Blog Marketing

A consumer perspective

Bachelor thesis within Business Administration: Marketing
Authors: Johannes Andersson
         Martin Blomkvist
         Mattias Holmberg
Tutor: Olga Sasinovskaya
Jönköping June, 2007
Abstract

The phenomenon of blogs is growing rapidly and is expected to increase even in a more rapid pace (Technorati, 2006, November 6). As Wright (2006) discuss; blogs provides a new way of communicating with customers, as customers want to be talked with, not to. Companies have newly started to pay attention to this and as a result, the concept of blog marketing has been born. The little research that has been done on blog marketing has been done from a company perspective. However, no or little research has yet considered how consumers use blogs. In order to use blogs as a communication tool, it is of huge importance for companies to understand how consumers use blogs in their decision making. Hence the purpose is;

“To explore how and why consumers use blogs in their decision making process“

In order to answer this purpose we conducted nine interviews on young adults, as previous research suggests that this population use blogs the most (Tremayne, 2007). From the collected data a qualitative analyse was made in which the empirical findings was analysed with support of the theoretical framework.

From the analysis we found that consumers use blogs throughout their decision making. Within the consumers’ decision making, collaborative blogs was mostly used as the consumers could get more input from a larger audience and because this type of blog tended to cover a specific topic of interest for the consumers. Consumers were found mainly writing in the blogs when they had knowledge to contribute with or when they needed information that they could not otherwise find in the blogs.

We also noticed that consumers turned to groups they belonged to, so called normative group, or they turned to groups that they did not belong to, so called comparative groups. These groups influenced the consumer by providing them with knowledge and by giving them positive and negative confirmation on their choice of purchase. However normative groups also persuaded the consumer to buy products in order to belong to the group.

Besides this, a pattern of characteristics of the individuals that the consumer blogged with were noticed. Consumers wanted user experiences and thus the vast majority of these individuals they turned to, seemed to be consumers themselves, with relevant product experiences. The consumers also seem to blog more with certain individuals, whose opinions were valued more. These individuals often shared the latest information on products.

Lastly we found that consumers seemed to be selective when reading blog posts. The blog posts needed to contain detailed- and up-to-date information. Moreover, consumers wanted blog post to be written by other consumers because they saw them as more credible then companies. The consumers also chose to read blog posts that show similarities between the consumer and the blogger in terms of either usage pattern of product or preference for product choices.
# Table of content

1 **Introduction** .................................................................................. 3  
   1.1 Problem Background .................................................................. 3  
   1.2 Problem Discussion .................................................................. 4  
   1.3 Purpose .................................................................................... 4  

2 **Definitions** .................................................................................. 5  

3 **Theoretical framework** ................................................................ 6  
   3.1 Blogs ....................................................................................... 6  
      3.1.1 Different types of blogs ..................................................... 6  
      3.1.2 How are people using the blogs today ......................... 7  
   3.2 Communication ....................................................................... 8  
      3.2.1 Types of communication .............................................. 9  
      3.2.2 Characters in communication .................................. 10  
      3.2.3 Word of mouth .............................................................. 10  
      3.2.4 Online WOM ................................................................. 11  
   3.3 Consumer decision making ..................................................... 11  
      3.3.1 The consumer decision making process .................... 12  
      3.3.2 Reference groups ......................................................... 14  
   3.4 Previous research .................................................................. 16  
   3.5 Summary of theoretical framework and research questions .... 17  

4 **Method** ....................................................................................... 19  
   4.1 Research approach .................................................................. 19  
   4.2 Research Strategy .................................................................. 19  
   4.3 Qualitative vs. Quantitative ............................................... 19  
   4.4 Data collection ....................................................................... 20  
      4.4.1 Interview methods .......................................................... 20  
      4.4.2 Sample selection ............................................................ 21  
   4.5 Credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability ... 22  
   4.6 Data presentation and analysis .............................................. 25  

5 **Empirical findings** ...................................................................... 26  
   5.1 Interview with Anna ................................................................. 26  
   5.2 Interview with Anders ............................................................. 27  
   5.3 Interview with Jim .................................................................... 29  
   5.4 Interview with Josefin .............................................................. 31  
   5.5 Interview with Peter ............................................................... 33  
   5.6 Interview with Michael ............................................................ 34  
   5.7 Interview with Marie ............................................................... 36  
   5.8 Interview with Eric .................................................................. 38  
   5.9 Interview with Magnus ............................................................ 40  

6 **Analysis** ..................................................................................... 43  
   6.1 Consumer decision making process .................................... 43  
      6.1.1 Need .............................................................................. 43  
      6.1.2 Information search ...................................................... 44  
      6.1.3 Alternative evaluation .................................................. 45  
      6.1.4 Purchase decision .......................................................... 46
6.1.5 Post purchase decision.......................................................... 47
6.2 Group influence in the blogosphere........................................... 48
6.3 Characteristics of influential individuals in the blogosphere ...... 51
6.4 Characteristics of information in blog posts............................ 52

7 Conclusion.................................................................................. 55

8 Discussion............................................................................... 58
  8.1 Limitations............................................................................. 58
  8.2 Further research.................................................................... 59

Reference list................................................................................ 60

Appendicies
Appendix 1 - Before the interview ............................................. 63
Appendix 2 - Interview manuscript ............................................. 64

Figure 3-1 - Consumer decision making process.......................... 12
Figure 6-1 - Required content of blog posts................................. 52

Table 6-1 - Summary of group influence..................................... 48
1 Introduction

In this section we will go through the background of the research and the problem. We will also present the purpose of this thesis.

1.1 Problem Background

Ever since the internet was introduced for the general public during the 1990s, people have used it as a source of information. Recent statistics shows that the majority of the population in Sweden use internet in order to get information regarding products and services (SCB, 2006, December 18). However most statistics available does not tell how the consumers use the internet and what kind of information they search for. There are many different sources of information online, for example company web pages, communities, blogs etc. The concept of blogs and blogging is a relatively new phenomenon in today’s society and it has not really been explored before. Nevertheless, magazines are today filled with articles on the importance for companies to start blogging and join the communication of the future, if they do not want to loose ground to their competitors (Lindstedt, 2005, November).

The major blog search engine, Technorati, shows some interesting facts on the number of blogs and its growth. In October, 2006, Technorati counted 57 million blogs and a growth rate of one hundred thousand new blogs per day. This number is expected to keep growing and double every eight month (Technorati, 2006, November 6). However, when it comes to the number of blogs in Sweden, there is uncertainty. Different articles talk about a wide interval of blogs, starting at around 18, 000 (Lindstedt, 2005, August) and counting up to more then hundred thousands (Johansson, 2007). The reason to this wide span is due to the lack of a clear definition on what a blog is and also the fact that the figures are 18 months apart from each other. But the fact is that the tremendous growth of blogs worldwide also is true for Sweden. Sweden contains actors like Aftonbladet, Passagen and MSN spaces whom all contain blogs and allow for a creation of your own blog. Thus, the creation of blog is available for almost everyone in Sweden, with very little effort.

A result of this growth, blog marketing has emerged as a new innovative way to create closer relationship with customers. It has also given the consumers the possibility to discuss amongst each other. Blog marketing allows not just for marketers to establish closer relationships towards a small segment, but in fact, it can also allow for relationship marketing towards larger segments. This of course only holds if the blogs have a large audience, but statistics above shows that this is most possibly the case.

Today limited research has been made within the concept of blog marketing. Furthermore, all research that has been conducted has had the focus on how companies can use blogs in order to interact with consumers. Something that has not been considered, and has been taken for granted, is the issue of how consumers use blogs in their decision making. Moreover, how consumers consider the information that is being transmitted on the blog has not yet been explored. The truth could be that consumers use blogs in a way that companies have not thought about. The existing use of blog marketing could thus miss its objectives if companies do not know how their audience perceives it.
1.2 Problem Discussion

There are several interesting angles to take on the problem discussed above. For example; how does the communication process in blogosphere looks? What does the feedback process in communication process look like? Which different message contents, structures and format are there in blogosphere? We have however chosen to focus on the consumer decision making process and to explore how consumers use blogs in this process. We choose this angle since this area is not very extensively researched. Blogs provides a new way of communicating with customers, as customers want to be talked with, not to (Wright, 2006). In order to use this communication tool, it is of big importance for companies to understand how consumers use blogs in their decision making.

There are several views of the theory regarding the consumer decision making process is and how many stages it consist of. Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel (2001), define the stages as need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post-purchase, and this also the model that is adapted for this thesis.

The focus on the consumer decision making process in the context of blog is of importance for several reasons. It is today unclear how and in what stages consumers use blogs in their decision making process. An overview of the literature shows that not much research has been done within this subject. Traditional marketing tools such as advertising, sales promotion etc have different impact in the different stages of the consumer decision making process. But it is unclear what impact blogging has in those stages.

By mapping out this information, companies can learn how to use their marketing in a new and innovative way to appeal consumers. One reason is that today there is very little research conducted on blogs from a consumer perspective. Firms who conduct blog marketing can only rely on very limited blog marketing, which is only researched from a company perspective. To be successful in blog marketing, we argue that the marketing needs to be shaped in accordance to consumers’ blog usage. This is however difficult to do as no research have ever really been conducted on consumers blogging habits. If companies learn how blogs are used, they can benefit in several ways. For example, they can engage in the viral marketing on the blogs to create knowledge of their products. They can listen on why consumers prefer competitor’s products.

As blog marketing is a new phenomenon, existing theory on consumer decision making and market communication might not be completely integrated with blogging. Thus our purpose is to see how blogs affect consumers in their decision making process.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how and why consumers use blogs in their decision making process.
2 Definitions

In this section we define some of the words we have used extensively in this thesis, in order to simplify the understanding for the reader. Since many of the areas we discuss are rather new, there are not many confirmed definitions that can be used; we have therefore chosen to make our own interpretation of those words.

- **Blog** – A blog is a web page that contains regularly posted inlays that are archived and arranged in reversed chronological order (Wright 2006). This can include anything from an online diary to a more interactive page, a so called collaborative blog.

- **Collaborative blog** – a blog where many people can post inlays, write comments and answer to questions in other blog posts.

- **Diary blog** – a blog that is written by one author, often about his/her everyday life, it can also include almost anything. The author also post inlays that can be used in consumption decision for others, also often the reader has the possibility to comment on the diary inlay.

- **Blogging** – when people either read and/or writes in a blog.

- **Blog post** – an inlay in a blog, this could be either in form of a comment or the original post itself.

- **Bloggers** – individuals who read or write in blogs. They can be paid professionals or just ordinary people.

- **Blogosphere** – The community of blogs, bloggers and blog posts (Wright, 2006).

Clarifications on forum, blogs and online community

In order to clarify our paper we need to distinguish the differences between blogs, discussion forums and virtual communities. Discussion forums are divided into specific sub-forum dealing with a distinctive topic. The discussion in such a form is designed as a sub-forum where the contributions are posted in a chronological order. The main distinguishing characteristic between blogs and discussion forums is that the reader has the ability to follow the blog through specific software and received message when the blog is updated. The administrator that creates the conversation in the discussion forum can be a different user every time new conversations appear on the forum. The administrator has access to edit, close, delete comments and modify the thread on the forum that he/she created.

Virtual communities are a sociological group where individuals are official members that interact in a socialised approach. The communication in an online community is usually a supplemental form of face-to-face interaction, where the members write separately to each other. The distinguishing characteristic between a blog and an online community is that the latter requires registration for the user in order to take part of the content in the online community means a blog allow the reader to read.
3 Theoretical framework

In this part of the thesis we discuss the relevant theories used as a framework for the thesis in order to be able to reach the purpose. The theories discussed deal with research within the consumer decision making process and the theories available on blogs. Also we discuss certain issues regarding communication as well as the concept of word of mouth. Lastly, previous research that is of interest to our purpose is discussed.

3.1 Blogs

When the first blogs appeared in the late 1990s, they were primary web pages that contained many links, offering mostly “personal information” and easy to update. The blogsphere has been expanding rapidly over the last few years. According to the New York Times and Pew Research, nearly one blog per second is created (Tremayne, 2007).

Blogs are simple web sites, or part of web sites. Compared to the regular sites on the web, which mostly have little significant change on a daily, weekly or even monthly basis, they are updated more frequently. They are user-friendly, inexpensive, self-publication of content for a potentially vast audience on the web. The entries in the blogs are called blog posts. Blogs are more flexible and interactive than previous publication print and digital formats. They contain numerous hyperlinks that are often accompanied by comments regarding the destination of the link. Blogs are designed to be a part of a network where they are connected to each other through links, which are generally related to the content. The readers then have the possibility to comment on the blog posts. Blogosphere is the term used to describe the global network of blog postings. Blogs can be thought of as a gateway to vast sources of information where users may respond to a blogger by sending comments and links to additional information. In this sense, it is fulfilling many needs (Tremayne, 2007).

3.1.1 Different types of blogs

Diary blog

A diary blog is often about what is happening in a person's life. It can be a mixture a diary and a guide site, and there are as many unique types of blogs as there are different people (Tremayne, 2007). These characteristics share a common ground that diary blogs is a web-based tool that gives the author of the diary the possibility to post information for consumption for others. Also, diary blogs gives the reader the possibility to add comments regarding its content; however, this is not applicable for all diary blogs. Diary blogs has several benefits according to Madden (2005). They are started with very little effort and necessary software is inexpensive or, most often free. Furthermore, the blogger does not need high speed internet in order to create a diary blog. The authors that are writing on a diary blog all have different opinions regarding things and express their view of whatever they are writing about. This is a demonstration to the personal and dynamic capacity of a diary blog according to Searles and Sifry (2002). Pomerantz and Stutzman, (2006) describes diary blogs as web pages that arranges discrete posts that contains chunks of information that may contain images, multimedia and text. According to Lamshed, Berry and Armstrong (2002) diary blogs are very personal and if the reader does not like the author and his/her opinion, it may not interest them enough to return. The blogger can use the diary blog for personal enjoyment and archive the happenings in their lives.
Collaborative blog

A collaborative contains information that is posted by several individuals not just one author. In collaborative blogs, readers have the possibility to contribute with links or posts comments, in order to participate with their opinions, answers and questions. Most collaborative blogs focus on a specific topic, and the authors can be both regular people as well as experts within the topic (Holtz and Demopoulos, 2006).

The collaborative blogs are an online group created by the bloggers in the blogosphere. These groups have focus on certain topics in order to encourage readers to correspond to each other, which is similar to a normal discussion group. The purpose, according to Lamshed et al. (2002), is to break down the barriers between people and to extend the blog to more than just one author, in order to create a discussion among its members. Collaborative blogs have standard rules about participation in order to avoid development of poor quality content, which do not encourage new and current readers to come back on a regular basis.

Company blog

A company blog can include two types of blogs, product and customer service blog. Product blogs can consist of different approaches. One approach is to provide updates about the product so customers can receive the latest information. A second approach is to provide customers with insights and information directly from those who are responsible for the products. A product blog that keeps customers updated can build loyalty to the product and the brand/company. The customer service blog is rather similar to product blogs, but customer service blogs focus completely on issues on the already purchased products. The customer service blogs is a channel in order to address the issues on the products to the customers that have purchased the product (Holtz and Demopoulos, 2006).

3.1.2 How people are using the blogs today

People have blogged long before the term was coined, but the trend gained force with the introduction of automated published systems, especially Blogger at blogger.com. Thousands of people use services such as Blogger to simplify and increase the publishing process. In the beginning, the rapid growth of blogs was dependent on extreme events. Examples of event, after which blogging has rapidly increased were during and after the attack on World Trade Center, wars, political campaigns and natural disasters. People started using the blogs because they wanted to express themselves about these mentioned events. Blogging about these events has attracted the attention of the mainstream news media, further contributing to the popularisation and adoption of this new phenomenon of computer-mediated communication. Today the blogging in the blogosphere concerns business, for example about markets, customer service, product etc. (Tremayne, 2007)

According to the search engine Technorati (2006, November 6) there were more than 57 million blogs available on the internet as of the end of October 2006. Approximately 12% of those blogs had posted comments or links. Research by the Pew Internet and American Life Project presented by Tremayne (2007) also indicates that blog readers today are similar to the early adopters of the internet and other new communication technologies. The bloggers are young, well-educated and more likely to be males. According to Tremayne (2007)
the development of blogs seems to follow the traditionally diffusion path of successful new communication technologies and users with great interest in technology. The final step to become a part of the broader public of the internet community is then to shift to the general internet users.

The new stage of the development of blogs is the business sector. Business has become a new phase of the communications that appears on the blogosphere today. Bloggers communicate and share information to each other since blogs are the new ways for customers to reach out to the companies. This scenario has made the companies more alert to listen to their customers' demands through the blogosphere. Enterprises now have the opportunity to gain new knowledge from the customer and to gain an idea about what the customers are saying about them (Tremayne, 2007).

Observations have been done on why internet users connect to blogs. Blogs seem to encourage a sense of community, especially for those who seek more in-depth information than what is available through traditional media. Blog content generally reflects the bias of the blogger, who tends to take one side of an issue. Furthermore, it contains a sense of belonging to a group of like-minded individuals. Information seeking is also a reason for accessing blogs. Bloggers provide the latest news and analysis by experts and other with inside knowledge, some of which is glossed over or omitted by the traditional channels. Blog users can also frequently use one certain blog due to they follow a story for a longer period of time than that they would be able to do if the story came from traditional media (Tremayne, 2007).

### 3.2 Communication

In business, companies are required to communicate with their customer and have a strategy for the implementation of the chosen approach (Kotler et al. 2005). Communication is the transfer of information between the actors participated in the process and is a central part of marketing. Communication with customer can take many forms, such as advertising, mailed brochures, sales promotion and personal selling etc. The marketers are often those who conduct this communication. They are often perceived as people with something to sell; they express what is good, great and irresistible with the product/service (Varey 2002).

Communication theory of today mainly comes from the same model, namely the linear model of communication by Wilbur Schramm in 1955 (Fill 1999). According to him, and his model is today generally accepted by major authors such as Blackwell et al (2001), Dubois (2000) & Harrell et al (1999), communication consists of:

1. A source that is sending the message,
2. Encoding of the message into terms that can be easily understood and interpreted by the target
3. A signal, which is how the message is transferred
4. Decoding of the message, which is the recipients trying to understand the message.
5. A receiver, which is the individual who receives the message
6. Feedback, this is the receiver’s feedback to the sender
(7) Noise, which is the distortion of the process, which might make it harder for the receiver to interpret and encode the message.

(Adapted from C.Fill *Marketing communications*, p.25, 1999)

All the above authors have made their own definition of the types of communication and the roles of the participants. But their theories can be summarized as follow.

### 3.2.1 Types of communication

#### One-step flow of communication

In traditional mass marketing, information is directed only in one-way, from the company to the target audience - the consumers (Fill 1999, Harrell et al 1999, Ottesen 2001). Mass marketing is defined by Kotler et al. (2005) as non-personal communication since the message is carried without personal involvement. At this stage all the consumers are exposed to the same message at the very same time. This message can take the form of printed media, images, radio etc. Fill (1999) argues that with mass communication there is a large part of the population that does not consider the message sent, either because of noise or simply since they are never exposed. As this step did not completely cover the personal communication that takes place in the market, the following types of communication were developed.

#### Two-step flow of communication

In a two-step flow, information goes from the sender to certain receivers, (opinion leader & opinion formers), that in turn reach the target audience through interpersonal networks (Fill 1999). However, Blackwell (2001) adds to this, in that the mass communication also reaches the target audience and that the opinion leaders and formers are there to strengthen the influence of the message. However, opinion formers and leaders can also be used in order to reach targets that were missed by the traditional mass communication.

#### Multiple-step flow of communication

This model was developed since the two-step does not consider the information flowing between individuals in the target audience. Neither does it includes the communication between the original senders, via a consumer, to the opinion leader and then passed on to other consumers. The multiple-step of communication also adds the function of gatekeepers, who are people in a position able to decide whether or not the target audience will be able to take part of the message. So basically what this adds is the function of more information flowing, which also can be considered Word-of-mouth (Blackwell et al 2001), but also the fact that targets that missed the information from both the marketing source and the opinion leaders/followers, now face a third possible influencer, their peers.

Kotler et al. (2005) calls this kinds of communication personal communication, since it is communication between two or more individuals, and also since this information cannot be controlled by the company.

All authors mentioned above seem to agree that today the multiple-step flow of communication, that is, the interpersonal communication, is of great importance. They also agree that the one-step communication mainly works as an “eye-opener” for consumers.
3.2.2 Characters in communication

Except from the above discussed participants in communication, sender and receiver, there are also some important characters that need to be discussed in order to understand the impact of communication.

Opinion leaders – are people in a position from where they are able to heavily affect individuals. They are often targeted by organizations to pass the information on to the rest of the consumers (Fill 1999). Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) showed in a study that opinion leaders tend to affect the target even more positive then if the message was sent from the original sender. According to Corey (1971) opinion leaders are trusted and informed people who exist in normative groups, where they are more active and influence on the other members then the regular member. Opinion leaders are often a role model of opinions within their group which means they can be the most important influencers on marketing effort through oral or written communication to their readers or listeners.

Research has shown that the opinion leader and the opinion follower often tend be rather similar in lifestyle and social class. It is also important to notice that opinion leaders does not have to be a “leader” in all subject, but only the very subject in which he/she posses great knowledge (Blackwell et al 2001). Corey (1971) argues that opinion leaders are significantly more involved in their main interest compared to regular members and that they are more informed about new developments in within their interest. Finally the extent to which opinion leaders reads in the media, related to their topic is significantly larger than among the regular members. Another important characteristic of the opinion leaders is that they normally have more self-confident then their followers and also are more socially active (Mowen 1993). This goes very well with what is stated before that opinion leaders being willing to share information, and actually like being in the centre of attention. According to Glock and Nicosia (1963) the opinion leaders act not only as a channel of information but also as a starting point of social pressure toward a particular choice. The opinion leader also works as a social support to reinforce the choices once they have been made.

Opinion formers – these people have the same power in affecting people as opinion leader. However, opinion formers are given the power to affect due to their powerful position, which could be due to authority, education etc, whereas opinion leaders more is “selected” by their surroundings (Fill 1999).

Opinion followers – are the vast majority of the population, they gather their knowledge from the opinion leader and followers but also directly from the mass communication (Fill 1999).

3.2.3 Word of mouth

Word of mouth (WOM) is defined by (Blackwell et al 2001 p.404) as “the informal transmission of ideas, comments, opinions, and information between two people, neither one of which is a marketer”. Further they argue that WOM consists of the same types of components as in the communication examples mentioned above. They also add that both the sender and the receiver gains from WOM, which is supported by Fill (1999), who also argues for the above. The benefits for the receiver are rather straight-forward; as they gain lots of information they would not be able to obtain otherwise. The benefits for the sender can be a little vaguer at first glance, but according to both Blackwell et al (2001) and Fill (1999) people like to talk about the purchases for a number of reasons, such as confirmation, satisfaction, status etc.
According to Blackwell et al (2001) the affect of WOM has increased rapidly due to Internet. Consumers of today are able to spread the word of something faster and further than ever before.

### 3.2.4 Online WOM

Schindler and Bickart (2005) discuss that the traditional WOM and online WOM differs in the strength of ties between consumers when they are exchanging information between each other. Granovetter (1973) previously argued that the strength of ties between two individuals is a function of the amount of time spent together, the emotional intensity and degree of intimacy in the relationship. Following this discussion, online WOM is thus characterized by weak ties. Weak ties then provide three possible benefits for the consumer. Friedkin (1982) argues that it first provides a potential input for a decision. Second, consumer information should be more diverse then that coming from stronger ties. Thirdly, it also gives consumers the opportunity to gain access to expertise which they normally would not get access to (Constant, Sproull and Kiesler, 1997). One downside is however, that consumers do not know the motives of the person that provides the online WOM. It can be difficult to access the informant's background and expertise in the topic (Schindler and Bickart, 2005).

### 3.3 Consumer decision making

The consumer decision making process, when it comes to goods, consists of mainly five steps according to most researchers within the field (Blackwell et al. 2001, Statt 1997, Kotler et al. 2005). Although not everyone uses the same terms, they talk about the same phenomena. The steps included in the model are; need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and the post-purchase process. These steps will be explained more in details further below.

Before getting to the decision making process there are more aspects that need to be considered such as other factors that affect the consumer in their purchasing process. However, some aspects will only be considered briefly, as they are not used extensively in the thesis. They are however mentioned in order to provide a background and to show that there are more aspects then only the decision making process that affects consumers.

First of all, consumer are affected by what Blackwell et al (2001) call the individual determinants and by what Harell & Frazier (1999) call physicals factors. Even though they name the concept differently, they all talk about the same thing. The reason for why this influences affect consumers, is since the consumers are different, have different experiences and motivations, therefore, they will interpret things differently. Also consumers differ in available resources and knowledge which will further affect their decision.

Another aspect that affects the consumers is the environmental influences. This is what Blackwell et al (2001) and what Harell et al. (1999) call societal and social factors. Here the authors talk about external factors that affect consumer, such as culture, social class and reference groups, but also the influence of the family and other individuals by whom the consumer is affected. The reason for why this aspect of reference groups is very important is since this is a very general phenomenon, almost all individuals strive to some extent “fit in” heavily affect consumers. Also the information provided by these groups tend to have high credibility, depending on the consumers need to belong. The aspect of reference group is further developed in section 3.4.
Lastly, consumers are also affected by their degree of involvement (Harell et al. 1999). Involvement is the degree to which the consumers perceive the purchase to be of importance to them, and how complex they find the purchase situation (Blackwell et al. 2001). The more complex the purchase is the more effort will be needed from the consumer in order to make a good decision. Whereas the opposite, a non-complex decision will not demand very much from the consumer. The involvement in turn affects the way in which consumers will learn about the products. Since a low involvement purchase is fairly routine consumers do not engage in a very extensive information search on the product, they mainly gather their information passively. A high-involvement purchase will demand more from the consumer and they will be more motivated to actively search for information.

3.3.1 The consumer decision making process

The consumer decision making process presented below, in figure 3-1 and in the following sub sections, provides a general description on how a purchase decision is made. Consumers does not necessarily go through all the stages for all the kinds of decisions they make, and neither do they always go through the stages in the very specific order that is presented below (Blackwell et al 2001).

![Figure 3-1 - Consumer decision making process, (Laudon and Traver, 2007)](image)

**Need recognition**

The need recognition stage is the very first step in which the customers encounter a need for something. This occurs when there is a gap between the actual state and the desired state, that is, a difference in what they have, what they want to have and want to be. But Statt (2001), amongst others, argues that the gap between these two situations is not reason enough for consumers to take action. For consumers to act on this difference the need must be strong enough to motivate action as well as the consumer must have the ability to reach the desired state. This includes having available resources, concerning time and money etc (Blackwell et al. 2001).

The need is not only affected by the gap between the desired and actual state, but it is also affected by the fact that these two stages changes. Consumers change their desired and actual state as they live their life (Blackwell et. al. 2001).
**Information search**

The information search can be divided into two main categories; internal and external search (Blackwell et al 2001).

The internal search focuses mainly on what the consumer already knows, based on previous experiences and learning (Wells & Prensky 1996). Statt (1997) argues that the internal search is based on either *undirected internal search*, which is when consumers learn without intention to, and *directed internal search*, which is when consumers actively search their memory in order to find a solution to their need.

The external search takes place when the internal search is not sufficient, in cases where consumers do not possess the knowledge needed to make a good decision. Also this search can be further divided into two subcategories, the *pre-purchase search* and the *ongoing search*. The pre purchase search is external search conducted due to a coming purchase; whereas the ongoing search is conducted more regularly over time due to a great consumer interest in the subject, or just to develop a larger knowledge base in areas where purchases might occur in the future (Blackwell et al 2001).

There are some different opinions regarding the classifications of the ongoing search, whether it is internal or external. One could say that it is internal since it will be retrieved from the memory at the moment of purchase, but also it has been gathered externally for the purpose of a future purchase. In this thesis we have used the definition from Blackwell et al (2001), and thus classified the ongoing search as an external search.

The extent to which consumers will engage in the search for information depends on the impact of the purchase. If it is a high involvement product more search will be made whereas low involvement purchase will demand less amount of search (Blackwell et al 2001).

**Evaluation of alternatives**

At this stage consumers evaluate the alternatives. Since not all possible alternatives can be evaluated consumers have to narrow their choices. The alternatives that are evaluated are the ones that consumers either knew of from before or the ones they learned about in their external search, and that they believe can meet their criteria. These alternatives make up the consideration set (Wells & Prensky, 1996)

In order to be able to differentiate between the alternatives in the consideration set, consumers must evaluate them on the criteria they perceive being most important, they have to implement a decision rule. Depending on the involvement of the purchase and the number of attributes that the consumers evaluate, this can differ hugely depending on the consumer and the type of product (Statt, 1997). According to Blackwell et al (2001) there are mainly two categories of decision rules, either non-compensatory evaluation strategies, where a failure to meet one of the criteria cannot be offset by exceeding another, and the compensatory evaluation strategies, where a perceived weakness in one criteria can be compensated by a huge strength of another criteria.

Another aspect to be considered in consumer decision is the use of heuristics; this is mentioned both by Wells & Prensky (1996) and Blackwell et al (2001). Heuristics are “rules of thumb” that are used by consumers in order to shorten the decision process and make it easier for themselves to make decisions.
Purchase decision

At this stage of the purchase process consumers consider the questions whether to buy or not, but also more detailed questions regarding the purchase such as when, what, how and where to buy (Blackwell et al 2001). According to Kotler et al (2005) consumers can change from the intention to purchase to the purchase decision. This is due to attitudes of others, people around the consumers of which acceptance is important to the consumer, but also due to unexpected situational factors, that is external factors that disrupt the purchase. The main factors that influences the purchase today, is according to Statt (1997), the decision of how and where to buy.

At the end of the purchase process is the stage of consumption which also is included in the purchase stage, this deals with the actual usage of the product/service. The consumption stage mainly deals with questions regarding when, how, where and how much that is consumed (Blackwell et al 2001).

Post purchase behaviour

At the post-purchase stage consumers have used the product and their experience from the product will now serve as feedback into the next time they will purchase a product. Depending on whether or not the consumer’s expectations were met by the products perceived performance, they will be either satisfied or dissatisfied (Kotler et al 2005). Both Statt (1997) and Blackwell et al (2001) argues that it is of great importance that consumers’ expectations are met. A positive experience will foster repeat purchase and positive word of mouth, whereas, a negative experience will create consumer discomfort and may also result in negative WOM, which tend to be spread even more then positive word of mouth.

3.3.2 Reference groups

Reference groups play an important role in the consumer decision making process. Definitions are somewhat different between the authors, but a reference group mainly refer to; a person or a group that an individual refers to for comparison in their decision making (Blackwell et al 2001, Antonides and van Raaij 1998, Wells and Prensky 1996, Mowen 1993).

According to Wells and Prensky (1996) a consumer can have many different reference groups at one time and choose to turn to different reference groups depending on the situation. Although the authors use different terminology they mainly speak about three broad aspects on how groups can affect consumers. The first one is what Antonides and van Raaij (1998) and Blackwell et al (2001) name as norms and what Wells and Prensky (1996) name image, that is that groups provide norms on what is generally accepted and how consumers should behave to be accepted in the group. Secondly, what Wells and Prensky (1996) call image, also include what Blackwell et al (2001) and Antonides and van Raaij (1998) name value-expressive, which is how the consumer is perceived by the group. The third aspect, in which they all agree, is what they call the informational influence (Wells and Prensky 1996, Antonides and van Raaij 1998, Blackwell et al 2001), which occurs when the consumer does not have enough knowledge to make the decision.

Within a group there are several roles and positions; a role consists of the particular behaviours expected of a person in a position. Thus, when a person takes on a role, normative pressures apply influences on the person to act in a particular way (Assael 1992).
Status refers to the position the person have within the group. High status means greater power and influence. Products sometimes are purchased to demonstrate status in a broader social sense. For example, elegant suit and an expensive car can be status symbols (Assael 1992). Consumer socialization is the process by which consumers obtain the knowledge, dispositions and skills required to enable them to participate as members in the society (Mowen 1993).

The degree to which reference groups actually affect consumers depends on several things, such as the consumer’s desire to belong to the group (Antonides and van Raaij 1998) or the credibility of the group when it comes to providing information (Wells and Prensky 1996).

**The power of the reference group**

The influence that a group has on an individual is closely related to the group’s power. There exist several different kinds of power that has been identified as affecting consumers buying behaviour. Three aspects are particularly relevant for marketing strategy: expert power, referent power, and reinforcement power. An individual who exerts expert power need experience and knowledge in the certain subject in order to affect the consumers. The consumers need the person with expert power to have credibility and to be more knowledgeable or experienced with the product. The identification with members of the group is the base for referent power. When consumers have a close similarity in terms of social situation, beliefs and attitudes to the members of the group, the group can affect consumers with referent power. The person is either a member of a group or may aspire to belong to the group. This desire to belong make the consumers eager to adapt to the norms and values provided by the group (Assael, 1992).

The third aspect of influence that has a major impact on consumer’s decision making is reinforcement power. Kohli (1989) discuss that reinforcement power is the ability to mediate positive and negative reinforcements. It consists of reward and coercive power. Assael (1992) discuss that this phenomenon is based on the group’s ability to confirm the individual’s purchase. Social groups can confirm the purchase both through rewarding (reward power) or criticising (coercive power). Compliments on purchased products provided by a relevant group member reinforce the consumer’s choice and is thus an example of reward power. Groups that have reward power may also have coercive power over the individual. Coercive power is a negative confirmation of the consumer’s purchase. This means that the group disapproves with the individual’s choice, and thus encourage him/her to reconsider their purchase. The greater the value of the group, the greater is its power to express dissatisfaction and even criticize.

**Types of reference groups**

There are many different kinds of social groups. As stated above, it is possible for a consumer to belong to several groups and also to turn to different group depending on the situation. Here below is a short description of some general features for reference groups.

According to Antonides and van Raaij (1998) a comparative group is a group that the consumer does not belong to. This group is according to Blackwell et al (2001) just another source of information in the consumer’s decision making.

The normative groups are according to Antonides and van Raaij (1998) much stronger in their ability to affect consumers; they provide norms and values that set the standard in behaviour and ownership. The normative influence can, according to Blackwell et al (2001) be
seen as more binding and more severe then the comparative groups. The normative members are more affected of products beliefs, taste and preferences and have a more direct influence on consumer decision making. Previous research has shown that the outcome of this is that these groups are more likely to buy the same brands (Assael 1992). However, more recent research (Blackwell et al 2001) suggests that the normative pressure is declining in the western world since the new generation is putting their own needs before the group, thus prioritizing themselves.

Virtual group

Virtual groups are based on online encounters, and are thus not necessarily based on geographical proximity. They are normally also based on similar interests, and serve as an online meeting point where people can meet and discuss their main interest. Blackwell et al (2001) also argues that the information flow amongst the group members are often less inhibited, as people dare to be more honest when not meeting face-to-face. Also they argue that the subject can span over a very large width, including all possible subjects. The tools used to communicate for these virtual groups can in many cases be a collaborative blog.

3.4 Previous research

Bickart & Schindler (2001) investigated the WOM in online forums on the Internet. They assigned students to look at either corporate web pages or consumer forums about specific products. They found that after one semester, there was a higher interest in the product category for those who used the online discussion forum. They then suggested that a reason for this was because the content posts in the online discussion forums are thought to be more credible and more relevant but also having more empathy among its readers.

Bickart & Schindler (2005) also did another study in which they sought to explore the consumer use of online WOM. They found three motives for using online WOM. The interviewees used it to gain information in purchase decisions, in which consumer reviews and negative information was of most interest. Another motive was to get support from decision already made in which positive was used most for confirmation of that the right choice have been made. The third motive was purely for entertainment purpose where information was searched for fun. Another theme they discovered was the evaluation of the content of information in online WOM. Their interviewees were concerned if information would be biased or untrustworthy. The interviewees questioned information from corporate web pages. Independent web pages free from corporate marketing, in which detailed information and authentic first person experience was viewed more credible and reliable. A consensus of agreement among consumers in the online WOM also tended to increase the credibility. Finally, they found the use of WOM online to be spread through all the stages in the consumer decision-making process. During the need recognition, when product was mentioned, it sometimes stimulated interest or problem recognition for the consumer. Other consumers sometimes provide ideas that lead for alternative product to be included, or removed, in the consumer consideration set. Online WOM also suggested important attributes that could influence the criteria of which alternatives are compared. Information from consumers on how alternative rate on those criteria was also of importance when comparing alternatives. After purchase was done, online WOM information could increase the consumer’s satisfaction of the purchase through positive information. They also discovered that their informants were selective in their information gathering process. This was done to simplify the information but also to help them absorb the information with minimal effort. This selectivity they discuss is necessary as the Internet contained a vast
amount of consumer information about a large area of different products. They continue and suggest that future research should look deeper into what characterise the content in those online WOM consumers choose to read.

Bernhad, Bjurling and Åhrén (2006) did another study on un-addressed consumer complaints through blogs. They found that the blog is used as a way to express dissatisfaction on companies and their products and services. It is used when the consumer do not get enough amendments from the companies. Blogs then works as a complement to complaints through friends and family, and it is an easy way to ease the consumer’s experiences and reduce the stress of a distasteful treatment from companies. The consumers have then used blog to warn other consumers on products and companies but also to tell their own story regarding the complaint. When consumer does not warn other consumers, the blog posts are about easing their own thoughts and feelings about the company. Bernhad et al. (2006) discuss that the technical development has reduced the barriers to complain and this had led to increased likelihood to present complains for products of less value. Interesting is that they found that the probability to get amends from un-addressed complaints is low but in this stage the complaint is about getting personally amendments and to leave the complaint behind.

Wallstén (2005) then comes to the conclusion that the collaborative blogs increase the learning process in which people can learn from each other by reading blog post. It also gives a shared knowledge base for the participants.

In another study by Constant, et al. (1997) weak-tie sources were found to make it harder for consumers to assess the quality of the WOM information they received. Schindler and Bickart (2005) then discuss that the reason for this may be that the consumer do not know the motives of the informant and it may also sometimes be hard to assess the background and expertise in the topic of the informant.

3.5 Summary of theoretical framework and research questions

As the purpose of this thesis is to explore how consumers use blogs in their decision making, the model presented above, the consumer decision making process is used as the main framework. The consumer decision making model, which is adopted for this thesis, consists of five stages; need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and the post-purchase process. Consumers do not necessarily go through all this stages or this exact order. We have however chosen to arrange the thesis in this order as it will be easier for the reader to follow. So in order to learn more about the influence of blogs in the different stages and generally how the blog works in consumer decision making the first research question states;

- What blogs are used within the consumer decision making process?
  - How are these blogs used?
  - How does these blogs influence the consumers' decision making?
When consumers is about to make their purchase, they are normally affected by what other people around them think (Kotler et al 2005). With this in mind, together with the knowledge that blogs can provide a sense of belonging the following research question was developed;

- **Are there certain groups in the blogosphere that influence the consumers in their decision making process?**
  
  - **How does these groups influence the consumers in their decision making process?**

However, before the consumer comes to this decision, they have to be influenced from somewhere. Therefore the authors have also looked at the concept of market communication; what this shows is, and what all authors mentioned in section 3.2 agree upon is that the communication of today is built on the interactive communication amongst consumers. As discussed in section 3.1 of this thesis, blogs are a very simple mean for the regular person, to either start writing a blog, or just post in a collaborative blog and share their opinions. Blogs are therefore a good way for consumers to interact with each other, when they want to reach a wider span, as well as when they want input from more sources. This has given the creation of online WOM, when comparing the traditional WOM with the online WOM there are some differences to be found (Bickart & Schindler 2005). It is argued that the online WOM should include weaker ties amongst the sender and the receiver, thus leading to certain characteristics of that communication. These are the fact that the receiver of online WOM demands more wide information, from more different sources, and also the input that is being provided online can give the receiver information they would be unable to reach otherwise. With all this in mind, the third research question reads;

- **What characterise the individuals that the consumers are influenced by in their decision making?**
  
  - **What makes consumers turn to these specific individuals?**

Another aspect that is relevant is the amount of information available online and in blogs as discussed by Tremayne (2007), and which is suggested by Schindler and Bickart (2005) an important aspect to look deeper into. With all this amount of information available, how does consumer know what information to choose, and what characterise this information. What do they focus on in their blogging, why do they choose this specific blog post to focus on? All these questions we had before reading developed into the following research question;

- **What characterise the information in the blog posts that consumer choose to read?**
4 Method

In this section we discuss a plan for the method of conducting our research. This involves discussion on research approach, collection methods, and method for analysing the data. This is followed by a discussion on the threats of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

4.1 Research approach

When designing the research approach, there are two methods to consider; the deductive and the inductive approach. The deductive approach is where hypothesis is developed from the theory and where the research strategy is designed to test the hypothesis. It does so by establish a cause and effect relationship between two or more variables. This is however done without understanding the meanings that humans attach to their behaviour (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003). The inductive approach, on the other hand, begins with data. It develops an empirical generalisation that describes patterns of that data and it seeks to identify or develop a theoretical proposition that is consistent with those patterns (Schutt, 1996). The purpose of using this strategy is therefore to understand the nature of the problem studied (Saunders et al. 2003).

Our purpose holds that we will need to understand how consumers perceive their own experiences and behaviour. This is something best done through the qualitative nature that the inductive approach has. We will therefore be using the inductive approach to our research. Furthermore, this approach will, as Saunders et al (2003) suggest, allow a more flexible structure that will permit alternative explanations of the phenomena.

4.2 Research Strategy

Putting emphasis on the inductive approach, our research strategy is built on an exploratory study. An exploratory study is where the researcher seeks new insights of a phenomenon. This strategy is one of the threefold of exploratory, explanatory and descriptive. An explanatory research emphasise on studying a situation or problem in order to explain the relationship between variables. The third, descriptive study, is then about presenting an accurate profile on persons, events or situations (Saunders et al. 2003).

It is also of importance to discuss the research strategy in the context of time horizons. Cross-sectional studies are the study of particular phenomena at a particular time (Saunders et al. 2003). We will conduct interviews over a short period of time, thus doing a cross-sectional study. The other approach would then be to do a longitudinal study, in which the research topic is studied over time (Saunders et al. 2003). As our research project does not allow for sufficient time for conducting a longitudinal study, a cross-sectional study is more appropriate. Moreover, our purpose is not intended to study the effects of change and development of the blogging phenomena on the consumers’ decision making process. Instead it is intend to be a “snapshot” approach of a particular time.

4.3 Qualitative vs. Quantitative

There are two broad categories of methods to discuss; quantitative and qualitative methods of choice. Quantitative methods are concerned with gathering numerical data or data that will be quantified. Qualitative method then refers to collecting non-numerical data or data that will not be quantified (Saunders et al. 2003). Due to the empirical and numerical inherent of quantitative research method, it is seldom able to capture the subjects’ perspectives.
Moreover, this research method is not concerned with creating a rich description from the study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). On the contrary, qualitative research method emphasis a more interpretive approach to the study. It comes to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain relatively naturally occurring phenomena in a social world (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Lowe, 1991). By then recognising that the reality is socially constructed, it seeks questions on how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

As our purpose is taken from the consumer’s perspective, we believe that qualitative method will take us closer to the informant’s perspective. As we want to explore, we need to get deep into the minds of our informants. Using a qualitative research method will enable us get this rich description from the informants. This will enable us to understand the phenomena we are studying even better. The qualitative research method will thus allow us to understand the meaning that the informants’ attach to their experiences of blogging. To get this rich description, it is important to establish personal contact, and this is best suited, as Saunders et al. (2003) discuss, from a qualitative research approach. This description will be based on the meanings that our informants’ express through words. A qualitative approach will allow us to get this non-standardised data as it allows us to explore without being locked into a standardised set of questions. This is because the nature of the questions will need to be flexible and open-ended in order to explore what emerges during the interview. Furthermore, to get a rich description of this non-standardised data and to get into the thoughts of our informants’, the interviews will need to allow a long length of time. We thus believe by using a qualitative method we will get a rich description from the informants that will enable us to understand the phenomena we are studying better. Hence, our research approach will addressed through a qualitative approach.

4.4 Data collection

We have primary focused on collecting primary data as there exist little research within our research topic. This primary data has been collected through interviews as explained in section 4.4.1. The sample selection consists of young adults and is further explained in section 4.4.2. Besides collecting primary data we have also collected secondary data. The limited research that exists and relates to our research topic has therefore been used as secondary data in our report. Secondary data is used in the forms of previous research. Some of this research has partly guided our research questions. However, mostly it has worked to strengthen our findings.

4.4.1 Interview methods

There are many typologies to classify interviews in; the most commonly used typology is related to the level of formality and structure of the interview. Using this typology, interviews are classified into; structured, semi-structured and in-depth interviews. Structured interviews are based on a structured and standardised, or identical, set of questions. In contrast, unstructured interviews are informal and unstructured with no predetermined list of questions (Saunders et al. 2003). Semi-structured interviews are unstructured interviews where themes with questions will, to some extent be, based on the framework that the research has (Easterby-Smith et al. 1991). This type of interview, together with in-depth interviews, puts the interviewee in focus. Thus the interviewee decides how the phenomenon of study is defined and decides how it is understood (Lantz 1993).
Because of the nature of our purpose, as we need to understand the meaning that our informants attach to their actions and experiences, we need to conduct qualitative interviews. As Easterby-Smith et al. (1991) argue; in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews are appropriate for this. These types of interviews will allow us to probe questions, as we need the informants to develop their answers. Thus, the less structured nature of the interview will allow us to get a richer description on our research phenomena that would not be allowed from a structured interview with pre-determined questions. Furthermore, as Saunders et al. (2003) argue, semi-structured and in-depth interviews are more appropriate when questions are complex, open-ended, in varied order and where the logic of the questioning is varied. To answer our purpose, we have turned to a large number of complex and open-ended questions. The logic and order of the questions will therefore differ from interview to interview. Furthermore, questions may need to be modified or composed into another question in order to get an answer. Thus, the nature of the semi-structured and in-depth interview will be more suitable for our purpose.

The choice between using a semi-structured interview and an in-depth interview then seems to lie in the choice of structure for us. Jones (1985) argues that researchers should have some broad questions in mind. Furthermore, the more interviews the researchers’ conduct and the more patterns they see in the collected data, the more likely it is that the researcher explores those patterns instead of others (cited in Easterby-Smith et al. 1991). Easterby-Smith et al. (1991) argue that researchers need a framework from which to begin to develop the themes that will be covered in the interview. As the interviews goes on, researchers should be encourage to explore data of interest further and ignore lines of questioning not of interest. However, the framework should not tie up researchers as Jones (1985) argues (cited in Easterby-Smith et al. 1991). Using semi-structured interviews, where themes act as a loose guide to the questions is a good way to avoid being too bound by the framework. Furthermore, letting the interviewee talk freely on issues in in-depth interviews is more likely to cause no clear picture in the mind of the interviewee what the interviewer is interested to investigate. Also, it does not guarantee that the interviewer understands what questions the interviewee is trying to answer (Easterby-Smith et al. 1991). Following the arguments presented so far, we used a semi-structured interview in order to avoid the issues covered above and still not being bound by our framework too much.

In order to test whether or not our semi-structured interview was able to get deep into our research phenomena we did two pilot studies. The first semi-structured interview we felt gave too much theoretical jargon to the informant and we were not able to get deep into our informant’s mind. The second test then avoided the theoretical jargon and explanations but the informant’s blogging did not cover our research phenomena. This informant were characterised by using only diary blogs. The interview guide that was used in the study is showed in appendix 2. As later discussed when covering dependability issues, this interview guide has only been used to ensure that all relevant themes were covered in the interview. These themes have not led to theoretical questions in the interview; it has only helped us to follow a route in order to describe the phenomena of interest.

4.4.2 Sample selection

We chose young, educated, adults; this is because previous research suggests that these are the group that uses blogs the most. The sample used for our research thus consisted of nine people within the ages of 21 to 28. Of those nine people, three are females and six are males. We could not find more females who blogged therefore this sample consist of a ma-
jority of males. To identify our informants, we first used a self-selection sampling. This sampling method allows the individual to identify their desire to take part in the research (Saunders et al. 2003). We put up advertise notes in four colleges in Jönköping, however we did only get one response, which we included. When we judge that we would get any more responses, we turned to people whom we knew blogged and interviewed them instead. People whom the researchers were familiar with were selected because of the difficulties to identify other members of the population. We discovered that some of our friends, or friends to them, blogged a lot. This thus made us able to get suitable participants who had rich experiences of blogging. The low number of informants can be justified by that it allows us to get a richer description of the phenomena that we are studying. Furthermore, we do not intend to generalise our findings, instead to we want to seek an understanding of our research participants.

4.5 Credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest four constructs to check the trustworthiness of the research project. The first construct is credibility, which refers to ensure that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner that it can ensure that the subject in the study was accurately identified and described. As Marshall and Rossman (1999) argue, in-depth descriptions that grasp the complexities of processes and interactions will in fact be embedded with data received from the research settings. To get a rich description, every informant got information on what the interview will cover in short, two days before the interview. We ensured that each informant had read it before the interview took place. This information letter can be seen in Appendix 1. This made them able to be prepared and get them in to the phenomena of study. The informants were interview in two different ways. One way was that we interviewed our informants face-to-face. Six informants were interviewed this way. However, we tried to make all interviews face-to-face as it will enable us to establish personal contact. This is important as Saunders et al (2003) argue; qualitative data favours the establishment of personal contact. We judged that the face-to-face contact would increase the likelihood of describing and identifying our informants accurately. Those six interviews were done in quite rooms with no disturbances and they were also recorded. However, due to limitations in time and resources we were not able to interview three of our informants face-to-face as they lived at a longer distance. Those interviews were therefore made at distance through Skype and recorded. Recording was made to get accurately data from the informants so that we got their view and not ours. By using semi-structured interviews, we got in-depth understanding and rich descriptions from our informants. Furthermore, when we wrote the empirical findings we several times compared it with the original transcripts from the recordings of the interview to make sure that we captured the informant right. Some problems with credibility are that the interviews were conducted in Swedish and then translated in to English. This translation process was however done very carefully. We used lexicons when it was needed in order to accurately translate each word correct. Moreover, we tried do minimize our own thoughts and beliefs on our informants in order to not put our view and beliefs on theirs. Lastly, anonymity was guaranteed to ensure that informants could feel free about letting out their thoughts without having to be scared what other might think.

The second construct that Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss is transferability. The goal is here to demonstrate if the findings will be useful to others in similar situations with similar research questions. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue, qualitative research does not intend
to have external validity. As Svenning (1997) argues, qualitative research is more about making examples than generalising to a population. We thus want to give relevant examples on how and why young adults use blogs in their decision making process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that qualitative researchers should provide a rich description that is big enough to enable other researchers to test whether the findings hold in other contexts and times. In other words, they argue that the success of making transferability between two contexts is a function of how similar they are to each other. What then constitutes a proper base of information for making this transferability test is not agreed upon in the research. It must however specify everything that the reader needs to know in order to understand the research findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that qualitative researchers should at least provide an explication of the problem that the research builds on, a thorough description on the processes observed in the context, a discussion on the elements that are important and thus studied in more depth and a discussion on the outcomes of the research. We have followed these recommendations and therefore refer to section 1.2 for problem discussion and section 5 for descriptions on raw data. Furthermore we refer to our analysis section for discussion on the elements of the research phenomena studied. Lastly, we also refer to a discussion on the outcomes of the research which can be found in the conclusions. Moreover, we suggest that researchers who wish to test whether our findings holds in other contexts and times goes through our theoretical framework. By then using the same framework when conducting the interviews and analysis, researchers can then determine whether our findings can be applicable and transferred to other settings.

When discussing transferability, it is also of importance to discuss whether students can be representing other populations as well. In order words, can our findings, partly based on students, be applicable and transferred to other populations?

Cunningham, Anderson and Murphy (1986) discuss that there is a mixture of evidence whether students’ response patterns accurately reflect other consumers. They themselves come to the conclusion that students’ responses do not accurately reflect those of other consumers. Students, according to them, are socio-psychologically different from other consumers, differences that are manifested in decision factors and information preferences that influence product selection and in store image perceptions. Contrary to this study, Clevenger, Lazier and Clark (1965) for example found big similarities, when comparing images from two corporations, between housewives and students. Another study by Hovland (1959), speaks for that students’ responses does reflect other consumers. His study reconciled previous findings regarding differences in communication research, in which experimental studies have been done, mostly on students and survey studies mostly on non-students. The differences in the process attitude change between the two population he found was due to situational (experimental vs. survey) and personal differences. He discusses that if situational and personal differences were to be eliminated, there should be no differences between the two groups (cited in Shet, 1970). Shet (1970) then follows this up and reports great similarities in post-purchase decision dissonance reduction between male students and housewives. Bennet (1997) argues that samples made in universities generally contain a balanced mix of students from different economic, social and political backgrounds. Therefore, they do provide a representation of the general buying public (cited in Bodey & Grace, 2006). Khra and Benson (1970) did a study if business behavioural research must have businessmen as subjects or whether students could allow for valid generalizations. They studied students and businessmen who all were exposed for a short film sale presentation and then asked to fill in a questionnaire. They found that students behave similar to businessmen when they have the adequate background for the research task, that
is, similar degree of knowledge in the business area. They come to the conclusion that careful consideration must be given to the nature of study, in which special attention needs to be given to the student's frame of reference in designing the research.

Following this discussion, we believe that, although there is research that suggests that student responses are similar to other consumers, our sample might still not be generalized to other consumers. However, as only half our sample are students, and those students mostly comes from different economic, social and political backgrounds, or sample should not be as biased as previous research which seems to based only on students. Moreover, all of our informants, both students and non-students, have extensive experiences of blogging as consumers. Parallels can thus be drawn to the study discussed above, by Khera and Benson (1970); if student has enough knowledge in the research field, they do provide great similarities between other populations. We still however suggest that the study should be replicated with a completely non-student sample to prove whether the findings hold then as well. We have therefore, as previously discussed, clearly showed how our research was done, how we analysed it and what theoretical framework we used.

The third construct is then dependability, which means that the researcher needs to tell how the findings can be replicated if the study were conducted with the same participants in the same context (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Qualitative research does however not claim to be replicable (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). We have purposively focused on recording the findings from the interview as the findings emerged naturally. To really understand the informants’ meanings to their experiences and actions we used a flexible approach within the semi-structured interview. Although questions were bound to the themes that we covered, questions were flexible to allow an understanding of the participant. Due to this flexible research design, it is impossible to replicate the research. Furthermore as Marshall and Rossman (1999) argue, it is impossible to be sure that the findings will be replicated if the study was conducted with the same informants in the same research context. This is because the real world changes. However, we have enclosed the interview guide in appendix 2 that we used in the interviews. This guide has only been used to ensure that all relevant themes were covered in the interview. Furthermore, we have outlined raw data before the analysis section and the rationale behind it, so that it is possible to inspect how we proceeded with our data collection and analysis. Moreover, the data are put in well-understood categories in a retrievable form so that if it is challenged or someone wishes to re-analyse our data it is possible to assess it once again.

The last construct that Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe is conformability. This is concerned with showing if the findings of the study can be confirmed with another study. In other words, how can the researcher be sure that the findings reflect the participants in the study and the inquiry itself, rather than a fabrication of the researchers’ own biases and/or prejudices? Saunders et al. (2003) then address a number of issues to overcome interviewer and interviewee bias. First of all, interviewers with strong knowledge in their research topic receive credibility from the informant and increase the confident of the informant. Credibility is also retrieved from supplying relevant information to informant before the interview. We therefore gave the informants a list of themes to be covered in the interview to increase his/her confident, as we believe there is a strong value in letting the informant be well prepared before the interview. Another way to reduce the bias is to use clearly understood questions. Also, as Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) argue, open-ended questions could reduce bias and could be followed by probing questions (cited in Saunders et al. 2003). Saunders et al. (2003) then continue and argue that theoretical concepts and jargon should
be avoided if interviewee is not familiar with them. Sensitive questions should be left at the end of the interview as it allows time for building up trust. We followed these tips and only used open-ended questions except for questions concerning information on age, level of study and location of home. The fact that the interviewers knew the informants might have biased the findings by giving us prejudices on our informants. However, it should be noticed that most of the informants is not known by all of us. When conducting the analysis, all of the authors participated and those who did not know the informants that well acted as a devils advocate. Concerning the questions asked during the interview, all theoretical concepts and jargons were avoided. This was because our pilot study showed to be unsuccessful in getting deep into the minds of the informants and instead seemed to reflect the inquiry itself. Questions concerning the more sensitive nature we also left till the end of the interview if they did not naturally emerged during the interview.

4.6 Data presentation and analysis

Our raw data will be presented through sectioning each interview individually. Raw data is then defined as selected information from the total information available that could be collected from the research and that will be used a basis for the analysis (Lantz, 1993). This raw data has been put into categories and themes that emerged from the interview. The categories and themes used emerged from our interviews in order to portray the informants’ perceptions and experiences of our research area. This is important, as we want to have a close understanding to our informants. Furthermore, as Jones (1987) argues, this will work better than forcing data within deductively derived assumptions and categories. He continues and discuss, that researchers should use the previous mentioned approach because, where data is derived from the concepts and categories used by the research subject themselves, it interprets their social reality and organise their words (cited in Easterby-Smith et al. 1991). Furthermore, variations have been categorised in terms of shared characteristics and differences in order to make each interview comparable.

After this is done, we will then turn to the analysis section, although one should argue that the analysis did begun already when we started to collect the data. We will use the information under each category and compare it to other categories. In this way we will identify relationships, discover key themes and recognising patterns and trends. After this have been done, we will apply our theoretical framework on those patterns in order to understand it in a new and different way then what have previously been done. Quotes will be made to simplify what we mean and to make the analysis more comprehensible. After the analysis has been done, we will derive our conclusions.
5 Empirical findings

Here below we present the empirical findings for this thesis. A total number of nine interviews were conducted. They were all conducted during April 2007. The interviews are structured according to the themes that were found during the empirical gathering process, and also in consideration to our research questions.

In order to keep the participants anonymous but still make the thesis easy to follow and read we have given all the participants fake names.

5.1 Interview with Anna

Anna, 25 years old, was interviewed at her home in Jönköping and she is studying at Jönköping University. She mainly uses blogs when she wants to buy something new or when she wants to find out what kind of products that is available. But she also uses blogs for reading travel diaries, which she mainly reads just for fun and to keep in touch with people she knows. When it comes to blogging about a future purchase, she reads blogs by people who are in the same situation as her and that have experience from the things she is interested in.

Anna mainly blogs about travels, but sometimes she also blogs about consumer electronics and hiking. Generally she blogs about things that she is interested in and wants to know more about. Anna has never actually used blogs actively, she only reads them. The kind of blogs she uses is mainly product blogs, and collaborative blogs, where she can read and learn more. She does not really read the blogs from companies since she mainly cares about the opinion of other users instead of company propaganda.

When Anna uses blogs she mainly wants to find opinion and experiences that fit her predetermined mind about the product as she want her opinion to be supported. Rarely she reads a blog and completely changes her mind. The blog can instead make her choose a different brand.

Relationship with bloggers

The blogger is normally not someone she knows from before and they do not have a continuous relationship, it is just someone whose blog she happens to find. Anna trusts all the information that is written in the blogs, but she explains that the more detailed description on how the product has been used, the more she relies on the inlay. The people whose blogs she reads most often posses greater knowledge then her, within the subject. This is perfectly fine with her since she blogs to learn.

Need and awareness discovered with blogs

Anna agrees that she discovers a lot of new kinds of products and things that could be used together with her main purchase, but this has never actually evolved to a need. This has occurred, for example, when she has blogged about hiking gear. She has then learned about many new products and the advantaged with those products. But as she is not very experienced in the area, many of those products are just too complicated. However, the blogs she reads regarding travels could actually create a need sometimes. From these blogs she learns more about possible places to travel to which she might visit later in her life she explains.
Blogging for information and evaluation of potential purchase

Anna searches for information about experience from other consumers and their opinions. What she looks for when she searches for new things is what product that will give her the most value for her money. This since price is often one of the most important factors affecting her decision. Even here Anna mainly searches for blog posts that will support her opinion, in making her purchase in the predetermined direction she had planned. The reason to why Anna chooses to collect the information from blogs is because she feels that this is the only place where she can learn about people’s experiences and opinions, and also since this information is more neutral then if it would be from a company.

When it comes to evaluating products, Anna mainly uses collaborative blogs in where many people can express their opinions on things. She further claims that the more the bloggers has written about the product and the more detailed they have expressed their experiences, the more she trust them and the more credible she perceives them. Last time when she wanted to purchase a backpack, she wanted information from bloggers who had experience from real situations, similar to the once she would use the product in. When Anna evaluate products she mainly stick within one price category, and she always search for the maximum value of her money.

Blogging for purchase decision

Anna feels that one of the most important things she finds in the blogs is where she should buy her products and whether if she should look online or in a store. Since there are so many different brands, which several times are rather similar, she feels it is important to learn where she can buy it, and who has the best brand. An example of this is when she wanted to buy a sleeping bag, and since she thinks they are all pretty much the same, the blog played an important role in her decision on where to purchase.

The information she looks for when deciding how and where to buy are more hard facts instead of people’s opinion and experience. That is because she looks for who offers the best price and this can always be controlled.

Blogging for evaluation of the purchase

As Anna has never actively participated in a blog, she has never evaluated and searched for confirmation by writing. But she does use the blog in order to read about others experience and to get her own opinion confirmed. The opinions she reads at the blog can actually make her change her mind regarding the product and to become more positive. If she already has an opinion, a blog post can never make her dissatisfied about it. Further she sometimes uses the blog after the purchase. She does this in order to evaluate something she had already purchased but had not had time to check before, in order to decide whether or not to keep it.

5.2 Interview with Anders

Anders is 22 years old, and is studying at Jönköping University. The interview took place at Jönköping University in a group room. He uses blogs more or less everyday, mostly within the areas of sport and music. But he also from time to time uses blogs when he needs to buy something, which often concerns electronics. When he blogs about music he uses different kinds of blogs; first of all he has his own blog where he recommends and comments on music. But he also continuously read blogs from writers and music critics to be able to
learn more about new artists. Finally he also reads blogs about certain artist, that he finds through Google, when he want to learn more about a new artist.

When he uses blogs within sports he mainly goes through the latest news about his favourite teams and rumours about the players and other teams. When he blogs about products he reads more collaborative blogs where he can get opinions from more people. Anders is more active in his blogging when he knows more about something. This is exemplified in music, where he posses knowledge and wants to share this to other people. Whereas in consumer electronics, Anders keeps to reading since he does not think he knows enough to write in the blogs. The blogs he uses on a daily basis are mostly used for pleasure and just for keeping him up-to-date with what is happening in his areas of interest. The blogs he uses in purchasing situations, such as electronics, are used more in a purposeful way as the blogs then only is a mean to reach the end.

**Relationship with bloggers**

Anders relationship with the bloggers depends on the situation in which he uses blogs, whether it is music or about products. When he blogs about music he usually reads the same blogs and he knows about the bloggers from previous encounters. He feels that he can identify himself with the other bloggers when he blogs about music, where he meets many likeminded people. This is the same when he blogs about sports, where he meets people who support the same team or at least care for the same sport. When he blogs about consumer electronics, he does not really know the ones he is blogging with, as he mainly just blogs in order to get more information.

**Need and awareness discovered with blogs**

When Anders blogs about sport he feels that there are not really any needs that can be discovered. However, when he blogs about music he can learn a lot about new music and new artists that he actually develop a need for. When it comes to other products, like consumer electronics, he does not really have a need for the products he reads about, as he knows he is not able to afford it. For consumer electronics it is mainly about getting awareness and scanning the market for a potentially future purchase.

**Blogging for information and evaluation of potential purchase**

Anders use blogs in order to get more information before doing a purchase but also on different subjects that interest him. These subjects he continuously blogs about. What he looks for before a purchase in consumer electronics, is how other users have experienced the product and what kind of experiences they have had. Once, when he bought a new iPod, he wanted to learn how others felt about their iPods, and to learn what possible problems that could occur. Anders thinks that the information provided by the producer is not neutral enough, and feels that he gets more honest picture of the product if he reads the opinions from previous customers. When it comes to music, which he blogs a lot about, he continuously scan blogs in order to keep up-to-date with news, such as new artists and albums, in the music industry. He also blogs about purchases he might do in the future, just to scan the market and to see what options that is available for him. Since he is using blogs on a regular basis, he learns a lot from the blogs and he retrieves lots of information which he sometimes is able to use later on.

When he feels he can identify himself with the bloggers, his need for more diverse information from different bloggers decrease. This happens quite often when he blogs about mu-
sic, where he often meet likeminded people. When it comes to the credibility of the source of information he relies more on the people who describes about who they are and how they have experienced the product. As for the music critics, he knows who they are, and who has the same preference for music as himself and therefore knows who he should carefully pay attention to.

When Anders evaluates products and music he uses mostly collaborative blogs, but also blogs written by experts in the subject. He then want to know if the product gives good value for the money and also what kind of problems that have been experienced with the product. What kind of people he listens to depends on the value of the product. The more expensive the product is, the more knowledgeable he demands the writer to be before he trust the opinion; and also, as the price increase he shift focus from opinions to more hard facts. When deciding on a product, he only blogs about products within in the same cost-interval, since he already has a pre-determined idea of how much money he wants to spend.

**Blogging for purchase decision**

When he uses blogs to read about customer opinions he also learn what they think about the company that delivered the product. He checks if the company has reliable delivery and good customer support. Another thing that is important except from searching for customer opinions is looking for a good price. This is the most important factor when he makes a decision, and by reading blogs he is provided with price reviews and he learns where to look. So Anders basically uses blogs to decide from where to buy the product and rely to a great extent on previous customers.

When he decides to purchase something, he wants the support from many bloggers in a collaborative blog, that is; he wants to read many positive inlays about what he is buying, since this makes him more comfortable.

**Blogging for evaluation of the purchase**

Anders uses blogs to some degree in the post-purchase stage, especially when it comes to music. Here he gives feedback on different albums and artist, both positively and negatively. When it comes to consumer electronics he does not write as often; however he has wanted to, but he has not been given the chance to take part in those blogs. By reading collaborative blogs he can learn about things that occurred to other users and avoid ending up in the same situation or maybe helping him resolve a problem.

He can also get confirmation from other users on products he has purchased, which makes him more confident with his decision. However, he is not necessarily affected by negative information that is written about something he has bought and already likes.

### 5.3 Interview with Jim

Jim is a 21 year old student who is currently studying at Jönköping University. He was interview in a quiet room. Jim uses blogs rather extensively, both in purchasing situations and in his everyday life, just for fun. He uses blogs quite a lot, mainly about comics that not yet have been released in Sweden. He uses blogs more or less everyday, just in order to keep up-to-date with the comics and learn more about them. When blogging, he generally both read and post inlays and comments, but also he uses the ads that are available in the blogs. He uses these ads to be able to learn more about the subject he is blogging about, from dif-
ferent companies. The kinds of blogs he mainly uses are collaborative blogs, where he discusses comics, but also he uses product blogs when he wants to learn more about a certain product.

The main reason for him to use blogs is that it is very hard to get the information otherwise; the blogs provide him with the latest news in a very smooth way, this is especially true when it comes to comics. He says that normally it takes several years from release date for the comics to come to Sweden, and thus the blogs are his only way to keep up-to-date.

**Relationship with bloggers**

When he blogs about comics he knows the blogger from previous online encounters, thus they have some kind of history. Jim also knows what to expect from the blogs and if he can or cannot trust the bloggers opinion. Due to their mutual interest Jim can identify himself with the ones who he is blogging with, and he also tells us that these virtual contacts also has ended up in real life meetings. When it comes to areas he blogs less about, such as consumer electronics, he is a bit more sceptical to the bloggers opinion. Therefore he does not pay as much attention to their personal opinions, but try instead to focus on their experiences and comments about the products. This means that he does not put focus on their judgement, but instead focus on the facts that they write about. Also, within these areas, he prefers to turn to experts before other consumers.

**Need and awareness discovered with blogs**

Jim discovers new things both when he blog about comics and consumer electronics. As he spends quite much time blogging about comics he learns a lot about new comics and updates, which he later ends up buying or downloading. But in his blogging about other consumer electronics, he mainly learns about new products and a need is not immediately developed. But nevertheless, he admits that after reading many blogs about this one product, an iPod, he realised this was a fashion thing and actually ended up buying it later on. What really affect him at this stage are the opinions from of other users of products and comics. This is because he wants their experience.

**Blogging for information and evaluation of potential purchase**

Jim has used blogs a lot in searching for information and evaluating alternatives, especially in comics as described above, but also when buying consumer electronics. When it comes to comics he usually searches for certain characters and story outlines that fit his interests. Jim explains that the information should come from someone with similar taste for comics, in order for him to consider the information. When he searches for information regarding consumer electronics he mainly wants expert information, therefore he visit product blogs or turns to magazines and blog about articles written there. He specifically asks the expert to evaluate/confirm the product he intends to buy. In general he also says that he has more trust in experts then consumers when it comes to consumer electronics. This is since he is afraid that consumers used the products wrongly and therefore have bad experiences, not because the product is bad. But he is really careful to make a difference between experts and sellers, where he only trust experts, since sellers often provide more biased information. What he looks for and compare is often different functions and quality of the products, together with the bloggers experience of the products; as long as the products are in the same price range.
It is also important for Jim to find the support for his specific product by many bloggers as he thinks the more comments the better. He tries to gather both positive and negative comments, but he admits that the negative posts make more impression. Why he listens more to the negative information is since he already has so much positive information from all commercials about the product. So by reading blogs he is able to learn about both sides of the product, and get a more neutral picture. Also he adds that he want the information to be as objective as possible, so the people who are extremely negative and whose opinions and experiences are not based on facts, he does not really pay attention to.

Previous purchase experience has lead to Jim being disappointed with the product, mainly since he did not know enough about the product before he purchased it. So now, in order to make a better decision and not be too disappointed again, he uses blogs more extensively. When he is not able to find what he wants, he pose questions and start discussions about the product he is interested in. Finally what he reads in the blogs at this stage can potentially make him change his mind, and make him choose something else.

**Blogging for purchase decision**

At this stage he does not use blog that much. The only use Jim has of blogs when deciding on how to purchase is from where he should purchase. When he decides he looks at things like; what company can offer the most reliable delivery, which company offers the best price and customer service etc. So he uses the blogs to get the other customers experiences from the different companies.

**Blogging for evaluation of the purchase**

After his purchase he always tries to share his information and experience as he wants to give something back to the people who helped him. He wants to add his experience of the products, unless it is not already there. Further he admits that he has a stronger urge to evaluate when he have had a negative experience, since he thinks all positive information already is being promoted by the companies, and he think consumers should know of both sides.

Sometimes he also uses the blogs in order to confirm his experience of the product, and to strengthen his satisfaction. Another thing he blogs about after the purchase is about possible upgrades and the possibility to resell his used product. So at this stage he both writes and reads in the blog.

### 5.4 Interview with Josefin

Josefin is 23 years old and was interviewed at her home in Ronneby. Josefin blogs when she sits at home and have nothing ells to do in order to pass time. But also since she thinks it is fun and she usually finds topics of interest to blog about. One of her biggest interest is actually nutrition, partly because she herself has food allergies, but also since she thinks it is very exciting and interesting. She also read blogs about celebrities and television shows. She admits that she read blogs sometimes to still a curiosity on celebrity gossip. When blogging, Josefin only reads and never write in them herself.

**Relationship with bloggers**

Josefin reads blogs that dietician writes who can answer diet questions concerning allergies or similar things. She also reads blogs on people who also have allergic problems or that
have the same interest that she has. Josefin explains that she can easier relate to those with allergic problems because they have gone through the same things as she has and because they can offer her advice. She also reads blogs written by people that have seen movies she might be interested to see. She then reads what they thought about the movie, whether they liked it or not. But she does not know any people that she blogs with in real life she explains.

**Need discovery in blogs**

She says that she sometimes, when she reads blogs on celebrity gossip, she also read comments on movies that they have participated in. Sometimes she thought of renting those movies depending on if the bloggers have written good or bad comments. She continues and explains that the opinions of these bloggers play quite an important role and that if a large number of bloggers have complained about it she rarely goes against them. She goes on and says that if she has missed a show on TV and other bloggers writes that it is a good show, she wants to see it. Another thing that Josefin discovers a need for, in the blogs, is new products that can ease her allergy. She discovers those products when other bloggers write that they have tried them and recommends them.

**Blogging for information and evaluation of potential purchase**

Josefin reads blogs about diet related subjects because, it is one of her biggest interests, as she herself has allergies, but also to learn from others. So she usually reads blogs from other regular people with allergies that writes about the subject, but also from educated dieticians. It usually involves seeking advice on allergic reactions she or others have experienced. Sometimes it is about allergies that there is no medicine for. Then she seeks advice from others, with similar symptom, on how she can milder her problems. Those advices are sometimes used when purchasing her food she says. She goes on and explains that she basically takes in information from everything that is related to special diets and food allergies. She often reads on how people with allergies experience certain food or pills and how their special diets worked out for them. She also tests to avoid the food that other bloggers, with similar allergies, has claimed to be unhealthy. As she explains, it is a big likelihood that it will work well for her as well. Josefin explains that she has problem with her stomach and she reads about other bloggers that have experienced this kind of problem. Even with this problem she can get advices on what to eat and what to avoid.

But it is not only subjects related to allergies that Josefin blogs about; she also says that she look for information when she have missed a television program, that she follows, and wants to see from others bloggers what they thought about the show in order to see whether she should see it or not. Further, Josefin says that she also read comments on movies, on what other people think and how they felt about the movie.

**Blogging for purchase decision**

Josefin has never used blogs for deciding on how, when and where to purchase the things that she blog about. However, it has affected her how much to buy of certain food and medicine used in her diets.

**Blogging on evaluation of products**

Josefin explains that she sometimes reads about diets and medicine that she has tried and discovers that other also have tried them. In those situations she reads how they have ex-
experienced the diets and she checks if the medicine and the diet have had the same effect on them and what they felt about the treatment.

5.5 Interview with Peter

Peter, 24 years old, was, due to long distance, interviewed through Skype. He was alone at home in Kallinge and did not do anything else at the moment of the interview. He has finished his education and works today as a bricklayer. One of the biggest interests in Peter's life is playing computer games; in fact he belongs to the elite of Sweden in his particular game. He therefore blogs in so called clan sites, which is a closed blog for players in the same team/clan. But he also reads blogs about consumer electronics, which is one of his interests as well. Peter goes on and says that the blogging is a hobby but as well as to pass time. He also points out that he needs to follow the development of technology components in order to be in the elite of the computer game that he plays.

Relationship with bloggers

He read blogs on other that play on the same game level that he is, he says. At the beginning it was just virtual contacts but later he has met them in real life. They often have contact when playing game through microphones. Other than that, it is more or less people with the same interest or people with experiences with product that he is looking for, that he blogs with.

Need discovery in blogs

During the latest time, he has blogged much about plasma and LCD TV devices. Peter admits that he often feels that he wants certain models that he reads about in the blogs. He checks the comments on what other people think about these certain models. Comments often concern what other people think of the improvements on the latest technology, and how these models are improving. So what he really wants is to learn about their experience.

Other situations when he discovers needs are when he searches for tips and tricks, within the clan site, on the game that he plays. There he also gets tips on the latest technology and accessories he needs in order maintain his position as a top player. Although Peter mostly read blogs, he later during the interview admits that he sometimes also writes comments on so called clan sites for gaming. But it is then most about that he agrees or not on what people has written, not that he himself starts a discussion or give an answer.

Blogging for information and evaluation of potential purchase

Peter uses blogs when searching for new information within his interest or in order to solve specific problems. Peter once had a computer problem and he got a tip from a friend that he might find the solution in a certain blog for the problem. He looked in the blog and found the solution there and from that day, he started to use blogs as a support for his computer because he realised that all information is more or less there in the blogs. The blogs that he uses are written by expert users within computers and technology. He also reads blogs about consumer electronics. For example, Peter explains that he reads blogs on plasma and LCD TV devices that he want to have. He then checks out what other people think about them. He develops this and says that he needs to see what separates the two techniques from each other. Another situations when he used blogs for searching information was recently when he helped his father to find information on computer components.
Peter checked out memory cards, graphic cards and other components that he needed to have in order to build the computer for his father.

Peter also explains that he has used blogs several times to search for information on graphic cards in other situations. He sometimes searches for information to compare his existing graphic cards with those that he intends to buy. He goes on and explains that he found that the one he uses today is the most suitable. Also he compared what other people who used the graphic cards thought of the performance. Peter underlines that graphic cards really is important for him and that he needs all information possible and that others experiences and preferences cannot be found on the manufacturers’ website. When he reads blogs he gets to know how the product works in practice, he explains.

Peter explains that other peoples experience is really what is most important for him. He underlines that he cannot get certain types of experiences that other people have because as you are often not allowed to test products in the store. He therefore does not know how user friendly the product is if he only goes to the store. When he compares he usually reads all the critics because he feel that they are more detailed. But if positive comments on products are as detailed he reads them to.

**Blogging for purchase decision**

He often reads on what other people think of the supplier and use this information sometimes for deciding who to purchase from. He does however not check out the prices on the blogs because he feels that having a reliable supplier is more important for him. As he often buys consumer electronics on Internet he can go direct to the retailer online if people recommend them.

**Blogging on evaluation of products**

Peter recall one time when he bought a graphic card and later discovered that several other users in the blog did not recommend that graphic card and complained that it made to much noise. This bothered him quite much, so he got a bit upset about it, however he did not take any action in the blog. Instead, he told his friends in real life, that were searching for a graphic card, about the bad card that he had bought and warned them to buy the same.

### 5.6 Interview with Michael

Michael is 23 years old and is studying at Jönköping University. The interview with him took place in a quiet room at his university. Michael blogs everyday, and in most of the time he keeps to reading. But when he feels that he has something to add or need answers, he writes in the blogs. Michael blogs about several things but most on games, sport and how to become a better photographer. When he blogs it is for fun, to pass time or to keep up with what is happening.

**Relationship with bloggers**

Michael says that he values the users’ experiences in the blogs more, then for example going in to Sony’s home page to read about mobile phones. He also says that he knows that many in the blogs have great knowledge concerning certain topics. He thinks that they are honest and the information provided is unbiased, which he cannot say about sellers. Michael also says that he trust the bloggers because they are ordinary users like himself, thus
he can relate to them. He adds that he cannot use all information provided from real experts in the blog, since it is often too complicated to match his usage. He notices if people have experiences and can be trusted, by the way they write he says. Furthermore, he is sometimes sceptic to the information regarding specific products that is shown in blogs who treat various topics, but not if it is a blog that treat a specific topic such as cameras. In other words, he trusts the information in specific topic blogs whereas he is more uncertain about information in general blogs. Michael also says that he has contacts with bloggers that he blog with, about the game that he plays online, however not in real life. Those bloggers are mainly from Sweden he says, but he has also made some international contacts from the rest of the world.

**Need and awareness discovered in blogs**

Throughout the interview, Michael does not discuss any need or awareness that he has discovered in the blogs. He says that he always had a need in the product that he blogs about before he goes into the blogs.

**Blogging for information and evaluation of potential purchase**

Michel says that when he was looking for mobile phones he found lots of information in the blogs. People wrote about the models and recommended certain of them as well. He remember one time, when he was about to buy a mobile phone and he discovered a blog by coincidence that he could gather information on mobiles from. The blogs he used was about everything, not just mobile phones. When he was searching a mobile phone he claims that the blogs made him interested in a certain model and brand. He recalls that someone had written down questions concerning mobile phones within a more general collaborative blog. After he had read the answers, Michael got lots of information on this specific model, as well as knowledge of peoples’ experiences. When he blogs about mobile phones, he keeps to reading blog posts. He points out that since mobile phones are very important for him, it is important that he get other users’ opinion.

One of his interests, that he blogs about, is how to become a better photographer. This interest in photography was actually something that he discovered in the blogs. Michael was looking for information for a specific camera that he had in mind, and the blogs gave him the answers he needed. Michael got the answers after asking for advice in the blog, as he posted a comment on his potential purchase and asked for advice. He then got a confirmation from other bloggers that it indeed was a good model. Although he adds, he would have bought it anyway. He asked a lot of questions he explains, in which he wrote about his situation; that he was a beginner and what he needed in a camera and what would suit him best. He also asked if he, as a beginner, could use all the functions in the camera, such as zoom function, and if others have tips on other models. The bloggers he turned to was mainly written by people whom he thought used the product. Michael also compared different cameras when he blogged. He read comments from other users who wrote about their experiences. Some answers that he got, concerning the questions that he asked, gave him tips on other camera models that he was able to check in online stores. Due to the extent of some of the blog posts he checked other models as well, however in the end; he bought the one he intended to. His questions also concerned a price limit that he was willing to pay. Michael also says that he felt that most bloggers listened to him and helped him; however, they did not always respect his demand as some answers gave tips on cameras that were above his budget that he had stated in the blog post. But when he blogged about the cameras he asked questions because as he explained, he lacked information.
Michael has also blogged about a computer that he intended to buy. Several others had written about computers that they thought could be better than the one he intended to buy, but in the end, he did not follow their tips. However he adds, he did use their advices to eliminate several computers on the way. However, he found another computer in a store that he bought. Michael explains that he does not really have technical expertise himself; therefore the blogs can help him. He goes on and says that he learned a lot from the blogs also, for example how RAM memory works. Since his knowledge is rather limited he keeps to reading when he blogs about computers, except in some cases when he might ask questions.

Regarding travels Michael says that he sometimes has blogged about his travels that he is going to make. He then reads blogs about what one can do on the travels, what is good and when the activities are able in the travel.

**Blogging for purchase decision**

Michael discuss that he has got tips several times from bloggers on where to make the purchase, if he should use an online store or a regular retailer. The tips concerned mainly who was a good retailer and who could be trusted. Although he adds, the most important factor is the price, which mainly steers him where to purchase.

He continues and says that he blogs about travels that he is going to make. The most recent case was a trip to Madrid to watch football. He then visited a football blog where he got tips on who to purchase tickets from. Michael got an important piece of information here; that it was hard to get tickets if you were not a member in the football club and he then got the tip that he should go through other sellers who are members in the football club.

**Blogging for evaluation of the purchase**

After he has made a trip Michael says that he writes answers on questions concerning what he has done and experienced. He goes on and explains that he usually ends up in other types of blogs by coincidence, but that the confirmation that he gets when he reads about his purchase is still very relevant. He adds, that if he would read negative comments about his purchase, that other bloggers have experienced and Michael does not agree, he would write a comment that his experience does not agree. He also says that if he gets information about minor details in his product that he had bought and has not noticed before, it would bother him. He goes on and says that depending on the fault, it might give him reason to not buy the model or brand again.

### 5.7 Interview with Marie

Marie is 22 years old and student at Jönköping University. The interview with Marie took place at Jönköping University. She is a very experienced blogger, she has her own blog which she updates approximately once a week, and she reads other blogs a couple of times a week.

Her own blog is only for people she knows, it is thus kind of a limited online diary in where she tends to write more when she is upset about something. She blogs mainly about her feelings and experiences about everyday life, however, this also includes products and services. Other blogs she reads continuously are diary blogs that deal with certain subjects that she is interested in and people with interesting lives. Products she has blogged about
includes consumer electronics, her studied subject, books and things that she might be interested in, in the future.

Marie tells us that she mainly blogs just for fun and that she really love to blog, both reading and writing. Another important factor in her blogging is that she wants the blogs to be well written and be written in a humorous way. She says that she often end up in different blogs due to clicking on track-backs that other bloggers have visited and linked to.

**Relationship with bloggers**

In the blog that she writes, she knows all her readers since she decides who can read it, this is done through invitations. In some of the blogs that she reads, she has followed the writer for quite a while and she gets to know the person behind the blog. In occasions, such as when she is interested in buying something, she just reads the blogs for this purpose and does not necessarily know the bloggers’ behind the opinions. Marie says that when she looks at things that are very subjective, such as clothing and fashion, it is important that the blogger is rather similar to her, as otherwise the information will not be valid for her. She also tells us that the bloggers, with whom she can identify due to their common interest, can actually be more important then real life acquaintances, mainly since they share a common interest.

**Need and awareness discovered with blogs**

Since Marie is blogging quite much about people’s everyday life she gets to know about lots of different products and services. Some of these products and services also develop to a need later on. She realises this when she is writing in her own blog, where she air her opinions about what she wants and needs. When she reads and learns about other bloggers’ experiences, for example on laptops, she realise how good it is and how much this could add to her life. What she then looks for is more positive blog posts telling about the advantages with computers, thus strengthening her need even more. At this stage it was however, more general information about laptops and no specific brands.

Other things she has discovered and developed a need for in blogs are consumer electronics, shoes and clothing. This also came from reading blogs about the bloggers’ life and their latest purchases. She has also discovered needs for books when reading critics opinions as well as bloggers, that is, if they manage to formulate it in an objective way.

**Blogging for information and evaluation of potential purchase**

When she blogs about clothing at these stages, she mainly uses blogs when it comes to more expensive clothing and she really have to put effort into making the right product choice. But as stated above, it is very important that she can identify herself with the blogger, since clothing is a very subjective area, according to her. The same applies when she reads about books. The importance of being able to identify herself with the blogger is a little bit less important for her when it comes to consumer electronics, as she feels this subject is less subjective; however, the blogger has to have used the product more or less in the same way she will use it. Also, she wants the user to have experience from the product, or at least she wants to know how long they have had the product when they evaluate and give feedback. Another thing she mentions is that she put more trust to a well written blog post, since she then feels that blogger has put some effort into writing it. She also uses the blogs in order to learn about possible accessories to the original product. The most impor-
tant for Marie is that the product has a good overall image and that the price corresponds to quality.

When she is evaluating her options she likes to compare the information from the company/seller, with the information provided from the bloggers, as to see if their demands were met. She then gets both biased information from the company as well as neutral information from the users she explains. An important determinant here is that she wants to have the best value for her money, and thus she want to know what the other users have felt about the product. For the user to have impact on her they should be in the same situation as her.

When she is considering information, both positive and negative, it is how the information is written that matter, not if it is positive or negative. A well written, positive or negative blog post always has greater impact then its counterpart. But if they both are well written she says that she has a tendency to believe in the negative, so she needs more positive blog posts to confirm the positive experiences. When evaluating, she mainly reads on blogs, sometimes she writes about those things in her own blogs as well, but since her blog is only for her friends she cannot get any feedback, and also, she prefers to discuss things face-to-face.

**Blogging for purchase decision**

In deciding on how to purchase, Marie mainly gets influence from blogger about different companies; if they are good, reliable, deliver on time etc. It is the same here as in the rest of her blogging; she wants to find people in the same situation as herself, and learn how they experienced the seller. She also looks for information regarding prices, and which company that can offer the best price, if it is an online company or if she should go to a physical store.

**Blogging for evaluation of the purchase**

In this stage Marie mainly writes in her own blog, what she thinks and feels about the product she has purchased. For the books she buys and reads she often do a brief review of, whereas consumer electronics she just make smaller comments on. But she also tries to tell her experiences, about more expensive things she has bought, on collaborative blogs that are open for everyone, as she wants to give something back to the bloggers who helped her purchase. She has never used blogs in order to confirm her opinion about things, but when she reads something negative about a product that she likes, she wants to tell her opinion as well. When she reads something negative about “her” product she is initially quite surprised as she often only has positive experience, but she does consider the negative information and the negative information will make her more aware of possible problems.

**5.8 Interview with Eric**

Eric is 28 years old and works as a sales representative in Stockholm. Due to long distance the interview with Eric was made through Skype. He uses blogs regularly, mainly diary blogs, but also product blogs and collaborative blogs, when he wants to learn more about a certain thing. His main use is when he read blogs, which he does more or less every day, but he also writes several times per week. He mainly uses blogs just for fun, to socialize with people; when he blogs about products he checks the blogs when he need something or is about to buy something new or just to keep up-to-date with the latest news in tech-
nology. Normally he also uses several blogs that discuss the same things, in order to get even more opinions. The reason to why he blogs is in order to keep up-to-date with what is happening and what his friends are doing, and also he think that reading blogs is the easiest and best way to get new information. This is since he thinks it is very convenient to be able to get all information from one source.

**Relationship with bloggers**

In the diary blogs he reads, he knows the blogger from before, since he is reading his friends’ blogs, just to keep up-to-date with their life. But with the bloggers he blogs with, in purchasing situations, he is more unfamiliar with, since these bloggers he mainly reads to learn more about a certain thing. Eric admits that he does not trust these people a 100%, and says that they could actually be company people, doing commercial. Although there is not a certain blogger he reads and rely on he can still identify himself with some of the bloggers he reads, since they have the same interest. Eric wants the bloggers to write about their experience and the more detailed description they can give of the situation, the more credibility he has in them; and also, he want the bloggers to know what they are talking about, so they should have had the product a long time or at least they should have had similar products.

When it comes to the information Eric reads, he tells us that he generally listens more on negative information than the positive, and also he demands more details description from a positive post.

**Need and awareness discovered with blogs**

Eric has not really discovered any need for products or services when he is blogging, most of the time he is already aware of what he will buy and he just needs the blog to decide on the model, brand etc. However, since he is reading many diary blogs he gets in touch with many new things that bloggers, mainly his friends, talk about, although, he does not develop a need from this blogging.

He also says that the more he reads about products and the more bloggers that actually have used the products, the more tempted he is to purchase, and they can actually direct his purchase a little.

**Blogging for information and evaluation of potential purchase**

Searching for information about a future purchase is what he mostly uses the blogs for, in order to learn more about his options, when it comes to consumer electronics, such as computers, cell phones etc. He does not have a certain page he turns to; instead he searches online to find relevant blogs. The information he wants from the bloggers are partly the technical aspects, but also other users’ experiences. He tells us that since he does not have the product and he wants to “try” it before he buys it, the bloggers are his eyes and ears. When it then comes to evaluating alternatives he trust the user experiences the most. Other aspects he looks at when evaluating is price information, which is the most important factor, but also he looks at the seller. But since all these things can be double-checked, he finds the user experience as the most important function in the blog. When comparing products he wants to be able to identify himself with the user; especially when it comes to how he will use the product and how the blogger used it, there have to be a match. For example, when he looked for a mobile phone, he wanted one that was good for music, and thus searched for bloggers who used their phones as mp3’s. If he finds some-
one who is using the product like he will use it he knows exactly what to expect, and this makes his search for more information from other users decrease. Finally, Eric admits that the more expensive the product is, the higher demands he has on the blogger, who is sharing the information

Blogging for purchase decision

He has used blogs in order to decide on where to purchase, since the blogs can often discuss where he can find the best price, which is where he will buy the product. An example of this is when he has used the blogs to decide where he should buy consumer electronic. What affects him at this stage is what other blogger write and share about their experience about the seller. If he buys relatively cheap products the decision on where to buy is not affected, whereas as when he buys more expensive products he is more careful of who he purchases from. At this stage he keeps mainly to reading the blog. When it comes to when to buy and how much to buy the blogs does not have a huge influence.

Blogging for evaluation of the purchase

After Eric has purchased something he rarely uses blogs to evaluate the product or discuss it. Sometime he uses the blogs to share his experience with the product, but that is mainly when he has some negative critics to the product. However, Eric says that although he does not always evaluate immediately, he always remember his opinion about the purchase, and he is not sure whether or not he might express it later on.

5.9 Interview with Magnus

Magnus is 24 years old and works as guard at a security company in Ronneby. The interview with Magnus was made on telephone due to the long distance. An important part of Magnus life, that affect his blogging habits, is his great interest in cars. Magnus is a very experienced blogger; he spends at least one hour throughout the day checking his favourite blogs. He visits many kinds of blogs, diary blogs, collaborative blogs and also sometime, blogs written by companies.

Magnus mainly blogs about cars since this is his big interests. But he also uses blogs when he is about to purchase something, such as consumer electronics, videogames, movies and books. He uses the blogs several times, often as soon as he gets close to a computer, so that he can read the latest updates, mainly on things concerning cars.

The reason to why he is blogging is mainly to learn more on how to take care of his car, what he can do if there is a problem with the car etc. When it comes to other products he mainly blogs for the reason of getting more concrete information, price and functions, on a product he intends to buy. As a blogger, he is generally rather passive, he mainly sticks to reading other people’s comments and posts, sometimes however, he writes comments in collaborative blogs.

Relationship with bloggers

As Magnus constantly visit the same kind of blogs where many likeminded people meet, he kind of gets to know these people and their cars. So he can really feel that he belongs to this group. This ongoing blogging has learned him that there is this one guy he can really trust when it comes to advices. Apart from this blogger, Magnus put more confidence to blogger who dare to be critical and honest about their purchases; and also, the more infor-
information they are share the more Magnus is affected. Magnus also tells us that this blog played an important role for him when he bought his car; since he wanted something to talk about in order to belong more. Much of the time, Magnus blogs with people who also does repair work on their cars.

However, when it comes to blogging in areas where he is less interested, such as in order to get more information regarding an upcoming purchase, Magnus has no personal relations to anyone of the bloggers.

**Need and awareness discovered with blogs**

As he reads a lot about the subject of cars and what other people do with their cars, he actually discovers quite many needs when he is blogging. If someone bought a new part to their car, Magnus gets curious and starts thinking about maybe upgrading his car. Of course, he also gets aware about other things that he later develops a need for. By continuing and reading even more blogs about his product, this initial awareness sometimes develop into a need; as the more he reads, the more he realises that he needs it. He discovers most of his needs and awareness for products in collaborative blogs, where people write about their life and their cars. Needs that he discovers this way could be developed due to the fact that all his friends in the blogosphere have upgraded their cars with the same product, so Magnus actually feels forced to upgrade to be able to participate in the blog.

**Blogging for information and evaluation of potential purchase**

Magnus uses blogs very much when he searches for information regarding possible future purchases. He searches both in the long run aspect, when it comes to things regarding cars, but also in the short run, just in order to be able to make a better purchase decision.

If he knows exactly what product he wants, a specific mobile phone for example, he tries to gather as much user experience as possible. If he only knows that he needs a new product, but not exactly which, he browses the blogs in order to find something that can match his needs. Generally when he seeks opinions from blogs he wants them confirmed by a large number of bloggers, that is, he does not really trust only one individual. However, if he finds well written information from someone who is using the product like he will, he actually can trust this blogger’s opinion and Magnus information search then tends to decrease. What Magnus looks for is mainly price information and product attributes and the absolute most important is what other users/consumers has experienced.

Bloggers can even, in certain cases, be more important then people from his surroundings, so even though he does not know the blogger he trust them due to their expert-knowledge in the field. This mainly depends on how well written the information is and how well the bloggers can explain and evaluate the product.

When Magnus looks for information in blogs he mainly searches for people with complaints and negative experiences about the product. The reason for this, he explains, is since he wants to be aware of all possible problems that could occur, and also he believes that dissatisfied consumers are more credible then people who only have positive comments. He thinks that people finds it harder to complain on things they spent money on and always try to make them better than they actually are just to look good and not lose their face.
Blogging for purchase decision

When it comes to how to purchase, the blog has affected Magnus as well, mainly in deciding where to buy something. The blogs give him information on where he can find what he wants to the best price, but also which sellers he can trust and not trust. The blogs can also affect him in how much he should buy, for example how many new parts he should buy for his car. The blogs learn him about other good complement he can add to his car. Another way he has been affected in where to buy is by ads that were placed within the blog. This ad was placed in direct connection to the blog posts about this kind of products, and thus leads him to decide to buy from there.

Blogging for evaluation of the purchase

In the evaluation Magnus use the blogs mainly to discuss if he discovers a certain problem with his product (i.e. mobile phone). He then uses the blogs to see if he will be able to solve the problem himself, based on how other people have done. But he has also used blogs in order to get his opinion confirmed by other owners of the same product, especially when it comes to cars. He wanted to know how other people felt about their car. Lately, he has also used the blog in order to answer other bloggers’ questions. If people have negative experiences regarding products he already has purchased, he is not really affected and the more confident he has in the product, the more negative information is needed if he is to change his mind.
6 Analysis

In this section the empirical findings will be analysed in the light of the theory and the author’s viewpoint. The disposition of the analysis will follow the research questions; however, the sections will be named according to the theories used for analysing. Each research question will instead, be stated below.

6.1 Consumer decision making process

Under this section the following research question will be analysed;

- What blogs are used within the consumer decision making process?
  - How are these blogs used?
  - How does these blogs influence the consumers’ decision making?

Here below we will present the different stages, step-by-step and explain how consumers have used blogs. In each stage the structure will be as followed; first analysis is done on if blogs were used in the specific stage, this is followed by an analysis on what types of blogs were used and lastly, how they were used in each specific stage.

6.1.1 Need

Many of our informants agreed to have developed many needs for new products while blogging. The main reason for this is that they found very much up-to-date information about products in the blogs. This up-to-date information on products created a change in the informant’s desired state, and thus made the gap between the informant’s current position and desired state larger. As Statt (2001) argues, a need is developed when the consumers have enough motivation to close this gap. Besides this up-to-date information; information that was otherwise hard to get also seemed as an important factor in need creation. As there was information that only could be found through blogs this information was highly valued in need recognition. As one explains;

“I blog about comics, especially Japanese, this is since I cannot get the information on those comics otherwise. Sometimes I also want some of those comics and buy them, but mostly I only get aware of new comics.”

(Jim, personal communication, 2007-04-22)

In cases when a need was not developed the informants were not motivated enough to close the above mentioned gap. The most notable reason was their limited amount of money. A few of the informants were also very target oriented in their blogging; they only searched to fulfil the need they had discovered elsewhere, thus excluding all other products and complements. Another reason noticed amongst our informants, was when the blogs were used mainly for interacting with friends. This normally did not create a need for new products since it more concerned everyday happenings in their friend’s lives.

When need was developed, two types of blogs were used:

Collaborative blogs: The collaborative blog was the one used the most often by our informants. The collaborative blog is characterised by many bloggers who participate, both reading and writing, but also posting comments on other blogger’s inlays (Holtz and Demopoulos, 2006). Collaborative, blogs by definition, contains information from a wider variety of consumers whereas diary blogs has only one author (Holtz and Demopoulos, 2006). This suggests that collaborative blogs should provide more exposure of information,
related to the consumers’ field of interest, thus making it more influential in need recognition. This was also confirmed by our informants, who used collaborative blogs to a larger extent in recognising a need.

**Diary blogs:** Only a few of our informants used diary blogs when developing a need. Because the information most often only comes from one author, the informants should be exposed to less information within their field of interest. This might explain why diary blogs seemed to have a weaker ability to create need for the informants.

Following this discussion, no other types of blogs are used at this stage of the consumer decision making process, thus ruling out blogs such as product blogs, company blogs etc. This confirms Bickart & Schindler (2001) research who found that corporate web pages had a poor ability to develop consumer interest in products.

An important behaviour noticed among our informants was that when they discovered a need, they only read. The reading they conducted, concerned reading other’s blog posts more than reading comments on their own blog posts. Thus when developing a need they were very passive as bloggers.

### 6.1.2 Information search

All of our informants used blogs to search for information on products. When searching for information, many informants reported that they searched for up-to-date information. The majority of the informants used blogs both in I) ongoing search and II) pre-purchase search:

I. Ongoing search was done when the informants blogged continuously within their main interest. This was in order to constantly keep up-to-date with what is happening in their favoured subject, but also to gather knowledge on a potential future purchase. Another reason for using blogs in ongoing search is the fact that the informants learned very much about their interest from the blogs. A reason for this learning is that a lot of information is gathered in one blog. This confirms previous research by Wallstén (2005) whom explains that collaborative blogs is an excellent tool for learning. Although we also noticed that the diary blogs read also had an ability to give knowledge to our informants.

II. When the informants used blogs in their pre-purchase search, they turned to the blog when they knew they was about to buy something and they needed more information. As one informant explained;

> “When I bought my cell phone, I first went to the bloggers in order to learn from their experiences, if they had any issues with the model I was considering” (Magnus, personal communication 2007-04-23).

Within the blogging conducted by our informants, the majority of the external search took place in blogs that addressed a very narrow topic. Between the ongoing and pre-purchase search there were no differences in which type of blogs used. The blog types noticed within this stage were:

**Collaborative blogs:** When the informants turned to collaborative blogs, they turned to blogs covering narrow topics. Since the collaborative blogs contain input from many writers, the informant felt that they could always find a blog that only covered what they
wanted. Many of our respondents claimed that they easily could find the information they
needed in the collaborative blogs. This could be explained by the fact that there are so
many writers in the collaborative, thus our informants could always find someone who had
experience from what they wanted. Also since a large number of users provide the same in-
formation, the majority of our informants were given a confirmation that they were on the
right track in their information search. This provides a good explanation of why the col-
laborative blogs are used more than the diary blogs at this stage.

**Diary blogs:** The diary blogs was only used by a small minority of the informants when
searching for information. Tremayne (2007) argues that diary blogs often contain general
discussions on what is happening in the author’s life. The diary blogs used by our infor-
mants seemed however to be focused on a narrow topic. This shows the importance of a
narrowed topic within the blog. This is a reason to why so few diary blogs are used as they
mainly focus on general topic and the everyday life of the writer.

**Company blogs:** Company blogs were only used by one informant. The reason to why he
chooses to use company blogs was since he could not get the information he needed from
consumers. All the other informants only use collaborative and diary blogs as they can find
all the reliable information they need from those.

In most cases the informants were rather passive as blogger, the vast majority kept to read-
ing what other bloggers had to say. Only one informant wrote at this stage and that was the
same individual who turned to company blogs. This is since he could ask them specific
questions and he could not find the information elsewhere. The rest of the informants
were all able to get the information that they required only by reading blogs. This is also
their main reason for not taking active part in the blogs at this stage.

### 6.1.3 Alternative evaluation

After a while, the informants search for alternatives to their consideration set tended to de-
crease. Instead our informants started using blogs to evaluate and compare the products
within their consideration set in order to decide on which product to purchase. This
evaluation of alternatives dealt with both previously known alternatives and alternatives
that came up during the external search. When previously known alternatives were evalu-
ated, the informants tended to only absorb information that supported a decision to pur-
chase. The informants motivated this behaviour by stating that they already knew very
much about the subject, and just wanted to strengthen the view of their product. At the
same time, they were also deteriorating the view of other alternatives.

Besides this, the informants also seemed to be selective in which blog posts they read.
Wells & Prensky (1996) and Blackwell et al (2001) explain that this behaviour is due to
make the decision easier for themselves. As many informants felt, the vast information in
the blogosphere is sometimes too much to handle at one time. Thus focusing on certain
blog post helped the informants to make their decisions.

When our informants’ blogged within this stage, they used two types of blogs:

**Collaborative blogs:** All informants used collaborative blogs at this stage. A reason for
why collaborative blogs are used so much at this stage is that it gives access to more blog-
gers and thus more information. This was an important issue explained by our informants,
as they searched from input from many bloggers.
Diary blogs: Only a minority used diary blogs reported at this stage. When diary blogs were used, the informants used it to get information from a specific blogger that they valued more than others. In these exceptions, the informant often listened more to the individual blogger.

When evaluating alternatives, the majority only read blog post. The main reason given for this is that the information they needed were already available in the blogs. However, in the cases when the informants did not find the relevant information they wrote in the blogs in order to get answers. An explanation to why some had trouble finding information was that some of our informants searched for very specific information. When questions were asked the informants reported that they received well addressed answers that helped them evaluate the alternatives.

6.1.4 Purchase decision

All our informants were affected by blogs in their purchase decision. This influence occurred in two ways, either directly or indirectly. The direct influence occurred when the informants wrote in the blog about their potential purchase. Other bloggers then persuaded the informant to make the purchase. Our informants explained that the more different bloggers who argued for a purchase the more they were affected. As explained this influence was only perceived by the informants who wrote in blogs. All informants also showed to be influenced indirectly, this occurred when all the previously gathered information made them do the purchase. Therefore this decision to purchase was not affected by the opinion of other bloggers, but more the fact that the informants felt confident enough to purchase.

Most informants seemed to use blogs for deciding I) how, and II) where, to make the purchase. One informant was also affected by when to make the purchase, in which got the advice to wait with his purchase until the price drops. The search for where and how to make the purchase confirms to what Statt (1997) argues. He explains that these two types of information are the main factors influencing a consumer to purchase today. These two types of information that the informants searched for are explained below:

I. The majority of the informants searched information for deciding on how to make the purchase. This decision often concerned whether to buy in a physical store or in an online store.

II. All informants used blogs in order for deciding on where to make the purchase. This decision mostly concerned the trustworthiness of retailer and who offered the best price. However, the price part was only discussed within the blog when the price information was hard to receive from corporate websites. Many informants explained they are able to receive users’ experiences on the reliability of the retailer. This, as the informants explained, is hard to get elsewhere, especially in such a large number that is available in the blogs. One informant was also influenced by an ad at the blog site that made him decide to purchase from the company that advertised.

Collaborative and diary blogs was only found to be used at this stage. Company blogs was not used because as some of our informant explained, they do not trust those sources of information. Collaborative and diary blogs then used because the following reasons:
Collaborative blogs: All of our informants used collaborative blogs. This can be explained by that this type of blogs contains more authors and thus more information. This large amount of bloggers had a larger impact on our informants, as they felt more tempted to go through with the purchase. However, the fact that the informants rarely wrote at this stage, made the persuasion not as strong as it could have been. If our informants would have written about their purchases to a larger extent, the persuasion from collaborative blogs might have been greater. This is since the collaborative blogs enable other bloggers to comment on inlays written by the informant, thereby influencing the informants.

Diary blog: Diary blogs were not as commonly used at this stage. This can be explained by that the influence only came from one author. In the cases where our informants turned to diary blogs they were sometimes heavily influenced. However in general diary blogs was not that commonly used by our informants.

The informants mainly read at this stage. The minority that actively took part in the blogging did this because they felt that they were not given enough information to make a decision to purchase. Thus they needed to ask questions to get this information. This information then either persuaded them to make the purchase or not.

6.1.5 Post purchase decision

After the purchase was done, all informants did return to the blogs. The informants showed two main reasons for this, either they searched for I) confirmation, or they wanted to II) evaluate their purchase:

I. The majority of the informants searched for confirmation within the blogs. They all wanted confirmation that they had purchased the right product. Some of our informants only searched for the positive confirmation, reinforcing their choice, thus neglecting all negative comments on their purchase. However, the majority did accept both types of confirmation, and were thus interested to learn what others thought of the product that they had purchased.

II. Many of our informants also used the blog in order to evaluate their purchase. The informants browsed the blogs in order to find possible problems, but also to search for solutions with their existing problems. This was done by searching for solutions for problems that occurred.

Also at this stage, the collaborative and diary blogs are the most commonly used:

Collaborative: All informants turned to collaborative blogs. This type of blog was used as our informants’ were able to either share their experiences on their purchase and/or to share information from others bloggers. By writing, our informants also could get comments on their purchase from other bloggers.

Diary: This type of blog was only used by a minority of our informants. This is because the diary blogs hardly ever concerned the informants purchase. Another reason might be that the diary blogs rarely allow other bloggers to comment on their own purchase.

The majority of our informants participated in the blogosphere by writing about their purchases. Many explained that they did this because they felt that they had more knowledge to contribute with now, compared to within the previous stages. As one informant explains:
“Whether or not I write in a blog depends on how much knowledge I have, when I blog about consumer electronics, which I do not know very much about, I mainly stick to reading as I do not have anything useful to say. On the other hand, when I blog about music, which I know pretty much about, I share my own experience” (Anders, personal communication, 2007-04-15).

When writing, our informants mostly wrote about their own experiences with the products. These product experiences were either positive or negative. The urge that some of our informants felt to write about the negative experiences with own purchases confirms, to some extent, the findings by Bernhad et al (2006). Although the urge to share negative experiences existed among our informants, it was not stronger then sharing positive experiences. A reason for this is because many informants felt that it was equally important to warn consumers on bad products, as it was to help consumers find good products. It thus seemed to be important for our informants to be honest on both perceived negative and positive aspects of their purchase.

6.2 Group influence in the blogosphere

Under this section the following research question will be analysed;

- Are there certain groups in the blogosphere that influence the consumers in their decision making process?
  - How does these groups influence the consumers in their decision making process?

When analysing the data, it shows that the informants turn to many different groups in the blogosphere. These groups can be categorised as either comparative or normative, depending on the influence they have, and whether or not consumer are willing to adapt to the groups. In table 6-1 we present the two different groups and the influence they have; in each box it is also specified in which stages of the consumer decision making process, the influence and the group affect the consumers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Group</th>
<th>Comparative groups</th>
<th>Normative groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert power</td>
<td>All stages</td>
<td>All stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referent power</td>
<td></td>
<td>Need Recognition stage Purchasing decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward power</td>
<td>Post Purchase stage</td>
<td>Post Purchase stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive power</td>
<td>Post Purchase stage</td>
<td>Post Purchase stage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6-1 - Summary of group influence
Comparative

All the informants turned to groups in the blogosphere which they did not belong, nor desired to belong to. Even though the informants had no desire to belong, the group played an important role in providing information input for decision, which confirms Blackwell et al. (2001) discussion on comparative groups. However, the informants still had some things in common with the bloggers, namely the fact that they were all consumers. The informants felt no similarity or group pressure to adapt to the norms and values provided by those consumers.

Normative

A majority of the informants also had a strong desire to belong, or already belonged, to some of the groups in the blogosphere. With these groups the informants also had more in common, as they blogged about a shared interest. These groups had more influence on the informants because the informants were willing to adapt to the norms and values provided by those groups. As Blackwell et al (2001) discuss, this type of normative influence is often more binding than influence from comparative groups. One informant for example explained;

“I am principally looking for people with the same kinds of allergy as I have. Otherwise it is hard to identify yourself with their allergy due to our differences. I reflect over persons similar to me, it can be for example that they are intolerant to lactose and cannot eat a certain cheese. It is those kinds of issues that I am reflecting over. So my blogging is more about eating right and the blogger can help me with that issue.” (Josefine, personal communication, 2007-04-12)

Influences

The comparative and normative groups had both differences and similarities in the way they influenced the informants. Three main categories on how groups influenced the informants are presented below:

Expert: All informants seemed to search for bloggers with knowledge within the subject that they blogged about. They mainly used blog posts that were viewed as written by other consumers that had experiences with the product. This type of influence Assael (1992) refers to as expert power and it influences the consumer because they need credible information. Our findings confirms to this, as all informants in some way blogged to get credible sources of information instead of biased marketing oriented sources of information. It was mostly considered credible when it came from a consumer with user experiences. The only time they used marketing oriented sources was for facts that could not be questioned. These facts mainly concerned prices, and to some extent, product specifications. As showed in table 6-1, expert power came both from normative and comparative groups and none of the groups seemed to have a greater ability to influence the informants with expert power than the other.

This expert power did seem to influence the consumer throughout all the stages in the consumer decision making process. This is since the informants only read blog posts by consumer with user experiences. As our informants most often had less knowledge than those they blogged with, informants were exposed to expert power. One exception from this might be during the post-purchase stage were our informants had gathered enough information and experience on their own purchase. However, during this stage the informants
were exposed to expert knowledge as they search for ways to solve and discover potential problems with their purchase.

**Referent:** Normative groups seemed to have the ability to influence the informants with referent power. As Assael (1992) argues, groups that have close similarity of social situation, beliefs and attitudes to the consumer, provide a stronger base for referent power. An explanation to why no informants were influenced with normative pressure from comparative groups might be the lack of similarity in social situation and beliefs. Assael (1992) argues that reference power is unlikely to occur in other groups then normative, as other groups does not have the same close similarity. This was confirmed by our informants, who only were exposed to referent power in the case where they had a normative group in their blogosphere. A reason to why the informants were not affected by comparative groups were similar to the reason mentioned by Assael above, in that they had no desire to belong and thus would not adapt to the behaviour of the group.

The referent power exercised by normative groups, influenced informants in creating a need more than the comparative groups did. This can be explained by that the informants either wanted to belong to the groups, or because they wanted it to confirm that they belonged to the group. As explained by one of our informants;

> “I discovered a need for new breaks for my car when someone wrote they had bought. Then I read that others in the blog had bought it also, bloggers who I previously read a lot from. Then I felt that I also wanted it and after a while I went and bought it. I also have need for other things for my car that they tipped about.” (Magnus, personal communication 2007-04-23)

Normative groups also often persuaded the informant to decide on making the purchase. This mostly happened when the informants read blog post, only in some cases also when they received comments on their own writing, for example;

> “I visit a blog written by a midwife on a regular basis because I want to become a nurse one day. This midwife recommended a special type of shoes that are used in hospitals by nurses. After reading another blog post written by her, I ended up buying them.” (Marie, personal communication, 2007-04-23)

**Reinforcement power:** Most of our informants were influenced by reward and coercive power from groups within the blogosphere. These influences provided the informants with confirmation on their purchase. This confirmation was given to the informants both by normative and comparative groups. One thing we discovered is that comparative groups within the blogosphere have the same ability to give confirmation on the informant’s purchase as normative groups. So even though the informants were more willing to adapt to the norms of normative groups they valued the confirmation from comparative groups equally much. The informants got both positive and/or negative confirmation on their purchase from the members of the groups. Even though the informants did not write about their purchase, they could get positive/negative confirmation on their choice. This occurred when the informants read blog posts about the product they had purchased. The confirmation given from these groups either strengthened or weakened their purchase. The informants’ reactions to problems that were discovered were either a need to solve the problem, or if they could not, they just tried to ignore it. These reactions did not tend to differ that much whether the negative information came from comparative or normative groups.
When informants received negative confirmation on their purchases from the normative groups, they still did not show any cases on being persuaded to change. The informants showed no tendency to be affected by coercive power. There is one main reason for this, the faults with the purchase were not big enough to cause the group to condemn the purchase, so even though the group dislike the purchase it is still accepted. Confirmation was mainly given to consumer when they were in the post-purchase stage, when they had bought the product and wanted their experiences confirmed.

6.3 Characteristics of influential individuals in the blogosphere

Under this section the following research question will be analysed;

- What characterise the individuals that the consumers are influenced by in their decision making?
  - What makes consumers turn to these specific individuals?

Opinion followers

The most common character that is found in the blogosphere is opinion followers; these people are ordinary consumers who have experience of the products that are discussed. The reason to why the informants most often turn to opinion followers can be explained by the large amount of opinion followers being available online. The relationship between our informants and the opinion followers is characterised by rather weak ties, since they have little history of communicating and they lack emotional intensity. These weak ties, between consumers and the opinion followers, give the consumers problem in assessing the motives of the one who is providing the online WOM. The main reason to this is the lack of emotional intensity in the relationship. In order to deal with these weak ties our informants chose to gather information from a larger number of opinion followers. However, many times that the informants seemed to trust the information coming from one consumer follower without looking for same information from other consumers. This might be explained by the information content in the blog post. This content is then discussed in the research question that follows in section 6.4.

Opinion leaders

Some of our informants seemed to frequently return to certain bloggers. Our informants claimed that they returned to these bloggers since they had up-to-date information and they shared vast knowledge within their area of expertise. These are characteristics of an opinion leader according to Corey (1971).

For all informants who had an opinion leader, the blogosphere constituted a normative group, in where the opinion leader had important influence. It is however unclear, whether or not these opinion leaders had high influence on other consumers as well. What developed this high regard for the opinion leader was the long time span, who gave the possibility for the above mentioned factors to develop. Of the informants who had normative groups there were some exceptions that did not have an opinion leader. This can be explained by two reasons; first the informant was a new member of the normative groups, thus sufficient time had not yet been given to find an opinion leader. Another was an opinion leader himself within the normative group he belonged to.
When our informants turned to opinion leaders they tended to be satisfied with the information provided by this blogger. The reason for this is that this relationship is characterised by stronger ties than between consumers and opinion followers, however, it is still weak ties compared to real life. The reason to why these ties are stronger then between opinion followers is the longer history the informants had with their opinion leaders.

**Opinion formers**

The use of opinion formers in the blogs is very rare, only one of our informants turned to these characters in the blogosphere. A reason to this was that our informants did not trust the marketing oriented source of information. Instead, our informants wanted to select who to listen to themselves, in order to enable trust and respect to grow for an opinion leader. The majority of the informants did not trust the opinion formers since they had been given the authority. It is of course possible that some of the consumers within the blogosphere, that our informants turned to had been selected by organisations due to their influential position. However, no informant questioned that the opinion leaders they listened to, were actually given power from an organisation.

### 6.4 Characteristics of information in blog posts

Under this section the following research question will be analysed;

- **What characterise the information in the blog posts that consumer choose to read?**

Bickart & Schindler (2005) argue in their previous research that there is large amount of information available online for the consumer. This is also confirmed by the findings in our research. The blogs used by our informants all contained much information within specific topics. An interesting discovery was that our informants seemed to only pay attention to certain blog post, thus ignoring all the others. As shown in figure 6-1, the informants seemed to be selective in their choice of reading. Bickart & Schindler (2005) also found this in their research, where informants seemed to absorb certain information and ignore others on the Internet. A pattern of characteristics was noticed in the blog posts that our informants choose to read. The figure below shows the consumer in the middle, with a number of blog posts surrounding him/her. The arrow points at the blog post that contains the characteristics of the blog posts consumer choose to read.

![Figure 6-1 – Required content of blog posts](image-url)

---

52
The characteristics of the blog post that the figure 6-1 shows are developed below; I) detailed, II) up-to-date, III) credible and IV) similarity, are reviewed in the points down below:

I. The majority of informants listened to negative information on products and/or companies in blog posts. The content of these negative blog posts was characterised by detailed information. Most informants also seemed to pay attention to positive blog posts, however not in as large degree as they did with negative blog posts. The positive blog posts used by our informants were characterised by detailed information. Thus, at a closer glance, it seems like our informants require detailed information in order to consider reading it. An explanation to why negative information in blog posts is used more by our informants is because they are often more detailed. As some of our informants explained, people who complain have often scrutinized their own purchase out of disappointment with the company and/or the product. They often do this in order to warn other consumers not to make the same mistake. The study by Bernhad et al (2006) confirms this behaviour, as they discuss that blogs is an easy way for consumers to ease their negative experiences. One informant expresses the importance of detailed information:

“If one person on the blog writes detailed negative information, this will be enough for me to exclude that product, but only if it is truly well written. Negative information have more influence on me because that information is generally more well written compare to positive.” (Peter, personal communication, 2007-04-21)

II. Many informants reported using blog posts that contained up-to-date information on the products that they blogged about. They also found this new information easy to access due to that daily blog posts are arranged in reverse chronological order. This made the latest blog post in the centre for the informants reading as it always is on top on the blog.

III. Blog posts written on company blogs were hardly ever used. All informants claimed that they viewed marketing oriented sources as too biased and thus considered it dishonest. Blog posts that our informants believed to be written by consumers were instead used as they contained consumers’ experiences. This can be explained by that the informants viewed information from consumers to be more credible then information coming from company sources. The reason for this was because, as many explained, they knew that the information from consumers with user experiences was more credible. Another reason for this perceived credibility, explained by some of our informants, was that consumers dared to criticise their own purchase. This seems to have strengthened the trustworthiness of the information from the view of our informants.

Those few who did use information from company blogs used it only a couple of times, but only as complements to the information from the consumers. This information concerned facts on product specifications and was read without fear for biased information. Although the informants considered all other information from company blogs as biased, the blog posts written by consumers were sometimes also reported to be biased. The blog posts written by consumers were biased in the sense that it contained thoughts, feelings and opinions. However those biased blog
posts were still viewed credible. In fact some consumers wanted biased information:

“When it comes to consumer electronics it is usually more based on facts and tests that I can see on which product is best. Music is more personal to me. Everyone has opinions on albums and artists, but everyone does not have the same taste. When I blog about music I need to have someone who agrees with my taste for music, but when it comes to consumer electronics I want facts.” (Anders, personal communication, 2007-04-15)

IV. An important finding was that the readers need for similarity with the blogger. This was confirmed by all informants whom felt that the blog posts needed to be written by bloggers whom the informants felt similar to. It should be noticed that this mainly concerned bloggers which the informants did not know in the real world or had a relationship with in the online world. By relationship we in this case mean that the informants did not follow the bloggers blog posts continuously. Thus, the informants viewed them to be likeminded after reading only one or several blog posts. This like-mindedness that the informants felt with the blogger can be divided in two types:

a) Most informants needed blog posts that contained information regarding similar user preferences. By similar user preferences we mean similar ways of using the product. When blog posts contained information on how a product was used and this corresponded to the way that the informants thought they would use it, the blog posts showed similar user preferences. For example, one informant searched for blog posts containing information about mobile phones:

“Someone wrote that he was going to only use their mobile phone to listen to. For example, about this new Walkman-phone, they wrote that you could only listen to music for ten hours then the battery is empty, and then they were no longer able to even call. Then I felt that ok, as I am going to use my phone to listen to music to, and since we were pretty similar in how we wanted to use it, this opinion is pretty important. Then maybe it is not worth buying this model and then I maybe need to look for another model.” (Eric, personal communication, 2007-04-19)

b) In some cases, the informants had a need to identify themselves with the bloggers, in terms of preferences for product choices. This happened when the information content in the blog post concerned more subjective information regarding the bloggers’ opinions, thoughts and feelings. This subjective information in the blog post needed to be written in a way so that the informants could identify themselves with the writer. This similarity was often found necessary when it came to music and fashion. As one informant explained:

“One has to be a little critical to the information and one cannot of course trust everything. But I can notice what type of clothing style and taste for fashion a blogger has when they write about their peace of clothing. Then I think, perhaps these clothes fit me as well? If this person who writes is as I am, I get interested in the peace of clothing. However, some bloggers are really stupid with completely wrong fashion style, in other words, really ugly” (Marie, personal communication 2007-04-23)
7 Conclusion

This chapter provides a summary of the main findings in the analysis as well as summarized answers to the research questions. The chapter will be structured according to the order of research questions presented in section 3.5.

- What blogs are used within the consumer decision making process?
  - How are these blogs used?
  - How does these blogs influence the consumers’ decision making?

Blogs are used throughout all stages of the consumer decision making process. The main reason for why consumers discover needs within their blogging is the availability of up-to-date information, and that all information was gathered at one place. In the information search stage, consumers searched for information regarding ongoing purchase as well as in pre-purchase situations. In the evaluation of alternative stage, the consumers used blogs to gather other consumers’ experiences. An important issue in the evaluation stage is the selective use of blog posts. Blogs also have a strong impact on the consumer’s decision on how and where to make the purchase, whether to buy online or not and in which store. At the post-purchase stage, blogs are used for confirmation and evaluation of products. Consumers want confirmation from the blogosphere that they had made the right choice, but also they use the blogs in order to evaluate and express their opinions about their purchase.

As explained above, blogs are used at all stages; however collaborative blogs were used much more extensively. The reason for this is that diary blogs tend to only include more general information on everyday life, whereas consumers find more information from more bloggers in the collaborative blogs. When consumers turn to collaborative blogs, they can instead choose blogs within the specific topic they are interested in. Regardless of type, the blogs consumers use tends to include large amount of information, but be very focused on one topic. In some cases blogs are also used since the information is not available from anywhere else. Company blogs were used very rarely, this was since consumers wanted information from other consumers, not market-oriented sources.

Throughout all the stages consumers mainly read blogs, the only phase where they did write was in the post-purchase stage. The reason for increased writing at this stage is the fact that consumers did not write unless they had proper knowledge, and after they had purchased everyone felt that they had something to contribute with. The above mentioned seemed to be like an unwritten rule perceived by the informants in this research, “only write if you have something to contribute with”. This can also explain why blogs are used to such a large extent, that consumers trust what is written, and they expect the writer to be honest. Another factor for why consumers do not find it necessary to write is that often all information is already provided. Hence, they only wrote when they needed to ask for information.
• Are there certain groups in the blogosphere that influence the consumers in their decision making process?
  
  o How does these groups influence the consumers in their decision making process?

The groups that influence consumers can be divided into two groups, normative and comparative. Comparative groups played an important role in the consumer’s decision making as they provided valuable input for making the decision. The normative groups also provided valuable information, but normative groups tended to discuss mainly one subject. Therefore, in the cases where the comparative group could not provide the information demanded, consumers turned to comparative groups instead.

Nevertheless, normative groups had great ability to influence consumers with referent power, as consumer had a desire to adapt to the norms of these groups. This reference power was most noticed within the need recognition and purchase decision stage. Consumer learned about what the normative group members had and thus wanted the same in order to belong. Consumers were also persuaded to make the decision to purchase by normative groups when they read blog posts written by them. Both groups did have the same ability to influence consumers with expert power, their knowledge and experience. This expert power affected consumer through their whole decision making process. This is because consumers always sought to find bloggers with superior knowledge. However, as normative groups mainly acted within a narrow topic they were not as frequently used as comparative. In terms of reinforcement power both groups turned out to be equally important in their influence. So even though the informants were more willing to adapt to the norms of normative groups they valued the confirmation from comparative groups equally much. This reinforcement power influenced consumers within their post-purchase stage because they were able to receive negative and positive confirmation on their purchase.

• What characterise the individuals that the consumers are influenced by in their decision making?
  
  o What makes consumers turn to these specific individuals?

Consumers mainly turn to opinion followers, this is since they are the biggest group online but also since they can provide consumers with what they mainly search for; user experience. The weak tie amongst consumers and opinion followers makes consumers often demand input from a number of opinion followers, in order not to be fooled.

Within the normative groups in the blogosphere, some bloggers had characteristics of being opinion leaders. When consumers turned to these opinion leaders it was in the case when they been blogging for a long time. This long time span had allowed consumers to get to know the opinion leaders and also learn that they had great and up-to-date knowledge. As this relation is characterised by a little stronger tie, the opinion leader himself/herself had greater ability to influence consumers.

Opinion formers were not used to a large extent by consumers. This is mainly since consumers are not able to identify themselves with them. Thus opinion formers only provide subjective information in the eyes of consumers. Another factor why consumers do not
turn to opinion formers is since opinion formers are given power and has not earned it by possessing great knowledge, which is the case of opinion leaders.

- **What characterise the information in the blog posts that consumer choose to read?**

An important issue is the consumer’s selectivity when it comes to reading blog posts. Unless the blog post fulfilled the below discussed criteria, they did not even consider the post. The blog posts should contain the follow criteria:

I) Blog posts should contain *detailed* information. This was discovered since blog posts containing negative experiences was read more since they often were written in detail whereas blog posts containing positive experiences were only read when they were in detail.

II) Blog posts should contain *up-to-date* information on products. This was since consumers used blogs in order to keep updated on products.

III) Blog posts should be *credible*. Consumers turned to blog posts they perceived to be written by other consumers and they hardly ever read information from company blogs. However, company blogs was used, to some extent, when objective information was needed. This were in cases were consumers needed facts about products, such as product specifications, and not subjective comments such as experiences and opinions.

IV) Consumers read blog posts in were they felt that they were *similar* to the blogger. They wanted to be able to identify themselves with the blogger; this could be either that they wanted to identify with the bloggers usage pattern of the product, or, they needed to identify with the blogger, in terms of preferences for product choices.
8 Discussion

We will, in this section, underline some findings and reflections that have occurred to us during the research process that is of benefit for companies. Further, we discuss the limitations with our findings and areas with our subject that could be further researched.

Blogs are a rapidly growing communication tool and companies can use this tool in order to make them more competitive in their environment. Through blogging, company can build goodwill, discover new business areas, improve customer relations, enhance their brand, recruit competent employees, weather a crisis, and build customer support. The alternatives, how to use the blogosphere is huge and companies need to use blogs in an honest and down-to-earth; in order to earn customers attention and trust. The global development of different communication tools has made it more important for companies to manage WOM. Most companies care about what traditional media says about them, as well about the industry, competitor etc. Negative attention in media can be a great damage for the company and leading to decrease in revenues and market share for instance. In order to avoid this outcome most organizations monitoring traditional media, which can reveal what is sad about the organization, CEO, Industry, competitors etc. and today they need to include blogs. Companies need to react before it is too late to repair the damage if customers start talking negative about their products.

Blogs are tactic tools for marketing research which can help companies understand customer behavior. The blogosphere is essential because it is here the customer talk about companies, products and their daily life habits. Organisation can also receive unique information on how they can improve their products in order to fit peoples’ demands. The first step in order to accomplish this is to take part of the blogosphere. Learning how consumers use blogs will also provide companies with knowledge on how to create their own blog. Using blogs for market research can be cost efficient, compared to other methods. This is since people that takes part in the blogosphere wants to talk about their experiences. Marketers can through listen to the ongoing conversations in the blogosphere become aware of new trends and adapt to it earlier than their competitors.

Blogs can also be used as a tool for companies to communicate with their customers. Our research shows that customers want honest information. Thus companies need to start talking with their customers and stop talking to them. As customers who are talked to, do not consider one-way communication as honest. Companies can through the blogosphere locate different customer groups and individuals that have influence on the mass of consumers that was confirmed in our study. Locating these groups and individuals in the blogosphere can open up business opportunities and thus find a new channel to reach their customers.

8.1 Limitations

Through our research process we have realised some boundaries with our work. One thing that occurred to us throughout the whole process is that people in general does not have very good knowledge about blogging. For example, they might be using blogs without actually knowing that it is a blog, or they might think they have used a blog when in fact they used a forum. Due to this, there is a risk that some of our questions have been misinterpreted, even though we carefully explained everything. It is however hard to hedge against
this kinds of issues when dealing with individuals and their interpretation of things. The main aspect for this is that blogs are, as mention before, a new concept and the definition and perception of what a blog is and is not completely clear. Another drawback is that many informants had difficulties remembering what blog they had visited, they only remembered the context and what they learned; this made it hard for us to check whether or not it actually was a blog. Also it is hard to separate what consumer actually learned from the blogs versus other sources. For example, if they discovered a need from a blog or from a commercial. So in fact, the influence from blogs, might be far more important then we found, only that the informants were not aware of where they learned from.

Another issue that occurred is the problem of defining the consumer decision making process. The different stages might be hard to define in reality even though it seems clear in theory. Although the model we have used is the most generally accepted there are also other opinions and other factors on what affect consumer in their decision making. Thus other researches choosing to have another angle of the problem might come to a different conclusion.

8.2 Further research

During the process of this thesis several questions for future research have occurred to us. An interesting issue is to further develop this study by doing a quantitative study, to verify the conclusions from this research. This would be of interest since this thesis has a rather narrow base of informants, and thus it would be interesting to see if the findings are applicable to other groups of consumers as well. This question can further be developed to see if there are differences amongst nationalities, different age spans etc. It is most likely that different segment use blogs differently and in order to get a full coverage of the blog usage more research is needed.

Another important issue that is not well researched is how Swedish companies are using blogs or if they even have blogs at all. From what has been discovered in this research it would be interesting to see how companies have adapted their marketing communication to the blog phenomena. Finally, an interesting question that was found in this research process is the high reliability that exists in the blog. Even though some explanations were found in this research, it would be interesting to further explore this issue, as this is a very important concept in the blogosphere.
Reference list


Hughes, J. (Dec 1th 2006) Should you bother to blog? PR Week. London:


Appendix 1 - Before the interview

Hi, we are three students at JIBS writing a c-level thesis about the influence of blogs in the consumer purchasing process. We want to find out how and why consumers blog. We would like to know more about your experiences about these things.

We define a blog as a webpage that contains regularly posted inlays that are archived and arranged in reversed chronological order. This can include anything from an online diary to a more interactive page, so called, collaborative blog. By blogging we mean that you are either reading or writing inlays in a blog.

The duration of the interview will be around one hour, and the conversation will be recorded. The recorded conversations will only be available for the three of us conducting this study and will not be made available to anyone else. Also we want to make sure you understand that you will be completely anonymous during the whole project. We will therefore leave not include any information that will make it possible to identify who you are. Further, all recordings will be deleted after the thesis is completed.

To prepare yourself for the interview and to be able to better answer our questions, we would like you to think, read and consider the following questions before the interview. During the interview we will also discuss other subjects that are closely related to blogs. Please do not be afraid to say what you think and feel, we greatly consider all you opinions.

- In what situations do you blog? Is it for vacation, for time killing, for pleasure, when you are buying something, etc?

- Have you ever discovered a need when blogging? That could be anything from needing new clothes, to feeling bored and you want to do something fun.

- Have you ever searched for a solution to a problem/need by blogging?

- Have you ever used a blog to compare different options for a purchase, for example if you will buy an ipod or a regular mp3 player?

- Has your blogging affected you in how to make a purchase, such as when, how, where and how much you should buy?

- Have you ever used blog to evaluate a product/service you have had experiences from?

We are looking forward to meet you and we would like to thank you already at this stage for participating. If you have any questions or concerns about the interview do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

Best regards: Johannes Andersson, Martin Blomkvist and Mattias Holmberg
Appendix 2 - Interview manuscript

What to think about when you are interviewing. Each point is to be interpreted as themes to be covered. Some themes could possibly be rather short, whereas other themes could be quite much developed.

Ask them if they know what a blog is and what is meant by blogging.

- A blog is a webpage that contains regularly posted inlays that are archived and arranged in reversed chronological order. This can include anything from an online diary to a more interactive page, so called, collaborative blog. By blogging we mean that you are either reading or writing inlays in a blog.

Get the interview started and make sure that the informant can feel free to ask questions, be honest and give their opinions on all issues. It is their opinion that counts and they are completely anonymous.
Part 1 – Introduction questions

- Age, gender, education
- What blogs do you use the most often?
- How often do you blog?
- How do you use blogs?
- In what situations do you usually blog?
- Why do you blog?

Notes:
Part 2 Need recognition

- Have you ever discovered a need while blogging?

  - How did you discover the need, in what situation where you?
  - What kind of blog was it?
  - What was the need you discovered?
  - When you discovered the need, what was the blogging about? What was the topic, and how was it written to make you realize the need?
  - How did you participate in the blog? Did you write, read, asking questions, did you participate in the discussion, did you start the discussion etc.?
Part 3 – Information search

• Have you search for information regarding a service/product with the aid of a blog?
  o Have you searched actively from you memory about previous blogging regarding a product/service?
  o Have you searched information regarding a future purchase?
  o Have you searched information during a longer period of time about a subject that truly interests you?

Within each part, depending on how the interview develops, make sure to cover the following themes!

• In what situation did you search and what were you blogging about?
• What kind of information did you search?
• What kind of information did you use from the blog?
• How did you participate in the blog? Did you write, read, asking questions, did you participate in the discussion, did you start the discussion etc.?
• Why did you choose to search the information through a blog?
• From where did the information come, who wrote it?

Notes:
Part 4 – Evaluate and comparison of alternatives

- Have you used blogs in order to evaluate and compare options to products?
  - What kind of evaluation and comparison did you read?
  - What information did you compare with in the evaluation? Was it price, quality, delivery, place etc.?
  - What characterised the inlays and/or the person whose opinion you listened to when evaluating the alternatives?

- How did you participate in the blog? Did you write, read, asking questions, did you participate in the discussion, did you start the discussion etc.?

Notes:
Part 4 – Purchase

• Have you blogged to be able to decide on how to buy a product/service?
  o Where to purchase?
  o When to purchase?
  o How much to buy?
  o How to buy?

• What characterised the inlays and/or the person whose opinion you listened to when evaluating the alternatives?

• How did you participate in the blog? Did you write, read, asking questions, did you participate in the discussion, did you start the discussion etc.?

Notes:
Part 6 – Post purchase behaviour

- Have you used blogs to evaluate your purchase? How?

- Have you used blogs to express your opinion and experiences on your purchase?

- Have you used blogs to get your own experiences of the product/service confirmed?

- How did you participate in the blog? Did you write, read, asking questions, did you participate in the discussion, did you start the discussion etc.?

- How to you react on negative criticism to the product/service you have bought?

Notes:
Sensitive themes

• Can you identify yourself with the people you blog with?
  o You have the same interests
  o People you know in real life or only virtual contacts

• Is a positive inlay worth as much as a negative, do you see a difference in positive and negative information?

Thank you for participating!!