

In Vlogs We Trust: Consumer Trust in Blog and Vlog Content

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# Abstract

In the digital age we live in, consumers seek out product information from their online peers via electronic word-of-mouth information platforms such as blogs and vlogs. Vlogs (i.e. video blogs) are typically hosted on online video-sharing sites such as YouTube. Some vloggers attract hundreds of thousands or even millions of followers, which has spawned a new approach to consumer persuasion, influencer marketing (Glucksman, 2017).

However, although consumers trust online user-generated product information as if it were similar to word-of-mouth from their offline networks of friends and family, this online information omits one key basis of trust in traditional word-of-mouth: personally knowing the information provider (Dichter, 1966). Thus, this thesis seeks to discover why it is consumers trust blog and vlog content despite the consumer not personally knowing the blogger or vlogger. Secondly, the thesis addresses the question whether there are any differences in the factors that influence trust in blog content versus trust in vlog content. Social Exchange Theory provides a theoretical basis for this research, whereby consumers and bloggers/vloggers enter into an exchange relationship. Content creators seek intrinsic satisfaction and extrinsic monetary or status benefits, whilst content audiences seek entertainment and information benefits as well as consumer information that reduces purchase risks. Thus, there is an exchange of knowledge and entertainment for viewership, which results in satisfaction, status and money for the content creator – a reciprocal exchange.

An exploratory sequential mixed methods design was employed. First, qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 blog readers and vlog viewers, as well as three industry personnel involved in content creation. Based on the qualitative interviews, a model was created of the key influences on consumer trust in blog and vlog content.

Next, an online survey was conducted with 300 USA blog readers and vlog viewers to test this model, using structural equation modelling. Exploratory factor analysis was run on the initial data set to ensure scale measures were reliable and valid, followed by a process of confirmatory factor analysis and structural modelling.

The study concludes that amongst the many characteristics of blogs and vlogs, what truly influences consumer trust in blog and vlog content is a parasocial relationship that

develops between the consumer and the content creator. This relationship is influenced most strongly by content authenticity, content attractiveness, personal content (that is, self-disclosure by the content creator), and the provision of product information. The research concludes that consumers trust blog and vlog content because they feel that they know the content creator; they have a relationship with the content creator, albeit a one-sided relationship.

This research contributes to the body of marketing knowledge by illustrating how and why consumers trust blog and vlog content; and by identifying that parasocial relationships exist between consumers and online content creators in video- and text-based channels. For managers, this research highlights the importance of matching target markets to content creators for successful marketing. As consumers form relationships with their favourite content creators, managers need to understand their target markets and the content creators most attractive to these markets.

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## **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Signature

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## **Ethics Approval**

Both studies in this PhD were approved by Auckland University of Technology's Ethics Committee (AUTEC). The ethics approval for Study One was gained on 28 April 2017 – ethics approval number 17/94 (see Appendix 1). Ethics approval for Study Two was gained on 25 July 2018 – ethics approval number 18/289 (see Appendix 6).

# **Chapter One: Introduction**

This chapter introduces and summarises this research. First, background and context of this research is discussed, supporting the need for this research. Theoretical foundations and the gaps in current knowledge are then highlighted, followed by the research questions and aims. Finally, the design of the study, contributions, and structure of the thesis is then summarised.

## **1.1 Background to the Research**

This section gives context and background to support the need for this research. It begins with looking at the importance of the internet in everyday life, followed by the importance of word-of-mouth, user-generated content, a generation gap in internet usage, and a power shift from marketers to consumers.

### **1.1.1 The Importance of the Internet**

The Internet reflects a technological breakthrough in the way we all communicate. It combines key features of prior communication tools, bridging gaps in geography and reaching large audiences, with its own innovative features such as anonymity and community (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). Consumers' everyday lives have become digitised – from books, television, music and shopping to petitions and fundraising. Access to the Internet continues to increase across the world, and this digital connectivity is important in bettering the lives of the world's population (International Telecommunications Union, 2017). By the end of 2018, it was estimated that 51.2% of the global population were connected to the Internet, up from 8% in 2001 (International Telecommunications Union, 2018). This growth in the Internet illustrates how channels of information are opening up to consumers. Notably, mobile broadband connections are increasing (International Telecommunications Union, 2017), allowing consumers to have access to the Internet's abundances of information anytime, anywhere. Connected consumers are informed consumers.

In turn, it is only natural that the advice and opinions that consumers previously gained from their offline networks have also become digitised. It is now very easy to find out

non-marketer information on a product or service through digital means. Prior to the advancement of the Internet, consumers were limited to offline information, including traditional word-of-mouth. If a consumer's networks had not used a specific product or service, then the consumer only had marketer-related information to rely upon. The Internet, and the recent rapid increase in digital devices and digital platforms, has created connected consumers (Nielsen, 2014) who are connected to brands and connected to each other. Consumers today have more access to and engagement with brands and content than they have ever had in the past (Nielsen, 2014). This consumer use of the Internet and digital devices has changed the media scene as we once knew it (Nielsen, 2014), even changing the way we understand and consume traditional media; newspapers and television are available online to consumers anytime, anywhere rather than being constricted to the media's timetable. Today's Internet accessibility and advances in mobile and digital technology are changing the way consumers interact. For example, consumers are able to search for and find consumer information whenever they need, and it is apparent that these changes in the way consumers live with technology will only continue in the future (Nielsen, 2018a).

Consumers are connected now more than they have ever been. There are 4 billion people who are connected to the Internet (Nielsen, 2018a). Of these, the vast majority connect to the Internet via their mobile devices (Nielsen, 2018a). These digital devices are of importance to marketers, considering most consumers own more than one device through which they can connect to the Internet and the amount of time people consume content on these devices is on average 60 hours a week (Nielsen, 2014). Consumers are spending a significant portion of their lives in the digital realm on a variety of online activities. It is apparent that consumers today can connect with brands and other consumers anytime, anywhere, with the use of digital devices. Thus, it is imperative that research into the online arena is expanded to understand the consumers of today.

### **1.1.2 The Importance of Word-of-Mouth**

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) is important to consumer decision making as recommendations from peers are valued by consumers. This carries over to our digital lives where WOM has become sought after on the Internet. WOM is defined in this section, followed by a discussion of WOM's place in the online environment.

### ***1.1.2.1 Word-of-Mouth Definition***

Traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) is woven strongly into consumers' everyday lives. Consumers ask advice from their friends and family on what to buy or where to go. Likewise, consumers often like to share their experiences of what they have bought or where they have been to. WOM is a form of positive or negative, non-marketer generated two-way communication about a product, service or company, and it is one of the most trusted and influential sources of consumer information (Day, 1971; Dichter, 1966; Engel, Blackwell, & Kegerreis, 1969; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Richins, 1983).

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) transfers this to an online environment. Often posted on an online review website, social network, blog or vlog (Okazaki, 2009), eWOM can be either marketer-generated, business-created (including business run blogs and viral marketing) or consumer-created without marketer influence (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Kozinets, Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Park & Lee, 2009; Vilpponen, Winter, & Sunqvist, 2006). This study views eWOM as an extension of traditional WOM and focusses solely on consumer-generated eWOM.

### ***1.1.2.2 Word-of-Mouth and the Internet***

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is viewed as the most effective but at times largely misunderstood marketing concept (Misner, 1994). WOM is informal positive or negative communication about product and service experiences (Tax, Chandrashekar, & Christiansen, 1993). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) takes this communication to an electronic or digital platform, where the WOM message not only originates from a consumer but is also forwarded by consumers to one another (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Because of today's highly connected consumers and the relative anonymity of the Internet, it is understandable that marketers may fear WOM.

Non-marketer sources of information are key to traditional WOM. Consumers trust WOM as being unbiased advice from someone like themselves who is not gaining anything material from giving their feedback (Dichter, 1966). Consumers do not know the people who are creating the information content online. To counter this, content creator's attempt to make themselves appear real and authentic. This may enable the reader or viewer to relate to the source, just as they would offline in traditional WOM. Thus, it may be that consumers are filling the gaps in their WOM networks in the

traditional sense with online content creators (or eWOM creators) when they are able to estimate the human qualities of the content creator (characteristics about the content creator in which they can identify them as real consumers). In other words, content creators become real when they portray themselves as real.

Content creators, those who actively create original content and publish it to an audience (Jaret, 2012), in the case of this research, an online audience, of eWOM may be viewed as a suitable substitute for traditional WOM when traditional WOM is not available. This is because content creators may be viewed as more like a real consumer than other information sources such as advertising messages or celebrity endorsements. Recommendations from fellow consumers are valued more by consumers than celebrity endorsements, with a quarter of Americans stating they would not rely on any celebrities at all for recommendations (Baer & Lemin, 2018). eWOM on social media is most important when consumers are looking for information on electronics and home improvement products, whereas offline WOM is more important for information on entertainment, children's products and restaurant recommendations (Baer & Lemin, 2018). Thus, WOM and eWOM are trusted in different circumstances but valued highly by consumers, and thus play an important role in marketing.

Unlike traditional WOM, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can lead to the original message and source going viral and being passed on continuously to numerous other consumers. Virality is a form of sharing and social media, including Facebook and YouTube, encourages the sharing of content, for example photos and life updates. Entertaining and enjoyable content encourages the audience to share it with their own networks (Phelps, Lewis, Mobilio, Perry, & Raman, 2004). This has seen online reviews, blog and vlog posts become popular and often a source of not only sought-after information, but of entertainment and engagement, such as has been found with the sharing of pass-along emails (Phelps et al., 2004).

What makes WOM so important to consumers is that people trust people (Dichter, 1966). People value WOM from their friends and family more than they value advertising. Consumers assume that the advice they are getting from their friends, family and social networks is not given based on any monetary incentive (Dichter, 1966); that is, the advice consumers receive from those close to them comes with no intervention from marketers. In this sense, WOM is pure. True WOM is created by people with genuine motivations to help others searching for advice or information; it

has no interference by businesses. With eWOM platforms becoming a popular source of information, it is important that we research them to further our understanding.

### **1.1.3 User-Generated Content**

A common source of WOM in the online environment is user-generated content. This is content created by non-business entities such as online reviews, or consumer blog and vlog channels. Blogs and vlogs are defined in this section, followed by a discussion of user-generated content and content creation in the online environment.

#### ***1.1.3.1 Blog Definition***

A blog, a truncation of the term weblog, is a personal online website that is updated regularly, usually run by one person or a small group of people and is written in a more informal or conversational style (Oxford University Press, 2017). A blog is a collection of the writer's thoughts, opinions and experiences and can take the form of a diary/journal or a collection of reviews of products or services (Cambridge University Press, 2017). Blogs are often used now as personal blogs reflecting an online journal (Chau & Xu, 2012; Gill, Nowson, & Oberlander, 2009; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004). Blogs tend to be largely text-based but often also include digital images and links to websites or other blogs. Although there are many personal blogs in existence, few attract many readers; only a few amongst the many in existence have become popular enough to attract significant advertising sponsorship. In this sense, some bloggers have become famous in their own rights – a celebrity of sorts – both in the online and offline worlds.

There are many different types of blogs which are categorised by who writes the content, the main two being consumer or organisation blogs that are consumer owned and written, and business owned and written, respectively. This research focusses only on consumer blogs; content created by consumers for other consumers. Consumer blogs provide a supposedly unbiased perspective when discussing products and services, in the sense that they are not influenced by marketers, and can be viewed as a form of eWOM. However, there are times where consumer blog posts are sponsored by companies who send products free of charge for bloggers to review or simply pay for positive reviews to be given (Breazeale, 2009; Werde, 2003). This consumer-generated

advertising can be quite provocative in that companies may insist on only positive feedback, thus potentially turning consumer-generated eWOM into marketer-generated content. Sponsored posts, and even non-sponsored posts, by bloggers about certain products or services can act as a form of “free” advertising (Y. Chen & Xie, 2008) for companies, assuming it is positive – a form of advertising not seen as marketing in its traditional form and, as such, more trusted by other consumers (Dichter, 1966).

Consumer blogs cover a range of topics and can be written as simply a daily diary or be a more analytical and discussion-based review of products, services and companies. Some of the most popular blogging topics include fashion, beauty, travel, food and daily life. There are numerous blogging platforms available on the Internet, both paid and free services, with some of the most popular currently being Blogger and WordPress. WordPress alone sees over 409 million people view more than 23.8 billion pages each month (WordPress, n.d.).

### ***1.1.3.2 Vlog Definition***

Vlogs, a truncation of online video weblogs, are a form of blog; just as eWOM is an extension of WOM, vlogs are an extension of blogs. Where blogs are text-based, vlogs are video-based. Vlogs can cover a range of topics, just like blogs, most often self-filmed by the information source themselves, rather than a film crew like traditional video media. Consumer vlogs often cover product reviews via usage videos, tutorials and un-boxing videos, where the vlogger opens a product on camera to convey an initial impression as well as daily ‘follow around’ vlogs. Both are important to marketers as they provide consumer information that any consumer can release to the public without interference from companies. Just as with blogs, vlogs can be sponsored by companies to review products; whether this is disclosed or not is up to the vlogger. Thus, vlogging is not blogging (Tolson, 2010), just as television is not the same as a newspaper; rather, it is an extension or alternative means of content sharing utilising a different media platform to share the same information.

The most popular vlogging platform is YouTube. YouTube itself has its own unique communication practices surrounding communicative entitlements: presentation, interactivity and expertise (Tolson, 2010). These ideas are all discussed in the later sections of this literature review. They contribute to making YouTube somewhat ‘post-television’ with no hierarchy of discourse and a linkage of everyday people with

celebrities in a sole network (Tolson, 2010). YouTube has the largest audience base with over a billion users. Their mobile users alone see more 18-49 year olds than any cable network in the United States (US) (YouTube, n.d.). Digital video is on the rise, resulting in the increased popularity of vloggers. In 2015, US adults spent over an hour every day using digital video, compared to only 21 minutes every day in 2011. By contrast, television viewing has declined (eMarketer, 2015). Digital video is taking the place of television, in the same way that other aspects of our lives are becoming digitised. Likewise, online “celebrities” are becoming traditional celebrities, such as Zoe Sugg (*Zoella*), a popular blogger and vlogger, and Tyler Oakley, a popular vlogger. Popular vloggers’ use of digital video to spread their thoughts and opinions on any topic, reflective of eWOM, can allow viewers to see them (physically) as a person – an extension of a written blog’s capability. That and the increase in popularity of digital video today may explain the increase in the popularity of vlogging.

Blogging and vlogging’s popularity today can be seen as coinciding with the increase in access to the Internet – faster, more affordable, unlimited Internet. Likewise, the younger generations tend to be the majority users of blog and vlog content (Euromonitor International, 2016). This is also not surprising considering the use of these technologies is something that these generations have grown up with (Euromonitor International, 2016). Their use is not out of the ordinary for them and they have not had to change their ways as the older generations have needed to and oftentimes struggled with. With technology only increasing in capabilities and access, it is important this area of marketing research is thoroughly understood in order to understand the consumers of today.

### ***1.1.3.3 Content Creation and User-Generated Content***

Consumer blogs and vlogs oftentimes do not just analyse products or services. They incorporate some aspect of the writer or presenter’s life (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017), be that giving personal details on how the product or service is used or why it was bought, or presenting posts of a more personal nature. Sharing information on and giving insight into their lives could make these content creators seem less like marketers to their audience and more as real people like themselves, thereby allowing their audiences to connect with them on a more personal level. By giving insight into their own lives beyond just a product or service review, bloggers and vloggers seem “real”.

These pseudo-relationships could be of great importance in the building of trust in content creators and therefore in their product and service recommendations as trust is associated with WOM information (Dichter, 1966), and this personal touch to information may turn simple online information into WOM information. The Internet is a fruitful place for forming relationships based on shared values, beliefs and interests (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). It is reasonable to assume that relationships with content creators who give insight into their authentic selves can be created based on the feeling of shared values.

User-generated content, such as that presented in consumer blogs and vlogs, provides an insight into the content creators' lives beyond merely consumer information. This is most evident in vlogs, whereby vloggers become popular by documenting their daily lives at the same time as providing entertaining content, such as in the daily, diary-style, vlogs of Jake Paul, Zoella and Shane Dawson. These three popular 'YouTubers' create original vlog content that includes a mix of scripted entertainment and daily follow-me-around vlogs. This is reminiscent of reality television on a traditional media platform which, like blog and vlog content, often weaves consumer information and brands into entertaining content. People are curious about other people's lives. Reality television is often described as voyeurism; people watch reality television for voyeuristic reasons (Nabi, Biely, Morgan, & Stitt, 2003). This voyeurism is not scandalous or sexual in nature; rather, it reflects a curiosity about the way other people live and interact with one another (Nabi et al., 2003). Vlogs, and to a certain extent blogs in their written format, are somewhat similar to reality television in that they involve filmed content of a person's life and interpersonal interactions portrayed as real life. Regular viewers of this reality television content regard it as entertaining (Nabi et al., 2003). However, content creators of vlogs who are not associated with a brand or business may be perceived as producing content that is even more real than its traditional media counterpart, reality television. Regular viewers of this online reality content may be curious about how someone else lives as well as seeking entertainment, even when consumer information is woven in.

Social influence is not a new phenomenon; however, the means by which the influence takes place, via online platforms such as blogs and vlogs, is new. Some people in society such as opinion leaders have the ability to dispense information better than others (Katz, 1957). These influencers are often similar to those they influence, personifying certain values that both hold and display competence (Katz, 1957).

Influencers have been apparent throughout history, from political and religious leaders to media celebrities, and it is logical that they appear in the online environment as well. Because the Internet has the ability to rapidly disperse information to a mass audience, and this ability is increasing with the proliferation of digital devices and Internet accessibility (International Telecommunications Union, 2017; Nielsen, 2014), these influencers now hold more importance than they have in the past.

#### **1.1.4 A Generation Gap in the Usage of the Internet and eWOM**

WOM is of vital importance to consumers today. It is the preferred information source for consumers when they are looking to purchase (Baer & Lemin, 2018). However, there is a generational difference between the use of WOM and eWOM in relation to the digital savvy younger generations, those raised in this digital world, and those who have had to adapt to the digital takeover in the later stages of their lives. Even in terms of simple news consumption, millennials digitally consume news more than those older than them (Nielsen, 2018b). Millennials have spent a greater portion of their lives in the online environment, and as such it is apparent that life on the Internet is more natural for them than for those who have had to adapt to the online world by changing their norms.

Most Americans become more interested in buying a product or service after a recommendation from friends or family (Baer & Lemin, 2018). This reliance on WOM is also heavily skewed towards the younger, more digitally reliant generations. Millennials are the most likely to engage in WOM behaviour; 77% of Millennials make at least one recommendation per month to their own networks (Baer & Lemin, 2018). In comparison, this figure reduces to 55% of Americans overall (Baer & Lemin, 2018). Millennials and Generation Z are also vastly more likely than Generation X and Baby Boomers to choose a restaurant via social media and online review recommendations (Baer & Lemin, 2018).

Thus, the Internet, although used by all age groups, is heavily entwined in the lives of younger citizens. Those under the age of 24 are the most connected age group in the world, with 71% of this age group having access to the Internet in comparison to 48% of the world's population (Unicef, 2017) and they are leading Internet adoption worldwide (International Telecommunications Union, 2017). This heavy use of digital technology, especially by younger generations, illustrates a connected (Nielsen, 2014) and informed consumer base, with consumers now having the power to be informed by

fellow citizens worldwide before making consumption decisions. The digital population will only increase as time goes on and as humans are born into the digitally connected world. Thus it is important to continue research into this area in order to understand both the consumers of today and the consumers of the future.

### **1.1.5 A Shift in Power**

The importance of other consumers in the information search stage of the consumer decision making process has been apparent for a long time; we can see this from the continual popularity of WOM recommendations (Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Nielsen, 2015; Restaurant Association of New Zealand, n.d.). It is only recently that companies and marketers themselves have acknowledged this importance and the shift of power towards the consumer. The power now lies in the hands of the consumer; their feedback on a product, service or company can spread like wildfire via the Internet and make or break a business (Labrecque, von Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013).

In the present day, should the consumer's offline networks not have advice on products and services, at the click of a button, consumers can find out "real" opinions from supposedly real people to fill the void of their offline social network. Compared to traditional WOM, eWOM has allowed for even greater dispersion of opinions and information by being directed at multiple people, being anonymous and being accessible (Jeong & Jang, 2011). However, despite the ease in accessibility and reach of eWOM, anonymity can be an issue (Jeong & Jang, 2011). The Internet involves a somewhat blind trust as consumers do not know the people on the other side of the information; they can only assume they are genuine consumers. Of course, this is not always the case. Consumers themselves must wade through the information and decide for themselves what to trust – whether the information is genuine, the source is real and whether this information is helpful.

The growth of the Internet has allowed consumers to access an abundance of product and service information, both by brands and most notably by other consumers, that formerly was not accessible (Labrecque et al., 2013). Consumer power in the online environment is based on eWOM and reflects information-based power. Information-based power is based on the creation and consumption of content, the accessibility of product information online and the rapid diffusion of this information (Labrecque et al., 2013). Thus, everyday consumers have the ability to create user-generated content, thus

becoming content creators (Labrecque et al., 2013). The Internet allows everyday people to create content, which is empowering, a form of self-expression, and allows people's opinion to become influential, especially in regard to consumer information (Labrecque et al., 2013).

Consumers' ability to access information online, for example, through product reviews, allows these consumers to make better, more informed purchase decisions, which reduces the information inequality between consumers and marketers (Labrecque et al., 2013). Thus, today's digitally savvy consumers are better educated decision makers, who are different in their shopping behaviours than their offline counterparts. This provides marketers with a greater challenge in creating consumer awareness, as the channels by which to reach consumers have increased (Labrecque et al., 2013). There has been a fundamental change in consumer-brand relationships and in marketing, a favouring of consumers (Kucuk & Krishnamurthy, 2007). Consumers have greater control over their media consumption (Kucuk & Krishnamurthy, 2007), accessing online media, such as paid online streaming services and user-generated channels like YouTube as a consumption choice, rather than being solely limited to traditional mass media. Brand websites and traditional media are now in competition with user-generated content such as blogs and vlogs. Thus, consumer information is no longer solely influenced by businesses who have relied on traditional media and physical retail stores (Kucuk & Krishnamurthy, 2007). This has seen a power shift from marketers to consumers, who now have a greater ability to decide where and when marketers can reach them and who they choose to gain product information from.

## **1.2 Theoretical Foundations and Gap(s) in the Knowledge**

There is a clear gap in knowledge within the marketing field concerning the recent rise in trust in bloggers, and more especially, vloggers (mostly 'YouTubers'), as well as the key characteristics differentiating of blog and vlog content, beyond the simple format. To understand this research area, key theories and empirical insights on trust, online content, content creators and online content audiences were sought. Social Exchange Theory forms the theoretical base for the research.

As the trust literature spans numerous disciplines, boundaries were set to focus the research. Trust theories and constructs centred on the areas of consumer trust and online trust were chosen. Dispositional, system/institutional and interpersonal trust were the

key trust types focussed on in this research due to their already held association with consumer trust (Tan & Sutherland, 2004). Trust was viewed as a dynamic, multidimensional construct throughout this research (Wingreen & Baglione, 2005). In accordance with this, key constructs that influence a person's trust were characterised by the researcher as trust level influencers. These key trust theories and constructs were comprised of the following: proximity, group and threshold (Frederiksen, 2012); cognitive and affective influences (Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006; Lewis & Weigert, 1985); conditional and unconditional trust (Jones & George, 1998); calculus-, knowledge- and identification-based trust (Lewicki et al., 2006; D. Shapiro, Sheppard, & Cheraskin, 1992); psychological and sociological bases to trust (Lewis & Weigert, 1985); and normative and informational influences (Chu & Kim, 2011). The differing attributes of these constructs were characterised in this research as being either intrinsic or extrinsic trust influencers. Intrinsic trust influencers are those attributes of each construct or theory that create a closer-held trust; an unconditional, close trusting relationship. Extrinsic trust illustrates the attributes of each construct or theory which create a more general trust; a trusting relationship that has conditions and is not held quite so close or dear, but still is useful.

Theories and concepts used to understand blog and vlog content were characterised as either content-related or visual-related concepts. Social Exchange Theory provides a theoretical basis for this research, whereby consumers and bloggers/vloggers enter into an exchange relationship. Content creators gain viewership which can translate into monetary and status benefits, as well as internal satisfaction in helping others. Content viewers receive the information and entertainment they were seeking to meet their needs, with consumer information potentially reducing risk in making purchase decisions.

Content-related concepts used in this research were the perceived usefulness of information and the concept of sharing. Interactivity, engagement and entertainment were also considered. The design constructs and theories this research was based on were website quality, social cue design, structural design, graphic design and perceived privacy and security. Together, these concepts and theories formed the basis of the blog and vlog content aspect of this research.

The theories and concepts used to understand the blogger or vlogger (the content creator) cover a range of characteristics. Reflecting Source Credibility Theory,

reputation and credibility formed the basis for understanding content creator trust. The concept of self-disclosure provided important background to trust in blog and vlog content, including personal identification and consumer power, illustrating the characteristic of bloggers and vloggers to identify themselves as a real people. Source re-embodiment, which has been related to blogs in the past (Belk, 2016), and the idea of the extended self was also used as a basis for understanding the content creator. As bloggers and vloggers are often viewed as social influencers, the concept of opinion leaders and market mavens formed a strong base for understanding consumer trust in these bloggers and vloggers. Content creators' knowledge and expertise were also considered when developing the theoretical base for understanding content creators, again reflecting Source Credibility Theory (Erdogan, 1999). As many content creators reach a pseudo-celebrity status of notoriety, research into celebrities in terms of endorsements, accessibility and identifiability was undertaken. The concept of authenticity was an important aspect of this research, incorporating the ideas of being genuine, unique, honest, real – being true to the self (van Leeuwen, 2001). Authenticity also reflected Self-Determination Theory and Attribution Theory. The theory of parasocial interactions or relationships (Auer, 1992) provided a base for this research, explaining the connection felt between an audience and a blogger or vlogger. This concept incorporated aspects of the content, the creator and the audience. Finally, the concept of community was important to understand the nature of blog and vlog content, surrounding the behaviours of the content creator and the audience.

Lastly, the theories and concepts used to understand the blog reader or vlog viewer incorporated some of the concepts discussed prior (such as parasocial interactions) in order to identify the intrinsic characteristics of the audience. The concepts of homophily and similarity provided the basis for understanding connection and attraction (Feder & Savastano, 2006; Rogers, 1995) to a content creator. Likewise, the audience's prior experience with the online environment including blog and vlog content was examined to determine their trust in and future use of this content. The concept of social ties provided a theoretical basis to connections with a content creator, especially in regard to information flow. The extended self, such as with parasociability, was also used as a basis for understanding the audience's own role in their trust in blog and vlog content, and provided the insight that possessions can be digital, and collaboration can occur in constructing the self (Belk, 2016). Finally, concepts surrounding user characteristics were examined in order to understand the blog reader and vlog viewer, including their

tendency to trust especially online, and the theory of third places; an accessible place beyond home and work (Belk, 2013). Thus, this research was grounded in numerous concepts and theories spanning both the offline and online worlds, including trust, content, creator and audience.

### **1.3 Research Question / Research Aims**

The aim of this research is to explore the factors influencing consumers' trust in blog and vlog content. Two key Research Questions are addressed:

1. Why do consumers trust blog and vlog content?
2. Are there differences in the factors that influence trust in blog content versus trust in vlog content?

### **1.4 Design of the Study**

This research used an exploratory sequential mixed methods, qualitative-quantitative research approach (Creswell, 2014). A postpositivist paradigm was adopted for this research. Exploratory mixed methods were used due to the Research Questions being broad and surrounding a new topic requiring general exploration. Study One was an exploratory, qualitative investigation using in-depth interviews with 13 blog readers, vlog viewers and industry personnel who provided differing aspects of consumer-based created content related to products and services. These industry members were a blogger, a talent manager, and a marketing manager who utilises key opinion leaders. This first study aimed to gather a general understanding as to why consumers trust blog and vlog content. The findings of this study were used to build a model of blog and vlog trust that was tested in Study Two to determine which concepts influence trust in blog and vlog content. Study Two involved a quantitative study with data gathered via a structured questionnaire distributed to an online survey panel of 300 respondents in the United States of America. The model was tested using scale measures of the most important model constructs (e.g., predispositions to trust, content characteristics, and creator characteristics), and structural equation modelling aimed at verifying which characteristics of blog and vlog content lead to consumer trust.

## **1.5 Contributions of the Thesis**

This research successfully addressed the two Research Questions and aimed to fill the gaps in marketing literature: an in-depth look into why consumers trust blog and vlog content and any differences between two content formats in regard to consumer trust. There is little knowledge currently looking into the intricacies of consumer trust in blog and vlog content or in content creators; what there is reflects a shallow look at surface of this area. This research looks at consumer trust in blog and vlog content at a deeper level, aiming to understand why consumers trust what appears to be seemingly strangers with advice on where to spend their money. The answer to Research Question One, why consumers trust blog and vlog content, is that the content creator is the key reason why people trust blog and vlog content. A pseudo-relationship is important to building this trust in the content creator, and therefore their content, and this relationship, a parasocial relationship as it is one-sided and with a media persona, is most influenced by the authenticity of the content, the attractiveness of the content, consumer information provided by the content creator and personal content; self-disclosure of the content creator. This trust in blog and vlog content is also influenced by the consumer's system, or institutional, trust in general blog and vlog content. The importance of a relationship in trust formation is reflective of the trust literature which emphasises that closer relationships coincide with more trust (e.g., Frederikson, 2012).

Research Question Two, differences in the factors that influence trust in blog content versus trust in vlog content, was also addressed in this research. The key differences between blog and vlog content are that vlogs are viewed as containing more personal and attractive content and as more entertaining. Blogs were viewed as being more informational, containing more consumer information, and in being more parasocial in their interactions. Most parasocial research focusses on visual, filmed media so the fact that blogs were also inductive of parasocial interactions is an important finding for the body of the marketing literature. Thus, this thesis contributes to the body of marketing knowledge, especially in new areas of online trust and parasocial relationships.

This thesis also offers key managerial contributions. As marketers increasingly recognise the importance of the Internet in consumers' lives, they require further understanding of how consumers gather product and service information and why they are prepared to trust WOM online. WOM is trusted by consumers in the traditional sense because they know the people they are receiving the information from. eWOM reflects a key characteristic of the Internet, anonymity, which negates a key trusting

component of WOM. However, consumers are prepared to trust online opinions every day, and eWOM is only growing in importance especially with the younger generations' reliance on it. This research provides valuable information to marketers alike as to why consumers trust blog and vlog content (eWOM) and provides insight into how and when marketers can send their messages through these channels.

There are a number of limitations in this research. Firstly, although theoretical saturation was quickly reached in Study One, the willing interview pool was limited to New Zealand. Many interviewees were students and content creators themselves. However, as the university student population is made of Millennials and Generation Z, it represents the key audience of online content; therefore, this accessible interview pool was reflective of the average blog and vlog user. Thus, students, and other blog and vlog users under the age of 30 made up many of the interviewees. A number of the interviewees who were blog readers or vlog viewers also mentioned that they themselves had created a blog or vlog at some stage, although their efforts were not as successful or as popular as other content creators. Likewise, the blogger, talent manager and marketing manager also shared that they were consumers of created content. Thus, the interview pool gave insight into blog and vlog content as many interviewees were not simply content consumers; they were, or had been, content creators.

Opportunities for future research in the areas covered in this thesis are considerable as this is a relatively new research area. For example, future researchers may wish to investigate the intricacies of the relationships between an audience and their favourite content creators. Currently, parasocial relationships fit the descriptions of respondents best; however, there is scope for further research into this relationship or a redefinition of parasocial interactions. Also, because this research identified key differences between blog and vlog content, and these differences could be investigated separately in further research.

## **1.6 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis follows a logical structure, telling the story of this research. Chapter 2 provides a thorough literature review of the relevant literature on trust and blog and vlog content. This includes WOM, eWOM, Internet communications, parasocial relationships, online content and design, information sources and the audience. Chapter 2 also includes the Research Questions and aims. Chapter 3 presents the research design

of the overall research and Study One, covering the details and justification for the use of a mixed-methods research design and a qualitative study. Chapter 4 discusses in depth the findings of Study One's qualitative in-depth interviews. Next, Chapter 5 presents the justification and design of Study Two – the quantitative survey. Chapter 6 discusses the findings of Study Two, the quantitative research, including structural equation modelling. Concluding the thesis, Chapter 7 provides a summary of the entire thesis, along with answering the Research Questions and discussing the key findings and the contributions of the research to the body of knowledge.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The literature review focusses on two key areas of literature that form the basis of this research: trust and blog/vlog (including electronic word-of-mouth) literature. The literature review starts with definitions to set boundaries for this entire research study as to what is considered to be word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth, social influencers and content creators as well as content style. This section is followed by an in-depth look into the trust-related literature surrounding electronic word-of-mouth. It defines trust in this context, determining key dependencies influencing trust and key trust level influencers. The literature relating to digital content creation, specifically blog and vlog content, is then discussed. This is separated into three key areas: the blog or vlog, the content creator (the blogger or vlogger) and the reader or viewer.

### **2.1 Electronic Word-of-Mouth**

In order to understand blog and vlog content, word-of-mouth must be understood in an online environment. In looking into word-of-mouth, social influencers and content creators, and their content, can be better understood.

#### **2.1.1 Electronic Word-of-Mouth as an Extension of Word-of-Mouth**

As with the digitisation of consumers' offline lives, eWOM is a natural progression of traditional WOM, just as eBooks, online streaming of television, movies and online newspapers have been a natural progression of their offline counterparts. eWOM increases the reach and dispersion of information using electronic devices and the Internet.

eWOM communication, on platforms such as blogs and vlogs, is seen by marketers as being an important extension of traditional WOM (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Panteli, 2009). Like WOM, it is viewed as a channel of interpersonal influence (Grewal, Cline, & Davies, 2003); however with eWOM, this influence uses the likes of blogs and online reviews as a vehicle to spread information (Okazaki, 2009). Like WOM, eWOM information is sought near or during the purchase decision (Barton, 2006) and it usually involves discussions of effectiveness, issues encountered, experience using a product or service and price (Coovert & Burke, 2009).

Both eWOM and WOM are regarded as credible and trusted sources of information (Forbes, 2016; M. Lee & Youn, 2009).

Traditional WOM is a trusted and important source of information for consumers in the information search stage (Dichter, 1966). Interaction (importantly, two-way communication) is key to WOM communication and contributes to making it a highly influential source of consumer information (Day, 1971; Engel et al., 1969; Richins, 1983). WOM has two forms: pre- and post-decision (Dichter, 1966). This study acknowledges that the pre-decision stage relates to those who are searching for WOM (and eWOM), while the post-decision stage reflects the source of WOM (and eWOM), which provides feedback and eliminates dissonance from the purchase situation.

The ability of blogs and vlogs to be a two-way form of communication lies in their ability to comment and reply. Readers and viewers are able to comment on the posts they see, and the source of the information is, in turn, able to reply to these messages. Thus, blogs and vlogs are not a static information source like a typical website is. Rather, they allow conversation to occur directly between the source of the information and the receiver – something unique to eWOM platforms that distinguishes them from other online sources of information.

Unlike traditional WOM, eWOM uses electronic devices to communicate (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Hung & Yiyan Li, 2007). Although this is the most obvious difference, it goes beyond this. eWOM extends WOM by raising the number of channels of communication which allows the information to reach more recipients, as well as saving time and cost of research for consumers (Hung & Yiyan Li, 2007). Because of the increase access to this information and because eWOM is permanent (written or logged – unlike traditional WOM which is generally spoken), consumers worldwide have access to the information and are able to communicate with ease and without delay (Gelb & Sundaram, 2002). eWOM extends traditional WOM because of its longevity and broader reach of influence than can be obtained using face-to-face communication as in traditional WOM (Breazeale, 2009; Graham & Havlena, 2007; Lyons & Henderson, 2005).

Consumer (or user) generated eWOM is found in virtual communities, discussion boards, online reviews and blogs (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Cheong & Morrison, 2008; U. M. Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004; Zhu & Zhang, 2010). These sources of consumer information have been the focus of numerous studies in the past including the

types of information presented (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Zhu & Zhang, 2010); purchase intention and potential sales (P. Y. Chen, Wu, & Yoon, 2004; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Dellarocas, Zhang, & Awad, 2007; Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008); credibility of the information presented (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010; C. M. K. Cheung & Thadani, 2012); and motivations for use of eWOM (Bailey, 2005). Although eWOM has been the focus of past studies, there is little research in these areas focussed solely on blogs and/or vlogs.

Consumer generated eWOM is more effective than its marketer generated counterpart (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). Despite this, consumer generated eWOM allows the author to be anonymous (M. Y. Cheung, Luo, Sia, & Chen, 2009; Schindler & Bickart, 2005). Consumers assume that those posting reviews or blog posts about products or services are genuine consumers rather than marketers and do not gain any compensation for posting their opinions (Breazeale, 2009; Werde, 2003). Of course, consumers are aware that anonymous online commentators are not always providing pure or untouched forms of communication; such forms of communication can easily be infiltrated by advertisers and Internet trolls, turning consumer generated content into marketer-generated content without the reader being aware of it. This is something less likely to happen in traditional WOM where the source of information is usually someone known in the recipient's social network. Having a higher information volume is an indication of trust; it acts as a trusting cue as a multitude of postings (e.g. of online reviews) is more difficult to fake (Flanagin & Metzger, 2013), a situation that is less likely to inspire the consumer and something that is less likely to occur in traditional WOM, or more importantly, as quickly.

The importance of WOM and eWOM to consumers makes advertising in this space inevitable. Much research has been done on advertising in the online environment. In particular, consumer purchase intentions can be influenced by web advertising visual cues through advertising and brand attitudes; however, this is not a direct effect of purchase intention (Shaouf, Lü, & Li, 2016). An eWOM platform, purchase intention and brand awareness can also be influenced by advertisements on YouTube specifically (Dehghani, Niaki, Ramezani, & Sali, 2016). Television advertising can also have an influential effect on the online environment; the brand being advertised and the television program within which the advertisement is aired can impact the volume of eWOM in the online environment (Fossen & Schweidel, 2016). Social influencers like bloggers and vloggers are able to reinforce brand strategy in the online environment due

to their ability to provide information that can lessen the risk perceived by readers or viewers (Chatterjee, 2011). Thus, in a world where information on a product or service can be found easily but also be overwhelming, social influencers like bloggers and vloggers are an important asset not only for consumers but for brands as well.

With this in mind, blogs and vlogs and the power they now hold are now of upmost importance to marketers and advertisers alike. eWOM platforms such as blogs and vlogs are a simple and effective way for consumers to give feedback on, as well as showcase or advertise, products, services and companies. More importantly, they are platforms that marketers and advertisers cannot blatantly interfere with. eWOM extends on the limits of traditional WOM and considers the increasingly digitised world by incorporating the ease of communication and importance that electronic devices and the Internet bring to our lives.

### **2.1.2 Social Influencers and Content Creators**

This research interchangeably uses the terms ‘content creator’, ‘blogger’ and ‘vlogger’, the latter two being more specific type of content creators. The term ‘social influencer’ is used in this context to discuss a content creator with a large following who has the ability to influence a large number of people. As such, the term ‘content creator’ is used more frequently in this research as the focus is not just on popular content creators (or those with large followings) but content creators in general. Bloggers and vloggers, those who contribute eWOM, are content creators who deliver eWOM content via a blog or vlog platform. This is content not only for brands and recommendations, but content that allows the content creators to express themselves (Forbes, 2016). Social influencers can be seen as content creators who have acquired a large number of followers to support them; they stand apart from the average content creator because of their larger following which has the potential to gain a larger reach (De Veirman et al., 2017). However, it should also be noted that the number of followers does not always have positive effects; a very large number of followers could see the influencer’s likeability as negatively impacted if they themselves only follow a small number of accounts (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Social influencers share much about their daily lives, including personal information, everyday experiences and opinions on a range of topics (De Veirman et al., 2017). In the case of bloggers and vloggers in particular, sharing such insights into one’s daily life

may allow their followers to see themselves reflected. Their popularity grows through engaging on social networking sites and online media and creating content which allows insight into their personal lives (Forbes, 2016). In this sense, and especially for the video format of vlogs and other eWOM videos, YouTube (one of the biggest vlogging platforms) represents a world that is somewhat 'post television' (Tolson, 2010). YouTube, whereby anyone can upload video content (and similarly on blogging platforms where anyone can upload written or image-based content), everyday people as well as celebrities alike are woven into a singular network; all can upload their own content. In this world, there is no hierarchy of discourse, although when content goes 'viral', whereby content spreads rapidly and widely between people via the Internet (Oxford University Press, 2018), it can bring about hierarchy where there was none before (Tolson, 2010).

Social influencers epitomise third-party advocates who have influence on their audience's attitudes (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011) and therefore can be seen as leaders in the eWOM environment. Top social influencers are often paid for the content they produce about brands, similar to advertorials (Forbes, 2016). The most appealing social influencer characteristics are that they are vocal and composed, clever, ambitious and productive (Freberg et al., 2011). It is also important that they emit trustworthiness (Forbes, 2016).

### **2.1.3 Social Exchange Theory**

This research stems from Social Exchange Theory. Social Exchange Theory can explain the influence content creators can have on their audience. This theory suggests that *two parties each learn to trust that the other party will reciprocate the exchange of resources in the future* (Cook, 2005) and therefore engage in an exchange that both rewards and supports one another (J. J. Li, 2008). These rewards are not just monetary; they are often emotional at their core and include approval from social peers or pride (Lawler, 2001).

In social exchange, what is exchanged is not restricted to physical goods or money; rather, information, human interaction and approval can also be exchanged (Chan & Li, 2010), including information given out by social influencers via blogs or vlogs. Interactions with social influencers such as via the comments sections on blogs or vlogs is reflective of a human-human interaction mediated by the website (Abdul-Ghani,

Hyde, & Marshall, 2011) – in this case the blog or vlog website. Thus, for content creators, social exchange is reflected in an audience following or subscribing to a content creator or viewing their content in exchange for entertainment and information.

Social Exchange Theory suggests that rewards can be both tangible and intangible (Homans, 1958, 1974); two parties engage in a relationship that rewards and reinforces one another (J. J. Li, 2008). This differs from economic exchange where tangible resources are exchanged; thus, social exchange is distinct from economic exchange (Blau, 1964) because it goes beyond the exchange of simply tangible resources. In social exchange, resources exchanged include information, social approval and status, human connection, as well as goods and money (Chan & Li, 2010). Thus, social exchanges see smaller social distances, where reciprocity and trust are key characteristics (Blau, 1964). Parties in a social exchange learn to trust one another and create a reciprocal exchange environment. Because these social relations often involve interactions with strangers, trust and reciprocity are key to social exchange (Cook, 2005). Likewise, benefits must outweigh costs for the social exchange to go ahead.

In the case of trusting blog and vlog content, a viewer may trust the content if the benefits of doing so outweigh the risks; these benefits are motivators to engage in the social exchange. Motivations for content creators to exchange their entertaining or informational content may include intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation or internalised extrinsic motivations (Tong, Wang, & Teo, 2007; Vallerand, 1997). For content creators, these benefits they are seeking in the social exchange include monetary and status rewards, as well as satisfaction in helping their audience. Thus, the benefits of entering into the social exchange are both tangible and intangible in this case. These benefits need to outweigh the potential costs of engaging in the social exchange to occur. For content creators, the risks of sharing their content include emotional and cognitive risks such as fatigue in creating content to share and annoyance in people not viewing it, leading to a potential loss in income for a lack of views and frustration over lost time and income creating the content. Thus, for content creators, the benefits of exchanging their content for viewership (and the related status, emotional and monetary benefits associated) must outweigh the costs of creating and sharing the content.

In exchange for their viewership, a blog/vlog audience is seeking entertainment and information – an intangible resource exchange. The benefits they can attain from viewing created content include enjoyment and entertainment, satisfaction and social

status from viewing certain content, alongside risk reduction for purchases from consumer information. These benefits need to outweigh the costs of viewing created content; the risk of inaccurate, unsuitable or unenjoyable content. Thus, for created content viewers, the benefits of entertainment and consumer information must outweigh the risks of potentially inaccurate or unenjoyable content.

Thus, social exchange suggests that there are benefits and costs that must be weighed up for content creators sharing content and for an audience to engage with the content. Reciprocity is critical in social exchange relationships, whereby both the content creator and the audience receive benefits. Overall, in regard to blog and vlog content there is a social exchange of knowledge and entertainment for viewership, which results in satisfaction, status and monetary benefits for the content creator; shared informational and entertaining content by the content creator results in entertainment and consumer information for the audience.

Social influencers can also be understood by looking at Social Learning Theory. In viewing others, people develop new behavioural patterns; that is, people can make a judgement about what behaviour will be successful by watching others (Bandura, 1971). These behaviours are not necessarily solely consciously learned, rather than can also be learned unintentionally (Bandura, 1971). Thus, in viewing or following a social influencer, a consumer may be more likely to take on the influencer's behaviour, including the purchase of the same products or services.

Similarly, Attribution Theory has also been related to online content and explains how an observation can be attributed to an external situation (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). This reflects social influencers impact on consumers whereby consumer information from a content creator perceived to be an accurate reflection of reality increases the content creators credibility; for example, the more the consumer associates what an influencer is saying about the product or service with the product or service's actual performance, the more credible that influencer will be seen to be and, in turn, the more likely the consumer will see their review to be accurate (M. Lee & Youn, 2009). These theories suggest that social influencers, like bloggers and vloggers, play an important role in the consumer decision-making process as a strong information source. Thus, social influencers have become an important marketing tool, or at times a hindrance, to marketers.

## 2.2 Trust

Trust is a building block for society and interpersonal interactions. The body of literature on trust is immense and spans a variety of disciplines. Thus, boundaries must be set when discussing the concept of trust, and in this research these boundaries sit around the idea of trust in an online environment and in interpersonal interactions. In this section, trust is defined, types of trust are discussed in relation to this research, and trust dependencies and key trust influencers are discussed.

### 2.2.1 Trust Definitions

Trust, as a subject in its entirety, spans numerous disciplines. Because of this scope, there is no single agreed upon definition of trust; rather, there are many discipline-specific and topic focussed definitions. These definitions often share commonalities: belief, reliance, risk avoidance, integrity, ability and benevolence (Bachmann & Zaheer; Blomqvist, 1997; Gefen, Benbasat, & Pavlou, 2008). *Essentially, trust, in general, is the decision to rely on another party under a condition of risk; to willingly become vulnerable having taken in the characteristics of the trustee* (Inkpen & Currall, 2004; McKnight, Kacmar, & Choudhury, 2004; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). It reflects the expectations of another's behaviour in the future as based on that persons present and prior claims (Blomqvist, 1997). Past literature has noted three key aspects of trust: competence (including ability, knowledge and expertise), benevolence (including concern, care, empathy and faith in humanity) and integrity (including honesty, openness and commitment) (Borum, 2010; Kasperson, Golding, & Tuler, 1992; McKnight & Chervany, 2001a; Peters, Covello, & McCallum, 1997).

Trust and distrust are not viewed as being two points on a continuum (Gefen et al., 2008; Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998; McKnight & Choudhury, 2006); rather, they are distinct constructs in themselves (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McKnight et al., 2004). Trust and distrust have different consequences and are defined in different ways. Trust is usually defined using emotions or feelings such as security or comfort (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McKnight et al., 2004). A trusting person is calm and assured of a positive outcome because their analysis of the trustees characteristics has allowed them to put their fear and doubt aside (Holmes, 1991; McKnight et al., 2004).

Distrust on the other hand, focusses on suspicion or doubt (Deutsch, 1958; McKnight et al., 2004); that is, it is a more frantic or emotionally aroused state than trust (McKnight et al., 2004). Whereas trust sees a more positive mind-set, distrust is riddled with negative emotions like fear, doubt, panic, paranoia and even anger (Lewicki et al., 1998; McKnight et al., 2004). This creates a more wary, protective and defensive attitude or stance (McKnight et al., 2004), one which can reflect the human survival instinct (McKnight & Chervany, 2001b).

Online trust is an extension of general trust, much as eWOM is an extension of WOM. The online and offline worlds are connected and therefore the trust in both is also connected (Mesch, 2012). For example, our actions in the offline world can be based upon what has happened in the online world, just as our actions online can be based on offline experiences. In other words, our experiences offline can contribute to eWOM online; what we read or hear online can influence our consumption choices offline. This clearly illustrates the crossover of the online and offline worlds. In both the offline and online worlds, trust forms the basis of interaction in society (Abdul-Rahman & Hailes, 2000) in both “real” and virtual communities.

Antecedents to online trust that have been found through past research include reputation, formal control structures (including perceived security and privacy), disposition to trust, communication, performance, self-disclosure and situational factors (Y.-H. Chen & Barnes, 2007; Henderson & Gilding, 2004; Meents, Tan, & Verhagen, 2003). Likewise, uncertainty, vulnerability and risk avoidance are seen as necessary conditions for trust to exist (Blomqvist, 1997). Trust in consumer generated media has been found to be fostered through beliefs in good intentions and honesty as well as the belief that the source knows what they are writing about (Yoo, Lee, Gretzel, & Fesenmaier, 2009).

As discussed prior, it is possible that our trust in WOM transfers to eWOM. With WOM being one of the most trusted sources of information (Dichter, 1966), it is not surprising that eWOM has become so popular. However, despite WOM being so trusted, trusting eWOM seems to go against everything consumers normally do. Essentially, eWOM sees consumers trusting strangers as opposed to known social networks such as traditional WOM. One of the key reasons that WOM is such a trusted source of information is because consumers see it as real and given without material incentive (Dichter, 1966); consumers know the source, know the source is real (and not a

marketer) and likely know the source's expertise or knowledge around the topic. With eWOM, consumers are unlikely to know the source personally so can only assume the source's credibility. This raises the question of why consumers trust eWOM. In order to understand trust, the key trust types, affecting concepts and key trust level influencers will be discussed in further depth.

### **2.2.2 Trust Types**

Trust is often conceptualised as being one 'type' of trust in any given situation; usually dispositional, institutional or interpersonal. However, in looking at the trust consumers have in blogs and vlogs, it is apparent that it may be encompassed by just one trust 'type'. Instead, it appears to be a combination of dispositional, institutional and interpersonal trust that creates blog and vlog trust. Interestingly, these three types of trust are also often viewed as the key elements that create consumer trust (Tan & Sutherland, 2004), and it is only fitting that these are all considered in looking at trust in consumer blogs and vlogs. Essentially, trust is a multidimensional, dynamic construct (Wingreen & Baglione, 2005).

It is expected that in the case of online content creators, trust in the system (institutional or system trust) is the biggest influencer, with dispositional trust impacting initial trust and interpersonal trust reflecting that of the content creator (or blog or vlog) themselves.

#### ***2.2.2.1 System or Institutional Trust***

Institution-based trust (institutional trust), also referred to as system trust, is *the trust we hold in an institution or system* – in this case the Internet, and blogs and vlogs themselves. This type of trust is significant in this research as prior research has shown that the trust people hold in institutions is associated with their overall online trust (Mesch, 2012). Trust in the institutional sense refers to being willingly vulnerable to a context; in this case, the Internet (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998). Formal structures or mechanisms and vendor guarantees, offline strength and one's disposition to trust (as discussed prior) can all lead to institution-based trust (Bachmann & Zaheer).

Institutional or system trust looks at a person's belief that the impersonal structures support the likelihood for success in a particular situation; that effective measures are in

place to ensure that the institution meets the user's expectations (McKnight et al., 1998; Sledgianowski & Kulviwat, 2009). In this context, trust reflects the security a person feels in a given situation due to the guarantees or safety structures in place (McKnight et al., 1998; S. P. Shapiro, 1987), such as third-party certificates or security measures on a website.

As this kind of trust does not rely on personal characteristics or prior experience with the trusting party, formal mechanisms or structures are used to provide trust (Grabner-Kräuter, 2009; Grabner-Kräuter & Kaluscha, 2003; S. P. Shapiro, 1987). Institution-based trust, therefore, refers to a person's perceptions of these protective structures which create a feeling of trust in a given situation, in this case the Internet (A. C. Costa, Bijlsma-Frankema, & Jong, 2009; Grabner-Kräuter, 2009; Grabner-Kräuter & Kaluscha, 2003). Thus, someone who is already comfortable in an online environment and with its formal security structures is more likely to have more greater trust in blog and vlog content and even eWOM in general. This is because the person believes that the proper technical security measures exist to protect them against any privacy and identity issues (Grabner-Kräuter, 2009; Grabner-Kräuter & Kaluscha, 2003; McKnight & Chervany, 2001a).

Institution-based trust is not limited solely to technical components; it also encompasses an understanding of online formal and informal rules such as transaction and interactional norms (Grabner-Kräuter, 2009). In this sense, it can be inferred that other participants on the website or social network (or in the case of this study, the blog or vlog) are also likely to behave trustworthily (Grabner-Kräuter, 2009; Kramer, 1999). As such, some form of situational normality is apparent where the situation (for the purpose of this study, using blog or vlog content) is normal or favourable to situational success (Borum, 2010; McKnight & Chervany, 2001a).

This research, in looking at trust in content and those who create it, relies more on this type of trust to impact consumers trust in blogs and vlogs. This is because this form of trust underpins using blog and vlog content in the first place, and therefore in trusting a specific blog or vlog.

### ***2.2.2.2 Interpersonal Trust***

Interpersonal trust is *the trust we hold in another person* (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McKnight & Chervany, 2001a), *or group of people* such as content creators, rather than the general trust in others that dispositional trust highlights. It is not surprising, therefore, that one's disposition to trust is important in the creation of interpersonal trust (Gefen et al., 2008; McKnight et al., 2004). Based on the confident expectations of another's actions to come, a key characteristic of interpersonal trust is the willingness to accept both risk and vulnerability and a recognised interdependence on another (Kramer, 1999; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). Just as interpersonal trust, or trust between people, is important offline, it can significantly influence intentions to exchange information online (Ridings, Gefen, & Arinze, 2002; Sledgianowski & Kulviwat, 2009). This reflects the idea that the online and offline worlds influence one another (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004); that is, that the importance of trust in the offline world translates and reflects the importance of trust in the virtual world.

Interpersonal trust often has a more intense emotional component than a cognitive component (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). However, it is suggested that the cognitive-based trust within interpersonal trust comes before affect-based trust (Lewicki et al., 2006; McAllister, 1995). Although the emotional component of trust is often more intense, knowledge about the other party is needed to get there. Like the other trust types discussed, interpersonal trust also sees some crossover and influence from other trust types. In particular, institutional trust in a way supports interpersonal trust; as the common institution or system disintegrates, one would expect the trust in the other person to disintegrate also (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Lewis and Weigert (1985) suggest that this shows the sociological nature of trust in regard to human group life and that interpersonal trust is natural and cannot be narrowed down to individual psychology in groups where trust is a social reality.

It has also been suggested that interpersonal trust in particular follows a process whereby trust increases, beginning with a calculus-based analysis of the benefits of trusting versus the costs of betraying the relationship (Borum, 2010). This calculus-based trust is the first 'step' in the process of trusting interpersonally; that is, it is a simple calculation of the outcome of entering and supporting a trusting relationship (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Lewicki et al., 2006). The second basis of interpersonal trust is knowledge-based, whereby trust is constructed through knowing the other person

well enough that one can predict their behaviour (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Lewicki et al., 2006; D. Shapiro et al., 1992). Lastly, interpersonal trust can move forward to identification-based trust. This is where one party internalises the other party's preferences and both parties can identify with each other's wishes and goals; that is, a mutual understanding is reached and each person acts in the other's interests (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Lewicki et al., 2006; D. Shapiro et al., 1992). These ideas will be discussed in further depth as a key trust level influencer impacting on overall trust in blog and vlog content.

For this research, interpersonal trust is reflected in the dependent variable: content creator trust.

### ***2.2.2.3 Dispositional Trust***

Dispositional trust is a unique personal characteristic, as identified in psychology research (McKnight & Chervany, 2001a). It is a personality trait which is brought forth in all situations and is both essential and static (A. M. Rose, Rose, & Dikken, 2010; Wrightsman, 1974). Trust, in the dispositional sense, means *to willingly become vulnerable to others in general* (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McKnight et al., 2004) and is often referred to as a person's 'basic trust' (Abdul-Rahman & Hailes, 2000). A higher level of dispositional trust is reflective of those who tend to consistently trust others across different situations and contexts and are less likely to believe that others are incentivised into being dishonest (A. M. Rose et al., 2010; Wrightsman, 1974). This type of trust is said to have specific influence in decision contexts (A. M. Rose et al., 2010; Wrightsman, 1974).

Dispositional trust can be seen as the result of two constructs: faith in humanity and trusting stance. Faith in humanity looks at one's assumptions about people in general as well as the faith one may have in a group of people or individuals (e.g., doctors) and that assumes that others in general are usually honest, benevolent and competent (McKnight & Chervany, 2001a; Wrightsman, 1991). Trusting stance is a personal strategy in which regardless of what assumptions have been made about other people in general, better outcomes will be achieved by dealing with people as though they are reliable (McKnight & Chervany, 2001a).

This tendency to believe in the positive attributes of others is important in the initial stages of a trusting relationship (Meents et al., 2003). These early stages of trusting relationships see people relying on their disposition to trust others because they do not have enough (or specific enough) information with which to judge the other party (McKnight et al., 1998). Disposition trust is developed over a person's lifetime as they encounter others in different trusting situations. Children come to trust their caregiver because they are reactive to the child's needs (McKnight et al., 1998). As we grow, over time, we generalise these trusting (or distrusting) thoughts and feelings about other people and apply these generalisations to new relationships and trusting situations (Rotter, 1971). Because this type of trust is generalised to reflect a lifetime of encounters with people, it is relatively stable; however, it is not completely static (Mayer et al., 1995). As we encounter new experiences, our disposition to trust may become more negative or positive. As such, our disposition to trust (and distrust) is the result of our entire life's experiences and is an individual characteristic dependent on our own unique experiences.

In this research, dispositional trust was expected to initiate exposure to a content creator and contribute to the building of trust, rather than directly lead to trust in a content creator. Thus, it was important to consider and measure, but not expected to play a direct role.

### **2.2.3 Dependencies**

Trust is not as simple as just being trust. It is not only the different types of trust that can influence overall trust; rather, trust is context and situation dependent, reputational and based on prior experience. Likewise, it is influence by both cognitive and emotional components.

#### ***2.2.3.1 Context and Situation Dependent***

Trust (and in turn, distrust) can depend on and vary in its mode and scope based on context and situation (Abdul-Rahman & Hailes, 2000; Frederiksen, 2012; Henderson & Gilding, 2004; Lewicki et al., 2006). If we think about this in general in our own lives, it becomes common sense. We may only trust some people in certain situations or contexts; I trust my banker with my money, but I may not trust them to recommend a

movie that I would be guaranteed to enjoy. Some disparities in online trust research can in fact be attributed to contextual differences and as such, trust research can be quite relative (Beldad, de Jong, & Steehouder, 2010). In looking at online trust specifically, consumer generated media sees trust dependent on the type of website used and on perceptions of other consumer generated media sources (Yoo et al., 2009).

#### ***2.2.3.2 Prior Experience***

Trust can also be influenced by prior experience (Abdul-Rahman & Hailes, 2000; Bachmann & Zaheer; Beldad et al., 2010; Y.-H. Chen & Barnes, 2007). Trust matures over time with mutual experiences in a trusting relationship; trust increases alongside an increase in experience with the other party (Bachmann & Zaheer). This illustrates the previously discussed trusting process discussed by Shapiro (1992), Lewicki and Bunker (1996) and Lewicki et al. (2006) whereby trust begins as a calculation and grows with experience with the other party to the point where behaviour can be predicted. This same idea crosses over to online trust whereby experience and familiarity with the online environment, associated technology and, in the case of online shopping specifically, online purchasing can all have an influence on trust development and purchase intention (Beldad et al., 2010; Y.-H. Chen & Barnes, 2007). Prior experiences shape our future experiences; like everything else in life, we learn from our experiences (be that positive or negative experiences).

#### ***2.2.3.3 Reputation***

As trust is influenced by prior experience, it is only natural that it is also influenced by reputation, which stems from other people's past experience. Like offline trust, online trust is also influenced by reputation (Abdul-Rahman & Hailes, 2000; Beldad et al., 2010; Y.-H. Chen & Barnes, 2007; Henderson & Gilding, 2004; Meents et al., 2003). For online trust, this could mean the reputation of the source of the information, the organisation responsible for the product or service discussed, or the blogging or eWOM platform itself. Reputation is also said to be an antecedent to initial trust (Lewicki et al., 2006; Meents et al., 2003), rather than solely a trust influencer. In this sense, reputation can contribute to the calculation made on whether to trust someone on the first encounter. When there is no past experience to rely on, a person or organisation's

reputation produced through the past experiences of other consumers is a way to help determine whether or not that party should be trusted.

#### ***2.2.3.4 Cognitive and Emotional Components***

General trust incorporates both cognitive and emotional elements (Blomqvist, 1997; Lewicki et al., 2006; Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Webber, 2008). Trust begins one-dimensionally and is focussed more on the cognitive dimension; to trust, some information is needed (Blomqvist, 1997; Webber, 2008). As trust is nurtured and grows over time, the affective or emotional component of trust becomes more apparent. The affective and cognitive elements of trust surface separately (Webber, 2008); however, despite being viewed as separate elements of trust, both are needed in all trusting situations (at differing levels depending on the context and situation of the trusting relationship). If only the cognitive dimension is present (i.e., in situations of perfect information), then trust is not warranted; rather, it is a matter of rational calculation (Blomqvist, 1997). Likewise, if only the emotional or affective dimension is present in a given situation (where no information is present), then it is not a matter of trust but of blind faith or gambling (Blomqvist, 1997). As such, both components are vital in trusting situations; however, it appears that the degree or level to which each is present differs depending on the level, context and situation of the trusting relationship.

#### **2.2.4 Key Trust Level Influencers: Intrinsic versus Extrinsic**

In accordance with past trust literature (both in an online and offline context), it is apparent that trust is not a solid state; rather, it is dynamic and differs dependent on the context and situation with which the trusting relationship lies. These different levels of trust propensity moderate perceptions towards online content (Y.-H. Chen & Barnes, 2007). As such, in this research, past literature has been gathered and categorised to explain what is referred to as key level influencers. These influencers are then explained with their polarising ends as being either ‘intrinsic’ or ‘extrinsic’ trust, respectively. The term ‘intrinsic’ is used to describe the end of the spectrum of each trust influencer where trust is close, personal and established. The term ‘extrinsic’ is used to describe the opposing end of the spectrum of each trust influencer where trust is there for a specific reason; it is situational, cognitively based and to some extent required for

everyday social function. These key trust level influencers of online content trust are discussed in further detail below and illustrated in Figure 1.

Intrinsic	Key Trust Level Influencers	Extrinsic
High	Proximity	Mid/Low
Primary	Group	Secondary
Inner	Threshold	Outer
Emotional	Function	Cognitive
Unconditional	Strength	Conditional
KBT → IBT	Type	CBT → KBT
Psychology	Basis	Sociology
Normative	Interpersonal Influence	Informational

**Figure 1 Summary of key trust level influencers**

#### ***2.2.4.1 Proximity, Group and Threshold***

Proximity, threshold and group are viewed in this research as key trust influencers that surround the idea of how close something or someone is to a person. Trust fluctuates in mode and scope due to differences in relations and situations (Frederiksen, 2012).

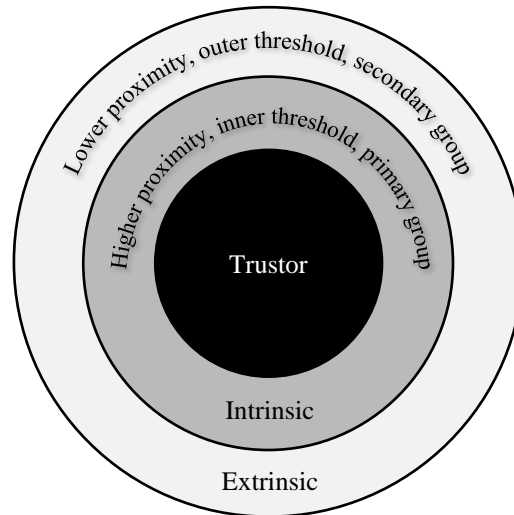
Proximity represents concentric circles that encompass the trustor (Frederiksen, 2012); circular levels that reflect how close a trustee is to a person. The scope and mode of trust differs dependent on the proximity: lower or decreasing proximities see a limited mode of functional competence-based trust; medium proximity relations see an experience-dependent mode of reciprocal trust; and higher proximity relations see a disposition mode of trust (Frederiksen, 2012). As such, higher proximity relations are placed in the intrinsic trusting group and lower proximity relations in the extrinsic group – dispositional, close relations and more distanced, knowledge-based relations, respectively.

Thresholds illustrate the two key areas of trust: an outer threshold with an expectation of deception and an inner threshold with a confidence in reliability (Frederiksen, 2012). The outer threshold represents those in the outer concentric levels of trust, similar to the lower proximity and secondary group relations which also describe the outer concentric

levels of trust. The inner threshold refers to those closer to us, similar to the higher proximity and primary group relations which describe the inner concentric level of trust.

Group as a key trust influencer refers to either primary or secondary group relations. A primary group member refers to those few people in a person's life that are closest, for example, parents or partner. In other words, these relationships or associations are intimate and face-to-face, resulting in a synthesis of individualities into a mutual entity (Cooley, 1909). This mutuality can be described as reaching a primary status when it is natural to use the term "we" to describe the relationship; something that is often used when describing family and partners, for example. A secondary group member refers to a person who is part of a relationship for a specific purpose or who is not quite as close as those in the primary group; for example, workmates and acquaintances. However, this is not to say that the secondary group member is not a key influencer in a person's decisions; rather, if the primary group has no information (or when offline WOM contacts have no information), the online environment, that includes secondary group members, provides a way in which people can still get the trusted consumer information they need through eWOM. Thus, the secondary trusting group may be of importance in an online, eWOM environment.

Viewing these concepts as concentric levels of trust illustrates their closeness the trustor as well as their size. Those in the intrinsic group (higher proximity, inner threshold, primary group) illustrate the first concentric level of trust surrounding the trustor, which is smaller in size and closest to the trustor. The extrinsic group (lower proximity, outer threshold, secondary group) represents the outer concentric level of trust surrounding both the intrinsic level and the trustor and is further away from the trustor and larger in size. A summary of this concept is illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2 Illustration of proximity, threshold and group as key trust influencers**

#### ***2.2.4.2 Cognitive and Affective Function***

As mentioned prior, trust requires both emotional/affective and cognitive components in order to move beyond a simple cold-blooded calculation or blind faith (Blomqvist, 1997; Lewicki et al., 2006; Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Webber, 2008). However, this is not to say that the cognitive and emotional components need to be equal. The cognitive aspect of trust, also known as calculative or knowledge-based trust (Bachmann & Zaheer), focusses on the importance of knowledge or competence and is used to make a calculation of whether or not to trust. This was made evident in the previous discussion on the interpersonal trust process, which begins with calculus-based trust and is followed by knowledge-based trust (Lewicki et al., 2006; D. Shapiro et al., 1992); that is, trust begins with cognition or a need to know that the other is competent. Affective trust, which relates to the emotional component of trust, recognises the importance of relations (Bachmann & Zaheer). This importance is largely seen when looking at interpersonal trust specifically, where the idea of identification-based trust follows the more cognitive-based trust stages (Lewicki et al., 2006; McAllister, 1995). This intense interpersonal trust has a greater emotional component than cognitive trust; however, to get to that stage, knowledge about the other party has already been gathered and confirmed in the prior two trust stages.

It is apparent that there is a causal relationship between structural assurance and the source (e.g., online vendor) and technological trustworthiness, that is, knowledge-based

trust and institution-based trust respectively (Wingreen & Baglione, 2005). It is only as trust grows over time that the emotional or affective components emerge as separate (Webber, 2008). When the emotional component of trust is larger than the cognitive component, trust becomes intrinsic. Likewise, as the cognitive component of trust becomes larger than the emotional component, trust becomes more extrinsic. This can be compared to “head versus heart” decisions; decisions involving those closest to us more often than not see us thinking with our hearts and emotions, rather than relying on knowledge.

#### ***2.2.4.3 Conditional and Unconditional Trust***

The state of trust is either conditional or unconditional. Conditional trust refers to the state of trust where each party behaves appropriately and uses a similar way to define the situation, and thus are willing to work with one another. Attitudes towards each other, therefore, are agreeable enough for future interactions and there is sufficient positive affect (or a dearth of negative affect) to support these attitudes (Jones & George, 1998). Unconditional trust refers to the state of trust where the suspension of belief cover can be forgotten as the social situation is now controlled by shared values (Jones & George, 1998). In this state, trustworthiness on both sides is certain and based on confidence in the other’s values resulting from repeated past experiences (Jones & George, 1998). This state of trust sees the relationship grow into something significant and involves common empathy (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996).

Conditional trust is usually enough to go forward with a range of exchanges (both social and economic) as it is in accordance with the idea of knowledge or positive expectations being a base for trust (Jones & George, 1998; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; D. Shapiro et al., 1992). As it represents a foundation of trust, conditional trust is likely the most common form of trust (Jones & George, 1998). Unconditional trust extends the stable and routine nature of conditional trust to become something more significant and will often involve a sense of mutual identification (Jones & George, 1998; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; D. Shapiro et al., 1992). Essentially, conditional trust can more easily dissolve than unconditional trust. Unconditional trust is more complex and more difficult to dissolve in that the relationship is based on positive affect, mutual identification and is instilled with meaning (Jones & George, 1998). Parties may become more understanding of the other’s issues rather than destroying the trust completely as is the case with conditional trust.

As such, conditional trust falls within the extrinsic group of influencers. This is because it is representative of the majority of trusting relationships and is based on conditions and knowledge more so than shared values. Unconditional trust falls within the intrinsic trusting group; it is representative of those few who are the closest and it is more difficult to dissolve. Conditional trust represents our most frequent trusting interactions in everyday life in that we trust others based on conditions we have set for the situation (e.g., excluding certain groups of people such as criminals or drug users). Unconditional trust can lead to trust with a specific party growing to a point where the relationship is based on shared values and mutual identification. We do not have conditions for trusting this specific person as we do with those in our conditional trust group.

#### ***2.2.4.4 Calculus-Based, Knowledge-Based and Identification-Based Trust***

Trust, specifically interpersonal trust, can be seen as a process, as previously discussed. This process begins with a stage of trust based on calculation of risk and knowledge. It can then move onto a stage based on prior experience and prediction, and for a select few, move to a stage of trust based on mutual identification; that is, calculus-based, knowledge-based and identification-based trust respectively. This trust process is relevant to interpersonal trust because of how specific it is to individual relationships. Not all doctors or friends or colleagues in our lives move to the same stage of trust in our trust process; it is based on the individual (interpersonal trust) rather than the general group (dispositional trust) or institution (institution or system trust). This process reflects a transformational approach to trust in that the essence of trust itself transmutes over time (Lewicki et al., 2006).

This first stage of trust, calculus-based trust (previously named deterrence-based trust), involves a simple calculation of the outcome of trusting or not trusting the other party based on an analysis of the benefits of trusting the other party versus the penalty of betraying the relationship (Borum, 2010; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Lewicki et al., 2006). In this beginning stage of trust, trust is maintained to the point where the deterrent (or negative consequence) is clear, conceivable and probable if the trust is broken (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Essentially, calculus-based trust is created when parties perceive the positive intentions of the other to perform a beneficial action (Rousseau et al., 1998). Trust here is not just based on deterrence but also on credible information about intentions or competence (Rousseau et al., 1998). Such trust relies heavily on the cognitive component of trust in order to determine whether the other

party should be and is competent enough to be trusted. It is also this stage where vulnerability is key (Lewicki et al., 2006) as one of the bases of trust by definition.

Trusting relationships can then move onto the next stage of trust: knowledge-based trust. This is where trust is based on knowing the other party well enough to predict their behaviour (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Lewicki et al., 2006; D. Shapiro et al., 1992) as the other party is now known sufficiently (Bachmann & Zaheer). In other words, there is enough prior experience of trusting situations with the other party in order to be able to predict whether or not they will be trustworthy (or not trustworthy) again. Knowledge-based trust is established over time through experience with the other party, which allows for the creation of generalised expectancy of the other's behaviour (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). The key difference between this stage and the prior stage is that where calculus-based trust is based on deterrence, knowledge-based trust is based on information (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). However, both stages can be found in the extrinsic trust group, both are more applicable to the majority of our relationships and are largely based on the cognitive aspect of trust which precedes the affective component (Lewicki et al., 2006; McAllister, 1995).

Finally, a few relationships can move a stage further to identification-based trust. This stage is reserved for a close few in our lives and represents a relationship where both parties identify with, understand and appreciate the others wants, needs and preferences. In essence, a mutual understanding has been reached to the point where parties are able and willing to act on behalf of each other (Bachmann & Zaheer; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Lewicki et al., 2006; D. Shapiro et al., 1992). This stage promotes the affective component of trust and relational importance is evident (Bachmann & Zaheer). However, the cognitive component is still apparent, if not quite as important, as to get to this stage, the relationship will have already passed through two knowledge and information saturated stages – knowledge about the other party has already been established and the emotional component can now come into play.

As such, it can be seen that the extrinsic trust group reflects the first and second stages of trust: calculus-based and knowledge-based trust. This is due to this group's reliance on knowledge, which is at the basis of the majority of our trusting relationships. The intrinsic group, on the other hand, reflects the movements from calculus and knowledge-based trust to identification-based trust. This is where relationships develop beyond knowledge-reliance to a point where experience enables predictability and

mutual identification. The intrinsic group is already focussed on those relationships in the identification-based stage but also on those relationships moving from the knowledge to the identification-based stage, reserved for those few close relationships.

#### ***2.2.4.5 Psychological and Sociological Base***

Past literature has generally classed trust as either a psychological or a sociological concept. This research sees trust as both, dependent on the type of trusting relationship. Trust at the extrinsic level is sociological in nature because without this basic trust, society as we know it would cease to exist; that is, trust is required in order to go about our daily lives (e.g., to purchase goods, to feel safe, etc.). The largest trusting group reflects trust that is sociological in its essence whereby trust serves as a profound assumption supporting social order (Lewis & Weigert, 1985).

Sociologically, trust should be regarded as collective units rather than isolated individuals (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). This coincides with the basis of the extrinsic trust group where trust has a more cognitive base and oftentimes involves trusting groups (e.g., doctors) before gaining the trust of individuals. Much like calculus-based trust, trust exists in a social system so long as members behave as expected (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Without this trust, society would cease to function and drown in chaos and fear (Lewis & Weigert, 1985), ultimately leading to the destruction of society as we know it.

Trust at the intrinsic level is more psychological in nature as it is at this level of trust that the trusting relationship becomes personal and independent from any group. The closer a person is to us, the more emotional the relationship becomes and the more trusting those few who fall into the intrinsic category become; therefore, dispositional trust is a psychological trait (McKnight & Chervany, 2001a). The psychological view of trust has been a large focus of trust research; however, it can be regarded as incomplete as it often fails to acknowledge its social reality (Lewis & Weigert, 1985).

Trust has been viewed as unidimensional in the past – a psychological tradition that emphasises the cognitive and affective processes and assumes that trust and distrust are bipolar opposites (Lewicki et al., 2006). However, as stated prior, trust research has moved on from this approach and, within this research, takes a more transformational approach whereby trust is viewed as developing and emerging over time and has

different forms (Lewicki et al., 2006). As such, it is acceptable that this research acknowledges both the psychological and sociological bases of trust. It has also been noted that psychological trust research often uses methods which focus on trust's cognitive component such as psychometric scaling or laboratory settings which focus on behavioural expressions (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). This is why it is vital that trust is acknowledged for its psychological and sociological basis in order to gather a holistic view of the topic.

#### ***2.2.4.6 Interpersonal Influence***

Interpersonal influence can also influence trust level and it plays an important part in consumer decision making (Chu & Kim, 2011; D'Rozario & Choudhury, 2000).

Interpersonal influence has two key dimensions: normative and informational influences (Chu & Kim, 2011), which reflect the intrinsic and extrinsic trust levels, respectively. Normative influences look at the tendency to conform to others expectations, and affect attitudes, norms and ideals (Chu & Kim, 2011).

Those prone to normative influences are expected to follow the beliefs of significant others (those they have a close relationship to) and they tend to pursue social approval through purchasing and using products, services and brands that their significant others approve of (Chu & Kim, 2011). This suggests that for those relationships that fall within an intrinsic trust level, information is sought out to provide advice, emotional support and approval without a so much need for expertise. As discussed prior, in these close relationships, competence has already been accepted as present, thus trust is based on seeking approval and advice through more than just knowledge. Essentially, at the intrinsic level, trust in these relationships is based above knowledge and expertise; the importance of normative influence is recognised as being something more than simply information.

Informational influence means taking information from knowledgeable sources (Chu & Kim, 2011; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Those who are susceptible to informational influence tend to exhibit a greater need to gather information and direction from knowledgeable sources when involved in the consumer decision-making process (Chu & Kim, 2011). For those relationships falling within the extrinsic group, value and importance is placed on the the information and knowledge provided, unlike the intrinsic group where competence has already been proven and accepted. Expertise and

knowledge hold precedent in trusting situations, which is representative of the importance of the cognitive component of trust in the extrinsic group. The extrinsic group includes those susceptible to informational influence due to their need for information and knowledge in trusting relationships at this level.

#### ***2.2.4.7 Intrinsic/Extrinsic Categorisation***

The intrinsic and extrinsic trusting levels have been created by the researcher to summarise the key trust level influencers and to represent the idea that trust is not a solid state. Essentially, intrinsic trusting relationships represent those relationships that are closest to us (e.g., parents, partners, etc.). These relationships are fewer but mean something more than just a source of information and are maintained for more than just a specific purpose. Extrinsic trusting relationships represent those relationships that are relevant to our everyday lives (e.g., managers, colleagues, acquaintances, etc.). These relationships are not as close to us as intrinsic relationships; that is, there is distance in these relationships in that we may only trust individuals for a specific purpose (e.g., our doctor) or for social purposes (e.g., acquaintances or some work colleagues), but not to the extent that we trust without question or base our trust on emotion.

In terms of trust in blog and vlog content, we would assume that this trust is extrinsic. We (most likely) do not know the person producing the content but have sought this person out for specific information. However, in cases where following a blogger or vlogger goes beyond the need for specific information, it is possible that the relationship, though one-sided, could move towards the intrinsic end of the trust scale. This makes blog and vlog content (as a form of eWOM) an interesting area for marketing and advertising research in that that relationships with these online, physically unknown sources may develop into something similar to offline relationships (although one-sided). Thus, there is a possibility that eWOM can become, in essence, WOM without the need to actually know the person.

## **2.3. The Blog/Vlog**

This section looks at prior research in the area of blog and vlog content, and at online content in general. It examines both the content itself and the design of the content, and the influence on viewer perceptions.

### **2.3.1 Content Style and Language**

Blogs are the earliest type of social media and, along with vlogs, can be categorised as either personal diaries or summaries and commentary that provide information and opinions on a content area (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; J. Li & Chignell, 2010; Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, et al., 2004). The actual content of a blog or vlog can influence the overall trust and general impression of the blog or vlog (Colucci & Cho, 2014; F. Li & Du, 2011). This can relate to the content design, the authenticity of the content (discussed in more depth in the following section on information sources), the curation of the content, content verifiability and the frequency of posts (Colucci & Cho, 2014; Wang & Emurian, 2005). As a form of eWOM, blogs and vlogs are guided by social and functional brand characteristics (Lovett, Peres, & Shachar, 2013; Stephen, 2016). As such, in an online environment, WOM is driven by the need to provide information (information demand and information supply) and the need to show one's expertise, uniqueness or social status (self-enhancement, expressing uniqueness and the desire to socialise and converse) (Lovett et al., 2013).

Blogs and vlogs can be seen as a form of user-generated content (UGC). This is because blogs and vlogs can (and in this research, do) fulfil three key conditions: they are published on a publicly accessible website; they show creative effort; and (for consumer blogs and vlogs, which are the focus of this research) are created outside a professional practice (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The unbiased nature of consumer blogs and vlogs, and their distance from companies and marketers, are key for consumers assessing these sources of information (Meuter, McCabe, & Curran, 2013).

Like any form of writing or video, blogs and vlogs can come in different types.

Although blog type is generally reflected in the blog writing style, vlog type is more apparent in research and more prominent in practice. A clear way to see a difference in vlog style is in the level of editing and in the conversational style of the video (Aran,

Biel, & Gatica-Perez, 2014). Vlogging styles take into account personality and production and two clear vlogging styles have been found in the research: dynamic and flat (Aran et al., 2014). Dynamic vlogging styles are those that are highly active with a notable amount of motion and contain a high amount of editing (Aran et al., 2014). This style is reflective of highly extraverted personality type, whereby the vlogger is more active in front of the camera and is more likely to edit their footage ((Aran et al., 2014). The vlogger also includes more than just conversational footage; rather, the vlogger uses dynamic settings and creates frames closer to the camera (Aran et al., 2014). These characteristics are also seen in those who are more open and experienced in the vlogging field (Aran et al., 2014).

On the other hand, flat, or conversational style vlogs see the vlogger mostly motionless in front of the camera and with less use of editing (Aran et al., 2014). This is reflective of a more introverted and conscientious personality style who is less energetic and dynamic, and uses less editing and more inert environments for filming (Aran et al., 2014). Although there is no correct way to vlog, the more active, extraverted vloggers tend to gain a higher number of video views than other vloggers (Aran et al., 2014).

Vlog topics or contexts can also see a difference in vlogging style. A significant difference has been found between a solo vlog which is more scripted and a gaming or live video which is less scripted (S. Lee, 2017). Haul videos, videos whereby a content creator or vlogger shows off a multitude of purchases (their purchase haul), are also commonly found on vlogging channels. Haul videos are important tools for marketers as they can act as a clear channel in the marketing process whereby consumer vloggers can pass on the organisations message whilst feeling like the message is their own; that is, the vlogger, rather than the organisation, is navigating the market (Jeffries, 2011). Like any type of media content, there are various writing, filming and editing styles that a content creator can use. It is a matter of personal style and the context of the message as to which is best in any given situation.

### ***2.3.1.1 Linguistic Style***

Linguistic style can also influence consumer perceptions of blog and vlog content. Interestingly, the gender of the author has no effect on words used in the blog post, yet masculine and feminine stylistic features reflect blog type (Herring & Paolillo, 2006). Blog type can include a diary-style blog entry (commenting on events within the

author's own life) or a 'filter-style' blog entry (commenting on events outside the author's own life) and tend to contain more feminine stylistic features or masculine stylistic features, respectively (Herring & Paolillo, 2006).

Besides gender, language type and linguistic style can also influence perceptions. Diary-style entries tend to use the first person and entries on things outside of the author tend to use the third person (Herring & Paolillo, 2006). Figurative language can positively affect consumer attitudes and decisions (for hedonic goods in particular) (Kronrod & Danziger, 2013; Stephen, 2016), whereas explanatory language can affect the perceived helpfulness of content in an eWOM review situation (Moore, 2015). When passing on negative opinions within eWOM, using softening language can increase the perceived source credibility and likeability of eWOM (Hamilton, Vohs, & McGill, 2014).

Affective or emotional language is also important in eWOM content. The use of emotional words in blogs coincides with the author's personality. Just as different types of blogs relate to different genders of linguistic style, they also relate to personality in that blog types differ in how fittingly people judge the author's personality (J. Li & Chignell, 2010). However, the effects of emotional words appear to have a greater impact in commentary-based blogs rather than personal diary blogs, likely because emotional linguistics are expected in diary-based personal blogs (J. Li & Chignell, 2010). In more informative, commentary-based blogs of the author's person, wording is more reflective of the author's personality (J. Li & Chignell, 2010); it is apparent that more extroverted people use more positive affective words, whilst more neurotic or less conscientious people tend to use more negative affective words (J. Li & Chignell, 2010).

It is not only the blog type that has an impact on affective linguistics. In review-based eWOM, consistency between the linguistic style used and what is typical for the product group being discussed is most beneficial to conversion rates (Ludwig et al., 2013). Within this, positive affect can increase conversion rates for the product being reviewed; however, this rate diminishes the more positive affect is presented (Ludwig et al., 2013). Negative affect decreases conversion. Congruency between what is being discussed and the linguistic style can also increase purchase intention (Ludwig et al., 2013). Jointly, positive affective content and a match in linguistic style have a positive influence on purchase intention (Ludwig et al., 2013). As such, the way in which a blog

is written (or a vlog is scripted) can influence how the content itself is perceived by its readers (or viewers).

Besides the actual written or spoken content, consumers can be influenced by the volume and congruency of eWOM. Research on online reviews have found that the temporal contiguity of language, whereby the reviewer states that they have recently had the experience they are reviewing, can positively influence consumer perceptions of the review content (Z. Chen & Lurie, 2013). Cues to this temporal contiguity in the language used can decrease any consumer bias held towards a positive review and also increase the value of the review for a consumer (Z. Chen & Lurie, 2013). For eWOM in general, it is suggested that a higher volume of positive eWOM alone does not lead to more favourable customer perceptions (Meuter et al., 2013). However, multiple congruent evaluations in blogs specifically, be they positive or negative evaluations, have been found to be helpful by a higher percentage of blog users (Zehrer, Crotts, & Magnini, 2011). Thus, it is not just the way in which a blog or vlog is written (or scripted), but also, in terms of review-based posts, what other bloggers or vloggers are saying and whether there is some congruency with other postings.

When making a purchase decision, consumers are dependent on eWOM for product and service recommendations (Hsu, Lin, & Chiang, 2013). This includes product or service information from blogs and vlogs. As such, how this content is written and presented has an important influence on consumer decision making. Presenting an unbiased form of UGC, linguistic style and posting congruency can have an impact on a consumer's final purchase decision. It is for this reason that businesses and marketers alike should take blogs and vlogs as product information sources seriously and attempt to fully understand them.

### **2.3.2 Content Design**

The look and feel of online content and websites impact users perceptions of the content. This includes the quality of the website, social cue design, structural and graphic design. This combines to create usability and accessibility, as well as attractiveness of online content.

### ***2.3.2.1 Website Quality***

Website quality is important for inducing trust (Beldad et al., 2010), especially in terms of online retailers. The same goes for blogs and vlogs – we judge a book by its cover just as we judge blog and vlog content by its website quality. Website quality is important in that good website quality signals trustworthiness, while the opposite is true if the website is of poor quality, even if the reputation of the website owner is good (Gregg & Walczak, 2010). The trust generated from perceptions of good website quality can increase intentions to transact (Gregg & Walczak, 2010). Because consumers are often limited in their knowledge or lack relevant information (Kardes, Posavac, & Cronley, 2004), they often rely on signals provided in order to make evaluations about competence and ability (C. Shapiro, 1982), especially in regards to online stores. This relates to Signalling Theory (Standifird, 2001) in that a signal by an organisation can convey information in situations where there is a lack of or an irregularity in information provided (Gregg & Walczak, 2010) and consumers may come to rely on signals in order to assess quality.

Website quality is made up of differing dimensions. These include the quality of the information provided, how easy the website is to use, aesthetics, trust-building tools and affective appeal (Barnes & Vidgen, 2001; 2004; Lin & Lu, 2000; Ranganathan & Ganapathy, 2002). Website quality can significantly influence a consumer's trust in an online merchant (McKnight et al., 1998; McKnight et al., 2004; Pavlou & Gefen, 2004) and it can also have a positive relationship with initial trust in a company (Koufaris & Hampton-Sosa, 2004; McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002). Much research on website quality has been undertaken in an online retailer context. However, bloggers and vloggers often post opinions about products and services. Trust in blog and vlog content, just like any other website, may also see consumers relying on signals relating to the blog or vlog content quality in order to trust and use the advice given. Thus, a perceived poor-quality blog or vlog may suggest to readers or viewers that it is unwise to trust the content or the source. Blog or vlog quality could signal to users whether or not to trust the content presented, and therefore make a purchase based on the information provided.

### ***2.3.2.2 Social Cue Design***

Along with overall website quality, consumer perceptions of blog and vlog content can be influenced by social cue design. Social cue design represents the inclusion of embedded social cues to make the online situation reflect that of a face-to-face interaction (Wang & Emurian, 2005). Trust in an online environment may be hindered due to the lack of human presence (Beldad et al., 2010; Ridings et al., 2002; Riegelsberger & Sasse, 2002). Virtual re-embedding can help with this issue (Riegelsberger & Sasse, 2002; Steinbrück, Schaumburg, Duda, & Krüger, 2002). For instance, photographs can help with inducing trust, and functional social cues like live chat are highly valued (Steinbrück et al., 2002; Wang & Emurian, 2005). Including a photo of the blogger on their blog, or even just including photographs in their blog posts, may help induce trust in the blog itself; likewise, vlogs showing the presenter may also induce trust in the content.

The digital nature of blogs and vlogs lacks the face-to-face contact and visual signals that occur in the offline environment. Infusing social presence in websites can increase online trust (Cyr, Hassanein, Head, & Ivanov, 2007; Gefen & Straub, 2004). Social presence relates to the amount of feeling, awareness and response to being connected in an online environment and can be determined by the platform's characteristics, user perception and user activities (Beldad et al., 2010; Tu & McIsaac, 2002). Social presence has a positive influence on online group and community identification and on online participation intention (Beldad et al., 2010; Schimke, Stoeger, & Ziegler, 2007; Tu & McIsaac, 2002). In this sense, social presence is similar to interpersonal interaction (Beldad et al., 2010); that is, interpersonal interaction in an online environment may appear similar to interactions in the offline environment (thus, helping to induce trust in the online environment).

### ***2.3.2.3 Structural Design***

The structural design of the blog or vlog website can also influence consumer perceptions. Structural design looks at the organisation and accessibility of the information presented on the website (Wang & Emurian, 2005). A blog or vlog should be easy to navigate in order to help build online trust (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004; Wang & Emurian, 2005); that is, users should be able to easily find the information that they are looking for. This is where simplicity can be key. A website

with a simple and clear design can reduce the perceived time wasted, dishonesty and the frustration felt in trying to find information (Wang & Emurian, 2005). A blog or vlog needs to be clear and easy to use in order that the user can find the information they are looking for. If not, there is a risk that the user will feel they are wasting time and become frustrated.

As well as ease of use, consistency is also an important structural feature of websites (including blogs and vlogs). Users may become annoyed when they see different formatting or design on different pages of a website (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004) as this could be seen as unprofessional and unorganised and may influence consumer perceptions of the website content. When a website's structure and design are consistent, it may boost confidence in users as they can extend their learning through different pages and posts rather than seeing each post as a new website (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). The information presented needs to be accessible in order to establish online trust; all hyperlinks need to work, and images need to contribute to the post (to make sense and contribute to the information, rather than being a place filler) (Wang & Emurian, 2005; P. Zhang, Small, von Dran, & Barcellos, 1999).

A key characteristic of blogs and vlogs is that they are arranged in chronological order. Although this makes it easy to browse in time-order, it can make finding specific information difficult (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). Being able to sort posts by category or tagging posts with keywords (so search engines can find them easily or to enable a search by category within a blog) can be helpful for users (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). The structural design of a blog or vlog website can influence how users perceive the information presented – whether they can access the information they want with confidence without wasting time and whether the posts have been tagged using keywords by the author in order to help with the user's search process.

#### ***2.3.2.4 Graphic Design***

The graphic design also has a large impact on consumer perceptions of the information presented in blogs and vlogs (Colucci & Cho, 2014). Graphic design features give consumers their first impression (Wang & Emurian, 2005). Because a website cannot cater to the senses of smell, taste or touch, it relies heavily on visual content and sound (S. C. Chen & Lin, 2015). After evaluating their experience, users also generate preferences about the layout and design of a blog (S. C. Chen & Lin, 2015); blog

aesthetics are a key component of the perceived value of a blog (Keng & Ting, 2009). This can relate to the uses and gratifications literature whereby entertainment and exploration are the key uses of the online environment (Eighmey & McCord, 1998). When providing product information, clarity and ease of use are key. However, more involvement is apparent when information is not simply well organised, but is also presented in a way that may induce elements of entertainment and in a more idea-driven context (Eighmey & McCord, 1998). Website users are helped by organisational and efficiency features (Eighmey & McCord, 1998), including the speed of the website (whereby images and video content do not slow it down).

Visual features are important in an online environment. Images, typography, colour, brightness and symmetry can all have an influence on trustworthiness (Kim & Moon, 1998). High quality, real photographs create more consumer confidence that can then be transferred to other areas of the website (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004; Wang & Emurian, 2005), such as the actual information presented in a blog or vlog. Blogs and vlogs are visually reliant; that is, creating trust and building confidence is key to getting information across to consumers, which is often achieved through the use of photographs. Without the physicality of the offline environment, the look of a blog or a vlog can be crucial in building trust in the content presented. Just as in the offline world, the online environment relies on judging a book by its cover in order to determine which information should be trusted (when we do not know the source ourselves).

#### ***2.3.2.5 Perceived Privacy and Security***

Finally, a key aspect of the online environment is the perceived privacy and security (or lack thereof). It can be difficult to trust an unknown entity in an online environment and there is some aspect of risk in doing so. Security assurances in a website, like third party certificates or privacy statements, can help reduce this perceived risk (Beldad et al., 2010). When the author of online information is not known personally, it can be difficult to determine whether they are being truthful and whether they should be trusted. Security assurances can help with any perceived privacy or security issues when interacting with a blog or vlog, for example via commenting on the post to communicate with the author.

### **2.3.3 Perceived Usefulness of Information**

The perceived usefulness of blog and vlog content is relevant to what consumers do with that information. Compared with traditional methods of finding information about a product or service, eWOM provides sought after information at a minimal cost and more efficiently (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Information gained from blogs can significantly influence readers' attitudes towards their intention to shop (Hsu et al., 2013). Likewise, interpersonal trust and two-way communication (a feature that both blogs and vlogs allow for) can positively affect brand attitude (J. S. Chen, Ching, Tsai, & Kuo, 2008). Readers trust a blogger cognitively when they perceive the blog to be a good source of information (Huang, 2015). Cognitive trust can also be positively affected by the popularity of a blog (Huang, 2015). Creating higher cognitive trust can then generate higher affective trust (Huang, 2015) which, as discussed prior, can generate a closer trusting relationship.

A key and agreed upon finding in eWOM research is that negative statements have a greater influence on consumers than positive statements (Browning, So, & Sparks, 2013; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Kusumasondjaja, Shanka, & Marchegiani, 2012; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Racherla & Friske, 2012; Sparks, Perkins, & Buckley, 2013; Yang & Mai, 2010) and there is a negativity and an extremity effect (M. Lee, Rodgers, & Kim, 2009). Negative WOM can also lead consumers to certainty (East, Uncles, Romaniuk, & Lomax, 2016). This is not to say that positive eWOM has no impact; positive eWOM influences consumers in that it can induce more initial trust, especially when the source's identity is disclosed (Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012). It is also suggested that positive WOM has more of an impact on purchase intention (East et al., 2016). Valence is positively related, not only to purchase intention, but to the credibility of eWOM (C. M. K. Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

Congruency also influences the perception of usefulness of blog and vlog content. Most blog users find blog content useful, although multiple postings congruent with each other are seen to be more helpful (Zehrer et al., 2011). Information consistency, whereby the information presented is unfailingly positive or negative, has an influence on the perceived usefulness of the content (Purnawirawan, de Pelsmacker, & Dens, 2012). The volume of eWOM review content can also positively signal trust, reliability, quality and confidence and influence purchase intention (C. M. K. Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Flanagin & Metzger, 2013; Yang & Mai, 2010). In terms of blog and vlog

content, this could relate to a blog or vlog with multiple postings or multiple blogs and vlogs reviewing the same product or service.

Content characteristics such as argument density and diversity contribute to how eWOM content is perceived (Willemsen, Neijens, Bronner, & de Ridder, 2009). The depth of the content and how specific it is can also have a positive effect on consumers in that the content is viewed as useful and trustworthy information (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Sparks et al., 2013). That being said, the readability of the eWOM content, like a blog post, is essential to get this information across (Korfiatis, García-Bariocanal, & Sánchez-Alonso, 2012). Readability is more important than the actual length of the posting (Korfiatis et al., 2012). As such, it is apparent that the actual content, more so than its shallow appearance, is important to building consumer perceptions of usefulness. Appearance and design are what help to get this information across and ensures readability, an area that will be discussed further.

As well as content, characteristics about the eWOM source can influence perceptions of content usefulness. Characteristics of the source, such as trustworthiness, the source's experience and evidence of their experience can influence eWOM content perceptions, as can the characteristics of the reader or listener, including self-perceived knowledge and purchase involvement (Martin & Lueg, 2013). The information that a person can gain from an eWOM source like a blog or vlog can be more influential than conversing with friends in a face-to-face situation and can be just as influential as the reader or listener's own primary experience (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). These eWOM sources are more influential than simple feedback on company websites; customer testimonials on websites have been found to be significantly less influential than reviews of Yelp or advice from Facebook friends (Meuter et al., 2013). Consumers gain information about products and services from blogger recommendations prior to purchasing and they depend on this source of information before making their final purchase decisions (Hsu et al., 2013).

### **2.3.4 Entertainment**

Related to playfulness and engagement, entertainment is the idea of voluntarily experiencing something of interest (Karat, Pinhanez, Karat, Arora, & Vergo, 2001). Video content is associated with entertainment, whilst text-based content is associated

with information (Clicktale & Taboola, n.d.). Entertainment is a key defining characteristic of blogs and vlogs, which can be seen as forms of ‘communitainment’ (Cunningham & Craig, 2016). This term encompasses the ideas of network-based communication technologies such as social media platforms, primary communication strategies such as strong interaction, expansive and conversational content topics and formats, and a community-based focus (Cunningham & Craig, 2016).

‘Communitainment’ by definition differentiates blogs and vlogs from professionally created content, such as paid online video streaming services which simply provide a digital gateway to distribute television online such as Netflix or Amazon Prime (Cunningham & Craig, 2016).

The ideal entertainment level in regard to advertising is different dependent on the type of entertainment and the target group, rather than the product category (Teixeira & Stipp, 2013). Thus, it is important that the customer comes first; that is, that content is developed for a specific audience rather than for the product itself. In looking at YouTube advertisements specifically, customisation and informative entertainment are the strongest positive influencers of advertising value; contrastingly, irritation is a negative influencer (Dehghani et al., 2016). In looking at advertisements in general, entertainment once again shows its importance in that entertainment and values shared may initially attract viewers to an advertisement (Alperstein, 1991). Entertainment is a key characteristic of blog and vlog content with the aim of encouraging return reading or viewing whether the content is sponsored or not.

### **2.3.5 Content Sharing**

One of the key concepts of the online environment (social networking sites and eWOM platforms) is sharing. This is important in regards to blog and vlog content because interactional sharing can effect purchase intention (Chiang & Hsieh, 2011). One of the primary foundations of blogs, vlogs and social media platforms is that of sharing (Belk, 2013; John, 2012). The idea of sharing is not new: we have experienced it throughout our lives, and in fact throughout the history of humankind in the offline world (Belk, 2010, 2013). The online world has merely made this action easier to do and easier to disperse, moving us into an age of self-portraiture (Schwarz, 2010). Blogs have helped this idea develop into a greater form of self-reflection (K. R. Cohen, 2010) and increased our extended selves through digital aspects (Belk, 2013). However, with these

online mediums now playing a key role in our self-presentation, there is a concern with managing our reputation and identity and preventing the trap of oversharing (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011; Shepherd, 2005; Suler, 2002). Thus, active identity management has now become important in our everyday lives and this is representative of a historical progression from ascribed to achieved to actively managing one's social identity (Belk, 2013; Côté, 1996).

Just as it is important to identify the fact that we share and that there is a need to manage identity because of this, it is also important to understand why it is we have a desire to share information about ourselves in the first place. We share and self-disclose in the online environment partly because of the disinhibition effect (Suler, 2002). Because the online environment allows us to feel anonymous, we feel free to disclose ourselves, which leads people to believe that they can truly be themselves in this online environment more so than they can in face-to-face situations (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002; Tosun, 2012). However, we do not only disclose or share positive things in our lives; many also share and confess to the negative (Belk, 2013). Confessing feels freeing and can be traced back in history through Christian (and pre-Christian) ideas (Belk, 2013; Kitzmann, 2003). The Internet has simply allowed for the private confessions of the past to be brought into the public arena (Belk, 2013). Confessing and disclosing, even in a public arena like a blog, feels, in essence, both healing and freeing.

This sharing through platforms like blogs and vlogs can be therapeutic not just for the author, but also for the audience. Readers can express empathy and satisfy curiosity in that they can witness a confession that once was private but is now in the public domain (Kitzmann, 2003), just as is the case on talk shows (Belk, 2013) and reality shows. An increase in these confession-based actions on the Internet through blogging and vlogging may be attributed to more than just the feeling of healing and freedom gained; rather, the increase may also be attributed to the fact that the confessor's audience is unseen, unlike in the offline world where anonymity is difficult. Confessing can also become a way for self-validation for the author (Belk, 2013); sharing our "blessings" and "sins" can feel freeing and remedial (just as it can in the offline world) and provide a way for the author to validate themselves in this world partly lived in the digital and the anonymous.

## **2.4. The Blogger/Vlogger**

This section covers prior research in the area of content creators, bloggers or vloggers, and information sources. This incorporates reputation and credibility, self-disclosure, source re-embodiment, opinion leaders and market mavens, knowledge and expertise, celebrity status, authenticity, parasocial interaction, and communities.

### **2.4.1 Authenticity**

The concept of authenticity has increased in popularity in recent research. Authenticity focuses on the concept of being true to oneself – genuine, real, unique and honest (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Ilicic & Webster, 2016; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; Moulard, Garrity, & Rice, 2015; Thompson, Rindfleisch, & Arsel, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2001). Based on philosophical and psychological research, authenticity refers to a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviours mirroring their true identity (van Leeuwen, 2001). Because authenticity is viewed as a socially constructed phenomenon based on observation (Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; Leigh, Peters, & Shelton, 2006) and interaction occurs between the authentic person and the consumer, consumers themselves can be considered a co-creator of authenticity (Leigh et al., 2006; R. L. Rose & Wood, 2005). This suggests that consumers can individually define authenticity (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; Leigh et al., 2006); that is, consumers' perceptions of authenticity may differ and what one person perceives as real, another may perceive as fake (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; R. L. Rose & Wood, 2005).

Authenticity is important in a marketing context as it has been found to positively influence purchase intention, relationships and evaluations (Brunell et al., 2010; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). Even more importantly, it can influence consumer trust (Moulard, Raggio, & Folse, 2016). Social influencers are most successful in their interactions with consumers when they are interactive, confident and authentic in their communications (Glucksman, 2017). Authenticity occurs when it is accepted by consumers that a person (celebrity or information source) is who or what they claim to be (Peterson, 2005), that is, whether they are genuine, real and true (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). Authenticity, in particular celebrity brand authenticity, is a distinct concept based on attachment (Ilicic & Webster, 2016). Thus, authenticity is about accepting that what is presented is real, not simply a feeling of attachment.

Authenticity and emotional attachment are regarded as favourable outcomes of following a celebrity on social media platforms and have a positive influence on consumers' likelihood to purchase and on the outcomes of WOM (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). Celebrity brands in particular are perceived as being authentic and reflective of the 'real' celebrity if the celebrity's relationship with consumers is believed to be genuine and when their behaviour aligns with the values consumers' bestow on them (Ilicic & Webster, 2016). Authenticity can be discovered by an audience through comparing what they presume to be inauthentic, fictional, on-screen behaviour (Cunningham & Craig, 2017); that is, viewer may compare what they see on a fictional television show with a vlogger, for example, and determine authentic behaviour from that. What both brand and celebrity authenticity suggest is that authenticity surrounds the idea of being real. Essentially, authenticity can be deemed as the essence of the person/brand that provides a point of difference from any competitors (Beverland, 2006; Ilicic & Webster, 2016).

It is suggested that uniqueness, scarcity, longevity and longitudinal consistency are key precursors of brand authenticity (Moulard et al., 2016), while rarity and stability have been found to be precursors of celebrity authenticity (Moulard et al., 2015). Uniqueness and scarcity are seen to be related to rare brand behaviours, and longevity and longitudinal consistency are related to stable brand behaviours (Moulard et al., 2016). In regard to celebrity authenticity, rarity and stability are positive influencers and both are regarded as second-order factors (Moulard et al., 2015). Rarity is a combination of talent, discretion and originality – all first-order factors (Moulard et al., 2015). Stability is a combination of consistency, candidness and morality – also all first-order factors (Moulard et al., 2015). These aspects see a generational effect on celebrity authenticity whereby age is a moderator of rarity and stability, with rarity being more effective for younger respondents and stability being more effective for older respondents (Moulard et al., 2015). This should be taken into account when looking at social influencers, with many readers and viewers (especially) being younger (Euromonitor International, 2016).

Authenticity is often associated with Self-Determination Theory and Attribution Theory (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). Self-Determination Theory regards intrinsic motivations as authentic because they come from the essence of oneself, whereas extrinsic motivations are not seen to be authentic because they are related to potential consequences (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Authenticity stems from engaging in behaviours

that are satisfying to the self, whereas inauthenticity is associated with behaviours based on consequences external to the self (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). Attribution Theory is associated with authenticity in the same way – behaviour based on intrinsic motivations versus extrinsic forces. Like Self-Determination Theory, authenticity comes from intrinsic motivations where behaviour is unique to the person and consistent across differing situations or stimuli (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). Overall, it is apparent that authenticity stems from the inner self and is an individual concept. Authenticity comes from the essence of an individual and allows people to perceive them as real.

#### ***2.4.1.1 Reputation and Credibility***

Characteristics of the source or author of eWOM, including their reputation and their credibility, can influence how that information is perceived (Colucci & Cho, 2014; T. J. Johnson & Kaye, 2004). A source's (or organisations) reputation can influence trust development (Beldad et al., 2010; Hsu et al., 2013; Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky, & Vitale, 2000; Koufaris & Hampton-Sosa, 2004; Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight et al., 1998). Bloggers with a good reputation value this reputation in that they will back their recommendations (Hsu et al., 2013). The effect of eWOM is greater for websites that have established reputations (Park & Lee, 2009). Similarly, an established reputation can be seen in social media platforms through a social influencer's following. On Instagram, for instance, the more followers an influencer has, the more likeable they are seen to be, partly because they are seen as more popular (De Veirman et al., 2017). Thus, reputation may be perceived in different ways but that does not change its importance in influencing consumers' perceptions of information and information sources.

Trust influences user intentions and attitudes towards high reputation blogs and positively affects online transactions. However, trust has no direct effect on attitude and intention in regards to blogs perceived as low reputation (Hsu et al., 2013); rather, when this trust is not apparent and there is no established reputation to base trust on, the perceived usefulness of the information content itself influences attitude towards transacting online (Hsu et al., 2013). Thus, an established reputation can help to easily generate trust in a blog. When reputation has not been highly established, users rely on content usefulness to somewhat replace this reputational basis of trust.

Credibility, a key characteristic of WOM, contributes to highly persuasive opinions and endorsements (Brooks, 1957) and can influence how a message is accepted by the receiver (Ohanian, 1990). Credibility of a source is made up of their trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Ohanian, 1990). Because WOM is perceived as a credible source of information and is assumed to be created with no self-interest in selling something, consumers give WOM more attention when looking for information to help make a purchase decision (Arndt, 1967; J. Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007). In other words, blogs and vlogs can be perceived as a credible source of information because they are perceived to be independent from corporate interference and are not afraid to discuss topics that traditional media may stay away from or that may hurt an organisation (T. J. Johnson & Kaye, 2004). It has been suggested that website users focus on the source of eWOM information only in regards to the author's credibility (J. Brown et al., 2007). Lifestyle vloggers in particular have been found to be highly credible, even more so when they engage in full disclosure as this increases the chance the vlogger's message will be accepted (Chapple & Cownie, 2017).

The expertise of a source has an effect on source credibility, as identified by source credibility theory (J. Brown et al., 2007; Buda & Zhang, 2000; Erdogan, 1999). Online sources are identified as experts based on their knowledge and on how their opinions are sought after (J. Brown et al., 2007). Source expertise encompasses the perceived competence of the information source; that is, expertise is determined by the information user by evaluating the knowledge the source holds (J. Brown et al., 2007; Gotlieb & Sarel, 1991). In the online environment, these evaluations can be difficult for a user to make from content that is impersonal; the user has limited knowledge about the source's characteristics or background that could help determine their level of expertise (J. Brown et al., 2007). Source bias, like expertise, can impact on the credibility of a source (J. Brown et al., 2007; Buda & Zhang, 2000). Users assess the trustworthiness of WOM in regards to their belief that the source's opinions are genuine and unbiased (Gotlieb & Sarel, 1991).

Popular bloggers and vloggers can be approached by organisations to promote a product or service. Sponsorship within a blog or vlog can be perceived by readers or viewers differently dependent on how the sponsorship takes place. A simple sponsorship can see a reduction in perceived source credibility and in message attitudes; however, this same reduction is not seen when the source emphasises that their information is their honest opinion (Hwang & Jeong, 2016). When the information source emphasises their

honesty, it has a positive influence on their credibility amongst those who are high in scepticism about the review-based posting, whereas those low in scepticism do not experience this same effect (Hwang & Jeong, 2016). It is apparent that blog readers (generally young consumers) are often suspicious of recommendations made online; they are aware that sponsorship occurs and that bloggers often do not emphasise that a post has been sponsored (Liljander, Gummerus, & Söderlund, 2015). This may also help explain why emphasising that recommendations are honest opinions may help increase the credibility of the source.

Looking beyond simple sponsorship, covert and overt marketing do not influence the credibility of a blogger (Liljander et al., 2015). It is likely that with the popularity of online information sources, people are accustomed to online recommendations and can filter out information that is not useful to them. Covert marketing also does not impact on the intended behaviour of the blog reader; however, overt marketing has a negative effect on blog reader behavioural intentions (Liljander et al., 2015). Overtly sponsoring a product within a blog post, however, can reduce consumer interest in the blog and it can negatively impact on their response to the content. It is apparent that overt sponsorship within blog posts is opposed by consumers most likely because they do not view the recommendation as genuine (Liljander et al., 2015). As discussed prior, emphasising that a recommendation is an honest opinion (Hwang & Jeong, 2016) may help with this decrease in credibility and feelings that the blogger recommendation is not genuine.

It should be noted that it may not only be the author of eWOM content that can be viewed by users as a credible source. Rather, the website (or in this case the blog or vlog) itself can be seen by users as an actor in its own right in online social network situations (J. Brown et al., 2007). This makes sense because Internet users in general more often interact with a website and its information than with the source of that information (as an actual, real individual). Thus, the prior discussed blog and vlog characteristics are also important in perceived eWOM source credibility. Source credibility is important in regards to blog and vlog content as it is a key determinant of behaviour to come (Liljander et al., 2015; Swanepoel, Lye, & Rugimbana, 2009). This is of great importance to bloggers and vloggers as a message is perceived as being more authentic and credible when it is given by another consumer (De Veirman et al., 2017); thus, information given via blogs and vlogs is better when the authors show themselves as fellow consumers.

### **2.4.2 Self-Disclosure: Source Identification as a Real Consumer**

A key characteristic of eWOM, and the online environment in general, is that it is easy to appear anonymous. This can allow for more genuine experience information to be displayed without fear of retribution from a company; however, it can also make it difficult for eWOM users to know whether to trust the information presented because it can be difficult to determine whether the eWOM author is a genuine consumer. Personal identification online has a positive influence on the perceived credibility of review content (Xie, Miao, Kuo, & Lee, 2011).

The sources of blog and vlog content are by nature consumers themselves and the growing popularity in these platforms of product and service information illustrates the power that consumers now hold. Consumer power can be seen as being obtained from four bases: demand-, information-, network-, and crowd-based power (Labrecque et al., 2013). Demand-based power is a form of individual-based power that looks at the influence of consumption and buying behaviour on online technologies. Information-based power, another individual-based power, is crucial in regard to the source of blog and vlog content in that it looks at how easy the information is to access as well as the production of content.

Likewise, network-based power is important in the context of blogs and vlogs in that it involves the conversion of the eWOM content through networking actions which are designed to create the personal reputation of the blogger or vlogger and to influence markets. Finally, crowd-based power, derived from network-based power, relates strongly to blog and vlog sources in that it highlights the ability to gather, muster and organise resources in a beneficial way (Labrecque et al., 2013). The megaphone effect is utilised when there is an ability to reach larger audiences in the online environment (Stephen, 2016), and in an easier way than in the offline environment. This is highly explanatory of eWOM, particularly blog and vlog, sources (or influencers), in that they focus on consumption experiences, are an information source, are able to disperse this information (and can use this to build their reputations) and are able to gather a following or crowd.

Vlogs are more likely than any of their video counterparts to be associated with self-disclosure (Ferchaud, Grzeslo, Orme, & LaGroue, 2018). By including personal content in the blog or vlog, or using self-disclosure throughout the content, the feeling of realism is increased (Ferchaud et al., 2018). In personally identifying themselves on a

blog or vlog, the blogger or vlogger is able to show the consumer that they are real. This allows them to use and build on their consumer power to create a more credible information source that consumers can refer to gain pre-purchase information. The importance of self-disclosure in blog and vlog content is apparent throughout the discussion on the numerous characteristics of blog and vlog content, and as such, it is woven throughout further discussion in this chapter.

#### ***2.4.2.1 Source Re-embodiment***

Just as many aspects of our lives have become digitised, so have our identities. Our extended selves have extended to now include the digital environment (Stephen, 2016). The online environment has become a more visual place and as such, our identities have been disembodied from our physical selves and re-embodied as profile pictures, avatars and videos (Belk, 2013). This occurs even when we use social media and blogs (Belk, 2016). One key characteristic of the online environment is that the way we re-embody ourselves does not necessarily have to be an exact representation of our real, offline selves. Despite our online selves being very similar to the offline, physical version, we are easily able to filter, manipulate and edit our re-embodied avatars (Belk, 2013; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008).

Avatars, by definition, are simple digital representations of ourselves (Belk, 2013), although not necessarily an exact replica. An avatar still needs to have some kind of similarity to our physical self – the same age or gender at the very least – in order that we can feel like ourselves, or identify with it on a psycho-physiological level in the online environment (Belk, 2013). Thus, an online persona – an avatar – is chosen to represent our ideal selves (Robinson, 2007; T. L. Taylor, 2002); that is, what we aspire and most desire to be. We tend to choose an online representation of ourselves that is closer to what we desire to be (our ideal self) than to who we actually are (Belk, 2016). This could be as simple as a blogger posting photos that make themselves look their best (flattering photographs) or vloggers using lighting and makeup when filming vlogs and posting information that does not portray them as something they do not want to be seen as. How a blogger or vlogger represents themselves to their audience could influence perceptions of their content. Showing themselves as real, or as close to their real selves as possible, could help their audience identify them as a fellow consumer, not a marketer or business representative. We can be whoever we want to be in this

digital environment, but it is important that others are able to identify with this persona so that they can feel represented and connected.

### **2.4.3 Parasocial Interaction**

Parasocial interaction refers to an individual's belief that they have a relationship with a media persona (Auter, 1992) that has become more meaningful and dimensional through repeated experiences (Alperstein, 1991). It can be described as being similar to or an illusion of a face-to-face, physical interpersonal interaction (Auter, 1992; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Parasocial interaction has a foundation in empathy, perceptions of similarity and physical attraction (R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). This phenomenon may be apparent in a blog and vlog context in that feelings of empathy and similarity could be fostered with the blogger or vlogger. Likewise, bloggers and vloggers could contribute to the initiation of parasocial interactions because, based on interpersonal attraction and impression formation theory, it is important that people present themselves in a positive manner to instigate attraction in the early stages of relationship formation (R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Bloggers and vloggers want to present themselves in an attractive way in order to gain and maintain an audience. However, they are not the only ones who contribute to creating parasocial relationships. Communications can differ in their parasociability and this difference can be influenced by the ability to estimate reality and content characteristics (Auter, 1992).

Perceptions of physical attractiveness increase the intensity of a parasocial experience (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Source attractiveness is related to similarity, familiarity and likeability (Erdogan, 1999) as well as physical attractiveness. Physical attractiveness is associated with positive characteristics in that it encourages perceptions of trust (Colucci & Cho, 2014). Attractiveness is pleasing; it can reflect what we aspire to be like. A source's attractiveness represents the people that we like, find physically attractive and can relate to. As such, attractiveness can contribute towards initiating a parasocial relationship with a source as we can identify with or aspire to be like this source. Parasocial relationships are based on identification, and identification can produce interpersonal affect (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009). Although we may not identify with a source's physical attractiveness, we can identify with this source in that they may be what we aspire to be like.

Vloggers in particular can initiate parasocial interaction through how they speak to their audience. A parasocial experience can be initiated by bodily addressing their audience (looking straight into the camera) (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). It is also related to content in regards to intimacy: the more intimate the content, the greater the parasocial experience (Auter, 1992). Likewise, breaking the fourth wall, whereby a presenter breaks down the walls of fiction to speak directly to the viewer, increases positive perceptions of a performer and parasociability (Auter, 1992). In breaking the fourth wall, the character becomes more dominant and intimate (Auter, 1992). This suggests that if a vlogger presents more intimate content to their audience, faces the audience straight on and breaks the fourth wall by speaking directly to their audience, parasocial interaction is like to occur.

Speaking directly to the audience by looking directly into the camera is clearly seen in non-fictional media content such as news or current events shows. This is reflected in the research of J. Cohen (2003) who found that when asked to choose their favourite characters, the majority (63.4%) chose news, current affairs or talk show hosts, while only 36.4% chose fictional characters from TV shows or movies. Moreover, having a face on the camera, no matter the direction it is facing, is associated with more authentic content (Ferchaud et al., 2018). This is an important finding for vlog content which primarily has the content creator speaking directly to the camera. This could be replicated in a blog context, despite the blogger not physically facing a camera, as they are still real people (non-fictional characters). Authenticity could be represented by the language that a blogger uses in their content; that is, the blogger could use language that speaks directly to their audience in order to break the fictitious wall that may be apparent in a non-face-to-face environment.

When viewing media content, the audience can often feel transported into another world where they feel involved with the characters they are viewing (Alperstein, 1991), creating a bond of intimacy (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This corresponds to a suspension of disbelief where the audience can become distanced from the real world and their imaginary social world becomes closer (Alperstein, 1991). This has the potential to occur in the blogging and vlogging environment because social influencers, unlike their celebrity counterparts, are seen as accessible, believable and intimate (De Veirman et al., 2017). This can make them seem relatable because they tend to share personal parts of their everyday lives which are usually kept at a distance from the public and which, in turn, could see parasocial interactions created (De Veirman et al., 2017).

As vlogs are somewhat of a video diary and show the content creator speaking directly to the camera, they are associated with self-disclosure (Ferchaud et al., 2018). It is not just vlog content that has an association with self-disclosure, it is also present in other video genres on YouTube, including gaming videos (Ferchaud et al., 2018). This self-disclosure is also associated with authenticity; content creators engaging in self-disclosure in their content are viewed as more authentic (Ferchaud et al., 2018). Likewise, self-disclosure is influential in forming parasocial relationships (Chung & Cho, 2014). Thus, in showing personal content or aspects of their lives, content creators can initiate a relationship with their audience.

Celebrities can use the parasocial interactions they have with their audience to their advantage. Celebrities can play off these parasocial interactions to successfully advertise products through entrenching recommendations and endorsements into their personal stories or content (Lueck, 2015). Surrounding advertising or endorsements with personal content and promoting a lifestyle rather than a singular brand, allows the audience to stay alert throughout, with the audience wanting to stay informed about their idol and even imitate their lifestyle based on their recommendations (Lueck, 2015). Thus, when handled well, parasocial interactions and relationships can be used to marketers' advantage.

Loyalty towards celebrities develop over time as their fans see the reliability and predictability of the celebrity (Horton & Wohl, 1956). However, within these imaginary relationships, some people may find certainty and predictability, while others find intimacy and scepticism. This shows the importance of learning during the progression of a relationship in that the feeling of being close to a relationship partner can change dependent on the information gained (Sunnafrank, 1986). Thus, in acquiring information to reduce uncertainty, or in contrast, to increase uncertainty, relationship status can change and in turn change the level of parasociability felt.

Blog and vlog content can also influence parasocial interactions. Posting frequency, an important aspect of blogs and vlogs, can influence parasocial interaction in regard to interest group identification and problem solving aspects of parasocial interaction (Ledbetter & Redd, 2016). This is important as these aspects of parasocial interaction can influence the perceived credibility of the source (Ledbetter & Redd, 2016). Credibility is vital to blog and vlog content trustworthiness (Beldad et al., 2010; Hsu et al., 2013; Jarvenpaa et al., 2000). As such, creating a parasocial experience for an

audience can influence the trust they place in a blog or a vlog, as parasocial relationships may influence trust directly (Sherman-Morris, 2005).

#### **2.4.4 Knowledge and Expertise**

As mentioned previously, source expertise and knowledge, and user perceptions of such, influence how blog and vlog content is perceived. The perceived expertise of a blogger contributes towards the trust a reader has in the blog content (Colucci & Cho, 2014). Expertise represents how much a communicator, in this case a blogger or a vlogger, is perceived to give valid claims, including the knowledge, experience and skills of the source (Erdogan, 1999). However, it should be noted that the source does not necessarily have to be an expert in any field; rather, they only have to be perceived as an expert by their audience (Erdogan, 1999). In this sense, blogs and vlogs provide an interesting illustration of source expertise in that a source may appear as an expert simply by being a regular consumer giving their own opinion about their personal experience (with a product or service) (Tolson, 2010). Blog readers tend to search for information regarding a blogger's expertise in a topic because it is more difficult to ascertain in this online environment than it is in our offline lives (Colucci & Cho, 2014). They want to find this information because it is a way to determine the trustworthiness and credibility of a blog source (Colucci & Cho, 2014).

Perceptions of blogger expertise can be increased by socialness (Hayes & Carr, 2015). Bloggers who have a background in the topic they are posting on, or who are active in a related industry, are also considered to be a more trustworthy source of information; an independent basis for opinions increases the trustworthiness of a blog source (Colucci & Cho, 2014). Expertise can also increase persuasiveness and purchase intentions (Erdogan, 1999). Overall, expertise, along with trust, can influence the effectiveness of a message (R. R. Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Erdogan, 1999). From a marketing perspective, this is something of vital importance and increases the usefulness of blogs and vlogs as an information source for products and services.

##### ***2.4.4.1 Opinion Leaders and Market Mavens***

Bloggers and vloggers can be seen as opinion leaders or market mavens by consumers. Market mavens are viewed as a type of opinion leader (Nisbet & Kotcher, 2009).

Opinion leaders with higher sociality (encompassing the idea of intimacy) are best for a quicker diffusion of information; those with higher distance centrality (the closeness of entities) are best for the adoption of information (Cho, Hwang, & Lee, 2012). The most effective opinion leaders for communicating information are those that are not excessively superior to their followers or distanced in socio-economic status (Feder & Savastano, 2006), thus, allowing followers to see that the opinion leader is like themselves (or if anything a better version of themselves) rather than someone they cannot identify with.

Characteristics of opinion leaders include status, expertise, knowledge and experience (Feder & Savastano, 2006; Rogers, 1995; Vigar-Ellis, Pitt, & Caruana, 2015). They have external contacts for their information, are educated to a higher degree, have higher literacy levels, are more diverse and generally have higher wealth (Chatman, 1987; Feder & Savastano, 2006; Rogers, 1995). They have the ability to effect attitudes and knowledge (Chatman, 1987; Feder & Savastano, 2006). Despite these characteristics, if an opinion leader shows that they are excessively superior to their audience and their community, their effectiveness and relevance decreases (Feder & Savastano, 2006). This will limit their audience to a small circle that includes only those of a higher status and who are closely connected with them.

Market mavens, although similar, are different from opinion leaders (Feick & Price, 1987). Market mavens are also distinct from consumer innovators (Goldsmith, Flynn, & Goldsmith, 2003). These consumers have a great deal of information about numerous aspects of a marketplace, including products and places to purchase (Feick & Price, 1987; Goldsmith et al., 2003). Market mavens generally comply with social norms. Related to interpersonal influence, market mavens are vulnerable to the normative influences of those who tend to conform, reflecting the idea that although they are information leaders, they also have normative boundaries that direct their consumer behaviour (Clark & Goldsmith, 2005). Vulnerability to normative influences is most often associated with lower self-esteem, however market mavens tend to have higher self-esteem (Clark & Goldsmith, 2005). Likewise, even with this vulnerability to norm conformity, market mavens need to be unique and they display this through their product and brand decisions (Clark & Goldsmith, 2005). Thus, market mavens, like opinion leaders, are apparent amongst bloggers and vloggers. Market mavens in particular have a tendency to conform to norms but at the same time have a need to stand out; they need to be noticed but also accepted by their peers.

#### ***2.4.4.2 Celebrity***

Bloggers and vloggers can reach such a large audience that they become something of a celebrity. This new age of ‘influencers’ can, through their postings about products as well as general daily life, become famous and well known amongst the general public. This has been especially apparent in the vlogging environment with ‘YouTubers’ becoming a new form of celebrity. In this sense, bloggers and vloggers can come to reflect something of a celebrity endorser. Celebrity endorsers tend to be effective because of their attractiveness, credibility, product-celebrity match, product type, involvement, receiver characteristics and meanings like personality and values (Erdogan, 1999). Celebrities may also be effective endorsers for brands because of the positive associations between the brand and the attitudes people have towards the celebrities (De Veirman et al., 2017). Therefore, even if bloggers and vloggers may only hold a pseudo-celebrity status, their effectiveness could still be an asset to brands.

Companies have limited control over their celebrity endorsers, who have created their own identity over time (Erdogan, 1999). The same applies to bloggers and vloggers. When a celebrity matches the product they are endorsing, they are more effective than non-celebrity endorsers in regards to attitudes towards brands and advertising, purchase intention and sales (Erdogan, 1999). Natural brand-celebrity associations create stronger brand effects than commercial associations without disintegrating the credibility of the celebrity (Russell & Rasolofiarison, 2017). Thus, social influencers who are viewed as celebrities may be better from a brand perspective than commercial celebrities.

Bloggers and vloggers are not traditional celebrities; rather, they can become a form of new celebrity through their blogging and vlogging success using their identity and expertise (or perceived expertise). Through vlogging in particular, ordinary, everyday people can become celebrities on YouTube even though mainstream media platforms do not recognise them as such. Through its accessibility and status, vlogging is open to ordinary people who can rise to become pseudo-celebrities (Tolson, 2010). Expert blogs are viewed as lower risk than simple celebrity blogs and they are associated with higher purchase intention (Ho, Chiu, Chen, & Papazafeiropoulou, 2015). YouTube celebrities (incorporated into the term vloggers in this research) have been found to be more engaging and relatable than traditional celebrities and, because they are not subject to the same image controlling strategies as traditional celebrities, they are viewed as creating a more intimate, authentic and candid experience for their viewers (Variety, 2014).

Bloggers and vloggers have a distinctive place in the minds of their readers; they are identifiable (Belch & Belch, 2011) and recognisable and it is this place that is similar to that of their celebrity counterparts. Readers come to idolise bloggers in their minds (Halvorsen, Hoffmann, Coste-Manière, & Stankeviciute, 2013). In this sense, bloggers and vloggers can develop into a new form of celebrity. This newly formed celebrity can be important to product review-based blogs and vlogs because if the blogger or vlogger is perceived as a type of celebrity in the minds of the reader, meaning transfer can occur (just as it can with an offline celebrity). A celebrity brings with them their own symbolic meanings when endorsing a product (Erdogan, 1999), that is, meanings, like status or personality, that pass through to the products they are endorsing.

Just like a celebrity, bloggers and vloggers first of all create their own image. Should they reach this more celebrity-like status in their readers (or viewers) minds, this meaning could be transferred onto the products that they are reviewing or discussing and then passed on from the product to the reader (or viewer) should they purchase that product. This could be a positive thing for advertising: celebrity-brand associations that are perceived as being more genuine and real can create stronger effects than those associations created within the realm of advertising because those perceived as more genuine are developed in the real world (Russell & Rasolofoarison, 2017). This is reflective of the blog and vlog environments whereby any advertisement or sponsorship of products or services appearing in the content is appearing in a 'real' environment. For vloggers especially, the 'real' environment seen in their videos is their own home or the local shops or restaurants. In other words, bloggers and vloggers may appear more genuine because they are not in a film studio (a fake environment) like their television or movie celebrity counterparts.

Celebrities are followed on social media platforms because people want insight into their personal lives (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). This is a key characteristic of social influencers like bloggers and vloggers who depict their personal lives from the start, whereas traditional celebrities are initially recognised for their celebrity-status before revealing aspects of their personal lives. Both celebrities and these pseudo-celebrities are now able to connect directly with their audience – something that has only come about recently. This has transformed engagement (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016) between celebrities and their audiences. The result for bloggers and vloggers who are viewed as a kind of celebrity in the minds of their audience is that their recommendations are received with more meaning, transferred from the blogger or

vlogger themselves. Buying a product recommended by a favourite blogger or vlogger is therefore similar to a celebrity endorsement by a favourite celebrity.

### **2.4.5 Community Creation**

Communities are essential to society; thus, it is not surprising virtual communities (like their offline counterparts) have been extensively researched. The concept of community enters our lives whether it is intended or not. Despite community being such an important societal concept, there is no consensus on the nature of community itself (Hillery Jr., 1955). Community can be defined using three key foundational ideas: place, common ties and social interaction (Hillery Jr., 1955). A community is the creation of its member units and the relationships between those units (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Community is the feeling of being a part of an ideal place (at an ideal time) where those we know and care about surround us (Bess, Fisher, Sonn, & Bishop, 2002) and is identifiable based on commonalities or identification (McAlexander et al., 2002).

Key to community is the idea of social identity (U. M. Dholakia et al., 2004). Social identity encompasses the key parts of a person's group identification in regard to how they see themselves as a part of the community (U. M. Dholakia et al., 2004). Social identity can also suggest emotional involvement with the group – an attachment to the group (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002) that can nurture a feeling of loyalty or citizenship (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). This can justify the reasons why consumers are willingly uphold relationships with brands (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) – in this case, with content creators on blogs and vlogs. When looking at its evaluative elements, social identity is an important aspect of community in that through it, an individual defines their own self-worth in belonging to a community (U. M. Dholakia et al., 2004).

A community can also be seen as a social network (Wellman & Gulia, 1999) and virtual communities can be seen as WOM networks (De Valck, van Bruggen, & Wierenga, 2009). Within an environment, people develop relationships with other people, brands and a social network. Trust between members of that environment, shared interests, experiences and brand relationships help to foresee these relationships (Quinton & Harridge-March, 2010). Group norms are also of importance here. Group norms, along with social identity, attitudes and predicted emotions, assist in the creation of behavioural desires (Tsai & Bagozzi, 2014). As opposed to traditional offline reference

groups, virtual communities serve as reference groups in the online environment and are often used as an information source (De Valck et al., 2009). Thus, a group, or community, can influence a consumer on what to buy or what information to consume.

Group norms can invoke internalisation that is, understanding and committing to goals, values, beliefs and agreements that are shared within the group (U. M. Dholakia et al., 2004). Informational reference group influence is an internalisation process of the reference group's perceived norms and opinions (De Valck et al., 2009). Credibility (made up of source expertise and trustworthiness) is also an important source characteristic which can determine internalisation (De Valck et al., 2009). These aspects are highly relevant to virtual communities as the group-related information in these communities is highly accessible and deductible (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 2000). It should also be noted that, as virtual communities encourage interaction, subjective norms are worse than group norms or social identity in encouraging involvement and contribution to the community (Tsai & Bagozzi, 2014). In other words, group norms and social identity are important to a successful community.

Social ties are also of importance within communities. Good social ties are crucial to one's wellbeing. Without these social ties amongst family and community, there is a larger risk of feeling isolated along with other negative psychosocial consequences (Durkheim, cited in Worsley, 1987). This can be transferred to an online environment whereby strong ties online have similar characteristics to those in the offline environment, including the incitement of voluntary and frequent contact and companionship (Wellman & Gulia, 1999; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). However, weak ties are not necessarily a bad thing; rather, weak ties in both online and offline environments are more suitable for connecting people with different social characteristics (Wellman & Gulia, 1999).

The online environment is most suited to supporting intermediate strength ties between people who do not see each other very often (Wellman & Gulia, 1999) based on its accessibility and ease with which the Internet can be used. The online environment also facilitates information which becomes a strong factor in the development of online social ties and ties in the offline world (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). However, this does not mean that the online world lacks the social characteristic of offline social ties. Rather, the Internet allows for companionship, emotional support and the feeling of belonging (Wellman & Gulia, 1999).

The online environment also differs from the offline environment in terms of perceived intimacy. Virtual communities are more likely to develop feelings of closeness in their relationships based on shared interests rather than shared social characteristics (e.g. gender, socioeconomic status etc.) (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Most relationships, in general, are able to provide specialised support – support which is related more towards the relationship characteristics than the network members' characteristics (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). This suggests that the online environment can facilitate relationships just like the offline world. Thus, online interactions can become as sociable and intimate as real-world relations which shows that the Internet does not prevent intimacy (Walther, 1995).

Community influence in itself is not a solid state. The extent community influence can have fluctuates dependent on the different members of the community and on various phases of the consumer decision-making process (De Valck et al., 2009). The influence the reference group can have is significant. When making purchase decisions, consumers consider other people to be important (De Valck et al., 2009). In a brand community, there is a customer-to-customer-to-brand triad (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) and there is no geographical boundary (McAlexander et al., 2002), especially in the case of virtual communities.

Becoming involved in a virtual community is a conscious choice. Traditional community membership may not be voluntary; instead, it is potentially determined by where and when a person was born and now lives (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Virtual communities have become more notable with the rise of collective individualism (Quinton & Harridge-March, 2010) and the onslaught of “word-of-mouth” (De Valck et al., 2009) communications which the online environment and increasingly the digital world has brought forth.

Internet communities are sometimes viewed as not being true communities, although this does not mean they are not communities in some form (Driskell & Lyon, 2002). Rather, some suggest that online relationships can actually reduce, reinforce or simply provide a weak replacement for the traditional community (Driskell & Lyon, 2002). These virtual communities could reflect real world communities in that there is a support system available (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). However, there are obvious differences between online and offline communities in regard to face-to-face and electronic communication (Blanchard & Markus, 2004).

Becoming a part of a virtual community is not out of the ordinary. Rather, it could be deemed as unavoidable with Internet users seeking for more than just information – they also seek for companionship and social support and even simply feeling like they belong (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). What makes virtual communities stand apart from traditional communities is members' willingness to communicate with strangers in an online environment, which differs from the real world and offline situations where people usually refrain from intervening and communicating with strangers (Latane' & Darley, 1976). In contrast, the online environment may see people more willing to intervene in a community and communicate with a stranger because they feel as though they are the only one around to answer (Wellman & Gulia, 1999).

The online environment's comparatively egalitarian essence can help encourage people to respond to others' requests (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). In comparison to traditional media formats like film and television, blogs and vlogs in particular are based on interactive audience-centricity and can appeal to authenticity and community. In the commercial space, this is referred to as social media entertainment (Cunningham & Craig, 2017).

The lack of social richness in the online environment may actually lead to contact with more diverse people who are used as a substitute for physically present others (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Virtual communities based on a topic of interest actually bring people together; strangers that have never met and will likely never meet in the offline world (De Valck et al., 2009) are willing to interact. Thus, the power in virtual communities (as reference groups especially) relies strongly on the heterogeneity of its members. A sense of virtual community can be felt through the exchange of support, identity creation and the construction of trust (Blanchard & Markus, 2004). The use of virtual communities as a source of information is preferred in different formats: factual, socialisation or recreational (De Valck et al., 2009). Thus, social influencers like bloggers and vloggers, who remain part of their created virtual communities and maintain that sense of identity, are seen by their followers as credible and relatable (Forbes, 2016). These are key characteristics for successfully communicating marketing messages and in recommending products in a way which works for their community.

## **2.5 The Reader/Viewer**

This section examines the research on what influences an audience member may have on their own perceptions of blog and vlog created content. These include parasocial interaction, homophily and similarity, prior experience, social ties, extended self and user characteristics. These concepts are discussed with reference to the impact of perceptions and trust in online content.

### **2.5.1 User Characteristics**

The blog reader or vlog watcher themselves can influence how blog and vlog content is perceived (F. Li & Du, 2011) and this includes their general tendency to trust (Beldad et al., 2010). In general, younger consumers, the general blog and vlog user group, are reasonably suspicious of recommendations made online and often suspect that a blogger has been sponsored, even if there has not been a recommendation in the post (Liljander et al., 2015). However, this suspected covert marketing does not appear to have a negative effect on behaviour (Liljander et al., 2015). This is likely because while users may be suspicious and aware of blogger and vlogger sponsorship online, this is not a rare occurrence and thus they are generally sceptical of recommendations anyway.

Consumers can have a relationship with a website, including a blog or a vlog. This could be a more formal or functional relationship where the user visits for informational purposes only, either looking for specific information or just browsing to see what information is there. Alternatively, it could be a more personal or emotional relationship where there is low intimacy, but the website is often sought out. It could also involve a more long-term relationship where users are a part of a specific online community (J. Brown et al., 2007). Likewise, a blog or a vlog could become a 'third place' (a place other than the first place of home or the second place of work). They can become somewhere that people frequent and enjoy themselves, and a place that they feel accepted (Belk, 2013). In the offline world, these third places can include pubs or coffee shops; somewhere that people become regulars and are known and accepted by others (Belk, 2013). Therefore, it is possible that online spaces that people frequent, like blogs or vlogs, can become third places; places that are accessible, feel like another home and allow for conversation (Oldenburg, 1999).

Blogs and vlogs do have some benefits for their users. Social media platforms have a positive relationship with consumer purchase decisions (Song & Yoo, 2016). Specifically, hedonic, functional and monetary benefits from social media have a positive influence on consumer purchase decisions (Song & Yoo, 2016). WOM usage influences user attitudes towards the products being discussed (Martin & Lueg, 2013). Also, trust in the WOM source has a stronger impact on users' use of the WOM content than the source's evidence for their recommendation, product experience, knowledge or skill in the surrounding product group (Martin & Lueg, 2013). For blogs specifically, blog users gain experiential value whilst they read blogs, which positively influences their perception and attitudes about what is being discussed (Keng & Ting, 2009). Thus, blog and vlog content can be beneficial to the reader or viewer in that they can gain the knowledge they want, as well as being beneficial to the company whose brand or product is being discussed. Importantly, the trust that a reader or viewer can gain from an information source can strongly influence their perceptions. Just like the blog or vlog itself, and the blogger or vlogger (the source), the reader or viewer themselves can have an impact on their own perceptions of blog and vlog content.

#### ***2.5.1.1 Prior Experience***

Prior experience in the online environment can influence the way content is perceived. It is not only the experience with a WOM source that can have an influence on the perceived usefulness of WOM content; experience with the product discussed can also impact (Martin & Lueg, 2013). Likewise, online trust can be influenced by a user's experience with the technology they are using (computers, Internet, blogs and vlogs) (Beldad et al., 2010). Past experience with the online environment could reduce the perception of risk associated with using the Internet (Metzger, 2006).

For blogs in particular, prior experience can also influence how the blog content is perceived. User experience with blogs has a positive influence on their perceived value and satisfaction (S. C. Chen & Lin, 2015). Blog users' perceptions of value can then positively influence their satisfaction and intention to continue involvement with the blog community (S. C. Chen & Lin, 2015). Blog content satisfaction, in turn, can positively influence the intention to continue and the sustainability of the social relationship (S. C. Chen & Lin, 2015). Thus, prior experience within an online environment, and specifically with blog and vlog content, can influence perceptions of the content, especially in regard to satisfaction and value.

## **2.5.2 Connectedness**

Characteristics of the viewer or reader can contribute to their perceptions of feeling a connection with a content creator. These include their own characteristics which can make them more susceptible to parasocial interactions, as well as feelings of similarity and homophily, and social ties.

### ***2.5.2.1 Parasocial Interaction***

Parasocial interaction is a concept related to both the information source (as discussed prior with regards to bloggers and vloggers) and the information receiver (the reader or viewer). It is a suspension of disbelief in which a viewer becomes distanced from the real world and is pulled closer to their imaginary social world (Alperstein, 1991). For one, the reader or viewer needs to have the ability to maintain a cognitive perspective. A stronger parasocial experience can be derived from the ability to maintain a strong cognitive perspective (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). It has also been suggested that attitude homophily is the strongest predictor of parasocial interactions (Turner, 1993). However, it is not the only predictor; it is apparent that parasocial interactions may involve many aspects.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger, 1986) could help explain parasocial relationships (Perse & Rubin, 1989). This theory suggests that, over time, relationships develop as uncertainty reduces; that is, increasing certainty about a character allows for relationships to progress (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). This suggests that when followers of a content creator read or watch the creator's content on a frequent basis, any uncertainties about that content creator, particularly in the case of vloggers, are reduced and a relationship, or parasocial relationship, may develop. However, despite this, Turner's (1993) study that looked at television personalities and parasocial relationships found only a small, if any, relationship between the amount of time a person watched their favourite television personality and parasocial interaction with that same television personality. Rather, the strong feelings towards a media character, characteristic of a parasocial interaction, are likely to occur only once the viewer has experienced numerous parasocial encounters (Auter, 1992). Thus, parasocial relationship development is based on more than just following a media personality for a length of time; rather, there are numerous factors (discussed further in this section), including prior exposure to parasocial experiences, that can influence a parasocial relationship.

A third-party revelation about a blogger being sponsored can impact on parasocial interaction in that such a revelation will decrease the parasocial interactivity felt (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015). Interestingly, this parasocial interaction mediates a decrease in blog credibility and attitude (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015). Parasocial interactions also mediate the relationship between interactivity and perceived interactivity and website attitude (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006) and therefore, the attitude of a blog or a vlog can be important in relation to content trust. The creation of a parasocial interaction with an audience increases their enjoyment of the situation (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011), and as such, is a desired state for both the presenter and the viewer.

People may depend on certain media types when there is a lack of other options. For example, consumers may turn to a blog or a vlog when they cannot get WOM advice from their offline contacts. Thus, as the number of substitutes decreases, the level of reliance a consumer places on a mass medium rises in order for them to satisfy their need – and as this dependency increases, so might its effects (A. M. Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985; R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). In advertising in particular, even if a person is sceptical of the advertisement, they may still look outside the intended message when there is a convergence of information, gossip and prior exposure to the presenter (e.g., celebrity, vlogger) (Alperstein, 1991). In the case of blogs and vlogs that contain sponsored content or advertising within a post, even if the viewer or reader is sceptical about the content, the person may look beyond the message when it coincides with other information they have. This can become a part of the person's social construction of reality (Alperstein, 1991).

Dependency can be developed through perceived reality factors; the user must believe the content they are consuming in order for the media to have more impact (A. M. Rubin et al., 1985). The perception of reality appears to be important in developing parasocial interactivity as the presenter of the content attempts to recreate the presence of intimacy (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

The use of media by people who are lonely shows the importance of dependency in the creation of parasocial interaction. Those who are lonely, despite wanting to be social, may be inclined by their own psychological state to be less effective in creating sufficient interpersonal relationships (A. M. Rubin et al., 1985). Therefore, in order to satisfy their need for socialisation, people may seek out social encounters through the

use of media as a substitute for physical engagement (A. M. Rubin et al., 1985). There is an association between loneliness and the use of communication alternatives (A. M. Rubin et al., 1985): those who struggle to engage in interpersonal relationships may look for alternative socialisation techniques like interacting with bloggers or vloggers. Likewise, some aspects of a person's self-esteem can help with predicting and explaining parasocial interactions (Turner, 1993). Despite the potential lack of social fulfilment that some literature suggests may lead to parasocial relationships, it is also apparent that there are other factors. Thus, parasocial relationships should not be seen as a simple compensation for the lack of social relationships; rather, they should be seen as an extension of social relationships (J. Cohen, 2004).

Parasocial interaction is associated with relationships and relationship development. Parasocial interaction is positively (and significantly) related to perceived relationship development importance (R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Parasocial interaction is used in a similar way to actual, physical relationships (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009). It is not just a one-way development; rather, users themselves actively participate in parasocial relationships and work to establish them (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009). But are these parasocial relationships similar to, or enough to replace, ordinary offline (face-to-face) relationships? It is apparent that people make individual judgements about media personas and then react to them as if they were within their physical space (Giles, 2002). This helps integrate media personas into their lives and social group and it can therefore be suggested that the psychological processes of both parasocial and ordinary relationships are similar (Giles, 2002).

In essence, it is apparent that many aspects of parasocial interaction are similar to those of social interaction (Giles, 2002). Parasocial interaction could stem from the simple need for interpersonal interactions (A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987). There is a linear relationship between the construct systems of real people and soap opera characters (Perse & Rubin, 1989). It has been suggested that people use a large percentage of their interpersonal constructs when describing soap opera characters (Perse & Rubin, 1989). This supports the idea that the same psychological processes which influence close relationships amongst people are the same as those which parasocial relationships are contingent on (J. Cohen, 2004). Thus, parasocial interaction can reflect, and potentially be a substitute for, traditional face-to-face relationships and fulfil a similar socialisation need.

Parasocial interactions are also related to attachment; that is, a willingness to create a parasocial bond with a media personality is associated with attachment beliefs (Cole & Leets, 1999). Attachment in adults can reduce the distance they feel between themselves and the attachment figure (or fulfil proximity seeking needs), and provide a sense of security (fulfilling the need for a security base) (Cole & Leets, 1999). Attachment is not a blanket term; rather, there are different attachment styles a person may fit into.

There are three key categories of attachment styles: secure, anxious-ambivalent and avoidant (Cole & Leets, 1999). Secure persons tend to be more sociable (Duggan & Brennan, 1994), and have a more positive affect (Simpson, 1990). These individuals have a diverse range of expectations that result in relational interactions (Cole & Leets, 1999) and fall into a middle range of trust with the more mistrusting individuals in this category tending to engage in a parasocial interaction experience (Cole & Leets, 1999). This could suggest that an individual who is more mistrusting may become involved in a parasocial relationship with a content creator.

Anxious-ambivalent individuals tend to idealise their relationship partner (Feeney & Noller, 1990) and pursue extensive contact with and devote themselves to this partner (Hindy & Schwartz, 1984). Anxious-ambivalent individuals are more likely to engage in an extreme variety of behaviour that lead to the dissolution of relations, guided by their own fear of loneliness and disappointment in their relationship partner who does not live up to their ideal expectations (Cole & Leets, 1999). People with this attachment style are most likely to develop a parasocial bond, potentially because of their own desire for intimacy or the stability of media characters meeting their idealised relational needs (Cole & Leets, 1999).

Finally, people who have an avoidant attachment style tend to be less sociable (Duggan & Brennan, 1994). Avoidant individuals tend to be more pessimistic about relationships and themselves in general (Feeney & Noller, 1990) and are the least likely to develop parasocial relationships (Cole & Leets, 1999). These individuals find it difficult to trust other people and often keep them at a greater, more comfortable distance (Cole & Leets, 1999; Feeney & Noller, 1990). Thus, these individuals are less likely to develop a parasocial bond with a content creator as they have difficulty forming relationships in the real world and are not easily trusting people, making connections with a supposed stranger less likely.

Parasocial interaction has expanded from simple television communication: the online environment has become an important medium for consumption and relationships in our everyday lives that it is only natural that parasocial relationships can now develop there. There has been an evolution in parasocial interaction alongside the evolution in Internet communication technologies which allow users more ways to interact (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009). Parasocial interaction is likely in not only vlogs (as a digital, online alternative to television) but also blogs (as written content). Blogs potentially lead to the establishment of parasocial relationships because physical attraction is not as important in parasocial relationships as social attraction (whereby the media figure, or in this case a blogger, can be viewed as a friend) (R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). These relationships can also develop when advertising material is included by content creators whereby an individual may relate their experience of the advertisement to a fictitious social relationship with the content creator, just as has occurred in the realm of television (Alperstein, 1991). Parasocial interaction is an illusionary experience (Horton & Wohl, 1956) which can help satisfy the need of a face-to-face relationship.

#### ***2.5.2.2 Homophily and Similarity***

Associated with parasocial interactions is the idea of homophily. Homophily is defined as communication flow mostly among those who are similar to one another (Feder & Savastano, 2006), encompassing the idea that “birds of a feather flock together”. It contrasts with heterophily – those who communicate with others who are different to themselves (Feder & Savastano, 2006). The similarities of those in homophilous relationships are evident not just within individual relationships but within the whole population of a homophilous community. Communities that are created based on ties within a group of people do not have distinguishing interests, which suggests that the social ties that are created are not directed by homophily (Bisgin, Agarwal, & Xu, 2010, 2012). Homophily is a concept of its own and although it is related to the strength of ties, it does differ (J. J. Brown & Reingen, 1987).

Online homophily differs from its offline equivalent. This is because the website itself can act as a social proxy for the identification of homophily (J. Brown et al., 2007). It is suggested that online homophily may also differ from offline homophily in the sense that it is almost completely independent of interpersonal factors which are usually associated with homophily (J. Brown et al., 2007). Instead of these interpersonal factors, the concepts of shared group interests and a group mind-set, which are evaluated at the

website level itself, are drivers of online homophily (J. Brown et al., 2007). Thus, online homophily may occur in blog and vlog settings because of the communal nature of these platforms and their foundations in eWOM.

The effectiveness of homophily can be seen in different ways, and there is some debate surrounding the place of homophily in effective eWOM. It has been suggested that those who share similar qualities tend to more frequently exchange information (Rogers, 1995). Homophilous sources have more influence over decision making (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). Research has also suggested that similarities in the attitudes of consumers and in psychographic attributes do not lead to eWOM behaviour; therefore, there is a negative relationship between homophily and eWOM (Chu & Kim, 2011). Research focused on blogs specifically has found that blog readers are attracted to blog writers with similar personalities to themselves (J. Li & Chignell, 2010). This supports the idea of homophily in an online, eWOM context. Thus, it is apparent that there are some disparities in homophily based research in an online context and this is an area that requires further research.

Homophily explains the idea of similarity in age, gender, education or lifestyle amongst people (Rogers, 1995). Although related to the idea of homophily, similarity is a different concept. Similarity can influence people towards greater interpersonal attraction, comprehension and, importantly, trust than is evident amongst those who are not similar (Ruef, Aldrich, & Carter, 2003). As such, it makes sense that people tend to associate with those they perceive to be similar to themselves. However, this does not imply that only similar people will associate; rather, those who are not similar (heterophilous) can enable information flow between diverse parts of society (Rogers, 1995).

Blog users are more trusting of bloggers who demonstrate similar personal qualities to themselves (Colucci & Cho, 2014). When a blog user perceives themselves as having similar characteristics to a blogger, they are more likely to feel that their own opinions and judgements coincide with those of the blogger, thereby creating a good fit between the blog user and the blog recommendations or posts (Colucci & Cho, 2014). Having even only a few similar interests makes friendship more likely (Lauw, Shafer, Agrawal, & Ntoulas, 2010). Likewise, friendship also makes it more probable that a pair share common interests (Huang, 2015). An increase in the degree of similarity, in regards to thoughts and opinions, sees a coinciding increase in the level of acceptance of a blog

(Keng & Ting, 2009). Thus, like homophily, similarity is important to a blog (or vlog) user in their estimation of the source of the information they are consuming. This can reflect feelings of real relationships and contribute to the way blog and vlog content is perceived.

### ***2.5.2.3 Social Ties***

Tie strength relates to the closeness of a relationship (J. Brown et al., 2007; J. J. Brown & Reingen, 1987; Money, Gilly, & Graham, 1998). Tie strength is multidimensional, can range from strong to weak, and includes the ideas of closeness, intimacy and associations (J. Brown et al., 2007; J. J. Brown & Reingen, 1987; Money et al., 1998). A strong tie is reflective of an intimate and special relationship (Frenzen & Davis, 1990) – a relationship voluntarily invested in and desired.

This is not to say that weak ties are not useful; rather, it has been suggested that weak ties should not be completely discounted (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). In an eWOM context, there may not be much difference between strong and weak ties (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). Those with weaker ties may be more likely to be viewed as having greater expertise and can be beneficial to information flow (J. J. Brown & Reingen, 1987). However, when both strong and weak ties are present, it is more likely that the stronger tie will be a trigger for information flow (J. J. Brown & Reingen, 1987). However, research that has examined eWOM behaviour has concluded that perceptions of tie strength have a positive association with the intention to seek out and pass along product information online (Chu & Kim, 2011). It is apparent that there is a need for further research on the disparities surrounding tie strength in an online and eWOM context.

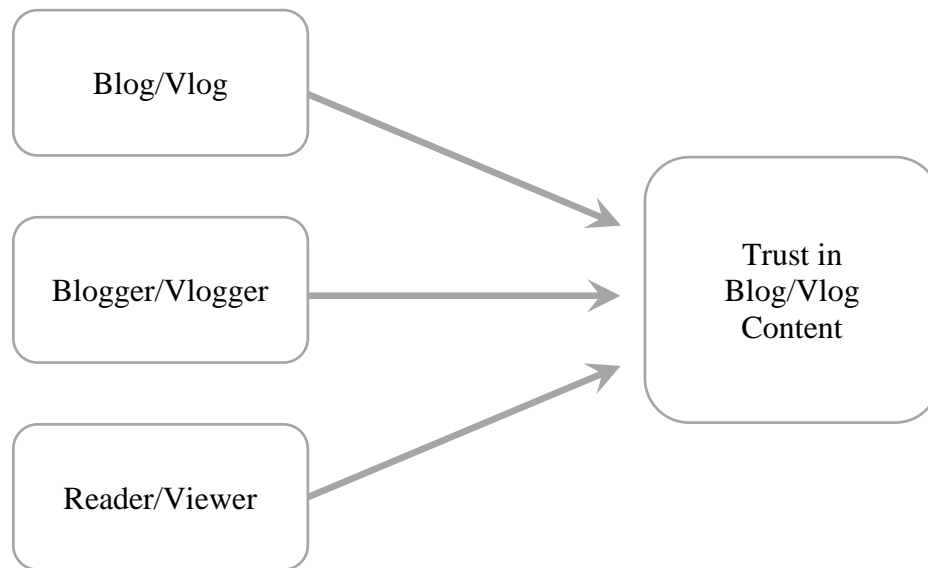
Tie strength impacts on the flow of information (J. Brown et al., 2007). Strong tie relationships see more interaction more frequently than weak tie relationships (J. J. Brown & Reingen, 1987). More WOM is contributed to stronger ties than to weaker ties as strong ties have more of an influence on the receiver's behaviour because of the increased frequency and perceived importance of the relationship (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). In an online social network context, consumers show lower self-control in decisions when exposed to those they are closer friends with (Stephen, 2016). However, sharing a tie in an online social network does not necessarily mean participants share interests (Bisgin et al., 2012). Tie strength also relates to similarity. The stronger a

social tie is between people, the more likely they are to be similar (J. Brown et al., 2007; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). This shows that tie strength coincides with homophily in that an increase in one relates to an increase in the other.

However, some research suggests that tie strength in an online environment may not be as relevant as in the offline environment (J. Brown et al., 2007). Like homophily, there is a distinction between online and offline tie strength; a website can act as a proxy for tie strength, just as it does for homophily (J. Brown et al., 2007). This suggests that tie strength can be developed between the person seeking out the information and the information source; the source, however, may be the website rather than an individual person (J. Brown et al., 2007). In other words, in the context of blogs and vlogs, it may not be the blogger or vlogger that the user has a tie with; rather, it may be the blog or vlog itself.

## **2.6 Conceptual Model and Research Questions**

Figure 3 represents the previously discussed concepts that influence consumer trust in blog and vlog content: blog/vlog, blogger/vlogger and reader/viewer characteristics. Blog and vlog characteristics influence trust in blog and vlog content in terms of institutional trust. This is because they reflect aspects of the blog or vlog itself that relate to blog and vlog systems or institutions and as such trust in the system of blogs or vlogs (or even the online environment in general) can develop. Blogger and vlogger characteristics represent the information source and influence the trust in blog and vlog content in terms of interpersonal trust. This is because the reader or viewer form a relationship with the blogger or vlogger when they are consuming content and trust in the individual blogger or vlogger is likely to develop. Reader and viewer characteristics influence trust in blog and vlog content in terms of dispositional trust. This is because the reader or viewer's general tendency to trust can influence how they trust the blog or vlog content as well as trust people in general.



**Figure 3 Conceptual model of trust in blog and vlog content**

Blog/vlog, blogger/vlogger and reader/viewer are constructed of the differing concepts and characteristics discussed in the prior corresponding sections. This model leads to two key Research Questions:

1. Why do consumers trust blog and vlog content?
2. Are there differences in the factors that influence trust in blog content versus trust in vlog content?

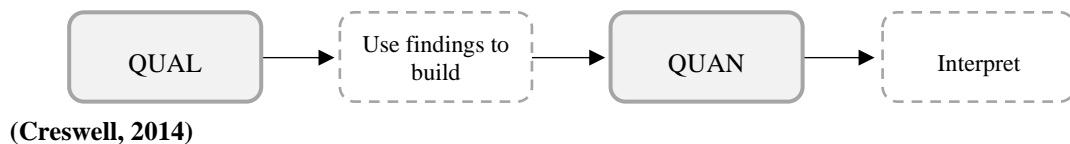
What is it that makes consumers trust the information presented by strangers in the online environment? Do blogs and vlogs differ in how they are trusted and are the factors which make consumers trust blog content different from what makes consumers trust vlog content? These questions will guide the research as it delves deeply into the psychological and sociological processes which have made blogs and vlogs popular sources of consumer information and help identify why it is consumers use these platforms as information sources. This will, in turn, help businesses provide consumers with the information that they are looking for when making a purchase decision.

# Chapter Three: Research Design

## 3.1 Introduction

This research used an exploratory sequential mixed method, qualitative-quantitative research approach (Creswell, 2014), (Figure 4). Study One comprised a qualitative investigation that allowed for depth and new ideas to be gained directly from the source. These findings allowed for the concepts relating to trust in blog and vlog content to be narrowed down for use in Study Two. A model with hypotheses was developed for further testing based on Study One's results. Study Two, a quantitative study with data gathered via a structured questionnaire distributed to an online survey panel, tested this model with scale measures of model constructs and structural equation modelling.

This chapter presents the research philosophy adopted in the study, then justifies the use of a mixed methods research approach, and describes in detail the research design for Study One.



**Figure 4 Sequential mixed method (qualitative-quantitative) approach**

### 3.1.1 Research Aims

The aim of this research was to first explore the factors and characteristics surrounding why consumers trust blog and vlog content. The concepts and characteristics discovered in Study One were then used to form a model which was tested in Study Two through structural equation modelling. These steps address the Research Questions developed in the literature review chapter:

1. Why do consumers trust blog and vlog content?

2. Are there differences in the factors that influence trust in blog content versus trust in vlog content?

### **3.2 Research Philosophy**

This section introduces and illustrates the researcher's choice of research paradigm and justifies the philosophical basis for the research.

#### **3.2.1 Justification for Research Paradigm**

It is important to acknowledge the researcher's chosen research paradigm as it forms the basis of how the research will take place. Research paradigms describe how the researcher views the nature of reality and suggests how the research into the nature of reality should be undertaken (Bryman & Bell, 2003). It is essentially a framework of the researcher's worldview or belief about the nature of reality, knowledge and existence, which may influence the researcher's interpretation of qualitative data.

A research paradigm consists of key philosophical assumptions: ontology, epistemology and the researcher's chosen methodology. Ontology asks the question of the nature of reality and the study of existence, acknowledging the worldviews and assumptions of a researcher which impact their research (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Epistemology is the determination of what counts as knowledge, the process of thinking and how the nature of reality should be researched; the relationship between that which is being researched and the researcher themselves, and between what we know and what we see (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lincoln et al., 2011). Methodology refers to the overall process of the research; how the researcher gains new knowledge (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lincoln et al., 2011). The choice of research paradigm (ontology and epistemology) influences the choice of research methodology (Myers, 2009). Paradigms also take into account the researcher's ethics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It is important to acknowledge the researcher's paradigm as all research is based on interpretation and guided by the researchers own beliefs and feelings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003); it is a human construction of their principles which may reflect upon their interpretations of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

These philosophical assumptions are rooted in interpretive frameworks or research paradigms (Creswell, 2013). These generally fall under social science theories (theories of leadership, attribution or influence) or social justice theories (advocacy or participatory theories) (Creswell, 2013). There are four main research paradigms: positivism, postpositivism, interpretivism (or constructivism), and critical theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lincoln et al., 2011; Myers, 2009). Positivists are viewed as realists or ‘hard science’ researchers; postpositivists are a modified version of positivists (Lincoln et al., 2011). Social constructivists, or interpretivists, seek an understanding of the world through developing subjective meanings of experiences (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2011). Critical theory aims to create change and help those suffering from oppression, for example race or gender (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2011). Other notable interpretive frameworks include postmodernism, which focuses on changing way of thinking, and pragmatism, which focuses on research outcomes (Creswell, 2013). Finally, researchers may take a transformative framework, which is based on democratic participation between a researcher and the subject (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2011).

A postpositivist paradigm was adopted for this research. This was due to the researcher’s own beliefs towards research and because it was most appropriate for the mixed methodology chosen for this research. Postpositivism is also viewed as fitting comfortably with mixed methodology, with a large portion of mixed methods research leaning towards a postpositivist epistemology (Denzin, 2010; Giddings, 2006). Mixed methodology has been said to validate postpositivism, indicating that any method can be used as methods are simply tools (Denzin, 2010). Postpositive qualitative research relies heavily on a well-articulated research question and triangulation by using more than one data collection method (Giddings & Grant, 2009). This research uses clearly articulated research questions and mixed methodology (i.e. more than one method of data collection). As such, a postpositivist paradigm marries well with the mixed methodology chosen for this research.

### ***3.2.1.1 Postpositivism***

Postpositivism takes a scientific approach to research using a theoretical lens based in social science and signifies the thinking or thought processes after positivism, as the name suggests (Lincoln et al., 2011; Phillips & Burbules, 2000). Postpositivism is representative of the traditional research form alongside acknowledging that, when

studying human behaviour, we cannot be completely positive about our findings (Creswell, 2014). As postpositivism is a modified form of positivism, the two paradigms do share some similarities. Both are viewed as realists or as 'hard science' researchers and are commensurable whereby all data created is equal (Lincoln et al., 2011). Positivist paradigms aim to explain and grow or accumulate knowledge and appear as a somewhat disinterested scientist. Ethically, positivist paradigms are extrinsic in nature, leaning toward deception techniques (Lincoln et al., 2011).

Positivists and postpositivists, when looking at the quality of research, both use the traditional standards of precision and accuracy, favouring internal and external validity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003); confidence levels and objectivity (Lincoln et al., 2011). Thus, positivists and postpositivists believe that they, as the researcher, should remain objective and do not get involved with any actions resulting from their research findings (Lincoln et al., 2011). Overall, all positivists are realists and believe the researcher should remain objective in their research to ensure high quality, precise research is produced.

### *3.2.1.1.1 Postpositivism versus Positivists*

Although they share some key similar beliefs, there are some key differences between these two paradigms. Postpositivists aim to ask more questions than positivists do due to their acknowledgement of unknown variables occurring in research (Lincoln et al., 2011). Where positivists have verified hypotheses which they recognise as fact or law, postpositivists have nonfalsified hypotheses that are viewed as probable fact or law (Lincoln et al., 2011); the key difference here lying in the postpositivist identification that findings are probable. Postpositivists research with an understanding that findings are not certain, rather simply probable; postpositivists do not believe in solid cause and effect relationships, rather that cause and effect is probable (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2011). In regard to method, positivists rely on quantitative methods, whereas postpositivists have the ability to research using mixed methods (Lincoln et al., 2011).

However, an important difference between positivists and postpositivists lies within their beliefs or views on the nature of reality. According to Lincoln et al. (2011), positivists believe that there is only one truth, or one reality and that knowledge is the comprehension of and control over nature. Postpositivists believe that, like positivists, there is a singular reality, however they believe that it can never fully be understood

(Lincoln et al., 2011); thus, research findings are probable more so than certain. In other words, postpositivism discards the notion that knowledge is constructed on unequivocally secure foundations (Phillips & Burbules, 2000).

#### *3.2.1.1.2 Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology*

Postpositivists focus their data collection and analysis on careful observation and measurement of the existing objective reality. They undertake a deterministic philosophy whereby cause and effect is probable. They are reductionist in that they try to reduce their findings into smaller, more discrete sets to further test (Creswell, 2014). Ontologically, postpositivists lean towards critical realism; understanding the ‘real’ reality is imperfect and only probable (Lincoln et al., 2011). In regard to the nature of reality, they believe that although there is a singular reality, we can never completely understand it because of concealed variables and an absence of certainty in nature (Lincoln et al., 2011).

Epistemologically, postpositivists are viewed as modified dualists or objectivists. As they believe nature can only be estimated, postpositivists view research as a means for making decisions using imperfect data (Lincoln et al., 2011). Not only this, but postpositivists seek validity of research from peers rather than subjects (Lincoln et al., 2011).

Methodologically, postpositivists embrace a modified experimental or manipulative research style, incorporating critical multiplism, falsifying hypotheses, and the ability to include qualitative methods alongside quantitative (Lincoln et al., 2011). According to Lincoln et al. (2011), postpositivists make an attempt to approximate reality and see the importance in using quantitative methods to visually understand their findings. They believe in the scientific method of research, just like positivists, and believe that research is the effort to create new knowledge (Lincoln et al., 2011). Postpositivists also tend to use the hypothetical deductive method, whereby they hypothesise, deduce and then generalise their research findings (Lincoln et al., 2011).

#### *3.2.1.1.3 Postpositivists and Social Reality*

Postpositivists hold key beliefs about the nature of reality and knowledge gathering. As stated prior, postpositivism centres around the nature of reality being probable rather

than certain; they use nonfalsified hypotheses that are probably realities (Lincoln et al., 2011). They do believe that there is a correct singular truth, however there may be hidden variables that hinder the researcher from fully understanding the entire truth (Lincoln et al., 2011). Thus, postpositivist researchers should aim to understand reality, as truthful and accurate as they can through data and findings that illustrate what is known to be reality (Lincoln et al., 2011). Rather than being viewed as concrete or factual, the nature of reality is simply likely or probable.

In regard to accumulating knowledge, postpositivism aims to build on knowledge, generalisations and cause and effect associations (Lincoln et al., 2011). Postpositivists try to be as accurate as possible in their interpretation of reality and they believe that even incomplete data can hold valuable information (Lincoln et al., 2011). Internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity are held to importance in postpositivist research (Lincoln et al., 2011). Because their research is primarily focussed on accuracy rather than influencing greater populations, the effect on others is not taken into consideration (Lincoln et al., 2011). Thus, knowledge is acquired in order to help estimate and understand reality, as close to truth of reality as is possible.

### **3.3 Methodology**

This section discusses and justifies the decision to use a sequential, qualitative-quantitative, mixed methods research design. The research begins with qualitative, in-depth interviews which allow for exploration into this area of research, followed by a quantitative, online survey to test the results of the initial study.

#### **3.3.1 Justification for Research Methodology**

This thesis addresses the questions of why it is consumers trust blog and vlog content and the differences in factors influencing the trust of blog versus vlog content. As this is a new topic in marketing research with very little research, and even less in-depth research, this study used a qualitative-quantitative sequential mixed methods approach. This study began with an exploratory qualitative study to discover key concepts in the area which could be studied in more precision in the following quantitative study.

### ***3.3.1.1 Mixed Methods Definition***

Mixed methods, like any methodology, has had an array of definitions since its birth. All of these definitions centre around the same key idea: a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, at least one qualitative and one quantitative method in a study, in order to increase understanding of a research topic more than can be done using one method alone (Creswell, 2011; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011). The mixed methods researcher takes care in collecting and analysing qualitative and quantitative data, integrating or successively building the data sets in a single study, or multiple phases of study; combining the philosophical assumptions, methods of inquiry, theoretical frameworks and procedures into specific mixed methods research designs (Creswell, 2011; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

The combination of qualitative and quantitative elements into research can extend the range and depth of understanding and validation (R. B. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). Mixed methods neither favours quantitative or qualitative research, rather, because incorporates both approaches, it falls in the middle of the quantitative-qualitative continuum (Creswell, 2014). Mixed methods research has a tendency to focus on realistic claims of knowledge and both open- and closed-ended questions (Creswell, 2011). This approach to research can be both emergent and predetermined in its use of qualitative and quantitative data and analysis, and integrates the different data types at different phases of the research (Creswell, 2011). Mixed methods' combination of research approaches uses distinct methods and philosophical assumptions (Creswell, 2014). Theory is also used within mixed methods research; inductively in qualitative studies, and deductively in quantitative studies (Creswell, 2011).

There are eight key characteristics of mixed methods research according to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2011): methodological eclecticism, paradigm pluralism, diversity, an emphasis on continua, a continuous recurrent approach to research, focus on the Research Question, earmarked research design and analyses, and an inclination towards balance and cooperation. Of these, methodological eclecticism is a key defining factor of mixed methods research. Methodological eclecticism is viewed as the harmonious amalgamation of research techniques from qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research in order to provide a more thorough study of the topic at hand (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011).

Mixed methods assumes that this combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques generates a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem than using only one approach alone (Creswell, 2011). In collecting both qualitative and quantitative data, mixed methods sees the weaknesses of each approach neutralised as each approaches weaknesses cancel out the other (Creswell, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011). Greene (2007) encourages everyone to discuss the differing ways seeing and hearing, and of making sense of the social world around us. By taking into account the different ways the world is understood through using different research approaches, it can be understood what research participants truly value and how they perceive the world around them (Creswell, 2011; Greene, 2007). Mixed methods research abides by the assumption that collecting a range of data provides a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem than using a singular method (Creswell, 2011). As such, mixed methods is appropriate to use when neither qualitative or quantitative research alone can answer the Research Question (Creswell, 2011).

In the case of this study, the Research Questions were broad and exploratory due to the new nature of this area of research. Qualitative or quantitative research alone was unable to answer these questions fully. Mixed methods also favours a postpositivist approach to thinking (Creswell, 2011); the chosen theoretical framework of the researcher. Therefore, mixed methods was the most appropriate method for this study.

### ***3.3.1.2 Mixed Methods Designs***

Within mixed methods design, there are three common approaches: convergent parallel, explanatory sequential and exploratory sequential designs. There is also a transformative, embedded and multiphase approach to mixed methods (Creswell, 2011), but this section will focus on the three most common designs. Convergent parallel mixed methods converges or merges quantitative and qualitative data, collecting both datasets at the same time (Creswell, 2011). Explanatory sequential mixed methods sees quantitative and qualitative data collected consecutively (Creswell, 2011). First, quantitative research is undertaken and the results analysed; qualitative research is then undertaken in order to build on the initial quantitative findings (Creswell, 2011). This allows for the quantitative findings to be explained in more detail via the qualitative research (Creswell, 2011). Exploratory sequential mixed methods sees the opposite chronology of research methods undertaken; first, qualitative research is undertaken, followed sequentially by quantitative research (Creswell, 2011). Qualitative research is

first undertaken to explore the topic at hand; to understand the overall perspectives of research participants (Creswell, 2011). The data is then analysed and used to build a second, quantitative phase of study (Creswell, 2011). This research uses the exploratory sequential mixed methods approach. The following section will explain why exploratory mixed methods was chosen for this research and give more detail into this approach to research.

### ***3.3.1.3 Exploratory Mixed Methods***

Exploratory mixed methods was chosen for the research design due to the nature of the Research Questions; broad Research Questions on a new topic in the marketing field which required some general exploration and verification of the theorised dimensions that influence consumer trust in blog and vlog content.

As stated prior, exploratory sequential mixed methods research employs a qualitative study followed by a quantitative study. This is done with the intention to generate better measurement instruments with specific population samples and to determine whether the data from a few participants can be generalised to a larger population (Creswell, 2011). The qualitative study is undertaken to create scales or quantitative measurement instruments. In this study, the qualitative study was undertaken to determine the key concepts that influence blog and vlog trust, so that quantitative measures could either be identified from prior research or created where there were no previously validated measures.

Qualitative methods are suitable when an understanding of the details of a concept is desired (Patton, 2002a). This research method looks into the detail of an individual's experiences, and due to the intricacy and depth obtained, the respondent pool is smaller (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Qualitative research observes the person as a whole, in their natural environment; a more contextual, holistic approach to research (Gelo, Braakman, & Benetka, 2008). Guba and Lincoln (1994) highlight two key strengths of qualitative research: the ability for gaining descriptions of human experiences that are rich in detail, and accounts that are studied within the original context of the observation. Qualitative research offers detailed, thorough analysis of complex human experiences in a way that cannot be attained through quantitative methods (Plano Clark, Huddleston-Cases, Churchill, Green, & Garrett, 2008). Thus, qualitative research is able

to study the emotions, beliefs and behaviours in the context in which the experiences occur, allowing for depth and richness of information produced.

Just as there are strengths, qualitative research also has its limitations. These limitations centre around the reliability of information from and associations made across the observations (A. C. Costa et al., 2009). The smaller sample sizes common across qualitative methods are also often noted as a limitation. The focus lies more on obtaining saturation rather than of numbers of participants (A. C. Costa et al., 2009). These smaller samples are often referred to as being unrepresentative and limiting the generalisability of the findings (A. C. Costa et al., 2009); although some qualitative researchers have reasoned that generalisability, reliability and validity are not relevant in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research also often sees a limitation in the capability of deducing definitive conclusions, because of the often lack of well-defined strict procedures (A. C. Costa et al., 2009; Morse, 1994). Although these weaknesses are notable, mixed methods counteract these weaknesses by supporting the qualitative findings with quantitative, statistical validation.

In exploratory mixed methods research, the quantitative study follows the qualitative phase in order to test and validate the qualitative findings on a larger sample. The participants used in the qualitative phase should not be included in the quantitative sample so as to not introduce any unwarranted response duplication (Creswell, 2011). The measures used in this phase are determined from the qualitative phase which identified appropriate measurement instruments and variables which needed further study (Creswell, 2011). Thus, the qualitative phase is needed for exploration of a topic area and to determine appropriate measurement tools. The quantitative phase is a confirmatory stage of research, validating the prior study's findings and their appropriateness to a larger sample.

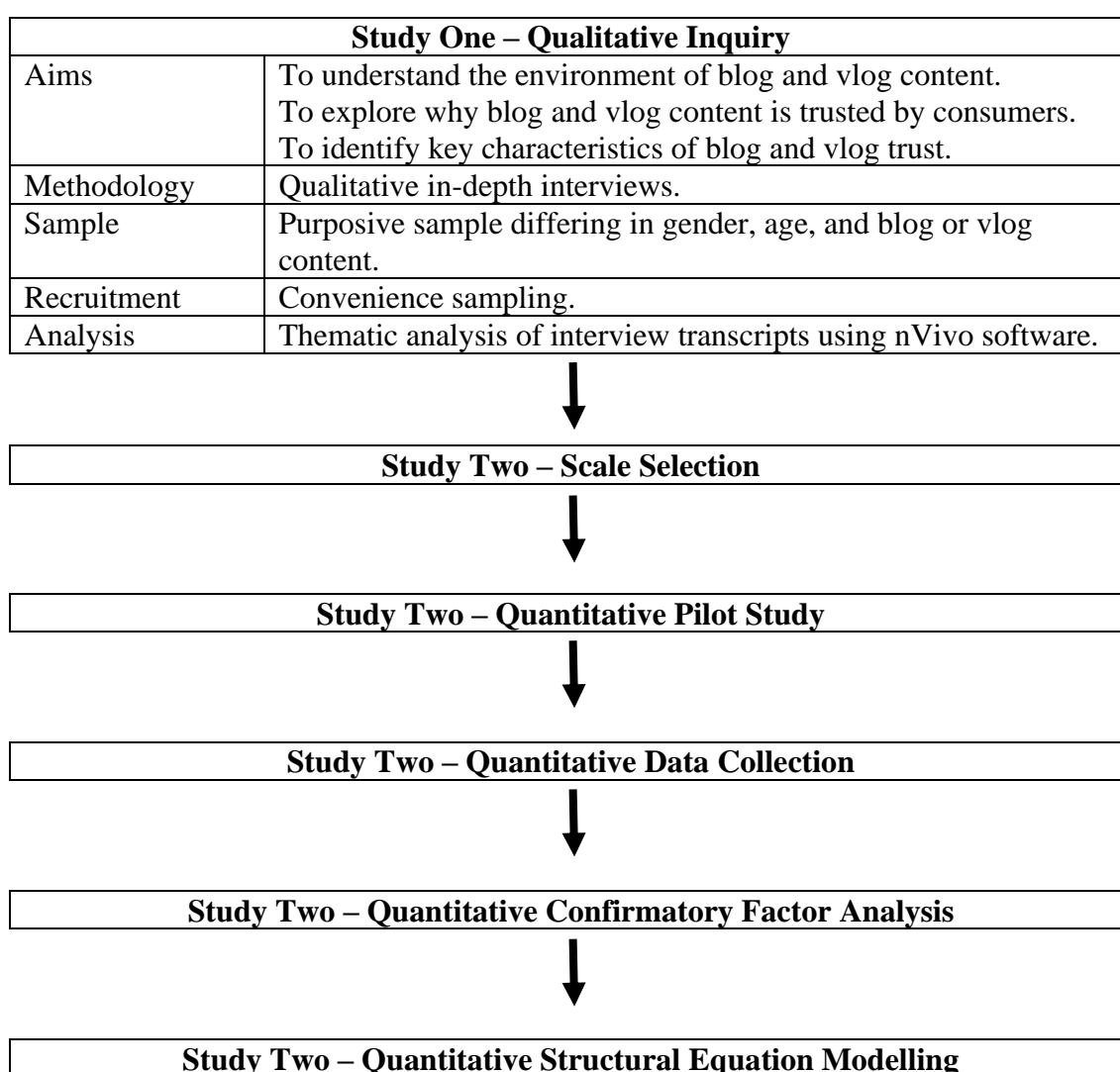
Like qualitative research, quantitative research has its own strengths. For one, quantitative research provides accurate measurement of a construct and the ability to compare amongst groups (A. C. Costa et al., 2009). Quantitative research also has the ability to study the strength of relationships between variables and the ability to test hypotheses and specify models (A. C. Costa et al., 2009). Quantitative research is often praised for its larger sample sizes, allowing the data to be analysed statistically and generating credible findings (A. C. Costa et al., 2009; Dreher, 1994). Limitations of quantitative research include the detachment which the measurement causes between

the information and its original, real context (A. C. Costa et al., 2009; Moghaddam, Walker, & Harre, 2003). Thus, mixed methods research allows the qualitative phase of research to balance out these limitations.

### 3.4. Methods – Study One

This section describes and justifies the research design for Study One, qualitative study. (Chapter Five describes the research design for Study Two). Table 1 illustrates each phase of the research.

**Table 1 Research phases – study one**



### **3.4.1 Study One – Qualitative Enquiry**

Study One aimed to identify key characteristics of blog and vlog trust. This was done using in-depth interviews to allow for participants to elaborate on their ideas surrounding trust in blog and vlog content.

#### ***3.4.1.1 Aims***

This first study in this mixed methods research was a qualitative study that aimed to explore the topic of consumer trust in blog and vlog content. It aimed to develop an understanding as to why consumers trust blog and vlog content and what differences between blog and vlog content there are in regard to trusting factors; to identify key characteristics and constructs impacting blog and vlog trust. This was suited towards a qualitative inquiry as this is a new topic in the marketing literature which needs exploration before a model can be developed to test quantitatively.

This study also aimed to take a consumer-centric view. It aimed to understand consumers of blog and vlog content individually in order to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences in the area. Thus, this study provided a base for the subsequent quantitative study by exploring and determining the area of trust in blog and vlog content.

#### ***3.4.1.2 Sample***

The sample was gathered until theoretical saturation was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in each of the interviewee groups. It was clear after 12 interviews with blog readers and vlog viewers that theoretical saturation was reached as the interviewees were discussing the same overarching themes; the same was apparent with content creator industry experts after three interviews. The sample was recruited via convenience and snowball sampling, and advertising at Auckland University of Technology in Auckland, New Zealand. Advertising for the study was undertaken in marketing classes at Auckland University of Technology, asking for interviewees who frequently view blog and/or vlog content. Industry interviewees were recruited through the researcher's own network and the researcher's colleagues' networks. This generated a good sample as it incorporated the other side of the blog and vlog content creator, i.e. marketing management, talent management, and content creators, alongside the main

target of blog readers and vlog viewers. Interviewees were offered a \$20 voucher for their time as interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 2.5 hours (see Table 2). In total 13 participants were interviewed: three industry members working at different stages of content creation, nine primarily vlog viewers and one primarily blog reader. One interview comprised of two respondents, resulting in an interview over two hours. Respondents were recruited through an open invitation to blog readers and vlog viewers both within a student base and from the researcher's and participants networks. Respondents favoured a variety of bloggers and vloggers whose content span a range of topics, as seen in Table 2.

**Table 2 Summary of interview participants**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Favourite Blog(s) or Vlog(s)</b>	<b>Role in Content Creation</b>	<b>Interview Length</b>
Vlog Viewer	Female, 18-30	Fleur De Force Sarah Lemkus Sarah's Day		2 hours, 20 minutes <i>20,705 words</i>
Vlog Viewer	Male, 18-30	Casey Neistat Rooster Teeth Steven Suptic		2 hours, 20 minutes <i>20,705 words</i>
Vlog Viewer	Female, 18-30	Sarah's Day Zoella Pointless Blog		1 hour, 1 minute <i>10,488 words</i>
Vlog Viewer	Female, 18-30	Shaaanxo		1 hour, 18 minutes <i>11,626 words</i>
Vlog Viewer	Female, 18-30	The Life of Kim and Liz Jamie and Nikki		1 hour, 11 minutes <i>11,895 words</i>
Vlog Viewer	Male, 18-30	Mikey Bustos		28 minutes, 50 seconds <i>4747 words</i>
Vlog Viewer	Female, 18-30	Zoella Pointless Blog Shani Grimmond		1 hour, 5 minutes <i>10,518 words</i>
Blog Reader	Male, 18-30	Daring Fireball Marco Arment Vox		1 hour, 31 minutes <i>15,359 words</i>
Blog Reader/Vlog Viewer	Male, 18-30	Fun for Louis Casey Neistat Ben Brown		1 hour, 55 minutes <i>15,316 words</i>
Blog Reader/Vlog Viewer	Female, 18-30	Janni Deler Polkadot Passport Zoella		56 minutes <i>9343 words</i>
Content Creator	Female, 18-30		Blogger	48 minutes, 32 seconds

				<i>8837 words</i>
Content Creator	Female, 30-40		Talent Manager	57 minutes, 52 seconds <i>9361 words</i>
Content Creator	Male, 25-40		Marketing Manager (using key opinion leaders)	46 minutes, 36 seconds <i>6859 words</i>

Qualitative research tends to focus on smaller, more information-rich cases in order to gain the rich insight and understanding desired (Patton, 2002a). This study utilised purposive sampling for this reason. There are a range of purposive sampling strategies that can be used. These include strategies focussing on specifically chosen/pre-planned or extreme cases: extreme/deviant case sampling, intensity sampling, critical case sampling, criterion sampling, etc.; using participants or key informants to gather further participants, snowball or typical case sampling; stratified purposeful sampling, or samples within samples; maximum variation sampling, heterogeneity; or the opposing homogenous samples, or samples of convenience, opportunistic, purposeful random, or convenience sampling (Patton, 2002a).

In this study, a purposive approach to sampling was used (Patton, 2002b). The sample also included maximum variation regarding gender, blog/vlog favourability and lifestyle. Both genders were included, and a variety of lifestyles were incorporated in order to not focus on a single topic area of blogs and vlogs. This included blogs and vlogs related to the topic areas of gaming, health and fitness, beauty and fashion, travel, and everyday life, so as to be inclusive of all participants no matter what blogs or vlogs they were interested in. Purposeful samples should be determined based on the purpose and motivation of the study (Patton, 2002a); thus, this study aimed to recruit people who are frequent blog or vlog users in order to understand why it is the consume the content and why they trust it.

As there is no specific rule for qualitative research sample size (Patton, 2002a), data was collected until theoretical saturation was reached. Theoretical saturation is the stage of data analysis where sampling and analysing of qualitative data has occurred until no new data is apparent and concepts regarding the theory are developed well (Morse, 2004). In this study, theoretical saturation was reached after 13 interviews where no new information was produced. Although this could be viewed as a small sample, the

depth of information produced in these interviews counteracts this weakness. In-depth information from a small sample is valuable if they are information rich cases (Patton, 2002a). This was the scenario with this study as the interviews ranged from 28 minutes to 2.5 hours. Thus, for qualitative in-depth interviews, it is advised that you interview as many people as is needed to discover what it is you need to find out (Kvale, 2007; S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). As such, you cannot determine the sample size until interviews begin (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). In this study, a sample size of 13 in-depth interviews produced information that had reached theoretical saturation and had told us what we needed to know. Because of the small sample size, interviews were kept anonymous with reporting only using gender, age range and whether they were a blog or vlog user to keep their information confidential. Participants were gifted a voucher at the end of the interview to thank them for their time.

#### ***3.4.1.3 In-Depth Interviews***

Social science has a reliance on spoken narratives of experiences and events to learn about social life, especially using interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2003; S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Thus, in-depth interviews are a common tool to use in investigating social concepts. They enable the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of participants perspectives about their own life experiences or situations, as told in their own words (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

In-depth interviews are largely unstructured with open-ended questioning (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). They are flexible, dynamic, non-directive, and hold the ability to modify questions and further probe when required (Robson, 1993). In-depth interviewing should be reflective of a conversation between equals so as to encourage an open and honest discussion even when the topic is sensitive (Anastas, 1988; S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998); an everyday conversation between friends or acquaintances. This method of qualitative research is best suited to research when the interests of the research are quite clear and defined, as well as when the sample under study are not accessible by other means (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). In-depth interviews are also appropriate for research where there are time constraints and when the research aims to gather an understanding of a wider range of people and situations (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

In-depth interviews are chosen for Study One because of their ability to delve deeper and encourage participants to elaborate on ideas. Study One aims to identify characteristics and concepts that encourage trust in blog and vlog content. The interests of this study are quite clear and defined, there are time constraints and the overall aim of this study is to gather an overarching understanding of consumer trust in blog and vlog content; thus meeting Taylor and Bogdan's (1998) guide of when it is appropriate to use in-depth interviews. Using this method allows for this research to go beyond the surface characteristics of blog and vlog trust and the online eWOM environment of which is what we currently have some understanding of.

Interviews are a great method for exploratory research topics because people tend to be willing to talk about themselves and their experiences (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Alongside this, interviews see more information gained than what is just shown on the surface. Meanings are not merely spoken or communicated, rather they are constructed between the research and the interviewee (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). There is more to what is being said than simply the words spoken.

Data collection for in-depth interviews involves a few key steps. First, the Research Questions need to be determined, followed by deciding who can best answer these questions (Creswell, 2013). The interview type can then be decided, alongside what recording equipment is needed (Creswell, 2013). An interview guide should then be created, containing guiding questions to keep the interview on track; these questions can be refined through pilot testing (Creswell, 2013). A place for the interview needs to be chosen, suitable for both the researcher and interviewee, and consent via a consent form obtained, before finally beginning the interview (Creswell, 2013).

For this study, the Research Questions were determined as a result of the literature review (see chapter 2). It was decided that frequent users of blog and/or vlog content would be best suited to answer these Research Questions, alongside some consideration from a content creator, a blog/vlog talent manager and a marketing manager each representing a step in the process of content creator sponsored content. It was decided that individual, in-depth interviews were the best form of interview to answer the Research Questions because they allowed for individual interviewees to give great detail and independent experiences of blog and vlog usage, without fear of judgement. It was determined that recording the interviews via smart phone and digital voice recorder would be best to ensure that the interview would be clearly recorded. It was also seen

that this would be better than video recording so as not to make interviewees uncomfortable and to ensure confidentiality of interviewees.

An interview guide was created to provide key outlining questions to guide the interview (see Appendices 4 and 5) this ensured that during the interview, key topic areas were covered. This guide was adjusted after the first few interviews as new key ideas arose. Two interview guides were created: one for the blog reader and vlog viewer interviews and one for the industry-member interviews, in order to make the line of questioning appropriate to the interviewee. The main location for interviews undertaken was at the university as this was convenient and safe for both the researcher and interviewee. The industry member interviews were undertaken at their workplaces during work hours. Each interviewee signed a consent form (see Appendix 2) and read an information sheet (see Appendix 3) to ensure they understood what the interview was about and to assure them of their confidentiality. Once these checks were complete, the interview began in a conversational manner.

An interview guide is a key instrument in planning a successful in-depth interview. The interview guide for this study can be seen in Appendices 4 and 5. The interview guide contains key topics and questions to raise in the interview to ensure all important topics are explored (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). It contains a list of general areas and questions to be investigated with each interviewee and as such, assumes that there is already a certain amount of knowledge already held by the researcher (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). For this study, this knowledge was obtained through an extensive literature review. This being said, qualitative interviewing requires flexibility in the research design (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Thus, the interview guide was just a guide; the researcher encouraged a natural conversation progression, using the interview guide to guide the conversation to topics not covered.

Interviews should use a conversational tone in order to help interviewees feel comfortable and open up about their experiences and insights. Interviews are a type of social interaction (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) and they should therefore reflect this. Interviews should begin with non-directive questions to learn what the interviewee values and to help create a relationship and the interviewer should establish a comfortable atmosphere to encourage the interviewee's to talk and engage in conversation (Robson, 1993; S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The interview atmosphere and setting should try to reflect that which people usually find themselves in when

talking about important topics; thus, the interview should be conversational and relaxed as this is the norm for social interaction (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). It should be similar to that of an ordinary conversation and interviewers should encourage the flow of conversation (Patton, 2002a) to ensure it is as natural as possible.

Interviewing requires the interviewer to be able to relate to others and be non-judgemental and, at times, go out of their way to reassure and guide interviewees to ensure they feel comfortable to continue the conversation (Patton, 2002a; S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Interviewers need to be able to share their own understanding and empathy with interviewees and share a genuine interest in what the interviewees are saying (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Interviewers need to also be open-minded, aware of how their words and body language may influence or affect interviewees, and at times simply plead ignorance without being insulting or pretend to know what or who the interviewee is talking about in order to get interviewees to continue talking in-depth (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Overall, interviews enable the researcher to gain insight into how people build their own realities (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), thus the interview should be natural and conversational to encourage to gain insight into each interviewees own reality.

The interview style used in this study was an informal, conversational style to match the overall younger respondent base. This allowed for more open discussion using an interview guide (see Appendices 4 and 5) as simply a guide; the conversation was encouraged to flow as a normal conversation. The interview started with general questions about the respondent's use of blogs and vlogs, allowing them to then focus on which platform they used most frequently. The interview then discussed key aspects of blogs and vlogs in a consumer sense: review posts, sponsorship, blog and vlog characteristics (taken from the prior literature review), relationships, trust (both blog and vlog specific and general trust).

A key feature of individual, in-depth interviews is the ability to probe interviewee responses for further information. Probing involves looking for further details and more specific descriptions of experiences and further explanation of interviewee perspectives (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Patton, 2002a). This is what makes interviewing different from an everyday conversation amongst individuals (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Probing is important because what interviewees mean may be different to what the interviewer interprets the information; probing allows the research to clarify and elaborate on what

the interviewee is saying (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Robson, 1993; S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). For this research, although there was a detailed interview guide with suggested questions and topics (in order to keep the conversation flowing), probing was used a lot in order to further the depth of the information given by interviewees. During this probing, many of the interview guide questions and topics were covered without prompting. Thus, the interview guide was followed but it was not a concrete document; it was flexible and dynamic, just like qualitative in-depth interviews characteristically are.

#### ***3.4.1.4 Data Analysis***

This section describes the method of analysis undertaken for the in-depth interviews. Once all interviews were recorded via digital recording device, the recordings were transcribed onto Microsoft Word documents. These documents were then hand coded and then placed onto NVivo for further analysis (QSR International, 2018b).

The final qualitative dataset comprised of 13 interviewees and 12 interview transcripts. A total set of 135,054 words from all 12 transcripts. This study utilised thematic analysis to analyse the interview data through nVivo. This was chosen because interview data such as this needs an accessible and flexible analysis tool (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis identifies, analyses and reports themes or patterns that are apparent within the data (Aronson, 1995; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013). Although similar to other analysis methods, thematic analysis does not need detailed theoretical and technological knowledge, it is a more accessible analysis form, and it is not bound into any pre-existing theories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, in researching blog and vlog content trust, an area of research currently rather limited, using an analysis that did not require the use of pre-existing theories was beneficial.

Thematic analysis involves searching data for themes in the data related to the Research Question (Creswell, 2013). Themes are representative of patterns within the data, however it must be determined what constitutes a pattern or theme and how big does a theme need to be (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013). This is something that will need to be determined once the data has been collected. This analysis can then be used to gain a thematic description of the entire data set to give the reader an overall sense of the most important themes. This would be obtained by identifying, coding and analysing themes that accurately represent the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Doing this would reduce some of the depth and complexity of the data but it did allow for a rich description of the overall content. This research identified themes related to the Research Questions for the study.

Themes can be identified in either an inductive or deductive way; themes that are strongly linked to the data itself or themes that are driven by the researchers thematic or analytic interests, respectively (Creswell, 2013). This research used the inductive technique whereby themes were derived from the data set itself rather than from the researcher's interests. The data in this study was collected specifically for this research and therefore the themes that were identified may not relate directly to the questions asked in the interview; the themes identified in the data set will not be driven by the researcher's theoretical interests. In this sense, an inductive approach to thematic analysis requires the data to be coded without trying to make it fit into a frame that already exists or into the prejudices of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006); data-driven thematic analysis.

Likewise, thematic analysis can occur at different levels: semantic or latent. The semantic approach to thematic analysis looks at themes on the surface of the data; themes identified from what participants have said and not going beyond this (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The latent level of thematic analysis goes beyond themes on the surface. It begins to identify ideas that underline what has been said; assumptions, beliefs and conceptualisations which shape the semantic content of the data set (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research aimed to reach the latent level of the data to extend on what is currently known semantically about blog and vlog content trust as well as general eWOM trust.

Thematic analysis can be viewed as a six-step process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first step is to become familiar with the data you have gathered, be that through transcribing the data if needed or simply reading through the data and jotting down any ideas. The next step is to create initial codes; to code any interesting features within the data in a systematic way throughout the whole data set. Codes are ideas, that are found whilst analysing the interview transcripts one line at a time, that coincide with the aims of the research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); undeveloped pieces of the interview that are related to the phenomenon in a meaningful way (Boyatzis, 1998). Once this is down, codes can be collated into potential themes. These themes are then reviewed to see if they work with both the coded extracts and the overall data set to create a thematic map. Themes

are then named and defined where analysis continues in order to refine each theme. Finally, a report can be generated using a choosing of compelling examples which are analysed again to relate back to the Research Question and literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013). This research incorporated this process of thematic analysis to analyse the interview transcripts and create themes that help answer the Research Questions.

The interviews were transcribed, coded by hand and uploaded into NVivo software. NVivo is a software that helps with qualitative research organisation and management; allowing for coding, storage, organisation, categorisation, and analysis (QSR International, 2018a, 2018c). Interview transcripts were coded in NVivo, allowing for the creation and organisation of nodes. Codes were created of key ideas across all interviews. These codes were then sorted into thematic groups three different times to ensure key themes were apparent. A total of four key themes were developed out of 64 codes: blog/vlog, content creator (blogger/vlogger), trust and relationships. These findings will be further presented in the following chapter. Qualitative research analysis goes beyond determining codes and themes on the surface of data, rather delving deeper to interpret their deeper meaning (Creswell, 2013). This research aimed to use interview data to gain an in-depth understanding of consumer trust in blog and vlog content, to delve beyond the surface of simple explanation.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter covered the overall mixed methods research design for this thesis, exploratory sequential mixed method, qualitative-quantitative research approach. It details the researcher's philosophical basis and research paradigm. This chapter then detailed the research design for Study One, qualitative in-depth interviews which explore the nature and use of blog and vlog content, uncovering key characteristics triggering consumer trust in blog and vlog content. The following chapter details the findings from these in-depth interviews.

## Chapter Four: Study One - Qualitative Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative study. It delves in-depth into the interview data, highlighting key findings. Four overall key themes were apparent from the interviews: trust, content, creator and relationship. Of these, the trust, content and creator aspects were expected and reflected the outline of the interview itself. The relationship theme, however, arose from the data itself – an unexpected but important aspect of blog and vlog content to interviewees. These key themes are summarised in Table 3 below.

**Table 3 Summary of key themes**

Summary of key themes from interview data		
<i>Theme</i>	<i>Sub-Theme</i>	<i>Key Findings</i>
<b>Trust</b>	General	General trust in blogs and vlogs Content creators and why their content is trusted Online trust versus offline trust
	Predisposition to trust	Dispositional trust System/institutional trust
<b>Content</b>	General	Blog and vlog usage Evolution of created content
	Content	Blog and vlog content Blog and vlog formats Entertainment and information Influence and engagement
	Consumer information	Sponsorship Sponsorship trust and the importance of sponsorship disclosure Sponsorship and online reviews
<b>Creator</b>	Authenticity	Authenticity and credibility Content creators are viewed as real people
	Expertise	Expertise by experience and quality Volume and consistency of postings
	A new form of celebrity	Popularity and attractiveness Identity and aspiration
<b>Relationships</b>	Relationship	Connection and trust The feeling of a real connection Community
	Social	Generational differences Social issues

## 4.2 Trust

A key theme discussed in the interviews was that of trust in content creators. This discussion spanned general discussion in blogs and vlogs, trust in interviewees' favourite content creators, and predispositions to trust spanning the online realm.

### 4.2.1 General

General trust discussions occurred surrounding interviewees' trust in blog and vlog content. They also investigated trust in content creators themselves and online versus offline trust.

#### 4.2.1.1 General Trust in Blogs and Vlogs

When asked about their trust in blog and vlog content, interviewees were strikingly aware, eager to discuss and candid. They discussed their insights into this area in both general and specific terms. The overall response to the general question of blog and vlog trust was that these content platforms were trusted. In more specific terms, consumer information provided by interviewees' favourite bloggers and vloggers, especially those they had followed for some time, had become one of their most trusted and used sources of consumer information. Just as in the offline world, their trust grew over time with repeated exposure; in viewing multiple posts, interviewees were able to get to know the content creator and understand their style, beliefs and personality.

*I would say I trust a blogger I have trusted for a while or know of. I would say I trust them more than any other form of product information or review.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader)*

Broadly speaking, interviewees were influenced by the content creators they followed, and they acknowledged this influence. When interviewees were asked about purchases made at the recommendation of a favourite content creator, they pointed out that if their own experiences matched that of the content creator, they were more inclined to trust future recommendations from that content creator. This degree of influence was apparent in both positive and negative product reviews by the content creator they followed. A positive review by a favourite content creator could influence a follower to

purchase an item, likewise a negative review could influence them to turn away. Thus, content creators can have a high level of influence on those who follow them, which is something that does not escape the attention of their followers.

*I think if he said oh no this wasn't good, yeah, I would definitely be influenced on what he said.*

*(Male, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

A remarkable observation which emerged was that interviewees, overall, trusted the content creator rather than the blog or vlog itself; that is, they trusted the person. It should be noted that some viewed the blog or vlog and the blogger or vlogger as one in the same. However, when discussing their trust, they referred to the person creating the content. Interviewees also acknowledged that the trust they had in content creators depended on how long they had followed that particular content creator; the more they were exposed to that content creator, the more they were able to create an opinion about them and from there build trust. For vloggers specifically, the visual format of facing the camera allowed the viewer to see the content creator's personality, confidence and the fact that they were a real person (rather than relying on the content alone) which could have further contributed to the building of trust. Thus, the format of the content influenced the building of trust in content creators.

Interviewees' trusted content creators to give them advice, including product information and recommendations. In regard to product information sourced from content creators, what arose from the discussion was that interviewees wanted to know how a product could benefit their lives; that is, they wanted a real user's experience and general experiential opinions from someone they viewed as being like themselves (another consumer). Interviewees wanted information and advice from someone who had actually tried the product before they spent their own money, in order to make a more informed and satisfying purchase. In other words, people desire WOM information. This observation is supported by the fact that interviewees were also open to general life advice from their favourite content creators, reflective of real world WOM sources (such as friends or family).

*If it's product related, again the main reason I go to a blog is for entertainment and education. But if it's product related, I am purely looking for someone who I respect and trust experience of using*

*something. So, I can find out what it's like to use or own that product before I do. You can't try out a heater. You can't try out a TV really in a shop, it's not a real experience, so you are looking for someone who you trust and respect I guess to just tell you what their thoughts are, do the testing for you.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader)*

This trust in content creators can expand beyond the blog or vlog's main topic area. Trust in content creators could develop from being topic specific trust (reminiscent of the extrinsic trust group discussed and defined in Chapter Two) to a more broad or general trust (reminiscent of intrinsic trust). This includes product and service recommendations outside the scope of the content creator's perceived expertise. This trust could expand due to the reader or viewer learning about the content creator beyond simply what they see on the screen, that is, learning about personal aspects of their lives such as their personality and family. These personal aspects help a reader or viewer determine their similarity to the content creator and then, in turn, derive that because the content creator enjoyed (or disliked) something, they too would share the experience. This theme was echoed by one of the interviewees in this study:

*If I trust them because of their background and history and track record then I am likely to trust them on a variety of topics, not just ones I am interested in looking at.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader)*

What this trust in content creators really reflected amongst interviewees was a desire for honesty – honest advice and information of the sort they could gain through WOM from their offline, known networks. Interviewees' wanted something that was 'real' and they wanted to see and feel this from content creators they followed. They desired information from someone who had done the work for them, that is, a true user experience so as they would not need to waste their money on something that did not live up to their expectations.

*An honest opinion and someone who has already done the hard work for you in terms of reviewing and learning something.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader)*

Broadly speaking, interviewees suggested that an initial indicator of content creator trust lies in the interaction and engagement with the content creator's audience. This could be in the form of likes, comments or overall engagement between a content creator and their audience. Someone who is not trusted quite as much may still have a significant number of followers but may not get many comments or interactions from their audience. Marketers today are becoming aware of these influencers' effectiveness in delivering a message to their audiences, as suggested by the marketing manager interviewed whose marketing plans had a heavy reliance on key opinion leaders. Interviewees suggested that those within their general age bracket – young, millennials involved in the digital environment – no longer trusted traditional advertising. Due to their heavier use of online platforms including streaming entertainment, they were not as exposed to traditional advertising as generations before. Therefore, to advertise effectively, marketers need to adapt to the new consumption behaviours of their audiences.

It was noted from the interview data that people did not want honest information from content creators alone. Rather, when viewing this content daily, they primarily wanted entertainment. Likewise, when looking for product information specifically, it was suggested that this information should still be presented in an entertaining way. Interviewees wanted deeper information about a product or service; that is, they wanted more than information presented at face value – they also wanted ideas on how to use the product or different applications of it. Interviewees did not just trust their favourite bloggers and vloggers for consumer information, they also trusted them to give approval of their potential purchases. They wanted to see that these content creators approved of buying a certain product or service before they fully committed to the purchase – if the content creator liked it, it was okay for them to buy it also.

*Their opinion I would say, or maybe almost approval before I trust that kind of company or business or store, so probably approval from someone I don't even know on something that I don't know anything about.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Amongst the interviewees, it was not just readers and viewers of created content that recognised the large amount of trust and influence these content creators hold. Rather, content creators and marketers alike recognised this trust. They understood that these

platforms are not just a source of entertainment; rather, they are marketing tools. Although the interviewees who worked within the content environment (creating or managing content) believed that all information posted to the Internet should be trustworthy, they were aware that there is no regulation to guarantee this. They also acknowledged that content creators have the ability to frame their content in any way that they want. They can present it in a more trustworthy way, allowing opportunities to edit and taking their time in creating their content – something that is not so apparent in true offline WOM situations. As such, created content, although it may reflect an honest opinion, may not truly reflect reality.

*You can totally present it in a way that will gain trust. I am not saying people can be manipulated but you can. It's writing. You've got time to edit it. You've got time to create it. You've got time to think about it before you put it online. You can edit it whenever you want to. It's not like you are speaking off the cuff. You've got time to really think about it. So, because of that you can alter your content to create an outcome.*

*(Female, 18-30, blogger)*

Just as content creators can style their content to generate trust, they can also do things to reduce trust. One of these, as suggested by interviewees, is 'click-baiting' whereby the content creator may title their video or blog post with something that will draw the audience in, without it featuring truthfully (or as is claimed in the title) in the actual posting, thereby 'baiting' the reader or viewer to click into the post. Likewise, fake followers used to increase the follower numbers of a content creator were viewed by interviewees as detrimental to their trust in a blogger or vlogger. When a brand is involved in a click-bait post, this may negatively impact on the perception of the brand as well as the content creator. People trust content creators to be real people who are able to provide honest opinions and advice. When they do not get this, their trust can dissipate.

In discussing their general trust in blog and vlog content, interviewees often compared it to trusting relationships they held in the offline world. Broadly speaking, interviewees had a high level of trust in bloggers and vloggers. They were prepared to trust these content creators over a shop assistant for product recommendations and over traditional advertising for product information, and sometimes even more so than online review

websites. When compared with offline relationships, trust in content creators was, for some interviewees and in some contexts or situations, placed ahead of workmates and acquaintances but behind close friends and family. What was very clear was that this trust was large enough to be influential in certain purchase decisions.

*Not enough to go put my life on the line for them or anything but if I see a couple of good ones that are saying like this product is good, you do need this product, I feel like I would be quite inclined to go and get it.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Interviewees most often compared their trust in their favourite bloggers, and more frequently vloggers, to that of their friends and, at times, family. For many interviewees', trust in blog and vlog content and in the content creator had developed to the same level as that of friends and family (and as stated prior, could even develop beyond this). This was especially the case if the content creator was actively followed by the interviewee, thus making the content creator a large part of the interviewee's life and at times, may even be seen (or visited) more than offline friends and family. In terms of trusting consumer information, this means trust could develop because content creators often have the means to try out more products and are able to compare them all, having received products through sponsorship or through having the money or means to be able to purchase different products. This is not to say all interviewees trusted content creators to a same or greater extent than their friends and family; a few interviewees still trusted their offline friends and family (offline WOM networks) more than their favourite content creators. Rather, it was clear that this trust was often highly situation or context based. Some interviewees simply trusted people who they met face to face more. This is often the case when the interviewee had not followed a content creator for long. However, in general, it was apparent that trust in closely followed content creators was comparable to that of offline friends and family.

*I feel like I would probably trust them more than my friends and family because they have got the money to spend on things before my friends and family do, so they can waste their money, even if it's like a crap product or something, they kind of did that for you without having to do it yourself.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

This suggests that, just as with offline trusted information sources, for content creators to be trusted, a relationship needs to be built based on a rapport. The key difference here is that the relationship between a content creator and their audience is one-way.

Interviewees' connection to the content creator or their view of the content creator as a friend may be attributed to the fact that interviewees viewed themselves (and those they were friends with in the real world) as sharing characteristics with the content creator. Therefore, the level of trust in a blogger or vlogger was related to the relationship that they felt with the content creator; if the content creator was someone they would be friends with in the real world or someone they saw themselves in, this feeling transferred into the trust that they had in the content creator. However, interviewees were very aware of the strength of the trust they had in these content creators, conceding that they were people they did not know in real life, and for this reason the trust was abnormal. They were aware that trusting these content creators on a similar or the same level as their friends and family was not something that they should do. However, they still felt this connection to their favourite content creators, despite acknowledging its one-sidedness.

*And if I compared advice from a vlogger and advice from a friend,  
most of the time I feel like it would be similar because I watch the  
people who have similar ideals and outlooks on life to me which is  
what my friends have as well.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Broadly speaking, although interviewees described the connection they felt with their favourite bloggers and vloggers as being similar to the relationship they had with their offline friends, they still noted that it was different. This difference was most aptly described as being on the same level as offline friends but distanced from these real-world relationships. Although this difference was felt, it could not be described well or explained beyond being the same level of trust as with friends and family but in a separate area. This difference could be related to the view of some interviewees that friends and family have opinions that come solely from their own world whereas bloggers and vloggers may bring another perspective. However, this does not mean that one is trusted more than the other, but rather that the trust felt is a different kind. Interviewees clearly acknowledged that their offline networks lived in a different space

than their favourite bloggers and vloggers. Although the online and offline worlds could cross over or be a proxy for one another, they were still different worlds.

*It's an equal level of trust but they are in different domains.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

What came across clearly from all interviewees is that the trust held towards their favourite bloggers and vloggers was not straightforward. This trust was not the same kind of trust they held in their offline social networks, nor was their trust the same across all bloggers and vloggers. Rather, they trusted content creators on different topics and in different situations, context and situation dependent. This trust was notably context-based whereby the trust was quite often more pronounced within the content creator's focus area or topic – something acknowledged by both readers and viewers and content creators alike. Where their offline friends and family (their offline WOM network), lacked knowledge on a product category, they were willing to seek the advice of bloggers and vloggers and place their trust there.

It is apparent that the interviewees, when looking for consumer information, attempted to find the best information they could to make the most informed purchase decision. It is also apparent that trust in blog and vlog content is often attributed to the creator of that content as well as the content presented itself. Therefore, if a blogger or vlogger had more experience in a certain product category or context, they would place their trust there. This is not to discount the trust they had in their offline WOM network, however, this network may not have had the information that they needed. This is also not to say that trust in a blog or vlog only existed with reference to a topic that they specialised in; rather, trust was able to expand beyond this to cover things outside this initial trusting area. This is reflective of a change from calculus-based, to knowledge-based, to identification-based trust (Lewicki et al., 2006; D. Shapiro et al., 1992). As such, it is apparent that trust in content creators is dynamic and complex. Dependent on the creator and the context or situation, trust can equal or even exceed that which an audience has in their offline friends and family. However, such trust may largely lie only within the context of the creator's expertise. Nevertheless, for others, the trust an audience may have in a content creator may extend beyond the scope of the creator's expertise. It is clear that trust is dynamic, flexible and situation- and context-dependent.

#### ***4.2.1.2 Content Creators and Why their Content is Trusted***

Most interviewees were able to distinguish a difference between the blog or vlog itself and the content creator. Those who viewed the content and its creator as one and the same, or those who believed it was actually the content that they trusted, would still discuss blog and vlog content in terms of the content creator and it was apparent that it was the content creator that was trusted. Most interviewees trusted the content creator over the content platform. This was because it was seen to be the content creator's information; the content belonged to a person and was seen as real content from a real person. Interviewees were able to find out information about the content creator, enabling them to see the content creator as a real human being. Finding out information about the content creator was viewed to be enjoyable as it could give insight into how that person formed opinions or their content delivery style; that is, it gave an understanding and background to the content creator. This helped build trust between the audience and the content creator, giving context and understanding to the content itself through understanding the content creator.

*I see the blogger as a person. One of my favourite things to do when I go to a blog is pretty much after reading the first article of the blog post I generally go to the about page and I want to read about the person and I want to read about their background because that generally will give you some context of how they think and how they do things and I am also looking for people who have had an interesting kind of path to get where they are. I'm just nosy. I like learning about those people. I definitely look at them as a person which is why I can probably name most of the authors of the blogs I read.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader)*

A key aspect to trusting blog and vlog content that emerged from the data was that interviewees felt that having a track record of content postings was very important in developing trust with that content creator. Interviewees desired a track record of content in order to see experience and consistency in style and content. These postings could be review-based, non-review based (daily vlog, lifestyle or opinion postings) or a mix of both – simply more content from the same content creator. Seeing more than just a single post or a single posting style helped interviewees to form a bond with the content

creator; that is, it helped them get to know and understand the content creator as a real person. Seeing multiple forms of content or multiple postings also helped interviewees relate to the content creator.

*Again it's a track record, so if I can see a consistent post history, if I can read about them and see that they don't have any obvious affiliation or reasons to be promoting a certain product, if I can then go look at their social profiles and see what they are Tweeting about that is probably a good indication and generally the more information they give about themselves, I feel like they earn some trust.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader)*

Subsequent to a track record of content, interviewees also suggested key characteristics which made content trusted. Firstly, interviewees suggested that the format of blogs and vlogs, written pieces and video respectively, created different elements which influenced their trust in these sources. For blogs, the track record of postings (rather than relatability to the blogger) was more important. Being able to look back and assess the consistency and style of blogging was key. For vlogs, it was suggested that their visual format and relatability were highly important. Since younger people tend to be the largest audience, being fun and realistic and relatable to the viewer was seen an important characteristic for a vlogger to have. In comparison, online review websites were discussed as not showing much information about the reviewer.

Interviewees essentially wanted to be able to see that the content creator was a real human being like themselves, not a marketer in disguise. Being able to go back through content, in blogs especially, allows for consistency and understanding to be determined. Whereas for vloggers, simply seeing the vlogger visually allows them to see the vlogger as a real person and allowing for an initial quick visual assessment of relatability. Despite being more apparent amongst vlog viewers, this idea of relatability was important to interviewees in terms of trust in both blog and vlog content. Interviewees wanted to be able to connect to the content creator, to relate to them in some form, be that visual, lifestyle or interest. It was suggested that relatability could be determined by the content creator including personal information throughout their content, providing more informal style of blog and vlog content (in comparison to traditional media) and in the content creator being likable. Similarly, popularity was also discussed as to why a

blog or vlog could be trusted. In general, the more followers a content creator has, the more traffic he or she may receive. It was also suggested that seeing how popular a content creator had become meant that their content was regarded as good – a follow-the-herd mentality.

*You feel like you can trust that person because it's a person, whereas online reviews you may not see the person, you don't know who they are, you can't see the photos or anything.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Besides characteristics that could initiate trust in created content, interviewees also suggested a key reason as to why they may turn away from certain created content is commercialisation. With the blog and vlog space becoming more closely aligned with brands and agencies, trust in this content could decrease. This “once untouched by business” form of consumer information is now interwoven with branded content. Although many content creators are genuine in their product information, giving genuine, honest reviews, it is known that some content creators fall into the sponsorship trap. Some content creators have been known to choose money over authenticity, leading to their followers losing trust. Interviewees wanted authentic, genuine created content. Any kind of commercialisation raised a red flag as to the authenticity of the content created.

*I think again it depends, but if you put all of the influencers together, we would have seen a rise in trust for sure over the last three years, but I feel that that has probably dropped off a bit. The reason I say that is because it has become a very commercial place and new people, new influencers, new agencies, new PR companies or anyone that has gone okay I am going to work with influencers, I am going to figure out how to do this myself, how hard can it be, and have got it wrong. There is so much that you need to understand about a person, the influencer and the brand before you can put the two together, so mistakes have been made for sure and unfortunately some influencers have taken money over the brand and gone and done something that they possibly shouldn't of that has been detrimental to their followers and their followers then lose trust. It*

*does happen and it happens more now because there is more money  
being thrown around.*

*(Female, 30-40, Content Creator Talent Manager)*

#### **4.2.1.3 Online Trust versus Offline Trust**

Trust in blog and vlog content or content creators was often explained by interviewees through comparison with the offline world. A trusting relationship which was often compared to trust in content creators when discussing trust in product information was that of shop assistants. Shop assistants were seen as being paid to sell certain products whereas content creators were not seen to hold a bias to the same extent. The few interviewees that viewed their trust in content creators as equal to shop assistants were very clear that traditional advertising and sales techniques were no longer trusted by consumers; instead, content creators were filling that space.

*And you might be working off commission, whereas this person  
online, like kind of the world is their oyster. They are not restricted  
to the products that are stocked if that makes sense.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Likewise, blog and vlog content was often compared with WOM in the offline world. eWOM, in comparison to WOM, was viewed as allowing for many opinions and reviews on consumer products in an easily accessible way, whereas offline WOM networks were seen as limited in their range of opinions. Content creators of blog and vlog content often have more experience with a larger range of products and brands than a person's offline network. Because of this, they can be seen as less aligned with a single brand – less biased and more experienced in comparing products. This is especially the case for a content creator who is focussed on a singular genre, for example, beauty or gaming bloggers or vloggers. Because they are focussing on a single product area, they may be able to gain many more opinions on a larger range of products within that category than a person's offline networks are able to.

However, interviewees most often compared their connection and trust in content creators with that of their offline friends and family as well as with traditional, offline media. Friends and family are a very important WOM source of product information and recommendations and the online environment has not taken this importance away.

Rather, content creators are providing information that is more trusted and sought after than traditional advertising and more trusted in instances where offline friends and family do not have the information or experience needed. The interviewees shared that the more they viewed their favourite content creators, the more they trusted them – they had invested in their lives. Thus, a number of interviewees compared the feeling of trust they had in their favourite content creators with the trust they had in their offline relationships because they felt like they knew the content creator after investing time into following them, eventually understanding more about the content creator than just their product recommendations.

Although this trust felt similar to the trust they had in friends in the offline world, interviewees acknowledged that the trust was still different. Notably, they remarked that their offline relationships were clearly two-way relationships, whereas online, they were only one-way relationships as, despite the ability to comment on blog and vlog posts, the chances of a popular content creator responding was not guaranteed. Despite this key difference, interviewees still felt connected to their favourite content creators (this will be discussed under the Relationships theme).

*I think it's a different kind of trust in sense of like I've got a two-way relationship with the people offline whereas the people online, it's just the one way, so I can't necessarily ask questions to the people online, or you could but the chances of them replying to you is quite low. So you can't really get the information that you are looking for from them whereas people offline it's a two-way interaction, yeah. I think there is a two kind of trust thing.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Finally, trust can be strengthened if a content creator supports the audience's already held opinions and beliefs that coincide with or match their own. According to some interviewees, when a content creator expressed an opinion that contradicted their own, it made them question the validity of their content and really investigate the truthfulness of their information. This can be reflective of offline friendships. Trust in the information a content creator generates can be increased if the opinion coincides with the viewer's preconceived idea as to what a product will be like. This is not to say a content creator cannot have their own opinion on things; interviewees acknowledged

that everyone is entitled to their own opinion. Having a similar outlook on topics and opinions rather reflected the relatability of the content creator.

*I think they just need to kind of have like a similar outlook to me.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

## **4.2.2 Trust Types**

After looking into general trust in blog and vlog content, this section looks at interviewees' predispositions to trust, in general. This includes their dispositional trust, as well as system trust in both blog and vlog content (in general) and the Internet.

### ***4.2.2.1 Dispositional Trust***

The interviewee pool demonstrated a range of levels of dispositional trust. Those who stated that they generally were not very trusting of people also conceded that if they were given a little while to get to know a person, then that may change. Likewise, for those who had a tendency to trust, their trust could dissolve very quickly through even a single conversation.

*My instinct is to trust but it is very easy to lose that trust and that can happen throughout just a simple conversation.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader)*

The majority of interviewees believed that they were generally trusting people. These interviewees pointed out that they had a strong faith in humanity and tended to look for the good in others, and that they were generally quite open about their own lives. This trusting disposition also related to discussions on instincts, that is, trusting in and understanding their own instincts when judging whether to trust other people.

### ***4.2.2.2 System/Institutional Trust***

Trust was also discussed by interviewees at the system or institutional level. This type of trust is separated into three areas: trust in the Internet in general, trust in online information in general, and trust in all blog and vlog content in general.

Like dispositional trust, trust levels in the Internet as a whole were quite varied amongst interviewees, although the majority did not trust the Internet overall (or at the very least were wary of the Internet). Of those that stated they did not trust the Internet in general, this was often justified through its accessibility, that is, that anyone can access and put any information (truthful or not) on the Internet. These interviewees would often have a few trusted online sources but for information in general, the Internet was not initially trusted.

Those who showed the greatest lack of trust in the Internet were in most cases those who worked or studied in the area (communications or online specific jobs) and often referenced privacy and security issues. Some interviewees clearly acknowledged that the Internet is not a safe place and should not be trusted. Interviewees were aware that, because anyone can put any information online, there is a need to fact check any information found online. The Internet was seen by some interviewees to be a dark, addictive place where anything can be said and as such they should be cautious. However, they also acknowledged that in this digital age and because the Internet is such a relied upon information source, it is hard to not trust it especially when wanting to make a purchase decision. Thus, it was made apparent that online trust comes down to the source of the information: if the information source (content creator) is trusted, then the information can be trusted. Trust in the online world, often like the offline world, needs to be earned.

*The Internet is a dangerous place. There's so many crazy things on it  
and I feel like people like just for reviews as well people can say  
whatever, people can do whatever on the Internet so no I don't trust  
the Internet but it's hard not to because that is your only resource  
and you are like, oh I really want to buy that product, I'm going to  
believe these...*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Many of those who stated they generally trusted the Internet often did not know why. One interviewee could only justify her trust in the Internet as being the fact it is used so readily and it must be trusted in some form. Growing up in a digital world, the Internet is a natural information source. As such, although some interviewees were trusting of the Internet, they were also wary and aware of privacy, security and factual issues that may arise.

*I think to trust it, yeah, I know that there are so many untrustworthy things on there but like I usually veer away from any of that kind of that stuff.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Like trust in the Internet in general, many interviewees were wary about trusting online information overall. Trust in online information was regarded as dependent on the source it came from. Interviewees maintained that it is important to learn about a person before the information they put online can be trusted and this can take time. Unlike face-to-face interactions, online interactions made it more difficult to read a person or information source. The source of any online information needed to be perceived as credible in order for interviewees to trust it.

*I guess it takes time because you are not like actually talking to them in person so it's hard to tell. It's more-harder to read the person.*

*(Male, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

The general consensus amongst interviewees was to tread carefully online. They were aware that anyone can put anything into the online realm and as such they should be cautious with what they trust. If they were intrigued by information they found online, they tended to cross check this information either by finding out more about the information source or comparing the information with other sources. In the case of product information, this meant reading multiple reviews, blogs or vlogs and even seeking the opinion of offline friends. Even those who did tend to trust information online were clear they did so with caution.

*No. I will make sure like if I see something and I think oh that's interesting, if it's something I want to know more about or I just want to check I will definitely, like go find other sources, like books or friends or anything just to clarify what I have seen online.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Although they admitted getting carried away with consuming information online, leading to their previous caution diminishing, interviewees were still aware that they needed to be careful about what information they trusted. However, they may have been more willing to trust online information as it had proved accurate in the past or because

they had found it relatable or believable in some way. Company-created content was avoided where possible as this was seen to be biased. The accessibility of created-content sees a multitude of opinions available instantly. The ability to find many different pieces of information and then to confirm and compare these in the online world also made interviewees more trusting, especially when the multiple pieces of information corroborated one another.

*It's accessible. It's just there and they can type anything into Google and it will pop up with things in less than a second and it's like, it's just the immediacy of having that information at your fingertips that people are willing to overlook whether the information is valid or not.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

Finally, system (institutional) trust was discussed in regard to trust in all blogs and vlogs. It was clear amongst all interviewees that they did not trust all blogs and vlogs to the same degree. Their trust was heavily dependent on the source of the information, that is, the content creator. Interviewees did not trust all blog and vlog content unless they could see a track record of content and of presence online and they enjoyed finding out about the content creator in order to understand them as a person to give context to their content. It also came down to the relationship they had with a content creator. Without any form of connection with a content creator, interviewees struggled to trust their content as much. As such, not all blog and vlog content was trusted to the same degree.

Although interviewees were wary of trusting the Internet and online information, they still held great trust in their favourite content creators. They trusted the person behind the content, which explains why they also did not regard all blog and vlog content to be the same.

### **4.2.3 Trust Conclusion**

After talking to the interviewees about the role of trust both generally in their lives and specifically in their online lives, it is apparent that trust is dynamic and flexible, dependent on the situation. This reflects past findings on trust from Wingreen and Baglione (2005) that trust is multidimensional; flexible and dynamic. This was also

apparent when discussing their trust in blog and vlog systems, and the online environment. System trust reflects the trust they hold in blog and vlog content in general; the rules and norms of the blog and vlog environment and the technical systems behind blogs and vlogs, as Grabner-Kräuter (2009) highlights. Thus, system trust holds importance in this research when considering consumers trust in blog and vlog content, especially in trusting specific content creators (where interpersonal trust is important). The interviewees spoken to were experienced with online content – their learned trust in online content and continued experiences built their system trust in blog and vlog content. It is believed that this may be the most influential of the three consumer trust types looked into to building creator trust as creator trust reflects interpersonal trust and dispositional trust appeared more influential for initial trust.

### **4.3 Content**

The next key theme found throughout the interviews was the importance and characteristics of blog and vlog content. This theme led to general discussion with interviewees about blog and vlog content, content specific discussion, and consumer information in content, specifically.

#### **4.3.1 General**

General discussion about blog and vlog content focussed on the content (rather than the source of the content) itself. This covered blog and vlog usage, and the evolution of created content.

##### **4.3.1.1 Blog and Vlog Usage**

Of the interviewee pool, the majority were primarily vlog watchers more so than blog readers. Because blogs have been around longer than vlogs, it was not surprising that those who read blogs had done so for a longer span of time than vlog viewers had been watching vlogs, with the main blog enthusiast having read them for over a decade. This was attributed to this interviewee taking an interest and starting their career the technology industry, with blogs having been (and continuing to be) a great source of information both to learn and to keep up with current trends from those deep in the industry. Vlogs were seen to be a newer, more up-to-date form of presenting blog

content, with most interviewees starting their viewing within the last five years. They discussed becoming quite addicted in a shorter span of time.

*Last year I didn't know any YouTubers at all, so my introduction to vlogging has really only been this year but honestly I got like hooked straight away, yeah so very new.*

*(Female, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

Interviewees had a motive to start viewing blog and vlog content. Some interviewees were actively searching for information about a particular topic and found content creators who could provide that information or insight. One interviewee specifically stated that they were looking for information about cruelty-free cosmetics and found certain content creators who also envisioned this lifestyle. They could then take advice from and aspire to be like these people.

*It was whenever I started doing, looking at cruelty free makeup stuff, maybe four years ago, three-four years ago around about. That was the main reason I started because I started researching what is and what isn't cruelty free.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Interviewees had two key ways of finding new content creators: searching for information, and recommendations from another source. Searching for information often led interviewees to find a content creator they liked and they continued to watch or read content beyond the information they were initially searching for. Once they enjoyed the content, they continued viewing that content creator's posts.

*Probably yeah probably just discovering it, not accidentally but you know, you are looking for something in particular about a video game being reviewed or something like that and then all of a sudden there is a let's play video or all of a sudden there is a vlog about something like that and then you just watch it, enjoy it and they've got a couple more videos and you get into the swing of things really.*

*(Male, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Interviewees watched vlogs a lot: most viewers of vlogs watched daily. Others noted that although they watched daily, they may not watch the entire vlog. Rather, they regularly checked their favourite content creators but may not watch everything. One interviewee also noted that they tended to go through fads in watching vlogs, watching more when they had spare time. Blog readers were not so frequent. This may be because their favourite bloggers may not have posted as often as many vloggers do. Blog readers also were quite varied in their frequency of blog reading, ranging from daily to monthly to occasionally when they needed information. Those who were both blog readers and vlog watchers were clear in that they watched vlogs a lot more than reading blogs. This could be compared to reading a book versus watching a movie in the offline world. Vlogs also enabled viewers to do other things whilst watching; interviewees noted it was easier to multitask whilst watching a vlog than reading a blog. In this sense, vlog watching is comparable in the offline world with watching television: it can be playing in the background as dinner is eaten and chores are done.

*Reading a blog probably like maybe on average I would only read  
one blog post a day but vlogs maybe like three or four a day  
sometimes average. It's a lot.*

*(Female, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

Interviewees often discovered new content creators through recommendations. This could be through recommendations from current content creators they were following, from YouTube recommendations (similar videos are suggested based on prior viewing) and even through offline WOM from their friends and family. If an interviewee's friends liked a certain content creator, they took note of this WOM information and viewed the content for themselves – in this case, WOM information led to eWOM information. This is similar to a friend or family member recommending a movie or television show that they have enjoyed. Thus, eWOM and traditional WOM are not siloed or separated information sources; rather, they are interwoven and can often be seen effecting or interacting with the other. Content creators often collaborate with other content creators, sending their own viewers to view other content creators' postings.

*I was just kind of like oh there's nothing on TV, I feel like I want to  
like watch something else, can you recommend someone to me. And  
she recommended I think Alfie and Zoella. She really likes them and  
I'm like yeah I'll watch them, check it out and then so I liked their*

*content and I still actually watch them on a semi-regular basis and then from there you just get suggested other people.*

*(Female, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

Interviewees enjoyed discussing their favourite content creators, describing them or their content in some detail. This suggests there was a connection with their favourite content creators. Casey Neistat, a well-known vlogger, was the most often referenced favourite content creator. Other popular vloggers such as Fleur de Force, Sarah's Day, Zoella and Alfie Deyes (Pointless Blog) were also discussed by multiple interviewees.

Some interviewees talked about those they followed in terms of where they were from, for example, a New Zealand or Australian blogger or vlogger. Some interviewees followed content creators who they could relate to based on their location; either the content creator lived in New Zealand or they travelled to places that the interviewee had been. The content creator's location or travel destination became something the interviewee could relate to and it showed their realness.

*I watch, well one person I follow kind of religiously at the moment is Sarah's Day. She is like a fitness vlogger from Sydney, Australia. I don't know, she is really like I guess empowering, motivational, yeah.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Specific content and creator characteristics were discussed as an influence on interviewees' decision to follow or subscribe to a content creator. This was in addition to looking at a content creator's back catalogue of postings to see if all of their content was consistently as enjoyable or useful as the first blog or vlog that attracted their attention. These characteristics included reputation, visiting New Zealand (or any place familiar to the reader or viewer), interesting or fascinating content, being real or original, and relatable. Content that was detailed rather than broad – helpful tips and tricks rather than broad spectrum information – as well content-creators' interaction with their audience, also influenced interviewees' intention to subscribe or follow. It was also suggested that people followed or subscribed to a content creator if they were able to offer an escape for their audience through content that provided a distraction from the stress of reality. Through this, interviewees were made to feel better about their own lives.

#### ***4.3.1.2 Evolution of Created Content***

Interviewees suggested that the increased use of and reliance on the Internet has influenced the evolution of blogs and vlogs and increased their popularity. There are a few key blog and vlog characteristics which interviewees believed have contributed to their popularity, including the relatability of content creators.

*I just guess it's like a fun and like easy thing to follow and so easy to watch them and understand them and I want to say they are just like us, they are just people and they seem like they are human beings and they are doing their own thing and it's just entertaining to watch.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

A key idea suggested by interviewees was that accessibility and created content format is key to increased popularity of blogs and vlogs. Interviewees suggested that in watching a video, it is possible to experience what the content creator is talking about (e.g., a product) along with them, that is, to experience what they experience.

Interviewees also raised the idea that blog and vlog popularity has increased as people can be curious about others' lives. Some interviewees described this idea as vlogs being the 'real' reality television. In the offline world, we are bombarded with reality television. Online, we are surrounded by social media platforms that encourage sharing information about our personal lives. Thus, we are conditioned towards seeking out information into people's everyday lives just as we share our own so easily. And this is what a vlog does, especially a daily vlog whereby it is possible to see even the mundane tasks of everyday life. Therefore, blogs and vlogs in particular have become more popular because we want to see into a real person's everyday life – what they do, their family, their opinions and experiences about what to buy – just as we share these things amongst our own social networks.

Along with the increased accessibility of the Internet, blogs and vlogs themselves have become more accessible. The Internet has allowed consumers to both search for and upload product information anytime, anywhere. Consumers favour WOM for consumer information and the Internet has increased the number of eWOM channels, like blogs and vlogs. Vlogs in particular are available in one key place: YouTube. This makes vlogs easier to find than blogs as vlogs are easily found on one key platform.

*I think it's definitely to do with like the rise of the Internet obviously. It's so much more accessible and I think everyone is realising that information doesn't have to come from a textbook or the newspaper. People are so much more open to gaining insight through more like informal and personal ways. I think that has definitely helped.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Blogs and vlogs have evolved over the years. Vlogs have changed from simple entertainment videos, to a more daily vlog style and currently can often incorporate both a traditional daily vlog style and a more 'main channel' style video (more scripted or topic focussed).

*It's become more like I want to show you what I do, kind of almost showing off a bit because YouTube is their life so they need to put up content that we want to see.... So now it's become more like they are trying to get the viewers more involved in their lives, but I don't know whether that would be like their real life.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Likewise, blogs and vlogs have become more mainstream for the audience who grew up with the Internet, that is, the younger, millennial generations. These consumers have grown up with the Internet being highly accessible and they use it heavily for entertainment and information alike. It is likely that the interviewees trusted blog and vlog content because they have evolved alongside it and seen it evolve alongside the Internet.

*This platform is slowly becoming normalised I guess or mainstream ... maybe mainstream, whereas for example our parents probably won't watch any of them. It's just a generational thing. But people who are our age, probably younger, haven't really known a time without, for example, You Tube and a time without the Internet.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

### 4.3.2 Content

The key theme of content was elicited from the interviewees through content specific discussion, focussing on the written or visual content of blogs and vlogs. This covered discussion on blog and vlog content, the format of blogs and vlogs, entertainment and information in blog and vlog content, and influence and engagement in content.

#### 4.3.2.1 Blog and Vlog Content

Interviewees defined both blog and vlog content as having similar characteristics: writing or filming whatever the content creator wants in their own personal way. Blogs were seen as a place where a content creator can write about anything they like in their own way, without having to conform to any specific structure or writing style. Vlogs were seen to be videos which document aspects of the content creator's life including ideas, opinions and daily life experiences.

*A blog to me is where someone can go and basically just write about any topic that interests them in their own way without having to conform to like say if you were a journalist and you were writing for a newspaper or something, you would probably have to write a certain way and under someone's control whereas a blog it is kind of like all your own stuff, it's when you want and what you want.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Interviewees were attracted to the content creator, not the content. They were attracted by the personality that comes across in the writing or video. They liked to feel an authentic presence in the content, to feel like the information received is from a real human, a real consumer, not a marketer.

*I think the fact if it's really authentic, being able to feel as if you are with them or they are your friend, just in terms of how real and open or like they keep it just casual, nothing too extra, so they are not doing the most to try and make it like "wow now I am waking up in a brand new date". You can't be that happy in the morning. It's just being real and having fun, like not necessarily always doing things*

*but like having a good chat about interesting things, showing new things as well.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Interviewees expressed that they wanted to see passion and originality in created content. They wanted to see good writing and quality filming; interesting content structured in a clear, concise, unique and entertaining way. Honesty and realism were desired by all; genuine opinions, real content from a real human being. Interviewees liked blogs and vlogs that coincided with their own already held beliefs as well as content which exposed them to new ideas or perspectives and was both entertaining and informing. They enjoyed blogs and vlogs as they provided information that was shared by the content creators who had the choice of keeping the information to themselves. They especially enjoyed information which provided unique tips and tricks to do with products, services or general life advice. The desire for honesty was highly apparent, especially when interviewees talked about sponsored content within blogs and vlogs. They believed that although sponsored content is not desirable, if it is necessary, content creators should be open about it and continue to keep their reviews or promotions genuine.

*And if there is any kind of product placement, I mean I don't like it, but if they are being paid to do something and just coming up saying hey, I'm being paid for this, rather than trying to make it a sneaky little infomercial.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

These ideals were upheld by those working in the influencer space. Industry experts acknowledged the impact content creators can have and that when it is done well, sponsorship in created content is a powerful influencer of consumer decisions. Thus, they too were aware that sponsored content should not be taken lightly. Rather than forcing an audience to change, influencers can use sponsored content to lead their audience gently in the direction they choose. Thus, it is important to recognise that blog readers and vlog watchers inherently do not like sponsored content but they do not mind it as much if the content creator is open and honest about what is being sponsored and remains honest in their opinions. These ideas surrounding sponsored content will be further discussed in section 4.3.3.

Interviewees had all experienced a bad blog or vlog at some stage. Bad blogs and vlogs were often referred to as unrelatable and boring; topics that were not of any interest or were “click bait”. Bad content involves a lack of explanation and detail provided to the reader or viewer. Bad blogs and vlogs were also referenced by interviewees regarding bad blog design or bad vlog filming quality. This was viewed as inexcusable as many blog platforms provide free templates and vlogs are able to be edited. Likewise, for vlogs, seeing the vlogger appearing uncomfortable in front of the camera make the viewers feel uncomfortable – confidence is key. Vlogs are able to be edited and good quality camera and lighting equipment is easily available on the consumer market. Therefore, bad quality was an immediate turn off for interviewees.

*I think you can tell if someone is uncomfortable on the camera as well. If they are really uncomfortable it makes you uncomfortable watching them.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Many aspects of the interviewee discussion revolved around a dependency on a blog or vlog and its content. Parenting bloggers and vloggers are often seen as providing trustworthy information. They are sought out for real, hands-on advice. Fashion bloggers and vloggers are looked to for the latest trends and advice on where to shop. As blog and vlog content can be uploaded and dispersed very quickly, fashion advice from these content creators can allow their followers to stay up-to-date and on trend in such a fast-moving industry.

Likewise, interviewees also found they required different things from content creators depending on whether they were viewing the content for entertainment or information. In terms of content that was sought primarily for entertainment, like gaming videos, humour was seen as important while information about the content creator was not so important.

*I don't always need to know every bit of detail about them. Some of them, depending on what I watch, if it's a gaming video or something like that, it's for entertainment. It's for comedy. It's them talking about the game and stuff like that. Some of the more slice of life stuff, like the Casey Neistat daily vlogs and stuff like that, yeah I'd like to know him a bit more and know about his background and all that*

*sort of stuff. That's interesting. But yeah I guess it would depend on the content or the market or niche.*

*(Male, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

For consumer information-based content, the product type itself influenced trust development. Whether the product the content creator was discussing was higher risk, higher price or lower risk, lower price could influence the level of trust the interviewees had in the content.

*Well it does depend on the product. Say for instance a beauty vlogger is reviewing this eight dollar concealer that is amazing and then they show you an eighty dollar concealer from a high end brand, I mean I probably wouldn't be as interested about the eighty dollar one because I would never consider spending that sort of money.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

As such content quality, context and style can all influence trust in blog and vlog content. Interviewees all wanted quality content that was relatable to them. They wanted content that was engaging, entertaining and informative, passionate and comfortable. They had all experienced both good and bad blog and vlog content, the bad causing them to switch away very quickly. Good blog and vlog content can have a great deal of influence on consumers, influencing them in their trust in the content creator and in making purchase decisions.

#### **4.3.2.2 Blog and Vlog Formats**

While the majority of interviewees were primarily vlog watchers, most had also read blogs – although not consistently, and often only when searching for information. Although this research views vlogs as an extension of blogs, there are some distinct differences between the two, largely relating to the differences in their formats. For one, interviewees believed blogs were more content focussed than vlog, while vlogs were seen to be more personality or source driven. In this sense, interviewees believed that blogs often provided better information, with more clear, concise and well-structured content. This reflected what interviewees suggested overall: blogs were primarily for information and vlogs were primarily for entertainment. Interviewees required vlogs to be more relatable and entertaining, even when presenting consumer information.

Interviewees primarily visited vlogs for entertainment purposes but also sought out information from these sources. Though viewing initially for entertainment, vlogs often grew to be a valid information source. Blogs on the other hand, were often used as an initial information source, until the choice was made to follow them if the content was enjoyable.

*I think I more read for information and watch for entertainment.*

*That would be my viewing habits.*

*(Female, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

Blog and vlog content can work together in collaboration. Some interviewees stated they often read the blogs of the vloggers they follow to get more information about what was spoken about in the video.

*You actually get to see the product on vlogs and in blogs you hear more about it.*

*(Female, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

Interviewees expressed that they felt vlogs could induce more interaction between the content creator and the audience and that, as the viewer could see the vlogger in action, there were less places for them to hide; in other words, vlog content appeared more genuine. Blogs, although still highly trusted, may not be trusted to quite the same extent as vlogs because there are still places to hide; a blogger does not have to show their face publicly or fully put a face to the opinions and ideas they put forth.

*I agree with the trusting vlogs more than blogs because I still think coming back to the whole Trip Advisor thing, I think with a blog people can still be a little bit hiding behind, you know, certain things or not. They can rip things to shreds. Whereas with a vlog you have more interaction because you can see the physical person, you can see their facial expressions and so on when they review something, whereas with a blog you can't tell what that person was thinking or doing at the moment they were writing.*

*(Male, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

For vlogs specifically, interviewees noted that the video (visual) format of vlogs influenced their trust in the content. A key vlogging characteristic is that the vlogger

usually faces the camera and talks directly to their audience, thus interviewees were able to use body language and mannerisms to help determine honesty in the content being presented. Some interviewees compared vlogs with television or movies in that, as a visual medium, a vlog needs to be entertaining. Vloggers were viewed as being entertainers just as television or movie actors are. It was also suggested that the video format allows people to become more invested in the vlogger's life as the vlogger could be actively followed around.

*It feels like they are giving me an honest opinion because I can see them and I can tell from their body language or yeah.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

#### **4.3.2.3 Entertainment and Information**

Entertainment was of importance to interviewees, even in primarily informational posts. It was expected that the interviewee's favourite content creators would be entertaining. Entertainment enables the content creator to hold the viewers' attention. Entertainment does not have to be theatrical; rather, the nature of the blog or vlog and the content creator's personality and presentation style are of primary importance. Interviewees also suggested that blogs and vlogs need to be influential in building connections between the content creator and the audience.

*Because it keeps my interest. For me I don't know, if I am bored by something I switch off really quickly. So I think it's entertainment wise I talk about like the way they set it up, their presentation sort of thing, that is what I class as entertainment. I don't like how they are presenting it or how they are coming. I am just like nah.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

According to interviewees, entertainment was of less important in blogs; expertise appeared to be more important. This is not to say that blogs did not need to be entertaining; entertainment was still helpful. Even in an informative post, entertainment was regarded as helping make the content more appealing and more real. It increased engagement and interest in the content and spurred return visits.

In blog content, personality and knowing the content creator appeared to be less important. In primarily entertainment sources like vlogs, interviewees wanted to know

about the content creator; they wanted to see the personality and personal aspects of the content creator as an actual person. Interviewees often compared vlogs to television or film as entertainment sources, although a source of information as well. Entertainment helped the interviewees connect with a content creator, showing their personality and helping engage the audience.

#### ***4.3.2.4 Influence and Engagement***

Interviewees recognised that content creators could have a significant influence over them. Although they recognised that these content creators had influence over their purchase decisions, it did not make them think negatively of the content creator. Content creators are highly influential in encouraging consumers to purchase certain items. One interviewee suggested that their favourite content creators only needed to recommend a product once for them to purchase it.

*I have bought also camera gear from people who have suggested like  
or that I have seen that's what they've used and they have  
recommended it. That has been a high influence to my decision. And  
I would say like because I am into travelling I have gone to  
destinations purely just because someone has been there and I am  
like that looks cool.*

*(Female, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

*I feel like if you see them do something once it can be enough just to  
be like yep, that is dinner tonight or yeah go buy that, I am going to  
go and buy that foundation next time I am needing something.*

*(Female, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

It was apparent this influence was not just directed at encouraging consumers to purchase items. Rather, content creators were able to influence interviewees to act in a certain way or portray certain personal characteristics. Interviewees suggested this may be because content creators can often give a different perspective on their own on topics and issues (or simply explain them in a way that they understood and connected with), making them rethink their own ideas and personal attributes.

*I feel like, this sounds kind of cheesy but I feel like they have actually made me a better person in many aspects of my life. You think about ... because they kind of just push you to think about life differently or like do more or like that kind of stuff.*

*(Female, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

Interviewees often referred to blogs and especially vlogs, as being highly engaging and this was viewed as an important characteristic of good blog and vlog content.

Interviewees found vlogs more engaging than other sources of information or media.

This engagement could be triggered with good quality content and design, humour and originality. Engaging content is important for content creators in influencing trust; engaging content is trusted more than content which bores the reader or viewer.

*I feel like when I watch TV it's more like in the background kind of thing. I will be on my phone whereas when I am on YouTube I am engaged in that.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Those creating content also acknowledged the importance of engaging and interacting with their audiences.

*So some of them are really vigilant at replying to every comment on their posts. In saying that some intend to but it can become impossible because there is just so much happening. It's something that we heavily encourage with paid hosts because it is so important for engagement to have those replies coming through. So influencers that we work with ... they keep that conversation going then we are snowballing and we are starting to get more and more people sending posts in. It travels organically that way which is the best way to travel on social is that way rather than paid.*

*(Female, 30-40, Content Creator Talent Manager)*

Thus, it is important to acknowledge the influential and engaging nature of blog and vlog content when looking at why it is trusted. Interviewees could identify the influence content creators had over them; they understood what the content creator was encouraging them to do. Yet, they embraced this influence. They desired engaging

content and interaction between the content creator and the audience. This all influenced the trust they had in their favourite content creators.

### 4.3.3 Consumer Information

Another key theme found in the interviews was the inclusion of consumer information in blog and vlog content. This discussion focussed around sponsorship in content, trust and the importance of sponsorship, and sponsorship and online reviews.

#### 4.3.3.1 Sponsorship

In general, interviewees were wary of sponsorship in any review-based post, whether it was disclosed as being sponsored in some way or not. If a product being reviewed or featured in a post was sponsored (either paid to review or the product provided for free), interviewees were vigilant to see whether the content creator still talked about the product in the same way as if they had bought it themselves.

*I feel like I always have just in the back of my mind like if they weren't sponsored to do it, would they be doing it and so I kind of think of who they are as a person and like what kind of lifestyle they have and I think does it actually fit into their lifestyle and then I kind of decide from there whether I trust it or not.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Overall, interviewees did not like advertising and they did not trust it. A similar feeling was reflected in sponsored content in blog and vlog content in that it made interviewees wary of the truthfulness of the content. For blogs in particular, it was suggested that sponsored content in a written format was less trustworthy. This likely coincides with the idea discussed previously that content creators can, to some extent, still hide in written blog content while vloggers are more visible. If a product review felt like a commercial, interviewees would not watch. They wanted genuine, helpful advice and recommendations. They wanted honesty from content creators through indicating when a post had been sponsored or when a product has been sent to them.

*Genuine and honest, and if there is any kind of product placement, I mean I don't like it, but if they are being paid to do something and*

*just coming up saying hey I'm being paid for this, rather than trying to make it a sneaky little infomercial.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Interviewees did not mind sponsorship in blog and vlog content; they did not necessarily like it, but they understood that it was typical in the digital age. So long as the opinion was honest and authentic to the content creator, sponsorship was not a concern. Interviewees liked to assume that content creators would genuinely use whatever they were promoting. The product needed to fit with the content creator and their content style. Overall, interviewees wanted content that was authentic, even when content was sponsored.

*The ones I watch don't do a lot, so I don't really mind but a couple of ones that I have watched, if I watched like two or three videos in a row where they are sponsoring like every five minutes throughout the video then I am like that changes my view and I am like okay clearly you are half vlogging for entertainment and half vlogging for money kind of thing, which yeah I am not really the biggest fan of.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

One way this authenticity could be inferred by interviewees was if content creators discussed products which had not been sponsored; that is, products that they had bought themselves. It was suggested that this could indicate to the audience that the content creator always gives their honest opinion and will only recommend something they truly like; that is, they do not only recommend products when they have been sent them for free or when they are paid to do so. In other words, content providers put the audience ahead of the sponsoring company by being honest and genuine in their reviews.

*I think as well if people make recommendations about stuff even when they are not being sponsored for anything, that builds more trust. So, if someone is ... like oh I got this product and I really like this product and then they do that again with a sponsored one you are like oh yeah they always recommend what they enjoy*

*(Female, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

Interviewees, in general, trusted their favourite bloggers and vloggers to be honest about sponsorship dealings. They understood that some content creators can be influenced by money, however, they believed that they had built enough trust in their favourite content creators to know when they were being genuine in their reviews. Interviewees also understood that sponsorship is needed at times to maintain a blog or vlog.

*You become vested into that person, into who they are and you actually want them to succeed so you are like that's awesome that they are getting this sponsorship. You are kind of like pro for it in a way.*

*(Female, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

Blog and vlog content influenced interviewees to purchase certain items. There appeared to be two key reasonings for purchasing based on a content creator's influence: purchasing because a product was said to be good and purchasing items to become like the content creator. Interviewees also suggested that they may not have bought the exact product a single content creator was recommending, but they had been influenced enough to look into more information about a product category. Having items recommended by several content creators was influential in the purchase decision; if multiple sources were recommending a product, it must be good.

*I bought like a similar camera to the one Casey Neistat has. I guess yeah because it's the kind of wanting to emulate the image of him so you had to have the same stuff like the griller part, the camera itself, the microphone thing that sticks out. Second to that I bought a penny board. I used it once because and then I fell off and never used it again because I have never been able to hold balance. But it just looked like fun. Oh man they make it look so easy and then I tried it and I was like, oh you fool.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

Review-based content was also enjoyed for post-purchase support. It was suggested that enjoyment could be gained by watching content creators review and react to products an audience member has already bought. A good review can help to justify satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a purchased product. It may also help a viewer or reader to align their views with the content creator. If the content creator dislikes a product the reader

or viewer likes, or likes a product that they are dissatisfied with, then they may seek advice from another content creator whose experiences and views align with their own. This could be a way to determine homophily with the content creator. Likewise, if a person is dissatisfied with a purchase, they may seek the content creator's advice in finding tips or tricks to make the product work better for them.

#### ***4.3.3.2 Sponsorship Trust and the Importance of Sponsorship Disclosure***

Interviewees trusted sponsored content less than non-sponsored content; that is, trust decreased if there was too much sponsored content. Sponsored content can make the audience feel that the content creator's opinions on the sponsored product are not genuine. The products being promoted need to be something the content creator would genuinely use. The interviewees did not want to see a beauty blogger or vlogger suddenly promoting a video game. Interviewees discussed the fact that product fit necessitated the promoted product genuinely being a product the content creator would buy.

*But if it's something that is way out of field or something they would never buy by themselves, that's when I would kind of get a bit sceptical.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Interviewees were not opposed to sponsored content so long as the creator clearly disclosed which products or content have been sponsored. Interviewees quite simply did not want to be taken advantage of in this way. Content creators were be trusted more if they disclosed that the product had been sponsored.

*As long as they tell me this is a sponsored thing and don't try to just shimmy it in, like there is a can of Pepsi there and then suddenly they will pan the camera across, like woops, oh what's that. As long as they don't try and dupe me in that way.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

Sponsorship disclosure could lead to internal debate for readers and viewers regarding the authenticity of the review. Interviewees questioned whether the content creator would actually use the product they were promoting and still be completely honest or simply hide any negative aspects.

*Well, I mean I trust them more if they say straight away that it's sponsored content but I will then read that review more critically than I would if it was not a sponsored content post. So, I am less likely to trust that specific review, but as long as they tell me upfront I wouldn't think less of them as a writer or a blogger overall.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader)*

As well as wanting honest content that was consistent with the content creator's style (not scripted), interviewees also wanted honesty regarding which products or what content had been sponsored. If it was found later that the content had been sponsored and it had not been clearly disclosed, interviewees felt their trust would lessen, and at times disintegrate fully.

*I guess it would depend on how loyal I was to that person in the first place. If it was someone like Shaaanxo for example who I have consistently followed for a long time and I found out she had whatever, a secret contract or whatever that she wasn't disclosing I probably would.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Interviewees were very aware of the large amount of sponsorship that occurs in created content and that for this reason, the more popular content creators are likely to get multiple offers. This means that they are able to pick and choose which sponsorships to engage in. This is corroborated by content creators and those in the business of social influencer marketing.

*I would much rather be told because I mean I would obviously much rather not be advertised to but I think we are in this day and age where, let's be honest, it's part of the bread and butter. They get paid to do it. So I would much rather be told. And again you have got to*

*take with a grain of salt but I feel like some of them will only agree to advertise something that they actually like, so they say.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Overall, interviewees viewed sponsorship in created content as a necessary evil in this digital age. They did not necessarily like it, but they did not hate it as long as content creators clearly disclosed what content was sponsored and that they were not left feeling they were viewing an infomercial. In other words, they felt that the content needed to remain authentic and honest. If the sponsored product was woven into usual content, this needed to be done seamlessly rather than feeling like an advertisement.

#### ***4.3.3.3 Sponsorship and Online Reviews***

Interviewees discussed the differences between a review post on a sponsored product versus a review post on a product the content creator had bought themselves. Positive reviews of sponsored products were trusted less than positive reviews of non-sponsored content. Interviewees generally believed that sponsorship may cause bias in a content creators review, even when it was stated that the review was the content creator's honest opinion. Overall, the interviewees also believed they could tell the difference between a sponsored and non-sponsored post, even when sponsorship was not disclosed. However, they also acknowledged that content creators and brands are getting better at producing content that appears as authentic even though it is sponsored, making undisclosed sponsored content more difficult to identify.

Sponsored content was often seen to be overly positive with little discussion of any negative aspects about the product. Interviewees preferred that a content creator discuss both the positive and negative aspects of a product and pointed out that nothing is completely perfect and therefore a product being discussed must have some negative attributes as well. Interviewees were very clear that they wanted a review with both positive and negative aspects. This was key in trusting the advice from a content creator. This showed that thought had gone into the review and that the content creator was not trying to please a brand or company for their own gain.

*That is what I would expect out of a good reviewer, someone who is actually going to tell you the negatives to an issue as well, not just rave about, you know, the particular product. From time to time*

*maybe there is a genuine product that is 100% perfect, but I really doubt there is. Isn't it like human nature to tend to look for the negatives and all that sort of stuff? Yeah, I would be looking for that in a video.*

*(Male, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

In comparison to online review websites, blog and vlog content was seen to be more thoughtful and interactive. By understanding the content creator, the product review itself can be better understood. The audience can understand the context in which the opinions are given, including content providers' belief systems, lifestyles, and so on. However, online reviews were still used by the majority of interviewees. They tended to visit these to corroborate blog and vlog information or to gain further information on the products prior to deciding to purchase. Therefore, online reviews and blog or vlog content were often used in tandem. Overall, interviewees all desired product information from real consumers.

*A blog post as a general thumb, especially ones that I read seem to be more thoughtful and well written than the general Amazon reviews.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader)*

Interviewees acknowledged that it was easier to negatively review a product on an online review website than on a blog or vlog. It was suggested that content creators have an image that can be negatively impacted if they negatively rate a company or brand, thus they must review truthfully and with caution. On online review websites, the author does not have to show the same responsibility for their opinion; rather, they can say what they want with less care of the consequences. Interviewees felt that online review websites required less care in their writing. Some interviewees made it clear that they trusted blog and vlog information more than online review website information due to the due diligence taken in comparison to online review websites.

*On like the separate review sites anyone can go onto them and give their review and since I don't know them, since I haven't seen them before I don't have as much trust as I would have in like a well-known vlogger reviewing it and like I know with a vlogger I know a bit about their lifestyle, how it fits into their lifestyle whereas on*

*those review sites you are kind of just getting a very, very small snippet of their life and so, I don't know, it doesn't seem as relatable as a blog post.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Overall, review posts in blogs and vlogs, whether they were sponsored or not, were not disliked, even when product information was not being actively sought. Rather, so long as the review content fit with the usual blog or vlog style and remained authentic, with a balanced review and without any aspect of an infomercial, interviewees were satisfied. In other words, so long as the review portrayed a sense of honesty, fit with the blog or vlog style and did not come across as an advertisement to please a brand or company, interviewees did not mind product reviews being included amongst the usual created content.

#### **4.3.4 Content Conclusion**

Our interviewees were aware that they were greatly influenced by blog and vlog content. They found this content both entertaining and informational; highly engaging and interactive content, with the feeling that the content creator was speaking directly to them. Blogs and vlogs were viewed as entertaining, even when information seeking; “communitainment” as Cunningham & Craig (2016) describe. Vlogs were said to be primarily used for entertainment and secondarily used for information; blogs were viewed in the opposite. However, entertainment was key to continued visitation or viewing. The attractiveness and quality of the content contributed to this and was seen to be a highly important aspect of blog and vlog content; it was what would encourage future viewing or turn viewers away.

In regard to consumer information, this was viewed to be a key characteristic of blog and vlog content. Whether it be a genuine review or a sponsored post, interviewees did not mind the content, so long as it fit with the content and it felt authentic. It is here we see Alperstein's (1991) finding that entertainment in advertising can initially draw the viewer in. Our interviewees also confirmed Hwang & Jeong's (2016) findings that sponsorship in content is not negatively influential on an audience so long as the creator emphasises that it is their honest opinion; it is an authentic review. Thus, both consumer information and entertainment, as well as content attractiveness, are all key characteristics of blog and vlog content, with a lens of authenticity over all content.

## 4.4 Creator

A key theme from the interviews that arose was that of the importance of the creator (the blogger or vlogger) in trusting blog and vlog content. This theme included the concepts of authenticity, expertise and celebrity status.

### 4.4.1 Authenticity

Authenticity arose as an important characteristic of content creators. Authenticity was discussed in terms of credibility and viewing the content creator as a real person.

#### 4.4.1.1 Authenticity and Credibility

A key area of importance to interviewees when discussing trust in content creators was authenticity. Authentic content was seen as being original and true, rather than a copy of someone else's style. Interviewees believed content creators need to stick to their own brand, especially in the online environment which is often so inauthentic and shows only what the content creator wants shown. It is a key reason as to why interviewees trusted the information they found on blogs and vlogs and why they continued to read or watch certain content creators.

*Sticking to their brand, absolutely. Or it's what makes them a long-lasting influencer because they will lose their audience very quickly if they steer too far away or if they lose sight of what their brand is, especially if they do that in a commercial way.*

*(Female, 30-40, Content Creator Talent Manager)*

Authentic content creators were regarded as honest, credible, genuine and real, only engaging in brand deals and sponsorship when they would genuinely use the product themselves, rather than only thinking about the money. Authentic content creators come across as real. They do not seem fake or as if they are acting. They are simply themselves. Authentic content creators were viewed as those who are not afraid to be themselves and are willing to speak their minds. Even when talking about sponsored products, authentic content creators are not afraid to give their true opinions. They also make their content personal – even sponsored reviews are given a personal touch. This can be done by showing the content creator's real life. In vlogs, using reviewed

products on camera and showing parts of their lives such as everyday tasks like cooking creates a window into the content creator's personal life. This encourages the consumer to connect with the content creator on a personal level, just as they would an offline friend.

*I think it is a large influencing part. People do care about authenticity, particularly in an environment that is so fake.*

*(Female, 18-30, blogger)*

*Although I think because we don't really watch the SACONNEJOLYs anymore or not much anyway and I think that's because, well Casey Neistat became sort of more popular and then people started imitating his videos and you could see it in their content and Jonathan from the SACONNEJOLYs like he started sort of more that style of vlogging and that kind of put me off. I didn't like it. It didn't suit his personality. And we kind of stopped watching it. I still watch occasionally but I am not really interested anymore. It just put me off.*

*(Male, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Among the interviewees, content creators and those working with content creators acknowledged that they wanted to be authentic but at the same time, they were aware that they were producing content to portray the best version of themselves. The remaining interviewees were not oblivious to this, being aware that what they saw on blogs and vlogs were just snippets of content creators' real lives. There is a fine line between authenticity and entertainment that content creators and their audience both acknowledge.

*I try as much as possible to be authentic but obviously in a sense you produce content, you take time to produce it, you try and obviously make yourself as shiny as possible, not to the degree that you are trying to ... you try and present the best possible angle of yourself.*

*(Female, 18-30, blogger)*

Interviewees often identified credibility as an important part of authenticity, often viewing them as one and the same. Credibility can be cultivated through being genuine and having a consistent track record of postings. Reputation was seen as a key aspect of credibility, including both what is said about the content creator and their track record of postings.

*He was saying to his girlfriend, he was like oh I wish you could do that again so I had the camera on, and sometimes it makes you think like do people put it on for the camera or do they redo things. It's not like that moment that they are capturing.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Interviewees were very aware that content creators only show the parts of themselves that they want other people to see. They were aware that content is edited by content creators to portray the best version of themselves – a version of themselves that appears authentic and relatable so as to connect with their audience but still somewhat polished and edited and unlikely to be an exact portrayal of the content creator's real life. Interviewees were aware that content creators want an audience and they produce content which attracts that audience. They liked to think that their favourite content creators were authentic in what they presented, but they were aware that much time and editing goes into deciding what version of themselves a content creator wants to portray.

*You don't know whether it is actually honest but it comes across as honest*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

#### **4.4.1.2 Content Creators are Viewed as Real People**

Interviewees also suggested that including personal content which identified the content creator to be a real person also contributed to an image of authenticity. Personal content provides the audience with a basis with which they can determine for themselves the ways in which they can relate to the content creator.

Vlogs themselves by default visualise personal content, visually displaying the content creator and their body language as they speak. Including content about their personal lives helped interviewees feel like they knew the content creator. It was apparent

amongst interviewees that in sharing personal information about their own lives, content creators create a connection with their audience. Interviewees found it interesting to get a glimpse into the lives of their favourite content creators.

*To be honest I feel more connected with the ones who are more open about their own lives, even if they are health bloggers, if they share a little bit, you kind of almost get to know who their husband is or what their dog's name is and you feel like you know them almost, and that also keeps you coming back again and again.*

*(Female, 18-30, blogger)*

Personal content here does not refer to potentially sensitive information being shared, such as address or phone number. Rather, personal information may provide glimpses into content providers' lives, their homes, pets or friends. This could be a vlog filmed in the vloggers home – cooking in their kitchen, putting their makeup on in their bathroom – or a blog post discussing the happenings of the bloggers day, from making breakfast to taking the bus to work. Any content with which the viewer or reader can determine the realness of the content creator and feel like they are a part of their lives creates a sense of authenticity and provides context to the content.

*Like the other day I was watching Estee Lalonde's Japan vlog and her partner was sitting on the bed filming himself but you could hear her singing in the shower and it was the funniest thing ever. And I was like oh my gosh that's totally relatable because everybody sings in the shower, even if you do it quietly, everybody sings in the shower. But you know it just made you feel like you were there and it was funny and you know they let you in on like semi private things in their life and I think that makes me feel like they are friends.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Interviewees wanted to see the real person behind the computer, especially in review-based posts and in sponsored content. Interviewees also wanted to see real emotion: excitement, sadness, anger. Interviewees wanted identifying information and personal details that helped to build an understanding of the type of person the content creator was. This could contribute to building trust in the content creator and assessing whether the content presented could be trusted.

Honesty was of great importance to all interviewees. They sought information from their favourite content creators because they expected them to give them an honest opinion. They also expected content creators to practice what they preach; when content creators promoted a product, the interviewees expected them to genuinely use the product in their lives. Content was deemed honest when it was presented naturally rather than being forced, over-dramatic or attention seeking.

Similarity was also of importance to interviewees, especially when considering review-based information. It was suggested by interviewees that if they felt that the content creator was similar to them, they then the things that were said and products that were recommended would apply to them also; that is, if the content creator liked a product, then they would too. In general, interviewees were not prepared to follow content creators who did not share similar interests with themselves. Interviewees also suggested that if they saw something in a content creator which they identified in themselves, they felt a connection to that content creator. Similarity can be determined from watching a content creator review a product the viewer or reader has already used. If their opinions align, they may trust further opinions from that content creator.

*I guess it's that basis of human connection once again, if we feel like we are connecting with somebody because we see something in them that we identify in ourselves or we want to identify in ourselves then you do sort of form a bit of a connection.*

*(Female, 18-30, blogger)*

Finally, just like similarity, interviewees liked content creators who were relatable. Relatability can be determined from personal information and identification shared by the content creator. Relatability is important in showing that the content creator is just like the audience member rather than being distanced or unreachable. Interviewees regarded vloggers who showed themselves doing menial tasks in everyday places (e.g., at home, at the mall, walking down a street) as relatable. It was felt that, unlike television and movie celebrities, real people do not do exciting things every day.

*It's reality TV but something you can relate to because sometimes they were doing something exciting and other times they were just sitting at home doing nothing. And yeah it was something that you can actually relate to whereas nobody can relate to the Kardashians.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Interviewees wanted to be able to picture themselves in the content creator's place; if the content creator travelled to a specific place or bought a specific product or engaged in a certain lifestyle, then the interviewees could imagine themselves doing that too. In this sense, relatability represents attainability. When the audience can relate to the content creator, they can see themselves in that position; that is, they can see themselves using that product or travelling to that place. Thus, the goal becomes attainable.

*That's exactly what a review is, it's their opinion on a product and it's going to be completely different. If I can find someone that I feel I relate to that has the same interests as me then they might represent me better.*

*(Male, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Although entertainment was a key characteristic of vlogs in particular, interviewees did not want to see or hear from a fictional character; they wanted to see that the person behind the screen was real. Interviewees were continually looking for evidence that the content creator was a real person.

In summary, for interviewees, authenticity was of great importance in the building of trust with content creators. Authenticity could be built from a content creator sharing personal content and providing honest opinions that showed them to be a real person. Similarity and relatability between the content creator and themselves were important in building trust.

#### **4.4.2 Expertise**

Expertise was discussed in relation to the content creator in terms of expertise by experience, and the volume and consistency of blog or vlog posts.

#### ***4.4.2.1 Expertise by Experience and Quality***

In general, interviewees found expertise to be an influence on trust. However, this did not have to be expertise in the traditional sense. Rather, expertise was often referred to as expertise by experience. Especially in information-based postings, interviewees wanted the content creator to show that they were an expert in their relevant field. This expertise did not have to be a traditional, physical qualification. Rather, expertise was often viewed as confidence in that field, whereby the content creator used products and discussed topics at a higher or more in-depth level, presenting them through the content. Expertise was also viewed as experience in content creation more so than experience in a particular product or service industry. What was important was the presentation of information.

*But definitely showing when you are writing that you are an expert in that field or have a lot of knowledge, you should be pointing out things or finding good things or faults at a level that other people may not. So one of the things if I am reading a review and someone mentions something or an aspect or how it works and then I go wow, I would never have thought of that is a really positive sign for me.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader)*

Interviewees also viewed expertise through the quality of the created content. This could include blog design and layout or vlog camera quality, filming and editing. For blogs, good writing was key. This was considered to be writing which was interesting and well-structured whilst also being clear and concise. The blog design needed to be professional, easy to read and include pictures – in general, attractive to the eye. This was similar for vlogs. Camera and editing quality were important, including filming techniques such as lighting and sound.

*It's like the production quality of the video, like how good the actual video is. If it's a terrible cell phone quality with really bad audio, don't get me started on vertical bar lines then I would absolutely skip that video. So production quality for me is important.*

*(Male, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

#### ***4.4.2.2 Volume and Consistency of Postings***

Expertise by experience can be determined by a track record of postings by the content creator. Having a volume of postings allows the audience to have a track record of content they can go back through in order to get to know the content creator and their style and to determine expertise in both their given field and in content creation. A track record of content can also show growth in the content creator. Having this track record of postings was of great importance to interviewees in building trust with a content creator.

This track record also allows a viewer to determine consistency within the blog or vlog content. This is especially important in regard to sponsored posts – whether the content creator only posts reviews of sponsored content or whether they also review products they have bought themselves. For interviewees, subscribing to a content creator’s channel was often encouraged by the creator’s consistency in posting content, which allowed the interviewees to be alerted to new content. Subscribing to a content creator’s content illustrated their commitment to seeing future content and their growing connection to the content creator.

*If they are entertaining and trustworthy enough. I don't know. I have watched a few of them in a row maybe or over me, that I quite like for whatever reason, whether it's the honesty or entertainment or whatever, just if they are consistent then I will follow.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Consistency was also discussed regarding posting frequency. Interviewees liked content creators who were reliable and consistent in their posting. This helped build a returning, loyal audience. Interviewees liked consistency in the content creator’s style. They did not want to see a random review post if the content creator usually posted lifestyle or daily blogs or vlogs; rather, both the product and post style needed to fit with the regular blog or vlog content. It is apparent viewers of blog and vlog content need consistency in order to trust the content creator.

*If they are known to do normal day to day vlogging and they do a here and there review product, it's okay, but if it's like a complete switch then... it's just like who told you do to that.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

### 4.4.3 A New Form of Celebrity

Content creators were often compared to celebrities. This was discussed surrounding the ideas of popularity and attractiveness, and as a part of the viewer's identity and someone the viewer aspires to be like.

#### 4.4.3.1 Popularity and Attractiveness

Interviewees compared content creators to traditional celebrities. Although popular content creators were seen to be able to reach celebrity status, they were viewed as a different kind of celebrity. Notably, they were seen to be an attainable celebrity. Where traditional celebrities were viewed as unattainable and out of reach, content creators were viewed as reachable and realistic. Content creators were seen to be famous for being themselves.

*I already feel like they are a celebrity, not in the sense of like movie star or singer or that, but nowadays if you have got this amount of subscribers on You Tube, you are well known. There are two types of celebrities. You've got the vlogger celebrity and then you've got the traditional.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Content creators were viewed as a more trustworthy form of celebrity whereas traditional celebrities were seen to promote anything they were paid to do so. Content creators were regarded as telling their own story, rather than the story of others as told by traditional celebrities; that is content creators play themselves rather than playing a character.

*But it's kind of weird kind of scary but it's cool how there is like stars from Hollywood and they seem to have this unattainable lifestyle but then there is like the You Tube stars or the vlogging stars who everybody can relate to and they are so popular and yeah it's just crazy.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Content creators with a large number of subscriber numbers (500,000 at least) were viewed as less of a trust risk, as other viewers or readers were already trusting them for a reason. As well as subscriber or follower numbers, interactions and engagement with blog and vlog content is an indicator of popularity. Engagement can be viewed through comments, likes and interactions with the content. This is a sign of other people enjoying the content. As in the idea of safety in numbers, if other people are enjoying the content then it is a sign that the current viewer might too.

*I would probably not even bother watching a video if it's only got like three views, unless it's like something really particular or really peculiar, you know, that it's not very popular or it's not even like can I say mainstream, then I might decide to watch it but I wouldn't trust them, no.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Attractiveness was also discussed by interviewees as being an indicator of trust in blog and vlog content. It was apparent that the physical attractiveness of the content creator had a certain level of influence on the content being viewed, particularly for vlogs, although this did not override the importance of good content. Physical attractiveness was also of particular importance for topics which surrounded the idea of attractiveness; particular the beauty industry. It was seen to be important for beauty vloggers as their entire vlog channel surrounds the idea of being attractive. It may be that they are already attractive or that they can show their audience how to become attractive by covering blemishes with makeup or using makeup to enhance natural beauty. Viewers want to see how they can become attractive, like the vlogger; if they do as they do, buy what they buy, then they can recreate that attractiveness that they see.

*I feel like if I was given the chance to watch someone that wasn't super attractive but their content was still good, I would continue to watch them.*

*(Female, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

Attractiveness was not discussed solely in terms of the physical attractiveness of the content creator, but rather referred to in terms of the attractiveness of the content itself. In general, there was a consensus amongst all interviewees that the attractiveness of the content itself was more important than that attractiveness of the content creator. Like

expertise and experience, this is again where the importance of content quality is apparent. Interviewees regarded camera quality or writing quality, imagery, editing and professionalism of the presentation to be of utmost importance.

*The attractiveness of the vlogger doesn't earn the trust. I would say as a whole not coming from me but it's probably a lie if I said it wasn't a factor in people initially clicking on them, seeing them. But I think what to me was more important was attractiveness of the video or the edit or the post online. Like if it's a crappy looking website with crappy font, it's poorly written, if you are reviewing something and there's no pictures of it, like you can't tell me that this amazing Chinese meal is awesome and then you don't even include a picture, you know what I mean? That sort of stuff is probably a factor for me personally.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

#### **4.4.3.2 Identity and Aspiration**

It is apparent from discussions with interviewees that their favourite bloggers and vloggers were able to become a part of their own identity. Interviewees reflected on the idea that content creators who are followed closely can become a part of the viewers in that viewers begin to internalise aspects of the content creator – buy what they buy, act how they act. Content creators have the ability to become a big part of their audiences' lives, engraining themselves as a defining part of people's personalities. Interviewees did not like to think that content creators could go as far as becoming a part of their own identity, but they felt that they judged others by the content creators they followed.

*You could form your own conclusions based on who people follow. In my case if you see who I follow it's like you could see it as me watching people that I want to emulate or me watching people that kind of do stuff that I wouldn't normally do.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

Interviewees often talked about following content creators who they aspired to be like. As discussed earlier, content creators represent an attainable aspiration. This is because they are viewed as more real and like the audience than a traditional celebrity and

because they often detail how the audience can be like them. One interviewee discussed how a beauty vlogger showed her audience how to cover acne. In this example, the audience could initially relate and connect to the content creator through this inclusion of a personal (and often regarded as embarrassing) detail of their life, that is, having acne and showing it to the audience. The audience could then fulfil their aspiration to be like the content creator by copying their makeup routine to cover their acne. Once they related to the content creator, they could then copy the content creator's behaviour or buy the same products in order to become like the content creator.

*When Zoella doesn't wear makeup and she's got a pimple here it's like oh bad skin day and I am like oh wait, we all have that.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

Interviewees often made reference to well-known vlogger Casey Neistat as someone they followed and enjoyed watching because they aspired to be like him. Neistat's content is engaging and visually pleasing. His videos are of high quality and use an original filming style. Interviewee's wanted to buy the things that Neistat used in his created content, including cameras, clothing accessories and skateboards. In purchasing the things Neistat owned, interviewees aspired to be just like him.

*Well it's the kind of you connect the equipment to the image you see and you want to recreate that image in yourself so you need the equipment to do it effectively and you need the skateboard and you need the black glasses with the bleach and you know. You need to have the whole package in order to you know do the same thing.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

This suggests content creators are trusted because they are a part of their audience's identities and reflect a better, attainable version of themselves.

#### **4.4.4 Creator Conclusion**

Our interviewees trust the content creator rather than the content itself; they see blog and vlog content as coming from a real person – and that is who they trust. Interviewees all referred to their favourite content creators as authentic. Authenticity increased credibility and relatability for our interviewees. Interviewees, like Moulard et al. (2016)

in regard to consumer trust, suggested that authenticity was important in building their trust with a content creator and, as Brunell et al. (2010) and Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016) suggest, can influence purchase intention when discussing products and help build a connection or relationship with the content creator.

One of the leading ways interviewees identify that content creators show their authenticity is through sharing personal content. This allows for similarities to be drawn, creating an aspect of relatability between the audience and content creator. In this sense, the suggestions of Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016) and R. L. Rose and Wood (2005) surrounding perceptions of authenticity differing on a per person basis are highlighted here; what people find relatable and aspects of similarities will differ for everyone, just as perceptions of authenticity differ. This suggests that, in regard to content creators, relatability and similarities (including homophily) may influence perceptions of authenticity.

Interviewees also revealed that expertise was a characteristic of their favourite content creator but not in the traditional sense. Rather expertise was defined by experience, be that in the content's field or in content creation. The volume (track-record) and quality of postings were evidence of expertise, alongside content depth especially when consumer information was involved. Thus, in some ways our interviewees agree with Erdogan (1999) in that the content creator does not need to be an expert in the traditional sense in any field, rather just perceived as an expert.

Likewise, the creators themselves do not need to be attractive to be a favourite of our interviewees – rather, just their content. There was some indication that creator attractiveness can initiate viewing, especially in beauty field as they can be seen as aspiration. Thus, unlike past research by the likes of Ohanian (1990) attributing the attractiveness of a person to their credibility, this was not found to be the case. Rather, the attractiveness of their content was key (as discussed prior). Although interviewees saw content creators with large followings as gaining celebrity status, they still saw them as different to traditional celebrities; as attainable celebrities. Yet, where attractiveness has been found to be a key aspect of celebrity endorser effectiveness (Erdogan, 1999), content creator pseudo-celebrities do not see this importance placed on their physical looks; just their content's attractiveness.

## 4.5 Relationships

The final theme that arose from the interviews was the idea of having a pseudo-relationship with the content creator. This was discussed both in terms of a one-way relationship with the creator and the general social aspects of created content.

### 4.5.1 A One-Sided Relationship

The concept of a relationship with a content creator was of importance to interviewees. This was discussed surrounding the feeling of connection to and trust in the content creator, and the overall feelings of community surrounding the content creator.

#### 4.5.1.1 Connection and Trust

Interviewees trusted their favourite content creators because they felt a connection with them; they felt like they were like a friend. Many interviewees felt that the connection they had with a content creator was a real relationship, just like the relationships they had with their offline friends. Interviewees acknowledged that building a connection with people was key in developing trust in the offline world and they felt this was the same for content creators. Interviewees were less likely to trust a content creator whose content they had seen only once than a content creator they actively followed.

*If I feel like I kind of have a connection with them, like they are  
relatable, they are easy to listen to or read I definitely feel like it's  
easier to trust them.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

When talking to their offline friends about their favourite content creators, interviewees often discussed them as if they were mutual friends. However, interviewees were also very aware that although the relationship felt real, it was different than the offline relationships they had in their lives. They were aware that this relationship was one-sided, and aware that the trust they had in these content creators was different than the trust they experienced in offline relationships (although they could not explain how it was different).

*I remember one time I was talking to my friend and she was like wait, what are you talking about? I'm talking about Kim off a YouTube channel. She was oh my gosh I thought it was an actual person. I'm like no, she is an actual person, she is real. She thought it was an actual friend, not a girl in the USA who has got a YouTube channel. Sometimes I do make it sound, because I feel like I am really connected to the person when really I am not.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

This connection was felt quite intensely by many interviewees, largely those who were primarily vlog viewers. This may be because of the pseudo face-to-face contact that vlogs encourage. Blog readers did not refer to a clear relationship, but rather a connection of some sorts that could not clearly explain or an acknowledgement of similarity. Vlog viewers, on the other hand, were clear in their feelings of connection and relationship to their favourite vloggers, especially those who were more open about their personal lives. Content creator's themselves are aware of the connection building characteristic of their content.

*It comes back to people feeling like they know the person behind the blog and I think they almost, you know, you form a relationship with them. I certainly do with the bloggers that I follow and you think you know their life and you do kind of, you kind of don't, it's a weird thing.*

*(Female, 18-30, blogger)*

Interviewees, mostly vlog viewers, also discussed the feeling that the content creator was speaking directly to them and only them. They felt that the content creator was a friend talking directly to them through the video.

It was also noted by interviewees that trust develops over time; it is not instant. Trust in content creators can develop more quickly because the audience can view as much of their content as they want at once. Interviewees suggested that trust is developed with content creators because relationships are developed.

In summary, it is apparent that the connection interviewees had with their favourite content creators felt like a real connection or relationship. However, because this connection or relationship is one-sided (an illusionary relationship), this suggests that

the connection is a pseudo-relationship or an extension of a parasocial relationship (Auer, 1992; Horton & Wohl, 1956).

*So for me it doesn't feel like there's millions of other people watching that video with me. It just kind of feels like you have this relationship with that person but you have never met them. You see so much of their life. You kind of feel like you are a part of their life.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

#### **4.5.1.2 The Feeling of a Real Connection**

Similar to feeling a friendship with the content creator, interviewees also discussed the strong feeling of knowing the content creator. This was especially apparent when the content creator showed their personal lives rather than just reviewing or unboxing products. This could be in the form of daily vlogs or simply showing parts of their personal lives, like their families, homes or personal connections.

*Some more than others because some use that blog to talk about what's happening in their lives and personal aspects more than others. Daring Fireball doesn't really talk about anything personal. It's always about the tech industry news and Apple products, whilst Marco Arment regularly talks about his personal life and what is going on. So, you get a feeling that you know him quite well.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader)*

Despite this, interviewees were also clear that they did not really know the content creator. They were very aware that viewers can only see those parts of the content creators' lives that they wanted them to see – in many cases, only the best parts of their lives, the shiny polished version. Although they felt a connection or relationship with the content creator, they understood that it was not real. But this did not dull their trust in the content creator.

It was clear from interviewees that they considered relationships between content creators and their audience to be pseudo-relationships whereby the audience's relationship feelings are real, while also being aware that the relationship itself is not real.

*So yeah I feel like sometimes I feel like I do know them but I know for a fact that I kind of don't because it's just all for the camera. You never know what someone is going through.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

#### **4.5.1.3 Community**

Interviewees discussed the idea that feeling a connection with a content creator could expand to feeling like they were a part of a community. Interviewees who did not feel like they were a part of the content creator's community could still see the community around them; they were spectators from the outside but could clearly see the community surrounding the content creator. Content creators also acknowledged the development of these communities and strived to interact with the community members to show their appreciation.

*I used to not bother as much, must be because I didn't think it was necessary, people commented, great I would comment on other people's and didn't expect a reply, but now I think it's really important to answer all questions, like all comments. It does take up time but I think we need to be grateful for all the interaction we get and all the engagement and if people are taking the time out to like my post I think I should take the time out to acknowledge that.*

*(Female, 18-30, blogger)*

Interviewees discussed seeing blog and vlog audience members interacting with one another, either in the comments section or on separate forums online. They also saw the blogger or vlogger interacting with community members and even organising events in the real world to bring the community together.

*Couple of people that I have talked to online, they share that kind of interaction with vlogs and blogs and it's like you can have a different kind of conversation with them ... and it's like you can relate to them on that additional level. It's really just like a television show that you can talk about. It's like did you see the last episode of Fun for Louis and it's like yeah, he got caught speeding, what a fool.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

Similar to the feelings of a relationship with a content creator, feelings of community can also influence trust. The relationship felt with a content creator can open doors to relationships within the community. Relationships, in this sense, are the basis for community development. A viewer may see they are not the only person that trusts the content creator and they instead have a large support network surrounding the content creator and the trust held in them.

*It does because it just gives another like community to be part of, not just with the vlogger themselves but with the other people who are followers. So I guess maybe the relationship with the vlogger builds this other community that maybe you didn't necessarily set out to form in the first place. Like you have tried to set up this connection between the vlogger, instead you've got a whole bunch of connections with the community that surrounds the vlogger, but then they are still kind of attached to that community as well.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

This sense of community was seen by interviewees as being an important social aspect of blogs and vlogs. There is a blog or vlog channel online for almost any topic of interest and a community surrounding that. This is something that may not be present in the offline world where communities are often limited by location.

*But because again there is a place that you can go and you can find, no matter what your interest is, as long as it's legal, you are going to find it on YouTube and there will be a community on YouTube for you. So I think a lot of people can go to that on the Internet and feel at home and part of a community which they can't get anywhere else as well.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader)*

#### **4.5.2 Social**

The idea of feeling a connection to a content creator was further discussed in regard to the social aspects of blog and vlog content. This discussion included the ideas of generational differences in blog and vlog usage, and the general social issues surrounding blog and vlog content.

#### ***4.5.2.1 Generational Differences***

Interviewees acknowledged the influence of generational differences on blog and vlog usage. In general, those who trust blog and vlog content are largely millennials.

Interviewees themselves were all younger, aged in their early thirties and younger.

Older generations who were introduced to the Internet at a later stage in their lives are still living partly in the world in which they were raised and are likely to trust more traditional relationships and channels. Trust in blog and vlog content, therefore, may lie largely with the younger, “YouTube” generation who use social media platforms to share their lives. And just as they share their lives, they want to see others share theirs.

Gone are the days when the only source of video content was film or television whereby viewers had to live by a film or television company’s schedule. Vlogs are to today’s younger generation what television was to the generation before them, and radio was to a prior generation.

Many interviewees did not have their televisions plugged into television aerials at all; instead they only used their televisions for streaming online content.

*Yeah, I think a lot of people would replace that, especially people growing up with YouTube. I think they would much rather watch a lot of those things than ... in some ways it’s replacing reality TV for some people I expect. Watch like James De Franco, I think there are people who would use that as their news source daily rather than watching the news.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader)*

#### ***4.5.2.2 Social Issues***

Finally, interviewees also discussed the social impacts of blog and vlog content. In an age of oversharing, higher social media use has seen greater instances of anxiety and depression, lower self-esteem and lower sleep quality (Woods & Scott, 2016). Viewing blog and vlog content may provide an outlet to these stresses. One interviewee was clear that they believed the online world is addictive – sharing their lives and viewing others’ shared content is addictive; a compulsion even.

It appears the current generation has been conditioned to share their personal lives and want to see others' personal lives shared. The innate curiosity of humans has been inflamed with the arrival of the Internet and the new ability to see into many people's lives if they choose to share them. The digital age has encouraged people to post and share parts of their lives: photos, statuses, ideas and achievements. Thus, it is understandable that we want to see others do the same.

*We have become conditioned to be more stalkers and curious about other people's lives. It's true. I think before reality TV vlogging would have never taken off because people would have found it too intrusive to look into someone else's life. But we have been conditioned that that's what we should be doing.*

*(Female, 18-30, blog reader and vlog viewer)*

The communities that develop around content creators can provide a home or safe place for the viewer. Blogs and vlogs can provide a sense of belonging to the viewer that is lacking in the offline world. In feeling like they have a connection with the content creator and even with the community surrounding the content creator, the audience can gain a sense of belonging and support.

*But because again there is a place that you can go and you can find, no matter what your interest is, as long as it's legal, you are going to find it on YouTube and there will be a community on YouTube for you. So I think a lot of people can go to that on the Internet and feel at home and part of a community which they can't get anywhere.*

*(Male, 18-30, blog reader)*

Blog and vlog content can provide an escape for viewers. It can make them feel better about their own lives or influence or inspire them to live different lives. Blogs and vlogs can take viewers to another part of the world or another way of life. Importantly, content creators can offer feelings of friendship while the offline world is lonesome. Blog and vlog content can be accessed anytime, anywhere and so too can the associated relationship feelings. Thus, when a viewer needs a friend, there is always one available. This has its own ethical implications; to ensure marketers do not take advantage of this may be an important focus for future research.

*Sometimes you might be at home by yourself and you think oh I'll just watch some vlogs, it seems like I know this person like they are my friend.*

*(Female, 18-30, vlog viewer)*

In summary, content creators may fulfil the social needs of their viewers when the real world is unable to fulfil them. Content creators create communities of viewers and can provide a sense of belonging. Blog and vlog content can fulfil viewers' curiosity about how other people live. By filling gaps in or replicating relationships in the offline world, content creators become trusted friends.

### **4.5.3 Relationship Conclusion**

The key reason why interviewees trusted their favourite content creators was because they felt a connection to them; like a real relationship. They felt that trust in people in the offline world was built from forming a connection with them, and that this was the same in the online world. Although they all felt this connection, they felt with their favourite content creators was real, they all acknowledged that it was not a real relationship because it was one sided; a pseudo-relationship.

What interviewees described reflects a parasocial relationship. How interviewees described their connection to their favourite content creators reflects Auter (1992) definition of parasocial interactions: the feeling of a relationship with a media persona. Their descriptions also reflect the suggestion of Alperstein (1991) that repeated exposure can make this relationship more meaningful.

The strength of trust that interviewees felt they had with their favourite content creator – often matching that of friends and family not only in their expert field but also in a general sense – suggests that this parasocial relationship may be stronger than the traditional television parasocial interactions; what the researchers deem a parasocial-plus relationship. This high trust and feeling of intense connection to a content creator may stem from the realness of the environment that blogs and vlogs occur: video and photos of real people in 'real' environments like their homes or out in public places. What is certain from these interviews is that the feeling of a relationship with a content creator, stemming from numerous factors discussed prior like authenticity and personal content as well as repeated exposure, creates a high level of trust with them.

## 4.6 Conclusion

Many insights into trust in blog and vlog content arose from this study. For one, it is apparent that trust lies in the content creator, rather than in their blog or vlog.

Furthermore, the development of trust in a content creator can vary depending on the audience members' predispositions to trust.

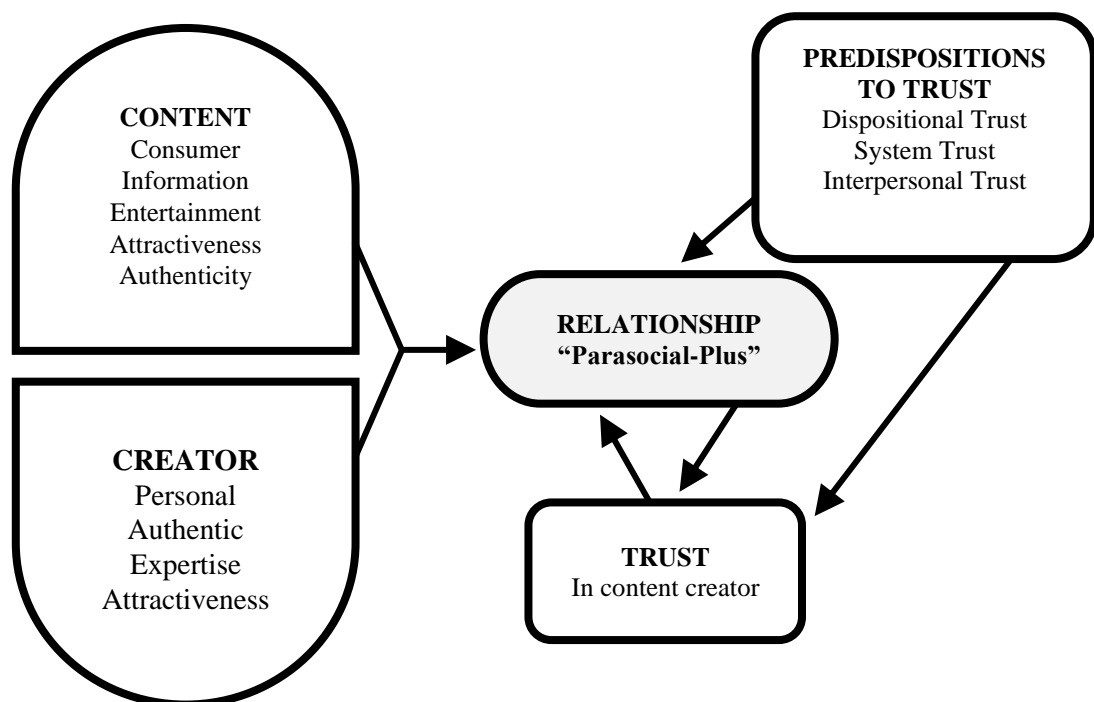
Trust in the content creator develops from both content and creator aspects of the blog or vlog. Important content aspects of blog and vlog content include the provision of consumer information. Sponsorship is viewed as inevitable; so long as it is disclosed and not overdone, sponsorship is not hated (nor is it loved) and nor is it a cause to stop viewing a creator's content. Blog and vlog content is also viewed favourably if it is entertaining and attractive. According to interviewees, entertainment is more important for vlogs in that it is necessary to keep the attention of the audience and to encourage a connection with the creator through continued viewing. Attractiveness was discussed in terms of both the content creator and the content. Most interviewees said they were not influenced by the creator's attractiveness unless this related to a beauty or fashion related blog or vlog. Rather, most found the attractiveness of the content to be of greater importance – if the content was not pleasing to the eye, they would not want to view a vlog.

According to the data, there are three things that people like to see reflected in blog and vlog content in order to develop trust. The first is seeing personal information incorporated into the content: family life, the creator's home and their daily routine. Authenticity is also important in that the content creator should be seen as an authentic person who is credible, genuine and not a marketer. Expertise is also deemed a key characteristic. Expertise by experience, rather than by qualification, is desirable and can be illustrated by a content creator's track record of postings to show expertise both in content creation and in their content category.

Finally, the idea of forming a connection or relationship with the content creator is vital in developing trust in the content creator. Interviewees often referred to content creators who were like them or like a friend; that is, similar to themselves or similar to someone they would be friends with. The relationship was often described as a feeling that was like the trusting relationships one has with offline friends but different in a way; interviewees had difficulty describing it. All interviewees acknowledged that the connection or relationship they felt, no matter how strong, was one-sided and they were

all very aware that the content creator had no feeling of connection to them. This suggests that this relationship is some form of parasocial relationship (Auter, 1992), potentially an extension of the traditional parasocial relationship, catalysed by the reality of the blog and vlog environment. In this study, the term “parasocial-plus” is put forward to describe this relationship.

Thus, the key constructs taken from the interviews to take forward into quantitative testing are summarised to be consumer information, entertainment, content attractiveness, content authenticity, personal content, creator authenticity, expertise, creator attractiveness, parasocial interaction, dispositional trust, system trust, interpersonal trust and content creator trust.



**Figure 5 Trust in blog and vlog content**

A model relating to trust in a content creator was developed from the four key themes apparent in the interview data. As seen in Figure 5, content and creator aspects of the blog and vlog content are what initially attracts the audience. The most important aspects of blog and vlog content to the audience are the inclusion of consumer information, entertainment and attractiveness. The most important aspects of the content creator include the audiences’ desire to see personal aspects of the creator’s life, the authenticity of the creator and their expertise by experience. These aspects can help the audience form a connection or relationship with the content creator. This relationship is

reflective of a one-sided friendship where it feels like an offline friendship however the audience is well aware that this relationship is only felt by them and not the content creator; in other words, it is a “parasocial-plus” relationship.

There is a symbiotic connection between relationship and trust: the relationship prompts trust, and trust further enhances the relationship. The audience’s predispositions to trust (dispositional, system and interpersonal trust) also influence the development of a relationship with the content creator and the development of trust in that content creator. The model highlights that the development of a relationship with the content creator is central to the development of trust in the content creator.

Based on the literature and the key findings of this chapter, a few key influencers of blog and vlog trust can be deduced. First, dispositional, interpersonal and system trust may encourage the development of a connection or relationship with a content creator and the building of trust with a content creator. Next, content characteristics of blog and vlog content may encourage the recurring use of blog and vlog content and the development of a connection or relationship with a content creator. These characteristics comprise the inclusion of consumer information, entertainment, content attractiveness, and content authenticity.

Creator characteristics of blog and vlog content may encourage the recurring use of blog and vlog content and the development of a connection or relationship with a content creator. These characteristics comprise the inclusion of personal content or self-disclosure, authenticity, expertise, and the attractiveness of the creator.

Also, blog and vlog audiences may build a parasocial relationship with a content creator. From this, the building of a parasocial interaction or relationship with a content creator may influence the creation of trust with that content creator, and vice versa. Finally, these findings along with the literature suggest that there may be differences between blog and vlog content in terms of what makes them trustworthy; blogs may see consumer information influencing trust more so than vlogs, and vlogs may see content authenticity, content attractiveness, and personal content influencing trust more so than blogs.

# **Chapter Five: Research Design – Study Two**

## **5.1 Introduction**

Study Two aimed to quantitatively investigate why consumers trust blog and vlog content, and whether there are differences in the factors that influence trust in blog content versus trust in vlog content. This study is built upon the results of Study One. This chapter presents the research design for Study Two, a quantitative survey and structural equation modelling. It details the aims, hypotheses, research design, pilot study, sample, and analysis.

### **5.1.1 Aims**

Study Two aimed to test the conceptual model developed from the findings of Study One. It tested the relationships within the model by obtaining data through a quantitative survey, analysed through structural equation modelling. It also aimed to compare the key influencing characteristics of blog and vlog content, in order to discover any key differing characteristics.

### **5.1.2 Hypotheses**

The following presents a list of hypotheses resulting from a thorough review of related literature and the results from Study Two (Table 3).

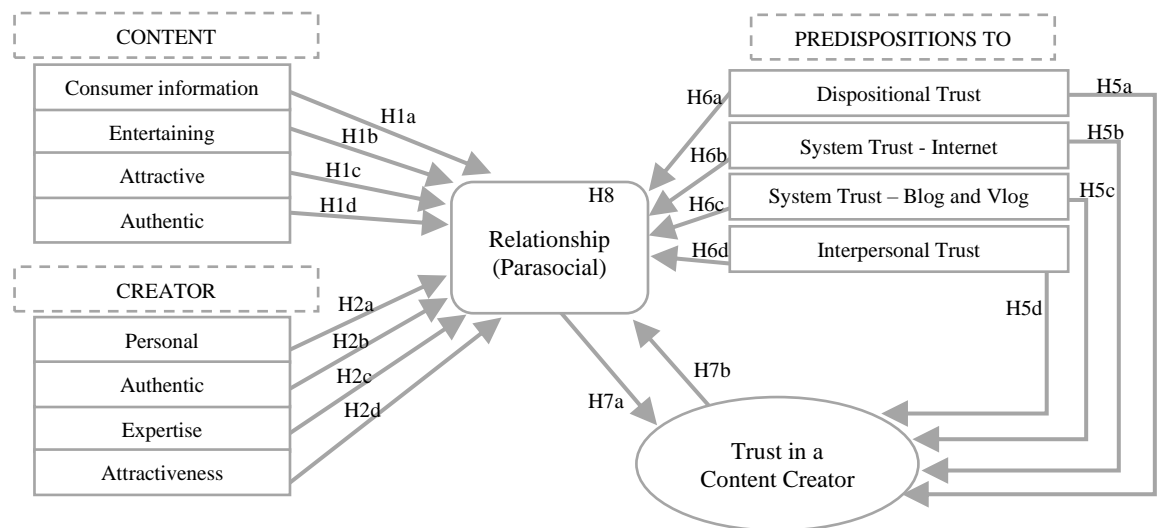
**Table 3 Hypotheses for research question one**

<b>Hypotheses (Research Question One)</b>	
<b>H1a</b>	Entertaining b/vlog content helps build a relationship with the content creator
<b>H1b</b>	Attractive b/vlog content helps build a relationship with the content creator
<b>H1c</b>	Consumer information (in the form of product reviews and recommendations) in b/vlog content helps build a relationship with the content creator
<b>H1d</b>	Authentic b/vlog content helps build a relationship with the content creator
<b>H2a</b>	Illustrating the creator as authentic in their created content helps build a relationship with the content creator
<b>H2b</b>	Illustrating the creator as an expert (by experience) in their created content helps build a relationship with the content creator
<b>H2c</b>	Personal content about the creator helps build a relationship with the content creator
<b>H2d</b>	Illustrating the creator as attractive in their created content helps build a relationship with the content creator
<b>H3a</b>	Dispositional trust encourages audience trust in a content creator
<b>H3b</b>	System trust (in the Internet) encourages audience trust in a content creator
<b>H3c</b>	System trust (in blog and vlog content) encourages audience trust in a content creator
<b>H3d</b>	Interpersonal trust encourages audience trust in a content creator
<b>H4a</b>	Dispositional trust encourages the development of a relationship with a content creator
<b>H4b</b>	System trust (in the Internet) encourages the development of a relationship with a content creator
<b>H4c</b>	System trust (in blog and vlog content) encourages the development of a relationship with a content creator
<b>H4d</b>	Interpersonal trust encourages the development of a relationship with a content creator
<b>H5a</b>	Building a relationship with the content creator helps build trust in a specific content creator
<b>H5b</b>	Trust in a specific content creator helps build a relationship with that content creator
<b>H6</b>	A blog or vlog audience can develop a parasocial relationship with a content creator

These hypotheses are reflective of the key results of Study One - Qualitative. H1 through H2 reflect the thoughts of interviewees, that these important blog and vlog characteristics can make them feel they know the content creator, and help to build their trust in them. H3 and H4 look at the audience's predispositions to trust which may influence their ability to trust a content creator, or build a connection with a content creator. H5 seeks to determine whether the perception of having a relationship with a

content creator builds trust in that content creator, or vice versa. Finally, H6 aims to give a name to this connection to the content creator and to determine whether the connection felt can be deemed a parasocial relationship; as indicated through literature and Study One interviews.

Study Two – Quantitative looked at the relationships between the concepts to determine what are the strongest influencers of blog/vlog content trust. The testing of these hypotheses addressed the Research Questions for the study. These hypotheses are represented in Figure 6 as influencers of trust in blog and vlog content. These hypotheses cover Research Question One only, and were tested using SEM.



**Figure 6 Research model with hypotheses**

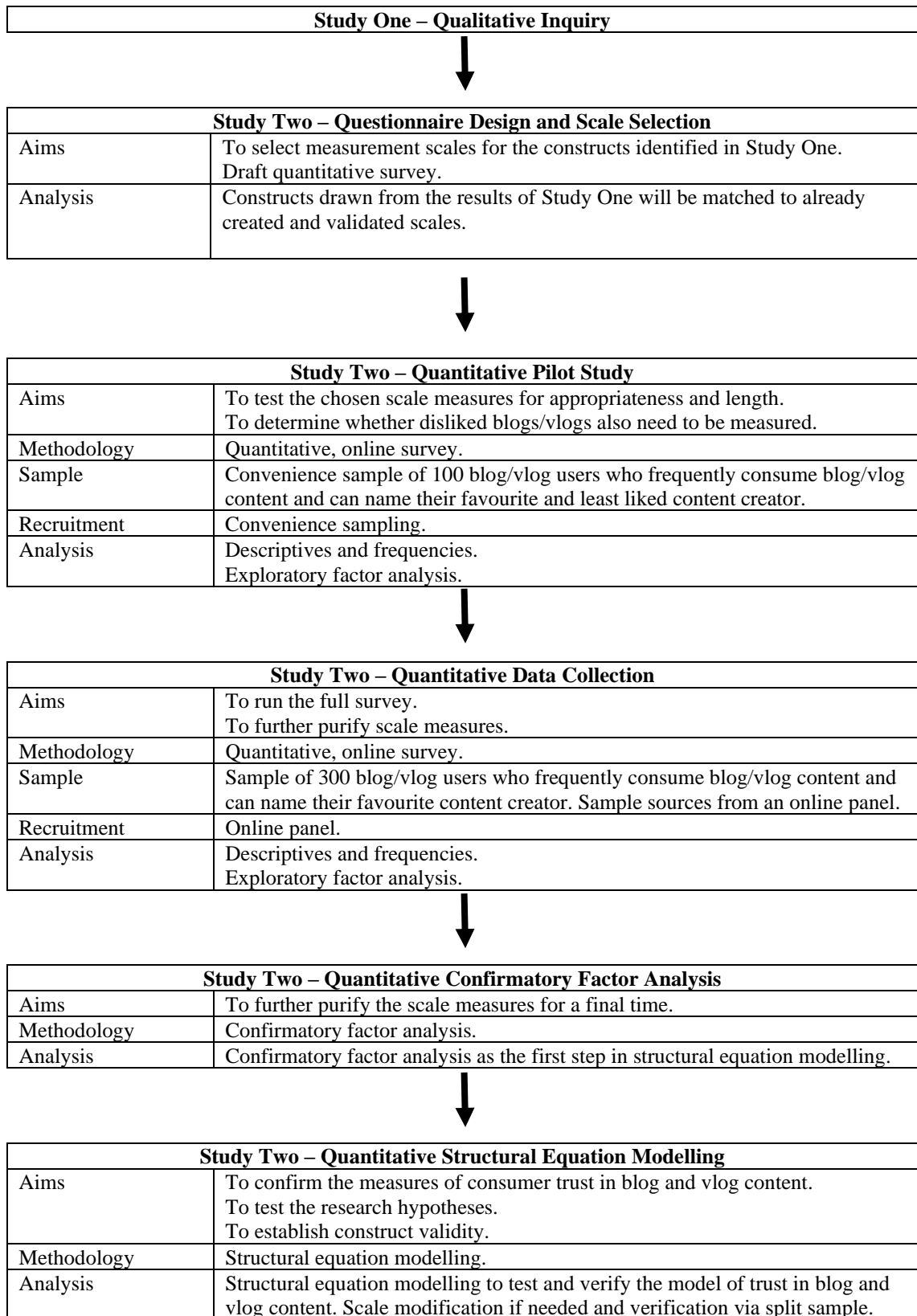
Also based off the findings of Study One, Table 4 shows the hypotheses for Research Question Two. These surround the idea, brought up in Study One, that the differences between a blog and a vlog are reflective of that between a book and a television show or movie; blogs being more information-driven and vlogs being more entertaining. It also surrounds the idea that vlogs, are more visual with the format being video content, and may be perceived as being more attractive and as prompting more parasociability. This research question will be tested separately; using multiple regression.

**Table 4 Hypotheses for research question two**

<b>Hypotheses (Research Question Two)</b>	
<b>H7</b>	Blogs will see consumer information influencing trust more so than vlogs.
<b>H8</b>	Vlogs will see authentic content influencing trust more so than blogs.
<b>H9</b>	Vlogs will see content attractiveness influencing trust more so than blogs.
<b>H10</b>	Vlogs see personal content influencing trust more so than blogs.

## **5.2 Research Design**

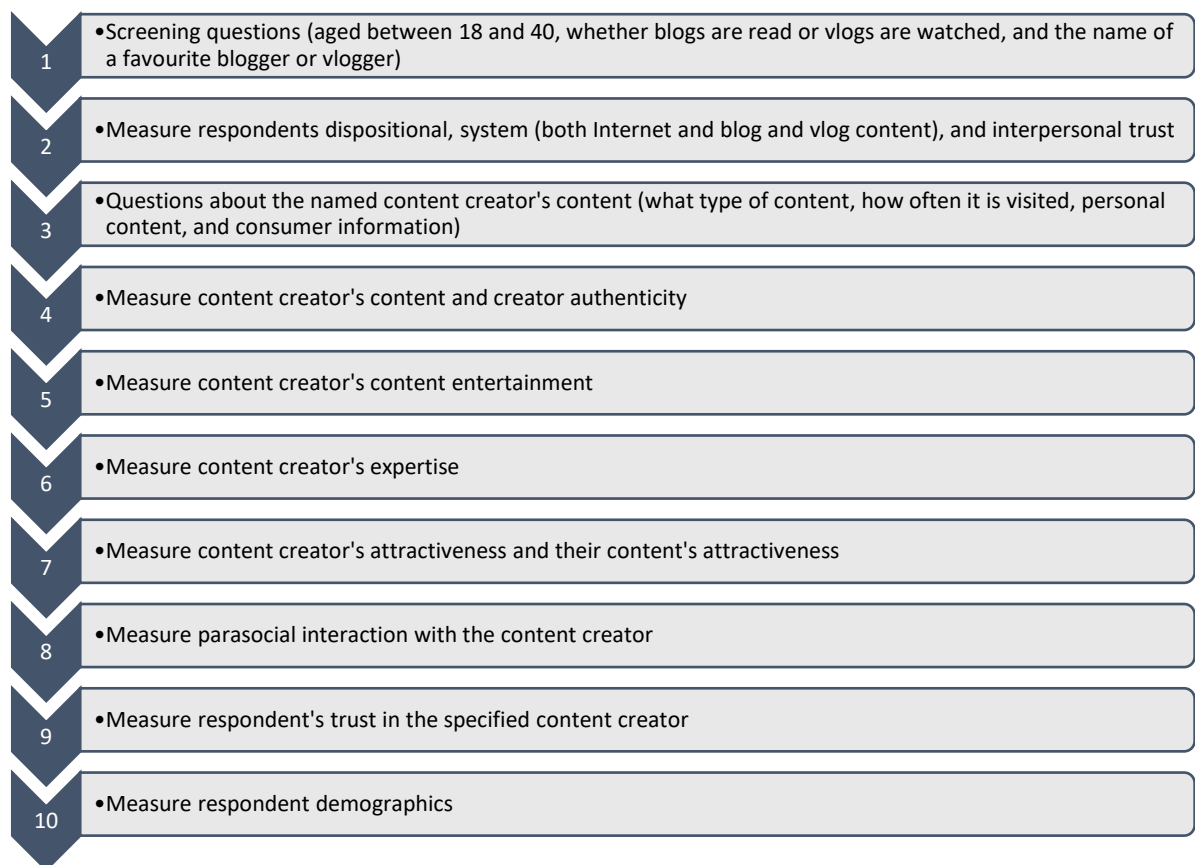
The research design in Figure 7 illustrates the research process for this thesis. It illustrates the research design transition from Study One to the second, quantitative, study. This figure shows the process of this study from designing and creating the online survey to the pilot study. It then shows the process of full data collection through to analysis; confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling.



**Figure 7 Research phases – study two**

### 5.2.1 Questionnaire Design and Scale Selection

Figure 8 illustrates the structure of the quantitative questionnaire used in Study Two; the quantitative study (see Appendix 7 for a copy of the full questionnaire). The first section within the questionnaire was to provide screening questions to ensure the most appropriate sample was recruited. These screening questions ensured the sample only contained people who were aged between 18-40, frequently use blogs or vlogs, and could name their favourite blogger or vlogger.



**Figure 8 Structure of the questionnaire**

The next section, before asking respondents about their favourite content creators, was to determine participant dispositional, institutional or system trust (for both trust in the Internet in general and trust in blog and vlog content), and their interpersonal trust. Dispositional trust was be measured using the Frazier, Johnson, and Fainshmidt (2013) propensity to trust scale. System trust, measuring both trust in the Internet in general and in blog and vlog content was measured using Lucassen and Schraagen's (2012) scale. Finally, interpersonal trust was measured using the Schiffman, Thelen, and Sherman (2010) 7-item scale, based upon the original Rotter (1967) interpersonal trust scale. These constructs and their scale measure items are displayed in Table 5.

**Table 5 Predispositions to trust scale measures**

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Scale Source</i>	<i>Scale Items</i>
<i>Dispositional Trust</i>	Frazier, Johnson, & Fainshmidt (2013)	I usually trust people until they give me a reason not to Trusting another person is not difficult for me My typical approach is to trust new acquaintances until they prove I should not trust them My tendency to trust others is high
<i>System Trust (Internet)</i>	Lucassen & Schraagen (2012) – Section: Trust in the Internet	When you are looking for information, how often would you use the Internet as opposed to offline sources? What do you think is the credibility of the Internet? How much do you trust the institutes and people ‘running the Internet’? How much do you trust the institutes and people ‘running the Internet’? How much confidence do you have in the people with whom you interact through the Internet? If you are in need of information, how confident are you that you can find it on the Internet? How well do you think your privacy is protected on the Internet?
<i>System Trust (Blog and Vlog Content)</i>	Lucassen & Schraagen (2012) – Section: Trust in the Wikipedia – <i>adapted for blog and vlog content</i>	When you are looking for information, how often would you use blogs or vlogs as opposed to other sources? What do you think is the credibility of blogs and vlogs? How much do you trust the institutes and people ‘running blogs and vlogs’? How much confidence do you have in the people who add information to blogs and vlogs? If you are in need of information, how confident are you that you can find it on blogs and vlogs? How large do you think the risk of getting inaccurate information on blogs and vlogs is?
<i>Interpersonal Trust</i>	Schiffman, Thelen, and Sherman (2010)	Most salespeople are honest in describing their products. Most students in school would not cheat even if they were sure of getting away with it. Most repairmen will not overcharge even if they think you are ignorant of their specialty. Most people answer public opinion polls honestly. Parents usually can be relied on to keep their promises. Most experts can be relied upon to tell the truth about the limits of their knowledge. Most people can be counted on to do what they say they will do.

Respondents were then asked about their named, favourite, blog or vlog. Questions here asked; how often the respondent views the content, and the category of the content. Respondents were then asked whether and how the content creator uses personal content and consumer information; these scales were created by the researcher based on Study One findings. These questions primed the respondent to think about their favourite (named) content creator, which lead on to scaled questions about aspects of that content creator's content and their trust in that content creator. These items are seen in Table 6.

**Table 6 Personal content and consumer information scale measures**

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Scale Source</i>	<i>Scale Items</i>
<i>Personal Content (Self-Disclosure)</i>	Created by the research based on Study One.	<p>&lt;blogger/vlogger&gt; talks about or shows personal aspects of their life (e.g. their family, friends, health, etc.).</p> <p>&lt;blogger/vlogger&gt; shows or talks about their friends and/or family in their content.</p> <p>&lt;blogger/vlogger&gt; shows or talks about their home (e.g. filming or photography taking in their own home).</p> <p>&lt;blogger/vlogger&gt; shows or talks about their daily life (e.g. filming or photography doing normal daily tasks like cooking, grocery shopping, walking around a street/mall/beach).</p> <p>&lt;blogger/vlogger&gt; is someone I could be friends with in real life.</p> <p>I feel a connection to &lt;blogger/vlogger&gt;.</p> <p>I feel like I know &lt;blogger/vlogger&gt;.</p>
<i>Consumer Information</i>	Created by the research based on Study One.	<p>&lt;blogger/vlogger&gt; often mentions a specific branded product or service in their content.</p> <p>&lt;blogger/vlogger&gt; often reviews specific branded products or services in their content.</p> <p>&lt;blogger/vlogger&gt; often shows themselves using a specific brand of product or service in their content.</p> <p>How useful is the information &lt;blogger/vlogger&gt; provides about products or services?</p> <p>I have used information provided by &lt;blogger/vlogger&gt; about a product or service to decide whether or not to purchase something.</p> <p>The information provided by &lt;blogger/vlogger&gt; about a product or service has given me the idea to purchase something.</p>

The respondent was asked about both the authenticity of the content and the authenticity of the creator. The content's authenticity was measured using Morhart, Malar, Guevremont, Girardin, and Grohmann's (2015) Perceived Brand Authenticity scale. Rather than asking about a brand in particular, the content creator's name was inserted via piped text into each rating scale item. This scale measured authenticity using four key dimensions: continuity, credibility, integrity and symbolism. Creator authenticity was measured using Schallehn, Burmann, and Riley's (2014) scale of brand authenticity, again replacing a brand with the content creator's name. These two scales covered authenticity of blog and vlog content in that they provided two measures focussing on both the content itself and the creator. Both scales were measured on a 7-point scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The items for these measures are displayed in Table 7.

**Table 7 Authenticity scale measures**

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Scale Source</i>	<i>Scale Items</i>
<i>Content Authenticity</i>	Morhart, Malar, Guevremont, Girardin, & Grohmann (2015) – <i>adapted brand for favourite content creator's content</i>	<blogger/vlogger>'s content has a history <blogger/vlogger>'s content is timeless <blogger/vlogger>'s content survives times <blogger/vlogger>'s content survives trends <blogger/vlogger>'s content will not betray you <blogger/vlogger>'s content accomplishes its value promise <blogger/vlogger>'s content is honest <blogger/vlogger>'s content gives back to its audience <blogger/vlogger>'s content has moral principles <blogger/vlogger>'s content is true to a set of moral values <blogger/vlogger>'s content shows they care about their audience <blogger/vlogger>'s content adds meaning to people's lives <blogger/vlogger>'s content reflects important values people care about <blogger/vlogger>'s content connects people with their real selves <blogger/vlogger>'s content connects people with what is really important
<i>Creator Authenticity</i>	Schallehn, Burmann, & Riley (2014) – <i>adapted brand for favourite content creator's</i>	<blogger/vlogger> possesses a clear philosophy which guides their content. <blogger/vlogger> knows exactly what they stand for and does not promise anything which contradicts its essence and character. Considering its brand promise, <blogger/vlogger> does not pretend to be someone else. Considering its brand promise, <blogger/vlogger> doesn't curry favour with its target group; moreover, it shows self-esteem. <blogger/vlogger> distorts themselves, to match contemporary market trends. The saying "you trim your sails to every wind that blows" describes <blogger/vlogger> adequately.

Content entertainment was then measured using a short, three-item scale by Brackett and Carr (2001). This entertainment scale was taken from the entertainment dimension of their scale measures of advertising value. This was measured on a 7-point scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These items are displayed in Table 8.

**Table 8 Entertainment scale measures**

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Scale Source</i>	<i>Scale Items</i>
<i>Entertainment</i>	Brackett & Carr (2001)	<blogger/vlogger>'s content: Is entertaining Is enjoyable Is pleasing

Perceptions of blogger or vlogger expertise in their topic area was measured based on the expertise measures suggested by Ohanian's (1990) expertise dimension of the Source Credibility Scale; expert, experienced, knowledgeable, qualified and skilled. This scale was measured on a 7-point scale. These scale items are displayed in Table 9.

**Table 9 Expertise scale measures**

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Scale Source</i>	<i>Scale Items</i>
<i>Expertise</i>	Ohanian (1990)	To what extent is <blogger/vlogger>: An expert in their field Experienced in their field Knowledgeable in their field Qualified in their field Skilled in their field

The attractiveness of the blogger or vlogger was then measured, also be based off Ohanian's (1990) attractiveness dimension of the Source Credibility Scale; attractive, classy, handsome/beautiful, elegant and sexy. This scale was measured on a 7-point polar scale. The attractiveness of the content itself was also measured. This scale was created based off Study One's interview findings and the notion that content presentation could influence website credibility (Constantinides, 2004). Important aspects noted were that the content was designed well, pleasing on the eye, edited well, provides a good atmosphere (Cyr & Bonanni, 2005; Hasan, 2016; Y.-M. Li & Yeh, 2010), consistent and high quality. This was measured on a 7-point scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The scale items for creator attractiveness, and measures created for content attractiveness by the researcher, are displayed in Table 10.

**Table 10 Attractiveness scale measures**

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Scale Source</i>	<i>Scale Items</i>
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	Ohanian (1990)	To what extent is <blogger/vlogger> themselves: Attractive Classy Beautiful Elegant Sexy
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	Created by the research based on literature and Study One.	<blogger/vlogger>'s content is designed well <blogger/vlogger>'s content is pleasing on the eye <blogger/vlogger>'s content is edited well <blogger/vlogger>'s content provides a good atmosphere <blogger/vlogger>'s content is consistent <blogger/vlogger>'s content is high quality <blogger/vlogger> uses images or video that is clear and high quality

Parasocial interaction was measured using the parasocial interaction scale developed by Auter and Palmgreen (2000). This scale was developed for measuring parasocial interactions in a more traditional setting, television viewing, so was adapted to work for blog and vlog viewing. Where television was noted in the scale, this was replaced by blog or vlog. References to a favourite character were changed to favourite content creator and references to characters viewed were changed to people the content creator interacts with in their content. This was measured on a 7-point scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Scale measure items for this construct are displayed in Table 11.

**Table 11 Parasocial Interaction scale measures**

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Scale Source</i>	<i>Scale Items</i>
<i>Parasocial Interaction</i>	Auter & Palmgreen (2000) – adapted for content creators instead of characters	<Blogger/Vlogger> reminds me of myself. I have the same qualities as <Blogger/Vlogger>. I seem to have the same beliefs or attitudes as <Blogger/Vlogger>. I have the same problems as <Blogger/Vlogger>. I can imagine myself as <Blogger/Vlogger>. I can identify with <Blogger/Vlogger>.  I would like to meet <Blogger/Vlogger>. I would view <Blogger/Vlogger> on another <blog/vlog> or on television. I enjoy trying to predict what <Blogger/Vlogger> will do. I hope <Blogger/Vlogger> achieved his or her goals. I care about what happens to <Blogger/Vlogger>. I like < reading the words /hearing the voice> of <Blogger/Vlogger>.

Respondents were then asked about the trust they hold in their favourite, selected, blogger or vlogger. This was done, again, using Ohanian's (1990) trust dimension of the Source Credibility Scale. These items (Table 12) included measures of dependability, honesty, reliability, sincerity, and trustworthiness. This scale was measured on a 7-point scale.

**Table 12 Creator Trust scale measures**

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Scale Source</i>	<i>Scale Items</i>
<i>Creator Trust</i>	Ohanian (1990)	To what extent is <blogger/vlogger>: Dependable Honest Reliable Sincere Trustworthy

Finally, participants were asked about themselves. These demographic questions included age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, state where they lived, and their general Internet usage.

The full, final survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix 7. Piped text was used throughout to insert the name of the respondents' favourite blogger or vlogger to make the survey relevant to a singular, favourite, content creator.

### **5.2.2 Pilot Study**

Initially, a pilot study was run using 100 participants. For this study, respondents were asked about both their favourite and least favourite blogger/vlogger in order to determine whether there was a difference in trust characteristics between the two. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used in order to identify any non-performing items. The study incorporated the use of the principle components with varimax rotation as the main method of data reduction. Each construct was run independently through the EFA. The results for the pilot study were used solely to determine whether the scales used were robust and whether to include questions to compare the respondent's favourite blogger/vlogger with their least favourite blogger/vlogger.

It was concluded there was no need to include the least favourite blogger/vlogger; asking about the least favourite blogger/vlogger was not required as considerable variation was obtained from just asking about the favourite blogger or vlogger. Rather, the inclusion of these extra measures made the survey very long and it was apparent this was causing fatigue for some respondents. More questions about personal content in blogs and vlogs and consumer information were added, and nominally scaled questions in this section were replaced with 7-point scales from nominal questions. The final version of the questionnaire was then released to 300 respondents.

### **5.2.3 Sample – Study Two**

The sample for Study Two was gathered through an online panel. Three screening criteria were used in the selection of survey participants:

- those who frequently read blogs or view vlogs
- aged between 18 and 40, as this appeared to be the key age bracket of those who tend to use blog and vlog content frequently, as represented by the Study One sample

- able to name a specific, favourite content creator, to confirm that they did view created content frequently and can answer questions based on a content creator that they are very familiar with. This was to ensure that participants were users of these mediums and were familiar with them.

Those who were screened out were those who indicated that they were not in the targeted age range, did not indicate that they frequently read blogs or viewed vlogs, and/or those who could not name a specific content creator. These screening questions were at the start of the survey and those who did not fit the criteria ended the survey at this screening point. The sample sought was based in the United States of America (USA), to ensure the model could be tested against a large enough sample.

The sample saw the recruitment of 300 US blog readers or vlog watchers from an online panel, Cint. Once the data has been collected by Cint, the data was cleaned and any deemed low quality (e.g. bad text inputs and straight-liners) were removed (Cint, n.d.). Straight-lining is when a respondent just selects the same response for all answers in an attempt to get through the survey without thought (e.g. all responses strongly agreeing or strongly disagreeing) (Vannette, 2018). Thus, straight-lining can influence the analysis and potentially increase outliers or skew data. For this research, due to questioning respondents on their favourite content creator (of which they may be quite passionate about), straight-lining was viewed as being responses using the same response for most of the scaled questions over the survey.

This study recruited 300 respondents via Cint. 300 was deemed sufficient in this case because of the intent to analyse the data using structural equation modelling (SEM). SEM is sensitive to the size of the sample (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010); this is not just whether the sample is too small, rather it is sensitive to overly large samples also. When deciding the appropriate sample size for SEM analysis, there are five key considerations: multivariate normality, estimation technique, the complexity of the model being tested, missing data, and the average error variance (Hair et al., 2010). Taking this into account, 300 was deemed suitable for this study, as it is suggested that anything over 400 respondents can increase the sensitivity of the analysis method (Hair et al., 2010).

## **5.2.4 Analysis**

The method of analysis used for Study Two was structural equation modelling (SEM). The independent (exogenous) variables were: consumer information, entertainment, attractiveness (content and creator), authenticity (content and creator), knowledge/expertise, personal content, parasocial interaction, dispositional trust, institutional trust, and interpersonal trust. The dependent (endogenous) variable was trust in the blogger or vlogger (creator trust). The first step once the entire data set was complete was to clean the data. This involved removing any respondents for whom there was incomplete data (i.e. they had not named a favourite blogger or vlogger), an incorrect favourite blogger or vlogger (i.e. these respondents had either typed in a random word or not named a blog or vlog creator), and any straight-lining. The respondent pool was then refilled by Cint until there were 300 complete responses. Once this data set was complete, the data set was analysed using frequencies and exploratory factor analysis, followed by confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling. The data was analysed using SPSS v 25.0 and AMOS v 25.0.

### ***5.2.4.1 Data Screening and Cleaning***

The most important prerequisite for use of SEM is having a clean, screened data set (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). SEM is covariance method and can be influenced by anything that may affect the variance-covariance amongst variables, including the measurement scale, constraints on range in the data values, missing data, outliers, non-linearity, and non-normality (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). Thus, prior to building the structural model, the data set was cleaned of cases containing missing or incomplete data, and the data was checked for skew and normality and fixed accordingly.

Because SEM analysis is sensitive to missing data (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016), this needs to be addressed prior to any analysis occurring. Missing data can be deleted, replaced, or statistical procedures can be used to account for the missing values (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). Deletion can be listwise or pairwise; deleting subjects with missing data on any variable or on each pair of variables use, respectively (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016).

This study used the listwise deletion method because, although this meant the loss of subjects, the sample size was replenished easily through the Cint panel. After

eliminating all incomplete surveys, there were 374 responses (with a goal of obtaining 300 responses). 74 responses were eliminated for data quality issues: 27 did not state who their favourite blogger or vlogger was, 45 did not name an actual content creator, and 2 were removed for straight-lining.

Frequencies and descriptives were viewed in order to gain an overall understanding of the dataset and to assess normality, skew and kurtosis. There were four cases of minor issues with skew. A skew greater than 2 was flagged and investigated further (as stated prior, 4 cases), as was a kurtosis great than 6 (one case). These cases are identified in Table 13. All cases, besides one, were repaired by replacing outliers. There were 18 cases of outliers in the data set and these were addressed by truncating the outliers (P. J. Costa, 2014): the outliers occurred where the respondent selected 1 on a 7-point Likert scale; these were replaced with the next highest scale option (a 2 on the 7-point Likert scale). The one case that was not fixed by addressing outliers was fixed via a square-root transformation.

**Table 13 Skew issues in the dataset**

Item	Skew	Fix	New Skew
<i>System Trust Internet</i> – “When you are looking for information, how often would you use the Internet as opposed to offline sources?”	-2.141	Outliers - truncate	-1.822
<i>Entertainment</i> – “<Favourite blogger/vlogger>’s content is entertaining”	-2.088	Outliers – truncate	-1.797
<i>Entertainment</i> – “<Favourite blogger/vlogger>’s content is enjoyable”	-2.196	Outliers – truncate	-1.852
<i>Creator Trust</i> – “To what extent is <favourite blogger/vlogger> sincere?”	-2.066	Mirror – square root – mirror back	-1.479

Frequencies were run on nominal and ordinal variables. This included the respondents favourite bloggers and vloggers, whether or not they subscribe to the blogger or vlogger, how long they have been visiting their favourite content creator’s content, hours per day spent on the Internet, hours per day spent on blog and vlog content, and the respondent’s demographics; their age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, education, employment status, and their state of residence. Descriptives were run on all scale variables. This included all items measuring dispositional trust, system trust and interpersonal trust. It also included all measures focussing on the respondent’s favourite

blogger or vlogger: personal content, consumer information, content authenticity, creator authenticity, entertainment, creator expertise, creator attractiveness, content attractiveness, parasocial interaction, and creator trust.

#### ***5.2.4.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis***

Once the dataset was clean, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was run. Factor analysis is an interdependence technique which interrogates a group of variables with the aim to create a new set of variables which better summarise the overall dimensions of the initial data (Malhotra, Hall, Shaw, & Oppenheim, 2002). Factor analysis takes into account all variables, not just dependent or independent and is used for data reduction (Malhotra et al., 2002). It is a useful tool in marketing research as there are often many variables which are correlated in the data, and factor analysis can reduce these variables to a more manageable level (Malhotra et al., 2002).

Factor analysis is suitable in a few key situations. The first is when there is a need to identify the underlying factors that explain correlations amongst variables in a data set (Malhotra et al., 2002). Another circumstance for the use of factor analysis is when there is a need to identify a new, smaller group of variables that are uncorrelated, from a group of correlated variables used prior (Malhotra et al., 2002). Finally, factor analysis is useful in identifying a reduced group of salient variables from a larger group of variables used prior (Malhotra et al., 2002). In this study, there were a large number of scales used, some with many items; factor analysis is useful here to create a smaller set of uncorrelated variables that measure what they should.

Factor analysis shares a likeness to multiple regression analysis whereby they both see each variable conveyed as a linear blend of underlying dimensions (Malhotra et al., 2002). There are two key methods of factor analysis: common factor analysis and principal components analysis (Malhotra et al., 2002). Common factor analysis estimates factors through solely the common variance. Principal components, on the other hand, looks at the data's total variance (Malhotra et al., 2002). Principal components was used in the analysis of this study as it is less inclined to be misinterpreted and has been recommended for non-expert users (Malhotra et al., 2002).

The number of factors a data set has can be determined through a variety of ways. These include through priori determination, eigenvalues, variance percentage, split-half

reliability, and significance tests (Malhotra et al., 2002). This study used eigenvalues  $>1.0$  (Hair et al., 2010). Eigenvalues signify the total variance that each factor describes (Malhotra et al., 2002). During factor analysis, the factors can be rotated in a variety of methods. These include orthogonal rotation (whereby the axes are kept at right angles), varimax rotation (a variation of the orthogonal method), and oblique rotation (whereby the axes are not kept at right angles) (Malhotra et al., 2002).

This study incorporated the use of the principle components with varimax rotation (orthogonal) as the main method of data reduction. This rotation is an orthogonal method that lessens the number of variables with greater loadings on a factor (Malhotra et al., 2002). This is a positive aspect of this method as it strengthens the interpretability of the factors in the data set, alongside the benefit of orthogonal rotational methods creating uncorrelated factors (Malhotra et al., 2002).

There were several key criteria used in assessing the results of the EFA. First, the dataset needed to be checked whether it was suitable for factor analysis (B. Zhang, Gao, Bi, & Yu, 2014). This was done using the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test (B. Zhang et al., 2014). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was used to look at variable correlation and ensure that the EFA can proceed (Hair et al., 2010; Malhotra et al., 2002). A significant result ( $p < 0.05$ ) was required to determine that factor analysis is feasible for the dataset (Hair et al., 2010; B. Zhang et al., 2014). The KMO is another test of dataset suitability for EFA (Malhotra et al., 2002). A high KMO (between 0.5 and 1) shows the suitability of the dataset for EFA (Malhotra et al., 2002). However, a KMO greater than 0.7 is preferable (B. Zhang et al., 2014).

The correlation matrix was then examined. Factor loadings are the correlations between the variables and factors (Malhotra et al., 2002). Factor loadings of variables should be over 0.5 to be viewed as relevant to that factor, over 0.7 is considered to be highly relevant (Hair et al., 2010). Any variables less than 0.5 were not included in the EFA. Communalities represent the variance variables share with one another and the variance which the common factors describe (Malhotra et al., 2002); communalities should be over 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). There should be no cross loading of factors; where an item loaded by more than 0.4 on two or more factors, the variable was deleted and the EFA was rerun (Hair et al., 2010).

EFA provides a good preliminary analysis of a dataset, especially when considering data reduction (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). However, in regard to structural equation modelling, it is not sufficient alone; a Confirmatory Factor Analysis is required.

#### ***5.2.4.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis***

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is a test of measurement theory (Hair et al., 2010). Measurement theory details how the measured variables represent the constructs in a theoretical model, stipulating a series of relationships which advise just how the measured variables embody a latent construct (Hair et al., 2010). CFA follows the data cleaning and initial EFA analysis and represents the first half of the structural equation modelling method.

CFA estimates the measurement model and looks at whether the loadings of indicator variables and the number of factors conform to what is expected from theory (Hair et al., 2010; Malhotra et al., 2002). The sample data is illustrated by a covariance matrix of measured items and theory is illustrated by the proposed measurement model (Hair et al., 2010); model fit compares these two matrices.

In CFA, the researcher needs to specify the number of factors for each variable set and the factor that each variable will load on, prior to the results being calculated (Hair et al., 2010). The indicator variables are based upon theory; CFA aims to discover whether these load on the factors as expected (Malhotra et al., 2002). CFA statistics, overall, show how well the theoretical specification of the factors equals reality (Hair et al., 2010).

CFA is an important procedure in the scale development process as it is able to identify construct measures that are unidimensional; surround a single dimension (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012; Gerbing & Anderson, 1988), something EFA lacks. The key benefits to CFA include the ability to establish unidimensionality of measures, and the estimation and modelling of random or measurement error of variables which contributes to a more precise measurement of constructs (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012).

In assessing the CFA, several measures were checked. Factor loadings should be at least .5; preferably .7 or greater (Hair et al., 2010). Standardised loadings estimates should be used as these remove the effects of the scale of the measures (Hair et al., 2010). High

factor loadings signal construct validity and show that the indicators have a strong relationship to their construct (Hair et al., 2010).

Factor loadings are a good indicator of model fit but multiple fit statistics should be analysed in order to understand the true fit of the model (Hair et al., 2010). Alongside factor loadings, the statistical significance of each coefficient should be evaluated (Hair et al., 2010). Any nonsignificant estimates should be dropped, just as low factor loadings should also be deleted (Hair et al., 2010). It is also suggested that chi-squared goodness-of-fit statistic and the degrees of freedom, as well as an absolute fit index measure (such as the GFI or the SRMR) and an incremental fit index measure (such as the TLI or CFI) are considered (Hair et al., 2010; Hu & Bentler, 1999); Table 15 gives further information on these measurement criteria. A badness-of-fit measure, such as the SRMR or the RMSEA, are also analysed in order to understand the true model fit (Hair et al., 2010; Hu & Bentler, 1999). These criteria are discussed further in the following section on Structural Equation Modelling. Factor loadings are also an important measure as they can also be a measure of convergent validity; high factor loadings are an indication that they are converging on a common point (the latent construct) (Hair et al., 2010).

Modification indices resulting were used as an indication of what could be improved in the model. The results of CFA, where there was more than minor modification occurring – where over 20% of the constructs were deleted – were re-evaluated (Hair et al., 2010), using comparisons to an alternative model. Table 14 below shows the final dependent and independent variables employed in the model.

**Table 14 Dependent and independent variables**

<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Independent Variables</i>
<i>Creator trust</i>	Content authenticity
	Consumer information
	Content attractiveness
	Entertainment
	Creator authenticity
	Expertise
	Creator attractiveness
	Personal content
	Dispositional trust
	System trust in the Internet
	System trust in blog and vlog content
	Interpersonal trust
	Parasocial interaction

#### ***5.2.4.4 Structural Equation Modelling***

SEM is used in the analysis of structural relationships and is a combination of factor analysis and multiple regression analysis; path models and confirmatory factor analysis (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). It contributes to the precision of specification in hypotheses and constructs, considers measurement reliability, and can provide new insight into research directions (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). A key characteristic of SEM is the difference between observable and latent variables; variables that represent the data and variables which are hypothetical constructs which are not blatantly observable (Kline, 2016). SEM requires a somewhat large sample (Kline, 2016). This is suited to Study Two which recruited 300 participants. Each of the hypotheses (H1-H6) were tested by examining the regression weights between exogenous (independent) and endogenous (dependent) variables in the structural model.

A two-step process was used, firstly checking the measures of latent constructs with confirmatory factor analysis (the measurement model); then testing the relationships between latent constructs with structural equation modelling (the structural model). Confirmatory factor analysis was undertaken first. This was followed by the creation and testing of a path model which gives insight into how the model is designed and specified, and the estimates of parameters (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016).

SEM follows five key steps for creating and testing the hypothesised model. The first step is where the model is specified, based on past research and theory (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). The next step is model identification; an identified model is one in which the degrees of freedom equals or is greater than 1 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). Next, the model is estimated using either the unweighted least squares method or the maximum likelihood method (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016) – this study used maximum likelihood estimates. The model is then tested for fit using a variety of indices, followed by model modification should it be required (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016).

Determining the model fit was done using a few key criteria. The non-significance of the chi-square is viewed as a global fit measure; it indicates that the sample covariance matrix and the tested model covariance matrix are similar to one another (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). Likewise, the chi-square to df ratio ( $\chi^2/df$ ) is a measure of fit commonly used. Other commonly used fit criteria include: the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), root-mean-square residual index (SRMR), normed fit index

(NFI), non-normed fit index (NNFI), and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). These criteria look at the difference in variance-covariance matrices between the observed and the model-implied (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). All of these can be used to assess the fit of a model and their criteria can be seen in Table 15.

**Table 15 Model fit criteria**

<b>Model Fit Criteria</b>		<b>Good Fit Range</b>
<i>Chi-square</i>	$X^2$	Ideally non-significant but is sensitive to samples >150 and likely to be significant even with good model fit.
<i>Chi-square/degrees of freedom</i>	$X^2/df$	<5 adequate <3 very good
<i>Goodness-of-fit index</i>	GFI	1 = perfect fit Close to 0.9 is a good fit
<i>Adjusted goodness-of-fit index</i>	AGFI	1 = perfect fit Close to 0.9 is a good fit
<i>Standardised root-mean square residual</i>	SRMR	<0.05 very good fit <0.08 good fit
<i>Root-mean-square error of approximation</i>	RMSEA	<0.08 very good fit
<i>Normed fit index</i>	NFI	1 = perfect fit Close to 0.9 is a good fit
<i>Non-normed fit index</i>	NNFI	Close to 0.9 is a good fit
<i>Tucker-Lewis index</i>	TLI	1 = perfect fit Close to 0.9 is a good fit

(Hair et al., 2010; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2016; Malhotra et al., 2002; Schumacker & Lomax, 2016)

The regression weights on each pathway were examined. Any non-significant pathways were deleted, one at a time, until adequate model fit was achieved. Because there was some model modification to achieve the best model fit, the resultant model was then compared with two alternative models to ascertain what model achieved best fit to the data. A t-test was also run in order to answer Research Question 2: Are there differences in the factors that influence trust in blog content versus trust in vlog content?

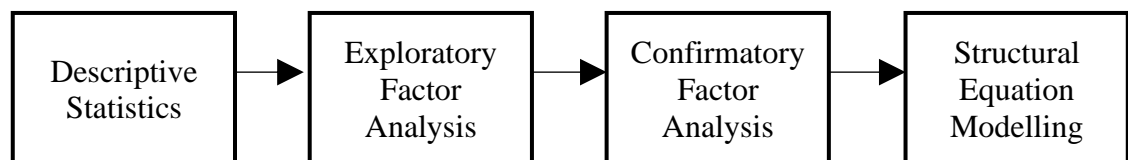
### 5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has covered the research design for Study Two; a quantitative survey testing the model created in Study One. The next chapter discusses the findings of Study Two; frequencies and descriptive statistics, blog/vlog viewing behaviour, a comparison of factors influencing trust in blog versus vlog content, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modelling.

## Chapter Six: Study Two - Quantitative Findings

### 6.1 Introduction

The results of Study One provided guidance as to what to test quantitatively in order to determine why it is consumers trust blog and vlog content. Study Two tested several key blog and vlog characteristics as potential antecedents to trust: content and creator authenticity, content and creator attractiveness, consumer information, entertainment, personal content, expertise, parasocial interaction, dispositional trust, system trust, and interpersonal trust. This chapter covers the following findings for Study Two: frequency tables and descriptive statistics to present an overview of the dataset, blog and vlog viewing behaviour was examined using crosstabs and ANOVA to understand how engaged respondents are in blog and vlog content, comparing hours per day on the Internet with hours per day consuming blog and vlog content. This chapter also presents a regression analysis to answer the second Research Question regarding differences in factors influencing blog versus vlog trust, an exploratory factor analysis, and finally the confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling to test the hypothesised model. Figure 9 illustrates the analysis process for Study Two.



**Figure 9** Process for study two analysis

## 6.2 Demographics and Internet Usage

Basic frequencies and descriptives were run first in order to gain familiarity with the dataset. This showed that there were 300 respondents, in general aged between 18 and 40 with just two respondents aged over 40. These respondents were kept in the dataset due to there being no other anomalies with their data. This age data can be seen in Figure 10. There was a mean age of 29.55 years. Note, the youngest age of respondents was 18 as per the ethics requirements of AUTECH.

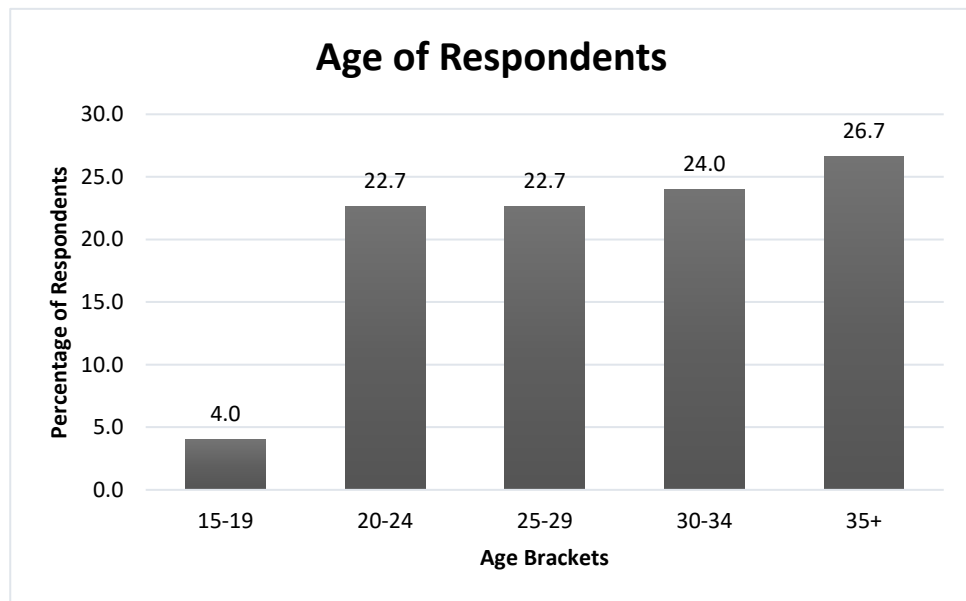


Figure 10 Respondents age

Table 16 Gender split of respondents

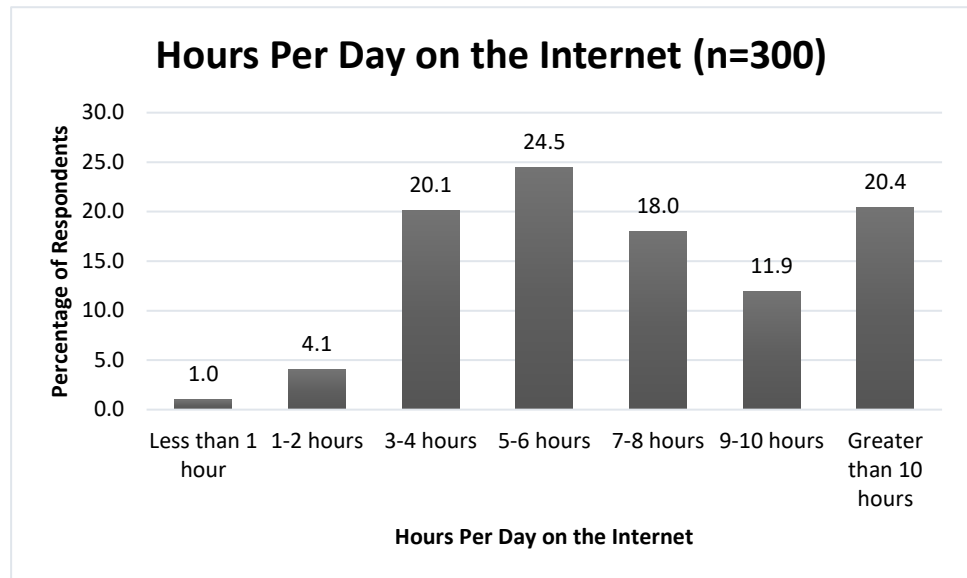
Gender	Count
Male	150
Female	148
Did not wish to respond	2

There was a reasonably even gender split in the respondents (Table 16). This suggests that blog and vlog content do not favour one particular gender. Table 17 summarised the top 10 most frequently named bloggers or vloggers by named respondents. There was much variety in content creator topic and interest area. The frequencies detailed respondents' favourite blogger or vlogger, with the most popular favourite blogger or vlogger being PewDiePie. This is logical with PewDiePie being the most subscribed vlogger on YouTube (Coomes & Barbee, 2018) not run by a corporate. What is notable within this frequency data is that most of the top 10 most frequently chosen favourite blogger or vlogger were all vloggers; all apart from Perez Hilton and Joe Rogan who dabble in multiple platforms of created content including blogs and vlogs amongst other platforms. There was such a variety of bloggers and vloggers named which illustrate that perceptions of trust differ per person, just as perceptions of authenticity are co-created and therefore differ (Leigh et al., 2006).

**Table 17 Favourite blogger or vlogger**

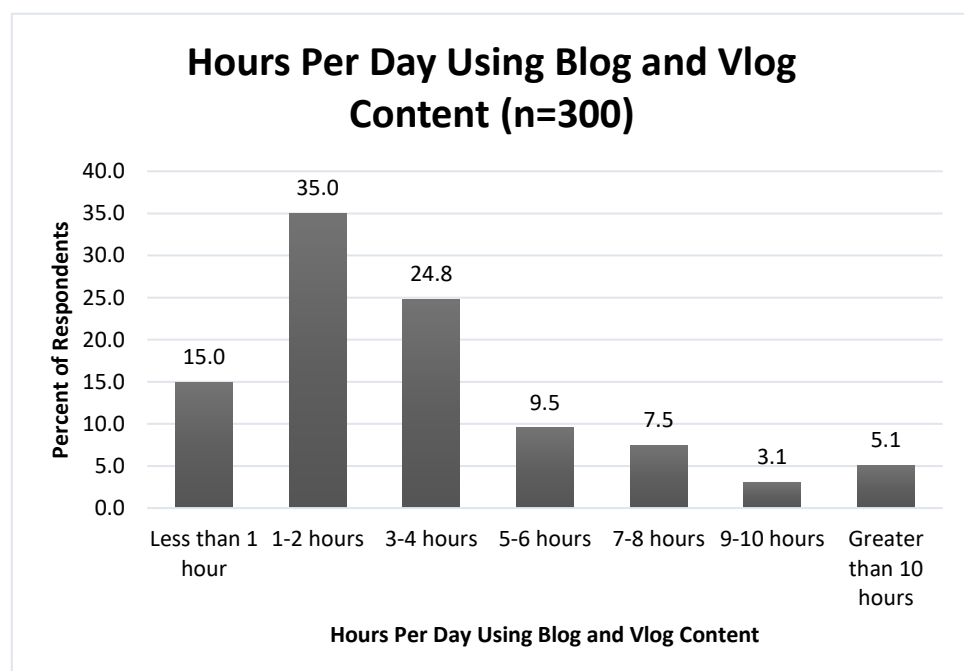
<b>Favourite Blogger/Vlogger</b>	<b>Count</b>
<i>PewDiePie</i>	9
<i>Perez Hilton</i>	5
<i>Shane Dawson</i>	5
<i>Logan Paul</i>	4
<i>Casey Neistat</i>	3
<i>Graveyard Girl</i>	3
<i>Ice Poseidon</i>	3
<i>Jenna Marbles</i>	3
<i>Joe Rogan</i>	3
<i>Lele Pons</i>	3
<i>Roman Atwood</i>	3

Respondents were also questioned about their Internet usage. This revealed that respondents spend a large amount of time on the Internet every day (Figure 11). The trendline shows that 74.8% of respondents spend 5 hours or more on the Internet every day.



**Figure 11 Hours per day respondents spend on the Internet**

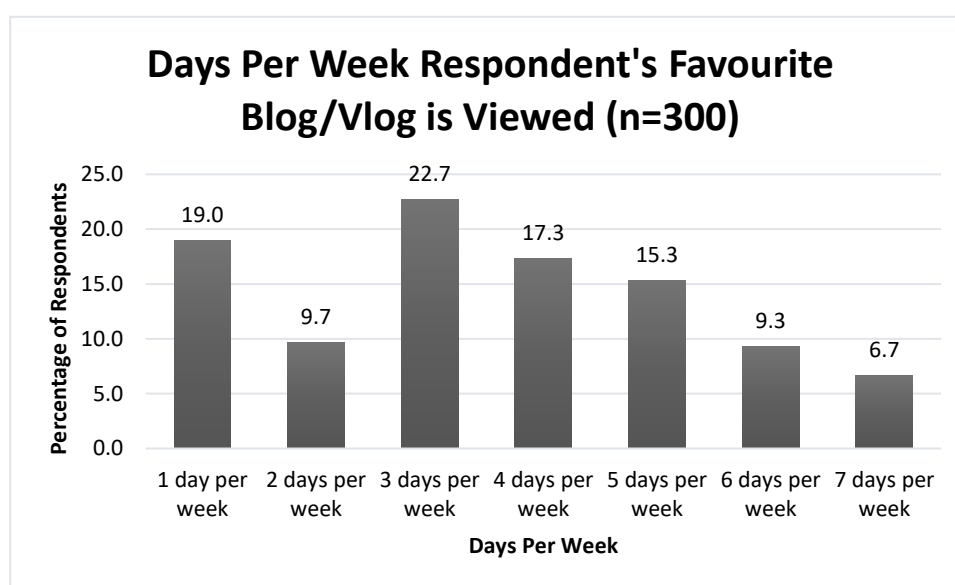
Likewise, respondents were asked about their blog and vlog usage. Of the hours spent on the Internet, 50% of respondents spent up to 2 hours consuming blog or vlog content (Figure 12). 74.8% spend up to 4 hours. Thus, blog and vlog content make up a significant portion of respondents' daily Internet usage, but it is not their sole purpose for using the Internet.



**Figure 12 Hours per day respondents use blog or vlog content**

Figure 13 shows how often respondents viewed their named favourite blogger or vlogger's content each week. In looking at how often respondents viewed their favourite content creator's content, 71.3% viewed the content at least three days a week. All respondents viewed this person's content at least once a week.

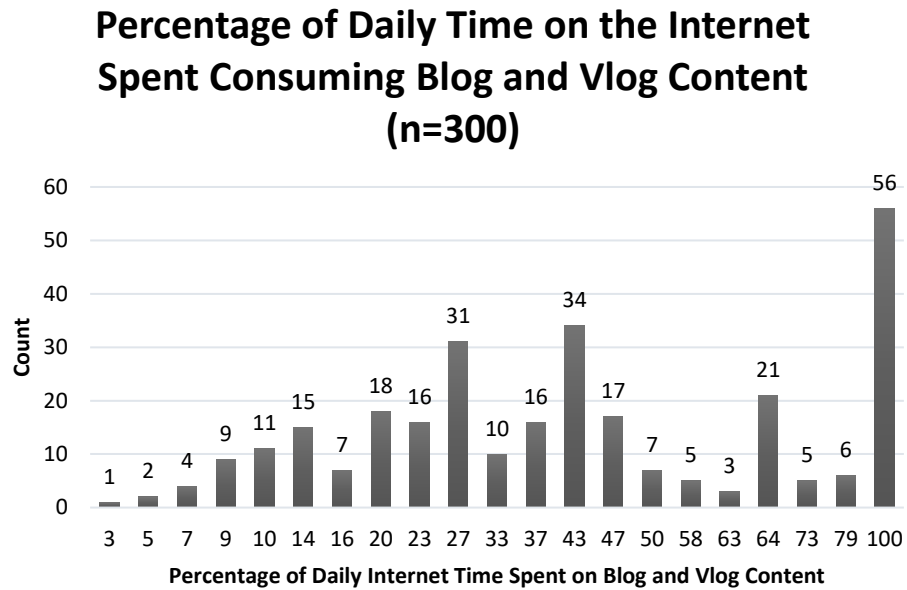
**Figure 13 Days per week favourite blog/vlog is viewed**



### 6.2.1 Blog/Vlog Viewing Behaviour

In comparing the hours spent on the Internet and the hours spent consuming blog and vlog content, it was apparent six respondents did not understand the question as they reported spending more time-consuming blog and vlog content than they did on the Internet each day. Thus, for analysing the percentage of Internet time spent consuming blog and vlog content each day, those six respondents were removed. Figure 14 shows percentage of each respondent's daily Internet usage spent consuming blog and vlog content; daily Internet time versus daily blog and vlog time. 35% of respondents (n=103) spend at least 50% of their daily Internet time consuming blog and vlog content; 19% claim to spend all of their time-consuming blog and vlog content. Thus, blog and vlog content is of importance to consumers, taking up a significant portion of their time on the Internet every day.

**Figure 14 Percentage of daily time on the Internet using blog and vlog content**



Key demographics, age and gender, was also investigated to determine whether demographic factors influenced blog/vlog behaviour. First, gender and age were compared against whether the respondent's favourite content creator was a blogger or a vlogger (Table 18). There was a significant difference between blog readers and vlog viewers based on their age. Blog readers tended to be older than vlog viewers,  $X^2(4, N=300) = 13.61, p=.009$ . There was no significant difference in blog readers and vlog viewers based on gender,  $X^2(2, N=200) = 2.15, p=.341$ .

**Table 18 Crosstabulation of 'blogger or vlogger' against 'age brackets'**

Blogger or Vlogger * Age_brackets Crosstabulation							
			Age Brackets				
			15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35+
Blogger or Vlogger	Blogger	Count	4	24	36	38	51
		% within Age_brackets	33.30%	35.30%	52.90%	52.80%	63.80%
	Vlogger	Count	8	44	32	34	29
		% within Age brackets	66.70%	64.70%	47.10%	47.20%	36.30%

Gender and age were also compared to the days per week a favourite blogger or vlogger's content is viewed, using ANOVA (Table 19). There is a significant difference between genders as to how often they view their favourite content creator's content. Females ( $M=3.77$ ,  $SD=1.81$ ) view their favourite blogger or vlogger's content more often each week than their male ( $M=3.31$ ,  $SD=1.76$ ) counterparts,  $F(2, 297) = 3.697$ ,  $p = .026$ . Age was not significant here,  $F(4, 289) = .062$ ,  $p = .993$ .

**Table 19 ANOVA for gender and days per week favourite blogger/vlogger is viewed**

<b>Descriptives</b>								
Daysperweek_recode								
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</i>		<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
					<i>Lower Bound</i>	<i>Upper Bound</i>		
<b>Male</b>	150	3.307	1.761	0.144	3.023	3.591	1	7
<b>Female</b>	148	3.770	1.815	0.149	3.476	4.065	1	7
<b>Do not want to respond</b>	2	5.500	2.121	1.500	-13.559	24.559	4	7
Total	300	3.550	1.805	0.104	3.345	3.755	1	7

ANOVA on the hours per day spent on the Internet, hours per day using blog/vlog content, and the percentage of time spent online using blog/vlog content indicated no significant differences for gender or age (Table 20).

**Table 20 ANOVA for hours spent on internet and on blogs/vlogs against gender and age**

		F	p
Hours Per Day on the Internet	Age	1.620	.169
	Gender	.982	.376
Hours Per Day on Blog and Vlog Content	Age	.881	.476
	Gender	.808	.447
Percentage of Daily Internet Time Spent on Blog and Vlog Content	Age	.326	.861
	Gender	1.029	.359

### **6.2.2 Measurement Items for Constructs**

All items for construct measurement used a 7-point Likert scale. The mean, skew, and kurtosis were analysed here in order to identify any issues in the data. The key statistics for these can be seen in Table 21. As stated in the research design chapter, a skew greater than 2 and a kurtosis greater than 6 were highlighted as issues in the data. These can be seen in Table 23 highlighted in bold.

**Table 21 Mean, skewness and kurtosis**

<i>Descriptive Statistics</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
<i>n</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>s</i>	
<b><i>System Trust (Internet) - Looking for Info</i></b>	<b>6.29</b>	<b>-2.141</b>	<b>6.064</b>
<i>System Trust (Internet) – Credibility</i>	5.43	-0.64	0.67
<i>System Trust (Internet) - Institutes and People</i>	5.1	-0.793	0.579
<i>System Trust (Internet) - Confidence in those you interact with</i>	5.2	-0.794	0.45
<i>System Trust (Internet) - Confidence you can find info</i>	6.13	-1.708	3.666
<i>System Trust (Internet) – Privacy</i>	4.57	-0.363	-0.771
<i>System Trust (Blogs/Vlogs) - Looking for Info</i>	5.16	-0.71	0.106
<i>System Trust (Blogs/Vlogs) – Credibility</i>	5.19	-0.757	0.457
<i>System Trust (Blogs/Vlogs) - Institutes and People</i>	5.27	-0.859	0.657
<i>System Trust (Blogs/Vlogs) - Confidence in people adding info to blogs/vlogs</i>	5.23	-0.678	0.033
<i>System Trust (Blogs/Vlogs) - Confidence in finding info</i>	5.15	-0.678	-0.221
<i>System Trust (Blogs/Vlogs) - risk of inaccurate info</i>	5.17	-0.481	-0.486
<i>Dispositional Trust - trust until reason not to</i>	5.27	-0.811	-0.042
<i>Dispositional Trust - trusting is not difficult</i>	4.73	-0.504	-0.476
<i>Dispositional Trust - trust until prove shouldn't</i>	5.01	-0.663	-0.158
<i>Dispositional Trust - tendency to trust is high</i>	4.71	-0.435	-0.75
<i>Interpersonal Trust - sales people are honest</i>	4.31	-0.071	-0.874
<i>Interpersonal Trust - most students would not cheat</i>	4.08	-0.094	-0.956
<i>Interpersonal Trust - repairmen won't overcharge</i>	4.08	-0.001	-0.833
<i>Interpersonal Trust - public opinion polls honestly</i>	4.96	-0.519	-0.357
<i>Interpersonal Trust - parents can be relied on</i>	4.97	-0.689	0.162
<i>Interpersonal Trust - experts can be relied on</i>	5.06	-0.687	0.435
<i>Interpersonal Trust - most people can be counted on</i>	4.89	-0.511	0.1
<i>Days per week favourite is viewed</i>	4.45	-0.203	-0.853
<i>Personal - Talks/shows personal aspects</i>	5.45	-1.107	0.878
<i>Personal - Talks/shows friends/family</i>	5.31	-0.909	0.192
<i>Personal - Talks/shows home</i>	5.14	-0.827	-0.277
<i>Personal - Talks/shows daily life</i>	5.33	-0.958	0.454
<i>Personal - Favourite is someone I could be friends with</i>	5.88	-1.25	1.667
<i>Personal - Favourite is someone I feel a connection to</i>	5.69	-1.189	1.473
<i>Personal - Favourite is someone I feel like I know</i>	5.48	-0.976	0.705
<i>Consumer info - Mentions specific brand/product in content</i>	5.23	-0.872	0.083
<i>Consumer info - Reviews specific brand/product in content</i>	5.03	-0.718	-0.322
<i>Consumer info - Uses specific brand/product in content</i>	4.97	-0.708	-0.428
<i>Consumer info - Information usefulness</i>	5.84	-1.351	1.921
<i>Consumer info - Used favourite's information to decide whether to purchase</i>	5.04	-0.769	-0.114
<i>Consumer info - Used favourites information to give you idea to purchase something</i>	5.22	-0.937	0.433
<i>Content Authenticity - history</i>	5.63	-0.832	0.696
<i>Content Authenticity - timeless</i>	5.3	-0.9	0.499

<i>Content Authenticity - survives times</i>	5.45	-0.68	0.277
<i>Content Authenticity - survives trends</i>	5.63	-0.751	0.472
<i>Content Authenticity - not betray</i>	5.56	-0.789	0.351
<i>Content Authenticity - value promise</i>	5.68	-0.789	1.001
<i>Content Authenticity - honest</i>	5.88	-1.079	1.082
<i>Content Authenticity - gives back</i>	5.71	-0.817	0.27
<i>Content Authenticity - moral principles</i>	5.64	-0.794	0.164
<i>Content Authenticity - moral values</i>	5.6	-0.965	0.686
<i>Content Authenticity - care</i>	5.86	-0.987	0.765
<i>Content Authenticity - meaning to lives</i>	5.73	-0.999	1.284
<i>Content Authenticity - important values</i>	5.58	-1.004	0.816
<i>Content Authenticity - connects people to their real selves</i>	5.62	-0.872	0.866
<i>Content Authenticity - connects with what is really important</i>	5.71	-0.913	0.522
<i>Creator Authenticity - clear philosophy</i>	5.69	-1.027	1.067
<i>Creator Authenticity - know what they stand for</i>	5.68	-0.994	1.133
<i>Creator Authenticity - do not pretend</i>	5.88	-1.181	1.208
<i>Creator Authenticity - don't curry favour</i>	5.58	-0.759	0.304
<i>Creator Authenticity - distort themselves</i>	3.77	0.234	-1.227
<i>Creator Authenticity - trim your sails</i>	3.53	0.392	-0.577
<b><i>Entertainment - entertaining</i></b>	<b>6.34</b>	<b>-2.088</b>	<b>5.832</b>
<b><i>Entertainment - enjoyable</i></b>	<b>6.37</b>	<b>-2.196</b>	<b>6.969</b>
<i>Entertainment - pleasing</i>	6.27	-1.945	5.353
<i>Creator Expertise - expert</i>	5.78	-1.376	1.638
<i>Creator Expertise - experienced</i>	5.72	-1.418	1.79
<i>Creator Expertise - knowledgeable</i>	5.95	-1.78	3.031
<i>Creator Expertise - qualified</i>	5.75	-1.495	1.752
<i>Creator Expertise - skilled</i>	5.85	-1.625	2.354
<i>Creator Attractiveness - attractive</i>	5.73	-1.33	1.268
<i>Creator Attractiveness - classy</i>	5.49	-1.034	0.384
<i>Creator Attractiveness - beautiful</i>	5.55	-1.137	0.855
<i>Creator Attractiveness - elegant</i>	5.36	-0.9	-0.026
<i>Creator Attractiveness - sexy</i>	5	-0.603	-0.638
<i>Content Attractiveness - designed well</i>	6.02	-1.447	2.346
<i>Content Attractiveness - pleasing on the eye</i>	5.91	-1.302	2.153
<i>Content Attractiveness - edited well</i>	6.01	-1.506	2.549
<i>Content Attractiveness - atmosphere</i>	6.09	-1.666	3.316
<i>Content Attractiveness - consistent</i>	6.09	-1.72	3.483
<i>Content Attractiveness - high quality</i>	6.15	-1.603	3.063
<i>Content Attractiveness - high quality images or video</i>	6.11	-1.735	4.066
<i>PSI - remind me of myself</i>	5.29	-0.909	0.47
<i>PSI - same qualities</i>	5.35	-0.836	0.478
<i>PSI - same beliefs/attitudes</i>	5.58	-1.003	1.075
<i>PSI - same problems</i>	4.85	-0.61	-0.255
<i>PSI - imagine myself</i>	5.2	-0.98	0.342
<i>PSI - identify with them</i>	5.59	-0.975	1.074
<i>PSI - would like to meet them</i>	5.84	-1.156	1.317
<i>PSI - view them on another</i>	5.78	-1.014	0.951
<i>PSI - enjoy trying to predict</i>	5.38	-0.872	0.426

<i>PSI - hope they achieve goals</i>	6.03	-1.364	1.979
<i>PSI - care about them</i>	5.91	-1.06	1.188
<i>PSI - like reading/hearing</i>	5.8	-1.282	1.747
<i>Creator Trust - dependable</i>	6.03	-1.871	3.251
<i>Creator Trust - honest</i>	5.9	-1.768	2.705
<i>Creator Trust - reliable</i>	6.02	-1.798	3.023
<b><i>Creator Trust - sincere</i></b>	<b>6.07</b>	<b>-2.066</b>	<b>4.002</b>
<i>Creator Trust - trustworthy</i>	5.98	-1.872	3.196

To address these four items with skew and kurtosis issues, the data was winsorized scores with outliers being transformed to the next closest score (Reifman & Keyton, 2010). In rerunning the four items, skew and kurtosis were repaired for three items as seen in Table 22.

**Table 22 Winsorized variables to repair skewness**

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
<i>System Trust (Internet) - Looking for Info</i>	6.3	-1.822	3.734
<i>Entertainment – entertaining</i>	6.35	-1.797	3.497
<i>Entertainment - enjoyable</i>	6.38	-1.852	4.098
<b><i>Creator Trust - sincere</i></b>	<b>6.07</b>	<b>-2.066</b>	<b>4.002</b>

To repair the remaining item, it was square-root transformed. Table 23 shows the resulting mean, skew and kurtosis for this item once this was done. Thus, with this final item well within an acceptable skew and kurtosis range, the dataset was clean and suitable for further analysis.

**Table 23 Transformed creator trust – sincere variable to repair skewness**

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
<i>CreatorTrustsincere_SQT</i>	6.682689	-1.47926	1.610354

### 6.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was run on a clean data set to check the measurement items for each construct. First, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were considered. These tests assess the data's suitability for structure detection (IBM, n.d). The KMO test indicates the amount of variance in the variables that may be caused by underlying factors; a KMO value over 0.5 indicates that a factor analysis may be appropriate for the data (IBM, n.d). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity indicates whether the variables are unrelated and unsuitable for factor analysis; a significance level less than .05 indicates that a factor analysis may be appropriate for the data (IBM, n.d). The KMO and Bartlett's for all constructs was affirmative (Table 24).

**Table 24 KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity**

<i>Concept</i>	<i>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)</i>	<i>Bartlett's Test of Sphericity</i>		
<i>Consumer information</i>	.850	1074.680	15	.000
<i>Content attractiveness</i>	.910	1081.140	21	.000
<i>Content authenticity</i>	.940	3088.511	105	.000
<i>Creator attractiveness</i>	.876	903.804	10	.000
<i>Creator authenticity</i>	.691	612.005	15	.000
<i>Entertainment</i>	.745	478.876	3	.000
<i>Expertise</i>	.908	1296.898	10	.000
<i>Personal content</i>	.834	1140.043	21	.000
<i>Parasocial interaction</i>	.908	1481.136	36	.000
<i>Creator trust</i>	.907	1394.933	10	.000
<i>Dispositional trust</i>	.820	644.731	6	.000
<i>System trust – blog/vlog</i>	.874	879.785	15	.000
<i>System trust – Internet</i>	.781	478.754	15	.000
<i>Interpersonal trust</i>	.876	971.595	21	.000

An EFA was run on each concept using principal components with varimax rotation; 14 EFA's total. Table 25 illustrates the results of EFA.

**Table 25 Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis**

<b>Final Factor(s) – items</b>		
(principal component analysis – with varimax for more than one factor)		
<b><i>System Trust – Internet</i></b>		
<i>Factor 1</i>	What do you think is the credibility of the Internet?	.705
	How much do you trust the institutes and people ‘running the Internet’?	.841
	How much confidence do you have in the people with whom you interact through the Internet?	.763
<i>Factor 2</i>	How well do you think your privacy is protected on the Internet?	.844
	When you are looking for information, how often would you use the Internet as opposed to offline sources?	.817
	If you are in need of information, how confident are you that you can find it on the Internet?	.773
<b><i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i></b>		
<i>Factor 1</i>	When you are looking for information, how often would you use blogs or vlogs as opposed to other sources?	.831
	What do you think is the credibility of blogs and vlogs?	.860
	How much do you trust the institutes and people ‘running blogs and vlogs’?	.835
	How much confidence do you have in the people who add information to blogs and vlogs?	.868
	If you are in need of information, how confident are you that you can find it on blogs and vlogs?	.832
<i>Factor 2</i>	How large do you think the risk of getting inaccurate information on blogs and vlogs is?	.991
<b><i>Dispositional Trust</i></b>		
<i>Factor 1</i>	I usually trust people until they give me a reason not to	.844
	Trusting another person is not difficult for me	.856
	My typical approach is to trust new acquaintances until they prove I should not trust them	.879
	My tendency to trust others is high	.867
<b><i>Interpersonal Trust</i></b>		
<i>Factor 1</i>	Most salespeople are honest in describing their products	.783
	Most students in school would not cheat even if they were sure of getting away with it	.744
	Most repairmen will not overcharge even if they think you are ignorant of their specialty	.790
	Most people answer public opinion polls honestly	.770
	Parents usually can be relied on to keep their promises	.739
	Most experts can be relied upon to tell the truth about the limits of their knowledge	.731
	Most people can be counted on to do what they say they will do	.781
<b><i>Personal Content</i></b>		
<i>Factor 1</i>	<Favourite blogger/vlogger> talks about or shows personal aspects of their life (e.g. their family, friends, health, etc.)	.841
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger> shows or talks about their friends and/or family in their content	.855
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger> shows or talks about their home (e.g. filming or photography taking in their own home)	.854

<i>Factor 2</i>	<Favourite blogger/vlogger> shows or talks about their daily life (e.g. filming or photography doing normal daily tasks like cooking, grocery shopping, walking around a street/mall/beach)	.806
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger> is someone I could be friends with in real life	.850
	I feel a connection to <Favourite blogger/vlogger>	.866
	I feel like I know <Favourite blogger/vlogger>	.855
<b>Consumer Information</b>		
<i>Factor 1</i>	<Favourite blogger/vlogger> often mentions a specific branded product or service in their content	.832
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger> often reviews specific branded products or services in their content	.859
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger> often shows themselves using a specific brand of product or service in their content	.827
	How useful is the information <Favourite blogger/vlogger> provides about products or services?	.654
	I have used information provided by <Favourite blogger/vlogger> about a product or service to decide whether or not to purchase something.	.843
	The information provided by <Favourite blogger/vlogger> about a product or service has given me the idea to purchase something.	.792
<b>Content Authenticity</b>		
<i>Factor 1</i>	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content will not betray you	.659
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content accomplishes its value promise	.754
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content is honest	.763
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content gives back to its audience	.690
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content has moral principles	.775
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content is true to a set of moral values	.781
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content shows they care about their audience	.774
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content adds meaning to people's lives	.739
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content reflects important values people care about	.763
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content connects people with their real selves	.673
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content connects people with what is really important	.750
<i>Factor 2</i>	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content has a history	.768
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content is timeless	.777
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content survives times	.806
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content survives trends	.791
<b>Creator Authenticity</b>		
<i>Factor 1</i>	<Favourite blogger/vlogger> possesses a clear philosophy which guides their content	.816
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger> knows exactly what they stand for and does not promise anything which contradicts its essence and character	.838

<i>Factor 2</i>	Considering its brand promise, <Favourite blogger/vlogger> does not pretend to be someone else	.789
	Considering its brand promise, <Favourite blogger/vlogger> doesn't curry favour with its target group; moreover, it shows self-esteem	.746
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger> distorts themselves, to match contemporary market trends	.919
	The saying "you trim your sails to every wind that blows" describes <Favourite blogger/vlogger> adequately	.903
<b>Entertainment</b>		
<i>Factor 1</i>	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content is entertaining	.905
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content is enjoyable	.897
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content is pleasing	.895
<b>Expertise</b>		
<i>Factor 1</i>	To what extent is <Favourite blogger/vlogger> an expert in their field	.867
	To what extent is <Favourite blogger/vlogger> experienced in their field	.906
	To what extent is <Favourite blogger/vlogger> knowledgeable in their field	.907
	To what extent is <Favourite blogger/vlogger> qualified in their field	.902
	To what extent is <Favourite blogger/vlogger> skilled in their field	.910
<b>Creator Attractiveness</b>		
<i>Factor 1</i>	To what extent is <Favourite blogger/vlogger> themselves attractive	.878
	To what extent is <Favourite blogger/vlogger> themselves classy	.763
	To what extent is <Favourite blogger/vlogger> themselves beautiful	.901
	To what extent is <Favourite blogger/vlogger> themselves elegant	.869
	To what extent is <Favourite blogger/vlogger> themselves sexy	.799
<b>Content Attractiveness</b>		
<i>Factor 1</i>	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content is designed well	.832
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content is pleasing on the eye	.733
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content is edited well	.760
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content provides a good atmosphere	.842
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content is consistent	.757
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger>'s content is high quality	.787
	<Favourite blogger/vlogger> uses images or video that is clear and high quality	.804
<b>Parasocial Interaction (PSI)</b>		
<i>Factor 1</i>	I would like to meet <Favourite blogger/vlogger>	.735
	I would view <Favourite blogger/vlogger> on another blog or vlog or on television	.793
	I hope <Favourite blogger/vlogger> achieved his or her goals	.782
	I care about what happens to <Favourite blogger/vlogger>	.810
	I like reading the words or hearing the voice of <Favourite blogger/vlogger>	.740

<i>Factor 2</i>	<Blogger/Vlogger> reminds me of myself	.815
	I have the same qualities as <Blogger/Vlogger>	.792
	I have the same problems as <Blogger/Vlogger>	.799
	I can imagine myself as <Blogger/Vlogger>	.786
<b><i>Creator Trust</i></b>		
<i>Factor 1</i>	To what extent is <favourite blogger/vlogger> dependable	.863
	To what extent is <favourite blogger/vlogger> honest	.915
	To what extent is <favourite blogger/vlogger> reliable	.920
	To what extent is <favourite blogger/vlogger> sincere	.906
	To what extent is <favourite blogger/vlogger> trustworthy	.925

System trust in the Internet was measured using a scale of six items. The EFA suggested that the data was best represented by two factors. The first factor contained four items surrounding the idea of trust in the systems behind the Internet. This factor accounted for 42.48% of variance. The second factor contained two items surrounding the information found on the Internet. This factor accounted for 23.74% of variance. Together, these two factors accounted for 66.23% of variance.

System trust in blog and vlog content was measured using a scale of six items. The EFA suggested that the data was best represented by two factors. The first factor was comprised of five items covering all aspects of the systems behind blog and vlog content. This factor accounted for 59.54% of variance. The second factor only contained one item, looking at the risk of blog and vlog content, and was therefore excluded from further analysis. This factor accounted for only 16.97% of variance. Together, these two factors accounted for 76.51% of variance.

Dispositional trust was measured using a scale of four items. The EFA suggested that the data was best represented by one factor; all four items loaded strongly on one factor. This factor accounted for 74.18% of variance.

Likewise, interpersonal trust was measured using a scale of seven items. The EFA suggested that the data was best represented on one factor. This factor accounted for 58.19% of variance.

Personal content was measured using seven items. The EFA suggested that the data was best represented by two factors. The first factor was comprised of four items covering the idea that the respondent's favourite blogger or vlogger includes parts of their personal lives in their content (e.g. their friends and family, their home, and their daily

life). This factor accounted for 41.79% of variance. The second factor contained three items, which covered the idea that the respondent was connected to their favourite blogger or vlogger (they felt they were someone they could be friends with, they felt a connection to, and they feel like they know them). This is reminiscent of the concept of homophily or similarity (Feder & Savastano, 2006). This factor accounted for 34.23% of variance. Together, these two factors accounted 76.03% of variance.

Consumer information was measured using six items. The EFA suggested that the data was best represented by one factor; all six items loaded strongly on one factor. This factor accounted for 64.65% of variance.

Content authenticity was measured using a scale of 15 items. The EFA suggested that the data was best represented by two factors. The first factor contained 11 items covering the more human aspects of content; honesty, morals, and connection. This factor accounted for 42.42% of variance. The second factor contained four items to do with the content specific aspects of content authenticity; it's history and survival. This factor accounted for 23.00% of variance. Together, these two factors accounted for 65.42% of variance.

Creator authenticity was measured using a scale of six items. The EFA suggested that the data was best represented by two factors. The first factor contained four items to do with the creator being their true selves. This factor accounted for 42.70% of variance. The second factor contained two items were reverse coded items, looking at whether the creator adapts themselves to fit in to the crowd. This factor accounted for 29.02% of variance. Together, these two factors accounted for 71.71% of variance.

Entertainment was measured using a scale of three items. The EFA suggested that the data was best represented by one factor; all three items loaded strongly on one factor. This factor accounted for 80.85% of variance

Expertise was measured using a scale of five items. The EFA suggested that the data was best represented by one factor; all five items loaded strongly on one factor. This factor accounted for 80.74% of variance.

Creator attractiveness was measured using a scale of five items. The EFA suggested that the data was best represented by one factor; all five items loaded strongly on one factor. This factor accounted for 71.19% of variance.

Content attractiveness was measured using a scale of seven items. The EFA suggested that the data was best represented by one factor; all seven items loaded strongly on one factor. This factor accounted for 62.22% of variance.

Parasocial interaction was measured using a scale of 12 items. The EFA suggested that the data was best represented by two factors. However, there were three items showing cross-loading. This was addressed by deleting each cross-loaded item sequentially.

These items were: “I seem to have the same beliefs or attitudes as <favourite blogger or vlogger>”, “I can identify with <favourite blogger or vlogger>”, and “I enjoy trying to predict what <favourite blogger or vlogger> will do”. Once all three cross-loaded items were removed, two clean factors remained. The first factor contained five items surrounding the idea of respondents caring about and enjoying their favourite blogger or vlogger. This factor accounted for 37.30% of variance. The second factor contained four items surrounding the idea of the respondent feeling like their favourite blogger or vlogger was like them. This is also reminiscent of the concept of homophily or similarity (Feder & Savastano, 2006). This factor accounted for 32.75% of variance. Together, these two factors accounted for 70.06% of variance.

Creator trust was measured using a scale of five items. The EFA suggested that the data was best represented by one factor; all five items loaded strongly on one factor. This factor accounted for 82.06% of variance.

All items loaded strongly on their corresponding factor's, all with factor loadings over .6. One concept saw a factor with one item (system trust – blog/vlog: “How large do you think the risk of getting inaccurate information on blogs and vlogs is?”); this one item was removed as it was deemed not suitable to have a factor with only one item. The resulting constructs or factors were used for the structural equation model were: system trust – Internet (factor 1 and factor 2), system trust – blog/vlog (factor 1 only), dispositional trust, interpersonal trust, personal content (factor 1 and factor 2), consumer information, content authenticity (factor 1 and factor 2), creator authenticity (factor 1 and factor 2), entertainment, expertise, creator attractiveness, content attractiveness, parasocial interaction (factor 1 and factor 2), and creator trust. System trust – blog/vlog factor 2 was deleted due to it only containing a single item. Overall, this analysis identified the key factors underlying trust in content creators.

## **6.4 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)**

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was then run as the starting point for structural equation modelling. CFA provides a test of measurement theory, estimating the measurement model and determining whether the number of factors and the indicator variable loadings coincide with what is expected from theory (Hair et al., 2010). First, CFA was run for each grouping of constructs: predispositions to trust, PSI and creator trust. These three construct groups were run together before being analysed alongside the content and creator constructs. These sections, with variables discarded where needed, were then run together one at a time until the final, most appropriate, path model was assembled.

### **6.4.1 Trust**

First, the items measuring the predispositions to trust were analysed together: dispositional, system (Internet and blog/vlog), and interpersonal trust. Table 26 shows the first CFA analysis of the predispositions to trust variables. All items in each construct were significant at the  $p < .001$  level. However, the items comprising system trust in the Internet (factor 2) had a lower standardised regression weight and because the factors contained only two items. It was decided that this factor would be dropped.

**Table 26 CFA of predispositional trust factors – version 1**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>Interpersonal Trust</i>	InterpersonalTrustmostpeoplecan becountedon	.760	***	Keep
	InterpersonalTrustexpertscanberel iedon	.673	***	
	InterpersonalTrustparentscanberel iedon	.660	***	
	InterpersonalTrustpublicopinionp ollshonestly	.704	***	
	InterpersonalTrustrepairmenwont overcharge	.745	***	
	InterpersonalTrustmoststudentsw ouldnotcheat	.695	***	
	InterpersonalTrustsalespeopleareh onest	.759		
<i>Dispositional Trust</i>	DispositionalTrusttendencytotrust ishigh	.828	***	Keep
	DispositionalTrusttrustuntilproves houldnt	.843	***	
	DispositionalTrusttrustingisnotdif ficult	.781	***	
	DispositionalTrusttrustuntilreason notto	.786		
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfiden ceinfindinginfo	.783	***	Keep
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfiden ceinpeopleaddinginfotoblogsvlogs	.841	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsInstitutes andPeople	.795	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCredibilit y	.820	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsLookingf orInfo	.771		
<i>System Trust – Internet (factor 1)</i>	SystemTrustInternetCredibility	.592	***	Keep
	SystemTrustInternetInstitutesand People	.798	***	
	SystemTrustInternetConfidencein thoseyouinteractwith	.739	***	
<i>System Trust – Internet (factor 2)</i>	SystemTrustInternetPrivacy	1.000		Discard
	SystemTrustInternetConfidenceyo ucanfindinfo	1.000		
	SystemTrustInternetLookingforIn fo	.528	***	

Thus, with system trust in the Internet (factor 2) discarded, the CFA was rerun. This resulted in four strong factors measuring a blog or vlog audience member's predisposition to trust: interpersonal trust, dispositional trust, system trust in blog and vlog content, and system trust in the Internet factor 1 (Table 27).

**Table 27 CFA of predispositional trust factors – version 2**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>Interpersonal Trust</i>	InterpersonalTrustmostpeoplecanbecountedon	.760		Keep
	InterpersonalTrustexperts canbereliedon	.681	***	
	InterpersonalTrustparents canbereliedon	.667	***	
	InterpersonalTrustpublic opinionpollshonestly	.708	***	
	InterpersonalTrustrepairmen wontovercharge	.740	***	
	InterpersonalTrustmost studentswouldnotcheat	.690	***	
	InterpersonalTrustsalespeoplearehonest	.755	***	
<i>Dispositional Trust</i>	DispositionalTrusttendency to trustishigh	.833		Keep
	DispositionalTrusttrust until proveshouldnt	.841	***	
	DispositionalTrusttrusting is not difficult	.781	***	
	DispositionalTrusttrust until reasonnotto	.782	***	
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinfindinginfo	.782		Keep
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinpeopleaddinginfo toblogs vlogs	.842	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsInstitutesandPeople	.793	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCredibility	.819	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsLookingforInfo	.774	***	
<i>System Trust – Internet (factor 1)</i>	SystemTrustInternetConfidenceinthoseyouinteractwith	.725	***	Keep
	SystemTrustInternetInstitutesandPeople	.762	***	
	SystemTrustInternetCredibility	.644	***	
	SystemTrustInternetPrivacy	.761		

The items measuring creator trust and parasocial interaction (PSI) factors 1 and 2 were then analysed together using CFA. Table 28 shows the CFA analysis of these variables. All items in each factor were significant the  $p < .001$  level and the standardised regression weights were all strong, above .6. Thus, all variables were retained.

**Table 28 CFA of PSI and creator trust factors**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSIlikereadinghearing	.766		Keep
	PSIcareaboutthem	.836	***	
	PSIhopetheyachievegoals	.694	***	
	PSIviewthemonanother	.789	***	
	PSIwouldliketomeetthem	.782	***	
<i>PSI (factor 2)</i>	PSIimaginemyself	.789		Keep
	PSIsameproblems	.699	***	
	PSIsamequalities	.831	***	
	PSIremindmeofmyself	.833	***	
<i>Creator Trust</i>	CreatorTrustsincere_SQT	.884		Keep
	CreatorTrustreliable	.902	***	
	CreatorTrusthonest	.895	***	
	CreatorTrustdependable	.815	***	
	CreatorTrusttrustworthy	.908	***	

### 6.4.2 Blog and Vlog Characteristics

Next, the CFA was run on all blog and vlog content characteristics. Table 29 shows the results of the CFA. All items in each construct were significant and had strong standardised regression weights of over .6. Thus, content authenticity (factor 1), content authenticity (factor 2), entertainment, content attractiveness, and consumer information were suitable for further analysis in the structural model.

**Table 29 CFA of blog and vlog content factors**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticityconnectswit hwhatisreallyimportant	.772	***	Keep
	ContentAuthenticityconnectspe opletotheirrealselves	.744	***	
	ContentAuthenticityimportantva lues	.802	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymeaningtoli ves	.790	***	
	ContentAuthenticitycare	.802	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymoralvalues	.805	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymoralprinci ples	.781	***	
	ContentAuthenticitygivesback	.756	***	
	ContentAuthenticityhonest	.732	***	
	ContentAuthenticityvaluepromi se	.789	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	ContentAuthenticitynotbetray	.715		Keep
	ContentAuthenticitysurvivestren ds	.828	***	
	ContentAuthenticitysurvivestim es	.874	***	
	ContentAuthenticitytimeless	.730	***	
<i>Entertainment</i>	ContentAuthenticityhistory	.690		Keep
	Entertainmentpleasing	.842	***	
	Entertainmentenjoyable	.815	***	
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	Entertainmententertaining	.872		Keep
	ContentAttractivenesshighqualit yimagesorvideo	.756	***	
	ContentAttractivenesshighqualit y	.752	***	
	ContentAttractivenessconsistent	.699	***	
	ContentAttractivenessatmospher e	.813	***	
	ContentAttractivenesseditedwell	.716	***	
	ContentAttractivenesspleasingo ntheeye	.686	***	
<i>Consumer Information</i>	ContentAttractivenessdesigned well	.809		Keep
	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinf ormationtogiveyouideatopurcha sesome	.711	***	
	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinf ormationtodecidewhethertopurc hase	.757	***	
	ConsumerinfoInformationuseful ness	.552	***	
	ConsumerinfoUsespecificbrand productincontent	.827	***	
	ConsumerinfoReviewspecificb randproductincontent	.860	***	
	ConsumerinfoMentionspecific brandproductincontent	.816		

Blog and vlog creator aspects were then analysed via CFA. The results can be seen in Table 30. All items in each construct was significant and had strong standardised regression weights. Even though creator authenticity (factor 2) only had two items, each item has a strong standardised regression weight.

**Table 30 CFA of blog and vlog creator factors**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	CreatorAttractivenesssexy	.725		Keep
	CreatorAttractivenesslegant	.825	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessbeautiful	.891	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessclassy	.685	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessattractive	.869	***	
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	CreatorExpertiseskilled	.887		Keep
	CreatorExpertisequalified	.880	***	
	CreatorExpertiseknowledgeable	.883	***	
	CreatorExpertiseexperienced	.885	***	
	CreatorExpertiseexpert	.823	***	
<i>Personal Content (factor 1)</i>	PersonalTalksshowsdailylife	.775		Keep
	PersonalTalksshowshome	.743	***	
	PersonalTalksshowsfriendsfamily	.858	***	
	PersonalTalksshowspersonalaspects	.870	***	
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfeellik elknow	.803		Keep
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfeelac onnectionto	.824	***	
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIcould befriendwith	.807	***	
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	CreatorAuthenticitydontcurryfavour	.648		Keep
	CreatorAuthenticitydonotpretend	.671	***	
	CreatorAuthenticityknowwhatthey sandfor	.751	***	
	CreatorAuthenticityclearphilosophy	.800	***	
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	CreatorAuthenticitytrimyoursails	.957		Keep
	CreatorAuthenticitydistortthemselv es	.715	***	

The content and creator factors were then run together through a CFA. Table 31 shows these results. All items for each construct of the content and creator aspects of blog and vlog content, when analysed together, were significant.

**Table 31 CFA of blog and vlog content and creator factors**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	CreatorAttractivenesssexy	.724		Keep
	CreatorAttractivenesselegant	.822	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessbeautiful	.893	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessclassy	.686	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessattractive	.870	***	
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	CreatorExpertiseskilled	.886		Keep
	CreatorExpertisequalified	.879	***	
	CreatorExpertiseknowledgeable	.882	***	
	CreatorExpertiseexperienced	.885	***	
	CreatorExpertiseexpert	.826	***	
<i>Personal Content (factor 1)</i>	PersonalTalksshowsdailylife	.780		Keep
	PersonalTalksshowshome	.759	***	
	PersonalTalksshowsfriendsfamily	.856	***	
	PersonalTalksshowspersonal aspects	.856	***	
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PersonalFavouriteissomeone I feel like I know	.799		Keep
	PersonalFavouriteissomeone I feel a connection to	.831	***	
	PersonalFavouriteissomeone I could be friends with	.803	***	
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	CreatorAuthenticitydontcurryfavour	.637		Keep
	CreatorAuthenticitydonotpretend	.682	***	
	CreatorAuthenticityknowwhat they stand for	.779	***	
	CreatorAuthenticityclearphilosophy	.777	***	
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	CreatorAuthenticitytrimyour sails	.875		Keep
	CreatorAuthenticitydistorthemselves	.781	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticityconnects with what is really important	.769		Keep
	ContentAuthenticityconnects people to their real selves	.739	***	
	ContentAuthenticityimportant values	.796	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymeaning to lives	.791	***	
	ContentAuthenticitycare	.807	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymoral values	.805	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymoral principles	.783	***	
	ContentAuthenticitygives back	.752	***	
	ContentAuthenticityhonest	.734	***	
	ContentAuthenticityvaluepromise	.791	***	
	ContentAuthenticitynot betrayed	.719	***	

<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	ContentAuthenticitysurvives trends	.825		Keep
	ContentAuthenticitysurvives times	.871	***	
	ContentAuthenticitytimeless	.726	***	
	ContentAuthenticityhistory	.703	***	
<i>Entertainment</i>	Entertainmentpleasing	.840		Keep
	Entertainmentenjoyable	.814	***	
	Entertainmententertaining	.875	***	
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	ContentAttractivenesshighqualityimagesorvideo	.757		Keep
	ContentAttractivenesshighquality	.750	***	
	ContentAttractivenessconsistent	.699	***	
	ContentAttractivenessatmosphere	.813	***	
	ContentAttractivenessedited well	.716	***	
	ContentAttractivenesspleasingontheeye	.689	***	
	ContentAttractivenessdesign edwell	.808	***	
	ConsumerinfoUsedfavourite sinformationtogiveyouideato purchasesome	.707		Keep
<i>Consumer Information</i>	ConsumerinfoUsedfavourite sinformationtodecidewhethe rtopurchase	.749	***	
	ConsumerinfoInformationus efulness	.542	***	
	ConsumerinfoUsesspecificbrand andproductincontent	.839	***	
	ConsumerinfoReviewsspecificbrand andproductincontent	.860	***	
	ConsumerinfoMentionsspecificbrand andproductincontent	.816	***	

## 6.5 Modification to the Structural Model

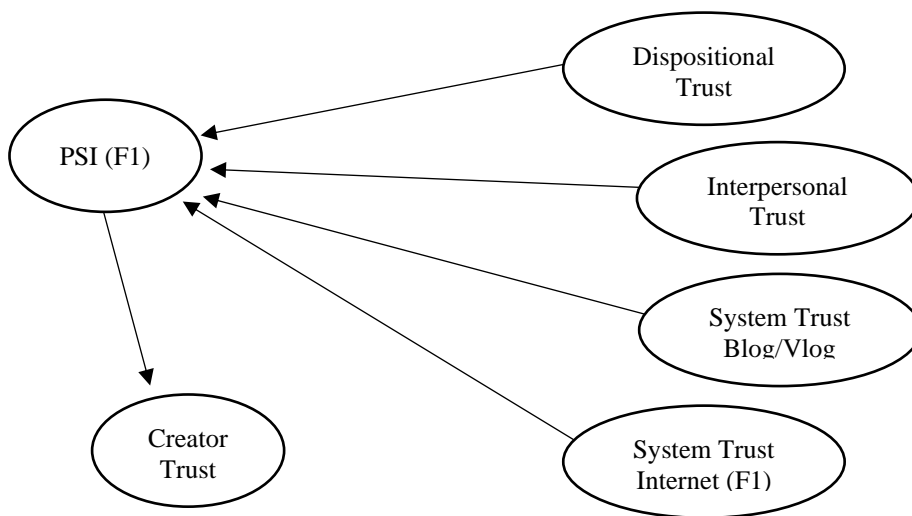
To build the structured model, components of the model were first tested separately to assess what, if any, modification to the model was required.

- Firstly, the three dispositions to trust were modelled on PSI and creator trust. Then content and creator characteristics were modelled on PSI.
- Then content and creator characteristics were modelled on both PSI and creator trust.
- Following, content characteristics were modelled on PSI, creator trust and system trust in blog and vlog content.

- The creator characteristics were modelled on PSI, creator trust and system trust in blog and vlog content.
- Finally, content and creator characteristics were modelled together on PSI, creator trust, and system trust in blog and vlog content.

### 6.5.1 Dispositions to Trust, PSI, and Creator Trust

Interpersonal trust, dispositional trust, system trust in blog and vlog content, system trust in the Internet (factor 1) were modelled on PSI (factor 1 and factor 2), and creator trust. To begin with, the predispositions to trust were analysed against creator trust and PSI (factor 1) alone. The results can be seen in Table 32 and the path diagram in Figure 15. This model had the predispositions to trust leading to PSI (factor 1) which then lead to creator trust.



**Figure 15 Path diagram: predispositions to trust, PSI and creator trust factors (V1)**

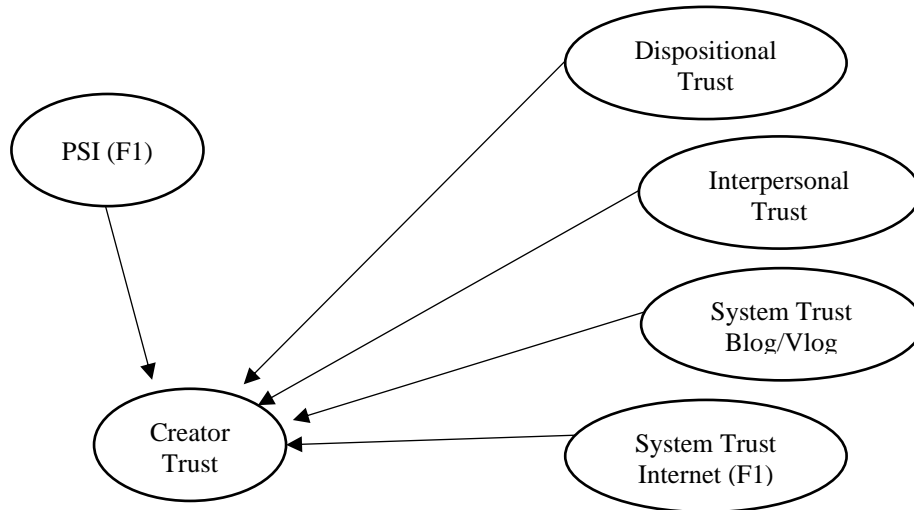
**Table 32 Predispositions to trust, PSI and creator trust factors – version 1**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>Interpersonal Trust</i>	PSI_F1	.015	.915	Discard
<i>Dispositional Trust</i>	PSI_F1	.255	.032	Discard
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	PSI_F1	.358	.004	Keep
<i>System Trust – Internet (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	-.149	.344	Discard
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	.447	***	Keep
<i>Interpersonal Trust</i>	InterpersonalTrustmostpeoplecanbe countedon	.760		Keep
	InterpersonalTrustexpertscanberelie don	.682	***	
	InterpersonalTrustparentscanberelie don	.667	***	
	InterpersonalTrustpublicopinionpoll shonestly	.709	***	
	InterpersonalTrustrepairmenwontov ercharge	.739	***	
	InterpersonalTrustmoststudentswou ldnotcheat	.689	***	
	InterpersonalTrustsalespeopleareho nest	.755	***	
<i>Dispositional Trust</i>	DispositionalTrusttendencytotrustis high	.830		Keep
	DispositionalTrusttrustuntilprovesh ouldnt	.841	***	
	DispositionalTrusttrustingisnotdiffi cult	.781	***	
	DispositionalTrusttrustuntilreasonn otto	.785	***	
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsLookingfor Info	.774		Keep
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCredibility	.820	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsInstitutesan dPeople	.791	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidence inpeopleaddinginfotoblogsvlogs	.842	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidence infindinginfo	.782	***	
<i>System Trust – Internet (factor 1)</i>	SystemTrustInternetPrivacy	.761		Keep
	SystemTrustInternetCredibility	.643	***	
	SystemTrustInternetInstitutesandPe ople	.761	***	
	SystemTrustInternetConfidenceinth oseyouinteractwith	.726	***	
<i>Creator Trust</i>	CreatorTrustdependable	.816		Keep
	CreatorTrusthonest	.894	***	
	CreatorTrustreliable	.901	***	
	CreatorTrustsincere_SQT	.884	***	
	CreatorTrusttrustworthy	.909	***	
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSIlikereadinghearing	.757		Keep
	PSIcareaboutthem	.842	***	
	PSIhopetheyachievegoals	.701	***	
	PSIviewthemonanother	.786	***	
	PSIwouldliketomeetthem	.777	***	

Before discarding any variables entirely, it was important to check whether the same constructs leading to creator trust directly rather than PSI (factor 1) was any better. The same constructs, predispositions to trust were analysed against creator trust and PSI (factor 1), were then rerun using CFA however this time the predispositions to trust were leading directly to creator trust, with PSI (factor 1) still leading to creator trust also. The results can be seen in Table 33 and the path diagram in Figure 16.

**Table 33 Predispositions to trust, PSI and creator trust factors – version 2**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	.337	***	Keep
<i>Interpersonal Trust</i>	Creator_Trust	.043	.755	Discard
<i>Dispositional Trust</i>	Creator_Trust	.085	.457	Discard
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	Creator_Trust	.398	.001	Keep
<i>System Trust – Internet (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	-.241	.117	Discard
<i>Interpersonal Trust</i>	InterpersonalTrustmostpeoplecanbecoun tedon	.760		Keep
	InterpersonalTrustexpertscanbereliedon	.681	***	
	InterpersonalTrustparentscanbereliedon	.667	***	
	InterpersonalTrustpublicopinionpollsho nestly	.708	***	
	InterpersonalTrustrepairmenwontoverch arge	.740	***	
	InterpersonalTrustmoststudentswouldno tcheat	.690	***	
	InterpersonalTrustsalespeoplearehonest	.755	***	
<i>Dispositional Trust</i>	DispositionalTrusttendencytotrustishigh	.832		Keep
	DispositionalTrusttrustuntilproveshould nt	.840	***	
	DispositionalTrusttrustingisnotdifficult	.781	***	
	DispositionalTrusttrustuntilreasonnotto	.782	***	
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsLookingforInfo	.775		Keep
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCredibility	.819	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsInstitutesandPe ople	.794	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinpe opleaddinginfotoblogsvlogs	.841	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinfin dinginfo	.781	***	
<i>System Trust – Internet (factor 1)</i>	SystemTrustInternetPrivacy	.762		Keep
	SystemTrustInternetCredibility	.643	***	
	SystemTrustInternetInstitutesandPeople	.763	***	
	SystemTrustInternetConfidenceinthosey ouinteractwith	.723	***	
<i>Creator Trust</i>	CreatorTrustdependable	.807		Keep
	CreatorTrusthonest	.887	***	
	CreatorTrustreliable	.896	***	
	CreatorTrustsincere_SQT	.878	***	
	CreatorTrusttrustworthy	.904	***	
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSIlikereadinghearing	.759		Keep
	PSIcareaboutthem	.839	***	
	PSIhopetheyachievegoals	.708	***	
	PSIviewthemonanother	.790	***	
	PSIwouldliketomeetthem	.773	***	



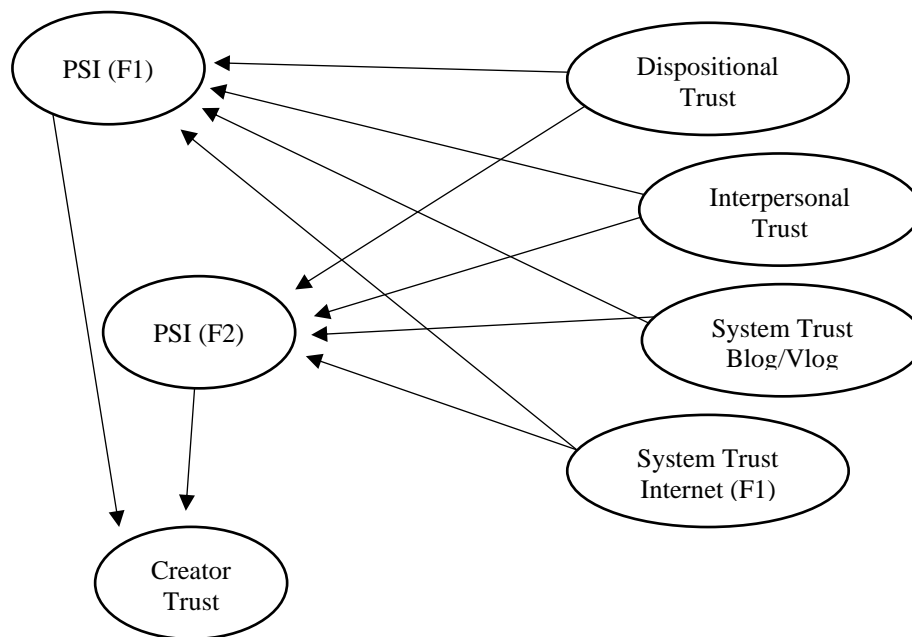
**Figure 16 Path diagram: predispositions to trust, PSI and creator trust factors (V2)**

These same characteristics were run again, prior to deleting any constructs, with the addition of PSI (factor 2), and the predispositions to trust once again going only to PSI (factors 1 and 2), and both PSI factors leading to creator trust. The results of this CFA are shown in Table 34 and the path diagram in Figure 17. This analysis showed that PSI (factor 2) was underperforming and was an indication that this variable should be removed to strengthen the model. The results of all three versions of this model, the results of each CFA, indicated that interpersonal trust, dispositional trust, and system trust in the Internet (factor 1) should be removed as, like PSI (factor 2), these were not significant. Thus, these first three versions of this model (creator trust, PSI, and predispositions to trust) suggest that only PSI (factor 1), creator trust, and system trust in blog and vlog content should be included in the structural model.

**Table 34 Predispositions to trust, PSI and creator trust factors – version 3**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>Interpersonal Trust</i>	PSI_F1	.093	.510	Discard
<i>Dispositional Trust</i>	PSI_F1	.197	.094	Discard
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	PSI_F1	.388	.002	Keep
<i>System Trust – Internet (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	-.184	.245	Discard
<i>Interpersonal Trust</i>	PSI_F2	.318	.018	Keep
<i>Dispositional Trust</i>	PSI_F2	-.022	.843	Discard
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	PSI_F2	.266	.021	Keep
<i>System Trust – Internet (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F2	.071	.627	Discard
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	.466	***	Keep
<i>PSI (factor 2)</i>	Creator_Trust	-.034	.569	Discard
<i>Interpersonal Trust</i>	InterpersonalTrustmostpeoplecanbecountedon	.761		Keep
	InterpersonalTrustexperts canbereliedon	.682	***	
	InterpersonalTrustparents canbereliedon	.663	***	
	InterpersonalTrustpublic opinionpollshonestly	.707	***	
	InterpersonalTrustrepairmenwon't overcharge	.739	***	
	InterpersonalTrustmost students would not cheat	.688	***	
	InterpersonalTrustsalespeople are honest	.758	***	
<i>Dispositional Trust</i>	DispositionalTrusttendency to trustishigh	.830		Keep
	DispositionalTrusttrust until proven should not be difficult	.841	***	
	DispositionalTrusttrusting is not difficult	.781	***	
	DispositionalTrusttrust until reason not too	.785	***	
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsLookingforInfo	.774		Keep
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCredibility	.819	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsInstitute sandPeople	.791	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinpeople adding info to blogs vlogs	.841	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidencein finding info	.782	***	
<i>System Trust – Internet (factor 1)</i>	SystemTrustInternetPrivacy	.762		Keep
	SystemTrustInternetCredibility	.643	***	
	SystemTrustInternetInstitute sandPeople	.762	***	
	SystemTrustInternetConfidence in those you interact with	.724	***	

<i>Creator Trust</i>	CreatorTrustdependable	.817		Keep
	CreatorTrusthonest	.895	***	
	CreatorTrustreliable	.902	***	
	CreatorTrustsincere_SQT	.885	***	
	CreatorTrusttrustworthy	.909	***	
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSIlikereadinghearing	.757		Keep
	PSIcareaboutthem	.842	***	
	PSIhopetheyachievegoals	.700	***	
	PSIviewthemonanother	.786	***	
	PSIwouldliketomeetthem	.777	***	
<i>PSI (factor 2)</i>	PSIremindmeofmyself	.836		Keep
	PSIsamequalities	.823	***	
	PSIsameproblems	.713	***	
	PSIimaginemyself	.784	***	

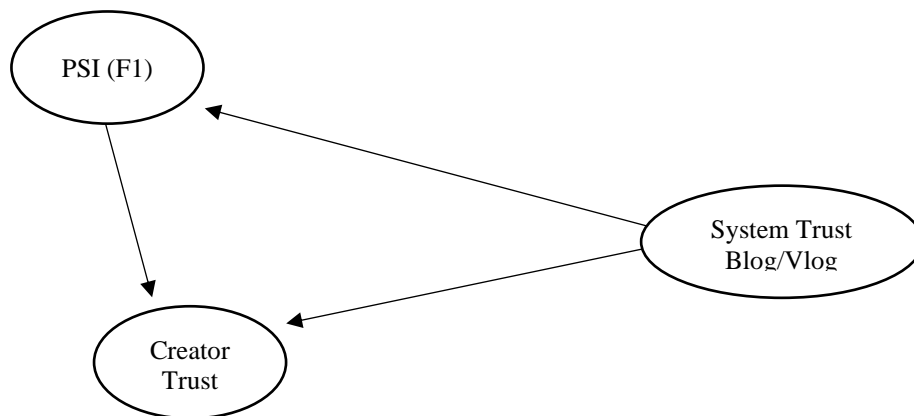


**Figure 17 Path diagram: predispositions to trust, PSI and creator trust factors (V3)**

This model was rerun with the removal of the PSI (factor 2), dispositional trust, interpersonal trust, and system trust in the Internet (factor 1). The results of this final analysis for this part of the model can be seen in Table 35 and the path diagram in Figure 18. As seen in the table, this version of this part of the model was the best performing with all items and constructs being significant. These constructs were thus deemed suitable for analysis in the final structural model.

**Table 35 Predispositions to trust, PSI and creator trust factors – version 4**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	PSI_F1	.392	***	Keep
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	.332	***	Keep
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	Creator_Trust	.259	***	Keep
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsLoo kingforInfo	.780		Keep
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCre dibility	.827	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsInsti tutesandPeople	.785	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCon fidenceinpeopleaddinginfo blogsblogs	.838	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCon fidenceinfindinginfo	.781	***	
	CreatorTrustdependable	.816		
<i>Creator Trust</i>	CreatorTrusthonest	.893	***	Keep
	CreatorTrustreliable	.902	***	
	CreatorTrustsincere_SQT	.884	***	
	CreatorTrusttrustworthy	.909	***	
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSIlikereadinghearing	.758		Keep
	PSIcareaboutthem	.842	***	
	PSIhopetheyachievegoals	.701	***	
	PSIviewthemonanother	.789	***	
	PSIwouldliketomeetthem	.777	***	



**Figure 18 Path diagram: predispositions to trust, PSI and creator trust factors (V4)**

These constructs being carried forward as the strongest constructs for the model are supported by the findings from the qualitative study. System trust in blog and vlog content is what was suggested by interviewees as allowing them to initiate blog and vlog trust; good experiences in the past with blog and vlog platforms had allowed them

to be open to trusting content creators on these platforms. As their trust increased with content creators and they had successful experiences, their trust in blog and vlog platforms grew.

Likewise, PSI (factor 1) reflects experiences with the content creator whilst PSI (factor 2) reflects similarities and relatability with the content creator. The qualitative study revealed the feeling of a connection being key in trusting content creators more so than similarity or homophily which tended to come under the umbrella of personal content. Thus, system trust in blogs and vlogs and PSI (factor 1) are the strongest influencers of creator trust.

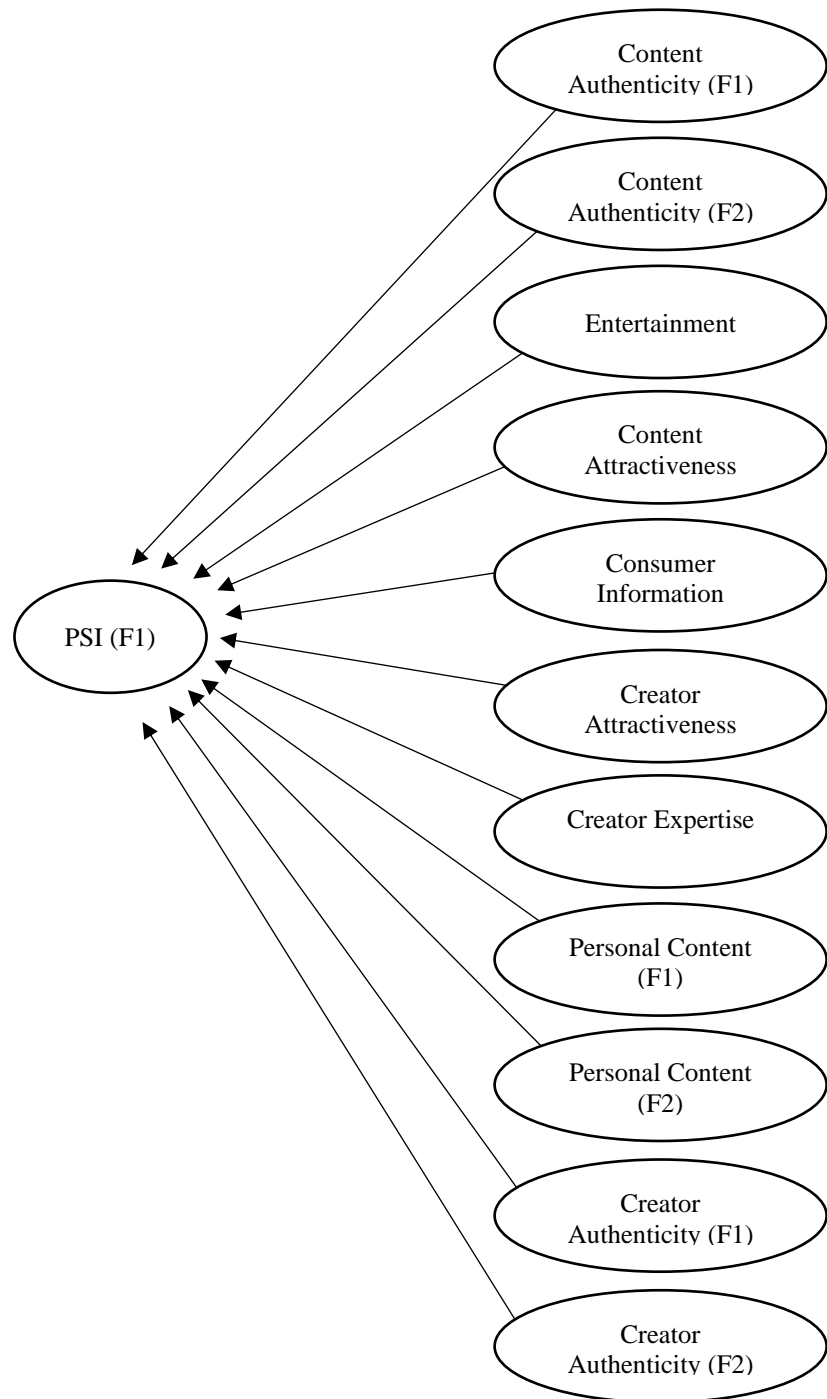
### **6.5.2 Content Characteristics, Creator Characteristics, and PSI**

The content and creator aspects were then analysed alongside PSI (factor 1). PSI (factor 1) was singularly used as, as stated prior, PSI (factor 2) was not significant and as such was indicated by the CFA that it be removed from the model. The results of this CFA can be seen in Table 36 and the path diagram in Figure 19. The CFA here indicated that content authenticity (factor 2), entertainment, creator attractiveness, creator expertise, personal content (factor 1), and creator authenticity (factor 1 and factor 2) should be removed from the model as these were not significant in regard to building a relationship with the content creator.

**Table 36 Content and creator characteristics, and PSI (factor 1)**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.390	***	Keep
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	.038	.639	Discard
<i>Entertainment Content</i>	PSI_F1	-.087	.377	Discard
<i>Attractiveness</i>	PSI_F1	.389	***	Keep
<i>Consumer Information</i>	PSI_F1	-.111	.039	Keep
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	PSI_F1	-.026	.632	Discard
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	PSI_F1	.038	.456	Discard
<i>Personal Content (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	-.006	.921	Discard
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	.240	.002	Keep
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.082	.465	Discard
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	-.024	.653	Discard
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticityconnectswit	.768		Keep
	hwhatisreallyimportant			
	ContentAuthenticityconnectspe	.740	***	
	opletotheirrealselves			
	ContentAuthenticityimportantva	.800	***	
	lues			
	ContentAuthenticitymeaningtoli	.793	***	
	ves			
	ContentAuthenticitycare	.804	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymoralvalues	.808	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymoralprinci	.782	***	
	ples			
	ContentAuthenticitygivesback	.751	***	
	ContentAuthenticityhonest	.732	***	
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticityvaluepromi	.788	***	
	se			
	ContentAuthenticitynotbetray	.720	***	
	PSIhopetheyachievegoals	.734	***	Keep
	PSIcareaboutthem	.825	***	
	PSIlikereadinghearing	.779		
	PSIwouldliketomeetthem	.760	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	PSIviewthemonanother	.776	***	
	ContentAuthenticitysurvivestren	.825		Keep
	ds			
	ContentAuthenticitysurvivestim	.871	***	
	es			
<i>Entertainment</i>	ContentAuthenticitytimeless	.728	***	
	ContentAuthenticityhistory	.703	***	
	Entertainmentpleasing	.840		Keep
	Entertainmentenjoyable	.814	***	
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	Entertainmententertaining	.876	***	
	ContentAttractivenesshighqualit	.753		Keep
	yimagesorvideo			

	ContentAttractivenesshighquality	.754	***	
	ContentAttractivenessconsistent	.697	***	
	ContentAttractivenessatmosphere	.817	***	
	ContentAttractivenesseditedwell	.710	***	
	ContentAttractivenesspleasingontheeye	.688	***	
	ContentAttractivenessdesignedwell	.810	***	
<i>Consumer Information</i>	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinformationtogiveyouideatopurchasesome	.706		Keep
	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinformationtodecidewhethertopurchase	.749	***	
	ConsumerinfoInformationusefulness	.540	***	
	ConsumerinfoUsespecificbrandproductincontent	.839	***	
	ConsumerinfoReviewsspecificbrandproductincontent	.859	***	
	ConsumerinfoMentionsspecificbrandproductincontent	.818	***	
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	CreatorAttractivenesssexy	.724		Keep
	CreatorAttractivenesselegant	.822	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessbeautiful	.893	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessclassy	.686	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessattractive	.870	***	
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	CreatorExpertiseskilled	.886		Keep
	CreatorExpertisequalified	.878	***	
	CreatorExpertiseknowledgeable	.882	***	
	CreatorExpertiseexperienced	.885	***	
	CreatorExpertiseexpert	.826	***	
<i>Personal Content (factor 1)</i>	PersonalTalksshowsdailylife	.780		Keep
	PersonalTalksshowshome	.759	***	
	PersonalTalksshowsfriendsfamily	.857	***	
	PersonalTalksshowspersonalaspects	.856	***	
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfeelikeIknow	.800		Keep
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfeelconnectionto	.827	***	
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIcouldbefriendswith	.806	***	
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	CreatorAuthenticitydontcurryfavour	.636		Keep
	CreatorAuthenticitydonotpretend	.680	***	
	CreatorAuthenticityknowwhattheystandfor	.783	***	
	CreatorAuthenticityclearphilosophy	.774	***	
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	CreatorAuthenticitytrimyoursails	.877		Keep
	CreatorAuthenticitydistortthemselves	.780	***	



**Figure 19 Path diagram: content and creator characteristics, and PSI (factor 1)**

### **6.5.3 Content Characteristics, Creator Characteristics, PSI and Creator Trust**

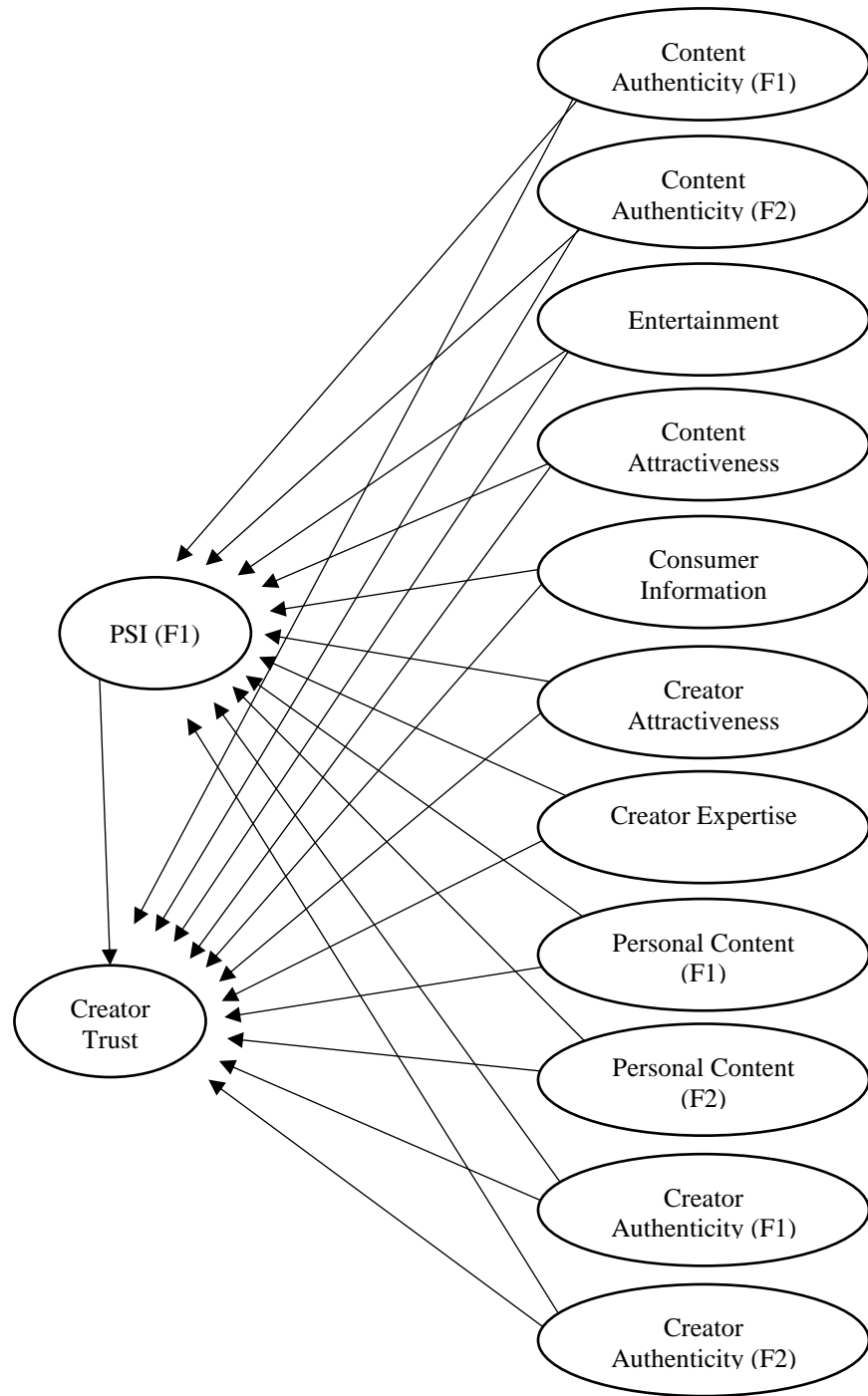
Before removing any of these underperforming constructs, the same model with all variables was analysed alongside creator trust. The content and creator aspects had pathways directly to PSI (factor 1) and creator trust in this model. This is summarised in Table 37 below and the path diagram in Figure 20. The CFA for this model indicated that several variables should be removed from the model. First, content authenticity (factor 2), entertainment, creator attractiveness, creator expertise, personal content (factor 1), and creator authenticity (factor 1 and factor 2) should be removed from leading to a relationship with the content creator (PSI factor 1) in the model as these pathways were not significant. Secondly, content authenticity (factor 1), content authenticity (factor 2), entertainment, content attractiveness, consumer information, personal content (factor 1), personal content (factor 2), creator authenticity (factor 1), and creator authenticity (factor 2) should be removed from leading directly to creator trust in the model as these pathways were not significant.

**Table 37 Content and creator characteristics, PSI (factor 1), and creator trust – version 1**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.390	***	Keep
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	.038	.635	Discard
<i>Entertainment Content Attractiveness</i>	PSI_F1	-.085	.387	Discard
<i>Consumer Information</i>	PSI_F1	.387	***	Keep
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	PSI_F1	-.111	.041	Keep
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	PSI_F1	-.026	.633	Discard
<i>Personal Content (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.038	.454	Discard
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	-.006	.923	Discard
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.240	.002	Keep
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	.081	.469	Discard
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	-.023	.672	Discard
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	-.133	.189	Discard
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	Creator_Trust	.174	.132	Discard
<i>Entertainment Content Attractiveness</i>	Creator_Trust	-.134	.098	Discard
<i>Consumer Information</i>	Creator_Trust	.176	.075	Discard
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	Creator_Trust	.043	.694	Discard
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	Creator_Trust	.025	.658	Discard
<i>Personal Content (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	.448	***	Keep
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	Creator_Trust	.391	***	Keep
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	-.063	.317	Discard
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	Creator_Trust	.019	.820	Discard
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	.038	.735	Discard
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	Creator_Trust	.106	.056	Discard
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticityconnectswit hwhatisreallyimportant	.769		Keep
	ContentAuthenticityconnectspe opletotheirrealselves	.740	***	
	ContentAuthenticityimportantva lues	.799	***	

	ContentAuthenticitymeaningtolives	.791	***	
	ContentAuthenticitycare	.805	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymoralvalues	.809	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymoralprinciples	.783	***	
	ContentAuthenticitygivesback	.751	***	
	ContentAuthenticityhonest	.733	***	
	ContentAuthenticityvaluepromise	.787	***	
	ContentAuthenticitynotbetray	.720	***	
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSIlikereadinghearing	.779		Keep
	PSIwouldliketomeetthem	.761	***	
	PSIviewthemonanother	.778	***	
	PSIhopetheyachievegoals	.733	***	
	PSIcareaboutthem	.823	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	ContentAuthenticitysurvivestrends	.826		Keep
	ContentAuthenticitysurvivestimulates	.868	***	
	ContentAuthenticitytimeless	.730	***	
	ContentAuthenticityhistory	.701	***	
<i>Entertainment</i>	Entertainmentpleasing	.836		Keep
	Entertainmentenjoyable	.814	***	
	Entertainmententertaining	.879	***	
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	ContentAttractivenesshighqualityimagesorvideo	.754		Keep
	ContentAttractivenesshighquality	.755	***	
	ContentAttractivenessconsistent	.698	***	
	ContentAttractivenessatmosphere	.817	***	
	ContentAttractivenesseditedwell	.710	***	
	ContentAttractivenesspleasingontheeye	.686	***	
	ContentAttractivenessdesigned well	.809	***	
<i>Consumer Information</i>	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinformationtogiveyouideatopurchasesome	.706		Keep
	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinformationtodecidewhethertopurchase	.749	***	
	ConsumerinfoInformationusefulness	.540	***	
	ConsumerinfoUsespecificbrand productincontent	.839	***	
	ConsumerinfoReviewsspecificbrandproductincontent	.859	***	
	ConsumerinfoMentionspecific brandproductincontent	.818	***	
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	CreatorAttractivenesssexy	.721		Keep
	CreatorAttractivenesselegant	.818	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessbeautiful	.891	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessclassy	.699	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessattractive	.870	***	
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	CreatorExpertiseskilled	.884		Keep
	CreatorExpertisequalified	.879	***	
	CreatorExpertiseknowledgeable	.881	***	
	CreatorExpertiseexperienced	.887	***	
	CreatorExpertiseexpert	.826	***	
<i>Personal Content (factor 1)</i>	PersonalTalksshowsdailylife	.780		Keep
	PersonalTalksshowshome	.759	***	

	PersonalTalksshowsfriendsfamily	.856	***	
	PersonalTalksshowspersonalasp ects	.857	***	
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfee llikeIknow	.801		Keep
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfee laconnectionto	.826	***	
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIco uldbefriendswith	.806	***	
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	CreatorAuthenticitydontcurryfa vour	.636		Keep
	CreatorAuthenticitydonotpreten d	.680	***	
	CreatorAuthenticityknowwhatth eystandfor	.782	***	
	CreatorAuthenticityclearphiloso phy	.775	***	
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	CreatorAuthenticitytrimyoursail s	.851		Keep
	CreatorAuthenticitydistortthems elves	.803	***	
<i>Creator Trust</i>	CreatorTrustdependable	.826		Keep
	CreatorTrusthonest	.892	***	
	CreatorTrustreliable	.900	***	
	CreatorTrustsincere_SQT	.883	***	
	CreatorTrusttrustworthy	.906	***	



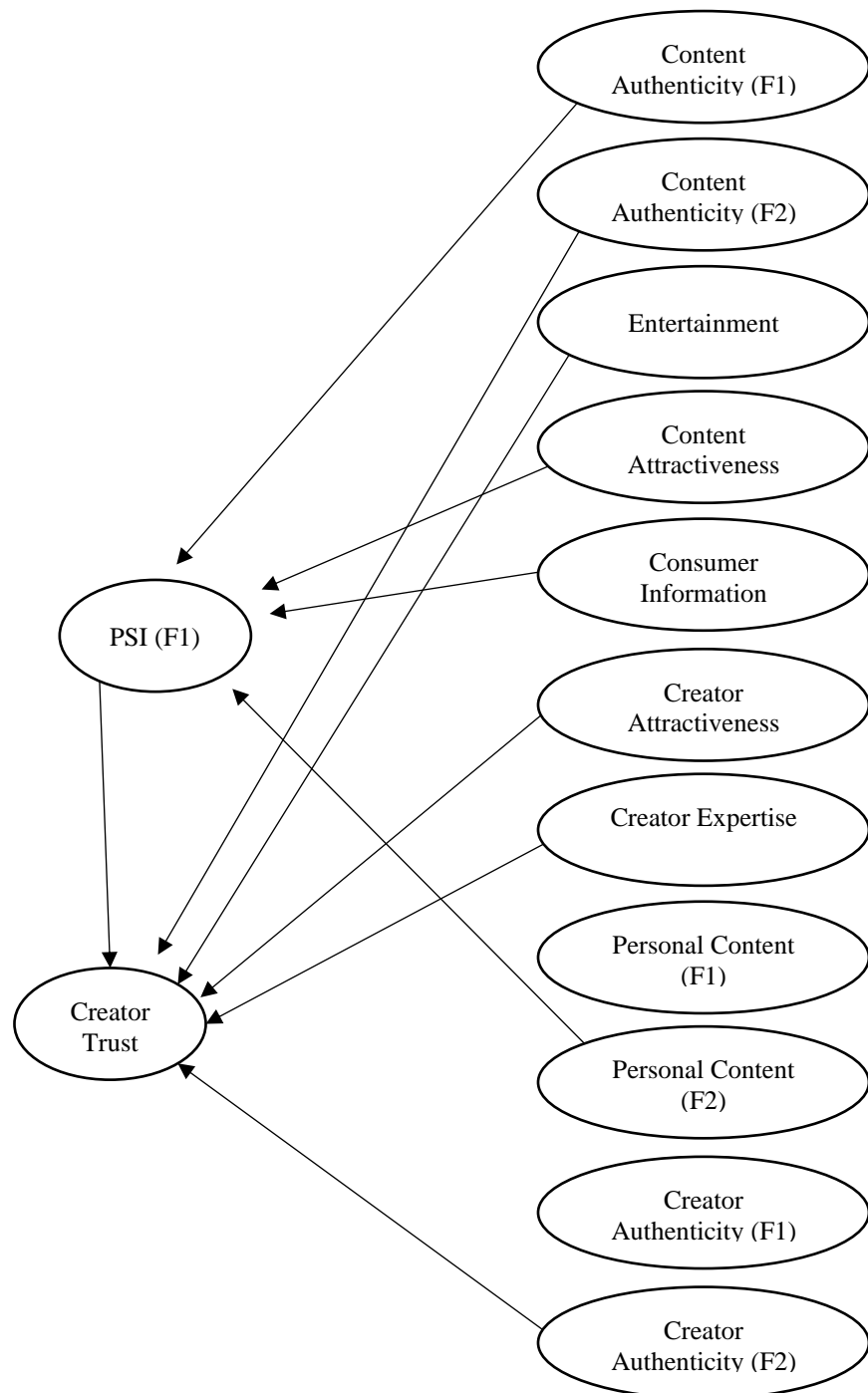
**Figure 20 Path diagram: content and creator characteristics, PSI (factor 1), and creator trust (V1)**

This analysis suggested that the removal of several key content and creator constructs would strengthen the overall model. This same model (content and creator characteristics, PSI factor 1, and creator trust) was rerun with only certain characteristics leading to PSI (factor 1) and creator trust. Content authenticity (factor 1), content attractiveness, consumer information, and personal content (factor 2) were analysed leading to a relationship with the content creator (PSI factor 1). Content authenticity (factor 2), entertainment, creator attractiveness, creator expertise, and creator authenticity (factor 2) were analysed leading to creator trust. Although constructs leading to creator trust were not all significant in the prior version of this model, the constructs included here were either significant or very close to being significant ( $p < 1.0$ ). The results of this CFA can be seen in Table 38 and Figure 21 shows the path diagram. Of these content and creator characteristics, all were now significant apart from content authenticity (factor 2) leading to creator trust.

**Table 38 Content and creator characteristics, PSI (factor 1), and creator trust – version 2**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.482	***	Keep
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	PSI_F1	.342	***	Keep
<i>Consumer Information</i>	PSI_F1	-.090	.038	Keep
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	.213	***	Keep
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	.007	.913	Discard
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	Creator_Trust	-.081	.214	Discard
<i>Entertainment</i>	Creator_Trust	.204	.003	Keep
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	Creator_Trust	.475	***	Keep
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	Creator_Trust	.409	***	Keep
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	Creator_Trust	.135	.008	Keep
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticityconnectswit	.771		Keep
	hwhatisreallyimportant			
	ContentAuthenticityconnectspe	.747	***	
	opletotheirrealselves			
	ContentAuthenticityimportantva	.804	***	
	lues			
	ContentAuthenticitymeaningtoli	.793	***	
	ves			
	ContentAuthenticitycare	.798	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymoralvalues	.808	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymoralprinci	.781	***	
	ples			
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticitygivesback	.754	***	Keep
	ContentAuthenticityhonest	.728	***	
	ContentAuthenticityvaluepromi	.785	***	
	se			
	ContentAuthenticitynotbetray	.716	***	
	PSIhopetheyachievegoals	.730	***	
	PSIcareaboutthem	.826	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	PSIwouldliketomeetthem	.760	***	Keep
	PSIviewthemonanother	.776	***	
	PSIlikereadinghearing	.780	***	
	ContentAuthenticitysurvivestren	.825		
	ds			
<i>Entertainment</i>	ContentAuthenticitysurvivestim	.872	***	Keep
	es			
	ContentAuthenticitytimeless	.733	***	
	ContentAuthenticityhistory	.697	***	
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	Entertainmentpleasing	.836		Keep
	Entertainmentenjoyable	.815	***	
	Entertainmententertaining	.878	***	
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	ContentAttractivenesshighqualit	.755		Keep
	yimagesorvideo			
	ContentAttractivenesshighqualit	.756	***	
	y			

	ContentAttractivenessconsistent	.699	***	
	ContentAttractivenessatmospher e	.817	***	
	ContentAttractivenesseditedwell	.710	***	
	ContentAttractivenesspleasingo ntheeye	.686	***	
	ContentAttractivenessdesigned well	.808	***	
<i>Consumer Information</i>	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinf ormationtogiveyouideatopurcha sesome	.708		Keep
	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinf ormationtodecidewhethertopurc hase	.757	***	
	ConsumerinfoInformationuseful ness	.551	***	
	ConsumerinfoUsesspecificbrand productincontent	.830	***	
	ConsumerinfoReviewsspecificb randproductincontent	.858	***	
	ConsumerinfoMentionsspecific brandproductincontent	.818	***	
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	CreatorAttractivenesssexy	.722		Keep
	CreatorAttractivenesselegant	.817	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessbeautiful	.890	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessclassy	.701	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessattractive	.869	***	
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	CreatorExpertiseskilled	.884		Keep
	CreatorExpertisequalified	.879	***	
	CreatorExpertiseknowledgeable	.881	***	
	CreatorExpertiseexperienced	.887	***	
	CreatorExpertiseexpert	.826	***	
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfee llikeIknow	.799		Keep
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfee laconnectionto	.836	***	
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIco uldbefriendswith	.798	***	
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	CreatorAuthenticitytrimyoursail s	.818		Keep
	CreatorAuthenticitydistortthems elves	.836	***	
<i>Creator Trust</i>	CreatorTrustdependable	.826		Keep
	CreatorTrusthonest	.893	***	
	CreatorTrustreliable	.900	***	
	CreatorTrustsincere_SQT	.883	***	
	CreatorTrusttrustworthy	.906	***	



**Figure 21 Path diagram: content and creator characteristics, PSI (factor 1) and creator trust (V2)**

#### **6.5.4 Content Characteristics, PSI, System Trust in Blog and Vlog Content, and PSI**

With these CFA results giving insight into key constructs to place in the structural model, the final pathway model itself could begin to be pieced together. The CFA of each component of the model and these components placed together showed that all items were measuring the construct that they should be. Thus, before deleting any non-significant items from the final model, all content and creator constructs need to once again be analysed, this time, against the final trust components: system trust in blog and vlog content, PSI (factor 1), and creator trust.

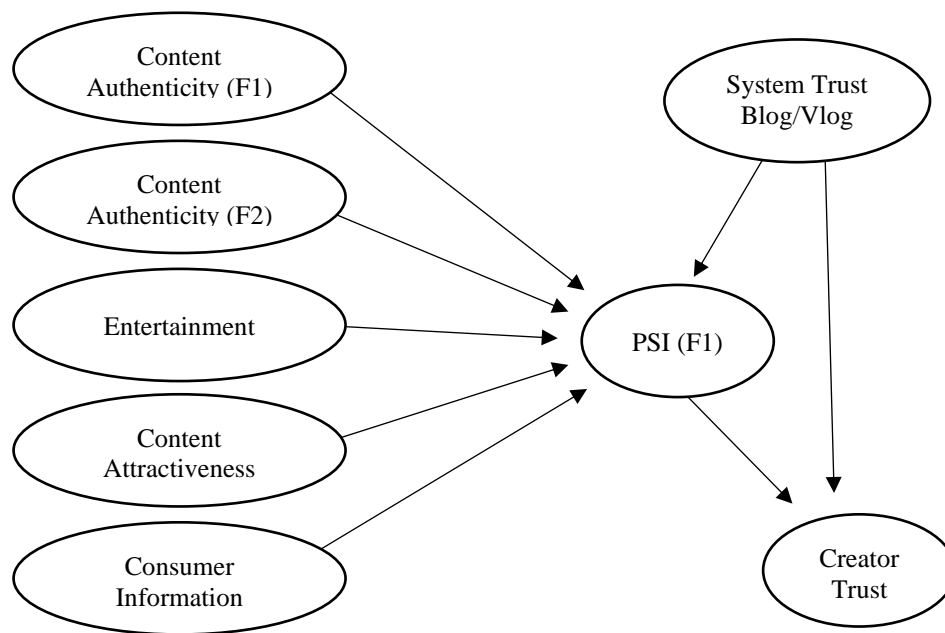
Next, all content characteristics were analysed against system trust in blog and vlog content, PSI (factor 1), and creator trust. The prior analyses showed that the models were stronger with the content characteristics leading to PSI (factor 1) rather than creator trust. Thus, this model had content authenticity (factors 1 and 2), entertainment, content attractiveness, and consumer information, all leading to PSI (factor 1), and PSI (factor 1) as well as system trust in blog and vlog content, leading to creator trust. The results of this CFA can be seen in Table 39 below and Figure 22 shows the path diagram. The CFA here indicates the model may fit better by eliminating content authenticity (factor 2) and entertainment from the model. It also suggests that system trust in blog and vlog content lead only to creator trust rather than to PSI (factor 1).

What this suggests is that system trust in blog and vlog content influences creator trust directly (rather than PSI). It also shows that the key aspects of blog and vlog content that influence a pseudo-relationship (PSI) with a content creator are authenticity and content attractiveness – both of which were highlights as key influencers of creator trust in the qualitative study.

**Table 39 Content characteristics, PSI (factor 1), system trust – blog/vlog, and creator trust**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.029	.446	Discard
	PSI_F1	.576	***	Keep
	PSI_F1	.038	.576	Discard
	PSI_F1	.045	.604	Discard
	PSI_F1	.316	***	Keep
<i>Entertainment Content Attractiveness</i>	PSI_F1	-.066	.129	
<i>Consumer Information PSI (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	.411	***	Keep
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	Creator_Trust	.241	***	Keep
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsLookin gforInfo	.780		Keep
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCredibil ity	.827	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsInstitute sandPeople	.787	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfide nceinpeopleaddinginfotoblogsvl ogs	.838	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfide nceinfindinginfo	.779	***	
<i>Creator Trust</i>	CreatorTrustdependable	.807		Keep
	CreatorTrusthonest	.887	***	
	CreatorTrustreliable	.896	***	
	CreatorTrustsincere_SQT	.878	***	
	CreatorTrusttrustworthy	.904	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticityconnectswit hwhatisreallyimportant	.771		Keep
	ContentAuthenticityconnectspe opletotheirrealselves	.746	***	
	ContentAuthenticityimportantva lues	.805	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymeaningtoli ves	.792	***	
	ContentAuthenticitycare	.799	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymoralvalues	.809	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymoralprinci ples	.780	***	
	ContentAuthenticitygivesback	.754	***	
	ContentAuthenticityhonest	.729	***	
	ContentAuthenticityvaluepromi se	.784	***	
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticitynotbetray	.716	***	
	PSIlikereadinghearing	.777		Keep
	PSIhopetheyachievegoals	.730	***	
	PSIcareaboutthem	.822	***	
	PSIwouldliketomeetthem	.746	***	
	PSIviewthemonanother	.767	***	

<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	ContentAuthenticitysurvives trends	.827		Keep
	ContentAuthenticitysurvives times	.874	***	
	ContentAuthenticitytimeless	.731	***	
	ContentAuthenticityhistory	.690	***	
<i>Entertainment</i>	Entertainmentpleasing	.840		Keep
	Entertainmentenjoyable	.813	***	
	Entertainmententertaining	.875	***	
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	ContentAttractivenesshighqualit yimagesorvideo	.752		Keep
	ContentAttractivenesshighqualit y	.756	***	
	ContentAttractivenessconsistent	.697	***	
	ContentAttractivenessatmospher e	.816	***	
	ContentAttractivenesseditedwell	.710	***	
	ContentAttractivenesspleasingo ntheeye	.686	***	
	ContentAttractivenessdesigned well	.811	***	
<i>Consumer Information</i>	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinf ormationtogiveyouideatopurcha sesome	.710		Keep
	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinf ormationtodecidewhethertopurc hase	.756	***	
	ConsumerinfoInformationuseful ness	.551	***	
	ConsumerinfoUsesspecificbrand productincontent	.827	***	
	ConsumerinfoReviewsspecificb randproductincontent	.860	***	
	ConsumerinfoMentionspecific brandproductincontent	.818	***	



**Figure 22 Path diagram: content characteristics, PSI (factor 1), system trust – blog/vlog, and creator trust**

### 6.5.5 Creator Characteristics, PSI, System Trust in Blog and Vlog Content, and Creator Trust

The same analysis was then run using creator characteristics rather than content characteristics. This model had creator attractiveness, creator expertise, personal content (factors 1 and 2), and creator authenticity (factors 1 and 2), all leading to PSI (factor 1), and PSI (factor 1) as well as system trust in blog and vlog content, leading to creator trust. The results of this CFA can be seen in Table 40 and Figure 23 shows the path diagram. As the table shows, the CFA here indicates the model will be a better fit by eliminating creator attractiveness, personal content (factor 1) and creator authenticity (factor 2) from the model. It also suggests that, like the prior model using content characteristics, the model would fit better with system trust in blog and vlog content leading only to creator trust, rather than to PSI (factor 1).

What this suggests is, although our interviewees in the qualitative study suggested that they trust the content creator rather than the content, perceptions of authenticity are derived from the content and that the content is viewed as being created by the content creator. The insignificance of creator attractiveness (and significance of content

attractiveness) also supports the qualitative findings where interviewees felt creator attractiveness was not at all influential in their trust of them.

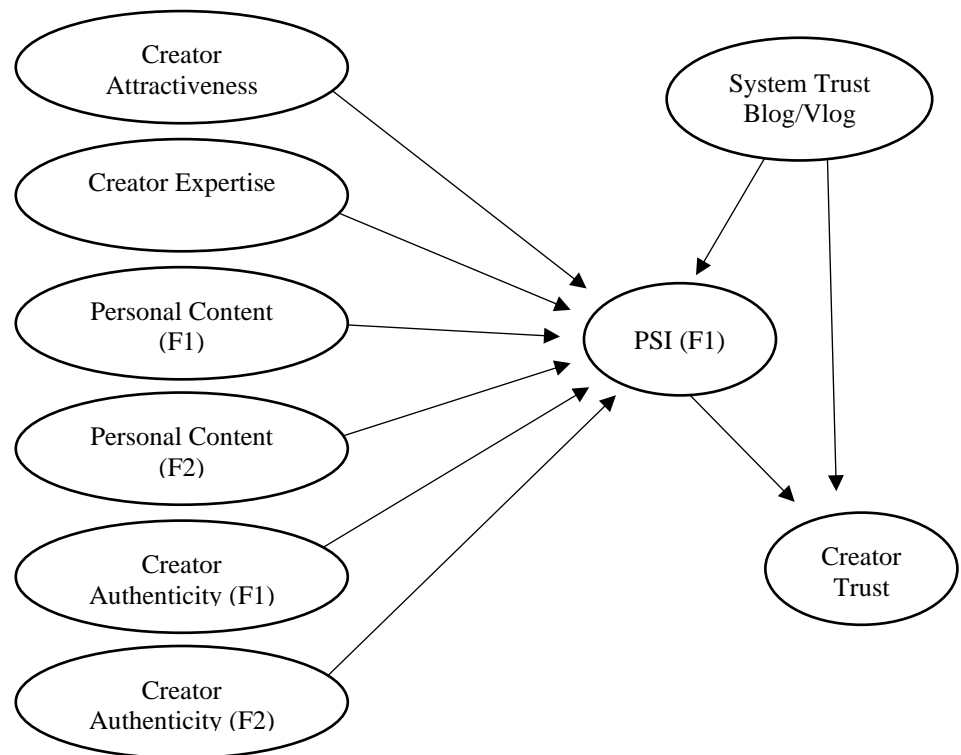
Personal content (factor 2), which relates more to the feeling of a connection with a content creator (reflecting the initiation of PSI), being significant supports both the existence of PSI and of the importance of content that allows the audience to feel like they know the content creator. Although the qualitative study suggested personal content (factor 1), where content that shows personal aspects of the content creators' life was important for them creating a connection with a creator, it appears that that content may overall create the feeling of knowing the creator which is they key aspect in building PSI with them.

Expertise here was also significant. This was viewed as important in creating a relationship with a content creator by interviewees simply because it was defined as allowing repeated exposure; expertise by experience as illustrated by their 'track-record' or volume of content.

**Table 40 Creator characteristics, PSI (factor 1), system trust – blog/vlog, and creator trust**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	PSI_F1	.030	.493	Discard
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	PSI_F1	.040	.511	Discard
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	PSI_F1	.139	.018	Keep
<i>Personal Content (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.032	.586	Discard
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	.245	.002	Keep
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.548	***	Keep
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	.026	.623	Discard
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	.409	***	Keep
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	Creator_Trust	.241	***	Keep
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsLookin gforInfo	.780		Keep
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCredibil ity	.827	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsInstitute sandPeople	.787	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfide nceinpeopleaddinginfotoblogsvl ogs	.838	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfide nceinfindinginfo	.780	***	
<i>Creator Trust</i>	CreatorTrustdependable	.807		Keep
	CreatorTrusthonest	.887	***	
	CreatorTrustreliable	.896	***	
	CreatorTrustsincere_SQT	.878	***	
	CreatorTrusttrustworthy	.903	***	
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSIhopetheyachievegoals	.725	***	Keep
	PSIcareaboutthem	.826	***	
	PSIwouldliketomeetthem	.758	***	
	PSIviewthemonanother	.776	***	
	PSIlikereadinghearing	.760	***	
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	CreatorAttractivenesssexy	.725		Keep
	CreatorAttractivenesslegant	.824	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessbeautiful	.891	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessclassy	.685	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessattractive	.869	***	
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	CreatorExpertiseskilled	.887		Keep
	CreatorExpertisequalified	.879	***	
	CreatorExpertiseknowledgeable	.882	***	
	CreatorExpertiseexperienced	.886	***	
	CreatorExpertiseexpert	.824	***	
<i>Personal Content (factor1)</i>	PersonalTalksshowsdailylife	.775		Keep
	PersonalTalksshowshome	.743	***	
	PersonalTalksshowsfriendsfamil y	.857	***	
	PersonalTalksshowspersonalasp ects	.870	***	

<i>Personal Content</i> (factor 2)	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfee llikeIknow	.802		Keep
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfee laconnectionto	.816	***	
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIco uldbefriendswith	.815	***	
<i>Creator Authenticity</i> (factor 1)	CreatorAuthenticitydontcurryfa vour	.644		Keep
	CreatorAuthenticitydonotpreten d	.675	***	
	CreatorAuthenticityknowwhatth eystandfor	.780	***	
	CreatorAuthenticityclearphiloso phy	.777	***	
<i>Creator Authenticity</i> (factor 2)	CreatorAuthenticitytrimyoursail s	.940		Keep
	CreatorAuthenticitydistortthems elves	.728	***	



**Figure 23 Path diagram: creator characteristics, PSI (factor 1), system trust – blog/vlog, and creator trust**

### **6.5.6 Content and Creator Characteristics, PSI, System Trust in Blog and Vlog Content, and Creator Trust**

Finally, content and creator characteristics were analysed together alongside PSI (factor 1), system trust in blog and vlog content, and creator trust. This reflects the structure of the final model, with the inclusion of all key components: blog and vlog characteristics (content and creator), the relationship with the content creator (PSI factor 1), predispositions to trust (system trust in blog and vlog content), and creator trust. This was initially run without removing the constructs indicated as candidates for deleting in the prior two models. Table 41 shows the results of this CFA and Figure 24 shows the path diagram. The CFA indicated that the model would be a better fit if the following content and creator variables were removed from the model: content authenticity (factor 2), entertainment, creator attractiveness, creator expertise, personal content (factor 1), creator authenticity (factor 1), and creator authenticity (factor 2). It also suggested that system trust in blog and vlog content only lead to creator trust; that the pathway to PSI (factor 1) be removed. All of these constructs, besides creator expertise, were indicated for removal in the prior two models.

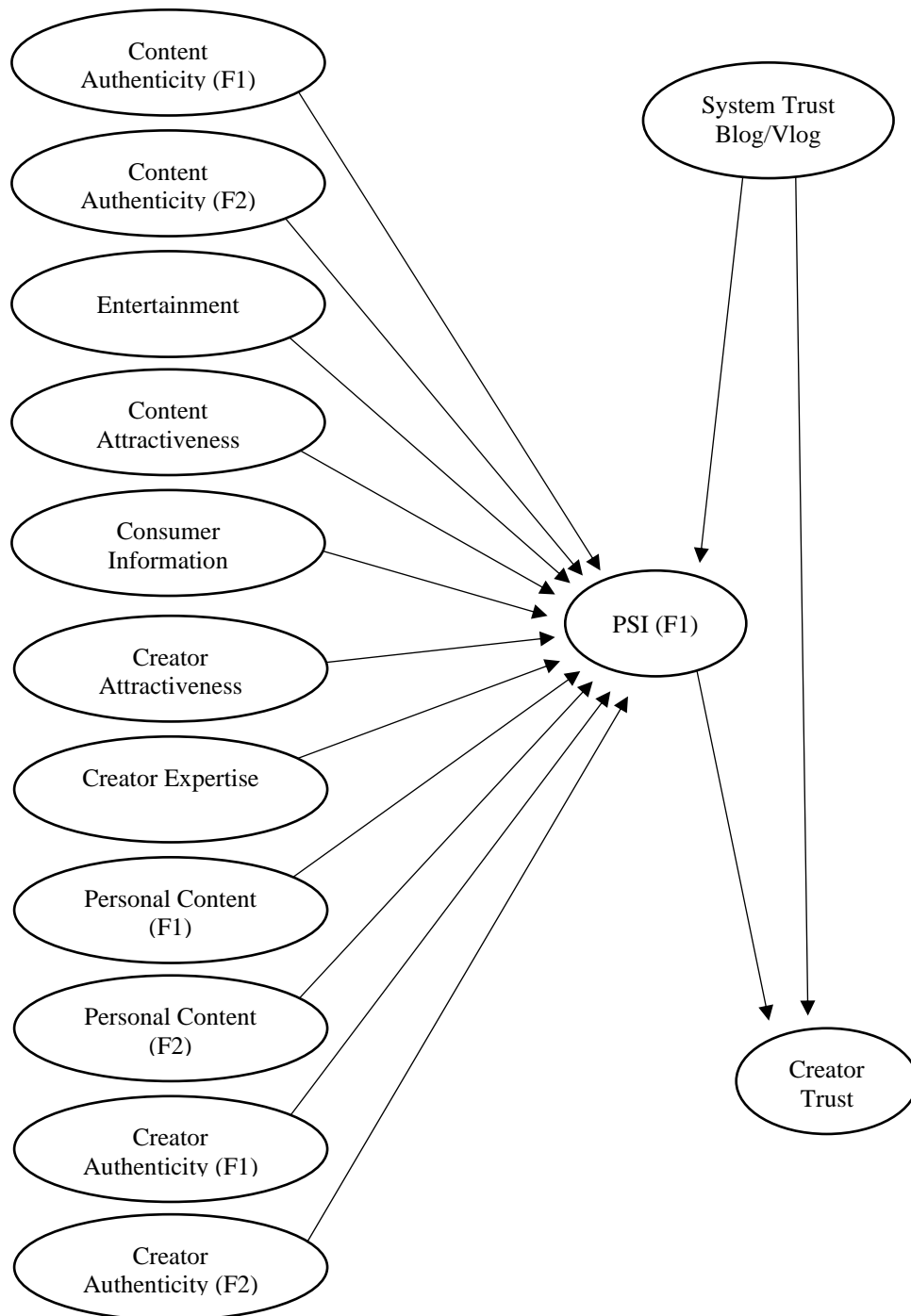
Expertise being rejected here may be due to it being an instigator of repeated exposure rather than influencing trust. Expertise by experience was seen in the qualitative study to be defined by experience as shown by content volume which allowed for an audience to view past content. This allows for an understanding of the content creator to be built. Expertise was also illustrated by the content quality in that experience in content creation was visible through high quality content. It may be that expertise in this sense is already characterised by content attractiveness in this model.

**Table 41 Content and creator characteristics, PSI (factor 1), system trust – blog/vlog, and creator trust – version 1**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.389	***	Keep
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	.021	.785	Discard
<i>Entertainment Content Attractiveness</i>	PSI_F1	-.072	.448	Discard
<i>Consumer Information</i>	PSI_F1	.379	***	Keep
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	PSI_F1	-.109	.037	Keep
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	PSI_F1	.003	.959	Discard
<i>Personal Content (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.066	.187	Discard
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	-.010	.867	Discard
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.230	.002	Keep
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	.085	.430	Discard
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	PSI_F1	-.015	.777	Discard
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	-.003	.931	Discard
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	Creator_Trust	.431	***	Keep
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	.236	***	Keep
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticityconnectswit hwhatisreallyimportant	.768		Keep
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticityconnectspe opletotheirrealselves	.740	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticityimportantva lues	.800	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticitymeaningtoli ves	.792	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticitycare	.804	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticitymoralvalues	.808	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticitymoralprinci ples	.782	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticitygivesback	.751	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticityhonest	.732	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticityvaluepromi se	.787	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticitynotbetray	.720	***	
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSIlikereadinghearing	.777		Keep
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSIhopetheyachievegoals	.738	***	
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSIcareaboutthem	.821	***	
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSIwouldliketomeetthem	.749	***	
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSIviewthemonanother	.769	***	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	ContentAuthenticitysurvivistren ds	.825		Keep
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	ContentAuthenticitysurvivistim es	.871	***	

	ContentAuthenticitytimeless	.727	***	
	ContentAuthenticityhistory	.703	***	
<i>Entertainment</i>	Entertainmentpleasing	.840		Keep
	Entertainmentenjoyable	.814	***	
	Entertainmententertaining	.876	***	
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	ContentAttractivenesshighqualit yimagesorvideo	.753		Keep
	ContentAttractivenesshighqualit y	.754	***	
	ContentAttractivenessconsistent	.697	***	
	ContentAttractivenessatmospher e	.817	***	
	ContentAttractivenesseditedwell	.710	***	
	ContentAttractivenesspleasingo ntheeye	.687	***	
	ContentAttractivenessdesigned well	.809	***	
<i>Consumer Information</i>	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinf ormationtogiveyouideatopurcha sesome	.706		Keep
	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinf ormationtodecidewhethertopurc hase	.749	***	
	ConsumerinfoInformationuseful ness	.540	***	
	ConsumerinfoUsesspecificbrand productincontent	.839	***	
	ConsumerinfoReviewsspecificb randproductincontent	.859	***	
	ConsumerinfoMentionsspecific brandproductincontent	.818	***	
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	CreatorAttractivenesssexy	.724		Keep
	CreatorAttractivenesselegant	.822	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessbeautiful	.893	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessclassy	.686	***	
	CreatorAttractivenessattractive	.870	***	
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	CreatorExpertiseskilled	.886		Keep
	CreatorExpertisequalified	.878	***	
	CreatorExpertiseknowledgeable	.881	***	
	CreatorExpertiseexperienced	.885	***	
	CreatorExpertiseexpert	.826	***	
<i>Personal Content (factor1)</i>	PersonalTalksshowsdailylife	.780		Keep
	PersonalTalksshowshome	.759	***	
	PersonalTalksshowsfriendsfamil y	.857	***	
	PersonalTalksshowspersonalasp ects	.856	***	
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfee llikeIknow	.800		Keep
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfee laconnectionto	.826	***	
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIco uldbefriendswith	.806	***	
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	CreatorAuthenticitydontcurryfa vour	.636		Keep
	CreatorAuthenticitydonotpreten d	.680	***	
	CreatorAuthenticityknowwhatth eystandfor	.783	***	
	CreatorAuthenticityclearphiloso phy	.774	***	
	CreatorAuthenticitytrimyoursail s	.876		Keep

<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	CreatorAuthenticitydistortthemselves	.781	***	
<i>Creator Trust</i>	CreatorTrustdependable	.806		Keep
	CreatorTrusthonest	.887	***	
	CreatorTrustreliable	.896	***	
	CreatorTrustsincere_SQT	.878	***	
	CreatorTrusttrustworthy	.901	***	
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCredibility	.826	***	Keep
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsInstitute sandPeople	.787	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinpeopleaddinginfotoblogsvlogs	.838	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinfindinginfo	.779	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsLookingforInfo	.779		



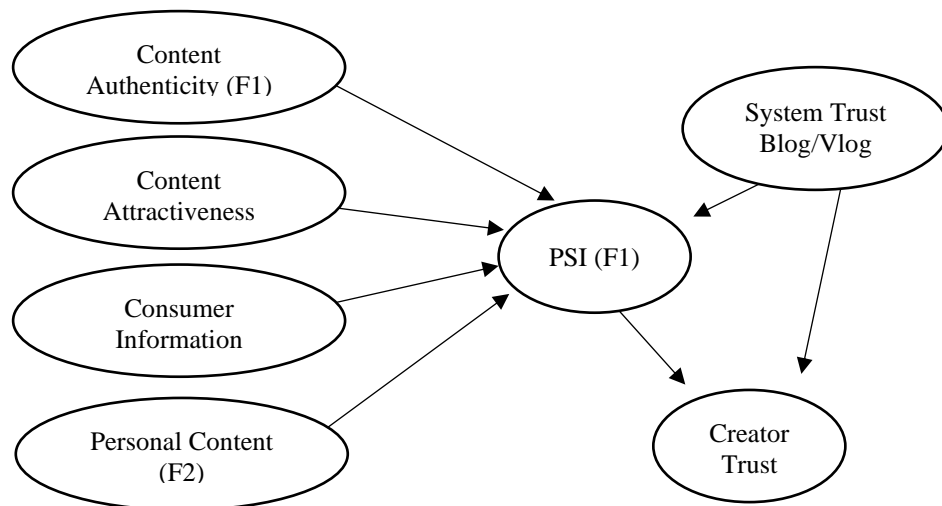
**Figure 24 Path diagram: content and creator characteristics, PSI (factor 1), system trust – blog/vlog, and creator trust (V1)**

These constructs were removed from the model and then rerun. This resulting model saw the inclusion of the following variables: content authenticity (factor 1), content attractiveness, consumer information, personal content (factor 2), PSI (factor 1), and system trust in blog and vlog content. Table 42 shows the results and Figure 25 shows the path diagram. The resulting model shows all significant constructs and items. This model is a good fit for the data and is therefore deemed the final model.

**Table 42 Content and creator characteristics, PSI (factor 1), system trust – blog/vlog, and creator trust – version 2**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>CFA Indication</i>
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.477	***	Keep
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	PSI_F1	.363	***	Keep
<i>Consumer Information</i>	PSI_F1	-.091	.032	Keep
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	.212	***	Keep
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	.384	***	Keep
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	Creator_Trust	.245	***	Keep
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticityconnectswit hwhatisreallyimportant	.774		Keep
	ContentAuthenticityconnectspe opletotheirrealselves	.747	***	
	ContentAuthenticityimportantva lues	.806	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymeaningtoli ves	.791	***	
	ContentAuthenticitycare	.799	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymoralvalues	.809	***	
	ContentAuthenticitymoralprinci ples	.782	***	
	ContentAuthenticitygivesback	.752	***	
	ContentAuthenticityhonest	.730	***	
	ContentAuthenticityvaluepromi se	.783	***	
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticitynotbetray	.713	***	Keep
	PSIlikereadinghearing	.780		
	PSIhopetheyachievegoals	.733	***	
	PSIcareaboutthem	.824	***	
	PSIwouldliketomeetthem	.752	***	
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	PSIviewthemonanother	.770	***	Keep
	ContentAttractivenesshighqualit yimagesorvideo	.751		
	ContentAttractivenesshighqualit y	.749	***	
	ContentAttractivenessconsistent	.715	***	
	ContentAttractivenessatmospher e	.826	***	
	ContentAttractivenesseditedwell	.703	***	
	ContentAttractivenesspleasingo ntheeye	.678	***	
<i>Consumer Information</i>	ContentAttractivenessdesigned well	.807	***	Keep
	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinf ormationtogiveyouideatopurcha sesome	.720		
	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinf ormationtodecidewhethertopurc hase	.770	***	
	ConsumerinfoInformationuseful ness	.565	***	
	ConsumerinfoUsesspecificbrand productincontent	.815	***	

<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	ConsumerinfoReviewsspecificb randproductincontent	.854	***	
	ConsumerinfoMentionsspecific brandproductincontent	.813	***	
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfee llikeIknow	.808		Keep
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfee laconnectionto	.834	***	
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIco uldbeFriendswith	.790	***	
<i>Creator_Trust</i>	CreatorTrustdependable	.816		Keep
	CreatorTrusthonest	.893	***	
	CreatorTrustreliable	.902	***	
	CreatorTrustsincere_SQT	.884	***	
	CreatorTrusttrustworthy	.909	***	
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCredibil ity	.822	***	Keep
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsInstitute sandPeople	.780	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfide nceinpeopleaddinginfotoblogsvl ogs	.833	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfide nceinfindinginfo	.790	***	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsLookin gforInfo	.787		



**Figure 25 Path diagram: content and creator characteristics, PSI (factor 1), system trust – blog/vlog, and creator trust (V2)**

Content authenticity (factor 1) surrounds the idea of honesty and credibility, whereas content authenticity (factor 2) focuses on the history of content. Thus, content authenticity (factor 1) remaining in the model supports the findings from the qualitative study in that it focusses on perceptions of consumer authenticity that surround honesty, reliability and the feeling of being genuine. This feeling of being a real consumer and being relatable was key to interviewees feeling a connection with a content creator.

This is similar for personal content. Interviewees from the qualitative study suggested that content creators sharing personal content that gives insight into the real lives is a way they connect with them; finding similarities with the content creator and providing a way in which they could link the content to their own lives and experiences. Personal content is key in making a content creator feel like a real friend. Personal content (factor 2) surrounds the idea of a viewer being connected to a blogger or vlogger (they feel they are someone they can be friends with, they feel a connection to, and they feel like they know them). This reflects the concept of homophily or similarity (Feder & Savastano, 2006).

Consumer information is an important influencer on PSI, likely due to it being a key defining factor in blog and vlog content. Interviewees stated that they trust their favourite content creators' opinion on consumer products because they feel a connection with them; because they feel like a friend. This relationship (PSI) acts as a filler between traditional WOM and eWOM in this sense in that the consumer feels they know the content creator and that they would be honest about their recommendations.

Finally, content attractiveness was seen by interviewees as being essential for repeated exposure to content; whereas creator attractiveness is not. This is a key thing that leads them to discard created content and a key thing that attracts them to content in the first place. This is key in allowing entertainment to be perceived in the content they view. Thus, all remaining constructs are supported by the qualitative study.

This model will be discussed further in the next section as the structural model.

### **6.5.7 Summary of model modification**

Table 43 below summarises retained and removed constructs.

**Table 43 Construct inclusion and removal in the final model**

Construct	Result	Impact on meaning
<b>Content Authenticity (F1)</b>	Retained	Focuses on honesty and credibility. Reflects authenticity as was discussed in the qualitative study.
<b>Content Authenticity (F2)</b>	Removed	Focuses on the history of content. This does not change the meaning of content authenticity as it focuses on history rather than credibility and honesty as was indicators of authenticity in the qualitative study.
<b>Entertainment</b>	Removed	Entertainment was seen to be an important characteristic of blog and vlog content to retain viewership. Retained viewership could lead to trust, but entertainment alone was not an influencer of trust. The removal of this construct therefore does not change the meaning of trust.
<b>Content Attractiveness</b>	Retained	Content attractiveness encouraged further viewing and was an indicator of blogging or vlogging expertise.
<b>Consumer Information</b>	Retained	Viewed to be a characteristic of blog and vlog content and an influencer on creator trust – influencing perceptions of authenticity and honesty in content.
<b>Creator Attractiveness</b>	Removed	Although consumers trust the content creator rather than the content, physical attractiveness was not seen to play a role in trust at all – rather the attractiveness of the content was important. The removal of this does not change the meaning of trust because content attractiveness fulfilled this attractiveness construct.
<b>Creator Expertise</b>	Removed	Expertise could be illustrated through content attractiveness – expertise as defined as being by experience was illustrated through high quality content. The removal of this construct does not therefore change the meaning of trust, rather it is reflected in the content attractiveness construct.
<b>Personal Content (F1)</b>	Removed	Reflects the illustration of personal content – showing personal aspects of life. Rather than assessing the influence of showing personal content, it simply measures whether illustrations of personal life are present. Thus, this does not change the meaning of personal content as personal content (F2) looks at the result of illustrating personal content.
<b>Personal Content (F2)</b>	Retained	This construct reflects the connection felt with a content creator – reflecting similarity and homophily.
<b>Creator Authenticity (F1)</b>	Removed	The removal of creator authenticity does not change the meaning of authenticity as it is reflected in greater detail in content authenticity (F1); what the qualitative study interviewees described as authenticity.

<b>Creator Authenticity (F2)</b>	Removed	This construct on held two items and also saw quite a broad view of authenticity. The removal of this construct did not change the meaning of authenticity due to the inclusion of content authenticity (F1) which incorporated the ideas of honesty and credibility (reflecting the qualitative study).
<b>PSI (F1)</b>	Retained	Items in this construct reflect relationship measures. Thus, retaining this construct defines the relationship aspect of PSI.
<b>PSI (F2)</b>	Removed	Items in this construct reflect envisioning the self in the content creator, rather than the actual relationship. The removal of this construct does not impact on the meaning of PSI as it removes the non-relationship items; the self, introspective items.
<b>Dispositional Trust</b>	Removed	Dispositional trust may influence on a consumer's initiation with a content creator but not on the trust in that content creator. Does not impact on the meaning of trust as system trust in the internet proved too general as system trust in blog and vlog content incorporated this on a more specific level.
<b>System Trust in Internet (F1)</b>	Removed	Removal does not impact on the meaning of trust as system trust in the internet proved too general as system trust in blog and vlog content incorporated this on a more specific level.
<b>System Trust in Internet (F2)</b>	Removed	Only contained two items and was as such removed. Removal does not impact on the meaning of trust as system trust in the internet proved too general as system trust in blog and vlog content incorporated this on a more specific level.
<b>System Trust in Blog and Vlog Content</b>	Retained	Provides a predisposition to creator trust but incorporating trust in the system of blog and vlog content, incorporating dispositional trust through past experiences.
<b>Interpersonal Trust</b>	Removed	Interpersonal trust is reflected in the direct creator trust measure. Therefore, its removal does not impact on the meaning of trust.
<b>Creator Trust</b>	Retained	Reflects a specific interpersonal trust.

During the quantitative stage of this research, several constructs were removed. Firstly, in regard to a blog/vlog audiences' predisposition to trust, only system trust in blog and vlog platforms and creator trust were retained. The removal of dispositional trust does not impact on the meaning of trust because it was reflected in a viewer's initial trust with a content creator; what allowed them to view the content in the first place, rather than influencing overall trust in a content creator. System trust in the internet (F1 and F2) were also removed and do not impact on the meaning as system trust is included in

the model but on a more specific internet level – with system trust in blog and vlog platforms. Likewise, interpersonal trust was removed as this is reflected in the more specific creator trust measure and therefore does not impact upon the meaning of trust.

Two content constructs were also removed. Content authenticity (F2) was removed, leaving content authenticity (F1) to remain in the model. Content authenticity (F2) focussed more on a history of content rather than the credibility and honesty of the content as were viewed to be more characteristic of authenticity in the qualitative study and as described in the literature review chapter. The removal of this construct therefore does not impact upon the meaning of trust. Entertainment was also removed from the model. Although this was viewed to be an important characteristic of blog and vlog content, especially to retain viewership, it was not viewed to influence trust in the content creator. Thus, the removal of this construct also does not impact upon the meaning of trust.

Finally, several creator constructs were removed from the model despite blog and vlog audiences trusting the content creator, rather than simply the content. Personal content (F1) was removed from the model as this reflects the illustration of personal content – the showing of personal aspects of a content creators' life – rather than the actual influence of showing personal content; presence over influence. Thus, the removal of this construct does not impact upon the meaning of trust and personal content (F2) remains in the model and focuses on the results of illustrating personal content. Creator attractiveness was also removed from the model which was supported by the qualitative study which highlighted that audiences are not influenced by the attractiveness of the creator but the attractiveness of the content (which remained in the model). As such, the removal of this construct, leaving the focus to be on content attractiveness, does not impact upon the meaning of trust. Creator expertise was also removed from the model as this was illustrated through content attractiveness; expertise was defined by experience and high-quality content reflected this expertise through experience. Therefore, the removal of this construct does not impact upon the meaning of trust, rather it is reflected in the attractiveness of the content itself. Finally, creator authenticity (F1 and F2) were removed from the model as this was reflected in content authenticity rather than creator authenticity; F1 was reflected in greater detail in the content authenticity construct included in the model and F2 held only two items which took on a very broad view of authenticity. Thus, the removal of creator authenticity does

not impact upon the meaning of trust and content authenticity better reflects these measures in a blog and vlog setting.

## **6.6 Validity**

Finally, this model was checked for discriminant validity using the square-root of the AVE. The results of this are presented in the Fornell-Larcker Table (Table 44), which illustrate the square-root of the AVE for each construct (the diagonal of the table) is higher than that of the correlations (below the diagonal) between that construct and any other.

**Table 44 Fornell-Larcker table**

	<b>Content Authenticity (F1)</b>	<b>Content Attractiveness</b>	<b>Consumer Information</b>	<b>Personal Content (F2)</b>	<b>System Trust (B/Vlog)</b>	<b>PSI (F1)</b>	<b>Creator Trust</b>
<b>Content Authenticity (F1)</b>	<b>.772</b>						
<b>Content Attractiveness</b>	.487	<b>.749</b>					
<b>Consumer Information</b>	.116	.092	<b>.762</b>				
<b>Personal Content (F2)</b>	.417	.188	.153	<b>.811</b>			
<b>System Trust (B/Vlog)</b>	.449	.102	.294	.223	<b>.803</b>		
<b>PSI (F1)</b>	.199	.558	.068	.411	.151	<b>.775</b>	
<b>Creator Trust</b>	.253	.271	.076	.111	.151	.191	<b>.881</b>

## 6.7 T-test

Finally, a t-test was run with the data and confirms that continued exposure to a content creator increases parasociability. As seen in Table 45, respondents who subscribed to their content creator's content had higher levels of parasocial interactions. The t-test was showed significant results,  $p < .000$ , for both PSI factor 1 and PSI factor 2.

**Table 45 Independent samples t-test for PSI vs. subscribe/no subscribe**

<i>Concept</i>	<i>Significant (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Subscribe Mean</i>	<i>Not Subscribe Mean</i>
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	.000	<b>6.0016</b>	5.3000
<i>PSI (factor 2)</i>	.000	<b>5.3760</b>	4.2639

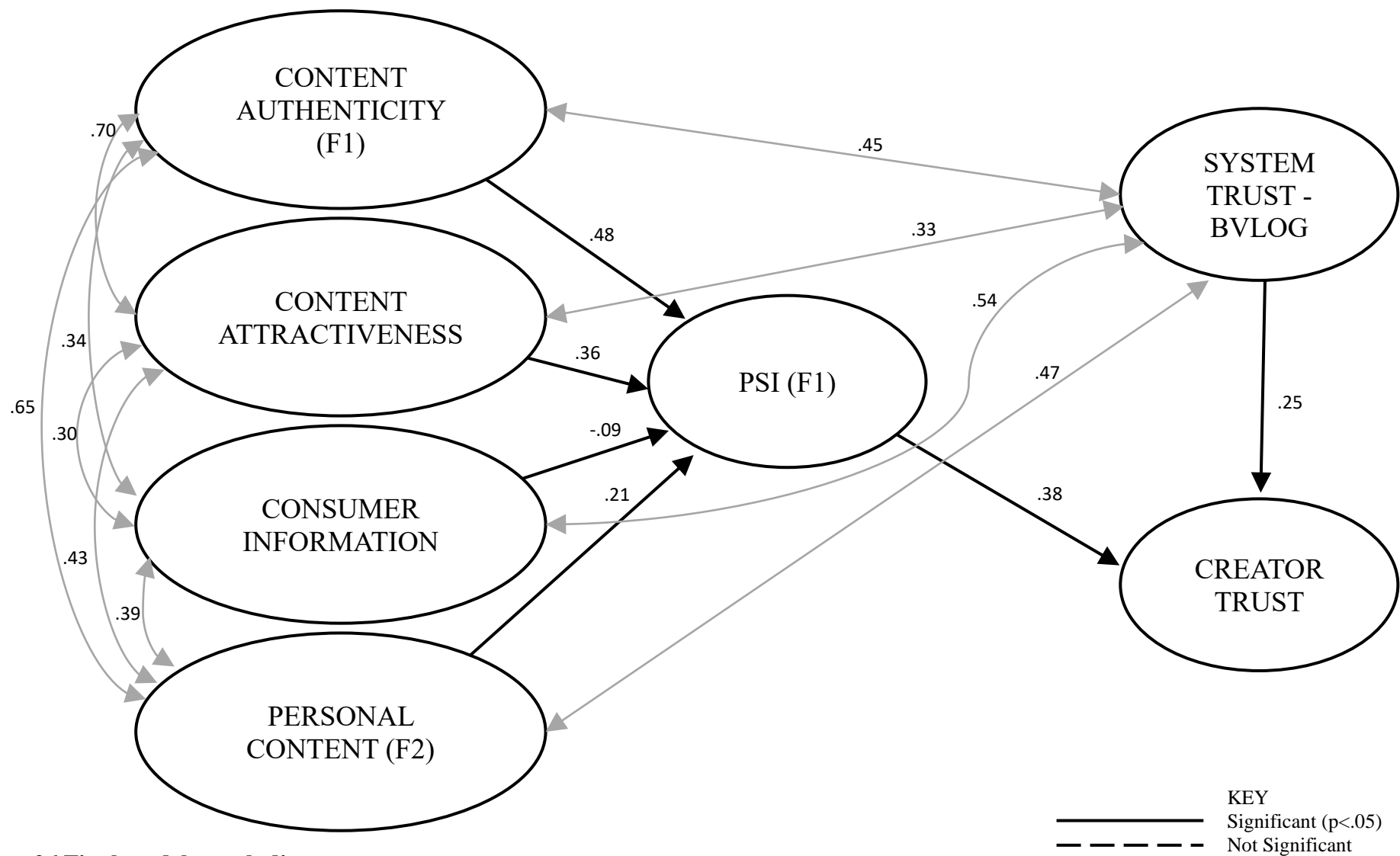
An independent samples t-test was also run between the content and creator characteristics of the blog or vlog content of respondent's favourite content creator individually alongside whether the respondent subscribed to their favourite content creator or not. Subscribing indicates frequent and continued use of the blogger or vloggers content. The results are seen in Table 46.

**Table 46 Independent samples t-test for content and creator characteristics vs. subscribe/no subscribe**

<i>Concept</i>	<i>Significant (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Subscribe Mean</i>	<i>Not Subscribe Mean</i>
<i>Consumer Information</i>	.000	<b>5.3520</b>	4.6541
<i>Personal Content (F1)</i>	.000	<b>5.4855</b>	4.5236
<i>Personal Content (F2)</i>	.000	<b>5.8866</b>	4.7987
<i>Content Authenticity (F1)</i>	.000	<b>5.7997</b>	5.1595
<i>Content Authenticity (F2)</i>	.000	<b>5.6131</b>	4.9387
<i>Creator Authenticity (F1)</i>	.000	<b>5.8268</b>	5.1792
<i>Creator Authenticity (F2)</i>	.061	3.5539	4.0472
<i>Entertainment</i>	.001	<b>6.4136</b>	5.9874
<i>Expertise</i>	.168	5.8573	5.5736
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	.008	<b>5.5212</b>	4.9585
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	.007	<b>6.1340</b>	5.7736

## **6.8 Structural Equation Modelling (RQ1): The Final Structural Model**

Having tested parts of the structural model separately and identified significant paths in parts of the model, the final path model was determined. The final path model that best fits the data set can be seen in Figure 26. The model estimates for this model can be seen in Table 47. These estimates show all pathways being significant.



**Figure 26 Final model – path diagram**

**Table 47 Final model estimates (regression weights)**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Unstandardised</i>	<i>Standardised</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>PSI_F1</i>	<i>Content_Auth_F1</i>	.500	.477	***
<i>PSI_F1</i>	<i>Content_Attract</i>	.450	.363	***
<i>PSI_F1</i>	<i>Consumer_Info</i>	-.085	-.091	.032
<i>PSI_F1</i>	<i>Personal_F2</i>	.190	.212	***
<i>Creator_Trust</i>	<i>PSI_F1</i>	.446	.384	***
<i>Creator_Trust</i>	<i>System_Trust_BVLOG</i>	.257	.245	***
<i>ContentAuthenticitygivesback</i>	<i>Content_Auth_F1</i>	1.000	.752	***
<i>ContentAttractivenessconsistent</i>	<i>Content_Attract</i>	.944	.715	***
<i>PersonalFavouriteifsomeoneIfeellikeIknow</i>	<i>Personal_F2</i>	1.138	.808	
<i>CreatorTrustdependable</i>	<i>Creator_Trust</i>	.920	.816	
<i>CreatorTrusthonest</i>	<i>Creator_Trust</i>	.953	.893	***
<i>CreatorTrustreliable</i>	<i>Creator_Trust</i>	1.103	.902	***
<i>CreatorTrustsincere_SQT</i>	<i>Creator_Trust</i>	1.012	.884	***
<i>CreatorTrustworthy</i>	<i>Creator_Trust</i>	.934	.909	***
<i>SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinfindinginfo</i>	<i>System_Trust_BVLOG</i>	.871	.790	***
<i>SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinpeopleaddinginfotoblogsVlogs</i>	<i>System_Trust_BVLOG</i>	.892	.833	***
<i>SystemTrustBlogsVlogsInstitutesandPeople</i>	<i>System_Trust_BVLOG</i>	.957	.780	***
<i>SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCredibility</i>	<i>System_Trust_BVLOG</i>	.833	.822	***
<i>SystemTrustBlogsVlogsLookingforInfo</i>	<i>System_Trust_BVLOG</i>	.912	.787	
<i>ContentAuthenticitynotbetray</i>	<i>Content_Auth_F1</i>	.928	.713	***
<i>ContentAuthenticityvaluepromise</i>	<i>Content_Auth_F1</i>	.912	.783	***
<i>ContentAuthenticityhonest</i>	<i>Content_Auth_F1</i>	1.000	.730	***
<i>ContentAuthenticitymoralprinciples</i>	<i>Content_Auth_F1</i>	.980	.782	***
<i>ContentAuthenticitymoralvalues</i>	<i>Content_Auth_F1</i>	1.010	.809	***
<i>ContentAuthenticitycare</i>	<i>Content_Auth_F1</i>	1.108	.799	***

<i>ContentAuthenticitymeaningtolives</i>	<i>Content_Auth_F1</i>	.991	.791	***
<i>ContentAuthenticityimportantvalues</i>	<i>Content_Auth_F1</i>	.921	.806	***
<i>ContentAuthenticityconnectspeopletotheirrealselves</i>	<i>Content_Auth_F1</i>	1.095	.747	***
<i>ContentAuthenticityconnectswithwhatisreallyimportant</i>	<i>Content_Auth_F1</i>	1.000	.774	
<i>ContentAttractivenessatmosphere</i>	<i>Content_Attract</i>	1.000	.826	***
<i>ContentAttractivenesseditedwell</i>	<i>Content_Attract</i>	1.149	.703	***
<i>ContentAttractivenesspleasingontheeye</i>	<i>Content_Attract</i>	.657	.678	***
<i>ContentAttractivenessdesignedwell</i>	<i>Content_Attract</i>	1.267	.807	***
<i>ContentAttractivenesshighquality</i>	<i>Content_Attract</i>	1.319	.749	***
<i>ContentAttractivenesshighqualityimagesorvideo</i>	<i>Content_Attract</i>	1.171	.751	
<i>ConsumerinfoUsespecificbrandproductincontent</i>	<i>Consumer_Info</i>	1.000	.815	***
<i>ConsumerinfoReviewspecificbrandproductincontent</i>	<i>Consumer_Info</i>	.967	.854	***
<i>ConsumerinfoInformationusefulness</i>	<i>Consumer_Info</i>	.849	.565	***
<i>ConsumerinfoMentionsspecificbrandproductincontent</i>	<i>Consumer_Info</i>	1.000	.813	***
<i>ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinformationtogiveyouideatopurchase</i>	<i>Consumer_Info</i>	1.149	.720	
<i>ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinformationtodecidewhethertopurchase</i>	<i>Consumer_Info</i>	1.071	.770	***
<i>PersonalFavouriteis someoneI feel a connection to</i>	<i>Personal_F2</i>	.324	.834	***
<i>PersonalFavouriteis someoneI could be friends with</i>	<i>Personal_F2</i>	.996	.790	***
<i>PSIhopetheyachievegoals</i>	<i>PSI_F1</i>	.942	.733	***
<i>PSIcareaboutthem</i>	<i>PSI_F1</i>	.997	.824	***

<i>PSI would like to meet them</i>	<i>PSI_F1</i>	1.066	.752	***
<i>PSI view the monanot her</i>	<i>PSI_F1</i>	1.000	.770	***
<i>PSI like reading hearing</i>	<i>PSI_F1</i>	1.125	.780	

Table 48 summarises the model fit indices for this final model. The CMIN/DF is close to 2.000 at 2.049, indicating a good fit. The GFI was .788 and the AGFI was .762 which are both acceptable fit indices. The SRMR was .0623 which indicates good model fit. Likewise, the RMSEA was less than .08 at .059, indicating a very good model fit. The TLI, CFI exceed .9, indicating a good model fit. Figure 27 shows the final model with the standardised weightings.

**Table 48 Fit indices for final model**

<i>Model Fit Indices</i>	
<i>CMIN/DF</i>	2.049
<i>SRMR</i>	.0623
<i>RMSEA</i>	.059
<i>CFI</i>	.908
<i>TLI</i>	.901

### 6.8.1 Alternate Models

The final model resulted from a series of modifications to ensure adequate fit. Thus, the final model was compared with two alternative models to ensure that the final model was indeed the best fitting model for the data. The first alternative model contains the same variables as the final model, however instead of having pathways from the content and creator characteristics (content authenticity factor 1, content attractiveness, consumer information, and personal content factor 2) solely to the relationship variable (PSI factor 1), there are also pathways from these content and creator characteristics directly to creator trust. This can be seen in Figure 27. Table 49 shows the model estimates for this alternative model. This model has adequate fit with a CMIN/DF of 2.026, TLI of .903, GFI of .791, CFI of .910, RMSEA of .059 and an SRMR of 0.0568. However, despite this good model fit indices, the alternative model holds several non-significant pathways. PSI (factor 1), consumer information, and personal content (factor 2) to creator trust were not significant. Thus, because the pathways directly to creator trust from these content and creator variables were the addition to this alternative model, in order to remove non-significant variables, it would mean removing a number of these additional pathways. Thus, alternative model 1 an inferior model to the final model.

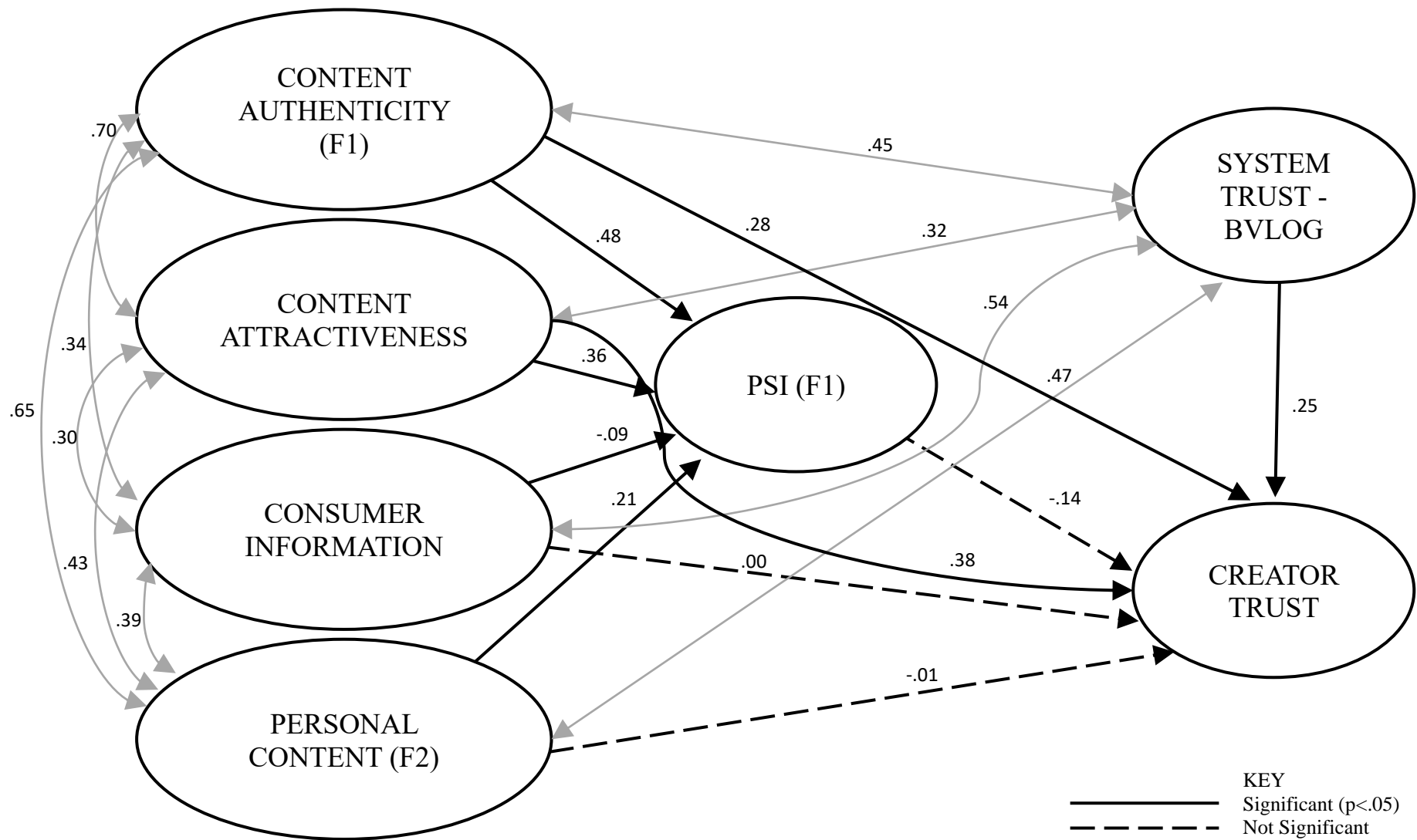


Figure 27 Alternative model 1

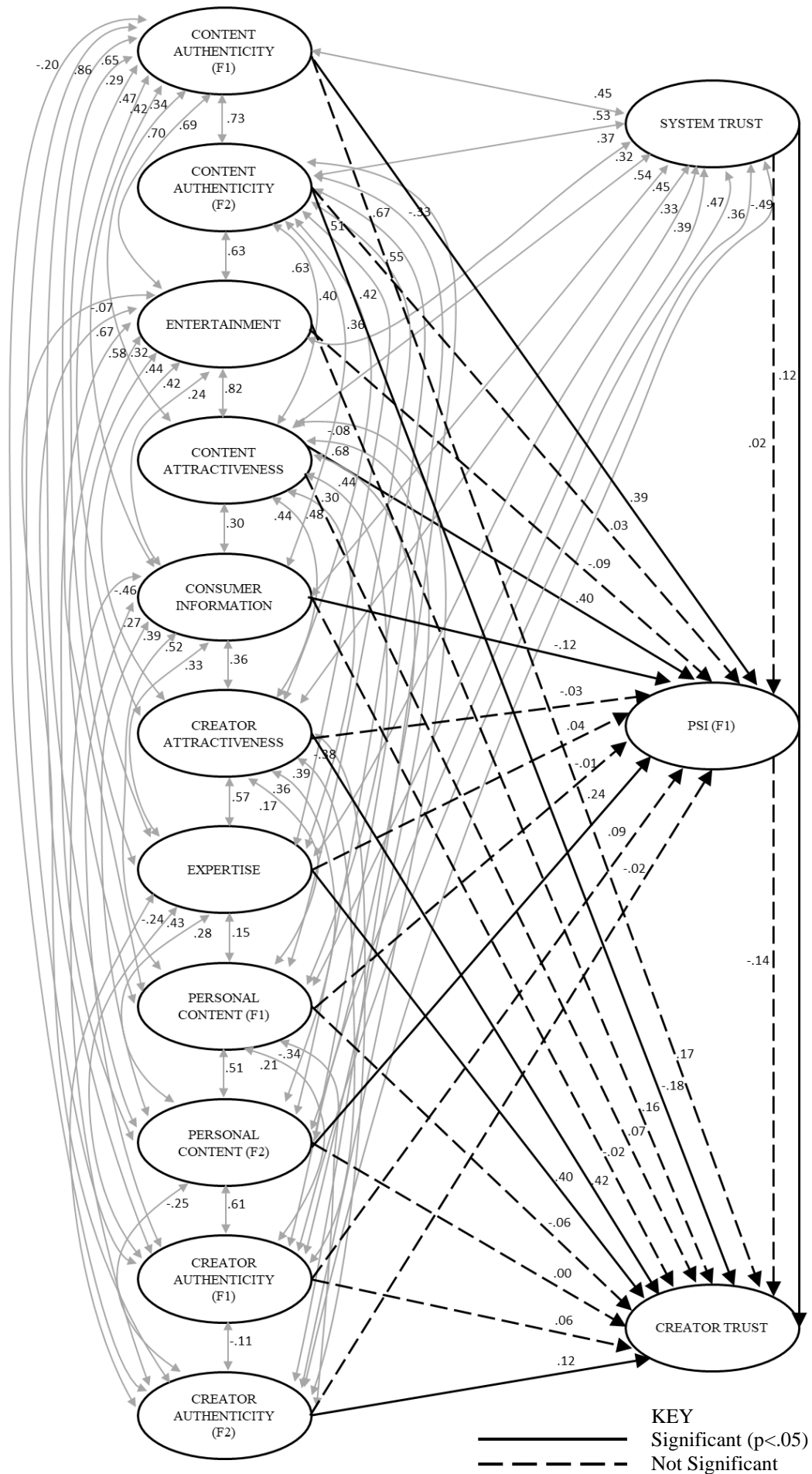
**Table 49 Alternative model 1 estimates**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.471	***
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	PSI_F1	.350	***
<i>Consumer Information</i>	PSI_F1	-.092	.034
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	.222	***
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	-.144	.287
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	Creator_Trust	.209	.003
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	.277	.016
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	Creator_Trust	.376	***
<i>Consumer Information</i>	Creator_Trust	-.004	.955
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	Creator_Trust	-.014	.872
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticitygivesback	.752	***
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	ContentAttractivenessconsistent	.716	***
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfellikeI know	.808	
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfelaconnectionto	.834	***
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIcouldbefriendswith	.790	***
<i>Creator Trust</i>	CreatorTrustdependable	.817	
	CreatorTrusthonest	.894	***
	CreatorTrustreliable	.901	***
	CreatorTrustsincere_SQT	.884	***
	CreatorTrusttrustworthy	.908	***
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinfindinginfo	.790	***
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinpeopleaddinginfotoblogsvlogs	.833	***
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsInstitutesandPeople	.779	***
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCredibility	.823	***

	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsLookingforInfo	.787	
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	ContentAuthenticitynotbetray	.713	***
	ContentAuthenticityvaluepromise	.783	***
	ContentAuthenticityhonest	.731	***
	ContentAuthenticitymoralprinciples	.783	***
	ContentAuthenticitymoralvalues	.810	***
	ContentAuthenticitycare	.800	***
	ContentAuthenticitymeaningtolives	.790	***
	ContentAuthenticityimportantvalues	.805	***
	ContentAuthenticityconnectspeopletot heirrealselves	.746	***
	ContentAuthenticityconnectswithwhat isreallyimportant	.774	
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	ContentAttractivenessatmosphere	.823	***
	ContentAttractivenesseditedwell	.703	***
	ContentAttractivenesspleasingontheeye	.678	***
	ContentAttractivenessdesignedwell	.803	***
	ContentAttractivenesshighquality	.751	***
	ContentAttractivenesshighqualityimagesorvideo	.755	
<i>Consumer Information</i>	ConsumerinfoUsespecificbrandproductincontent	.815	***
	ConsumerinfoReviewspecificbrandproductincontent	.854	***
	ConsumerinfoInformationusefulness	.564	***
	ConsumerinfoMentionspecificbrandproductincontent	.813	***
	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinformationtogiveyouideatopurchasesome	.719	
	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinformationtodecidewhethertopurchase	.770	***
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSIhopetheyachievegoals	.729	***
	PSIcareaboutthem	.826	***
	PSIwouldliketomeetthem	.761	***
	PSIviewthemonanother	.776	***
	PSIlikereadinghearing	.781	

The second alternative model contains all content and creator constructs: content authenticity (factors 1 and 2), entertainment, content attractiveness, consumer information, creator attractiveness, creator expertise, personal content (factors 1 and 2), and creator authenticity (factors 1 and 2). These characteristics each have pathways to both the relationship with the content creator (PSI factor 1) and creator trust. System trust in blog and vlog content has pathways to both PSI (factor 1) and creator trust, and PSI (factor 1) leads only to creator trust. This can be seen in Figure 28. Table 50 shows the model estimates for this alternative model. This model has adequate model fit with a

CMIN/DF of 1.881, GFI of .720, TLI of .872, CFI of .880, RMSEA of .054 and an SRMR of 0.0545, though TLI and CFI are below the .9 criteria. However, the alternative model holds several non-significant pathways. Non-significant pathways to the relationship with the content creator (PSI factor1) were: content authenticity (factor 2), entertainment, creator attractiveness, personal content (factor 1), creator expertise, creator authenticity (factor 1), creator authenticity (factor 2), and system trust in blog and vlog content. There were also non-significant pathways to creator trust: PSI (factor 1), content attractiveness, personal content (factor 1), content authenticity (factor 1), entertainment, consumer information, creator authenticity (factor 1), and personal content (factor 2). Thus, due to these non-significant pathways, alternative model 2 is an inferior model to the final model.



**Figure 28 Alternative model 2**

**Table 50 Alternative model 2 estimates**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Leading Item/Variable</i>	<i>Standardised Regression Weight</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.386	***
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	.033	.688
<i>Entertainment Content</i>	PSI_F1	-.086	.385
<i>Attractiveness</i>	PSI_F1	.389	***
<i>Consumer Information</i>	PSI_F1	-.115	.043
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	PSI_F1	-.030	.590
<i>Personal Content (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	-.006	.925
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	PSI_F1	.039	.447
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.085	.451
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	.237	.002
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	PSI_F1	-.021	.708
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSI_F1	.018	.753
<i>Content</i>	Creator_Trust	-.139	.168
<i>Attractiveness</i>	Creator_Trust	.069	.527
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	Creator_Trust	.395	***
<i>Personal Content (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	-.056	.379
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	.165	.151
<i>Content Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	Creator_Trust	-.176	.033
<i>Entertainment</i>	Creator_Trust	.159	.105
<i>Consumer Information</i>	Creator_Trust	-.018	.755
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	Creator_Trust	.421	***
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	Creator_Trust	.055	.619

<i>Personal Content</i> (factor 2)	Creator_Trust	.000	.996
<i>Creator Authenticity</i> (factor 2)	Creator_Trust	.121	.029
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	Creator_Trust	.135	.021
<i>System Trust – Blog/Vlog</i>	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsLookingforInfo	.797	
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCredibility	.817	***
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsInstitutesandPeople	.776	***
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinpeopleaddinginfotoblogsvlogs	.832	***
	SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinfindinginfo	.790	***
<i>Content Authenticity</i> (factor 1)	ContentAuthenticityconnectswithwhatisreallyimportant	.769	
	ContentAuthenticityconnectspeopletot heirrealselves	.740	***
	ContentAuthenticityimportantvalues	.799	***
	ContentAuthenticitymeaningtolives	.791	***
	ContentAuthenticitycare	.805	***
	ContentAuthenticitymoralvalues	.809	***
	ContentAuthenticitymoralprinciples	.783	***
	ContentAuthenticitygivesback	.751	***
	ContentAuthenticityhonest	.733	***
	ContentAuthenticityvaluepromise	.787	***
	ContentAuthenticitynotbetray	.720	***
<i>Content Authenticity</i> (factor 2)	ContentAuthenticitysurvivestrends	.825	
	ContentAuthenticitysurvivestimes	.870	***
	ContentAuthenticitytimeless	.731	***
	ContentAuthenticityhistory	.700	***
<i>Entertainment</i>	Entertainmentpleasing	.836	
	Entertainmentenjoyable	.814	***
	Entertainmententertaining	.879	***
<i>Content Attractiveness</i>	ContentAttractivenesshighqualityimagesorvideo	.755	
	ContentAttractivenesshighquality	.754	***
	ContentAttractivenessconsistent	.698	***
	ContentAttractivenessatmosphere	.818	***
	ContentAttractivenesseditedwell	.711	***
	ContentAttractivenesspleasingontheeye	.686	***
	ContentAttractivenessdesignedwell	.807	***
<i>Consumer Information</i>	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinformationtogiveyouideatopurchasesome	.712	
	ConsumerinfoUsedfavouritesinformationtodecidewhethertopurchase	.757	***
	ConsumerinfoInformationusefulness	.548	***
	ConsumerinfoUsespecificbrandproductincontent	.831	***

	ConsumerinfoReviewsspecificbrandpr oductincontent	.858	***
	ConsumerinfoMentionsspecificbrandp roductincontent	.815	***
<i>Creator Attractiveness</i>	CreatorAttractivenesssexy	.723	
	CreatorAttractivenesselegant	.819	***
	CreatorAttractivenessbeautiful	.890	***
	CreatorAttractivenessclassy	.699	***
	CreatorAttractivenessattractive	.870	***
<i>Creator Expertise</i>	CreatorExpertiseskilled	.884	
	CreatorExpertisequalified	.879	***
	CreatorExpertiseknowledgeable	.881	***
	CreatorExpertiseexperienced	.887	***
	CreatorExpertiseexpert	.826	***
<i>Personal Content (factor 1)</i>	PersonalTalksshowsdailylife	.780	
	PersonalTalksshowshome	.758	***
	PersonalTalksshowsfriendsfamily	.856	***
	PersonalTalksshowspersonalaspects	.858	***
<i>Personal Content (factor 2)</i>	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfeellikeI know	.802	
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfeelacon nectionto	.827	***
	PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIcouldbef riendswith	.804	***
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 1)</i>	CreatorAuthenticitydontcurryfavour	.638	
	CreatorAuthenticitydonotpretend	.680	***
	CreatorAuthenticityknowwhattheystan dfor	.784	***
	CreatorAuthenticityclearphilosophy	.773	***
<i>Creator Authenticity (factor 2)</i>	CreatorAuthenticitytrimyoursails	.880	
	CreatorAuthenticitydistortthemselves	.777	***
<i>PSI (factor 1)</i>	PSIhopetheyachievegoals	.732	***
	PSIcareaboutthem	.824	***
	PSIviewthemonanother	.777	***
	PSIlikereadinghearing	.779	
	PSIwouldliketomeetthem	.761	***
<i>Creator Trust</i>	CreatorTrusttrustworthy	.906	***
	CreatorTrustdependable	.825	
	CreatorTrusthonest	.892	***
	CreatorTrustreliable	.901	***
	CreatorTrustsincere_SQT	.883	***

In comparing the final model with these two alternative models, although they show potential, the alternative models hold many non-significant pathways in comparison to the final model. A larger degree of modification would be required to make these

alternative models fit perfectly. Thus, the final model (Figure 26) is deemed to be a good fit for the data, and the best model to represent the data.

### **6.8.2 Split Sample**

A split sample test was run in addition to model comparisons. The sample was randomly split using SPSS; the sample of 300 seeing two splits of 150 each. Due to the split sampling creating a very small sample (impacting on results of the SEM), parceling was undertaken to attempt to mitigate this effect. Parceling is the aggregating of items and using those aggregates as latent construct indicators (Matsunaga, 2008). Unidimensionality of the scale is required to undertake parceling, which the scales used in this research has achieved.

Items for three constructs were parceled; being those with the most items attached to them: content attractiveness, consumer information and content authenticity (F1). Items in these constructs were parceled into the recommended three parcels per construct with items randomly, using a random number generator, placed into a parcel (Matsunaga, 2008).

Content attractiveness' three parcels consisted of two with two items each and one with three items. The first contained 'designed well' and 'atmosphere'. The second contained 'edited well' and 'high quality'. The third contained 'pleasing on the eye', 'consistent', and 'high quality images or video'.

Consumer information's three parcels consisted of two items each. The first contained 'mentions specific brand/product in content' and 'uses specific brand/product in content'. The second contained 'information usefulness' and 'used favourite's information to decide whether to purchase'. The third contained 'reviews specific brand/product in content' and 'used favourites information to give you idea to purchase something'.

Content authenticity's three parcels consisted of two parcels with four items each and one with three items. The first contained 'honest', 'value promise', 'connects people to their real selves', and 'moral principles'. The second contained 'gives back', 'not betray', 'moral values', and 'care'. The third contained 'connects with what is really important', 'important values', and 'meaning to lives'.

The result of running a random split sample on the model illustrated that, even with a small sample, the model fits. Both splits reveal strong model fit indices, as seen in Table 51. The regression weights for each can be seen in Table 52 below.

**Table 51 Fit indices for split sample 1 and 2**

<i>Model Fit Indices</i>	<i>Split Sample 1</i>	<i>Split Sample 2</i>
<i>CMIN/DF</i>	1.672	1.774
<i>SRMR</i>	.0619	.0611
<i>RMSEA</i>	.067	.072
<i>CFI</i>	.936	.929
<i>TLI</i>	.927	.919

**Table 52 Standardised regression weights for split sample 1 and 2**

		<b>Split Sample 1</b>	<b>Split Sample 2</b>
<b>PSI_F1</b>	Content_Auth_F1	.467	.460
<b>PSI_F1</b>	Content_Attract	.432	.313
<b>PSI_F1</b>	Consumer_Info	-.041	-.112
<b>PSI_F1</b>	Personal_F2	.072	.368
<b>Creator_Trust</b>	PSI_F1	.495	.276
<b>Creator_Trust</b>	System_Trust_BVLOG	.238	.259
<b>PSIhopetheyachievegoals</b>	PSI_F1	.783	.682
<b>PSIcareaboutthem</b>	PSI_F1	.793	.864
<b>PSIwouldliketomeetthem</b>	PSI_F1	.740	.756
<b>PSIviewthemonanother</b>	PSI_F1	.775	.747
<b>PSIlikereadinghearing</b>	PSI_F1	.822	.747
<b>PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfeellikeIknow</b>	Personal_F2	.772	.845
<b>PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIfeelaconnectionto</b>	Personal_F2	.758	.925
<b>PersonalFavouriteissomeoneIcouldbefriendswith</b>	Personal_F2	.839	.736
<b>CreatorTrustdependable</b>	Creator_Trust	.824	.813
<b>CreatorTrusthonest</b>	Creator_Trust	.890	.901
<b>CreatorTrustreliable</b>	Creator_Trust	.903	.897
<b>CreatorTrustsincere_SQT</b>	Creator_Trust	.899	.867
<b>SystemTrustBlogsVlogsCredibility</b>	System_Trust_BVLOG	.827	.821

<b>SystemTrustBlogsVlogsInstitutesandPeople</b>	System_Trust_BVLOG	.713	.848
<b>SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinpeopleaddinginfotoblogsvlogs</b>	System_Trust_BVLOG	.830	.855
<b>SystemTrustBlogsVlogsConfidenceinfindinginfo</b>	System_Trust_BVLOG	.786	.779
<b>SystemTrustBlogsVlogsLookingforInfo</b>	System_Trust_BVLOG	.800	.765
<b>CreatorTrusttrustworthy</b>	Creator_Trust	.891	.927
<b>ContAttract_1_4</b>	Content_Attract	.871	.888
<b>ContAttract_3_6</b>	Content_Attract	.838	.864
<b>ContAttract_2_5_7</b>	Content_Attract	.870	.913
<b>ConsInfo_parcel_1_3</b>	Consumer_Info	.847	.792
<b>ConsInfo_parcel_4_5</b>	Consumer_Info	.766	.756
<b>ConsInfo_parcel_2_6</b>	Consumer_Info	.977	.951
<b>ContAuthF1_9_10_2_7</b>	Content_Auth_F1	.909	.949
<b>ContAuthF1_8_11_6_5</b>	Content_Auth_F1	.934	.933
<b>ContAuthF1_1_3_4</b>	Content_Auth_F1	.868	.862

## **6.9 Differences in Blog and Vlog Characteristics Influencing Trust (RQ2)**

In order to answer RQ2, whether there are differences in the factors that influence trust in blog content versus trust in vlog content, a regression was run. The data file was split in two, according to whether the respondent's favourite content creator was primarily a blogger or a vlogger, and the regression run based upon the constructs in the structural model.

For each condition – blog versus vlog - a multiple linear regression analysis was calculated to predict PSI (F1) based on content authenticity (F1), content attractiveness, consumer information, and personal content (F2). Table 53 presents the results of this analysis. A significant regression was calculated for blogs:  $F(4,148) = 58.315$ ,  $p < .000$ , with an  $R^2$  of .612. A significant regression was also calculated for vlogs:  $F(4,142) = 82.748$ ,  $p < .000$ , with an  $R^2$  of .700.

Content authenticity (F1), content attractiveness, and personal content (F2) were all significant predictors of both blog and vlog PSI; consumer information for both blogs and vlogs was insignificant and negative. This suggests that content authenticity, content attractiveness, and personal content for both blogs and vlogs is expected to increase the audiences parasocial interactions. As consumer information was insignificant for both blog and vlog content, it did not contribute to the multiple regression model. For both blog and vlog content, content authenticity provided the strongest influencer of PSI ( $\beta = .518$  for blogs and  $\beta = .416$  for vlogs), followed by content attractiveness ( $\beta = .278$  for blogs and  $\beta = .340$  for vlogs), and finally personal content ( $\beta = .150$  for blogs and  $\beta = .250$  for vlogs).

**Table 53 Multiple regression summary for PSI**

		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Unstandardised Coefficients		Beta	t	Sig.
						B	Std. Error			
Blogger	Personal Content (F2)	.782	.612	.601	58.317	.127	.058	.150	2.205	.029
	Consumer Information					-.066	.057	-.074	-1.158	.249
	Content Authenticity (F1)					.559	.083	.518	6.708	.000
	Content Attractiveness					.311	.076	.278	4.113	.000
Vlogger	Personal Content (F2)	.837	.700	.691	82.748	.050	.050	.250	4.434	.000
	Consumer Information					.034	.034	-.052	-1.073	.285
	Content Authenticity (F1)					.066	.066	.416	6.095	.000
	Content Attractiveness					.072	.072	.340	5.534	.000

Dependent Variable: PSI

A multiple linear regression analysis was also calculated to predict creator trust based on PSI (F1) and System trust in blog and vlog content. Table 54 presents the results. This regression was run on data split between respondents with a favourite blogger versus those with a favourite vlogger to determine the differences, if any, between the two content formats. A significant regression equation was found for blogs:  $F(2,150) = 24.834, p < .000$ , with an  $R^2$  of .249. A significant regression equation was also found for vlogs:  $F(2,144) = 15.881, p < .000$ , with an  $R^2$  of .181. PSI (F1). System trust in blogs and vlogs was a significant predictor of both blog and vlog creator trust. This suggests that PSI and system trust in blogs and vlogs are expected to increase the audiences trust in a blogger or vlogger.

**Table 54 Multiple regression summary for creator trust**

		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Unstandardised Coefficients		Beta	t	Sig.
						B	Std. Error			
Blogger	PSI (F1)	.499	.249	.239	24.834	.335	.097	.279	3.452	.001
	System Trust – Blogs and Vlogs					.328	.088	.301	3.732	.000
Vlogger	PSI (F1)	.425	.181	.169	15.881	.331	.082	.311	4.014	.000
	System Trust – Blogs and Vlogs					.191	.065	.229	2.962	.004

Dependent Variable: Creator Trust

A t-test was also looked into to see if there were any characteristics differing significantly in their mean between blog and vlog content. These findings are displayed in Table 55. First, vlog content ( $M=5.47$ ,  $SD=1.40$ ) was viewed as being more personal than blog content ( $M=5.15$ ,  $SD=1.35$ ); it used more personal content whereby vloggers tend to show more of their own personal life (including their everyday life and their own friends and family). This is reflective of the more common daily vlog style and the visual media of vlogging in comparison to the text-heavy blog content. This was a significant difference between blog and vlog content,  $t(298)=-2.028$ ,  $p=.043$ .

Consumer information was more characteristic of blog content ( $M=5.44$ ,  $SD=1.15$ ) than of vlog content ( $M=5.00$ ,  $SD=1.38$ ). Blogs were viewed as having more content which talks about using and reviewing products. This relates to the finding that entertainment was seen to be more of a vlog characteristic. Vlogs were viewed as being more entertaining, enjoyable and pleasing. This shows that people view blogs as a more informative platform; based more on information than entertainment. Whereas vlogs were seen to be primarily entertainment based; a more visual medium primarily used as a form of entertainment over information. This was a significant difference between blog and vlog content,  $t(298)=2.985$ ,  $p=.003$ .

Vlogs ( $M=6.18$ ,  $SD=.84$ ) were seen to have more attractive content than blogs ( $M=5.95$ ,  $SD=.92$ ). They were viewed more as being designed well, pleasing on the eye, well edited, providing a good atmosphere, consistent, high quality, and using clear and good quality visuals. This was a significant difference between blog and vlog content,  $t(298)=-2.304$ ,  $p=.022$ .

Parasocial interaction was also seen to be more prevalent in blog content ( $M=5.35$ ,  $SD=1.30$ ) than in vlog content ( $M=4.99$ ,  $SD=1.32$ ). This was for parasocial interaction factor 2 only, where the respondents related more to bloggers than vloggers in that they could see themselves in the blogger; the blogger reminds them more of themselves, they share the same qualities and problems, and they can imagine themselves in the place of the blogger. This was a significant difference between blog and vlog content,  $t(298)=2.396$ ,  $p=.017$ .

**Table 55 Independent samples t-test**

<i>Concept</i>	<i>Significant (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Blog Mean</i>	<i>Vlog Mean</i>
<i>Personal (factor 1)</i>	.043	5.150	<b>5.473</b>
<i>Consumer information</i>	.003	<b>5.437</b>	5.000
<i>Entertainment</i>	.001	6.179	<b>6.499</b>
<i>Content attractiveness</i>	.022	5.948	<b>6.183</b>
<i>PSI (factor 2)</i>	.017	<b>5.353</b>	4.992

Thus, in answering Research Question Two, there are no major significant differences between blog and vlog characteristics leading to their trust. However, overall blogs were seen to be more informational; consumer information heavy. Vlogs were viewed as being more entertaining and attractive. They were also viewed as being more personal and authentic than blogs, likely because of their visual medium. Interestingly, blogs were seen to be more parasocial in that people could see themselves in the blogger more than the vlogger.

## 6.10 Hypotheses

Table 56 displays the hypotheses related to Research Question One, investigating why consumers trust blog and vlog content. It also shows whether these hypotheses were supported or rejected.

H1b, H1c, H1d, H2c, H3c, and H5a were all supported as the strongest influencers of creator trust in blog and vlog content in the structural equation model discussed prior. Hypothesis H6 was assessed using an independent samples t-test and was also confirmed. All other hypotheses were rejected in regard to the structural model as key content creator trust influencers. Some of these rejections were quite surprising considering the emphasis placed on them in Study One. The entertainment factor of vlogs was emphasised by interviewees; however, it is apparent that this may be an influential factor in them consuming vlog content; not in their trust of that content. Creator attractiveness not being influential in creating parasocial interactions in blog and vlog content is also interesting. Past parasocial literature illustrated this as an influencer of parasocial intensity (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987), however our findings reflect the views of our Study One participants who suggested that the physical attractiveness of the person (the blogger or vlogger) is

not influential but the attractiveness of their content (e.g. editing and quality) is. Finally, of the predispositions to trust, only system trust in blog and vlog content was the only influential trust concept in building overall creator trust. What is surprising is that interpersonal trust is not as influential considering the importance interviewee's in Study One placed on the connection or relationship they felt with a content creator.

**Table 56 Research question one hypotheses results**

	<i>Hypotheses</i>	<i>Decision</i>
<i>H1a</i>	Entertaining b/vlog content helps build a relationship with the content creator	Rejected
<i>H1b</i>	Attractive b/vlog content helps build a relationship with the content creator	Confirmed
<i>H1c</i>	Consumer information (in the form of product reviews and recommendations) in b/vlog content helps build a relationship with the content creator	Confirmed
<i>H1d</i>	Authentic b/vlog content helps build a relationship with the content creator	Confirmed
<i>H2a</i>	Illustrating the creator as authentic in their created content helps build a relationship with the content creator	Rejected
<i>H2b</i>	Illustrating the creator as an expert (by experience) in their created content helps build a relationship with the content creator	Rejected
<i>H2c</i>	Personal content about the creator helps build a relationship with the content creator	Confirmed
<i>H2d</i>	Illustrating the creator as attractive in their created content helps build a relationship with the content creator	Rejected
<i>H3a</i>	Dispositional trust encourages audience trust in a content creator	Rejected
<i>H3b</i>	System trust (in the Internet) encourages audience trust in a content creator	Rejected
<i>H3c</i>	System trust (in blog and vlog content) encourages audience trust in a content creator	Rejected
<i>H3d</i>	Interpersonal trust encourages audience trust in a content creator	Rejected
<i>H4a</i>	Dispositional trust encourages the development of a relationship with a content creator	Rejected
<i>H4b</i>	System trust (in the Internet) encourages the development of a relationship with a content creator	Rejected
<i>H4c</i>	System trust (in blog and vlog content) encourages the development of a relationship with a content creator	Confirmed
<i>H4d</i>	Interpersonal trust encourages the development of a relationship with a content creator	Rejected
<i>H5a</i>	Building a relationship with the content creator helps build trust in a specific content creator	Confirmed
<i>H5b</i>	Trust in a specific content creator helps build a relationship with that content creator	Rejected

<i>H6</i>	A blog or vlog audience can develop a parasocial relationship with a content creator	Confirmed
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Finally, the results of the hypotheses related to Research Question Two are displayed in Table 57. None of the hypotheses were confirmed using the multiple regression analysis as there were no statistically significant differences between blog and vlog content for creating PSI in regard to the blog and vlog characteristics.

**Table 57 Research question two hypotheses results**

	<i>Hypotheses</i>	<i>Decision</i>
<i>H7</i>	Blogs will see consumer information influencing trust more so than vlogs.	Rejected
<i>H8</i>	Vlogs will see authentic content influencing trust more so than blogs.	Rejected
<i>H9</i>	Vlogs will see content attractiveness influencing trust more so than blogs.	Rejected
<i>H10</i>	Vlogs see personal content influencing trust more so than blogs.	Rejected

## 6.11 Conclusion

The results of this study have provided answers to the two Research Questions of this thesis:

1. Why do consumers trust blog and vlog content?
2. Are there differences in the factors that influence trust in blog content versus trust in vlog content?

# Chapter Seven: Discussion

## 7.1 Introduction

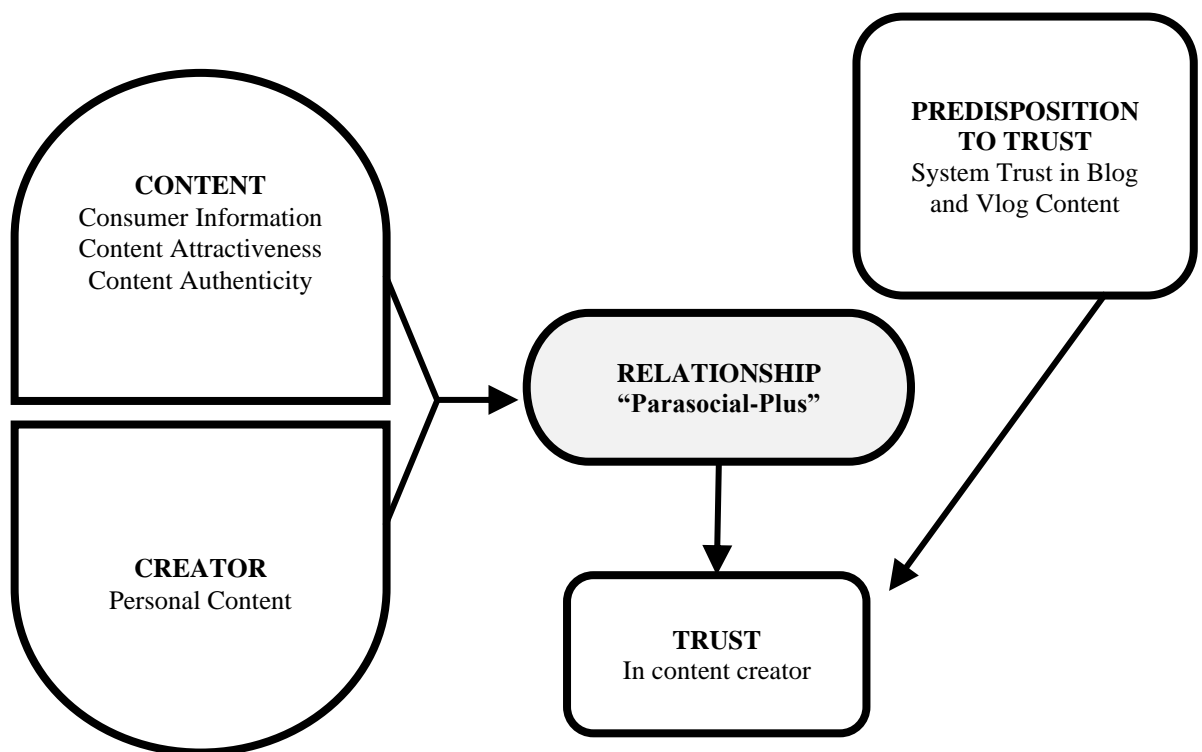
Study One and Study Two were undertaken in order to investigate consumer trust in blog and vlog content and revealed some important findings for academics and managers alike. Little research has been undertaken in the influence of blogs and vlogs in marketing, especially in regard to trust and parasocial relationships. The research has revealed that in terms of consumer trust in blog and vlog content, it is not the content that is trusted but the content creator. An interpersonal relationship of sorts is apparent in the interactions between consumers and their favourite content creators. Even though all participants in the qualitative study knew they did not have a real relationship with their favourite content creator, they still felt a connection and this connection influenced their trust. This one-sided pseudo-relationship with a media persona was indicative of a parasocial relationship. Thus, Study Two aimed to determine which of the key blog and vlog characteristics uncovered in Study One most influenced this parasocial relationship – authenticity, attractiveness, consumer information, personal content, or expertise.

This chapter examines the key findings of the combined two studies in order to answer the Research Questions. The chapter then discusses the key contributions of the research to the body of marketing knowledge and theory. Next, managerial contributions of the research are presented. Finally, the limitations of this research and suggestions for future research are discussed, before concluding the thesis.

## 7.2 Answering the Research Questions

This research provided insight into blog and vlog usage and why their content is trusted by consumers. Blog and vlog content was consumed often by interviewees, with the majority spending most if not all of their daily Internet time consuming this content. The findings of both studies combine to clearly answer the Research Questions:

1. Why do consumers trust blog and vlog content?
2. Are there differences in the factors that influence trust in blog content versus trust in vlog content?



**Figure 29 Revised model of trust in blog and vlog content**

Figure 29 illustrates the revised model of consumer trust in blog and vlog content. The answer to Research Question One, as addressed in Study Two, is that consumers trust blog and vlog content when they feel a connection to the content’s creator (the blogger or vlogger). This relationship, or pseudo-relationship, was described by interviewees in Study One as being a one-sided relationship, where the audience was well aware that the content creator does not know them. Despite this, interviewees still felt a connection

or relationship with the content creator. Thus, this relationship is reflective of a parasocial relationship; that is, a pseudo-, one-sided relationship with a media persona. Much past research in the area of parasocial interactions has been carried out in the traditional media space, especially television, with some research beginning to arise on these interactions in the online environment, e.g., Ferchaud et al. (2018), Ledbetter and Redd (2016). The current research clearly indicates that feeling a connection to a content creator, through the means of a parasocial interaction or relationship, increases the trust consumers feel with that content creator. This finding coincides with the literature that indicates that parasocial relationships may influence trust (Sherman-Morris, 2005).

Past research also suggested that parasocial interactions become more intense with continued exposure (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Thorson & Rodgers, 2006). The findings of Study Two confirms this suggestion. Interviewees who subscribed to their creator's content had more intense parasocial interactions. Thus, those who show a commitment to a content creator by subscribing tend to experience deeper parasocial relationships with that content creator.

Study Two also indicated that the blog and vlog characteristics that are most influential in developing parasocial interactions with a content creator are content authenticity and personal content (or self-disclosure), content attractiveness and consumer information. Literature on authenticity and personal content are often discussed in relation to one another, as they focus on the similar idea of intimacy. For one, a vlogger simply facing and speaking to the camera can create perceptions of authenticity (Ferchaud et al., 2018); for bloggers, this could be reflected by wording of their content being directed at the audience. For vloggers, a key characteristic of the content is showing themselves on camera and talking directly to the camera. This coincides with the importance of incorporating personal content or self-disclosure into their content, as it helps to create the feeling of authentic content. Many bloggers include photos of themselves alongside their written content, and their content is written in a conversational style, giving the perception of the blogger talking directly to their audience. Thus, the nature of blog and vlog content – conversational, diary-style, personal and engaging directly with the reader or viewer – may itself initiate or increase perceptions of authenticity.

Authenticity is also discussed in the literature in relation to the idea of intimacy. Intimacy influences parasocial interactions (Auer, 1992). Blogs have been found to

induce intimacy based on the simple fact the audience is able to interact with the blogger, through comments, and this gives the audience the sense of a parasocial interaction (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006). As vlogs have the same interaction opportunities, it is likely this finding crosses over. Intimacy can also be initiated through 'breaking the fourth wall', that is breaking the veil of fiction to address the audience directly (Auter, 1992); the nature of blog and vlog content is that the fourth wall is broken. Blogs and vlogs, by nature, speak directly to the audience; they are not reflective of fictional movie or television content and instead allow a view into the real lives of real people. Thus, the camera and viewer are often acknowledged. Breaking the fourth wall increases parasocial interactions (Auter, 1992). As such, by nature, blog and vlog content is a hotbed for parasocial interactions and relationships as they thrive on authenticity, realism and intimacy.

What the findings emphasise, and is not clearly distinguished in previous literature, is the importance of content authenticity rather than creator authenticity. It may be that the interviewees that took part in this study viewed both content authenticity and creator authenticity as the same thing. Or it is possible that the scale used to measure content authenticity was simply a better scale measure than the one used for creator authenticity. Either way, it is important to acknowledge that this research found that content authenticity is more important than creator authenticity. As such, future research should delve into whether this type of authenticity is true authenticity or whether the content creator is simply producing content that is authentic to the audience rather than to themselves. Although bloggers and vloggers are often viewed as being their authentic selves, rather than playing a character, audience members and content creators alike are clear that the audience only sees what the content creator wants them to see. For example, the content creator interviewed in Study One acknowledged that her content was edited to portray herself in the best manner.

Content attractiveness was found to be of importance in this research. However, past research has focussed on the physical attractiveness of the person. Thus, there is little research on the importance of content attractiveness in regard to parasocial interactions and trust. Past research related to parasocial interactions has found that physical attractiveness increases parasocial interactions (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Physical attractiveness has also been found to increase trust directly (Colucci & Cho, 2014) and help form perceptions of credibility (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Ohanian, 1990). Physical attractiveness was only considered important

in Study One when the content of the blog or vlog was about beauty or physical attractiveness. However, Study Two found that the attractiveness of the content creator is not influential in creating trust or a parasocial relationship. Rather, only the attractiveness of the content itself is important.

Although the inclusion of consumer information, be that through brand deals or product reviews, was deemed a key characteristic of blog and vlog content in Study One, there is no prior research that has focussed on the connection of providing consumer information with parasocial interactions and trust. This study found that the inclusion of consumer information in blog and vlog content impacts parasocial interactions, and consequently trust. It may be that the inclusion of consumer information increases parasociability because it is reflective of a traditional, offline, WOM interaction that consumers are used to receiving. There is also little research focussing on the impact of advertising in parasocial relationships, such as providing consumer information in parasocial interactions. Media personas can incorporate brand messages throughout their personal content and, if done correctly, this can actually be beneficial for both the celebrity and the brand (Lueck, 2015). This supports the finding of this research that consumer information is influential in trust in content creators.

Finally, in answering Research Question One, it was found that trust in a specific content creator is also influenced by the audience's system, or institutional, trust in blog and vlog content in general. This is supported by the literature, which has found that trust in a system is associated with one's overall trust (Mesch, 2012). Much past research has associated system trust with overall trust, with perceptions of protective structures generating trust in a situation (A. C. Costa et al., 2009; Grabner-Kräuter, 2009). In this research, those protective structures are the blog or vlog platform, such as like WordPress or YouTube. Having an understanding of the formal and information norms on a website suggests to the audience that other people using that website will abide by those same norms and behave trustworthily (Grabner-Kräuter, 2009; Kramer, 1999). Therefore, the finding that the audience's trust in blog and vlog systems or institutions influences their overall trust in a content creator is supported by past research findings that system trust influences overall trust.

Thus in response to Research Question One, it is concluded that perceptions of a connection or relationship with a content creator, a parasocial relationship, influence consumer trust in that creator. This relationship is influenced by the blog and vlog

characteristics of content authenticity and personal content, content attractiveness and consumer information. Creator trust is also influenced directly by the audience's system or institutional trust in general blog and vlog content.

Like Research Question One, Research Question Two was answered through the findings of Study One and Study Two combined – tested using a regression in Study Two. This regression revealed that there were no real differences between blog and vlog content in regard to trust.

The study also revealed there are five significant differences between blog and vlog content in regard to the means of characteristics. Blogs are regarded as having more parasociability. There is little past research to support this finding as most of the parasocial research has focused on television and only a small amount of research has been undertaken on the online environment. Blogs are also viewed as containing more consumer information. Study One suggested that people view blogs as more informational than vlogs and Study Two supported this finding. This coincides with past research into blog content which has found that blog content influences purchase intention (Hsu et al., 2013).

Vlogs, on the other hand, were viewed by interviewees as being more personal, attractive and entertaining. They were also seen to contain more personal information or self-disclosure. In the past, self-disclosure has been associated with an increase in realism and is represented in vlog content (Ferchaud et al., 2018). Showing a face increases authenticity, which is associated with parasocial interactions (Ferchaud et al., 2018). Interestingly, parasociability was found to be stronger in blog content in Study Two. However, this personal content is likely related to social influencers' ability to create intimacy (De Veirman et al., 2017), which can be developed through the audience feeling transported into the world they are viewing (Alperstein, 1991).

Vlog content was viewed as more attractive than blog content by the interviewees that took part in this research. There is little research on online content attractiveness and nothing associating it with parasociability and trust. Physical attractiveness of a media personality is related to parasociability with that person (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987) and to credibility of that person (Ohanian, 1990). It is likely that this physical attractiveness in a blog and vlog context is not related to the content creator but to the content, that is, viewing the content and creator as one and the same. This is because Study One interviewees maintained that the attractiveness of a

content creator did not influence their trust in the content and Study Two supported this. Because the content is illustrated through a visual medium (either a text-based blog or a video-based vlog), this is what the consumer is face-to-face with, rather than the content creator themselves.

Finally, this research found that vlogs are more entertaining than blogs. This was supported by Study One in which interviewees viewed blogs as primarily informational and vlogs as primarily entertainment. This finding is also supported by industry research suggesting consumers seek online video content such as vlogs for more entertainment purposes, and text-based content like blogs for goal-oriented or informational content (Clicktale & Taboola, n.d.). Thus, when combined, both studies in this thesis answer the second Research Question: whether there are differences in the factors that influence trust in blog content versus vlog content. The answer to this question is there really are no significant differences between blog and vlog content in regard to influencing trust. This is likely because the information provided by the content creators of these platforms is in essence perceived similarly and therefore trusted similarly: authentic and real content provided by a like-minded person. Overall, the findings of this thesis categorise key influencers and characteristics of trust in blog and vlog content to an extent that has not been achieved in marketing research before. These contributions to the body of marketing knowledge will be discussed in the following section.

### **7.3 Changes in Construct Definitions**

During the qualitative and quantitative phases of this research, a number of changes were made to construct definitions. The remaining constructs rather reflect many of the removed constructs or incorporate the items which give the construct its original meaning.

The definition of trust has become content creator focussed rather the content focussed as was originally thought. Although many constructs included in the model are content focussed, the true trust in blog and vlog content lies in the content creator themselves. Thus, a minor change here is the specificity of the trust in blog and vlog content to be trust in bloggers and vloggers; the people.

The definition of personal content has not changed. Rather than being an illustration of where personal content is seen in blog and vlog content, the focus lies in the effect of personal content. Thus, only this factor was evident in the final model.

The definition of authenticity has not changed. Rather, as was evident in the building of the final model, factors in which the original definition of authenticity surrounding ideas such as credibility and honesty were not included were removed. This left one authenticity construct that was derived by blog and vlog audiences from the content itself (rather than the creator) and with a focus on what builds or illustrates authenticity rather than general aspects or history.

The definition of entertainment did not alter. Rather its direct importance to creator trust was seen to not be as evident. Rather it became apparent that content attractiveness is the important influencer of creator trust; entertainment can be derived through content attractiveness. The definition of content attractiveness did not change, rather its importance simply highlighted in the final model and how it is important in illustrating both entertainment and expertise. The definition of creator trust did not change, rather simply supporting the qualitative study that the attractiveness of a content creator is not influential in creator trust.

The definition of expertise changed more so in the qualitative study than in the quantitative study. The qualitative study highlighted that expertise was defined by experience and that this could be illustrated through the volume of content produced and through content attractiveness. The quantitative study showed that it was not directly important to creator trust, supporting the idea that it was represented through content attractiveness.

Finally, the definition of PSI did not change. Rather, the inclusion of one factor supported the importance of the relationship aspect of PSI. The removal of the PSI factor pertaining to introspection and seeing the self in the content creator did not support the original definition surrounding a one-sided connection or relationship with the content creator. Therefore, there were no large changes to construct meanings after the quantitative study, rather support for the qualitative study and for the original, intended definitions.

## 7.4 Contribution to Theory and Knowledge

The findings of this research contribute new knowledge to theory. For one, this research details the formation of trust in blog and vlog content. Prior research has tended to be generalised or focused on one aspect, such as just design or just the content style. This research, in contrast, identifies the most important influencers of consumers trust in blogs and vlogs.

Interviewees in Study One indicated that they strongly trusted their favourite bloggers or vloggers, often just as much as their offline friends and family; their traditional WOM networks. The difference noted here was that they personally know their friends and family, whereas they only view their trusted content creators. This suggests that WOM comes from known sources whereas eWOM comes from sources where there is a one-way relationship. However, the content creators of blogs and vlogs become known to consumers when they feel a connection to these content creators. Content creators enhance this sense of connection by incorporating personal content throughout their content and increasing the volume of their content through developing a track record and illustrating expertise by experience. Thus, this allows audiences to feel, or build a feeling, of a sense of similarity to the content creators and in turn allowing them to feel a connection to a content creator through relating to their situations. This bridges the gap between WOM and eWOM, allowing blog and vlog content to gain the same feelings and trust as traditional WOM. This suggests that when it comes to favourite content creators, there is almost a blurring of lines between WOM and eWOM; between physically knowing someone and feeling like you know someone.

Trust research in the online environment sees past studies focussing largely on online retail shopping and, for eWOM, on sponsorship or endorsements within content (e.g., Chapple & Cownie, 2017). The research this study provides contributes to the body of trust research by identifying the key characteristics of blog and vlog content that make it trustworthy, through influencing parasociability. These characteristics that define trust in blog and vlog content are content authenticity, personal content, content attractiveness and consumer information. These characteristics lead to the key influencing factor of blog and vlog trust: a one-sided relationship or connection with the content creator defined as being a parasocial relationship.

Study One of this research also highlighted that the strength of the trust between a consumer and their favourite content creator/s is high, often described as being equal to

that of their friends and family. Despite feeling trust to the level experienced with their friends and family, it was also revealed that these consumers feel that this trust is different; that is, it has the same level of strength but is separated from true intrinsic trust. However strong this trust is, it may still be conditional rather than unconditional. Interviewees often mentioned that in terms of consumer information, the trust in the content creator's information is dependent on the product category or context; whether it is the content creator's field of expertise, or whether the content creator usually produces content in a particular field versus general content. These conditions to the strength of content creator trust is reflected in the notion that all interviewees acknowledged that they did not actually know the content creator. Thus, despite favourite content creators being trusted highly, there are limits to this trust based on the fact that consumers understand that their connection to this WOM source is not a true relationship.

This research also contributes to the knowledge of trust types. Both studies incorporated consumers' predispositions to trust. Of these predispositions to trust, system trust in blog and vlog content in general is the most influential in creating overall trust in a content creator. Past research has not detailed content creator trust to this extent. This research goes beyond the surface characteristics of blog and vlog content to discover the influential characteristics which differentiate whether a content creator can gain an audience member's trust. These characteristics are dependent on the audience and their individual perceptions of these characteristics. Therefore, not all content creators will be trusted the same; it is dependent on how much the audience member perceives the content creator to fulfil these trusting characteristics; whether the audience can connect to an individual content creator. Thus, this research defines a new type of trust: content creator trust. Content creator trust is influenced by system trust in blog and vlog content, content authenticity, provision of personal content, content attractiveness and provision of consumer information. This type of trust is relevant to the digital world of today.

The research contributes new knowledge to the area of blog and vlog content, created content, though investigating the evaluation or experience with bloggers and vloggers. Study Two identified key differences between blog and vlog content. These key differences are that blogs are viewed as being more parasocial and as being more informative. Vlogs are viewed as being more personal, attractive and entertaining. Study One revealed that blogs are often used with a goal in mind: to learn something or find

out more information about something. Vlogs, on the other hand, are often used as a replacement for television and as a source of video entertainment. This is a useful finding as there has been little research into entertainment versus information in online content, especially in comparing blogs and vlogs. Whilst prior research has largely skimmed the surface on differences between blog and vlog differences, this research digs deeper and highlights that blogs and vlogs differ in how they are perceived. Blogs were associated with being sought out initially for informational purposes, with entertainment as a secondary result. Vlogs were viewed as the opposite; primarily sought for entertainment purposes, with information or education as a secondary result. Some interviewees associated this with the argument of reading a book versus watching the movie – you watch the movie to be entertained quicker and read a book for more information. Vlogs were also associated with being more personal as you get to see the content creator in action; whereas for blogs, text and photos are relied on for this personal information.

One clear finding from the research is that the physical attractiveness of the content creator does not influence trust in blog and vlog content, even though the content reflects the content creator. Rather, the attractiveness of the content itself is important. This attractiveness could include blog layout and design, or vlog filming (camera and lighting) and editing quality. Past research has not looked at the importance of content attractiveness in parasocial interactions and content creator trust. Rather, past studies have found that physical attractiveness is important in encouraging parasocial experiences (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). This was not found to be the case in this research and as such, the findings offer a significant contribution towards understanding parasocial interactions, blog and vlog content, and content creators in the online environment.

This research contributes knowledge to the area of bloggers and vloggers, that is, content creators. Study One identified that although some content creators can achieve notoriety, they are not viewed as celebrities in the traditional sense but as new, different forms of celebrity. Interviewees identified this difference as content creators being a more attainable form of celebrity, and as such they were viewed as being more ‘real’ or like themselves.

This research also contributes to the knowledge on the area of bloggers and vloggers as it identifies the importance of expertise in content creation. Study One identified that

expertise in blog and vlog content is not necessarily expertise in the traditional sense. Consumers do not find qualifications and certificates in a content creator's field to be of importance; rather, they define expertise as experience. This may be blog and vlog experience, as illustrated by a track record of content, or this experience may be the content creator's experience in their content field. This was supported by Study Two which did not find expertise to be of importance when building a relationship with a content creator, and from this creating trust.

This research also contributes knowledge to the area of content creators by identifying the importance of personal content, that is, the self-disclosure of the content creator. Interviewees believed that discussing personal aspects of their lives humanises content creators and makes them real. As identified in Study One, a content creator's self-disclosure, through incorporating personal content helps consumers to feel a connection to the content creator; that is, it allows them to identify similarities and authenticity. By disclosing personal aspects of their lives, such as their showing their home or aspects of their daily lives, content creators allow avenues by which an audience can find similarities with the content creator; e.g. showing pets, cooking dinner, showing laundry, or health issues. It allows an audience to see a content creator as a real person rather than a distant media figure. This importance of self-disclosure by the content creator is replicated in Study Two, with personal content found to be a key influence of parasocial interactions with content creators and therefore trust in the content creator.

Finally, this research also contributes knowledge to the area of bloggers and vloggers through identifying the importance of parasocial interactions and highlighting that these interactions are not limited to video media. Few studies have investigated the parasociability of text-based media. Although parasocial interactions have been found before in blog content (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015), this was not a major focus of the research. In contrast, this study shows that blogs actually have a slightly higher rate of parasociability than vlogs. Most past studies on parasocial interactions have focused on traditional video media like television with a few more recent studies looking at the online environment (e.g. De Veirman et al., 2017). It was expected that vlogs, in which the creator actively faces the camera and is therefore more personal (Ferchaud et al., 2018), would see higher parasociability. However, this was not the case. Parasocial interactions were apparent in both eWOM forms, with blogs having a slightly higher rate of parasocial interactions.

The importance of parasocial interactions and relationships in blog and vlog trust has not been emphasised to this extent in prior research. At most, past research has associated parasociability with online content (e.g. De Veirman et al., 2017) but without addressing its importance in trusting eWOM. This importance of the consumer's sense of connection or relationship with the content creator in order for them to trust their content is likely due to the nature of eWOM. eWOM encompasses the Internet's characteristics of anonymity and unlike traditional, offline WOM, in eWOM the receiver can never be sure who it is they are receiving information from. By creating a parasocial relationship with a favourite content creator, the consumer is replacing that anonymity with the feeling of knowing who they are getting information from. Thus, eWOM almost becomes traditional, offline WOM – a highly trusted form of consumer information.

This research contributes knowledge about blog and vlog readers by emphasising that consumers want and need to feel a connection to a content creator in order to trust them. This reflects the ideas of similarity and homophily, with feelings of similarity allowing consumers to identify with a content creator and find a way to connect with them, as discussed in Study One. Interviewees identified that they were initially attracted to content creators with whom they shared a similarity, be that a topic of interest, geographical location, values or beliefs, or consumer tastes. This is mirrored in the idea that consumers can make assumptions about a person based on which content creators they follow closely, as discussed in Study One. This contributes to the theory of the extended self (Belk, 2013, 2016), in that consumers not only incorporate online content or online possessions as part of their selves, but also intangible online objects like content creators and the connections they feel with these content creators.

Thus, this thesis provides insight into the role of parasocial interactions and relationships in generating online consumer trust – an area in which there is little current research. This thesis contributes specific knowledge on the creation of consumer trust in content creators by examining both blog and vlog characteristics and highlighting the importance of parasocial interactions in trust generation. Collectively, these characteristics and interactions show that blog and vlog content has an importance for consumers that goes beyond simple eWOM. Content creators can become an important part of people's lives, making up a significant part of people's overall daily Internet viewing. People can develop a one-sided relationship with content creators and

continue to see them as a trusted source of information. Thus, bloggers and vloggers have become important influencers of purchase decisions amongst consumers.

A reciprocal social exchange, where the benefits outweigh the costs for both content creators and their audiences, is the ideal situation. In this situation, the parasocial relationship and creator trust will thrive; both parties benefit from the relationship. Here, the audience feels a connection and trust with the content creator which allows them to satisfy their entertainment and information needs, whilst the content creator gains a strong following which, as it grows, can be monetarily beneficial. Thus, trust in a content creator is a reflection of Social Exchange Theory – a reciprocally beneficial exchange that, in the case of blog and vlog content, can turn into a continuous and strengthening exchange.

## **7.5 Managerial Contributions**

This research makes significant contributions to the body of marketing knowledge, and it also provides significant findings of relevance to managers, particularly because marketers understand the importance of online content, especially user-generated content and eWOM, to today's consumers. This research illustrates not only the trust that consumers have in their favourite content creators, but also why: they feel a connection to, or relationship, with the content creator. Traditional WOM is trusted by consumers because they know the people they are receiving the information from. eWOM shares this feeling but the recipients do not truly know who they are receiving information from.

This research provides answers to marketers as to why consumers trust blog and vlog content (eWOM) in the same way they would trust WOM recommendations from their peers. This is because the content is perceived as being authentic and real, and consumers are attracted to it. The research also emphasises that marketers need to carefully choose a content creator to match the brand message and product they are wanting to promote as it needs to fit in with the authenticity desired by the audience. Brands can also utilise this trust by ensuring that their brand is used in an authentic way; not scripted or reflective of marketing material but allowed the content creator to present their brand in their own way. If there is a hint that the consumer information presented is marketing material, consumers tend to not freely trust the information

given. Thus, allowing content creators to incorporate branded material into their content in their own authentic and personal way will allow for a better brand-creator fit.

Marketers need to understand that consumers trust content creators most when they feel a connection to or a relationship with the content creator. What managers can take from this finding is that working with a content creator to promote a brand is like working with a consumer's friend to promote the brand. This means that consideration must be taken as to which content creators best suit the target audience and the brand, rather than just content creators who are popular or willing to promote the brand. Brands can utilise this finding in allowing content creators to discuss branded content in a natural way; like an everyday conversation with a friend, as a content creator's audience feels that they are a real friend. This finding is of great importance to brands and marketers alike as the presence of a relationship between content creators and their audiences puts their content into the realm of true, and trusted, WOM information. Brands should also ensure that their brand reflects the values a content creator holds; again, creator-brand fit is essential. If a product or service discussed by a content creator is not perceived as fitting with a content creator's usual style, it will not be viewed as authentic and not trusted as their usual content. Thus, it is important to understand the target market in order to understand which content creators are suited to deliver the brand message, as this message will be trusted most by those consumers feel a connection to.

Likewise, this research has implications for content creators. For one, this research provides an understanding of just how much consumers trust content creators, for which reason, content creators should use their power wisely. This research also shows content creators that, although they may not have a connection with each individual audience member, their followers feel a connection to them. It also highlights that content creators can help generate trust with their audience by: creating authentic content, incorporating personal aspects throughout their content to give their audience a window into who they really are, creating attractive content through editing and producing high quality visuals, and incorporating consumer information into their content. This will help initiate a parasocial interaction or relationship with their audience that leads to the audience's trust in the content creator. Content creators can utilise this relationship to their advantage when incorporating branded deals and information into their content; knowing that when presented in their usual authentic way their audience truly trusts their opinion. This could lead them to further brand deals for future content, so long as it still fits with their own brand. In understanding what leads to this relationship, they

can ensure when they present consumer information that they are not doing so in a detrimental way to their relationship with their audience.

These findings are also relevant for blog readers and vlog viewers as they give insight into just how much readers and viewers trust their favourite content creators, and the triggers that help create this trust. The findings provide readers and viewers with an understanding of created content, why they feel a connection to their favourite content creators and the impact of this relationship. It also allows for blog and vlog audience members to be aware of the influence content creators hold over them, whether they realise it or not, and to therefore understand more about consumer information presented and whether or not it should be trusted.

## **7.6 Limitations and Future Research**

As with any research, this study has its limitations. First, although theoretical saturation was reached quickly in Study One, the interview pool was limited to New Zealand participants due to funding constraints, and this particularly limited the content creator (and manager) interviewee pool. In trying to interview content creators, alongside viewers and readers, only one content creator responded to a request to be interviewed. No other content creators or their managers replied to interview requests, including overseas content creators. Thus, the ability to gain insight into the content creator mindset was limited to one content creator, a talent manager, and a marketing manager in order to compensate for more content creator interviews. However, insight into each stage of brand promotion and the creation of relevant content was gained from these perspectives of a marketing manager (the start of incorporating the brand into created content), a talent manager (the middle-person between brands and content creators), and a content creator (incorporation of the brand into content and the delivery of the brand message to the consumer).

There are also methodological limitations to this research. As this model did require optimisation and revision of the original model, replication should incur further replication testing. This model was also run on a United States sample, with the interviews conducted with a New Zealand sample; a limitation of this methodology and a further research opportunity would be to replicate this model on a global audience.

Another limitation is the nature of online research. The online environment is fast-paced and ever-changing. The popularity and importance of vlog viewing and vloggers have become more apparent over the course of this study, with blogs having a more sustained level of popularity over time. Thus, a limitation of this study is that this research looks at both a more stable eWOM information source (blogs) and an eWOM source (vlogs) that has increased in popularity rapidly. Further research should look into vlog content specifically, as marketing content is often woven in, intentionally or not. Vlogs are quite a new area of marketing research due to their new nature in the scheme of marketing literature, and research looking into further intricacies and influences of vlog content would broaden the body of marketing knowledge.

Finally, a limitation of this research is that the relationship described by interviewees in Study One was classed as a parasocial relationship as this closely matched the feelings that interviewees had. Thus, this research assumes that the pseudo-relationship between viewers and content providers is a parasocial relationship. A limitation here is that this relationship should be defined in its own terms due to the strength of the trust and connection felt between the audience and their favourite content creator/s. Further research to address this limitation could simply look into adapting or evolving the definition of parasocial interactions and relationships to incorporate and relate this notion to the online environment.

These limitations also hint at future areas for research. Notably, the important relationship described by interviewees fits with a parasocial interaction in the online environment. However, further research into this relationship should be conducted in order to determine whether parasociability should be redefined to give further explanation into its presence in the online environment, viewed separately as an extension of parasocial interactions, or whether this relationship in the online environment should be defined in its own terms as a pseudo- or phantom-relationship in the online world. Awareness that the relationship felt with a content creator is not real, yet still feeling a connection with the content creator despite this, is an interesting avenue for further research.

Also, future research should look further into the differences between blog and vlog content. Vlogs are viewed as an extension of blogs, yet key differences were found beyond just the content formats. Future research should investigate the key differences found in this research more deeply. This is especially the case for the findings of higher

recognition of the parasociability of blog content within the respondent pool, yet key characteristics found to initiate parasociability such as personal content or self-disclosure were found to be higher in vlog content. Why a higher rate of intimacy did not lead to a higher rate of parasociability should be investigated further in order to determine whether this relationship should be fully defined as parasocial or whether it is an extension or offshoot of a parasocial interaction.

Lastly, further research should investigate entertainment and authenticity – key characteristics of blog and vlog content. Interviewees in Study One were very clear that entertainment was an important factor in blog and especially in vlog content, when first having contact with a content creator's material. Entertainment is one of the primary reasons for starting to watch vlogs. Authenticity should be further investigated in the blog and vlog environment, both to characterise authenticity and to identify consumer perceptions of it, as authenticity is a key influencer of content creator trust and influences parasociability. Specifically, further research on the authenticity of blog and vlog content should look into whether the perceived authenticity of blog and vlog content is authentic to the content creator or authentic to the audience. The question is raised as to whether the audience sees the content creator's true life and whether this is true "behind the scenes" information. Research should also look into perceptions of authenticity – how it is defined in a blog and vlog context and whether consumers believe what they see is truthful.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

To conclude, this thesis has discovered why it is consumers trust blog and vlog content and identified the key differences between the two forms of eWOM. The thesis has illustrated that an environment so often criticised as addictive and lonely, the online environment, is actually rife in human connections. This thesis has revealed that even on the Internet, connecting to human beings is important and these connections, or relationships, feel very real to created content audiences. Human interactions and relationships are vital to the user's trust, especially when it comes to consumer information. Some may claim the Internet is distancing people from reality and from human interaction; however, perhaps it is actually connecting us all over distances. Just as telephones enabled connection to those at a distance, the Internet does the same by bridging gaps in geography, lifestyle and need.

Because the Internet thrives in anonymity and because of the high trust held by some consumers in blog and vlog content, it is important that marketers and content creators act ethically in how they engage in brand deals, recommendations and product placements. This is especially important as the more frequent users of eWOM content are the younger generations (Baer & Lemin, 2018). Thus, in understanding how to best target consumers through content creators, marketers need to act responsibly. Many content creators already act responsibly and clearly indicate to their audiences when a product recommendation or placement has been sponsored. The findings of this research open doorways for a better understanding of how to target brand messages to audiences through eWOM using eWOM sources already trusted by an audience.

What this research highlights is the importance of, and the desire, for human connection and relationships in our lives. As we live in a highly digital world, it is understandable that we search for connections online. If our offline lives are lacking in relationships, the online environment provides an avenue to find a community that we fit into. Where communities in the real world see less human connection than they did in the past, the current generation of consumers may be replacing these connections with those online where they can find a community to engage in and connect to. Even in a digital world, where consumer information is available anytime, anywhere, trust is still gained through connecting information with a human. Relationships are still key to consumer trust in information.

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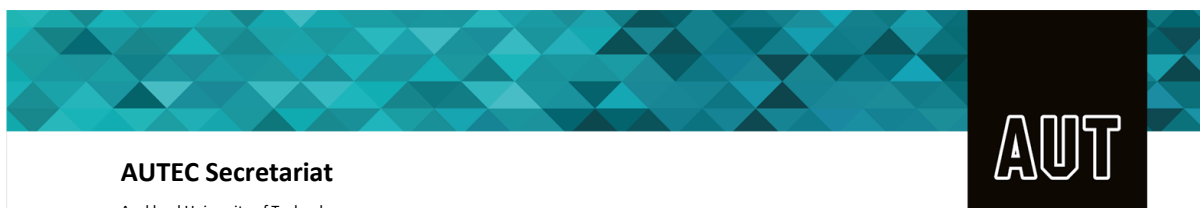
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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Study One Ethics Approval Letter



### AUTEC Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology  
D-88, WU406 Level 4 WU Building City Campus  
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316  
E: [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)  
[www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics](http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics)

28 April 2017

Ken Hyde  
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Ken

Re Ethics Application: **17/94 Consumer trust in blog and vlog content**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Subcommittee.

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 27 April 2020.

#### Standard Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation then you are responsible for obtaining it. If the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all locality legal and ethical obligations and requirements.

For any enquiries please contact [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)

Yours sincerely,

Kate O'Connor  
Executive Manager  
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: [maree.lockie@aut.ac.nz](mailto:maree.lockie@aut.ac.nz); Martin Waiguny

## Appendix 2: Consent Form

### Consent Form

*Project title:* **Trust in Blog and Vlog Content**  
*Project Supervisor:* **Associate Professor Ken Hyde & Dr. Martin Waiguny**  
*Researcher:* **Maree Lockie**

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 04 April 2017.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Date:

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 28 April 2017, AUTEC Reference number 17/94.**

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*

## Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet	
Information sheet for readers or viewers of blog or vlog content.	
<b>Date Information Sheet Produced:</b>	
04 April 2017	
<b>Project Title</b>	
Trust in Blog and Vlog Content.	
<b>An Invitation</b>	
<p>You are invited to participate in an interview for a research project conducted by PhD Candidate Maree Lockie, AUT University. Your participation in this research is valued highly and would contribute to understanding why it is blog and vlog content is trusted (or not trusted).</p> <p>Participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw from the research project at any time prior to the completion of data collection. This form contains information about the research that you are being asked to participate in, which you may wish to keep for your records.</p>	
<b>What is the purpose of this research?</b>	
<p>This research aims to identify what it is that makes readers of blogs and viewers of vlogs trust (or not trust) the information they gain from these platforms. This research has significant benefits as consumers are relying more and more on the advice given in blogs and vlogs. Knowledge is lacking in this new area; the online environment which is so heavily relied upon. With increasing consumer power, consumers are relying on advice from other consumers for trusted information when they are looking to make a purchase decision. Thus, the major question asked by this research is: "Why do consumers trust blog and vlog content?"</p> <p>This research is undertaken as a part of a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) qualification. The findings of this research will be published in a Doctoral thesis and in publications or presentations within an academic context.</p>	
<b>How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?</b>	
<p>You were identified to participate in this research because of your prior indication of using blog and/or vlog content. You were identified as a regular user of blogs and/or vlogs either directly to me or by someone you know. Your regular use of blog and/or vlog content makes you a good candidate for this research because you are familiar with and understand them.</p>	
<b>How do I agree to participate in this research?</b>	
<p>In order to agree to participate, please email me (maree.lockie@aut.ac.nz) to confirm your interest. A time and place to conduct the interview will then be organised at your closest convenience. You will then be asked to sign a consent form (given to you prior to the interview starting). Your participation is completely voluntary and you can stop the interview at any time. You will also be given the transcripts of your interview to review (and amend) should you request to do so.</p> <p>Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.</p>	
<b>What will happen in this research?</b>	
<p>If you agree to participate, you will be asked questions surrounding your use of blogs and/or vlogs. There will be questions surrounding the topics of blog/vlog usage, favourite or most followed blogs/vlogs, and potential blog/vlog characteristics that influence your usage of blog/vlog content (e.g. the source of the information, credibility, popularity, etc.). The interview will continue as a conversation; there are no right or wrong answers! You can expand on any question you wish, ask for clarification or decline to answer a question. The interview will be recorded and once completed, sent for transcribing. Should you wish, you can request to review the transcript of your interview before analysis is undertaken. Transcripts of your interview will then be analysed and these findings will only be used for the purpose of a PhD thesis and academic publications/presentations.</p>	

AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

Information sheet for authors of blog or presenters of vlog content.

**Date Information Sheet Produced:**

04 April 2017

**Project Title**

Trust in Blog and Vlog Content.

**An Invitation**

You are invited to participate in an interview for a research project conducted by PhD Candidate Maree Lockie, AUT University. Your participation in this research is valued highly and would contribute to understanding why it is blog and vlog content is trusted (or not trusted).

Participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw from the research project at any time prior to the completion of data collection. This form contains information about the research that you are being asked to participate in, which you may wish to keep for your records.

**What is the purpose of this research?**

This research aims to identify what it is that makes readers of blogs and viewers of vlogs trust (or not trust) the information they gain from these platforms. This research has significant benefits as consumers are relying more and more on the advice given in blogs and vlogs. In understanding what it is that makes consumers trust certain blog and/or vlog content, content can be created that is better suited to consumers during the information search stage of the consumer decision-making process? Knowledge is lacking in this new area; the online environment which is so heavily relied upon. With increasing consumer power, consumers are relying on advice from other consumers for trusted information when they are looking to make a purchase decision. Thus, the major question asked by this research is: "Why do consumers trust blog and vlog content?"

This research is undertaken as a part of a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) qualification. The findings of this research will be published in a Doctoral thesis and in publications or presentations within an academic context.

**How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?**

You were identified to participate in this research because of your prior indication of creating or contributing to blog and/or vlog content. You were identified through your job involvement with blogs/vlogs and identified by others in your field. Your regular use and creation of blog and/or vlog content makes you a good candidate for this research because you are familiar with and understand them.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

In order to agree to participate, please email me (maree.lockie@aut.ac.nz) to confirm your interest. A time and place to conduct the interview will then be organised at your closest convenience. You will then be asked to sign a consent form (given to you prior to the interview starting). Your participation is completely voluntary and you can stop the interview at any time. You will also be given the transcripts of your interview to review (and amend) should you request to do so.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

**What will happen in this research?**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked questions surrounding your use of blogs and/or vlogs. There will be questions surrounding the topics of blog/vlog usage, favourite or most followed blogs/vlogs, and potential blog/vlog characteristics that influence your usage of blog/vlog content (e.g. the source of the information, credibility, popularity, etc.). The interview will continue as a conversation; there are no right or wrong answers! You can expand on any question you wish, ask for clarification or decline to answer a question. The interview will be recorded and once completed, sent for transcribing. Should you wish, you can request to review the transcript of your interview before analysis is undertaken. Transcripts of your interview will then be analysed and these findings will only be used for the purpose of a PhD thesis and academic publications/presentations.

## Appendix 4: Interview Guide for Blog Readers and Vlog Viewers

### Interview Guide for Study One – Viewers/Readers

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#### **Opening questions:**

*Do you read blogs, watch vlogs or both?*

*How often to you read/watch?*

*When did you start and why?*

*Do you follow any blogs/vlogs closely? Who? When did you start? How did you find them?*

*Are your favourite blogs/vlogs popular? Why/not?*

#### **Blog/vlog characteristics – general:**

*What is a popular blog/vlog? How do you know it is popular?*

*What makes you follow or subscribe to a blog/vlog?*

*What makes a good blog/vlog?*

*What makes good blog/vlog information?*

*Have you ever seen a bad blog/vlog? What made it bad? Do you base your impression of the overall blog/vlog on one post?*

*What is the difference between a good and a bad blog/vlog?*

*Do you read/watch for entertainment or for information?*

#### **Sponsorship and reviews:**

*Have you ever bought something after seeing it on a blog/vlog? What? Why? Planned to buy beforehand (was gaining information) or did you buy because you saw it on the blog/vlog (based on the advertisement)? Was it a good or bad decision?*

*Do your favourite blogs/vlogs advertise products (i.e.. Sponsorship)?*

*Do your favourite blogs/vlogs tell you when a post contains sponsorship? Do you have a preference for this to be disclosed or not?*

*Does sponsorship in blog/vlog content influence your trust in the blog/vlog? Does it change your view of the overall blog/vlog?*

*Can you tell the difference between a sponsored product and a genuine review (of a product they bought themselves)?*

*What is the difference between blogs/vlogs and online review websites? Do you have a preference?*

*Review specific posts: do you find them enjoyable? Useful? Trust them more than other sources of information? Trust all posts the same -why? Make you want to buy?*

#### **Blog/vlog characteristics – trust and relationships:**

*Do you trust the blog/vlog or the blogger/vlogger (or both the same)?*

*What makes you trust the blog/vlog/blogger/vlogger?*

*Do you trust only if they identify themselves (real name) or you don't mind a pseudonym?*

*Do they need to be popular for you to trust them?*

*Do you feel like you know your favourite blogs/vlogs? Why?*

*Do you chat with your friends about them? Like a mutual friend? Are they a part of your identity?*

*Do you feel like you have a relationship with them?*

*Do you feel a part of a community? Do communities appear around blogs/vlogs?*

*Can bloggers/vloggers become celebrities? Why? How? Do you trust them more or less with this status?*

*Do you trust them for advice of products just as you would your friends/family? Why?*

#### **Blog/vlog trust:**

*Do the following influence your trust in blog/vlog content and how:*

- Credibility?
- Authenticity?
- Expertise? How do you define expertise?
- Popularity?
- Attractiveness? Of the creator or of the content? What makes it attractive?

- *Feeling a relationship with the blogger/vlogger? Is it real? How do you define this?*
- *Similarity?*

*Do you trust the blog/vlog just for the content you are looking for? Or trust them in general?*

*What are you trusting them for?*

*How much do you trust your favourite blog/vlog, blogger/vlogger? Why?*

*What is the difference between the blog/vlog (the platform/content) and the blogger/vlogger (the source)?*

***Predispositions to trust:***

*Do you trust people generally in real life?*

*Do you trust the Internet in general?*

*Do you trust information online, in general?*

*Do you trust all blogs/vlogs the same?*

*What makes people trust information online? Blogs and vlogs specifically?*

*What makes you trust blogs/vlogs more and what makes you trust them less?*

*Does your trust in blog/vlog content differ from offline information? Why/how?*

***Final summarising questions:***

*Do you look for information offline or online first? Why?*

*Is entertainment important for blog/vlog content? Why? How?*

*When you're not looking for information, what do you do when you watch/read product related information on the blog/vlog?*

*Do you read/view multiple blogs/vlogs when you're looking for information? How do you exclude/choose what to trust?*

*Why do you think vlogs have increased in popularity?*

*What do you think the future trends in this area will be?*

## Appendix 5: Interview Guide for Industry Members

### Interview Guide for Study One – Industry Members

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#### **Opening questions:**

*What is your involvement with blogs/vlogs?*  
*When did you start? Why did you start?*  
*What is your overall goal working with blogs/vlogs?*  
*When did you notice people taking notice of blogs/vlogs as a marketing tool?*  
*Is there something that triggered blog/vlog popularity in marketing? Slow or quick growth?*  
*What makes people follow/subscribe or view blog/vlog content?*  
*In your opinion, what makes a good blog/vlog?*

#### **Sponsorship/advertising:**

*How do you go about sponsorship/advertising in blog/vlog content?*  
*Does sponsorship need to be disclosed?*  
*How strict are you about what sponsorship is included – limits or guidelines?*  
*What is your opinion about sponsorship and advertising's place in blog/vlog content?*  
*What do readers/viewers think about sponsorship in blog/vlog content?*  
*How is the sponsorship included? Review specific posts or incorporating the sponsorship in the content (product placement)?*  
*Is sponsorship enjoyable to talk about in blog/vlog content?*

#### **Blog/vlog content:**

*What is a blog/vlog?*  
*Is personal information or personalisation included in your posts?*  
*What is better: simple, informational posts with no personal content or casual inclusion of personal information?*  
*How are blogs/vlogs different than a standard website?*  
*Is the blogger/vlogger a brand or is the blog/vlog itself a brand? Are they one in the same?*  
*Is it important that the content creator's real name, photos of themselves included rather than just the blog/vlog name?*  
*How is it decided what to post about?*  
*Is it important to interact with readers/viewers? Why? How?*  
*Would you consider a blog/vlog a business?*  
*How would you explain how the blog/vlog works – from decisions over what to post to the results of the posting? Does it differ from sponsored to not sponsored content?*

#### **Trust:**

*Would you say people trust your content? Why? How can you tell?*  
*Is trust important for blog/vlog content?*  
*Why do people trust blog/vlog content? Why do people trust the blogger/vlogger?*  
*Do they trust the blogger/vlogger, or do they trust the blog/vlog? Or is it the same?*  
*Do you try and present the blog/vlog content in a certain way in order to gain trust?*  
*Does the audience trust just for the information they are looking for or do they trust in general?*  
*How much do you think the audience trusts you?*

#### **Blog/vlog trust characteristics:**

*Is what you present the real you? Is it important to present your real self?*  
*Is your credibility important to gain trust? How do you show credibility?*  
*Is being authentic important for trust? Why? How do you show authenticity?*  
*Is being an expert on your blog/vlog topic important for trust? How do you show this?*  
*Is your blog/vlog content popular and is it important for trust? Why? How do you define and measure popularity?*  
*Is attractiveness important for trust? Attractiveness of the creator or of the content?*

*Is forming a relationship with the audience important for trust? Does the audience feel like you are a friend?*  
*Is similarity important for trust? Does the audience see themselves in you?*  
*Is building a community around your blog/vlog important for trust? Why? How do you build this community?*

***Summarising questions:***

*Overall, do you think people trust your content/you? Why?*  
*Do you read blogs/view vlogs or engage with other blogs/vlogs? Why?*  
*Do you trust the information from other blogs/vlogs? Why?*  
*Why do people trust blogs/vlogs?*  
*How much do they trust blogs/vlogs?*  
*Are blogs/vlogs replacing other information or entertainment sources?*  
*Do blogs/vlogs create communities?*  
*Is entertainment important to trust and/or viewership?*  
*What is the difference between blogs/vlogs?*  
*How does sponsorship influence trust in blogs/vlogs?*  
*What do you think the future of blogs/vlogs will be?*

## Appendix 6: Study Two Ethics Approval Letter



### Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology  
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ  
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316  
E: [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)  
[www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics](http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics)

25 July 2018

Ken Hyde  
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Ken

Re Ethics Application: **18/289 Trust in content creators**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 25 July 2021.

#### Standard Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation then you are responsible for obtaining it. If the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all locality legal and ethical obligations and requirements. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries, please contact [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K O'Connor', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Kate O'Connor  
Executive Manager  
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: [maree.lockie@aut.ac.nz](mailto:maree.lockie@aut.ac.nz); Martin Waiguny

## Appendix 7: Final Questionnaire

### Trust in Content Creators FINAL

---

#### Start of Block: Screening Block 1

Q1 Are you aged 18-40 years?

☐ Yes

☐ No

*(If 'no' is selected, end survey)*

---

Q2 Do you have at least one favourite blog or vlog that you read/watch at least once per week?

☐ Yes

☐ No

*(If 'no' is selected, end survey)*

#### End of Block: Screening Block 1

---

#### Start of Block: Screening Block 2



Q23 Which blogger or vlogger (specific person or personality) do you read or watch **most frequently**?

☐ Blogger/Vlogger: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I do not know

☐ I cannot remember their name

*(If 'I do not know' or 'I cannot remember their name' is selected, end survey)*

#### End of Block: Screening Block 2

---

#### Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q4



---

Q3 **Participant Information Sheet Date Information Sheet Produced:** 13 July 2018

**Project Title** Trust in Blog and Vlog Content. **An Invitation** You are invited to participate in a survey for a research project conducted by PhD Candidate Maree Lockie, AUT University. Your participation in this research is valued highly and would contribute to understanding why it is blog and vlog content is trusted (or not trusted). Participation is completely voluntary. This form contains information about the research that you are being asked to participate in, which you may wish to keep for your records.

**What is the purpose of this research?** This research aims to identify what it is that makes readers of blogs and viewers of vlogs trust (or not trust) the information they gain. This research may produce significant benefits as consumers are relying more and more on the advice given in blogs and vlogs. Knowledge is lacking in this new area. With increasing consumer power, consumers are relying on advice from other consumers for trusted information when they are looking to make a purchase decision. Thus, the major question asked by this research is: "Why do consumers trust blog and vlog content?" This research is undertaken as a part of a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) qualification. The findings of this research will be published in a Doctoral thesis and in publications or presentations within an academic context.

**How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?** You were identified to participate in this research as a

member of a CINT survey panel.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?** In order to agree to participate, start the survey. Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

**What will happen in this research?** If you agree to participate, you will be asked questions about your use of blogs and/or vlogs. There will be questions surrounding the topics of blog/vlog usage, favourite or most followed blogs/vlogs, and potential blog/vlog characteristics that influence your usage of blog/vlog content (e.g. the source of the information, credibility, popularity, etc.). There are no right or wrong answers! The survey will be analysed and these findings will only be used for the purpose of a PhD thesis and academic publications/presentations. You may stop the questionnaire at any point.

**What are the discomforts and risks?** There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. You may stop the questionnaire at any point.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?** There is no personally identifiable information required. You may stop the questionnaire at any point.

**What are the benefits?** There are many benefits for this research. You will gain a better understanding of your own use of blogs and vlogs as a platform for information that you may, or may not, be aware of. You will also gain a better understanding of what it is about information, especially about products and services, which makes you trust it (and act on it). This research will also benefit me, as a researcher, as it will contribute towards completing my PhD at AUT University. It will allow for not only myself, but other marketing academics to gain a better understanding of the online environment; blogs, vlogs and the consumer information search process.

**How will my privacy be protected?** Your privacy will be protected throughout this research project. The information gained through the survey will not be personally identifiable.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?** If you wish to participate in this research, the only cost to you is your time. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?** You have one week to take this survey, or until all places are full.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?** No.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?** Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Associate Professor Ken Hyde, khyde@aut.ac.nz, +64 9 921 9999 ext. 5605. Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTC, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext. 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?** You are able to contact the research team as follows: Researcher Contact Details: Maree Lockie, mlockie@aut.ac.nz, +64 9 921 9999 ext. 6026. Project Supervisor Contact Details: Associate Professor Ken Hyde, khyde@aut.ac.nz, +64 9 921 9999 ext. 5605. **Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 25 July 2018, AUTC Reference number 18/289.**

Thank you for your time.

☐ I agree

Page Break

Q5 When you are **looking for information**, how often would you use the **Internet** as opposed to offline sources?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

Q7 What do you think is the **credibility** of the **Internet**?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not credible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very credible

Q8 How much do you **trust the institutes and people** 'running the **Internet**'?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	A lot

Q9 How much **confidence** do you have in the **people with whom you interact** through the **Internet**?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
None	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	A lot

Q10 If you are in need of information, how **confident** are you that you can **find it on the Internet**?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not confident	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very confident

Q12 How well do you think your **privacy is protected** on the **Internet**?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very well

Page Break

Q14 When you are **looking for information**, how often would you use **blogs or vlogs** as opposed to other sources?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

Q15 What do you think is the **credibility** of **blogs and vlogs**?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not credible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very credible

Q16 How much do you **trust the institutes and people** 'running **blogs and vlogs**?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	A lot

Q17 How much **confidence** do you have in the **people who add information to blogs and vlogs**?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
None	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	A lot

Q18 If you are in need of information, how **confident** are you that you can **find it on blogs and vlogs**?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not confident	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very confident

Q19 How large do you think the **risk of getting inaccurate information on blogs and vlogs** is?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Low risk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	High risk

Page Break

Q20 Please select how much you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I usually trust people until they give me a reason not to.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trusting another person is not difficult for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My typical approach is to trust new acquaintances until they prove I should not trust them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My tendency to trust others is high	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

Q21 Please select how much you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Most salespeople are honest in describing their products.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most students in school would not cheat even if they were sure of getting away with it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most repairmen will not overcharge even if they think you are ignorant of their specialty.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most people answer public opinion polls honestly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents usually can be relied on to keep their promises.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most experts can be relied upon to tell the truth about the limits of their knowledge.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most people can be counted on to do what they say they will do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

Q22 Think about your most visited blog/vlog: \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4)

---

Q24 Are they **primarily** a blogger or vlogger?

☐ Blogger

☐ Vlogger

---

Page Break

---

Q25 How many **days per week** do you view \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4)'s content?

☐ 7

☐ 6

☐ 5

☐ 4

☐ 3

☐ 2

☐ 1

☐ Less than once per week

---

Q26 Do you **subscribe** to \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4) (receive notifications about a post/subscribe to them on YouTube) or just **revisit their content on your own**?

☐ Subscribe

☐ Do not subscribe (visit their content of my own accord)

---

Q27 How long have you been **visiting** \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4)'s content for?

☐ Less than a month

☐ 1-3 months

☐ 4-6 months

☐ 6-12 months

☐ 1-2 years

☐ 2-5 years

☐ Over 5 years

---

Q28 What **content category** would you primarily classify \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4)'s content as?

- ☐ Beauty and fashion
  - ☐ Comedy
  - ☐ Entertainment (e.g. movies and music)
  - ☐ Gaming
  - ☐ Health and fitness
  - ☐ Lifestyle (or daily blogging or vlogging)
  - ☐ Technology
  - ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q29 \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4) talks about or shows **personal aspects** of their life (e.g. their family, friends, health, etc.).

- ☐ Strongly disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Strongly agree
- 

Q80 \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4) shows or talks about their friends and/or family in their content.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Strongly agree
-

Q82 \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4) shows or talks about their home (e.g. filming or photography taking in their own home).

- ☐ Strongly disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Strongly agree
- 

Q83 \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4) shows or talks about their daily life (e.g. filming or photography doing normal daily tasks like cooking, grocery shopping, walking around a street/mall/beach).

- ☐ Strongly disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Strongly agree
- 

Page Break

Q30 \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4) is someone I **could be friends with** in real life.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Strongly agree
- 

Q32 I **feel a connection** to \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4).

- ☐ Strongly disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Strongly agree
- 

Q33 I **feel like I know** \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4).

- ☐ Strongly disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Strongly agree
- 

Page Break

Q84 \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4) often **mentions** a specific branded product or service in their content.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

Q85 \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4) often **reviews** specific branded products or services in their content.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

Q86 \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4) often **shows themselves using** a specific brand of product or service in their content.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

Q35 How **useful** is the information \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4) provides about products or services?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not useful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Useful

Page Break

Q87 To what extent do you agree with the following statements:

---

Q36 I have used information provided by \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4) about a product or service to **decide whether or not to purchase** something.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Strongly agree
- 

Q37 The information provided by \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4) about a product or service has given me the **idea to purchase** something.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Somewhat agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Strongly agree
- 

Q38 I have **bought something** based on the advice or a recommendation of \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4).

- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
- 

Page Break

---

Q36 To what extent do you agree/disagree that **\$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4)'s content:**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Has a history	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is timeless	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Survives times	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Survives trends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Will not betray you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accomplishes its value promise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is honest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gives back to its audience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Has moral principles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is true to a set of moral values	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Shows they care about their audience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adds meaning to people's lives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reflects important values people care about	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Connects people with their real selves	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Connects people with what is really important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

Q37 To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements about \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4):

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
They possess a clear philosophy which guides their content.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
They know exactly what they stand for and do not promise anything which contradicts their essence and character.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
They do not pretend to be someone else	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Considering their brand promise, they don't curry favor with their target group; moreover, they show self-esteem.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
They distort themselves, to match contemporary market trends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The saying "you trim your sails to every wind that blows" describes them adequately.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

Q38 \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4)'s content:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Is entertaining	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is enjoyable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is pleasing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

Q39 To what **extent** is \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4):

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not an expert in their field	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	An expert in their field
Not experienced in their field	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Experienced in their field
Not knowledgeable in their field	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Knowledgeable in their field
Not qualified in their field	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Qualified in their field
Not skilled in their field	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Skilled in their field

Page Break

Q40 To what extent is \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4) **themselves**:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Unattractive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Attractive
Not Classy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Classy
Ugly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Beautiful
Plain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Elegant
Not sexy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Sexy

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Q41 \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4)'s content:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Is designed well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is pleasing on the eye	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is edited well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provides a good atmosphere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is consistent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is high quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Uses images or video which is clear and of high quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

Q42 To what extent to you agree with the following statements about \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4):

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
They remind me of myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have the same qualities as them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I seem to have the same beliefs or attitudes as them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have the same problems as them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can imagine myself as them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can identify with them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like to meet them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would view them on another blog or vlog channel or on television	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy trying to predict what they will do	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I hope they achieve their goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I care about what happens to them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like reading the words/hearing the voice of them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

Q43 To what **extent** is \$(Q23/ChoiceTextEntryValue/4):

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Undependable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Dependable
Dishonest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Honest
Unreliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Reliable
Insincere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Sincere
Untrustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Trustworthy

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Q45 What is your current **age**?

Q77 Which **gender** do you identify with?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Gender diverse
- ☐ Do not want to respond

Q78 Which **ethnicity** do you most identify with?

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Caucasian
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other

Q79 What is your **marital status**?

- ☐ Single
  - ☐ In a committed relationship
  - ☐ Married
  - ☐ Divorced
  - ☐ Widowed
- 

Q91 What level of education have you completed up to?

- ☐ Less than high school
  - ☐ High school graduate
  - ☐ Some college
  - ☐ 2 year degree
  - ☐ 4 year degree
  - ☐ Professional degree
  - ☐ Doctorate
- 

Q92 What would you class as your main employment level?

- ☐ Employed full time
  - ☐ Employed part time
  - ☐ Unemployed looking for work
  - ☐ Unemployed not looking for work
  - ☐ Retired
  - ☐ Student
  - ☐ Disabled
-

Q88 How many **hours per day** do you spend on the **Internet**?

- ☐ Less than 1 hour
  - ☐ 1-2 hours
  - ☐ 3-4 hours
  - ☐ 5-6 hours
  - ☐ 7-8 hours
  - ☐ 9-10 hours
  - ☐ Greater than 10 hours
- 

Q90 How many **hours per day** do you spend consuming blog and/or vlog content (any content creators)?

- ☐ Less than 1 hour
  - ☐ 1-2 hours
  - ☐ 3-4 hours
  - ☐ 5-6 hours
  - ☐ 7-8 hours
  - ☐ 9-10 hours
  - ☐ Greater than 10 hours
-

Q80 Which **state** do you live in?

- ☐ AL Alabama
- ☐ AK Alaska
- ☐ AZ Arizona
- ☐ AR Arkansas
- ☐ CA California
- ☐ CO Colorado
- ☐ CT Connecticut
- ☐ DE Delaware
- ☐ DC District of Columbia
- ☐ FL Florida
- ☐ GA Georgia
- ☐ HI Hawaii
- ☐ ID Idaho
- ☐ IL Illinois
- ☐ IN Indiana
- ☐ IA Iowa
- ☐ KS Kansas
- ☐ KY Kentucky
- ☐ LA Louisiana
- ☐ ME Maine
- ☐ MD Maryland
- ☐ MA Massachusetts
- ☐ MI Michigan
- ☐ MN Minnesota
- ☐ MS Mississippi
- ☐ MO Missouri
- ☐ MT Montana
- ☐ NE Nebraska
- ☐ NV Nevada
- ☐ NH New Hampshire

- ☐ NJ New Jersey
- ☐ NM New Mexico
- ☐ NY New York
- ☐ NC North Carolina
- ☐ ND North Dakota
- ☐ OH Ohio
- ☐ OK Oklahoma
- ☐ OR Oregon
- ☐ PA Pennsylvania
- ☐ RI Rhode Island
- ☐ SC South Carolina
- ☐ SD South Dakota
- ☐ TN Tennessee
- ☐ TX Texas
- ☐ UT Utah
- ☐ VT Vermont
- ☐ VA Virginia
- ☐ WA Washington
- ☐ WV West Virginia
- ☐ WI Wisconsin
- ☐ WY Wyoming
- ☐ Other US territory

**End of Block: Default Question Block**

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