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Organic and amplified eWOM in consumer fashion blogs

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Abstract: Purpose - In the past few years fashion blogs have become a popular form of user-generated content, and consequently, the fashion industry has shown great interest in fashion blog marketing. The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyze consumer-to-consumer (C2C) electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in fashion blogs, and especially to compare naturally-occurring, i.e. organic eWOM with marketer-influenced, i.e. amplified eWOM. Design/methodology/approach - The study takes a netnographic approach to the phenomenon of fashion blogs. The empirical material consists of observational data including blog texts and audience comments of six popular fashion blogs in Finland. Findings - Findings indicate that although not as varied as organic, amplified eWOM content in consumer fashion blogs resembles organic content. The main topics discussed in organic eWOM include personal style, brands, designers and retailers, tips and advice as well as purchases. Amplified topics concerned products received by the blogger, brands, designers and retailers, tips given to the audience, and competitions. Practical implications - The findings indicate that for blog marketing to be effective and credible, the marketed fashion items, designers, or retailers need to fit the blogger's personal style. Originality/value - Social media, especially blogs, play an important role in contemporary fashion marketing. This study addresses the emerging, yet scarce area of research into how marketer influence on fashion bloggers can be seen in user-generated content.

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Full text: 1. Introduction
The fashion industry has changed tremendously in the internet era and the change continues as new types of online business models are needed to reach ever more demanding and digitalized consumers ([4] Doherty, 2004). Online communities, such as electronic mailing lists, discussion forums, and weblogs, have become very popular as a consequence of the digitized social world ([13] Kozinets, 2010, pp. 7-16). In those online communities, consumers seek not only information, but also entertainment and social relationships. Consumers write openly about values, meanings, and feelings and also deem the postings of other consumers more trustworthy than those of the marketing professionals. Marketing professionals have therefore recognized the need to encourage consumer-to-consumer (C2C) electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) with rewards such as free products and services, vouchers, and discounts ([29] Ryu and Feick, 2007). Monitoring postings actively can also provide profound insights for a company's further usage ([27] Rickman and Cosenza, 2007). Encouraging eWOM activities is especially evident in consumer fashion blogs ([3] Corcoran, 2010). The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze eWOM in consumer fashion blogs. The main idea is to differentiate the organic and amplified fashion blog texts that the blogger and blog readers are producing. What topics are shared in organic and amplified fashion blog texts? Are there any differences between organically produced and marketer-influenced fashion blog texts?

2. Organic and amplified eWOM
eWOM can be defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via Internet" ([8] Hennig-Thuraus et al., 2004, p. 39). Consumers frequently create and search for eWOM information to reduce the perceived risk in making purchase decisions ([24] Moore, 2010). eWOM information, i.e. messages and meanings, is coproduced between several people in consumer networks ([14] Kozinets et al., 2010). eWOM is coproduced on the internet in new media services, such as web sites, electronic newsgroups, blogs,
and other online communities. Online communities are being used for eWOM and can be found by anyone with computer skills and internet access ([9] Hung and Li, 2007). A plethora of information can be found in online communities about products and companies, such as different brands, retailers, and shopping behaviors. Word-of-mouth (WOM) has always influenced consumer behavior but its meaning and importance have increased with the internet (e.g. [17] Lee and Yoon, 2009; [25] Park and Lee, 2009).

eWOM differs in several ways from the traditional WOM, which usually occurs between two persons: the relationship between sender and receiver is weaker, there may be multiple senders and receivers, the conversation lasts longer, and measuring the effects is easier (e.g. [6] Godes and Mayzlin, 2004; [1] Andreassen and Streukens, 2009; [32] Steffes and Burgee, 2009). Despite the differences, eWOM is said to exert the greatest influence on purchase decisions today ([20] Manafy, 2010).

Organic eWOM occurs naturally when a person wants to tell others about a positive or negative experience with a product or a company ([35] Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA), 2011). This endogenous WOM entails no direct intervention from the firm and occurs among consumers as a function of their experiences ([7] Godes and Mayzlin, 2009). The naturally occurring and rich content of fashion online communities and blogs is very useful for fashion companies as well as consumer researchers. The content of organic eWOM depends on the subject being discussed, but similarities between the topics have been found in earlier studies made in this area. Personal issues, such as personal style, expertise, and experiences with trends or usage of a product have been popular topics in organic discussions ([33] Thomas et al., 2007). Company-related information, such as brands, designers, retailers, and business practices, constitute another popular topic ([15] Kretz and de Valck, 2010). Giving and requesting information also forms a big part of organic eWOM ([1] Andreassen and Streukens, 2009; [22] Miller and Pole, 2010). These may be issues such as advice on style or using products or tips on new launches and developments.

Amplified eWOM occurs when a marketer launches a campaign or in some other way encourages others to speak about a product or a company ([35] WOMMA, 2011). Marketing managers are increasingly taking actions to influence customer-to-customer interactions by different agent campaigns, opinion leader programs, and viral marketing. This can also be called exogenous WOM ([7] Godes and Mayzlin, 2009). Studies on amplified eWOM have mainly concentrated on examining the profitability, reliability, and ethicality of these marketing campaigns ([19] Libai et al., 2010). In order for the campaign to work, it is important for companies to examine the character narratives of the blogger and the prevailing culture in the blog, i.e. how campaign blog content is created according to the character narrative and pressures from the audience ([14] Kozinets et al., 2010). The marketer tries to exert influence over the content of amplified eWOM but ultimately this is in the hands of the eWOM creator. The blog content determines the popularity of the blog and helps to understand the messages, writing style, and tone of communication ([18] Li and Du, 2010). Thorough scrutiny of the content helps companies to identify the popular blogs and opinion leaders to whom to promote their products or services. eWOM content can be both organic and amplified due to a marketing campaign. The main emphasis in this paper is on the message content created by the blogger and the blog audience. The theoretical framework was developed from an overview of eWOM and from the topics discovered on the eWOM content studies. Figure 1 [Figure omitted. See Article Image.] illustrates the process and elements in creating eWOM in fashion blogs (e.g. [8] Hennig-Thurau et al. , 2004; [33] Thomas et al., 2007; [7] Godes and Mayzlin, 2009; [14] Kozinets et al., 2010; [15] Kretz and de Valck, 2010; [18] Li and Du, 2010; [24] Moore, 2010). Since the theoretical literature concerning eWOM information, especially concerning fashion, was scarce, the framework introduces the reader to the process and elements of eWOM. The framework will be used as a guiding and helping tool in analyzing texts from the empirical material.

The framework consists of the blogger, who mainly creates the content in a fashion blog, and in addition, there is an audience consisting of consumers who only read the blog and contributors who also comment and discuss the blog content. The possibility of marketing influence, however, must be taken into consideration. Accordingly,
in amplified eWOM content, there is a direct influence by a marketer. If there is no direct marketing influence, the eWOM content will be organic. Between the blogger and the audience is the actual message that they send to each other. It represents the bloggers’ entries as well as the audience’s comments. This study will concentrate on analyzing those messages and revealing their fashion-related content.

3. Method
In this study, the research approach is based on netnography. Netnography is a fairly recent and not so commonly used methodology developed from ethnography. Since the social world is going digital and online cultures are increasingly popular, a suitable methodology in studying them was needed (e.g. [5] Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, pp. 96-7; [13] Kozinets, 2010, p. 2; [28] Rokka, 2010).

3.1 Netnography as a method
Netnography can be defined as "a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications" ([10] Kozinets, 2002). It aims at a similar holistic and interpretive understanding of a phenomenon as ethnography does but uses data that have been generated with a computer as a communication tool. In netnography, studying social experiences is equally meaningful as in ethnography, but the time investments are smaller because the researcher need not travel anywhere. Netnography is about observing "naturally" occurring data and texts, and one of its benefits is that the surroundings are not created artificially by the researcher. Therefore it is less intrusive than interviews and surveys and even suitable for studying sensitive topics ([16] Langer and Beckman, 2005). Placing netnography in the context of this study, observing and analyzing the postings in fashion blogs yielded a holistic understanding of eWOM content in online blogs about fashion products. However, this study could not overlook the phenomena of fashion blogs since their meaning is much more than just a medium of sharing reviews about products.

There are also challenges that come with netnography ([11] Kozinets, 2006). The amount of data available online is huge. It is important that the topic and sites are focussed, because otherwise the information collected may be irrelevant. In this study, only fashion blogs written by consumers were taken into consideration. This study is also limited to fashion products and related issues, such as brands, designers, retailers, and buying behavior. Even if a blog is categorized as a fashion blog, the topics may still range from cosmetics to food. Therefore, those texts concerning only fashion product-related information were analyzed. In addition, the comments of blog readers and the visual presentation in blogs, including photos and videos, were taken into consideration.

The form of data is mostly textual without the typical characteristics of face-to-face talk. The anonymity of people as well as the lack of the tone of voices and body language reduce the richness of data. Luckily, fashion bloggers tend to provide some background information about themselves but most of the readers remain anonymous. Furthermore, bloggers usually use emoticons to fill the void of tone and body language. The major challenge that affects the whole research is the ability to interpret the data found. The data may be full of writing that is unique and different from everyday writing. In order to interpret the data correctly, the researcher must be familiar with that particular online culture.

3.2 Blog selection
In the beginning, the research topic was quite wide but evolved during the process to comprise of fashion blogs and their content, since they have a significant influence on fashion consumers in today’s markets ([15] Kretz and de Valck, 2010, p. 326). We selected six blogs according to the following criteria: relevant information about fashion and fashion products, large amount of activity by the blogger, interactivity with the audience and substantiality of the information ([13] Kozinets, 2010, p. 89). In addition, heterogeneity of the bloggers and richness of the data were important criteria.

The profiles on the six bloggers appear in Table I [Figure omitted. See Article Image]. The chosen bloggers were popular, interesting in a fashion sense and active in their blogs. The blogs were selected from Blogilista.fi,
a web site that lists the most popular blogs in Finland. Most of the popular blogs on the list are fashion blogs and we selected the most relevant fashion blogs on the list for the purpose of this research. Being on the list meant also that the blog community was active, i.e. the blog had many subscribers, who actively commented on blog entries. As evident from Table I [Figure omitted. See Article Image.], the blogs were also active in a sense that the average amount of blog entries per month ranged between 15 and 48. More heterogeneity between bloggers would have enriched the data but since blogging is a fairly new phenomenon, fashion bloggers are mainly women and under 30. Ethical netgenealogy requires the researcher always to fully disclose his or her presence ([13] Kozinets, 2010, p. 147). Therefore, we notified bloggers of the research and requested bloggers’ permission to use texts in January 2011 when blog observation started. The request was made directly by e-mail. If permission had been publicly requested in the commenting section of the blog, this may have caused a disruption in the flow of comments and in the naturally occurring texts ([13] Kozinets, 2010, p. 180).

3.3 Data collection and analysis

Blog observation was the main tool in collecting data. Blogs are a source of information that “can contain rich, detailed, longitudinal data about individuals and their consumption practices, values, meanings and beliefs” ([12] Kozinets, 2007, p. 138). The empirical data consisted of naturally occurring texts, hence the researcher’s role was unobtrusive. Observational techniques such as qualitative content analysis, visual analysis, and interpretive analysis were used to divide the data into topics. Our data includes the blog postings and audience comments concerning fashion product-related information from these six blogs from the beginning of January 2011 to the end of March 2011. Total collected data amounted to 1,726 pages of text with 1.5 spacing, 238,361 words, and 315 entries. In addition, fieldnote data consisted of the first author’s own reflective and observational comments. In addition to textual data, important visual and audiovisual data was described among the actual data.

The data analysis included both analytical coding of the data as well as hermeneutic interpretation ([31] Spiggle, 1994; [10], [13] Kozinets, 2002, 2010, p. 118). In this study, the collected data were sorted and classified into Microsoft Word sheets according to each individual blogger and according to the nature of the eWOM in the entry, i.e. organic or amplified. Categorizing eWOM into organic or amplified was based solely on blog content, thus relying on the bloggers to reveal any marketer influence. Therefore, it must be noted that if the blogger has disguised the direct marketing influence behind some entry and it is not visible in any way, the entry was analyzed as organic. The data analysis started in January 2011 as soon as blog observation started and fieldnotes were made. The data collection and analysis were thus intertwined. As [13] Kozinets (2010, p. 116) puts it, “data are endlessly converted and sorted as they are recorded.” Collecting, and especially coding the data were also a preliminary analysis because it forced the researcher to scrutinize, refine, and categorize the data according to the aim of the study (see [23] Moisander and Valtonen, 2006, p. 120). These codes and classifications labeled the data according to a more general phenomenon that they belong to. After this collection and initial filing, the entries were carefully gone through and coded according to the bloggers’ own categorization and the topics found from the previous studies. The entries consisted of bloggers’ own texts and comments that the audience had written below the entry.

In addition, the data were interpreted using hermeneutic approach to consumer research (e.g. [31] Spiggle, 1994; [34] Thompson, 1997). The understanding grew with constantly changing new interpretations and with new experiences emanating from the blog texts and visual material. According to the hermeneutic helix, knowledge and theory develop as new data is collected, analyzed, and interpreted ([36] Ödman, 2007, p. 119). On the one hand, by analyzing and interpreting the individual elements in blog texts, the meaning of the whole is constructed. On the other hand, individual elements could not be understood without the meaning of the whole. After the big picture of fashion blogs became clear, the different elements, i.e. topics, and similarities among them began to emerge. The fieldnotes were written from the ideas arising from these elements as the results started to emerge. The best examples of the blog texts were selected to represent the element or the
4. Results
The results of this study were divided into organic eWOM topics and amplified eWOM topics in consumer fashion blogs. The idea was to find out whether there were any differences between them or not.

4.1 Organic fashion blog topics
Organic topics in fashion blogs consisted of four main topics or themes, i.e. personal style, brands, designers and retailers, tips and advice, and purchases. Table II [Figure omitted. See Article Image.] illustrates each topic and their subthemes, as well as examples of each from the data.

4.1.1 Personal style
It was seen in multiple entries that bloggers’ personal styles played a crucial part in the blog. Each fashion blogger studied had a unique personal style. It continues to be the leitmotiv that ties all the blog entries together and gives a reader clues about the general style of the blog. Personal style was exhibited in four ways - by the outfit of the day and by evaluating street and celebrity style as well as trends. The most typical way to document personal style was to present an outfit worn on a particular day. These entries are usually quite short and simple consisting of one or multiple photos of the outfit worn by the blogger and brand details presented below the photo(s):
Scarf Gina Tricot, vest Vila Nelly.com, grey bomber jacket H&M (new! found in the sales for 15[euro]), tunic Ellos, leggings Gina Tricot, necklace Pieces, shoes Dr Martens eBay, bag Zara eBay (Aino, January 15, 2011).
It is important to mention the brand or the retailer of every piece of clothing because the readers are very interested where the products can be bought. Fashion bloggers are role models because of their unique personal style, and therefore the readers tend to copy the style or pick an interesting product for their own use. However, if the brand is easily recognizable in the illustrations or photos, as in one of the bloggers’ Louis Vuitton handbags, the brand may not be individually mentioned. In these entries, bloggers showed their fashion expertise and inspired many readers.

4.1.2 Brands, designers, and retailers
As discussed earlier, brand, designer, and retailer information is included in today’s outfit entries. In addition, the blogger may devote a whole entry to discussing a brand or a designer. This theme was shown in two subthemes, collections as well as history and other company details. Entries on brands, designers, and retailers are often presentations of blogger’s favorite brands and include brands’ own promotional or catwalk photos. The information about brands may include a short history of the brand, such as when, where, and by whom the company was founded. Moreover, the information may include names of the designers, where the brand is currently located and sold, and what type of products are the brand’s signature items:
Diemme is from the Montebelluna area which is known to be one of Italy’s leading shoe industry towns. It was interesting to hear that Diemme is still run in Montebello by the original Italian owners who are two brothers. Nowadays Blender Agency is responsible of the designs world wide except for Japan. In Japan there is another local office who does the design for Japanese market (Tuukka, January 27, 2011).
The information is usually very detailed and gives the audience background information on the brand before presenting the actual products. Bloggers taking a more journalistic approach to blogging, such as Tuukka and Niina, evaluate different brands’ fashion shows or new collections critically. However, rarely were any negative evaluations seen in these blogs but rather predictions of what the trends for the future will be and which products from the brand’s collection are likely to be popular.

4.1.3 Tips and advice
Fashion blogs can be considered as places to share and ask for tips and advice on fashion-related issues. They are two-way portals in a sense because the tips and advice can be shared and requested by the blogger and by the audience. Such discussions can be seen in online forums where eWOM is mostly exchanged but also in fashion blogs due to the active use of the commenting section of the blog. In our data, tips and advice were
given and shared on diverse topics: experiences, sales, product alternatives, favorite shops, product details such as material, size, and price, as well as buying procedures especially in webstores (see e.g. Table II [Figure omitted. See Article Image.]). When reviewing fashion products, the bloggers tend to avoid negative product reviewing because this could easily create negative atmosphere in the blog. However, the readers are willing to share their negative experiences with other readers and the blogger. For example, blogger Linda wrote an entry about leather flats she wanted for the summer. She mentioned that previously she had faux leather flats and they lasted only for one summer. As in the example below, many blog readers then shared their experiences of faux leather and leather flats:

Sad to say the Tory flats are no more durable than cheap flats made from imitation leather. I don’t know why, but I guess it is because flats have such a thin sole. They last for one summer, two at the most if you don’t care for the worn-out look. In the third summer, they would fall apart if you didn’t buy a new pair [...] :S (Luisa in Linda’s blog, February 1, 2011).

Negative as well as positive experiences shared by blog readers can easily influence the final choice the blogger makes. If the blogger decides not to buy the product, many readers may end up making the same decision in accordance with their fashion opinion leader.

4.1.4 Purchases
Online communities are venues to discuss purchases ([33] Thomas et al., 2007), and fashion blogs are no exception. In our data, the purchases theme consisted of four subthemes, i.e. new products, stories, online purchases, and desired products. All in all, the blog entries discussing purchases emphasized how experienced a consumer the blogger is. Fashion bloggers make purchase decisions that are different from the norm but still viewed as acceptable and distinct from the group. However, the fashion bloggers studied here did not boast about expensive high-end purchases but rather about cheap but good finds in sales and high-street chain stores. The purchases, however, are presented in different ways than, for example, the outfit of the day. The purchases have their own entries where the products bought are shown on hangers or otherwise on display but rarely worn by the bloggers themselves. If new purchases are included in an outfit with other items, they are usually mentioned in the product details as new. These purchases were both from brick-and-mortar and online stores and discussed in the blog in an equally detailed manner:

Yep, I too think that the top looks pretty cheap but it fitted so nicely that I had to drag it to the cashier. I think it cost 25 Euros and the store was Terranova. The Bronx shoes on the other hand were something that I have been looking for a long time: pumps with low heels. It felt a bit painful to pay 80 Euros but I have gotten over it (Salla, January 5, 2011).

Bloggers take pictures of the products purchased and then add product details including the brand, where it was bought, and how much it cost. Bloggers moreover give explanations for why the product was purchased, for example, because it fitted nicely or the color was unique. The prices were also mentioned in order to show the audience good bargains. On some occasions, the blogger told the entire purchase experience as a story that can include very detailed accounts of emotions associated with the purchase experience, such as desire, uncertainty, and happiness. In online purchases, the blogger usually discusses the entire purchase experience in a more detailed manner than brick-and-mortar purchase experiences. For example, reporting the online purchase experience typically consists of two blog entries - an entry after the order was made and another after the order has arrived. Especially in these online purchase experiences, the feelings of success, disappointment, and learning from mistakes were evident because buying online always entails some uncertainty. Further, in addition to actual purchases, bloggers tell about purchases they desire to make. These entries typically consist of either one product with a longer explanation why the blogger wants it or multiple products presented like a shopping list. The shopping list products can be listed on a very general level, whereas single product desires can be very specific. However, photos of desired products are always included in these blog entries.

4.2 Amplified fashion blog topics
The amplified topics were not as varied as the organic topics. This may have been because there were not as many amplified entries as organic entries. The main themes of amplified topics consisted of products received, brands, designers and retailers, tips, and competitions. Amplified fashion blog topics with examples from data are illustrated in Table III [Figure omitted. See Article Image].

4.2.1 Products received
Blogger sponsorship - i.e. offering bloggers gifts or gift vouchers for the purpose of feeding the blog content - shows in our data in three subthemes: outfit of the day, purchase-like stories, and product details. Sometimes the product the blogger has received is part of an outfit of the day entry. Fashion bloggers mention the name of the brand or designer, give details about the products, and show photos of them incorporated into the outfit of the day where other clothes might be bought by the blogger:

Here's one favorite piece of clothing. A skirt that I got from Putilikki (Putilikki's own line) last summer has surprisingly become my favorite skirt. I usually don't wear dark blue but in this skirt the color just works. Big pockets create a look that's relaxed and the elasticized waist is relaxation itself! I'm obviously comfort-loving these days (Niina, January 5, 2011).

Some retailers preferred to give the bloggers gift vouchers, discounts, or an opportunity to select something free of charge from the collection. If the blogger then chose to have something, this selection was presented to the audience in a similar way to other purchases, i.e. as a purchase-like story. Even though the product was free of charge for the blogger, also the price of the product was mentioned as when presenting regular purchases. If the product has some special features, the blogger may give very a detailed account of the product details. Fashion bloggers use their own language that is different from marketing language, and therefore these accounts can appear more authentic for the audience.

4.2.2 Brands, designers, and retailers
Amplified eWOM related to brands, retailers, and retailers was shown in the subthemes of continuous co-operation and collections. A few of the selected bloggers were in a continuous co-operation with a company. When the bloggers discuss these brands or retailers, they mention them in multiple blog entries that concern their new product lines, regularly received products and discounts, and news or events that the blogger passes on to the audience. Therefore, in a continuous co-operation, the blogger acts almost like an employee for the firm by promoting different sales, giving discounts to the blog audience, and presenting new products. It is important that the blogger relates to the retailer and the brand. Otherwise, he or she might be reluctant to accept the co-operation offer from the firm:

The people from Fida asked if I would be interested in co-operating with them, and of course I am interested! In addition to making purchases with a discount, I feel that I'm supporting a good cause. In my opinion, Fida does wonderful charitable work (Aino, February 24, 2011).

The blogger may justify a new co-operation setup to the blog readers, for example, by pointing out that the basic content of the blog is not going to change. Some readers may still be skeptical about the co-operation and express their negative feelings regarding the blogger, the brand, or their co-operation. In addition to the co-operation, brands, designers, and retailers show in amplified eWOM when the bloggers receive invitations to showrooms and other events where brands present their collections. The bloggers tend to report about these showroom events and collections in their blogs using text and photos. As these showroom products might not be available in shops yet, blog audience can feel privileged to see them first.

4.2.3 Tips
Fashion bloggers give tips to their audience about shopping events and new store openings to which they may have been invited themselves or on which they have received information in press releases. The shopping events mentioned are usually blogger's favorites or those that the blogger would go to, and those that are organized only once a year or are otherwise special:

Surprise surprise, I won't make it to the Helsinki Vintage this year either, but you go and enjoy it! More
information on tickets and schedule from here CLICK! I'm going to enjoy the wintry scenes in Lapland on Sunday :) (Niina, March 1, 2011).

When reporting about new store openings, the blog entry may include the press release or an explanation by the blogger why this is relevant information on the brand or the retailer. These retailers or brands may be bloggers' favorites from abroad and opening a new store in their home country or opening a webstore.

4.2.4 Competitions

Retailers work together with bloggers to organize competitions where the blog audience can win product prizes or gift vouchers. When a competition is about presenting a product or a collection, the entry typically begins with the blogger telling something about the brand or product and choosing favorite items from the selection. After introducing the brand, the blogger explains the competition. Blog readers can then choose or vote for products they like, design something or comment the blog entry and take part in the competition. The audience is very eager to take part in these competitions:

After a try-on, I went for two different sets: the ivory colored Sorbet balconette (1.) and the black beautifully decorated Linnea (2.). We decided with the Patricia people that because I got the chance to try their lingerie so should one of you. You can enter the competition by voting for your favorite of these two sets (Emmi, March 24, 2011).

Competitions can be arranged also with gift vouchers instead of product prizes. Usually in these cases also bloggers receive a gift voucher in return for promoting the company, for example for presenting a new collection in the blog or selecting their own favorites from a collection. Typically, a similar gift voucher is then drawn among audience contributors.

5. Discussion

The results show the diversity of eWOM topics discussed in fashion blogs, and highlight the similarities and differences between organic, i.e. naturally occurring and amplified, i.e. marketer-influenced fashion blog topics. Organic eWOM in fashion blogs concerned personal style, brands, designers, and retailers, tips and advice and purchases. Amplified eWOM ranged over the products received by the blogger, brands, retailers, and retailers, tips as well as competitions arranged by companies. The organic and amplified eWOM topics were not as different as might have been assumed. At their best, the amplified topics resemble organic topics as much as possible because they are not radically different from the general feeling of the blog. However, some topics can only be seen either in organic or amplified messages. Tips and advice messages emanated from the bloggers' and the audience's information need and competitions emanated from the retailers' desire to organize these. Even though some topics are different, their presentation is similar. For example, if a blogger receives a gift voucher or can choose a product on her own, the use of these benefits is explained in the same way as if the product was purchased with the blogger's own money.

On the whole, the importance of portraying personal style - a form of digital self-presentation (30 Schau and Gilly, 2003) - is evident from our data, as personal style shows both in organic and amplified fashion blog content. Earlier, [33] Thomas et al. (2007) found that posts on personal style and preferences were the most popular discussion topics within a fashion forum on MySpace.com, and [15] Kretz and de Valck (2010, p. 315) pointed out that fashion bloggers "use their blogs as spaces for self-stories about fashion consumption practices." Our findings support this and give further evidence that personal style of the blogger does not show only in the organic eWOM topics, such as personal style - the outfit of the day, evaluating street, and celebrity style as well as trends - but also in amplified eWOM where the fashion-related content should comply with the personal style and preferences of the blogger. For example, only those products bloggers have received from companies that fit their personal style are likely to be incorporated to the outfit of the day. In addition, our findings give further support for the importance of the character narratives of blogs ([14] Kozinets et al., 2010), as audience gives negative feedback if especially amplified content is not considered appropriate for the general style of the blog.

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Consistent with results by [33] Thomas et al. (2007) and [15] Kretz and de Valck (2010), our study also highlights the role of brands, designers, and retailers in fashion blog eWOM. In fashion, brands, designers, and retailers are a crucial part of telling others about one's own style, and hence, fashion blogs can be considered branded storytelling where visual and textual elements are arranged to place brands in the plot as characters ([15] Kretz and de Valck, 2010). In our data, a brand, designer, or retailer is mentioned in almost all types of eWOM - not only in content about brands, designers, and retailers per se - whether it is outfit of the day, purchases the blogger has made or tips and advice. In amplified eWOM it is obvious that the marketer, i.e. brand, designer, or retailer is mentioned, however, bloggers want to avoid unwanted or unrelated advertising ([15] Kretz and de Valck, 2010), and therefore, for example continuous co-operation is often justified to the blog audience in order to adhere to the communal norms ([14] Kozinets et al., 2010). Further, a recent study by [2] Colliander and Dahlén (2011) showed the importance of brand relationships in fashion blogs compared to online fashion magazines. According to them, as long as bloggers follow brands, blog audience forms relationships with the brands as well. For example, a higher brand attitude and purchase intention was related to blogs than online magazines. However, writer credibility and the unbiased nature of the sender were more important in fashion blogs ([2] Colliander and Dahlén, 2011).

The communal and interactive aspect of fashion blogs is mostly evident in giving, sharing, and asking for tips and advice. Giving advice and tips on fashion issues, such as experiences and great deals on products or how to wear a specific piece of clothing shows concern for others and benefits those who read the advice ([8] Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Earlier research has identified both concern for other consumers and advice seeking as motivating factors for visiting as well as posting on online communities ([8] Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). However, our findings suggest that there is a difference between organic and amplified eWOM concerning tips and advice. In organic eWOM tips and advice can be considered benefiting both the blogger and audience, as blogger can now and then ask for advice and tips from the blog audience. However, in amplified eWOM the direction is more one-way - the blogger serves the audience by giving them tips, for example on new stores or shopping events.

Lastly, as [15] Kretz and de Valck (2010) point out, bloggers need to find a balance between audience expectations (authenticity and trustworthiness) and marketer expectations (brand magnifying). Our findings give further insight on this by pointing out that amplified eWOM postings are often written to resemble organic eWOM. For example, for marketers one of the most influential ways of reaching potential and current customers is giving a blogger a piece of clothing that he or she incorporates into her personal style and everyday wardrobe ([3] Corcoran, 2010). In these outfit of the day postings, the marketing campaign itself is not so salient because the products received are presented in the same way as the ones that bloggers buy themselves. This also shows in the importance of positive eWOM. Although it was not the focus of this study, we noted that bloggers tend to create a positive atmosphere in the blog by posting mainly positive eWOM. Negative eWOM comes mainly from the blog audience in their comments. [8] Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) noted, however, that those consumers who are motivated to vent their negative feelings on online community platforms visit communities less often than others.

6. Limitations and areas for further research
This study was explorative in nature, and therefore, entails some limitations. The six fashion blogs observed were among the most popular fashion blogs in Finland, and even though our results are generally in line with other studies on fashion blogs, there may be some variations between countries, and the results may not be applicable to all fashion blogs. Therefore, further research is needed to examine different fashion blog subcultures. In addition, our objective was to gain a holistic view of the differences in topics between organic and amplified eWOM in fashion blogs. Therefore, examining the frequencies or occurrence of different topics was beyond our focus, but it would be interesting to examine them in the future.

As our research approach was based on observing blog entries and audience comments, analyzing content as
amplified was based on bloggers explicitly mentioning a marketer influence. However, this approach might have left some marketer influence unnoticed, and therefore, in the future, we encourage studies that take into account all actors involved, i.e. the blogger, audience as well as marketer, and that enrich observational data with other types of data, for example interviews. Also, future studies may examine fashion company practices of organizing a seeding or blog marketing campaign, and, for example, the role of these campaigns in brand management. Moreover, as more fashion companies provide style advice and other fashion information in their own blogs (see [21] McCormick and Livett, 2012), future research may investigate differences and similarities between consumer-generated fashion blogs and fashion blogs on company web sites. From the audience point of view, future research may examine the value that organic vs amplified eWOM can create for consumers (see also [19] Libai et al., 2010).

7. Conclusions and practical implications
The purpose of this paper was to describe and analyze eWOM in consumer fashion blogs, and, especially, to compare the organic and amplified fashion blog texts that the blogger and blog readers are producing. In conclusion, this study addresses, through a netnographic approach, the emerging, yet scarce area of research of how marketer influence on fashion bloggers can be seen in user-generated fashion blog content. Our findings indicate that although not as varied as organic, amplified eWOM content in consumer fashion blogs resembles organic content. All in all, our study contributes by giving further insight about the diversity of C2C interactions in the era of Web 2.0.

The companies that engage in fashion blog marketing can make several implications from this study. Observing organic eWOM content in consumer fashion blogs can be very useful for fashion companies in trend forecasting and improving their collections (see also [27] Rickman and Cosenza, 2007). Our findings reveal different forms of fashion blog marketing, such as organizing competitions with bloggers, feeding bloggers with products or gift vouchers, or establishing a continuous relationship with a blogger through co-operation agreement. Blog competitions can be a convenient way to collect information from consumers. An incentive, such as a gift voucher or a product prize encourages many blog readers to place a comment on the blog, and give insight, for example on product development. If a company decides to feed a blogger with a specific product, the risks are higher that the product does not fit the blogger’s style and therefore, it is not presented by the blogger, or if presented, can cause negative feedback from the audience. However, if a blogger receives a gift voucher, the product chosen by the blogger is more likely to fit the blogger's style and be incorporated into the outfit of the day. If a product is part of an outfit of the day posting, the blogger gives an impression that he or she genuinely likes the product, would spend money on it and actually wear it. All in all, our findings indicate that for blog marketing to be effective and credible, the marketed fashion items, such as brands, designers, or retailers need to fit the blogger's personal style and the general atmosphere of the blog. Therefore, it is essential to find an appropriate blogger and a blog. However, as the audience requires authenticity and trustworthiness from fashion blogs ([15] Kretz and de Valck, 2010), companies should strive to respect this open relationship between the blogger and the audience.

WWD

References

Further reading

Appendix
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Illustration
Figure 1: Organic and amplified eWOM content in blogs
Table I: Profiles of the bloggers
Table II: Organic fashion blog topics
Table III: Amplified fashion blog topics