Social exchange and social capital in blogging: Interactions among mum bloggers, marketers and public relations practitioners in the virtual third place

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Abstract

The rise of consumers using social media and the resulting changes in the media, marketing and business landscape have seen governments, corporations, not-for-profit organisations and individuals dealing with the ramifications of ‘digital disruption’. Bloggers, as a group of social media ‘influencers’, have become important and of concern to both marketers and public relations (M&PR) practitioners. One group of bloggers is the so-called mum, mummy or mommy bloggers (MBs). As mothers are an important group of consumers, and women drive most purchasing decisions in Australia, the need for M&PR practitioners to influence these influencers has become apparent.

This research explores the phenomenon of mum blogging in Australia and the exchanges between: MBs and each other; MBs and their readers; and MBs and M&PR practitioners, representing brands and organisations. Social exchange theory and social capital theory underpin the research, which sought to answer several research questions. Specially; what are MBs’ motivations to blog? What are the nature and extent of MBs’ exchanges with M&PR practitioners online and offline? What are the major ethical issues surrounding blogging and do MBs and M&PR practitioners have differing viewpoints on these issues? This research draws together concepts from separate but inter-related disciplines, namely marketing and public relations. Within marketing, the contrasting concepts of co-creation and covert marketing are explored and within public relations, the normative concepts of relationship management, two-way communication and dialogue are reviewed and critiqued. For MBs, the divergent views of them as empowered prosumers or in a period of liminality and vulnerability are explored.

Data were gathered using a netnography approach. Netnography is ethnography applied to the online environment, and was particularly appropriate for this research which sought to explore the offline and online experiences of MBs in depth. The netnography included interviews, a survey and an analysis of blogs in Australia.

Findings illustrate six main motivations for MBs to blog: community and connection, therapy, helping people, having a voice, developing new skills and making money. Bloggers ‘market’ to M&PR practitioners and develop networks with their readers and
each other, giving them significant social capital and power. M&PR practitioners do recognise the influence MBs have and are eager to capitalise on it. M&PR practitioners appear to expect professionalism from bloggers, while admitting that bloggers are often not professionals in an accepted sense of the term. Finally, the key ethical issue discovered was of whether to disclose ‘cash for comment’, or payment for opinion, on blogs, and this issue remains an unresolved concern for bloggers and M&PR practitioners.

Theoretical implications of this research are significant. First, the role of social capital in blogging relevant to marketing and public relations is clarified. Influencers are using their social capital to expect a return for their ‘work’ in their social exchanges with M&PR practitioners. Relevant to social exchange theory, bloggers only wish to work with M&PR practitioners promoting brands if the M&PR practitioners offer some benefit, including money, in-kind reward, or prestige. Relevant to the concept of liminality, mum bloggers often begin blogging in a liminal state but as their blogging continues they are neither empowered nor vulnerable, but are paradoxically often both at the same time vulnerable-empowered women.

Managerial implications for M&PR practitioners include acknowledging that the motivations of bloggers are often personal and may not dovetail with a brand’s marketing or communications objectives. There should also be a requirement for clearer codes of conduct for working with bloggers, and more mindful self-awareness on the part of M&PR practitioners when dealing with potentially vulnerable new prosumers. For mum bloggers, as one genre of new influencers, their own part in the changing media landscape also requires an ethical review when dealing with M&PR practitioners.
Relevant refereed journal articles and conference papers

This thesis contains published work and/or work prepared for publication, some of which has been co-authored. The bibliographical details of the work and where it appears in the thesis are outlined below. A signed declaration is contained in the submission form.

Journal articles


*Catherine Archer researched and wrote the entire paper with advice (review of Catherine’s written work) from Paul Harrigan (and anonymous reviewers). The content of this paper was used within the PhD within the literature review, findings and discussion chapters.*


*Simone Pettigrew wrote this paper with review and advice from Catherine Archer and Paul Harrigan (and anonymous reviewers). The content of this paper has not been included in the thesis (other than as a reference).*


*Catherine Archer researched and wrote the entire paper with reviews of her written work by Simone Pettigrew and Paul Harrigan (and anonymous reviewers). The content of this paper was used within the PhD within the literature review, findings and discussion chapters.*
Conference papers and presentations


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They say it takes a village to raise a child. While writing a PhD could be seen as a solitary activity, it has also taken a village of family, friends and fellow academics to support me as I have ‘raised’ my PhD.

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family but also to Shakespeare’s Sisters, the bloggers of the 21st century.
For Shakespeare’s Sister

“I told you in the course of this paper that Shakespeare had a sister; but do not look for her in Sir Sidney Lee’s life of the poet. She died young—alas, she never wrote a word. She lies buried where the omnibuses now stop, opposite the Elephant and Castle. Now my belief is that this poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the cross-roads still lives. She lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here to—night, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed. But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh. This opportunity, as I think, it is now coming within your power to give her. For my belief is that if we live another century or so—I am talking of the common life which is the real life and not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals—and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves; if we look past Milton’s bogey, for no human being should shut out the view; if we face the fact, for it is a fact, that there is no arm to cling to, but that we go alone and that our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women, then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare’s sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down. Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born. As for her coming without that preparation, without that effort on our part, without that determination that when she is born again she shall find it possible to live and write her poetry, that we cannot expect, for that would be impossible. But I maintain that she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worthwhile.”

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.0 Chapter overview

According to many academics and practitioners, the shift from consuming traditional media to engaging in social media by consumers has revolutionised marketing and public relations (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Miller & Lammas, 2010; Scott, 2011). It has been argued that social media, known also as Web 2.0, is at the heart of concepts such as co-creation within marketing (Cova, Dalli, & Zwick, 2011), and dialogue theory within public relations (Grunig, 2009; Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). Bloggers, who write blogs (short for weblogs), are viewed as important ‘influencers’ by marketing and public relations (M&PR) practitioners (Gillin, 2008; Stansberry, 2015; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005; Woods, 2005). Mum (or mommy/mummy) bloggers are a significant group within blogging (Burns, 2016; Lopez, 2009; Lupton, Pedersen & Thomas, 2016; Morrissey, 2009; Stansberry, 2015) and their interaction with M&PR practitioners has grown in Australia (and in the world) as their influence among their readers has increased (Lee, 2012; Stansberry, 2015). The focus of this thesis is blogging mothers, their motivations and their interactions with M&PR practitioners (that is, those professionals who communicate with bloggers on behalf of brands or organisations).

The present study is important given the rise of social media influencers, the complex changes in the media landscape and the resulting theoretical and practical implications for both M&PR practitioners and academics. This chapter introduces concepts related to bloggers, specifically mum bloggers, highlighting the gaps and contradictions in the extant literature, relevant to both marketing and public relations and the bloggers these M&PR professionals seek to interact with. The objectives and research questions for the research are then introduced. To further emphasise their significance, a background to the context of the research study is outlined. A brief review of the research methodology for this qualitative study is then provided. The chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of the thesis. Statements made in this chapter will be supported in detail in later chapters.
1.1 The ‘new’ influencers

Blogs and other social media are now considered essential components of M&PR communications campaigns (Ferguson, 2008; Jensen, 2011; Sullivan & Krall, 2008). The term social media refers to “internet services where the online content is generated by the users of the service” (Cann, Dimitriou, & Hooley, 2011, p. 7). Historically, word-of-mouth (WOM) has been considered largely outside of the realm of marketers’ and public relations practitioners’ influence, but it has been noted by Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki and Wilner (2010) that theories and observations of this phenomenon were originally made prior to the internet. WOM Marketing (WOMM) is defined as “the intentional influencing of consumer-to-consumer communications by professional marketing techniques” (Kozinets et al., 2010, p 71). No differentiation is made by Kozinets et al. (2010) between WOMM and such terms as social media marketing, viral marketing, buzz and guerrilla marketing. The internet has now motivated M&PR practitioners to have an influence on influencers (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011; Kozinets et al., 2010). Academic research on marketing through influencers has been described as still in its infancy (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007) and it has been suggested that research examining marketing through viral WOM in different and new contexts is important (Kozinets et al., 2010). According to Sepp, Liljander and Gummerus (2011) research is needed into bloggers’ expectations of and attitudes toward blog marketing. Blog marketing is defined as “the use of weblogs to promote a brand, company, product or service, event or some other initiative” (Corcoran, Marsden, Zorbach, & Röthlingshöfer, 2006, p. 148).

Blogs as a genre are becoming increasingly important for consumers and organisations (Sepp et al., 2011). Bloggers, as influencers, are being courted by organisations keen to cut through the clutter and connect with their consumers through an influential third party (Ashley & Leonard, 2009; Macnamara, 2010). The sheer number of blogs is substantial and increasing daily (Kerr, Mortimer, Dickinson-Delaporte, & Waller, 2011). By the end of 2011, NM Incite, a Nielsen/McKinsey company, tracked over 181 million blogs around the world, up from 36 million only five years earlier in 2006 (Nielsen/NM Incite, 2012). Blogs are important for consumers as they are read for entertainment and information, and are perceived as trustworthy (Armstrong & McAdams, 2009; Brown et al., 2007). For organisations, blogs and bloggers are important because they can quickly spread information and opinion about organisations.
and products (Jones, Temperley, & Lima, 2009). After conducting a thorough literature review of marketing research on bloggers, Sepp et al. (2011) concluded that bloggers have a substantial influence on their readers’ behaviours.

1.2 Background to the research

Blogs are defined as websites that are produced by individuals in a diary format and presented in reverse chronological order. Blogs usually include text, photographs, videos and links to other blogs and web pages (van Heerden, Salehi-Sangari, Pitt, & Caruana, 2009). The academic definition can be contrasted with a blogger’s definition. "A blog is that vice-clenching pain in your heart that explodes through your fingers while the words in your head run at a million miles an hour. It is the shadows and the sunlight in your everyday life. A blog is life. Transcribed." (By Kristy of Hespera’s Garden, hesperasgarden.com, as featured on edenriley.com). The blogosphere has been defined as a network of blogs and “a segmented and independent public that dynamically evolves and functions according to its own rules and with ever-changing protagonists” (Bross, Quasthoff, Berger, Hennig, & Meinel, 2010, p. 453).

One important group of bloggers who have gained ascendancy and influence is the mum or mummy/mommy bloggers (Burns, 2016; Lopez, 2009; Morrissey, 2009; Stansberry, 2015). Mommy bloggers, to use the American sobriquet, are according to an online dictionary, mothers who blog about their children, motherhood, parenting or related topics (http://www.yourdictionary.com/mommy-blogger). However, a broader definition is advocated by others. For example, Lopez (2009, p. 374) suggested that “for the most part, women categorized as ‘mommy bloggers’ are simply women who are mothers and occasionally write about their own children. The language used in such blogs is extremely informal and usually narrative and the most popular writers employ a great deal of humor and levity to entertain their audience”. Lopez made the point that the topics on ‘mommy blogs’ are not limited to issues related to parenting and that these bloggers “also write about popular culture, food, current events, politics, their town, the weather, financial issues, their husband and any other possible topic” (Lopez, p. 734).

Similarly, an Australian blogger supplied the following definition of ‘mummy bloggers’ (note the Australian/English spelling).

A Mummy Blogger is a Mum who blogs. She may write about parenting or she may write about fashion, food, work or craft. She writes about the topic/s she is
passionate about and often that includes parenting her children. Some bloggers have a very specific and obvious niche, most don’t. That she writes about parenting doesn’t limit her interests to that field, or define her. Most Mums who blog write as a way to find or maintain their sense of identity as they balance family life, work and personal interests (Claire, 2011).

Given these definitions, for the purposes of this thesis the adopted definition of mum bloggers is ‘bloggers who are mothers’. The Australian spelling and expression mum blogger (MB) will be adopted, unless in a quoted context from an American source. It is important to also note that the term ‘mummy/mommy blogger’ is contentious and debated, even amongst mum bloggers themselves (Lopez, 2009; Webb & Lee, 2011) as “it can be both a source of pride and a source of embarrassment; it can both compliment and demean” (Lopez, 2009, p. 730). Chen (2013), in her critique of the term, suggested that mommy blogger is an ideological concept and one that is far from benign because it “reinforces women’s hegemonic normative roles as nurturers, thrusting women who blog about their children into a form of digital domesticity” (2013, p. 511). According to Chen, the act of writing a blog is empowering but the term ‘mommy blogger’ may undermine this empowerment for some women and that these women could become complicit in their own oppression.

Blogs by parents, in particular mothers, have evolved as a ‘genre’ and the once archetypal ‘mommy blogs’ have changed in character and appearance in recent years to offer an array of news items and articles that are not strictly related to the experience of motherhood (Lupton et al., 2016). While debates continue over the term mommy blog, mom/mum bloggers continue to exert influence among their readers, as recent literature shows (see Burke-Garcia et al., 2017; Lupton et al., 216).

Given that mothers are an important consumer group who make the majority of household purchasing decisions (Bailey, 2008; Bailey & Ulman, 2005; Soccio, 2009) it is perhaps no surprise that mum bloggers, in particular, have become an important influencer group for M&PR practitioners on behalf of their brands (Lopez, 2009). Researchers have suggested that mothers represent a potentially huge ‘marketing opportunity’ and one that is far from fully understood or served by marketers (Bailey, 2008; Carrigan & Szmigin, 2004; Clements & Thomson, 2011).
With the rapid rise of social media, and social media influencers, M&PR practitioners have had to play catch up (Stansberry, 2015). With blogging and other social media communities online there has been an increase in the ‘prosumer’ and online influencer. Prosumer, a term originally developed by the futurist Toffler, describes a consumer who has become a producer (Kotler, 1986; Toffler, 1980). While some citizens/consumers are becoming social media producers (prosumers) through their blogging/Instagram/YouTube activities, others are now turning to blog sites and other social media for advice, eschewing traditional media and favouring the wisdom of crowds and individuals over typically one-way communications generated by corporations/organisations (Abidin & Ots, 2015). Major multinationals, not-for-profit organisations and small businesses, and the M&PR people who work for them, have started to recognise the commercial importance of these new influencers and are innovating their practices to gain benefit from influencer interaction. This brave new world appears to frighten some M&PR practitioners, who have referred to the ‘nobodies’ becoming ‘somebodies’ and the ‘loonies taking over the asylum’ (Booth & Matic, 2011; Bowen, 2009).

This study focuses on Australia, a highly urbanised, technologically advanced nation with high internet and social media use (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017). Australian women of child-bearing age are, on average, better educated than men but earn less and are the predominant caregivers of children within families (Skinner & Pocock, 2014). Women’s changing roles in Australian society has been seen as a key issue by social commentators (see, for example, Mackay, 2007). This study uses a predominantly qualitative methodology, and in qualitative research it is important to understand the context and how ‘the context matters to the phenomena under consideration” (Belk, Fischer, & Kozinets, 2013, p. 3). The context within a qualitative study is important for the impact of situations on behaviours (Johns, 2001).

Following discussion of the study context, the literature review in this thesis discusses several theories which have relevance for the interaction between MBs and M&PR practitioners. Overarching concepts of relevance to this study are Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Bagozzi, 1975; Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961; Mauss, 1925) and theories related to social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). MBs and M&PR practitioners engage in
complex (social) exchanges and MBs are of importance to M&PR practitioners because of the social capital, and therefore the influence, they have with their readers.

From the marketing literature, and relevant to SET, the concept of co-creation has been used in reference to interaction with bloggers (see, for example, Zwass, 2010), but the contrasting concept of ‘covert’ or ‘stealth marketing’ has also been applied (Jensen, 2011; Magnini, 2011; Martin & Smith, 2008). Within the related field of public relations, there have been claims that social media has ‘reinvented’ PR and is a democratising influence that allows true dialogue between organisations and publics (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). Related to both SET and social capital, dominant public relations theories including dialogue, symmetrical two-way communication and relationship management, have been employed to explain practitioners’ interactions using social media (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011; Gordon & Berhow, 2009; Grunig, 2009). However, given that these normative public relations theories have been questioned by critical scholars, in particular in relation to the ethical practice of public relations as a profession and their pertinence in social media, there exist questions over their application to the exchanges between PR practitioners and MBs (see, for example, Valentini, 2015).

Bloggers are often portrayed in the relevant marketing academic and practitioner literature as empowered consumers and new influencers or prosumers (Hamelin, 2011; Kline & Burstein, 2005; Kucuk, 2009; Weber, 2009). It is logical, therefore, that blogging mothers could also be viewed by M&PR practitioners and academics as powerful prosumers. However, some marketing academics believe that mothers are actually vulnerable, due to their liminal state (see, in particular, VOICE group, 2010). Therefore, blogging mothers may themselves be vulnerable, because they are mothers, rather than empowered. Liminality derives from the Latin *limen*. Liminality denotes rituals of transition, a time out of time where one is betwixt and between different social roles (Turner, 1969). Noble and Walker (1997, p. 32) define liminal transitions as “a change in a significant life role marked by a transitional or liminal period during which (a) personal identities are suspended, producing significant psychological consequences, and (b) symbolic consumption may be used to facilitate the transition to the new role”.

While initial conceptualisation of liminality has begun in marketing (Cody & Lawlor, 2011; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006), there are scant academic studies in the marketing field which have looked into new mothers’ use of social media in this key liminal
phase, an exception being the recent netnographic and ethnographic study by Cappellini and Yen (2016) of Taiwanese mothers in an online community. It has been suggested, relevant to liminality, that “little is known about the potential incongruence between managed distinctions and suppositions of segmentation strategists and the meaning making consumption practices of those who exist ‘betwixt and between’ two sociocultural categories” (Cody & Lawler, 2011, p. 224). In conclusion, there is a paradox of blogging mothers being both viewed as empowered consumers/producers, but also, because they are mothers, potentially liminal (and therefore vulnerable), with a precarity in existence that leads to an exploration of their identity (Noble & Walker, 1997). From a theoretical perspective, this study will explore and expand on this apparent paradox.

Related to Turner’s liminality is his concept of communitas, which refers to a community where people in a liminal state feel comfortable and interact. Communitas has resonance with the theory of the third place (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982; Oldenburg, 1989). The third place was initially theorised as a great, good place to be, a place outside work and home, such as a coffee shop, club or bar, where people can hang out and enjoy the company of like-minded others. Since Oldenburg’s initial theorisation, the theory of the third place has extended to the internet or the virtual third place. MBs, spending considerable time on their own blogs and other MB sites as well as on other social media, could be said to live part of their lives in the virtual third place, interacting with each other and their readers. A virtual third place could be seen as a great, good place to be, a place where communitas exists, but this thesis explores what this place becomes when M&PR practitioners encroach, invade or are invited in.

The following diagram represents and summarises the main theoretical constructs discussed in the literature review and used as the basis for this study. At the top of the diagram are the bloggers themselves, seen as both influencers, prosumers and potentially vulnerable. The key theories of SET and social capital relate to marketing, public relations and bloggers and their interactions with each other. Under marketing, the contrasting theories of covert marketing and co-creation are explored while under public relations, relationship management, dialogue theory and two-way symmetrical theory plus ethics are reviewed.
Figure 1.1 A diagrammatic representation of the key theoretical foundations and concepts related to MBs as influencers, and their interactions with M&PR practitioners, under consideration in this study.
1.3 Research problem and questions

A problem statement is a “clear, precise and succinct statement of the question or issue that is to be investigated with the goal of finding an answer or solution” (Sekaran, 2003a, p. 70). Based on the literature introduced in section 1.1 (and discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3), contradictions and gaps have been identified in terms of empirical studies of bloggers and their interactions with M&PR practitioners and the relevant theories that have been applied to them.

According to Kleman (2008), because of the emergent nature of the personal yet public forum of blogging, this type of media use is ripe for research applying existing theories to new ways of communicating. The research uses the lens of prosumer versus vulnerable consumer within the virtual third place to explore the following issues and research questions:

What are MBs’ motivations to blog?

What are the nature and extent of MBs’ exchanges with M&PR practitioners online and offline?

What are the major ethical issues surrounding blogging and do MBs and M&PR practitioners have differing viewpoints on these issues?

1.4 Significance of the research

This research makes a contribution to both theory and practice, having significance in both areas. From a theoretical perspective, this study draws together concepts from separate but inter-related disciplines, including marketing and public relations. The blurring of boundaries between public relations, advertising and marketing (and the turf wars between them) have been acknowledged by various authors for decades, as far back as the 1970s (see Kotler & Mindak, 1978) and more recently (see, for example, Bourne, 2015; Hutton, 2010; McKie & Willis, 2012). The impact of social media has heightened the tensions and created new job titles, whole new departments, new consultancies and new university courses as both public relations and marketing attempt to gain ascendancy in the social media space. Meanwhile, public relations and communications scholar Macnamara (2010) has called for the use of ethnographic methods and interviews to investigate, among other areas, the levels of interactivity
within social media and the issues of control and ethics within blogs. Kent concluded that there is “very little scholarly research in communication or public relations about blogging” (2008, p. 34).

As noted above, there is a need to explore exchanges between M&PR practitioners and MBs, including the practices of online co-creation and/or stealth or covert marketing. There has been little research, particularly beyond the US, looking at how bloggers in general, and parenting bloggers in particular, interact with marketers and consumers. It has been noted that understanding the experiential nature of social networks is vital for effective marketing (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009). From a public policy perspective, the blogosphere in Australia is currently an under-regulated arena that has been described as the ‘wild west’ of the media (Journalism and Media Ethics Fact Sheet, 2010). Research into this new frontier could inform Government policy relating to regulation or codes of conduct for bloggers and the organisations that attempt to influence bloggers.

This research makes an original contribution to the field of public relations by using an open system approach with regards to theory development, as proposed by Broom (2006). Broom suggested that public relations needed to move beyond its own walls to connect with research in communication and human behaviour at all levels. This research uses empirical evidence to critically evaluate some of the dominant, normative public relations theories, including relationship management, dialogue and two-way symmetry. Further, the ethical implications of bloggers’ motivations and exchanges with M&PR practitioners are explored. Within marketing, it has been said that the power has shifted from the corporation to the consumer as a result of Web 2.0 (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012). This supposed power shift is evaluated in the present study with empirical evidence and by examining the contrasting theories of covert marketing and co-creation.

As an important consumer group and one increasingly turning to social media, mothers have not been given adequate attention in marketing research (Bailey, 2008; Haines, 2011; Kucuk, 2008; VOICE group, 2010). Mothers’ increasing use of online information, blogs and forums has been recently recognised in the academic arenas of child and maternal health (see, for example, Kish-Doto, 2010; McDaniel, Coyne, & Holmes, 2011; Sarkadi & Bremberg, 2005), feminism (see, for example, Friedman,
2010; Haines, 2011; Lopez, 2009) and even geography (see Madge & O'Connor, 2005), but there is limited research within marketing.

1.5 Research methodology

When discussing the challenges and opportunities for M&PR practitioners that have arisen with the emergence of social network media, Palmer and Koenig-Lewis (2009, p. 172) suggested that a range of “qualitative, interpretative and ethnographic approaches is required to study the experiential values of social network sites and is likely to yield as much insight as conventional behavioural metrics”. Macnamara (2010, p. 33) said that future research into the way M&PRs are adapting to the changes brought with social media should “utilise ethnographic methods and content analysis as well as surveys through observation of practices and communication content”. Huang et al. (2007) recommended analysing both blogs and bloggers in order to understand blogger motivations.

The interplay between the offline and online life of consumers was the focus of this study which followed the concepts of netnography (Kozinets, 2010). Netnography “adapts the open-ended practice of ethnography to the contingencies of the online environment” (2006, p. 281) and is a predominantly qualitative research methodology which may include interviews outside the online environment and be complemented by online surveys. A netnography was judged appropriate, given that the MB community is based on and has its foundations in an online, computer-mediated environment which have then extended into the ‘real world’ setting, and that there is a lack of research into the interplay online and offline between MBs, their readers and the M&PR practitioners who seek their influence.

The study aimed for an in-depth and holistic view of bloggers’ culture and interactions with each other and M&PR practitioners. Netnography provided the opportunity for thick description as well as depth and details of MBs’ motivations to blog and the nature of their exchanges with both their readers (including each other) and M&PR practitioners. Following Kozinets’ guide for methodological stages, this study also incorporated three forms and phases of data collection. The following phases and forms of data collection, as part of the netnography, were employed:
Phase 1 In-depth interviews

(a) of MBs and

(b) expert informants, mostly M&PR practitioners

Phase 1 (a)

A total of 45 individual Australian MBs were recruited via email through their blog sites and in person by attendance at two Digital Parents conferences. The MBs were invited to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. This sample size is in line with recommendations for large qualitative studies (Britten, 1995).

Phase 1 (b)

Ten Expert Informants (EIs) were interviewed. The EIs consisted of professional M&PR practitioners and business owners who actively sponsor and interact with parent bloggers. These EIs were recruited for interviews through attendance at the same Digital Parents conferences where recruitment for MBs occurred.

Phase 2 An online survey of the blogging community under study

An online survey was conducted with members of the Digital Parents community. According to Kozinets (2010, p. 43), online surveys, as part of netnography, can be used to “inform a range of important questions about online communities and cultures”. The open-ended questions included in the survey were developed on the basis of the interview findings and were used to verify and expand on themes and to triangulate the data (Kozinets, 2010). The link to the online survey was emailed to the 2,234 members of the Digital Parents group, accompanied by a request to participate in a study on blogging beliefs and behaviours. A total of 245 bloggers responded.

Phase 3 Analysis of blogs

Comparing what MB and M&PR practitioners said in relation to major ethical issues in the in-depth interviews and blogger survey to what MBs did (i.e., what was actually presented on their blogs) allowed for triangulation of the data. The blogs analysed were those written by the same bloggers who were interviewed. Particular attention was paid to mentions of brands and the general themes of posts. Overt advertising was noted and any disclaimers related to sponsored posts were identified.
Data processing and analysis took place throughout the data collection period. NVivo software was used for coding data from all sources. The coded data was used to generate themes relevant to the exchanges that occur between mothers, bloggers and M&PR practitioners. The themes of liminality and prosumption were used as a broad commencing framework. The research was based on multiple theories as starting points, including the theories of prosumption and liminality and the concept of co-creation versus stealth marketing. The collection of data was within both the virtual third place and in the real world.

1.6 Chapter summary and thesis outline

This chapter began with a background and introduction to concepts. The research problem and questions were then introduced, followed by an outline of the significance of the research. The research methodology was also briefly outlined.

This thesis has six chapters. Chapter 2 provides a context for the research within the modern Australian social landscape and Chapter 3 presents a critical review of relevant literature. Chapter 4 provides a description of the research methodology and Chapter 5 presents the findings from the three data collection phases. Chapter 6 discusses the relationship between the research findings and previous literature, draws implications for theory and practice, reviews the limitations of the research, and suggests recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2 Context

2.0 Introduction

Can you keep a secret? I had decided to overhaul my business and move away from fashion and lifestyle brands and into celebrity management….So why was I suddenly prepared to move into people management? Because there was a new breed of a celebrity taking over the scene – bloggers!

A blog is no longer seen as the thing you do if you can’t get a ‘real job’ writing. The underdogs of the internet had risen to greatness and had the potential to make themselves a fortune...

This was a multimillion dollar business if you knew how to work the system. In this town and across the world, bloggers are the new celebrities, much to the annoyance of the ‘old’ celebrities who can’t understand why they don’t have the same currency.

*The Spotlight*, Roxy Jacenko, (2014, p.27)

The excerpt above is a work of fiction, written by Roxy Jacenko. However, Jacenko’s novels have been seen as mining her own real-life experiences in public relations and marketing with characters closely resembling her own family, business associates and friends (according to media reports). Jacenko is described on the book’s front cover as ‘Sydney’s PR queen’, and in the inside front cover as ‘the powerhouse behind Sydney’s hottest fashion, beauty and lifestyle PR firm, Sweaty Betty PR’. As a cultural phenomenon, the celebrity super blogger is now described in popular fiction (and in media reports) and these bloggers are often also mothers. Jacenko herself has turned her toddler into an online celebrity and money earner, with Instagram posts of the child in her favourite designer outfits earning cash (Roxy Jacenko defends baby Pixie’s Instagram earnings, 2014).

This thesis explores the phenomenon of blogging mothers and their interaction with M&PR practitioners. Given the ‘rise of the mummy blogger,’ it is important to understand the context of blogging and in particular mum blogging, within Australia. Contexts are vitally important for researchers in developing and testing theories.
(Arnould, Price, & Moisio, 2006) and in qualitative research, “data are frequently
gathered from a single context or a narrow range of contexts and immense care is taken
to understand how the context matters to the phenomena under consideration” (Belk et
al., 2013, p. 3). This chapter first discusses the mum blogging phenomenon in Australia
and its rise in recent years, as reported by mainstream media. Then, Australians’
increasing use of technology, including the internet and social media, is described.
Finally, women’s shifting roles as mothers, earners and consumers is presented.

This chapter uses novels, popular non-fiction and social commentary texts (generally set
within the Australian context) that have provided insight into Australian culture as it is
experienced by some of its members (for a discussion of the use of fiction in qualitative
research see Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Similarly, newspaper articles have contributed
significantly to this discussion of Australian society related to the thesis topic, as they
provide an up-to-date and self-analytical perspective on different aspects of Australian
culture. These non-academic sources have been employed as valuable additional
resources in constructing an interpretation of the forces behind the mum blogging
phenomenon. It was found that this approach yielded insights into the Australian
context that were not always evident in the academic literature, particularly given the
lack of current research into the phenomenon under study.

2.1 The rise of the blogging mother

In May 2012, ‘The rise of the mummy blogger’ was reported in the Sydney Morning
Herald. Since that time, the headlines from other ‘traditional’ media, that is, those
owned by large media corporations, reveal a sometimes sneering attitude towards mum
bloggers. Examples include ‘Curse of the mummy bloggers’ (Devine, 2013a), ‘The
mummy blog war raging on the Internet: The Organised Housewife accuses other
publication of pinching clicks’ (2014) and ‘Mum bloggers show dark side of feminist
parenting’ (the last article written by former Australian politician and ex-Labor leader,
Mark Latham, 2014). The fall of high-profile bloggers has also been given prominence
in more recent times, when a ‘health’ blogger’s cancer claims came into question in
2015 and a related headline read ‘Lifestyle blogger Belle Gibson slips up on booze,
milk’ (Jefferson & Cavanah, 2015). Meanwhile, murder trials of two American bloggers
have seen salacious headlines such as ‘Mummy Blogger to Murderer ‘I wanted my
daughter to find peace’ (2015), documenting a mother’s attempt to kill her autistic
daughter.. Another recent headline in the Daily Mail, ‘Mommy blogger convicted of
poisoning son, 5, to death with huge amounts of salt to get attention from her readers’, describes another mother’s slow poisoning of her son, allegedly to gain a following and sympathy from readers (2015).

When Australia’s first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, invited female bloggers to dinner (rather than locals) at the Rooty Hill Returned and Services League club in early 2013, the reaction from mainstream media could be described as incredulous. Columnist Miranda Devine asked, “Why are mummy bloggers so important to the PM?” (Devine, 2013). The phenomenon of mum blogging is, as has been discussed, related to two major trends within Australia which have echoed around the world: (i) major changes in technology and subsequent changes in consumers’ use of media and (ii) changes in women’s roles and status within Australian society. The two trends are discussed in turn in the following sections. Finally, and related to both trends, mothers’ importance as consumers is also reviewed.
2.2 The internet and social media within Australia

Australia is an advanced market economy, located in one of the fastest growing regions of the world economy (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017) and its technology usage reflects this. In 2012, it was in the top 10 of the world’s online countries, with an internet usage rate at 88.8% (Internet World Statistics, 2012). As early as 2008 it was reported that Australians’ internet use overtook TV viewing (Nielsen, 2008). The survey found Australians were spending 13.7 hours a week on the internet while average television viewing was 13.3 hours a week. In 2011, Nielsen research reported that Australia had the highest social media usage in the world with the average Australian spending seven hours and 17 minutes a month using social media with extra time spent on other forms of internet usage (Nielsen/ NM Incite, 2011). Internet and social media usage have increased each year and this has been partly due to the rise of smartphone and tablet ownership. In late 2014, 81% of Australians owned a smartphone and this figure had increased by 21% over the previous three years (Deloitte, 2014). In the same study, more than half of those surveyed (54%) updated or checked social media daily, up 170% from 2013. Some Australians reported checking their social feeds more than 20 times a day. The survey also found that personal recommendations, including those from social media circles, are the most important influence when it comes to buying decisions. Importantly for the present study, online reviews by people unknown to the survey respondents were rated more influential on buying decisions than product placements, newspaper and magazine advertising (see Deloitte Media Consumer Survey, 2014).

While Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have become popular platforms for social media users (Macnamara, 2014a), blogs, one of the first social media applications to gain widespread use, are still created, written and read by millions worldwide (Macnamara, 2014a). By the end of 2011, NM Incite tracked 181 million blogs around the world (Nielsen/NM Incite, 2012). Accurate statistics for the number of blogs worldwide are elusive, but in 2013 WordPress reported it had 60 million blogs and Tumblr claimed to have 96 million blogs in the same year. Blogger, owned by Google and one of the most popular blogging platforms, does not release its statistics but
estimates suggest it could host more than 60 million blogs (Macnamara, 2014a). A recent Nielsen report indicated that Blogger is the second most-viewed social networking site in the United States, reaching over 58 million users. Blogs are popular worldwide with bloggers becoming online celebrities in places as disparate as Sweden, China, the US, Egypt and Singapore ((Macnamara, 2014a; Pihl & Wahlqvist, 2010).

Women’s role in Australia – as mothers and workers

The rise of online usage in Australia was seen as an important cultural revolution by social commentator Hugh Mackay when he wrote *Advance Australia... Where?* in 2007. However, he suggested that the *single* greatest revolution of recent times was the evolving role and status of women (Mackay, 2007). In this section, women’s dual role as mothers and earners in contemporary Australian society is discussed.

In 2001, for all the changes in women’s roles, Susan Maushart argued in her book *Wifework* that the care of children in Australia was still predominantly seen as women’s work and men were predominantly seen as the main breadwinners in families. “Beyond the lip service paid to equal marriage by both men and women, the contemporary family remains primarily and profoundly organised around gender. “Beneath the veneer of its sleek post-feminist contours, the divisions of labour with the family remain rigidly gender-specific” (Maushart, 2001, p. 22). Fast forward 15 years and it seems little has changed. Journalist Annabel Crabb, in her 2014 social commentary book, *The Wife Drought*, presents a similar picture of contemporary Australian society. Academic statistical research confirms this view (see Baxter, 2013; Skinner & Pocock, 2014).

“The male breadwinner/female caregiver model of the 20th century is alive and well in the 21st century, Australia and many workplace cultures are made in the image of the full-time, male worker unencumbered by care responsibilities. Australian women work around this image, and the practices it embeds, while doing around twice as much caring and domestic work as men”. (Skinner & Pocock, 2014, p. 1)

Women have made advances in education and employment in the past 40 years. In Australia, younger women are generally better educated than men as 89.5% of women aged 20-24 have attained year 12 qualifications or above compared to 83.4% of men, and 42.0% of women aged 25-29 have achieved a bachelor degree or above compared to 30.6% of men in the same age bracket (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2016).
However, on average, women working full-time earn 18.8% less than men working full-time and female graduate salaries are 90.9% of male graduate salaries (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2013).

Women in Australia delay having children compared to earlier generations. The average age of first-time mothers continues to rise (AIHW, 2012). According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare’s *Australia’s mothers and babies* report (2012), the average age of women having their first baby in 2010 was 28 years, up slightly from 27.9 the previous year, and 27.5 in 2001. Of all first-time mothers in 2010, about 14% were aged 35 or older, compared with 11% in 2001. The average age of all mothers in 2010 was 30.0 years, compared with 29.2 in 2001. This was higher in women who gave birth in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory (30.7 and 30.9 years respectively) and lower in the Northern Territory (27.9). The proportion of older mothers aged 35 and over has continued to increase and there are more women aged 40 and over giving birth (AIHW, 2012).

As stated previously, one of the main areas of employment difference between genders in Australia is participation in part-time work. In Australia, once women have children, part-time work becomes the norm (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Baxter, 2013). Around four out of five (84%) mothers who started or returned to work following the birth of their children, decided to go back to work part-time. Most of them chose to return part-time in order to be able to look after their children (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Women comprise 45% of all employees in Australia. As a proportion of all employees, 24% are women working full-time and 21% are women working part-time. Women constitute 69% of all part-time employees, 35% of all full-time employees and 54.8% of all casual employees. The labour force participation rate for women is 58.6% compared to 71% for men (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2013).

To summarise, younger women are better educated than men but they have less full-time participation in the workforce and, on average, earn less and are represented in greater numbers in the lower paid professions/workplaces. Despite this, compared to other nations Australian women are better off, as shown, for example, by a research reported in 2012 which inspired the headline ‘Australia’s women most empowered in world’ (Lucas, 2012). In the report, the consultancy firm Booz & Company found that Australia topped a list of 128 countries in relation to women’s access to education, equal pay, childcare and antidiscrimination policies.
The paradox of empowered, educated, employed Australian young women encountering a social norm of being expected to (and perhaps wanting to) abandon full-time work once children arrive is illustrated with a recent controversy. Perth radio boss Linda Wayman acknowledged in colourful language how difficult it was for management (and employees) when she was reported as saying that she ‘supplied condoms’ to stop her female staff getting pregnant and said that “work-life balance is bullshit” (Burrowes, 2015). Wayman’s comments sparked public debate because she was stating that in an environment such as a commercial radio station, full-time employees were preferred but the reality was that many of those employed were young women who would get pregnant and their priorities might change. Her comments showed the current cultural expectations for women once babies arrive may conflict with employers’ expectations. Wayman was quoted as saying: “We had a breakfast host who had a huge work ethic. She had a baby, then another one. She used to do breakfast, then the house cleaning because her husband wanted to go surfing. I offered to go and shove a vacuum cleaner up his arse because that’s how supportive I am of our female staff.”

2.3 Mothers as consumers

 Mothers in most developed economies, including Australia, are the most powerful of all consumer market segments (Bailey & Ulman, 2005; Clements & Thomson, 2011). In the US, for example, mothers control more than $1.6 trillion of annual household spending (Bailey and Ulman, 2005). In Australia, statistics specifically on mothers as consumers are not readily available, but women, in general, are responsible for expenditure on 90% of groceries coming into the home, 50% of DIY and 90% of over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, and they make 75% of banking and finance decisions (Soccio, 2009).

Researchers have suggested that mothers represent a potentially huge ‘marketing opportunity’ and one that is far from fully understood or served by M&PR practitioners (Bailey, 2008; Carrigan & Szmigin, 2004; Clements & Thomson, 2011). With mothers having a high spending power and their increasing reliance on social media, there is a need for more research into mothers as consumers that includes consideration of their internet activities (Bailey & Ulman, 2005; Bailey, 2008; Clements & Thomson 2011). There has also been a call for further research specifically into the field of weblog writing and female gender identity (Gomez, 2010). In a study that looked at pregnant women’s experience of time linked to their consumption, Carrigan and Szmigin (2004)
suggested that more research should be directed towards mothers’ media habits and appropriate ways of communicating with them. They also proposed that future research should investigate the strategies mothers use to manage time and competing demands given that many more mothers are opting for a range of work/home lifestyle combinations.

2.4 Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter has argued that key ‘cultural (r)evolutions’ are relevant to the rise of the blogging mother in Australia and globally. First, the changes in technology and the increasing reliance and use of social media were discussed and the rise of blogging mothers was explored. Second, women’s participation in the workforce and their role as mothers and earners have been described with the conclusion that the 20th century model of women as carers still exists despite younger women in the 21st century being better educated than men and generally expected to contribute as wage earners. Finally, women’s (and mothers’) roles as important consumers were highlighted.

The focus of this thesis is blogging mothers and their interaction on and offline in the market economy. For some mothers at home, or working part-time or full-time, blogging has become a popular pastime. For some blogging mothers, blogging is also a way to earn money. Just how the motivations for blogging are tied to women’s current role in society, the rise of social media and mothers as consumers will be discussed in the findings and discussion chapters.
Chapter 3 Literature Review

3.0 Chapter overview

This chapter begins with a discussion on bloggers as new influencers and empowered prosumers relevant to marketing and public relations. Through the internet (and in the real world), bloggers engage in complex social exchanges with their readers, each other and (often) M&PR practitioners. These exchanges are the focus of this study.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is relevant to the study of these new influencers because M&PR practitioners must engage in exchange processes when they seek to influence or interact with bloggers as influencers. Further it has been suggested that the essence of consumer behaviour is exchange. Because bloggers have been labelled empowered ‘prosumers’ with influence, bloggers could also be seen as stakeholders with high social capital. Therefore, two key theories related to bloggers’ exchange with M&PR practitioners under review are SET and social capital. These are discussed in turn. As has been noted in the introduction, the professions included under the umbrellas of marketing and public relations interact with bloggers (and these professions often blur or intersect). Relevant to marketing theory and marketer-blogger interaction, the opposing concepts of co-creation and covert marketing are discussed. Relevant to public relations theory and PR practitioner-blogger interaction, the normative concepts of relationship management, dialogue theory and two-way symmetry are reviewed and critiqued, specifically in relation to ethical practice.

The final section of the literature review focuses on bloggers, specifically MBs. MBs’ motivations are relevant in their exchanges through blogging so the extant literature relevant to blogger motivations is then reviewed. Finally, it has been argued that mothers are not empowered, but in a liminal and vulnerable state (VOICE group, 2010; Madge and O’Connor, 2005; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006), so the literature relevant to liminality is discussed, with the related concept of identity explored. The chapter concludes with the research questions.

3.1 Bloggers as Prosumers

The concept of ‘prosumers’, consumers who are also producers, was discussed long before social media existed (Kotler, 1986; Toffler, 1980). Writing in the mid-1980s,
Kotler (1986) forecast that: “As society moves towards the post-industrial age, so will the number of pure consumers decline. They will be replaced by prosumers, people who produce many of their own goods and services” (p. 510). He argued that prosumers should be looked at as another market segment(s) and marketers should identify those who have a strong need to produce their own goods and “figure out ways in which marketers can help them meet this need” (p. 513). With the rise of social media, the title of prosumers has now been applied to social media users in general and bloggers in particular (see, for example, Kerr et al., 2011; Macnamara, 2010; Pihl & Wahlqvist, 2010; Varey & McKie, 2010). Individual bloggers independently produce and promote content for and to their readers, usually without backing from employers. Within the fields of marketing and public relations, the new prosumer is heralded as an empowered consumer, able to defeat large organisations with a single blog post (see, for example, Hamelin, 2011; Kucuk, 2009; Weber, 2009). It has even been argued that “blogging’s ultimate product is empowerment” (Kline & Burstein, 2005, p. 248). Reappraising Belk’s (1988) seminal work on the extended self in light of the digital transformation, Sheth and Solomon (2014) also noted boundary fusions between the producer and consumer. They suggested “user-generated content… is most likely the biggest marketing phenomenon of this decade” (p. 125) and their diagram looks at the way producers and consumers have been fused for the “digital extended self”.


However, some sociologists have suggested that prosumers may not be truly empowered consumers and producers, arguing that the democratisation of the internet and power for consumers turned producers is an illusion or ‘infectious rhetoric’ (Beer, 2008; Beer & Burrows, 2007; Cammaerts, 2008; Chia, 2011; Comor, 2011). For example, Comor (2010) argued that prosumers’ engagement mostly serves status quo interests and that prosumers are actually being exploited. He went on to suggest that the empowered blogging prosumer is a fantasy and that prosumption is “more about the perpetuation of alienation than a mechanism for self-realization and genuine freedom” (p. 321). Comor (2010) takes particular issue with marketers and marketing academics for their promotion of the concept of the empowered prosumer.

3.2 Social exchange theory

The concept of social exchange, as has been discussed, is at the heart of marketing. One of SET’s basic tenets is that for relations to evolve into trusting, loyal and mutual commitments parties have to abide by rules and norms which are the guidelines of exchange processes (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET developed in anthropology within the writings of Mauss (1925) who stated that reciprocity is the motivation behind
all social exchanges. Within sociology (e.g. Blau, 1964) and social psychology (e.g. Homans, 1961), SET has developed as a concept that has gone on to be adopted by other disciplines, including organisational behaviour and marketing. Murgolo-Poore, Pitt and Berthon (2003), noted in their application of SET and marketing to dating/mating behaviour that there are two approaches to SET: individualist and collectivist. They suggested that Homans’ (1961) and Blau’s (1964) work fell within the American individualistic approach that suggests that individuals seek to maximise their gratification (Murgolo-Poore, Pitt & Berthon, 2003).

The marketing discipline adopted SET as early as the 1960s, with Kotler and Levy (1969), Kotler (1972) and especially Bagozzi (1975) highlighting its importance. Zaltman and Sternthal (1975) proposed that the essence of consumer behaviour is exchange. Bagozzi said that the marketing concept “centres on the very notion of exchange” (1975, p. 32).

Bagozzi (1975) developed the concept of the ‘marketing man’ (p. 37), which in today’s terms includes man and woman. His assumptions were:

1. Man is rational, sometimes irrational.
2. He is motivated by tangible as well as intangible rewards, by internal as well as external forces.
3. He engages in utilitarian as well as symbolic exchanges involving psychology and social aspects.
4. Although faced with incomplete information, he proceeds the best he can and makes at least rudimentary and sometimes unconscious calculations of the costs and benefits associated with social and economic exchanges.
5. Although occasionally striving to maximise his profits, marketing man often settles for less than optimum gains in his exchanges.
6. Finally, exchanges do not occur in isolation but are subject to a host of individual and social constraints: legal, ethical, normative, coercive and the like.

As part of SET, Foa and Foa (1975) identify six resource categories involved in interpersonal exchange which are love, status, information, money, goods and services. Blau (1964) suggested that "only social exchange tends to engender feelings of personal obligations, gratitude, and trust; purely economic exchange as such does not" and that "the benefits involved in social exchange do not have an exact price in terms of a single quantitative medium of exchange" (p. 94). SET can be used to understand and give insight into the processes that create value within blogger-reader relations and a blogger-brand representative, as SET focuses on value creation not just from the
producer or consumer perspective but on how the actual relationship and interactions create value. The three exchange components of commitment, power and trust (social rewards) may be more valued than economic factors in exchange (Blau, 1964). These three components are continually explored in conjunction with relationship longevity in SET (Blau, 1964). Thus, when these factors are present and positive within the relationship (i.e. there is high trust and continual power and commitment), the relationship is more likely to succeed and endure. This notion is likely to be particularly relevant when seeking to understand blogger-marketer and blogger-reader relationships because bloggers seek to develop long-term relationships with their readers through an on-going commitment but may also engage in economic exchange with M&PR practitioners.

3.3 Social capital and its importance for bloggers

The concept of social capital, which is relevant to bloggers and their exchanges, originated in sociology and has since been adopted into mainstream thought (Portes, 1998). French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was the first in recent times to give a thorough analysis and explication of the concept. Bourdieu defined social capital as:

The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or, in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to a credit, in the various sense of the word. (1986, pp. 248-249)

Lin (1999) described the premise of social capital as fairly straightforward: that people invest in social relations expecting returns. Lin’s operational definition is that social capital is “the resources embedded in social networks accessed and used by actors for actions” (Lin, 2002, pp. 24-25). There are three fundamental forms of capital: economic (financial), social (resources from individuals’ social networks) and cultural capital (education, knowledge and skills) (Lin, 1999). These three forms when put together may also be described as the fourth form of capital, symbolic capital, which determines people’s status in a particular field or enterprise (Bourdieu, 1986).

Social capital can only be gained through an investment strategy of exchanges (hence its close relationship as a concept to SET) of, for example, gifts, words, time, attention or
care and there is a risk involved in its investment as a return is not guaranteed (Ihlen, 2005; Lin, 1999; Portes, 1998). According to Portes (1998, p. 4), “transactions involving social capital tend to be characterised by unspecified obligations, uncertain time horizons and the possible violation of reciprocity expectations”. However, investment in social capital takes time and must commence before returns are expected (Bourdieu, 1986). An example would be the ‘investment’ parents (and extended family) make in their children (Portes, 1998).

Related to Bourdieu’s concept of social (and other forms of) capital is his development of the concept of ‘field’, a structured social space with its own rules, schemes of domination and legitimate opinions (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Societal groups in fields want to ‘reproduce themselves’ and have to compete for different forms of capital to ‘dominate’ and/or survive and thrive (Häuberer, 2011). Examples of ‘fields’ (or ‘champs’ in French) include higher education, journalism, academia, business or science. For Bourdieu, smaller, discrete fields can be part of larger group or contain subfields (Ihlen, 2005). An obvious example of fields within fields in 2016 would be the communication industry or the ‘knowledge economy’ which could include public relations and marketing, journalism, media production and also extend to photography, video, digital design and advertising. Overlapping and influencing (as well as being influenced by) these fields are secondary and tertiary education in business and the arts. In his 1966 essay, translated into English in 1969 and originally titled ‘Champ intellectuel et projet createur’, Bourdieu discussed the intellectual ‘field’ and the arts, including a historical analysis. He described a scale of legitimacy, with music, literature and theatre at one side (the most legitimate), cinema, photography and jazz in the middle (becoming legitimate) and other less legitimate creative activities such as interior design and cooking on the far side. Given blogging’s recent rise, beginning as a domestic hobby (but then embraced by, for example, mainstream media), it would seem likely that its actors’ incursions into other spaces (and quest for legitimacy) have resonance with Bourdieu’s concept of field. To further illustrate Bourdieu’s work in today’s terms, bloggers’ legitimacy (as a relatively new ‘field’) is contested by actors in other, established fields (hence, we see the derisive headlines from those in the related journalism field, as discussed in Chapter 2).

Bourdieu discussed the need for artists in the intellectual field (what could now be called the ‘knowledge economy’) to be approved of by other society members
(including the public) and develop networks to increase their power and legitimacy. He used a telling parable to describe the artist’s need for public endorsement and the influence of many voices on fame, position and approval…”Psaphon, the young Lydian shepherd, trained birds to repeat: ‘Psaphon is a god’. When they heard birds speaking, and the words they said, Psaphon’s fellow-citizens hailed him as a god” (Bourdieu, 1969, p. 104). Writing decades before Twitter, Bourdieu captures the power of social capital and the equivalent of ‘viral’ blog posts, ‘likes’, ‘shares’ and ‘retweets’ with this tale from Ancient Rome which could equally be applied to bloggers whose need for social capital through shares and likes is paramount.

While Bourdieu’s analysis essentially links social capital to power for any individual, and conflict among actors and fields, American political scientist Robert Putnam viewed social capital as fundamentally ‘good’ for societies and lamented its erosion in recent times within the USA (Portes, 1998; Lin, 1999). Putnam’s article “Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital” (1995) painted a picture of less membership of community and community groups and more individualism within the USA at that time. Putnam’s definition of social capital is “features of social organisations such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1993, pp. 35-36). He put forward social capital as the ‘solution’ to many of America’s ills and for this he has been critiqued by sociologists (see, for example, Portes, 1998; Siisiainen, 2003). Putnam identified two main forms of social capital – bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital is seen as the resources gained from strong ties, such as personal support or intimacy, while bridging capital is the capital acquired from weak ties such as new knowledge about the world (Lambert, 2016). For the purposes of this thesis, it is essentially social capital as described by Bourdieu that will be the basis for exploration and discussion. However, many scholars have focused more on Putnam’s work and the concepts of bridging v bonding social capital, particularly when examining such social networks as Facebook (see, for example, Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007).

As recently as 1998, Portes noted that social capital is ‘intangible’ compared to other forms of capital. However, in 1999, Lin, in his thorough discussion of social capital theories, controversies and debates grasped the revolutionary nature of the internet to move the previously intangible to the tangible, suggesting “indeed we are witnessing a revolutionary rise of social capital, as represented by cyber-networks…we are
witnessing a new era where social capital will soon supersede personal capital in significance” (p. 45). Lin’s predictions were prescient. The rise of the internet has fundamentally changed social capital’s intangibility and made the intangible ‘measurable’. Before the digital age, it was not easy to measure an average person’s social capital, quantify their number of friends or colleagues or qualitatively measure their influence through positive or negative comments on their social media posts and shares (Hearn, 2010).

The adoption of social media by people and organisations means that “what used to be private or ‘intimate’ information is now becoming a public parameter that can, and is, deployed in evaluating the overall social worth of a person or organization” (Arvidsson & Peitersen, 2013, p. 18). Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) in their study of a sample of American College students’ use of Facebook, found that there was a strong association between the use of Facebook and social capital. Since then, scholars have given the relationship between Facebook and social capital for individuals substantial attention (Antheunis, Vaneden Abeele & Kanters, 2015), often focusing on psychological outcomes or antecedents, such as the relationship between social capital and self esteem (see, for example, Burke et al. 2010, Ellison et al. 2011, Stutzman et al. 2012). Antheunis, Vaneden Abeele & Kanters (2015) after conducting a synthesis of all literature to that date pointed out that the individual benefits of using Facebook may not have a wider civic or societal benefit. However, using Facebook more intensely appears to enhance ‘bridging’ social capital for individuals and active and directed behaviour increases social capital while passive behaviour does not (Antheunis, Vaneden Abeele & Kanters, 2015). Given that bloggers are active, directed and public in their behaviour it would appear that their social capital should increase. More recently, Schrock (2016) explored the relationship between mobile Facebook and social capital for parents of young children, using an online survey, and frequency of use of Facebook on mobile media was positively related to ‘bonding’ capital.

While most studies looking at social capital and social media have tended to focus on correlations with psychological outcomes and used quantitative approaches, Lambert (2016) took a more critical and qualitative approach. Using ethnographic research, Lambert found that the exchange of social capital on Facebook is significantly influenced by mobility, surveillance and norms of public intimacy. Lambert (2016) suggested the term ‘intimacy capital’, showing that some sections of society could have
greater or lesser skills surrounding public intimacy through social media such as Facebook. Given mum bloggers’ frequent public displays of intimacy with each other and their readers, Lambert’s suggestion may have significance when applied to mum bloggers. With the rise of measurement of a person’s ‘social worth’ enabled through social media, it soon followed that M&PR practitioners became keen to make use of those with high social capital to access their social networks. M&PR practitioners (and academics) have couched this concept of tapping into bloggers’ social capital in different ways, including generating ‘e-Word-of-Mouth’ (eWOM) (see, for example, Brown et al., 2007) or working with and through influencers (see, for example, Booth & Matic, 2011; Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011; Zanette, Brito, & Coutinho, 2013). Social capital as a concept and its importance relative to networks within social media has only begun to be studied within marketing, public relations, communication and related fields. The limited studies of social capital as a phenomenon directly related to social media influence and bloggers has been researched in diverse geographic locations such as Italy (Pedroni, 2015) and Taiwan (Ko, 2012). Ko found that A-list bloggers build social capital, which consequently provides opportunities to “convert popularity into a profit source” (2012, p. 401).

While social capital theory can be applied to bloggers, the accumulation of (visible, measurable) social capital through social media has also become a phenomenon for the M&PR practitioners themselves as well as other knowledge workers such as journalists (Gandini, 2015). Ihlen (2005) argued that the development of social capital was fundamental to, or at the heart of, public relations (but he did not make the distinction between social capital on and offline) and that the concept needs to be better understood, better integrated and further researched. Gandini (2015) found that for freelance knowledge workers in particular, the development of self-branding and networking through social media was seen as vital to help in securing employment. If, as Ihlen (2005) suggested, the use of social capital and the practice of public relations are inter-changeable concepts it is not difficult to see why communications practitioners must build their own visible social capital through social media. Self-branding (and networking) through social media “becomes an investment in social relationships with expected return for the acquisition of a reputation” (Gandini, 2015, p 1).

In summary, SET and social capital theories which originated in sociology are both concepts that apply to the complex exchanges between MBs and M&PR practitioners.
and between MBs and each other (and between MBs and their non-blogging readers).
While both theories have been applied in only limited studies relevant to bloggers, public relations and marketing, there is an opportunity to further investigate their application within the current Australian context. Given the rising importance of related concepts of ‘eWOM’ and social media marketing through influencers, SET and social capital have not been fully explored within social media marketing or the related field of public relations. And since it has been suggested that public relations’ basis is social capital (Ihlen, 2005), these complex exchanges are of particular importance. SET and social capital are both relevant to motivations for blogging. Given that the first research question relates to motivation to blog, the following section looks at existing research specifically related to motivations of bloggers. Following a discussion on blogger motivations, the next section discusses how theories, developed within marketing and public relations - the dominant professions which relate to bloggers - are applicable to the social exchange between the actors within and between these groups.

3.4 Motivations of bloggers

Some studies on motivations for blogging have appeared in the academic literature (and this area continues to grow), although there is very little academic literature focused specifically on mothers who blog. In addition, the Australian context has been largely ignored in relation to motivations for blogging mothers. One notable exception is Pettigrew, Harrigan and Archer’s (2016) study which used the data set from the online survey research in this study and was principally analysed and written by one of the author’s supervisors, Simone Pettigrew, in collaboration with the author and her other supervisor, Paul Harrigan. The acquisition of social capital (described using various terms such as community or connection) has been found to be a key motivator for bloggers in all studies (see Nardi, Schiano & Gumbrecht, 2004; Sepp et al., 2011).

A pioneering study, using ethnographic interviews and analysis of blog posts of 23 ‘ordinary’ USA bloggers (all bloggers in the study were university educated and middle class) identified five motivations for blogging: documenting the blogger’s life; expressing commentary and opinions; working out emotional issues; thinking by writing; and promoting conversation and community (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). Huang, Shen, Lin and Chang (2007) examined blogger motivations in Taiwan through interviews and an internet survey. They found five key motivations: self-expression, life documenting, commenting, forum participation and information
seeking. However, the Taiwanese study was limited to bloggers who blog for non-financial purposes without considering motivations related to business or money making. The study was also skewed to younger bloggers.

Another quantitative international study of (English speaking) personal male and female bloggers found seven motivations: helping /informing, social connection, passing the time, exhibitionism, archiving/organising, professionalism and gaining feedback (Hollenbaugh, 2011). Sepp, Liljander and Gummerus (2011) applied uses and gratifications theory as a lens to research 12 Estonian bloggers’ motivations through interviews. They found process, content, and social gratifications from blogging activities. New motivations found relative to previous research included the content gratifications of enlightening others, advertising, promotion, and the social gratifications of communication, image management and vanity (Sepp, Liljander & Gummerus, 2011). More recently, Bronstein (2013) found bloggers viewed blogs as part of their selves, a communication tool, a writing tool and a favourite hobby.

Fullwood, Nicholls and Makichi (2014) developed and validated a blogging motivations questionnaire from previous literature. Their six factors included: emotional outlet, social networking, advertising, personal revelation, creative outlet and selective disclosure. They found that women were motivated by ‘selective disclosure’ and men by ‘advertising’ and ‘emotional outlet’ (Fullwood, Nicholls & Makichi, 2014). Other studies have also focused on the gender differences in blogging. For example, Pedersen and Macafee (2007) suggested that more women use blogging as an outlet for creative work and had a greater preference for anonymity while men had more ‘technical proficiency’. Chen (2012) focused on women, and found that the need for self-disclosure and affiliation played a role and that the social aspect of blogging was key. The centrality of community (social capital) as a motivator is a key theme in the small number of studies which focused on mothers who blog (Fleming, 2008; Lee, 2011; Webb & Lee, 2011). While many bloggers are now moving towards ‘monetisation’ of their blogs, (see Abidin & Ots 2015; Chia, 2011; Thompson, 2007) the literature on blogging motivations appears to ignore this aspect in most cases with a notable exception being Pedersen (2010) who touches on this as a motivation in her book.
3.5 Marketing and public relations and blogger courtship

There is evidence that practitioners within the domains of marketing, public relations and advertising are all beginning to see the importance of cultivating relationships with bloggers, as seen in work from these fields in the practitioner and academic literature. For example, bloggers have been described as a ‘new play in your marketing game plan’ (Singh, Veron-Jackson & Cullinane, 2008) and the relationship between bloggers and public relations practitioners has gained some (if limited) attention in the public relations and corporate communications literature (see, for example, Smith, 2011; Smith, 2012). The industry of advertising has also placed some focus on understanding bloggers (see Kerr et al., 2011) with terms like ‘native advertising’ arising and being debated and discussed (see, for example, Macnamara, 2014b; Pullizi, 2015). The blurred boundaries delineating the disciplines is not new but appears to have gained further pace with the advent of social media (McKie & Willis, 2012).

Given the blurring of lines between these fields, it is useful to look at the definitions of marketing and public relations and the theories relevant to relationships with bloggers. Therefore, the following sections will examine major theories and domains of marketing and public relations that are linked to blogger interaction and ‘courtship’. The next part of the literature review will proceed as follows. First, definitions of marketing will be explored, and the contrasting theories of co-creation and covert marketing relevant to blogger relations will be discussed. Co-creation and covert marketing have both been used to describe blogger-marketer interaction but are vastly different in their intent. Then, public relations as a field and theories related to dialogue and relationship management and ethics (all relevant theories applied to blogger interaction with M&PR practitioners) will be critiqued.
3.6 Marketing definitions and theories relevant to blogger interaction

3.6.1 Marketing – its definitions and evolution

One of the dominant views of marketing is that it has developed more or less over the past 100 years, originally from a concept of ‘to market - selling’, leading to ‘marketing to (customers)’ and finally marketing ‘with’ stakeholders (co-creation) (see, for example, Lusch, 2007). However, Lusch (2007), who was one of those involved in the development and revision of marketing’s definition in the 2000s, did not believe the new definition went far enough. He suggested that the to-market and market(ing) approaches treated the customer as exogenous. In comparison, “the emergent ‘market(ing) with’ philosophy views the customer as endogenous and as a partner in the co-creation of value” (p. 265). The most current American Marketing Association definition is “Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large. (Approved July 2013)” (see the AMA website, 2013). The definition has obviously been expanded beyond the customer, traditionally the focus of marketing.

At the heart of the current definition is ‘exchange’ (note its link to SET), and offerings can be tangible or non-tangible but must have ‘value’. The claims for marketing’s evolution have also been made by one the ‘legends’ of the field (see Roberts, 2012), Phillip Kotler, who said that the very character of marketing has changed and moved from product-centric marketing (Marketing 1.0) through customer-focused marketing (Marketing 2.0) and finally it is now founded on the human spirit and called ‘Values-driven Marketing’ (Marketing 3.0) (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2010). Kotler and his co-authors link marketing’s changes to developments relevant to this thesis, including changes in technology and the rise of social media and consumer power. However, the human spirit is markedly absent from Kotler’s definition on his own organisation’s website, which focuses on a much more functionalist approach with the following definition:

What is Marketing? Marketing is the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit. Marketing identifies unfulfilled needs and desires. It defines, measures and quantifies the size of the identified market and the profit potential. It pinpoints which segments
the company is capable of serving best and it designs and promotes the appropriate products and services. (Kotler, 2016)

On the same website, the role of marketing, and the Kotler Marketing Group, is made abundantly clear with a simple mission statement: Our mission is to help clients achieve profitable growth. The two sides of the marketing coin – co-creation (which implies marketers and consumers/prosumers working together) and covert marketing (which implies exploitation of customers and underhandedness on the part of marketers) will be examined in the following section.

3.6.2 Marketing and co-creation

Web 2.0 (that is, social media) is seen as a major driver of co-creation (Cova, Dalli & Zwick, 2011). Co-creation is a related concept to prosumption and has arisen from the roots of relationship marketing via service-dominant (S-D) logic (for a detailed explanation of the evolution of co-creation see Bharti, Agrawal, & Sharma, 2015). Empirical research and theoretical discussion around co-creation have developed in the marketing literature over the past two decades (see Payne, Storbacka, Frow, & Knox, 2009; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The internet and social media have been major forces behind prosumption and co-creation, and according to Zwass (2010), virtual communities are an important source of collective co-creation.

Different definitions of co-creation place more or less emphasis on the marketer and organisation. For example, according to Bharti, Agrawal and Sharma (2015) “value co-creation is a marketer’s mind-set and a creative philosophy of meeting consumer needs effectively by sharing experiences and building long-term relationships with the actors involved (p. 595).” Note the emphasis on the marketer first and relationships. However, Zwass extended the definition by arguing that co-creation may be initiated by producer firms OR by consumers themselves and in many co-creation activities participants are “considered consumers only in contrast to producers” (2010, p. 13).

Co-creation is seen as a relatively new concept in marketing (see, for example, Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011) even though Ritzer (2009) argued it was neither new nor specific to the 21st century because consumers have been part of the production process of goods and services since before the middle ages. According to Cova et al. (2011), two important questions are raised which are related to the co-creation concept. First, the question is what constitutes our understanding of value and
what is its relation to labour power? The second question relates to what constitutes labour in value co-creation and can labour be exploited by capital? Clearly, the study of bloggers’ labour is important in that organisations must liaise with bloggers if they wish them to be creative on behalf of brands. The bloggers’ exchange with M&PR practitioners and the organisations they represent is of central importance in this current research, including the potential for exploitation of bloggers. Cova et al. (2011) argued that co-creation cannot be reduced to passive consumerism “nor to the insidious manipulation of capitalists” (p. 235).

Most studies on co-creation centre on brand communities and there is less work on the roles of individual participants (Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011). The present study will focus on individuals’ (MBs’) reactions to attempts by M&PR practitioners to introduce varying forms of ‘co-creation’, while also looking at the impact of these interactions on the community of MBs.

It was found by Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder (2011) in their study of Liverpool Football Club fans online, that members of a co-consuming group pursue individual and collective goals. Further, they found that individual consumers can play one of two main roles – they can be providers (by sharing resources and other benefits within a community) and beneficiaries (receiving value from community membership). While co-creation has been held up as encouraging a culture of togetherness (see Bharti et al., 2015) some critics have suggested that co-creation may not be as easy as it seems and there will be tensions involved. For example, Brown and Patterson (2009), in their empirical, longitudinal examination of the Harry Potter (HP) publishing, movie and merchandise phenomenon found that fans and consumers co-created value and meaning through efforts such as fan fiction. However, when the issue of intellectual property arose as a result of some of the same fan fiction, the companies behind HP began legal proceedings and were not always keen for co-creation to continue. Brown and Patterson argued, based on their HP case study, that customer co-creation is “more problematic in practice than it is in fulsome articles by spokespersons for ‘crowdsourcing’, ‘we-think’, ‘wikinomics’ et cetera” (2009, p. 527). They went on to suggest that co-creation, and its antecedent, S-D logic, were more nebulous and fractious than they would first appear. While literature and concepts related to word-of-mouth, word of mouth marketing, e-WOM or social word-of-mouth (see Yap, Soetarto & Sweeney 2013; Sweeney, Soutar & Mazzarol 2010; Lin, Hsu, Chen & Fang 2016; King, Racherla & Bush 2014), could
have been further discussed in this study, as the focus in this thesis is on word-of-mouth that is generated by bloggers as a result of direct input from M&PR practitioners, the next section discusses the related but distinct concept of covert marketing. Further, bloggers motivations to blog will be investigated in this study as they are more complex than motivations to simply engage in e-WOM.

### 3.6.3 Covert marketing – marketing under cover

At the same time as marketing is apparently evolving and the concept of co-creation is gaining traction, within the realm of ‘blogosphere’, the concept of stealth or covert marketing has begun to receive attention. While seemingly the antithesis of co-creation and ‘stakeholder relationship marketing’, and in particular trust, stealth marketing focuses on sponsored messages disguised as genuine word-of-mouth, particularly on blogs or in other internet forums (Jensen, 2011; Magnini, 2011; Martin & Smith, 2008; Petty & Andrews, 2008; Rotfeld, 2008; Roy & Chattopadhyay, 2009; Swanepoel, Lye, & Rugimbana, 2009). Stealth marketing has been defined as “the use of surreptitious marketing practices that fail to disclose or reveal the true relationship with the company that produces or sponsors the marketing message” (Martin & Smith, 2008, p. 45). Similarly, covert marketing has been defined as “marketing actions that consumers do not recognise as sponsored by a firm” (Sprott, 2008, p. 4). Covert and stealth marketing are both paid forms of communication in which the commercial source is concealed and the marketing message is passed off as news or genuine opinion in an effort to minimise audience scepticism toward the message (Ashley & Leonard, 2009; Martin & Smith, 2008).

The academic interest in authentic versus sponsored blog posts is not confined to marketing, with writers in the fields of law (Sprague & Wells, 2010) and feminism (Friedman, 2010; Haines, 2011; Lopez, 2009) advocating more research into blog and social network sites in general and blogs by parents (and the ethical issues surrounding them) in particular. Despite this cross-disciplinary interest, to date, there is limited empirical research that examines stealth marketing in the context of social media (Swanepoel et al., 2009). Much of the little information that exists regarding covert or overt sponsorship of blogs is in the form of anecdotal evidence (Jensen, 2011).

In the US, stealth marketing on blogs has been given the catchword ‘blogola’ (Cammaerts, 2008; Jensen, 2011). Blogola is a reference to and play on the term of
‘payola’ - practices originally found in the music industry as far back as the 1950s, where DJs and radio stations were paid to play and provide favourable comment on specific music (Cammaerts, 2008). According to Cammaerts (2008), the practice of blogola is becoming commonplace in the blogosphere. Covert marketing is closely related to word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) which, as has already been discussed, is defined as the “intentional influencing of consumer-to-consumer communications by professional marketing techniques” (Kozinets et al., 2010, p 71).

There is now a call to extend research into WOMM and stealth marketing via blogs to markets other than the USA (Magnini, 2011). On the basis of the limited existing work, researchers have suggested that WOMM via social media and stealth marketing online requires further academic attention (Jensen, 2011; Kozinets et al., 2010; Magnini, 2011; Sepp et al., 2011).

In Australia the concept of payment for opinion is better known as cash for comment (see, for example, Lee, 2009). A cash for comment controversy erupted in the late 1990s regarding high-profile radio hosts receiving payment for favourable mentions of products on air (Salter, 2012). The ABC television programme Media Watch’s investigation eventually resulted in the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) requiring disclosure of payments from radio stations, with a new set of standards only coming into effect in May 2012 (Salter, 2012). In April 2012, Media Watch broadcast an expose on payments to celebrities for favourable comments in a new medium other than radio -- Twitter (see abc.net.au/mediawatch).

From a public policy perspective, the Federal Trade Commission in the USA introduced rules in 2009 for bloggers to disclose payments or free goods they receive from organisations, and failure to do so can result in fines of $US11,000 (Lee, 2009; Sprague & Wells, 2010). There appear to be no guidelines in Australia on sponsored posts. Bloggers are also beyond the realm of the Australian Press Council and the Australian Journalists’ Association code of ethics, resulting in payment being seen as a “grey” area of law (Lee, 2012). The Australian Government’s Convergence Review Final Report (2012) into Australia’s media and communications policy framework recommended that content on social media, including blogs, should be free from any regulation. The report was commissioned because of the changing nature of the Australian media and the blurring of lines between radio, newspapers, television and internet sources.
However, questions about the ethics of commenting in cyberspace for monetary rewards have been starting to gain momentum in Australia, as evidenced by the Media Watch coverage and articles appearing in newspapers and trade publications, starting around 2012 up to the final write up of this thesis (see, for example, Smith, 2012; McWhinnie, 2013; Sas, 2016).

Empirical research on the evolving landscape of the blogosphere in Australia could potentially inform public policy regarding regulation versus non-regulation of bloggers and the provision of guidelines for organisations engaging in blog WOMM. Of course, the impact of commercial realities on any creative or specialist endeavour that requires talent and hard work is not a new phenomenon. Across history, artists have struggled with the need to work independently while receiving money from wealthy patrons (Rosen, 1983). The sporting arena has evolved into a highly commercialised sphere and ‘celebrity’ chefs have become brand ambassadors for large food multinationals. In 2016, bloggers, as lone operators, are operating in a relatively new space with no rules or codes to guide them.

3.7 Public relations models and theories related to blogger interaction

Marketing theory and research, as it has developed, has focused more steadily on relationships and stakeholders. However, marketing is not the only field that considers relationships as a key component of its purview. Relationship management, it has been argued, is the central concept for the public relations profession (Grunig & Hon, 1999; Hutton, 1999; Ledingham, 2003; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, 2000). In order to investigate and illustrate the exchanges between brand representatives and bloggers, marketing and public relations need to be examined both as separate and merging disciplines. The following section outlines definitions of public relations, discusses relationships, dialogue and two-way communication within public relations theory, reviews the stewardship model and finally looks at these concepts in relation to ethics in public relations.

3.7.1 Public relations—its definitions and evolution

Alongside marketing, public relations has also had its own ‘evolution’, particularly according to the textbooks read at undergraduate levels (see, for example, Wilcox, Cameron & Reber, 2015) from one-way ‘press agentry’ and spin to two-way communication. However, the tensions and contradictions inherent in the field of public
relations are evident in its definitions as espoused by the main professional bodies in
Australia, England and the USA, for example. It has been argued that Australia and
New Zealand originally followed the US in both their approach to practice and theory
(Fitch, 2013) and public relations developed its central ideologies based on its origins as
primarily a Western corporate, capitalist practice (Curtin & Gaither, 2007).

The Public Relations Institute of Australia’s (PRIA) definition could best be described
as equivocal in that it firstly discusses mutual understanding but goes on to describe PR
as a management function with strategic intent to gain an organisation ‘acceptance’.
Quoting directly from the PRIA website, it can be seen there is a renunciation of the
first part of the definition in the latter part of the paragraph.

The definition of public relations used by the PRIA on its website is:

*The deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual
understanding between an organisation (or individual) and its (or their)
publics….However, with the massive change in the communication process
brought about by the information era, public relations could be described easily
as: The management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the
policies and procedures of an individual or an organisation with the public
interest, and plans and executes a programme of action to earn public
understanding and acceptance.*

(Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) About Us, 2015)

In the US, the definition of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) not only
puts relationships front and centre, but also strategy. “Public relations is a strategic
communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between
organizations and their publics” (“PRSA About Public Relations,”). Just as the PRIA’s
definition starts with understanding and goes on to include ‘management’ so too the
PRSA describes public relations as a management function. US textbook definitions
also tend to highlight relationships and management. One such definition is that “public
relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial
relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure
depends” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006, p. 5).
In England, the Chartered Institute of PR’s (CIPR) definition of public relations emphasises the notion of reputation: “Public relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour” (“CIPR Chartered Institute of PR What is PR?,” 2015). Again, the broader discussion of the definition (on the CIPR website) focuses on business interests and uses corporate-style language, for example stating: “In today's competitive market, reputation can be a company's biggest asset – the thing that makes you stand out from the crowd and gives you a competitive edge. All of these definitions are organisation- (and to a large extent corporate-) centric, despite the claims of ‘mutual understanding’. Therefore, there is a tension and paradox within the language of definitions, in particular, the Australia and American ones, in that they claim to be of mutual understanding and benefit, but are framed from an organisational and management perspective with a clear agenda.”

3.7.2 Public Relations and relationship management, dialogue and two-way communication

Relationship management, it has been argued, is the central concept for the public relations profession (Grunig & Hon, 1999; Hutton, 1999; Ledingham, 2003; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Linked to the concept of a relationship-based approach to communication, the notion of dialogue, as opposed to one-way communication, is espoused by authors from stakeholder/management, marketing and public relations disciplines. Grunig and Hunt (1984) developed the dominant communication model of public relations, which is divided into classifications of one-way communication and two-way symmetrical communication. Two-way symmetrical communication is seen by Grunig and Hunt (1984) as the preferred, normative model of communication, where consensus is achieved, and mutual understanding between the organisation and its publics, or stakeholders, is the goal. Also known as Excellence Theory, two-way communication has come to be seen as the dominant model for public relations, but has received its share of critical attention.

Botan (1997) differentiated between monologic communication and dialogic communication, suggesting the latter is both ethically and practically superior to the former. Monologic communication is seen as more manipulative in nature in that other people are viewed as there to be exploited (rather than listened to) and the focus is on
the communicator’s message and intent – not on the audience’s real needs. Basing his argument in the writings of Habermas (1984) and Johannesen (1996) Botan argued that monologue was essentially about power and seeing the other as a means to an end, including for profit. Following Botan, Ledingham (2003) outlined a general theory of public relations as relationship management, identifying 11 dimensions of organisational-public relationships (trust, openness, credibility, emotion, intimacy, similarity, immediacy, agreement, accuracy, common interests and relational history).
Since then, public relations as relationship management has become a central construct within public relations. Hon and Grunig (1999), went further, on the basis that strategic relationship management could be seen as a fundamental goal of public relations. They developed a scale for measurement of relationships for organisations that included six elements or components of relationships: control mutuality, trust, commitment, satisfaction, exchange relationships and communal relationships. Their aim was to help organisations measure and track relationships in order to determine the value of public relations within organisations.

The notion of dialogic theory and the related ‘Grunigian’ theory of two-way, symmetrical communication as the dominant concepts for public relations has received critical attention from Pieczka (2015), among other scholars. Pieczka has argued that there are tensions and contradictions within Excellence Theory, and has undertaken a comprehensive review of criticisms of it while suggesting that action research may be one way of moving forward in the discussion of dialogue. Pieczka (2011) argued that:

“Despite assertive statements about the importance of dialogue to public relations theory and professional practice, the field has a very poor understanding of the concept (2011, p 109).”

It is acknowledged that as public relations matures as a field of study and practice, further critical scholarship is emerging. For example, Valentini (2015) has queried the ‘commonly accepted’ assumption within public relations that social media is ‘good’ because it is supposed to help organisations develop dialogue and relationships with publics. Valentini’s perspective is that public relationships scholarship is overly positive on the subject of social media and has called for more understanding and critical reflection on the impact of social media on interpersonal communication and relations. Kennedy and Sommerfeldt (2015) used a postmodern lens to critique the assumption that social media is a tool for relationship building. Social media, they argued, can ‘give
unexpected power to unforgiving parties in organisation-public relationships’ (Kennedy & Sommerfeldt, 2015, p. 38).

3.7.3 Ethics, dialogue and relationship building in public relations

Stealth marketing and social media cash-for-comment are areas of ethical interest for M&PR relations practitioners and theorists as bloggers are fast becoming a key stakeholder group. According to Smith (2010), the blogosphere is seen as an important and legitimate arena for public relations efforts. The question of ethics in public relations within social media is also closely related to the ‘big questions’ – the definition of public relations, its theoretical foundations and what, as a discipline, it should try to achieve.

The concept of dialogue in public relations – seen as an “ethical form of communication” – has been discussed by Kent and Taylor (2002), based on the work of scholars Pearson (1989) and Botan (1997). Kent and Taylor (2002, p. 33) argue that “dialogue is considered more ethical because it is based on principles of honesty, trust and positive regard for the other rather than simply a conception of the public as a means to an end.” The related concept of relationship building is a central theme in the public relations scholarly and practitioner literature (Langett, 2013). With the rise of social media there has been even more focus on dialogic communication in public relations (see, for example, Gordon & Berhow, 2009; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

Scholars have recommended the normative views of a dialogic theory of public relations (Pearson 1989; Botan 1997; Kent & Taylor, 2002) and a relationship-grounded research approach (Bruning, 2002; Ledingham, 2003). These contrast with the arguably more functional approaches when applied to stakeholder (and specifically blogger) engagement, written largely from a practitioner perspective. For example, Booth and Matic (2011), both practitioners, wrote that the ‘nobodies’ of the past are now the new ‘somebodies’, demanding the attention of communication professionals who “seek continuous engagement with targeted consumers throughout the various channels of the social web” (p. 184). Their paper reviewed a tool to identify the ‘new somebodies’ (that is, bloggers) who are “the influencers creating a revitalized level of brand awareness for companies” (2011, p. 184). While helpful for practitioners, the tone of the article sees the new somebodies as a ‘means to an end’ and could also be viewed as derisive towards these former nobodies. Similarly, Brown (2009) wrote a chapter in his book on
public relations and the social web titled ‘the lunatics have taken over the asylum’ and points to ways to interact with these new influencers. Gordon, in her textbook for students (2011, p. 336) said that the key issue in social media for practitioners is ‘control’. Bridging the academic and practitioner divide, public relations academics Uzunoglu and Oksuz (2012, p. 1), writing for a marketing communications journal, offered practitioners a case study of a “well‐planned, creative campaign that successfully exploits the opportunities provided by interactivity” – and provided a guide to side-step restrictive alcohol advertising laws through exploiting bloggers and social media with an outreach programme on behalf of an alcohol company. The tone of this article is hardly dialogic in nature but again sees the bloggers and landscape of social media as a means to an end – in this case a (covert) way to promote alcohol. The how-to guide for public relations practitioners related to social media provided on the PRIA website (accessed June 2014) and originally from the PR Daily talks about “connection” and “conversation” but finally discusses “conversion” and says “you can’t talk about social media without having a return on investment (ROI) conversation” (Royse, 2013).

The few examples above show the seeming chasm between scholarly literature on normative approaches to relationship management, dialogue and ethics and the arguably means-to-an-end approaches of (mostly) practitioners. The divided ethical identity of public relations – with the idealised codes of conduct espoused by academics on one side and the practitioner-led expectations which privilege clients over society - has been given in-depth analysis by Fawkes (2012) in her conceptual paper. She painted the two sides as saint v sinners and suggested a Jungian middle ground as one way forward, where self-acceptance and a willingness to embrace contradiction could offer a resolution. A critical view of the dialogue concept has been proposed by Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2012, p. 6) who ask whether it is actually possible for an “organisation to engage in dialogue with its stakeholders where a specific interest is served and whether it is even desirable to do so.” Theunissen and Wan Noordin also discuss the functional notion of control and balance, at the heart of communication management, and argue that true dialogue is actually about relinquishing some control (2012).

The stakeholder concept itself is contested and originated in management literature. Freeman’s now classic definition of a stakeholder is… " any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (1984, p.
46). Clearly, bloggers have been shown to affect the operations of a firm in both positive and negative ways, as shown by those practitioners with concern for control of their messages in the blogosphere (see Larry Weber, 2009) and bloggers, therefore, can be defined as stakeholders. Stakeholder theory has been adopted by some public relations academics (see de Bussy, 2008; 2010 & Smith, 2012) but as de Bussy (2013) points out, the stakeholder theorists in the management literature do not consider or discuss stakeholder theory in direct relation to public relations or communications. Interestingly, within marketing, Lusch (2007), in his discussion of marketing’s evolving identity (and crusade for co-creation to be considered) argued that more attention to stakeholder theory must be central to marketing scholarship.

Public relations as a field is continuing to evolve and digital disruption has had a significant impact on its own identity and practice (Macnamara 2014). While terrains are blurring, turf wars are still occurring across the related communication disciplines (McKie & Willis, 2012). This research investigates the approach of both public relations and marketing practitioners when interacting with bloggers and critically examine whether their practice is truly dialogic and co-creational, given the emphasis placed on dialogue by some public relations scholars and the subsequent critiques of the dialogic approach by more critical scholars (see, for example, Pieczla, 2011; L’Tang, 2005 Roper 2005 for more critical approaches). While these and other scholars question the normative view of public relations as dialogue and symmetrical communication, their work is largely conceptual. L’Etang noted in 2005 that there was a major gap in terms of anthropological ways of studying the practice and ethnographic methodology. Edwards (2006) suggested that using Bourdieu’s framework, including the concepts of fields and social capital, would lead to a more comprehensive understanding of how power operates in public relations. In particular, Edwards recommended a research agenda which looked at the day-to-day practices that define public relations and the power relations within them as well as the types of capital that are relevant to the field. The current research, in a critical approach, uses empirical ‘evidence’ to uncover the nature of M&PR practitioners’ approaches to and relationships with MBs.

3.8 Blogging mothers

The key ‘stakeholders’, ‘co-creators’ and ‘prosumers’ discussed in this research, and targeted by M&PR practitioners, are MBs. Family consumption of online media in Australia has never been higher and Australians are the top users of social media out of
10 major developed countries (Nielsen/ NM Incite, 2011). Mothers, in particular, are turning to the internet for advice on parenting (Archer & Wolf, 2011). At the same time, women in Australia and across the world – in countries as diverse as China, Italy and the US - are using the blogosphere to write about their experience as mothers (for studies of blogging mothers in different countries see Chen, 2011; Dubini & Campana, 2010; Lopez, 2009). As discussed in the introduction, major multinationals and marketers have started to recognise the commercial importance of these new influencers (Friedman, 2010; Lopez, 2009; Morrissey, 2009; Thompson, 2007; Woods, 2005).

Lopez (2009, p. 739) noted the collision of business and mum bloggers as follows:

Mommy bloggers have been officially outed as a prime commodity audience for advertisers. With the combination of thousands of eyeballs and an undeniable consumer market for all manners of baby products, it was only a matter of time before advertisers started snatching up real estate on all the best blogs.

Specific statistics on blogging mothers in Australia are not readily available. However, a report by ACMA stated that 40% of Australians regularly read a blog or social networking site and one in 10 Australians writes a blog or uploads content to the internet (ACMA, 2009). With the rapid change in social media, these statistics are now likely to be much higher. Early research from Britain painted the average blogger as male (Taylor, 2004), and a Taiwanese study showed bloggers had a median age of 23 (Huang et al., 2007). Other studies showed that just as many women blog as men (Haferkamp & Kramer, 2008; Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Women are more likely to write journal or diary blogs (Karlsson, 2007; Kleman, 2008; Wei, 2009) and to write about personal experiences (Haferkamp & Kramer, 2008) than men. In Australia 88% of the 594 respondents to a survey on bloggers were female (“Nuffnang Australia Blogger Survey Results,” 2011). The same survey showed that 50% of bloggers were over 30.

3.8.1 Are blogging mothers empowered or vulnerable?

As previously stated, despite alternative views from sociologists (Beer, 2008; Beer & Burrows, 2007; Cammaerts, 2008; Chia, 2011; Comor, 2011), bloggers are portrayed in the relevant marketing literature as empowered consumers, co-creators and new influencers or prosumers (Hamelin, 2011; Kline & Burstein, 2005; Kucuk, 2009; Weber, 2009). It is logical, therefore, that blogging mothers could also be viewed by marketers and public relations practitioners as powerful prosumers. However, some
marketing academics believe that mothers are inherently vulnerable, due to their liminal state. Liminality derives from the Latin *limen*, meaning threshold (Levinson & Christensen, 2003).

3.8.1.1 **Liminality**

It is acknowledged that the transition to motherhood is a time of upheaval and is demanding, psychologically as well as physically (Figes, 1998; Yelland, Sutherland, & Brown, 2010). According to the VOICE Group (a collective of marketing academics with the aim of “Voicing International Consumer Experience”), women in this liminal phase are “potentially vulnerable, and their vulnerability often leads them to spaces that have become increasingly marketized” (2010, p. 384). They suggest that such vulnerability can be felt both as liminal vulnerability, when women attempt to make their way through a new phase in their lives, and as consumer vulnerability when women navigate a space of new consumption (VOICE Group, 2010).

The VOICE group (2010, p. 392) made the following argument.

> The crucial point here, however, is that even otherwise privileged women do not seem immune to the vulnerability that comes with pregnancy and the transition to motherhood. In the transition to motherhood, vulnerability is likely to be shaped by symbolic as well as structural dimensions of the environment, and, crucially, often exacerbated by the market. In today’s developed world, the logic of the market has seeped into areas that may have formerly represented “neutral ground” for new mothers, such as the medical environment.

Arnold van Gennep first used the term liminality, writing in French in 1909. However, it was British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner who adopted and adapted Van Gennep’s concepts for an analysis of Ndembu rituals in Zambia, Africa. Turner’s work popularised the term liminality. Turner says of liminal entities that they are “betwixt and between positions” (Turner, 1969, p. 95).

Turner, when discussing the attributed of liminality and liminal (or threshold) people suggested “they are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there (1969, p. 95).”
In the 1990s, Noble and Walker explored the concept of liminality and applied it empirically to college and high school students. They also noted that new mothers were one group which would be in a liminal state. A study of the marketisation of existential liminality focused on the television talent show *the X factor* (see Hackley, Brown, & Hackley, 2012), viewing participants as being in a liminal state. Noble and Walker defined a *liminal transition* as

A change in a significant life role marked by a transitional or liminal period during which (a) personal identities are suspended, producing significant psychological consequences, and (b) symbolic consumption may be used to facilitate the transition to the new role (1997, p. 32).

First-time mothers (and fathers) experience the tensions and ‘fruitful darkness’ (Cody & Lawlor, 2011) of moving from one stage of their lives to another (Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006). The concept of fruitful darkness refers to the simultaneous darkness of the unknown with the potential for new possibilities and understanding of any liminal state (Cody & Lawler, 2011). As Madge and O'Connor (2005, p. 84) state, liminality, “clearly holds resonance with the case of new mothers in cyberspace”. The same authors made the link between the internet as liminal place and early motherhood as a liminal lifestage and suggested these were “particularly suited to one another.”

The concept of liminality has been given attention in marketing when looking at consumption behaviours of brides-to-be (Pearson & Syson, 2006) and young adolescents (Cody & Lawler, 2011), and it has been suggested that the application of liminality to first-time parents and their consumer behaviour could be a fertile area of research (Pearson & Syson, 2006; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006; Cody & Lawler, 2011). More recently, Capellini and Yen (2016) investigated spatial and identity liminality in an online community of Taiwanese mothers and suggested liminal identities can be exacerbated in an online community, perpetuating the darkness. The paper found that online space is at the same time the “product of online and on-site liminal identities and liminal social interactions and the re-producer of such interactions” (2016, p. 1280).

The notion of a change or suspension of identity during a liminal phase is highlighted in Noble and Walker's (1997) definition. Similarly, Noble and Walker suggested that a state of liminality has the potential to cause profound and disruptive effects
on our identity, or as they put it, innermost self-perceptions, as major life transitions cause shock and confusion. Bjork-James (2015) argued that mum blogs offer the MBs a place to foster a sense of identity and community. Importantly, liminality is not necessarily linear in motherhood but more fluid and in motherhood ongoing identity adaptation occurs (Phillips & Broderick 2014). Discussing identity, Bauman, in his e-mail interviews with Benedetto Vecchi, argued that in a liquid modern setting of life, identities are “perhaps the most common, most acute, most deeply felt and troublesome incarnations of ambivalence” and that they are “firmly placed at the heart of liquid modern individuals’ attention and perched at the top of their life agendas” (Bauman & Vecchi, 2004, p. 32). Mothers’ liminal states bring about a disruption in their identity and in this search for identity they may seek out a communitas, perhaps via blogging. For example, Phillips and Broderick (2014) in their paper on mother’s use of the social networking site, mumsnet, focus on identity adaptation, with liminality as a key theoretical foundation.

Bauman’s notion of ‘liquid modernity’, has resonance both with liminality and with the concept of precarity. Bauman (2000) suggested that previously ‘solid’ bonds of collective identity are now less determined but rather have melted as a result of instantaneous communication and other aspects of the globalised, modern world. Bauman and Vecchi (2004, p. 11) suggested, in a comment that could resonate with new mothers: “One becomes aware that ‘belonging’ and ‘identity’ are not cut in rock, that they are not secured by a lifelong guarantee, that they are eminently negotiable and revocable; and that one’s decisions…are crucial factors of both.”

In terms of employment and identity, mum bloggers could also be seen as members of the ‘precariat’, a term developed and used by Standing (2011) to describe a relatively new class whose employment is precarious as a result of global economic forces. The precariat, according to Standing, lacks labour security in seven ways, including assurance of a stable wage. Standing suggests this new class is ‘dangerous’ but he also says that they will have a higher level of education that is “greater than the labour they are expected to perform.” A precariat is a person who lacks steady employment, lacks security of pension and other benefits. While Standing’s vision of a new, dangerous class may suggest images of young, disaffected (perhaps male) youth, it has elements which align with mum bloggers, who are producing content and ‘working’ in a ‘field’ that does not have a history as an accepted profession.
Identity as a concept is highlighted as a key element or moment in Curtin and Gaither’s (2007) model of a circuit of culture, alongside representation, consumption, production and regulation. Writing from an international public relations perspective, Curtin and Gaither discussed constructing identities as emerging from cultural classification systems and highlighted that motherhood is, while obviously based in physical reality, also a product of cultural classification. Motherhood results from the larger cultural construction of family and often is constructed from what it is not, hence the cultural constructions of ‘good mothers’, ‘bad mothers’, ‘working mothers’, ‘stay-at-home mothers’, supermothers, etc. Identity, then, and the identity adaptation which occurs during motherhood, is a useful construct when looking at the process of mum blogging during the liminal phase. The literature on liminality has shown that identity is in a state of flux during any liminal phases and those in a liminal state seek to adapt their identity to their new role.

One of the key concepts linked to liminality is the communitas. Communitas, according to Turner (1969), is most likely to occur when people share a similar liminal state. It is an anti-structure or open society in that usual structures are modified. The community will set up its own structures and hierarchy through shared rituals developed within and by the group. However, communitas corresponds to a stage in time and is not permanent. Members of a community will share a specific identity that is beyond the bounds of normal society. Blogging could be seen as a solitary activity, so one could question whether the question of communitas may be relevant. However, given that motivations to blog in previous studies have highlighted the importance of connection, communication and community, there is evidence to suggest that a sense of communitas may well be an important motivator for blogging mothers. Communitas also has resonance with Bauman’s concept of ‘cloakroom communities’ (Bauman & Vecchi, 2004). Bauman suggested that traditional locations where people had feelings of belonging, such as work, family and neighbourhood, are not now as trustworthy or useful in today’s world and that instead people seek out, as part of their search for identity, ‘cloakroom communities’ which are “patched together for the duration of the spectacle…and promptly dismantled again” (2004, p. 31). The advantage of these cloakroom communities over the ‘genuine stuff’ he argued was that they had a short lifespan and did not take much commitment to join and enjoy. Bauman, however, placed a value judgement on these sorts of communities saying they were less genuine than more traditional communities. This thesis explores blogging mothers’ motivations
to blog, given their liminal state, and apparent search for identity and desire for communitas through the medium of blogs and act of blogging.

3.8.1.2 The virtual third place

Linked to liminality’s communitas (and Bauman’s cloakroom communities) is the theory of the third place. A third place is beyond work and home and is defined as “a public setting accessible to its inhabitants and appropriated by them as their own” (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982, p. 270). Oldenburg and Brissett (1982) reasoned that participation in a third place provides people with a large measure of their sense of wholeness and distinctiveness. It has been argued that the nature of motherhood has changed, with mothers now more geographically isolated from each other due to the changes in communities, including more mothers in paid work and the ‘village’ disappearing (Savage, 2011). The internet (and blogging and social networking in particular) has been proposed as a virtual forum for social support and connectivity for mothers (McDaniel et al., 2011; Sarkadi & Bremer, 2005). It represents a place where the ‘fruitful darkness’ of liminality can be explored by mothers (Madge & O’Connor, 2005). Given this concept of a ‘supportive community’, the notion of a virtual third place appears relevant for blogging mothers. The view of the internet (and various forms of social media within the internet) as a virtual third place has now been taken up by researchers across disciplines (Soukup, 2006). The elements of a virtual third place seem to have resonance for blogs by mothers, where mothers are interacting beyond the home, although still often at home. According to Soukup (2006), more research is needed into the ‘online’ and ‘offline’ functions of virtual third places – in particular, how participants integrate virtual third places into their family and work experiences. This thesis answers this call, and extends it to explore the potentially darker side of a virtual third place that may be colonised by M&PR practitioners.

In conclusion, a review of the literature illustrates the paradox of blogging mothers being both viewed as empowered consumers/produces but also potentially liminal (and therefore vulnerable) consumers. From a theoretical perspective, this study will explore and expand on this apparent paradox. If blogging mothers are empowered how can they be vulnerable to M&PR practitioners?
3.9 Aims and research questions

This thesis explores the MB phenomenon using the lens of the contrasting theories of (i) bloggers as empowered prosumers, joining with M&PR practitioners in co-creation through dialogue and relationships, and (ii) mothers as vulnerable, liminal consumers and targets of exploitative covert marketing. Further, MBs themselves could be viewed as exploited prosumers and vulnerable consumers within and beyond the virtual third place.

The research uses the lens of prosumer versus vulnerable consumer within the virtual third place to explore the following issues and research questions:

1. What are MBs’ motivations to blog?
2. What are the nature and extent of MBs’ exchanges with M&PR practitioners online and offline?
3. What are the major ethical issues surrounding blogging and do MBs and M&PR practitioners have differing viewpoints on these issues?

As a powerful consumer group and one increasingly turning to social media, mothers have not been given adequate attention in marketing research (Bailey, 2008; Haines, 2011; VOICE group, 2010). In particular, little is known about the nature of their exchanges with bloggers. Mothers’ increasing use of online information, blogs and forums has been recently recognised in the academic arenas of child and maternal health (e.g. Kish-Doto, 2010; McDaniel et al., 2011; Sarkadi & Bremberg, 2005), feminism (Friedman, 2010; Haines, 2011; Lopez, 2009) and even geography (Madge & O’Connor, 2005), but has not been given significant attention within marketing research.

3.10 Conclusion

This literature review began with a discussion of the recent phenomenon of blogging and bloggers as new influencers and prosumers. Given the complex social exchanges within the blogosphere between bloggers and their readers and bloggers and M&PR practitioners, social exchange theory (SET) was discussed, followed by the concept of social capital as a vital tool for bloggers to develop. Social capital has been given limited attention with marketing and public relations relevant to blogging influencers, despite its apparent applicability. Related to social capital and its importance as a motivator for bloggers, literature relevant to blogger motivations was examined.
The two related fields of marketing and public relations were examined and their supposed parallel ‘evolutions’ and definitions noted. The seemingly opposite concepts of co-creation and covert/stealth marketing were reviewed within the marketing field. Within public relations, dialogue and relationship management as key frameworks were reviewed and critiqued and their impact related to ethical practice (particularly in regards to blogger outreach) was discussed.

Finally, the focus shifted to the influencer stakeholders themselves – MBs. The notion of MBs as empowered prosumers or, alternatively, liminal/vulnerable (and potentially exploitable) actors, whose identity is under construction, concluded this discussion, and gives the research a focusing lens.

This research attempts to answer Macnamara’s (2010) call for the use of ethnographic methods and interviews to investigate, among other things, the levels of interactivity within social media and the issues of control and ethics within blogs. Given the limited exploration of SET and social capital applied to marketing and public relations (and blogging), the researcher has followed Bourdieu’s suggestion and plunged into “the peculiarity of an empirical reality, historically located and dated, but with the objective of constructing it as a special case of what is possible” (1998, p. 2). The next chapter will discuss the research methodology employed for this thesis.
Chapter 4 Methodology

4.0 Chapter overview

Entering the blogosphere as a blog ‘newbie’, was like gazing into a dark and tangled labyrinth. The endless criss-crossing hyper tracks and trails of the blogosphere were overwhelming. ‘It’ seemed unwieldy and unmanageable – words that immediately arouse anxiety in the social researcher. (Hookway, 2008, p. 98)

This chapter presents the rationale for the choice of paradigm underpinning the research and the consequent methodology that was employed. Details of the method and research design are presented and ethical considerations are explored.

To summarise: the selected paradigm was constructivism and the methodology was predominantly a qualitative netnography (Kozinets, 2010; Kozinets, 2002, 2007; Kozinets, 1998), also known as online and virtual world ethnography, which included interviews, blog analysis, and a complementary and related online survey, with a descriptive quantitative component. Netnography, as has been detailed in Chapter 1, applies ethnographic principles to the study and analysis of (consumer) behaviour embedded in online communities (Kozinets, 2002). The netnography involved 45 interviews with mum bloggers, 10 interviews with expert informants and analysis of the corresponding blogs of 45 of the same bloggers interviewed. A survey that had closed questions and open-ended, qualitative questions was also employed. While the survey had a descriptive statistical element, the focus of the study was qualitative in nature. Kozinets (2010) proposed online surveys as complementary elements to netnography for investigations of online communities.

The study’s approach followed the rationale that while netnography may be conducted solely by researching in the online environment (‘the field behind the screen’), in-depth interviews and surveys can enhance studies of online communities (Mann and Stewart, 2004; Kozinets, 2010). Given that the research was concerned with bloggers, blogging and the impact of these new influencers on the marketing, media and public relations sphere as well as bloggers’ interactions with M&PR practitioners, a netnography was considered an ideal choice.
4.1 Paradigmatic considerations

Whatever methodological approach is chosen, it is argued that questions of methods are secondary to questions of paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Paradigm refers to the progress of scientific practice based on people’s philosophies and assumptions about the world and the nature of knowledge (Hussey & Hussey, 1997); a paradigm represents the worldview of the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Paradigms are “universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners” (Kuhn, 1962, p. viii). Guba and Lincoln outlined the four basic beliefs of alternative inquiry paradigms. Their table is reprinted on the next page.

It is proposed that this study is situated as a constructivist study, as represented in the table. In a constructivist study such as this, the aim of the inquiry is understanding and reconstruction of meanings that people hold (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As this study concentrated on perceptions of different individual bloggers (who are in turn members of a blogging community), M&PR practitioners within the social setting of the blogosphere (and in the offline environment), it would be naive to assert that there was one apprehendable and ‘true’ reality. However, the researcher’s aim was to interpret the participants’ realities. Looking at the ontological belief related to this study (i.e. the nature of reality), it would be argued that the bloggers’ perceptions and behaviours have certainly been shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values (as discussed in chapter 2, which looked at the rise of social media and the changes in the role of women and mothers in the 21st century) – but there are also local and specific constructed realities relevant to the rules and culture of the blogs and blogging community.
Table 4.1 Basic beliefs (metaphysics) of alternative enquiry paradigms

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<th>Item</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
<th>Postpositivism</th>
<th>Critical theory et al</th>
<th>Constructivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td>Naïve realism – “real” reality</td>
<td>Critical realism – real reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendable</td>
<td>historical realism – virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values; crystallized over time</td>
<td>relativism - local and specific constructed realities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Dualist/objectivist; Finding true</td>
<td>Modified dualist/objectivist; critical tradition/community; findings probably true</td>
<td>transactional/subjectivist; value-mediated findings</td>
<td>transactional/subjectivist; created findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Experimental/manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods</td>
<td>Modified experimental/manipulative; critical multiplism; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods</td>
<td>dialogic/dialectical</td>
<td>hermeneutical/dialectical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The epistemology of a study refers to “the relationship between the knower or would-be-knower and what can be known” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). In other words, if the researcher believes in an objective reality, then he or she will take a different approach to ensure their study is completely ‘objective’. The researchers will have the mindset of distancing themselves from the data. In the current study, the researcher and participants were interactively linked. It is impossible to research a practice and concept such as mum blogging (and the intense intimacies associated with the practice, despite it being in the public domain) without forming a relationship with those people interviewed and researched. What can be known is inextricably contained within with the interaction between a particular researcher and a particular group (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Finally, the question of methodology represented in the table refers to how the would-be knower goes about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A constructivist approach is transactional, that is, there is a process of creation of “findings” as the investigation proceeds. The study was transactional through and required a dialogue between the researcher and subjects of the inquiry. While findings were interpreted by the researcher, reference was also made back to the participants to discuss the interpretations made by the researcher and seek the participants’ input into the findings’ veracity. This process is known as ‘member checking’, and is seen as an important way of substantiating findings (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001).

4.2 Qualitative research

Having discussed the paradigm of choice, the methodology will now be explained. Several authors have called for more qualitative research in the areas of marketing in general (Carson et al., 2001; Goulding, 2003; Pettigrew & Roberts, 2011) and social media and blogging in particular (Macnamara, 2010; Kozinets, 2010). The next section will provide definitions of qualitative research and outline its key characteristics.

Qualitative research can be defined as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible…qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”
Qualitative methodologies are primarily directed to understanding the complex and the elusive in a systemic perspective more than to establish unambiguous cause and effect relationships between single variables. This form of research is built on the notion that life cannot be broken down into well-defined constituent components. Reality is more than the sum of its parts; there are also synergy effects (Gummesson, 2005).

The aim of qualitative studies is to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation (Carson et al., 2001). In order to gain a deeper understanding of consumer society, there should be a greater emphasis on rich and varied forms of data collection, according to Goulding (2003). Ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic research methods are able to generate the thick description of the complex lives of consumers on and offline (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003). The blogosphere and the bloggers, M&PR practitioners and readers who inhabit its realm require a depth of understanding which would be difficult to gain from a purely quantitative study.

At its most simplistic qualitative research is based on words rather than numbers (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). While this is a seemingly basic observation, it is an important one as language and words are prerequisites for social life (Gummesson, 2003). Other core characteristics of qualitative research include:

- **Natural settings.** Qualitative investigations often (but not always) take place in the research subjects’ natural environments – such as their workplace, home or where they shop (Creswell, 2003; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991; Hussey & Hussey, 1997). In the case of bloggers, their virtual ‘natural environment’ would appear to be social media (Kozinets, 2010) including their own blogs, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, to name some platforms. This study took place online with the researcher analysing the bloggers’ blogs as well as in real-life at the bloggers’ homes, in coffee shops or via the phone.

- **Researcher involvement.** The researcher is closely involved with the people being studied – rather than being removed as is the case for quantitative researchers who tend to base methods on surveys or tightly structured interviews. The researcher systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry, is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study and articulates this (Creswell, 2003; Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). This study saw the researcher participate in two blogging conferences and via social media to gain and establish the bloggers’ (and expert informants’) trust. The researcher also communicated with the bloggers and expert informants in-person, on the phone and via email and ‘followed’ them on Twitter, often interacting informally. As a result of these interactions, some of the bloggers...
have become connected with the researcher via Facebook and LinkedIn and at social and industry events. The researcher used memos to describe her thoughts and was reflexive throughout the research journey. While the researcher in some ways became immersed in the community, she was also always keenly aware of being an invited-in outsider, given that she did not blog and always presented herself as a sympathetic researcher, rather than a participant insider or ‘one of them/us’.

- Small-scale studies. Qualitative researchers are interested in deep exploration in order to provide rich, holistic description. Small samples are therefore more usual – investigated in-depth and over time (Creswell, 2003; Daymon & Holloway, 2002, 2010; Easterby-Smith et al., 1991; Hussey & Hussey, 1997). While this study included a large-scale survey, the study was focused on the 45 bloggers, their blogs, and the 10 expert informants who were interviewed to gain a rich understanding of the phenomenon.

- Holistic focus. Qualitative researchers are not interested in analysing a small number of variables but look at the whole picture including different stakeholders’ experiences and beliefs (Creswell, 2003; Daymon & Holloway, 2002). This research looked at the perspectives of not just bloggers but also the M&PR practitioners who sought to influence the influencers, described as ‘expert informants’. The big pictures of ethics and motivations underpinned the research questions rather than narrow hypothesis testing.

- Flexible. Although qualitative researchers have a topic and an agenda as a basis for their research, they are often open to exploring new avenues of research that may arise during the research process. It is emergent rather than tightly prefigured. The research questions may change and be refined as the inquirer learns what to ask and to whom it should be asked (Creswell, 2003; Daymon & Holloway, 2002). This research began with interviews and used the other phases of methodology to explore the research questions from different angles. While the research questions remained the same, other themes emerged which had not been discovered in the initial literature review.

- It is fundamentally interpretive. The qualitative researcher makes an interpretation of the data, including developing a description of an individual or setting. The personal interpretation brought to qualitative data analysis cannot be escaped (Creswell, 2003). In this study the researcher developed themes as a result of the data gathered.

As has been discussed in the literature review, the research used the theoretical lens of the contrasting theories of the mother bloggers as ‘prosumers’ (powerful consumers who have become producers) (Kotler, 1986; Toffler, 1980) versus vulnerable consumers who are in a liminal state (VOICE group, 2010). The literature offers arguments that blogging mothers could be represented in either of these categories. Creswell (2003)
suggested that qualitative research begins with assumptions and the possible use of a theoretical lens so this research followed that view. Blogging mothers are described as both empowered and vulnerable so exploratory research seemed appropriate. The focus of the research is on how consumers-turned-producers are motivated to blog and their views on interactions with readers and M&PR practitioners. Therefore, a largely qualitative research approach which enables interpretation of the blogging phenomenon “in terms of the meanings people bring to them” was deemed appropriate (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2).

4.3 Netnography

The profound changes social media has made to consumers’ lives are just beginning to be studied but deserve greater attention from researchers (Sosnowy, 2013). A qualitative netnography, with a complementary quantitative survey, was judged appropriate. The mum blogging community is based and has its foundations in an online, computer-mediated environment which has then extended into the ‘real world’ setting, and there is a lack of research into the interplay online and offline between (mum) bloggers, their readers and the M&PR practitioners who seek their influence. Kozinets, who pioneered qualitative research into online phenomena and was the father of the term ‘netnography’, argued that blogs provide… “an opportunity to enter the life streams of consumers and learn the role of products and services in them. They are a source of information that tends to offer rich, detailed, longitudinal data about individual consumers and their consumption practices, values, meanings and beliefs” (2007, p. 138).

As has been discussed above, netnography is a method of qualitative research developed and championed by marketing academic Kozinets (1998; 2002; 2008; 2010) which also has parallels in methods of (mostly) online research developed by anthropologists, sociologists and other researchers (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012; Hine, 2000; Mann & Stewart, 2004; Markham & Baym, 2009; Murthy, 2008; Underberg & Zorn, 2013). Various terms for similar or related forms of study, other than netnography, have included digital ethnography, virtual ethnography, online ethnography and internet inquiry (Hine, 2000; Mann & Stewart, 2004; Markham & Baym, 2009; Murthy, 2008; Underberg & Zorn, 2013). Netnography was originally defined by Kozinets (1998, p. 366) as “a written account resulting from fieldwork studying the cultures and communities that emerge from online, computer mediated, or
internet-based communications, where both the field work and the textual account are methodologically informed by the traditions and techniques of cultural anthropology.”

The current study has followed Kozinets’ approach closely as this thesis aligns to the marketing discipline. Kozinets’ book entitled Netnography Doing Ethnographic Research Online (2010) offered a step-by-step guide to netnography and it has been invaluable. It is acknowledged that Kozinets updated his approach to netnography in his recent book, entitled Netnography: Redefined (2015). However, given that the data collection and analysis for this thesis was conducted prior to the publication of Kozinets’ latest book, his more recent approach could not be followed.

It has been argued that there is no one accepted way that online communities should be studied, and while online ethnography may involve observation of postings, Hine (2000) suggested that data collection offline as well as online may be conducted. This research followed Hine and collected data both online and ‘in real life’ from interviews (as the bloggers term it, IRL). Kozinets, too, proposed that netnography, perhaps paradoxically, did not have to be confined to the internet, as in-depth, face-to-face or phone interviews could offer nuance and depth to a study (Kozinets 2010). Some netnographies have been conducted solely in the online space (see, for example, Avery, 2007; Bahl, 2011; Langer & Beckman, 2005), in some cases due to the sensitive nature of the research topics. However, others have purposefully included interviews including, for example, Muniz and Shau’s (2005) netnography of the Apple Newton brand community and Cova and Pace’s (2006) study of the Nutella brand community. Using the anthropological research lens, Boellstorff et al. (2012) argued that interviews are an important part of (digital) ethnography.

Researchers are now recognising that while some social phenomena occur only online, most have an offline component (Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff, & Cui, 2009). It could be argued that any study which examines people’s lived experience and consumer behaviour should include settings/research from both IRL and consumers’ other real/virtual life – spent on and through computer-mediated communication, as both spaces have an influence, on the other (Garcia et al., 2009). This study therefore takes place both firmly in the real world of face-to-face interviews and in the computer-mediated world of the blogs themselves. Netnography requires prolonged engagement with and in-depth immersion in a community (Boellstorff et al., 2012; Kozinets, 2010). This has occurred over four years, with the researcher interacting with the bloggers
across different platforms and IRL. While the interviews were done primarily at the early stages of the research, the researcher continued to immerse herself in the blogging world on-line, that is regularly reading blogs and the associated other social media sites relevant to the blogs. The research study was designed to observe, analyse and understand blogging mothers’ motivations and interactions with each other, their readers and M&PR practitioners as a dynamic and evolutionary social process phenomenon.

4.4 Research design

The following sections will describe in more detail the netnographic approach to data collection and analysis. In particular, the following approaches will be described: the rationale for the choice of community to study, the data collection methods, data analysis techniques employed, research ethics and member checks (Bryman, 2008; Freshwater, 2007).

Kozinets (2010, p. 61) presents a ‘flow chart’ of a netnographic research project as follows:

Step 1 Definition of research questions, social sites or topics to investigate.

Step 2 Community identification and selection.

Step 3 Community participant observation (engagement, immersion) and data collection (ensure ethical procedures).

Step 4 Data analysis and iterative interpretation of findings.

Step 5 Write, present and report research findings and/or theoretical and/or policy implications.

Kozinets (2002, p. 62) also recommended the following methodological stages and procedures for netnographic studies.

1) Entrée. Formulation of research questions and identification of appropriate online fora for study
2) Data collection
3) Analysis and interpretation. Classification, coding analysis and contextualisation of communicative acts
4) Research ethics, to be discussed in more detail later in the chapter
5) Member checks

Following Kozinets’ approach, the next section will address entrée—that is, how the online fora were chosen, or the community selection process. Discussion of formulation of research questions has been addressed in Chapter 2. Following a description of the rationale and procedure for community selection, an in-depth discussion of data collection will be provided.

4.4.1 Entrée: Community selection

Kozinets (2010) outlined guidelines for entrée which includes site choice (community selection) that were followed in this research. Each criterion will now be addressed in turn.

4.4.1.1 Criterion 1: Relevant, they relate to your research focus and questions

The selection of active Australian mum bloggers was seen as paramount in answering the research questions.

Internet search terms were used to discover the MBs and their blogs. These terms included ‘Mum Bloggers Australia’, ‘Mum Blogs Perth’, ‘Mum Blogging’, ‘Mummy Blogging’. The researcher was initially not a participant observer online, to use the ethnographic term, but an outsider seeking entrée. The researcher had no personal experience of blogging. According to Gatson (2011), there are three different methods in ethnography which can be adaptable to the online setting. They are:

- Traditional field methods - one lone researcher is a covert or known participant
- Autoethnography - the researcher is a native/insider (in this case a ‘digital native’) of a particular site or social setting
- Multisited/extended case ethnography where the goal is ‘to move from a micro mundane world to the macro systems that structure these worlds’.
  (Gatson 2011, p 514).

Gatson noted that these categories can bleed into each other and this was certainly true with the research conducted. Starting as a lone researcher, the tentative early steps of the researcher were by necessity ‘covert’ as the researcher Googled terms and read blogs without the bloggers being aware of being read. As Gatson points out “the first step in any online environment is reading” (2011, p 516). However, the very point of a publicly accessible blog is to be read so the traditional notion of covert behaviour could
be contested. From reading blogs, the researcher went to being in some ways auto-
ethnographic, a interacting in person, on blogs, on Twitter and on Facebook. The study
was multi-sited, across different blogs and in person during the interviews.

The sampling strategy for the blogs and bloggers worked in tandem. In order to achieve
a variety of participants in terms of age, number and ages of children, locality, subject
matter of blog, length of time blogging and motivations for blogging (for example,
business, personal or both) the researcher aimed to interview approximately 50
bloggers. This approximate sample size is in line with recommendations for large
qualitative studies (Britten, 1995). After 45 interviews the key themes from the
interviews were being repeated and it was determined that saturation of themes was
achieved (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) so interviewee recruitment
stopped. Rich data resulted from these interviews. Two women with no children and
one ‘dad’ blogger were interviewed earlier on to get an overview of blogging as a
phenomenon from different viewpoints, but their interviews were not included in the
thesis for data analysis. Other relevant studies have used fewer participants. Brown et al.
(2007) interviewed 30 high users of the internet for their study that conceptualised
word-of-mouth in social media. While researching the consumption of prams, relevant
to the liminal experience of new mothers, Thomsen and Sorensen (2006) interviewed
eight mothers. Cody and Lawlor (2011) interviewed 15 ‘tweens’ when exploring liminal
consumption among that group.

Snowball sampling was initially used to recruit participants for this study. This
sampling method is also called chain referral sampling and could be considered a type
of purposive sampling. Snowball sampling works by the researcher identifying a few
members of a population with particular knowledge and experience, then asking these
participants to refer others (Jugenheimer, Bradley, Kelley, & Hudson, 2010). In this
case, the first bloggers the researcher met with told her of bloggers they read regularly
and important contacts within the mum blogging world. This type of sampling is cost-
efficient and effective and normally used for research where useful informants are
difficult to identify and when the researcher lacks extensive personal networks and
relevant contacts (Johnston & Sabin, 2010).

The sampling strategies of qualitative research are guided by the underlying principle of
gaining rich, in-depth information (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). Judgement sampling
calls for special efforts to locate and gain access to the individuals who have the
requisite information. It may be the only useful one for answering certain types of research questions (Sekaran, 2003b). The selection criterion initially was simple – the bloggers had to be mothers and had to blog. However, as the interviews continued the researcher looked for bloggers who had small, medium and large followings (determined by Facebook likes, Twitter followers and numbers of comments on specific posts) and evidence of sponsored posts.

“The success of qualitative interviewing and ethnographic access often depend on the relationships of trust a researcher is able to build, the depth of their access to participants’ social worlds, and how much they are able to ‘get’ from participants that goes deeper than surface understandings” (Reich, 2014, p. 3). Given that the researcher had, at the start, no established understanding of the social world of mum bloggers, gaining and establishing trust was obviously paramount and just how to do that unfolded in unexpected ways. As one of the first steps, a female colleague of the researcher (not a mother) who blogs was contacted for an informal discussion about the researchers’ intentions and the colleague wrote a tweet on Twitter to seek mum bloggers interested in being interviewed. The Twitter call-out soon yielded bloggers from Perth, Western Australia, who were happy to be interviewed and they emailed the researcher. Meanwhile, the internet search found an Australian online mum blogging community, Digital Parents. At each interview the blogger was asked what blogs/bloggers she followed and these names and contact details were followed up by the researcher.

However, after the initial interviews and once more familiar with the blogging world, judgement sampling was used. The discovery of the Digital Parents online community and subsequent liaison with its founder was a major breakthrough. Ethically, Kozinets (2007) took the view that an online community should be aware of the researcher’s intentions. By contacting every blogger for interview the researcher was able to outline research objectives and ask for informed consent. The researcher also connected with the bloggers through Twitter.

As the research began it was discovered that the mum blogging community was having its second ever conference – to be held in Melbourne in 2012. This was an opportunity to cross from the online world to the offline, real world and to establish trust with and recruit (at least some of) the participants. For the researcher, it was also an opportunity to see the bloggers interacting in person, rather than online. As Boellstorff et al. noted, “success in establishing rapport and trust can shape an entire research project” (2012, p.
76). Being an ‘outsider’ initially, the researcher was conscious of being accepted into the community and power issues (as discussed by Gatson, 2011; Reich, 2014). Gaining access to conduct enough interviews and understand the community under study were key objectives. As Reich (2014) discussed, with online availability of profiles of researchers, access becomes even more fraught as potential interviewees can vet the interviewer via their online persona/footprint created by sites such as LinkedIn.

Attending the Digital Parents Conference in 2012 was instrumental in gaining access to and developing trust with some of the potential interviewees. Once contacted by email in 2012, the founder of Digital Parents was interested in the research and (during a conversation on Twitter) asked the researcher to send her the academic article “The radical act of Mommy Blogging” (Lopez, 2009). When the keynote guest speaker dropped out at the 2012 conference, the organiser asked the researcher to host a panel session on the “radical act of mommy/mummy blogging”. At that point, the blurring of lines between being a lone, outsider researcher and a participant observer began.

One of the other keys to gaining trust prior to the conference and beyond was the use of Twitter to interact with participants. The conference webpage had each participant’s blog address and Twitter handle. By meeting many of the bloggers in person at the first conference, the researcher was able to introduce herself and ask for the bloggers’ business cards. The researcher then followed the bloggers on Twitter and often interacted with them there prior to emailing to request an interview. The public nature of Twitter also meant there were ethical issues to consider with regards to the bloggers’ privacy. Ethical issues will be further discussed in Section 4. The vast majority of mum bloggers only had email addresses on their blogs so organising a phone or in-person interview meant emailing a request. Most bloggers responded positively and quickly. The researcher also attended the 2013 Digital Parents Conference and conducted more interviews during and following this conference.

The method of access to the bloggers for interview, with a combination of real-world contact with many at the Digital Parents conferences, social media contact via Twitter, internet contact through email and finally in-person or telephone contact shows the complexity of participant recruitment for this study. However, for all the importance of computer-mediated interactions, the face-to-face meetings were also important giving credence to the view that both worlds are important in research (see Garcia et al., 2009; Mann & Stewart, 2000).
4.4.1.2 **Criterion 2: Active, they have recent and regular communications**

While initially bloggers were approached via email, their blogs were viewed prior to contact being made, to ensure that the blogs had recent and regular communications online. All blogs chosen were active in that they had recent posts, that is posts from less than two weeks prior and there were ‘regular’ postings, that is postings more than once every two weeks.

4.4.1.3 **Criterion 3: Interactive, they have a flow of communication between participants**

Blogs, by their very nature (that is, written by a sole author), begin as individual (one-way) communication or online journals. However, all the bloggers chosen for the study invited and received comments from their readers and used a variety of strategies to elicit comments. These strategies included asking questions of their readers at the end of a post and running competitions and give-aways. It is worth noting that readers often commented through other media (for example via the bloggers’ Facebook page, on Twitter or Instagram).

4.4.1.4 **Criterion 4: Substantial, they have a critical mass of communicators and an energetic field**

All blogs had input from readers/other bloggers and therefore had a ‘critical mass’. While Kozinets does not define ‘substantial’, it was decided that blogs with regular posts (not less than three per month) and regular comments from readers (on average, at least three per post) were seen as substantial. Some blogs had an average of 50 comments per post while others had only five or less. A range of blogs was considered important to capture themes relevant to motivations which could differ depending on the nature of the blog and blogger.

4.4.1.5 **Criterion 5: Heterogeneous, they have a number of different participants**

As discussed previously, blogs chosen in this study had one author but they sought and received comments from different participants. Often (but not always) the participants were also blogging mums (as identified by themselves in the comments/their avatar or handle). The average number of commenters across blogs per post was 15.

4.4.1.6 **Criterion 6: Data rich, offering more detailed or descriptively rich data**
The blogs chosen had descriptively rich data and the subjects blogged about included, but were not limited to:

- funny personal stories
- sad personal stories
- funny/sad personal stories
- commentaries on issues of the day that had been in the media
- health topics, for example, discussion of children’s illness or chronic diseases and/or people’s own health issues
- fitness
- product reviews
- craft
- discussion of parenting
- competitions and give-aways
- recipes
- fashion and beauty
- how-to’s, including craft, cake-making and house DIY
- blogging.

Many blogs had an archive of all their posts. Blogs contained photographs and text and some included videos. Many blogs had links to other blogs, advertising, buttons for other forms of social media and headings such as ‘popular posts’.

In summary, the blogs chosen met these criteria in that they were obviously relevant to the research questions, active, interactive, substantial and data rich. While each blog was written and published by a single author, all blogs were in the public domain and invited (and received) comments from other bloggers and general readers.

4.5 Data collection – the three phases

Following Kozinets’ guide for methodological stages, this study also incorporated three forms of data collection. As discussed previously, the study aimed for an in-depth and holistic view of the bloggers’ culture and interactions with each other and M&PR practitioners. Netnography provided the opportunity for thick description as well as depth and details of MBs’ motivations to blog and the nature of their exchanges with both their readers (including each other) and M&PR practitioners. For this reason, the research was designed to incorporate three forms and phases of data collection: 1) in-depth interviews (of both bloggers and expert informants), 2) an online survey of the
blogging community under study and finally, 3) analysis of blogs. Analysing both what bloggers and M&PR practitioners said in relation to major ethical issues, in the in-depth interviews and blogger survey, and what they did – what was actually presented – on their blogs allowed for triangulation of data.

The three phases of the research are illustrated (Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1 Phases of data collection.**

Phase 1
In-depth interviews

Phase 2
Online survey

Phase 3
Analysis of blogs

### 4.6 Phase 1 In-depth interviews

Depth interviews are central to qualitative research, and (digital) ethnography, and are often the major source of information for qualitative researchers (Boellstorff et al., 2012; Carson et al., 2001; Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Boellstorff et al. (2012) offered three benefits of interviewing (within the digital ethnography context). Firstly, while there is an important difference between what people say and what they do, the meaning people give to what they do is still important. Secondly, they argued that people are aware of and can articulate many (if not all) aspects of their own cultures. Thirdly, interviews give participants a chance for an intimate and private discussion where views could be expressed that may not be given in other more public settings.

Discussing their depth interviews with marketers Cotte and Kistruck (2006, p. 474) asserted, “when one is searching for a deeper understanding, seeking to go beyond what can be achieved with other methods, depth interviews offer a valuable window into our understanding”. Depth interviews are also valued for their ability to access subconscious and unconscious motivations (Dichter, 1964).

However, researchers have acknowledged the difficulties associated with gaining reliable information and the ‘art’ of good interviewing (Carson et al., 2001; Dilley, 2000; Whiteley et al., 1998). “The qualitative research interview, as one of the most complex and socially interactive forms of social research activity, exemplifies that there will always be a conscious and rational as well as a subconscious and irrational view of reality seeking expression (Whiteley et al., 1998, p. 7).” Whitely et al’s (1998) reference
to the challenges of interviewing are also detailed by Patton (2002) who warns of the dangers, but also the rewards of interviewing.

Limitations in interviews include the discrepancies between what informants say they do and what they actually do; the time consuming and labour-intensive nature of interviews, the question of subjectivity and the effect of the interviewer on the interview itself (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 184). Whitely et al. (1998) outlined the variables which can affect the outcome of an interview, which include the gender of the interviewee and interviewer, the timing of the interview, the relative status of both parties, how language is phrased and its tone (paralinguistics), and the physical space between the interviewer and interviewee (proxemics). The researcher was mindful of the variables that could affect the interview and was also keen to establish trust with the interviewees. It is important to build up trust right from the start of the interview (Daymon & Holloway, 2002) and beyond its completion. Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran (2001) even went so far as to outline the different phases of an interview in diagrammatic format and highlight the importance of ‘entrance and exit time investment’, using ritual and informal exchange to develop intimacy within the heart of the interview. The approach taken by the interviewer can enhance interview results, according to Fontana and Frey (1994, p. 371) who suggested that “the interviewer ‘come down’ to the level of informants and engage in a ‘real’ conversation with ‘give and take’ and empathetic understanding.” With a conversational, ‘give and take’ approach, informants are more likely to then be more open (Wuest, 1995). As explained in the section on interview execution, the researcher established a commonality with the MB interviewees (being herself a mother of younger children) and also positioned herself as a non-expert in the field of blogging, seeking their opinion as experts. The face-to-face interviews with the MBs sometimes took place in their homes, often with a coffee, and time was taken on the informal exchange prior to the recorded interview and afterwards. The researcher made sure to listen and, while trying to give minimal opinions, did use the art of conversation to keep the interview moving. With the M&PR practitioners, the researcher presented herself as a former practitioner but, again, with little expertise in the field of blogger liaison. In her professional life, starting as a journalist and moving into marketing and public relations, the researcher has spent many years practising the art of interviewing. It is important to note that the interviews were semi-structured, allowing the interviewer to pursue comments that were interesting or required further probing.
4.6.1 Phase 1A In-depth interviews with bloggers

In line with the research questions, the aim of the interviews was to discover the (stated) motivations of bloggers and the extent and nature of their exchanges with M&PR practitioners. There was some difficulty in eliciting responses to questions that related to the encountering of any ethical issues as often participants felt there weren’t any issues to discuss. Therefore, the question of ethics was also raised in the later online survey and ethical practice was investigated in the blog analysis. The interviews began with a broad ‘grand tour’ question “tell me about your blogging experiences to date” which was geared to elicit a more general answer and to generate stories.

Below is a list of the bloggers who were interviewed. Constructing such a table may, at first glance, seem a simple enough task. However, finding the number of Facebook ‘likes’ and Twitter ‘followers’ for a blogger is not as easy as it seems. Many bloggers have more than one blog or persona on the internet. They may have a personal Facebook page for ‘real’ family and friends, a Facebook page for their main blog and a Facebook page for their other blog or business. Similarly, bloggers may have a personal Twitter account as well as a Twitter account for their different blogs/personas. As interviews began in 2012 the bloggers often changed their blogs’ names and direction as the years progressed (or even stopped blogging completely). For the purposes of this table, the Facebook likes refers to the blogger’s 2014 blog (rather than personal) Facebook page and the Twitter followers refers to the blogger’s personal Twitter account.
Table 4.2 The MBs interviewees

<table>
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<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of children at time of interview and their ages</th>
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<th>Facebook likes</th>
<th>Twitter followers</th>
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<td>30s</td>
<td>3; school age</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1; toddler</td>
<td>At home</td>
<td>2611</td>
<td>3175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; (pregnant with third)</td>
<td>At home</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>Not on twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aisha</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1; pre-school</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>1713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renae</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; pre-school/toddler</td>
<td>At home</td>
<td>Not now blogging</td>
<td>Not now on Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>3; school and preschool</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>1477</td>
<td>2261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanche</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>3; school and preschool</td>
<td>Own business</td>
<td>Now in corporate space (personal blog closed)</td>
<td>3174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandy</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>2; pre-school</td>
<td>Farm/own business</td>
<td>989</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lara</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; pre-school</td>
<td>Own business (part-time)</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>3096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>4; from school to toddler</td>
<td>At home</td>
<td>14,938</td>
<td>3108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; pre-school</td>
<td>Blog has become business</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>1; pre-school</td>
<td>Studying and working part-time</td>
<td>Closed down original blog</td>
<td>865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Facebook page</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Rita</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1; pre-school</td>
<td>Studying and working full-time</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Ciara</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1; pre-school</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>New blog name 97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Briony</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>2; older</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>No longer blogging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Lilian</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; pre-school/school</td>
<td>Own business</td>
<td>1199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; pre-school/toddler</td>
<td>At home.</td>
<td>1064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Michela</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>2; school age</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; school and pre-school</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Dierdre</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>2; school</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>New blog 228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>3; school, pre-school</td>
<td>At home</td>
<td>16,028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Jacinta</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>3; adult to school age</td>
<td>Studying and working full-time</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Karla</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1; toddler (pregnant with second)</td>
<td>At home. Blog is becoming a business</td>
<td>2310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Josephine</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>6; from teenage down to babies</td>
<td>At home. Own online business</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Kayley</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; school and pre-school</td>
<td>Own consultancy</td>
<td>793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Fleur</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1; pre-school</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; pre-school</td>
<td>Own business</td>
<td>New blog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Lisbeth</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>1; school</td>
<td>Studying</td>
<td>Not bloggin g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Grown up children and grandchildren</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>2; school aged children</td>
<td>Blog is her business</td>
<td>7698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Cherie</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; school aged and baby</td>
<td>Blog is her business</td>
<td>156,126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Alana</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>3; adult, school and pre-school</td>
<td>At home – on a farm</td>
<td>1372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Greta</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; pre-school</td>
<td>At home</td>
<td>1123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>2; teen and school</td>
<td>Own business</td>
<td>18,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Tiana</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>3; pre-school</td>
<td>Studying</td>
<td>1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>2; school age</td>
<td>Part-time, writer</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1; school age</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Bridget</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; pre-school and school</td>
<td>Blog has become business</td>
<td>4471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>Selena</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1; school</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>1433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Shona</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; teenage and school</td>
<td>At home</td>
<td>155 friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>Nicola</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>4; school and pre-school</td>
<td>Makes money from blogging</td>
<td>5612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>Raelene</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1; school</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>1042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>Cora</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; pre-school</td>
<td>Own business</td>
<td>3251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2; school</td>
<td>Own business</td>
<td>949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>Josey</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>2; adults</td>
<td>Makes money from blogging</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6.1.1 **Interview execution**

The blogging mothers were invited to participate in individual semi-structured interviews by email, with an informal email sent initially introducing the researcher. Attached to the email was the Participant Information Form. Once the participant agreed to be interviewed a consent form was emailed. The bloggers were able to select the location of their interviews with potential venues including the blogger’s home, office or a neutral venue such as a coffee shop. Alternatively, if they were unable to attend an interview (for example if they lived interstate) they were interviewed by phone. Having young children made it sometimes difficult to meet and talk one-on-one. Some bloggers chose to speak to the researcher during their children’s naps, either in their house or over the phone, others spoke at night after their children had gone to sleep, and some of those who worked outside the home were interviewed in their lunch hours. Some bloggers who were the principal carers of children left their children with a carer (such as the children’s grandmother) to be interviewed at a coffee shop. The effort required to be interviewed is noted as it shows that the bloggers were generally keen to contribute to the research. However, the interviewer was also flexible and accommodating with time and place, according to each blogger’s individual needs.

The researcher started the interview by thanking the (blogger) interviewee for their time and usually an opening discussion of something the blogger had written recently on their blog or a discussion on how their children were. Most interviews took between half an hour and an hour but some were much longer. One interview stretched over three hours with three different phone calls.

See the Appendix C for suggested questions for the interview that were used as a starting point. The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and subsequently transcribed.

Being of the same gender and also being a mother seemed to be important in gaining trust of the blogger interviewees. Fontana and Frey (1994) nominate several areas for consideration when planning interviews, including dress and body language which they suggested could alter the interview results. When interviewing the bloggers care was
taken not to dress too formally and the shared experience of parenting was often an initial discussion as an ice-breaker to put the participant at their ease. The researcher, as a non-blogger, also used the approach of seeking knowledge from an expert thus placing the bloggers in the role of experts in their field. Following the interview, the researcher always took the time to send a note of thanks via email with a digital image of flowers (different flower pictures were selected to try to match the interviewer’s image of the individual blogger) inserted. A request to keep in touch was part of the thank you email and this was often responded to warmly by the blogger by email. Continuing contact occurred sporadically with some of the bloggers via email and through mediums such as Twitter. In some cases the researcher initiated the contact and in others it was the bloggers who contacted the researcher.

4.6.1.2 Interview type

Interview types range on a continuum from unstructured to structured (Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Patton, 1990). The interviews for the current research were ‘semi-structured’, which means that interviews did not always stick specifically to the interview guide but often followed a line of thought or questioning raised by the interviewee. Prior to the start of the in-depth interviews a discussion guide was devised and approved by the project supervisor and the University Ethics Committee. The discussion guide was developed more to tease out every possible question on the topic, but during the real interviews when topics emerged from the first open question for example, they were followed up and expanded upon. This approach allowed new topics to emerge and also gave the interviews more of a conversational tone. Some questions were added and some replaced by others as the study progressed, in line with new information emerging from data already collected.
4.6.2 Phase 1B In-depth interviews with expert informants (EIs)

Table 4.3 The EIs interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Position and organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>Blogger, agency owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brendan</td>
<td>Senior consultant, major international PR agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskia</td>
<td>Owner operator, tourism business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aileen</td>
<td>In-house marketer, charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damion</td>
<td>Owner, managing director, PR consultancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Owner and director, boutique PR consultancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leanne</td>
<td>Owner and director, business and agency for bloggers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marnie</td>
<td>Senior in-house marketing director, financial organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>Owner and director, public relations consultancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>Owner and director, business which works with bloggers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The aim of the interviews with expert informants was to see the perspective of M&PR practitioners and organisation representatives who worked with or liaised with bloggers to determine answers to the research questions listed below.

What are the nature and extent of MBs’ exchanges with M&PR practitioners online and offline?

What are the major ethical issues surrounding blogging and do MBs and M&PR practitioners have differing viewpoints on these issues?
From a data triangulation viewpoint it was important to determine if the views of bloggers corresponded to or were in contrast with the views of those seeking to ‘influence the influencers’. Secondly, it was important to determine the motivations behind the exchanges and relationship building from both sides.

4.6.2.1 **Sampling strategy**

Judgement sampling was used to select ‘expert informant’ interviewees who brought their business, marketing and/or public relations perspective to the blogging world. All of the 10 expert informants sought for interview had interacted with mum bloggers in some way in order to gain benefit for their organisation. In other words, the expert informants had all interacted with the bloggers and developed relationships with them in the hope of some form of commercial (or positive outcome for not-for-profits) gain for their own or their organisation’s business. Most of the expert informants worked for organisations that may have sponsored a blogging conference or individual bloggers. Some of the expert informants were self-described as public relations or communications consultants, others had the job title of marketing manager or director and others were owners of businesses that had mothers as an important ‘target market’.

4.6.2.2 **Interview recruitment**

At the two Digital Parents conferences in 2012 and 2013, the researcher took note of the organisations that actively sought to sponsor and interact with parent bloggers. The M&PR practitioners representing the sponsor organisations were approached in person and asked for an interview while the researcher attended the two Digital Parents Conferences. Those M&PR practitioners indicating their interest in participating were subsequently contacted via email to arrange interviews (and some were interviewed while at the conferences, face-to-face and in smaller break-out rooms). While some were followed on Twitter, this did not seem to be as important in gaining trust of the M&PR practitioner expert informants. Meeting the prospective interviewees at the conference appeared to be an important way of gaining trust and consent for interview.

4.6.2.3 **Interview structure and interview type**

Interviews were semi-structured and were conducted in person or via telephone. Telephone interviews were conducted as most of the expert informants lived interstate and/or were extremely busy. The interview questions were distilled after a literature
review and related to the research questions. An interview guide was developed and received University ethics approval. See Appendix E for interview questions. Importantly, the questions asked of the expert informants corresponded to the questions asked of the bloggers. For example, the expert informants were asked what their dealings were with bloggers and what their motivations were for initiating contact.

4.6.2.4 Interview execution

A different approach was used with the ‘expert informants’ interviews than that taken with the bloggers, with the interviewer emphasising her own professional experience in marketing and public relations and using a slightly more formal tone and manner. The in-depth interview of expert informants began in 2012 and continued into 2013. Some interviews were conducted while at each Digital Parents conference in a room where the interview could be conducted privately while others were conducted by phone. Courtesy was shown to each respondent and exhibited throughout. Following the interview, a thank you note was sent via email with a digital image of a basket or bouquet of flowers. Similar to the thank you sent to the bloggers, a request to keep in touch was also included, and again, most expert informants responded warmly with a quick reply email.

4.6.3 Phase 1 summary

This section has detailed Phase 1 of the qualitative netnography. The in-depth interviews design was introduced and its deployment described. Details of interviews with both bloggers and expert informants were outlined. In the next section, the principally qualitative survey is introduced and described.

4.7 Phase 2 Survey

According to Kozinets (2010, p. 43) online surveys can be used to “inform a range of important questions about online communities and cultures”. The online, open-ended survey questions were developed following the interviews and were used to verify and expand on themes which arose in the interviews and triangulate data in line with Kozinets (2010). Initial and early coding of the interviews with bloggers yielded themes related to motivations for blogging and the nature of interactions with M&PR
practitioners. Kozinets (2010) asserted that surveys could help in comprehending how valid and popular these categorisations might be.

While the interviews were one-to-one with individual, lone bloggers, an important initial theme to emerge was the importance of community and connection amongst bloggers. To gain a sense of the community’s culture and make-up, a survey of the community itself was deemed important. This is in accordance with Kozinets (2010, p. 45) who suggested online surveys are good for research on online cultures and communities in which researchers want to

- Draw conclusions about online community usage that are representative of a particular population;
- Draw conclusions about changing patterns in online community usage;
- Understand expressed attitudes about online community;
- Gain retrospective accounts regarding what online community members recall about their actions;
- Gain a sense of people’s attitudes and opinions about online communities;
- Learn about people’s self-reported representation of what they do, or intend to do, in regards to their online community and cultural activity.

Early on in the interviews and blog searches it was discovered that bloggers interacted with each other through their individual blogs (via each blog’s comment section which usually follow each post by the blog author) and through other social media, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest. However, it was found that the bloggers also interact through a particular online community website called Digital Parents (initially known as Aussie Mummy Bloggers), facilitated by an online community manager. Digital Parents is an online community of Australian parent bloggers who use the site to share ideas and experiences (www.digitalparents.com.au) Note that much of the online interaction for this community migrated predominantly to Facebook in 2016. The vast majority of members at the time of research were mothers, with a handful being fathers and a small minority not having children. The Digital Parents Conference was initiated by the owner and community manager of the Digital Parents webpage/online community, with the conference enabling mum bloggers to interact in person. Therefore, this online community website was seen as the logical, easiest and most direct method to reach the Australian mum blogging community. The questions, while closely related to the questions raised in the in-depth interviews, were developed in consultation with the Digital Parents founder and owner. Her knowledge of the community helped inform the questions and their flow. It should be noted that the
Digital Parents owner also had questions she wished to raise in the survey. As the owner of the data base, her needs were important and the survey was collaborative and so not all the findings are reported as they were not relevant to the research questions.

The survey was also a useful tool for drawing out responses on ethical issues, with an open-ended question. The question of blogging ethics had been a sensitive one during interviews with bloggers’ answers (or lack of answers) raising some ‘red flags’ (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 81) and it was felt that a larger sample could help elicit more useful responses. The anonymity and mediated ‘distance’ (rather than a face-to-face or phone interview) of an (obviously computer mediated) online survey, was seen as an advantage in answering the sensitive question of blogging ethics as participants may have been more likely to give direct answers (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006).

In summary, the open-ended questions asked in the online survey corresponded closely to questions asked in the interviews to verify and expand on themes. Other closed-ended questions related to respondent demographics, frequency of blogging, attitude towards members and membership of the community, different forms of advertising and paid promotion on blogs, use of other social media, online shopping activities, and the range of topics discussed on their blogs. For a full list of questions, see Appendix F.

4.7.1 Pre-testing

Pre-testing was an important phase in the design of the questionnaire, with the survey initially vetted by the Digital Parents owner and her business partner and then sent to approximately 20 members of the Digital Parents community. The process served to improve the design of the questionnaire and its functionality, with respondents pointing out any glitches or wording that was not clear.

These improvements centred on streamlining and making the survey more efficient, made possible by the removal of a number of superfluous questions. The wording of the questionnaire also changed slightly on the basis of feedback provided by the respondents.

4.7.2 Distribution strategy

An online survey was deemed appropriate for the study population of MBs given their regular use of online media and their demonstrated ability and desire to express themselves in writing.
As Van Selm and Jankowski (2006) hold, online surveys are often employed in studies of users of the internet to gain access to a population with internet experience. Sills and Song (2002, p. 28) concur, asserting that “for particular populations that are connected and technologically savvy, the cost, ease, speed of delivery and response, ease of data cleaning and analysis weigh in favour of the internet as a delivery method.”

The link to an online survey was emailed to the 2,234 members of the Digital Parents group, accompanied by a request to participate in a study on blogging beliefs and behaviours. Participation in the survey was optional, and the study received ethics clearance from the University Ethics Committee. A total of 245 bloggers responded. An incentive of an iPad mini, as a prize, was given for those who chose to answer a supplementary question. This response rate is quite low, perhaps due to the length of the survey and the fact that some of the members have become inactive or less engaged since joining the group.

The advantages of online surveys are accessible for the researcher and the respondent. For the researcher, online research can:

- offer a higher response speed (Dommeyer & Moriarty, 2000); 75% of online questionnaires are returned within the first four days (Schaefer & Dillman, 1998);
- reduce the administration burden as data are returned in electronic format to be downloaded directly into the data analysis program (Wilson & Laskey, 2003);
- reduce the cost compared to, for example, postal surveys (Wilson & Laskey, 2003).

For the respondent, online research provides convenience and it provides anonymity where respondents may be more willing to participate and disclose information when privacy is assured (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006).

4.7.3 Phase 2 summary

This section detailed the rationale for, design and distribution of the online survey. Kozinet’s (2010) criteria for using surveys was outlined and followed. The next section will look at the final phases of the data collection, the blogs analysis.

4.8 Phase 3 Blogs analysis

In some literature, blog analysis as an isolated, singular activity is classed as ‘netnography’ (Bartholomew, 2012). However, this thesis follows Kozinet's...
considers netnography as an overall methodological approach that can include blog analysis (or, put another way, virtual field work) as well as other data collection methods, including interviews. The forty-five blogs analysed were those written by the same bloggers who were interviewed. Selected blogs were copied and pasted into Microsoft Word and then exported for the purpose of coding blog content into QSR NVivo software, a qualitative analysis software program. A week’s worth of postings was downloaded twice at a six-month interval for each blog. Blogs were assigned a unique identifier. As per the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006), blog content was interpreted using inductive thematic content analysis. Analysing blog content in this way enabled themes to emerge that provide a rich description of the perceptions and experiences of blogging mothers. Formal blog analysis occurred after the interviews and survey had been completed. However, the researcher had immersed herself in many of the blogs at the start of the research process and during the interviews in order to familiarise herself with the bloggers and the culture of the community.

The ethical issues surrounding blogging were raised in the interviews with both bloggers and the expert informants and further explored in the survey in the open-ended question. Coding of both interviews and the open-ended question in the survey raised the concern of if, when and how bloggers should disclose payment or sponsorship of posts. Other themes relating to privacy and attribution were also raised. One of the major red flags (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) raised in the survey was that 70% of those surveyed felt there were no ethical issues associated with blogging. Each major theme of ethical issues needed to be explored in the blogs themselves. Following on from analysis of the interviews and surveys, it was logical to focus on the ethical issues raised as well as looking at the research question of motivation through the blog analysis.

The question of researcher participation must also be addressed in any netnography, particularly in relation to the analysis of blogs (see Boellstorff et al., 2012; Kozinets, 2010). One research approach is for the researcher to elicit conversations on blogs through comments and use the responses in the analysis. Kozinets suggests there is a “spectrum of participation that ethnographers regularly negotiate in their fieldwork” (2010, p. 75). This research chose not to use postings or interactions from the researcher as part of the netnographic approach. Instead, questions were framed and answers gained in the real-life in-depth interviews and in the survey. Therefore, while the blog analysis could be considered passive, the researcher was not just ‘sitting on the
sidelines’ as Kozinets puts it (2010, p. 75), as she had reached out to the bloggers in real life and through other media such as Twitter.

The writing of field notes or memos and other types of written (and verbal) records is recommended in any netnography or online ethnography (see Kozinets, 2010, Boellstorff et al., 2012) and these were also a key feature of this study, particularly during the analysis of blogs. The memos and notes “stimulate[d] thinking” (Daymon & Holloway, 2011, p. 311) and the researcher recorded observations on an ongoing basis. This technique enabled the researcher to document her journey and development as a researcher, as well as to reflect on emerging theoretical propositions. For example, earlier reflective notes documented the researcher’s doubt about being accepted into the blogging community and whether bloggers would trust her enough. Later memos enabled the researcher to keep recordings of thoughts and to further develop existing observations and ideas. As such, memoing performed a central role in the coding and theory development process. Data, such as memos, reflections, transcripts, images, audio recordings and other written material were stored and coded with the aid of the software package NVivo Version 10. The central storage location enabled the continuous analysis and coding of data throughout this study.

4.9 Member checks

Member checks were used for clarification of the research findings once data were collected from in-depth interviews, the survey and blog analysis. “Member checks are a procedure whereby some or all of a final research report’s findings are presented to the people who have been studied in order to solicit their comments” (Belk, 2006, p. 136). Member checks were done with selected bloggers and expert informants based on their experience with the blogging community. The member checks helped to provide further clarification and accuracy of the research, and helped to give the community members a voice in their own representation. Two bloggers were given the key themes and ask to comment on them. In addition, one expert informant with strong links to the blogging community was given themes for review. The researcher also continued to interact with bloggers through industry and blogging seminars and via social media beyond the formal period of research. The MBs confirmed the themes and gave the researcher ‘heart’ following the coding process and the EI was keen to further collaborate on a future project, potentially showing there was a continued trust in the researchers’ findings and approach. As two years had passed before member checks were initiated it
was also useful to note how the bloggers had changed and evolved in some of their practices. The researcher was the main coder for the research, while both supervisors did have access to the data and provided feedback on drafts of the findings. Professor Pettigrew coded similar themes for her article, A thematic analysis of mothers’ motivations for blogging (2016). Member checks were an important way of checking on the applicability of themes for the researcher.

4.10 Data analysis strategy – a holistic approach

The interpretive approach to this study required that theories emerge from the data, which comprised the in-depth interviews of bloggers and expert informants, the evidence from the online survey of the Digital Parents Community and analysis of the blog posts. The theoretical lens of consumers as prosumers versus liminal and vulnerable consumers was also applied, meaning that this study did not use pure grounded theory.

Developed by two sociologists, Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory emerged in the 1960s as an alternative to the then dominant positivist research paradigm. Since then it has become popular within the social sciences, particularly within a qualitative context. In pure grounded theory, researchers enter the process without any prior assumptions, thereby concentrating on the discovery of emergent knowledge, shaped from the data. The fundamental idea is that theory is advanced during each step of data collection and development, requiring constant comparison between data and analysis. As such, the analysis of data commences as soon as the first data samples are collected, and continues in a cyclical fashion, until theoretical saturation is achieved, i.e. until new data does not generate any new information, but rather fits into already established categories.

Strauss, writing with Corbin, (1990) went on to develop a slightly different approach to ‘unadulterated’ grounded theory, permitting reading of relevant literature in the early stages. Since then it has been acknowledged that it is more realistic to acknowledge researchers’ prior experience and knowledge in an area of research (Goulding, 1998). For example, Charmaz (2011) has challenged Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) original notion that theory is to be discovered as emerging from the data, entirely separate from the scientific observer. She argues “neither data nor theories are discovered” (Charmaz, 2011, p. 10). Instead, they are part of the world studied by researchers, which means
that researchers ‘construct’ theories through their past and present involvement, as well as through interactions with people, research practices, etc. Charmaz (2011) argued that “any theory can only claim to offer an ‘interpretive’ portrayal of the studied world and not an exact picture of it” (p. 10).

As with the approach advocated by Charmaz, theoretical ideas in this study advanced from one research phase to the next. The entire research process has been iterative and inductive, as common in qualitative research (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). However, the study into mum bloggers in Australia started with an understanding of them as communicators and the study was done with knowledge of existing literature on social capital and blogging as well as mothers as liminal consumers and the prosumption concept. Therefore, in contrast to a ‘pure’ grounded theory study, the researcher entered with some ideas, research questions and a particular focus, following Charmaz’s arguments. Kozinets’ (2010) approach for analysis suggests a pragmatic interactionist approach within netnography which best describes the research and analysis undertaken. In practical terms, particularly when a researcher is required to present a literature review and formed research questions prior to acceptance of candidacy for a PhD, pure grounded theory is not applicable or, indeed, possible.

Kozinets (2010, p. 119) suggested the following analytic sequence and strategy, adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 9).

**Coding:** affixing codes or categories to data drawn from field notes, interviews documents or, in the case of netnographic data, other cultural materials such as...blog postings...drawn from online sources; during coding, codes, classifications, names or labels are assigned to particular units of data; these codes label the data as belonging to or being an example of some more general phenomenon; categories for coding usually emerge inductively through a close reading of the data, rather than being imposed by prescribed categories.

**Noting:** reflections on the data or other remarks are noted in the margins of the data; this form of data is also commonly known as ‘memoing’.

**Abstracting and comparing:** the materials are sorted and sifted to identify similar phases, shared sequences, relationships, and distinct differences; this abstracting process builds the categorised codes into high-order or more general,
conceptual constructs, patterns and processes; comparing looks at the similarities and differences across data incidents.

*Checking and refinements:* returns to the field for the next wave of data collection in order to isolate, check and refine the understanding of the patterns, processes, commonalities and differences across data incidents.

*Generalising:* elaborates a small set of generalisations that cover or explain the consistencies in the dataset.

*Theorising:* confronting the generalisations gathered from the data with a formalised body of knowledge that uses construct or theories; construct new theory in close co-ordination both with the analysis of data as well as the existing relevant body of knowledge.

Comparisons involved moving back and forth between passages within an interview or comments within the blog data as well as between the different sources of data. The main themes capturing the ways in which bloggers talked about motivations and ethics, the qualitative responses from the survey and the blogs themselves were identified as a result of this iterative process. These main themes were also examined in the context of the expert informant interview data that created the background and context within which the bloggers’ responses were analysed.

Gathering data, analysis and report writing are not mutually exclusive activities (Cavana et al., 2001). The data was constantly reviewed and compared at every stage of the research which is acknowledged as a “rich, messy and complex process” (Cavana et al., 2001, p. 175). However, while it may be messy and complex, there was also a procedure to follow, using content analysis and the constant comparative method to explore the raw data (Cavana et al., 2001).

Similarly, Braun and Clarke’s (2006) phases of thematic analysis were followed as outlined in Table 4.4.
Table 4.4 Phases of thematic analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generating initial codes</td>
<td>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for themes</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing themes</td>
<td>Checking the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic map of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining and naming themes</td>
<td>On-going analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producing the report</td>
<td>The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 35 ‘Using thematic analysis in psychology’. *Qualitative Research in Psychology.*

Data processing and analysis took place throughout the data collection period of the interviews, following the survey and finally once data had been downloaded from blogs. The coded data was used to generate themes relevant to the exchanges that occur between mothers, bloggers and M&PR practitioners. In addition to this formal analysis, blogs were read regularly over the three years and the researcher regularly accessed Twitter and other forums to gain a deep and broad understanding of the blogging community and interchanges between bloggers and also between bloggers and M&PR practitioners.
4.11 Ethical considerations

It is argued that ethics are intrinsic to the constructivist paradigm because the researcher does not hide his or her intent and the researcher seeks dialogue to create meaning with the participants involved in the investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). On the other hand, there may be ‘sticky’ problems of confidentiality and anonymity as well as other interpersonal difficulties (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In this vein, the inductive and holistic nature of qualitative research means there are inherent problems and dilemmas and close attention must be paid to ethical issues (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

The basic principles of ethical research include the right to free and informed choice, protection from harm for those involved, privacy and autonomy for those being researched and honesty on the part of the interviewer (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). Each of these principles will be dealt with in turn. At the outset, when dealing with each blogger and each expert informant the concept of a free and informed choice was considered. Candidates for interview were initially contacted by email and were sent an information guide regarding the research. Their approval was sought and it was explained that anonymity was assured and that they were free to withdraw from the interview or any involvement at any stage. They were also reminded in writing and verbally that they did not need to answer any question if they did not wish to do so. A copy of the information guide is in Appendix B. Following the interview, as per the previous discussion, a follow-up thank-you email was sent inviting them to contact the researcher at any time.

Looking at the concept of protection from harm, the researcher was well aware of any emotional risks for participants; hence the written and verbal assurances of anonymity for the interviewees. Many of the bloggers spoke of personal issues, including illness of their children and their own health issues. They were also asked about their own ethical stance which was a sensitive topic. For the expert informants, there was obviously a concern that confidential information related to commercial aspects of their work could harm their business or future dealings with bloggers. For this reason, any mentions of specific bloggers, brands or organisations were taken out of reported interviews to de-identify participants.

Turning to the concept of principles of privacy, autonomy and honesty, no bloggers or expert informants have been referred to by name within the body of the research.
document. The information from the interviews was recorded on a hand-held MP3 recorder while the researcher/interviewer also took notes at the time of the interview and the interviews were all transcribed by the researcher and by a professional transcription company which assures anonymity. All of these steps were taken to ensure that the information was handled and processed as faithfully to the original delivery as possible.

If ethics is an issue in qualitative research, it appears to be more so in the online world, given the ability of researchers to gather data without the participants’ knowledge. The concept of privacy is a particularly difficult one when researching bloggers and their blogs and the potential for netnography to do harm is a real risk (Kozinets, 2010). Kozinets (2010) also suggests that the researcher should take a cautious position on the issue of whether the online environment is a private or public medium. Kozinets (2002) suggests four ethical research procedures for netnography:

1) The researcher should fully disclose his or her presence, affiliations and intentions to online community members during research.

2) The researchers should ensure confidentiality and anonymity to informants.

3) The researcher should seek and incorporate feedback from members of the online community being researched.

4) The researcher should take a cautious position on the private v public medium issue (Kozinets, 2002, p 65).

The processes outlined by Kozinets (2002) were followed in the research. Because the researcher did not just ‘lurk’ on the blogs and forums but also met and talked to the bloggers in non-virtual, real life (through face-to-face interview, at the conference or on the phone) the bloggers were intentionally and specifically aware of her research intentions. For some bloggers, it appeared that the research validated their work. One blogger spoke to the researcher for over four hours over three different telephone conversations.

However, while the ethical considerations have been researched and followed, the “sticky problems” referred to by Guba and Lincoln (1989) were a constant source of tension for the researcher when so intimately involved with the mum bloggers and
blogosphere. For example, the researcher struggled with exactly what is doing the ‘right’ thing by the individuals who gave so freely of their time, for example by not over-stepping the mark in terms of asking too much – or too little regarding the interviewees’ personal lives and their blogging motivations - and doing the right thing in capturing and presenting information and interpretation to different audiences outside the community, including the academic community. While the researcher was concerned to keep interviews private, following some interviews the blogger involved would ‘tweet’ about the interview and/or blog about it. These Tweets did not impact adversely on future interviews and in a similar way to traditional word-of-mouth may have helped to establish the researcher’s reputation in the community.

Only recently have the ironies and complexities of ethics in online ethnography started to be fully appreciated, particularly with the rise of social media. Reich (2014), for example, discussed some of the ethical and other issues surrounding the blurring of lines between the researcher and the researched, given the digital footprint we all have. Reich (2014, p. 4) suggested that there has been little guidance on how researchers should manage online interactions that are “not expressly about research questions, nor part of the research design”. For example, the researcher was invited by one blogger to speak at a social media forum on families and social media. The forum was attended by families unknown to the researcher but other guest speakers were colleagues from the researcher’s university. The blurring between personal and public persona, private and work time continued. As the study was within the ambit of social media, decisions had to be made by the researcher when responding to Facebook friend and like requests, Twitter follows and LinkedIn requests from bloggers through the course of the study. Generally, the researcher always ‘followed back’ Twitter followers if their profile identified them as being an Australian MB. She also initiated a follow of many MBs on Twitter as a way of connecting with them, given that Twitter is considered a public sphere and following does not need to be ‘accepted’. Similarly, any LinkedIn requests from MBs were accepted. Facebook, as a more personal medium, was a decision based on the relationship formed during and beyond the interview. The interviewer did not seek out MBs to be Facebook ‘friends’ but did accept friendship requests from those who she felt she had made a deeper personal connection with. Those MBs who had collaborated with her in some other form were generally those people she has become Facebook ‘friends’ with.
One of the main concerns was that some of the participants had openly (on their blog) discussed their mental health issues -- even titling their blogs with references to ‘insanity’ or mental health issues. Some of the bloggers discussed extremely personal issues on their blog, such as losing a child, their own mental health problems, suicide of loved ones and post-natal depression. At the two conferences the researcher attended some of the women stood on stage and shared their stories (taken from their lives and often verbatim from their blogs) which spoke of these life-changing events and which had the whole room in tears.

The concept of privacy is a fluid one in the blogosphere and on other social platforms. For this reason, some researchers conducting netnographies have not sought permission from those originally ‘posting’ before downloading and analysing material from blogs or other internet forums. The researchers argued that the material is publicly available, not password protected. For example, Langer and Beckman (2005), when studying the sensitive topic of cosmetic surgery, did not ask permission of those who posted on the online forum. Terzano’s (2014) study of infertile males and Sosnowy’s (2013) study of women with MS also took the view that blogs were publicly available and permission was not sought. However, as only blogs of those MBs interviewed were analysed in this study, all MBs were aware of the researchers’ identity and intentions as soon as she contacted them and requested an interview.

Ethics approval was sought and obtained from the University for all of the three methods of research – the interviews, survey and blog analysis. All participants participated voluntarily.

4.11.1 The role of the researcher

As previously mentioned, qualitative research is interpretive and the inquirer is involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants (Creswell, 2003). This means that there are strategic, ethical and personal issues involved (Creswell, 2003). Possible bias is also a concern (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). At the time of data collection, the researcher was self-described as of Anglo-Saxon heritage, Australian-born, middle aged, middle class, tertiary educated, married mother of two children. Being a mother was an important part of being able to relate to those being interviewed as it presupposed at least some shared experiences, as has been noted previously. The researcher will now disclose her background, with some self-reflection.
Prior to working as an academic the researcher worked in public relations and marketing for 15 years and became an academic when she had her first child. One of the reasons to move into academic life was that the researcher believed (perhaps naively) the new role would give her more flexibility. The transition to motherhood was a fascinating topic for the researcher as it is such a life changing event. The changes in the media environment and impact on marketing, advertising, public relations and journalism were also of interest. However, as discussed previously the researcher first entered the world of mum blogging with little knowledge of its realm, as she had never blogged and was only a ‘light’ user of social media. The researcher’s first child was born before Facebook was invented, her second just after.

The researcher is believed to have theoretical sensitivity due to her personal and professional experience as well as a thorough investigation of the literature (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 42). On a cautionary note, this type of experience can also block the researcher from seeing things that have become obvious. To minimise bias, research must be balanced by a) frequently stepping back from the data b) maintaining an attitude of scepticism and (c) following the correct data collection and analysis procedures (Anselm Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Given the personal and intense nature of the research, the researcher has included an autobiographical reflection, written in the first person.

4.12 Autobiographical reflection

This thesis is written in the third person but as it is a study that comes from the qualitative research tradition, there has been a constant temptation, tempered by my supervisors, to speak in the first person and “tell it like I saw it”.

While I have followed my supervisors’ advice regarding the style of writing, I believe it is also important to disclose and comment on relevant past experiences and past orientations that are likely to have shaped my interpretations and approach to this study (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). I therefore wanted to add in this personal reflection.

It’s always difficult to say how or when a thesis begins. For me, I think the pivotal moment was far removed from the cyber world and based in Subiaco library, Western Australia, where I was whiling away a rainy Sunday with my (then) young children.
kids were happily reading books and I was a bit bored. This was in the days before I owned a smartphone so there was no Twitter, Instagram or Facebook to divert me. Picking up a parenting magazine, I saw an article on the new, influential ‘mummy bloggers’ (see Loury, 2009) and my interest was piqued. As a relatively new mother (at the time) I had found marketing to mothers and children intense (think the Wiggles and Disney as two prime examples). The ‘consumer’ choices confronting mothers and the pressures to conform to society’s (at times contradictory) ideals were real for me. Were these blogging women being used by corporations to market to their sisters in servitude? And yet, when I looked up “marketing to mothers” in the University library online database when I was back at work, there appeared to be very little scholarly research on the topic. I was also interested in how women adapted to motherhood after working as professionals for many years (having had to do the same thing myself). The more I read about mum bloggers and their interaction with marketers and PR practitioners the more the topic interested me. The rest, as they say, is history.

Stumbling my way into the mum blogging scene, at the beginning of my research journey (and still without a smartphone) in 2012, I found a group of women who were ‘doing it for themselves’ (to quote the Annie Lenox/Aretha Franklin song). These women were clever and innovative; they had learnt how to negotiate technologies, to garner and retain readers and to interact with marketers and PR practitioners through trial and error. I also saw that these same women often struggled – with their own issues, with, for example, their own mental illness or their children’s illnesses plus all the myriad challenges that parenthood brings. The struggles were laid bare for all to see on their blogs – and they kept on blogging.

My own background in public relations and marketing (and subsequent entry into academia) meant that I could be seen as a ‘professional’. And yet, for all that, it was the mum bloggers (derided by many in the mainstream media as wannabe hobbyists) who would teach me a great deal about social media and social media marketing through their own examples. So my journey began and continues to this day.
4.13 Questions of validity, reliability and trustworthiness

One cannot complete any largely qualitative study without referring to the criticisms of subjectivity and bias which are often made by those from the positivist paradigm. Indeed, Kozinets himself conceded that “the general lack of qualitative standards can become even more of a problem when coupled with a new field such as internet research.” (2010, p. 158). However, validity is seen as a strength of qualitative research (Creswell, 2003) and it is more important within qualitative research than questions of reliability and generalisability (Creswell, 2003; Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Validity refers to the “extent to which the researcher’s findings are accurate, reflect the purpose of the study and represent reality” (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 274). There are a number of different strategies available to check the accuracy of the findings of the researcher and to provide evidence of validity. This research used several of these strategies.

From a more interpretive perspective, goodness of qualitative research can be characterised by concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The criteria for evaluating trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). To ensure credibility, as has been discussed, member checking (Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2003) was used in this study. These themes were, indeed, verified by the bloggers and expert informants.

The criteria for trustworthiness and dependability is closely linked to credibility (Daymon & Holloway, 2002) and the concepts of construct validity and reliability (Yin, 2003). Findings need to be consistent and accurate to be seen as dependable, according to Daymon and Holloway (2002). To achieve dependability an audit trail may be used. All interviews were recorded and transcribed and the step-by-step process of obtaining interviews has been documented in this thesis. The methodology for the online survey has been described. The raw data from blogs was downloaded and coded. However, to protect the identity of the participants and due to commercial sensitivities, raw data, such as the transcripts cannot be included in the body of this dissertation. Edited versions may be provided upon request from the researcher and with the permission of the bloggers. It is worth noting that a tension exists because of the need for trust on the
readers’ part that the data is “true” and the need on the blogger’s or expert informant’s part to trust the researcher that her or his identity be protected. This tension is inherent in any qualitative study that goes in-depth into an individual’s life.

It is difficult to argue for complete transferability of the findings due to the context of the study. Transferability is related to generalisability which is not a feature of qualitative research. Would the same themes emerge in a study of mum bloggers in China, fashion bloggers in Sweden or technology bloggers in Singapore? There is an argument for transferability as many of the motivations and ethical challenges faced and decided upon could be common across the universal blogosphere. Similar situations may tend to occur in blogging communities across the world. Indeed, this age old argument can be looked at when one thinks of literature. The circumstances of a mother in a novel set in New York, USA by Lionel Shriver, for example, may be particular to that situation but will have wider relevance to the human experience and therefore will resonate with readers across the globe. Transferability can also occur through the development of theoretical propositions which arise from the empirical data. These can be transferred to different settings and then tested using quantitative research.

The criterion of confirmability refers to the ability to be able to track data sources and make use of such data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The concept of an ‘audit trail’ or chain of evidence is important. Another important point when referring to confirmability is to identify and analyse any ‘negative cases’ (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). Negative cases are those instances when data is inconsistent with earlier findings – indeed it may be the opposite view or perspective to one already uncovered. The uncovering and reporting of ‘dissenting voices’ in this study help to show the findings are not simply the result of preconceived assumptions (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). An ongoing literature review was conducted throughout the research with comparison of the emergent concepts and theory with the extant literature (Eisenhardt, 1989). While this approach does not fit with the ‘purest’ form of research advocated by grounded theory adherents (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), it guided the researcher in preparing the questions for the semi-structured interviews and, during later stages, helped enlighten as well as confront the researcher when key themes emerged.

The multi-method data collection approach has enabled the researcher to gain a more complex understanding of the experience of blogging mothers. Importantly, for confirmability, data was triangulated, with multiple sources of evidence used (Cavana et
al., 2001; Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003). As has been discussed previously, the phases began with interviews, followed by an online survey and finally blog analysis. The combination of these three data collection methods essentially contributed to the quality and depth of this study.

To improve trustworthiness a researcher should be reflexive about his or her role and assumptions and report his or her own beliefs and biases which may shape the inquiry (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Daymon & Holloway, 2010). In this chapter, the researcher has outlined her role and background, including her previous career as a public relations and marketing practitioner, her current work as an academic and her ‘non-blogger’ status, which would have shaped her perspective. The researcher’s own transition to motherhood has been noted. The researcher has sought to be transparent in her choices for the research design.

The term ‘legitimacy’ is also used as the qualitative equivalent to the inherently quantitative terms of validity and reliability. The current study aimed for legitimacy and followed the typology of methods for assessing and increasing legitimacy put forward by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007). Table 4.5 delineates this typology.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prolonged engagement</td>
<td>This is where the researcher conducts a study for a sufficient period of time; in this study the researcher spent four years immersed in the blogging world, interviewing 45 bloggers and analysing 45 blogs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent observation</td>
<td>Where prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth. The researcher gathered in-depth information on participants, through initial sample selection to interview and analysis of blogs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>Triangulation involves the use of multiple and different methods, investigators, sources and theories to obtain corroborating evidence (Patton, 1990). In this study, while only one researcher conducted the study, multiple methods were used, including interviews, blog analysis and the survey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave an audit trail</td>
<td>This involves maintaining extensive documentation of records and data. In this study, a password protected file exists on each participant comprising their interview recording, contact/business details and all communication that occurred. Blog downloads have also been kept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informant feedback</td>
<td>Guba and Lincoln (1989) recommend systematically obtaining feedback about one’s data, analytical categories, interpretations and conclusions from the study group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighting the evidence</td>
<td>Because some information is more important, relevant and better than others, a range of analytical tools and thematic analysis were employed to ensure rigour in the data analysis strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking for representativeness</td>
<td>A robust sampling design was employed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying researcher bias</td>
<td>There are two sources of researcher bias (Miles &amp; Huberman, 1994):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ the effects of the researcher on the participants (Bias A); which was reduced by prolonged engagement, persistent observation, using unobtrusive measures where possible and making the researcher’s intentions clear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ the effects of the participants on the researcher (Bias B); which was reduced by avoiding an elite bias by selecting a heterogeneous sample, including non-typical respondents, utilising informants to provide background and historical information, triangulating data and continually keeping the research objectives firmly in mind (Miles &amp; Huberman, 1994).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking outliers</td>
<td>The temptation is to ignore outlying explanations or to attempt to explain them away (Miles &amp; Huberman, 1994), but the sampling strategy in this study included extreme cases as they can provide valuable insights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer debriefing</td>
<td>A ‘devil’s advocate’ is a person who keeps the researcher honest and who poses difficult questions about every element of the research. The PhD supervisors, an international conference audience and other academics in the researcher’s institution all fulfilled this role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich and thick description</td>
<td>Verbatim transcripts of interviews are necessary in in-depth interview analysis (Patton, 2002). This study employed such an approach, along with comprehensive examination of the interviews and typed open-ended responses to the survey as well as the downloaded blog posts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.14 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological considerations relevant to the study. First, the philosophical underpinnings for the research inquiry were explained, positioning the researcher within the constructivist paradigm. Then the qualitative methodology and a rationale for its choice were outlined. The concept of netnography was described and related its choice to the research questions. As a relatively recent methodological approach, netnography was considered the appropriate choice for exploration of (mum) blogs and bloggers. The methodological stages of the research, corresponding to Kozinets’ guide, were described and the rationale for entrée, or community selection. The three phases of data collection were then outlined. The procedure of member checking was described and the holistic data analysis strategy was outlined. The discussion then centred on the ethical issues encountered and how they were addressed. Questions of validity, reliability and trustworthiness were presented and answered. In conclusion, the researcher is confident that the research methodology implemented has proficiently addressed the research objectives outlined in Chapter 3. The methodological process has been outlined to aid replication, expansion or critique (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). The next chapter will present the research findings of the study.
Chapter 5 Findings

5.0 Chapter overview

This chapter reports the findings from all three phases of the data collection. First, findings from phase one, the interviews with bloggers and expert informants, are presented and secondly the findings from the survey. Finally, the findings from the analysis of blog sites are reported.

5.1 Phase 1A – Findings from in-depth interviews with blogging mothers

The findings from Phase 1A include bloggers’ liminal context, bloggers’ motivations and the nature of their interactions with M&PR professionals.

As discussed in the methodology and literature review, this research used the lens of prosumers versus vulnerable consumers to explore the research questions. Given the research lens, the context of the mothers’ motivations (their life stage) is presented. The findings related to the research question, ‘What are blogging mothers’ motivations?’ are then reported. Next, the findings related to the research question, ‘What are the nature and extent of blogging mothers’ exchanges with marketers both in the virtual third place and offline?’ are outlined. Bloggers will be identified after each quote by their pseudonyms, as outlined in 4.2 in the previous chapter.

5.1.1 Liminality

Given that this research used the lens of prosumers versus vulnerable consumers to explore the research questions, it is important to understand the context of the bloggers’ life stage. Most of the bloggers spoke of being in a new phase of their life which they often found challenging at the beginning of their blogging. The theme of being in a liminal (and perhaps vulnerable) time came through from many of the bloggers. Bloggers often spoke of their initial liminal experience – for example, being home with a new baby after working full time, having post-natal depression or coping with the demands of a child with health issues, or even facing retirement, or moving to the country or another city. These comments were often elicited when bloggers were asked general questions about “their blogging experiences to date”. A change in their personal circumstances (often but not always through the birth of their children) was often the spark for writing the blog. While some had older children when they were interviewed, they may have been blogging for several years.
A blogger who had moved to a small country town discusses her foray into blogging below.

_I just--we don’t have a very big community and I’m a little bit lonely and thought that way I could share stuff with my family that don’t live here as well as--yeah, and with everyone else virtually._ Alana

Often the bloggers started the blog to just connect with close family and friends but then discovered a further audience of readers beyond their known network. The following comment shows blogging was a helpful avenue for coping with a lack of stimulation and ‘adult conversations’ after leaving a full-time job to have children. Many of the bloggers had worked professionally for at least 10 years prior to having a child and the shift was a big adjustment.

_Yeah, anywhere, and I find--because even lots of people, they leave their jobs [once they have] children, which is great, but then they’re used to seeing people every day and having adult conversations and getting dressed nicely occasionally. It is nice to be able to do those things, but by doing this you can--it keeps you a bit more, me on my toes, and it’s allowing me to use my brain a little bit, which I really needed._ Aisha

A similar theme is shown below, with the blogger discussing a major adjustment from being in the workforce for 15 years as a teacher before being a stay-at-home mother.

_It started in May of 2009. I was a stay-at-home mum after being a working person for 15 years. I was an early childhood teacher. Worked in various roles. So I sort of went from working full-time, my last job had been quite demanding, I had a lot of responsibility to being at home with a new baby full-time and that was a big adjustment, a big shift for me._ Cherie

The concept of blogging helping the mothers adjust was evident in many comments such as the one below.

_I also think for me personally it’s given me an outlet to share my ideas and to also form a community and a support network at a time in my life where I was going through a big adjustment period._ Josephine.
A retired principal who is also a mother and grandmother who found herself a “stay-at-home” carer for her husband and grandchildren after a full life working in education described her experience below.

Because when you stop work as I have, and school and my work in education has been my social outlet as well, you don’t have anything to hang your hat on, so to speak. And I’ve never been a stay at home mum and I’ve never been someone who’s gone out and done tennis clubs. Donna

A journalist who left work to look after her first baby found she missed writing even though she didn’t have to write while at home.

Well, it was purely selfish because I have always been a writer in my professional career. I’ve worked as a journalist for about 18 years now and I found it difficult not being able to write on a daily basis because I didn’t have to when I was at home with my son. Kayley

A younger blogger started blogging before her baby was born because she had moved from Perth to Melbourne, while one other described having a mental health crisis after the birth of her first child. The blogger quoted below had written a professional blog as a consultant but decided to write her own personal blog when her child was diagnosed with Asperger’s.

And then my daughter was diagnosed with Asperger’s, and various circumstances kind of led me to a point where I really wanted to talk about what we were going through as a family and I’d seen, you know obviously that there was that ability to build a little community around a blog, and kind of craved that for myself. And my role with the other company had finished so I started blogging on a personal basis, and that’s kind of how it started. Raelene

Thus, for many of the bloggers, their blogging started during a time of upheaval or significant change in their lives – often when they had left the paid workforce to care for children. A liminal phase is a time ‘betwixt and between’ (a ‘threshold’), and for many of the women it was a time of change which sparked their initial interest to blog. While there was not always a conscious link between blogging and adjusting to the change, their comments showed that often the change was the spark that caused them to start a blog and that blogging was a way of working through that time.
5.1.2 Motivations for blogging mothers

Six key motivators for the bloggers were distilled from analysis of the interviews: community and connection; helping people; therapy and venting; being heard; improving or developing new skills and making money. There is a link to the liminal phase experienced by many of the bloggers and some of these motivations. The mum bloggers’ motivations were reported to evolve over time, as they became more experienced and some interacted with marketers. Thus, while some may have started their blog as a way of connecting, for some the desire to make money ensued as their experience and reputation grew (and often as approaches from marketers or public relations practitioners increased). For others, making money was not a consideration that developed and blogging continued to be for more personal reasons.

5.1.2.1 Community and connection

The most commonly cited reason for blogging was the ability to connect with people and be part of a community. Many of the mothers expressed their motivation to connect with people who were like-minded and with whom they could discuss their own views and feelings. Their main priority, it seemed, was to satisfy their desire for community and connection. For some the blog was started to connect with existing friends and/or relatives who were not in their same geographic locality. However, this need for connection for bloggers soon extended beyond people they knew to ‘strangers’ who, in the course of the blogging journey, became known to the bloggers (via comments on the blog, on Twitter, on Facebook or at blogging events). For many of the bloggers some of the ‘strangers’ became friends ‘in real life’ (IRL).

Bridget’s view is typical of some bloggers, who started their blogs to share with family and friends without envisaging that their reach would extend to many strangers as their audience grew.

I have been blogging almost seven years. I started in 2006 when I was pregnant with my first daughter. I had a sister living overseas in London and another sister living in Melbourne; Facebook didn’t exist so we had to come up with a way to get in contact. At the time I had been reading American blogs so we decided to set up a blog; so my husband set it up and he wrote the first post.

Bridget
Cherie’s comment below typifies the importance of ‘community’ and finding connection via blogging.

*It was really just a matter of an outlet for me, a way of sharing and connecting with other people I think...So it was a good way of finding out liked-minded parents who are in similar situations to where I was and sort of forming a connection and growing community.*  Cherie

Reaching out and finding community were common desires expressed by many of the bloggers.

*For me it's been about community. I suffered with post-natal depression after my first child, and so having a community that I can, if I'm having a bad day, you can write so that someone can give you kind words about it…and I've met people through that that are in similar situations.*  Alana

A blogger who had used her own blog to improve her skill set also recognised the importance of community in her comments and the social support element.

*..And a connection and finding a like-minded person, that they can chatter with. And especially on Twitter you can see groups of women with babies of the same age.*  Christina

While motivations may have evolved for many bloggers, connection remained paramount for most of the bloggers.

*The main motivation probably hasn’t changed. It’s always been about connecting, and it’s always been about me staying in some sort of social group.*  Donna

*And then - and then the second reason, well, which actually got me doing it was that I just needed to find an outlet and I found a community at the same time, which was really amazing and a lot of women opened up to me about how they hadn’t found it so easy either.*  Lara

Given that blogging is a solitary activity, the need for connection is a paradox. One blogger, herself a former triathlete, used the metaphor of the triathlete community to explain this paradox – while all bloggers were in a sense ‘competing’ to improve their
readership or other goals and working individually on their blogs she felt they offered help and support for anyone new to the activity, just like triathletes.

*I’ve come from a triathlon background and I have compared bloggers to triathletes before. Triathlons is one of those sort of sports where if you sit down at a table with a bunch of triathletes and say you are keen to get into triathletes – they are going to fall over themselves to help you get into the sport and. There will be people lining up to give you advice.* Karla

It is important to note that while community and connection were important, there were some rumblings of discontent amongst the bloggers about ‘fitting in’ and ‘bitchiness’. For example, Raelene describes the ‘in-fighting’.

*And there’s a lot of in-fighting, there’s a lot of in-fighting between the bloggers which I don’t think we saw even two years ago, like there is a lot of…and I’m sure in your research someone would have told you about GOMI, with Get Off My Internet...And the snark and the nastiness on there just blows my mind, I’m just like...okay if that’s how you all want to spend your time.* Raelene

Jealousy and ‘bitchiness’ were discussed alongside the deep sense of community.

*I can be a bit over analytical but I did feel that after the conference you could see that the conversations on Twitter were more, like there was a few people that, you know, even if you’d had a private conversation with them you didn’t really get much further but then you can see that they’re trying to have a conversation with the big people and the celebrity bloggers.* Selena

Naomi noted that a relationship and sense of connection developed online did not necessarily translate in real life.

*I know from the blogging events, I read some blogs and tweet with some people and then I’ve met them and the picture that I formed in my head of them from their writing and their tweets, is completely different. That might be my fault, but they’ve come across as friendly and exciting and then when you*
meet them, they’re like “Oh hello” and it’s like oh, I thought we had a little relationship or thing going, but obviously we don’t. Naomi

Often, as noted by Karla, the jealousy and tensions arise (‘just like high school’) when some bloggers become more successful, known as ‘the bigger bloggers’, in part due to their larger readership and ability to command (more) money for posts. In a sense, being courted by brands means risking alienation from the community.

Now when people do sponsored posts and stuff and when people go ‘I didn’t get invited to that event’, I get frustrated when people just sit there and when they are a bit jealous of the bigger bloggers – for me, the space I occupy – people know not to come to me to bitch about anyone else. I want everyone to be friends. I get distressed when people are not getting along – for the very most part it’s a wonderful close community. If you want to see cliquiness then you will see it – it’s just like high school. Karla

5.1.2.2 Helping people

Closely related to the concept of community and connection was the desire by many of the bloggers to help others. If bloggers had experienced their own health or personal issues, they often used the blog to share their own story as a way of assisting others. For many, this opportunity to offer some form of advice was a key motivator. For some they were there to show that motherhood was not always easy and ‘perfect’.

Challenges such as having an autistic child or dealing with mental health issues were mentioned specifically by some as they believed writing of their own experiences had been of benefit to others who read their blogs. In some instances, helping people was not related to one specific cause but was generally seen as a positive experience as Bridget’s comment shows.

Feeling like what you have to say is helping other people is a great thing.

Bridget

My little boy is on the autism spectrum, so I share some of that… I have a teaching background, so …I’m just sharing it with other people. So …someone would say she is having trouble with this and I’d print them up something so that they can help their kids with stuff. Alana
The desire to help often evolved and grew as the bloggers received feedback which affirmed that their stories were useful to others as the following quote shows.

*And I initially thought, well why would someone want to read my information about my parenting expertise? And I had very limited blog posts that had parenting advice. However those posts are actually, often my most hit post...And so my goal at the back of my mind too is if one person reads it and just goes, oh, thank goodness I’m not alone, then I’ve done something that I want to do.*

Josephine

The concept of admitting that parenting was tough was also brought up by the bloggers as a way of connecting with and helping readers.

*To help people, yeah. To say that it’s okay to screw up during the day, you know, admit that you did a mistake, that’s cool; children need to see that too. It’s not always happy-happy-happy.*

Naomi

For some the helping went as far as advocacy for a particular area of health or parenting. Starting out as a lone person behind the screen who was dealing with their own parenting challenges evolved into connection and advocacy, as this quote below shows. The reaction from friends as well as strangers was a benefit and motivator.

*Look I get...it’s really humbling for me that I do get emails from other parents and from other families that reach out to me and say we’re going through a similar thing... I don’t get many emails, probably one a month, but if they just invariably bring me to tears every time, because to think that I’m helping someone like that.*

Raelene

*Well, interestingly enough, I think I’m having quite a bit of influence in the autism awareness area...so I feel like we’ve done quite a lot as a group and I think I’ve had a lot of influence there too.*

Shona

The following quote shows a theme, where bloggers sometimes coming from an initial experience of isolation then expressed the power of their blogging in overcoming this sense of being alone by helping or even inspiring others in similar situations.

*I think it’s sort of involved into me trying to inspire other people as well....That’s sort of now become more of a motivation for me to keep on going*
to inspire and somehow add some sort of value to people who might be in difficult situations; I mean really some women might be in similar situations.

Selena

The helping extended, for some of the bloggers with a specific interest in food, into guiding others with nutrition.

I am, I am, I definitely am enjoying it. At the same time I know I'm helping other mothers out there that have picky eaters and that's the one thing that everyone comments is, it's...I think my main motivation is to help other people out there who are looking for something to help their children eat. Yolanda

Blogging to help others saw bloggers work collectively on campaigns, joining up to promote causes such as Australia’s RUOK Day (a day which raises awareness of mental health issues and encourages people to ask friends, families and workmates – Are you Okay?).

5.1.2.3 Therapy and venting

While community and connection and helping people were strong motivators for many, a very personal and more introspective goal was related to therapy for many of the bloggers. Writing about their experiences helped the bloggers to process their day and clear their minds.

Now I say that it's – I blog because it's cheaper than therapy – I stand by that, I say that to everyone. It's – I can say what I want to an extent. It's the way to work things out. I do write a lot of things that I never publish just as a way of getting them out of my head and they sit in the drafts folder and they never see the light of day. It's like a diary now – my drafts folder. Tara

I just get to brain dump everything out, it's just for me to just download whatever I'm feeling that day or something happens and then I just "I have to say that", it's just like a brain dump because I keep lots of information. My husband tells me, "Your mind just doesn’t shut up", my mind just doesn't close, my mind just can't shut down itself. When I blog, it's just to dump all my information and what I'm feeling and things like that, so it doesn't necessarily mean it gets published to the blog but it's just an outlet for me. Fleur
I used to say that it’s basically an extension of my head, of my brain; it was getting stuff out of my brain on the screen. Deirdre

Sometimes the connection and therapy were dual and interconnected motivators and benefits.

..it was really a way to I guess branch out and make a bit of a connection with others, but also just as a way of processing the days <laughter>. At the end of the day I felt it was quite therapeutic just to sit and write, and talk about the things that I loved as part of motherhood. Nicola

It’s therapy I think. I can put a lot of how I’m feeling out there and a lot of times it will resonate with people and they’ll come back and understand what you’re going through and that’s sometimes really, really good. Selena

Therapy and ‘venting’ – writing as an outlet - were related concepts as these quotes show. Blogging became a way of dealing with strong emotions.

Yes, on a joking side (it’s) a form of therapy, we all need that outlet and with what happens in my life with so many children around me, it’s been a really, really great source to get that out... Josephine

So I was just seething so I wrote the blog and a couple of people agreed with me but of course I didn’t have very much traffic back then and I wasn’t expecting people to really read it, it was just a way of venting. Jacinta

Yeah. It’s an outlet for me because otherwise I would sit there and by the time my husband got home from work pity him because I’d be throwing the children at him, ‘they did this, they did that’. Gina

5.1.2.4 Being heard and sharing

While blogging may have begun as a method of journaling and personal therapy, for some the need for their voice to be heard was the reason the blogs were actually published (rather than the mothers simply keeping private journals).

At that stage I had no expectations of anything. It was just I’ve got a message that I feel like I can share, I would like to share. I was and am very passionate about early education. So yeah so I decided to try the blog. Cherie
The act of blogging was seen by some as a new way for women to be heard where perhaps they had been kept silent in the past.

*I would hope that it’s giving women a voice. I hope that - I mean, what I liked about the session at the conference, even though it was last minute, is that I think blogging for women is quite radically changing the way women are perceived and I think women need to keep talking and having a voice. I think blogging has given women a voice, finally, because we’re talking about whatever we want to talk about, even if we’re ostracised for it and belittled by it.*

- Deirdre

For some, their underlying motivation to be heard and discuss issues did not change as they became more experienced as the following quote describes.

*I’ve still the same reasons. I just read things and I just want to write about them and express an opinion or like to start a discussion on things that I’ve read or heard, and partly also too, a sort of a memoir as such, but it’s things that I think about.*

- Michela

For others, the realisation that they had something to contribute came after reading and ‘lurking’ on other blogs.

*So I guess I saw a little bit of connection there with various people, and I just decided to start following some particular bloggers, and then I thought, “I’ve got something to say.”* Donna

### 5.1.2.5 Improving, developing or keeping up skills

Many of the bloggers spoke about their desire to develop, improve or keep up skills and found that blogging was a way of doing this. Others did not explicitly mention the upskilling as a motivator but the resulting opportunities and skills learnt while blogging meant they could pursue paid work. Mastering new skill sets was a strong motivator for some and an added benefit for others. A large proportion of the blogging mothers had come from a background which requires knowledge of social media and writing, for example, journalism, marketing or public relations. However, some had not studied or worked in any related field and developed their skills (and found opportunities) as a result of their blogging. In a few cases, bloggers went on to create jobs for themselves.
which previously had not existed, such as brand-blogger agents or paid bloggers. Blogging offered opportunities that the bloggers may not have thought of when they first started.

..Actually I started on Twitter...almost over two years ago and a month into it I said ‘ah that’s not enough’, so a month after I started blogging. I am a stay at home mum and I have to use my brain cells so I started writing down my experiences, like the motherhood journey – I started diarising what I am going through. Blanche

From a desire to use her intellect, Blanche, who had a public relations and marketing background, went on quite quickly to be sponsored by major brands to attend events and write. As one of the early mum bloggers, Blanche also saw the potential to develop a business and decided to work as an agency between brands and bloggers. She describes her journey in the quote below.

I have a degree in public relations and I have a background in sales, marketing as well. So it’s ideal as well -- I started a business.... Basically I control the brands or the PR companies who would want to reach out, to engage with the mum blogging community and get the message out with regards to their client’s product and brands and all the rest of it then they talk to me. I partner together. I do up plans, develop strategic plans on how to engage bloggers or blogger engage to help brands reach out to bloggers in social media. Blanche

Other blogging mums with a background in marketing described their desire to improve their digital skills in the quotes below.

I started because I wanted to practise my digital marketing skills, because I actually went back to study and I studied digital marketing whilst I was pregnant with my son. So the idea was then to move on and start my digital marketing consultancy, from home, with the kids. Lara

I attend a lot of blogging events ...because I want to keep up with what's happening in the Mum blog industry. Same with the conferences and things like that, I just want to keep abreast, of exactly what's happening and the thoughts and processes. It's such a fast moving industry at the moment, for Mums. Christina
Not wanting to ‘fall behind’ while out of the paid workplace was a reason to blog for some as Christina noted.

*And social media as a marketing tool...whilst I was on maternity leave, I just thought I'd use that time to ensure I didn't fall behind. And I used my own blog to just set things up and test things out and never really expected anyone to read it, but just really, kind of grew by itself.* Christina

As discussed previously, some of the women had developed businesses or gone into (new) occupations directly as a result of their blogging and social media networks and skills. Their skills and networks which had developed as a result of their blogging were eventually seen as valuable by industry. The women effectively invented job positions which may not have existed previously. This is exemplified by one blogger who had not worked in any form of marketing or media before she started writing her blog but eventually created her own business connecting brands with bloggers. Reflecting on her journey from stay-at-home mum, who had a background in Christian ministry, to becoming a brand-blogger agency owner-operator, Lilian made the following comment...

*Basically when I was a year 12 student 12 years ago a “social media consultant” didn’t exist as a job.* Lilian

### 5.1.2.6 Making money

For some bloggers who developed skills while blogging and became influencers, the desire to explore paid opportunities presented by blogging developed as their experience and influence grew. Turning the blog into a money-earner (known as monetising the blog), or pursuing career opportunities related to blogging were not always conscious decisions at the start of the bloggers’ journeys. For most an evolution occurred.

*It definitely has changed since blogging became - certainly in the last 18 months – it’s started getting serious and you can start making money from it. I wanted to be a part of that – particularly as I had been doing it for so long and I felt like I had earnt this right to be a player and I wanted to do it.* Bridget

*..I think the time that I started was the time that a lot of people started as well, and also yeah, it just started to become popular as well, so it just seemed like a*
good time to start. It was totally unconscious because I didn’t know that there was even an industry. Kim

Making money from the blog was seen as also offering the flexibility of working from home and being able to ‘be there’ for the family.

_Hopefully my motivation now – once the blog sort of grew and I did start to generate some income from it it’s now become more it’s my means of staying at home with my girls…in some ways there’s a lot more flexibility to it so it’s easier to work around their need for their timetables and still sort of add a little bit of income to my family’s, you know, kitty._ Cherie

For those who had blogged for some time the opportunity to make money presented itself, often through approaches from M&PR practitioners with opportunities for sponsorships or paid posts. Conferences also had sessions related to monetising the blog, as it is known. For example, the 2013 Digital Parents Conference had a session on “how to price your ads, how much to charge for sponsored posts and how to negotiate with brands.”

_And I guess there’s an extra motivation now to make some money from my blogging experience, whether it’s to make it directly off the blog in terms of working with sponsors or whether to get some other writing work elsewhere or perhaps start another business, helping others learn what I’ve learnt._ Donna

While most bloggers did not put making money as their main motivator, for a few it was explicitly stated.

_I’m going to be very honest where a lot of people will say it's just for my enjoyment but for me it's to find a career._ Gina

_So I’ve avoided it but when it comes down to it I need to put food on the table. A PhD salary is just not going to do it for me so I’m starting to embrace the whole sell out thing. I’m thinking of doing a…buyer’s guide for Christmas._ Jacinta

Some (commercially successful) bloggers expressed concerns that people were starting without the initial passion for writing but were there to just make money…
Well, I just think that there is a lot more money coming into blogging than there was a couple of years ago and people now are coming into blogging to make money rather than to do it for the love of blogging. Lara

There was also discussion on the ‘controversy’ of making money from blogging by those who actually were making money. However, it is important to note that the bloggers who did not make money blogging did not mention this is an issue to the interviewer.

Well you know all that political stuff that goes on. There’s a lot of talk that seems to, you know, it’s like because people have issues about making money from blogging which... I don’t know... I don’t quite understand when if anything go out and have a job doing anything, but if it’s blogging you’re suddenly not allowed to make money from it. Nicola

It should be noted that some bloggers had consciously decided that ‘monetising the blog’ was not for them. Some used the blog as a way of helping others and in an advocacy role as previously discussed. Others used the blog to promote their business or their own personal ‘brand’. However, for most bloggers interviewed, making at least some money from the blog was seen as a benefit even if other factors were mentioned as key motivators. More discussion of the desire to monetise or not monetise is presented in the findings from the survey and analysis of blogs.

The quotes from the bloggers below illustrate the thoughts of those who did not want to monetise because it would take away their enjoyment of writing. It was seen as ‘too hard’ or conflicting with their joy of writing and/or connecting.

I started to look at monetising it...So I did do a few things – I started to do a gift guide. But in the end I realised I didn’t enjoy that side of it at all – and it took all the fun out of blogging for me. Karla

Well you see, I personally haven’t because I haven’t made any effort whatsoever to go chase that stuff. I have been one of that small group of personal/parents bloggers who have not set out to make money. Shona

During the course of the research a prominent blogger actively decided to stop trying to make money from sponsored posts although she continued to take banner advertising.
Her reasons for stopping writing sponsored posts appeared to be because of the demands from brands for control over content and the constraints over her own writing style.

It is important to note that the motivations are not mutually exclusive. For example, bloggers who were motivated to make money were still motivated by the desire for community and connection. Those who wanted to help people may also have found the blogging therapeutic.

5.1.3 Bloggers meet brands – interactions with business owners and M&PR practitioners

The following section details the findings related to the research question,

1. What are the nature and extent of MBs’ exchanges with M&PR practitioners online and offline?

The following themes were distilled after analysis of the interviews with bloggers who had interacted with M&PR practitioners. Firstly, bloggers explicitly discussed strategies and tactics to ‘market to the marketers’. Secondly, the bloggers were conscious of how the choice of ‘saying no’ or ‘saying yes’, depending on their own circumstances, could impact on their future exchanges with marketers. They were also acutely aware of the impact of the choice on their readers. A choice had to be made in line with the bloggers’ own blogging ambitions and perhaps their unconscious personal ethical framework.

Finally, the theme of evolution and acquisition of marketing knowledge was evident as bloggers’ attitudes to the attentions of marketers evolved as they became more experienced. Bloggers were often ambivalent in their reaction to their interactions with marketers. As bloggers’ experience grew, their handling of the brand representatives changed.

All the bloggers often began their blog in order to write, connect, vent or help people. However, as the bloggers’ profiles and their followers rose, marketers and other brand representatives approached them. All but one of the bloggers interviewed had been approached by a marketing or public relations professional representing a brand. As their blog influence increased, many bloggers then actively sought to make connections with representatives from organisations, particularly if they wanted to work with a particular organisation or had a personal goal in mind (such as a trip to a blogging conference).
5.1.3.2 **Marketing to the marketers**

While some bloggers ‘fell into’ making money, for others it was a conscious decision to market to the marketers by using tactics to increase their profile. The theme of marketing to the marketers came through as the bloggers used strategies to connect with organisations through M&PR practitioners. The following section details the nature of these blog-brand exchanges.

The growth in attention from professionals representing organisations (as the bloggers’ perceived influence grew), often through networking events, is illustrated with the quote below.

*"I haven’t really aggressively gone out and approached anybody for opportunities at this stage, although I did meet (a shoe brand) at a blogging event and because I used their products already I was really keen to talk to them. I had a coffee and now I’m a blogging brand ambassador for them for this year. So that’s a nice organic relationship that developed, but it was made possible because I was introduced to them at one of [blogging-brand]’s events…a bloggers’ brunch."* Lara

Many of the strategies bloggers put in place (for example, networking, developing a media kit and approaching brands) saw them actively ‘marketing to marketers’ where, in the first instance, they may have not consciously blogged with a marketing goal in mind.

*I sort of started getting – when this first conference came out - two years ago PR companies started paying attention to bloggers and send them bits and pieces so I just went about it that way and then but I was never really inundated with products or – I don’t know – I seemed to slip through the radar with that - so I just did a lot of networking with some of the - so if you want to take it seriously it’s pretty easy to work out who the key players are and who you need to start to network with and which other a lot of my professional work has come from – being championed by people like X and Y has absolutely helped me – I know I don’t have a huge readership.* Bridget

The blogger above (Bridget) had consciously networked with the intention of increasing her own and her blog’s profile. The blogger quoted below also consciously sought out
income streams. After blogging for some time, some bloggers then actively pursued paid opportunities as they arose or after realising there was money to be made.

Yep well it started off – after I won my first award and my blog started to grow I sort of thought okay well maybe this is something I could dabble with or pick up. So I started off just looking at small business, you know, some basic businesses offering and advertising and sponsored posts for them. Most of those, you know, I put an advertise call out over social media. Most of those just came through people that were already reading the blog. Then I signed up with Nuffinang and they sort of started, you know, their sponsored posts pay more than I’d ever charge personally. Because they’re working with a lot of bigger brands so yeah they sort of helped to bring regular work my way. And yeah so it just grew over time I suppose....you know more enquiries…Cherie

I always look – every opportunity I look that’s got something – obviously the brand and they’re looking for some sort of promotion, something for the reader and then obviously something for me. Cherie

The blogger quoted below also explored ways of increasing her income, initially paying an ‘expert’ to help her.

Now this year I’ve had more, but I’ve also put myself out there more. I did do that earlier by employing another blogger who was a PR person; I paid her some money to help me develop my media kit to put my information out there to various brands that I felt fitted me. I don’t believe in promoting or associating myself with a brand that’s nothing to do with what I believe in or I’m about.

Donna

For bloggers, a ‘media kit’ is a promtional document which sells the blogger to brand representatives. Media kits contain information on traffic statistics, the blogger’s social media following, awards, information about the blogger and anything else that a blogger thinks might help sell them to a brand (definition derived from the bloggers’ website http://www.foodbloggersaustralia.com.au/2012/11/media-kit-101/).
5.1.3.3 **Decisions on interactions: yes, no or maybe**

Bloggers were often aware that being paid to write about a product or service through sponsorship from brands brought with it responsibilities. They also were aware that being invited to events (often with a free meal with other bloggers) which showcased brands was fun but brought an expectation of some form of writing in return. One blogger discussed being invited to Shanghai by a large soft drink manufacturer for an all-expenses paid trip while another discussed attending an interstate, all-expenses paid trip for a breakfast cereal manufacturer. The attention and free experiences were clearly enjoyed by many of the bloggers, especially when they were new to blogging. As discussed earlier, some of the bloggers had sought specific, one-off sponsorship (for example to attend a blogging conference here or in the US) and recognised that to ‘service’ the sponsorship required writing posts about the brand. On-going sponsorships also required servicing.

Bloggers discussed the expectations of brand representatives, often described as ‘PR people’ by the bloggers, and the issues this raised. For some bloggers, the decision to write about a product (for payment) was related to whether or not they used or would use the product or felt it was useful to others. However, some bloggers recognised they had written about brands that they did not necessarily believe in. There was a general belief that ‘PR people’ should research the blogger and offer appropriate products. Bloggers whose children were older laughed about being sent baby products to review while there was discussion about one blogger who had been an alcoholic being asked to blog about wine.

The quote below shows that bloggers could be discerning about what they accepted as paid advertising or sponsorship.

> I’ve had probably four or five PR in a year, so not at the rate where people would say it’s an income or it’s survivable or anything else, but again I’ve only been going a year as well and I’m very picky. So I won’t just do advertising. I won’t just say yes, I want that money, therefore I’ll do it. I look at it, and I have rejected two or three and looked at it and gone you know what, I actually wouldn’t touch your product, and it’s not your product that’s the problem. 

Josephine
Thought was also given by some to the impact on readers and what the bloggers’ readership expected as the quote below illustrates.

> And how it’s not necessary to be, you know, to be whoring yourself out there to absolutely everyone. Which of course met some fans on one side of the coin and met some disgruntled people on the other side of the coin. But I kept true to what I said and that’s why I don’t have stacks and stacks of brand relationships and just coming back from BlogHer I’ve met quite a few PR people and I’ve been honest and upfront. Like I don’t do one-off giveaways and one-off this that and the other. I’m interested in long-term brand relationships in brands that I know and brands that I really think reflect the person that’s reading my blog.

Jacinta

Former Australian, now US resident, Jacinta discussed that many bloggers (this time in the US where she is based) did write about insignificant, fast-moving consumer goods (such as toothpaste and orange juice) and often for small return. One of the bloggers interviewed, an Australian academic working full-time, had written a post related to a national bakery chain in exchange for loaves of bread.

5.1.3.4 ‘You have to take the lousy stuff’

For some bloggers starting out, they felt they had to ‘take the small lousy stuff’ for the bigger rewards to follow. The more experienced bloggers recognised they had made mistakes in accepting some products, one blogger saying she often spoke at events in order for less experienced bloggers to learn from her mistakes. The following quote illustrates that some bloggers recognised they had to have lower expectations while they were seen as less ‘powerful’ bloggers.

> Yeah and it takes a long time to build it up, I feel a bit like you have to take the lousy stuff and build up a legitimate reputation before you get offered the good stuff. For example Disney, Disney's PR firm are brilliant, they're lovely, but they’ll give you one copy of a DVD to review and one to give away and build that up and write good reviews so they're a bit different because mine are obviously always about ‘this DVD allowed me one flat white and I'm now on eBay as opposed to well it was about a princess’. And I find that all the bloggers have to build up through the small give-aways and the small approaches before they get to the stage of we'll give you a whole party and a gift
card and a digital camera just to review the same DVD that we would have been
giving you a copy of before. Gina

In a similar vein, the one blogger who had never been approached by a brand
representative recognised that she would find it difficult to ‘say no’ to being paid to
write about any products or services (good or bad), even if they weren’t of interest.

_I probably wouldn’t turn it down because I’m a bit – unless it was a really
ridiculous product because (a) I’d probably feel flattered and (b) I’m not very
good at saying no to people to be honest…But I’d find it really challenging to
write, unless I really loved the product._ Sarah

5.1.3.5 **The bloggers’ evolution from newbies to street smart**

It was clear from most of the interviews that bloggers’ attitudes to marketers evolved
over time as they became more experienced. The concept of ‘monetising the blog’ was
something many bloggers grappled with after usually starting with no intention to make
money. Most of the bloggers became more particular about which brands to work with
as their blogging experience grew. They also became more particular about which event
invitations to accept. Some decided to turn their blog into a business and after a few
years realised they had the power of knowledge and experience in a new space.

The theme of evolution and bloggers’ ability to be more particular as they became more
experienced is illustrated in the quote below. Tara discussed that a sponsored post could
feel contrived and that earlier on she had written review posts after approaches from
brand representatives. However, she often now only did a review with a give-away to
encourage more interaction from readers and as a ‘hook’ to garner interest among
readers.

_Yes. I’d go through different stages of knocking everything back because I was
too busy to taking on whatever takes my fancy. When I was a much smaller blog,
I would take on a lot more because it got a little bit of interest. But now I don’t
like doing a review without a give-away. The give-away is the hook. I have done
without it – like when I have done sponsored posts. When I have done sponsored
posts – they tend to be a review without a give-away and they tend to “I really
like this – you should go and buy it!” It feels a little contrived._ Tara
The bloggers recognised that early on it was exciting and ‘a boost to the ego’ to be approached and invited to events but the excitement often faded with the realisation of what was expected and the effort involved.

*I used to go everything, just a fun thing. Oh my god, I get invited to things and you get free stuff and it’s a huge - when you first realise it, it’s quite a boost to the ego and it feels good to be going places because of this blogging thing that you do. And it still is. It’s just a great social experience for me. But these days I just think, oh, no, it’s going to cost me money to get there, money to park.*

— Deirdre

This second quote illustrates a similar reaction after initial enthusiasm.

*Well I ended up; it was after one disastrous day, where I had two kids screaming in the car. We’d been to a function, they were bored and I came back home and I just thought I’ve just spent five hours of my day, driving throughout the town, going to this blogging event for nothing.*

— Christina

For others who had grown their blogging influence and monetisation there was some regret at earlier paid posts. The more prominent bloggers learned that they could be paid a considerable amount of money to blog about products which they perhaps were not so in love with.

*That’s been a juggle in the last 12 months when someone wants to pay you good money – better money than a journalist would be paid to write an article – you kind of tend to say I will do it without thinking whether it’s a good fit for the blog so that’s been and I have made mistakes along the way because I have gotten greedy…or I have thought I have to take that job on to justify the expense of having an agent and having the monthly fees. So I have made a few mistakes, but that’s okay. So now I trying to get smarter about what I choose – she will put out an email saying I am working with this client – is anybody interested or I will get an email - she will say I am working with this client, they would like to work with you…And it’s up to you to say yes or no every time.*

— Bridget

As evidenced in the quote above, some of the more influential bloggers have now been approached or have approached and joined blogging agencies which connect brands with bloggers. It is worth noting that these agencies did not exist until after 2010 in
Australia so are a relatively recent phenomenon. Bridget, in the quote below, discusses being with an agent.

So now everything is through her – I still get PRs sending me stuff but I have become smarter with it – I don’t feel obliged to respond to everything. Bridget

One of the more influential bloggers advised other bloggers to ‘learn from her mistakes’.

Well you know when I do talk at conferences and things like that I always try – to get bloggers to learn from my mistakes, and in the sense that they’re [brand representatives] out to get as much from publicity as they can, and even if you’ve got a small readership they just want to be able to take snapshots and report back to their clients, “This is the coverage we got,” and I just say, “You’ve got to be really choosy who you work with.” It’s crazy in there, the amount of emails that come, and you feel bad but you actually can’t respond to everything, and I don’t write for free on my site unless it’s an event that I’m interested in going to or an experience or that, I generally sort of steer clear of a lot of the PR. Kim

5.1.3.6 Summary of findings relevant to the nature of exchange with marketers

In summary, all but one of the bloggers interviewed had interacted with brand representatives. As the bloggers became more experienced, some became ‘marketers to the marketers’ and generally more sophisticated in their dealings with brand representatives, some even working with agents as the intermediary between themselves and the brands. Bloggers often expected to be paid or at least have some reward for themselves or their readers. However, as discussed in the previous section, not all bloggers wanted to monetise their blogs and therefore were not interested in approaches from brand representatives. A strong theme of evolution was evoked in many of the bloggers’ comments, with bloggers recognising they had learnt from ‘mistakes made’.

5.2 Phase 1B - Findings from interviews with expert informants (EIs)

The following section looks at the same research question: ‘What are the nature and extent of MBs’ exchanges with M&PR practitioners online and offline?’ from the other side of the blogging exchange – the perspective of the marketers, public relations
practitioners and business owners who had liaised with bloggers in one form or another of what is commonly called ‘blogger engagement’. These interviewees were labelled ‘expert informants’ (EIs).

As discussed previously, all of the EIs had developed relationships with bloggers. The EIs had worked with a range of bloggers in a commercial (paid) arrangement, such as through sponsorship, or at least liaised with them in some form. The form of liaison varied but could include invitations to events organised to promote a brand, sponsorship of blogging-specific events, reaching out to bloggers with products or services for unpaid reviews and offering give-aways for the bloggers’ readers. Several themes were distilled from the analysis as outlined below.

- The concept of perceived ‘influence’ was a reason for interaction with bloggers by EIs.
- Professionalism was often expected from the bloggers (despite the fact that often bloggers were not generally earning a full-time income from blogging and had started the blog as a hobby).
- The issue of control was a concern for all EIs, with payment seen as one way to have control.
- Measurement and ROI was seen as an important but slippery issue for some.
- Bloggers were seen as a different ‘category’ to journalists, but EIs were grappling with this concept as often a major part of their previous work had been liaison with journalists for unpaid content, particularly for those with a strong public relations focus.

5.2.1 Influence

For most of the EIs, there was no doubt that bloggers were able to influence the bloggers’ readership, which was why they had approached the bloggers on behalf of clients or their own brand. The following quote sums up most of the comments given by EIs regarding bloggers.

They are influencers. Anyone who, whether they're writing their own blog and having their own blog or they're involved in any social media and sharing information, their experiences, they are influencers because it's that whole new word of mouth and it's almost like they're testimonials for their own experiences.

Brendan
There was recognition that sources of influence, such as conventional news media, had lost audience. From the interviews, some of the EIs were grappling with the sway of these new influencers and spoke about the old days prior to the rise of online influence.

In terms of the blogosphere here in Australia it's such a growing area of influence, yeah it's kind of a key way that a lot of brands can I guess connect with the larger communities online. So, so many people across Australia today are looking at traditional sources of news and information less, and they're turning to people all across Australia who are influential or experienced specific heartbreak. Damion

For some EIs, the mum blogger was seen as increasingly important in a campaign due to influence as the following quote shows.

The mummy blogger is considered I guess sort of a bit of a treasure at the end of the rainbow because there are so many factors that come into play to sort of have a mummy blogger want to talk about your client or talk about a certain trend. Julie

It was recognised that there has always been the word-of-mouth influence which was magnified by the internet.

I think there were influencers before the internet because people are either naturally influential and talk a lot...and offer their opinion a lot and before they might have been doing it at kinder (kindergarten) to 30 women, now they’re doing it behind a computer to 3,000 or 30,000. Saskia

EIs said the influence seemed to be increasing and further was not seen as confined to promoting products or services related to parenthood. The decision by the Prime Minister’s office in 2013 to reach out to blogging women (including some in the MB category) in an attempt to use their influence with voters saw a backlash from the mainstream media (as discussed in the context section). However, it was also tangible evidence that the bloggers were seen as useful in a political campaign. Personal bloggers had become ‘political’ in their influence. At the Digital Parents’ Conference in 2013, one (high profile) blogger’s interview with then Prime Minister Julia Gillard was broadcast to the entire conference. It is worth noting that the then US President, Barack Obama, had spoken at women’s blogging conferences in the US for some years before
the Australian event, and continued to do so during his presidency. MBs in Australia were seen by M&PR practitioners as influential across a wide range of sectors, including (but not limited to) fast moving consumer goods, tourism, food, health, finance, education and politics. The following quote references the upswing in influence of MBs.

*I guess where if you were a forward thinking PR person you got it before now but even if you were sort of blind Freddy you kind of had it smacked across your head a few months ago.* Damion

Within the profession of public relations, it was recognised that ‘influencers’ within social media could cross over to actually work within public relations and/or marketing. In fact, some of those MBs interviewed had started businesses related to brand-blogger outreach. Social capital, powered by the bloggers’ predominantly online networking, was important for bloggers to show ‘legitimacy’ to those in the older fields. Related to the importance of social capital one of the EIs interviewed (a senior executive in a major international public relations consultancy) spoke of hiring a graffiti artist (traditionally not a pursuit associated with public relations) principally because of his large number of social media followers.

*I would say, when we look at people’s CVs we’ll take a look and see, do they have a blog, or have they been really active on twitter. We just hired somebody brand new, first time, his first job ever. But he is a graffiti artist and he has a graffiti art Facebook page, a fan page for his work, he has 11,000 likes on Facebook. So clear passion on something that’s interesting, but he loves which is graffiti. He hasn’t tagged our office building yet!* Brendan.

### 5.2.2 Professionalism

Most of the EIs expressed a desire for professionalism from bloggers. Some recognised that bloggers started as hobbyists, but there was a paradox in that ‘professionalism’ was expected. This tension was evident in the comments from those who had worked with or at least liaised with bloggers. While professionalism was formally defined by the EIs, they did mention aspects including commercial rigour and treating the blog as a business venture.
The following comment comes from an agent who works for and with bloggers to promote brands. When asked what she was looking for in bloggers she said, firstly, the blogger had to have enough reach and, secondly, they also had to be willing to work with brands and then she made the following final point…

And then the third is a professional attitude, because it is really, it’s a job. We speak to our (bloggers) every single day. Leanne

Reflecting on the change in the blogging space she went on to say…

And I think three years ago when I started looking at this space, you would see bloggers blogging as a hobby and that was it, they didn’t expect to make any money out of it at all. …And then I think now you’re looking at a situation whereby bloggers are brands in their own right; they’ve got business cards.

Leanne

A small business owner in the tourism industry who had invited bloggers to her tourist facility made the following comment

I think the mummy bloggers really kind of need a bit of help with commercial rigour and elevating themselves above fairly inane… patter…but that’s a commercial response. Saskia

A frustration at some of the bloggers’ “lack of professionalism” was also expressed.

But, I don’t know, the sense of entitlement that some of the smaller mummy bloggers have, it’s not only unjustified, it’s unprofessional, very damaging to their reputation because trust me, word gets around, we know who they are, and it’s just not going to get them anywhere in life, let alone blogging. Saskia

The opinion that to make money, bloggers had to treat blogging like a business was a consistent theme as the following quote illustrates.

The reality is that people hear about monetising their blog, through you know, the successful bloggers, but then they don’t treat their blog like a business. If you want to earn something, if you want to make money, you’ve got to treat it like a business so they need to make that decision whether they’re going to do that or not and if they are, they need to treat it like a business. Vita
One of the EIs did show an understanding that for many of the bloggers, the blog was not their regular source of income.

> *Often times it's not their day job, so I guess the key difference, especially for an agency, is to keep in mind when we're doing outreach to a blogger. ...So it's the day job is the key difference, they're not being paid to review stuff that's been sent to them constantly throughout the day.* Brendan

One of the EIs expressed her frustration at the perceived seemingly unprofessional behaviour of some mum bloggers.

> *I'll give you an example, when you send a journalist a press release and it’s not relevant to them, they don’t get upset, they just delete it. The mummy blogger will blog about it, tweet about it, bitch about it, put it on a panels and that happens now and that kind of scares some of the agencies, but I think that maybe in two or three years, the agencies won’t put up with it anymore because they’ll know the mummy bloggers that aren’t worth it.* Vita

### 5.2.3 Control

From some of the respondents, there was a desire for control over what bloggers expressed about the EIs’ brands or organisation in any posts on social media. However, how this control was gained was not clear, unless bloggers were paid to write posts and even then it was seen as difficult to have complete jurisdiction over the writer. Some expressed the view that clients were fearful of the bloggers and had to be educated as the following comment illustrates.

> *Some of them [clients] are just, you know, are really scared. What we always find is, after we’ve done the campaign, to find enough bloggers because it’s such a different experience to mainstream media coverage, because it’s so immediate, you can see whether it was successful or not very quickly.* Alice

Another consultant expressed a similar opinion;

> *The ones [clients] that are more corporate tend to be a little bit more standoffish and one of the reasons for that is because they’re scared about putting things out there and if wrong not being able to take it back again, but once I talked to them and explained to them that the information that we're putting*
forward is not something that they just put out there; it’s something that would be approved by them in the first place. Leanne

An owner operator said that paying bloggers for posts, rather than simply offering content or opportunities to bloggers, did lead to more control.

*I think that there’s a lack of control and usually people are paying money to get what they want. I think there are a very noisy group of very big bloggers who are insistent on nobody doing anything for free.* Saskia

One agent working with bloggers and brands felt that there was more control over content for brands (because of a paid commercial arrangement) rather than relying on publicity through traditional media. Ultimately, it was felt that the way to have complete control was to enter into a commercial arrangement.

*Because they’re [brands] seeing it’s more time efficient, and the annoying part of working in PR, and I know is that you put on this amazing launch and so on, because I’ve done it countless times, but then maybe three diggers get killed in Afghanistan…and that’s it, your story’s gone. Whereas at least when you work with bloggers you can actually book it in and you know what’s coming out. You get back a sense of control and you’re able to manage it better.* Leanne

Here, Leanne was referring to traditional media relations where gaining coverage in news or other commercial media outlets depended on what other news was around on any given day. The M&PR practitioners did not generally correlate working with bloggers as relating directly to paid advertising. However, working with bloggers was still in a grey zone between ‘paid’, ‘owned’ and ‘earned’ media.

Some of those interviewed were still uncomfortable with payment to bloggers or felt their clients would not want to pay.

*I think probably the biggest thing that comes up in working with bloggers is whether or not they should be paid for the time or the space. And quite a lot of the time my clients are paying me to promote their product, their service, and so they're not interested in paying any more than they're already paying me, and so they see paying for space on a blog or paying for a guest post or something like*
that the same as if I'd said to them, "Do you want to put an ad in this newspaper?" They consider that in the same category. Julie

There was concern that blogger-brand agencies were commercialising the relationship as the following quote from a public relations consultant shows.

_The agencies, I’m in two minds about them because, again, they commercialise everything, even the conversations and I’m a little suspicious about that._ Alice

### 5.2.4 Measurement and ROI

For some of the EIs the issue of measurement of success for M&PR practitioners conducting blogger outreach was also one they were grappling with while others expressed that they had clear measures in place to show their clients. However, the concept of Return on Investment was important for all of the EIs whether that investment was time, money or both. One in-house marketer felt that it was still difficult to measure success of blogger outreach but it was important to be working in the area as it was a new space as the following quote illustrates.

_But as far as reaching out through bloggers and that sort of stuff it’s very much still, I suppose, in its infancy and just a bit experimental for us as well because we don’t really have any ways of measuring a success either. So it’s really just started and we’re keen to see where it goes._ Aileen

A public relations consultancy owner expressed a similar view.

_It shows that maybe some other campaigns can be rolled out in a more mainstream way, and it also establishes some credibility in a new space for you. These aren’t figures that I can go back to [the client] and say, you've spent ex amount and we've delivered ex back to you, but they're also not expecting that as well._ Julie

Another consultant expressed the same comment.

_So even though we might not see those results straight away that dialoguing gets people talking about it, it could be a gradual process, so it could long term have_
some effect but at the same time again we don’t really have a way of measuring it, so to speak. Damion

However, one blogger-brand agent (owner-operator) was clear on measurement.

Each brand is different. We always ask brands when we start working with them, “What is success to you?” Like, “What are you trying to achieve?” Because some brands will just want click-throughs. They will just want people to come over to their website and do something there, so that’s fine, we can gear the whole campaign that way. We measure every campaign that we do, we do full evaluation reports, and that measures across exposure which is reach, like how many people did we actually reach with it? Leanne

The small business owner/operator who had hosted a blogger event outlined the results but was still not convinced that measurement was easy.

Well, I mean, you can’t really measure it. In the lead-up to it in terms of tweets coming from mum bloggers accounts, it was just into the hundreds, almost thousands, just my [Twitter handle] in it. I mean how do you measure that? During the event the same thing. Instagram, you could track for likes I guess. Blog posts, I didn’t ever ask anyone at any time how many readers they had; how many eyeballs saw their posts, but I was tracking in Google Alerts for [business name] and got all their blog posts that way. They were re-tweeted by everyone who were here...you know, I think that’s a really difficult question. I think that’s what the industry’s really struggling with as well, okay, what is the ROI on that event? Saskia

In conclusion, from the interviews it was clear that measurement was still a vexed issue for most of the participants while the minority felt they knew how to measure the results.

5.2.5 Journalists V Bloggers

Many of the EIs interviewed, had traditionally liaised with journalists as key influencers or gatekeepers. With the media landscape shifting (and the influence of mainstream media declining) the EIs had moved into trying to influence influential bloggers. While often expecting ‘professionalism’ if working with bloggers, all of the EIs interviewed were clear that bloggers were operating in a different way to journalists. Differences
included the lack of a clear code of ethics for bloggers, the bloggers’ personal approach to writing and the fact that bloggers were not paid by an employer to write. For EIs it was felt that mainstream media were still important but their influence was falling and bloggers were a new and different way to promote clients’ brands.

*I think bloggers aren't journalists. However, they can work in the same space. They're not bound by the same code of ethics that journalists are. They may be working under that code of ethics because that's naturally how they work, but when I started working as a journalist that was something that was really drummed into me. You need to be following these ethics.* Julie

The lack of ‘objectivity’ from bloggers was an important difference according to one public relations consultant as this quote illustrates.

*Obviously, this is my opinion, but they [bloggers] tend to cover more one-sided stories or more issues, whereas when I work as a journalist I make sure that I speak to somebody on both sides and I have equal coverage and all of that sort stuff. I don't think bloggers spend as much time preparing what they're blogging about.* Julie

The rise of blogging was seen as a conundrum by the EIs, perhaps due to the bloggers’ lack of training or perceived ability to write well, according to one set of (journalistic) standards.

*I was actually away at the weekend and a journalist from The Australian was on the weekend with me, and she cannot understand the blogging thing. She’s working for The Australian, she sees that all these journalists around her are being made redundant. She’ll click in and read a blog and say, in her words, “The writing is shit.”* She said, “It’s terrible.” Vita

The fact that bloggers were taking over as newspapers’ influence was decreasing was noted by a blogger-brand agent and the threat to traditional media was expressed.

*So when you see those graphs on page, you’ve got newspapers who used to be next to God, and that [the graph] goes like that [points downwards], and then you’ve got bloggers who go like this [points upwards].* Leanne
I think that most noise comes from journalists because they’re poo-pooing people who aren’t credentialed to write, but everyone can do that. Everyone can write. It’s just a matter of the level of refinement... but I think that’s journalists who are feeling a little wobbly because all of a sudden they’re threatened in terms of their own importance. Saskia

There was some differentiation in that bloggers may not have had the professional skillset of journalists as the following quote illustrates from one business owner (herself a former journalist).

The blogger who blogs all about her kids Asperger’s, about how painful it is, that’s great writing, but it doesn’t mean she’s got the skills of a journalist, so it’s absolutely not - that statement is incorrect that “bloggers are journalists” - but absolutely bloggers can be journalists, if you learn the friggin’ skills. Vita

In a similar vein, it was recognised that the emotional nature of blogging was extremely different to journalistic writing.

Some of them, all they want to do is pour their heart out about their divorce, or they want to pour their heart out about how isolated they are or how terrible their mental illness is and that’s fine. It doesn’t make them journalists and nor do they want to be, they just want to express themselves. Vita

5.2.6 Summary of Phase 1B findings

In summary, all of the EIs viewed bloggers as influencers. The responses showed that the EIs were, at times, grappling with the concept of their desire for the bloggers to be professional over bloggers being hobbyists. This is a paradox, given that often the bloggers’ perceived influence and resonance may come from them being a mother blogging at home (rather than working as a staff writer or journalist). One informant even expressed grave concerns over her perception of the bloggers’ over-sharing of personal details (such as mental health issues) which could be a problem for their career prospects. How to retain control over content related to brands in paid (and unpaid) posts was seen as a critical issue for some of the EIs. Control over content was also related to payment to bloggers. A minority of the EIs were clear on how to measure success in any blogging/brand relationship while most felt it was difficult to measure. Despite often expecting professionalism, all of the brand representatives recognised that
bloggers were not journalists and operated in a different way with different constraints. The issue of payment beyond display advertising, for product reviews or mentions or sponsorship, was still a vexed one for some of the informants.

5.3 Phase 2. Online survey results

The following section outlines the findings from the online survey of members of the Digital Parents (DP) community. As discussed in the methodology chapter the online survey was conducted following the interviews in order to further explore the following research questions.

1. What are the nature and extent of MBs’ exchanges with M&PR practitioners online and offline?
2. What are the major ethical issues surrounding blogging?

While all of these areas had been explored in Phases 1A and 1B, the question of ethical issues, in particular, was still seen to have not been sufficiently answered. Participants (both bloggers and EIs) in the in-depth interviews were not always keen to discuss ethical issues and often answered that they did not believe there were any ethical issues to report. The interviews allowed a deeper understanding of the issues and research question while the survey allowed for a broader response with perhaps more feeling of anonymity on the part of the respondents. Only the results from the survey are reported that are relevant to the research questions. Those not reported are not relevant to this study and were designed as market research for the Digital Parents founder/owner.

5.3.2 The Digital Parents community – demographics

Only the responses of the 245 blogging mothers who completed the survey are reported here. The majority of Digital Parents (DP) MBs who responded were aged between 26 and 45 (89%) and were married (80%) with children, many with two young (primary school age or younger) children.

As illustrated in figure 5.1. the majority of the MBs worked part-time, with 38% in permanent work and 36% not employed at all. Only 11% were in full-time paid work. This reflects the statistics of the general female Australian population (see the context chapter). When asked about giving up employment to focus on blogging, only 3% had already done so. However, 84% stated that they would consider doing so.
### 5.3.3 Blogging

About two thirds (65%) of the bloggers had been blogging for less than three years. All the bloggers tended to maintain only one blog (68%) and when asked to describe their blogs they were very likely to be written in a conversational form (84%). What is clear is that there were regular updates, with 80% of respondents blogging at least once a week. The most popular topics for blogging were described as parenting (81%), home life (72%), and food and cooking. Options provided were: parenting, business and blogging, home life, fashion and beauty, food and cooking, travel, health and well-being, entertainment and celebrities, news and politics, books, places and ‘other’. Respondents were able to nominate as many topics as they wished from the list. Popular topics under ‘other’ included craft and sewing and gardening. However, there was a huge range of topics ranging from Christianity to camping, writing, photography, technology and even the occult. The content on blogs included personal stories (92%), ‘how-to’ articles (53%) and opinion pieces (50%). With this question, respondents were asked to tick as many as applied to them from a list which included: personal stories, ‘how-to’ articles, opinion pieces, news updates, interviews, product reviews, links to other resources, reader questions, guest posts, sponsored posts and ‘other’. Product reviews were also popular (53%). Most bloggers described their writing style as conversational (83%) with a minority describing their style as journalistic (3%), professional (4%) or confessional (5%).
Respondents also reported that blogging impacted on their lives in an extremely positive (28 %) way or mostly positive way (64 %). Only 8% felt it had a neutral or negative effect.

The favourite forms of social media reported by the bloggers (other than blogs) were Facebook (97%), Twitter (87%), Pinterest (79%) and Instagram (63%). The average reported time spent across all forms of social media was between 3 and 4 hours a day.

5.3.4 Blogging community

Significant agreement was reported on the sense of community in their blogosphere, where 91% reported satisfaction in this regard. This echoes the findings from the interviews, which found that ‘community and connection’ was a key motivator for blogging. All bloggers (100 %) said they participate (read AND comment) on other people’s blogs. Over half of the bloggers (57%) said they participated daily, with 29% doing so 2-4 times a week. Findings show that 62% of the bloggers had been involved in the blogosphere for less than three years.

5.3.5 Bloggers and influence

The majority of bloggers reported that they felt able to influence their readers to purchase an item they had recommended on their blog. Moreover, 93% believed that blogs were a better source of information than traditional or mainstream media (e.g. radio, television, magazines, and websites). The bloggers’ own sense of their influence found in the survey corresponded with views expressed during the interviews. For example, in the interviews, bloggers discussed particular products that had become popular as a result of a post by one blogger and, in a less commercial vein, had discussed receiving emails from readers who were grateful for advice shared.

5.3.6 Blogs and income generation – money a motivator

Figure 5.2 illustrates that while 40% of bloggers were currently receiving income from their blogs, a further 46% wanted to. The desire to make money as shown in the survey supported the findings from the interviews which also saw ‘making money’ emerge as a key motivator for some bloggers. A significant number (52%) of bloggers were receiving less than $50 per month from advertising on their blog. At the other end of the scale, 28% of bloggers were receiving over $300 per month.
While not generating money (but with product supplied), product reviews were reported as being done by 65% of respondents. Moreover, 67% of respondents felt positive about being ambassadors for brands. However, 33% did not feel positive about this.

The majority of surveyed bloggers preferred to be compensated for sponsored content with both cash and free products or experience (68%), 14% preferred cash only, 13% product or experience only and 5% would not accept compensation. This again shows that bloggers were keen to make money from blogging (as found in the analysis of the blogger interviews).

**Figure 5.2 Income generation from blogging as reported by MBs surveyed.**

![Income generation from blogging as reported by MBs surveyed.](image)

5.3.7 **Interactions with M&PR practitioners**

The majority of bloggers had been approached for some sort of writing, product review, give-away or sponsorship by a brand representative or PR consultant (60%). When working with brands, the most important considerations for bloggers were that the brand was relevant to their blog (96%), it is something their readers might be interested in (93%) and the brand contact communicates clearly (76%). For this question, bloggers were able to tick all considerations that applied to them.

5.3.8 **Bloggers and ethical issues**

When asked about ethics, the majority felt there were no ethical issues with blogging (68%). The 32% of the respondents who did believe there were ethical issues were
given an opportunity to describe any ethical concerns in an open-ended comment section.

The major theme to emerge from the open-ended responses to the question “what are the ethical issues related to blogging” was linked to ‘cash for comment’ – or, as the bloggers call them, sponsored posts. Under this topic of blog/ger sponsorship, the sub-themes which arose were that money or a free product or service potentially could buy (favourable) opinions, the perceived pressure to accept any sponsored post benefits (in case none were to follow), disclosure of sponsorship and the issue of sponsored posts annoying or offending readers.

Most other responses to the question of ethics were linked to issues of privacy for bloggers, their family and friends. However, there were only three comments related to privacy so this area of ethical concern could be seen as being very minor for most bloggers.

5.3.8.1 **Ethical issues – sponsored posts**

The grey area of sponsorship and what that means for the reader and the blogger was a consistent theme in most responses. The following comments are representative of the views related to sponsored posts.

> As much as everyone protests, I think there ARE problems with sponsored posts. The big bloggers do them well and are professional and transparent in their approach (especially [blogger name]). But honestly, WHEN have you ever read a bad or neutral product review on a blog? Not saying people should, but I hate that whole "this opinion is mine and the company didn't tell me what to write" stuff. You're doing the post and you have received some benefit, so be honest with yourself that your opinion has been influenced. I don't mind ads etc. - I probably prefer them to sponsored posts, but I know sponsored posts are bigger than ads now.

The comment shows that ‘advertising’, reviews, sponsored posts and competitions with prizes were clearly seen as different parts of the payment equation. This is in contrast to research by Fullwood, Nicholls and Makichi (2014) which used the description ‘advertising’ as a catch-all related to one motivational factor for blogging. Many of the different forms of content on blogs which were written because of approaches from
outside (often commercial) interests could be described as forms of ‘stealth marketing’ by the organisations behind the approaches because the posts are not clearly paid advertisements. The nuances of various blog content, including paid side-bar advertising, sponsored posts (with payment) and product reviews (without payment but with free product or experience OR with payment) need to be acknowledged for a full discussion on ethical issues surrounding blogging. In addition, disclosure of payment could be obvious or unclear on blogs. Based upon their responses, bloggers realised there were variations of paid promotion and were cognisant of the impact money could have upon a blogger’s opinion or willingness to write about a product. However, it should also be emphasised that the majority of bloggers did not respond to this question as they had felt there were no ethical issues to comment on. It is not clear why this is the case but, given that many of the bloggers currently made little or no money and were sole operators, perhaps they may have felt individually that sponsorship of posts was not an ethical issue or they had not even thought about it.

However, the problem of how to “just say no” to problematic sponsorship appeared to be a concern among some bloggers.

As I'm relatively new to blogging, I've struggled a little bit with promoting products I might not actually buy in the ‘real world’ - but I have not wanted to say no to the relatively few offers for promotions/sponsored posts that have come my way.

Some bloggers were clear that they would only review or promote products or services that they believed in. They felt honesty of opinion was important in any paid relationship. A theme that also came through was that an obviously ‘paid for’ review may annoy readers and also harm the bloggers’ reputation.

Doing a review and giveaway, for me, is to promote a product I'm interested in that I think my readers may also be interested in - some people seem to assume bloggers will accept any review and write a glowing and positive piece regardless. That's not true. Our reputation is at stake, and we always review honestly. I knock back a number of reviews because I don't like a product.

The approaches by brand representatives to review products was seen as a waste of time by some, as represented in this quote.
I don't review inexpensive products because it's not worth my time, but I feel it's unethical to take payment for reviews. Is it though? I don't know. I rarely see blogger reviews with a balance of positive and negatives, or that compare competitive products, give a rating out of 5, or say whether the blogger would buy the product in real life. Rather, the "reviews" are just descriptions of how their kids used the items, and tend to be overwhelmingly positive. I mean, they want people to enter the competition to win the item...

‘Disclosure’ of payment, free product or other inducement was also seen as an issue with the following comments highlighting this point.

I think disclosure is important. It seems to be a grey area for some bloggers.

It is important to be clear about what blog content is sponsored or paid for, and what is not. Transparency is important for trust.

Sometimes I find it hard to discern between a post that is sponsored or in some way affiliated with a product/brand and those that are just the blogger writing about their experience with something in their everyday life. I believe that sponsored posts and anything written about a product/brand where the blogger has been given something for free should be stated at the very start of the post to reduce any confusion and sense of being misled.

I have not encountered any myself, because I am clear on my own values. But I have a problem with bloggers who may not disclosed they are doing a sponsored post.

Given that transparency of payment for opinion was seen as an ethical issue, it could be concluded that ‘stealth marketing’ was present on some blogs with the bloggers acting as paid influencers representing brands or services without always fully disclosing payment. However, the question of stealth marketing appeared to require further investigation which was conducted through Phase 3, analysis of the blogs.

5.3.8.2 Ethical issues - privacy

As discussed previously, the vast majority of comments on the question of ethical issues related to payment for opinion. Ethical issues related to privacy were in the minority, with only three comments reflecting concerns in this area, as is seen below.
I protect my family's identity because I get people downloading photos of my children. I would never give away my personal details on my blog.

I'm a relief teacher in a very small town. You need to be careful what you talk about.

Sometimes I am not sure how personal to go - I photograph my baby, my house and my husband and put it out there for the world to see. Sometimes I question this, but then other times I figure there is so much on the web.

The issue of how much to reveal or conceal on blogs was also discussed during the interviews by some bloggers with one blogger describing how she went from being completely anonymous on her blog when she started to providing her real name and posting a photograph of herself naked on the blog within two years of blogging. During the interviews some had consciously decided to not have photographs of their children on the blog while others named their children and used photographs of their family regularly. Perhaps because the blog was seen as their own space, bloggers did not have a concern over ‘privacy’, despite the blogs being available for viewing across the globe 24 hours a day.

5.3.9 Summary of Phase 2 findings

In summary, the survey supported the findings from the interviews in that bloggers were looking to be compensated for their efforts if they promoted products or services as a result of approaches from commercial interests. Money was therefore a motivator for many bloggers. However, the decision by bloggers to be paid to promote a service or product (through various means including sponsored posts, product/service/experience reviews and competitions) was influenced by relevance to their blog, interest to their readers and the clarity of communication from those working for the brands. The blogging was generally a positive experience for the majority of bloggers, mostly working part-time. As found in the interviews, community and connection was also a key motivation and benefit for the bloggers. The majority of those surveyed felt there were no ethical issues with blogging but those that did felt that the major ethical issue centred on disclosure (or lack of disclosure) of payment (or other compensation) for posts and organisations buying opinion.

5.4 Phase 3. Analysis of blogs
The analysis of the blogs occurred both during and after interviews with the bloggers and the EIs and the survey. The analysis was principally to investigate further the marketing strategies used by bloggers to attract readers (and M&PRs), the underlying motivations of bloggers (witnessed through exchanges between bloggers and their readers and other behaviours exhibited on blogs) and the extent of ‘disclosure’ of payment for mention of brands or organisations.

It was felt that the analysis would offer depth to the interviews and surveys. Given the sensitivity of the topic of ‘stealth marketing’, it was felt that a direct analysis of the blogs would garner more information than had been elicited during the previous phases of research. It should be noted that bloggers actually wrote about issues related to paid posts as topics for discussion on their blogs occasionally.

The following themes were uncovered from analysis of the blogs:

1. Bloggers created a sense of community through a variety of methods. Initiatives, such as shared hash tags and dares, were used to create a sense of ‘in-group’ amongst groups within the blogosphere.
2. Humour and pathos were used as literary devices in the bloggers’ writing. Writing topics were many and varied and included ‘warts and all’ pieces on the lows and highs of life generally and parenting in particular, with practical advice for parents and finally ‘escapist’ or ‘aspirational’ pieces based on topics such as fashion, home decorating and beauty.
3. Bloggers used a range of marketing strategies and tactics to attract and retain readers.
4. Disclosure of payment by commercial interests to bloggers was evident but so too was ‘stealth marketing’. There appeared to be a sliding scale related to disclosure from obvious disclosure of compensation for post writing for commercial interests to no disclosure at all. Some bloggers were completely transparent regarding payment for content while others gave glowing reviews of products or services without mentioning any payment (in cash or kind). It was not clear from reading the blogs whether M&PR practitioners had required or expected disclosure but instead disclosure appeared to be an individual choice by the blogger.

5.4.2 Community – with other bloggers and readers

The sense of community amongst the bloggers was evident across the blogs. Bloggers often invited commentary from their readers by asking questions at the end of their posts and in turn responded to readers’ comments. They also commented on other bloggers’ posts. Many of the comments in the ‘commentary’ section following a post were from other bloggers (identified through their name) and often were in an
empathetic or sympathetic tone. There was also the possibility for readers to share the post via Twitter, Facebook or Pinterest through the share buttons for these platforms which were positioned on the blog. Some of the bloggers promoted their blogs by “link-ups” (or linkys, as the bloggers called them) where different bloggers posted their latest posts on one blog site via special buttons. One blogger would host the link-up on a specific day.

Figure 5.3 The Flog Yo Blog Friday button.

Different bloggers hosted special ‘days’ to promote their blogs across each other’s sites. The bloggers had special words and acronyms for some of their promotions, meaning only those in the community (or ‘in the know’) would understand what was being said. For example, the ‘Flog Yo Blog Friday’ concept was for bloggers to link up and promote their blog on a Friday. Flog Yo Blog Friday (or #FYBF) was hosted by one blogger with other bloggers (up to 50 at a time) posting their Friday blog post on her blog. Similarly, IBOT (I Blog on Tuesday) was another way for bloggers to blog on a Tuesday and link up to each other with the #IBOT hash-tag or link and Wordless Wednesday was for posts with only photographs. Most bloggers had a ‘blog roll’ which is a list of other blogs/bloggers they like and want to promote with links to the blogs. Different bloggers came and went with these days/promotions and the promotions were more or less popular across the years.

Bloggers also linked up with or were able to follow others’ commentary on different issues via hash-tags on Twitter. If bloggers were attacked or seen to be unfairly treated in the mainstream media (for example in the News Corporation stable of online newspapers) other bloggers would post their support. Bloggers often responded to
readers’ comments so that a dialogue was initiated through the blog. Through Facebook and Twitter bloggers promoted their posts and then also responded to readers’ comments on these platforms. When bloggers shared other bloggers’ posts on Facebook or Twitter there was often an expression of gratitude, with comments such as “thanks for the share” or “thanks for the RT (retweet)”.

The sense of a shared language extended to quirky sayings and comments which again might only be understood by those ‘in the know’ For example FFS Friday stands for *For Fuck’s sake Friday* and some bloggers would blog about (usually humorous) events of their week with the tag #FFS! On Friday afternoons some bloggers would have a virtual drinks party with different hash-tag acronyms on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to accompany photographs of (usually alcoholic) drinks and snacks. Another, more recent, hashtag was #Everyfuckingnight, referring to the expectation of (mothers) having to make dinner every night. It is interesting to note that swearing was common amongst bloggers as a way of generating a sense of humour and sharing frustrations.

### 5.4.2.1 **On Wednesdays we wear pink**

Related to a sense of community, the sense of ‘in-group/out group’ was strong across the blogs with different dares and challenges across social media and the blogs for those ‘in the know’ (and those who chose to) to play along. Bloggers encouraged people to be part of an obvious in-group through different means. The people who were part of the in-group included other bloggers but also general, non-blogging readers. Some of the more prominent bloggers (that is, those who had larger followings on social media) had started highly successful challenges that had earned them cult status amongst the other bloggers and general readers. Clothing was often a way for bloggers to show they were part of the group, with images of the bloggers wearing the same style or colour of clothes shared according to the day’s hash-tag decided by one blogger, often a fashion and beauty blogger. The image below is one example of an in-group challenge for people to take specific photos related to a subject on a particular day.
5.4.3 Darkness and light, humour and pathos

As discussed previously, the style and subject matter of posts were varied across the different blogs. Posts included ‘how-to’s’ such as parenting tips, recipes, cake decorating, organisational tips, craft lessons or house/personal style, fashion and beauty advice. Personal stories of experiences were common, relating every-day challenges with family life. Many of the posts were similar in subject matter to those written in women’s magazines. Some of the bloggers posted beautifully photographed shots of food, home interiors or other aesthetically pleasing subjects. Some of these posts could be described as escapist or aspirational material which transported the reader to a pretty place. However, more ‘raw’ and extremely personal posts were also present, including heart-felt discussions of children or the blogger’s own chronic illness, death of loved ones, stillbirths, mental health issues and relationship issues. Politics and issues such as Australia’s response to the refugees from Syria were discussed on some blogs.

Humour and pathos were two common forms of writing used by bloggers. Humour was often used for serious issues of tension. For example, the contested term ‘mummy/mommy blogger’ was treated with humour by some bloggers with one blogger posting a picture of herself naked, her bottom facing the camera with ‘mummy blogger’ written on it. Humour was also used in reference to children and husbands. Pathos was used as bloggers wrote about painful subjects such as loss of a child, having a child with
a chronic condition or experiencing the lows of parenting such as hospitalisation of children.

5.4.4 Marketing by many means

The bloggers used many marketing tactics to attract readers (and M&PR practitioners) and establish their blogs’ brand and, simultaneously, their own personal brand. Many of the blog names were catchy, were often a play on words and were in a designed banner at the top of the blog. All the blogs had a banner with a logo and/or photograph to complement the name of the blog. Bloggers also used taglines or slogans under their main title to further describe their blog and its unique selling point. An ‘About’ or ‘About Me’ section was generally used to describe the blogger and their family, with husbands and children often described and given pseudonyms. Sometimes husbands were known as Mr ‘(insert blog name)’, taking on the related identity of the blog while children were Miss or Master (insert blog name) or sometimes had their own pseudonyms. As discussed previously, bloggers generally had social media ‘buttons’ for readers to connect easily to the bloggers’ Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram and Twitter pages (the most popular of the social media sites used by bloggers as described in the survey). They also promoted their posts via these sites.

Bloggers often had a tab on their main banner labeled Advertising, PR/Advertising or Work with Me to promote themselves to M&PR practitioners (and to other potential sources of payment). Under this section, the bloggers’ willingness to work with commercial interests was described with some describing their blog as ‘PR friendly’. It should be noted that not all bloggers had this tab. One prominent, award-winning blogger reported on her blog that she had decided not to write for sponsorship after initially signing with a blogging agency, but still carried side-bar advertising on her blog.

5.4.5 Disclosure and stealth marketing

Some of the bloggers had a specific ‘Disclosure’ or ‘Disclaimer’ tab on their main bar under which they described their policy on disclosing any form of sponsorship or payment for posts written. Some bloggers went so far as to explain different types of sponsorship in content under the disclaimer heading, including attending a free event or experience, being gifted a product or service for review, being paid to write about an
experience or product or having an ongoing paid ‘brand ambassador’ relationship with a brand.

However, other bloggers did not have any specific reference to disclosure of payment and were explicit about their desire for money, with one blogger writing, albeit with her tongue in cheek: ‘Sponsorship - I need it. What will I do for it? Pretty much anything.’ There was some debate across the blogs about sponsorship and disclosure and if ‘free product’ should be declared as it “did not pay the mortgage”. The hash-tag #gifted (or simply a reference to the product being gifted) was used by some bloggers for product given to them by M&PR practitioners. Some bloggers went so far as to use the hash-tag #notsponsored, or a short phrase of explanation, to assure their readers that a positive comment or review of a product was not because of money from the brand, but simply because they liked it. Discussion about sponsorship and the pitfalls was also a theme across blogs with comments and discussion from other bloggers occurring in response to these posts.

It was difficult to determine whether or not disclosure of payment was a personal choice, but given that some bloggers did not mention being paid to write about products/services but were promoting products/services there was some evidence of ‘stealth marketing’ by brands. It would appear that if all M&PR practitioners wanted bloggers to be clear about a commercial relationship then a standard disclosure would have appeared on all blogs.

5.4.6 Phase 3 Summary

In summary, Phase 3, the analysis of blogs, showed a sense of community amongst bloggers and readers, a sense of in-group/out-group, literary devices of humour and pathos, strategic marketing by the bloggers and a variety of responses to the issue of disclosure.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the findings from the three phases of research, namely the interviews with bloggers (Phase 1A) and expert informants (Phase 1B), the survey of the Digital Parents blogging community (Phase 2), and the analysis of blogs (Phase 3). Findings have answered the research questions, specifically the motivations for bloggers interviewed, the nature and extent of bloggers’ interactions with M&PR practitioners,
and ethical issues encountered by bloggers. The next chapter will present a discussion on the ramifications of these findings for both theory and practice.
Chapter 6 Discussion and Conclusion

6.0 Chapter overview

This concluding chapter discusses the findings based on the research questions, outlines theoretical implications of the findings and potential impact on practice. The chapter begins with a discussion of the findings relevant to the first research question which focuses on bloggers’ motivations to blog. The findings pertaining to the second research question are then discussed, that is the nature and extent of blogging mothers’ exchanges with M&PR practitioners, both in the virtual third place and offline. The findings relating to the final research question, the nature of ethical issues surrounding blogging, are then reviewed and the liminal context of the participants is highlighted with attention given to the overall research lens of vulnerable versus empowered consumers. There are a number of important implications for the academic disciplines of public relations and marketing as well these areas of practice. Finally, the study’s limitations and directions for future research are discussed.

6.1 What are MBs’ motivations to blog?

This section discusses the motivations for blogging mothers, found in this study and relevant to previous literature. The main motivations for the blogging mothers were found to be community and connection; therapy and venting; being heard; helping people, developing new skills and making money. As discussed in the literature review, the literature on the motivations for blogging specifically related to mothers is limited, particularly in an Australian context. While the mommy blogging phenomenon has been given attention in the general news media and trade publications, few academic studies (with limited exceptions) have looked at blogging mothers as a distinct phenomenon and even fewer have examined their motivations and relationship to market. The following table outlines the main motivations uncovered in this study and where they have been found in previous literature relating to blogging motivations. A comparison of motivations for blogging found in this study of Australian mum bloggers with motivations found in previous literature is below. Note that other than the Fleming study (limited to eight bloggers) no other empirical study focused solely on the motivations related to blogging of Australian mum bloggers specifically. The only notable exception is the recent published study by Pettigrew, Archer and Harrigan
(2016) which was based on qualitative response in the survey used in this thesis and was co-authored by the researcher with her supervisors.

**Table 6.1 Comparing motivations of Australian mum bloggers found with previous literature.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivations found in the present study of blogging mums</th>
<th>Literature on blogging motivations where similar motivations found</th>
<th>Participants/respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community and connection</td>
<td>Nardi et al (2004)</td>
<td>23 bloggers (16 men, 7 women) from Stanford University, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Huang et al (2007), described as forum participating</td>
<td>311 male and female Taiwanese bloggers (personal); average age 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fleming (2008)</td>
<td>8 Canadian ‘mommy bloggers’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fullwood et al. (2014), described as social networking</td>
<td>312 personal female bloggers (from the USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapy</td>
<td>Nardi et al. (2004), described as working out emotional issues</td>
<td>12 Estonian male and female bloggers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sepp, Liljander &amp; Gummerus (2011), described under the <em>process gratification</em>, subheading <em>emotion management</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fullwood et al. (2014), described as <em>emotional outlet</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping others</td>
<td>Sepp, Liljander &amp; Gummerus (2011), described under the heading, content gratifications, subheading, enlightening others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not explicit in Huang et al. (2007) but touched on as a possible motivator</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivations found in the present study of blogging mums</td>
<td>Literature on blogging motivations where similar motivations found</td>
<td>Participants/respondents</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being heard</td>
<td>Sepp, Liljander &amp; Gummerus (2011), described under the heading <em>content</em>, sub-heading <em>commenting</em>. Fullwood et al. (2014), described under 2 factors, <em>personal revelation</em> and <em>selective disclosure</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain, develop new skills</td>
<td>Sepp, Liljander &amp; Gummerus (2011), described under the heading <em>process</em>, sub-heading <em>self-improvement</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>Most closely related to the findings of Sepp, Liljander &amp; Gummerus (2011) described as advertising and Fullwood et al. (2012), also described as advertising However, these headings do not specifically refer to earning money</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.1.1 Community and connection

The concept of community and connection came through most strongly as a motivator in this study. The pioneering study by Nardi, Shciano and Gumbrecht (2004), where ethnographic interviews were conducted with a small sample of male and female personal bloggers at Stanford University on their motivations to blog, introduced this finding of the importance of community. Other studies focusing on blogging mothers (while not directly reporting on motivations) also described the importance of community for the mum bloggers (see Lopez, 2009; McDaniel et al., 2011; Webb &
Lee, 2011). Most other extant work on general blogging motivations cites community and connection as a motivator, albeit under various terms including ‘social networking’ (Fullwood et al., 2014); the ‘need for affiliation’ (Chen, 2012) and ‘forum participation’ (Huang et al., 2007). Sepp, Liljander and Gummerus (2011) divided their blogging motivations into gratifications and under the ‘social’ gratification heading, the need for community, discussion, getting support and finding friends are listed as motivators.

6.1.2 Therapy and venting; being heard; helping people

As outlined in the table, the concepts of therapy and venting, being heard and helping people were all found to be motivators in the small, qualitative Sepp, Liljander and Gummerus (2011) study. While the recent Fullwood et al. (2014) study identified therapy (described as ‘emotional outlet’) and ‘being heard’ (similar to their factors of ‘selective disclosure’ and ‘personal revelation’), helping people was not a factor used when Fullwood et al. designed their Blogging Motivations Questionnaire (BMQ). Both Fullwood et al. (2014) and Chen (2012) did not cite the Sepp, Liljander and Gummerus (2011) study which appeared to have the most comprehensive list of motivating factors for bloggers to date.

6.1.3 Developing new skills and making money

Five of the six categories found in this study related to blogging mothers had been found as motivators in previous studies of bloggers to a greater or lesser extent. The desire to improve or develop skills was only evident in the Sepp, Liljander and Gummerus (2011) study. Within the literature, the desire to make money from blogging (in particular) has not been found to relate to bloggers’ motivation. Perhaps this is because many of the early studies on bloggers were focused on personal or ‘hobby’ bloggers. Indeed, Huang et al. (2007) noted that their study focused on bloggers who blogged for nonfinancial purposes and the Nardia et al. (2004) study was conducted when there was little money to be made from ‘personal’ blogging.

The recent scale development of the BMQ by Fullwood et al. (2014) also largely ignores money as a motivator (as well as the desire by bloggers to improve or develop new skills), perhaps because it is based largely on the (then) existing literature which focused on hobbyists/personal bloggers in the early- to mid-2000s. The literature related to bloggers’ motivations has not, to date, adequately reflected the changes in the blogging landscape and its increased marketisation. However, as discussed in Chapter 3
there has been research (not specifically looking at motivation) which has focused on the commercial aspect of blogging, with some work looking at the ethical issues surrounding payment for posts (see, for example, Cammaerts, 2008; Friedman, 2010; Haines, 2011; Jensen, 2011; Lopez, 2009; Sprague & Wells, 2010) and, very recently, the concepts of labour and work related to blogging (Duffy & Hund, 2015).

There is therefore a disconnect between the literature on motivations, mostly ignoring the possibility of bloggers having commercial desires, and other literature, which has focused on ethical issues related to payment and the bloggers as empowered consumers turned producers, that is, prosumers. This disconnect reflects the current landscape of the blogosphere, and other areas of social media, where the concepts of ‘personal’ and ‘professional’ are increasingly being blurred.

The categories described for motivations are not to be viewed as singular, but often occur together. For example, being part of a community may mean a blogger has a sense of wanting to help that community and it is difficult to have a voice unless there are people to hear you. The demarcation of categories by the researcher is always going to be artificial and all the motivations inter-relate in multifaceted ways.

The following section discusses in more detail findings relevant to the research question: What are the nature and extent of MBs’ exchanges with M&PR practitioners online and offline? To recap, this study found that for many bloggers (but not all), the chance to earn money from their blog meant that they wished to be contacted and ‘work’ with public relations and marketing practitioners. It was also found that bloggers actively marketed to both their readers and the M&PR practitioners, using tactics traditionally associated with the professions of marketing and public relations, for example, promoting their personal brand and blog across many different social media platforms and reaching out to M&PR practitioners with ‘media kits’ to prove their worth as collaborators. The bloggers often evolved in their attitude to M&PR practitioners, becoming more ‘savvy’ as their blogging progressed. Some of what the M&PR practitioners offered were considered useful in gaining readership, for example, giveaways for use in competitions on the blogs.

Some of the public relations and marketing practitioners were also still finding their way when it came to dealing with bloggers, often expecting ‘professionalism’ when dealing with bloggers who were working at home and balancing child-care
responsibilities with blogging. There was still confusion amongst many practitioners regarding sponsored posts, with their answers showing that it was not clear for all of them whether blogger posts should be ‘earned’ media (that is, gained only through dialogue and, perhaps, persuasion on their part) or paid media - content created by the blogger that is paid for by the sponsoring organisation. The issue of ‘control’ was a common theme, with M&PR practitioners recognising that it was difficult to exercise control without payment. For the public relations professionals, in particular, who were used to dealing with journalists, the bloggers presented a conundrum in terms of how to actually work with them to gain the result their clients/organisations wanted. There was a continuum of practitioners – some who had embraced payment as the only real option (with full disclosure) through to those who preferred to approach bloggers with offerings that were not limited to payment.

6.2 Bloggers’ interactions with M&PR practitioners

6.2.1 Bloggers as marketers

Organisations recognise the power of bloggers as on-line ‘marketers’ of ideas and products. This is evident from previous literature, mostly from the USA (Gillin, 2008; Stansberry, 2015; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005; Woods, 2005), and it was also apparent in this study. As detailed in the study, bloggers also used strategies and tactics often found in marketing and public relations text books, sometimes intuitively, to market their blog to their readers (and in some cases to the M&PR practitioners themselves).

While bloggers are not ‘professional’ marketers, their use of marketing techniques appears to be sophisticated. As an example, the Kelly (2001) model of stewardship has been applied to public relations both conceptually and empirically, and the findings of the present study suggest that the model may be used intuitively by some bloggers. According to Waters (2011, p. 129) “Stewardship provides four distinct relationship cultivation strategies that have been shown to impact public relations programming: reciprocity, responsibility, reporting, and relationship nurturing. These four strategies promote ethical behaviour by practitioners and their organizations.”

Bloggers in this study appear to practise all four of these strategies of the stewardship model in varying depth, particularly the strategies of reciprocity and relationship nurturing. For example, bloggers practise reciprocity by thanking readers for comments
and regularly replying to comments on their blogs and on other social media pages. They link up to other blogs regularly and often have guest posts on their blogs from other bloggers. Many bloggers have competitions for their readers to win. The bloggers show responsibility including being involved with charitable organisations and publishing their contact details. Their responsibility regarding ethics will be further discussed under research question 3. While ‘reporting’ could be seen as a corporate term and more relevant to business, bloggers are constantly ‘reporting’ their feelings and activities in each blog post. If they travel or go to an event they will report to their readers with videos, photos and text. Following major conferences, such as the Digital Parents Conference and ProBlogger, the conference organisers have lists with links to any bloggers’ posts about their thoughts and experiences of the conferences.

Finally, the bloggers nurture relationships by regularly posting photos and comments on their Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and other pages and through other community strengthening initiatives such as the ‘flog your blog’ Fridays and other hashtag challenges and dares. They meet up in real life at events (often sponsored by brands) and then post photos of themselves with each other. Some of the more commercially successful bloggers have their own events where they invite readers to real-life seminars, meals or even trips away. For some of these commercially successful bloggers, these events involve sharing their knowledge, either on blogging or their area of expertise.

It is therefore argued in this research that the bloggers, as ‘pro-am’ marketers and public relations practitioners, are (if the M&PR practitioners take the time to listen) able to teach the professional ‘experts’ a more authentic style of stewardship and relationship marketing. By following bloggers’ approach to stewardship with their readers, M&PR practitioners could gain expertise. The concept of ‘pro-am’ has been discussed by Bruns (2010) in relation to the differences and similarities between citizen journalists (the bloggers’ closely related cousins) and professional journalists. Indeed, the pro-am ‘revolution’ was even discussed and foretold over 10 years ago by Leadbeater and Miller (2004), although not referencing blogging. More discussion on the question of professionalism is below.

6.2.2 Professionalism
M&PR practitioners’ general expectation of ‘professionalism’ from bloggers (as found in the research) is still a vexed question, given that blogging mothers include individuals spanning mostly hobbyists to commercially savvy entrepreneurs (or ‘mumpreneurs’ as they are sometimes termed). It has been argued by Petersen (2014, p. 277) that mum bloggers “engage in the characteristics of professional communicators, model egalitarian professionalism, employ an ethic of care that combats elitism, and challenge the field to include their work, from the home and through new media, as professional.” However, although most mum bloggers employ marketing and professional elements in their practice, this research has found that they still occupy a zone not yet fully accepted as completely professional by all the marketing practitioners they deal with. The paradox is that the mum bloggers’ ‘playbor’ (play/labour) (Scholz, 2012) is considered important by M&PR practitioners for the opportunities it can offer for brand promotion and commercial influence of key target publics. The ‘inane patter’ described by one EI may be precisely what is appealing about the MBs’ exchanges for their readers.

When searching for a term that describes the paradoxical nature of the bloggers’ work/play in relation to commerce and interactions with brand representatives, the concept of the pink-collar precariat has resonance. This term combines ideas from two areas of discussion related to labour – pink collar ghettos, and pracarity. The concept of ‘pink-collar’ ghettos for women in certain professions has been discussed since the 1980s (see Bryant, 1985, for example). Within public relations, Cline et al. (1986), authors of The Velvet Ghetto, found that women (who make up the majority of workers in public relations) were more likely to perceive themselves as technicians rather than managers and their salaries were generally lower than men’s, even at similar levels of age and experience. Decades later, women’s salaries continue to be lower on average than men’s in the profession of public relations, hence the term pink-collar ghetto (Burrowes, 2014). It could be argued that Anglo-Saxon, middle-class, heterosexual, Australian mothers (generally, with some exceptions, the main group of bloggers interviewed and surveyed for this research) are generally not the group that would first come to mind based on Standing’s (2011, 2014) notion of the precariat. When first reviewing Standing’s concept of the precariat his writing sparks images of disaffected, (perhaps male) European youth, with a reasonably high education, protesting the global world order at various stand-ins and sit-ins across the globe, but with no access to full-time employment (as seen on the cover of his two books). However, Standing’s
description of the precariat as an emerging class characterised by chronic insecurity, “detached from the old norms of labour and the working class” (2014, p. 1) could also describe many of the bloggers, albeit with the security their partner’s wage may afford. Further, Standing argues that the precariat is also the first class in history “expected to endure labour and work at a lower level than the schooling it typically acquires” (2011, p. vii). As found in the context section of this research, young Australian mothers are generally better educated, with higher degrees than their male counterparts, but the vast majority, because of multiple factors including cultural expectations related to gender roles, work in part-time, casual labour, with blogging just one example. This is one possible interpretation, given that this study is largely qualitative and cannot be generalised.

Blogging, as an endeavour (for some turned into a way to earn money) meets the criteria of precarity described by Miller (2010) who argued that cultural producers’ work is precarious and that those in the labour of culture experience precarity. Miller contended “We inhabit a world where flexibility is the mega-sign of affluence, and precariousness its flipside: one person’s calculated risk is another’s burden of labour, inequality is represented as the outcome of a moral test, and the young are supposed to regard insecurity as an opportunity rather than a constraint” (2010, p. 97). Replace the word ‘young’ with mum bloggers, and the quote could be describing the world of blogging for the participants in this research. For example, one of the bloggers’ comments that she “had to take the lousy stuff from PR people when starting out with a desire to make a career of blogging”, was indicative of her insecurity in the field. For many of the bloggers, their ‘flexibility’ to blog around their children also meant they had to spend time labouring on the blog at night or at other times when their children were asleep. Other bloggers’ comments that the commercially successful bloggers had worked hard and had ‘real passion’ showed their feeling that there was an expectation of hard labour to be equated with success.

6.2.3 Marketing as exchange or co-creation?

Social exchange theory (SET) is one concept that may have applicability in the as yet unclear ‘rules of engagement’ between bloggers and marketers or public relations practitioners. Even though SET has been developed as a theory since the 1920s (see
Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1925) and has spanned the disciplines of anthropology, social psychology and sociology, a limited number of studies have directly examined the exchange process known as the ‘black box’ of social exchange (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Social exchange involves interactions that produce obligations (Emerson, 1976). Foa and Foa’s (1975;1980) work suggest that six types of resources are used in exchange – love, status, information, money, goods and services. For the bloggers, we have seen that their activity can provide them with access to a community of friendship (if not love), information and some status. While status was not overtly mentioned as a motivational factor, the discussion of the ‘bigger bloggers’ shows that status often tended to accompany material success. For the marketers and public relations practitioners to successfully negotiate a mutually beneficial exchange (that is, for the practitioners to receive positive and amplified promotion of their organisation’s brand), the marketers need to offer the bloggers something beyond what is already available in the blogging community. To succeed in their organisational objectives related to blogger engagement, according to SET, the M&PR practitioners need to offer money, goods, services and/or status for the bloggers to be interested. Dialogue is simply not enough. Clearly, the M&PR practitioners involved in this study expected reciprocity from the bloggers. The expectation was often related to favourable story-telling related to a promoted brand on a blog in exchange for some reward.

The concept of co-creation in the marketing literature has some resonance with the findings discussed (see for example, Bharti et al., 2015; Füller, Mühlbacher, Matzler & Jawecki, 2009) in that bloggers are approached to create meaning around brands through their story-telling. However, co-creation in the literature often refers to consumers and organisations working together to produce a product, rather than market a product. While internet-based co-creation has been touted as ‘consumer empowerment’ (see, for example, Fuller et al., 2010), there is evidence to suggest that some companies use the process of co-creation simply to increase sales and potentially exploit bloggers. Two examples of ‘sin’ products marketed through internet ‘co-creation’ and engagement with bloggers reported in the academic literature include cigarettes and alcohol (see Freeman & Chapman, 2008; Uzunoğlu & Öksüz, 2012). In both instances these products were subject to laws that meant traditional advertising was now no longer an option for marketers. In the case of the alcohol, the marketers were operating in Turkey where there are strict rules limiting advertising of alcohol and in the case of the cigarettes, the internet campaign (through bloggers) was promoted in
countries where tobacco advertising was banned. During the course of the author’s own research, one blogger (a reformed alcoholic) lamented on her blog the fact that a public relations practitioner had approached her asking her to write a sponsored post on a spirits brand. When she said she would consider it for $1000 (jokingly) the practitioner said ‘yes’. However, the blogger turned the offer down. It is argued therefore, that the M&PR practitioners studied in this current research were not attempting to practise true co-creation but were grappling to find ways to promote their organisations by using blogger influence.

6.2.4 Social capital related to the interactions between MBs and M&PR practitioners

As discussed under motivations, many of the MBs interviewed began blogging to “connect” and as their blogging progressed they formed a sense of community with their readers and each other. The M&PR practitioners generally described this social capital as ‘influence’. The MBs’ ensuing increase in social capital – and hence their influence – is what appeals to the M&PR practitioners who are looking for ways to promote their brands and/or organisations.

As a relatively new practice, blogging is often still not always regarded by those in related communication ‘fields’ as legitimate (see earlier discussion in the context chapter regarding journalists’ antipathy towards bloggers). Therefore, Bourdieu’s (1969, 1986) concept of fields and incursions by less legitimate fields using social capital as a tool for legitimacy has relevance. The notion of a gradient of legitimacy in fields (with a new field such as blogging seen as less legitimate) is also evidenced by some of the comments from the EIs who showed a sense of frustration and/or amusement at times with some of the bloggers’ apparent lack of ‘professionalism’.

An extreme example of name calling occurred recently when the media editor for The Australian (Australia’s major, News Corp-owned, daily newspaper), Darren Davidson, described bloggers as parasites, after a person used a fake email address, pretending to be him, to contact senior media executives to gain a story. Davidson is quoted as saying: “It’s yet another example of why too much of the blogging environment is populated by parasites. A vast wasteland of low-end junk and meaningless, undifferentiated traffic based on endless recirculation and cheap social media tricks to game content aggregators and search engines” (Hayes, 2016). With circulation of major daily
newspapers falling and many (including senior) journalists being made redundant, partly due to the rise of other forms of online content (including blogs), it is little wonder journalists are lashing out at these new-ish kids on the media block.

However, the MBs’ high social capital (visible through blog comments, Twitter followers and Facebook likes, for example), particularly those with a larger readership, contributed to a sense of legitimacy and visibility M&PR practitioners recognised as impressive. This finding links back to Bourdieu’s (1969; 1986) original conceptualisation of social capital, including popularity amongst the people, which contributed to people’s legitimacy. The M&PR practitioners felt they could not afford to ignore these new influencers. Over the course of the research, those bloggers with large networks (social capital) were able to increase their ‘legitimacy’ - at least as prescribed by Bourdieu (1969) in his discussion of fields - through book publishing, freelance writing for paid publications and training others to be bloggers. While blogging is an initially solitary activity, it is the social capital gained through blogging that is important for bloggers to be viewed as legitimate by M&PR practitioners. Power is gained and the less legitimate, newer field becomes more legitimate.

However, as bloggers come onto the M&PR practitioners’ radars, they may incite envy from (some) other bloggers. This issue with social capital was discussed by Portes (1998) when he expanded on the ‘downsides’ of social capital (and group membership). Portes noted that belonging to a strong community may see some members having to conform, rather than rocking the boat, and some communities may hinder some members’ commercial/economic success because of the desire by individuals to adhere to group norms.

6.3 What are the major ethical issues surrounding blogging and do MBs and M&PR practitioners have differing viewpoints on these issues?

This research found that the most mentioned ethical issue surrounding blogging according to the MBs surveyed is the issue of (often undisclosed) paid posts buying the MBs’ opinion. However, as discussed in the findings, while the majority of bloggers surveyed wanted to be paid for mention or reviews of brands/products/services on their blogs, the majority also did not see any ethical issues relevant to blogging. This represents something of a paradox. It is clear that those who had concerns over ethics (30 per cent of those in the survey but only a small number of those interviewed) were
mainly concerned with the question of money, ‘transparency’ and their own interests and their readers’ interests. One of the few studies looking at bloggers’ ethics arrived at only four attributes of blogging ethics: truth telling, accountability, attribution and minimising harm (Cenite, Detenber, Koh, Lim, & Soon, 2009). While it could be argued that the question of sponsorship could be covered under the concept of ‘truth telling’, the actual scale items for truth telling used by Cenite et al. (2009) were not connected to payment for blog posts.

As has been explained in the literature review, the Federal Trade Commission in the US introduced product endorsement rulings for bloggers in 2009 to disclose any payments from companies for comment on a product or service. Therefore, it would be assumed that in the US bloggers would be clearer on their need to disclose compared with Australian bloggers. However, a recent study by Walden, Bortree and Distaso (2015) found that only a minority (11%) of bloggers in their survey of mostly male ‘tech/gadget’ bloggers had made any changes to their blogs after the ruling took effect. They also found that bloggers wished to control interactions with PR professionals and that they worried about their editorial independence. The bloggers in the US study may want the benefits that products reviews bring but not necessarily the downsides of editorial control. Waldren, Bortree and Distaso suggest that public relations professionals “remind bloggers to be open with readers” about any form of compensation and that social media has “made it easier for both parties in the organisation blog relationships to demonstrate transparency” (2015, p. 265). However, it could be argued that transparency has actually suffered and the ethical waters are even murkier than prior to the advent of social media.

6.3.1 Bloggers and their relationships with readers

The mum bloggers’ fear of annoying readers is echoed in the findings of Smith (2010) whose American study of bloggers found they expressed an obligation to readers, which might influence content. Smith’s bloggers were, like the Australian bloggers, not keen to ‘piss their readers off’, to paraphrase a colourful comment by one of Smith’s respondents. Similarly, Abidin and Ots (2015, p. 3) in their very recent article on bloggers based in Singapore found that “when starting to accommodate commercial brands and contents in blog posts, influencers are constantly at risk of breaching their contract of trust with their followers.” Abidin’s research in Singapore with influencers was conducted in a similar timeframe to this study in Australia. The comments of the
new blogger in this Australian study not wanting to turn down offers from the brands also echoed Smith’s (2010) observation that a willingness to engage with public relations practitioners evolved. He found that more experienced bloggers were less likely to be excited by public relations approaches or content.

6.4 Impact on the theories of public relations

The findings have implications for the theory of public relations. Public relations is focused on serving client and organisational interests (Van Ruler, 2005). However, if public relations is defined as a practice of dialogue and relationship management, what is the outcome when a major stakeholder (other than a customer, staff member or supplier) is concerned with a commercial and dialogic relationship? The majority of blogging mothers’ ethical concerns related to payment for writing posts. In the works of Botan (1997) and Kent and Taylor (2002) on general public relations ethics, the monetary aspect of relationships is given scant, if any, attention. The practical reality of commercial entities building relationships is that money is of central concern. The ideals of dialogue and relationship building are to be extolled but it appears that for a relationship to be of interest, many bloggers want cold, hard cash. The concept of ‘the uninvited brand’ (Fournier & Avery, 2011) has resonance – if brands want to be at the table, money may be the only way to be invited. In this case it may be the uninvited PR practitioner who must resort to efforts beyond dialogue or rhetoric to establish a relationship. For public relations theory on ethics to progress, academics need to acknowledge, as Fawkes (2012) has done that, particularly in the blogosphere, dialogue ethics must include an understanding of commercial negotiation. Similarly, Theunissen and Wan Noordin in their conceptual paper, argued that while dialogue “has potential value, it is no more ethical than or preferred to persuasion” (2012, p.11).

As Fawkes (2012) pointed out, the public relations literature has largely focused on the rational approach to ethical decision-making. Fawkes also suggested that academic work has generally been divided into the two camps of the ‘saintly’ normative view of public relations as dialogue and two-way communication, contrasted with the ‘sinner’ perspective of the practitioner acting in the client’s interests. Bowen (2004, 2013) has been a key proponent of the normative side, arguing for a Kantian or deontological approach, where “a rational duty to uphold universal moral principles” is followed (2013, p. 125). Bowen developed 15 ethical guidelines, using case studies of the ‘best’ and ‘worst’ practice within public relations social media practice.
While Bowen’s call for social media guidelines is to be lauded, the empirical evidence from this study shows current practice is not always following a Kantian approach and rationality is sometimes in short supply. Based on the evidence of ethical concerns from the bloggers, there is still an issue with unidentified sponsored posts. Indeed, one of the few other empirical studies to investigate public relations practitioners’ approach to ethics using a deontological framework (see Place, 2010), determined that practitioners found deontological decision-making models difficult to uphold. The reasons for this difficulty included the rushed, situational and constrained nature of PR work. Place (2010) also found that some practitioners did not even give ethics any thought.

Public relations professionals are “forging onward into uncharted territory, driven by trial and error, informal discourses and emerging industry practices to create new forms of social media regulation and etiquette” (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2015, p. 319).

While press-agentry is seen at the base and most primitive form of public relations in the Grunig model, for a large part of PR’s recent history it was (and continues to be for many) an important part of a practitioner’s role (Ewen, 1996; Andrew, 2006). Public relations workers’ ability to influence the influencers on behalf of organisations has been framed as relationship management by many scholars (see Sallot & Johnson, 2006), and payment for editorial content or other influence has generally been seen as unethical (see, for example Parsons, 2008). Relationships between public relations practitioners and journalists were often (and still are) the focus for public relations academics and practitioners when discussing a normative approach to dialogue and relationship building and there have been more than 200 studies on this topic (Macnamara, 2014c). Historically, in the recent past, and still today, public relations practitioners’ interactions with journalists and mainstream media were seen as about building relationships, certainly, but with one clear objective - to gain positive coverage for an organisation. While mainstream public relations thought has viewed payment to journalists as unethical, there has existed a parallel universe (only touched on in US and Australian textbooks and skimmed over in university degrees) where payment for editorial, advertorial and ‘junkets’ (free travel and gifts) have increased the likelihood of media coverage for a client. For example, in the undergraduate text, This is PR (Newsom, Turk, & Kruckeberg, 2012), under the title ‘Money Matters’, it was acknowledged that free accommodation and other benefits are often expected by journalists.
Of course, journalists historically have been paid to write by their employers so often do not expect payment from outside sources. The female bloggers who were interviewed, are members of what could be called the ‘pink-collar’ precariat class, situated on a grey-shaded scale between hobbyist and professional. They are also part of a shift in the media landscape and are challenging the status quo for public relations practitioners (who normally don’t pay for coverage) by expecting to be compensated for their labour on behalf of organisations. Large public relations firms such as Edelman have had to ‘rethink’ payment to influencers in order to continue to be relevant. Meanwhile, blogger agencies (often run by former communications practitioners) have now emerged to help the most influential bloggers get the compensation they believe they deserve. The findings from this research have been echoed in Singapore where an ethnography of commercial bloggers and Instagrammers by Abidin for her doctoral thesis (see Abidin and Ots, 2015) showed similar concerns from the (mostly female) bloggers/influencers she studied.

In Australia and New Zealand the blogosphere is still largely an unregulated space but there are now Federal Trade Commission laws in the US prohibiting undisclosed payments for blog and other online comment (see Patterson, 2009). However, while it should follow that the practice of accepting payment without disclosure has stopped in the USA, recent research has shown that it has not changed most bloggers’ practice of disclosure (see Walden et al., 2015).

The rise of the pink-collar precariat bloggers, the focus of this study, whose writing, photography and other forms of media production on their blogs are influencing women’s purchasing, health and other serious decisions means that public relations may need to critically examine its role as the boundary spanner for organisations seeking to influence these influencers. Bloggers are only wishing to enter into dialogue (let alone an on-going relationship) with practitioners if there is a benefit for themselves or their readers. As the empirical evidence has suggested, the benefits often include money, prestige or a way of increasing readership. It is argued here that for public relations to grow and mature as a profession, it needs to face not only the ghosts of its recent theoretical and practical past, but also the complex realities of its present. Theories that gloss over commercial realities, while noble in formulation, may be doomed to fail in the application when the stakeholders that they purport to be about are developing new
forms of ‘relationship management’ – a relationship in which they do not wish to be managed but in which they play a significant part.

6.5 The liminal context – Are mum bloggers empowered or vulnerable?

After answering the three research questions, the following section discusses the findings relevant to the concept of the bloggers being empowered prosumers versus vulnerable consumers in a liminal state. The study used the lens of these two contrasting views as a way of exploring all the research questions. It is appropriate to now consider these over-arching themes. As discussed in the literature review, there is a paradox of blogging mothers being both viewed as empowered consumers/producers (particularly in the marketing literature related to blogging) but also potentially liminal (and therefore potentially vulnerable) consumers. From a theoretical perspective, this study explored and expanded on this apparent paradox. Through the interviews, blog analysis and survey a complex picture of blogging mothers was formed. This study provided some evidence of blogging mothers being in a liminal, and in some cases vulnerable state, particularly when they started blogging, as described in their reflections to the interviewer.

The concept of liminality (Turner, 1969) has been applied to new mothers in previous work (Capellini & Yen, 2016; Madge & O'Connor, 2005) and has been found to have resonance and applicability in this study. A key aspect of Turner’s work on liminality was that those going through a similar experience between two statuses will often share a sense of communitas. Turner’s concept of communitas, an unstructured, egalitarian world, has found to be pertinent, given the strong bonds, sense of connection and feeling of belonging that the bloggers described. Communitas experienced during a liminal state, means that people of different age, rank and kinship have a community spirit, according to Turner (1969) and this has been seen to be true for at least some of the bloggers. Turner (1969, p. 193) presciently, could be describing the encounters the bloggers have experienced in the following quote: “The very flexibility and mobility of social relations in modern industrial societies, however, may provide better conditions for the emergence of existential communitas, even if only in countless and transient encounters, than any previous forms of social order.”

One of the bloggers interviewed discussed how important friendships were that were gained only as a result of blogging. As an Australian residing in the US, she said that
she was astounded, as a left-leaning, small ‘I’ liberal voter, to have formed a friendship with a gun-using Republican through their love of blogging. The bloggers, as was found in the analysis of blogs, shared a special language (such as describing ‘in real life’ as IRL) and special rituals of, for example, dressing the same way for an Instagram challenge or sharing photos with a meaning only common to the group through special hashtags on specific days. In this way, the MBs were developing Lambert’s (2015) ‘intimacy capital’, enabling rewarding and safe exchanges within the group. These challenges were often initiated and led by what the bloggers interviewed described as ‘the bigger bloggers’ – essentially the higher priestesses of the blogging phenomenon.

While skydiving and blogging may not appear to have a commonality, academic research into the high-risk activity of skydiving shows that, here too, a sense of communitas was extremely important for the skydivers as they progressed in their sport (see Celsi, Rose & Leigh, 1993). Similar to the bloggers, gaining new skills, a sense of personal identity and communitas were of utmost importance to the skydivers who saw themselves (as some bloggers do) as slightly outside of societal norms.

The sense of Turner’s (1969) communitas is true, for the bloggers, up to a point. As has been demonstrated, when discussing motivations amongst bloggers, there is a sense of egalitarianism and kinship. However, if all bloggers are equal, some are perhaps more equal than others. Some bloggers discussed their desire to increase statistics or improve their earnings and there was also a sense of a hierarchy, with the term “bigger bloggers” used to describe those bloggers who had gained larger followings and monetised their blog. References to the blogging community feeling like high school and some evidence of “bitchiness” from bloggers meant that while there was certainly support and connection to be gained from blogging, there were also the realities of competitiveness which cropped up, just as it does in real-life communities. Related to the concept of communitas is the idea of the blogs as a ‘third place’. The theory of the third place was originally conceptualised as a great, good place to be by Oldenburg and Brisset (1982) for people to come together as a community. A third place is beyond work and home and is defined as “a public setting accessible to its inhabitants and appropriated by them as their own” (Oldenburg & Brisset, 1982, p. 270). As discussed in the literature review, Oldenburg and Brisset (1982) argued that participation in a third place provides people with a large measure of their sense of wholeness and distinctiveness. The notion of the internet (and various forms of social media within the internet) as a virtual third place has now been taken up by researchers across disciplines (see Soukup, 2006).
Soukup argued that: “Potentially, digital technology can provide a bridge to a time that has passed – a time when people felt more intrinsically connected to political and social life within their local community (2006, p. 438)”. For many of the mum bloggers, their blogs and the blogging community has connected them with each other and given them a voice, a sense of belonging to a community of practice and a place beyond the confines of the home and traditional notions of work. In all phases of the research - the interviews, survey and analysis of blogs - the sense of community was a common theme as was the belief that generally blogging elicited a generally positive experience. The blog-created community is not necessarily local (as was envisaged by Oldenburg and Brisset in their original conceptualisation of a real world space) but includes both geographically close and distant participants (for example bloggers in the same town, city, state or country, or those who have similar interests but are geographically distant). Given the constraints of being able to be in a real-world third place with small children, (and the 21st-century isolation of many mothers of younger children) the blogs (and other social media relevant to their blogging) offer the blogging mothers a virtual third place to have a voice and help each other. Crucially, though, the process of blogging also offers an avenue for economic success.

Certainly Oldenburg’s characteristics of third places all equate with the general tone of most blogs including the following:

- Conversation is the main activity
- They are accessible
- As a home away from home they have regulars
- The mood is playful

(Oldenburg, 1998)

However, as much as the blog spaces could be seen as ‘levellers’ (another characteristic described by Oldenburg), with the common experience of motherhood discussed and celebrated, they are not always neutral territory, as contentious issues can arise and marketisation creates hierarchy and competitiveness.

This research has shown that the blogging space is not essentially a bridge to a time that has passed, as hoped for by Soukup (2006), but a reflection of the current social landscape in Australia, with its aspects of materialism and conspicuous consumption. Where the blogging mothers gather and influence each other (and their non-blogging
readers), the marketers have followed and influenced both the content and character of
the blogs.

The sense of communitas is an important motivator for many bloggers, but
marketisation of blogs is a contributing factor to an accompanying sense of
competitiveness and alienation for some bloggers once they become involved. There is
a sense, for those involved in blogging, of blogs being slightly outside the mainstream.
The sense of ‘us against them’ and an existential communitas, particularly in relation
and contrast to mainstream media, was highlighted by responses from bloggers to
backlash from mainstream media directed at bloggers, for example following former
Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s courting of (mostly mum) female bloggers,
uncovered during the analysis of blogs and also reported in the context chapter. The
overwhelming feeling of bloggers, found in this study’s survey, that blogs were more of
an authoritative source than mainstream media, shows the bloggers’ feelings of being
slightly apart from, and more authentic than the media run as large organisations.

Blogging has given ‘fame’ and influence to individuals who may not have found it on
other platforms and ultimately the bloggers are aware that their readers (and marketers)
are a major factor in their “success”, particularly if they wish to pursue monetisation.
Turner’s (2006) conceptualisation of ‘the demotic turn’ also has applicability here.
Writing largely before the rise of influential online bloggers, Instagrammers and
vloggers, Turner referred to the increasing visibility of the ‘ordinary person’ as “they
turn themselves into media content through celebrity culture, reality TV, DIY websites,
talk radio and the like.” (Turner, 2006, p. 153). Turner argued that while media
representation may have broadened this it did not mean that the media was now more
democratic. Working largely outside the mainstream media machine, bloggers could be
seen as a ‘democratic’ form of prosumer power, but as we have seen, there are still
barriers to commercial success that hinge on linkages to commercial brands, developing
and maintaining relationships with public relations and marketing practitioners (as the
brand intermediaries), unseen work in maintaining and promoting the bloggers’ own
personal brand and blog and compromises with regards to what is written and promoted
on the various platforms, including the blog. The myth of the media as the centre of
society (see Couldry, 2003) has certainly been shaken by bloggers’ influence as there is
no longer a simple delineation between ‘media people’ and ‘ordinary people’. Blogging
could also be viewed as a ‘meritocracy’ with those bloggers with the skills and tenacity
potentially able to make a living from their blogging. The complexity of commercial liaison shows that it is only the rare blogger who can make a living from blogging.

The term ‘adjustment’ was used specifically by some bloggers when describing the period when they started blogging, often having left full-time work, moved to a new area and/or been at home for the first time with a baby. Mental health issues were also discussed openly by some of the participants with the researcher. The concept of liminal vulnerability applied to mothers as consumers was discussed by the VOICE group (2010) and is echoed in this research. The participants for the interviews in this study were predominantly white, middle class and married, with husbands in full-time employment. Only two of the interview participants were single parents and only a small minority were recent immigrants to Australia. None of those interviewed identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent. However, despite the participants’ relevant affluence, their adjustment to the demands of parenthood was very real.

Ironically, from this study’s perspective, the VOICE study optimistically labels blogs by mums as ‘nonmarket’ spaces and suggests that “various mothering blogs have been challenging the sanitized mothering images perpetuated by marketers” (2010, p. 393). This study has found that many blogs by mothers are no longer ‘nonmarket’ spaces. Advertising, paid posts, paid reviews, reader competitions for prizes and other permutations of brand promotion are now commonplace on Australian blog sites by mums, particularly those with higher readerships. Many mum bloggers are having to (and seek willingly to) interact with marketers and public relations practitioners and make decisions about whether or not to promote products and services on a (sometimes) daily basis and how much to charge for these promotions. The blogs studied by the author have become market spaces even if they were initially intended to be community and personal spaces.

However, while mum bloggers may begin as liminal and vulnerable consumers turned producers, the bloggers in this study were seen to evolve and as their experience and skills grew many of them were able to more confidently deal with the approaches of marketers representing commercial interests. In turn, the bloggers often became marketers themselves, using many of the accepted marketing strategies and tactics to
increase readership and, for some, increase their income. Mum bloggers, it could be argued, evolved and became empowered through the process of blogging, (while simultaneously becoming experienced mothers as their children grew) even if they decided not to pursue monetisation of their blog. The theme of evolution was echoed in Smith’s (2010) qualitative interview study of a small group of 10 bloggers in the United States from a variety of different genres. Smith observed that bloggers’ willingness to engage with public relations practitioners evolved. He also found that more experienced bloggers were less likely to be excited by public relations approaches or content.

In the course of this study it became evident that instead of resolving the paradox of the vulnerable/empowered prosumer mum blogger, and answering the either/or debate, the findings supported evidence that a paradox exists and should be embraced. The concept of the vulnerable empowered blogger has resonance with work by feminist/communications scholar Dubriwny (2012) who used the term and theoretical construct of the ‘vulnerable empowered women’ in her book discussing women’s health in the post-feminist 21st century. Dubriwny brings her feminist lens to women’s health, and in one of her essays she focuses on one of the original and arguably most powerful influencer/prosumers, American blogger Dooce, (Heather Armstrong) and her depiction of post-natal depression in her book. Dubriwny explains her concept thus:

The vulnerable empowered woman…is one who appears to have some agency and power to shape her own life. She is, in more ways than one, a thoroughly post-feminist woman who, through her various practices of risk management and consumption, functions to support a variety of neoliberal power structures. (Dubriwny 2012, p. 9)

During the final write up of this research, two examples of the vulnerable empowered blogger, emerged in the popular media. In Australia, teen Instagrammer Essena O'Neill publicly ‘quit’ social media in late October 2015, “describing it as “contrived perfection made to get attention”, documenting the work behind the seemingly effortless and ‘beautiful’ posts, meanwhile calling for others to quit social media” (Hunt, 2015). The aforementioned Dooce, described as the Queen of the Mommy Bloggers in the Guardian and New York Times, also announced that she was quitting blogging (or at least quitting the paid posts) in 2015. Her reasons included the need to please brands in her stories, the increasing nastiness and demands of (some) readers, and the relentless nature of the business, particularly in relation to sponsored posts (Ronan, 2015).
New York Times article, Dooce describes the evolution of her working on paid posts…
“Starting out as someone who didn’t do any of that, it was hard for my readers to accept sponsored posts. There was a lot of complaining. Then for me, it also got to a point when I was like, I don’t want to dress my kids up in Old Navy clothes. I was like, What the fuck am I doing? This is not how I want to spend my time. Mommy bloggers are going to come after me with knives for saying that. I love Old Navy, but eventually, it was like, Really, you want me to do another post?” (Ronan, 2015). Reflecting back on her blogging which has now spanned 14 years, and asked about the term ‘mommy blogger’, Armstrong said: “I find the term extraordinarily dismissive. The problem is that it stuck, so I’ve embraced it. We pioneered an industry. Thousands of women were making really good salaries for years in writing about what is happening inside their homes with their kids. I love it when people ask, “What’s the point of a mommy blog?” This is how we connect, communicate, heal. The internet saved my life. Hands down. The only way I got through my postpartum depression was by writing about it and talking with other women who’d gone through the same thing.”

Ironically, given her antipathy towards sponsored posts, Armstrong will now be consulting to brands on how to work with and market to mothers, thus using the skills gained through her blogging to help the marketers (Ronan, 2015). Armstrong’s conversion from blogger to consultant to brands is not an isolated case, with bloggers interviewed for this research making the transition, some coming originally from a professional background outside the marketing sphere. Similarly, other high profile blogging mums in Canada and the USA have gone on to work as consultants or in-house for major multinationals such as Nestle, Disney and McCain Food (Krashinsky, 2014).

The relentless and often invisible, behind the scene labour of blogging described in the interviews, while often depicted as something that can be fitted in and around the needs of family, in particular children, reflects the current Australian accepted gender roles of mothers working part-time while being the primary carers of children, with fathers generally working full-time. Whether part-time ‘daddy bloggers’ feel the same demands may be a topic for future research. A recent article by Duffy and Hund (2015), focused on fashion bloggers, argued that ‘bloggers create a notion of work that doesn’t seem like work as labour and leisure blend seamlessly together’ (p. 9). The same could be said for mum bloggers. Duffy and Hund contended that (female) fashion bloggers are tied to the
capitalist system which perpetuates narrow constructs of femininity. The notion of ‘playbor’ has also been coined to convey the internet as both factory and playground (Scholz, 2012), and the blogosphere, while offering increased access and participation still has a hierarchy as some of the ‘bigger bloggers’ as they are termed, rise to commercial success through a combination of labour and sponsorship by brands.

This research argues that those Australian mum bloggers who have encountered approaches from brands are vulnerable empowered prosumers and the evolution of their blogging and the blogging landscapes also mirrors the Australian materialistic, market-driven economy. While mum blogs were initially seen as reflections of ‘real’ motherhood, and a way for mothers to genuinely connect (as suggested in the VOICE, 2010 article), the blogging mothers’ relationship with ‘uninvited brands’ (see Fournier & Avery, 2011), through paid posts, brand ambassadorships and sponsorship deals, ensure that commercial interests are intertwined in the blogging (and reading) mothers’ sense of community and identity.

However, this research found that not all blogging mothers are motivated to earn money from their blog but as they gain readers and are approached by marketers this evolution towards monetisation of the blog often occurred. One well-known blogger, Eden Riley, (winner of the best Australian blog in 2011) decided against writing sponsored posts or being a brand ambassador (while still taking banner advertising) for commercial interests. Originally part of Australia’s first major blogger-brand agency, Riley still works and writes for a not-for-profit charity she believes in and takes banner advertising but she is no longer part of the agency.
6.6  Implications for theory – a summary and reflection

6.6.1  Motivations

Any theory related to motivations for social media usage must recognise the commercial imperative for at least some bloggers who wish to be compensated by brand representatives for any relationships. The motivation to ‘make money’ has been (with some exceptions) largely ignored in most literature related to blogging. However, the distinction between the personal and professional blog is arbitrary and misleading.

6.6.2  The nature of exchange between bloggers and M&PR practitioners

The relationship between bloggers and brand representatives is complex, but, social exchange theory gives us a way of seeing that bloggers expect an exchange for their efforts on behalf of brands. For most bloggers, the expectation is for some form of payment, product or prestige. Bloggers are not professionals in the traditional sense, but their particular skill-set means they are often intuitively practising the theoretical marketing and public relations approaches of relationship marketing, dialogue and stewardship. While public relations theory offers normative approaches such as dialogue and two-way symmetry for the profession (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Pearson 1989; Botan 1997; Kent & Taylor, 2002), the study has found that control is often an imperative for many practitioners. The concept of co-creation of brands and brand meaning has been found to often be a manipulative process rather than true co-creation. Paradoxically, it is the non-professionals – the bloggers -- who seem to be practising a more ‘true’ approach to dialogue and relationship building with their stakeholders than the marketers and public relations people themselves.

6.6.3  Ethical issues

The findings related to the motivations of bloggers and their relationships with marketers and public relations practitioners feed into the final research question of ethics. Ethical practice for both bloggers and practitioners has not been found to follow a deontological, rational process but is based on an evolving space where rules are not easy to come by. The bloggers, this research argues, are a ‘pink-collar precariat’, whose playbor is of value to the boundary spanners for organisations – marketers and public relations practitioners. Without a union or professional body behind them, the bloggers do not have professional ‘codes’ to help them navigate ethical questions. Often, the question of ethics is discussed by bloggers on their own pages, as comments on other
bloggers’ sites or through other social media forums. In practice, bloggers adopt practices on a scale with a wide variety of permutations, from disclosing all forms of ‘sponsorship’, including gifting of products or services with statements on posts and under a particular tab on their blogsite, through to no disclosure of any forms of gifting or payment.

6.6.4  Vulnerable empowered bloggers

Finally, bloggers are both vulnerable and empowered prosumers. The research found evidence for a significant proportion of bloggers being in a liminal phase and over time their blogging practice helped them move through this liminality and evolve. While liminality’s related concept of communitas was evident for bloggers (as discussed under motivations), the communitas is not without its commercial and marketised aspects, making the ‘third place’ one which mirrors Australia’s current gender roles and materialism and not simply a utopian ‘great, good place’ to be.

6.6.5  Reflection: New ‘word order’ required

Reflecting on the terms used to describe mum bloggers and their blogging throughout this chapter it is clear that many of these terms are blends of seemingly opposite constructs. For example, describing the bloggers’ activity – what they actually do – the term ‘playbor’ is used, a blend of play and labour (Scholtz, 2014). While some of the bloggers felt they got deep personal enjoyment from their blogging, very few described it in this research as a ‘hobby’. There was a sense of purpose beyond their desire to blog. The struggle to describe blogging and bloggers with our current language shows the change in the new world order of social media which, it is suggested here, requires a ‘new word order’ (with acknowledgement to McKie, 2016 and Farrell, 2001) to give us the ability to think beyond old bifurcations of professional and hobbyist, ethical and unethical (see Fawkes, 2012) and play and work (to name some). Sheth and Solomon (2014), discussing the changes the digital world have made to our own self-identity and recognising Belk’s (1998) seminal paper on the extended self, observed three crucial domains in which the traditional boundaries between self/not self increasingly have blurred. They proposed that these three areas are the blurring of boundaries between producer and consumer, the blurring between online and offline and the blurring of body and technology. The figure below represents this blurring across three spaces as discussed in Chapter 3.
Figure 6.2 shows the suggestion that a blurring of boundaries and fusions created in the blogosphere have gone beyond Sheth and Soloman’s (2014) original blurring of producer/consumer, offline/online and body/technology to also include play/labour, amateur/professional, vulnerable/empowered, individual/community and precariat/privileged. Indeed, expanding on Sheth and Solomon’s (2014) ‘boundary fusions’ of the digital self, we can see that these also include the following.
6.7 Implications for practice

6.7.1 Implications for practitioners in public relations and marketing

This research has implications for public policy, as the practice of disclosed and undisclosed payment for blog posts appears to be an issue with further exploration and with significant ethical implications. The results relate to the stakeholder or ‘prosumer’ point of view and some respondents had given serious and considered thought to the areas of ethical concern they face. As public relations practitioners and marketers grapple with how to work with the ‘new influencers’ this research provides an insight into the opinions of the bloggers and other stakeholders. The thesis attempts to address the issues raised by Gioia (1999) in the stakeholder literature, aiming to represent the complex social, economic and organisational realities managers face. It has also responded to Macnamara’s (2010) call for further research into ethics in social media and the issue of control.

Codes of ethics and guidelines/regulations for social media are still a grey area, although there has been more focus on this since the research commenced in 2012. Developments that have occurred in that time include a release in 2013 of Social Advertising Best Practice Guidelines by the Interactive Advertising Bureau Australia (IABA). The guidelines discussed ‘best practice’ around what the bureau describes as
‘paid social advertising’, including sponsored blog posts, sponsored tweets and sponsored Facebook posts. The IABA guide states that best practice, related to sponsored blogs, was

- Sponsored blog posts should be identified as a sponsored feature
- The client should brief the bloggers about the product being covered in the post but the blogger should maintain independence over the final content and positive or negative feedback
- The client should set clear expectations with the blogger about whether they need to review reactions and/or comments on the sponsored post.

(IABA, 2013)

The IABA is described as the peak industry body for online advertising and its decision to publish the guidelines is one example of the increased blurring of lines between advertising, public relations and marketing.

Meanwhile, the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) broadened its definition of advertising to include marketing communications and, from its guidelines, includes:

“any material which is published or broadcast using any medium or any activity which is undertaken by, or on behalf of an advertiser or marketer,” and over which the advertiser or marketer has a reasonable degree of control, and that draws the attention of the public in a manner calculated to promote or oppose directly or indirectly a product, service, person, organisation or line of conduct.”

Interestingly, the AANA guidelines stated that Excluded Advertising or Marketing Communications means labels or packaging for products, public relations communications (corporate or consumer) and related activities. Given that blogger outreach often comes under the guide of public relations communications and the notion of control is still questionable, these guidelines create more questions than they answer (AANA), 2014).
The Communications Council, another peak Australian advertising, marketing and (recently) public relations body, has a best practice guide/code of conduct for social media. This guide is worthwhile but it does not focus explicitly on the issue related to sponsored posts. At the time of writing, the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) appears to have as yet not released guidelines for practitioners specifically related to organisations and sponsored social media, including blogs. In June 2014, leading public relations academic, Professor Macnamara, argued in a cross-post for the Conversation and Mumbrella that so-called “native advertising” or embedded content, including paid online posts, comments and reviews was a media credibility crisis in waiting (Macnamara, 2014b).

The current Public Relations Institute of Australia code of ethics states that: Members shall be prepared to identify the source of funding of any public communication they initiate or for which they act as a conduit (“Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) About Us,”).

If public relations practitioners are to be the boundary spanners between bloggers and organisations/brands, and most bloggers want compensation to write about brands, then issues relating to the current code of ethics need to be further explored. Similarly, many traditional public relations definitions view public relations as a management function which seeks to further the organisation’s interests (see, for example, Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2006; Heath & Coombs, 2006). Given the empirical results from this research, perhaps it is time to honestly review whether or not public relations is always about true dialogue with stakeholders.

A recent synthesis of public relations research in social media by Wang (2015) did not contain any specific mentions of ethical issues. It reported a lack of theoretical frameworks and a dominance of quantitative methods but also, tellingly, described most of the research as from an organisational viewpoint including online relationship cultivations strategies, organisation-public relationships and dialogic theory. Meanwhile, research continues to develop which focuses on the benefit to be gained from blogger outreach, rather than true ‘dialogic’ potential.

An article from (major international PR consultancy) Edelman’s website, titled Paid Media — A Change of Heart (and quoted in Bowen’s 2013 article on social media ethics) is a telling indication of the commercial imperative for public relations
professionals to respond to the “unmatched opportunity” of paid comment by bloggers. Edelman writes:

I have been one of the hard-liners opposing any blurring of the lines between advertising and PR. I am now prepared to change my position. I still believe that we have a primary task of proposing stories to journalists and bloggers. But there is a vital emerging business to be done in content creation for brands….Those of us in PR have to change the game. Let’s recognize that the digital platform for mainstream and hybrid media is an unmatched opportunity to offer hundreds of visual images, a different mentality about contributing comments, a high propensity to share quality material and a short-form mode for absorption of information. Why not take on the chance to make content the basis of advertising? Ads are inherently more effective when you have something to say. And we are better than any other marketing services sector at knowing what is newsworthy at any moment in time. (Edelman, 2013)

Underlying this comment from Edelman is recognition that bloggers often expect payment to write about brands and that for PR people to stay relevant they have to consider this new dynamic and change their approach to payment for content. The blurring of boundaries between public relations, advertising and marketing (and the turf wars between them) have been acknowledged by various authors for decades, as far back as the 1970s (see Kotler & Mindak, 1978), and more recently (see, for example, Bourne, 2015; Hutton, 2010; McKie & Willis, 2012). The impact of social media has only heightened the tensions and created new job titles, whole new departments, new consultancies and new university courses as public relations attempts to stake a claim for legitimacy as both a profession and an academic discipline.

During the final stages of this thesis, following examination and being passed with minor revisions, the expectations related to sponsored posts in Australia shifted again. The Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) has stated that from March 1, 2017, social media influencers have to clearly label their sponsored content (Purtill, 2017). However, the association is self-regulating and the rules only apply to the brands themselves – not to bloggers, so in some ways, not much has changed. The Advertising Standards Board can ask for the “ad” to be taken down. But given the fast moving nature of the internet, this is not really an appropriate solution. It is also acknowledged that there is still a grey area over who has control of the content, the influencer or the
brand. With advertising, marketing and public relations practitioners all claiming responsibility for influencer outreach, it is unclear which profession should be ultimately responsible for considering the ethical ramifications of blogger-brand interaction.

6.7.2 Implications for bloggers

This research also has implications for bloggers themselves, both individually and collectively. Given that blogging has been described as a favourite hobby (see Bronstein, 2013), semi-professional (Abidin & Ots, 2015), and a creative self-enterprise (Duffy & Hund, 2015) it appears that there are many shades of grey when it comes to describing what bloggers actually do. The difficulty in ‘categorising’ bloggers is noted by Pihl (2013) who discusses bloggers having attributes of both personal and corporate brands. Pihl used language like “borderland” and “blurring” to describe bloggers’ identity as both personal and corporate brands. He also notes their evolution and adaptation to the commercial sphere.

Earlier research attempted to delineate bloggers into professional and non-professional, (Cenite et al., 2009), but this either/or delineation is no longer helpful and does not represent the nuanced picture of bloggers’ relationship with work, marketers or their readers. However, while bloggers are of value as influencers because of their image as being “just like us”, the reality is that marketers are often expecting them to be “professional” and readers are also expecting a level of ethical behaviour. The following decision path is proposed, based on the finding discussed in this thesis. The decision box is not proposed as an ‘easy fix’ for bloggers. Both bloggers and the marketers and public relations practitioners have a hand in what is promoted via the blogging platform. Therefore, the blogger decision box could just as easily be used by marketers when considering what products to promote to bloggers. Given the findings of this research, it is proposed that bloggers may find a decision path useful when deciding (or not) to write about and/or photograph brands, products, services or organisations. From an ethical viewpoint, the amber and red zones could be considered unethical spaces which would need to be reviewed.
### Figure 6.3 The bloggers’ decision box: A guide for bloggers’ decision making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Used by blogger</th>
<th>Not used by blogger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product is used by blogger and is considered to be useful or helpful for readers</td>
<td>Product is NOT used by blogger but is considered to be useful or helpful for readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The green zone</strong></td>
<td><strong>The yellow zone</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product is used by blogger but is NOT considered useful for readers</td>
<td>Product is NOT used by blogger and is NOT considered useful or helpful for readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The amber zone</strong></td>
<td><strong>The red zone</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.7.3 Implications for not-for-profit organisations

The study has implications for organisations seeking to support the health and well-being of parents and their children. It has been recognised that bloggers are influencers of other (perhaps non-blogging) mothers. As has been outlined, bloggers have in recent years been targeted by commercial entities seeking to influence parents as consumers. For organisations such as the World Health Organisation, non-government organisations and Government State and Federal health departments, with concern for parental and child welfare, there is potential to reach out to mum bloggers who could potentially influence their readers with their advice on matters related to parental physical, emotional and mental health. Rather than always turning to traditional institutions for health advice and support, it has been shown in this study that bloggers are helping each other through their blogs. Replacing or perhaps supplementing traditional word-of-mouth and support among mothers through historical avenues such as the phone and mothers’ groups, social media has become a new vehicle for those who are socially isolated to connect and contribute to each other’s well-being. Being
part of the conversation on social media is becoming increasingly important for health-related organisations. We have seen that products including alcohol and soft drinks have already been promoted on blogs. It is acknowledged that some organisations such as the Cancer Council in Australia have recognised the power of social media and are already beginning to work with bloggers. Mum bloggers could be seen as potential allies or partners by traditional health organisations with their attempts to help parents negotiate the complex changes brought about by parenthood.

6.8 Limitations

This study has several limitations which have also been discussed in the methodology section of this research. These limitations fall into a number of different categories including its parameters, the problems with qualitative interviewing, the nature of interpretive research and the researcher’s own potential for bias. These categories will now be reviewed in turn.

This paper only focused on one ‘type’ of blogging group – that is, blogging mothers. One limitation that should be noted is that many of the bloggers interviewed had attended a blogging conference so were potentially more well off than those who were not attending. However, not all bloggers interviewed had attended the conference. The interviews were conducted in Australia where, at the time, there are no laws on disclosure for bloggers. As discussed, guidelines from the ACCC are written from the perspective of businesses. However, the limitations could also be seen as strengths as the very characteristics of mum bloggers mean they are in demand from big business to influence a major consumer group, that is, parents. The Australian context means the ‘Wild West’ situation of no laws or ethical codes (for bloggers at the time of research) made it a location worthy of research.

Qualitative interviewing always has some degree of risk regarding credibility and truthfulness of data gathered from respondents. This could be true given that the bloggers may have wanted to present one version of themselves to the researcher. The marketers and public relations practitioners (EIs) may also have wanted to not reveal their perspectives on blogging, given that blogger relations is a relatively new field of enterprise in Australia. The EIs may also have been wary of not being seen as “experts” by appearing to lack knowledge. The triangulation of the data, including data from the anonymous survey and analysis of blogs allowed responses to be viewed in the light of
multiple sources, therefore enhancing the ability of the researcher to reach a trustworthy interpretation. In the final stages of the research write-up, ‘member checking’ was used with several bloggers who concurred with the findings of the key themes.

The analysis of the study was inevitably largely interpretive, a situation synonymous with qualitative research. While this is not necessarily a negative phenomenon, it must be acknowledged that the researcher’s values and life experiences potentially influenced the interpretation of the data. The researcher’s background in marketing and public relations also means that her own worldview may be coloured by personal experiences. As a relatively middle-class mother (while having had young children prior to the advent of social media) the researcher’s own experience of motherhood will also have a bearing on her interpretation. As discussed previously, the researcher has been conscious throughout of the potential for bias and has used member checking and peer debriefing (checking key themes with her supervisors, for example) to attempt to minimise the effects of her own influences on the data.

6.9 Future research

This study could be replicated with other ‘groups’ of bloggers such as food, fashion, ‘tech’ or travel bloggers to see if their responses are similar to those outlined here. With the rise of Instagram as a popular platform for ‘influencers’, more research could be conducted in this context (while acknowledging that most of the bloggers interviewed and surveyed were already using Instagram to promote themselves and their blog). This study takes into account the Australian context of mum bloggers, given the social norms of most mothers working part-time with the primary responsibility for the care of their children. Mum blogging is a global phenomenon so the study could be replicated in full or part in other countries to see if the same motivations, interactions with marketers and ethical issues occur or at least have commonalities. The emerging phenomenon of daddy bloggers is worthy of attention to assess whether they are seeking similar motivations and ethical issues related to their blogging. Relevant to ethics, a larger survey of public relations practitioners and academics on their attitude to ethics in the blogosphere would be useful for a comparison of responses between these two groups.

It could be worthwhile researching the use of blogging among other (potentially socially isolated) groups which may be going through a liminal phase including teens and seniors. With the rise of the baby boomer demographic facing/experiencing retirement
or job loss, the use of blogs in particular and social media in general could potentially be an intervention used by health organisations. Research into this phenomenon among this group, potentially using an experimental design, could well yield fruitful results which could be compared to the mum blogging population.

The majority of new mothers in many English-speaking countries, such as Australia, the USA, Canada and England, if not blogging, use social media platforms that are simpler to create and maintain, specifically Facebook. For example, in Australia, 95 per cent of social media users use Facebook (see https://www.sensis.com.au/content/dam/sas/PDFdirectory/Yellow-Social-Media-Report-2014.pdf, 2014). However, Facebook with its ubiquity and ease of use may not provide the benefits of blogging such as the extension of skills and abilities. A broader study of a general population of mothers’ use of social media in Australia and elsewhere and the potential benefits of use and motivations would be worthwhile future research.

It is acknowledged that the mothers surveyed were relatively privileged and educated compared with other populations. The use of technology (for example tablets) to allow mothers in less privileged communities to connect with each other and access information could well be investigated.

From an academic perspective, the continued rise in take-up and popularity of social media across the population means that its importance as an area of research will continue to grow.
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APPENDIX A Glossary of key terms

Note: Many of these terms have not yet made it into official dictionaries or academic articles. Definitions are generally from industry websites. If the definition is sourced completely from a website, the website is quoted in brackets directly after the definition. Definitions from academic articles are found in the reference list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertorial</td>
<td>Paid advertising in the form of an article which is a combination of the words advertisement (advertising) and editorial (article). (<a href="http://www.medita.fi/uploads/liitetiedostot/12-OMAM-1115%20Worldcom_GlossaryA.pdf">http://www.medita.fi/uploads/liitetiedostot/12-OMAM-1115%20Worldcom_GlossaryA.pdf</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>App</td>
<td>A shorthand term for “application” made popular among consumers and developers for mobile applications used on smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Marketing Association (AMA)</td>
<td>A professional association for marketing professionals with 30,000 members as of 2012.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)</td>
<td>Responsible for the regulation of broadcasting, the internet, radio-communications and telecommunications. ACMA's responsibilities include promoting self-regulation and competition in the telecommunications industry, while protecting consumers and other users; fostering an environment in which electronic media respect community standards and responds to audience and user needs; managing access to the radio frequency spectrum, including the broadcasting services bands; representing Australia's communications and broadcasting interests internationally. (<a href="http://www.directory.gov.au/directory?ea0_lf99_120.&amp;organizationalUnit&amp;b3c7ffa9-03a0-4237-84ee-c93e729e8bee">http://www.directory.gov.au/directory?ea0_lf99_120.&amp;organizationalUnit&amp;b3c7ffa9-03a0-4237-84ee-c93e729e8bee</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)</td>
<td>According to its website, the ACCC promotes competition and fair trade in markets to benefit consumers, businesses and the community. It also regulates national infrastructure services. Its primary responsibility is to ensure that individuals and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>businesses comply with Australian competition, fair trading, and consumer protection laws - in particular the <em>Competition and Consumer Act 2010</em>.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Association for Data-driven Marketing &amp; Advertising (ADMA)</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>According to its website, ADMA is the principal and largest body for information-based marketing in Australia.</td>
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<th><strong>Banner advertising</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>A graphical internet advertising tool. Users click on the graphic to be taken to another Web site. The term &quot;banner ad&quot; refers to a specific size image, measuring 468 pixels wide and 60 pixels tall (i.e. 468x60), but it is also used as a generic description of all graphical ad formats on the internet.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Blog</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>A particular type of website publishing multimedia content organised in posts.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Blogger</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>The creator or editor of a blog; most bloggers consider themselves free to express their own views and are therefore more independent compared to online editors and print media journalists.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Blogger outreach</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blogger outreach is the process of building relationships with qualified, influential bloggers, asking them to write about a particular product, service or experience, providing an incentive</td>
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</table>
for them and their readers with the goal of receiving brand recognition (or some call to action) within their networks.

(http://brandswithfansblog.fandommarketing.com/5-tips-for-blogger-outreach-from-a-bloggers-perspective/)

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Blogola</strong></th>
<th>A slang term used in online marketing circles to describe the act of bribing or paying influential bloggers to create a buzz in the blogosphere about a specific product or technology in their blog.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(<a href="http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/B/blogola.html">http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/B/blogola.html</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Blogosphere</strong></th>
<th>A network of interconnected blogs, forming a community; at times used to reference the internet as a whole.</th>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Blogroll</strong></th>
<th>A list of links to other relevant blogs, featured by a blogger on their site; a method of driving traffic within the blog community.</th>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Brand ambassador</strong></th>
<th>An individual who works at the grassroots level of a campaign to deliver messaging to individuals on a word-of-mouth basis.</th>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Brand journalism</strong></th>
<th>Marketing through journalism. Instead of using content that directly promotes the brand through traditional marketing tactics, brand journalism focuses on building stories and other informational content that highlights value from a different point of view. Companies that embrace brand journalism use interviews and article-based websites that provide journalistic</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>information to support a product’s offerings.</strong></td>
<td>(<a href="http://www.forbes.com/sites/danielnewman/2015/12/08/the-state-of-brand-journalism-are-brands-becoming-the-media/#2f9a0ed6104b">http://www.forbes.com/sites/danielnewman/2015/12/08/the-state-of-brand-journalism-are-brands-becoming-the-media/#2f9a0ed6104b</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Buzz marketing</strong></td>
<td>Marketing activities designed to encourage spontaneous discussion between people about a specific product, service, company or brand.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR)</strong></td>
<td>The professional body for public relations practitioners in the UK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clickbait</strong></td>
<td>Web content with a misleading or sensationalist headline that entices readers to click through to the full story, usually with the goal of generating page views and advertising revenue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communications Council</strong></td>
<td>According to its website, the Communications Council is the peak professional body representing companies in the Australian advertising industry. Its member base spans more than 160 agencies which operate in the areas of creative, digital, strategic planning, promotion, direct marketing, PR, design, production, and healthcare advertising.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content curation</strong></td>
<td>Content curation is the process of sifting through the web to find the best and most relevant content for an audience and then presenting it to them in a meaningful way. Unlike content marketing, content curation doesn’t involve publishing new content. Instead, it’s about creating value for the audience by saving them time and effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content marketing</strong></td>
<td>A marketing strategy based on attracting and retaining customers through the creation and distribution of valuable content, such as videos, white papers, guides and infographics. Content marketers look to earn customer loyalty and influence decisions by providing useful, entertaining, or educational media. With the rise of social media and search engines, content marketing is now a vital technique for businesses of all sizes. (<a href="https://blog.hootsuite.com/the-2015-social-media-glossary-207-essential-definitions/">https://blog.hootsuite.com/the-2015-social-media-glossary-207-essential-definitions/</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Covert marketing</strong></td>
<td>In this strategy, commercial messages are transmitted to consumers using unexpected times and styles so that they are not even aware of it (Akdoğan &amp; Altuntaş 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Daddy blogger</strong></td>
<td>A dad who blogs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disclosure</strong></td>
<td>An explicitly revealing payment by a third party (with money or in-kind) to the blogger/influencer for a review or blog post on a blog or entry on another social media platform. See also advertorial, blogola and paid post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement</strong></td>
<td>The acts of talking to, messaging or otherwise interacting with other people on social networks. This broad term encompasses several different types of actions on social media, from commenting on Facebook posts to participating in Twitter chats. At its simplest, social media engagement is any interaction a user has with other users. For that reason, it’s a core part of every social media strategy. (<a href="https://blog.hootsuite.com/the-2015-social-media-glossary-207-essential-definitions/">https://blog.hootsuite.com/the-2015-social-media-glossary-207-essential-definitions/</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>e-Word of Mouth</strong></td>
<td>A form of buzz marketing that can become viral if the message is persuasive or funny enough. In eWOM the focus is on person-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>The world’s most popular social networking website that allows users to connect with family and friends. Facebook users can add photos, post status updates or create a page. (<a href="https://www.hallaminternet.com/social-media-glossary/">https://www.hallaminternet.com/social-media-glossary/</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followers</td>
<td>Twitter users who have subscribed to a person’s Twitter account so they can receive Tweets in their home feed. The account holder can send them a direct message by following them back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hashtag</td>
<td>A single word or phrase preceded by the # symbol to define messages relating to a particular topic. Hashtags are most commonly used on Twitter. On Twitter the # symbol is used to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet. (<a href="https://www.hallaminternet.com/social-media-glossary/">https://www.hallaminternet.com/social-media-glossary/</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencer</td>
<td>A social media user who can reach a significant audience and drive awareness about a trend, topic, company or product. From a marketer’s perspective, the ideal influencer is also a passionate brand advocate. However, influencers often try to remain impartial toward brands in order to maintain credibility with their hard-earned audiences. Successful influencer strategies usually involve the coordination of Marketing, Customer Service and Public Relations teams. (<a href="https://blog.hootsuite.com/the-2015-social-media-glossary-207-essential-definitions/">https://blog.hootsuite.com/the-2015-social-media-glossary-207-essential-definitions/</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>Purchased by Facebook in 2012 for $US1 Billion, Instagram allows users to share pictures and video, apply filters to them and share them on other social networking sites such as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) Australia</strong></td>
<td>According to its website, the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) Limited is the peak trade association for online advertising in Australia and was incorporated in July 2010. As one of 44 IAB offices globally, and with a rapidly growing membership, IAB Australia's principal objective is to support and enable the media and marketing industry to thrive in the digital economy.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>IRL</strong></td>
<td>Blogger-speak for In Real Life (as opposed to interaction online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Likes</strong></td>
<td>An action that can be made by a Facebook or Instagram user. Instead of writing a comment or sharing a post, a user can click the Like button as a quick way to show approval.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Meme</strong></td>
<td>An idea, fashion, or behaviour that is transmitted from person to person through media, speech, gestures and other forms of communication. The term was conceived by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in the 1970s, but it has exploded into greater relevance in the past decade with the rise of online culture. In Dawkins’ theory, memes are ideas (or fragments of ideas) that are copied and combined as they move from person to person, much like genes are passed down from generation to generation. Dawkins surmised that we could use the concept of</td>
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evolution by natural selection to understand how ideas spread and change over time. Some memes spread far and wide, some die out, and others mutate. Social media has made it possible to visualise and measure this phenomenon like never before. For example, we can see hashtags rise and fall in popularity and track how quickly they spread throughout a network.


| **Mommy blogger** | A mom (American spelling) who blogs (see Chapter 1 for full definition and discussion). |
| **Monetis(z)e** | An attempt by a blogger/influencer to make money from a blog or other online platform, through such initiatives as advertising, paid posts, reviews or e-books, to name some examples. |
| **Mum/Mummy blogger** | See Mommy blogger. |
| **Native advertising** | Native content refers to a type of online advertising in which the ad copy and format adheres to the format of a regular post on the network it is being published on. The purpose is to make ads feel less like ads, and more like part of the conversation. |
| **Nuffnang** | According to its website, Nuffnang is the World’s leading blog advertising community, dedicated to building strong relationships between the bloggers and brands seeking relevant publishers with strong followings to engage with. |
| **Paid post** | A written blog entry that is paid for by a third party organisation/company/brand with the intent of promoting its organisation/company/brand via the blogger’s site. The blogger |
receives some form of payment (money, product, service or combination) to write the post in an engaging and entertaining way (on behalf of the organisation paying). As well as text, the post can include hyperlinks, video and photographs.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pinterest</th>
<th>Pinterest is a photo sharing social network that provides users with a platform for uploading, saving and categorising &quot;pins&quot; through collections called &quot;boards&quot;. Boards are typically organised by theme, such as: Food &amp; Drink, Women's Fashion, Gardening, etc. Users have the ability to &quot;pin&quot; and &quot;repin&quot; content that they like to their respective boards.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>A (usually dated) entry on a blog (usually a written entry but can include photographs, hyperlinks and video).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA)</td>
<td>According to its website, the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) is the national industry body for public relations and communication professionals in Australia. The PRIA represents and provides professional support and recognition to over 4,000 practitioners and more than 100 consultancies nationwide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)</td>
<td>According to its website, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is the world’s largest and foremost organisation of public relations professionals with more than 22,000 public relations and communications professionals, in addition to more than 10,000 university and college students through the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA).</td>
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(https://www.prsa.org/AboutPRSA/index.html#.V1TnCvl96M8)
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<tr>
<th><strong>Retweet</strong></th>
<th>The re-posting of a user’s tweet on the social media platform, Twitter; the re-posted message is preceded by “RT” announcing that it is a ReTweet.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Selfie</strong></td>
<td>A self-portrait that is typically taken using the reverse camera screen on a smartphone or by using a selfie stick (a pole that attaches to a camera). Selfies are commonly shared on social media networks like Instagram, Twitter and Facebook using the hashtag #selfie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Share</strong></td>
<td>The main focus of all social media platforms is to share content, thoughts and company voice with others. Sharing options can also be added to the site to allow people to like, +1, email, tweet or use many other methods to endorse or forward content to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Snapchat</strong></td>
<td>A social application (app) that allows users to send and receive time-sensitive photos and videos known as &quot;snaps,&quot; which are hidden from the recipients once the time limit expires (images and videos still remain on the Snapchat server). Users can add text and drawings to their snaps and control the list of recipients in which they send them to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social media</strong></td>
<td>Various platforms that allow members of that community to</td>
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interact with one another socially to share ideas, messages and other content.


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<tr>
<th>Sponsored post</th>
<th>See Paid post.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tweet</td>
<td>The name given to a message posted on Twitter. Tweets are micro blog messages that are up to 140 characters in length.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(<a href="https://www.hallaminternet.com/social-media-glossary/">https://www.hallaminternet.com/social-media-glossary/</a>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>A social network and media platform that enables users to publish 140-character messages along with photos, videos, and other content. Twitter is famous for its real-time and emergent discussions on breaking news stories and trends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-generated content</td>
<td>User-generated content is content -- blogs, videos, photos, quotes, etc. -- that is created by consumers. Marketers typically tap into their audience in an online setting to collect this type of content to support a campaign or initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viral</td>
<td>Viral is a term used to describe an instance in which a piece of content -- YouTube video, blog article, photo, etc. -- achieves noteworthy awareness. Viral distribution relies heavily on word-of-mouth and the frequent sharing of one particular piece of content all over the internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlogging</td>
<td>(Short for video logging). Producing a piece of content that employs video to tell a story or report on information. Vlogs are common on video sharing networks like YouTube.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(<a href="http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/6126/The-">http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/6126/The-</a></td>
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| **Web 2.0** | The second stage of development of the internet, characterised especially by the change from static web pages to dynamic or user-generated content and the growth of social media.  
(http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/web-2.0) |
| **Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA)** | According to its website, WOMMA is the official trade association dedicated to word-of-mouth and social media marketing.  
(https://womma.org/) |
| **YouTube** | A video sharing website, owned by Google, where users can upload, view and share video clips.  
(https://www.hallaminternet.com/social-media-glossary/) |
APPENDIX B Participant information form – blogging mothers

Project Title: The three-way exchange: Bloggers, marketers and mothers in the virtual third place

We have approached you as a blogger to share your insights into your motivations for blogging, the challenges you face and your opinion on your influence on your readers and influencers on your own blog.

The research today is a first step to understand how bloggers are operating in Australia in 2012. As a relatively new field, little is known about why people blog and how they believe they influence their readers, and are in turn influenced by readers and marketers. The interview should take up to 45 minutes to complete.

Catherine Archer, a UWA PhD student and Curtin University lecturer in marketing, is conducting her PhD on this topic. Catherine has an interview guide with questions on the above topic. However she is keen for you to share any other thoughts on the topic. You may choose to answer or not answer any of the questions in the interview. Responses will be treated confidentially and anonymity will be respected and assured. Participation is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice in any way. You need give no reason or justification for withdrawing. If you do withdraw, any records of participation by you will be destroyed, unless you agree that the researchers may retain and use the information obtained prior to your withdrawal. Your participation in this study does not prejudice any right to compensation, which you may have under statute or common law.

To assist in recording the comments, each interview will be recorded electronically and typed at a later date in a transcript. Your comments will be used to identify themes from the interviews. The data will only be available to the researchers. It will not be possible to identify individual respondents in any material disseminated outside the immediate research team. Responses will be reported to ensure your anonymity. The research will be used as the basis for Catherine’s PhD and will be published in academic journals related to blogging and new media. The research will potentially help identify the current state of the blogging industry in Australia and current issues faced by bloggers. It will potentially inform marketers on better ways to interact with bloggers. It could also help inform Government policy on blogs and bloggers.
Should you have any queries on this research, please feel free to contact:

Supervisor: Professor Simone Pettigrew Tel. 6488 1437 Simone.Pettigrew@uwa.edu.au

Researcher: Catherine Archer Tel. 9266 2433 catherine.archer@cbs.curtin.edu.au

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by The University of Western Australia, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time.

In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at The University of Western Australia on (08) 6488 3703 or by emailing to hreo-research@uwa.edu.au All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information For and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.

Yours sincerely

Professor Simone Pettigrew
APPENDIX C Interview guide – blogging mothers

1. Tell me about your blogging experiences to date.
2. When and how did you start blogging?
3. What do you think is your main motivation for blogging?
4. Has your motivation changed since you started blogging? How?
5. How did you go about designing your site?
6. What sort of time and effort does it take to be across social media, including your blog?
7. What sort of influence do you think you have on other parents?
8. What sort of approaches do you get from companies or PR consultancies?
9. How do you handle these approaches?
INTERVIEW GUIDE – BLOGGING MOTHERS (Continued)

1. Do you take paid advertising on your site? How does that work?

2. How do you view the act of blogging as a parent?

3. Where do you get your parenting advice from?

4. Do you have a long-term plan for your blog?

5. How would you describe your blog? Your blogging?

6. What are the benefits of blogging?

7. Are there any downsides of blogging?

8. Have there been any posts you have regretted writing?

9. Do you think there are any ethical issues associated with blogging?

10. What advice would you give to someone starting out blogging?

11. Are there any other areas you wish to comment on that I have not covered?
APPENDIX D Participant information form: M&PR practitioners

Project Title: The three-way exchange: Bloggers, marketers and mothers in the virtual third place

We have approached you to share your insights into your motivations for liaising with bloggers, the challenges and opportunities you face and your opinion on bloggers’ influence on your stakeholders. The research today is a first step to understand how bloggers are operating in Australia in 2012 and how they are interacting with marketers and other brand representatives. As a relatively new field, little is known about why people blog and how they believe they influence their readers, and are in turn influenced by readers and marketers. The interview should take up to 45 minutes to complete.

Catherine Archer, a UWA PhD student and Curtin University lecturer, is conducting her PhD on this topic. Catherine has an interview guide with questions on the above topic. However she is keen for you to share any other thoughts on the topic. You may choose to answer or not answer any of the questions in the interview. Responses will be treated confidentially and anonymity will be respected and assured. Participation is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice in any way. You need give no reason or justification for withdrawing. If you do withdraw, any records of participation by you will be destroyed, unless you agree that the researchers may retain and use the information obtained prior to your withdrawal. Your participation in this study does not prejudice any right to compensation, which you may have under statute or common law.

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satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at The University of Western Australia on (08) 6488 3703 or by emailing to hreo-research@uwa.edu.au. All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information Form and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.

Yours sincerely

Prof Simone Pettigrew
APPENDIX E Interview guide – M&PR practitioners

(Consultants/brand managers/professionals interacting with blogging mums)

These suggested questions are a guide only - some of these topics may emerge earlier and others that do emerge (but aren’t listed here) will be followed up.

1. Please tell me about how you have been involved with blogging mothers.
2. What made you decide to sponsor Digital Parents/Blogger (this question may not be relevant for all)?
3. What have been the benefits of sponsorship?
4. How do you go about connecting with blogging mums?
5. What are the key approaches you use?
6. How do you decide which bloggers to contact or work with?
7. How do you measure the success of campaigns?
8. How do your clients view these interactions?
9. What ethical issues have you have encountered in working with bloggers or you have heard of?
10. There’s a lot of talk of journalists v bloggers – do you think they are different? If so - how?
11. What are your views on paid posts?
1. What is the future of blogging in Australia?

2. What would be your tips for marketers/PRs when working with bloggers?

3. Bloggers have been described as the new influencers. What do you think of this title?

4. Are there any other areas you wish to comment on that I have not covered?

5. Demographics: The type of business (eg service/not-for-profit/fast moving consumer goods/multinational) will be noted. The interviewee’s title will be noted.
APPENDIX F Digital Parents Australia – Benchmarking Survey 2012

Section 1. Demographic data

First we would like to ask you some general demographic data.

1. What is your gender?
   - M ☐
   - F ☐

2. Please indicate your age
   - 25 or less ☐
   - 26-35 ☐
   - 36-45 ☐
   - 46-55 ☐
   - 56+ ☐

3. How many children do you have?
   - None ☐
   - Currently pregnant ☐
   - 1 ☐
   - 2 ☐
   - 3 ☐
   - 4 or more ☐

4. Where do you live?
   - Outside Australia ☐
   - Rural or remote Australia ☐
   - A regional centre ☐
   - A major metropolitan city ☐

5. Indicate the ages of your children. Choose as many as appropriate
   - I don’t have any ☐
   - Currently pregnant ☐
   - Baby 0-12 months ☐
   - Toddler (1-3) ☐
   - Pre-schooler ☐
   - Primary school ☐
   - Teenager ☐
   - Adult ☐

6. What is your current marital status?
   - Single ☐
   - Married ☐
   - De facto ☐
   - Divorced ☐
   - Widowed ☐

7. Besides blogging do you engage in any paid work?
   - Yes, full-time ☐
   - Yes, permanent part-time ☐
   - Yes, casual part-time ☐
   - Yes, freelance ☐
   - No (go the next section, Section 2) ☐

8. If you could quit your paid job to become a full-time blogger would you?
   - I already have ☐
   - I would ☐
   - Maybe ☐
   - No ☐
Section 2. Your blogging

Now we would like to ask you about your own blogging.

1. How long have you been blogging?
   - Less than a year ☐
   - 1-2 years ☐
   - 3 years or more ☐
   - I don’t have a blog (go to section 3) ☐

2. How many blogs do you have?
   - 1 ☐
   - 2 ☐
   - 3 ☐
   - More than 3 ☐
   - I don’t have a blog (go to the next section, Section 3) ☐

3. What topics do you blog about? Please tick all that apply.
   - Parenting ☐
   - Business and blogging ☐
   - Home Life ☐
   - Fashion and beauty ☐
   - Food and cooking ☐
   - Travel ☐
   - Health and wellbeing ☐
   - Entertainment and celebrities ☐
   - News and politics ☐
   - Books ☐
   - Places – e.g. restaurants and shops ☐
   - Other (please specify) ☐ ______________________

4. What sorts of content do you write for your blog/s? Please indicate all that apply.
   - Personal stories ☐
   - How to articles ☐
   - Top tips ☐
   - Opinion piece ☐
   - News updates ☐
   - Interviews ☐
   - Product reviews ☐
   - Links to other resources ☐
   - Reader questions ☐
   - Guest posts ☐
   - Sponsored posts ☐
   - Other (please specify) ☐ ______________________

5. How would you describe your writing style on your blog/s?
   - Professional ☐
   - Journalistic ☐
   - Conversational ☐
   - Confessional ☐
   - Other ☐ (please specify) ______________________

6. How many times do you post a week?
   - Less than 1 ☐
   - 1-2 ☐
   - 3-5 ☐
   - More than 5 ☐
7. How would you describe the impact of blogging on your life?

- Extremely positive
- Mostly positive
- Neutral
- Mostly negative
- Extremely negative

8. What other types of social media do you use besides blogs? Please choose all that apply.

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Myspace
- Forums
- LinkedIn
- Google+
- Pinterest
- YouTube
- Flickr
- Foursquare
- Delicious
- Tumblr
- Instagram
- Other (please specify) ________________

9. How many hours per week on average do you invest in social media?

______________________________

10. What are your goals for blogging?

Please comment ________________
Section 3. The blogging community

Now we would like to ask you some questions on the blogging community.

1. Do you participate (read AND/OR comment) in other people’s blogs?
   
   Yes □  No □  (Go to section 4)

2. How long have you been participating in other blogs?

   Less than a year □  1-2 years □  3 years or more □

3. What motivates you to participate in other people’s blogs? Please tick all that apply.

   Recreation □  Socialising (making friends and connecting with others) □
   Reviewing products □  Gaining advice □
   Driving traffic to my own blog □  Sharing opinions □
   Other (please specify) □

4. How often do you engage in the blogosphere?

   Daily □  2-4 times a week □
   Weekly □  Once or more a month □

5. What topics do you follow on other people’s blogs? Please indicate all that apply.

   Parenting □  Business and blogging □  Home Life
   Fashion and beauty □  Food and cooking □  Travel □
   Health and wellbeing □  Entertainment and celebrities □
   News and politics □  Books □
   Places – eg restaurants and shops □
   Other (please specify) □  __________

6. Do you feel there is a sense of community amongst bloggers?

   Yes □  No □  Not sure □

7. Would you consider other bloggers you know to be friends?

   Yes □  No □  Not sure □
8. How satisfied are you with the blogging community?

- Extremely dissatisfied □
- Someewhat dissatisfied □
- Neutral □
- Somewhat satisfied □
- Extremely satisfied □
Section 4. Blogs and income generation/sponsorship

Now we would like to ask some questions regarding blogs and income generation.

1. Have you accepted compensation for sponsored content?
   Yes ☐ No – I wouldn’t want to ☐ No – but I would like to ☐

2. How would you prefer to be compensated for content promoted by a company?
   Cash ☐ Free product or experience ☐
   Both cash and free product or experience ☐
   I would not accept compensation ☐

3. Brands and PR consultants should offer compensation to bloggers for mention of brands.
   Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐
   Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐

4. In general, how do you feel about advertising on blogs?
   I like it ☐ I don’t like it ☐ Neutral ☐

5. Do you use advertising on your blogs
   Yes ☐ No (Go to question 7) ☐
   No, but I would like to (Go to question 7). ☐

6. How much money do you generate from advertising on your blog per month?
   Less than $50 ☐ $50-$149 ☐ $150 to $299 ☐
   $300-499 ☐ $500 to $1000 ☐ More than $1000 ☐
   I don’t take advertising ☐

7. In general, how do you feel about sponsored posts?
   I like them ☐ I don’t like them ☐ Neutral ☐

8. Do you include sponsored posts on your blog?
   Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Rarely ☐ Never (go to question 10) ☐
   No, but I would like to (go to question 10) ☐
9. How much money, on average, do you charge per sponsored post?

- Less than $50
- $50-$149
- $150 to $299
- $300-499
- $500 to $1000
- More than $1000
- I don’t do sponsored posts

10. In general, how do you feel about product reviews on blogs?

- I like them
- I don’t like them
- Neutral

11. Do you include product reviews on your blogs?

- Yes, weekly
- Yes, monthly
- Yes, but rarely
- No, never (go to question 13)
- No, but I would like to (go to question 13)

12. How much do you charge for product reviews on your blog?

- Less than $50
- $50-$149
- $150 to $299
- $300-499
- $500 to $1000
- More than $1000
- I don’t charge for product reviews

13. In general how do you feel about giveaways on your blogs?

- I like them
- I don’t like them
- Neutral

14. Do you include give-aways on your blogs?

- Yes, weekly
- Yes, monthly
- Yes, but rarely
- No, never (go to question 16)
- No, but I would like to (go to question 16)

15. How much do you charge for give-aways on your blog?

- Less than $50
- $50-$149
- $150 to $299
- $300-499
- $500 to $1000
- More than $1000
- I don’t charge for give-aways

16. How do you feel about being an ambassador for a brand?

- I like the idea
- I don’t like the idea
- I’ve never thought about it

14. Are you currently an ambassador for a brand?

- Yes
- No
- No, but I would like to be
15. Has a brand ever approached you about writing for them, doing product reviews or giveaways or being sponsored?

Yes □ No (go to question 17) □

16. What’s important to you when working with brands? Please indicate all that apply.

The brand is relevant to my blog □
It is a brand I know and trust □
I am fairly compensated for my efforts □
It is something my readers might be interested in □
The brand offers give-aways for my readers □
The brand contact understands my blog □
The brand contact includes me as part of decision making □
The brand contact communicates clearly □
Other (Please specify) □ ________

17. How do you generate money from your blog? Please choose all that apply

Advertising □ Google ads □ Sponsored posts □
Affiliate marketing links □ Being a brand ambassador □
Paid subscriptions to content □
Paid to give advice/speeches related to blogging □
I don’t generate income from my blog □
Other (please specify) □ ________

18. How much income per annum do you make from your blog?

Under $1000 □ $1000 to $1,999 □
$2000-$4999 □ $5000-$9,999 □ $10,000-$19,999 □
$20,000-$50,000 □ Over $50,000 □
I don’t make money from my blog □
Blogging costs me money more than I make □
Section 5. Blogs and influence.

You’re almost there. We would now like to ask some questions on blogs and influence.

1. Do you believe you can influence your readers to purchase an item you have recommended on a blog?
   - Completely agree □  Somewhat agree □
   - Somewhat disagree □  Completely disagree □
   - I have never recommended a product on my blog □

2. Do you believe blogs are a better source of information than traditional or mainstream media (e.g. radio, television, magazines, and websites)?
   - Completely agree □  Somewhat agree □
   - Somewhat disagree □  Completely disagree □

3. Do you believe that blogs (i.e. through recommendations) influence your decision about purchasing a product?
   - Completely agree □  Somewhat agree □
   - Somewhat disagree □  Completely disagree □

4. Have you ever made a purchase based on a recommendation/review from a blog?
   - Yes □  No □

5. What have you purchased after seeing a recommendation from a blog? Please choose all that apply.
   - Fashion □  Entertainment □  Holidays/travel □
   - Beauty □  Books □  Technology □
   - Vouchers □  Household items □  Groceries □
   - Child-related products □
   - I haven’t made any purchases based on a blog □
   - Other (Please specify) □
6. What characteristics of a blog influence your decision to purchase a recommended product? Please indicate all that apply.

- The blogger has similar opinions to me  □
- I trust the blogger □
- The blogger has many followers □
- The blogger has an adequate amount of comments/likes □
- I like the way the blogger writes □
- I have not made a purchase after reading a blog □
- Other (please specify) □
Section 6. Your thoughts.

Thank you so much! We would now like to ask you just two final open-ended questions. Please take the time to give us your thoughts.

1. What are the main benefits and/or challenges encountered with blogging?

2. Are there any ethical issues you encounter with blogging?

   No. □

   Yes. □ Please describe

Thank you for your help with this survey! We will share the results with you and the Digital Parents community once all the surveys are collated and analysed. Your answers are confidential and will be aggregated.

END OF SURVEY