

The Influence of Instagram on the Irish Fashion Industry

By

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in Journalism and Public Relations, is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other students.

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Abstract

Fashion and social media play a major role in society. Fashion houses and designers have existed since the 19th century, with trends, patterns and models changing every day. The first social media platform was created in 1997, followed by the first blog in 1999. Since the beginning of 2000, the digital age began to expand. Platforms such as MySpace, Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram are becoming an everyday norm in society. In the present day, both social media and the fashion industry are worldwide recognised platforms. Fashion and social media have now become intertwined, with social media shaping a huge impact on the fashion industry in terms of sales, marketing, P.R, blogging and retail.

Throughout this study, the researcher will investigate the influence social media has on the fashion industry. As both are recognised platforms, the study will focus on the social media platform of Instagram created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Kreiger in 2010 and the Irish fashion industry in the present day.

In order to identify the influence Instagram has on the fashion industry, the three themes of retail, blogging and P.R which shape the industry will be explored using the methods; interviews, a questionnaire and a content analysis of two Irish fashion magazines.

Since the industry in Ireland is expanding every year with fashion bloggers, stylists, P.R's and influencers, it was found throughout the study that social media plays a huge role in terms of sales growth, recognition, fame and wealth. Within this dissertation, the findings of the research on how Instagram is influencing the Irish fashion industry will be articulated.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“There is something about seeing an Instagram blogger with a large following putting up a clothing item from a high street store and you being the follower, being able to go in and purchase that same item”. (Wynne, 2019)

1.1 Summary of Topic

It is 2019, and it is safe to say we as humans are living in a social media obsessed world. Today's generation are brought up in an online generation through the screens of technology devices, mobile phones, laptops and most importantly, social media. Some might call it an addiction in a culture of 'likes' or 'hashtags' but social media has become a huge influence in our work, education and social lives.

As mentioned in the abstract, both the role of social media and fashion play a significant role in society. Fashion has always existed. It is everywhere we go whether it is second-hand, high street or designer; everybody has a different interpretation of fashion or style.

Due to the rise of social media and the digital age we live in, social media and fashion have become connected and have somewhat created a worldwide known device for businesses, bloggers and online users. Since the creation of Instagram in 2010, it has grown each year with the introduction of new tools and developments added to improve the platform.

In comparison to the U.S. or U.K. fashion industry, the Irish fashion industry is relatively small. Many fashion designers, models and faces of Irish fashion work overseas with major brands such as Chanel, Burberry or DKNY. However, with the rise of digital media, fashion bloggers have become the modern replacement for celebs or fashion icons. Suzanne Jackson, a fashion blogger and businesswoman was Ireland's first blogger in 2011. Jackson created her blog online posting images of clothing items she wore, liked or bought. Since her rise to fame, Ireland has become the home to many new bloggers in the field of fashion, beauty, lifestyle and fitness. “The media industry has changed beyond recognition since the arrival of the smart phone and Ireland has produced its fair share of new media stars”. (www.thinkbusiness.ie, 2016)

1.2 Outline

In light of the Irish fashion industry and Instagram, this dissertation is structured as follows in the contents table on p. 4. In this chapter, a brief introduction on the topic will be outlined alongside the study's research aims and expected results. Chapter two will focus on the review of literature used within the study under the three themes of retail, blogging and P.R. Authors such as Louise McDonnell (2017), Susannah Gardner & Shane Birley (2012) and Eric Davies (2018) were primarily used for the study. Nevertheless, all the sources used contributed a major insight towards the study especially as each book, article or blog post had a different approach on the subject being researched. This is why it is important for the interviews to engage with the information used in the literature review. In chapter three, the methods for the research will be discussed and analysed. For this study, a mixed methods approach was deemed most suitable. The methods of quantitative and qualitative were used alongside a content analysis on two Irish fashion magazines: '*Stellar*' and '*Tatler*'. Chapter four presents the results and analysis of the dissertation under the three key questions. The chapter is outlined by each theme of retail, blogging and P.R that is associated with Ireland's fashion industry. The interviews from three Irish professionals are compared to relevant findings from the literature review. The content analysis is also discussed and presented with visual images and keywords analysing the two magazines' content. In the final piece of Chapter four, a survey with the support of graphs representing the results on the public's opinion on Instagram is included. Finally, chapter five concludes the overall study with key points articulating the research findings discovered throughout the dissertation.

1.3 Research Aims

The aim of this research is to investigate the influence of Instagram on the Irish fashion industry. Likewise, by using the word *influence*, the study will focus on both the positive and negative influence of Instagram and how it is affecting the industry in Ireland in terms of retail, blogging and P.R.

As the researcher, the overall aim is to gather relevant findings to support the case that Instagram plays a huge role within the fashion world. This research will focus on the three themes because each theme has a significant role in the fashion industry in the 21st century.

By exploring relevant academic sources, personal experiences through interviews, magazine content and public opinion through an online survey, each piece of information adds to the study of why and how Irish fashion is **actually** being influenced.

In light of the research aims, the research questions for this study will be:

- Retail: How fashion retailers in Ireland are benefitting from social media in terms of sales growth, online business and store reputation.
- Bloggers: How Irish fashion bloggers are shaping the industry in Ireland in terms of advertising, collaborating and influencing.
- Public Relations: How the fashion PR industry in Ireland is evolving due to the rise in social media in the present day.

1.4 Expected Results

Since the overall aim of this research is to find out the influence of Instagram through the three key objectives of retail, bloggers and P.R., initially, the expected results are to have relevant support and accurate findings on how Instagram is shaping the Irish fashion industry.

Being the researcher throughout this entire study, I expect varying opinions on the subject being asked, especially in the semi-structured interviews. This will provide the study with a diversity of content and opinions that will help determine the research questions alongside chapter two's relevant sources.

Finally, the content analysis will undertake a different approach. Through vivid images, headlines and keywords, the expected results of the six cover examples of '*Stellar*' and '*Tatler*' will represent the women of the Irish fashion industry and how in today's world women are portrayed on the cover of fashion magazines.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

“A substantive, thorough, sophisticated literature review is a precondition for doing substantive, thorough, sophisticated research. ‘Good’ research is good because it advances our collective understanding.” (Williams, 2011, p. 183)

In essence, the information gathered for this literature review comes from secondary sources. Not only is it valuable information to compare the influence of Instagram in different sectors on the growing fashion industry; secondary sources such as articles and books offer a vivid understanding that covers the proposed questions alongside the key questions developed throughout the study.

This literature review will be structured with an overview, discussing the themes, sources and authors used for the dissertation. As the researcher, I will discuss and analyse the sources I have used and how they impacted the study. The main review will discuss the sources I have read and researched under the themes which relate to the researched topic. The overall goal of the review will showcase the work I have read with regards to Instagram and the fashion industry under the main sections of: retail, the hashtag, fashion bloggers and public relations.

2.2 Overview of Literature

Firstly, focusing on the major theme of retail and fashion, it is vital to understand that fashion, in some form, has always existed. Since the beginning of the 19th century, major fashion labels such as Hermes, Louis Vuitton and Zara were created. The first department store Macy's was opened in the 19th century in New York and shortly after in 1909, Selfridge's department store was established in London. According to an online article from the BBC website: "Department stores proved so appealing that they blossomed at most unlikely junctures in 20th Century history". (Glancey, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com>.) Authors such as Amarnath, McDonnell, Shiu, Chan, Thayer and Mohr will be used in this section of the study. Each source explores the role of retail and its development through the ages especially due to the rise of social media.

Romano (2017), McDonnell (2017), and Smarty (2018) are discussed under the theme of social media and the power of the hashtag. Although these sources are entirely on the subject of the hashtag and its role within social media today, it is therefore broad but helpful as it answers the research question on the power of the popular social media symbol.

Fashion blogging in a modern day context is closely linked to retail. With the rise of social media and new improvements of technology, more bloggers have joined the social media network of Instagram. Mitchell (2018) contributed a piece to the Irish Independent on the inside truth of blogging, the difficulties with welcoming new bloggers, and how online pressure can affect a blogger's career. Moreover, I want to identify the importance of blogging in the fashion industry, the positive and negative side of it, and how it ultimately influences Instagram users and retail consumers. In an argument from Bair (2016), the author talked about the steps to a successful blog and how originality can shape a bloggers profession online. Fox (2017) also reveals her own experience in the blogging industry in two interesting articles. Esch (2018) shared a different approach in his study. Instead of promoting the career of a blogger, he talked about paid advertisements and collaborations. McGinnis (2012), Sedeke (2013) McDonnell (2017) and Armstrong (2017) also contribute to the research.

The profession of PR and how it helps influence the fashion industry in the present day is discussed with the study of Bernays (1952), El Shehaws (2016), Shiau (2014), Thayer (2010), Gunning ((2007) Davies (2015) and Solis (2009). Public Relations is an important piece of this study. It is interesting to compare the professional P.R. practitioner with the role of fashion blogging in today's world.

2.3 Retail

The beginning of retail or the department store as we know it now coincides with The Industrial Revolution. "The Industrial Revolution in Europe began in England in the 18th century". (Sumod, 2012, p. 3.) During the revolution, new developments in society added to the change in fashion. New pieces of clothing such as the bonnet, gloves and silhouette shaped dresses were produced in factories all over Britain. "Since the Industrial Revolution and today, even people of average means have a number of outfits for different occasions, and continue to buy clothes simply because of their tastes". (2013, blankstyle.com)

Retail nowadays defines the process of selling products or goods to consumers through various channels of distribution. From the early 1900's, new developments and improvements were added to the retail world.

The biggest breakthrough with technology came with Frank Woolworth's innovation of taking products from behind the counter and displaying them on the shelves, so people could both touch and feel them, much like they do nowadays. Thanks to this self-service model, shoppers didn't need to constantly ask for an associate's help. This fundamentally changed retail as customers became more involved in the process. (2019, mi9retail.com)

Today, the retail industry is bigger than ever. Shopping malls, larger retail chain stores such as Primark, Abercrombie and Macy's have created a worldwide reputation amongst shoppers. Advances in technology, debit cards, air conditioning, open air shopping centres and till systems have changed the retail industry incredibly. Modern consumers all over the world can access what they want in a quicker and easier way especially through online

shopping on websites such as Amazon or eBay. “Innovative retailers are embracing this new reality, using digital to extend their storefronts”. (2013, thinkwithgoogle.com)

Due to the rise of social media, retailers depend on the platform for sales growth, store reputation and recognition.

Technology encourages customers to interact with brands. These customer interactions build the brand by increasing awareness, involvement, and engagement; thus, adding to brand recall and stimulating purchases. (Mohr, 2013, p. 18)

In Ireland, people are joining Instagram to promote their fashion businesses, their designs, stores or simply their own fashion style. According to the Economic Times, Amarnath (2018) said: “The fascination of Instagram is because of its unique engagement. It’s more engaging in terms of having a conversation with clients or an audience”. (Amarnath, 2018) In her informative article, Amarnath focused on the visual aspect of the social media platform and how it influences people in fashion. “The free photo sharing mobile application designed for story telling is considered a perfect fit for fashion which relies heavily on powerful visuals and graphics”. (Amarnath, 2018)

Shih (2009) argued that the 90’s were the development of the World Wide Web and because of the rise in social media and the social networks it offered worldwide businesses immense opportunities to transfer their profit, business function and sales. “The 90’s were defined largely by the advent of the world wide web, developed by Tim Berners-Lee working with Robert Calliau at CERN”. (Shiu, 2009, p. 15) Even though the platform of Instagram was only created in the same year the book was published, Shiu dedicated a chapter to the evolution of digital media and how online networks such as Facebook and Google are the best social networks for recruiting. “Facebook is emerging as a popular recruiting tool, mainly due to its extensive reach to nearly 200 million people around the world”. (Shiu, 2009, p. 125)

In a similar context, Edelson (2018) dedicated her online article to how retailers get serious about their businesses through Instagram. Her work is critical especially in terms on how small retailers depend on Instagram for popularity. Many small businesses in Ireland use the

platform for promoting sales, advertisement and recognition. Her online article gave a valuable insight into the retail workforce especially how small stores used to depend on word of mouth for advertisement and sales, but now they depend on social media.

McDonnell (2017) shared her tips on the essential guide for Irish organisations who want to become more effective in the business market through social media. In chapter one of her study, she dedicated a section on common issues for small businesses in Ireland. One of the main problems retailers mistakenly do is use 'personal profiles' instead of a 'business profile'. This means a business is limited in terms of reaching a large audience which could affect their sales growth and reputation. "If you are set up like this you are in breach of Facebook's terms of use and your business profile could be removed". (McDonnell, 2017, p.7) The same regulations are for every social media network especially Instagram. A small business or retailer is more likely recognised if their profile is on the 'business profile'.

McDonnell also offers advice on the fashion side of advertising in a case study with Guna Nua Boutique in Co. Mayo. McDonnell writes: "The founder of the boutique realised that the quality of images on a social media page had a direct impact on sales". (McDonnell, 2017, p. 210)

Mohr (2013), in her book: 'The impact of social media on the fashion industry,' she focuses on its impact worldwide, especially the New York market and how the fashion industry was in difficulty in 2008 due to the rise of social media, online shopping and financial difficulties.

During the financial crisis of 2008, retailers faced a dilemma relating to both the economic environment and psychographic issues: how to convince consumers of fashion and luxury goods to purchase when even the wealthy cut back and how to plan for spring when sales are declining at retail stores. (Mohr, 2013, p. 17)

This work describes the growing impact social media is playing in the fashion industry, how people rely on social media on a daily basis and how it both can positively and negatively shape a person's career. Mohr explains: "Though many fashion brands initially believed social networking would weaken the relationship with consumers, social media is now viewed as an opportunity to improve customer relationships and to ultimately capture a larger audience". (Mohr, 2013, p. 18)

For smaller retail stores, it is important to have a reliable platform to depend on in terms of promoting sales and online advertising. In an article for Forbes Magazine, Thayer (2018) revealed how Instagram is capable of reaching a worldwide audience and the more online followers a retail store has, the more it will succeed in becoming recognised by the public. Thayer also suggests the role that Instagram could play in the future of small retail businesses. In the article, Thayer reveals:

Small businesses are certainly trying to figure it out. Since Instagram launched business account profiles about two years ago, more than 25 million users have opted in for the free features that let you add contact and location details, see additional analytics, and purchase ads. (Thayer, 2018, forbes.com)

The article shares a unique perspective into the insight of the business frame of Instagram and how its latest updates and tools can help small retail stores achieve a reputation and the sales goals they deserve. This way of advertising is an incredible way for consumers to retrieve information on a certain product. Thayer explores the analytics Instagram is offering which also helps to play a major part in influencing the fashion industry of retail.

Chan (2018, www.linkfluence.com), discusses the topic of consumer insights for fashion on a global scale. Since this study was in contrast to the research that was looked at on small businesses, it was interesting to witness the reliability fashion has on social media today. The case study was based on the worldwide retail chain store Zara.

Consumer trends affect all industries, but perhaps none more so than fashion. Public sentiment drives purchasing decisions, and fashion brands need to know what consumers want before releasing their next range. (Chan, 2018, www.linkfluence.com)

Chan (2018, www.linkfluence.com) believes for every retailer to be successful, they need to have limited supply and keep up with current trends and consumer insights. Due to social media interaction stores can benefit from what their shoppers want from the retail store, what styles they are looking for and what they want fashion to consist of. The chain relies on feedback from all stores: "Store managers communicate customer feedback on what shoppers like, what they dislike, and what they're looking for. That demand forecasting data

is instantly funnelled back to Zara's designers, who begin sketching on the spot." (Chan, 2018, www.linkfluence.com)

2.4 The Powerful Hashtag

The term hashtag is a word preceded by the symbol #. It is commonly used on social media websites to highlight a certain word or phrase. In this case, Instagram's hashtag is a powerful tool that connects brands with consumers all over the world. By the click of a hashtag, an account can be redirected to another account. According to Romano (2017) who writes about the powerful hashtag and how the symbol is changing modern culture online, he believes the hashtag will keep developing into something more than a symbol as time goes on. The hashtag has "the ability to unite the internet around moments of real-life activism". (Romano, 2017, www.vox.com)

McDonnell (2017) described hashtags as a widely used symbol on social media channels throughout the world. In her book she commented: "Hashtags are search terms and can increase the visibility of posts for related searches". (McDonnell, 2017, p. 137.) McDonnell's overall study is aimed at Irish business owners who want to become more effective in the social media and marketing world. By using the hashtag in a post or online add, a larger audience is targeted. She talks about compelling content for online business profiles and by using the hashtag or social media tool such as tagged pages, images and videos; the more effective and powerful a business in Ireland will become.

With the use of a hashtag, people can tag what they are wearing. This can give people all over the world public access to the user's image/ style and it can also connect the person with the brand or retailer tagged. Likewise, the rise and power of the hashtag is discussed by Smarty (2018). Smarty purports how hashtags can speed up a user's experience on Instagram. A user can utilise up to thirty hashtags per post which have become a huge part of Instagram success. Although the online article was helpful in terms of why the hashtag is powerful, it focused more on Twitter than Instagram which is still beneficial to this research.

Davies (2018) dedicated a chapter to the social media takeover in the present marketing and P.R world. Under the subject of Instagram, Davies reveals in his own words the purpose of the hashtag on the social media platform and how business pages or sponsored posts use

the hashtag to connect with a larger audience worldwide. Davies said: “Tagging other users using @theirusername will turn the link clickable, as will using #hashtags. You can place a link in the ‘website’ entry in your profile, which you can of course direct people to click from posts if you want”. (Davies, 2018, p. 322)

2.5 Fashion Bloggers

A blogger is a person that regularly writes or publishes material on a website or online blog. In this research, fashion bloggers are central in the discussion of how they have helped influence the present fashion industry through their work on Instagram. Mitchell (2018) said, “Bloggers were the original of the species, the first ones to put themselves out there and share their lives online.” (Mitchell, 2018, The Irish Independent.) In her article, ‘Being a blogger in the age of Influencers’ Mitchell (2018,) states, “I love and hate Instagram. I think there have been a lot of changes that I’m unsure about for my type of blog”. The blogger declares how Facebook has ownership of Instagram and has created new changes and tools on Instagram for bloggers to benefit from. She then goes on to summarise the competitive side of Instagram and how it is difficult for new bloggers to join the growing industry in Ireland. Mitchell (2018, The Irish Independent) argues: “They favour the people with more followers, because the advertisers will go for the bigger people. I miss the time when it was not all about advertisements”.

Bair (2016) covers the guide to blogging and how to run a successful blog online. Reading the first two chapters of the book provides a rich understanding on the concept of blogging, how it was developed and the challenges bloggers have faced with originality. The book also reveals the pros and cons of the blogosphere, the latest trends and techniques for successful bloggers and how they impact the fashion industry in a professional online approach. In the introduction of the book, Bair adds: “Just because blogs have a funny name, it doesn’t mean they have to be written by funny people”. (Bair, 2016, p. 3) The guide delivers a persuasive, friendly message, almost persuading the reader to create their own blog. What I enjoyed most about the book was the reassurance every chapter delivered. From research, the blog industry can be daunting. However, this book delivers an optimistic approach for creating a successful blog.

The fourth edition of 'Blogging for Dummies', (2012) the book focuses on blogging for money and the blogosphere lowdown on online software and style. In chapter seven, Gardner and Birley discuss the importance of finding your niche as a blogger and how learning from professionals in the blogging industry and reaching out to other fashion bloggers is important. "Don't forget that other bloggers are your primary audience, meeting with bloggers in person and communicating with them in online are terrific ways to network and market your blog". (Gardner, 2012, p. 157) The book also highlights privacy online, measuring blog presence and exploring the marketing and promoting side of the blogging world.

Gardner and Birley mention the crucial factors of advertising through the profession of blogging. This can be an effective way for businesses such as PR firms or retailers to promote their work on a free online platform. "Advertising on your blog has never been easier. Many different advertising systems offer bloggers a free way to place adds on their blogs and businesses have picked up on the fact that blog advertising can really work". (Gardner, 2012, p. 309)

In the February 2019 edition of Stellar Magazine, Louise Cooney, Irish fashion blogger was the cover girl. Cooney has a following of over 100k on Instagram and is rated as one of Ireland's top professional fashion bloggers and influencers since her rise to fame in 2017. In the interview, the editor of Stellar questioned Cooney on the life of blogging especially since she left her full time job at Google to work full time on her fashion blog. Cooney (2019) reveals: "You're so on your own as a blogger, and that's the one thing that made me hesitant about leaving the office environment, that I'd be on my own". (Stellar, 2019 p. 32) It was interesting to read the various opinions on the realistic world of blogging and Cooney dealt with the pressure of blogging, its downsides and stress from a young age. Cooney also states the perks of a successful blog. In 2018, alongside a fellow blogger friend, she got to attend the New York, Victoria Secret Fashion Show.

In a piece on the subject of false advertising and the flip side of blogging, Fox alleges: "In the blogging world, we all know this is happening but so many stay quiet". (Fox, 2017, retro-flame.com) Fox sees the blogging world as competitive and often false, especially on Instagram. She recalls Irish bloggers paying for their followers instead of organically gaining

a natural following online. She also went on to talk about how disheartening the industry can be especially when starting up a blog. Fox even went on far as to say:

Those of you who are start-up bloggers, to stop being disheartened by those 'bigger' ones who may have conned their way to the top or just those of you, bloggers or not, who are victims of a little comparison every now and again, always remember that there's more than meets the eye. (Fox, 2017, retro-flame.com)

The blog post was an eye opener into the world of fashion and Instagram. Instead of being brought up in a 'comparison obsessed' environment, Fox argues the realities of blogging which many Instagram users are blinded by online.

Fox (2017) also went on to reveal a greater insight into the success of the industry in, 'The three secrets to success so far'. She states in a nutshell how every fashion blogger has to be original, be themselves and honest. The fashion industry can be nasty at times. However, in comparison to the Irish fashion industry on Instagram, Fox revealed: "The US blogging industry was 110% slower to adapt to incorporating the 'real' side of things into their daily content". (2017, retro.flame.com) Again, the article was interesting and filled with informative facts on blogger content on Instagram.

The power of a woman's image and destructive obsession of advertising and looking a certain way is investigated in Wolf's (1991) 'The Beauty Myth'. In comparison to Fox's (2017) argument on living in a 'comparison obsessed' environment, Wolf believes: "The stronger that women grow, the more prestige, fame and money is accorded to display professions'. (Wolf, 1991, p. 27) Women are consumed in an environment to look and behave a certain way. On social media, women want to portray a utopian-like lifestyle; they want to fit into the feminine culture of today's "beauty". Wolf brings up many interesting points in her chapter dedicated to 'culture' which reflect on the argument of women's beauty and the myth associated with it. She argues: "Culture stereotypes women to fit the myth by flattening the feminine into beauty-without-intelligence or intelligence- without-beauty; women are allowed a mind or a body but not both". (Wolf, 1991, p. 59) Wolf's overall approach on women in the beauty industry answers the

research on 'Instagram V's Reality' and how everything on social media is not always what it seems.

Esch (2018) believes following a blog or blogger online can help shape a consumer's choice of buy, especially if that blogger is advertising a certain product online. He reveals the importance of paid collaborations and advertisements for bloggers online and how this online strategy reaches consumers on a new level. The entire study favours blog content, the visual experience of the blog and similar to Fox (2017), online behaviour and trust is essential. "Therefore, an effort to discover how paid blog advertisements influence consumer attitudes toward bloggers and the products they advertise will help marketers gain an understanding of how to use bloggers as paid sponsors to influence consumer purchase intent". (Van Esch, 2018, p. 1) The study also investigates the important factors bloggers need to consider especially their online trust, behaviour patterns alongside their affective, high quality content.

In the case study, '*The status of blogging in the Republic of Ireland*, McGinnis' (2012) explains the nature of Instagram and the role of fashion blogging in the Republic of Ireland. This case study was extremely beneficial and interesting. This source gives a valuable insight into the blogging sphere and how people make a high profit wage from promoting certain fashion brands or stores. Moreover, the study reflects the history of fashion blogging in Ireland through social media and how it has become a major part of an average social media user's life. People rely on bloggers for fashion tips, style inspiration and collaborations. For example: if a person was following a blogger online and admired their style, they would often shop the same clothes as the blogger or request fashion tips. Bloggers are seen as the experts in the fashion industry, people rely on them especially when it comes to new trends and fashion patterns. "The Irish fashion blogosphere is vibrant, diverse and evolving additionally". (McGinnis, 2012, p. 5) The book offers directions on the influence of blogging through Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

Blogging can also be considered a new type of fashion journalism online. In an online article, Sedeke (2013) considers:

"Blogging in general is considered as a new form of online journalism, enjoying great attention of users, based on a personal and interactive approach, versus the standardized tr

eatment through mainstream media.” (Sedeke, 2013, journals.uic.edu) The study focuses on the characteristics of blogging, how it’s a new form of fashion on social media for the digital age. “Despite the wide potential of social media, the fashion industry is resistant when it comes to its use. In fact, in the fashion industry Internet technologies are used as a distribution channel rather than as a communication device”. (Sedeke, 2013, journals.uic.edu)

Likewise, the information analysed from Sedeke’s (2013) study can be read in a similar context to ‘Fashion Bloggers: communication tools for the fashion industry’ (Estaban-Santos, 2018). Estaban-Santos investigates the reason why consumers are influenced by bloggers shopping patterns and trends. The research underpins why bloggers have a certain influence over their online followers in terms of what they buy and wear in the fashion market. Estaban-Santos mentions the purpose of fashion blogs and how millennials are influenced by bloggers in the clothing industry. She believes today’s generation are becoming more obsessed of what they see online and how blogging is shaping a person’s fashion taste. Estaban-Santos also dedicates a different approach on blogging and how bloggers should try connecting with their audience on a personal level.

Armstrong (2017) focuses on a different approach to the subject of blogging. In her study, Armstrong compares blogging to labour. Although the study underpins fashion blogging as the reason why the public understand today’s digital culture, she reveals the labour of fashion bloggers. “The thin line between blogging as work and blogging as hobby is also articulated in the discourse of my respondents”. (Armstrong, 2017, p. 72) The author is critical of blogging throughout her study. She criticizes the profession, the false advertising, money and fame involved. Armstrong also draws a straight divide between qualified journalists and unqualified bloggers. The entire study was interesting, raw and realistic. “To better understand it and the new forms of work that are emerging in digital culture interrogating the rise and establishments of such agencies as well as the ways PR and social marketing departments approach fashion bloggers would no doubt be useful”. (Armstrong, p. 77)

2.6 Public Relations

2.6.1 History of P.R

The father of P.R., Edward Bernays (Sigmund Freud's nephew) is considered to be the man who invented it in 1920, alongside Ivy Lee and P.T Barnum. From the 19th century until the modern day, the P.R. profession is based on shaping and maintaining the image of a company, to foster and protect trust in a company's reputation especially across the public sphere. "While no single person can claim exclusive credit for the ascendancy of advertising in American life, no one deserves credit more than a man most of us have never heard of: Edward Bernays." (2015, theconversation.com) In this case, public relations, 'manipulation', 'trust' and 'recognition' can be linked with the profession of retailers and fashion bloggers today.

Bernays (1952) offers an in depth knowledge and understanding on the profession of P.R. in his book: *Public Relations*. The book is introduced by Bernays explaining the underlying philosophy of public relations and the P.R methods and practices to be applied in specific cases. He presents broad approaches and solutions as they were successfully carried out in his long professional career.

This source helped shape an understanding on P.R. and how manipulation can control the public mind. Bernays was considered by many to be 'the father of P.R.', using much propaganda and manipulation. He coined the term of what the public knows as public relations today. From his theories, a link can be made between the role of public relations and bloggers and how they can often manipulate their followers with 'false advertising'.

2.6.2 Fashion P.R

Fashion P.R., in this case has similar strategies and plays similar roles to Bernay's (1952) public relations. However, due to the increase in technologies, fashion P.R. has changed since the digital age. According to StartUp Fashion (2018): "P.R. has always played a primary role in the business of fashion and since content has become so important and traditional barriers to entry for fashion companies and media outlets crumbled, the role of fashion P.R. has indeed intensified." (2018, startupfashion.com) The online article discusses the traditional approach to fashion P.R. and how it has evolved throughout time. The overall

study has an interesting approach. It teaches the readers from the early developments of fashion P.R. to fashion P.R. today. The shift into the P.R. industry also reveals the changes for small retail stores or independent fashion designers. In contrast, the writer acknowledges that P.R. is not only influenced by the rise of social media. Instead, pitching to the media and networking is essential for a successful fashion P.R. firm.

Nevertheless, researchers worldwide have considered the platform the most important social media tool for gaining public recognition especially in the business sphere. El Shehraws (2016) said:

Instagram has proven itself to be a highly useful tool that businesses around the world have learned to utilize for public relations purposes. Instagram has now settled into becoming the lead visual tool which people, and businesses, can no longer ignore. (El Shehraws, 2016, organizational-consultants.com)

The article goes on to expose how Instagram helps P.R. firms present their aims and key messages through the platform. Instagram images can be an effective way to gain more attention than a text. Instagram in this case offers a visual promotion. “The beauty of this feature is that it allows for businesses to reach out to others and make valuable connections which all lead to the one thing P.R. agents try to achieve; create networking opportunities in a thriving arena”.(organizational-consultants.com, 2016)

Gunning (2007) introduces Irish and international P.R. practises and their position in the current business market. His book covers the key areas of P.R. and the media, working with the media and the effect media has on the profession. Chapter six of the study is most relevant to my dissertation. It outlines P.R. in the twenty-first century alongside the future of public relations. The chapter goes on to determine the changes in the industry and possible changes the profession will most likely overcome. “PR people have a role to play in training people in the language of e-mail, and the way to project the right image using a medium which requires brevity and informality”. (Gunning, 2007, p. 380)

Moreover, as P.R. firms around the country help a business or people develop a positive reputation with the public. There is a strong connection through both public relations and Instagram. According to the online website Instazood.com:

If you regularly roll out new products or want to let your customers know about your new service updates, Instagram is an excellent platform for these things. You can even use it to produce a flow around a new product launch by posting teasers ahead of time. (Instazood.com, 2018)

The website reveals the importance of Instagram as a P.R. tool and how businesses can no longer ignore Instagram. As Instagram offers a variety of tools for P.R. teams to use, P.R. firms use this advantage especially when they count on a nationwide social media interaction.

If your company is participating in any social initiatives or other altruistic causes, Instagram is a great platform for promoting it, engaging with the public, and organically expanding your networks in the digital world. Because of the rapid adoption of the mobile phone as the ultimate source of social media interaction, diminishing patience for long or monotonous texts, and with billions of users daily, Instagram definitely a platform in for exploration and utilization". (Instazood.com, 2018)

Davies (2018) deals with the content of PR, understanding the marketing and digital decision making of social media for businesses. The book provides the reader with an engaging approach to social media marketing and marketing communications. The nature of P.R. is defined alongside its role played by communication and language. Davies argues: "Even the smallest businesses can use publicity to broaden its customer base and improve the scales climate for its products". (Davies, 2018, p. 359) Moreover, he compares P.R. as a two way process. "It is no exaggeration to claim the role that PR plays can be a decisive factor in whether our business is ultimately successful or not". (Davies, 2018, p. 367)

The overall study provided me with a better outlook on the profession and role of P.R. today. Davies summarised the importance of communication, persuasion and online performance every business needs. The concluding chapter of the book highlighted the influence of social media platforms and how they are influencing P.R. firms around the world. This book will be an ultimate P.R. guide throughout my study.

Jordana Shiau in 'Public Relations and the Fashion Industry' describes how blogging and online work is relevant to fashion P.R. The purpose of the research was to acknowledge the different sectors of the fashion industry and how it affects public relations in today's world. The author is critical of the industry explaining: "This study investigates how blogging benefits the fashion industry, creating a sense of accessibility that was not previously there, changing the way audiences view the industry".(Shiau, 2014, p. 6)

Shiau's work not only relates to fashion P.R., but it also covers a large amount of material on the subject of fashion blogging and what it takes to be a successful fashion blogger in the competitive social media market. Major fashion labels hire fashion bloggers to use their social media platform for the benefit of their brand. According to the Shiau:

Most designers have begun to post regularly to their blogs as a "behind the scenes" look on the brand and to post about things related to the brand. Marc Jacobs blog, for example, is used by the blog medium Tumblr posts, all Marc Jacob related things along with things that go along with the Marc Jacobs aesthetic. (Shiau, 2014, p. 9)

Solis (2009) argues how social media is reinventing the aging business of P.R. In his book, he states:

Through Lee and Bernays, the foundation of PR was built decades ago. And as the years went by, criticism and scepticism mounted. By the time we entered the industry about 20 years ago, uncertainty was already swirling about the PR industry and PR professionals as strategic partners involved in true management functions. "(Solis, 2009, p. 25)

Solis challenges the traditional status quo of P.R. and speaks to the ongoing challenges it faces especially throughout the past twenty years. Instead, he favours the present and future of P.R., the rise of social media and how P.R. will benefit from the new changes in technology. He agrees that social media and P.R. are connected and by intertwining the two, it will help build a successful P.R. agency. "Read the blogs, magazines, newspapers, forums, newsletters, and so on—this is where customers are actively engaged. Then understand

how to translate what you do in a way that matters. This is the only way to be successful in running PR in the “Long Tail”. (Solis, 2014, p. 13)

2.7 Conclusion

Lastly, the three major topics: retail, fashion bloggers and public relations all provide a distinct perspective into the fashion world of Instagram. Although they all share different factors, the three topics share a similar link on how Instagram is influencing the fashion industry in the present day and potential future. The summary of literature listed above consisted of reliable sources with accurate information and facts on the dissertation topic. The range of books, magazines, blog posts and online articles also shared an appropriate perspective on the subject being researched.

A balance in the literature was found between academic books and recent online articles. Online articles have a greater range of context and evidence behind the reason why social media is influencing the industry. The reason behind this I believe is because Instagram is a new moving platform that is becoming an advanced technology to the world. By searching online search engines, I noticed there was a large amount of material online regarding the effect of Instagram in the fashion world but not on the Irish industry.

Davies (2018) provided me with a rich insight into the P.R. and marketing industry which links with retailers and businesses. The book will help frame my research especially as it covers the topics that are most relevant throughout the study. Nevertheless, as the three key topics relate to the central theme of my dissertation, each piece of literature in the aforementioned sections contribute enormously to the research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Methodology Overview

In this chapter, the research methodology is outlined alongside the methods used to conduct the research. According to Oxford a methodology defines: “The design of a particular research study: a set of procedures according to which it is undertaken, including techniques of data gathering and data analysis (this may involve quantitative research and/or qualitative research. (Oxford, 2019) The methods carried out within a study are techniques such as qualitative/ quantitative procedures that are used to gather information or data related to a particular field of study. In this case, the research methods used throughout the academic study are most appropriate to explore the proposed question regarding Instagram and the present fashion industry in Ireland. By using a mixed methods approach, a greater understanding is gained, which helps the research engage in joint methods through various perspectives. Evidently, the aim of the data gathered for the research question was to make sure it benefited the overall dissertation especially in light of the key questions on the subject of Instagram and the fashion industry.

3.2 Research Objectives

The purpose of this chapter is to provide answers to the key research objectives with appropriate methods. “Methodology is crucial for any branch of scholarship because an unreliable method produces unreliable results and, as a consequence, undermines the value of your interpretations of the findings”. (2019, libguides.usc.edu) In order to achieve a valid and reliable research, the researcher must recognise their research objectives in order to gain an accurate response.

3.3 Research Philosophy

A research philosophy is a belief about the way in which data about a phenomenon should be gathered, analysed and used. The term epistemology (what is known to be true) as opposed to doxology (what is believed to be true) encompasses the various philosophies of research approach. (Holden, 2016, p. 3)

People research every day for the purpose of a specific subject or theory. The term research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs or assumptions within a study.

The way in which research is conducted may be conceived of in terms of the research philosophy subscribed to, the research strategy employed and so the research instruments utilised (and perhaps developed) in the pursuit of a goal - the research objective(s) - and the quest for the solution of a problem - the research question. (Holden, 2016, p. 2)

Nevertheless, the four philosophies of research are pragmatism, positivism, realism and interpretivism. For this study, the researcher will depend on the research of interpretivism especially as it relies on the study of society, observation and interviews. "Interpretivism, also known as interpretivist involves researchers to interpret elements of the study, thus interpretivism integrates human interest into a study". (2019, research-methodology.net)

3. 4 Qualitative V's Quantitative Methods

In this study, qualitative research is the primary method used to gain insight into the world of fashion and social media. The research method focuses on society and culture through a greater detailed context, which benefits the key objectives mentioned above. In addition, the study relies on this research method as it reflects a greater approach of realistic circumstances.

Qualitative research is a multifaceted approach that investigates culture, society and behaviour through an analysis and synthesis of people's words and actions. Unlike quantitative approaches, it does not try to transform verbal symbols into numerical ones; the data remains at the level of words, either the research participants' own words. (Hogan, 2009, p. 3)

The research gathers non numerical data and is one of the most common methods used when obtaining facts or information. The characteristics of the research examine the constraints of life, but most importantly it captures an individual's experience or perspective on a specific subject.

Qualitative research has ‘traditionally’ been conducted by means of direct observation of a sample, case studies, experiences, introspection, an examination of relevant texts, interviews, focus groups, life stories, and the researcher’s own participation in the settings that she / he is researching. (Hogan, 2009, p. 4)

Qualitative research is primarily used to gain an understanding or insight for opinions, reasons or facts. Usually the data method uses unstructured or semi-structured techniques such as interviews, observations ethnography analysis or focus groups. In this case, the best suited form of qualitative research will be semi-structured interviews and a survey. Both forms of research were conducted because they best suited the proposed questions throughout the study. Likewise, in order to gain a greater in debt understanding on the fashion industry today, the interviews and survey provided a detailed, personal and realistic approach.

3.4.1 Qualitative Interviews

Interviews are an important method of research. The main task within an interview is to understand what the interviewees are saying on a factual level. Through an interview, the researcher is able to receive direct answers, facts and information through the questions he or she wants answered.

An interview is a conversation for gathering information. A research interview involves an interviewer, who coordinates the process of the conversation and asks questions, and an interviewee, who responds to those questions. Interviews can be conducted face-to-face or over the telephone. (Easwaramoorthy, 2006, <http://sectorsource.ca>)

Interviewing is the main qualitative method utilised in this research dissertation. Similar to any primary source, whether it is a diary notice, recording, document or manuscript, the primary source of interviews is used in light of the research questions. Moreover, the idea of gathering first hand information from an interview with a professional in the Irish fashion industry is a significant way to gain insight of the experiences of the interviewee alongside their different opinions. Interviews reflect what the human mind has experienced or what

the person being interviewed is thinking. “In order to engage in qualitative research, it is necessary to consider it as a network of various approaches, or a combination of approaches” (Hogan, 2009, p. 4)

As the interviews are based on what the interviewee says, the researcher must create a set of questions on the subject they want specific answers to. Moreover, as the overall topic is on Instagram and the fashion industry. A set of questions was created to ask each interviewee based on their role in the relevant topic and their insight. According to Edwards (2013): “The open-ended qualitative interview, with its possibilities for discussing unexpected topics, means that emotional dynamics can be significant for the interview process”. (Edwards, 2013, p. 85)

The interviewer has also to be aware the interviewee can refuse to answer any question if they wish. If the interviewee is sensitive about a subject, the interviewer has to respect his or her wishes. The interviewee can also leave the interview at any time without explanation. Again, the interviewer has to respect the interviewee especially as they were aware of this event when both parties were in contact prior to the interview.

To prevent a problem like this occurring, it is expected to have a backup plan or a different interviewee in line. Each interview requires ethical approval in advance. It is also important to understand what type of interview the researcher is conducting. Interviews can be either formal or informal. For each of the interviews, every conversation must be conducted in a professional approach, by the interviewer asking the questions along with the interviewee answering them. Interviews are usually divided into the three main categories: structured, semi-structured or unstructured.

All of the interviews utilised for this research are semi-structured. This method suited best because the interviewee had the freedom to answer the questions in their own words without being guided to answer in a certain way. This form of interview also allowed the interviewee to express their own opinions and experiences on their own terms.

In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer uses a set of predetermined questions and the respondents answer in their own words. Some interviewers

use a topic guide that serves as a checklist to ensure that all respondents provide information on the same topics. (Easwarramorthy, 2006, p.1)

The role of the researcher is knowing what you want to achieve from the interview. Gaining the correct information is essential. It is extremely important to identify what information you need before the interview takes place. This is why having a set of questions created in advance will help achieve this goal.

Basically these interviews allow much more space for interviewees to answer on their own terms than structured interviews, but do provide some structure for comparison across interviewees in a study by covering the same topics, even in some instances using the same questions. (Edwards, 2013, p. 30)

Interview questions are usually open ended, the researcher will have to remember this especially in terms of timing and the amount of questions that the researcher will want to ask. The three interviews in this case, will have a set of questions created prior to the interview. The researcher will forward the questions to the interviewee before the interview formally takes place. This will help the interviewee know what will be asked which can often make the interviewee feel relaxed while answering the questions. “It is important for qualitative researchers to be able to draw their participants onto the terrain of the research interview, for them to understand what the research is about, and how the interviews will differ from others they might have experienced”. (Edwards, 2013, p. 8)

3.4.2 Quantitative Survey

Quantitative research, on the other hand, is a way of generating numerical data in the form of statistics. It is used to quantify behaviour and opinions through various tools such as surveys, telephone surveys or polls. This method of research was used because it provided the researcher with a greater perspective on the influence of social media on the fashion industry.

Quantitative research is a way to learn about a particular group of people, known as a sample population. Using scientific inquiry, quantitative research relies on data that are observed or measured to examine questions about the sample population. (Allen, 2017, p. 1)

The use of quantitative methods also helps identify information without the person being acknowledged. For example: the results of a person's opinion or information can remain anonymous. In this case, the survey was created for the purpose of a large audience. The participants could answer the survey without being identified as all the six questions were answered anonymously.

Gaining an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative research puts a researcher in a position to mix or combine strategies and to use what Johnson and Turner (2003) call the fundamental principle of mixed research. (Johnson, 2004, p. 17)

Survey research is used to quantitatively describe specific aspects of a given population. These aspects often involve examining the relationships among variables. Second, the data required for survey research are collected from people and are, therefore, subjective. (Glasow, 2005, p. 1) Surveys are a popular research tool when a researcher wants to obtain a certain piece of information from a large audience. Often the audience is anonymous which provides the answers from the survey and prevents bias. "Surveys can also elicit information about attitudes that are otherwise difficult to measure using observational techniques. It is important to note, however, that surveys only provide estimates for the true population, not exact measurements." (Glaslow, 2005, p. 2)

The surveys can be conducted online through Survey Monkey or in person by handing out leaflets to members of an anonymous sample group. Similar to an experiment or observation, surveys are an excellent way to obtain primary data through a fast and easy process. It is also simple to analyse the results of a survey unless the answers are bias or in some cases, respondents' can provide inaccurate answers.

After the survey is completed and answered by the sample group, the answers given will have to be measured according to accuracy. This is up to the researcher to observe and determine whether the answers are reliable or inaccurate.

Bell (1996) observed that biases may occur, either in the lack of response from intended participants or in the nature and accuracy of the responses that are received. Other sources of error include intentional misreporting of behaviours

by respondents to confound the survey results or to hide inappropriate behaviour. (Glaslow, 2005, p. 4)

Survey Monkey is an online development created in 1999 in the U.S. The purpose of the online website is to drive businesses through the free online survey tool with the aim of capturing people's opinions. The website is simple to use, with free access to create an online survey with up to ten questions, the survey allows up to 100 responses per survey. The researcher used Survey Monkey as primary platform to obtain answers from the survey. The questions and answers were directly sent to the researchers email after the anonymous participants completed the task.

In addition, it is important for the researcher to realise a simple survey can be created with open-ended questions. Open ended questions also allow the researcher to explore additional ideas or approaches within the study.

3.5 Mixed Methods

In essence, by using both techniques of qualitative and quantitative methods, a mixed methods approach is the main source of collecting data. "Mixed methods research has been practiced since the 1950s but formally began in the late 1980s and is increasingly used by a growing number of researchers". (McKim, 2017, p. 202) The purpose of a mixed methods research is to provide a framework of both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The method offers a diverse perspective without the researcher limiting themselves to only one source of research, for example: to obtain a more successful and accurate research, using mixed methods provides a stronger research answer. "Mixed methods research will be successful as more investigators study and help advance its concepts and as they regularly practice it." (Johnson, 2004, p. 14)

By using the mixed methods research, a broader view is gathered on how the research topic and question providing negative and positive responses. "Mixed methods research offers great promise for practicing researchers who would like to see methodologists describe and develop techniques that are closer to what researchers actually use in practice". (Johnson, 2004, p. 15) For the following research on the dissertation, as the topic is broad, using the collection of open and closed- ended data is vital. "Mixed methods can facilitate greater

scholarly interaction and enrich the experiences of researchers as different perspectives illuminate the issues being studied”. (Shorten, 2017, p. 8)

Nevertheless, instead of choosing a single study, theorists believe using mixed methods research is the most important research method technique when wanting to collect/analyse data. “It is a key point that mixed methods research truly opens up an exciting and almost unlimited potential for future research”. (Johnson, 2004, p. 20)

It is important to understand the perceived value of combining two distinct methodologies, especially given the added resources, time, and expertise required to conduct a mixed methods study. Mixed methods research requires additional time due to the need to collect and analyze two different types of data. (McKim, 2017, p. 203)

3.6 Content Analysis

A content analysis is the final method chosen in order to achieve the overall research objective. According to MacNamara (2005): “A media content analysis is a specialized subset of content analysis, a well-established research methodology”. (MacNamara, 2005, p. 1) The research method is used to study a broad subject of texts which could be transcripts, film, interviews. The method of a content analysis was originally used to study propaganda. “Media content analysis was introduced as a systematic method to study mass media by Harold Lasswell (1927), initially to study propaganda”. (MacNamara, 2005, p. 1) Today it helps you define and understand your media profile by evaluating issues, messages, advocates, critics, media and journalists by giving qualitative ratings to print, broadcast and online coverage and recommending PR action and response. (Trueman, 2019, www.historylearningsite.co.uk)

Instead of using one specific research method, content analysis offers another avenue of accessing and evaluating visual media “Media content analysis looks directly at communication via texts or transcripts, and hence gets at the central aspect of social interaction. It can allow for both quantitative and qualitative operations”. (Trueman, 2019, www.historylearningsite.co.uk)

The content analysis for this research will be conducted through the form of two Irish magazine publications. The content of the two publications: '*Stellar*' and '*Tatler*' will be analysed in the study according to the overall approach on how social media is shaping the Irish industry. The researcher will focus on various issues and will analyse the fashion, Instagram, blogger, and retail related content that is relevant to the study.

This research method is an interesting method as it offers a visual experience on the present fashion industry and how in the past month it has effectively changed. The content analysis also delivers a richer perspective as each publication shares a different approach to the fashion world. The content analysed from the two magazines will be visual images or looks and repeated key words relevant to the study. The repeated key words in headlines of the magazines will be used as an influential piece of information. Likewise, the content analysis of a magazine is believed to have been an influential effect for an audience. People become influenced by the method and it has become a primary method for many 21st century researchers. Magazine headlines, images and keywords are aimed to portray a certain message to its readers. According to Davalos: "Young women ranked magazines as the most influential source of information". (Davalos, 2007)

Moreover, this research was essentially used because it offers an insight into the Irish industry, it includes the role of social media and most importantly the content analysed can be used to study a broad range of texts. For example: content analysis allows the researcher to take aspects of qualitative data and to transform it into quantitative data. By using media content analysis, "The content can be used to study a broad range of 'texts' from transcripts of interviews and discussions in clinical and social research to the narrative and form of films, TV programs and the editorial and advertising content of newspapers and magazines". (MacNamara, 2005, p. 2)

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the methodology all of the methods aforementioned were most suitable to help achieve the overall study. The data collected from the interviews survey and content analysis were all conducted in a professional manner. It is important for the researcher to be aware of the limitations associated with the certain methods they are using while researching. For example: during the interviews, the researcher must value the rights of the

interviewee. Ethical issues are also an important consideration for the researcher. Research can often damage the rights of the participants. To prevent this, all interviews were consented approval prior to the interview, Griffith College Dublin ethically approved the rights of the quantitative interviews and possible problems were also considered by the researcher.

All of the data collected was analysed and data collected from the three interviews were recorded. Lastly, the possible ethical problems as stated above, limitations, participant's rights and future improvements were all considered by the researcher throughout the entire methodology process.

Chapter 4: Results & Analysis

4.1 Overview

In this chapter, the aim of the research analysis is to present and discuss the results of the following data collected. The research questions for this dissertation are:

- How fashion retailers in Ireland are benefitting from social media in terms of sales growth, online business and store reputation.
- How Irish fashion bloggers are shaping the industry in Ireland in terms of advertising, collaborating and influencing.
- How the fashion PR industry in Ireland is evolving due to the rise in social media in the present day.

The results analysis will be divided into three sections:

- The three **interviews** conducted on the themes of retail, blogging and public relations will be discussed.
- The **content analysis** on the two magazine publications of '*Stellar*' and '*Tatler*' will be presented. Visual images, headlines and keywords will be discussed along with the theme of fashion in Ireland from the editions.
- Lastly, the **quantitative survey** on the 'Influence of Instagram' will be discussed in the form of six graphs representing each question answered by the 34 anonymous participants.

All of the findings in this chapter were analysed based on the research methodology used in chapter three on the themes and sources collected in chapter two.

4.2 The Role of Social Media for Retailers in Ireland

Research from chapter two identifies the role social media plays in the retail market in Ireland. Smaller businesses and stores are benefiting from sales growth due to the role of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. McDonnell (2017) encourages businesses in Ireland to set up a business page to achieve better store results. "Rather than seeing Facebook as a place to push your products or services to potential customers, think of it as a place where you can remind customers that you exist". (McDonnell, 2017, p. 3) The

theme of retail in this research is an important element of the fashion industry. Retail has been around since the 19th century and every day new improvements and developments are being created. The rise of social media in the late nineties marked the beginning of change for businesses around the world. In the modern day, retailers and businesses have to rely on online platforms to gain the recognition they deserve. “Though many fashion brands initially believed social networking would weaken the relationship with consumers, social media is now viewed as an opportunity to improve customer relationships and to ultimately capture a larger audience.” (Mohr, 2013, p. 18.)

Interview one on the subject of retail was with Dianne Wynne, manager of ‘BORN’ in Co. Westmeath. There are 15 BORN stores located in Ireland and the stores cater for both genders. When Wynne was asked about the influence social media has on her store, she mentioned the change of retail from her own experience before the rise of media applications until now. Wynne has also worked in retail for the past six years.

“I think retail compared to years ago is now very much online. There is a massive online shopping culture. Compared to the past, people regularly went shopping on a Friday or Saturday. Now, people can shop online on a Tuesday evening at home watching TV. It has certainly shifted; people now tend to shop online. It can save money too”. (Wynne, 2019)

The findings support McDonnell’s argument in her ‘Guna Nua Boutique’ case study outlined in the literature review. Guna Nua Boutique is located in Co. Mayo and similar to BORN, it caters for both genders. In addition, McDonnell compares shopping culture now as an effective marketing strategy. Online brands and stores represented online are guaranteed more successful. McDonnell states: “Sales come through social media in the form of private messages, phone calls and emails”. (McDonnell, 2017, p. 210) Wynne created a Facebook and Instagram page for her business. On the retailers Instagram profile, the account offers an insight into new collections and products. The account shares live videos daily on store arrivals, buying trips and store locations.

On the topic of Instagram influencing a shopper what to buy, McDonnell’s case study revealed how consumers are inspired by what celebrities or bloggers wear. It is essential for retailers to keep up with current trends celebrities are wearing.

“One evening, boutique owner, Suzanne spotted a photo of Kate Middleton wearing a dress very similar to one in her store. Using PicCollage she posted an image of the dress she had for sale alongside Kate with the caption ‘#Stealherstyle’ and a link to her store where the dress could be purchased”. (McDonnell, 2017)

The study goes on to discuss the importance of influencers and how within twenty seconds of sharing the online post gained one sale. Wynne agreed with the statement that Instagram is influencing a shopper what to buy especially fashion bloggers on the app.

“There is something about seeing an Instagram blogger with a large following putting up a clothing item from a high street store and you being the follower, being able to go in and purchase that same item. For many people, I think it’s exciting to share a little piece of what that person has. I think people look up to bloggers. Even though they are just normal people. People feel like they know the person. They have a huge following and we are let into their lives by their Insta stories. So yes, Instagram definitely is an influence”. (Wynne, 2019)

Wynne also claimed the platform of Instagram is both good and bad for retailers. Although it can promote a business through advertising and sales, Instagram can have a negative affect especially if an influencer or blogger doesn’t like a product and shares their opinion of this online. Question three of the interview questioned the impact Instagram has for retailers. Wynne answered by stating:

“It’s good in the way it can promote a business. Somebody with over 150,000 followers comes in and fits something on and they like a product. A business will get foot fall from that and people will want to buy the same product. Or, if a blogger puts up that they dislike a product that can also cause a negative impact on sales”. (Wynne, 2019)

In addition for Instagram to become positive impact for retailers, online accounts attached to the store must actively engage with online customers and their followers on a daily basis. In McDonnells words: “Using memes, high quality images and interesting posts will appeal to an audience to keep engagement levels high”. (McDonnell, 2017, p. 214) Being

committed to customer's comments, online messages and requests also benefits both the retailer's social media account and their business. "Responding to people personally makes them feel valued, and help grows brand loyalty". (McDonnell, 2017)

Question four of the interview highlighted how Instagram benefits Wynne's store and business strategy since the clothing business has started using social media.

"We had a collaboration with a local blogger. When we started collaborating with her she had 6,000 followers, now within a few months she has 10,000. She comes in twice a week, puts up her posts of what she fits on. Whatever she posts online, there is definitely more interest on what she wears from customers. Items she had advertised would fly out of the store. We had to get her in the second time because it was such a success the first time. Now she posts on both Facebook and Instagram for us. It definitely impacts the demand on products and sales". (Wynne, 2019)

Alongside the present role of social media in the retailer world, it was interesting to question the future of the technology and how retailers would benefit if social media no longer existed or if the platform changed. For smaller businesses similar to 'Guna Nua Boutique', sales ultimately rely on social media and in this case Instagram. However, if the social platforms had to disappear in the morning, where would the businesses in terms of advertising and marketing stand? The reliance retailers have on social media is now a huge part of owning and managing a successful business.

Wynne answered this topic in question five with belief that influencers, especially in the Irish industry will keep growing. She revealed even if there is a change in social media, there will be a solution. In her opinion social media is here to stay.

"Social media could go even further. It will either maintain the level it is now or it's so changeable. They could be something new in four to five years time. It's hard to predict but I think social media is here to stay. Every time I go onto Instagram there are new influencers, there are so many of them in Ireland now".

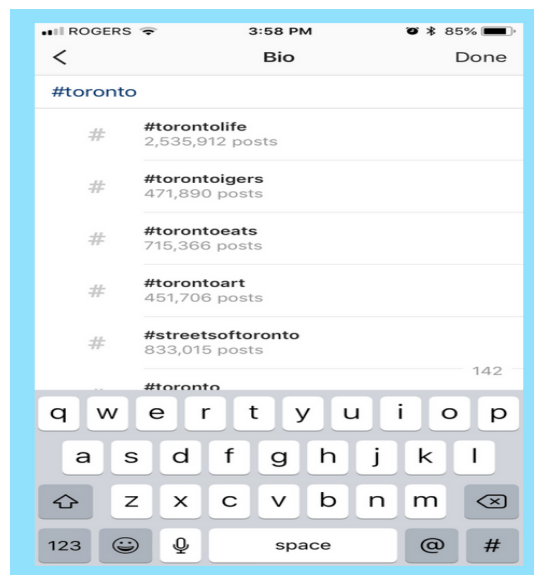
*"It's a small country and to have so many – we have to question **how much influence one can actually influence**. I think 'influencers' has a negative effect*

too. People say such a person is an influencer because they receive free items or advertise online". (Wynne, 2019)

4.2.1 The Rise of the #Hashtag

The hashtag symbol has become a huge part of a spoken language for certain demographics because of Instagram. The symbol is used on various platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Furthermore, the symbol is placed in front of a word as an advertising tool. Hashtags allow people to connect with brands or products from all over the world; through the click of a button Instagram users are able to reach a certain brand or designer. Figure 1 is a visual example on how hashtags are used on the app. The search bar allows users to search a tag to gain more access to related tags or similar images. "Hashtags are search terms and can increase the visibility of posts for related searches". (McDonnell, 2017, p. 37)

Figure 1



Hashtags are also an advertising tool that many bloggers or influencers use when uploading an image. If an influencer or blogger is collaborating with a clothing company, they are obliged to use “#Add” in the caption. This is for public awareness that the post is sponsored or if the post is paid advertising. This is an extremely important factor for bloggers especially when it comes to false advertising. Many bloggers upload images advertising a brand, even though the blogger might not like the brand they still could ‘pretend’ they do for the free gifts, sponsorship or payment they receive. “Sponsored posts through the ads system give you more range, cross-platform reach if you choose, and targeting capabilities, and you still can add an actionable button and a URL. The creation process takes a tiny bit more time and isn’t done within the app, but all advantages and reason suggest that sponsored posts are going to be the way to go for most businesses”. (Gotter, 2018, adespresso.com)

4. 3 The Realities of Blogging

By using the research gathered from interview two with fashion blogger and stylist, Leann Connor; it was intriguing to witness a blogger articulating the profession of blogging. Known as the ‘Wicked Blonde’, Connor is a fashion blogger based in Co. Westmeath. She started her blog in 2016 and since then she has created a following online of 10,000 followers. Connor is also a part time manager in a clothing store and through her fashion blog on

Instagram, she promotes, advertises and collaborates with various Irish brands such as 'Jenny Glow', 'Primark', 'Dunnes Stores', 'Fields' and 'Villa'.

Figure 2



In light of the research question on how bloggers are shaping the industry, blogging has become a huge part of the digital culture worldwide. In chapter two, Fox (2017) revealed the nature of blogging, the unrealistic side to the profession and the stigma attached to it.

In a similar context, the interview Connor, revealed the realities of blogging. Her experience and opinions answered the research question on blogging outlined in chapter three. The questions are briefly shared beneath and the entire interview layout will be included in the appendix.

Connor began her interview by starting at the beginning of her blog journey. "When did you start blogging? Had you always an interest in fashion?"

"I started blogging three years ago. I had always an interest in fashion; people would compliment my style, outfits which eventually gave me the confidence to start my blog. I also worked part time in retail in the beginning too." (Connor, 2019)

According to Garnder and Birley (2012) to start a successful blog, the person must have an interest in a certain hobby to blog about. It could include travel, lifestyle, cooking or in this case, fashion. Similarly to Connor, starting a blog requires confidence because what is posted can be accessed by anyone online. "If you put something on your blog, *anyone* can read it. Blogs, like all websites, are accessible anywhere in the world at any time, and anyone who can access a computer and understand the language the blog is written in can read it". (Garnder & Birley, 2012, p. 31)

When asked, "Do you find the blogging community in Ireland competitive?"

"Yes. Everybody wants to do better than everybody else. There is a lot of jealousy involved within the community especially at blogging events. Blogging is not all rainbows but I suppose that's associated with every type of work".
(Connor, 2019)

Question three and four was based on the positive and negative side of Instagram and how the blogger has experienced both through her social media platform.

"The support from followers, friends and family would have to be the positive side. Instagram has also boosted by self-confidence, my passion for fashion, blogging and sharing what I love to such a huge following. Since the beginning of the month, I have gained 2,000 new followers. Then on the flip side, the negativity would be through online hate or should I say 'Keyboard Warriors'. People would message me of fake pages saying nasty comments about posts I have shared and it can be disheartening". (Connor, 2019)

Mitchell (2018) answered the same question confirming: "I love and hate Instagram. I think there have been a lot of changes that I'm unsure about for my type of blog. I think Facebook, which owns Instagram, has created the new changes on Instagram to help the bigger bloggers with loads of followers".

Question four and five were both linked on the subject of Instagram and how it is expanding throughout the Irish industry. Connor responded by saying:

“Instagram is expanding because the platform is for everyone. Everyone has a passion to share what they love online and Instagram can be a great advertising tool or blogging platform for people to join”. (Connor, 2019)

Through the platform of Instagram, people showcase their life and careers through Insta stories, high quality images, live updates and posts. Instagram is expanding due to the involvement and content that is being shared by people. Within the Irish industry people are using Instagram to develop their careers especially bloggers or influencers. “Bloggers online have used blogs as starting points for book deals, television shows and even sources of revenues”. (Garnder & Birley, 2012, p. 33)

In response to Fox (2017) and Mitchell (2018) on their insight on how the life of a blogger can be unrealistic at times, Connor stated:

“As I said before, it’s not all sunshine and rainbows. Instagram is not real life. Social media is only a minor part of anybody’s life. What is shared online isn’t always what it seems. People only want others to see what they want to see. I think many people including bloggers only care about how many followers or likes they receive on the high quality image they shared. Instead, Instagram should be how people are as a person. People compare their lives to bloggers, their travels, wealth and style. However, this again is unrealistic and bloggers should become more honest to their followers”. (Connor, 2019)

Mitchell (2018) revealed: “A lot of people have learned things in the last year, and it's interesting to see where people will go with this. I think the successful bloggers and influencers will be the ones who are authentic and real”. There is a similar connection with opinions between the three bloggers on their perspective of the realities of blogging, from the interview, Connor comments on how “bloggers should become more honest to their followers”. According to Garnder & Birley, being honest and telling the truth to followers is one of the main factors with owning a successful blog. In chapter two of the book it was articulated: “Honestly in blogging is different from honesty in real-life relationships of even journalism or advertising, because knowing who someone is or what they represent online is complex”. (Garnder & Birley, 2012, p. 36)

The next question asked was: “In your opinion, do you consider Instagram a major platform for bloggers to influence their followers in terms of style tips or collaborations with other brands?”

“Yes. I use Instagram as a platform to advertise other brands. Although many bloggers work with brands because of the money or free gifts, I only work with brands I actually like. If a company reached out to me to advertise their product and I didn’t like it, I wouldn’t promote it. Honesty is the best policy and followers online remember this. I collaborate with many brands and I share images of the clothes, where people can purchase, the cost and sizes. My followers appreciate this because it gives them style inspiration and it also gives the brand sales reputation. It can be a win win at times”. (Connor, 2019)

Irish bloggers online showcase their style and collaborations on Instagram more so than other social platforms such as Facebook or Snapchat. Mitchell (2018) informed her readers:

I don't get too many paid blog posts. There are agencies who contact me with a client and they will give me the brief. I always ask to try the product before agreeing to talk about it. And I say no to brands way more than I say yes, because I get a lot of emails about random things that I have no interest in, and my readers will know I have no interest in them.

In the final part of the interview, the fashion blogger went on in her own words about her journey so far through the blogging community in Ireland. Connor summarised:

“I have learnt so far, there is a certain shelf life to blogging. Blogging is a two way street and the work of a blogger can work both ways. My first year blogging was tough. I found it difficult to gain followers until word of mouth helped me out. I eventually began to become more active online, I became dedicated, I attended events and I would help small businesses by going into their store and trying on outfits and posting it online. Three years on, I feel overwhelmed by how far I have come. The fashion industry in Ireland is small but I think if bloggers in Ireland work together and support as a team, Instagram will become more of a

positive platform to work on. I honestly love what I do, I have loyal followers and that's what got me where I am today". (Connor, 2019)

In a similar context, Fox (2017) summarised her journey so far in her blogpost based on her view of blogging online and the truth that comes along with it. Fox, originally from Co. Kerry has been freelance fashion blogging for eight years and works with many clothing brands in New York and Ireland.

I started Retro Flame as a hobby 6 years ago while I was in college. At the time, I had absolutely no idea what lay ahead, I just did it because I was passionate about it. I loved fashion, I loved writing and I wanted a place to share both. Fast forward 6 years, it's now my full-time career here in New York and my sister, Kaelin works full-time with me. I fully support myself, pay tax, pay rent in Manhattan, pay photographers, graphic designers, accountants etc. so in short yes, I turned my passion into a fully-functional business. (Fox, 2017, retro-flame.com)

4.4 Public Relations and Instagram

As stated in the literature review, the profession of P.R is being influenced by social media platforms especially Instagram. El Shehraws (2013) argued: "Instagram has now settled into becoming the lead visual tool which people and businesses can no longer ignore". Through research there is a strong link between P.R and social media. Irish P.R firms in this case rely on social media.

In an interview with Orlagh Ryan, she discussed the main purpose of P.R in Ireland and her opinion on the final research question: how the fashion P.R industry in Ireland is evolving due to the rise in social media in the present day. Ryan is a Managing Executive for Murray P.R Agency located in Dublin. She has worked in the industry for ten years and has witnessed the change and adaption from print to digital.

The semi structured interview started off by Ryan discussing her background in the Irish P.R industry.

She stated: *"I started my career in PR at the very start of Twitter. Twitter had only been a platform for a few years at the time and not many businesses in Ireland depended on it. Instagram during this time was only available on Apple and I owned an Android phone. However I have grown up through the rise of Instagram especially through work". (Ryan, 2019)*

In a similar context, according to Davies (2018): "Instagram has now developed into a full-blown social network in its own time, with an Android and even a web version now". (Davies, 2018, p. 322) Instagram has become a huge platform for companies to advertise on especially in the marketing and P.R world. It not only gains relevant traffic or recognition, it is an excellent tool that professionals can no longer ignore. "With billions of users daily, Instagram is definitely a platform in for exploration and utilization". (Instazood.com, 2018)

When Ryan was asked: "Do you think the P.R industry in Ireland is being influenced by social media?" she answered with full intention from her own view on how the P.R industry is being influenced.

"Yes absolutely. It has been for a long number of years now. If we have to look at the industry now, social media is completely intertwined with communications and the news industry. For example: journalists in one respect have to adapt in a new way of working". (Ryan, 2019)

Ryan discussed how journalists and P.R practitioners are adapting to social media.

"They now need to consider the change of social media for their audiences and how they are accessing the news. It's now a two way street. P.R practitioners now have to adapt because of social media entirely. Fundamentally and totally, the Irish media has been impacted by the rise of social media and I think it's here to stay. It's only developing". (Ryan, 2019)

As fashion P.R firms in Ireland such as Burrell, Valerie Roe, Murray and Elevate are active on Instagram, it is interesting to question a P.R Executive's opinion on how the fashion P.R market in Ireland is growing. When asked: "In terms of the fashion industry, do you think the fashion P.R market in Ireland is growing?"

Ryan agreed the fashion industry in Ireland is growing due to changes in the industry.

“Yes, the visual platform of Instagram is for the fashion lens. Fashion is visual. It’s growing. The fashion industry moves at a fast paste now online because of social media, in terms of fashion P.R and fashion houses and brands have to produce ‘snackable’ content. Instagram posts are visual similar to a magazine spread. I think as well, there is a potential challenge in the fashion P.R market on a global level”. (Ryan, 2019)

She also revealed how local content has become an issue for fashion houses.

“Content is coming from New York which is a challenge for local brands, for example: if you were working with a global team such as Chanel and you were showcasing at New York Fashion Week. How would P.R teams in Ireland look after this event? The localisation of content is important and this has been a challenge for fashion P.R in Ireland. (Ryan, 2019)

Keeping up with trends and developments online is essential for P.R accounts. Similar to the life of a blogger, P.R teams need to know their audience and what they want to see online. Ryan talked about fast fashion which defines the production of designs and how clothing items can move from catwalk to current trends.

Ryan responded: *“Sustainability has also been influenced in the fashion industry in Ireland. It’s a massive trend in Ireland which has been sphere headed on social media. Fast fashion is getting a backlash. There are various influencers being influenced by fast fashion and this is definitely something fashion P.R had to get up and listen to because that’s where their audience is because of social media”. (Ryan, 2019)*

Despite the negative and positive side of Instagram for retailers or bloggers, it was interesting to focus on this impact for P.R. In the final piece of the interview, Ryan was asked: “Can you discuss the negative and positive side of social media in this case?”

Ryan finished the interview by talking about her own view of how she as a P.R practitioner in Ireland has witnessed both impacts.

“At the moment I’m definitely starting to notice the negative and positive side of social media. The negative side would be how we as P.R practitioners measure social media. Sometimes it can be tough seeing our clients being talked about all over the internet on social media platforms. Yes we can measure the number of followers, but we don’t know how many people a post can actually reach, so that’s definitely a perceived negative”. (Ryan, 2019)

“Another negative would be that social media is everywhere. It never seems to switch off. As a P.R practitioner you certainly can’t switch off. I think ultimately it is a negative that with the profession, you need to have one ear and eye on social media at all times. On Instagram, with the tool of Insta stories, you have your 24 hour window. You can check in anytime, even if you’re on holidays.” (Ryan, 2019)

Similar to Davies (2018) perspective on P.R as a two way street, the positive side of P.R can be associated with sales growth, recognition, instant feedback and marketing as mentioned in the retail section.

“The positive side would be, as P.R’s we can reach people quickly. We can have conversations now instead of the one way street. We can get feedback straight away. Online, we can see if followers don’t like something we share. For example: the Pepsi add with Kendall Jenner received backlash online, P.R’s could immediately see the reaction”. (Ryan, 2019)

Most importantly, fashion P.R is linked to blogging, influencers and Instagram in the present day. It is a major influence for practitioners to develop a large amount of content provided for P.R online especially by fashion bloggers since the rise of social media.

“Social media can be brilliant then. It can communicate brands with people. P.R firms can’t ignore what is being posted online. There is so much information online at our fingertips; we are in a period of change. P.R is in a period of change due to the digital age”. (Ryan, 2019)

4.5 Content Analysis: Irish Fashion Magazines

While researching for the dissertation, the two Irish magazine publications, *'Tatler'* and *'Stellar'* seemed most suitable for the research. Firstly, the magazines are Irish which represents the modern Irish fashion industry today and each of the two all shared similar material on the subject of social media. The publications also share a visual concept on how their own fashion and lifestyle magazines gain readership through Instagram. Through their online magazine and their hardcopy, a large quantity of information surrounds the Irish fashion world. This shaped my critical thinking as the researcher on deciding to research about the influence Instagram has in today's fashion world in Ireland.

For example, on each issue of *'Stellar'* magazine, page six is dedicated to Instagram: "Stellar is your magazine, so we want to hear from you! Email us info@stellar.ie, reach us on social @Stellarmagazine and use the hashtag #STELLARMAGAZINE to tag your pics on Instagram". (Stellar, 2019, p. 6) This is another example of how the fashion world relies and benefits on Instagram for readership, followers and sales growth.

In addition to the large content covered on the Irish fashion industry here, answering both research questions one and two; the magazine content analysis visually shapes the representation of the Irish fashion industry and how it relies on aspects of retail, trends, bloggers and influencers. The magazines discussed below are also relevant to the two key questions on blogging and retail.

4.5.1 2018-2019 Magazine Covers and Key Words

Louise Cooney (figure 4), Joanna Cooper (figure 5), Pippa O'Connor (figure 6) and Suzanne Jackson (figure 7) are presented on each cover of *'Stellar'* magazine. Despite the issues being published on different dates from 2018-2019, it was interesting to focus on the selected issues as all four women are representatives of the Irish fashion industry today. Likewise, all four women have a 100,000 or more following on Instagram, all four are associated with the blogging world, all four are white Irish females and all four are considered influencers by the Irish public.

In figure 4, cover girl Louise Cooney is a fashion and lifestyle blogger from Co. Limerick. Cooney is one of Ireland's leading bloggers and has a following of over 100,000 followers on

Instagram. Similarly, in the August 2019 edition of *stellar*, Joanna Cooper is the 'Ireland's top model' cover girl. In figure 6, Irish model, blogger and influencer Pippa O'Connor is presented and in figure 7, Suzanne Jackson, Ireland's first fashion blogger is pictured beside the words "the woman behind the business", which perhaps suggests blogging is the modern day business.

Each of the four women are active online through their social media account. They share their daily routines, fashion buys and life through the platform. For example, Suzanne Jackson or known online as 'SoSueMe', has a following of 269,000 followers. Since becoming a fashion blogger, Jackson is now the CEO of her own award winning company that produces beauty products such as tan, makeup, lashes, nail polish and clothes. In a 2017 issue of '*Stellar*', Jackson revealed: "So while SoSueMe is still there and I will always have my finger in it, I am very much Suzanne the businesswoman these days and my goal was always to make a big brand out of blogging." (Stellar, 2017).

Focusing on Instagram, Mitchell (2018) and Fox (2017) shared the pressure of having a large following and how only certain brands will work with people with a large following instead of being organic. In the literature review, Fox revealed: "Those of you who are start-up bloggers, to stop being disheartened by those 'bigger' ones who may have conned their way to the top or just those of you". In contrast, both '*Stellar*' and '*Tatler*' have six major Irish stars on their magazine covers. Although each of the six had to start at the beginning of the blogosphere like every blogger, the magazine only highlights their successes and achievements they have gained in life so far which includes their large online following. For example: "*A Star Is Born*" is captioned in Cooney's piece on the February 2019 '*Stellar*' issue.

Figure 3



Fashion statements and keywords on each issue such as: “Cosy buys from now until spring” (figure 4), “Getting to know Ireland’s top model” (figure 5), “Beauty, fashion and bargains” (figure 6) and “You’re not an influencer, so stop acting like one” (figure 7) are highlighted. Figure 3 represents the words used in each cover. Words such as ‘Bloggers’, ‘Influencers’, ‘Beauty’, ‘Self-Esteem’ and ‘Power’ can be compared to Wolf’s (2017) argument in *The Beauty Myth* (1991). Wolf dedicates a piece of the subject of women’s magazines and how women are portrayed. In this case, the women and words used surrounding their images present them as powerful and independent. As stated above, all women are white slim Irish females. They all have a secure job in the Irish fashion industry and they are all recognised by the Irish public as ‘influencers’.

For instance, figure 9 is recalled as the “Instagram issue”. Amber Jean Rowan, Irish model and influencer, is the cover girl or according to this issue “The new face of Irish fashion”. Her look on the cover of *Tatler* is exotic in comparison to the other issues where the women are presented to look and behave in a certain way. Described as the new face of fashion, Rowan can be compared to Fox’s (2017) argument on how women are living in a ‘consumed obsessed environment’. Rowan’s strong features rebel against Wolf’s (1991) ‘*beauty myth*’. As recalled in the literature review: “The stronger that women grow, the more prestige, fame and money is accorded to display professions’. (Wolf, 1991, p. 27)

Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



4.6 Instagram's Influence

In chapter three, the method of quantitative surveys was outlined. In order to gain a wider perspective on the role of Instagram a survey was created on Survey Monkey. The survey was published online, it consisted of six simple questions with a choice of a 'yes' or 'no' answer which was answered anonymously by 34 participants.

In order the questions for the survey were:

1. Do you have an Instagram account?
2. Do you follow any Irish bloggers or influencers?
3. Do you follow any Irish retailers or businesses online?
4. Do you think bloggers help promote smaller stores in terms of helping sales growth and sales reputation?
5. Are you influenced by what you see a blogger wearing online?
6. Do you think bloggers are shaping the fashion industry in Ireland today?

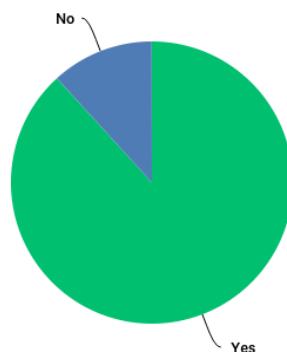
4.6.1 Results of the Survey

The overall results shown below depict an insight into the 34 participant's personal view on Instagram. The information analysed from the survey concludes Instagram is an influence for people in Irish society.

Question 1:

Figure 10

Q1 Do you have an Instagram account?



Data from question one identifies 88.24% participants with an Instagram account alongside

11.76% that don't own an account. From this result, the researcher can gain a straightforward insight into the popularity of the social media platform.

Question 2:

Figure 11

Q2 Do you follow any Irish Bloggers or Influencers?

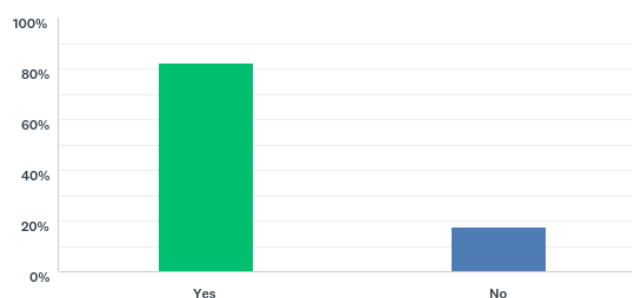


Bloggers such as Suzanne Jackson (SoSueMe), Erika Fox (RetroFlame), Lisa Jordan (JustJordan) and Louise Cooney have a following on Instagram of over 100,000 followers. In question two, thirty participants revealed they follow blogger or influencer accounts and four people revealed they don't. The results of question two underpins the fascination of bloggers and how people on Instagram enjoy keeping up with a bloggers life online.

Question 3:

Figure 12

Q3 Do you follow any Irish retailers or businesses online?



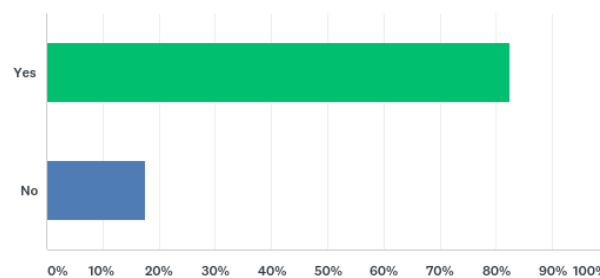
In question three, 82.35% answered 'yes' and 17.65% answered 'no'. The six people that picked 'no' revealed the participants do not follow any Irish retailers or businesses online. This is interesting because out of the 34 people, only 28 follow Irish retailers accounts in

comparison to question two, 30 participants follow blogger accounts. From question two and three, participants are more inclined to follow blogger accounts online.

Question 4:

Figure 13

Q4 Do you think Bloggers help promote smaller stores in terms of sales growth and their reputation?

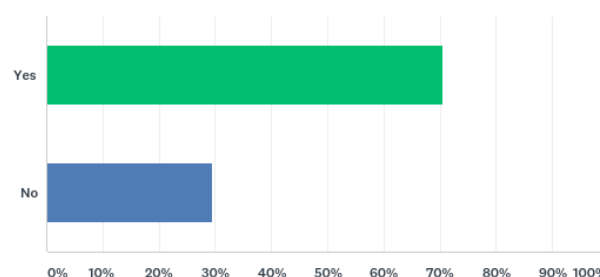


Question four covers both topics on blogging and retail. As outlined previously, research gathered articulated that retailers depend on social media for sales growth and store reputation. The 82.35% participants responded 'yes' and 17.65% responded 'no'. The result here strengthens the research from chapter two on how retailers or small businesses use social media platforms as a marketing and sales strategy.

Question 5:

Figure 14

Q5 Are you influenced by what you see a Blogger wearing online?



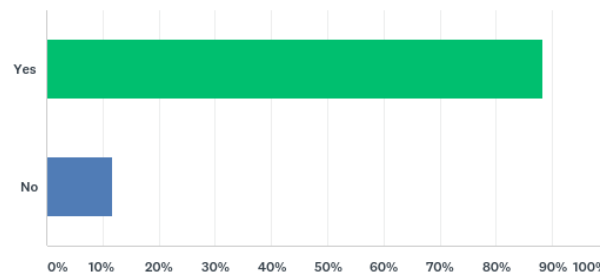
Question five is a similar approach to the topic discussed around the subject of influencing in section 4.3. In this case, 70% of people are influenced by what they see a blogger wearing

online and the remaining 30% are not influenced. This statistic revealed how the work of bloggers and influencers **influence** people online through what they wear, buy or advertise.

Question 6:

Figure 15

Q6 Do you think Bloggers are shaping the fashion industry in Ireland today?



In the final part of the survey, question six critically shaped the overall view of the research questions. 86.24% participants agreed that bloggers are shaping the industry, while 11.76% disagreed. Focusing back on question one, the statistics were the same. Thirty people answered 'yes' while four clicked 'no'. It is possible that the four participants that clicked 'no' might not own an Instagram account and might not witness the blogger activity online compared to the remaining thirty.

4.7 Conclusion

In conclusion to the results and analysis chapter, the aforementioned interviews, the magazine content analysis and survey were used to address the research questions of this dissertation. The three research questions listed below will be explored in depth in the next chapter.

1. How fashion retailers in Ireland are benefitting from social media in terms of sales growth, online business and store reputation.
2. How Irish fashion bloggers are shaping the industry in Ireland in terms of advertising, collaborating and influencing.
3. How the fashion PR industry in Ireland is evolving due to the rise in social media in the present day.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Overview

The final chapter will explore the concluding points of the dissertation through the findings from the three interviews, the content analysis and the quantitative questionnaire in chapter four. As outlined in the literature review, the themes of retail, blogging and public relations will be explored throughout. Each piece of research defines the overall approach on how the social media platform of Instagram is shaping the fashion industry in Ireland. Overall, this final chapter highlights the research findings that emerged from the study alongside accurate evidence supporting the information.

To restate the research questions once more:

- How fashion retailers in Ireland are benefitting from social media in terms of sales growth, online business and store reputation.
- How Irish fashion bloggers are shaping the industry in Ireland in terms of advertising, collaborating and influencing.
- How the fashion PR industry in Ireland is evolving due to the rise in social media in the present day.

5.2 Literature Review Overview

Sources from the literature review revealed the various ways Instagram is influencing the fashion industry in Ireland. Focusing on the research objective of retail, chapter two discussed the beginning of retail and the department store. It was interesting to understand the development of retail and how new developments added to the world of retail for improvement. Amarnath (2018), Shiu (2009) and Edelson (2018) discussed the theme of retail and how retailers get serious about their business through the platform of Instagram. McDonnell (2017) was the main focus of study in this chapter. Her case study on 'Guna Nua Boutique' in Co. Mayo supported the findings from the interview on retail in chapter four.

Romano (2017), McDonnell (2017) and Smarty (2018) shared information on the purpose of the hashtag, its rise to fame on social media and also how a hashtag helps businesses or sponsored posts reach a larger target audience online.

The second research question on bloggers was explored under the works of Fox (2017), Mitchell (2018), Sedeke (2017) and McGinnis (2012). The literature review described the realities of blogging and how the blogosphere in Ireland has expanded. Mitchell (2018) argued: "They favour the people with more followers, because the advertisers will go for the bigger people. I miss the time when it was not all about advertisements". In the final piece of the literature review, El Shehraws (2010), Gunning (2007) and Davies (2011) answered the research question on P.R. and how it has been affected by social media. The study finds P.R. in Ireland can no longer ignore the platform of Instagram.

5.3 Methods

The methods listed in chapter three contributed to a richer insight on the dissertation topic. By using a mixed methods approach, a greater understanding on the role of both Instagram and the fashion industry was gained. According to Johnson (2004): "Mixed methods research will be successful as more investigators study and help advance its concepts and as they regularly practice it." (Johnson, 2004, p. 14)

Moreover, the methods of three interviews under the three themes helped gain a wider perspective on the realities of the fashion industry. Interviews in this case provide relevant information on the subject being researched from anecdotal or personal experience. The three semi-structured interviews helped shape my critical thinking especially when comparing the interviews with information from sources in chapter two. Edwards stated: "The open-ended qualitative interview, with its possibilities for discussing unexpected topics, means that emotional dynamics can be significant for the interview process". (Edwards, 2013, p. 85)

The survey was created to achieve an accurate public opinion on the influence of Instagram. A set of six questions was created online through the platform Survey Monkey. 34 anonymous participants responded to the survey which provided the overall research outlook a distinctive perspective on how the public view Instagram's relationship with Ireland's fashion industry.

The content analysis on the two Irish fashion magazines shared a visual medium of information, similar to social media. Information gathered from the content analysis

revealed the 21st century image of a woman's fashion magazine and how women are portrayed similar to Wolf's (1991) critical views.

5.4 Results & Analysis Key Points

The main research results extracted from the research gathered in chapter four included the key points:

Retail: Small businesses and retailers depend on social media for business growth.

McDonnell (2017) claimed: "Sales come through social media in the form of private messages, phone calls and emails". (McDonnell, 2017, p. 210) Retailers in today's world, use bloggers, influencers or celebrities to showcase their products. This is a major sales point for a business because consumers are influenced by what they see other people wearing online. Mc Donnell's (2017) case study on Kate Middleton is a prime example of this. "Suzanne finds that when she works with local bloggers, it has an impact of sales in her Mayo based store". (McDonnell, 2017, p. 213) The role of Instagram is influencing the fashion industry especially through the work of bloggers and influencers as highlighted in section 4.3 of the results & analysis chapter.

Bloggers: Bloggers have become a huge part of Irish online community. Both retailers and consumers are being influenced by their work and content they post online.

Wynne described the impact of bloggers in her clothing store: *"I think people look up to bloggers. Even though they are just normal people. People feel like they know the person. They have a huge following and we are let into their lives by their Insta stories. So yes, Instagram definitely is an influence"*. (Wynne, 2019) The blogging industry can be unrealistic at times, as Connor (2019) stated *"It's not all sunshine and rainbows"*.

The blogging community in Ireland is competitive and people now are living in a 'comparison obsessed' environment. Online users are become blinded by the reality of social media activity.

The #hashtag has now become a powerful symbol in the digital age. The clickable symbol online can connect people from all over the world. The hashtag on Instagram can help promote a business's reputation or sales.

P.R.: The P.R. field in Ireland has become influenced by social media. The profession of P.R. is changing due to the digital age. P.R. practitioner, Ryan (2019) said: *“It has been for a long number of years now. If we have to look at the industry now, social media is completely intertwined with communications and the news industry”.*(Ryan, 2019) As stated in the chapter two, P.R. & blogging share a similar link on how they can often manipulate their followers with ‘false advertising’. P.R. has become a two-way street. Ryan commented: *“The positive side would be, as P.R.’s we can reach people quickly. We can have conversations now instead of the one way street. We can get feedback straight away. Online, we can see if followers don’t like something we share”.* (Ryan, 2019)

Content Analysis: ‘Stellar’ and ‘Tatler’ are both visually appealing for consumers. The images of the cover girls represent the Irish fashion industry and the four women on *Stellar* are associated with the blogging/ influencer sector. The women presented on the cover of both magazines are white, Irish, of a middle class background, slim, glamorous women. This finding can be compared to Wolf (1991) and her arguments in the ‘Beauty Myth’ in the literature review.

Survey: The survey on the ‘Influence of Instagram’ revealed the 34 anonymous participants informed the researcher Instagram is influencing the fashion industry.

Following on from the research findings and evidence provided from each chapter, the research topic was answered with various examples as listed above that: **Instagram is influencing the Irish fashion industry.**

5.5 Future Recommendations:

For future studies or recommendations, researching different social media platforms influence on the fashion industry would be interesting. Media applications such as Snapchat, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are also part of this a huge phenomenon during the digital age. While researching, a significant amount of material covered the platforms in terms of marketing and advertising. Research on the fashion industry in Europe or the U.S. would also be an interesting approach to research especially because the industry in Europe or the States works with major brands such as Chanel, Louis Vuitton and Victoria Secrets.

If I had to add another aspect to the study, I would have focused on the lack of male bloggers on Instagram compared to the high number of female bloggers online. For future studies, it would be interesting to know why this is the case.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Images

Figure 1. Google Images: Hashtag

Figure 2. The Wicked Blonde Instagram

Figure 3. Word Cloud

Figure 4. Stellar: February 2019

Figure 5. Stellar: August 2019

Figure 6. Stellar: May 2019

Figure 7. Irish Tatler: 2018

Figure 9. Irish Tatler: 2018

Appendix 2: Survey Graphs

Chart 1. Survey Monkey

Chart 2. Survey Monkey

Chart 3. Survey Monkey

Chart 4. Survey Monkey

Chart 5. Survey Monkey

Chart 6. Survey Monkey

Appendix 3: Interview Information Sheet

Dear Interviewee,

My name is Hayley Doherty. I'm currently studying an MA in Journalism & Public Relations in Griffith College, Dublin.

You are invited to take part in a research study to examine how Instagram in the present day is influencing the Irish fashion industry. I would like to interview you to ask you about your own view and personal experience on this statement. As Instagram is expanding each day it has become a major part of the fashion industry, especially in Ireland. Since you play a role within the Irish fashion industry, your words would be beneficial for my upcoming academic written dissertation. This research is part of a Master's Thesis in Journalism and Media Communications for Griffith College, Dublin. Before you decide whether to take part in the study it is important that you understand what the research is for and what you will be asked to do. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep. You will also be asked to sign a consent form. You can change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study without giving a reason. The purpose of the research study is to examine your thoughts about the Irish fashion industry at a time when Instagram is becoming more popular than ever. The questions will be shaped around your role in the fashion industry and how your career/social life is influenced by Instagram.

You have been chosen because of your experience in working in the fashion world. Furthermore, if you choose to take part, the interview will last approximately 20-25 minutes and will be arranged at a time to suit you. Information from the interview will be used as information for the written dissertation on how Instagram influences the fashion industry.

You are free to stop the interview at any time without giving a reason. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Each of the three interviewees will be assigned a number and the key to real names and organisations will be kept in a password-protected folder.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further information

Yours sincerely,

Hayley Doherty

Appendix 4: Consent Form

Hayley Doherty, MA Journalism & Public Relations, Griffith College Dublin

The aim of this study is to examine the influence the social media platform Instagram has on the present fashion industry in Ireland and how it is impacting people, fashion retailers, businesses and bloggers both positively and negatively.

- I will be the researcher conducting the questions; you will be asked five to ten questions about how Instagram influences your role in the Irish fashion industry
- The interview should last approximately 20-25 minutes
- This research will be of benefit as it draws on the experience your role in the industry The interview will also share a perspective on how Instagram can both negatively and positively impact a person's life especially working at a time of change in the media industry
- Personal participant information will not be used for any reason outside of the academic written dissertation. All information provided will be used for my dissertation only
- Taking part in this research is voluntary and there will be no consequences for withdrawing
- If you wish to remain anonymous during the interview or have any further questions about the questions, interview or on this research, you can contact me:

Researchers Name: Hayley Doherty: 087-1415016

Email Address: hayleydoherty123@gmail.com

Supervisor Name: Bláthnaid Nolan: 0876491120

Email Address: blathnaid.nolan@griffith.ie

This project has been approved by the Griffith College Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

Participant Signature _____

Researcher Signature _____

Appendix 5: Transcription of Interviews

Researcher: Hayley Doherty

Date: May 2019

Interview one: Dianne Wynne - Retail

Location: BORN, Co. Westmeath

- 1) Researcher: As you have experience in the field of retail, can you tell me what your opinion is on how retail has changed over the years?**

Wynne: *I think retail compared to years ago is now very much online. There is a massive online shopping culture now. Compared to the past, people regularly went shopping on a Friday or Saturday. Now, people can shop online on a Tuesday evening at home watching TV. It has certainly shifted; people now tend to shop online. It can save money too.*

- 2) Researcher: Do you think social media and in this case, Instagram influences a shopper on what they buy?**

Wynne: *Yes. I definitely think there this. There is something about seeing an Instagram blogger with a large following putting up a clothing item from a high street store and you being the follower, being able to go in and purchase that same item. For many people, I think it's exciting to share a little piece of what that person has. I think people look up to bloggers. Even though they are just normal people. People feel like they know the person. They have a huge following and we are let into their lives by their Insta stories. So yes, Insatgram definitely is an influence.*

- 3) Researcher: Do you think Instagram is a good or bad influence for retailers?**

Wynne: *It can be both. It's good in the way it can promote a business. Somebody with over 150k followers comes in and fits something on and they like a product. A business will get foot fall from that and people will want to buy the same product. Or then if a blogger puts up that they dislike a product that can also cause a negative impact on sales.*

- 4) Researcher: How does Instagram benefit your store?**

Wynne: *We had a collaboration with a local blogger. When we started collaborating with her she had 6k followers, now within a few months she has 10k. She comes in twice a week, puts up her posts of what she fits on. Whatever she posts online, there is definitely more interest on what she wears from customers. Items she had advertised would fly out of the store. We had to get her in the second time because it was such a success the first time. Now she posts on both Facebook and Instagram for us. It definitely impacts the demand on products and sales.*

5) Researcher: Do you think the future of retail will depend on social media? In terms of advertising, bloggers and promotions online?

Wynne: *Social media could go even further. It will either maintain the level it is now or it's so changeable. They could be something new in four to five years time. It's hard to predict but I think social media is here to stay. Every time I go onto Instagram there are new influencers, there are so many of them in Ireland now. It's a small country and to have so many – we have to question how much influence one can actually influence. I think 'influencers' has a negative effect too. People say such a person is an influencer because they receive free items or advertise online.*

Researcher: Hayley Doherty

Date: April 2019

Interview two: Leann Connor: Blogger

Location: Athlone Town Centre, Co. Westmeath

1) Researcher: When did you start blogging? Had you always an interest in fashion?

Connor: *I started blogging three years ago. I had always an interest in fashion; people would compliment my style, outfits which eventually gave me the confidence to start my blog. I also worked part time in retail in the beginning too.*

2) Researcher: Do you find the blogging community in Ireland competitive?

Connor: *Yes. Everybody wants to do better than everybody else. There is a lot of jealousy involved within the community especially at blogging events. Blogging is not all rainbows but I suppose that's associated with every type of work.*

3) Researcher: Can you recall the positive and negative side of blogging?

Connor: *The support from followers, friends and family would have to be the positive side. Instagram has also boosted by self-confidence, my passion for fashion, blogging and sharing what I love to such a huge following. Since the beginning of the month, I have gained 2,000 new followers. Then on the flip side, the negativity would be through online hate or should I say 'Keyboard Warriors'. People would message me of fake pages saying nasty comments about posts I have shared and it can be disheartening.*

4) Researcher: Why do you think Instagram is expanding?

Connor: *Instagram is expanding because the platform is for everyone. Everyone has a passion to share what they love online and Instagram can be a great advertising tool or blogging platform for people to join.*

5) Researcher: Can Instagram and the portrayal of bloggers online be unrealistic at times?

Connor: *As I said before, it's not all sunshine and rainbows. Instagram is not real life. Social media is only a minor part of anybody's life. What is shared online isn't always what it seems. People only want others to see what they want to see. I think many people including bloggers only care about how many followers or likes they receive on the high quality image they shared. Instead, Instagram should be how people are as a person. People compare their lives to bloggers, their travels, wealth and style. However, this again is unrealistic and bloggers should become more honest to their followers".*

6) Researcher: In your opinion, do you consider Instagram a major platform for bloggers to influence their followers in terms of style tips or collaborations with other brands?

Connor: *Yes. I use Instagram as a platform to advertise other brands. Although many bloggers work with brands because of the money or free gifts, I only work with brands I actually like. If a company reached out to me to advertise their product and I didn't like it, I wouldn't promote it. Honesty is the best policy and followers online remember this. I collaborate with many brands and I share images of the clothes, where people can purchase, the cost and sizes. My followers appreciate this because it gives them style inspiration and it also gives the brand sales reputation. It can be a win win at times.*

7) Researcher: Can you tell me in your own words the blogging journey of the 'Wicked Blonde' so far?

Connor: *I have learnt so far, there is a certain shelf life to blogging. Blogging is a two way street and the work of a blogger can work both ways. My first year blogging was tough. I found it difficult to gain followers until word of mouth helped me out. I eventually began to become more active online, I became dedicated, I attended events and I would help small businesses by going into their store and trying on outfits and posting it online. Three years on, I feel overwhelmed by how far I have come. The fashion industry in Ireland is small but I think if bloggers in Ireland work together and support as a team, Instagram will become more of a positive platform to work on. I honestly love what I do, I have loyal followers and that's what got me where I am today.*

Researcher: Hayley Doherty

Date: May 2019

Interview three: Orlagh Ryan: P.R

Location: Murray P.R, Dublin

1) Researcher: Can you tell me about your background in public relations?

Ryan: *I started my career in PR at the very start of Twitter. Twitter had only been a platform for a few years at the time and not many businesses in Ireland depended on it. Instagram during this time was only available on Apple and I owned an Android phone. However I have grown up through the rise of Instagram especially through work.*

2) Researcher: Do you think the P.R industry in Ireland is being influenced by social media?

Ryan: *Yes absolutely. It has been for a long number of years now. If we have to look at the industry now, social media is completely intertwined with communications and the news industry. For example: journalists in one respect have to adapt in a new way of working. They now need to consider the change of social media for their audiences and how they are accessing the news. It's now a two way street. P.R practitioners now have to adapt because of social media entirely. Fundamentally and totally, the Irish media has been impacted by the rise of social media and I think it's here to stay. It's only developing.*

3) Researcher: In terms of the fashion industry, do you think the fashion P.R market in Ireland is growing?

Ryan: *Yes, the visual platform of Instagram is for the fashion lens. Fashion is visual. It's growing. The fashion industry moves at a fast pace now online because of social media, in terms of fashion P.R and fashion houses and brands have to produce 'snackable' content. Instagram posts are visual similar to a magazine spread. I think as well, there is a potential challenge in the fashion P.R market on a global level.*

Content is coming from New York which is a challenge for local brands, for example: if you were working with a global team such as Chanel and you were showcasing at New York Fashion Week. How would P.R teams in Ireland look after this event? The localisation of content is important and this has been a challenge for fashion P.R in Ireland. Keeping up with trends and developments online is essential for P.R accounts. Similar to the life of a blogger, P.R teams need to know their audience and what they want to see online. Ryan talked about fast fashion which defines the production of designs and how clothing items can move from catwalk to current trends.

.Sustainability has also been influenced in the fashion industry in Ireland. It's a massive trend in Ireland which has been sphere headed on social media. Fast fashion is getting a backlash. There are various influencers being influenced by fast fashion and this is definitely something fashion P.R had to get up and listen to because that's where their audience is because of social media

4) Researcher: Can you discuss the negative and positive side of social media in this case?

Ryan: *At the moment I'm definitely starting to notice the negative and positive side of social media. The negative side would be how we as P.R practitioners measure social media. Sometimes it can be tough seeing our clients being talked about all over the internet on social media platforms. Yes we can measure the number of followers, but we don't know how many people a post can actually reach, so that's definitely a perceived negative. Another negative would be that social media is everywhere. It never seems to switch off. As a P.R practitioner you certainly can't switch off. I think ultimately it is a negative that with the profession, you need to have one ear and eye on social media at all times. On Instagram, with the tool of Insta stories, you have your 24 hour window. You can check in anytime, even if you're on holidays.*

The positive side would be, as P.R's we can reach people quickly. We can have conversations now instead of the one way street. We can get feedback straight away. Online, we can see if followers don't like something we share. For example: the Pepsi add with Kendall Jenner received backlash online, P.R's could immediately see the reaction.