Remarks from the Backstage: Blogging Performances, Blogger Identity and Privacy Strategies

Marketing

Master's thesis

Saara Jänkälä

2013

Department of Marketing
Aalto University
School of Business

Remarks from the Backstage: Blogging Performances, Blogger Identity and Privacy Strategies

Marketing
Master´s Thesis
Saara Jänkälä
2013

Author Saara Jänkälä		
Title of thesis Remarks from the Backstage: Blogging Performances, Blogger Identity and Privacy Strategies		
Degree Master of Science.		
Degree programme Marketing		
Thesis advisor(s) Elina Koivisto		
Year of approval 2013	**Number of pages** 77	**Language** English

Abstract

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study seeks further understanding on the phenomenon of blogging by exploring its relation to consumer identity construction. Blogging motivations, functions of symbolic consumption in self-presentation and strategies how bloggers manage their privacy in social media are explored. In focus of the study are bloggers who engage in 'lifestreaming', i.e. blogging is anchored to the rhythm and resources of one's mundane everyday life.

METHODOLOGY

The findings ground on interviews held with 17 bloggers who ranged in age from 23 to over 50 years old and represented all range of sociocultural backgrounds. Interview technique of *autodriving* (Heisley and Levy 1991) was used which purpose is to elicit reactions to individual's own consumption activities – here the activities in consumers' personal profiles and spaces in social media. In data analysis, narrative approach was taken using a hermeneutic framework to interpret consumer stories and consumption meanings (Thompson 1997).

FINDINGS

The motivations found in blogger stories are self-documentation and group spirit which support previous research emphasizing social interaction. Symbolic consumption was found function different ways in blogging performances and in terms of blogger identity. In the first it was instrumental in balancing identity conflicts that arose from unfitting life themes in relation to the community one is part of. In the latter, consumption was found to create sense of self and social linkages in signifying affiliation and distinction from others in the blogosphere. Two strategies how bloggers manage their privacy in relation to community and social media in general were distinguished: privacy as strategic act and privacy as control.

Keywords blogging, consumer identity, self-presentation, symbolic consumption,, self-disclosure, social media, privacy

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

When thinking about bloggers, what do we see? An influencer or opinion leader who initiates word-of-mouth about products? An enthusiastic community member? Or a storyteller whose stories we can utilize in improving brand marketing as well as in product and service development? Perhaps all, yet in reality we find ourselves puzzled.

The study seeks better understanding of the phenomenon of blogging by exploring its relation to consumer identity. Bloggers and blogging come in many forms, thus worth of emphasizing is the study's focus on blogging which can be described as *'lifestreaming'* i.e. the bloggers' self-presentation is anchored to the rhythm and resources of one's mundane everyday life.

Thanks to the accessibility, reach and transparency of the Internet and advances in various devices applications, the everyday social life is more and more shifting online. This increasingly results in competing judgments and voices and one's social life becomes one collapsed context (Gergen 1991; Marwick and boyd 2011b). Thus, these bloggers who engage in lifestreaming are not mere brand storytellers (Kretz and de Valck 2010) or active online community participants (Kozinets et al. 2010) but individuals who pursue their identities and lives at the same time tackling with the blurring boundaries of private and public.

Identity has been an important research topic in consumer research and approached from various traditions (Sirgy 1982; Shankar et al. 2009). This study takes a cultural approach for the matter acknowledging the importance of consumption as means through which individuals *"tell stories about who we are and with whom we identify"* (Wattanasuwan 2005, 179) and the aforementioned challenging nature of social media for identity building. The theoretical framing is situated in the stream of *consumer identity projects* of consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

Marketers are challenged with the ever emerging consumer-driven social media (Beer and Burrows 2010) and new innovative ways to target, influence and monitor consumers in the Web are established on continuous basis (Zwick and Dholakia 2004; Mangold and Faulds 2009; Kozinets et al. 2010). This study provides new insights for marketers willing to build relationships with bloggers.

1.2.   Research Gap

At a time before popularization of blogging and other social media, consumer researchers studying consumers online have explored motivations and brand symbolism in self-presentation (Schau and Gilly 2003) as well as the tensions between manifesting self-identity and communal participation (Schau and Muniz 2002). While these motivations and strategies are still visible encompassing how consumers express their identities in the digital realm, they do not reflect the current socially interactive conditions where blogging is embedded.

Scholars across disciplines inform how self-presentation online has become a dynamic narrative that base on lifestreaming or archives of everyday life (Featherstone 2000; Kozinets 2006; Kozinets et al. 2010; Beer and Burrows 2010). Blogging captures ongoing expressions of the blogger and the audiences which is why blogs are socially interactive and networked (boyd 2006; boyd and Heer 2006; Robinson 2007; Schmidt 2007; Davis 2010). There's a further need to study blogging and how it relates to consumer identity and symbolic consumption.

Recent consumer culture research focusing on nethnography or more specifically in case of blogs on netblography (Kozinets 2006) has emphasized consumption communities online, whereas meanings from the view point of identity making have been studied relatively less. Social media representing the contemporary, socially saturated conditions (Gergen 1991), blogging and consumer identity dynamics are left rather undefined when their relation is seen only from vantage point of community or brand identity (Kretz and de Valck 2010). Nevertheless, cultural research ought to report and be attentive to the lifeworlds and voices of both individuals and groups to reflect the heterogeneity of social life (Moisander and Valtonen 2006, 40).

1.3.   Research Objectives and Questions

1.3.1. Research Objectives

To achieve better understanding of the phenomenon of blogging and consumer identity, the objectives of the study are threefold. Firstly, the study explores blogger motivations. By exploring motivations, we are able to peak into the broader lifeworlds of consumers to which blogging is attached.

Secondly, study explores the functions of symbolic consumption in blogging. This second objective is approached via the concept of self-presentation (Goffman 1959). Previous research has established the significance of brands as shorthand storytellers in signifying personal and social identities in self-presentation, whilst the current study further explores the role of consumption in self-presentation beyond self-expression.

Finally, the third objective of the study is to explore how bloggers manage their privacy in relation to the community expectations and social media. This relates to tension brought by private-public dichotomy found in the social media and will be approached through the concept of self-disclosure (Cozby 1973).

1.3.2. Research Questions

The following research questions are addressed:

Q) What kind of blogging motivations arise from consumer stories?
Q) How does symbolic consumption function in self-presentation?
Q) How do bloggers manage their privacy in relation community and social media?

1.4. Key Concepts

Blog is a dynamic online space which provides individuals a personal and controlled stage for self-expression and social interaction (Robinson 2007; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

Blogging is a continuous and dynamic act of self-presenting in social media. The focus of current study is the form of blogging described as *'lifestreaming'* (Kozinets 2006) which means that blogging is anchored to the rhythm and resources of one's mundane everyday life in oppose to professionally orientated or hobby devoted. Blogging consists of sequential interactions in terms of blog posts, comments and alike that do not stand alone as stories but constitute an emerging dialogue with other bloggers and community members (Robinson 2007).

Blogosphere refers to the entire world of blogs, bloggers and blog readers. It is visible through the cross-networked shared links and its accessibility through variety of classified blog portals and search engines (Kozinets 2006).

Consumer is understood as an active identity seeker and maker who through marketplace resources forge a sense of self on continuous basis (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

Consumption is *"central to the meaningful practice of our everyday life"* and means through which individuals *"tell stories about who we are and with whom we identify"* (Wattanasuwan 2005, 179). Consumption is a continuous process of self-identity and group articulation as well as source of consumer communication (Schau 1998).

Identity synonymoys to **the self** denotes '*who and what one is'* (Kleine et al. 1993). It is the totality of individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object (Sirgy 1982). Identity encompasses a multitude of identities from personal attributes to social roles, possessions and other symbols that are used for self-creation and self-understanding while being multifaceted including ideal and potential identities (Markus and Nurius 1986; Schouten 1991). Identity is understood on the basis of a process of self-reflexivity (Demo 1992; Reed 2002) and a project (Arnould and Thompson 2005) as identity evolves over the course of life when individuals encounter new roles and life transitions (Reed 2002). Identity creation is dependent on social interaction (Mead 1934, Blumer 1969; Goffman 1959).

Self-presentation refers to the performances that individuals give whenever entering a social situation (Goffman 1959). Bloggers' self-presentation is driven by impression management (Goffman 1959) and the individuals need to keep a particular narrative going (Kozinets et al. 2010).

Social media, the user-generated Web, is umbrella term to Internet-based applications that allow user profile making, content creation, exchange, sharing, interaction and social presence to varying degree when users connect with others (Kaplain and Haenlein 2010; Siapeara 2012).

1.5.   Previous Research

This section provides an overview of blogging by reviewing research focusing on its relationship to identity. In addition to reflecting from consumer and marketing research fields, I will also draw relevant findings from other disciplines, especially from the scholars of new media and computer-mediated-communication (CMC).

A blog is generally defined as a frequently updated online journal which postings appear in reverse chronological order (Herring et al. 2004). Often times, too, blogs are compared with the older-style personal Web sites. However, blogs have been noted to expand the concept of personal Web sites' with their dynamic yet permanent and interactional nature (Jenkins 2006; Robinson 2007; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Whereas personal Web sites were often bricolage-like displays, blogs are expected to be unending and incomplete (Stern 2008).

Technology evolves and things change for which the focus must not be the blog space itself but the very social activity to which consumers are engaged in. In this vein, the "why" of blogging has been widely explored. For example, Sima and Pugsley (2010) found self-expression and social interaction to be the main motivations for blogging among Chinese young adults.

From similar strong need to communicate self publicly, Schau and Gilly (2003) distinguished more nuanced motivation dynamics among consumers building personal Web sites. Motivations derived from 1) triggering events in life e.g. graduation, 2) the desire for personal growth, and 3) advocacy of e.g. favorite artist or social cause. Motivations were also found to be emergent growing towards complexity and more involving purposes when self-presentation online became a project beyond consumers' initial thought. Just as the collage-like personal Web sites, blogging has built a reputation of conveying individual's strong sense of personality, passions and point of view (Schau and Gilly 2003; Nardi et al. 2004; Trammel et al. 2006; Kozinets 2006; Lopez 2009).

Blogging is often depicted as *'lifestreaming'* (Kozinets 2006) or overall grounding on the resources of the mundane everyday life (Beer and Burrows 2010) for which it has been seen to represent a ongoing daily chronicle or journal (Hodkinson 2006). The presence of marketplace and the structuring influence of consumer culture for blogging have been established. For example, Sima and Pugsley (2010) show how Chinese Generation Y bloggers'

self-presentation was grounded to consumer products and consumption practices to show social status and to make cultural distinctions.

The initial findings on brands as cultural shorthand storytellers to signify aspects of consumers' identities in the digital freedom (Schau and Muniz 2002; Schau and Gilly 2003) have been taken further focusing on brand storytelling. Recently, bloggers have been shown to perform particular ongoing narrative styles or character types which are socially constructed (Kozinets et al. 2010). In this vein, self-brand associations in fashion and luxury blogs were found to be dependent on character types (Kretz and de Valck 2010).

The sense and knowledge of to whom we are presenting ourselves in social media is always limited. This is why it is found to take an imagined form some sort. In terms of blogging, publicly displayed social connections such as '*followers'* have been said to build sense of audience (Marwick and boyd 2011b). Link lists called *'bloggroll'* where individuals pro-actively recommend other blogs to express one's own interests, personal friendship and social affiliations are found to function the same way (Schmidt, 2007). More importantly from cultural perspective, communities in which one participates work as the prime audience such as 'Goth scene' or 'Mommy bloggers' or 'Fashion enthusiasts' (Hodkinson 2006; Lopez 2009; Kretz and de Valck 2010).

The normative communal aspect present in blogging has been acknowledged. Blogging does not derive only from autonomous acts of the blogger but also from sequential interactions with audiences or community for which blogger's character or identity is a collaborative act (Robinson 2007; Schmidt 2007; Kozinets et al. 2010). Yet bloggers are understood to retain control over their own narrative and social interaction (Efimova and Hendrick 2005; Robinson 2007), bloggers are thought to meet communal expectations of personal authenticity, for which self-presentation anonymously or under a pseudonym are popular strategies to cope with private-public tension (Schmidt 2007). Beyond anonymity, Kretz and de Valck (2010) found that the quality of relationship between blogger and readers is dependent on the amount of privacy shared by the blogger.

Finally, in addition to the relationship between blogger and community, also the changing boundaries between private and public aspects of identity have been of evolving research interest. Marwick and boyd 2011b and broadly point out the blurred temporal, social and spatial boundaries in social media and illustrate how personal online spaces are *"collapsed*

contexts" which melt together individual's various social roles, events and audiences that are traditionally segmented.

As a summary, blogging and its relations to identity, self-presentation, community and changing nature of privacy have been popular research topics across disciplines. Consumers self-presenting in the digital freedom have been found to tell stories and signify aspects of 'who and what one is' by associating with brands. Bloggers have been found to perform socially constructed character types at the same time being challenged by communal expectations and norms.

1.6.   Research Tradition – Consumer Culture Theory

Consumer culture theory (CCT) is an emerging research tradition in consumer research and marketing fields (Arnould and Thompson 2005; 2011; Arnould 2011). Despite the title, CCT is fundamentally interdisciplinary rather than a unifying theory. CCT embraces multiple theoretical perspectives and methodologies and research in this tradition is oriented by a heuristic framework consisting of four interrelated and mutually implicative streams of common theoretical interest (Arnould and Thompson 2005; 2011). Within this framework, the current study locates in the stream of *consumer identity projects*.

The fundamental premise of the stream of consumer identity projects is that consumers are considered as '*identity seekers and makers'* (Arnould and Thompson 2005). By analogy to the stream name, identity is conceptualized as a project - something continuously constructed. Here, CCT's interest is how consumers work with marketplace resources (both material and symbolic) to forge a coherent yet if diversified and fragmented sense of self (ibid).

Yet typically consumer identity projects are depicted goal driven (e.g. Schouten 1991, Schau and Gilly 2003), the sense of self individuals seek and create through consumption may not necessary refer to the *"grand meaning of being"* (Wattanasuwanan 2005, 180). Rather, meanings consumers create ought to be understood on the grounds of micro-meanings which realize in *"the myriad messy contexts of everyday life"* (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 875) and are "*embodied and negotiated by consumers in particular social situations, roles and relationships*" (ibid. 869). Thus, the aims and activities in such identity work are also tacit in nature and may entail conflicts as well as ambivalence (ibid. 871).

Whilst the very word 'project' emphasizes how identity is individual's own personal task, identity is fundamentally social (Livingstone and Lunt 1992, 24). Further, CCT considers identity as an effective cultural construct as consumer identity work and play reproduces cultural meanings and, thus, is co-constitutive to the evolution of consumer culture. After all, in consuming individuals do not simply reproduce their own existence but also sustain, contest, imagine and reject culturally specific, meaningful ways of life (Slater 1997, 4).

Culture is the fabric of experience, meaning and action (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Consumer culture is seen as the dynamic "*social arrangement in which the relation between lived culture and social resources, between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, is mediated through markets*" (Slater 1997, 8). consumers are bound to improvising within the positions and ideologies the marketplace entails: consumer culture also frames "*consumers' horizons of conceivable action, feeling, and thought, making certain patterns of behavior and sense-making interpretations more likely than others*" (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 869). Thus, within the dichotomy of structure-agency, CCT acknowledges the structuring influence of consumer culture (e.g. Kozinet 2002) yet emphasizing that the dynamics between them are complex and dialogical rather than being polar opposites (Arnould and Thompson 2011, 10).

These notions bring us to the underlying premise of the CCT framework: all four streams together form a holistic research tradition. The shared mutual focus is to link individual level meanings to "*different levels of cultural processes and structure and then to situate these relationships within historical and marketplace contexts*" (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 875). Thus, yet current study's theoretical framing is situated within *consumer identity projects*, reflections and insights from and in relation to other streams of *marketplace cultures*; *the socio-historic patterning of consumption*; and *mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumer's interpretative strategies* can be found.

1.7. Structure of the Study

In the opening chapter, I began by shedding light on blogging after which the research gap, objectives and questions as well as key concepts were presented in detail. The study was also located within the existing research and the orientating research tradition (CCT).

The study carries along as follows. *Chapters 2-4* outline relevant literature on consumer identity, self-presentation, self-disclosure and symbolic consumption. I will reflect traditional and contemporary views on identity in consumer culture; present how identity is created and maintained in self-presentation and its relation to self-disclosure. Finally, I will discuss identity and symbolic consumption. *In chapter 5*, the theoretical framework derived from the literature review is outlined.

Chapter 6 discusses the research methodology. Hermeneutic research orientation, interview and data analysis methods, as well as research process will be elaborated in respective sections. Also, the reliability and validity of the study will be addressed.

The empirical findings of the study are presented in *Chapter 7* through two blogger stories. The consequent theoretical analysis is discussed in *Chapter 8.* Finally, *Chapter 9* concludes the study with theoretical and managerial implications as well as suggestions for future research.

1.8. Limitations of the Study

Being qualitative and interpretative in nature, the study does not seek generalizations of the phenomenon of consumer blogging but rather further understanding of it. The findings are bound to the theoretical framing and methodological choices through which I have approached the phenomenon and understood in relation to the social and cultural circumstances (e.g. time, places, and people) in which the data was obtained.

The data gives access to understand about the phenomenon whereas through interpretation new ideas that have relevance beyond the data are sought after (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Moisander and Valtonen 2006). For the researcher this process of listening and interpreting the data is much like a journey of coming into an understanding (Arnold and Fischer 1994). In doing so, I have done my best in utilizing my own experience and imagination at the same time seeking critical introspection (McCracken 1988).

2. Identity in Contemporary Consumer Culture

Identity, referring to the totality of thoughts and feelings of *'who and what one is'* (Sirgy 1982; Kleine et al. 1993) has been understood in variety of ways throughout history. In earlier historical moments when societies were more stable, identity was not considered problematic when it was assigned rather identified (Baumeister 1987; Howard 2000). In current contemporary consumer culture, however, identity seeking and making is much more challenging of a task. In fact, consumer culture creates the need to have and to discover an identity (Livingstone and Lunt 1992, 24).

As consumer culture reflecting the soul of everyday life, identity is very much understood as a mundane process or project in which consumers engage as strategic social actors (Slater 1997; Arnould and Thompson 2005). In contemporary consumer culture, moreover, identity within this process is seen as multiple, open, dynamic and flexible. Thus, more broadly identity ought to be understood from the basis of a self-concept which encompasses multitude of identities including the ideal from personal attributes to social roles, possession and symbols that are used for self-creation and self-understanding (Markus and Nurius 1986; Schouten 1991).

Consumer culture denotes culture of consumption, a social arrangement in which the relation between lived culture and social resources, between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, is mediated through markets (Slater 1997, 8). It is understood that individuals socialize to the marketplace learning the skills, attitudes as well as symbolic meanings of objects from variety of media e.g. television programs (Solomon, 1983; Belk 1988; Hirschman 1988).

Through exposure to mass media consumers learn not only to agree on shared symbolic meanings but also to develop interpretations of their own. Consumers employ these personal and shared symbolic meanings to construct, maintain and express their multiple identities. (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998b) The pervasive power of consumer culture is so great that even our dreams are shaped by the values, symbols and consumption practices offered by the globalized media (Valtonen 2011).

Consumer culture constitutes the context within which individuals work out their identities (Livingstone and Lunt 1992). While also being a structuring force, the marketplace provides

consumers a heterogeneous palette of material and symbolic resources for forging a sense of self (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Individuals anchorage their sense of identity to consumption rather than a specific culture. Indeed, consumption serves the existential quest for meaningfulness in the pursuit of being which has no end (Wattanasuwan 2005). In Bauman's (2001) terms when it comes to identity – the point is not to catch the hare but keep chasing it.

Despite the concepts of identity and its grounds in consumption and consumer culture, further reflection is needed. In the following two sections I will reflect identity discourses present in social science literature in relation to two different conditions of consumer culture: modern and postmodern. These represent the broader theoretical frames within which understand how consumers pursue their sense of self before entering the blogosphere.

Modern consumer culture is often known as 'industrial era' whereas postmodern consumer culture refers to 'postindustrial information age' or 'third state of capitalism' or 'disorganized capitalism' (Arnould and Price 2000; Featherstone 2007; Slater 1997). Modern or postmodern denotations on culture, thus, are given as '*conditions'* as well as society's '*developmental stage'* covering social, cultural and economic changes which vary across world's societies and regions (Zukin and Maguire 2004).

2.1.   The Idea of Progress in Modern Consumer Culture

Whereas the traditional society gave little opportunity for personal development (Livingstone and Lunt 1992), in modern culture individuals believed in and committed building a future that represented progress (Fýrat and Vicdan 2008). Indeed, modernist worldview lies in truth and progress when the grand narrative of both people and societies represent continuous upward movement, improvement, conquest and achievement toward some goal (Gergen 1991). Urbanization and industrialization have been considered as such improvements for societies whereas for consumers mass-consumption opened an access to array of new goods and experiences (Zukin & Maguire 2004; Featherstone 2007).

Valuing progress, development and self-actualization or personal fulfillment found important in modern culture already had their roots in early modernism and romanticism (Baumeister 1987). In romanticism especially, uniqueness and the potential of each person that one was to fulfill were emphasized and guiding concepts giving meaning and purpose to the present self

(Baumeister 1987; Markus and Nurius 1987). However, consumer culture took these values to another height when marketers became important intermediaries creating meanings (McCracken 1986).

Zukin and Maguire (2004) remark how already in early 20th century, marketing allured towards self-enhancement when advertising began to emphasize self-realization, the viability to improve one's self through consumption and the importance of first impressions. Cultural associations became exploited in marketing by attaching images of romance, beauty and good life to even mundane products such like soaps, cars and washing machines (Featherstone 2007). Yet modern marketing treated consumers as consuming subjects, the rise of material culture and the sites of consumption enabled individuals to engage in modern identity creation of their own.

In addition to progress, modern worldview emphasizes self-knowledge and reason in one's beliefs, opinions and conscious intentions (Baumeister 1987; Gergen 1991). Increased leisure time encouraged to pursue one's potential in the ethos of the materialistic welfare and personal authenticity from consumption when traditional sources of fulfillment such as work or religion were less valued (Featherstone 2007). Modern culture and marketing valued and promoted democracy and supported consumers to fulfill the modern ideal in realizing their desires towards the betterment of human lives (Firat and Dholakia 2006). Consumption became means to solve concerns of socio-economic status as identity was seen to be free from fixed social institutions given by birth or origin but something that could be chosen and communicated through consumption (Baumeister 1987; Featherstone 2007).

Mass-consumption along with structural changes in society permeated the core of the family, extended interdepencies as well as changed people's values, attitudes and behaviors towards individualism (Zukin and Maguire 2004; Featherstone 2007). In this vein, modern culture has been criticized to foster a loss of the sacred, disenchant the world, and disconnect the individual as well as increase cultural emphasis on reason (Muniz and Schau 2005). In postmodern culture, however, community is found again whereas individuals' identity making is in the midst of threats as we will see next.

2.2. The Fear of Fragmented Self in Postmodern Consumer Culture

Postmodern consumer culture grounds on the expansion of capitalist commodity production and the idea of choosing one's identity through consumption (Featherstone 2007). In comparison to modern culture, however, it is a world where objects have materiality only in semiotic sense - in signification.

In postmodern culture, identity is created through symbols and the production of the symbols; identity and lifestyle is defined as a *spectacle* (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Goulding 2000; Featherstone 2007). Therefore, the homogenous culture of modern mass-consumption is shifted to ever fragmenting system of symbolic re-production of the marketplace (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Thompson and Troester 2002). Rather than on journey of self-actualization, consumers are on a chaotic run of endless relational ways of being.

Consumers use marketplace symbols as personal signifiers in changing social situations and the cultural meanings become continuously renegotiated in social interaction: consumers encode the symbolic meaning of objects and others decode what one is communicating through it. Ultimately consumption symbolism becomes negotiable and is subject to endless interpretations (Elliott 1997). Wattanasuwan (2005) states that the more society is saturated with marketer-made signs and images, the more those signs and images are detached from their referents (i.e. products) and the more manifold consumption symbolism becomes.

This shift from modern representation to postmodern signification started to arise during 1960s and 1970s in Western societies when consumption became expressive beyond social class. For example, various branded goods e.g. cigarettes were noticed to function as identification with particular lifestyle groups (Davies and Elliott 2006). The youth subcultures and alternative life-styles of anti-consumerism, too, shifted the consumer identity towards more expressive dimension (Hetherington 1998). Later, various domains of consumption (food, clothing, activities) became highly symbolic that were given meaning and signified in relation to cultural frameworks (Firat and Venkatesh 1995).

Extreme depictions of postmodern culture (radically diversified and fragmented postmodern marketplace, hyperindividuation, chaos, relativism, lack of commitment) philosophically challenge the essence of self (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Thompson and Troester 2002). Whereas some manifest the liberating potential (Firat and Venkatesh 1995), others note the

"*brutal paradox"* that the endless and overstimulated possibilities merely promote satisfaction but result in personal alienation (Slater 1997, 100).

Challenging long-held fashion codes and uniformity through exploiting unlimited symbolic possibilities has been argued to be disempowering and cause identity confusion or even paralysis (Arnould & Price 2000; Shankar et al. 2009). Many scholars have addressed how individual in postmodern culture is threatened by a number of identity problems (Gergen 1991; Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998b). For example, identity has been related to saturated self, emptiness, lack of continuity, alienation and overall decline of individualism. These notions represent the vocabularies of the self in postmodern culture which contradict the philosophical premises of the 'postmodern self' (Firat and Venkatesh 1995).

Multiple identity positions producing and lack of meaning has not supported (Thompson and Hirchsman 1995; Murray 2002). However, arguments over *nostalgia for the real* – a fascination with and desperate search for real people and real values have been made (Goulding 2000). Arnould and Price's (2000) find that against postmodern conditions, consumers engage in '*authenticating acts'* which emerge when consumers integrate life experiences within a narrative of self-development in marking their uniqueness in relation to others. These acts communicate first loyalty to one's self' as they relate to individual existence not necessarily as presented but as it 'really is' apart from any roles. Such acts are seen as response to the hyperreality, fragmentation and alienation found in postmodern culture (ibid.).

Moreover, in postmodern culture, consumer identity derives less from escaping societal structures but creating new based on consumption and from emotional basis and it is more fiercely grounded in the social space (Arnould and Price 2000). Fighting the modern alienation, consumers are creating their own spaces where socialization is affectual (Muniz and Schau 2005). These spaces challenge the individualistic premises of consumer culture (socioeconomic status, self-development, authenticity) by emphasizing consumer-driven communization or postmodern fragmented tribalism (Hetherington 1998; Thompson and Troester 2002).

These fluid postmodern tribes (Featherstone 2007) and theaters of consumption (Firat and Dholakia 1998) or generally consumption communities are said to break down marketer's dominance and allow people to continually rework their identities rather than let the market

dictate identities for them (Holt 2002). In these communities, identity is expressed or performed ephemeral social identity but which, nevertheless, is felt empowering because its transitional state requires a reflexive process of self-identity in the context of emotional identification with others (Hetherington 1998). Consumers are seen as active seekers and constructive participants of such communities within the corporeal and online (Kozinets 2001; Kozinets 2002; Firat and Dholakia 2006).

The performed consumption communities reflect how generally life-style has become the important base of self-consciousness both in terms of individuality and social groups (Featherstone 2007). Performing lifestyle is seen as resource through which everyday spectacularized and aestheticized, and so are the personal and social identities in similar vein. Yet the existence of 'postmodern consumer' is critiqued (Thompson 2000), the postmodern conditions of increasing hyperreality, fragmentation, globalization, deterritorialization are acknowledged in the marketplace (Arnould and Price 2000).

The literature reviewed informs that even in postmodern consumer culture romantic echoes are heard from notions of 'authentic self' and the 'emotional' consumption communities. Here we come to value *restored communality* next to individual's symbolic *self-expression* which abandons modern reason. Whereas the consumption communities are an ongoing interest of CCT in the stream of marketplace cultures (e.g. Kozinets 2001; Thompson and Troester 2002), we can see that consumer identity seeking and making in contemporary consumer culture is highly social and interwoven to the fragmented consumption communities in consumer culture.

2.3. Identity Entering the Blogosphere and Social Media

The previous discussion on consumer identity discourses in modern and postmodern conditions represents the broader theoretical frames within which we can understand identity seeking and making. How do these, then, apply to blogging and identity in social media?

Blogs are part of the larger social media and Web culture. Global Web enforces the process of deterritorialization as it brings forward ever expanding relational social possibilities while eroding linkages between place and cultural identities (Arnould and Price 2000). Fýrat and Vicdan (2008, 387) discussing Web culture observe that aspirations inscribed in modern

discourses still weigh heavily as people act but rather than having singular projects of self, consumers are engaged in multiple projects of self and life modes. We could think that engaging in blogging is grounded to salient life projects and life themes (Mick and Buhl 1992) or fresh new ones as life imposes new roles and challenges to individuals (Solomon 1983; Schau and Gilly 2003).

Bloggers are depicted as undisputed stars of their own pages (Kozinets 2006), This sense, social media have been associated with and accused to create ego-centricism and even feared to trigger narcissism - a grand and positively inflated self-concept - when the individual inhabiting his personal online space becomes the central point of everything (Buffardi and Campbell 2008; Aboujaoude 2011). However, yet the individual is the focus of communal response, the relation ego-mania is not that straight forward. For example, in studying Chinese Generation Y bloggers Sima and Pugsley (2010) ground the origins of the *"Me culture"* in broader sociocultural changes - in their case the stringent population controls and rise in standard of living in post-socialist China finding blogging to be the venue to manifest individualism.

In other occasions, social media are seen as an arena of attention seeking and exhibitionism (Holbrook 2001) and Cinematic Society (Denzin 1995) or an extension of confessional society (Bauman 2007). For the first, self-presentation in social media has been found to take the form of micro-celebrity practices focusing on intimate details in order to keep one's imagined audiences interested with 'backstage access' (Marwick and boyd 2011a). This keeps the voyeurs' gaze interested and the group of followers growing. For the second, Bauman (2007) describes contemporary consumer culture in terms of obligation to live private lives in the public domain for fear of being excluded. From these notions we can question if blogging and self-presentation in social media are new "technologies of self" in Foucaltian sense– conditioning us to be in certain way (Siapera 2012). The findings of Schau and Gilly (2003) on consumers building personal Web sites, however, show quite contrary results: consumers telling stories of the self this way were found to engage in authenticating acts.

Identity is a social product which is subject to social influences and social pressures (Slater 1997). According to Gergen (1991), people play out everyday life largely with the languages of romanticism and modernism arguing that these modes of understanding are built into the fabric of daily relationships. However, at the information age relationships have become fluid

and networked (Fýrat and Vicdan 2008) and social context one encounters through blogging can be described as "collapsed" (Marwick and boyd 2011b) or saturated (Gergen 1991). In such conditions, individuals are embedded in a world of others and a cacophony of competing voices from which all one must seek acceptance. The true or knowable self becomes questioned and individuals said to be subject to postmodern consciousness (Gergen 1991).

Digitalization increases speed and mobility of cultural production whereas social media are celebrated to enable participatory forms of social and cultural engagement (Beer and Burrows 2010). Obviously, these creative and participatory online arenas are only available to those who have the access and skills to involve one's self in the Web culture (Fýrat and Vicdan 2008) at the same time acknowledging that such participation and knowledge of new media technologies is not constrained to Western culture (Sima and Pugsley 2010).

Bloggers have been found to be active meaning creators (Kretz and de Valck 2010; Kozinets et al. 2010) and the digital realm has provided consumers more freedom to pursue also ideal and past identities over proximity and material ownership (Schau and Gilly 2003). Consumers participating in social media are depicted as *"prosumers"* (Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) and the blurring of production and consumption is increasing consumers' power. The tables between marketers and consumers are turning (Zwick et al. 2008; Beer and Burrows 2010).

As a summary, consumers have been depicted to engage in multiple projects of self in social media from which blogging might represent one or include many. The identity seeking and making in the Web is seen both to be empowering and threatening due to various driving cultural and social forces.

3. Identity and Self-presentation

In the following chapter, I discuss more thoroughly the social nature of identity and how it comes about in self-presentation. The applied approach is Goffman's (1959) conceptualization of everyday social life as a drama where individuals as performers engage in role playing. To begin, I will first cover the social nature of self after which discuss the motivational core of self-presentation, then moving to how self-presentation realizes on the front and back stages. Lastly, I will bring forward the relation of identity and self-disclosure which is inherently interlinked to self-presentation.

3.1.   Social nature of Identity

The work by James (1891), Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934) comprehensively bring forward the social nature of self. James philosophically distinguished identity as the *'I'* denoting the 'self as knower' and *'Me'* denoting 'the self as known' (cited Reed 2002, 238). Cooley further established how the sense of self realize through three-fold process called '*looking-glass self*': the individual first imagines how one appears to other person, then other's judgment of his appearance, and finally developing some sort of self-feeling upon that imagined judgment (in Solomon 1983, 321).

However, it was finally Mead (1934) who established how identity is produced entirely in interaction: the *'I'* as the subject and the *'Me'* as the object are in dialogue. The individual experiences himself as an object when he takes the role of *'generalized other'* by imagining the responses of others towards him. In comparison to James' concept of '*looking glass self*', the use of 'generalized other' is reflective not only towards significant others but also to one's sociocultural environment. The 'generalized other' is considered necessary for the construction of social identity and the production of meaning (Moisander and Valtonen 2006).

Together the '*Me'* and the *'I'* are a reflexive entity which exists both for and in the individual simultaneously when it holds that identity is constantly empirical rather than essential (Robinson 2007). Individual's self-definition is *'Me'* produced using the 'generalized other' whereas individual's collection of *'Me's'* form a total self-conception as *'I'* (Solomon 1983). The dialogical nature of identity converts an individual into an *actor,* and further, in this self-interaction he becomes the object of his own actions rather than merely being under the stimulus of social reality (Blumer 1969).

To conclude, identity is inherently a social construct as the sense of 'who and what one is' becomes defined by imagining the perceptions of others. This social nature of self implies that individuals are seen as acting organisms engaged in reflexive process of self-interaction (Goffman 1959; Blumer 1969).

3.2.   Self-presentation

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman takes dramaturgical stand on social life: individuals stage performances much like in actors in theater. Self-presentation foremost deals with how we appear to others and to ourselves in social life and how to control

it and when. In oppose to smoke and mirrors game, self-presentation in everyday life is thought to be genuine and closely tied to reality (Branaman 1997). However, whereas self-presentation in immediate corporeal life is socially situated behavior, in blogging the 'spatial and temporal boundaries' of one's performances and the 'social situation' are blurred (Meyrowitz 1985 ; Marwick and boyd 2011b).

Self-presentation continues illustrating the previously discussed dual nature of identity. However, for Goffman the *'I'* denotes '*the self-as-performer'* and the *'Me's'* referring to *the self-as-character*. *The self-as-performer* represents the thinking and dreaming individual whereas *the self-as-character* represents the socialized self, an image, a role or identity imputed to a person by others (Branaman 1997). For Goffman, identity is a product of a scene, thus, the initial conceptualization self-presentation emphasizes the importance of '*Me' or self-as-character* and downplays the significance of '*I'* or the *self-as-performer*.

3.2.1. Motivational Core of Self-presentation

The motivational core of blogging in terms of self-presentation and establishing a social *'Me'* are *impression management* (Goffman 1959) and one's *ability to keep particular narrative going* (Giddens 1991).

For the first, bloggers want to obtain social rewards and achieve valid impressions. Individuals want others in the same social presence to think favorably of them and therefore individuals will engage in impression management. The intra-self negotiations are prerequisite to control impression management but dependent on social structures of everyday life. Individuals are bound to reflect themselves through predicting others' perceptions of themselves (Goffman 1959) but also constrained by statuses, roles and relationships they accorded by the social structure (Branaman 1997). However, when thinking about the collection of character(s) and roles one performs, one should not think about them only as occupants of social order but rather as reflexive and dynamic.

For the second, bloggers aim to *keep particular narrative going*. Giddens (1991) state that in all cultures individuals preserve a division between their self-identities and performances they give in social contexts. Maintaining of constants of demeanour across varying settings of interaction is fundamental means within which coherence of self-identity is preserved (Giddens 1991). The ability and need *keeping a particular narrative going* in blogging ought to

be understood on the basis of "consistent ideal self" which relates to keeping one's public identity congruent to one's ideal across performances (Baumeister 1982). Another reflection point are *life themes* which emphasize behavior as anticipatory rather than reactive and evolve around dialectical tensions and are rather limited in number (Mick and Buhl 1992).

Due to the blurred spatial and temporal boundaries, however, in blogging, establishing this ideal narrative of self is dependent of the social interaction. Thus, rather than narrative referring to ideal biography of one's self, *keeping the particular narrative going* is ground on the narrative styles or character types e.g. "citizen journalist" or "humble mother" which are socially established with the blog readers (Kozinets et al. 2010).

3.2.2. Performing at the Frontstage

Whenever a person enters the presence of others, self-presentation arises. First, individuals aim to discover the factual nature of the situation, particular set of observers, other social data and the outcome deriving from self-presentation before staging a role. The initial projected denfition of the situation provides a plan for the co-operative interaction that follows at *'frontstage'*. (Goffman 1959)

The frontstage equipment and the interpretative audience affect self-presentation (Goffman 1959). Usually it is not feasible to define the situation and in blogging defining the "particular others" takes an imagined form (Marwick and boyd 2011b). Bloggers must *tact by tact* (Goffman 1959) interpret the hints given by the audience. In the absence of cues, bloggers are dependent on comments, discussions with blog visitors. According to Stritzke et al. (2004) the lack of visual and auditory cues such as body movements and facial expressions in online social interaction results in seeking impressions individuals indented at the same time being less able to seek negative cues of rejection.

The performer expresses facts and aspects about one's self which is understood to occur on two different levels of sign activity: expressions which performer *gives* and *gives off.* First refers to deliberately and overtly deployed signs and expressions which are often verbal in nature whereas the latter refers to signs and symbols unintentional kind often being non-verbal in nature (Goffman 1959). As Goffman sums (1959), to achieve giving a impression of being certain kind of a person "[*is] not merely to possess the required attributes, but also to*

sustain the standards of conduct and appearance that one's social grouping attaches thereto." (Goffman 1959, 75).

The important components of a performance are *dramatic realization, expressive control, idealization, and misrepresentation* (Goffman 1959)*.* Dramatic realization refers to a technique individuals use to fill in the truth of their selves and more specifically instrumental use of signs and acts to highlight and portray confirmatory facts and meanings that otherwise would remain obscure (ibid.). Individuals must conduct expressive control to sustain coherence in self-presentation by constraining the disruptive ups and downs such impulses may entail (ibid). In blogging, for example, such might downs could be negative moods or flaming (Vrooman 2002).

Idealization refers to performers' tendency to convey idealized impression for the audience when incorporating accredited values of the society. The capacity for idealization is enhanced by audience segregation (Branaman 1997), which in blogging is impossible. The impression management becomes increasingly difficult as bloggers are living up to many standards by which they are judged over time.

Finally, misinterpretation as a component of performance refers to individual's capacity to neglect the expressive care before the audience who may question the performer's sincerity - even take him as an impostor. However, self-presentation entails that the audience for its part is engages in protective practices e.g. avoiding secret areas of the performers and not making contradictions to the performance.

3.2.3. Self-evaluation at the Backstage

Whereas the front is controlled social stage, the backstage is symbolic state where bloggers can relax. Here, the self-as-performer evaluates the self-as-character. People are expected to be who and what they claim to be (Goffman, 1959), and individuals evaluate their performances as well as the conveyed impressions imputed to the individual.

Sometimes bloggers may behave out of character. For example, occasions arise in which people desire to stand out, be different, and gain notice, whereas in other instances, they want to fit in and convey an impression of being average, typical, or normatively appropriate. These competing motives—to stand out and to fit in—influence the ways people self-present (Leary

and Allen 2011). Ultimately, blogger has control over one's personal online space and experienced negative interactions can be deleted out of the sight.

Self-presentation includes experiencing fear and shame which can encourage minimizing the presentation chances of exposure (Goffman 1959). Risks and anxiety inherently co-exist with the rewards of successful self-presentation as bloggers expose themselves and one can never be sure what kind of judgments arise. Satisfactory role performance, on the other hand, enhances self-esteem whereas poor performance may create doubts of one's self-worth (Hogg et al. 1995).

In addition to spaces, the concepts of frontstage and backstage can also be understood in terms of content. For instance, intimate details about one's life are understood as part of the backstage while professional communication can be seen as a frontstage performance. (Marwick and boyd 2011a; Marwick and boyd 2011b). Here we come to the topic of self-disclosure which will be discussed next.

3.3.   Self-disclosure

In each social domain, individuals must decide on continuous basis what aspects of self to show and to what degree. For example, we have a 'private home self' and a 'professional identity (Tian and Belk 2005). So must bloggers decide what aspects and roles they want to disclose in self-presentation. As discussed earlier, being one' self can become more challenging the more socially saturated (Gergen 1991) and collapsed (Marwick and boyd 2011b) the context of blogging grows for which bloggers might have various techniquest to manage their privacy – the private and sensitive aspects of self.

3.2.1. Self-disclosure as Content in Self-presentation

Self-disclosure refers to any information what person shares for other person (Cozby 1973). More specifically, self-disclosure as an interaction entails will or intention to deliberately divulge something intimate, sensitive and personal about one's self to another person (Greene et al. 2006). Self-disclosing behavior is governed by two opposing forces, one operating to increase disclosure, the other operating to inhibit disclosure when trust plays a vital role what is disclosed (Cozby 1973). Thus, it is related to the content of self-presentation which in current study grounds on communicating aspects of self through consumption.

As noted, self-disclosing realizes in interaction but it also operates under the norm of reciprocity when individuals take turns to disclose. The relationship between disclosure and trust for one, and disclosure and liking for other, are well-established findings in literature (Cozby 1972; Berg and Derlega 1987). Presentation of self is impression driven when trust, liking, building and maintaining relationships can be seen as validating, positive rewards for living up to the standards how bloggers are judged. Depending on the reactions of others, self-disclosure plays an important role in validating self-worth and sense of identity (Greene et al. 2006).

A common finding from online environments has been that lack of corporeal presence, choosing anonymity and sharing interests may contribute to a greater likelihood to disclose which may further lead to liking and intimacy among online interactants (Henderson and Gilding, 2004; Gibbs et al. 2011). Through mediated presence and anonymity provided by pseudonym or unrecognizable photo, self-disclosure may be easier than in the immediate and ephemeral social situations. For building trust online, Hardey (2002, 577) has proposed that in addition to reciprocity, also authenticity and dialogical establishment of intimacy could be forms to establish trust.

On the other hand for intimacy, Cozby (1972) notes that increasing intimacy of disclosure not only may represent increasing reward in relation to building relationships with others but also anxiety over revealing information one would rather keep private. For example, Tian and Belk (2005) found that consumers' displaying of own personal possessions at the workplace increased sense of vulnerability to the extent of negotiating whether to display a graduation photo took a year. Other sensitive areas of self extended to possessions in such semi-public environment concerned family and work history (ibid.)

Anxiety in blogging may also arise when having to interact with an individual who is behaving in a somewhat unusual manner (Cozby 1972). Whereas in everyday life shared "interaction order" facilitates relationships (Drew and Wootton 1988), one distinct behavioral feature occurring in social media is flaming (Vrooman 2002). Such behavior, yet common, can be interpreted unusual and causing anxiety and discourage self-disclosure in order to avoid such assaults whether from anonymous blog visitors or other members of blogger community.

3.2.2. Self-disclosure as Self-presentation Tactic

Disclosing sensitive aspects of self is not necessarily a zero-sum game between increasing intimacy in interaction and regulating one's privacy – it can also refer to self-presentation tactic.

In this vein, Cozby (1973) makes an interesting point of discretion being important element in preventing boredom in interpersonal relationships. To illustrate, as Voltaire famously once captured it *"The secret of being a bore is to say everything."* This takes self-disclosure further from referring to *what* information is safe to conclude to whom and where towards *how* individuals disclose in self-presentation over longer period of time. After all, self-presentation as blogging constitutes an emerging dialogue with community members and relationship building with other bloggers over time rather than a mere session between "strangers on a plane" (John et al. 2011).

One such example of '*how to disclose'* comes from Marwick and boyd's (2011a) study on micro-bloggers in Twitter. They found individuals to balance between disclosing personal and public information whilst engaging in highly audience-attentive self-presentation techniques. According to the study, these techniques resembled practices of "*micro-celebrity"* when individuals strategically targeted "tweets" with intimate information to make one's image more appealing to various audiences. Hence, it seems that in social media people do not only engage in disclosure management but take disclosing as strategic self-presentation tactic.

4. Identity and Symbolic Consumption

In previous chapters of literature review I became to acknowledge how in consumption individuals find sense of being, self-fulfillment and belonging. Thus, consumption plays an important role giving form to communicating aspects of self to others and in locating one's self in the community (Wattanasuwan 2005). In current contemporary culture with endless possibilities, consumer identity seeking and making is considered a complex task which needs to be constantly reflected and managed. In this final chapter of literature review, I will more specifically review the forms and functions of symbolic consumption.

From the very start, combining identity and consumer behavior was grounded to symbolism (Levy 1959; Solomon 1983). The symbolic marketplace resources through which consumers

forge their sense of self can be distinguished as either lived experiences (the situated practical activities and immediate face-to-face encounters) and mediated experiences (the spatially and temporally distant events that are recontextualized in symbol use) (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998a). The study's interest in blogging naturally concerns the latter.

Consumption symbols can function in identity construction in many ways. Firstly, the symbolic meanings obtained from and imposed to objects operate to communicate and construct the self both inward and outward (Elliott 1997). Symbols operate as self-expressions when symbolic meanings operate inward towards constructing self-identity which is termed self-symbolism through which consumers subjectively perceive who they are.

Symbols operate also outward in constructing the social world, the social-symbolism, when consumer experiences how he appears to others. Here symbols function as signs of one's connection to or differentiation from other members of society. These two functions of symbols are shown to be culturally universal functions of consumption (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988; Belk 1988).

Third dimension how symbolic consumption has been shown to be instrumental in identity construction is identity transitions and identity conflicts when symbolic meanings operate to denote possible selves and the transition towards achieving them (Markus and Nurius 1986). Previous research has shown how consumers express their ideal self through digital appropriation in Web sites which is why it worth considering in this study, too. Before discussing each function in respective sections, I will begin with short review of the social nature symbolic objects basing on symbolic interactionism.

4.1.   Social Nature of Symbols

The basic premise of symbolic interactionism is that the world that exists is composed of objects and that people attach meaning to objects, behaviors, themselves and other people. The meanings are developed and transmitted in interaction in which language plays a central role. (Blumer 1969; Howard 2000)

In essence, an object is anything that can be indicated to but for the sake of clarity often classified through three categories: *material objects* such as a car; *social objects* such as a friend; and *abstract objects* such as ideas (Blumer 1969). The nature of object or symbol consist of the meaning that it has for the person for whom it is an object. The meaning sets

away how person sees the object, the way one is prepared to act toward it and the way he is ready to talk about it. Individuals also use objects to communicate, when it holds that symbols and objects are intentional acts of communication rather than used unconsciously or accidental. (ibid.)

The meanings may be idiosyncratic or widely shared with other people. In this vein, when consumers use symbols such as brands to enact notions of self, it does not mean that everybody who possesses the same brand use it for the same symbolic meaning (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998b). It is through the process of mutual indications, however, when common objects which have same meaning for given set of people emerge (Blumer 1969).

Consumers learn a culture when they are able to predict the behavior of others for one's own communication and the effect of the symbol used (Solomon 1983).For example, in communal consumption communities, social relationships are overtly structured around shared consumption interest (Ahuvia 2005). Whereas community members have general consensus of the public meaning of the symbols in specific settings, they also decode them in intra-group agreement which means that any member of the social group understand them in any moment despite meanings being dynamic (Schau and Gilly 2003, 388). Thus, in consumption community the symbols and rituals are shared.

However, in blogging, social relationships are always structured around the individual yet the emphasis of self-presentation would be certain consumption symbol. The acknowledgement that symbolic meanings are idiosyncratic holds that consumption in addition to being intentional also carries unconscious meanings that the consumer cannot forecast. Thus, the identities one aims to communicate through self-indicating symbols are validated socially when other people interpret the use of that symbol (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998a; 1998b).

In a community, individual consumer could be seen achieving communal validation when attaching and mastering shared meanings. In blogging, however, in addition to positive validation the meanings are not always shared with everyone and consumers are at stake to many interpretations. Indeed, personal Web space carries the risk of taking the interaction and meanings out of context (Davis 2010). Self-presentation through consumption includes dreams and fantasies for which digital nature provides great means but which, however, may not create be socially credible image.

Overall, identity construction and how symbols operate to support it is always determined by the interaction with one's self-concept and the symbol as well as self and the society (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998a; 1998b).

4.2. I for Myself·

The purpose of this section is to discuss how consumers use symbols to self-express their personal identity. In such performative or ritualistic act, symbolic meanings operate when consumption supports the construction, expression, maintenance of personal identity when consumer experiences *'I for myself'* (Joy et al. 2010). Self-symbolism operates inward in two ways when consumers enact object meanings to their self-concept and when they transfer their own meanings to objects.

4.2.1. The Extended Self

Important theoretical work in self-symbolism is the concept of extended self by Belk (1988) which emphasizes how individuals subjectively perceive who they are when using objects as vessels of personal meaning and employ cultural meanings to themselves. The idea making things part of the self through creating or altering them is understood to be universal human belief (Belk 1988).

In Belk's concept of extended self, possessions are contributor to and reflection of identities. Possessions are not limited to external and personal objects but include categories such as collections, money, pets, other people and bodily parts that are commonly incorporated to sense of self and function as extensions of self. Whatever one can claim "mine" is to note that object is "me" when also places and experience which person feels attached are seen as part of extended self – such as photgraphs (Belk 1988).

The feeling, attention and time given to possessions is high and through this invested *"psychic energy"* are objects regarded as part of the self because they have grown or emerged from the self (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Belk 1988). The act and energy given to personalize an object represent an attempt to transfer meaning from the individual's own world to the object. Such personalizing acts are called possession and grooming rituals which help consumers to overcome the alien nature of standardized or mass-produced products and assimilating them into the consumers own world and through this meaning transfer consumers are able to use objects as markers of time, space and occasion. (McCracken 1986)

The most profound attention is given when consumers ensemble their own piece of craft when consumers choose to design and create the end result instead of buying and modifying a purchasable product (Campbell 2005). Such feeling and productive energy is given when e.g. preparing a meal from special dishes when the preparation, cooking and presentation necessary to deliver that set of culturally prestigious culinary dishes that comprises the entity called 'a meal' (ibid). Here the extended self can derive from the specific dishes one is attached to or from cooking experience.

Alternatively, objects are also able impose their symbolic identities on people (Belk 1988). Acquiring the symbolic qualities of an object occur when claiming an object as possession is not bound to ownership but an attempt to draw the meaningful qualities of the object to the person and his life. McCracken (1986) argue that this kind of symbolic meaning imposed by advertising and fashion systems denotes acquiring the meaning of the collectivity in oppose to possession and grooming rituals which where consumers create personal meanings.

When consumption objects and materials used in blogging communicating personal and cultural meanings, self-presentation becomes instrument of cultural meaning transfer (McCracken 1986). Whereas McCracken (1986) theorize the cultural meaning transfer to move from the culturally constituted world through advertising and fashion systems to the consumer goods, his suggestion of ritual as the prime means for the transfer of symbolic meaning from goods to the person is questioned. Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998b) argue that the complex social practices of consumer culture extend far beyond the concept of the ritualistic, and entail also a reciprocal, dialectical relationship between the individual and one's cultural milieu. Overall, the cultural meaning transfer process is understood to be diffuse, transformative and consumer centered when consumers are in dialogue with cultural meanings within their own social spheres and the broader socio-cultural history (Thompson and Haytko 1997; Murray 2002).

Belk (1988) retelling Sartre distinguishes three processes how possessions are intentionally incorporated to the extended self: *control/mastery*, *creation* and *knowing*. Control/mastery may refer to mastering an object or skill such like when learning to use a new cooking technique or understood in relation to power over property as discussed previously. Furthermore, gift giving is one form of control when consumers as gift-givers selectively

32

distribute goods with specific symbolic properties to individuals who may or may not have chosen them otherwise (McCracken 1986; Belk 1988).

Control and mastery serve person to achieve a sense of self usually through *having* when the consumer owns the skill or the possession. Fromm (1976) note how having mode of existence derives from the nature of private property when consequently people's happiness lies in control of it and superiority over others. He further argues that most people find giving up having orientation too difficult, such act causing anxiety and loss of security. The importance of having is evident this way when person's sense of self is damaged when possessions are violated due to natural disaster or burglary (Belk 1988). Also, Price et al. (2000) found disposition rituals of special possessions to be highly ambivalent when older consumers seek sense of closure and contentment when deciding for whom and when as well as how they will give their cherished possessions forward.

Secondly, creating as a process through which to incorporate objects to extended self refers to creation of material object or abstract thought, even money which as a medium enlarges the imaginable possibilities of what one can do and have. Finally, knowing can refer to anything from a thing to a person and community through which possessions can be acquired to extended self (Belk 1988). Creating and knowing processes can be understood to serve the individual in achieving sense of self and existence through *doing* or *being* which are related to the experience with the possession.

It is understood that processes to incorporate object to self are not exclusive and some possessions emphasize achieving sense of self through doing whereas others types of possessions are valued through having orientation even though they would also include grooming rituals. Belk (1988) in line with Sartre defines doing to be transitional state to more fundamental desire to be or to have. Being and having are seen distinct but inseparable when only reason why people want something is to enlarge sense of self whereas the only way it can be observed is through what one has.

In terms of creation and extended self, an arising theme is the craft in which consumer is directly involved in both the object design and the production as discussed. Campbell (2005) discusses of arising *worlds of DIY* in the contemporary society which are related to e.g. home modification, gardening, cooking and the building and maintaining of a 'wardrobe', collections and other areas where improvisation occurs. Campbell (2005) argues such creativity to

ground on grooming and possession rituals and be symptom of a pre-existing hobby or leisure time pursuit which is built around commodity consumption. However, such a creative process requires building a new object rather than overcoming the alien nature of standardized or mass-produced products as it is the case of possession and grooming rituals.

Some possessions are more central than others and it has been argued that people, things and places represent the clearest extensions of self (Belk 1988). Furthermore, people's emotional attachment is what brings the personal meaning to the possessions to become and extended self i.e. we are more likely to be attached to things that are significant to our individual or group identity (Belk 1989). However, the functions that possessions play in the extended self involving creation, enhancement and preservation of a sense of identity are shown to exist at all ages and that possessions are convenient way of storing memories (Belk 1988; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988).

Yet it has been discussed that the extended self is a reflection of the material self and emphasize tangiability (Holt 1995; Ahuvia 2005), Schau and Gilly (2003) have urged that personal online spaces inform the discourse on self-presentation and possessions. Further, self-presentation online expands the concept of possessions as self-extensions when incorporating objects to the self realizes through the freedom digital appropriation.

4.3.   Me that Appear to Others

Goods, rituals and the patterns of consumption are like map of social order when objects as communicators indicate social relationships. The public meanings attached to objects and their public consumption makes social categories and ranks both visible and effective. (Slater 1997)

Thus, when self-expressing, consumers self-define themselves in relation to alternative meanings and other people in the society. Such like integrating objects to extended self is instrumental towards the object, consumption symbols as social linkages is communicatively instrumental to create relationships to relevant some while at the same time rejecting others (Wattanasuwan 2005). The social belonging or differentiation one aims to achieve can be related to family, nationality, or other social reference group to which one compares or subculture of consumption such as brand community (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001, Muniz and Schau 2005).People incorporate meanings they aspire to at the same time resisting and

avoiding those they find undesirable (Wattanasuwan 2005). In this sense, creating social linkages through display of consumption objects serve both to signify affiliation and distinction simultaneously (Holt 1995).

Holt (1995) criticizes the display approach to oversimplify how people communicate through consumption objects which also occurs through actions (manner) in addition to display. When the quality or intensity of the relationship to the object is understood to further be established through storytelling (ibid.), blogging visible means for such detailed signification rather than being constrained to just showing symbol displays.

Blogging builds on interrelated performances and interactions over the course of time which interrelated rather isolated (Robinson 2007). Thus, both the self-expressive indications of personal identity and self-defining notions to and from various social groups and communities become one this space. However, in digital environment consumers are not bound communicate what they are and would like to be but are also able to precisely articulate what they are not i.e. the *nonself* (Scau and Gilly 2003).

4.4.   Possible Selves and Identity Conflicts

Some identities are regarded as positive and others sensed negative and something to be avoided. Sometimes we consider possible selves and how we could change. During times of identity reconstruction through possible selves one may become receptive to goods, services and ideas that previously would have been considered undesirable (Schouten 1991) whereas during identity conflicts one may lean on what one loves most (Ahuvia 2005).

Possible selves refer to individual's ideas of what one might become, what one would like to become, and what one is afraid of becoming (Markus and Nurius 1986). Possible selves represent cognitive components of hopes, fears, goals, and threats, and give these specific self-relevant form, meaning, and direction to these dynamics. Possible selves are individualized but inherently social in the sense that are direct result from previous comparisons in which individual's self-concept has been contrasted to those of salient others. (ibid)

Previous research has shown that symbolic consumer behavior play important role in identity change and mediated online environments may provide the means to present ideal selves and explore new roles (Schau and Gilly 2003; Davis 2010). In case of personal Web site creators, the motivation to self-present develops towards more involving purposes when the sites

became project far beyond what consumers envisioned (Schau and Gilly 2003). The motivations evolve over time and migrate toward complexity when consumers want to display their talent in upgrading the sites and visiting other sites for inspiration to achieve this impression.

Just as life is in natural constant flux throwing us new challenges, so could one think of blogging to follow these changes to some extent. After all, the initial motivations to build personal Web sites were grounded to role transitions arising from triggering events in life such as graduation or marriage, desire for personal (Schau and Gilly 2003). Schouten (1991) distinguished two primary motivations to regard identity change: reintegrating self-concept in midst of new social roles and catalyst for further change and broader life transition in which both symbolic and experimental consumer behaviors are important to successful identity transitions aiding the exploration and establishment of new roles and identities.

Schau and Gilly (2003) further reflected possible selves noting that the digital association to objects and brands blurs the distinctions of material and immaterial as well as the real and the possible, thus through giving glimpse what consumers would like to be. Consumers are not restricted to self-express through ownership or proximity but rather are free to classify their identities through digital appropriation and manipulation as previously noted.

In the midst of identity conflict, on the other hand, Ahuvia (2005) found consumers to forge a coherent sense of self through their loved objects functioning in demarcating and synthesizing solutions. Consumers used demarcating symbolic statements of social membership when one alternative was strongly preferred over another.

In synthesizing instances when all alternatives possessed desirable aspects, love objects helped consumers to symbolically support an identity that combines potentially conflicting aspects of self. Identity conflict could arise from the tensions between the consumers' past identity versus the person the consumers wants to become, or the conflicts between ideals of who the consumer should in social validation. Finally, compromising solutions are similar to the occasion of synthesizing but Ahuvia (2005) note that in case of loved objects such acts were rare.

For social media, when consumers are actively engaged in self-presenting to interactive online others, possible selves through digital symbols give consumers means to share what they

want to become while fantasizing with others may give support and reaction to possible impressions that one seeks to achieve. Symbolic consumption being instrumental in self-transformations or self-transitions may support to achieve a sense of identity preparation, continuity and coherent sense of self (Belk 1988; Schouten 1991; Ahuvia 2005).

5. Theoretical Framework

In cultural studies, theory is seen not as means to address and explain a problem but as a framework which can particularize understanding of a social phenomenon and provide perspectives to it (Alasuutari 1996; Moisander and Valtonen 2006). Frames enable analytical approach and guide the process of understanding during the research by providing way of looking at the world (Silverman 2006).

Previous chapters outlined the broad theoretical groundings of the study.-I presented the tradition of consumer culture theory (CCT) within which this study contributes to the research stream of consumer identity projects. I also reflected the broader sociocultural themes in consumer culture within which consumer identity is embedded and vocabularies how we can go about understanding blogging as meaningful way of consumer identity seeking and making.

In the literature review, also the conceptualization of self-presentation and symbolic consumption were introduced. As the objective of the study is to build understanding of blogging and consumer identity making, consequently the theoretical framework was build to conceptualize consumer self-presentation online and its relations to symbolic consumption. Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework which I will elaborate further.
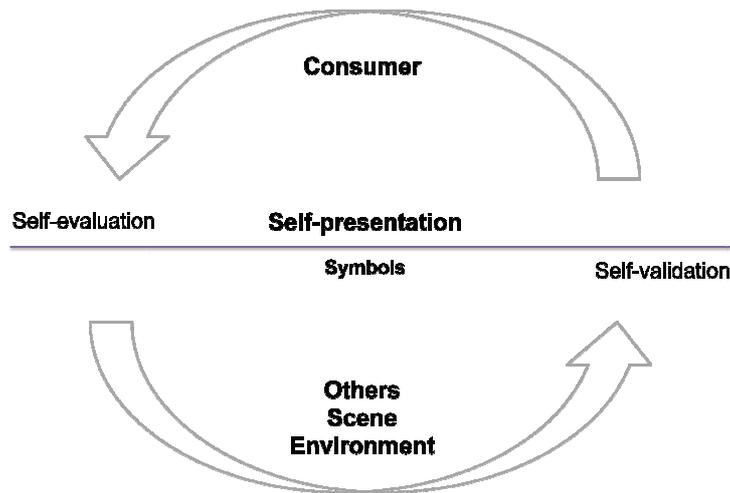
Consumer

Self-evaluation   Self-presentation

Symbols

Self-validation

Others
Scene
Environment

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of the Study

Bloggers are understood to tap into their self-concept thoroughly as self-presentation addresses wide subset of identities such as relationships, fantasies, and symbols according to individual's own choice (Schouten 1991). Over time, blogging becomes to document constantly evolving fabric of blogger identity which is collaboratively constructed (Robinson 2007; Kozinets et al. 2010).

Blogging as self-presentation realizes from sequential postings, commenting, discussions and alike performances acted through the blogger profile. Bloggers use 'generalized other' in *self-evaluation* over the course of blogging. Through taking the role of the others, the self emerges as *"Me"* and consumer's motivation to achieve favorable and socially supported image defines the self-presentation. This impression management is the motivational core of blogging in addition to evaluating whether one is in accordance with own ideals and keeping a particular narrative going across performances over time. Others in the actual blog *scene* do not play a role only in self-evaluation, but also affect the blogger's self-presentation..

The *environment* refers to the public nature of blogging and transparency in socially saturated social media which highlight how bloggers who engage in mundane 'lifestreaming' need to negotiate and manage their private identities in the tension of private-public dichotomy. Bloggers use consumption *symbols* to express, define and transform their identities. Consumers are understood to use of symbols that have meaning for them intentionally and through the display of symbols and acts of consumption those meanings are materialized.

6. Methodology

This chapter presents the research orientation informing this qualitative, interpretative study. I will first acknowledge the ontological and epistemological groundings in hermeneutics after which discuss the chosen research methods for data collection and analysis. Furthermore, I will review the research process in detail and finally address the reliability and validity of the study in the end.

6.1. Philosophical Research Orientation – Hermeneutics

Qualitative consumer research encompasses a variety of approaches and traditions. Current study had interpretative approach and it has its philosophical foundations in hermeneutics. This section presents the ontological and epistemological underpinnings in relation to which the study's findings ought to be evaluated. Hermeneutics is not a method and it is not constrained to any science field specifically but as a philosophical program it has provided theoretical foundation for social science research since taking the linguistic turn (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Thompson 1997; Josselson 2004).

6.1.1. Ontology

Ontological research assumptions encompass beliefs of the nature of reality and what can be known about it (Moisander and Valtonen 2006). Hermeneutics above all concerns the human ability to understand (Gadamer 2004) which evolves the central problem of interpretation (Ricoeur 1981). The nature of reality, thus, is bound to the subjective abilities of the researcher to understand the world that the research texts provide.

Thus, understanding has ontological status. This main premise grounds on the iterative process of interpretation through which the researcher is in continuous act of '*coming into understanding'* rather than finding one single truth (Arnold and Fischer 1994). Therefore, engaging in the process understanding is critical and will be further elaborated in its own section of The Process of Understanding.

6.1.2. Epistemology

Epistemology concerns the nature of knowledge (Moisander and Valtonen 2006) which in hermeneutics does not refer to explanation but relies in interpreting language (Ricoeur 1981).

Language is seen as universal medium in which understanding occurs, yet knowledge is also understood to be constrained by language as it always shapes and constrains our experience of the world (Gadamer 2004). In this vein, the nature of knowledge relies in the language produced in data collection (conducting interviews) and interpretation (the interview texts).

Firstly, it is understood that interview represents a specific form of cultural practice in which meanings are produced and exchanged in social interaction. Here both the researcher and the informant are enabled and constrained by the particular discursive and interpretive resources available for them (Moisander and Valtonen 2006; Moisander et al. 2009). The ways of talking in which meaning is given, for example the narrative discourse, provides people a way of thinking and representing as well as guidance the way a topic can be meaningfully discussed and reasoned about (Moisander and Valtonen 2006). Further, the life experiences and personal frames of reference (Thompson 1997) represent another canvas in relation to and from experiences and personal meanings are told as well as understood.

Secondly, the nature of knowledge arises when language and understanding are in dialogue. The interview texts (or any discourse fixed with writing) are considered autonomous in taking the life of their own (Ricoeur 1981; Arnold and Fischer 1994). Thus, texts do not represent the inner subjectivity of the informants but rather the texts represent contextual expressions upon which the researcher can generate insights that the individual did not realize or meanings one did not mean (Arnould and Fisher 1994). The epistemological relies in disciplined process of moving from text to meaning (Josselson 2004). Upon the informants storied accounts, the researcher then provides a different level of discourse when understanding also implies going beyond description to assimilating abstract concepts (Josselson 2004; Thompson 1997).

6.1.3. Hermeneutics of Faith

Interpretation is understood to occur as a gestalt shift and represent a synthetic, holistic, and illuminating grasp of meaning (Spiggle 1994, 497). From the echoes of practicing fidelity to sacred texts, Ricoeur (1981) distinguishes two forms of interpretative stance: hermeneutics of faith and hermeneutics of suspicion. These interpretative positions have different effects in terms of reflexivity and ethics in interpreting meanings (Josselson 2004), in which is I have utilized faith.

In adopting hermeneutics of faith, I have considered informants as experts of their own experience and meaning making whilst in the interpretation attempted to *"understand the Other as they understand themselves"* (Josselson 2004, 6). From this stance, the aim is to restore the meaning addressed to the interpreter by the text in oppose to problematizing it (Freeman 2004). When the interview discourse is socially and culturally bound to the resources available at given point of time, the meanings are understood to be conveyed in the form of a message that may lie beneath or within the structure of language used to depict experiences (Josselson 2004, 10).

The chosen interpretative stand ought to be foremost developed from property of the text to unfold *"the world which it opens up and discloses"* (Ricoeur 1981, 111). Freeman (2004, 33) further reflects upon the hermeneutic interpretative positions noting that rather than representing polarities they could be understood as *"moments of interpretative process".* In either case, the hermeneutical task in restoring the meaning is to understand the world the texts provide (Ricoeur 1981).

6.1.4. The Process of Understanding

When understanding is given ontological status, this journey of arriving to it becomes utmost importance. The foundation of developing a holistic understanding is based on the iterative part-to-whole analysis and the researcher's ability to build critical self-understanding. The tenets of *pre-understanding, self-understanding, the hermeneutic circle, the fusion of horizons,* and *the dialogic community* illustrate how the journey of understanding is guided.

Through *pre-understanding*, the researcher acknowledges that prior any reflection s/he and subject of research are bound to culture, context and tradition of their own (Arnold and Fischer 1994). My understanding is bound to my own personal history and the cross-academic knowledge I have gained to perceive the relevant historical and cultural conditions for the phenomenon of blogging. This background include beliefs, practices, institution echoes and ideologies that both govern and enable how I can understand the informants' stories, their respective personal backgrounds and the larger phenomenon studied.

When the continuous act of interpretation seeks to open new dimensions to the phenomenon, hermeneutics emphasize the 'enlightening' and 'imaginative' powers of interpretation to free the researcher's mind from what it silently thinks of the taken-for-granted reality (Arnold and

Fisher 1994; Moisander and Valtonen 2006). Of equal importance is taking the role of prejudice and self-reflection to build critical *self-understanding*. As Ricour (1981, 159) explains: *"the constitution of the self is contemporaneous with the constitution of meaning".* Yet researcher's understanding continually emerges further and the initial frames of reference expand, the interpretation is always partly a product of the pre-understanding. One shouldn't overcome pre-understanding but rather consider it as an enabling force in interpretation (Arnold and Fischer 1994).

When researcher works with the text elements and the larger whole of the textual data through the part-to-whole analysis, *the hermeneutic circle* occurs. Understanding the meaning of whole text is determined from the individual elements of that text at the same time the individual elements refer to the whole of which the element is a part of (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Thompson 1997; Gadamer 2004). One's interpretative orientation enables sensitivity to specific characteristics afforded by the text whilst engaging in data can bring to new and contradicting questions apart from the researcher's initial interpretations (Thompson 1997). Gradually, more comprehensive account of the elements and of the text as a whole emerges (Arnold and Fischer 1994).

Continuously coming into understanding, researcher's reflexive pre-understanding is recasted to encompass the sense of text when it fusions with the horizon of the text. It is in this *fusion of horizons* where the 'subject understanding an object' dichotomy is exceeded and understanding achieves ontological status. (Arnold and Fischer 1994) This fusion of horizons between the interpreter's frame of reference and the interpreted texts realizes in the hermeneutic circle (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Thompson 1997).

Final tenet for building understanding is the dialogic community which refers to the research community both in constitutive and a regulative means (Arnold and Fischer 1994). When it comes to thesis work, the dialogical community can be seen to focus on analyzing existing research and participating in iterative reviewing in the thesis group. However, dialogue continues when the thesis evaluators and readers interpret the study's findings.

6.2.   Data Collection Methods: Personal Interviews and Autodriving

The study seeks further understanding of blogging and its relations to consumer identity construction. The chosen data collection methods to facilitate cultural talk were personal interview and autodriving. In comparison to utilizing netnography to study blogging (Kozinets 2006), the purpose was to look on the other side of the coin how these ongoing *'consumer 'lifestreams'* come into being.

Before conducting interviews, I mapped a set of pre-planned themes which concerned keywords and questions about self-expressive content, audience, commenting as well as various feelings related to these areas. The idea of such loose map was to allow structure across interviews when otherwise the sessions were to be focused on autodriving.

Autodriving is a projective method in which the interview session is driven by the informant seeing her/his own consumption behavior (Heisley and Levy 1991). It can be build through various means whilst current study utilized projecting informant's various personal spaces in social media on a computer screen – mainly blogs. Use of such projective method relies on indirect questioning, reliance of rather ambiguous stimuli and great degree of freedom (Rook 2006). The projected profiles, blog postings and comments visible on the laptop screen operated as stimulus to memorize and explain the performances and interactions as well as support enjoyment of telling stories about them (ibid.).

The value of autodriving is found in aiding informants to manufacture distance from their common and familiar ways of being when informants gain increased voice and authority in interpreting own behavior (Heisley and Levy 1991). It is understood that such projection will encourage informants' need to explain them and arouse imagination, self-expression and personal emotion (Moisander and Valtonen 2006). Rook (2006) further amplifies the power of projective methods to support informants to overcome the normatively charges of the consumption environment and enabling them to more honestly express their 'true' feelings.

With an aim to produce cultural talk this way, consumers' memory retrieval, communication and self-disclosure during interview are dimensions to address (Rook 2006). It is believed memories are more easily stored and retrieved in story form, particularly when they encompass a goal, action, and some kind of resolution (Escalas and Bettman 2003). Further,

storied memories retain the complexity of the situation in which an action was undertaken and the emotional and motivational meaning connected with it (Polkinghorne 1995).

The traditional groundings of projective methods were also found important as identity in contemporary culture and current transparent information age is understood to be highly sensitive matter. Informants vary in shyness which can increase when talking about sensitive, embarrassing consumption topics (Rook 2006). Thus, the role of autodriving was to support when talking about difficult issues (Moisander and Valtonen 2006). In such situations researcher's supportive role in building trust as well as showing empathy and neutrality towards the informant is crucial (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000).

Following good research ethics, the method of autodriving was introduced already in the interview request to build trust. However, it should be acknowledged that informing about autodriving beforehand may have encourage informants' to enhance or modify their personal online spaces prior interview in order to achieve certain impressions. After interviews, informants were further assured for their privacy by changing names of people, pseudonyms, blogs and cities they lived in. In making these changes, I have given attention to restore the meanings by informants while acknowledging my confidentiality to retain their personal privacy (Hookway 2008).

Finally, in addition to the role of listener I also supported the talk and the autodriving as active participant during interviews. Yet being conversational, I also hold the control when to open and close various topics and the interviews as a whole (Silverman 2006, 112).

6.3.   Data Analysis Method: Narrative Analysis

This section presents data analysis method applied – narrative analysis. Thompson's (1997) hermeneutic framework, which is a narratological model of meaning construction, was used to interpret consumer stories. Drawing from narrative structuring of identity and the role of stories in constructing self-understanding, the framework's focus is to interpret how consumption meanings are negotiated in relation to consumer's sense of personal history and broader narrative context of historically established cultural meanings (Thompson 1997).

Narrative analysis is used for multitude of purposes in qualitative research (Polkinghorne 1995). Applying it always requires that the researcher selects a bounded system having

understanding the unity of totality of that system and its outlines (ibid.). The researcher's task is to move from the disperse text elements towards a synthesized story through collecting descriptions of events and happenings to a configured whole that gives meaning to the data as contributor to a goal or purpose (Polkinghorne 1995).

The underlying premise of all narratives is that meanings are created through establishing relationships to other event rather than defining category membership (Somers 1994 cited in Escalas and Bettman 2003, 238) Emplotting the story from the text through part-to-whole analysis, the researcher balances between *how* the story is told in terms of plots and through *what* story is presented (Lieblich et al. 1998; Escalas and Bettman 2003).

The plot refers to the narrative structure which organizes events and characters, while the chronological function of the plot is called narrative movement. This movement conveys a sense of "going somewhere" as events and experiences in temporal order are directed to some envisioned goal state (Stern 1995 cited Thompson 1997, 443). It is understood that stories reveal how people attempt to progress to a solution or clarification and that consumers' stories of everyday experiences create temporal trajectories i.e. past events are relived in relation to present concerns and projected toward an envisioned future (Thompson 1997). Thus, this projective sense making conveys a constellation of past —present—future relations (idid.)

The holism-creating function of plot, on the other hand, refers to narrative framing: meanings through which a given experience is understood and the narrative linkages (such as thematic and symbolic parallels) that consumer creates among different events (Polkinghorne 1988 cited in Thompson 1997, 443). These two functions of the plot - movement and framing - are mutually interrelated and intertwined dimensions in the conduct of an interpretation (Thompson 1997; Lieblich et al. 1998).

Researcher starts by asking 'how' did this become to be and 'why'. When the plot discovers, the crucial events and happenings to the story's denouement also start to become apparent (Polkinghorne 1995). The constant development of the plot follows the same hermeneutic process as discussed previously while the researcher's integrating operation of events and actions refers to *emplotment*. Through this operation, happenings take narrative meaning i.e. the perspective of their contribution and influence on a specified outcome. The emerging plot

informs which data items should be included and which smoothed away from the final story (Polkinghorne 1995).

Narrative analysis of consumption stories and the meanings they convey aim to discern more rich understanding of the identity-relevant consumption meanings, benefits, and motivations (Thompson 1997). The personalized consumption meanings that are retrospective in nature, express a dialectical relationship between the identity issues and life-world salient to given consumer and broader legacy of historically available frames of reference (ibid). Personal meanings arise in a consumer's story in relation to elements from the multitude of identity positions and the broader system of cultural meanings (Holt 1997; Thompson 1997).

In the hermeneutic framework of consumption meanings, the interpretation proceeds in part-to-whole manner which entails two distinct stages. The intra-text cycles refer to a procedure to gain sense of the one text and the consumption meanings it conveys. The inter-textual cycles further develop broader range of understanding upon the consumption meanings and the stories in progress when researcher interprets the different stories (Thompson 1997). The interrogation of plot and meanings of each story is a constant task.

Finally, broader conceptual implications are sought after when constructing an integrative interpretation from the stories (Thompson 1997). Holistic understanding of consumers' consumption stories which is achieved over time. How the data analysis proceeded during the research process, I will shortly discuss after first addressing the data collection process.

6.4. Research Process

6.4.1. Data Collection

The research data and the following analysis bases on the interviews held with 17 informants active participants in social media. The informants ranged in age from 23 to over 50 year old and were diverse in terms of social and educational backgrounds as well as life stages as well as their social media stages and networks. From the informants, 11 were women and 6 men. Interviews varied in their length, most of them lasting over 90 minutes. Acknowledging the intense nature of autodriving, most interviews were paused for a short break.

The data collection was carried out in two interview stages during the period of April 2011 – September 2012 in six cities of Southern and Western Finland. First interview round was

finished in September 2011 after which the following analysis four informants were chosen to second interview round. Second interviews were held approximately one year after the first ones during August – September 2012.

The amount of interviews conducted exceeds general *"less is more"* approach in qualitative for which e.g. McCracken (1988, 17) proposes sample size no greater than eight. This is due for the inductive nature of the data collection. The study was inspired by Schau and Gilly (2003) and grounded on the frames of CCT to explore how consumers build their identities in social media networks. In the beginning, I did not outline the focus but rather went for it all choosing informants who were committed and active in social media performers and had at least in two profiles in everyday use.

The data collection continued emergently by presuming anything and focusing on the themes arising interview data. During first two months, six informants were scouted through friends and acquaintances. At this time, I also interviewed an informant who did not have a blog but who was active in the blogosphere otherwise to have another kind of view to the phenomenon. The importance of blogging and its connection to identity started to arise.

In the second phase of scouting informants, I focused to contact bloggers. I used aggregate blog directories www.blogilista.fi and www.bloglovin.com where bloggers pro-actively advertize their own blogs after which blog-rolling was applied. Blogrolling refers to a method where researcher follows a collection of blog links promoted on some bloggers' site. Here, criteria for contacting the blogger were twofold: email address available on and at least 4 months of continual self-presentation at the blog at hand or in multiple interlinked blogs together. Some of the interviews had to be rejected due to geographical constraints but finally, eleven interviewees were found this way.

Interviews were held in places appointed by each informant – cafe, home or work place. I encouraged to choose a familiar place so that the atmosphere of the interview would be convenient while the only given condition for the choice of place was functional Internet connection that would allow autodriving.

Other than casual technical challenges, the interviews were successful. The informants enjoyed talking about their mundane performances in social media being surprised how interesting it is was to think about one's everyday life from this angle. A common realization

was that the interview crystallized and supported to understand one's needs and wants how to self-present in the blog or social networking site (SNS) and what one values most in social ties brought to these stages. To ensure informants' privacy, all the blogger names and such identifiable details have been changed and any potentially identifying information in blog quotations are disguised (Hookway 2008).

6.4.2. Data Analysis

The chosen method to interpret the data was narrative analysis and the process grounded on the hermeneutic framework by Thompson (1997) as presented earlier. The understanding of the phenomenon progressed iteratively.

When the interviews were conducted and texts transcribed, I started to distinguish themes in the texts and started to emplot a story after another. The goal of this first cycle was to gain sense of the whole interview text and analyzing the individual-level experiences and meanings and cultural systems affecting them.

During second cycle, patterns and differences across different interview texts were searched. The data brought forward vast amount of cultural and thematic differences. Over time, I came attuned how the stories and meaning making of bloggers passionately focusing solely on their hobbies and bloggers who were 'lifestreaming'. I chose to focus and look further on the latter group by engaging in further data collection (see previous section 6.4.1.).

Narrative analysis, in which importance is given to distinguishing the narrative structure of the story (Alasuutari 1996), is popularly applied to life stories in which the story line evolve around clear key episodes of life. In applying narrative analysis to these consumption stories of blogging, however, was quite another task. Following the logic two-stage of data collection and revising stories, the challenged my initial interpretations and re-emplotted the stories along the way with interpretation. Finally, I looked into broader conceptual implications and sought an integrative interpretation from the stories. The two stories presented in this study were selected from the set of last four taken to the second interview round.

As a summary, narrative analysis provided me lens through which understand blogging as a phenomenon and its connections to consumer identity making. The research findings in the form of chosen stories are presented after acknowledging the validity and reliability of the research.

6.5. Evaluation of Validity and Realiability of the Study

Academic research is conventionally evaluated in terms of generalizability or replicability, objectivity, validity and reliability (Lieblich et al. 1998; Moisander and Valtonen 2006). This study being qualitative and interpretative in nature, it seeks better understanding of the phenomenon in oppose to making generalizations of it. While positivistic assumptions are rejected, the transferability of the results i.e. how readers and evaluators find connections between the study and their own understanding, and familiar experiences is welcomed (Moisander and Valtonen 2006).

Validity refers to the truth of claims or accuracy of the researcher's interpretation and often revolves around objectivity (Moisander and Valtonen 2006). By the previously presented ontological and epistemological underpinnings of hermeneutics, it is evident that the interpretations are not value-free but bound to the subjectivity and more specifically the introspection of the researcher. The findings reflect my pre-understanding and critical self-understanding in seeking understanding of the phenomenon and new dimensions to it during my two year long thesis work.

In addition to philosophical assumptions guiding interpretation, the question of validity lies also in the use of concepts and methods through which the interpretation is achieved. In this sense, I also explored the accomplishment of other disciplines on self-presentation in social media to gain better pre-understanding. In terms of interview data, the co-constitutive nature of data production, the assumptions of narrative analysis as well as my ability to apply them also frame the study's findings of the phenomenon. Another researcher with other orientation could have come to different but equally valid interpretations of the data.

Whilst acknowledging the equally valid multiple interpretations, evaluators of interpretative research must also accept the existence of bad reading and good reading of texts (Arnold and Fischer 1994). When relying in language, the use of methods is also a question of researcher's integrity to overcome self-evident conclusions and achieve patience and rigor to engage in the journey of coming into understanding. Considering reading and interpreting on a broader level, Moisander and Valtonen (2006, 31) state that criticality to build new knowledge requires also tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity when exploring alternative perspectives and explanations.

Reliability as a criterion in academic research, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which the research findings are independent of accidental circumstances of their production (Kirk and Miller 1986 cited Moisander and Valtonen 2006, 27). In order to establish reliability, methodological transparency in terms of data production, data analysis and process of interpretation is advised. Transparency both in terms of theoretical stances and methodological choices support the evaluator to draw conclusions of the quality of the study (Moisander and Valtonen 2006). This study representing thesis work follows these well-established practices.

Ultimately, alternative ways of constructing knowledge exists for which fidelity is placed upon the research phenomenon and the in-depth reading of the texts. The adequacy of cultural consumer research lies in the degree to which the study makes possible new and meaningful interpretations of the social phenomenon it investigates (Thompson 1997; Moisander and Valtonen 2006). Specific criteria of interpretations are given many. For example, Spiggle (1994) emphasize the following; *usefulness* in aiding further inquiry and ideas; *innovation* at looking the behavior; *integration* of observations and inferences in representation; *resonance* in being sensitizing to evaluators and *adequacy* in grounding representation to reading. The meaningfulness and insightfulness, of course, are contextual to the research communities.

Finally, not only is interpretative research judged by discovering consumers' everyday reality, but evaluated also in constructing it. Researcher is a historically and locally situated co-producer of meanings (Moisander and Valtonen 2006) and interpretative research is much like a way of being in the world, a way of writing, hearing and listening (Denzin 2001, 43). This relates to the whole research process and the end report in which, too, language is given detail to represents the phenomena in question. In the spirit of hermeneutics, Arnold and Fischer (1994) hold that the interpretations must be coherent, free of contradiction and represented comprehensibly.

7. Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study through consumer blogger stories – Paula and Adele. Both the women have been actively blogging more or less two years and who envision their blogging future with long-term commitment. Their blogs are highly personal, in a sense that their blogging can be described as 'l*ifestreaming*' on weekly basis.

7.1. Paula's Story

Paula, 24, a professional in Business Information Technology, started her blog during studentship over two years ago. She recalls of that time: *"I always wrote a diary as a kid. I have 40 of them. And well I thought now that I'm older I could write something. Note down for myself…. And for myself I made it originally."* Yet Paula describes her blog as *"diary with pictures"* and *"notebook",* there's a clear distinction between her old diaries *"kept under pillow"* and her blogging on the other hand, which she describes to be *"smoothed truth"* or *"romantic version"* of where she goes and what she does.

Yet the self-reflection she finds in browsing her documentation and *"the ordinary photos of life"* is great pleasure she gets from blogging even nowadays, she also is an enthusiastic follower of other bloggers and interactive with them. In this vein, Paula tells about the meaning of her carefully detailed and up-to-date blogger profile page which covers lists of her favorite movies, books, bands and alike. Just as she checks other bloggers' profiles to find shared sameness, so does she want to have her own profile to communicate the right things about her. The profile page is a summary of what kind of person she is: *"Yeah… friends would recognize me from this spot-on."*

7.1.1. The Girl Gang and Identity Conflict

Paula feels her blog is "*out there amongst hundreds of thousands"*. In comparison to the great amount of bloggers she actively follows (currently 126), she describes her own community to consist of blogger acquaintances she has got to know little by little over the course of reciprocal commenting and the random anonymous ones she attracts from blog portals such as Bloglovin.

The blogosphere Paula sees herself to be part of is the group of bloggers who are simply *"their authentic selves"* and who report their everyday activities. For Paula entails blogging about

playing Xbox, watching movies, judging books, reporting going out and sharing household activities from decoration to cooking. Despite the wide array of topics, the vast majority however handle horror and mystery focused playing and movies for which Paula feels to be in the marginality of bloggers.

Paula defines game bloggers to be *"Totally different kind of people than those that put those eyelash photos up there."* and strongly dissociates herself from fashion bloggers yet finds herself constantly drawn to the superficial things through blog challenges send to her. Sometimes Paula takes part in these challenges like when sharing her "Your *four best characteristics"*, other times she is an overwhelmed tomboy:

"[*….] you have to picture 10 favorite cosmetic possessions. My problem is that I don't have even 10 cosmetic things, I couldn't do it. Like this too somehow fell to the side of fashion blogging and it is not, I don't know how to handle that part. [...] Yes I'm interested in it* [reading fashion] *but I don't know how in a way… […] It's somehow… maybe more superficial and in a sense it doesn't tell about a person."*

This superficial side of clothes and appearance, however, is important for Paula's followers as she tells that most interaction with girls evolve from such topics. Over the course of blogging, she has established a sense of "girl gang" based in her town which members she also meets in real life and some of whom she has also accepted to her Facebook friends.

7.1.2. The True Me - "The Lazy Indoor Person"

Paula finds herself as a person who likes many things and open to network and try out new things. Her favorite things, on the other hand, have always been playing games and watching movies. It is in doing and communicating these activities, she finds her true self jokingly describing herself as *"The Lazy Indoor Person".*

Due to her heavy pace of watching films and playing games, she always has many postings in pending. Paula may play several games at the time and one recording of playing may increase up to 200 played hours. She explains on her style *" …I always take advantage of everything possible which takes an half of eternity. You can see that the longer you enjoy the game then it's quite good."* Finally when Paula is finished with the game, it earns a review blog entry.

Paula is intrigued by mystery and the non-real which define both her taste of games and movies (e.g. Dead Island, The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, Serenity). She tells about a current movie which was vaunted in the media but which she herself did not find to be a superior: "*There was too much drama in it. There was one third of drama and it was too much.*"

The fascination of the different according to Paula "*comes with the personality*" and apparently runs in the family as she tells that her sister is the same: *"She doesn't blog but she watches same movies and play same games that I do. With her I get the best discussions."* Despite this closeness, she yearns for more interaction around her favorite things especially with girls: *"There are very few blogger friends who watch movies. Or play, the other thing I do."*

7.1.3. Moving Away, Changing Strategy

Half a year ago Paula moved to a bigger city following her fiancé and his new job. As a result of this move, the geographical distance grew between the local blogger circles which she established in her old town and her new everyday life. Paula had to change blogging strategy. She decided to show her face and give up her habit of blurring photos. Along with revealing her face, the blog name and blog banner experienced personalizing changes.

"Immediately on that day when I put my face there I got like 10 followers more. Like ok. The main point is nevertheless on what I do and not my looks but that doesn't really work in this world does it."

When the first posting with her face initiated a lot of praising comments on her good looks, Paula felt disappointed: comments about her face was not at all the essential thing of the whole blog entry. However, she has noticed the benefits of this strategy change: "[…] *when you show your face then in a way other people are more interested. You also get the discussion, people are interested even though for that reason exactly I didn't want my face there... What I write is the Thing. But people don't come along so well."*

In addition to blogging with own face, also the girly and superficial side has been increasing. One of the things she recently added to her blogging was a link to fashion scrapbook profile. Every time Paula "hearts" something across the Web, the object will be added to her collage of "Latest loves" fashion items. Paula tells of her hearting strategy behind all the clothes and fashion accessories: *"...it's especially all the glitter... it has always been the magpie side of me."*

However, it is not necessarily that the glittery things would be Paula's own style, like the one impractical pair of sparkly shoes which she has lost somewhere in her closet, but rather the glitter and sparkle looks enjoyable and great on somebody else wearing them. She explains *"… it would be nice to get girl acquaintances, some kind of contact.[…] So maybe this is some kind of channel…."* Now after changing the city scene, Paula wants to establish a new circle of bloggers in her new home town. *"I read all kind of stuff that is written here close to area and like when it's a new place, I'm interested to know all the possibilities and what's happening here."* Already for the next weekend she's planning to see a new blogger friend.

Changing her blogging strategy has also resulted in self-censorship, i.e. deleting old blog entries from her study years. *"…posts from the year 2010, for example, I have taken off. […]There's still some game and movie things, books and alike but nothing personal matters from that long time ago exist anymore."* Paula explains: *"I just wanted them out…. I thought like those need not be up there for anyone to see, so old stuff. Not everyone needs to read that far away into the past. Like somehow we are living in this year, this day and the 2010 not need to have that much importance."*

7.2.   Adele's Story

Adele is 40 year old juggling mother of two who travels a lot professionally. Active blogging came into the picture three and half year ago when her sister-in-law, who always consults her in fashion, promted that Adele should share her knowledge on children's clothes because of her access to broader variety in her travels.

Adele recalls the groundings of being a mommy blogger; *"I don't know how I fell into that circle in the first place… but I'm not really interested in children's clothes like in general I'm interested in all… but majority of my readers to my knowledge are mothers of small kids."*

The focus of her blogging is in everyday life but which for the most part focus on kids, fashion and design. A handful of her favorite brands include Audi, IKKS, Magis design, Peak Performance and Gant and which show her exclusive taste and its effect on various domains of life. Adele describes herself as a person whose life is on a white base and ironically notes that *"This blog give wrong picture of my style because I've tried to publish all my colourful clothes I have. Usually I'm black and white."*

7.2.1. From Social Interaction to Group Spirit

Adele describes the mommy circles in blogosphere obsessive and the expectations she feels in comparing her own style to other bloggers: *".... Now I dress my kids nicely and then go to the park to shoot photos. It's a bit... I'm not focused on that sort of thing."* Or as of lately the focus of discussion in their blogger meeting where she got shocked about the dominant nature of blogging in her friends' life: *"All the time they think when they leave the house... previously she could leave without make-up, which I still do, like they check how they look.... and how they treat their kids in public spaces like do you have nerve to yell at the fractious child because someone may recognize. [...] I was a bit shocked and I said like oh no it shouldn't be that way....."*

Despite the pinch of salt in these comments, Adele for the most part does not consider blogging serious, emotional or pressuring. At first it started as *"a joke"* and as *"a test"* which soon became *"a habbit"* and *"a fun way to pass the time"* which she combines to waiting in kids' hobbies and her own time in the evenings when the kids are sleeping and her husband travelling.

What she finds best in blogging is the group spirit which arises from reciprocal active commenting in each others' weekly postings of hers and her *"regular crew"* of 5 to 8 other long term blogger friends. They share practical tips when hunting down design and overall supporting as well as bonding when discussing the challenges face in everyday life e.g. bringing up kids, hobbies, ageing and cosmetics and overall trying out new things. Instead of the choir of answers and support, Adele yearns for more critical discussion. Over the course of blogging, her *"regular crew"* has stayed the same and grown closer and Adele enjoys their inside jokes in commenting. Also, new bloggers have joined. After all, kids grow, mommy blogging change and readership develops in the same vein.

7.2.2. The Fear of Popularity

Adele imagined her blogging to be a community of a hundred or two people. After discovering Google Analytics, she got shocked of the silent crowd of 800 up to over thousand readers that visit her blog every day. And just of recently, Adele's post about kids attracted more than 7000 hits in a day. She is surprised and shocked about her popularity which has led to defensive self-presentation.

Not that her blogging was profound in the beginning, but Adele has become cautious about disclosing intimate details about herself. She has deleted blog entries encompassing themes like her education, work and family which now on are expressed and touched upon indirectly, for example in her blog banner which has not had a photo before:

"This photo has been taken by Susan [another blogger] *who is a photographer in real life. Some time ago I spotted that photo…. and I specifically wanted that photo because we have lived in this house at the time of our firstborn…. so it's really special place for us. […] The readers don't know what kind of meaning that photo has for me. It's just mine."*

Thus, nowadays Adele's blogging is more fiercely focused on clothes and design and more covertly expressed in terms of level of intimacy in photos and writing. Especially, she does not want to show her home after becoming aware of insulting discussion thread in a forum which consisted of hundreds of comments in which the value of her home as well as income level and choice of car were ranted by *"retro"* people.

Despite such negative experiences in social media, she keeps the commenting possibilities in her own blog available for anonymous. Being aware of the popularity of posts including intimate details, she occasionally posts photos clothes on herself without revealing her face. In sharing her everyday doings and inspirations, she stays away from other cultural topics, e.g. music concerts, to which her community does not respond to.

Whereas some of Adele's blogger friends have moved to the editorial pages of family and design magazines, her approach is clear. *"[Inquiries] from journalists come to some degree like 'could we do a story' but no absolutely not and nothing. I don't have time. I don't want to be in that, I don't want be published. […] I have open blog and I should share everything and my whole life with everyone… I think not."*

7.2.3. Global Marketplace and New Source of Connoisseur

"[Let's] say that two or three years ago I had a lot of stuff that you couldn't get from Finland…. Now the collection of Filippa [K] hits the stores in Södermalm and Aleksanteri streat in the same time."

In blogosphere, Adele started as a children's clothes blogger and fashion connoisseur. Her blogging was dependent on the selection she found during travels abroad and the principle of

being ahead of everyone else. In the midst of speeding globalization and e-commerce, she is about realize that she's at the same level as other bloggers when it comes to reach of new things. The link list in her side banner of favorite brands is coming outdated. Recent blogging about her shoes gives a glimpse of the new motivations in her style to keep it interesting: considering ecological and promoting local fashion.

"Some five years ago I cursed with the nuts who keep up with waste… I have been forced to buy a bin for organic waste over the years after listening all the complaining. And in general through these friends and acquaintances like ecological clothes can be kind of cool looking…. You get a good conscious about it."

And further on local design: "And then…. I still have only few, I try to support these Finnish designers and fashion designers like Minna Parikka and Samuji. Mostly they are maybe too unusual [for Adele]. But you get a good feeling. […] Now I have one pair of shoes by Minna Parikka which may not be that good fit or uniquely me and well when travelling like 'wow whose shoes are those' and 'where can you get those'. That's the thing for me. "

Despite the transitions in her style, Adele is not a trend-setter or identify with specific fashion domains. For Adele it is everything beautiful and in this vein she is very precise how also very mundane things such as toilet brush and a dishcloth looks like. Thus, it is her sense of aesthetics more broadly which ground on her upbringing and things shared with her mother and grandmother:

"It's learned from home as my mom collects art both new and old. In my childhood, she forced me to sit in all kinds of auctions and as a 15 year old one could not be less interested. Now I'm grateful that she made me go there."

8. Discussion

The main objective of the study was to better understand blogging and its relation to consumer identity making. The phenomenon was approached by exploring consumers engaged in the form of blogging known as '*lifestreaming'.* The study's findings were presented through the stories of Paula and Adele.

In this chapter, the findings are analyzed with theoretical discussion through three sections following the rationale of the research questions. First, motivations will presented after which discussing the functions of symbolic consumption in self-presentation. Finally, strategies ho bloggers manage their privacy in relation to their community and social media will be explained.

8.1.   Blogging Motivations

All identity theories from psychology to sociology place importance on motivational aspects which are seen as the source of self-esteem and meaning as well as balance and consistency yet they are motivations are vaguely understood (Deaux and Burke 2010).

With the ethos of project definition on consumer identity, one could be tempted to think that all is conscious and planned. However, the blogging motivations ought to be understood from the basis of *"Why one starts blogging?" and "What hooks one to continue it in ongoing basis?"* rather than desired end state or anticipated future one aims to achieve. The aim of the study was to distinguish blogging motivations from the stories (Escalas and Bettman 2003).

The empirical analysis showed two blogging motivations: *the need self-documentation and group spirit.* The first is obvious in Paula's case: the individual need for self-documentation was already strong for as a child (diaries) and now as a young adult it took another form in blogging. Adele, on the other hand, initially started thanks to external prompt and purely on the basis of social and advocacy (Schau and Gilly 2003) which shortly crew to group spirit. This second motivation arose from both women's stories, however. Whereas for Adele the 'regular crew' is the salt of blogging in ongoing basis, Paula shows a pattern of building local blogger girl circles wherever she lives at current life stage. For both women these active group relationships extend on and offline.

Thus, current study supports the findings of previous research of blogging motivations continue focusing on self-expression and social interaction (Schau and Gilly 2003; Nardi et al. 2004; Lopez 2009; Sima and Pugsley 2010). However, rather than mere social interaction, the motivation to continue engaging in blogging is found in specific group of other bloggers established by the consumer rather than the whole scale of social behaviors taken via the blogging. Yet blogging is emergent in nature, the motivations were rather salient in blogger stories.

To conclude, the narrative analysis was found to open the circumstances and life worlds to which blogging motivations were bound and why consumers engage in this type of social lifestreaming on active basis (Thompson1997; Escalas and Bettman 2003).

8.2.   Symbolic Consumption in Self-presentation

In contemporary consumer culture, the self is constantly in the process of becoming and within this identity seeking and making consumption can function in many ways. In consumption we find sense of being and belonging as well as self-fulfillment and self-transformation (Belk 1988; Schouten 1991; Wattanasuwan 2005; Ahuvia 2005).

Understanding the blogging as sequential and interactive self-presentation, the second aim of the study was further study the role of symbolic consumption in blogging beyond symbol display. In this vein, symbolic consumption was found to function differently when it came to *blogging performances* and sense of *blogger identity.* In the first symbolic consumption was found instrumental when balancing identity conflicts that arose from unfitting life themes while being part a community. In the latter, consumption was found to create social linkages in signifying affiliation and distinction from others in the blogosphere.

8.2.1. Blogging Performances

Whenever a person enters the presence of others, self-presentation arises and the individual will engage in staging performances to audience (Goffman 1959). Goffman's original thesis of social life as drama entailed a situational and spatial boundaries, where in this study blogging performances refer to the sequential actions blogging entails (blog space, blog entries, commenting, social interaction). In these continuous blogging performances, the role of symbolic consumption was found to be instrumental in identity conflicts imposed by the community one was part of.

To begin, blogging was found to be strongly grounded in long term life projects and life themes of the consumers (Mick and Buhl 1992; Schau and Gilly 2003) which brought forward identity conflicts when being a member of a blogger community.

For example, Paula took part of blog challenges which represent one popular convention in her blogger community consisting of girls. Through taking part of these conventions Paula shows the communal identity and gains a sense of belonging.. However, the superficial nature of these conventions she failed to participate in such conventions. The self-identity 'I' becomes at odds with the community norms.

The community imposed an identity conflict when those aspects disputed her life them of being a tomboy who likes zombie games and movies. Paula finds her fondness of glitter and incrementally starts to manage her relationships with fashion and style focused community. She aims to find a balance between impressions given to and interaction achieved with the community while keeping own personal style up to the ideal – having best of both worlds. The instrumental use of consumption in resolving identity conflicts by synthesizing strategy is supported by the study (Ahuvia 2005).

8.2.2. Blogger Identity

Blogger identity refers to the thoughts and ideas how one perceives to be in the blogosphere in general. In this, consumption symbols function both as extended selves (Belk 1988) creating sense of true self and as instruments to create social linkages in signifying affiliation and distinction simultaneously (Holt 1995).

For the first, bloggers were found digitally associate with their personal possessions and bring extended self to the blogging stage (Belk 1988; Schau and GIlly 2003) or blogging performances. Example of the first, Adele's made the photo from her past as her banner – just for herself. For self-documenting Paula, the logic is reverse – she keeps games and movies, the self extensions is blogging performances.

As for social linkages, bloggers classify themselves to be in certain social category: for Adele being children's clothes blogger and being part of the mommy bloggers and Paula not-fashion blogger and keeping an up-to-date blogger profile to connect with like-minded gamers and movie enthusiast.

8.3.   Privacy Strategies

As discussed throughout the study, identity is a process and project like construct which, in fact, encompasses variety of identities, thoughts and ideas of who and what one is (Kleine et al. 1993).. In this vein, we have private selves, home self, family self, professional self and many others.

Bloggers who engage in '*lifestreaming'* bring their personal lives to the public. This entails that the boundaries between private life and the public sphere are blurring and so are the private and public selves becoming unified rather than alternative sources of identity (Tian and Belk 2005). In the saturated and collapsed (Gergen 1991; Marwick and boyd 2011b) conditions of social media, it entails that bloggers must especially manage the private identity. Privacy refers to managing private identity - matters considered intimate about one's s self - which is very different from the concept of true' self.

In this vein, the third and final aim of the study was to explore strategies bloggers use to manage their privacy or their private identities in relation to community and public social media in general. The objective was approached from the concept of self-disclosure which not only concern *what* aspects of self are shared but *how* such details are shared (Cozby 1973). The empirical analysis brought forward that bloggers both utilize their private identity and control it and, thus, the strategies found were *privacy as strategic act* and *privacy as control*.

8.3.1. Privacy as Strategic Act

Privacy as strategic act refers self-disclosing intimate details about one's self in order to achieve some goal. It is employed in blogging performances when the consumer reveals intimately perceived notions of self that give a glimpse to the *'backstage'* much like in celebrity culture (Marwick and boyd 2011a; 2011b). Adele was attuned to monitor her blogging popularity, and in this vein strategically noticed that performances including her real life appearance got heightened reactions from the readers.

Also Paula used privacy as a strategic act when giving in to show her face in photos, which increased the level of intimacy in her highly photo-focused blogging focusing in self-documenting. Her first aim was to establish more social interaction around her favorite things Privacy as a strategic is targeted to social rewards and is thus related to impression management (Goffman 1959). For both women, the private self was their face.

8.3.2. Privacy as Control

Privacy as control refers to inhibited self-disclosure (Cozby 1973). Bloggers were found to engage in this strategy when manage their identity in relation to the larger social media. Bloggers wanted to exclude their professional life from personal lifestreaming in order to manage both offline and online audiences when the goal was audience segregation.

Privacy as control also arose as a strategy in relation to the community and social interaction. Both women deleted blog entries from archives dating years back. Adele cleaned her blog from postings that had revealing photos of her home when her affluent lifestyle was criticized and ranted in a forum. Paula censored her history from the student years as a result of moving to a new city.

The results on bloggers' two privacy strategies suggest that self-disclosure and non-disclosure realize much like a zigzag way over the course of blogging when the sense of private aspects of self evolve over the life cycles and when bloggers engage in disclosing intimate details about themselves in order to keep one's community group interested and increase interaction.

9. Conclusions

In this chapter, I will conclude the findings of the study in terms of theoretical and managerial implications. Also, suggestions for future research are proposed in the end.

9.1. Theoretical Implications

The main aim of the study was to seek further understanding of blogging and consumer identity making. The study builds upon Schau' and Gilly's (2003) contributions on personal Web sites as conspicuous form of consumer self-presentation. The blogger stories gave a glimpse of the lives and identity making of consumers whose blogging is grounded in '*lifestreaming*' - the rhythm and resources of mundane everyday life.

Along with addressing *blogging motivation,* findings over *blogging performances, blogger identity* and *privacy strategies* were discussed as dimensions that define the relations of blogging and consumer identity making. Grounding on the research tradition of CCT, the study has taken a holistic view on individual and consumption by reflecting consumer identity to broader theoretical frames and vocabularies of the self in contemporary consumer culture.

Consumer-driven social media create ever emerging contexts and dynamics while scholars are challenged with to keep up with them. The phenomenon of blogging has been largely approached from the locus of the brand or by emphasizing the community. However, consumer research ought to explore the lifeworlds of both individuals and groups to reflect the diversity of social life. I make no claim that the interpretations made her of blogging would apply to consumer identity dynamics and self-presentation in other social media. But rather, the study can provide insights how to approach it and the findings can be used as point of reflection in realizing how different or alike they are.

9.2. Managerial Implications

Consumer research is study of choices and behaviors that really matter to the individual and, thus, the study was conducted in the service of the consumer. However, managerial implications can be drawn.

The study provides complementary insights for marketers in establishing a dialogue with bloggers and overall seeking more longstanding relationship with bloggers. Instead of ranking

bloggers by their network size, reach and social status, marketers ought to explore bloggers' identity pursuits. Here marketer's essential task is to support bloggers to take more engaging role at the same time acknowledging bloggers' privacy strategies in relation own community and social media in general.

Supporting consumers' creativeness, giving more visible role to their expertise and rewarding are ways to acknowledge bloggers as partner-players of meanings (Firat and Dholakia 2006). These views support the emerging paradigm of value co-creation (Vargo and Lusch 2004; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004) and its bridge to cultural consumer research (Arnould et al. 2006; Arnould 2011).

9.3.   Suggestions for Future Research

Future research can benefit from exploring consumers in social media and the changing identity dynamics from another point of view than self-presentation. Also, the study focused on blogging and its form known as *'lifestreaming'*. Thus, other forms of blogging, such as those grounded on passionate DIY projects, are an area to investigate further with a longitudinal approach.

References

Aboujaoude, Elias (2011), *Virtually You: The Dangerous Powers of the E-Personality*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Ahuvia, Aaron C. (2005), "Beyond the Extended Self: Loved Objects and Consumers' Identity Narratives*," Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 171–184.

Alasuutari, Pertti (1996), "Theorizing in Qualitative Research: A Cultural Studies Perspective," *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 371-384.

Arnold, Stephen J., and Fischer, Eileen. (1994), "Hermeneutics and Consumer Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 21, No. 1 pp. 55-70.

Arnould, Eric J., and Price, Linda L. (2000), "Authenticating acts and authoritative performances. Questing for self and community" in S. Ratneshwar, David Glen Mick and Cynthia Huffman (Eds.) *The Why of Consumption: Contemporary perspectives on consumer motives, goals, and desires*, (pp. 140-163), New York : Routledge.

Arnould, Eric .J., and Thompson, Craig J. (2005), "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research," *Journal of Consumer Research,* Vol. 31, No. 4, pp. 868-882.

Arnould, Eric. J., Price Linda. L., and Malshe Avinash (2006) "Toward a Cultural Resource-based Theory of the Customer", Robert F. Lusch and Stephen L. Vargo (Eds.), The Service-dominant Logic of Marketing: Dialog, Debate, and Directions, (pp. 91-104), New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Arnould, Eric and Thompson, Craig (2011), "Consumer Culture Theory (And We Really Mean Theoretics): Dilemmas and Opportunities Posed by an Academic Branding Strategy", in Russell W. Belk, John F. Sherry (Eds.) *Consumer Culture Theory* (*Research in Consumer Behavior,* Volume 11), Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp. 3-22.

Arnould, Eric .J. (2011), "Service-Dominant Logic and Consumer Culture Theory:Natural Allies in an Emerging Paradigm", in Russell W. Belk, John F. Sherry (Eds.) *Consumer Culture Theory* (*Research in Consumer Behavior,* Volume 11), Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp. 57-76.

Bauman, Zygmunt (2001), "Consuming Life." *Journal of Consumer Culture,* Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 9-29.

Bauman, Zygmunt (2007), *Consuming Life.* Campbridge. Polity Press.

Baumeister, Roy F. (1982), "A Self-Presentational View of Social Phenomena," *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 91, No. 1, pp. 3-26.

Baumeister, Roy F. (1987), "How the Self Became a Problem: A Psychological Review of Historical Research," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 52 No. 1 pp.163-176.

Beer, David., and Burrows, Roger (2010), "Consumption, Prosumption and Participatory Web Cultures: An Introduction," *Journal of Consumer Culture*. Vol. 10. No. 1 pp. 3-12.

Derlaga, Valerian J., and Berg, John H. (Ed) (1987), *Self-Disclosure: Theory, Research and Therapy,* New York: Plenum Press.

Belk, Russell W. (1988), "Possessions and the Extended Self," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 139-168.

Belk, Russell W. (1989), "Extended Self and Extending Paradigmatic Perspective," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 129-132.

Blumer, Herbert (1969), *Symbolic Interaction: Perspective and Method*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

boyd, danah (2006), "A Blogger's Blog: Exploring the Definition of a Medium, Reconstruction" 6(4). Available from: http://www.danah.org/papers/ABloggersBlog.pdf [Visited 21.1.2013]

boyd, danah and Heer, Jeffrey (2006) "Profiles as Conversation: Networked Identity Performance on Friendster." In Proceedings of the Hawai'i International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-39), Persistent Conversation Track. Kauai, HI: IEEE Computer Society. January 4 - 7, 2006.

Branaman, Ann (1997), "Goffman's Social Theory" in Lemert Charles and Branaman Ann (Eds.) *The Goffman Reader*, Blackwell Publishing, pp. xivii-ixxxii.

Buffardi, Laura. E., and Campbell, Keith W. (2008), "Narcissism and Social Networking Web Sites," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 34, No. 10, pp. 1303-1314.

Campbell, Colin (2005), "The Craft Consumer: Culture, craft and consumption in a postmodern society," *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 23-42.

Cooley, Charles H. (1902), *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Scribner's Sons.

Cozby., Paul C. (1972), "Self-Disclosure, Reciprocity and Liking," *Sociometry.* Vol. 35, No. 1 pp. 151-160.

Cozby., Paul C. (1973) "Self-Disclosure: A Literature Review," *Psychological Bulletin.* Vol. 79 No.2, pp. 73-91.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly., and Rochberg-Halton Eugene. (1981), *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Davies, Andrea., and Elliott, Richard (2006), "The evolution of the empowered consumer," *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 40, Iss. 9/10, pp.1106-1121

Davis, Jenny (2010), "Architecture of the Personal Interactive Homepage: Constructing the Self through MySpace," *New Media & Society*, Vol. 12, No. 7, pp. 1103-1119.

Deaux, Kay., and Burke, Peter (2010), "Bridging Identities," *Social Psychology Quarterly,* Vol. 73, Iss. 4, pp.315-357.

Demo, David H. (1992), "The Self-Concept Over Time: Research Issues and Directions," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol 18, (August 1992), pp. 303-326.

Denzin, Norman K. (1995), *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur's Gaze.* London, UK: Sage Publications.

Denzin, Norman K. (2001), "The reflexive interview and a performative social science," *Qualitative Research,* Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 23-46.

Derlega, Valerian J., and Berg, John H. (1987), *Self-Disclosure: Theory, Research, and Therapy*. New York: Plenum Press.

Douglas, Mary., and Isherwood, Baron. (1996), *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption.* London: Routledge.

Drew, Paul., and Wootton, Anthony (eds.) (1988) *Erving Goffman: Exploring the interaction order*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Efimova, Lilia., and Hendrick, Stephanie (2005),In search for a virtual settlement: An exploration of weblog community boundaries. [Online] Available from: https://doc.novay.nl/dsweb/Get/Document-46041/weblog-community-boundaries.pdf [Visited 24.1.2013]

Elliott, Richard (1997), "Existential consumption and irrational desire," *European Journal of Marketing*. Vol. 31, No. 3/4, pp. 285-296.

Elliott, Richard., and Wattanasuwan, Kritsadarat (1998a), "Consumption and the Symbolic Project of the Self," *European Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 3 (1998), pp. 17-20.

Elliott, Richard., and Wattanasuwan, Kritsadarat (1998b), "Brands as Symbolic Resources for the Construction of Identity," *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 17, Iss. 2, pp. 131-144.

Escalas, Jennifer E., and Bettman, James R. (2003), "Using narratives to discern self-identity related consumer goals and motivations", in S. Ratneshwar, David Glen Mick and Cynthia Huffman (Eds.) *The Why of Consumption: Contemporary perspectives on consumer motives, goals, and desires*,), pp. 237-258, New York : Routledge.

Featherstone, Mike (2000), "Archiving Cultures," *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 51, Iss.1, pp.161-184.

Featherstone, Mike (2007) *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 2nd Edition, London: Sage Publications.

Firat, Fuat A., and Venkatesh, Alladi (1995), "Liberatory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 239-267.

Firat, Fuat A.., and Dholakia, Nikhilesh. (1998), *Consuming People: From Political Economy to Theaters of Consumption,* London: Routhledge.

Firat, Fuat A.., and Dholakia, Nikhilesh. (2006), "Theoretical and philosophical implications of postmodern debates: some challenges to modern marketing," *Marketing Theory.* Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 123-162.

Freeman, Mark (2004), "The Matter of Text," *Narrative Inquiry,* Vol. 14, Iss.1, pp. 29-43.

Fromm, Erich (1976), *To Have or to Be*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

Fýrat,,Fuat .A., and Vicdan, Handan. (2008), "A New World of Literacy, Information Technologies, and the Incorporeal Selves : Implications for Macromarketing Thought," *Journal of Macromarketing*, Vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 381-396.

Gadamer, H. G. (1989), *Truth and Method*, London: Sheed & Ward

Gergen, Kenneth J. (1991), *The Saturated Self. Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. New York: Basic Books.

Gibbs, Jennifer L., Ellison, Nicole B., and Lai Chih-Hui (2011) "First Comes Love, Then Comes Google: An Investigation of Uncertainty Reduction Strategies and Self-Disclosure in Online Dating," Communication Research, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 70-100.

Giddens, Anthony (1991), *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age. Polity Press*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Goffman, Erving (1959), *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* New York: Double Day Anchor Books.

Goulding, Christina (2000), The commodification of the past, postmodern pastiche, and the search for authentic experiences at contemporary heritage attractions," *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 34, No. 7, pp. 835-853.

Greene, Kathryn., Derlega, Valerian J., and Mathews, Alicia (2006), "Self-disclosure in personal relationships" In A. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Cambridge handbook of personal relationships*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, (pp. 409-427).

Hardey, Michael (2002), "Life beyond the screen: embodiment and identity through the internet," *The Sociological Review*, No. 50, Iss. 4, pp. 570–585.

Heisley, Deborah D., and Levy, Sidney J. (1991), "Autodriving: A Photoelicitation Techinique," *Journal of Consumer Research,* Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 257-272.

Henderson, Samatha., and Gilding, Michael (2004), "'I've Never Clicked this Much with Anyone in My Life': Trust and Hyperpersonal Communication in Online Friendships," *New Media & Society,* Vol. 6, No. 4., pp.487-506.

Herring, Susan C., Kouper, Inna., Scheidt, Lois. A., and Wright, Elijah L. (2004), "Women and children last: The discursive construction of weblogs," In L. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman (Eds.), *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*, University of Minnesota.

Hetherington, Kevin (1998*), Expressions of identity: space, performance, politics*. London: Sage Publications.

Hirschman, Elizabeth C. (1988), "The Ideology of Consumption: A Structural-Syntactical Analysis of "Dallas" and "Dynasty," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 344-359.

Hirsjärvi, Sirkka & Hurme, Helena (2000), *Tutkimushaastattelu: teemahaastattelun teoria ja käytäntö*. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.

Hodkinson, Paul (2006), "Subcultural blogging? Online journals and group involvement among U.K. Goths". in Axel Brunns and Joanne Jakobs (Eds.), *Uses of Blogs.*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, pp.187-198.

Hogg, Michael A., Terry, Deborah J., and White, Katherine M. (1995), "A Tale of Two Theories: A Critical Comparison of Identity Theory with Social Identity Theory," *Social Psychology Quaterly*, Vol. 58, No. 4, pp. 255-269.

Holbrook, Morris B. (2001), "The Millennial Consumer Enters the Age of Exhibitionism. A Book Review Essay: Part 1,", *Consumption, Markets and Culture,* Vol. 4, No. 4., pp.383-437.

Holt, Douglas B. (1995), "How Consumers Consume: Toward a Typology of Consumption Practices," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 1–16.

Holt, Douglas B. (1997), "Poststructuralist Lifestyle Analysis: Conceptualizing the Social Patterning of Consumption in Postmodernity," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 326-350.

Holt, Douglas B. (2002), "Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding**,**" *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 70–90.

Hookway, Nicholas (2008), "'Entering the blogosphere': some strategies for using blogs in social research," *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 91-113.

Howard, Judith A. (2000), "Social Psychology of Identities," *Annual Review of Sociology,* Vol. 26, (2000), pp. 367-393.

James, William (1891), *Principles of Psychology,* London: Macmillan and Co.

Jenkins, Henry (2006), *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: exploring participatory culture*. New York: New York University Press.

John, Leslie K., Acquisti, Alessandro., and Loewenstein, George (2011), "Strangers on a Plane: Context-Dependent Willingness to Divulge Sensitive Information," *Journal of Consumer Research,* Vol. 37, No. 5, pp. 858-873.

Josselson, Ruthellen (2004), "The Hermeneutics of Faith and The Hermeneutics of Suspicion," *Narrative Inquiry*, Vol. 14, Iss.1, pp. 1-28.

Joy, Annamma, Sherry John F., Troilo, Gabriele Jr, and Deschenes, Jonathan (2010), "Re-thinking the relationship between self and other: Levinas and narrative of beautifying the body," *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 333–361.

Kaplan, Andreas M., and Haenlein, Michael (2010), "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media," *Business Horizons*, Vol. 53, No. 1, pp. 59-68.

Kleine, Robert E III., Kleine, Susan Schultz., and Kernan, Jerome B. (1993), "Mundane Consumption and the Self: A Social-Identity Perspective," *Journal of Consumer Psychology,* Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 209-235.

Kozinets Robert V. (2001), "Utopian Enterprise: Articulating the Meanings of *Star Trek*'s Culture of Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Research,* Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 67-88.

Kozinets, Robert V. (2002), "Can Consumers Escape the Market? Emancipatory Illuminations from Burning Man," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 20-38.

Kozinets, Robert V. (2006), "Nethnography 2.0" in Russel W. Belk (ed.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing.* Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 129-142.

Kozinets, Robert V., de Valck Kristine., Wojnicki, Andrea C., and Wilner, Sarah J.S. (2010), "Networked Narratives: Understanding Word-of-Mouth Marketing in Online Communities," *Journal of Marketing,* Vol. 74, No. 2, pp. 71-89.

Kretz, Gachoucha., and de Valck, Kristine (2010), ""Pixelize Me!": Digital Storytelling and the Creation of Archetypal Myths Through Explicit and Implicit Self-brand Association in Fashion and Luxury Blogs," in Russell W. Belk (ed.)*, Research in Consumer Behavior, Volume 12*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp.313-329.

Leary, Mark R., and Allen, Ashley Batts (2011), "Personality and Persona: Personality Processes in Self-Presentation," *Journal of Personality*, Vol. 79, Iss. 6, pp. 1191–1218

Levy, Sidney J. (1959), "Symbols for Sale," *Harvard Business Review,* Vol.37, (July–August), pp. 117–124.

Lieblich, Amia., Tuval-Mashiach, Rivka., and Zilber, Tamar (1998), *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation,* (Sage Publications, Applied Social Research Methods Series Vol. 47), Thousand Oaks California: Sage Publications.

Livingstone, Sonia M.., and Lunt Peter K. (1992), *Mass Consumption and Personal Identity: Everyday Economic Experience.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Lopez, Lori Kido (2009), "The radical act of 'mommy blogging': redefining motherhood through the blogosphere," *New Media and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 5, pp. 729-747.

Mangold, Glynn W., and Faulds, David J. (2009), "Social Media: The New Hybrid Element of the Promotion Mix," *Business Horizons,* Vol. 52, Iss. 4,, pp.357-365.

Markus, Hazel.,. and Nurius, Paula (1986), "Possible selves," *American Psychologist*, Vol. 41, No. 9, pp. 954-969.

Marwick, Alice., and boyd, danah (2011a), "To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter." *Convergence*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 139 – 158.

Marwick, Alice., and boyd, danah (2011b), "I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience," *New Media & Society*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 114-133.

McCracken, Grant (1986), "Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of Cultural meaning of Consumer Goods," *Journal of Consumer Research,* Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 71-84.

McCracken, Grant D. (1988), *The Long Interview*. (Sage Publications. Qualitative Research Methods Series Vol. 13), California: Sage Publications.

Mead, George H. (1934), *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Meyrowitz, Joshua (1985). *No Sense of Place. The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior,* Oxford University Press.

Mick, David G., and Buhl, Claus (1992), "A Meaning-Based Model of Advertising Experiences," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 317-338.

Moisander, Johanna. and, Valtonen Anu (2006), *Qualitative Marketing Research Methods. A Cultural Approach*. London: Sage Publications.

Moisander, Johanna., Valtonen, Anu., and Hirsto, Heidi (2009), "Personal interviews in cultural consumer research – post-structuralist challenges," *Consumption Markets & Culture,* Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 329-348.

Muniz, Albert .M., and O'Guinn, Thomas C. (2001), "Brand Community," *The Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 412-432.

Muniz, Albert M. Jr., and Schau, Hope Jensen (2005), "Religiosity in the Abandoned Apple Newton Brand Community," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 31, No. 4, pp. 737-747.

Murray, Jeff B. (2002), "The Politics of Consumption: A Re-Inquiry on Thompson and Haytko's (1997) "Speaking of Fashion"," *Journal of Consumer Research,* Vol. 29, No. 3, pp.427-440.

Nardi, Bonnie A., Shiano Diane J., Gumbrecht, Michelle., and Swartz Luke (2004), "Why We Blog," *Communications of the ACM*, Vol. 47, No. 12 pp. 41-46.

Polkinghorne, Donald. E. (1995), "Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis," *Qualitative Studies in Education,* Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 5-23.

Prahalad, C. K., and Ramaswamy, Venkat (2004), "Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation," *Journal of Interactive Marketing,* Vol. 18, Iss. 3, p. 5-14.

Price, Linda., Arnould Eric J., and Curasi, Carolyn F. (2000), "Older Consumers' Disposition of Special Possessions," *Journal of Consumer Research,* Vol.27, No. 2, pp.179-201.

Reed, Americus II (2002), "Social identity as a useful perspective for self-concept–based consumer research," *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 19, No. 3 pp. 235-266.

Ricoeur, Paul (1981), *Hermeneutics and the human sciences*, (J. B. Thompson, ed. & trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ritzer, George., and Jurgenson Nathan (2010), "Production, Consumption, Prosumption. The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital 'prosumer'," *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 13-36.

Robinson, Laura (2007), "The cyberself: the self-ing project goes online, symbolic interaction in the digital age," *New Media & Society*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 93-110.

Rook, Dennis W. (2006), "Let's pretend: projective methods reconsidered" in Russel W. Belk (ed.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 143-155.

Schau, Hope J. (1998), "Discourse of Possessions: the Metatheory of Russell W. Belk," *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 25, pp. 37-44.

Schau, Hope J., and Muniz, Albert M. Jr. (2002), "Brand Communities and Personal Identities: Negotiations in Cyberspace," *Advances in Consumer Research,* Vol. 29, pp. 344-349.

Schau, Hope J., and Gilly, Mary C. (2003), "We Are What We Post? Self-Presentation in Personal Web Space," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 30, No. 3, pp. 385-404.

Schmidt, Jan (2007), "Blogging Practices: An Analytical Framework, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*," Vol. 12, Iss. 4, pp. 1409–1427.

Schouten, John W. (1991), "Selves in Transition: Symbolic Consumption in Personal Rites of Passage and Identity Reconstruction," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 412-425.

Shankar, Avi., Elliott, Richard., and Fitchett James A. (2009), "Identity, consumption and narratives of socialization," *Marketing Theory,* Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 75-94.

Siapera, Eugenia (2012), *Understanding New Media,* London: Sage Publications.

Silverman, David (2006), *Interpreting Qualitative Data*. 3rd Edition. London: Sage Publications.

Sima, Yangzi., and Pugsley, Peter C. (2010), "The Rise of A 'Me Culture' in Postsocialist China: Youth, Individualism and Identity Creation in the Blogosphere," *International Communication Gazette,* Vol. 72, No.3, pp. 287-306.

Sirgy, Joseph M. (1982), "Self-concept in Consumer Behavior: A Critical Review," *Journal of Consumer Research,* Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 287-300.

Slater, Don (1997), *Consumer culture and modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Solomon, Michael R. (1983), "The Role of Producst as Social Stimuli: A Symbolic Interactionism Perspective," *Journal of Consumer Research,* Vol 10, No. 3, pp. 319-329.

Somers, Margaret R. (1994), "The narrative constitution of identity: A relational and network approach," *Theory and Society,* Vol. 23, pp.605-649.

Spiggle, Susan (1994), "Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Data in Consumer Research," *Journal of Consumer Research,* Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 491-503.

Stern, Barbara B. (1995), "Consumer Myths: Frye's Taxonomy and the Structural Analysis of Consumption Text," *Journal of Consumer Research,* Vol. 22, No. 2, pp.165-185.

Stern, Susannah (2008), "Producing Sites, Exploring Identities: Youth Online Authorship", in David Buckingham (Ed.) *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*: Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 95-117.

Stritzke, Werner G. K., Nguyen, Anh., and Durkin, Kevin (2004), "Shyness and Computer-Mediated Communication: A Self-Presentational Theory Perspective," *Media Psychology*, Vol. 6, Iss. 1, pp. 1-22.

Thompson, Graig J., and Hirschman, Elisabeth C. (1995), "Understanding the Socialized Body: A Poststructuralist Analysis of Consumers' Self-Conceptions, Body Images, and Self-Care Practices," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 139-153.

Thompson, Graig J. (1997), "Interpreting Consumers: A Hermeneutical Framework for Deriving Marketing Insights from the Texts of Consumers" Consumption Stories." *Journal of Marketing Research,* No. 34, No. 4, pp. 438-455.

Thompson, Craig J. and, Haytko, Diana L. (1997), "Speaking of Fashion: Consumers' Uses of Fashion Discourses and the Appropriation of Countervailing Cultural Meanings," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 15-42.

Thompson, Graig J., and Troester, Maura (2002), "Consumer Value Systems in the Age of Postmodern Fragmentation: The Case of the Natural Health Microculture," *Journal of Consumer Research,* Vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 550-571.

Tian, Kelly and Belk, Russell W. (2005), "Extended Self and Possessions in the Workplace," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 297-310.

Trammell, Kaye. D., Tarkowski, Alek., Hofmokl, Justyna., and Sapp, Amanda M. (2006), "Rzeczpospolita blogów [Republic of Blog]: Examining Polish bloggers through content analysis," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 11, No.3, pp. 702-722.

Zukin, Sharon., and Maguire, Smith Jennifer (2004), "Consumers and Consumption," *Annual Review of Sociology,* Vol. 30 (2004), pp. 173-197.

Zwick, Detlev., and Dholakia Nikhilesh (2004), "Whose Identity Is It Anyway? Consumer Representation in the Age of Database Marketing," *Journal of Macromarketing,* Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 31-43.

Zwick, Detlev., Bonsu, Samuel K., and Darmody Aron. (2008), "Putting Consumers to Work: `Co-creation` and new marketing govern-mentality," *Journal of Consumer Culture,* Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 163-196.

Valtonen, Anu (2011), "We Dream as we Live – Consuming". in Russell W. Belk, Kent Grayson, Albert M. Muñiz, Hope Jensen Schau (Eds.) *Research in Consumer Behavior (Research in Consumer Behavior, Volume 13)*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp. 93-110.

Vargo, Stephen L., and Lusch Robert F. (2004), "Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing," *Journal of Marketing,* Vol. 68, No. 1, pp. 1-17.

Vrooman, Steven S. (2002), "The art of invective. Performing identity in cyberspace," *New Media & Society*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 51–70.

Wallendorf, Melanie and Arnould, Eric J. (1988), ""My favorite things": A Cross-Cultural Inquiry into Object Attachment, Possessiveness and Social Linkage," *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp. 531-547.

Wattanasuwan, Kritsadarat (2005), "The Self and Symbolic Consumption," *Journal of American Academy of Business,* Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 179-184.