning. In doing so, we conducted each interview with only a partial structure. The structured part, included prepared questions in advance, listed in a specific order to cause a natural flow throughout the interview. The prepared questions stemmed from our secondary data collections, which we discussed in the previous section.

Although it was very important for us to get all of our questions answered, it was also our strategy to be open towards new questions that might arise. In order to get inside the interviewees’ life-worlds, we chose to end all our interviews with an open question, which allowed the interviewees to bring up other questions, areas or point of views which they found relevant to discuss.

The open-ended interview style can be described as *narrative*. According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2008: 173), a narrative interview focuses on the storytelling which the interviewer initiates. However, once the interview has begun, stories can appear more spontaneous. As a result, our interview style represents the traits of an everyday conversation (Kvale et al. 2008).

During the interview we did not take any notes, instead we stayed focused on the answers from the interviewees in order to be able to probe further into any detailed questions that might arise. Instead of note taking, we chose to record and transcribe all the interviews.

Due to the fact that transcripts are artificial constructions from an oral to a written form of communication, it is important to assess the significance of this based on *reliability* and *validity* (Kvale, 1994: 163). In order to make the transcription process as reliable as possible we created some ground rules for the process of such. However, even with detailed writing instructions, it is difficult for two researchers to convey the same text the same way. Not two people interpret the world identically (Fuglsang et al. 2009: 310). For that reason, the outcome of our transcription might be different if undertaken by someone else (Kvale, 1994:...
During the transcriptions of our interviews, we solely register the words which we can hear clearly as well as writing the text as cohesive as possible. Instead of writing a sentence with empty words such as “hmm” and “eehm”, it was more relevant for our research to capture the full meaning of the sentence while listening to the way the interviewee spoke in that specific moment. The reason for that is based on our strategy to reduce the transcription into shorter fragments. If we were to have transcribed the text word by word, the meaning of the sentence might have been interpreted in another way when reaching the stage of breaking the text into shorter fragments. To illustrate the aforementioned, we will draw on an example from our transcription with blogger Stine Frimann Hasselsteen from All Things Dapper. (Appendix 2: 65-69)

**Transcription A**: Well, I started my blog because of my good friend Laura who has *StyleJunkie, erhm asked… what was it now… to support her in one week while… (bad sound)…vacation*.

**Transcription B**: Well, I started my blog because my good friend Laura, who has a blog called *StyleJunkie, asked me to do a stand-in for her, for one week while she was on vacation*.

While transcription A is a verbatim transcription of the spoken words, B is an idealized comprehension of the same story. According to Kvale & Brinkmann (1994: 165-166), neither of them is more objective than the other; however, one should choose the method which suits the further analysis of the transcription.

As a result of compressing our transcriptions for the use of meaning condensation, we would argue that the cohesion of our findings are more likely to occur using method B, as we reduce the level of incorrect interpretation when compressing the transcripts into smaller fragments. Though we acknowledge that interpretation of the meaning is present to some extent, we also emphasize that transcripts are not copies of reality, but interpretive constructs which are

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1 Authors’ own translation: “Jamen altså jeg startede min blog fordi min gode veninde, Laura som har *StyleJunkie, ohh spurgtte... hvad hedder det.. at supporte hende i en uge mens (...) ferie.”
2 Authors’ own translation: “Jamen altså jeg startede min blog fordi min gode veninde, Laura som har en blog, som hedder *StyleJunkie, bad mig om at være stand-in i en uge mens hun var på ferie.”
useful tools for a particular purpose. (Kvale, 1994: 166)

**Telephone interviews**

During our data collection, we have conducted one telephone interview. The approach to our interview goes through same qualifications as the face-to-face interviews. As a result, the only difference is self-evident, as the interviewer cannot see the interviewees’ body language or gestures. This can in some cases be seen as a disadvantage, (Kvale, 1994) but as we are interested in interpreting only the answers and not the surrounding factors, we have not chosen to regard this as a relevant setback.

**Electronic interviews**

As face-to-face interviews were not possible with each interview, we engaged in an e-mail correspondence with several bloggers. This alternative has both advantages and disadvantages. Written correspondence as a data source will on one hand generally yield more informative and reflexive answers from the actors (Fontana & Prokos, 2007: 108-109), but on the other hand, we as researcher cannot be sure whether the information given is by the desired informant. As such, it can be difficult to analyze whether a response is negative or positive, depending on how good the informants are at expressing themselves through text (Fontana et al. 2007: 109). However, this bias will be evaluated later in this chapter when describing the quality of each e-mail interviews. Moreover, an electronic interview has the practical advantage of being self-transcribing, thereby, saving us a lot of time and making it easier when processing the data through meaning condensation, as the level of wrongful interpretation is being minimized.

According to Andrea Fontana & Anastasia H. Prokos (2007: 109), the method of electronic interviews through e-mails will only become more used in future qualitative data gathering, as people rely increasingly more on electronic modes of communication. We therefore argue that the use of e-mail interview is just as reliable and useful as our face-to-face interviews, as correspondence through e-mail is a daily routine in today’s society.

The e-mail correspondences were initiated both during our interview stage and after having treated the data, as we still had some unanswered questions after the first round of interviews. However, we were prepared for such situation, hence, as we initiated our interviews, we asked
all of our informants for permission to contact them again with follow-up questions. The primary questions in our second e-mail interview were structured around the interviewees’ first replies as well as the financial aspects of blogging. However, as monetary questions can be very sensitive and private, we introduced a specific tactic to lower the risks of offending or violating their privacy. When asking how much the bloggers’ annual income corresponded to, we created ten boxes with a range of 50.000 DKK, going from 0-50.000 DKK and ending on 450.000+ DKK. By doing so, we argue that our informants are more likely to answer this particular question, as the details of the answers are limited. On the other hand, it creates an uncertainty when being analyzed, as the bloggers who choose the first box might not have any earnings related to their blog at all, likewise, they might earn the amount of money bordering the next range. However, based on the information given whether bloggers do brand collaborations or not, we are able to tell if they profit from blogging, and thereby, eliminate such uncertainty. The purpose of the monetary question was to eliminate bloggers who do not profit from blogging, as our study only concerns blogs that make use of commercial benefits.

**Ethics**

Going into research which among other things seeks to understand the financial aspect related to blogging includes a certain *ethical risk*. (Kvale, 1994: 166) As mentioned, the risk of offending the source when asking financial questions can be high, especially within the creative industries, as the artistic value can easily be overshadowed by monetary success (Mathiasen, Poulsen, & Lorenzen, 2006). Thus, there is a tendency that the financial aspect determines whether the blog is a success or not. For that reason, we offered a confidentiality agreement for each interviewee to ensure that all confidential information will stay non-public.

As we previously argued that our interview style is narrative, we also argue that our last questions containing financial issues, to some extent can be viewed as *confrontational*. According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2008: 179), the confrontational interview aims to challenge the interviewees’ opinions, in which opens up for possible conflicts and power relations. Nonetheless, the power of confrontational interviews depends on who is being interviewed. For some interviewees, the confrontational approach will challenge their basic assumptions to such a degree that the interviewee will be offended. Meanwhile, respondents with great confidence, such as interviews with the elite, might feel stimulated by the
intellectual challenges. (Kvale et al. 2008: 181) According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2008: 167), an elite informant is characterized as a person who typically possesses a powerful position or expert knowledge. We therefore argue that our contribution to confrontational questions has a positive effect when being received by our elite informants. The argumentation of such will be further explained in the next sections, as we evaluate each of our informants.

**Description, validity and quality of the interviewees**

As the research of our study includes many different informants, we found it important to evaluate the validity and quality of the interviews in which our data derives from. When establishing the validity of each of the informants, we will evaluate the value which they bring to our study, judged by their background and overall performance during the interview. (Kvale et al. 2008: 272)

According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2008), the quality of an original interview determines the quality of the following analysis. Thus, the interviews will be evaluated through Kvale & Brinkmann’s (2008) six quality criteria: 1) The degree of spontaneous, rich and relevant answers, 2) The degree at which short questions lead to longer answers, 3) To what extent the interviewer follows up and clarifies the meaning of the relevant aspects of the answers, 4) That the interview goes through a degree of interpretation during the interview itself, 5) That the interviewer attempts to verify their interpretations of the interviewee's answers during the interview, and 6) That the interview is an independent story that does not require further explanation. (Kvale et al. 2008: 187) As such, we will in the following evaluate each of the informants.

- **Henrik Akselbo – director & co-founder of Bloggers Delight**

Beginning our study, we realized that a great reason for the commercialization of blogs is credited blog networks, and since Bloggers Delight is the biggest network in Denmark (Sixhøj, 2014), it appeared evident to contact Henrik Akselbo, who is the director and co-founder of Bloggers Delight. Bloggers Delight represents 160 Danish bloggers (Appendix 1: 373) and they are continuously expanding. The company has recently acquired Looklab, their biggest competitor, to obtain a greater connective network (Sixhøj, 2014).
Akselbo has an academic background from Copenhagen Business School; which in combination with his working experience in the field gives him strong business knowledge. Akselbo’s background is of great value for our study, as he brings essential knowledge of the commercialization of blogs. Due to his profession, however, we acknowledge that his responses naturally reflect more positively towards his business establishments. Hence, it is important for the validity of the interview to question his responses (Kvale et al. 2008). Thus, we interviewed independent bloggers and bloggers within Bloggers Delight.

As a result of Akselbo’s academic background and leading position within the blogging industry, we view Akselbo as an elite informant to our study (Kvale et al. 2008: 167). Also, as Bloggers Delight has a leading position on the Danish market (Sixhøj, 2014), we will only apply Bloggers Delight when evaluating the effect of a blog network. Having that in mind, we are aware that we cannot draw immediate generalization by only applying data from one network. However, as the overall purpose, is to get an indicative picture of the commercial aspects in blogs, we argue that the replies from Akselbo contribute to such knowledge.

During the interview with Akselbo, we received long, reflective and coherent answers when going through all our questions. According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2008), this is often a reflection of a person that is frequently interviewed, and thus, knows exactly what to answer and highlight. This was especially reflected during the transcription of the interview, as Akselbo gave full and coherent sentences when given his replies, clearly reflected by his experience of being interviewed. Even though he was very precise in his answers, he also acted spontaneous to some extent, which was of great value to us, as we went from the interview with more useful knowledge. On the basis of Kvale & Brinkmann’s (2008) definition of an elite informant, we identify Akselbo as an expert within the industry. Also, the interview with Akselbo is an independent story, which does not require further explanation in order to be understood. By evaluating the six quality criteria, we argue that the interview with Akselbo is of high quality and merits further analysis (Kvale et al. 2008).

• **All Things Dapper – fashion & interior blogger**

As mentioned, Bloggers Delight has a massive influence in the blogging industry. We therefore chose to interview several of the bloggers from Bloggers Delight and Looklab. One
of them was Stine Frimann Hasselsten, who has been blogging for nearly two years on Looklab (Appendix 2: 53). Besides blogging, she works at an advertising agency. With a background in advertisement, we argue that the interview with Hasselsten entails high value for our research, as she knows how to brand herself and communicate effectively. Additionally, combined with her experience in the field, Hasselsten has given us insight to both social and commercial aspects as well as the combination of such when building a blog.

The interview with Hasselsten was our very first interview with a blogger and was established through a telephone interview. According to Kvale & Brinkmann’s (2008) six quality criteria, the interview with Hasselsten lacked spontaneous responses and thought-through answers (Kvale et al. 2008). Hasselsten repeated her statements a lot throughout the interview and did not manage to go deeper into the topics. Had the questions been provided to her in advance, it is our belief that the degree of repetition could have been avoided and the answers have been more precise. For that reason, we decided to send out questions in advance, when conducting future face-to-face interviews. Nevertheless, we are aware that in some cases it can be a disadvantage to send the questions out in advance as it can limit spontaneity.

The interview with Hasselsten also went through a degree of interpretation, as we sent out follow-up questions through e-mail, including money-related questions. When she replied, she only answered the question related to money, as this seemed to eclipse the remaining questions. It was not until we specifically asked her to answer the remaining questions that she eventually did. (Appendix 2: 303) The example shows how sensitive monetary questions can be, and how one question of such can have a negative effect on all other non-monetary related questions.

Even though Hasselsten’s answers were not as reflective as we wished, we still argue that the interview is valuable to include in our research, as she contributes with useful points relating to social aspects of blogging.

- **Danica Chloe - beauty, food, travel, fashion & interior design blogger**

Taking the interview process with Hasselsten into account, we contacted Danica Chloe from Bloggers Delight, who agreed to an interview via e-mail. Chloe has been blogging for two and a half years and is an all-around blogger who does not focus on one specific subject. She
writes about a wide range of topics within the lifestyle category. In addition to her blog, Chloe works as a freelancer stylist, as she has not been able to make a living out of blogging. The relevance of interviewing a blogger who blogs due to desire is based on the social aspects, which in Chloe’s case outweighs the economic shortcomings. (Appendix 3: 94-109)

The e-mail interview with Chloe was one of our first e-mail interviews. For that reason, our first interview questions were structured around finding out the process of blogging, the motivation behind it, how the industry has evolved as well as the future prospects. As a result, we came up with additional questions as our data collection evolved. The second time we contacted Chloe, our questions were based on her first reply, as we sought to clarify some of her answers. In addition, our questions also illuminated some of our skepticism towards the bloggers’ circumstances, including their artistic freedom and the distribution of income between them and Bloggers Delight. We therefore sought clarification on some of Akselbo’s statements through the second round of e-mail interviews with Chloe.

The overall interview with Chloe entailed a high degree of detailed and reflective answers for our research. Thus, Chloe was the only one willing to unveil how much Bloggers Delight takes from the revenue generated from marketing deals. Also, Chloe provided us with insight into the evolution of blogging and how the commercial aspects have influenced the blogging industry. (Appendix 3: 258, 117-224) By evaluating the six quality criteria, we argue that the e-mail interview with Chloe contains a high quality for our further analysis (Kvale et al. 2008: 187).

- Nervøs Velour - fashion blogger

Emilie Foli is a fashion blogger and is also part of Bloggers Delight. Foli has been blogging for two and a half years and has no additional job besides her blog and studies. (Appendix 4: 107-114) When comparing the interview with Chloe, the responses to our questions varied greatly. For that reason, we found the interview with Foli of great value for our research, as we seek to challenge our own initial understanding of the field (Miles et al. 1994: 8).

The interview with Foli was established through e-mail, due to geographical distance. Foli’s replies were long and precise; additionally, she sent her replies in a separate document. To our
understanding, this implied that she took the interview seriously and wanted to deliver something valuable for our further analysis. Also, when answering questions towards Bloggers Delight, it was clearly that she found Bloggers Delight to be a great resource for bloggers. For that reason, we wanted to challenge her first replies in our follow-up questions, by questioning a few of her replies. As a result, the second round of replies entailed a lot of defensive answers toward Bloggers Delight, as she felt we tried to turn the blog network into something negative. (Appendix 4: 303-325) Nonetheless, we ended up receiving more detailed explanations of the operations within Bloggers Delight, as she eagerly wanted us to understand the positive values that the blog network entails. (Appendix 4: 241-297) However, we also went through a learning process during the interview with Foli, as she refused to answer how the percentage distribution between her and Bloggers Delight was divided. The mistake was on our part, as we in the introduction to our questions wrote the following: “(...) After reading your responses and conducting an interview with Henrik Akselbo from Blogger's Delight, we have a few follow-up questions that we hope you will help answering”\(^3\) (Appendix 4: 199-200). Evidently, Foli deduced that Akselbo had rejected the exact same question, and likewise, she declined answering (Appendix 4: 270-271). From then on, we decided not to inform the informants of our meeting with Akselbo, which increased the possibilities to ask additional questions. As a consequence of the aforementioned, we argue that the interview contains a level of interpretations during the second round of interview, and thus meets the quality criteria, which forms a good base for further analysis. (Kvale et al. 2008: 186)

**Homesick - interior design bloggers**

By continuing our research of bloggers’ cooperation with Bloggers Delight, we interviewed Camilla Marie, Tatiana and Mette, who run the interior design blog Homesick. The blog started with no intention of monetary gain. However, within six months they were upgraded to premium bloggers due to a fast growth of traffic, which entitled them to get a percentage of the commercialization agreements organized by the blog network. (Appendix 5: 93-115) The validity of this interview is high, as the interview represents the transition from being a hobby towards the creation of a business.

\(^3\) Authors’ own translation
Under the same conditions as our interview with Foli, the interview with Homesick was obtained through e-mail, as the geographic conditions limited the possibility of a face-to-face interview. (Appendix 5: 34-38) The interview with Homesick presents a very high quality for further analysis, as it fulfills all of Kvale & Brinkmann’s (2008) six criteria. The replies from Homesick are rich and longer than the questions being asked. Also, the interview went through an interpretation phase, as a second round of follow-up questions were sent. We further argue that the interview with Homesick is an independent story that does not require further explanation to be understood.

- **Couturekulten - fashion blogger**

As we continued to investigate the field of bloggers, we contacted Laura Tønder who is a former blogger with Bloggers Delight. Tønder has an independent fashion blog called Couturekulten. Beside from blogging she works as a stylist, fashion editor and model. Tønder is one of the more experienced bloggers within our data collection, as she started blogging in 2009, and has been blogging on and off for approximately six years. Even though Tønder cooperates with brands (Appendix 6: 106-107), business is not the overall purpose of her blog; instead she states that she would rather have a blog with no profit than a blog filled with advertisements that do not represent her point of view (Appendix 6: 103-104). Hence, passion is the primary driving force behind the blog. Therefore, the interview with Tønder provides great insight into the social aspects of blogging. The relevancy of the interview is grounded in Tønder’s decision to leave Bloggers Delight in favor of creating an independent blog. Tønder argues that “one cannot progress by staying in a huge blog network like Bloggers Delight” (Appendix 6: 132-336), and for that reason many like herself choose to move their blog to an independent site to gain full control of the blog.

The interview with Tønder was established through an e-mail correspondence, and like all our e-mail interviews, the interview took place through two rounds of questions. The interview with Tønder contains all six elements of Kvale & Brinkmann’s (2008) quality criteria, as she answered all of the questions with long and rich explanations that went beyond our questioning. Also, the interview went through a degree of interpretation during the second
round of questions, as we introduced more critical questions towards her first reply. As a result, the interview possesses a high quality for further analysis.

- **Twin Food - food blogger**

After interviewing several bloggers with association to Bloggers Delight, we found it just as important to investigate independent bloggers to gain insight into two different ways of running a blog. We therefore contacted two girls behind the popular food blog, Twin Food. The girls behind the blog are twin sisters Christine and Laura Falkensteen Overgaard, who started the blog three years ago, as they wanted to share their recipes with family and friends. (Appendix 7: 111-113) Since then, the blog has reached high popularity among women and developed into a business next to the twins’ studies. The value of this interview lies in the discussion of the difficulties of starting a blog at this point in time. They argue that the success of their blog might not have been the same, if they were to establish one now (Appendix 7: 137-141). We view this statement as trustworthy due to the growing level of competition within the industry since their establishment. The twins also enlightened us with their reflections on choosing to be an independent blog (Appendix 7: 143-158).

The interview with Twin Food was conducted via e-mail by their request. As in previous instances, the questions were sent out in two rounds. All questions were answered with long, rich and reflective replies. However, the degree of spontaneity was limited. Nevertheless, we argue that the interview with Twin Food contains a high level of quality for further analysis, as interpretation was established through the second round of e-mail interview. Also, the interview can be seen as an independent story that does not require any further explanation. (Kvale et al. 2008)

- **In Fashion We Believe - interior design & fashion blogger**

As we continue our research of independent bloggers, we reached out to Line Schjelde, who is an independent interior and fashion blogger. Schjelde has been blogging for three years and has a background in economics from Copenhagen Business School. Due to her background we argue that Schjelde is a valuable informant, as she has the ability to answer from an
analytical, business-oriented point of view. Also, Schjelde’s blog is solely based on interest, which enabled us to gain valuable information on the social benefits of blogging.

The interview with Schjelde was conducted via e-mail. This interview, unlike the ones previous mentioned, only entailed one round of questions. This was based on the knowledge from our previous interviews, as we were already aware of the pitfalls. The interview with Schjelde entails a significant degree of long, spontaneous, rich and relevant answers, without major fluctuations. Finally, we argue that the interview is an independent story that does not require further explanation.

• **Brasch On The Run – health, fitness & fashion blogger**

As our informants of bloggers represent a rather experienced group, we found it interesting to interview a new coming blogger to investigate whether a more experienced blogger has better opportunities for making a successful blog than less experienced. We therefore contacted 24-year-old Frederikke Brasch, who started blogging in June 2014. Brasch has no further educational background in addition to her high school degree. (Appendix 9: 13-14) Meanwhile, Brasch has something much more valuable for our study, as she possess a very influential network which caused the establishment of her blog, Brasch On The Run. Her network is in large part influenced by her sister Caroline Brasch, who is a successful Danish top model (Appendix 9: 362). Following her sister, Brasch has established close relationship with influential fashion designers and photographers and other people within the fashion industry (Langberg, 2014). As a result, the founders of the Danish luxury webshop, YouHeShe.com encouraged Brasch to start blogging. (Appendix 9: 22-27) Due to a starting point emerging from commercial demands instead of pure desire, the validity of our interview with Brasch is very high, as it represents a blogger starting due to commercial opportunities.

The interview with Brasch was conducted in a face-to-face interview and the questions were sent out in advance. Unlike our other face-to-face interviews, the interview with Brasch quickly became a very fluent conversation, where the questions were answered before having the change to ask them. This created a very pleasant setting where Brasch spoke very openly about herself and the industry. The casual approach led us to move into more cross-border
issues such as monetary issues and moral dilemmas within the blogosphere. Also, the degree of spontaneous, reflective and long answers appeared in interaction with the more relaxed conversation.

- **Look De Pernille – manager representing fashion blogger Pernille Teisbæk**

When investigating the balance between social and commercial aspects of a successful blog, we found it important to add an informant who has managed to turn blogging into a beneficial business. We therefore contacted Hannah Løffler who is a full-time manager representing the famous Danish fashion icon Pernille Teisbæk. One might argue that the validity of this data is limited, due to a secondary source speaking on behalf of Teisbæk. Since it is her job to speak and act on Teisbæk’s behalf; however, the answers still contain a high level of validity.

Løffler has an educational background from Copenhagen Business School studying Management of Creative Business Processes. Since then, she has been working in the creative industry of television, public relations and now as a manager balancing all the elements of Teisbæk’s business. Based on Løffler’s background, her statements are mostly driven from a business point of view, as her job is to create value for Pernille Teisbæk’s brand. The information is valuable to our research, as Løffler views the blog, Look De Pernille, as an important stepping-stone for further business establishments. Apart from business perspectives, Løffler also possesses the ability to view creativity and business as a balancing act, as she has a variety of background experience in several creative fields. We therefore view Hannah Løffler as an elite informant (Kvale et al. 2008: 167).

The interview with Løffler was conducted as a face-to-face interview at her office. The interview lasted one and a half hour, whereas our previous open-ended interviews only lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. The reason for the long interview is that Løffler was one of our last interviewees, and we went into the meeting with an immense amount of information based on the previous interviews in which we wanted to elaborate on. Furthermore, we had additional questions to ask, as Løffler quickly clarified that the motivation and starting point of the blog was founded on a business basis, thus, differing from the majority of our informants. As a result, the interview entailed rich and reflective replies towards the balance between social and commercial aspects of the blog. Løffler also managed to give us long
answers based on the questions that we sent out in advance. We choose to view the length of the interview as an advantage, rather than a set-back, as the information obtained was detailed and insightful.

• **Dorte Lytje - blog consultant & lifestyle blogger**

When investigating the blogging industry mostly through the eyes of bloggers, we found it important for our research to interview a consultant within the field, to bring a higher degree of nuance into our data collection. Consequently, we contacted Dorte Lytje who in the past five years has made a living out of teaching firms how to make a business out of blogging (Appendix 11: 37).

After many years of working in the field of marketing and sales, she realized that the blogging industry contained great potential in a business context. (Appendix 11: 7-25) As such, Lytje uses her own experience to theorize about the business aspects of blogging and apply a hands-on strategy. As Lytje draws on different perspectives that help us to understand the business of blogging, we do not see Lytje’s own experience with blogging as a limitation to our study, but as an advantage, as her theories are based on real life experiences.

The interview with Lytje was conducted in a face-to-face interview and the questions were sent out in advance. The interview took place subsequent to our interviews with the bloggers, as we wanted to draw on the responses from our bloggers. The quality of the interview can be characterized as high, as Lytje spoke very clearly and coherently throughout the interview. However, as the replies had a tendency to be long, Lytje sometimes digressed from the questions which were originally asked. Nevertheless, this created a degree of spontaneity, which brought up new topics of discussion. As such, the questions to Lytje had the purpose of validating or invalidating several of the bloggers’ replies and to provide better insight into their responses.

• **Interviews not submitted in the study**

During our data collection period, two interviews were established without further use. The reason is that the quality and relevance of the content was not in line with our remaining
informants, and therefore, did not live up to Kvale & Brinkmann’s (2008) six quality criteria.

**Consumer survey**

Going through our data collection, we noticed that a lot of the questions pertained to consumer habits. As such, we found that the informants’ statements needed an additional perspective in order to reach a higher level of certainty and validity. For that reason, we decided to make a survey for blog readers. In doing so, we entered the field with three additional presumptions based on our informants’ statements:

4) *The personality of the blogger will determine the overall value of a blog.*

5) *It is not crucial for a blogger to possess flawless writing skills at the same level as journalism in order to obtain success.*

6) *It is essential for the blogger to include the reader through the content.*

These presumptions form the basis of our understanding of blogging success criteria from the readers’ point of view, an understanding which we will challenge in our analysis.

The method which we chose for our survey is a combination of **closed-ended** and **open-ended** questions. The closed-ended questions are followed by the response options “yes” and “no”, whereas the open-ended questions seek to explore the answers of the respondents (Groves et al. 2009). As a result, we used closed-ended questions to further validate our informants’ responses and not blindly base our findings on our informants’ point of view. Meanwhile, as the closed-ended questions helped us to validate the statements of our informants, we also introduced some open-ended questions, to gain insight into the motivation behind reading blogs. In doing so, we found it beneficial to open up some questions, with the purpose of not influencing the answers given. For instance, provided that we asked whether the reason behind reading blogs was based on *inspiration* and the reader simply replied “yes”, then the validity would be questioned, as the reader might have used another word, if not guided. Thus, we found some of the answers more credible to leave open. Due to this strategy, we argue that the survey is a combination of a **quantitative** and **qualitative** research. However, we are aware that it predominantly contains characteristics of quantitative research.
All together, we collected 50 surveys; meanwhile, after reviewing all 50, we selected 31 of the surveys to use in our research, as all 31 of them contained the same validity and quality criteria suitable for our study. The validity of the chosen surveys was based on two things: 1) consistent blog reader and 2) the selection of blogs within the lifestyle category (Kvale et al. 2008: 272). Whereas the assessment of validity was more detailed, the quality criterion was based on a full completion of all questions submitted in the survey, as further interpretation of the answers was not the purpose. As we argue that the survey used in our research stems from same validity and quality criteria, we will not elaborate on each of the respondents, but instead refer to them as consumer 1,2,3 etc. (See appendix 12).

Analysis of data collection

As we have now summarized the data used in our study, we will describe the methodology of our data analysis; thus, how we use such data in our analysis and why. Our approach to analysis consists of multiple ad-hoc tactics. The tactics indicate the methods used to draw meaning from our data and whether the meaning we find is sufficiently valid to ensure the quality of conclusions. Our tactics are designed to do two things: One, reduce the amount of data obtained, and two, find patterns within them. (Miles et al. 1994) As such, we have applied tactics within meaning condensation as well as theories derived from our meaning condensation to reduce our subjective understanding of our data collection.

Meaning condensation of data

The most appropriate method of analysis for any given study will depend on the purpose of an evaluation and the nature of one’s material (Kvale et al. 2008: 223). As our data derives from many different informants, we decided early in the process to use an analysis method that entitled us to get a better overview of our data. Thus, we chose to use one of Kvale & Brinkmann’s (2008) five analytic methods, meaning condensation, when interpreting our informants’ statements and the consumer survey. The method is beneficial for our study as it represents a descriptive and explorative method for thematic cross-case analysis of different types of qualitative data. Within the method established by Kvale & Brinkmann (2008), we find it valuable to discuss what Miles & Huberman (1994) describes as tactics for testing or
confirming meanings, and thus, assuring the quality of conclusion.

The result of using meaning condensation is to give us an overview of the data collected and further enable us to compare and analyze the answers from all of our informants along with the questions being asked. The process of such consists of three steps: 1) Total impression; going from chaos to themes (Kvale, 1994). Such tactic is called *Noting Patterns*, which we used in order to organize our numerous of data selected (Miles et al. 1994). In doing so, we took the questions from our interviews and converted them into themes. 2) Identifying and sorting meaning units; going from theme to codes (Kvale et al. 2008). This tactic is called *Clustering*, meaning that we seek to identify which data are similar, which of them go together and which do not. As such, we seek to understand a phenomenon better by grouping, and then conceptualizing objects that have similar patterns or characteristics (Miles et al. 1994: 249). For that reason, we only coded the answers relevant for our themes selected. 3) Condensation; going from code to meaning (Kvale et al. 2008). In doing so, we used two tactics: *Counting* and *Making Comparisons*. According to Miles & Huberman (1994: 253), the numbers in qualitative research tend to be ignored, even though they imply essential qualities, providing us with justification of our statements. As such, we found it important to incorporate counting into our analysis to, among others, validate our hypothesis and to keep our analysis as honest and protected against bias, by identifying the majority of equal or similar answers. However, we also include counting in order to make comparisons that in the end will lead us to conclusions. Meanwhile, it is important to be sure that the comparisons being made are the right ones and that they make sense to even compare. (Miles et al. 1994)

For instance, when comparing how bloggers within a blog network differ from independent bloggers, it is important that the bloggers compared are within the same field. The questions and answers from the informants will be illustrated in a matrix in order to see how they differ and resemble each other in their processes of blogging (Kvale et al. 2008: 227). By applying these tactics, we will through our meaning condensation be able to *Subsume Particulars Into generals* (Miles et al. 1994: 255). For instance, a majority of the blog readers have at some point purchased goods derived from blog activity, which in general implies that blogs are an efficient marketing strategy (Appendix 15: *Purchase derived from blog activity*). Thus, we can by means of a number of questions draw the answers into something more general (Miles et al. 1994: 256). When all our primary data has been coded, we used a color system to
indicate the important variables. Miles & Huberman (1994) describes such tactics as *Partitioning Variables*, that is, when a set of raw data needs to be incorporated into a context in order to comprehend the full meaning. We used three different colors (green, red and blue) to illustrate when the informants introduce social aspects, commercial aspects or a combination of both when answering a question, respectively. Thus, whenever an informant states something related to social aspects, the data is marked with green; whereas, the data marked with red indicates commercial aspects. Finally, data marked with blue indicates a combination of both aspects. Even though we have coded the data by giving them different colors, we discovered that there sometimes is a fine line between the statements; nevertheless, the color-coding mainly has the purpose of quickly to scan through the three different themes.

**Theory derived from data collection**

As acknowledged in the last chapter, *Theory of Science*, we as researchers are part of what is being researched (Fuglsang et al. 2009). To limit our subjective impact, we will apply theories in our analysis, to reach a better understanding of the data collected. Thus, the theories selected should substantiate, enhance and challenge the statements from our primary data collection.

Before entering our theoretical stage of analysis, we have used *Factoring* as a tactic to identify the key findings from our data collection (Miles et al. 1994). Based on this approach, we were able to identify the social and commercial tendencies which the informant emphasized, and from that, we were able to assemble the right combination of theories in order to answer our research question. By doing so, we argue that our analysis of data will give us insight to meaningful contexts. In the next chapter, *Theory*, we will go deeper into which social and commercial theories we will apply to analyze our data, and finally explain how such will help us answering our research question.

**Validation and reliability of data collection methods & analysis**

Until now, the sections within this chapter have illustrated the way in which our data has been collected and how such data is applied throughout our analysis. For that reason, we will sum up this chapter by elaborating on the overall *validation* and *reliability* of our methods, hereunder, our data collection and analysis.
**Validation**

In order to enhance the validation of our data collection methods, we have been aware of the common pitfalls in qualitative research. Miles & Huberman (1994: 263) outline these as the holistic fallacy, elite bias, and going native. The holistic fallacy refers to interpreting events more patterned and consistent than they really are. Even though we have chosen a wide range of informants to identify the aspects of establishing a successful blog, we emphasize that our study cannot draw immediate generalizations of the industry. However, we argue that our research can give some indications of what success criteria a successful blog may fulfill.

Elite bias, that is overweighting data from articulated, well-informed and often high-status informants, is evident throughout our study, which means that there is a high risk of blindly accepting everything that our elite informants states. Therefore, it is beneficial to include lower status participants, in this case our bloggers and blog readers, as the quality of the information given will be enhanced when coming from different perspectives.

Finally, the going native fallacy is present when researchers are co-opted into the perceptions and explanations of local informants (Miles et al. 1994). Due to our hermeneutic understanding of the social world in our study, we are aware of the co-creative role we play in our primary data collection (Kvale, 1994: 57-60). However, as we argue that we are co-creators of the texts being produced, we also argue that the limitation of such is outweighed to some degree, as we incorporate theories to support our findings. As such, we argue that theories applied in our analysis will help us to further interpret our own initial biases of the field and develop significant understanding of social and commercial aspects within lifestyle blogging.

**Reliability**

Due to the use of mainly qualitative data in our study, a degree of complete reliability is not possible. We argue that the conclusions of the same study would be different if conducted by others, as everyone has different perceptions of the world, depending on their social background, culture and values. Even though people have the same motivation and are in the same situation, they may act differently, because they perceive the situation differently. (Kvale et al. 2008) As a result, we will evaluate reliability of our study by looking at the consistency and stability of the methods being used over time (Miles et al. 1994: 278).
According to Goetz & LeCompte (1984), reliability is a quality control; that is, *have things been done with reasonable care?* (as cited in Miles et al. 1994: 278) By evaluation of such, we need to establish our own skills as researchers, as we previously emphasized that we play a co-creative role in the texts produced. The questions were carefully designed so that everyone had the same questions. However, as we acknowledge our improved understanding of the field during our research, additional questions were added to later interviews. Meanwhile, as we enter the field with knowledge of such, we argue that the research goes through a congruent study design, and thus, can be evaluated as consistent.

All interviews were conducted in Danish. Therefore, the transcription from Danish to English needs to be evaluated due to the additional level of interpretation, which the text goes through, when being compressed into shorter fragments. (Kvale et al. 2008) However, as the mother tongue of the informants is Danish, we argue that interviews in English would have contributed to a higher level of misunderstandings and wrongful interpretations during the meaning condensation. Moreover, we argue that an interview in English might have caused less spontaneous responses from the informants, due to the lack of confidence with the language. We therefore argue that our findings are more consistent and reliable due to the decision of conducting the interviews in Danish.

Continuing our quality evaluation, we find it important to elaborate on the data selected for our study. During this chapter, we have carefully evaluated each of our informants. Furthermore, we have even omitted data, as we evaluated that the quality and relevance of the data was not in line with our main investigation of the field. Moreover, the stability of our data collection has proven to be solid, as all the coding categories were completed. This illustrates that our interview design has been successful. We therefore argue that our study has a high degree of stability, as our data went through a validity and quality check before further use in our study (Miles et al. 1994: 278). Due to the consistency and stability of our data collection, we were able to use the data effectively in our analysis. According to Miles & Huberman (1994: 278), reliability depends, in part, on the connectedness of data to theory. Accordingly, we have applied theories to make our findings more consistent, and thus enhanced the reliability.

In the following chapter, we will evaluate the relevant theories to apply when analyzing our data.
Chapter 4: Theory

Our theoretical focus will be structured around three separate theory sections, to help us analyze the social and commercial aspects separately and in relation to each other. As illustrated in the figure 1 below, the three analyses are structured as follows: Social Psychology, Commerce and Value Proposition.

**Theories to Identify Successful Blogging**

1. **Social Psychology**
   - Background Knowledge of Social Psychology (Allport, 1924) (Mead, 1937)
   - The Core Five Social Motives (Fiske 2010)

2. **Commerce**
   - Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010)

3. **Value Proposition**
   - Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010)

**Assessing a Successful Business of Blogging**

The first theory section has the purpose of illustrating the social aspects of blogging, applying the interdisciplinary field of social psychology. This will be done to give background knowledge of the field by means of two influential founding fathers of social psychology, Floyd Henry Allport (1924) and George Mead (1937). Moreover, to obtain a fundamental understanding of the underlying motivations for people’s actions, we will introduce the Five Core Social Motives by Susan T. Fiske (2010). The second theory section has the purpose of illustrating the commercial aspect of blogs. We will use the Business Model Canvas by Alexander Osterwalder & Yves Pigneur (2010), to get a representative picture and understanding of the business components of blogs.
As we are analyzing the social and commercial aspects of a blog through separate theories, the final theory section will combine these aspects when analyzing the value proposition of a blog using the business model canvas by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010).

An essential conclusion of hermeneutics that we want to highlight is that our presumptions are present when we sample our data and when we interpret texts. Thus, we must enter our research critically by introducing theories, to not unreflectively take on other people’s biases (Miles et al. 1994: 277). Therefore, this chapter will demonstrate why we have chosen the aforementioned theories and how these theories will help us in answering our research question. Furthermore, we will call attention to the potential limitations within our theories and reflect on whether these limitations are crucial for our study’s validity and reliability determined in the previous chapter or whether we can through other theories overcome such limitations.

**Theory Part One: Social Psychology**

In this section, we will look at theories that identify the social aspects of blogging. When looking at the social aspects of a blog, we realize that it requires at least two parties to make a social interaction, that is, the reader and the blogger. With that in mind, we will therefore call attention to the social interaction aspect, which is an essential aspect of blogging, and thus, will contribute to answering our research question. By introducing social theory into our study of social media, we are able to understand the motivation behind blog activity and the social aspect of a successful blog.

In order to clarify the social aspects, we will divide this chapter into four sections. Firstly, we will introduce the science of social psychology by including some of the fundamental ideas of human needs and behavior, in order to obtain background knowledge of how people interact in situations. Secondly, we will introduce the idea of the self, as a prerequisite of understanding others is first of all to be able to understand oneself (Shutter, 1975) (Fiske, 2010). Thirdly, we will introduce the idea of the group, as people by natural instinct act in groups (Fiske, 2010). Finally, when covering the aforementioned areas, we will be able to understand the motives behind blog activities by means of the Five Core Social Motives formulated by Fiske (2010).
Background knowledge of social psychology

In order to justify the use of social psychology, we find it necessary to look at the study of social interactions in order to ascertain the motives behind blogging and why people interact through blogs. A prerequisite for blogging is the interaction of people, that is, the social aspect. One of the founding fathers of social psychology, the American psychologist Floyd Henry Allport (1890-1978) contributed to the field with a fundamental principle that social psychology has derived from the starting point of the individual psychological processes (House, 1977):

"I believe that only within the individual can we find the behavior mechanisms and consciousness which are fundamental in the interactions between individuals. There is no psychology of groups which is not essentially and entirely a psychology of individuals.”

(1924: vi, 4 as cited in House, 1977: 163)

Psychology in all its branches is a science of the individual. Hence, all social behavior starts within the individual, however, it is simultaneously important to look at social stimuli in order to be able to obtain an adequate understanding of the phenomenon of social psychology. Meaning, in order to understand the social interactions, one needs to look at the individual internally and externally. Allport (1924) claims that the starting point of such a study must derive from the individual with a consciousness of the group.

Since we have just acknowledged that in order to understand others, people need to understand themselves, which is why we in the following find it relevant to define the self.

• The self

The American social psychologist George Mead (1937) defines the self as something which is not present at birth, but human beings develop with time in social interaction with others. (Shotter, 1975: 119) (Faris, 1937)

The self arises through communication with others, which enable the self to make inner reflection; hence, become its own object (mind) and as a result achieve a self (Faris, 1937: 401). Therefore, people need other people to come into being, one cannot fulfill the self on
ones own, "man is a self-defining animal" (Shotter, 1975: 132). Additionally, Mead (1937) distinguishes between the ‘me’ and the ‘I’, which are two different sides of the self. The ‘me’ arises through the taking on of attitudes and expectations of others, and is characterized as passive, objective and stable. The ‘I’, on the other hand, is the person’s individuality, which reacts to the ‘me’, and is characterized as unique, active and subjective. The ‘I’ is the leading part, as it calls out the ‘me’ and responds to it. In other words, others’ expectations and attitudes (‘me’) will form the individual’s personality (‘I’) and vice versa. (Shotter, 1975: 119-121)

As such, people become aware of the self through experiences and interaction with other people. When people become self-conscious, they become aware of their potentials (Brown S. P., 1921: 241). Consequently, people want to exploit those potentials through self-fulfillment. There are three terms that cover the same meaning of "the actualization of one’s potentialities", that is, self-fulfillment, self-realization and self-actualization (Gewirth, 1998: 6). The reason for using the term self-fulfillment instead of one of the other two terms, is due to the underlying meanings of each. Self-realization mainly concerns the capacity-fulfillment, that is, one’s ability or power to do or understand something, whereas self-fulfillment also concerns aspiration fulfillment, which is one’s hope or ambition to achieve something. Looking at self-actualization, the word implies that the self is already present to begin with as a set of potentialities that await actualization. (Gewirth, 1998: 7) Nevertheless, we have in the description of the self just argued that the self is not present from the beginning, as a consequence, self-fulfillment will be the best word to use. Thus, self-fulfillment both has a capacity side and a strong desire side focusing on people’s attainment of their deepest desires. (Gewirth, 1998: 7)

• The group

As we have now reached understanding of the internal factors of the self, we will now seek to understand the external stimuli of the individual.

Fiske (2010: 482) describes the ideal face-to-face group as a group consisting of two to six members; thus, surpassing this amount will deteriorate the outcome of the group, as some people dominate, conflicts will arise, performance and cooperation will decrease, etc.
However, as our concern is an online group, different rules apply, as the purpose of going online is to reach as many people as possible to spread the word. However, we still find it important to define the group in relation to Fiske’s (2010) principles, as the belonging principle refers to the importance of being part of something or someone (Fiske, 2010), thus, being part of a group. In other words, by ‘someone’ we mean the fact that people want to be part of either the ingroup, that is, their own group including friends and family or the outgroup, that is, groups of people to which they do not have any personal relationships to (Fiske, 2010: 428). Moreover, by ‘something’, we mean that people want to conform to society’s norms and values, and thereby be accepted and included in society.

Common goals create interdependence and cohesion, which results in developing a shared understanding of the situation which defines a group (Fiske, 2010: 483). Even though Fiske (2010) defines the group in a face-to-face context, we find her basic philosophy to be a common principle that can be applied whether online or in face-to-face contexts. However, it must be stressed that even though people within a group have shared understandings and shared goals, individuals differ highly from each other (Goldstone & Gureckis, 2009: 415).

The background knowledge of the self and the group justifies that we perceive blogging based on a social context. This is based on our perception that blogging derives from social interaction. As such, we will in our analysis use the self to understand the blogger, hence the internal factors and the group to understand the interaction between the blogger and the reader, that is, the external stimuli. Thus, these two elements will be applied in our analysis when establishing the social interaction occurring through blogs.

**Application of the Five Core Social Motives**

With time people have developed some core motives that interact with the social situation, which help us survive in groups. Social motives are linked to the individual situation that drives people’s thinking, feeling and behaving in social situations. By looking at those factors, we will in the following introduce motives that will lead us to better understand how and why human beings act in a certain social situation, and hence a better understanding of the underlying motives of the blogosphere.
The Five Core Social Motives that Fiske (2010) introduces are **belonging**, **understanding**, **controlling**, **self-enhancing** and **trusting**: By means of figure 2 below, it will give us an overview of how the Five Core Social Motives are structured, and thus, we will examine the theory as illustrated.

Belonging is the core motive that underlies the other four motives, as this is the motive for strong, stable relationships. Whereas two of the motives understanding and controlling are concerning thinking, and therefore, they are of a cognitive nature. Understanding is about the need for shared meanings and prediction. Further, controlling is about the need for contingency between behavior and outcomes. The last two motives, self-enhancing and trusting are more affective in nature and therefore related to moods, feelings and attitudes. The self-enhancing motive is the need for viewing the self as worthy or improvable and the trusting motive is the need for viewing others as benign. (Fiske, 2010: 16-25) Thus, we find all of Fiske’s (2010) social motives relevant to analyze in relation to our data collection in order to gain an understanding of the underlying motives of the blogosphere, as such will lead us to the success criteria of the valuable social interaction that occurs through blogs.
Though we find these motives relevant to apply when analyzing the social aspect of blogging, we recognize that these motives are not the only way to organize social interactions. For that reason, we will in the next section, evaluate the limitations when applying the Five Core Social Motives.

- Limitations & reflection of the Five Core Social Motives

When looking at the theory from a critical point of view, other possible motives can be applied or omitted depending on the context (Fiske, 2010: 26). However, as the Five Core Social Motives have high relevance when analyzing the social interaction of blogs, we decided not to replace any of the motives. Meanwhile, a weakness of Fiske’s (2010) theory is that her social principles are viewed in the physical world. However, as our context is the blogosphere, we managed the limitation by viewing the context in relation to a virtual universe. Therefore, we included the article ‘The Satisfaction of Human Needs in Physical and Virtual Spaces’ by Aharon Kellerman (2014), which adjusts the basic human needs to a virtual context based on the principles of Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1954). Thus, we applied the article to overcome the limitation in Fiske’s (2010) theory.

Taking the abovementioned into account, we find it relevant to evaluate whether we could have applied Maslow’s (1954) entire model Hierarchy of Needs instead of Fiske’s (2010) theory, as the theory is about the human motivational needs. He classifies the needs into seven categories, 1) physiological, 2) safety and security, 3) belongingness, 4) esteem 5) cognitive needs 6) aesthetic needs and 7) self-actualization. Hence, Maslow’s (1954) motives are a combination of physiological and emotional needs, where the first four motives are deficiency motivators and the rest are personal growth motivators. Those motives are arranged in a hierarchy and the needs must be satisfied in the given order. (Kotler, Armstrong, Wong, & Saunders, 2008: 256) Maslow’s (1954) theory merely focuses on basic human motivational needs and not the interaction of people; hence the psychological and not the social psychological aspect. Fiske (2010), on the other hand, focuses on the social psychological aspect, that is, the social motives behind social situations; therefore, we find Fiske’s (2010) theory more suitable to use in our context, as we want to investigate in human interaction within social situations in the blogosphere. Nevertheless, when analyzing the self, we find elements of Maslow’s (1954) Hierarchy of Needs relevant to apply. This is based on Fiske’s
emphasis on the social interaction, whereas Maslow (1954) goes deeper into the psychology of the individuals.

Regardless of which theory that is suitable to apply, it is important always to review it in relation to the present context and the individual situation. However, we argue that the fundamental social motives do not change radically over time; however, the emphasis of each motive may vary depending on the social context. Therefore, they are universal principles that can be applied disregarding time.

Theory Part Two: Commerce

In this section we will discuss the theories that will help identify the commercial aspects related to blogging. Hence, to point out the commercial part of a blog, we are addressing the way a blog produces profit. Based on this premise, we will use the Business Model Canvas established by Alexander Osterwalder & Yves Pigneur (2010), to get a representative picture of how bloggers create, deliver and capture value. The result the model will enable us to understand the coherence between revenue streams and blogging, and thereby give us a better understanding when evaluating the balance of both the social and commercial aspects.

The Business Model Canvas includes nine building blocks covering the main areas of a business, that is, customer segments, value proposition, channel, customer relationship, revenue streams, key resources, key activities, key partnerships and cost structures. The Business Model Canvas is a strategic management and entrepreneurial tool for companies to quickly identify, change or incorporate new innovative ideas. Thus, it is often used when developing new or existing business models as it provides a template to get a better overview of a company’s components and how they are interlinked. (Osterwalder et al. 2010)

When looking at all the building blocks, we find that two of the building blocks; customer relationship and value proposition, should be explained in combination with social aspects. Thus, we will merely use seven of the building blocks, that is, customer segments, key partnerships, key activities, channel, key resources, cost structures and revenue streams when establishing the commercial components of blogging.
Application of the Business Model Canvas

As just mentioned, we will in the commercial analysis, use the seven above-mentioned building blocks to gain a better understanding of the commercial impacts of blogging, that is, the different components and collaborations that need to occur when transforming a blog into a business.

We have made a few adjustments by applying seven building blocks in contrast to Osterwalder & Pigneur’s (2010) traditional approach. For instance, in the traditional use of the Business Model Canvas, Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010: 22) argue, that it is valuable to first identify the value proposition; that is, the fit between what you offer and what customers want. Meanwhile, in our study, we find it necessary to analyze the seven building blocks, before determining the value proposition; as such should be done according to both social and commercial aspects. According to Tim O’Reilly, “there’s not a single business model. There are really a lot of opportunities and a lot of options and we just have to discover all of them” (as cited in Osterwalder et al. 2010: 198). The quote illustrates that the Business Model Canvas is simply a template to create a business model. There are a lot of different opportunities, and thus, one should re-interpret the application through the lens of the Business Model Canvas, and design and adjust the business model to one’s own context and environment (Osterwalder et al. 2010: 199). Thus, we find it relevant to apply the business model concept in a reversible order, and eventually determine the value proposition. As such, we will in the following explain how the seven building blocks will be applied.

![Application of Commercial Theory](image)

*Figure 3: Application of Commercial Theory by Aunel & Hoang (2015)*
As illustrated in figure 3 above, the first establishment of building blocks involves both customer segment and key partners. Thus, we will apply these building blocks to establish the customer segments in blogs and the key partners that bloggers need to ally themselves with in order to optimize their business model. The purpose of the two building blocks is to understand the commercial potential and market growth of blogging. As we claim that the first two building blocks will give us a representative picture of the online potential, and thus, the business opportunities for bloggers, the key activities will determine the most important tasks that make a business in blogging work. Further, as we in our introduction questioned whether or not commercials have a diminishing effect on blogs, we find it essential to identify and analyze the different forms of revenue streams derived from the key activities. By doing so, we will be able to better identify the commercial aspects that have a negative effect on the customers.

Key resources and channel will be evaluated together, as they ensure the most important assets for the key activities to work. Further, we argue that key resources are the channels through which the customers are reached by means of key activities. Finally, we will analyze the last two building blocks, cost structures and revenue streams, by linking the abovementioned building blocks together. By doing so, we are able to achieve knowledge about the overall costs included in blogs and the revenue streams derived from the key activities and collaboration with the key partners.

**Theory Part Three: Value Proposition**

We will in this last theory section capture the overall value creation of a blog, by applying value proposition as the main building block and incorporating customer relationship as a subcategory. The reason for incorporating customer relationship as a subcategory when explaining the value proposition is that we view customer relationship as value creating to a blog. This will be further elaborated when applied in the analysis. Meanwhile, the purpose of the value proposition is to demonstrate the values that can attract stakeholders to a blog, enabling us to determine who the primary stakeholders are. As such, the value proposition is the last building block that will enable us to assess our own business model of blogging within lifestyle.
• **Limitations & reflection on the Business Model Canvas**

The reason why we have chosen the Business Model Canvas presented by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) is to give a representative picture of the business aspects of blogging and how the interaction of the different components occurs. Meanwhile, we are well aware that such theory is not the only way of assessing business aspects, thus, we will in the following reflect on our application of the Business Model Canvas.

Due to the flexibility of the template, a lot of business-oriented people have tried to further develop the template to concern more specific areas such as innovation, entrepreneurship, sustainability, etc. For instance, we identify primary two alternatives to the template relevant to highlight, that is, Lean Canvas by Ash Maurya (2010) and Strong Sustainable Business Model Canvas by Antony Upward (2014).

The Lean Canvas replaces four of Canvas original building blocks: Key activities, key resources, customer relationships and key partners. The purpose is to incorporate an entrepreneur-focused template; Maurya (2010) therefore replaces the building blocks with problem, solution, key metrics and unfair advantage, to capture the risks and uncertainties when starting a new business. (Maurya, 2012) Meanwhile, as our study does not attempt to analyze the start-up of a new business, we do not find the Lean Canvas relevant to apply. Further, we find that the replacements take important elements out of the model when seeking to establish the financial aspects of blogging. However, taken the Lean Canvas model into consideration, we became aware that the Business Model Canvas does not include external factors, thus, we will later in this section elaborate on how this will influence our findings.

Moving on to the Strong Sustainable Business Model Canvas by Upward (2014), the model criticizes the Business Model Canvas for not including a company’s dynamic developments, that is, the external factors. Moreover, the Business Model Canvas is based on a traditional “profit-comes-first” business plan, in which Upward criticizes as only accounting for a company’s financial viability. Thus, he incorporates aspects of social and environmental consideration. (Upward, 2014) Meanwhile, as we acknowledge that the social aspects are important to incorporate in successfully establishing a business, applying Upward’s model is not relevant to our study, as we find it relevant to identify the value of commercial and social aspects separately before assessing them together.
However, having in mind that the social aspects are important in a successful business of blogging, we realized that the interaction part between stakeholders is missing in Osterwalder & Pigneur’s (2010) Business Model Canvas. As we find the interaction on blogs crucial in order to be able to build up a business of blogging, we therefore managed this limitation by incorporating social aspects into the value proposition analysis. As a result, by incorporating social aspects into our third theory section, we are able to assess success criteria based on both social and commercial aspects.

Taking the two alternatives into consideration, we decided to use the original Business Model Canvas, however, as mentioned earlier, the interpretations of the Business Model Canvas made us aware of the external factors that the business model excludes. When accounting for the external aspects, we define such aspects to be threats and opportunities from external factors, that is, competition. Michael Porter (1980) does account for these limitations in his model Porter’s Five Forces, used to analyze the level of competition within an industry. The model includes elements concerning bargaining power of suppliers, bargaining power of buyers, threat of substitutes, threat of new entrants and rivalry among existing firms in the industry. (Hooley, Piercy, & Nicoulaud, 2012) As such, the subject concerning threat of substitutes is the missing element in the Business Model Canvas. When excluding such factors in our study, there is a risk of neglecting important indicators of external threats in the future of blogging. Emphasizing that this element is important in our study, one might argue that we could have applied Porter’s Five Forces. Applying this model, however, also has its limitations. For instance, the model assembles all external factors as threats, however, we argue that external factors, such as competitors, can similarly be collaborators, and thus, an opportunity. As such, we argue that Osterwalder & Pigneur’s (2010) building block, key partners, represents the opportunities, which we find equally important. We acknowledge the importance of assembling the external threats as well, however, we argue that external threats in terms of substitutes are more relevant to include when identifying future aspects. Therefore, in our discussion of future prospects, we will include possible threats to the industry of blogging.
As a result, we have identified two primary limitations of the Business Model Canvas by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010). The figure 4 below illustrates how we will manage those limitations through our study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limitations</th>
<th>Managing the Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eliminating the Social Aspects</td>
<td>Social Psychology (analysis part one)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliminating External Factors</td>
<td>Future Prospects (discussion part two)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Two Primary Limitations of the Business Model Canvas by Aunel & Hoang (2015)
Chapter 5: Analysis

Our analysis of successful blogging will be divided into three parts and conclude with the overall success criteria. Part one will analyze the *Social Aspects of Blogging*, part two, the *Commercial Aspects of Blogging* and part three, the *Value Proposition of Blogs*. Finally, *Assessing a Successful Business of Blogging* sums up all three analyses by presenting a business model of blogging and the success criteria of a blog when balancing both social and commercial findings throughout our three analyses.

Part One: Social Aspects of Blogging

Based on our theoretical establishment of the self and the group, we found that human beings do not live in isolation, neither are they separable from other human beings. Therefore, when learning about human beings’ mental development, they should not be studied individually, but in relation to other human beings (Brown S. P., 1921: 232). In fact, our blog informant Dorte Lytje enhances our statement, by elaborating that people use blogs due to two reasons. Firstly, because blogs derive from basic human needs to be seen and heard. Secondly, because people seek connection with other people as a natural human need for social interaction in order to be part of a group. (Appendix 11: 158-159) Based on these two observations, we will seek to understand the motives behind blogging and the motives behind the interaction between the blogger and the reader. As a result, we will on the basis of this analysis gain understanding of the social motives behind blogging, and from that understand the social success criteria of a blog.

Five Core Social Motives

As it takes two parties to make a social interaction, it is interesting to examine which social aspects that are being satisfied from both the reader’s and the blogger’s point of view; in order to get a more nuanced picture of the interaction.

**Belonging to a social group**

Belonging, which is the fundamental principal of the Five Core Social Motives, drives much of social behavior and forms the basis for the remaining four motives (Fiske, 2010: 17). The sense of belonging is closely connected to belonging to a group, that is, the need to connect with others. The feeling of inclusion makes people secure (Brown S. P., 1921: 234). When
bloggers receive recognition from their readers, they feel accepted in a group. As a result of the increasing social interaction spent online through blogs, the sense of belonging in a virtual space is enabled. As such, blogging permit expressions of instant social acceptance, for instance, reflected in comments, feedback or traffic numbers (Kellerman, 2014).

**Reader:** Correspondingly, when people read blogs, it is eventually also a matter of recognition and feeling accepted. As mentioned earlier, Lytje states that connection to other people is one of the reasons why people are drawn to blogs. Therefore, by establishing a connection to a blogger one can relate to, one builds up a sense of belonging. (Appendix 11: 158-159) When people search for inspiration, information and tips, it is with the purpose of improving oneself, hence, receive recognition from the group. In fact 97 percent from our consumer survey states that these are the main reasons for reading blogs (Appendix 15: *Motivation for reading blogs*).

**Blogger:** Likewise for bloggers, the need for belonging to a group can also be reflected through a blogger’s motivation. Thus, some bloggers start blogging due to encouragement from others within their ingroup, that is, friends and family or the outgroup, that is, influential people within the industry. For instance, 50 percent of our blog informants started blogging due to encouragement from others (Appendix 14: *Motivation*). Including an example with Brasch, who was encouraged to start blogging by the founders of the online fashion webshop, Youheshe.com (Appendix 9: 22-28). Such recognition from the outgroup influenced Brasch to start blogging even though she did not have any intention to start blogging on her own initiatives. As such, recognition from either the ingroup or the outgroup is a way for bloggers to feel accepted and hence, the need for belonging will be fulfilled.

Similarly, when readers recognize blogs, the readers understand and somehow accept the person behind a blog. In that way, the bloggers feel acknowledged, hence, they belong to a group. Homesick gives a great example of the need for recognition; “to us, it is a success if our blog is well-received and people find our work relevant and interesting. Our readers’ recognition is what makes our blog successful”⁴ (Appendix 5: 254-257).

In conclusion, when looking from both the readers’ and bloggers’ perspectives, belonging to a group is a strong motive behind blogging. Thus, the belonging motive will be reflected

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⁴ Authors’ own translation
through the remaining four motives.

**Understanding the familiar**

People tend to understand others that have the same values, that is, people that we by some means are familiar with. Shared meanings enable us to function in social situations, and as a result, people know how to behave accordingly and thereby predict their outcomes. (Fiske, 2010: 565)

**Reader:** Looking at our consumer survey, 52 percent of the readers identify the importance of being able to identify one self with the blogger or the blog content. In fact, when elaborating on their motivation for reading blogs, they emphasize that they choose blogs that reflect similar values of their own. (Appendix 15: *Motivation for reading blogs*) For instance, three from our consumer survey elaborates: "I read blogs to get inspiration, however, mostly from bloggers with similar focus on healthy food just like myself" (Appendix 12, Consumer 2: 63-64). "I find inspiration via blogs reflecting my own lifestyle (...)" (Appendix 12, Consumer 12: 477). "I mainly read blogs to get inspiration, however, this is mainly through blogs which I share common interests with" (Appendix 12, Consumer 4: 152). Thus, understanding the value of a blogger can be a prerequisite for the reader to feel drawn to it and make the reader want to come back for more.

There is a reasonable explanation to why people are attracted to others that they understand. A precondition for understanding others is first of all, to understand the self. *Self-knowledge* is vital in order to fit into a group. The effect of *self-reference* is the reason why we easily can relate to similar others. The information and thoughts that the self can compare with makes it more memorable. As they can easily put information and thoughts into categories based on the values and norms the self believes in. (Fiske, 2010: 185, 555) The self-reference effect makes it easier for the reader to memorize the information they encounter, and thus, easier to relate to. Thus, the self-reference effect is what draws readers to blogs and makes them come back for more.

**Blogger:** The person behind a blog is the fundament of blogs; it is therefore crucial that bloggers reflect their own style and personality through a blog, as a blog is an extension of the

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5 Authors’ own translation
self (Smith 2010: 176). In fact, 13 percent from our consumer survey emphasize that curiosity and eagerness to know or learn something about a person, is among others a motivation for reading blogs (Appendix 15: Motivation for reading blogs). For instance: "I find a blog a lot more capturing if I feel it is personalized" (Appendix 12, Consumer 12: 493-494). "(...) Personally, I think it is interesting to read about those people that expose their personalities online; it satisfies my curiosity" (Appendix 12, Consumer 18: 725-726). Thus, overall personality is crucial in order to make the reader understand a blog and come back for more: “We could all put someone off with a lot of talk, but I come back to the blog if I feel they give me something extra of themselves” (Appendix 12: Consumer 14: 580-581).

In relation to these statements, our survey has proven that the inclusion of the reader from a reader’s perspective is not a crucial factor, not as crucial as the personality of the blogger is. In fact, merely 23 percent of the readers find it valuable that bloggers include the readers through the content, whereas 77 percent of the readers find personality as a fundamental factor of a successful blog (Appendix 15: Definition of a successful blog). As a result, our fourth hypothesis can be partly validated, “the personality of the blogger will determine the overall value of a blog”. We only partly validate the hypothesis, as we have come to know that personality is only one aspect of many when identifying the success criteria of a blog. Based on the first hypothesis, we can partly invalidate our sixth hypothesis, that is, “it is essential for the blogger to include the reader through the content.” Thus, it is not always important for the readers to be included, as we just found that including personality is more important.

Based on our analysis of understanding the familiar, we found that bloggers need to reflect their personality through their blogs in order for their readers to understand and relate to blogs. Moreover, personality is a way of obtaining loyal readers, as readers become attracted to blogs primarily due to personality. However, the selection of blogs will thus depend on the readers’ ability to understand the blogger’s personality as a reflection of themselves.

_Believing someone is in control_

According to Fiske (2010), control is a relationship between what people do and what they get, or put differently, a relationship between behavior and outcomes. A desire for control

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6 Authors’ own translation
7 Authors’ own translation
makes people feel effective and thus competent in dealing with their social environment and themselves. A lack of control results in people searching for information in order to restore control. Mutual control helps people fit into social groups and further help individuals meet their own goals. As a consequence, people that are in control feel more secure. (Fiske, 2010: 20) Thus, we will in the following identify the control that bloggers and readers possess.

**Reader:** The readers have potential control of the outcome of a blog, that is, the popularity of a blog. In fact, one of our blog informants states that it is the readers that eventually decide whether a blog is popular or not (Appendix 3: 142-143). Thus, the readers’ opinions are valued as they might give the blogger an indication of how they are perceived by their readers (Baumer, Sueyoshi & Tomlinson, 2011: 24). Nevertheless, as the readers might control whether a blog becomes a success or not, the readers do not have much control of the content unless the bloggers invites them to. According to our blog informants, 70 percent of the bloggers choose to include the readers in their blogs or plan to do so in the near future by either taking their comments into account, asking them for suggestions to their blogs or even solve a problem in collaboration with the reader (Appendix 14: Inclusion of the reader). An example of such can be illustrated through the blog Homesick, who created a blog post titled, ‘Homesick interior help’, where the readers can ask for help with an interior design problem. Afterwards, the post is shared, so other readers have the chance of giving input as well. (Appendix 5: 167-171) Followed by the example, some bloggers choose to include the readers in such an extent that it influences the content being presented. As a result, we argue that the reader has partial control of a blog’s content, and consequently, helps shaping the blog.

**Blogger:** In spite the fact that 70 percent of our blog informants include their readers, all of the informants further emphasize that they will never include the readers to such an extent that will compromise their personal reflection and style of the blog (Appendix 14: Inclusion of the reader). As such, we argue that the control given to the readers is limited, as the blog informants are still selective in the inclusion of the readers suggestions. As such, the inclusion of the readers is moreover a formality to let the readers feel heard and acknowledged by the blogger. This can be further explained through a transition in sociality. The study of human beings has for many decades been centered around people acting collectively. Meanwhile there has been a transition in society back to focus on the individual, which captures a general
perspective of the interaction on blogs between the blogger and the reader. This transition is called the networked individualism, which is defined as, “people connect directly to other people and that they are involved in specialized relationships with specific others, with whom they share common interests” (Welmann (2002) as cited in Siapera, 2012: 200). In other words, connectivity depends on the individual rather than the group. Networks are created by the individual based on the preferences of the person, including skills, background, knowledge, etc. (Welmann 2002 as cited in Siapera, 2012). The essence of this idea illustrates the need for connection with others and the importance of recognition, which in a transferred sense can be seen in relation to blogging. To be more specific, the idea of the networked individualism stresses the societal change of today’s rather independent and creative individual that strives for the unique by reflecting their personal taste and style through their personalities.

The remaining 30 percent of the bloggers that do not include the readers claim that the reasons for not including them are because they use the blog as their free space and universe, so they like to control all content (Appendix 14: Inclusion of the reader). However, this does not diminish the fact that bloggers need the interaction with readers, to feel part of a group, as we found that such is a major motivation factor for the continuation of a blog. In all, the interaction itself is what constitutes blogging. However, it is a balance between not losing control and making the readers feel valued by listening to their suggestions and opinions; as bloggers still need their recognition of the work they do:

“Overall, the blog is my free space, therefore, I blog for my own sake and not my readers’. Nevertheless, I keep in mind what kind of content that is well received by my readers and try to coordinate future content accordingly”8 (Appendix 8: 172-175).

Thus, we argue that all our blog informants consciously or unconsciously takes some of the readers’ suggestions into consideration, or use their opinions to identify which posts that are more successfully received by their readers (Appendix 14: Inclusion of the reader). Furthermore, we argue that whether or not our blog informants intentionally include their

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8 Authors’ own translation
readers, all the bloggers emphasize the importance of not losing control of the content in order to please the readers.

As a result, the predominant control of a blog’s content always belongs to the blogger. However, having in mind that the readers control the popularity of a blog, it can be beneficial for the blogger to incorporate some of the elements that the reader finds interesting and value-adding.

**Enhancing the self**

The enhancing motive is closely related to three sub-motives, that is, *self-knowledge, self-improvement* and *self-enhancement*. Self-knowledge is similar to the understanding motive, as people have to understand themselves in order to be able to understand others, which eventually leads to the motive of belonging to a group. Self-improvement is the desire to bring oneself one step closer to one’s ideal and finally self-enhancement is the desire to increase the value of the self both in terms of making oneself better and feel better. People want to feel that they are good and lovable. (Fiske 2010: 183) People who receive positive feedback will consequently feel good, (Swann, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi & Gilbert, 1990 as cited in Fiske, 2010: 22) which automatically enhances the person’s self, whether it be the blogger or the reader.

**Reader:** As previous established, 97 percent from our consumer survey indicates that their main motivation for reading blogs is with the purpose of improving oneself, that is, finding inspiration, information and tips from bloggers that they can relate to or look up to (Appendix 15: *Motivation for reading blogs*). A consumer from our survey elaborates:

“My motivation for reading blogs is to keep abreast of current trends and get advice on how to get a more healthy and better lifestyle that eventually might enhance my quality of life and joy in my everyday life”9 (Appendix 12, Consumer 12: 478-483).

The act of finding inspiration to everything from outfits, interior, travelling, recipes, etc., searching for information, keeping up to date with trends, and getting tips and advice. These are all an act of enhancing and improving the self.

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9 Authors’ own translation
**Blogger:** As established earlier, the need for being seen and heard and the need for connecting with others are the two reasons for starting a blog, as we will elaborate in the following. Firstly, human beings have always had the need of being seen and heard. Those needs can in fact in today’s society be achieved through everyday communication and services. Further, as a consequence of the emergence of the Internet these needs can among others be achieved through blogs, as such, the Internet has facilitated the need for self-fulfillment. In a virtual universe as the blogosphere, the more abstract needs such as love and belonging, esteem, and self-fulfillment become the fundamental needs to fulfill when engaging in blog activity (Kellerman, 2014), as we argue that the physiological needs are already being fulfilled in the physical world. Therefore, the need for self-fulfillment exists through all our blog informants, as this is one of the motivations behind starting a blog (Appendix 14).

Taking this into consideration, one reason to start engaging in blog activities is due to the desire of fulfilling own needs. As such, the needs are centered around the individual blogger, as illustrated in a quote by one of our blog informants, Line Schjelde: “Overall, the blog is my free space, and I blog for my own sake and not my readers” (Appendix 8: 172-173). This can be related back to our findings from the previous motive, Believing someone is in control, as we found that blogging for own sake is more important than pleasing the readers. Holding on to the bloggers’ own needs can reflect positively on the bloggers’ ability of personal growth, creativity or self-awareness (Kellerman, 2014). According to Maslow (1954), those needs are a way of developing one’s abilities, and thus, a way of fulfilling and enhancing the self (Buhler, 1971: 381-382). Maslow (1954) further states in a quotation:

”Most human beings lose this as they become enculturated, but some few individuals seem either to retain this fresh and naive, direct way of looking at life, or if they have lost it, as most people do, they later in life recover it.”

(Maslow 1954: 223 as cited in Buhler 1971: 383)

Through blogging, which is a creative accomplishment, the blogger can reach fulfillment. Meaning, everyone has the ability of being creative and everyone can start a blog, however, some people lose this ability when becoming cultured. Meanwhile, when people start
blogging due to own interest, they have retained their creativity as a way of expressing themselves:

“Some people ask their readers what they want them to blog about, however, I don’t like to do that, because to me my blog is 100 percent reflecting what I like to do. It’s all about my life and my style and I’m very pleased if people read my blog, but I’m not doing it on my readers’ request” (Appendix 9: 254-261).

Similarly, we argue that readers read blogs in order to enhance and improve themselves; likewise, bloggers use blogs as a medium to reach out to their readers that in turn will improve the bloggers’ self-esteem. By acknowledging them in what they do and who they are, the bloggers will feel competent and worthy. Thus, there is an interdependence between the blogger and the reader.

We have just established that the desire for fulfilling own needs is one of the reasons for starting a blog, which is centered around the individual. Another reason is the need to connect with others, as previously established. These two different needs are not mutually exclusive, in fact, our blog informant Stine Hasselsteen supports this statement: “My blog is successful when the blog posts are well received by the reader and when I’m happy about my own content” (Appendix 2: 345-346). In other words, Hasselsteen defines a successful blog not only based on the people’s recognition (the need for connecting with others), but also a need for her own recognition (blogging for own purposes). In fact, 50 percent of our blog informants started blogging due to the need of being seen and heard and the remaining 50 percent started as a need for connecting with others (Appendix 14: Motivation). Despite that 50 percent of the bloggers’ motivation for starting a blog is due to the need of being seen and heard, our data further proves that with time such needs often develops into a desire to connect with others. In fact, our theory by Meads (1937) supports this finding as we realized that the self can only come into being by external stimuli (Shotter, 1975). Consequently, they will get recognition from the group (Appendix 14: Motivation, Strategy). As such, enhancing the self occurs through the recognition from the group when connecting with others and through self-fulfilment of own needs.

\[10\] Authors’ own translation
**Trusting the familiar and the people we like**

As we have learned from the section *Understanding the familiar*, people feel drawn to blogs that they can identify themselves with. Likewise, people put their trust in people they understand and are familiar with. Trust facilitates group cohesion and close relationships and attachments, which again leads back to the fundamental motive of belonging. In order for trust to be established between two people, one has to rely on the other party and believe that the person is reliable, good and honest. As such, people tend to put their trust in others that possess a referent power, that is, someone they can somehow relate to and understand. (Fiske, 2010)

**Reader:** Trust is crucial for the online environment as there is no physical things to relate to and rely on (Ricketts, 2013). Readers trust the bloggers’ personal taste and style, which makes the blogger trustworthy. For that reason, readers rely on the bloggers’ ability to communicate a message out correctly. As a consequence, when the readers encounter too many linguistic errors in a blog, our survey proves that it irritates them and has a distracting effect on them. Even some people may opt out when encountering too many spelling mistakes. Keying mistakes are inevitable, but consistently making the same linguistic mistakes have consequences:

"I actually stop reading those blogs that consistently misspell. I think it’s super unprofessional if a blogger misspells. One thing is making a keying mistake, we all do that once in a while; however, when a blogger consistently misspells, it’s obviously because he or she doesn’t know any better, it’s definitely a no-go”\(^\text{11}\)

(Appendix 12, Consumer 15: 630-633).

For this reason, our consumer survey indicates that 87 percent of the readers view spelling mistakes as unprofessional and an indication of carelessness (Appendix 15: *The distraction of misspellings*). Even though it is expected that the writing style is less formal and more casual on a blog, the linguistic errors and casual writing have an influence on the readers’ trust

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\(^{11}\) Authors’ own translation
towards the blogger, as it degrades the bloggers’ credibility and the level of trust of the things they post. However, according to Lytje this depends on a balance:

“I also follow blogs that are not super well written, but due to their personality and their subject focus, it is not really a big deal. However, it is more favorable if a blog is well written, and as a result, it will be taken more seriously (...)”12 (Appendix 11: 92-95).

Thus, if the personality of the blogger is predominant, the spelling mistakes might be less visible; nevertheless, the overall impression of a blog will appear more professional without spelling mistakes. Hence, we can partly invalidate our fifth hypothesis, that is, “it is not crucial for a blogger to possess flawless writing skills at the same level as journalism”. The reason for partly invalidating the hypothesis is due to the fact that it is not expected that bloggers write at the same level as educated journalists, however, the overall writing skills are expected to be on a certain level.

**Blogger:** As we have come to know, bloggers are opinion leaders and prime influencers, they are the ones people look up to and whom they take inspiration from, therefore, people put their trust in those people. Thus, bloggers that people look up to have a strong effect on the choice of blogs that they choose to follow. One blog reader from our consumer survey illustrates this in a quote; “the main reason why I read blogs is due to the person behind whom I find either interesting, inspiring or arousing my curiosity” 13 (Appendix 12, Consumer 24: 894-895). Thus, it is essential for the bloggers to reflect their own personality and have their own personal style, as we previously found that 77 percent from our consumer survey find personality as a fundamental factor of a successful blog (Appendix 15: Definition of a successful blog). Staying true to own values is eventually, what shine through a blog and make readers put their trust in the blogger, as readers trust people they can relate to (Appendix 8: 186-187). On this account, we have realized that blogger’s credibility and integrity is key.

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12 Authors’ own translation
13 Authors’ own translation
Sum up of the social analysis

To sum up the Five Core Social Motives, belonging is the leading element for the human social survival as it makes us social beings. Our consumer survey has proven that people mainly read blogs because they are looking for inspiration, information and tips from other people’s lives, which they can identify themselves with. Based on this finding, we argue that readers like to imitate the people that enhance their own lives in order to feel that they belong to a group.

From the bloggers’ point of view, we found that there are two motivations behind starting a blog, either due to the need of fulfilling own needs or the need of recognition from others by connecting with people, however, one motivation does not exclude the other. In fact, we found that bloggers need the readers in order to fulfill the self. Another thing we have come to know is that in order to understand other people, we need to first of all understand ourselves and share the same values with the people we like. Thus, bloggers need to reflect their personality through their blog, as such will attract readers, as we found that readers are attracted to bloggers whose personalities they can identify themselves with. Further, controlling makes us effective and competent in acting on the social situation. The readers have the power of controlling whether a blog is popular or not and likewise, bloggers can control how much influence the readers should have on their blog. This mutual controlling relationship helps both parties achieve their individual goals and consequently, feel a sense of belonging. Nonetheless, the blogger is more dependent on the reader, than vice versa as there are a lot of other blogs to turn to and a lot of other media to find inspiration from. Therefore, it is extremely important that the blogger’s personality and style is reflected through a blog both when it comes to visual and textual content in order to distinguish from the rest and to appear trustworthy. As a matter of fact, as we introduced initially, it takes two parties to make a social interaction, therefore, the blogger is not the only one who contributes to a blog’s success; without the reader a blog would not have any value. In fact, it would not be a blog, but rather a diary and the whole point of seeking recognition would be lost.

On this account, the social aspect of asking a friend for tips and advice, whether it be tips to a recipe or where to buy a certain piece of clothing has always been present; however, technology has only made the tendency broader by enabling social interaction online, allowing a greater population across borders to exploit this advantage. Simultaneously,
companies have also realized the power of blogs as a promotion channel. Consequently, we will in the next section analyze how the business of blogging operates.
Part Two: Commercial Aspects of Blogging

As discussed in part one of the analysis, blogging was grounded on a social foundation with no business prospects in mind, however, in order to understand how blogging seeks to create, deliver and capture value, we will in this part of our analysis focus on the commercial value within blogging. To do so, we will identify the Key Partners & Customer Segment, Key Activities, Revenue Streams Derived from Key Activities and Key Resources & Channel of blogging, as these aspects can give us an understanding of the Cost & Revenue streams within blogs. Thus, the commercial part of blogging will be illustrated through Osterwalder & Pigneur’s (2010) Business Model Canvas.

Key Partners & Customer Segment

One of the crucial revenue streams in blogging stems from collaboration with companies\textsuperscript{14}. Without the interest of such, blogging will be purely based on social gains; hence, collaboration with companies is a necessity in order to call blogging a business. By analyzing our data collection, it becomes clear that bloggers are still struggling to get the desired attention from companies (Appendix 14: Challenges and opportunities in the blogging industry). Therefore, we will in the first part of our commercial analysis seek to get a representative picture of the online blogging industry as a whole, by looking at customers’ and companies’ availability online. By doing so, we will identify the market potentials to establish a business out of blogging. However, as blogs generate revenue streams due to their key partners and not primarily from their readers, we will in relation to the business model identify blog readers as consumers and not customers, as they do not directly or continuously generate revenue streams by reading blogs; but on the contrary, only by free consumption of the content.

The number of consumers using online media platforms is increasing every year. According to Statistics Denmark 2014, 93 percent of all families in Denmark have access to Internet in their homes. Also, 73 percent of Danes between the age of 16 and 74 have at one point in 2013 purchased goods or services through an online platform. (Danmarks Statistik, 2014: It-anvendelse i befolkningen 2014) As a result, consumers are less available on traditional

\textsuperscript{14} When referring to companies, we mean companies who use blogging as an advertisement platform to reach more consumers.
channels such as television, magazines and newspapers. For instance, the average consumption of daily television has decreased significantly in 2013. In fact, the numbers were so drastic that television companies had to reduce the costs of TV-commercials in order to keep companies interested in buying them. (Danmarks Statistik, 2014: Radio og TV 2013)

Further, statistics shows that the use of social network platforms on mobile devices has doubled within the past two years. The number has increased from DKK 1.3 millions in 2012 to DKK 2.2 millions in 2014. (Danmarks Statistik, 2014: It-anvendelse i befolkningen 2014)

This tendency denotes that consumers are moving away from traditional media, and thus become more visible on online platforms like computers, smartphones and tablets.

These statistics indicate that it is essential that companies do not stick to the same marketing strategy as previously, simply because the consumers are no longer present on the traditional media to the same extent as before. (Appendix 1: 298-306) This development has made companies realize the importance of using non-traditional marketing strategies to get exposure. In fact, due to consumer habits, companies have increased their presence on social media by 40 percent since 2013. According to a report from Statistics Denmark, four out of five companies used social media as a marketing strategy in 2014. Further, 46 percent of companies used social media in 2014, which indicates that companies are aware of the potentials in social media platforms. Within these statistics, nine percent of companies use blogs as a strategic way to connect with the online consumers. (Danmarks Statistik, 2015: It-anvendelse i virksomheder 2014). Taken into consideration that blogs was not even included in the statistic measurements in 2012, the nine percent illustrates that companies have realized the advantage in blogs within the last couple of years. (Danmarks Statistik, 2013: It-anvendelse i virksomheder 2012).

The value of blogs can according to Henrik Akselbo, director of Bloggers Delight, be illustrated through two parameters: Consumer Segment and Effectiveness. Firstly, Akselbo argues that the consumer segment of blogging becomes valuable for companies, as 95 percent of blog consumers are women. In September 2014, more than 600.000 different women visited at least one of Bloggers Delight’s blogs. That is, 25 percent of all women in Denmark. (Appendix 1: 395-400) No other media has acquired the same percentage of visits from women. Thus, it becomes a force in a selling proposition, as companies only have a five percent possibility to waste page-views on a wrong target group, i.e. men; given that 95
percent of the blog consumers are women. (Appendix 1: 388-394) Secondly, bloggers can illustrate the value towards companies, by emphasizing two aspects compared to traditional media; one, the effectiveness blogs entails, and two, the reduced costs compared to traditional media (Appendix 1: 20-42). Given an example from Akselbo, who discovered such value, as he with a limited budget had to decide which promotion strategy to use when promoting his startup companies Billetto, Downtown and Take Offer, respectively. In doing so, Akselbo tried all kind of solutions, however, committing most of his marketing budget to traditional media. While traditional media had his primary focus, Akselbo also had a blogger promoting the offerings on his sites. However, when comparing the two very different strategies, Akselbo realized that the budget spent on advertisement did not result in higher traffic from the more expensive marketing strategy. Thus, he discovered that the sushi menu he gave a girl for writing a post about Downtown and Take Offer, generated more followers and traffic, than through advertisement on traditional media, which Akselbo paid more than ten thousand for. (Appendix 1: 6-29) Realizing the potential, Akselbo exploited this opportunity by establishing his own business based on blogging. Further, Akselbo elaborates that online marketing strategies within blogging contain a lot more than just a few banners, sporadically. Thus, if companies want to reach the consumers online, they have to engage in a marketing approach comparable with the level of commitment in traditional media. (Appendix 1: 298-320) Taken Akselbo’s example into consideration, we argue that the overall value through blogs is constituted by word of mouth facilitated by the Internet. Thus, together with the growth of online consumer availability, the strategy of worth of mouth becomes more effective applying online platforms rather than traditional.

Based on our observations, we argue that the business prospect of blogging entails many possibilities for further growth on the Danish market. As such, consumers are moving away from traditional media in favor of online platforms. Further, we argue that collaboration between companies and bloggers entails great promotion possibilities when seeking to reach the female audience. As such, we identify potential collaborators as key partners. Therefore, we will in the following alternate between key partners and companies, when viewing it from the bloggers point of view and the consumers. Thus, key partners will be explained in combination with the bloggers, and likewise companies, when stating the interaction of consumers and companies in general.
Key activities: On a blog

As we argue that blogging entails a valuable market and consumer segment to attract future business collaborations, we will in this section elaborate on the key activities within blogging. The key activities will be analyzed according to the commercial value for both bloggers and companies, and how such methods affects the consumer’s consumption of blogs.

According to Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010: 36), “the key activity building block describes the most important things a company must do to make its business model work”. Thus, we argue that one of the most important things within blogging and hence, the main key activity, is daily posts. Derived from our data collection, we further argue that daily posts can be categorized according to two main functions: problem solving and platform promotion.

As shown in figure 5 above, we view daily posts on blogs as a problem solving activity towards the consumers and a promotional activity towards key partners. As previously mentioned in the social analysis, our consumer survey indicates that 97 percent of the consumers read blogs in order to find inspiration, information and tips (Appendix 15). Thus, we argue that the key activity of daily posts attempt to give new solutions and inspiration to
solve a consumer’s problem, that is, everything from finding a new food recipe, finding inspiration on dresses to wear, or deciding where to go on vacation, etc. (Appendix 15). The other main function of daily posts is from the commercial interaction between bloggers and key partners, wherein key partners use bloggers’ daily posts as a platform promotion channel to achieve more exposure.

As we have established that the main key activity is generated through daily posts and thus, can be related to problem solving for consumers and likewise, as a promotion platform for key partners, we will now elaborate on how these two characteristics meet. According to blog informant Lytje, such characteristics are either met by a masculine or a feminine approach. The two approaches formulated by Lytje are also commonly known as an impulse-oriented and goal-oriented approach for consumers to search for information (Peterson & Merino, 2003: 104). Hence, the two approaches illustrate the most common reasons for consumers to become aware of a blog, and how such can lead to promotional benefits for companies. Masculine approach is a linear approach that starts with the consumer having a clear goal. For instance, if a consumer finds it difficult to choose between two products, the consumer within a masculine approach would through the Internet effectively try to solve such by means of a search engine (problem solving). In theory, the consumer might end up on a blog, and find the solution to the problem. Thus, if the blogger creates a credible and personal recommendation, it might add value to the product, and in the best possible manner, affect the consumer’s final buying decision (platform promotion). (Lytje, 2013) In order to benefit from a masculine approach, bloggers need to incorporate keywords to optimize the searching also known as Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Thus, the right use of SEO will enable more traffic, and hence, become a valuable tool for key partners to get exposure. (Sprung, 2014)

Meanwhile, as the aforementioned approach is targeted, the feminine approach is circular and occurs more randomly (Lytje, 2013). The approach in its essence is about traffic occurring through relations; thus, instead of having a direct goal the consumer establishes one through a process, that is, connecting with others via social media. In fact, this theory is supported by one from our consumer survey, “(...) sometimes, I visit blogs that write about e.g. fitness, but once again, I only notice the sites when people share it on e.g. Facebook”15 (Appendix 12, Consumer 30: 1129-1131). As such, the motivation for visiting a blog might also depend on

15 Authors’ own translation
the recommendation or link submitted in texts from others. For that reason, it is essential that bloggers are visible on as many social media sites as possible, as Lytje and Akselbo both argue that a lot of traffic occurs by randomly browsing through Facebook, Instagram or Twitter (Appendix 11: 110-111) (Appendix 1: 329-332).

As such, the two approaches fulfill both the consumers’ need of solving a problem, together with key partners’ ability to generating awareness of product or services using blogs as a promotion channel.

As we explained how daily posts most commonly connect the consumers and interest from key partners, we will now establish two other key activities that are complementary to the key operation of daily posts: fixed posts and competitions. All of our blog informants indicate that it is very important that consumers find a reason to come back to a blog regularly. One way many bloggers manage this is either through fixed posts, competitions or a mixture of the two.

Fashion icon Pernille Teisbæk established fixed weekly posts in order to involve the consumers:

“The consumers really like that you listen to their comments (...). However, the problem is that it takes incredibly long time to reply back, so instead we established some weekly themes that we know people like to follow. In that way, they still feel like they are being heard and taken into account”16 (Appendix 10: 241-249).

By introducing continuity on blogs, consumers feel a sense of attachment. Thus, instead of browsing through a variety of blogs each day, the consumers already know what to expect. As a result, the traffic numbers increases significantly each Thursday when Pernille Teisbæk posts ‘This week’s high street favorite’. However, according to manager Løffler, such an effect in traffic takes time, hence, bloggers need to be consistent if applying such strategy. (Appendix 10: 250-256) Backing up this statement, one consumer elaborates, “it is a plus if a blog has some type of recognizability. In that way, I can sort out the themes I don’t find interesting (...).” (Appendix 12, Consumer 29: 1105-1107) Thus, 81 percent might not find fixed posts as a necessity on blogs; however, 39 percent from our consumer survey states that

16 Authors’ own translation
applying them can make the content more fun to follow on a regular basis (Appendix 15: *Importance of fixed weekly themes*).

Likewise, competitions on blogs can be very effective for bloggers to use as a tool to involve their users and to promote a specific product or service (Appendix 7: 161-163). Meanwhile, most consumers find advertisement to be a distracting element on blogs. In fact, our consumer survey proves that 74 percent have been distracted by advertisement on blogs. However, in relation to competitions, one consumer replied:

“I think it’s cool if a blogger has a good discount code or competition, even though I know it has a commercial aspect. I really think it depends on how the blogger presents it. Hence, if the product or service do to not fit into the blogger’s universe (...), it’s clear that it’s only present because the blogger has been paid for it.”

(Appendix 12, Consumer 15: 642-649)

Based on this quote, consumers are less irritated by advertisement used through competitions. In fact, 19 percent from our consumer survey elaborates that promotion through competition is less distracting, if they can benefit from the commercial aspect (Appendix 15: *Importance of fixed weekly themes*). As a result, we argue that by using competitions as a key activity can benefit the consumers, bloggers and key partners, without irritating the consumers.

Overall, the use of both fixed posts and competitions can be a great supplement to involve consumers and generate promotional platforms for key partners to engage in. Bloggers must be careful that these key activities do not become too monotonous, however, as they can seem staged. Meanwhile, if they fit with the blogger’s universe, consumers are more likely to follow a blog regularly (Appendix 15).

**Revenue Streams Derived from Key Activities**

As we in the previous section identified the key activities in blogs, we will now identify the revenue streams, which the blogger can profit: *banner advertisement, affiliate links, sponsored posts* and *online shops* (Appendix 14: *Revenue streams*).
• **Banner advertisement**

A banner advertisement is a large graphical advertisement, most commonly placed in between posts or in the sidebar on blogs. By means of a click on a banner, bloggers generate traffic to key partners’ websites by leading the consumers directly to their website. However, in most situations, the consumer will not click on the banner, but instead unconsciously notice it. (Schow, 2014) When looking at our blog informants, all except for one engage in some kind of banner advertisement on their blog. From their perspective, the appliance of banners is mostly used to generate a fixed monthly income. According to our blog informant Danica Chloe, “it is unavoidable not to use any marketing solutions (...) We put a lot of time into blogging, so it is only fair that we profit a little from it, (...) hence, banners are standard advertisement on my blog”17 (Appendix 3: 240-248). There are three ways in which a banner agreement can provide revenue streams for bloggers: the number of traffic on blogs, cost per clicks on banners and pop-up banners (Schow, 2014). The most commonly used is based on a blog’s traffic (Appendix 14). The traffic is calculated through, cost per mille (CPM), that is, amount per thousand page views. For instance, if an agreement of CPM were established to be DKK100 the blogger would receive DKK1,000 when reaching 10,000 views on a blog. Agreements can also be initiated according to banner-clicks; however, this approach often leads to low revenue streams, since consumers rarely choose to leave a blog in order to look into the content of a banner (Schow, 2014). Finally, banner advertisement can also be obtained through so-called pop-up banners. These banners have the potential of great amounts of revenue streams; however, this strategy can also cause consumers to be irritated, as these banners have a disruptive effect. (Schow, 2014) Our consumer survey included the following remarks: “Pop-up banners are absolutely the most irritating form of advertisement” (Appendix 12, Consumer 24: 918-921), also “it takes too much space and attention on the site” (Appendix 12, Consumer 4: 183-186). “Sometimes I just have to give up and leave the site (...), as I in some situations by mistake, click on the banner and straight off I’m on a company’s website” (Appendix 12, Consumer 30: 1167-1172).18 Thus, we argue that bloggers will benefit from ignoring the commercial benefits of pop-up banners, as they compromise the overall content too much.

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17 Authors’ own translation
18 Authors’ own translation
While banner advertisement on the sidebar on blogs is a great way to ensure revenue streams, and have a minimal impact on the consumers, the process of getting the agreements with key partners can be very difficult. The process is both time consuming and requires business experience; thus, the blogger should not only be able to pitch the benefits and have the courage to reach out to potential advertisers, but also have the knowledge to reach out to the most suitable advertisers that match the values of the bloggers’ universe. (Appendix 11: 236-249) Such challenges can be limited by collaborating with a blog network, which we will discuss further in key resources.

- **Affiliate links**

Affiliate links are a marketing approach which all of our blog informants apply to make a business out of blogging (Appendix 14: Revenue streams). The approach is a collaboration strategy which makes it possible for bloggers to make money while helping companies obtain exposure of their products and services. Bloggers incorporate a link to a company’s website into their posts. When the consumer clicks on the link submitted and purchases a product or service within that key partner’s website, the sale will then automatically be tracked back to the blogger and generate revenue.

The ability to track the source of sales is caused by so-called cookies. When a consumer clicks on the affiliate link, a cookie is placed, which allows the sale to be tracked back to the blogger within a period of 30 days. (Schow, 2014) The revenue streams from such an approach depend on the agreements with key partners; however, most commonly the blogger receives between eight and twenty percent of each sale generated. (Appendix 1:127)

The approach of affiliate links is widely used within blogging, since bloggers automatically use links through their posts in order to advise the consumers. Another reason for such popularity is that it gives bloggers an artistic freedom to place links when suitable in posts. (Schow, 2014) However, according to our consumer survey, they all state that it is a balancing act, as too many affiliate links in every posts submitted make the post seem too commercialized, and less influenced by the blogger (Appendix 15: Distraction from advertisement). Overall, our data indicates that affiliate links has a less distracting effect on consumers and is an effective and discrete method of attaining revenue streams on blogs.
Sponsored posts

Sponsored posts are a brand collaboration approach between a blogger and their key partners. Thus, key partners engage in sponsored posts in order to obtain recommendations and exposure of their products or services. As a result, bloggers gain revenue when they incorporate recommendations of a key partner’s product or service into their daily posts. Such a strategy is commonly used in blogging. In fact, all of our blog informants use sponsored posts to generate revenue streams (Appendix 14: Revenue streams).

“It’s a shame that many of the influential bloggers only show brands that are sponsored. It’s rare that they display something they are not getting paid for, which means, it’s not reflecting their personal style 100 percent, and additionally, their sites are loaded with advertisement (...)”19 (Appendix 12, Consumer 8: 349-354).

Consumers find that, “it’s important that bloggers stay ‘true to themselves’ instead of being a ‘sell out’”20 (Appendix 12, Consumer 4: 183-186). Hence, bloggers need to find a balance when engaging in sponsored posts; in such way that consumers find the sponsored elements in line with the other content and subject of a blog. On the other hand, consumers are well aware of the need of advertisement on blogs. It is the way in which advertisements are incorporated that influences whether the consumers find it distracting or not: “I’m not really bothered by advertisement, (...) only when they have no connection with the blogger's style or content”21 (Appendix 12, Consumer 9: 384-386). In relation to this statement, Lytje states: “It’s important that bloggers reject some collaborations (...), for example, it’s very transparent if a fashion blogger suddenly writes about toilet paper. It might be an excessive example, however, it’s in these situations that the consumers notice the commercial aspect, and are provoked by it (...)”22 (Appendix 11: 70-74). Therefore, the consumers emphasize the importance of the personal content rather than the quantity of sponsored posts engaged in. Thus, bloggers will benefit from focusing on personalizing the content.

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19 Authors’ own translation
20 Authors’ own translation
21 Authors’ own translation
22 Authors’ own translation
• **Online shop**

Online shops are a common feature to generate revenue streams on blogs. Revenue streams of such can be generated in two ways. One, by selling own products or services, and two, by selling other’s products or services. (Schow, 2014)

For example, if a blogger in the fashion industry also has the ability to create and design clothing and jewelry, it can be beneficial to sell these products through a blog. If bloggers have a lot of followers, it is likely that consumers might also want to buy products or services produced by the blogger. For example, Lytje has through her blog found a way to create extra revenue streams by selling her experience and knowledge through books, workshops, online video courses, etc. (Appendix 11: 7-25). However, such revenue activity is mostly seen on blogs with high traffic numbers and stable income from advertisement deals, as this method requires additional capital. It is therefore more common for new bloggers to sell others’ products or services through their blogs, as there are no expenses to pay for in advance. (Schow, 2014) In all, consumers are provoked by advertisement hidden from them, however, entering an online shop they are aware of the promotional and commercial aspects of it. Thus, we do not see any disadvantages by selling others’ products through online shops as a way to gain profit, as long a the products reflect a bloggers persona.

Advertising on blogs can provoke many consumers, and thus, influence their motivation for following a blog. Our consumer survey has provided us with insight into how negatively blog advertising affects consumers: 74 percent were annoyed by advertisement on blogs. However, within the 74 percent, 44 percent replied that advertisement is acceptable to some extent, as long as they are well integrated into the posts. Nonetheless, 26 percent of the consumers are not bothered by advertisement on blogs. Thus, combining the 44 percent with the remaining 26 percent, we argue that a majority of consumers can accept advertisement on blogs as long as it is properly incorporated in the content, and thus, fits with the rest of a blogger’s universe. (Appendix 15: Distraction from advertisement) The balance is to incorporate advertisement naturally into blogs, so it does not appear too distracting.

Advertisements are also a necessity for the survival of blogs, of which our consumers are well aware (Appendix 15: Distraction from advertisement). Akselbo explains, “we have seen a
positive effect, as it is easier for the blogger to keep the good work going with money flow on the side” (Appendix 1: 282-286).

Further, 60 percent of our blog informants emphasize that money is a motivational factor, “it is also difficult to keep the spirit up the first couple of years, due to no earnings” (Appendix 4: 159-162) (Appendix 14: Motivation). Hence, advertising is needed in order for the business of blogging to survive, as money is a motivational factor for bloggers to keep the good work going, as money remind people of performance efforts (Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2008: 209).

Key Resources & Channel: Networks and Platforms

As previous established in part one of the analysis, blogging stems from a desire to express oneself and the need for recognition through connecting with others, as we are social by nature. For that reason, a lot of bloggers started their blogs with no intention of making a profit out of it, and hence they do not have any knowledge about price settings, contract agreements and so forth. (Appendix 11: 65-87) As a result, many bloggers choose a blog network as a key resource to ensure revenue streams and exposure. Therefore, we will in this section present the knowledge obtained about the key resources and channels used in the blogging industry, in relation to its commercial value. We will identify the advantages and disadvantages of being part of a network, and likewise, when managing the advantages and disadvantages on an independent platform.

• Blog networks

A blog network can be a useful key resource for bloggers, as some bloggers do not know how to manage all the technical solutions and marketing agreements by themselves. In fact, 50 percent of our blog informants choose to be part of a blog network using an indirect partner channel (Osterwalder et al. 2010), which supports everything from technical solutions to advertisement on blogs. Therefore, we want to investigate how this affects the business model of blogging in relation to key partners and key activities. Based on our data from Bloggers Delight, we will analyze blog networks using Bloggers Delight as a point of departure.

Everyone can be part of Bloggers Delight. The content of a blog has no limitations and the cost is free. According to Akselbo, all bloggers within Bloggers Delight have ‘free hands’ to
write whatever they want. Thus, a blog network does not want to be an assessor of the content being produced. Akselbo argues that consumers are satiated by high profile journalists deciding what is relevant for them to read and what is not. For instance, magazines have for many years hired high profile journalists to write about things that they perceived as relevant for the consumers. However, consumers now want to be part of the decision process giving them the opportunity to select what is relevant for them to read. For that reason, many people have been left out, which is a problem that Bloggers Delight aims to solve by providing a platform introducing different bloggers with diverse backgrounds, who may not necessarily be educated journalists (Appendix 1: 366-371). Meanwhile, this issue is not only solved by blog networks, as blogs in general accommodate this issue. Accordingly, Bloggers Delight handles the process of the commercialization on blogs, thereby, allowing bloggers to only focus on the creative part of the content (Appendix 1: 125-151). By doing so, we argue that there are many opportunities and advantages of being part of a blog network. Further, we argue that such advantages can be described through seven different service offerings including, physical, human, financial and intellectual resources (Osterwalder et al. 2010):

- Delivery of all technical solutions within blogging.
- Support with technical difficulties.
- Fulltime sales department.
- High traffic.
- Ensuring a safety net for bloggers.
- Abiding laws and regulations.
- Establishment of events, parties and workshops.

The physical resources is grounded in all the technological solutions, as Bloggers Delight has the responsibility of delivering an efficient platform, server and design resources that allow bloggers to deliver their content. This is also combined with human resources, as Bloggers Delight provides 13 employees to support with technological questions or difficulties. The employees are also the financial resource for a bloggers, as they are behind all the marketing agreements with companies. Everything financially goes through Bloggers Delight, including negotiations and contracts with key partners as well as law and regulations according to the Danish Marketing Practices Act, which Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) establish as the
intellectual aspect. (Appendix 1: 432-433) A blog network is therefore the key resource that deals with all revenue streams through a blog’s key activity. Thus, it is a blog network’s job to ensure that a blogger receives the right amount of payment for the business agreements established.

By identifying the commercial aspects, Bloggers Delight controls all banner advertisement and is negotiated without consulting a blogger:

“Bloggers Delight is responsible for all the marketing solutions on my blog, however, in the end it’s my decision what I want to post. The only thing I have no control over is which banners Bloggers Delight add on my site” (Appendix 3: 244-248).

However, as mentioned earlier, the work behind banner advertisement can be very difficult to master. Hence, the process can be very time consuming, and either prevents a blogger from focusing on the content or having any banner advertisements at all. For that reason, blog networks can be beneficial for bloggers, as they to some extent ensure revenue streams. (Appendix 1: 142-151) According to blog informant Dorte Lytje, it becomes a valuable resource for bloggers who do not have the knowledge, time or passion for establishing marketing solutions: “If one has no expertise in establishing marketing solutions, bloggers should let others do the work for them (...) especially if the work within promotion is out of one’s comfort zone”23 (Appendix 11: 65-87). While banner advertisement is controlled by a blog network, bloggers are directly involved with the creative campaigns initiated with the companies. In these situations, bloggers need to participate in the creative setting of the promotional content, and thus, act as an ambassador for a product or service. According to Akselbo, bloggers will in this situation have complete control in participating. Thus, if the promotional aspect is not aligned with the blog content, the blogger has the authority to reject the collaboration. (Appendix 1: 163-177)

As human resources generate value for bloggers, it also generates a financial guarantee. However, this goes both ways, as the bloggers gain 50 percent of all the revenue generated from marketing (Appendix 3: 258). Acknowledging that bloggers solely take half of the revenue streams generated through the network, Akselbo elaborates the advantage: “Instead

23 Authors’ own translation
of earning a premium based on your own sales, you make less than premium but more than zero”. (Appendix 1: 146-151) To give an example, the three girls behind Homesick elaborate on how such distribution is beneficial for them, as the alternative would result in much lower revenue opportunities:

“(…) Many people don’t understand why we just don’t have an independent blog, as we would be able to keep all profit to ourselves. However, we are all studying and working part time, so we simply don’t have the time. For that reason, Bloggers Delight manages all the practical stuff, while we focus on the content. (…) This distribution works very well for us”.

(Appendix 5: 148-154)

This quote indicates that Homesick find the distribution acceptable. In fact, all five blog informants within Bloggers Delight are satisfied with this distribution, as everyone gains from the collaboration (Appendix 14: Pros and cons being part of a blog network).

Beside revenue streams, bloggers within a blog network also receive an influential network and increased traffic on their blogs: “The balance between competition and ‘colleague-friendships’ is quite genius in my opinion, as we generate traffic to one another by being on the same platform”. (Appendix 4: 144-148) The gathering of blogs on one platform is likewise something 15 percent of our surveyed consumers find useful and relevant to highlight: “(…) I like blog networks because it’s so simple to navigate from one blog to another”24 (Appendix 12, Consumer 24: 928-932). “(…) I would say that it’s an advantage for Bloggers Delight that they have it all in one place. (…) I often visit several of Bloggers Delight blog’s since I’m on the site, anyway, and therefore, come across new bloggers. Thus, I think it is more difficult for independent bloggers to be noticed, compared to bloggers who are part of a blog network”25 (Appendix 12, Consumer 30: 1182-1188). These statements indicate that bloggers can benefit from the traffic generated from one blogger to another, as it will assist the discovery of new blogs of interest for the consumers. (Appendix 15: Opinion on blog platforms such as Bloggers Delight)

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24 Authors’ own translation
25 Authors’ own translation
According to Akselbo, blogging within a network will only generate more value for bloggers in the future, as companies get more accustomed to the media. Thus, he describes it as a “positive snowball effect” (Appendix 1: 286). He predicts that bloggers’ earning will increase as companies begin to realize the marketing potential in blogs. This has a self-reinforcing effect, as the blogger might be able to quit his or her part-time job, thereby, giving the blogger more time to focus on the blog content, and result in an increase of consumers. (Appendix 1: 277-286) However, this is not necessarily what all bloggers want, as some like to keep it as a part-time job next to their studies or full-time job. As a result, the statement by Akselbo supports our previous establishment; that due to the growing online presence of consumers, it is lucrative for companies to begin investing more on social platforms, which consequently benefits the bloggers.

The final benefit is the network that bloggers obtain through events, parties and workshops facilitated by blog networks. Backing up this statement, Twin Food elaborates that bloggers gain a lot from participating in the social events established by networks: “It can be difficult to establish a valuable network within the creative industry”\(^\text{26}\) (Appendix 7: 173-175), thus, meeting other bloggers or people through blog networks can lead to new projects and collaboration opportunities.

Having identified the advantages of being part of a blog network derived from our data, we will now evaluate four possible disadvantages when choosing a blog network as a key resource. These four statements will seek to challenge some of our aforementioned advantages:

- Lack of control in the commercialization.
- Bloggers disappear among other blogs.
- Similar campaigns recur on multiple blogs.
- Limitations of the revenue streams.

One of the disadvantages, the lack of control has resulted in some bloggers’ opting out from a blog network and establishing themselves on an independent platform. Laura Tønder, former blogger of Bloggers Delight, decided to leave the network after one and a half years:

\(^{26}\) Authors’ own translation
“I got a lot of promotional benefits from being part of a network. However, I decided to start on my own, as I wanted to get full control of the blog, which can be difficult to achieve in a blog network.”27 (Appendix 6: 136-140)

Even though the traffic and exposure of blogs through networks is a huge steppingstone to enhance one’s network in the creative industry, the control that Tønder mentions is lacking, as the commercial content is standardized. The commercial campaigns or banner advertisements on Bloggers Delight are often used in multiple blogs. Meanwhile, as this often is a disadvantage for bloggers, business wise, this is a clever approach, as companies’ chances for views are higher. Also, by allowing multiple bloggers to use specific keywords (SEO) in posts, companies become more visible on Google searches. Even though it is favorable for companies, Lytje argues that bloggers need to reject these kinds of promotion strategies, as the credibility towards the consumers disappears. Moreover, Lytje argues that the commercial part of blogging can become valuable for bloggers, consumers and companies, if the commercial content is in line with the blogger’s original content on the blog. (Appendix 11: 65-80) Likewise, 48 percent from our consumer survey state that big blog networks like Bloggers Delight have become too commercialized, and thus, makes consumers rather choose independent platforms or smaller networks (Appendix 15): “The reason why I don’t read blogs on Bloggers Delight is due to the immense amount of advertisement (...) that pops up everywhere”28 (Appendix 12, Consumer 15: 654-657). Even bloggers within the network acknowledge this tendency. Danica Chloe states: “Bloggers Delight can easily get a lot of commercial agreements with companies, due to its high traffic numbers; however, as such benefits the network, it might not reflect positively on the bloggers. For the same reason, it could be beneficial to leave the network and start independently“29 (Appendix 3: 132-135).

Overall, we argue that bloggers who are part of a network have a higher risk of being too commercial, as the standardized commercials deprive the personal aspect in the content.

Caused by the immense amount of bloggers on Bloggers Delight, some bloggers choose not to be part of blog networks, as they feel they will disappear in the crowd (Appendix 2: 147-

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27 Authors’ own translation
28 Authors’ own translation
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Even though the traffic is massive on Bloggers Delight, there is no guarantee that the consumers actually read the content, rather than just browsing from blog to blog. In fact, one of our blog informants fears that the quantity of bloggers will develop into a monopolistic status, meaning that due to the immense amount of bloggers, it will be harder to stand out. (Appendix 3: 136-137)

Evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of being part of a blog network, we argue that there are more opportunities than limitations when entering the market of blogging. However, this statement is based on bloggers who start without any knowledge of business as well as no established network. According to many of our blog informants, a blog network gives the blogger a security-net that ensures revenue streams, traffic and support within the network. Furthermore, the network can be valuable for the consumers, as they have a better overview of blogs and thus, more frequently engage with several blogs. (Appendix 10: 432-471) Also, if the blogger at some point feels lack of control due to commercialization, the blogger can always move to an independent platform, taking the experience, content and network established along with them (Appendix 1: 200-213). In terms of revenue streams most bloggers might also benefit from moving away from such networks with time, in order to benefit more from the revenue generated through their key activities (Appendix 5: 149-162).

- **Independent platforms**

By identifying the advantages and disadvantages of being part of a blog network, we are able to ascertain similar conclusions for bloggers who commit to independent platforms using direct channels (Osterwalder et al. 2010). Thus, we present three significant advantages derived from our data:

- Benefit from entire profit.
- Creative freedom.
- Perceived as higher level of professionalism.

As mentioned earlier, independent bloggers have the advantage of benefiting from the entire
profit when engaging in different commercial strategies. Even so, many independent bloggers tone down the commercial aspect on blogs, due to time issues and consideration towards the consumers. Meanwhile, as previously established, it is essential for some bloggers in order to keep the motivation and desire going (Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2008: 2099). Therefore, instead of focusing all revenue streams on advertisement solutions, many independent bloggers gain profit from other activities beside blogging. However, the more successful a blog is, the more projects will naturally derive thereof; hence, the two activities should be very closely connected (Appendix 14). Experienced fashion blogger, Pernille Teisbæk, uses such strategies as her primary income. As such, she differs from the rest of our blog informants and especially bloggers within a network, as she has a limited amount of affiliate links and sponsored posts on her blog. Instead, Teisbæk uses the blog as a ‘window’ to engage in other projects, which generate additional revenue for the blog. (Appendix 10: 401-428) In this case, the purpose of the blog is to strengthen the brand ‘Pernille Teisbæk’, and thus lead to bigger and better projects over time. For instance, Teisbæk has recently designed a collection for the Danish fashion brand Envii, as Envii value her persona and style. Her manager, Hannah Løffler, argues that the involvement of such projects is closely related to the popularity and traffic of the blog. (Appendix 9: 503-513) On that note, it is again crucial to highlight the personality within a blog. Thus, if bloggers do not present their persona or are critical towards collaborations, the content will be rather irrelevant for both consumers and possible key partners to follow. As such, Løffler elaborates the following:

“Pernille rarely uses affiliate links and sponsored products, as it does not fit her profile (...). She likes to write about things that inspire her, what she does in her everyday life, what kind of projects she is occupied with etc. It’s 100 % her universe (...), which consumers and collaborators like. (...) She only posts or links to things she can 100 % vouch for, which is also why we reject 8 out of 10 commercial agreements”.

(Appendix 10: 156-159, 177-179, 187-189)

Caused by the above-mentioned strategy and the awareness of not using too many commercial aspects to ensure revenue streams, we argue that independent blogs have a higher level of personal elements attached, as they have more creative freedom to shape the content

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30 Authors’ own translation
and design of a blog. As such, it appears that these criteria differ independent bloggers from those who are part of a network, since they have better possibilities of incorporating their persona with the activities. Likewise, consumers’ reply: “(...). In many ways, I think independent bloggers are better (...). I find it hard to distinguish between the various blogs through networks, which is why I distanced myself so much from them” (Appendix 12, Consumer 14: 603-606). “I definitely prefer independent bloggers who negotiate their own collaborations. (...). By doing so, they seem much more professional, and hence, also more trustworthy and personal (...).”

It appears that independent bloggers are more likely to be followed due to their personality and professionalism.

Though there are several advantages of running a blog independently, we also argue that there are three major disadvantages that can prohibit the success of an independent blog:

- Difficulties of establishing a valuable network.
- Difficulties of obtaining high traffic numbers.
- Time consuming.

According to blog informant Lytje, one of the most crucial parts of creating a successful blog is how good a blogger is at establishing a valuable network, as such affects both the volume of traffic and possibilities within its key activities. Thus, if bloggers engage in blogging independently, they either have to possess a network beforehand, or have the ability to build one in the process. (Appendix 11: 291-293) Independent blogger Frederikke Brasch, who is new in the blogging industry states: “The possibilities within a blog depends on how good you are at branding yourself and networking”, she further states that such can “require knowledge as well as luck” (Appendix 9: 490-493). In Brasch’s situation, she had both, as she was headhunted by the founders of the online retail shop YouHeShe. They wanted Brasch to join forces with them, and set up a blog for her so she could start blogging right away. (Appendix 9: 10-29) In doing so, Brasch had traffic from the beginning, and combined with her connections to the fashion industry, Brasch’s blog was mentioned in Eurowoman and Elle

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31 Authors’ own translation
32 Authors’ own translation
within the first month. (Appendix 9: 364-371) As a result, the ability to create a network affects how quickly a blogger can obtain high traffic numbers, and thus attract collaborating partners. We therefore argue that it is more difficult to obtain high traffic numbers independently, as the bloggers need to establish such depending on own initiative and skills. Such process is time consuming and independent bloggers therefore need to be prepared for a longer start-up phase.

Taking into account the challenges independent bloggers are faced with, they are equally as difficult as the challenges presented in blog networks. However, independent bloggers have a higher possibility of overcoming some of their challenges in comparison, as bloggers in a network have less control over the commercial aspect. Nonetheless, as the example of Teisbæk proves that too many commercial aspects will annihilate the popularity of a blog, such cannot be generalized to all blogs. Hence, the degree of what is perceived as acceptable depends on a blog’s type and audience. For example, the popular blogger Mascha Vang is one of the most viewed bloggers on Bloggers Delight and generates more revenue streams and traffic than any of our blog informants (Andersen, 2014). Her blog contains an immense amount of advertisement, which in most cases would scare consumers away. However, consumers know what to expect due to the type of blog and the transparency of advertisements. Thus, instead of pushing people away, she arouses curiosity among her consumers with her personality and life. (Appendix 10: 153-157) As Lytje explains, “in the end it’s all about the balancing act between social and commercial aspects; meaning, you can establish as many commercial aspect to your blog, if it matches your content and if the personality is intact (Appendix 11: 197-201). We therefore argue that a lot of advertisement on blogs is accepted if properly used.

Reflecting on all our blog informants’ future perspectives, independent bloggers have a tendency to reach for higher goals. For example, Brasch and Teisbæk both have ambitions of reaching international status, Twin Food want to publish their own cookbook and Lytje wants to expand her revenues in her online-shop activities. Meanwhile, bloggers within a network have a greater tendency of feeling satisfied having blogging as a spare time activity. (Appendix 14: Future prospects of the blog) As a result, there is a greater tendency of independent bloggers viewing blogging as a business opportunity and not just as a hobby.

33 Mascha Vang is a Danish blogger, TV-personality, model and reality star (Vang, 2015)
By analyzing and identifying the overall advantages and disadvantages of engaging in blogging independently or through a blog network, we find the determining factor when selecting a blog network or an independent platform depends on the bloggers’ motivation behind a blog. Thus, if no network or brand name is established from the beginning, bloggers might benefit more from being part of a blog network. However, if the blogger has a solid network or skills to create one, bloggers benefit more from being independent, as this makes it easier to establish personal content.

Cost & Revenue: Two-sided market
When evaluating the blogging industry in relation to our data collection, we argue that bloggers need key partners in order to obtain revenue streams, and key partners need bloggers to capture the online audience to increase revenue streams with additional sales of their products or services. Likewise, we argue that the costs can be explained as a symbiotic relationship; that is, a mutually beneficial relationship between both parties. (Eisenmann et al. 2006) In other words, the costs in blogging are equalized by the revenue streams paid by key partners and vice versa.

As revenue streams can be explained as profit earned, the costs for each party are different. More specifically, when looking at bloggers, the costs can be limited to the time spent on blogging, leaving aside the cost of a computer and Internet access, as we argue that such elements are basic resources in today’s society (Danmarks Statistik, 2014: It-anvendelse i befolkningen 2014). According to our blog informants, they spend a great amount of time creating posts. In fact, all of our informants state that the average estimated wage per hour is very low when comparing the overall revenue streams with the time spent (Appendix 14). While time is the overall costs of blogging, key partners are faced with an economic expense when paying the bloggers for the exposure they get. Key partners pay a fixed salary to bloggers, depending on which key activity they choose to engage in.

Considering the distribution of the revenue streams, we argue that the business model of blogging do not fit into the traditional B2C strategy. For instance, when comparing to Michael Porter’s traditional value chain (2001), where money flow move from left to right; hence, to the left of the company is cost and to the right is revenue. (Porter, 2001) However,
as bloggers and key partners depend on a distinct group of users on each side, we consider the cost and revenue streams to be both to the left and the right (Eisenmann et al. 2006).

As such, we find it relevant to include the two-sided market strategy by Thomas Eisenmann, Geoffrey Parker and Marshall Van Alstyne (2006), as the blogging industry deals with the B2B market in the creation of revenue streams, instead of the traditional way of creating value between companies and customers.

Two-sided markets are a fast growing tendency when assembling a business model, due to shared costs and distribution. This development is also caused by a change in consumer habits, as consumers expect all online content to be free (Siapera, 2010: 54). Thus, online businesses are faced with a challenge, as they have to focus their revenue streams towards the B2B market instead of B2C, as the willingness to pay for online media has changed (Siapera, 2010: 53). For that reason, two-sided markets are a necessity for bloggers in order to get paid for the work they do. However, as cost and revenue streams serve both groups, one side is often subsidized, that is, the blog. Meaning, without the financial support from their key partners, bloggers will not generate revenue from blog activities. Thus, our data indicates that bloggers are more dependent on key partners than vice versa, in relation to revenue streams, as their key partners can engage in other promotion activities beside blogs.

We further argue that the two-sided market consists of multi-sided platforms. These platforms are vital, as their function is to match both key partners and bloggers in a more efficient way. The multi-sided platforms can thus be characterized as the key resource, including independent platforms or blog networks. Key resources create value by facilitating the interactions between bloggers and key partners. If done successfully, multi-sided platforms like blog networks expand the value of two-sided markets, as it attracts more users, also known as the network effect. The phenomenon of network effect is an economic term, which describes the snowballing effect mentioned in the previous section, that is, how the interaction between the different parties create a positive feedback in terms of revenue streams and gathering of an immense amount of consumers. (Eisenmann et al. 2006)

Having analyzed the commercial aspects via the seven building blocks and interaction with the two-sided market, we are able to understand the relation between the blogger and key partners, which will be elaborated in the next section.
Part Three: Value Proposition of Blogs

As we in part one and two of our analysis have illustrated the separate value of social and commercial aspects of blogging, we will in this chapter evaluate how the key findings of the two parts can be combined when determining the overall value proposition of a blog. Contrasting the traditional business model by Osterwalder & Pigneur’s (2010), where the value proposition is to satisfy the consumers’ needs, we evaluate that key partners should be incorporated into the equation, as we view both parties as equally important due to the two-sided market.

Derived from our data collection, we found four aspects relevant to analyze when establishing the value proposition of a blog: Newness, Co-Creation, Performance, and Brand Name.

Newness

We find newness to be a relevant aspect when determining the value proposition, as we view the newness in blogs to concern the change in business approach compared to traditional media. Blogging creates a new set of needs, as there previously were no similar offerings. On this account, we find that newness is illustrated through two main focus points that will be examined in the following order:

- Two-sided market
- Peer-to-peer

As the industry of blogging has been booming in recent years (Laursen, 2013), an entirely new business model has emerged due to a novel pricing strategy between bloggers and key partners. As aforementioned, this strategy means that bloggers and key partners are creating revenue streams for each other (B2B) instead of from the consumers (B2C), which allows consumers to access information for free. As such, the value of the price strategy is emphasized in the attraction of consumers. Further, we argue that the value proposition is demonstrated through the relationship between bloggers and key partners, as they through a symbiotic relationship can target their audience more effectively, as they share a common target group due to the two-sided market. On this account, we argue that the newness is

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34 Definition according to www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/newness that is: “Taking the place of the previous one; recently appointed, acquired, etc.”
grounded in the interdependent relationship between bloggers and key partners contribute to the overall novel price strategy allowing the consumer to obtain information for free.

As commercials are omnipresent on blogs, consumers are struggling with the integrity of the message being advertised. We therefore argue, that consumers are believed to rely on peers rather than marketers due to the personal recommendation. Hence, when the online information load is overwhelming; it is easier to let others make decisions. (Wang & Ping, 2012: 108) As we have learned from our consumer survey, a majority of consumers trust those that are similar to themselves, as they both occupy the same position. Taken this into consideration, the peer-to-peer strategy will shorten the distance between the blogger and the consumer. Such an equalized relationship is precisely where the newness manifests.

Due to the tendency of relying on peers, companies exploit this opportunity by incorporating peer-to-peer as a marketing strategy to get exposure (Leuf, 2002). Taking this into consideration, bloggers posses an excessive power, as our consumer survey proves that 84 percent of the consumers have purchased products or services as a result of blog activities (Appendix 15: Purchase derived from blog activity). This implies that a peer-to-peer strategy is an effective way of reaching ones target group. As a result, we argue that value lies in the potential for personal recommendations using a peer-to-peer strategy when communicating with consumers and thus attracting potential key partners.

On this account, we found that blogging possessess two new aspects that contribute to the overall value creation, which are the novel price strategy and the personal recommendation through peer-to-peer.

Co-creation
In contrast to the traditional company-consumer relationship, where the company decides what creates value for the consumer (Osterwalder et al. 2010: 29), consumers are nowadays
part of the value creation. Many bloggers co-create with both consumers and key partners in order to create value. Therefore, we find co-creation to be a relevant aspect to further include when identifying the value proposition of a blog. Moreover, as co-creation indicates a relationship between blogger-consumer and blogger-key partner, we will in this section present the building block *customer relationship*, including both aforementioned relationships. The value proposition of co-creation will be examined through three main focus points, which are:

- Converging roles
- Personalized connection to consumers
- Consumer and key partner relationship

The act of co-creation is slowly taking over greater parts of the traditional way of creating value, as today’s consumers are more well-informed than ever, and thus, know what they want (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The traditional way, as Porter (1980) presents it, is that the content creator decides which content is relevant to the consumer through the value chain. Thus, the consumer and the company have distinct roles of production and consumption, meaning that the consumers are separated from the value creation (Kotler, 2002 as cited in Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004: 6). However, now the roles of consumers and companies have converged, as they all act as collaborators and competitors; hence, collaborators in co-creating value and competitors for the extraction of economic value. As such, we argue that the concept of co-creation is present in blogging, as the value is jointly created between the bloggers-consumers and bloggers-key partners; instead of bloggers and companies trying to please the consumers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004: 8). Taking the example of co-creation between bloggers and consumers, Homesick makes use of co-creation through their blog post ‘Homesick interior help’. In essence, the interior help is meant for the consumers to jointly come up with solutions to each other’s problem, allowing everyone to add inputs and ideas as well as ‘an interior design problem’. (Appendix 5: 165-172)

The concept of the consumer creating value jointly with the blogger in order to produce mutually valued outcome (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), is present in seven out of ten blogs according to our data previously presented in our social analysis. The results indicate
that 30 percent of the interviewees do not let the consumers have any influence on the blog, while 70 percent include the consumers (Appendix 14 – Inclusion of the Reader). The reason for not including the consumers is caused by the fear of losing control of the content. Many of our blog informants are part-time bloggers and use the blog as a free space to express own thoughts, as they tend to use the blog as a way of self-expression; blogging for their own purpose and not for the consumers’ (Appendix 8: 172-173). Meanwhile, as some of our blog informants play down the importance of co-creation, we find it relevant to analyze whether the bloggers who do not include co-creation into their blogs miss out on important values when trying to establish a successful blog. Therefore, we will in the following elaborate on the value gained from co-creation and whether or not co-creation within blogs will benefit all bloggers.

As a result, the value of co-creation in blogs can be explained through the relationship between bloggers and consumers. Through dialogue, the two parties co-create the content, therefore, the content will be more personalized towards the consumer, and consumers feel that they are being heard and acknowledged. As a consequence, key partners find it valuable to collaborate with bloggers, due to their personalized connection with consumers. In other words, co-creation between bloggers and consumers creates additional value when establishing collaborations with key partners. Likewise, the value of co-creation in blogs can also be explained through collaboration between bloggers and key partners, as they together contribute with the balance of personalized content and commercial information. Thus, contributing to solve a consumer’s “problem”. Figure 6 below illustrates how co-creations generates value for blogs:

![Image](image-url)

Figure 6: How Co-creation Generates Value for Blogs by Aunel & Hoang (2015)
Based on the above stated, we view co-creation on blogs to occur in two ways. One, the relationship between the blogger and the consumer, and second, the collaborative relationship between bloggers and key partners. As such, we find that bloggers can benefit from co-creation, and similarly, bloggers who do not co-create are missing out on valuable business opportunities with key partners as well as creating a personalized connection with consumers. Though we argue that co-creation is a valuable aspect when creating a blog, we further emphasize that the two co-creation strategy is a balancing act, as the blogger has to stay true to their values in order to maintain the social aspects of blogging. Thus, bloggers using co-creation must be selective towards the content they agree to apply. After all, the blog is still their creation, thus, we argue that the balance of both social and commercial aspects is easier to obtain when the bloggers have a final say in what should be applied.

Performance

Moving over to the third value aspect, performance, which is illustrated through four subcategories that will contribute to the overall performance of a blog. These values will be examined in the following order:

- Design
- Accessibility
- Immediacy
- Usability

The proverb a picture is worth a thousand words might have its truth, as our data has proven that people tend to be attracted to visuals, and that visuals will stick in the viewer’s mind better than text. This is also supported by our results from the social analysis; that people are attracted to things that catch their eyes. Even though the perception and interpretation of
images may vary depending on cultural, social and religious background (Fahmy, Bock, & Wanta, 2014: 138), we seem to reach out for attractive things, instinctively.

As the amount of online data is increasing, we claim that the need for visuals and a strong aesthetic expression through an attractive design will escalate. This is in fact highlighted in our consumer survey, as 45 percent of the consumers stress the importance of strong visual expressions with high-resolution images or videos, along with a simple graphical layout (Appendix 15: Definition of a successful blog).

Taken the above mentioned into account, the design of blogs, that is, the overall layout and aesthetic expression can further be connected to the performance of a blog. Thus, the performance of a blog is important for the value creation of a blog. Performance is interlinked with good design, accessibility, immediacy and usability. Accessibility to information has been increased with the emergence of the Internet, which has facilitated the level of immediacy that is one of the major differences between online media and traditional media (Ebbesen, 2009). Immediacy facilitates the level of relevancy, as people do not have to wait a whole month to read about the newest trends or go buy a cookbook to find recipes; they can find information whenever they need it. As such the overall performance of a blog that is, the design, accessibility including immediacy will facilitate the usability, and thereby contribute to the value creation of a blog. Moreover, value is expressed through the creative element in blogs, which enhances the performance and usability. Eventually, it will contribute to an enhanced commercial value of a blog and consequently, attract more consumers and hence more key partners.

![Performance Diagram](image)

**Brand name**

A strong *brand name* is attractive for both companies and bloggers. A brand is what appears in the consumers’ minds when associating with a product, person or service. A strong brand indicates status, which means that a lot of people recognize the brand (Fog, Budtz, Munch, &
Blanchette, 2010), whether it be a person (blogger) or a company. As such, we find brand name to be a relevant aspect when identifying the value creation. The value proposition of brand name will be examined through three main focus points, which are:

- Create awareness of oneself
- Enhancing brand name through associations
- Building up a strong portfolio

Further, we argue that the three above mentioned value creations of blogs can occur mainly through three branding strategies: Personal branding, co-branding and rebranding. Personal branding has become an important tool for everyday people to brand themselves and to create awareness of themselves (Shepherd, 2005 as cited in Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011). One way of doing so is through blogs, which can be illustrated in a quote by one of our blog informants, Brasch, who states: “My goal is to make a lot of people aware of who I am. For instance, I dyed my hair blue, which a lot of people don’t understand, but it’s all about standing out from the crowd so people will recognize and remember you” 35 (Appendix 9: 461-463). Consequently, Brasch uses her appearance as a strategy to create a personal brand, and to make her self noticed by companies who value her style and personality.

We further argue that a blogger’s brand can obtain additional value by co-branding with other companies, personas, bloggers, etc. Value creation through co-branding takes place when two or more brands engage in joint marketing activities in order to achieve greater and mutual awareness and brand associations (Besharat, 2010). One of our blog informants, Pernille Teisbæk, has engaged in multiple co-branding strategies to develop and strengthen her brand position. As previously mentioned, Teisbæk has designed a collection for among others the Danish fashion brand Envii as well as sneakers for the brand Superga (Appendix 10: 182-188). By doing so, Teisbæk increases her ability to get noticed and further enhances her prospect of continuously attracting a larger audience. Meanwhile, in order for co-branding to enhance a bloggers’ brand, it is important to be selective with the brands of collaboration. Thus, the partnership must result in a “win-win situation”, that is, that each party must gain

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35 Authors’ own translation
from the co-branding process. As such, the value of co-branding exists in the bloggers' ability to select key partners with a value proposition close to the bloggers' personal brand.

Nevertheless, in contrast to mutual partnerships, bloggers can in some cases also benefit from engaging in collaborations with brands that do not possess an equally strong brand name. Thus, the last brand strategy we find valuable to introduce is rebranding. Rebranding indicates the process of giving a product or an organization a new image, in order to make it more attractive or successful (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). Such a process often involves radical changes to a brand's logo, name, image and marketing strategy when trying to reposition a brand (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). Our blog informant Brasch explains how bloggers can benefit from helping companies repositioning themselves and simultaneously benefit from the process:

“I have recently entered a six-month collaboration agreement with Canada Goose, where I needed to test some of their new running clothes and display it on my blog (...). Thus, the purpose is to rebrand the entire vision of Canada Goose, as almost criminal associations of their brand have pushed them in the wrong direction. (...) I agreed on these collaborations, as it will benefit me with a strong portfolio and exposure when being mentioned in all sorts of media.”36 (Appendix 9: 33-35, 328, 519-522)

Followed by Brasch’s statement, collaborating with Canada Goose, in spite the fact that it is not connected to her personal brand, will benefit both parties. For instance, Brasch will benefit from the collaboration, as she will build up a strong portfolio to attract future key partners (Appendix 9: 518-521). Thus, the more exposure she receives, the more people will start noticing her and find it valuable to invest in her brand. Therefore, we evaluate Brasch’s case as a good example of building up a strong reputation when entering the blogging industry less experienced, as the prospect of generating revenue will enhance along with a stronger portfolio. Likewise, Canada Goose will benefit from the collaboration by the use of the peer-to-peer strategy through Brasch, as they find her personality and style compatible with the values of the consumers they want to target. Moreover, she has an extensive network of contacts; meaning that she will be able to expose the brand to influential people in the

36 Author’s own translation
industry. Thus, by means of the peer-to-peer strategy, Canada Goose will be able to change the consumers’ negative perception of the brand, that is, the “(...) almost criminal associations (...)” (Appendix 9: 328).

Taking everything into consideration, we argue that it is important for bloggers who want to make a business out of blogging to build up a strong brand name, as it will attract more key partners. This is due to the fact that key partners know what to expect when investing in an experienced blogger possessing a strong brand. (Appendix 10: 194-195) A strong brand name also reflects value towards the consumers, as we previous established through our social analysis that people read blogs in order to enhance themselves. As such, consumers select bloggers that they can look up to; thus, having a strong and acknowledged brand name increases the consumers’ willingness to keep following a blog.

Once brand names grow bigger due to recognition from consumers, it makes them more attractive for influential brand names to invest in. As such, acknowledgement from influential brand names in the industry is according to Brasch a sign of success, as we know from our social analysis that people trust and look up to others with expert knowledge (Appendix 9: 512-513) (Fiske 2010: 549-550).

**Summing up the Value Proposition**

We argue that the value proposition of a blog needs to satisfy both consumers and key partners in order for a business to function. As such, we found that value is created through four main aspects: firstly, *newness* is illustrated through the emergence of the new business model allowing the consumers to obtain information for free, and further the personal recommendation through peer-to-peer. Secondly, *co-creation* illustrates the value of collaborating with both consumers and key partners, allowing bloggers to establish a personalized relationship with consumers, and likewise, establishing business collaborations
with key partners. Thirdly, *performance* illustrates the importance of a strong aesthetic expression, which along with accessibility contributes to the overall usability, and performance of a blog. Finally, *brand name* illustrates the importance of creating awareness around oneself in order to get recognition from people in general, and the influential players in the industry. As a result, they can establish a strong brand name.
Assessing a Successful Business of Blogging

We will in this fourth part combine the key findings from each analysis. Thus, our findings will firstly be illustrated through the Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder et al. 2010) that will provide us with the tools to facilitate our understanding of the success criteria of a business blog. Secondly, we will by means of our findings from the business model establish the context and objectives of our findings when determining the overall criteria of a successful blog.

Business Model of Blogging

Having analyzed the social and commercial aspects within blogging, we now argue that we can give a representative picture of the blogging industry according to our analysis of Osterwalder & Pigneur’s (2010) nine building blocks. In doing so, we have assembled the building blocks through a business model shown in figure 7 below. Thus, the figure visualizes the business model of blogging and how it differs from a traditional business model as an effect of the two-sided market on a multi-sided platform.

![Business Model of Blogging](image-url)
According to Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010), consumers are the heart of a business. Hence, if there were no consumers, blogs would not exist. We want to highlight, however, that consumers and key partners are equally important, and thus, the interaction between bloggers, consumers and key partners together generate the value of blogs. For that reason, we have placed all three players on the same level. We therefore see the interplay of bloggers, consumers and key partners as a coherent interaction that comprises the heart of blogging.

The channel that facilitates the connection between these players is through the Internet. In order to establish the interaction, bloggers need to operate from a platform, whether it be on an independent platform or through a blog network. Thus, we see platforms as a key resource that will facilitate this action.

The collaboration between bloggers and key partners results in the key activities on blogs. Consequently, these key activities will influence the cost and revenue streams that are being generated through blogging. In contrast to a traditional business model, we argue that the cost and revenue streams can be described as a two-sided market in a network operating through a multi-sided platform with the blog as the mediator. This creates value for all parties, as it links bloggers to their key partners (B2B) either through their key resource or key activities and connects consumers to both the bloggers and companies. As such, this creates an entirely new business model allowing consumers free access to information.

**Success Criteria of a Blog: Balancing Act**

Based on our analyses of the blogging industry, we will now seek to identify the success criteria of a blog. In order to account for our evaluations of a successful blog, we need to define the objectives and context in which we operate: Whom does this benefit (objectives) and which setting do our evaluations cover (context) (DeLone & McLean, 2004). As a result, we identify consumers and key partners to be important objectives when evaluating the success criteria of a blog, as these are the primary stakeholders. The context we are examining is the Danish blogging industry within lifestyle; thus, the evaluations of success will only represent blogs within that field.

On this account, we argue that the interaction between bloggers, consumers and key partners together constitute the success criteria of a blog within lifestyle; thus, they will be evaluated as the key players. Therefore, we will now determine the benefits and overall outcome for
each player based on our data collection. By doing so, we will be able to define the essential success criteria of a blog when balancing both social and commercial aspects.

**The Benefits & Outcome for Each Key Player Constituting a Successful Blog**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blogger</th>
<th>Key Partner</th>
<th>Consumer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fulfilling own purposes</td>
<td>Additional sales</td>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Solution to a problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue streams</td>
<td>Authentic recommendation</td>
<td>Enhance the self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8: The Benefits & Outcome for Each Key Player Constituting a Successful Blog by Aunel & Hoang (2015)*

As just mentioned, the success criteria of a blog are accomplished when satisfying all key players. Therefore, we will in the following explain how the connection between them constitutes the essential success criteria of a blog. As a result, the balancing act is present in the interplay between the above stated benefits and outcome, as we have established that the successful creation of a business blog is a collaborative activity. This will further enable us to validate or invalidate our three initial hypotheses.

As illustrated in figure 8, we argue that the success criteria of a blog are present when bloggers blog about things which truly inspire them as a natural way of self-expression by sharing information with others. As we have come to know, consumers mainly read blogs to find inspiration, information and tips in order to enhance themselves with the pursuit of acknowledgement by their peers. Consumers are drawn to blogs where they find the blogger’s style and personality interesting to follow and where a sense of authenticity is present, as the consumers value personal recommendations. Simultaneously, the consumers wish to find a solution to their “problem” in order to feel enhanced and acknowledged which are the essential success criteria for consumers following a blog. Therefore, it is essential for bloggers to stay true to their own values in order to appear credible, as such will reflect positively back on the consumers. Key partners have realized this potential and are exploiting the opportunity to join forces with bloggers (two-sided market), as they are aware of the influential power that bloggers have on consumers. On one hand, key partners use a peer-to-peer strategy to create awareness of their products and services. On the other hand, they use blogs to naturally and authentically promote products and services, and thus create awareness.
of their brand name; eventually, they will generate additional sales, which in essence is their fundamental success criteria when collaborating with a blogger. For that reason, we can validate our first hypothesis: “Bloggers who blog to fulfill own purposes are more likely to attract consumers and business partners”. When bloggers stay true to own values, the personal aspect that consumers value will be reflected through a blog. This will generate more traffic, and thus, more awareness of the products and services that the companies offer, which will eventually benefit all three parties. Bloggers need their key partners in order to keep a blog alive as they also provide bloggers with revenue streams. As we have come to know, money is a motivational factor to keep blogging. Thus, each key player is interdependent, however, the distribution of each function is different, as the function of the blogger is to attract consumers, so they become aware of the companies’ products and services and eventually make a purchase. However, the function of key partners is to keep a blog alive both content wise and revenue streams wise, so they can attract consumers. The consumers will in turn give the bloggers their acknowledgement by following and returning to the blog, which will create a sense of belonging for the blogger, and thus, such acknowledgement is another motivational factor to keep blogging. On this account, we are now able to invalidate our second hypothesis: “The commercial aspects in blogs will diminish the blogs’ potential of prospering”. In fact, we have through our study realized that commercial collaborations generate valuable revenue streams to keep the bloggers’ motivation up to sustain blogging. Advertisements applied should be a reflection of the blogger, in order not to disturb the content, but commercial aspects as such do not diminish the chances of success. Further, we have come to know that bloggers should avoid using pop-up banners all together, as this will have a diminishing effect on the consumers’ willingness to accept advertisement.

Our last hypothesis states that: “Bloggers who choose to be independent have a higher likelihood of creating a successful blog than those who are part of a blog-network”. We argue that the success criteria of a blog have nothing to do with the platform bloggers select, but instead the blog they attempt to create. Choosing between the two should be done according to the bloggers’ motivation. Thus, if no network or brand name established from the beginning, bloggers might benefit more from being part of a blog-network. If, however, the blogger has a solid network or skills to create one, they will benefit more from being independent, as this makes it easier to establish personal content.
In the end, bloggers cannot succeed without the consumers as they eventually decide whether a blog is well received and worth following, so by co-creating mutual value, they help both the blogger to establish a brand name and the key partners’ brand name to prosper. As a result, our study has presented the essential success criteria shown in figure 8. The interaction of these success criteria is thus what constitutes the balancing act of a blog incorporating both social and commercial aspects.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, we will first explain how a blog should balance the social and commercial aspects when establishing a business out of blogging, before finally assessing the essential success criteria of a blog.

We have found that blogging is established on the foundation of social interaction between the blogger and the reader. From the bloggers’ point of view we found that the motivation for blogging is either to fulfill own needs of being seen and heard or belonging to a group. Further, we found that people mainly read blogs because they are looking for inspiration, information and tips drawn from other people’s lives, based on a identification between the blogger and the reader. Thus, readers are drawn to blogs that enhance their own lives in order to feel that they belong to a group.

The interaction of the blogger and the reader is a balancing act. The readers have the power of controlling whether a blog is popular or not, whereas bloggers control how much influence the readers have over the blog.

The balance between the blogger and the reader is challenged when incorporating commercial aspects into blogs’ social context. The commercial aspects are established through collaborations with companies, allowing the blogger to make a business out of blogging. Thus, revenue streams are generated between the key partners and blogger through a two-sided market approach, allowing the reader to keep accessing information for free. The balance between all three players is established through daily blog posts, also called key activities. Through key activities, bloggers can satisfy both readers and key partners. The sense of an authentic personality behind the blog is thus not compromised by inclusion of advertisement through key activities, as advertisements are seen by readers as acceptable, as long as they fit with the rest of the blogger’s universe.

The blogging industry operates on two different platforms, either independently or through a blog network. The choice of platform depends on the blogger’s motivation for blogging. If no network or brand name is established from the beginning, bloggers might benefit more from being part of a blog network. If the blogger has a solid network or skills to create one, however, the blogger will benefit more from being independent. Meanwhile, the ability to incorporate a balance of both social and commercial aspects is found to be more achievable independently, as it makes it easier to establish personalized content. In fact, we found that
the personality of a blogger is key in order to appear credible and authentic which is essential in attracting both readers and key partners.

In order to establish a business out of blogging, the value proposition needs to account for both the readers and key partners through four main aspects: 1) Newness which is illustrated through the emergence of the new business model, and personal recommendations using peer-to-peer strategies when communicating with consumers and attracting potential key partners. 2) Co-creation, which illustrates the value of collaborating with both consumers and key partners, allowing bloggers to establish a personalized relationship with consumers, and likewise, establishing business collaborations with key partners. 3) Performance which entails a strong aesthetic expression, contributing to enhance commercial value of a blog and consequently, attracting more consumers and key partners. 4) Brand name, i.e. creating awareness and a strong brand name around oneself in order to get recognition from both readers and key partners. These values contribute to a successful blog if balanced properly between the readers and the key partners. This balance relies on the blogger’s ability to include both parties to an extent that will not compromise the blogger’s universe.

By identifying the balancing act of both social and commercial aspects included in blogs we have been able to assess the essential success criteria of a lifestyle blog. We found that the essential success criteria of a blog account for each key player’s benefits and outcome of participating in a blog. As such, we define the key players to be the blogger, the readers and key partners. We found that a blog is successful when the blogger is able to fulfill own purposes, get acknowledgement from the group and achieve revenue streams as a motivation to sustain blogging. This is done by collaborating with key partners, whose goal is to achieve additional sales, awareness and authentic recommendations. Finally, a blog needs to be acknowledged by readers by providing content that solves their problems and enhances their lives. Accordingly, it is the interplay between all key players which provides the basis for a successful blog balancing social and commercial aspects.

On the basis of our study, we found that it is possible to maintain the social aspect derived from the feeling of the personal and authentic, and simultaneously make a profit out of blogging. Thus, the commercial aspect does not exclude the social foundation of blogging, provided that the blog lives up to the essential success criteria found in this study.
Chapter 7: Discussion of Unpaid Labor

Based on our analysis, a general issue is prevalent in the blogging industry, that is, bloggers find it hard to receive proper payment for their work. In the following, we wish to discuss how bloggers can manage such challenges in order to sustain the business of blogging.

As concluded in previous chapter, bloggers earn revenue streams primarily from their collaborations with their key partners. We further realized that the business model is derived from the fact that consumers expect everything to be free in online media. Moving the revenue streams B2B still entail obstacles of negotiating the ‘right price’ with key partners when engaging in sponsored posts. As such, we argue that there is a risk for conflict between key partners and bloggers. A number of companies have realized the power of personal recommendations through blogs; however, they are not willing to pay the bloggers actual salaries, but rather sponsored goods. In contrast, companies are willing to pay the full price for advertisement on traditional media even though, as established in our analysis, consumers are moving away from traditional media, meaning that traditional strategies become less effective than social media in reaching consumers (Danmarks Statistik, 2014: Radio og TV 2013).

As shown by our primary data, the conflict is constituted by bloggers’ initial approach to obtain the attention of potential business partners. Bloggers started accepting sponsored goods for the promotion of companies in order to prove their worth. Meanwhile, as companies have started to realize the power bloggers possess, their willingness to pay for the service has not changed. As such, bloggers still find themselves accepting gifts or keeping the price low for a service that is proven to enhance companies’ brand name, reputation, sales, etc. (Appendix 1: 6-29) (Appendix 14: The evolution of blogging)

On this account, one may ask, who is responsible for the challenges that the blogging industry is facing? Is it only the bloggers who are to blame for valuing their worth incorrectly from the beginning or is it the companies who need to realize that the service is worth paying for? One might argue that it is the bloggers who have declared their value incorrectly from the beginning, but one might also argue that bloggers have no grounds to ask for too much until they have built up a portfolio.

On the other hand, when looking at regular businesses, no one would be paid in goods over actual payment even if they were new to the industry. In the matter of regular businesses, labor
unions are present to protect new graduates from being taking advantage of by employers. Why is this different in the blogging industry?

Another party to blame for the conflict might be the companies. Influenced by the changes in the industry, an increasing number of companies have moved to online platforms in order to better market their products and services. Hence, one would think that companies would naturally pay for the costs attached to online marketing. Unless companies still hold on to the mindset that traditional TV commercials generate more sales and exposure than blogs. If this be the case, the problem might be that companies have yet to acknowledge the potential of new online advertisement solutions like blogging, and thus, bloggers need to be better at showing their worth.

In the following, we will seek to identify whether some of the above stated scenarios are causing the unwillingness to pay bloggers for their work. Identifying the responsibility, we will evaluate different approaches concerning both bloggers and companies.

Generally, there is a tendency of unpaid labor mentality in the blogging industry, which is a fundamental problem in society, which we argue can be due to two reasons. One being an inequality in supply and demand due to high competition, and second, being a legitimacy affected by the influential players in the industry causing unreasonable circumstances for newcomers.

The first reason for the unpaid labor mentality is the inequality in supply and demand causing an excess of bloggers. However, this is compared to how many companies that have acknowledged the potential of blogs. As a result, bloggers work for free in order to obtain experience and a network (Navne, Aarestrup & Hybel, 2014). Based on this, we argue that people are willing to offer unpaid labor due to a high level of competition in the industry. Thus, bloggers often accept unfair payment solutions to obtain companies’ recognition. This problem is mentioned by our blog informant, Brasch:

“Everybody needs money, but right now money isn’t the most important element. If I create a strong product, I’m sure the money will follow. First and foremost, I just want to create a strong portfolio, before demanding money. However, it’s all a balancing act, as nothing should be offered for free” (Appendix 9: 516-519).
On this account, some may argue that bloggers have started a negative spiral themselves by accepting symbolic goods from companies instead of actual payment. As a result of the disparity in supply and demand, bloggers are forced to do so in order to expand their portfolios. On the other hand, the quote also emphasizes the necessity of requiring payment at a time where ones portfolio has matured.

The second reason for the unpaid labor mentality is due a general legitimacy of the mentality; caused by a general logic and justification established by influential players in the industry. Due to the fact that everyone within the blogging industry is making use of unpaid labor, it is acceptable to do so.

The unpaid labor mentality is hard to change now, as it seems to be legitimised and deeply rooted in the entire industry since all companies are making use of unpaid labor and everyone seems to have accepted it even though it is in essence not equitable.

We argue that this issue can be paralleled to isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The process of homogenization is called isomorphism, which is a process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions. (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) The use of unpaid labor has started as a result of the influential players within the industry using bloggers without paying for their services. As a result, all the remaining players will adjust their behavior accordingly and start to imitate this tendency.

Moreover, imitation in an industry can occur caused by uncertainties in the environment. In fact, the creative industry is highly affected by uncertainties due to the reliance on an audience, who has different taste and preferences. Further, as it takes a lot of resources to develop a new product, the uncertainties are high as it is difficult to predict whether the product will be well received or not. Thus, it is a cost effective way of lowering the risks by making use of unpaid labor. (Mathiasen, Poulsen & Lorenzen, 2006) Paralleled to the creative industry, we argue that the blogging industry is highly affected by risks and uncertainties forcing them to make use of unpaid labor. In other words, when the influential players have proven that the effect of blogs is efficient, the less influential players will naturally follow this development in order to be able to compete with the more influential players.

As a result, using unpaid labor becomes acceptable because everyone makes use of it.
Based on our two explanations above, we see unpaid labor mentality as an entry ticket into collaborations with the influential players in the blogging industry. This unpaid labor mentality has fundamentally changed the view on working and the value of working. The value of work is no longer measured in actual payment, but in relation to the individual’s self-development project (Schmidt, 2011).

As examined in our analysis, bloggers that are part of a blog network have this so-called security net that protects bloggers from the issue of unpaid labor mentality. As such, blog networks function as a trade union for bloggers as they handle the bloggers’ interests. However, taking the disadvantages from our analysis into consideration, the negotiation of collaborations is not under the full control of the blogger. Therefore, if bloggers want to reach for higher goals they might seek to establish themselves on individual platforms. In doing so, bloggers are more exposed in terms of companies taken advantage of them, however, bloggers themselves can play a part in moving this mentality in another direction. Therefore, we argue that bloggers have to make an effort themselves, that is, to require actual payment for their work. By paying bloggers, companies can demand more from them and also tailor their goods and services to the right audience through the right bloggers, thereby communicating their message out in the most effective way.

Having said that, we acknowledge that all bloggers have to agree and act congruently in order to change the unpaid labor mentality. As this is easier said than done, we conclude that in the long run, this is not an issue that can be solved without the interaction of trade unions.
Chapter 8: Discussion of Future Prospects

During our study, we have encountered many articles questioning the survival of the blogging industry. As such, we find it important to discuss the future prospect within blogging, to challenge and question some of the prospects presented. To do so, we will in this last chapter of our study look into future possibilities for blogs to expand, and thus, the ability to stay relevant in a rapidly changing market. Further, we will evaluate the present external threats and opportunities for the blogging industry and the industry’s prospects to overcome such threats and turn the possibilities to its advantage.

Is blogging dead?

The question of whether blogging is able to prosper and stay relevant in a fast moving digital industry has been asked ever since blogging had its peak in the years 2001-2005\(^{37}\) (Kabadayi, 2014). Ten years later, blogging is still here and many people have built a business out of it. Thus, the question of whether or not blogging is dead is therefore mostly a reflection of a format in change. Ever since the emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, popularity has moved to those platforms (Kabadayi, 2014). The influence of such has changed the blog-format, as expressions through these social networks demand shorter updates and posts. The change has lead many people to believe that blogging is on its way out. However, taken the example of an article from The Guardian ‘The death of blogging’ is an exaggeration:

> The "death" of blogs may be an exaggeration – but it's also great news for anyone connected with the format in terms of media and marketing. Blogs haven't disappeared – they have simply morphed into a mature part of the publishing ecosystem. (...) Far from killing the blog dream, this has increased the quality of the blogosphere as a whole.

(Kabadayi, 2014)

Taken the quote into account, we validate the article’s argumentation that blogging is not dead, but a reflection of a format in change. Thus, we validate the statement, as we argue that the change in format is only enhancing the overall quality of the blogosphere in the future.

\(^{37}\) Hence, the peak is not merely seen from a commercial point of view, however, concerning blogging in general.
Meaning, the new generation will not in the same sense as earlier engage in PC or laptops, which the “traditional” format of blogs was established on. Instead, people are becoming more present on mobile devices, which mean that the format of content must adapt to the new technologies (Danmarks Statistik, 2014: *It-anvendelse i befolkningen* 2014).

However, recognizing these changes, we identify both threats and possibilities in the blogging industry. These will be discussed in the following.

**Possibilities of a changing market**

An industry’s ability to cope with changes depends on its ability to innovate. As such, we argue that the death of blogs depends on a blog’s ability to keep being innovative. Thus, will blogging reach a point like the traditional video rental industry Blockbuster, where innovation within its field has reached the limit? Given the example of Blockbuster, the Internet made it possible for customers to rent directly from their homes or by subscribing to platforms like Netflix or HBO. Thus, Blockbuster was faced with insolvency, as the company was not capable of more innovative solutions. As such, we believe that the survival of the blogging industry depends on the industry’s ability to stay innovative and keep up with the fast movement of the Internet and consumer habits.

According to innovation theorist Joseph Schumpeter (1942), innovation occurs when technology and inventions are combined with business knowledge in an effort to solve real challenges and issues. According to Schumpeter (1942), one can either react adaptively or creatively when a change or development occurs. The adaptive reaction refers to a traditional approach where one adapts when a change occurs. The creative approach, on the other hand, means doing something different than expected, something other than one normally does. A creative response cannot be predicted and will affect and change the subsequent events unalterably. This is referred to as creative destruction, meaning that one destroys a former way of doing things, because new solutions have been found. (McCraw, 2007) As such, the necessity of innovation on blogs is affected by influential social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter that changed the way people communicate, that is, going from long detailed text descriptions, to instant information created through short texts, comments and images. The blogging industry is adapting to the changes made by others. Thus, we will in the following discuss an innovative approach when adapting to the changes in a market and consumer needs influenced by other social media. Further, we will discuss the possibilities for
blogging to expand its horizon by proposing a potential new segment into its field.

**Visual storytelling on blogs**

Through our social analysis we came to know that people are attracted to the pictures and visual design of blogs, instinctively (Fiske, 2010). Thus, consumers are more likely to read texts that include visual storytelling through pictures or videos. In fact, statistics show that those bloggers, who include visuals such as pictures and videos, have approximately 94 percent more readers than bloggers who do not (Steenbeck, 2015). Further, we found that this is constituted by a growing tendency of visual expression formed by social media platforms including Instagram, Vimeo, Flickr, Pinterest, Tumblr, etc. Thus, in an online world where data is constantly renewed, these visual platforms have made it more manageable for people to quickly scan through the content; as we argue visuals enable one to capture the message faster, and thereby, allowing one to quickly sort out what content appeals to ones taste and preferences. Danish bloggers are well aware of this quality, as we have observed that all our blog informants and bloggers in general incorporate visuals to make their blog more appealing (Fiske, 2010). However, according to manager Løffler, the next innovative step for blogs is to engage in a lot more video based content: “(...) Video content will in the future be the primary focus on blogs, as people are beginning to look for a lot more than just beautiful pictures” (Appendix 10: 324-325). Though Løffler argues that using video content will attract more consumers, she also emphasizes the fact that video content is more time consuming and expensive to produce; compared to photographs when simultaneously not compromising on the quality. Løffler highlights that many bloggers will most likely use a combination of both pictures and videos when producing their posts. (Appendix 10: 326-329)

However, as we view videos and pictures as important future elements to incorporate in blogging, we further want to highlight that visual expression through blogs might not necessarily replace textual content, as we argue some people still want the opportunity to deepen into insightful content through text. For instance, in relation to recipes, guidelines etc. text can make it more convenient for people when applying it. Whether it be text, pictures or videos, we have through our analysis realized the importance of the bloggers’ personality, which will reflect the content of a blog. As a consequence, consumers will be attracted to

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blogs applying the elements that best reflect the bloggers’ personality. On the contrary, we argue that the innovative approach of incorporating video content into blogs is a reflection of the technological development that all internet based industries need to be aware of in order to adapt to those tendencies and not become obsolete. As such, videos will only add an extra feature to the blog format, and thus, not necessarily become the main content, as such depends on the bloggers’ choice of expression.

**Reaching new segments**

As we in our study have focused on the female segment within lifestyle blogging, we have come to know that blogs within that field are mostly focused towards women. Though this has been an advantage for the lifestyle blogging industry in attracting key partners targeting the female audience, it leaves room for growth.

According to Akselbo, the Danish market contains a vertical potential of growth if more bloggers tried to capture the male audience. Until now the male audience within Danish lifestyle blogs have been neglected Akselbo argues that the industry might miss out on a business opportunity, if they do not take the male audience into account similarly to the female segment. (Appendix 1: 338-395, 401-404)

A report of Danes’ IT usage in 2014 from Statistics Denmark indicates that men and women shop equally through online media (Danmarks Statistik, 2014: *It-anvendelse i befolkningen 2014*). Based on these data, blogs only reach half of the Danish population. Incorporating the male audience into the equation, the industry will engage in two very different customer segments serving different needs and problems. (Osterwalder et al. 2010: 21) One of the things that differs the two segments from each other, is among others, what men and women purchase online. While women mostly buy clothing, tickets for concerts and movies, men mostly buy video games and electronics (Danmarks Statistik, 2014: *It-anvendelse i befolkningen 2014*). This information is valuable when assessing a new potential segment for future growth, as the content in blogs should be altered depending on the gender. (Appendix 1: 400-404)

Taking everything into account, one might question where the blogs for the potential male segment should come from, as we have previously discussed in our analysis that the integrity of the blogger, depends on the person behind the blog. Consequently, one might further discuss whether the effect of the personal recommendation of the blogger’s integrity will be
lost if the motivation does not come from within. Based on these establishments, would people “hired” to communicate out to a male audience have the same effect as people who start blogging from own interests and needs? When paralleling with other social media, research indicates that the number of men on Twitter and LinkedIn is dominating, whereas, women dominate social media like Facebook and Instagram, as men and women communicate differently. Women are driven by social elements, which Facebook, Instagram and blogging facilitates, as the characteristics of those platforms are to be informed and keep up to date with one’s network. Whereas, men like to communicate short and to the point, which platforms like LinkedIn and Twitter facilitate. (Politiken, 2013) This research indicates that a predominantly number of men prefer to communicate through other social media platforms than through for instance blogs, Facebook and Instagram. The explanation to why the number of men who start blogging based on own initiatives are inferior to the number of women who start blogging on the same foundation; is simply because men and women’s digital habits differ greatly.

As a result, even though Akselbo sees an unexploited potential in the male segment, we argue that this potential is more difficult to exploit as such depends on the bloggers’ motivation to reach out to the male segment. Our argumentation is based on our findings from our social analysis that one cannot force inner motivation and needs. As such, expanding blogs to a new segment is not excluded, however, the full value is only present for all three players if initiated by the blogger’s own desire and motivation to do so.

**Threats and opportunities of substitutes**

As we in our theory section realized that the Business Model Canvas by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) does not cover external factors including competition, that is, threats and opportunities of substitutes, we will in this section cover the present and future threats and opportunities. In fact, Porter (1980) define such substitutes as either new entrants using existing technology or existing firms doing things in a new way by either making existing technology redundant or by means of incremental improvement in order to increase competition (as cited in Hooley, Piercy, & Nicoulaud, 2012, 69-70).
As social media has become omnipresent and is continuously expanding, one may argue that media platforms including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter might be a threat to blogs. As a matter of fact, all our bloggers have highlighted Instagram as a complement to their blog. Thus, we find it relevant to further use Instagram as an example to illustrate possible threats and opportunities. As we have just determined that the blogging industry is slowly moving over to visual storytelling rather than textual based content, we find it relevant to identify whether or not visual platforms such as Instagram are a threat to blogging.

Instagram is a platform where pictures and videos are shared on a mobile device that can be connected to social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Flickr (Instagram, 2015).

Since the launch of Instagram in 2010 (Abbott, Donaghey, Hare, & Hopkins, 2013), the platform has grown significantly with now more than 300 million users that share more than 70 million pictures and videos a day (Systrom, 2015). Based on this information, the popularity and increasing growth of Instagram indicates a lucrative potential for companies to exploit. Those statistics are in fact also supported by manager Løffler, who explains that Instagram is the future tool for commerce, as the platform is a great way of reaching exposure.

In fact, this is illustrated in Pernille Teisbæk’s Instagram profile, where she in the fourth quarter of 2014 had approximately 140,000 followers on Instagram (Appendix 10: 203). In the first quarter of 2015, her number of followers increased to 220,000 (Instagram, 2015: Lookdepernille). Followed by a quote by Løffler, “sometimes the numbers of followers increase by a thousand followers a day during fashion week” (Appendix 10: 309). This illustrates the great exposure one can reach through Instagram. However, Løffler further explains that the problem is that sales cannot be tracked on the platform:

“I can post a picture and hashtag a brand to it, and thereby hopefully make more people follow the brand. In other words, it is possible to get a high exposure of a brand or a product; however, it is not possible to buy the product directly from the platform

(Appendix 10: 201-219).

This problem has been frustrating for many companies, as they know the exposure is high, however, measuring of the bottom line is impossible. Løffler believes that companies will eventually find a way to track sales. As a consequence, she anticipates that people will
increasingly move over to Instagram. (Appendix 10: 305-307) Nevertheless, based on our data we argue that Instagram is not a threat, but rather an opportunity for blogging. We consider Instagram as a complement to blogs, as all our blog informants use their Instagram profile to create traffic and awareness to other social media platforms across the Internet (Whitler, 2015). Akselbo confirms; “they complement each other, they have distinct functions. It is not ‘neither nor’, but rather ‘either or’. Bloggers acknowledge this development as they are present on both platforms” (Appendix 1: 329-332). As such, it is lucrative to be present on as many social media platforms as possible as they are all connected and not necessarily mutually exclusive (Appendix 13: Instagram as a blog?).

The American online business magazine Forbes forecasts 20 digital trends for this year, one being a tendency of marketing media, that is social media, SEO, PR, etc. blending into one skillset, as these disciplines are all interdependent (Deeb, 2015). Thus, we argue that it is more likely in the future that blogging, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, etc., will merge into one big platform. By means of incremental improvements, Instagram has only taken blogging to the next level by blurring the different features of the individual platforms.

**Sum up of future prospects**

As a result, Instagram and other picture and video sharing platforms have not made blogging obsolete, on the contrary, it is a good way for enhancing the awareness of a brand and to drive traffic to a brand’s online platforms, where it is in fact possible to measure and track the number of sales. In other words, Instagram and other picture and video sharing platforms are not a threat to blogging, but instead, those platforms contribute to the complementation and improvement of blogging facilitating it to the next level, and thereby, become more attractive and competitive. As a result, we predict blogging to engage in more video based content, as a way to stay innovative in a fast moving digital industry. Further, we find that expanding the blog segment to focus more on the male audience is not a possibility that can be forced, but on the contrary, something derived from inner motivations.

As such, the digital industry of blogs will not ‘die’, but instead evolve into an industry merging different kinds of platforms and facilitating the interconnection of platforms.
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