THE LIFE OF THE FASHION BLOGGER
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SELF-IDENTITY AND PRESENTATION ON PERSONAL STYLE BLOGGERS

Thesis for Master, 30 ECTS
Textile Management

Andrea Simunic

Thesis number: 2017.15.10
Title: THE LIFE OF THE FASHION BLOGGER: an exploratory study of self-identity and self-presentation on personal style bloggers

Publication year: 2017

Author: Andrea Simunic

Supervisor: Nicklas Salomonson
Abstract

**Background:** The phenomenon of the 21st century, fashion bloggers, are having something that the glossy fashion magazines and fashion advertisements never had – a personal touch through their identity. Through sharing experiences, opinions and feelings about garments, shopping and other fashion related subjects, fashion bloggers share their self. Hence, blog can be the space where bloggers present, create or edit their self, shifting between who they really are and who they desire to be.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to get a deeper insight into the phenomenon of the fashion blogger by investigating bloggers self-presentation through the blog and the relation of their online identity to their real- and ideal-self.

**Design/method:** This study was designed as an exploratory two case study. The data was collected by using three different methods: the content analysis, the go-along method and the semi-structured interviews. The sources included blog content, human behavior and verbal narratives. The thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the data.

**Results:** Case I, a professional Croatian blogger, showed the usage of indirect elements to present the self on the blog and through blogging activities as well as the usage of ingratiation to maintain personal and business relationships, and competence to present the self as professionally competent. It also showed the usage of photo shooting as a cue for impression management as well as the struggle between different selves on the blog. Finally, the results highlighted the role of the blog in actualizing the self. Case II, a hobby Croatian blogger, showed the usage of direct and indirect elements to present the self on the blog and through blogging activities, as well as the intention to create a ‘fashionable personae’. It showed the usage of ingratiation to appear likeable and to get recognition, and competence to present the self as social. Analysis indicated the practice of fashion through dressing with an intention to create the ‘blogger’ identity and reach the ideal-self. The blog was found to be the place for practicing the self-confidence and the self-identity construction.

**Conclusion:** Case I showed the extensive conscious usage of the blog features and engagement into the blogging activities to present the self and usage of two self-presentation strategies; ingratiation and competence. Overall, it showed that the identity presented on the blog is majorly a reflection of already constructed identity and descriptive self while the significance of the blog is seen in the desire to reach self-actualization. Case II showed more unconscious usage of the blog features and engagement into the blogging activities to present the self and usage of two self-presentation strategies: ingratiation and competence. It also showed that the online identity on the blog mainly serves as a ‘trial identity’ through which the real-self is yet to be found and defined and through which the ideal-self is constantly reached. This study presents the first step into understanding how can blogger’s self-identity and self-presentation can be beneficial for the brand’s marketing strategy.

**Keywords:** fashion bloggers, personal style blog, self-identity, self-presentation
Acknowledgment

Firstly, I would like to express gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Professor Nicklas Salomonson of The Swedish School of Textiles at University of Borås, for guiding me in the right direction and having his office door open whenever I had a question. I would like to thank all my colleagues and friends who took the time to read my thesis and give their feedback. I would also like to thank both participants of my study for their openness and trust.

I would like to express my gratitude to my family and my friends for being unconditionally supportive and encouraging throughout these two years of Fashion Management master program and through the thesis writing process. Finally, I would like to thank my fiancé, who was always there, believing in me and who never gave up on motivating me. This achievement would not be possible without them.

Thank you.
# Table of contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................... II
Acknowledgment ........................................................................................................... III
List of figures .................................................................................................................. V
List of tables ................................................................................................................... V
1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Background ........................................................................................................... 1
   1.2 Problematization ................................................................................................. 2
   1.3 Purpose Statement and Research Questions ...................................................... 3
   1.4 Delimitations ...................................................................................................... 4
2 Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................... 5
   2.1 Research on fashion blogs .................................................................................. 5
      2.1.1 The bloggers self-identity construction and expression ....................... 6
   2.2 The self-concept ................................................................................................. 8
      2.2.1 The ideal-self .............................................................................................. 9
      2.2.2 The online-self .......................................................................................... 10
   2.3 Self-presentation ............................................................................................... 10
      2.3.1 Presenting the self online ......................................................................... 11
3 Methodology ............................................................................................................... 13
   3.1 Research approach and design ......................................................................... 13
   3.2 Sampling ............................................................................................................. 14
   3.3 Data collection methods .................................................................................... 15
      3.3.1 The content analysis ............................................................................... 16
      3.3.2 The go-along method .............................................................................. 17
      3.3.3 Semi-structured in-depth interviews ....................................................... 20
   3.4 Data analysis ....................................................................................................... 22
   3.5 Trustworthiness as an alternative to validity and reliability ......................... 23
   3.6 Method choice limitation ................................................................................... 23
   3.7 Ethical principles ............................................................................................... 24
4 Results and discussion .............................................................................................. 25
   4.1 Case I ................................................................................................................... 25
      4.1.1 Self-presentation strategies ..................................................................... 25
      4.1.2 Indirect presentation of the self ............................................................... 28
      4.1.3 Photo shooting – a cue for impression management ............................ 31
      4.1.4 Struggle between different selves ............................................................ 32
      4.1.5 Self-actualization through blogging ....................................................... 34
   4.2 Case II ................................................................................................................... 36
      4.2.1 Self-presentation strategies ..................................................................... 36
      4.2.2 Direct and indirect presentation of the self ............................................ 39
      4.2.3 Wearing the public-self .......................................................................... 41
      4.2.4 The self-confidence circle ...................................................................... 42
      4.2.5 Searching for the self ............................................................................. 44
5 Discussion summary ................................................................................................. 46
6 Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 49
7 Bibliography .............................................................................................................. 52
Appendices .................................................................................................................... 1
List of figures

Figure 1 McLeod, S. A., 2008. Self Concept. Available at: www.simplypsychology.org/self-concept.html............................................................................................................................................... - 9 -

List of tables

Table 1 Overview of data collection methods ............................................................ - 16 -
Table 2 Overview of the go-along method ................................................................. - 20 -
Table 3 Blogger demographics and blog statistics .................................................. - 25 -
Table 4 Overview of self-presentation strategies used on the blog ....................... - 25 -
Table 5 Blogger demographics and blog statistics ................................................. - 36 -
Table 6 Overview of self-presentation strategies used on the blog ....................... - 36 -
1 Introduction

1.1. Background

In the beginning of the century, fashion blogs were a rare occurrence that soon started growing rapidly, attracting the attention of the academics who have noticed the opportunity to explore the dimensions of fashion, contemporary society and digital media culture through this new phenomenon (Mora & Rocamora, 2015). Only ten years ago, fashion blogs presented the revolution of the fashion’s landscape; they were described as “all about now”, showcasing not only an “it” piece but also how to wear it and its value (Zamiatin, 2006). Findlay’s (2015) findings show that between 2006 and 2008 some reports were made on the growing phenomena of the fashion blogger followed by the crucial year 2009 in which blogging has been officially invited to the fashion industry and the bloggers took the front-row seats of the fashion shows. A year later, blogging platform ‘Blogger’ alone counted more than 2 million blogs related to fashion (Rocamora, 2011).

Today, fashion bloggers are a body of the fashion scene; bloggers sit on the first rows of fashion shows together with fashion experts, journalists and celebrities (Mora & Rocamora, 2015). They have an exclusive access to new collections or product releases and to public and private events. Even more, many brands seek for new brands ambassadors amongst fashion bloggers, rather than top models or celebrities.

What launched the fashion blogger to the center of the fashion world?

Fashion bloggers are having something that the glossy fashion magazines and fashion advertisements never had – a personal touch through their identity. Chittenden (2009) addresses that exactly the identity expression presents the fundament of the personal blog. Through the different media on the blog, fashion blogger dreams “out loud” about a desirable product, communicates the experiences with a clothing item or the brand, the service or the purchasing process at the store. Moreover, a blogger shares the level of satisfaction, emotions and memories related to the products with his/her audience (Carù & Cova, 2003). That way they offer not only the information but also the truth, as perceived by the audience (Zamiatin, 2006). As Rocamora (2011) defines, these independent personal style blogs, that are the central form of fashion blogs in this moment, are run by individuals who are considered “the voice of a fashion institution” such as the brand or the magazine (Bruzzi and Church-Gibson, 2013, p. 113). Because of that, more and more brands choose to invest into influencer marketing but also into finding the bloggers who are a perfect match for the brand to reach different goals, such as an increase brand recognition or revenue increase (Fashion & Beauty Monitor, 2015). In the interview for Forbes, Rasim Ayerden, the Dsquared2 Web Marketing Manager, explained: “We found out that when you build a relationship with the right influencer, it becomes organic and credible. We work with bloggers because the world of fashion has shifted I guess towards user-generated content, which was kicked off in the first place with them, the visits to our website are increasing, in part thanks to editorial partnerships with bloggers” (Forbes.com, 2017). However, finding the right blogger who will present the brand in its best light requires a deeper insight into the way the blogger ‘works’.

Even before the explosion of blogging and social media, Preece (2000, p. 16) defined online social environment as a place where “people interact socially as they strive to satisfy their own
needs or perform special roles”. The development of the social platforms, such as the blog, enables individuals to focus on themselves and to share their uniqueness with whoever is interested in it. Andy Warhol once said, “In the future everyone will be famous for 15 minutes” (Feig, 2003, p.419). Today’s online environment and different platforms turned this sentence into the real possibility, allowing the individuals to make a great effect out of their everyday life activities. Hence, the blog became the space devoted to blogger’s everyday life and, more important, the moments that happen in it (Rocamora, 2011).

Through sharing experiences, opinions and feelings about garments, shopping or similar subjects, fashion bloggers share their self. Rocamora (2011) described the blog as the document of self-identity construction. In that document, the self is constructed through different “technologies of the self”, such as screen and photo (Rocamora, 2011). Titton (2015), on another hand, suggests that bloggers aim to create the new identity through practiced bodily enactments and described experiences related to the outfit photos – ‘fashionable personae’. Fashion blogs present an ideal surrounding for identity construction especially for teenage bloggers who shape their identity through different blogging activities, such as matching the fashion outfits (Chitten den, 2010).

But more than anything, fashion blogs are the self-expressional and self-presentational spaces through which bloggers share their self with the audience using the tools which the blog as a platform offers; words, sounds, hyperlinks, still and moving images and plugins (Thelwall & Stuart, 2007). Even more, strategies that people use to present their self in the real-life context are also used online (Dominick 1999).

Therefore, the self-identity of the fashion blogger can have a huge impact on the content of the blog, as the blog can have a significant impact on the blogger’s self-identity. And because the online environment offers the great opportunity to control different actions, bloggers might be shifting between who they really are and who they desire to be.

1.2. Problematization

The content fashion bloggers creatively produce nowadays, in terms of various digital formats, spotlight different dimensions of contemporary society, digital culture and fashion (Mora & Rocamora, 2015). In that sense, they are a source of data on fashion practices across the world, including production, consumption and representation, as emphasized by Mora & Rocamora (2015).

Even though the role of a fashion blogger is significant in the 21st century, as a phenomenon, it remains to be explored more in-depth. In the issue of Fashion Theory, the Letter from the Editors: Analyzing Fashion Blogs—Further Avenues for Research, Mora & Rocamora (2015) note that only amount of work exists on fashion blogging. Studying the fashion bloggers provides the contribution to knowledge on fashion in general, fashion media as well as the cultural and social understanding of society, as explained by Silverstone (1999) at the beginning of the social media era. Regarding brands, fashion blogs present the new channels for the product launch, content promotions or event production. As the report by Fashion & Beauty Monitor shows, businesses are today ‘more than ready’ to invest time and money into marketing strategies regarding fashion bloggers (Fashion & Beauty Monitor, 2015). Studying fashion bloggers provides a new knowledge on the way bloggers ‘work’ with products which
contributes to brand’s strategy on online and influencer marketing.

The literature review on topics related to fashion bloggers and blogs showed that business-oriented view gets more attention of academics than the social phenomenon of blogging. The relations between the blogger and the brands are often explored as well as the blogger’s impact and influence on consumers, resulting in clarifying the importance of using bloggers as marketing tools. Hence, not many studies focus on fashion bloggers as a social phenomenon of the 21st century. A small number of research has been done on the fashion blogger’s identity. Most of them are conducted on teenage fashion bloggers, exploring how the identity is constructed, while a couple of them focus on the identity expression and self-performance through the blog (e.g. Bortree, 2005; Chittenden 2010; Rocamora 2011; Titton 2015). Bortree (2005) suggests the self-identity study on adult fashion bloggers who, in contrast to teenage bloggers, might not struggle for self-identity. Therefore, researching adult bloggers might result in different findings.

When it comes to the methods used to study fashion bloggers in existing studies, it is noticeable that qualitative online content analysis (e.g. Titton 2015; Bortree 2015; Chittenden 2010) and interviews with bloggers (e.g. Bortree 2015; Titton 2015) are used the most. The blogger as an individual, their self-identity and self-performance has been studied mostly through interviews, qualitative online content analysis and activity observations. Interestingly, no qualitative studies of the fashion bloggers in terms of participant observations were found with the idea of getting the ‘behind the scene’ insight. Based on the mentioned studies, I speculate that the reason for the lack of observations of bloggers might be the limited access to the blogging community. This finding presents the gap in the segment of methodology and it highly influenced the choice of the method that will be used in this study, introducing the novel angle on studying a blogger – following a blogger in a real life rather than online. This new way to study bloggers could provide new findings in the phenomenon of fashion blogging, based on the suggestion by Paterson et al. (2016) who emphasize the great opportunity this method offers; getting an insight into experiences that bloggers usually keep away from the public.

### 1.3. Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The fashion blogger as an individual and as a phenomenon of the 21st century is still quite an unexplored area, as emphasized by Mora & Rocamora (2015). Being a smaller personal style blogger myself, fashion blogging and bloggers are topics I am highly interested in. While my passion and hobby emphasized my interest in the fashion bloggers as today’s phenomenon, a strong motive came after reviewing the literature that showed only a small amount of studies done on fashion bloggers and topics related to their self-identity. Even more, the literature signals that new researches on fashion bloggers as the phenomenon of the 21st century is needed to contribute to current findings on the topic, the trend in general, the contemporary society and the digital culture (Rocamora, 2011).

The purpose of this study is to get a deeper insight into the phenomenon of the fashion blogger by investigating blogger’s self-identity and self-presentation. To focus the study, the following research questions have been established:

**R1:**

*How is the personal style blogger’s self-identity presented through the fashion blog and*
blogging activities?

R2: How does the online identity of a personal style blogger presented on the blog relate to the real- and ideal-self?

1.4. Delimitations

The identity can be analyzed on different levels, including societal, cultural or individual levels. This study explores the self-identity of fashion bloggers on an individual level, understanding the self-identity as individual’s characteristics’ perception and recognition (Solomon et al., 2015). This choice is based on the explanation by Solomon et al. (2015) that in the Western societies, the core value of the self lays in its unique nature.

This study explores the blogger’s online self in relation to the ideal- and real-self. It is important to note that certain limitations exist regarding exploring the real-self due to the time limitation to completely discover and meet the real-self of the fashion blogger but also due to the complexity of it. Hence, this study takes an approach that blogger’s descriptive-self in combination with observed behavior is the closest to the real-self.

Furthermore, even though both male and female fashion bloggers are a part of the fashion blogosphere, this study focuses only on female fashion bloggers, because “activities of ‘dressing up’ and ‘diary keeping’ are more often categorized as a female pursuit” (Chittenden, 2010).
Theoretical Framework

After establishing the research questions, key concepts have been defined. The purpose of these concepts is to explore theories and models related to the research questions in order to provide a starting point for further research steps.

The fashion blog: Understanding the fashion blog and, more specifically, personal style blog will give a clear overview on the idea behind the personal style blog, its concept and its form, all being crucial to understand the study materials and to be able to apply the further concepts and methods.

The self-concept: Exploring the self-concept as the primary concept aims to provide an understanding of the self-identity and its construction. The real-, the ideal- and the online-self concepts present a starting point of understanding different aspects of the self, concentrating on the online-self and its relation to the real- and ideal-self. This approach will be used as a guide for the second research question (R2).

The self-presentation concept: The exploration of the literature on the self-presentation offline and online aims to provide the insight into the strategies used by individuals to present their self. The focus is on presenting the self online. The concept regarding the strategies used in self-presentation online will be used as a primary guide for the first research question (R1).

2.1. Research on fashion blogs

The blog, also called the weblog, is an online diary/journal, which gives an opportunity for a quick report on a certain topic that, through the comments section, allows the further communication between the author and the readers. The blog gives an ability to link to other websites, which makes it an ideal space for virtual community creation (Blanchard, 2004). The core of the blog is the text, also called “the post” accompanied by images, videos, music playlists and other media that allow the blogger, the author of the blog, to express themselves.

While first blogs date back to the middle of the 1990s, the launch of the first fashion related blog, ‘nogoodforme’, happened in 2003 (Rocamora, 2011). In 2010, one of the most famous blogging platforms for creating a blog ‘blogger.com’, reported that more than 2 million blogs are fashion related (ibid). The exact number of active fashion blogs today could not be found indicating the rapid growth.

Fashion blogs soon became the highlight of the fashion landscape and consumers saw an opportunity to feel “the real fashion” instead of magazine editorials full of pricy garments. While there are still similarities between the fashion blog and the magazine, such as the intentions to entertain, inform or advertise (Engholm & Hansen-Hansen, 2014), the hypertextuality of the blog offers readers something that the print fashion media cannot. That is, as Rocamora (2012) points out, the complexity of the text formats, its production and consumption. The appearance of the fashion blog and therefore the more complex fashion media content undoubtedly exceeded the boundaries set by the print fashion media such as magazines.
The fashion blog became a strong part of the fashion system by introducing the forms of interacting with fashion and presenting it, but also by changing the hierarchy in the system, which can be seen in who sits at the first rows of the fashion shows (Engholm & Hansen-Hansen, 2014). Engholm & Hansen-Hansen (2014) highlight that blogs are not only a part of, but also “in the service of the fashion system”, as they have a strong link to the consumers and are highly involved into the economy of the system. Even though most of the fashion bloggers start blogging as a hobby, in some cases their blog becomes their product over time, carrying new business opportunities in the fashion industry. In this sense, the bloggers who run money-making blogs can be considered as professionals. They can be seen as self-branded and as self-entrepreneurs who are involved into the fashion system economy by, for example, collaborating with the brand or launching their own brand/product.

Based on the earlier mention of the presentation of fashion, fashion blogs can be divided into different types. Engholm & Hansen-Hansen (2014) offer quite a general division by separating fashion blogs into four different types: professional (produced by fashion magazines), fashiondustrials (produced by fashion industry professionals such as journalists and stylists), street style (photos of the “real people” on the street) and narcissus (personal diaries). Rocamora (2011), on another hand, offers a more detailed approach, starting from the rougher division primarily of the fashion blog to independent or corporate. She focuses on the independent blogs ran by individuals, dividing them into different sub genres based on the core interests, such as street style, celebrity, personal style, item focused (only bags or only shoes).

The different genres appearance in individual blogs, because of the rapid growth of the fashion blogs, started the new era of fashion discourses being produced and consumed online (Rocamora, 2011). This new era raised the interest of academics that noticed the opportunity to explore new, expanded dimensions of fashion, contemporary society and fashion media culture (Mora & Rocamora, 2015). Meanwhile, the businesses saw an amazing marketing opportunity; fashion blogs as the new channels for the product launch, content promotions or event production. Even more, as the report by Fashion & Beauty Monitor shows, businesses are now ‘more than ready’ to invest time and money into marketing strategies regarding fashion bloggers (Fashion & Beauty Monitor, 2015).

The researches indicate that there is indeed the reason to invest in fashion bloggers. The study by Halvorsen et al. (2013, p.211) showed that the advertisements created by fashion bloggers and posted on the blog are incomparable to traditional, mass media advertisements due to strong relationships they have with the readers which makes the advertisement perceived as “personal and non-intrusive”. The study on top 18 Swedish fashion blogs showed that fashion bloggers have a better relationship and contact with end consumers than brands and that consumers perceive bloggers as trustworthy (Pihl and Sandström, 2013). The 2013 Digital Influence Report by technorati.com showed that consumers often turn to blogs before deciding on a purchase (technorati.com, 2013). Even more, blogs are the 3rd most influential online space when it comes to overall purchases, right after the retail and brand sites (ibid). The survey also resulted in blogs being the most trustworthy source online by consumers, once again highlighting the role of the blog in consumer behaviour (ibid).

### 2.1.1. The bloggers self-identity construction and expression

As this study focuses particularly on the personal style blogs as a subgenre of the independent
fashion blogs, which are, according to Rocamora (2011), the central form of fashion blogs today, it is important to describe the nature of the personal style blog. As Rocamora (2011) explains, personal style blogs are devoted to the blogger’s own style, more specifically, their outfits. Personal style bloggers report about their outfits on a regular basis, giving information on how to style clothing pieces, where to buy them or maybe explain their garment choice. While at the beginning personal style bloggers reported only on their daily outfits, today their blogs are much more than that. Their content reaches new levels; from sharing their shopping related experiences, emotions and opinions on garments or brands to showing their audience their dream pieces put on the wish list as an inspirational content and asking for opinions. At the same time, readers experience something new in comparison to the classic, printed magazine - the real fashion worn by real people. Through sharing these types of content, personal style bloggers undoubtedly share their self-identity. Exactly this personal ‘touch’ through the self-identity expressions differs a personal style blogger from a glossy magazine but also from other bloggers.

The review of the studies related to personal style blogs and bloggers show that blogs can be seen as the space for the bloggers’ self-identity construction. Agnes Rocamora, an expert in fashion media analysis (Titton, 2015), has done several studies related to the bloggers’ self-identity construction as a part of the social phenomena of fashion blogging. In one of her papers, Rocamora (2011) researched the bloggers’ identity, explaining that blogs can be understood as documents of the identity construction through clothing while she compares the computer screen to the mirror; the identity is constructed through the technologies of the self. Rocamora (2011) emphasizes that personal style blogs might be a space for new and open fashion interpretations but also for women’s interpretations of themselves, interpretations by themselves and interpretations in relation to their female identity. Chittenden (2010) also addresses the strong link between the identity and its construction in the fashion blog through the study on teenage fashion bloggers. Using Bourdieu’s theory of capitals, she explores how the teen identity is shaped and expressed through the blogging activities. Further, she discusses the relation between the dialogic interaction in the fashion blogosphere and the understanding of own identity, proving that fashion blogs are indeed the spaces where teenagers form their identity through the outfit choices and blogging activities such as writing posts, interacting with audience and similar.

Titton (2015) argues that; when blogging about personal style, the bloggers to some extent enact their self-identity and use their fashion media knowledge to create the new identity – ‘the fashionable personae’. By presenting the narrative version of the self and using particular bodily enactments, as Titton (2015) explains, bloggers create the version of themselves meant specifically for the blog purposes, while it can be set-aside in other social surroundings.

While they can be a potential self-identity construction platform, personal style blogs are without a doubt the self-expression and self-presentational spaces in which bloggers use different strategies to express and present the self to the audience using the tools. The self-identity presentation of a fashion blogger has a huge impact on the content and the process of the communication happening on and through the blog (Thelwall & Stuart, 2007, p.524). Evenmore, Bortree's (2005) study shows that personal style bloggers use different strategies to express their self on the blog. Using the concept of five self-presentation strategies introduced by Jones (1990), Bortree (2005) studied the ways bloggers express the self through the interpersonal and mass communication on the teenage personal style blogs. She concludes that ingratiation, competence and supplication fit into the teen fashion blogger’s behavior online. However, teen personal style bloggers, who still search for their self-identity at that age, do differ from the adult bloggers who usually already have an established self-image and are
aiming to express it, highlights Bortree (2005).

2.2. The self-concept

Who am I? What separates me from the others?

One of the first ideas of the self-concept in the Western societies was introduced by psychologist Carl Rogers who devoted his life to studying the individual. Rogers (1959) suggests that the self-concept refers to the perceptions of the characteristics of “I” or “me” and the perceptions of the relationships of the “I” or “me” to others and to various aspects of life, together with the values attached to these perceptions. Baumesiter (1999, p. 13) simplified Roger’s definition by stating that the self-concept is "the individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is". Solomon et al. (2016, p. 208) supports these definitions but also emphasizes that the real self is in the “independent understanding of the self”, resulting in the separateness of each and every individual. He defines the self-concept as “the beliefs a person holds about his own attributes and how he evaluates the self on these qualities” (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 209). Today in the Western societies, as Solomon et al. (2016) explains, the core value of the self lays in its unique nature, compared to the Eastern societies where the emphasis is more on the collective self.

The self-concept is a complex structure, formed by many elements, as emphasized by psychologists throughout the years of exploring the self-concept. In order to understand complexity of the self-concept, it is important to review some of the most known definitions. Rogers (1959) suggests that the self-concept is built upon three components: the self-image, the self-esteem and the ideal-self, e.g. how we see ourselves, how much value we place on ourselves and how we wish to be like. While Rogers (1959) focuses only on the personal identity, John Turner, who developed the self-categorization theory in 1980s, suggests that the personal and the social identity are the levels that construct the self-concept, which then shifts between the two (Guimond et al., 2006). Turner (1987) additionally suggests that the self-concept is the result of cognitive processes as well as the interaction between the person and the social surrounding. Lewis (1990) also links self-concept to both individual and his/her surrounding, seeing the self-concept as the mixture of the existential and the categorical self. Both are being formed in the early childhood when individuals start being aware of our surroundings and themselves as well as when they start categorizing ourselves by age, gender and similar (Lewis, 1990).

The contemporary definition of the self-concept introduced by Solomon et al. (2016) suggests a more detailed structure, adding new elements compared to the previous definitions. According to it, the self-concept consists of the content, the positivity, the intensity, the stability over time and the accuracy. Each of these elements plays the crucial role in our everyday behavior. As an example, an individual with the low level of positivity, e.g. self-esteem, is expected to perform weaker than the one with the high positivity level (Solomon et al., 2016). The self can change to match the setting, just as people change outfits for different occasions. This study will take the approach introduced by Solomon et al. (2016), which explains that people have multiple versions of the self. Therefore, an individual has the inner/private self and the outer/public self. If put into the time expressing terms; an individual has the past, the present and the future self. Finally, Solomon et al. (2016) bases his third division on the Rogers’ (1959) self-concept definition. Hence, the real- and the ideal-self are rather the types or the forms of the self than
2.2.1. The ideal-self

We are all driven to reach the certain image of ourselves that we have pictured; the ideal-self (Rogers, 1959). His theory explains that when the way we see ourselves does not match the way we would like to be, the extent to which we value ourselves is affected (McLeod, S. A., 2008). Rogers (1959) introduced two aspects when it comes to the relation between the real-self and the ideal-self; incongruence and congruence. According to his theory, the incongruence appears when the real self-image and the ideal-self differ, compared to the state of congruence in which the self-image and the ideal-self overlap and are more similar (Figure 1). Rogers (1959) additionally stresses that the congruence is required for an individual to self-actualize.

Argyle (2008) introduces the four most important factors that determine the relation between the real and ideal-self; the way others react to us, the comparison to others, the social roles we have and the level of identification with others. While different elements impact the congruence, by using different actions, individuals consciously and unconsciously try to achieve its highest possible level.

Solomon et al. (2016) stress that individuals tend to get involved into “impression management”, meaning that, by strategically using different cues, such as clothing, they aim to manage how others perceive them. That way they are also trying to achieve the ideal-self. In this study, the features that the blog offers such as text, photo or video could also present the cues. Therefore, the “impression management” can be considered as an action taken to achieve congruence.

The ideal-self concept, e.g. congruence and incongruence, the factors that determine it and the impression management theory will be used in analysis of the real- and ideal-self, in relation to the second research question.
2.2.2. The online-self

The identity created online emerges from the motivation to present the version of the self to the audience. That version, as Solomon et al. (2016) suggest, might be an idealized one. As we encounter new people and situations, we negotiate our identity interpretation, according to Solomon et al. (2016). While we are doing so in real life, the online world gives us even a better opportunity to ‘edit’ our identity due to the technological progress. Today, blogs allow the usage of different media features: from the basic ones such as texts, photos, videos and links to the music playlists, current location of the blogger in the world and similar. A study on self-presentation online, showcased by Solomon et al. (2016), revealed that authors of the online content carefully choose and place these media features in order to express the self-identity. When presenting the self online, bloggers might start embellishing the self to achieve a certain goal, such as getting closer to the ideal-self. Bullingham & Vasconcelos (2013), who used the self-presentation theory established by Erving Goffman (1990) to explore the self-editing gradations in blogging, emphasize that bloggers tend to edit the certain aspects of the self, maximizing some and minimizing others. Titton (2015), on the other hand, sees the online-self as a “fashionable persona” that every blogger aims to become exclusively for the blog purposes by using the appropriate version of the narrative self and particular bodily enactments. Therefore, this study takes an approach that the online-self of the personal style blogger is a meeting point between the real- and the ideal-self while the amount of each varies from blogger to blogger potentially depending on the factors introduced by Argyle (2008); the way others react to us, the comparison to others, the social roles we have and the level of identification with others.

2.3. Self-presentation

When it comes to expressing the self online, terms such as self-presentation and self-representation are used. Since this study explores only the self-presentation on the personal style blogs, it is important to note the difference between the presentation and representation online. The self-representation term refers to a set of signs (sounds, images, words or objects) that are constructed in a certain way, which then leads to a specific concept or an object (Jill Walker Rettberg, 2017). The self-presentation refers to the role the individual performs by taking a certain action online, such as creating an image or sharing it. Self-presentation is, therefore, of a behavioral nature, it is an act that shows us how an individual behaves to present the self (Walker Rettberg, 2017).

The focus of this study is the self-presentation online, however, it is crucial to turn back to the real life face-to-face interaction and self-presentation theories as a starting point for understanding further concepts. Furthermore, understanding face-to-face self-presentation is of a high importance since this study researches both online and offline contexts.

One of the first theories on self-presentation was introduced in 1959 by Goffman who compares the real life to a stage. On that stage, performers communicate verbally and nonverbally to the audience in order to express the given role, just as individuals present the self to others in real-life (Goffman, 1959). That self is the version the self individuals choose to present and the self others perceive based on our self-presentation (Goffman, 1959). The way individuals present the self, e.g. the strategies they use, usually depends on what they want to achieve, the image they want others to get, as suggested by Leary (1995) who defines self-presentation as “the
process of controlling how one is perceived by other people”. Besides the verbal and nonverbal communication, the self is presented through other “channels” such as physical appearance, connection to others or sometimes material possessions (Goffman, 1959; Leary, 1995).

The way individuals present the self depends on the motive behind it. According to Leary (1995), the motivation can come out of the intention to maximize the reward of material kinds, such as money, to “take care” of our self-esteem or to get a step closer to the ideal-self. Jones (1990), on another hand, suggests that the general motive behind self-presentation is for a self-presenter to gain the power in a relationship with the audience. The motives differ depending on the goal and so do the strategies individuals use to achieve it. According to Solomon et al. (2016), individuals tend to encounter into different social roles depending on a situation which might require using different cues to reinforce their impression strategy, such as a strategic choice of the outfit. Hence, products might play an important role in their self-presentation strategies. The strategies individuals use can also be based on verbal skills, as Jones (1990) suggests. According to that theory, individuals present the self through five different strategies: ingratiation, competence, intimidation, exemplification and supplication. Interestingly, according to the results of the study by Dominick’s (1999), these five mentioned self-presentation strategies used in real-life, are used online too.

### 2.3.1. Presenting the self online

Self-presentation in real life and online differs due to the nature of the surroundings. When the way we present the self in real life is taken into the online setup, it is adjusted to what the online environment offers. Hence, personal style blogs differentiate in the content creation and presentation through the visual and textual forms (Engholm & Hansen-Hansen, 2014). Through this content creation and presentation play, bloggers encounter into the self-presentation actions of which the range is broader than in the real-life environment due to the nature of the online ‘world’. The study by Papacharissi (2002) shows that the authors of the personal home pages present their online-self by using a design element “palette” such as links, banners, plugins and others. The online environment offers different features and thus different, maybe more creative options to present the self. It also offers the time to think and plan rather than making instant unconscious decisions. The ability to control in the online world gives an ability to present the self carefully by using adequate media features (Solomon et al., 2016).

The authors of the personal home pages use online pages as the new channel to present the self, as concluded by Dominick in 1999. With an approach that “the personal web-page is a careful constructed self-presentation”, Dominick (1999, p. 645) took the real-life self-presentation strategies introduced by Jones (1990) and applied it to the online environment, proving that the same strategies are used both offline and online. The five self-presentation strategies, that are also used as a guideline in researching self-presentation in this study, are described by Jones (1990) as followed:

**Ingratiation:** A person using this strategy has a goal of being liked by others. Some common characteristics of ingratiation are saying positive things about others or saying mildly negative things about yourself, statements of modesty, familiarity, and humor.

**Competence** [also referred to as self-promotion]: The goal of this strategy is to be perceived as skilled and qualified. Common characteristics include claims about abilities,
accomplishments, performance, and qualifications.

**Intimidation:** Persons using this strategy have power as their goal. Typical characteristics are threats, statements of anger, and potential unpleasantness.

**Exemplification:** The goal of this strategy is to be perceived as morally superior or possessing high moral standards. Characteristics include ideological commitment or militancy for a cause, self-sacrifice, and self-discipline.

**Supplication:** The goal is nurturance or appearing helpless so that others will come to your aid. Characteristics of this self-presentational approach include entreaties for help and self-depreciation. (Dominick, 1999, p. 648)

The results of Dominick’s (1999) study showed that ingratiation is the most used self-presentation strategy on home pages, just as it is in a real life since most people desire to get the approval and the affection of the social surroundings (Jones, 1990). Competence is the second most used strategy in personal home pages, followed by exemplification; supplication and intimidation are used in small number of cases (Dominick, 1999). After this the study proved the possibility to apply these strategies to the online environment, Bortee (2005) conducted a similar study on teenage fashion bloggers, focusing on the communication happening on their blogs. In relation to the results presented by Dominick (1999), Bortee (2005) notes that teen fashion bloggers mostly use the same strategies – ingratiation and competence. However, as the third most common choice, teen fashion bloggers use supplication rather than exemplification (Bortee, 2005). It can be speculated that the difference comes from the fact that Dominick (1999) studied adults (above 18 years old) and Bortree (2005) studied teenagers (below 18 years old).

Inspired by Dominick (1999) and Bortee (2005), this study will explore the self-presentation strategies developed by Jones (1990) to find out which strategies are mostly used on personal style blogs ran by adult bloggers whose self-identity might be developed to the further extent in comparison to the teenage fashion bloggers (Bortree, 2005).
3 Methodology

3.1. Research approach and design

The literature and previous research review showed limited knowledge regarding the personal style blogger’s identity and self-presentation. The research questions presented in the background intend to explore and understand the blogger’s self-identity and self-presentation on the individual level. In order to provide an answer to the research questions, a qualitative approach to this study was chosen. Flick (2014) explains that a qualitative approach including research questions is more suitable when the knowledge on a certain topic is limited while in the opposite situation; there is a basis for a hypothesis. Furthermore, Flick (2014) explains that exploring human behavior includes the understanding of personal experiences, the meanings linked to them as well as the discourses and practices in certain contexts. To be able to gain these understandings, Flick (2014) emphasizes the importance of using qualitative data collection methods, such as interviews and observations.

This study is designed as a case study. This choice is supported by Burns’ (2000, p. 460) suggestion to do a case study when researching “contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context” in order to gain in-depth understanding of processes. In this study, the fashion bloggers present the contemporary, growing phenomenon (Mora & Rocamora, 2015). Furthermore, Yin (2009) states that a case study is a suitable choice when the intention is to contribute to the knowledge of individuals. Since this study aims to get a deeper insight into fashion bloggers as individuals, the case study allowed the focus on a very representative individual in relation to the research questions (Burns, 2000). Moreover, it is relevant to use the case study research design when the research questions are related to ‘a contemporary set of events’ and are formed to answer on how and why (Yin, 2009 p. 13). Furthermore, this study intends to discover rather than confirm, which is in the nature of the case study (Burns, 2000). As Burns (2000) explains, the main techniques used in a case study are observations, interviews and document analysis. This study follows this structure by conducting three data collection methods: the content analysis, the go-along method and the interview. Dealing with a variety of evidence presents the unique strength of the case study (Yin, 2009). During data collection, the basic principles of the case study data collection were followed, including usage of multiple sources, maintaining the chain of evidence and recording data (Burns, 2000).

The intention of this study is not to generalize the findings but rather to get a deeper insight into the phenomena on an individual level, since the core of the self lays in each individual (Solomon et al., 2016). As Burns (2000) emphasizes, the purpose of the case study design is to find out ‘what goes on within the complex bounded system’, in this case, the mentioned individual level. The intention behind choosing a case study is to focus on each case instead of the population of cases (Burns, 2000). It is important to note that there is no intention to compare the cases but to explore the same interests in each one of them, presenting them as individual cases (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, this study is exploratory due to its intention to discover the self-identity further in-depth as well as outside the online context by using a novel angle through one of the method choices, e.g. go-along method.
3.2. Sampling

In this study, the appropriate participants were searched for amongst female Croatian personal style bloggers. Even though both male and female fashion bloggers are a part of the fashion blogosphere, the appropriate participants were searched for amongst female personal style blogger. As Chittenden (2010, p. 508) suggests, “activities of ‘dressing up’ and ‘diary keeping’ are more often categorized as a female pursuit”. The decision to focus on Croatia was based on two facts. Firstly, I run myself a Croatian personal style blog. Therefore, I had an opportunity to access the blogging community more successful and easier than anywhere else. Since one of the methods (the go-along method) included spending a longer timespan with the participants, it was of high importance to ensure an easy access to the bloggers. Secondly, speaking fluently English and Croatian based me on countries where only English or Croatian are spoken as a first language (UK, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina). As the go-along method was chosen as one of the methods, it was crucial to understand not only the language spoken by the blogger but also the language spoken by the surroundings in case of any verbal interactions. As Croatian was both my and the participant’s first language, it was ensured that there will be no misunderstandings due to the usage of a second language.

As a sampling method, purposive sampling was used. The cases were selected to “serve the real purpose and objectives of the researcher of discovering, gaining insight and understanding into a particularly chosen phenomenon” (Burns, 2000 p. 464). Hence, the samples, e.g. the participants with particular characteristics were seeked out (Lewis-Beck at al., 2004) in order to match the relevance for the study and to contribute the research topic (Flick, 2014). The research questions focus on the personal style bloggers’ identity and self-presentation. Therefore, the most appropriate participants for this study were bloggers with personal style blogs. In order to find the most appropriate participants, ensure the credibility and the richness of the research data (Burns, 2000), I defined the following criteria:

- The personal style blogger possesses an independent blog for more than 1 year
- The personal style blogger is an adult (18+)
- The personal style blogger is active on the blog (posts minimum once per week)
- The blog content should include different types of media including photos in a good resolution, texts and links
- The main categories on the blog are personal style related blog posts, such as personal outfits, shopping experiences and hauls, wish lists etc.
- The personal style blogger should be able to share information and opinions in English or Croatian
- I was not in personal contact with the personal style blogger prior to this research
- The personal style blogger is visibly open to collaborations and the press
- The personal style blogger can be contacted
- The personal style blogger is willing to participate in this research

I then made a list of female Croatian personal style bloggers who matched all the criteria above. Some of the criteria were important in order to ensure the success in the further steps of data collection, such as regular activity, different types of media, fashion as a main category and an ability to use both languages. Selecting bloggers who blog for more than one year ensured their serious intentions regarding blogging. I selected bloggers who I considered would be interested in the study due to their openness to collaborations and press visible on their blogs in terms of e-mail of contact form for collaboration or question requires. Finally, the list included 8
bloggers that matched all the criteria.

The intention was to find two to three participants due to complexity of the method choices and in order to meet the thesis time schedule. I started by contacting bloggers one by one, prepared that not all bloggers will sympathize the idea of being followed around or participate in the study in general due to the desire to keep the activities behind the blog private. The first personal style blogger contacted almost immediately volunteered to participate. Two out of eight contacted bloggers never replied and other three were very skeptical about the research methods, especially the go-along method. In the meantime, two other bloggers volunteered to participate in the study. Two weeks before the start of the data collection, one of the bloggers informed me that she had an unplanned trip outside Croatia and she will not be available during the defined time.

After contacting eight Croatian personal style bloggers, two volunteered to participate. Therefore, the data in this study was collected on two personal style bloggers using the methods presented further below. Creswell (2007) suggests that a qualitative phenomenological study should involve up to ten participants. His recommendation agrees with Boyd (2001) who advises two to ten participants for the same type of the study. This study included several forms of data collection in order to ensure the data richness. Having only two participants (in the further text – bloggers) was found sufficient because it enabled more extensive data collection. Therefore, the research was designed as a “two-case” study. Yin (2009, p.61) highlights that a ‘two-case’ study raises a chance of doing a good study compared to a single-case study, explaining that “the analytic benefits from having two (or more) cases may be substantial”. The demographic information about bloggers is shown in the findings. Additionally, both bloggers were asked to sign a consent form including information about the study, its purpose, the methodological procedure, their role in it and a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix I).

3.3. Data collection methods

As described in the problematization, none of the reviewed studies used participant observations as a method when researching fashion bloggers. The idea behind this study was to gather data by following a blogger in real life, rather than online. Patterson (2016) suggests that, when some kind of participant observation is chosen as a research method, it usually “entails interviews and document analysis in conjunction with observations”. As one of the methods used to collect data was the go-along method which includes participant observations, this study follows that suggestion. Furthermore, the research followed the case study design, which suggests using multiple sources when collecting data (Burns, 2000). To collect the rich data and to research the topic in-depth, three research methods were selected. Also, three sources of data were chosen – online content of the blog, behavior of bloggers and their narratives. The intention with both data and method triangulation was to ensure the complementation rather than trying to confirm the same with each method (Flick, 2014). For a complete overview of the data collection methods, please refer to Table 1.
### Table 1 Overview of data collection methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METHOD</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>FORM OF DATA</th>
<th>GOAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content Analysis</strong></td>
<td>online content analysis of the blog</td>
<td>written descriptive data</td>
<td>exploring the blog to gain understanding knowledge for further data collection (interview questions) exploring online identity of the blogger exploring self-presentation strategies used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Go-along Method</strong></td>
<td>combination of participant observations and semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>vocal and written data</td>
<td>exploring behavior through real-life activities related to the blog and its context gaining a deeper insight into offline identity and self-presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview</strong></td>
<td>semi-structured in-depth</td>
<td>vocal data</td>
<td>gaining a deeper insight into descriptive and ideal-self, also in relation to blog exploring roles and key aspects of experiences related to blog clarification and further explanation of earlier gathered data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.3.1. The content analysis

Inspired by the methodology in the study on self-presentation of teenage fashion bloggers by Bortree (2005), I decided to start the data collection through blog content analysis. Content analysis as a data collection method has been often used when researching identity and self-presentation on personal blogs and websites (e.g. Titton, 2005; Dominick 1990). The purpose of this method choice was to get an impression and per-understanding of the blogger and the blog as well as to explore online self-identity and self-presentation. Getting an impression of a blogger online was crucial to understand the bloggers’ online-self, e.g. the image of the blogger presented on the blog. Furthermore, the content analysis of the blogs presented the source of data collection regarding self-presentation. It is important to note that the intention was not to analyze discourses and interactions with followers through comments under the blog posts. Inspired by Bortree (2005) and Dominick (1990) who analyzed the content to explore self-presentation strategies, this study took the same approach. In her study, Bortree (2005) analyzed different mediated spaces of the blog when investigating self-presentation, which this study follows.

The analyzed content included the following pages:
• the homepage of the personal style blog
• all blog posts posted in the timespan of one month (March 2017)
• “about me” page

Within those pages, the focal elements included the following:

• page design
• sidebar content
• advertising (banners, hyperlinks)
• media (images, texts, videos, music)
• post structure and content

Due to the smaller number of bloggers, I had the opportunity to analyze the content in the timespan of one month (most recent, March 2017) which primarily provided an insight into their blogging habits, e.g. how frequently bloggers post and what kind of content do they post during that period since this was one of the criteria to ensure the activeness (blog post minimum once a week) during participant selection. In order to investigate the blogger’s self-presentation, the primarily concept used within this method was the concept of the five self-presentation strategies by Jones (1990) introduced under 2.3.1. The self-presentation strategies include ingratiation, competence, intimidation, exemplification and supplication. The mentioned focal elements presented the main source of data for recognizing the particular strategy. While the text presented the main sources of examples in the study by Bortree (2005), I followed the same path and focused mostly on the text in the blog posts and on the “about me” page. However, I noticed that other elements could also present a potential source of information and reveal the strategy behind the particular element. Keeping that in mind, each page was visually analyzed and transcribed into a descriptive text.

The content analysis provided an insight into the blogger’s self-presentation strategies in the online context. Visual observations of the blogs provided an insight into the identity of a fashion blogger as well as the blogger’s relation to the blog. It additionally created an understanding of the blogger’s way of working; how often does she post, how does she structure the post, what kind of posts does she create and in which style does she write. The pre-understanding of the blog and the impression of the blogger ensured the knowledge used later in the guide for the go-along method (elements to focus on and topics to talk about) as well as in creating more specific questions for semi-structured in-depth interviews.

### 3.3.2. The go-along method

The purpose of this study was to get a deeper insight into the phenomena of the fashion blogger as an individual, their self-identity and self-presentation. Therefore, the first idea was to use the participant observations method with an aim to get a deeper insight into the blogger’s life (McLeod, S. A., 2008). Paterson et al. (2016) suggest that participant observations are a suitable method when the intention is to ‘reveal backstage realities’ of the participants’ experiences usually kept away from ‘outsiders’. Such a method allows the participants to develop the trust needed to open up (Paterson et. al, 2016). However, the primarily idea of this study was not only to observe participants, but also to be able to follow them around and gather more data by having casual conversations with them. By researching different studies using the method of following around participants, I discovered the go-along method, which portrayed the idea of transferring the online following into the offline, real-life context. Kusenbach (2003. p. 463)
defined the go-along method as following:

“Youngfieldworkers accompany individual informants on their ‘natural’ outings, and – through asking questions, listening and observing – actively explore their subjects’ stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment. Go-alongs are a more modest, but also a more systematic and outcome-oriented version of ‘hanging out’ with key informants – an ethnographic practice that is highly recommended in virtually all fieldwork manuals and textbooks.”

In her research paper, Kusenbach (2003) explains that both interviews and participant observations have its limitations when conducted separately. Those limitations are minimized when these two methods are combined into the go-along method. Kusenbach (2003) highlights several advantages. One of the most important ones is that this method opens the space for narratives to the maximum and is likely to capture everyday behavior of the participant (Kusenbach, 2003). Another advantage this method offers is the understanding of the role of the location in everyday experiences, which was of importance in this study since the personal style bloggers capture their outfits on different locations (ibid). The go-along method gives an opportunity to capture the participant’s perception, environmental engagement, biography (memories, anticipations), social architecture and social realms (interactions). Additionally, Kusenbach (2003, p. 435) emphasized the importance and the role of the place and location, which brings “greater phenomenological sensibility to ethnography”. Therefore, this method was the most adequate choice for exploring and getting the most detailed ‘picture’ of the life of a blogger through their daily activities and their behavior.

Since I had no experience in go-along methods, I decided to create a guide that will help me to concentrate on the data collection since sometimes both observations and interviews are happening simultaneously (see Appendix II). Before the guide, I created a schedule table in order to keep track of the meetings. The idea was to spend time with the bloggers in their natural surrounding while they are involved in the activities related to the blog. Hence, instantaneous (target time) the sampling was done, as the time of the observations was pre-selected in agreement with the bloggers (McLeod, 2008). The first schedule was made 2 weeks prior to the first meeting with the bloggers. I intended to spend as much time as possible in the timespan of 9 days with each blogger. Even though the schedule was made earlier, it started changing rapidly as the set dates were coming closer. Two days prior to the first meeting, one of the bloggers canceled and asked for another day. I noticed that their schedule constantly changed so I ensured my own flexibility to be able to meet whenever the bloggers could and wanted to include me. In the end, I spent three days with each blogger. However, with none of them I spent the whole day together since their activities were very spread through the days and their schedule was constantly changing. In total, I spent 8 active hours with one and 11 active hours with the other blogger. By active I mean the number of hours when the blogger was actively involved into activities related to blogging and/or being a blogger. I met one blogger per day to avoid confusion and to be able to fully focus on all the elements in the guide. Please refer to Table 2 for a complete schedule overview.

The second part of the guide consisted of listed elements I needed to focus on or remind myself of. Earlier through the emails, the bloggers themselves suggested to ‘show me’ how do they create a blog post. According to both; that included the photo shooting of the outfit and writing
the blog post. Those presented the first two themes in the guide. One of the blogger asked me earlier to join her in attending the fashion week. The third theme, therefore, was the fashion week attendance. Kusenbach (2003) suggests giving the participants the space for narratives. According to her experience, participants don’t necessarily need to be encouraged by many questions but will most likely share the information when they feel like. Kusenbach (2003) therefore suggest asking more general questions from time to time to keep the conversation going when needed or simply to start on a new topic. Furthermore, she emphasizes the importance of listening and observing, which sometimes can give even more valuable information than the verbal interaction. Inspired by Kusenbach’s (2003) experiences and suggestions, I set three to four more general questions under each theme in case of longer silent moments. Under each set of questions, I listed the observation moments I was interested in so I could focus more easily and follow the important elements I wanted to capture. I carried the guide with me every time I was meeting the bloggers.

As mentioned in the guide explanation, besides having casual conversations, I observed different activities the bloggers were involved into. The common activities I observed with both bloggers were the outfit photo shooting and the blog post creation. The fashion week attendance I observed only with one of the bloggers. The other blogger never attended the mentioned event, however, I unexpectedly got a chance to observe one of her short meetings with a client. The main observational focuses of each activity are presented in Appendix I, except the last one because it was unplanned.

Each day the go-along method took place at different locations (Table 2). In both cases, photo shootings included walking and changing locations. The blog post creation in both cases included a calmer surrounding without physical movements. Attending the Zagreb Fashion Week included the car ride as well as and a very hectic space with a lot of people. With both the bloggers I also had a couple of coffees in a bar, where the business meeting of one of the bloggers happened too. I tried to follow the bloggers in their natural setting, letting them suggest the location as they prefer and usually do. The field notes consisted of notes taken when possible, mostly during short breaks, detailed summaries about the blogger’s acts made right after the session finished and tape recordings. While taking notes during the observations, I tried to capture impressions, feelings and ideas. After each session finished, I wrote a thick summary in the form of a diary. I tried to make diary entries frequently; to keep my memories fresh. During more still moments, such as sitting and writing a blog post, I had the chance to do simultaneous recording. I tape recorded full conversations, being able to focus on taking notes related to the blogger’s behavior too. Some situations allowed me to pose questions, while in other I had only the chance to observe (especially during photo shootings). Therefore, I used the diary entries to construct questions related to certain acts in the next session.
Besides having an insight into the blogger’s life, the go-along method allowed posing questions related to activities involving the bloggers, in order to understand the deeper background of the activity. Spending time with the bloggers as well as being involved in the casual conversations seemed to give the bloggers a more suitable surrounding to open up and share their opinions and thoughts. As they both expressed, they saw me more as a new friend than a researcher, which made them more comfortable. Having a chance to change locations with them and join them during their everyday activities provided a great visualization of what happens before the final product, the blog post, is published. Using this method also served as a great base for following around the bloggers to different places while doing different activities and interacting through casual conversations, which provided further explanation of physical activities, made decisions and stated opinions. Additionally, this method enabled further exploration and explanation of the content analysis data as well as it served as a source for designing interview questions.

### 3.3.3. Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Patton (2002) suggests that in-depth interviews are a suitable choice when it comes to researching the phenomenon, emphasizing that in-depth interviews allow gathering the data on “how they perceive a phenomenon, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” because the participants have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest; that is, they have ‘lived experience’ (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Furthermore, Burns (2017) explains that interviews are essential, especially in case studies related to individuals and their activities. Additionally, interviews as a data collection method have been often used when researching identity and self-presentation (e.g. Bortree, 2005; Chittenden 2010).

In this study, semi-structured in depth-interviews were conducted. Bryman and Bell (2015) describe semi-structured interviews as interviews that have an outline of questions as in a

---

### Table 2 Overview of the go-along method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BLOGGER</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>DURATION /hour</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Friday, March 31\textsuperscript{st}</td>
<td>16:40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>coffee bar</td>
<td>first meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19:15</td>
<td>2,5</td>
<td>Fashion Week</td>
<td>attending public event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saturday, April 1\textsuperscript{st}</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>her apartment</td>
<td>creating a blog post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19:30</td>
<td>2,5</td>
<td>Fashion Week</td>
<td>attending public event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sunday, April 2\textsuperscript{nd}</td>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Zagreb city center</td>
<td>outfit photo shooting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lea</td>
<td>Tuesday, April 4\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>coffee bar</td>
<td>first meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>1,5</td>
<td>Zagreb city center</td>
<td>photo shooting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wednesday, April 5\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>2,5</td>
<td>coffee bar</td>
<td>creating a blog post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friday, April 7\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>16:30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>coffee bar</td>
<td>business meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
structured interview, however, the questions are more general. They point out that ‘the sequence of questions’ might vary depending on ‘the interview flow’ as well as that the interviewer has more freedom in terms of possibility to ask additional questions (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The interviewee, as Bryman and Bell (2015) explain, has an opportunity to give a descriptive answer not necessarily within the question frame. Finally, Bryman and Bell (2015) highlight that different interviews do not have to follow the same path. These suggestions were taken into consideration when designing the interview guide (see Appendix III), the list of questions that were planned to be asked in the semi-structured interviews (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Running a personal style blog lead to the decision to begin this methodological segment of the study with the introspective research. I started exploring and questioning myself as a personal style blogger, reflecting over the way I work: which approaches do I have regarding the blog, which goals am I working towards while creating the content, how am I achieving them? This process resulted in a set of questions of which some were reformulated and used in the interview guide. After the content analysis and before the go-along method I started working intensively on the interview guide. As Bryman and Bell (2015) suggest, I created the main topics relevant to the study and formulated questions that had a potential to provide answers to research questions. The first set of questions was related to the blog while the second set of questions was related to the bloggers themselves. Covering only two main topic areas in one interview ensured the depth of the data collected on each topic. When formulating questions, I was inspired by self-concept and self-presentation theory presented in the theoretical framework, by previous researches on similar topics (e.g. Bortree, 2005; Chittenden, 2015; Rocamora, 2011) and by findings that emerged out of the content analysis.

The final version of the interview guide was made after the go-along method (see Appendix III). The purpose of the interview was to capture the bloggers’ viewpoint of their blog and themselves as individuals. Furthermore, some interview questions were used to further explain findings that emerged from other sources. The interview questions in the guide mostly aimed to encourage bloggers to reflect over their blog, experiences related to it, their self and their ‘blogger’ self. Therefore, the questions in the interview guide were mainly open-ended to allow describing without feeling restrained (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Other, follow-up questions, were based on responses to encourage further explanation (ibid). I used comprehensive language to avoid misunderstanding. No leading questions were asked, as they could have influenced and suggested the responses (ibid).

I conducted two semi-structured in-depth Skype interviews that lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, as suggested for the case study by Burns (2000). Both interviewees were aware of the interview purpose and agreed to the tape recording of the interview. The Skype interviews were conducted a week after the go-along method to decrease the recall error (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The Skype interviews were chosen due to a lack of time for face-to-face interviews. However, Janghorban et al. (2014) explains that Skype allows the access to verbal and nonverbal cues, which is comparable to the face-to-face interview. The tone of both interviews was informal, following Bailey (1996, p.72) explanation that informal interviews result in finding out more about ‘the setting of the person’. The recorded data was transcribed into a written form.
3.4. Data analysis

All collected data was formed into the case study notes. They were derived from content analysis, the go-along method and the interviews, in a written and audio form. All audio forms were transcribed into a written form. As they were collected, the notes were chronologically organized in a document belonging to each blogger, e.g. case record (Burns, 2000). The thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the data. This technique allows the search for repeated patterns across the data collected, as explained by Braun and Clarke (2006). Using this data analysis technique, the intention was to search for patterns in each source of data (content analysis, observations and interviews). Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest the usage of this technique when research is in the psychological field.

To analyze the data, six steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87-93) were taken:

1 Familiarizing yourself with your data
2 Generating initial codes
3 Searching for themes
4 Reviewing themes
5 Defining and naming themes
6 Producing the report

In this process, I followed the guidelines by Flick (2014). As a first step, I read the written case records of each blogger several times. I analyzed the cases one after another, going through the whole analysis process first with one and then another one, avoiding shifting between them to decrease the chance for confusion and comparison. I then developed codes based on the theoretical framework. The codes were defined from the self-identity and self-presentation concepts. For example:

Definition of ingratiation: *A person using this strategy has a goal of being liked by others. Some common characteristics of ingratiation are saying positive things about others or saying mildly negative things about yourself, statements of modesty, familiarity, and humor.* (Dominick, 1999, p. 648)

Code: [saying positive things about others]

Example: *I think it would be lame to claim that I am amazingly dressed or that I have a great style when there are so many girls who don’t even have a blog, follow the trends more and have a great style. I would say that they have better style and are dressed better.*

I searched for defined codes, focusing on patterns occurring in different sources of data. Besides expressed meanings by the bloggers, I also focused on the context and underlying meanings. After coding, I sorted out the codes into themes. When reviewing themes, I developed subthemes and left out those that were less relevant. I then defined and named them and presented the results of the whole procedure.
3.5. Trustworthiness as an alternative to validity and reliability

To ensure the quality of the study, the trustworthiness concepts were applied (Bryman, 2012). While in quantitative studies the quality of the study can be ensured through validity and reliability concepts, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest using the alternatives, trustworthiness and authenticity, to achieve the same.

Trustworthiness in this study was established through four criteria. Each of them, as Bryman (2012, p. 390) explains, has “an equivalent criterion in quantitative research”. Credibility, which parallels internal validity, was increased by using data, theory and method triangulation techniques (Patton, 2002). When collecting the data, “multiple sources of evidence” were used: content from the personal blog, human behavior and narratives (Yin, 2009 p.42). In terms of theory triangulation, two main concepts were reviewed as a part of the theoretical framework: the self-identity and self-presentation concept. Furthermore, three data collection methods were selected: content analysis, go-along method and interview. Triangulation techniques, as explained by Yin (2009) contribute to the accuracy of the findings. The draft of the case study report was reviewed by the bloggers themselves and the respondent validation process was conducted. Yin (2009 p. 183) explains that the draft review by participants, including corrections made as a result of the process, increases the construct validity and accuracy of the study, e.g. reduces “the likelihood of falsely reporting”. Transferability, which parallels external validity, was established by the production of thick descriptions in the study, especially regarding data collection. Guba and Lincoln (1994) highlight that thick descriptions increase the chance of the same or similar research being conducted in ‘another milieu’ (Bryman, 2012, p. 391). To increase the dependability in the study, which parallels reliability, the auditing approach was adopted (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, all the records gathered during the data collection were kept until the end of the research question (ibid). Conformability, which parallels objectivity, was increased by the researcher acting in good faith throughout the research. Bryman (2012, p. 393) explains the term good faith as the researcher “has not overtly allow personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of the research and the findings deriving from it”.

3.6. Method choice limitation

When conducting a case study, Yin (2009) explains that several limitations can occur. One of them is the inability to generalize the findings due to the small number of cases. Furthermore, Yin (2009) explains that there is no reliability in the traditional sense in case studies. He additionally highlights the subjective bias, which comes from the researcher, especially when interpreting the data, and possible time and information overload. When it comes to the methods used, each one of them carries certain limitations. Within content analysis, Burns (2000) highlights several limitations. Firstly, the source of the collected data can be difficult to find. In this study, this refers to the online blog posts, which could potentially be removed. Secondly, there are biases regarding selectivity and reporting. Thirdly, the usage of paraphrases can affect the correct interpretation of the data. Regarding the go-along method, researchers signal several limitations and biases related to the observations. McLeod (2008) explains that the researcher might lose objectivity due to being too involved. In this case, the validity of the study is reduced. Yin (2014) warns that observations can become too intense, resulting in poor data collection or even forgotten data. He also explains that observations are time consuming, which might lead to not following the research schedule. Additionally, Yin (2009) warns that there is an increased
chance of reflexivity and bias in terms of manipulation. Interviews are, according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), prone to social considerations in comparison to other data collection methods, which is also a limitation. The interviewee might not feel comfortable during the interview and in front of the interviewer and therefore might not share honest information about personal experiences. Another limitation related to interviews includes the possibility of the wrong interpretation of data, bias due to questions formed and articulated poorly, reflexivity and response bias (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, when interviews are conducted over the phone or Skype, they have a higher risk of error while connection problems might occur during the interview (Janghorban et al., 2014).

3.7. Ethical principles

This study explored and observed human behavior. Because of that, it was of an importance to assure the prevention of any potential ethical issues. The study followed the Saunders et al. (2009, p. 183-184) definition of ethics, which explains them as “norms or standards of behavior that guide moral choices about our behavior and our relationships with others”. In order to obtain that, in all processes of this study, the principles of MRS Code of Conduct were followed (MRS, 2010). Therefore, it was ensured that both bloggers volunteered as participants and were aware that they could change their mind at any point. The consent form for participation was sent to the bloggers and signed by them, informing them on the purpose of the study, the methods of data collection and their rights. I, as a researcher, was transparent, honest and professional about all segments of the research towards the bloggers. I respected the confidentiality of all the data collected by keeping them away from publicity and destroying all collected data after transcription and usage in the final report. I respected their well-being, avoided harm of any kind and ensured balancing the bloggers’ needs by being completely transparent about the research, by being flexible regarding data collection methods and by being non-judgmental and ethically sensitive during the interviews. Finally, the bloggers were guaranteed anonymity. As Spardley (2016) suggests regarding the ethical issues, the participants have a right to stay anonymous. He additionally suggests using pseudonyms in both field notes and final report to assure the protection of the participants. This study follows that suggestion.
4 Results and discussion

Results and discussion were divided into two cases. In each case, the collected data is analyzed and findings are presented in the form of themes. At the same time, the findings of each case are discussed in relation to previous studies and theories presented in the theoretical framework. Results and discussion are followed by a discussion summary, highlighting the key findings from both cases in relation to the literature. It is important to note that the discussion summary intended to give an overall, clear presentation of the key findings from both cases rather than compare the cases.

4.1. Case I

The results and discussion of the Case I cover five themes that emerged during the data analysis. In chapter 4.1.1. Self-presentation strategies, strategies used to present the self on the blog are presented and discussed, including how was each strategy used and what was intended with it. In chapter 4.1.2. Indirect presentation of the self, other ways of presenting the self found on the blog are discussed. In the following chapter, 4.1.3. Photo-shooting – a cue for impression management, the role of the photo shooting is achieving ideal-self and creating a particular impression of the self is discussed. Struggles between different aspects of the self are presented and discussed in the chapter 4.1.4. Struggle between different selves, followed by last chapter, 4.1.5. Self-actualization through blogging, in which the role and the importance of the blog is discussed in relation to the self-identity. The blogger’s demographics and her blog’s statistics are displayed in the Table 3.

Table 3 Blogger demographics and blog statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Blogging for</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Blog Demographics/ majority</th>
<th>Blog statistics/ average per month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lea</td>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Blogger/ Influencer</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>Views 20.000</td>
<td>Posts 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.1. Self-presentation strategies

Table 4 Overview of self-presentation strategies used on the blog

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content source</th>
<th>Ingratiation</th>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Intimidation</th>
<th>Exemplification</th>
<th>Supplication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperlinks</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design/ template</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ingratiation as a way to maintain personal and business relationships

“My support is my team. My boyfriend John and my best friend David. They are my right hand, huge help, and only ones who can put up with my torture :) But without them, this would not be possible.”

The first example of ingratiation on Lea’s blog appeared on the static ‘about me’ page on which she described herself and her blog. Lea used positive ingratiation to highlight the importance of particular relationships to her as a blogger, to express gratitude to mentioned individuals and to emphasize their role related to her blog. The usage of ingratiation of this form indicated the intention to strengthen the mentioned relationships by being liked by mentioned individuals. Another example comes from the post about an outfit. In this post, Lea used ingratiation twice to emphasize her satisfaction with a photographer:

“After a long time, I finally did photo shooting with Mia and the results are these beautiful photos and a bit different spring outfit! … Thank you once again Mia (link to the Facebook page) for an awesome day and even better photos <3”

By expressing positive thoughts about Mia and giving her a ‘shout out’ through the link of her Facebook page, Lea probably attempted to be liked by her to strengthen the relationship with her on a business level. These findings match the results in the study by Bortree (2005) who concluded that links as a sign of ingratiation with teenage bloggers are used mostly with an intention to be liked by others. However, Lea uses ingratiation related both to her personal and business relationships, while teenage fashion bloggers use ingratiation to socialize with others. While ingratiation in these examples was expressed through the text, the link to the photographer’s Facebook page was another way to use the same strategy. Hence, Lea used the link not only to be liked by a photographer but also to build the trust and a good relationship with Mia, what she confirmed after the photo shooting by saying that linking Mia’s Facebook page is a way to say thank you and show satisfaction. The further content analysis showed that Lea uses links in each post for the same reason. In each post, link lead to the online web store of the brand which item Lea is wearing on the photos in that particular post. While sometimes including the link is a part of the contract, Lea sees it as a way of building a trust between her and the business partner and raising the partner’s satisfaction, which results in further collaborations:

“I always care that the brand gets enough clicks to continue the collaboration. If they don’t send me the link and don’t track it, I still want to see if my readers to be able to click. People buy through my links. I always include it, then I can show them the result. That is why I never had unsatisfied brands when we worked together. Since I started the blog, no one ever complained that they didn’t have clicks or purchases through me. I mean, I cannot guarantee the purchase but brands always come back to me.”

Knowing from the experience that posting a link will result in a positive outcome, Lea implemented ingratiation into her blogging routine, explaining “it’s just like adding photos into the post”. Interestingly, ingratiation used on the blog was only in a form of expressing positive thoughts about someone. Even though the self-presentation strategies were an aim to be analyzed only in the online context, it was obvious that Lea uses the same strategy in a real life with the same intention. One of those occasions was during the go-along, while having a face-
to-face meeting with a marketing manager of the brand she already has a contract with. Again, ingratiation was probably used with an attempt to be liked by the marketing manager to maintain the positive relationship. However, this time Lea used ingratiation as a reaction to positive comments marketing manager gave her. During the observations, I noticed that her verbal reaction to positive comments contained statements of modesty such as “Oh come on, it’s not like I did I don’t know what. I am happy you are satisfied!” or “You really gave me too many compliments now!” . She later told me that this is the first time she was working with that brand, which indicated that Lea used ingratiation in terms of modesty statement to be favored by the marketing manager regarding further collaborations with this partner. This finding parallels the results of the study on the employee’s performance by Wosinska et al. (1996) who concluded that highly modest female self-presenters were more liked in comparison to moderate female self-presenters when evaluated by their co-workers.

Blog as a professional competence gallery

While some examples of ingratiation were found on Lea’s blog, competence was found in almost every segment of it. One of the first signs of competence was that Lea uses her own, customized blog address, e.g. a bought domain. Papacharissi (2002) concluded that personal domains are a sign of creativity. Besides potentially expressing creativity as an ability, choosing an own, personalized domain indicated that Lea aimed to present herself as an established blogger, competent in her profession while a hosted domain could be perceived as amateurish. Even though her blog template was not designed by herself, she edited the sidebar by using particular widgets. At the end of the sidebar, she placed banners from online retailers, which contain the link to their online store. Papacharissi (2012) found that placing banners is a sign of community affiliation, which is in that sense proudly displayed. However, the banners Lea used are related to the online retail stores rather than the blogging community, which can be interpreted as a sign of her accomplishments as a blogger and present her as competent in the blogging community rather than a social affiliation seeker amongst bloggers.

One of the elements that captured my attention was the competence used in the title of the blog: ‘Follow the life and thoughts of this Internet super girl’. By naming herself the Internet super girl, Lea again showed her accomplishment as an established blogger. This title immediately gave an impression of her as qualified and established in the online world, which is even more emphasized by the usage of a personal pronoun in third, instead of the first person, sounding like this title was given to her. Interestingly, she used the same strategy during our first meeting. After introducing herself, she asked about the study and concluded: “then I am a perfect candidate for you, I do this 24/7 and you will see a lot going on, you will get good material”.

After analyzing Lea’s blog deeper and going into the blog posts, I noticed that competence on those pages is often used both in text and photography. One of the posts was about the event she attended recently. By sharing the photo of her invitation and photos of the event, she presented her accomplishment when it comes to the relationship with this brand. By sharing event photos including other established bloggers who also attended, she presented herself as qualified in the blogging circles. Another example of competence refers directly to another name for it, self-promotion. One of the blog posts presented the new notebook Lea designed together with another brand. The notebook was called after Lea’s blog. In this case, Lea used the blog post to promote herself, her work and her accomplishment not only as a blogger but also regarding collaboration and the interpersonal relationships with this particular brand. The third example of competence on Lea’s blog refers to her ability to give advice related to
clothing, rather than accomplishments. In one of the outfit posts, Lea gave a suggestion to her readers on this year’s trends and on how to style featured pieces:

“This jacket is made for the items I am wearing today. If you are spending days outside, this styling that I am wearing is ideal for you. You will look amazing no matter if it’s morning or afternoon, you can wear it in a casual or more chic way. Don’t forget that spring is not only pink and green. This year, choose neutral shades and look chic in any occasion.”

The study by Bortree (2005) showed that teenage bloggers use competence mainly to show their creativity regarding the design of the blog and features on it. In this case, competence as a strategy was implemented in almost every blog post text but also in visual segments on the blog, indicating that Lea wants to leave an impression of a qualified and skilled blogger through showcasing her accomplishments and performance, rather than creativity found with teenage bloggers. This finding might be influenced by the fact that Lea is an established blogger and that blogging is her life profession, indicating that Lea uses her blog to express her status as a blogger.

4.1.2. Indirect presentation of the self

When opening Lea’s blog for the first time, I first noticed the specific design. It was very sophisticated, clean, monochrome and minimalistic. I also noticed that the template of the blog was bought; it included the designer name, implicating that Lea probably doesn’t have experience with HTML design on the blogs. Lea later confirmed my impression by explaining how she has no knowledge in HTML or similar formats which led her to the decision to buy the blog template. The blog was easy to search through, with a lot of blank space between each media or post. The sidebar was not overcrowded, including 5 widgets: her photo, Instagram widget, translation option, archive and a couple of banners. The five latest posts were presented on the homepage, giving a minimalistic impression. Each one of the eleven analyzed posts included exactly six photos and a short text. The overall visual appearance of the blog gave an impression that Lea has a personal preference for minimalism and has a defined blogging routine. While joining her in the creation of one of the blog posts, Lea explained that her blog visually reflects her fashion style and a part of her personality and that she practices minimalism in a real life too:

“When I was buying a design a couple of years ago, I was looking for simplicity and that it’s black and white, to be able to shorten the post and have “read more” option, to have a sidebar and that’s it, just simple things. You know, I am very simple, I never complicate, I am not insisting on things, in everything, not only blogging. My blog is just like my style, neutral, black and white, with less saturated photos and not much text. I love everything to be calm, neutral and comfortable for the eye, not that something disturbs you from all sides. It’s not only in clothing or my blog, my apartment is completely black and white.”

The blog’s visual appearance, based on the content analysis, was indeed very neutral, mostly black and white, confirming the findings by Papacharissi (2012) that individuals present the self online by incorporating many indirect elements. Besides earlier mentioned elements, another indirect element Lea used to present the self were outfits on photos in blog posts that matched the description of her style, consisting mostly of basic, usually black, grey and white pieces, mostly causal. During the three days I spent with Lea, I noticed that the visual
appearance of her blog and the outfits presented in the blog posts matches her fashion style in real life. The first day, she was dressed in blue jeans, a simple white T-shirt, a black blazer and white sneakers. The following two days, she wore a black pullover and the same jeans and sneakers from the day before. None of those days she wore any accessories, make up or specific hairstyle. Indeed, during those three days her style and appearance was very simple, monochrome and minimalistic, reflecting truly the visual appearance of her blog and the outfits presented in blog posts.

Her description of the self as simple and never complicated was even more highlighted through her behavior during photo shooting with the professional photographer. In both interview and the go-along, Lea emphasized the importance of the photo shoot for the blog. However, she let the photographer choose the location based on previous experiences with this photographer. Her only requirement was for the clothes to fit in and for the background to be very neutral because, as she explained in an interview, saturated colors and people moving in the background steal the attention reserved for the outfit. Also, she does not like colors in general. The photo shooting was surprisingly short; Lea did five to six different poses such as sitting, standing and walking and the photographer took two photos of each. Instead of checking the photos to see how they turned out, Lea commented:

“She is a great photographer, I trust her, the photos are always like from an advertisement, I am so happy with them. And I am not complicated, I am always satisfied with whatever turns out. Even when I am taking photos with someone who is not professional, it takes ten minutes. I always do the same poses and I quickly explain how to hold the camera and that’s it. I mean, how bad can it be? I am dressed in pretty clothes, I have good hair, it will turn out good.”

Knowing which poses to do and always posing in the same way goes hand in hand with the theory developed by Titton (2015, p. 209) which explains that fashion bloggers construct their “fashionable personae” on the blog through bodily enactments by following the same “posing rules”. On all photos posted in a one-month period, Lea’s poses were quite static and very natural. Surprisingly, she almost had no fashion expression on most of her photos. These findings fit Titton’s (2015) description of bodily enactments. However, spending time with Lea in real life revealed that her intention is not to create the ‘fashionable personae’ (Titton, 2015) in this sense. On all the photos analyzed on her blog, Lea had a serious face expression. There was no excitement, no smiling. During the go-along, it was noticeable that her poses and facial expressions on the photos are the way Lea expresses her identity rather than constructs the new one. When spending time with her, I noticed that she is very calm in different situations and that she does not get excited easily. She rarely smiled, even though she was very friendly and open. She was quite serious and calm during the photo shooting, concentrated to get the work done. Even during the blog post writing, she followed her routine without many facial expressions. When talking about herself, she described herself as someone who is “not too excited, jumps around or smiles nonstop”. This calmer and less excited part of her personality was very well portrayed through her facial expression and static poses on the photos presented on the blog, but also the choice of already mentioned color palette, excluding bright, saturated colors. By choosing the template, the location for photo shooting and particular colors that reflect both her style and personality, Lea concluded that this is what differentiates her from other bloggers on the blogging market. Even more, she said that the visual appearance of her blog is what makes her recognizable to readers:

“Everyone knows they won’t find neon colors, super colorful cheerful photos or something like that. All the colors are toned down. I try to bring in a bit of rock, more heavy clothing pieces,
male items and so on. Also, the content, my content is very regular, I don’t think many bloggers have so many updates so often.”

That Lea is consistent, determined and self-motivated could clearly be seen in the updates she mentioned. In March, she posted eleven times, meaning that she created one blog post every three days. As mentioned earlier, it seemed like Lea has a blogging routine when it comes to creating blog posts, indicating a well-organized time on the blog but also the intention to maintain the style of the blog and keep it consistent. In the interview, Lea explained that blogging on a regular basis holds her attention to one thing, keeps her organized and motivates her to keep going. Therefore, regular posting for Lea is a way to express her motivation, drive and concentration.

When analyzing blog posts on Lea’s blog, I noticed that the text she writes in the blog post is very brief with quick information, which gave an impression that she does not give a lot of attention to the text. However, during the go-along it became evident that the texts in the blog posts are short and require a lot of time because they are not her strongest skill. Lea was very self-conscious about it when I joined her in a coffee bar while creating a blog post with photos that she took the day before. She left the text for the end of the blog post creation. When the writing moment came, she almost immediately shared her frustration with me:

“You can tell that I am not good in writing when you look at my blog post. I don’t even try to hide it. So see now, this first sentence is so pointless, sounds like from some news portal but I don’t know what else to write, it sounds so stupid! I don’t have an education in journalism nor I like to write nor I’m good in grammar. I really suck in grammar and whatever I write will sound stupid to me. I don’t know how to be creative with text.”

I noticed that she takes a long time to choose words, often deleting already written parts and rewriting. In the end, she shortened it as much as she could to avoid any potential mistakes or anything that sounded ‘pointless’, being almost nervous about it. Papacharissi (2002) argues that textual form, especially the language and the tone used in them, usually communicate personality traits. Since Lea writes very short, avoiding any storytelling, her texts indicate avoiding to share personal information with others, shyness and a more introvert personality. Interestingly, she described herself similarly when talking about having a coffee in a bigger group of people:

“I am usually in the background if I sit in a coffee bar with a bigger group of people, I am not loud or an attention seeker, I don’t need to be in the center of the attention, I take more of an observer role. I am naturally calm and not hyperactive at all, a bit weird and introvert. I mean, you see me, I will never jump around of the excitement probably.”

If being ‘less loud and more an observer’ in real-life is paralleled with the amount of the text in her posts, it can be indeed argued that Lea expresses her introversion through textual forms on the blog. She felt uncomfortable and nervous while feeling forced to write the text as she would if finding herself in the center of attention in a larger group. Hence, she uses photography and template design as a more indirect form of self-expression, which can be paralleled with the less noticeable, observer role. This finding confirmed the theory presented by Papacharissi (2002, p. 656) explaining that individuals who do not engage in direct expression of self-identity tend to “incorporate indirect elements of self-presentation online”.

Additionally, it can be argued that writing a short text on the blog “just to be able to include the link” indicates that Lea does not engage in producing the fashion texts related to her personal
experiences to construct the ‘fashionable personae’, as Titton (2005) presents. In her case, the ‘fashionable personae’ Titton (2005) describes might be constructed through the overall idea of the visual blog concept:

“I have this story in my mind, the idea, it’s hard to explain. Some item I want to show, what is the purpose of me taking photos. I make up a story around it, for example I have one jacket, I don’t want it to be fancy so I try to make it urban and cool, I make up a story around it, I want to show it from the back side. I want to show that idea through photos. My blog is like a little gallery of inspiration, a photo book.”

4.1.3. Photo shooting – a cue for impression management

Lea’s blog as a visual concept and features it offers presented channels for expression and reflection of her personality, visible in almost every segment of the blog. However, spending time with Lea in real life, talking to her and following her around, revealed that the blog plays an important role in her life of different aspects. Her behavior and real-life narratives uncovered that her descriptive self as well as her behavior in real life sometimes differ from what is presented on the blog.

The first time I joined Lea in her regular, daily activities, I had a chance to follow her during the photo shooting. As presented earlier, her style in real life matched the outfits shown on the blog. However, it was interesting to see that despite that, Lea engages into an action Solomon et al. (2016) call ‘impression management’. Before the shooting, Lea showed the items she would be wearing when taking photos, pointing out that she will change two outfits and partly wear what she is wearing now. Her outfits for the photo shooting was previously combined and planned to be photographed meaning that what will be presented on the photo was not something Lea wore that day, e.g. did not match real life. Both photos and clothes Lea decided to wear only for photo shooting can be understood as cues used in impression management (Solomon et al., 2016). It seemed like Lea consciously engaged into this action:

“I picked a bomber jacket with some quote, it’s very cool but to be honest, it’s nylon, the material is really not something special. I also got the sweatshirt and leather skirt but they are way overpriced just as the bomber jacket, I would never pay for them myself, it’s just not something I would give money for. And I will wear this skirt now but there is no way I would walk through the city center in it now, it’s way too short and no one has bare legs in April”.

Even though she would personally never buy these particular pieces because they are too expensive and of a poor quality in her opinion, she still decided to wear them and present them on the blog. Since this specific clothing line was designed by another professional, Lea’s decision to present something she would not wear might have come from the intention to be liked and discovered by others, resulting in more traffic on her blog. She reinforced that intention by mentioning an international blogger’s name in the blog post she created the day after. It can be argued that Lea engaged into impression management by using cues such as photos and clothes to reach for the ideal-self (Solomon et al., 2016). Being liked by others is a reaction received by others, which presents one of the factors that determine the relationship between the real- and ideal-self (Argyle, 2008). Positive reaction, therefore, might contribute to reaching the ideal-self.

As mentioned before, it seemed like Lea was aware of her impression management. However,
that her action was unconscious could be understood from her description of the self in relation to collaborations with brands:

“I would never promote the product that doesn’t fit me or that doesn’t go with me. Like those slimming powder shakes now or whatever it is. I got an email from them offering me a compensative collaboration but how does that make any sense, I am thin, I don’t work out or anything, I don’t fit to that product and I would never use it. Of course, I didn’t accept it.”

Hence, the products that Lea uses and chooses to present do not always present her descriptive self. These products are the cues that are used to engage into impression management (Solomon et al., 2016). While the locations of photo shooting reflected her monochrome, simple style, from the casual conversation with her after the photo shooting, it became evident that they are also a cue to create an impression that she is more an outgoing person:

“I am almost never in the city center, especially when it’s crowded, I don’t like it. It annoys me. I literally come here for a photo shooting like today and that’s it, I actually don’t enjoy it at all and avoid it. I much more prefer being in the neighborhood, take a walk there and meet people there.”

Moreover, Lea asked the photographer to change the location when photographing the second outfit to avoid the same background. It is possible that Lea wanted to create an impression that two photo shootings happened on a different day, which can again be understood as the location being a cue to create a certain impression of her, such as having more active days. That not every day is very active in Lea’s life was confirmed when she canceled our meeting the following day, explaining that she will do nothing related to the blog.

Besides clothing and location, Lea also managed the image of her self through posing on the photos. Interestingly, while analysis of the blog post showed that her facial expressions and poses match her calm, introvert personality, the second photo shooting I had a chance to observe indicated that Lea modifies her posing to create an impression of a more cheerful, excited person. Compared to the first photo shooting, in this one it was important for her to create a playful atmosphere because the sweatshirt had the word ‘laugh’ on the back side. She was improvising with the bag, spinning around to get the breeze in her hair and smiling much more than before. This example is indicating that Lea used modified bodily enactments to tell a particular story related to the product. In other words, she uses modified posing and facial expressions as a cue to create an impression to appear cheerful (Solomon et al. 2016). No similar examples were found on her blog during the month of March, which indicated that Lea modifies her bodily enactments occasionally.

4.1.4. Struggle between different selves

At the end of the first day spent with Lea, she shared with me some of her concerns related to the content she shares with her followers, highlighting that she feels responsible as an influencer who creates content on different social media. As she explained, a minor part of her followers are teenagers who often text her that she is their role model. From the description of her attitude, it was noticeable that she takes being a role model seriously and that it influences the blog content she creates:
“This whole influencer thing is not ‘whatever’ to me, to know that many young people follow me and think of me as a role model. I know that I am not acting to be anything else than I am but some things I avoid showing because you can never know what will kids take from that, how will they interpret is and how they understand it. I had children running away from home just to come and see me at the event, their parents were furious.”

Hence, the previous negative experiences influenced Lea’s decision to choose which aspects of the self to show to fit into the role model description. Related to that, Lea stated that the blog is not a place to reveal everything about her private life. As a few examples, she mentioned beer drinking, cursing and being rude which she does in what she called ‘real life’. She controls the presentation of mentioned behavior or particular attitudes on the blog:

“Many times, I want to express them but it’s not a place or time to share on the blog. I am not afraid of negative comments, I just think there’s time and place for everything. I don’t hide it but if I would post photos with beer in my hand and write “shit, check this thing”, it’s not nice nor appropriate. I wouldn’t like to read something like that either, only in the column and that’s not what I do.”

Lea’s description of herself in relation to the blog indicated choosing to show particular aspects of the self in a particular setting. This finding goes hand in hand with the theory developed by Bullingham & Vasconcelos (2013) that a blog can present a space where certain aspects of the self are partially minimized. By minimizing those particular aspects of the self, Lea ensures to minimize negative impact on teenagers who are partly her followers. It can also be argued that this is another way to achieve the ideal-self through impression management (Solomon et al., 2016). Hence, the core factor that brings the real closer to the ideal-self is the social role Lea believes she has, a role model to teenagers (Argyle, 2008). That she indeed minimizes and maximizes aspects of the self through the blog was obvious in her description of her blog being only partly ‘her’:

“I don’t think it’s 100% me. We are people, we have so many dimension and layers. It’s a part of me, what I love, what inspires me, what I want to do. The part that presents me is that taste, style, black and white, less of bright cheerful colors, clothing, the desire to create the content in form of photos. Let’s say that creativity, no matter if it is creative for you or not. That presents me, that is something I make an effort about and that I love.”

When asked what does not present her, Lea referred to the impression of her life she thinks her followers might have – always in front of the camera and posing. To show followers that her self-identity has other aspects than the one presented on the blog, she chose to present them through another media channel, video:

“I think a lot of people think that I nonstop take photos and pose. When I started You Tube and videos, everyone met real me, how I am and that is important for me. Blog is a place for inspiration, where I can be one part of me and videos on You Tube are where people see how my days look like when I don’t do blogging stuff, another part of me. There people relate to me, I like that.”

This description of the self indicated that the blog is a space where Lea aims to show certain aspects of the self, confirming the theory by Solomon et al. (2016) that the people change their self depending on the setting. The aspect she presents on the blog matches the setting she created on her own, the idea of the blog as a creative space. Hence, she simply chose different
channels to display different aspects of the self, carefully selecting which media matches each aspect. Interestingly, Lea’s description of the self indicated that Lea struggles between different selves daily:

“It’s like there are 100 sides of me. 100 sides of me but none of them is forced. In one moment in a day I am very introvert Lea, I don’t want to talk or meet anyone, I want to be alone. The other part of the day it’s like being super social suits me, I want to be surrounded by people, I am chatting with all those people who follow me. Some days I spend in my pajamas, with messy hair and without make up. And some days I am putting on heels, going to an event and I enjoy it so much. It’s like there’s layers of me and they change constantly.”

These findings indicate that Lea struggles between different selves in real life while online, she controls presenting each aspect of the self by using different platforms and media. Hence, switching between different selves is threaded into her self-identity, confirming the theory by Solomon et al. (2016) that there are many aspects of the self, which individuals use depending on the setting. In this case, Lea created those settings on her own.

4.1.5. Self-actualization through blogging

“I was a kid when I started, quite insecure, with different dreams and goals and I didn’t expect anything from this, that some business can come out of this. But it helped me. I became calmer and more open, I realized not everything is living a life according to what others expect. The blog is some kind of a liberation, even though it’s a hobby. Especially when you are younger, that’s how it was for me, it brought me confidence.”

While there were no specific findings indicating that Lea’s identity is currently constructed through blogging, her self-description in relation to the blog at the beginning of her blogging career revealed that the blog used to have that role, confirming the theory presented by Rocamora (2011) that a blog presents a space for identity construction. While a study on teenage fashion bloggers showed that teenagers construct their identity through blogging experiences (Chittenden, 2010), Lea, who was 21 years old when started blogging, and her self-description indicated that identity construction through blogging is not necessarily related only to teenage age but rather to the level the self-identity is developed on individual level. In the interview, Lea mentioned twice that running a blog helped her to become more confident regarding her attitudes, decisions and desires; indicating that blogging had a significant impact on the level of her self-esteem. Interestingly, according to one of the studies showcased by Solomon et al. (2016), people with higher level of positivity, e.g. self-esteem, tend to perform better than people with a lower level. Hence, it can be argued that Lea’s successful blogging career was partly determined by a grown level of self-esteem through blogging.

On another hand, a higher level of positivity is sometimes an element that brings the real-self to the ideal-self (ibid). While at the beginning, the blog presented a space to construct parts of her identity, it also presented the way to get closer to the ideal-self:

“When I was younger I wanted to be everywhere and do too many things. Blog helped me to be concentrated which I never was. I never liked anything or wanted to continue forever and I have that with my blog. Blog is my safe place, not in a way that I will do it forever, but I place that I can take care of, some responsibility, I need that, something I am used to.”
This example shows that for Lea, blogging was a way to achieve something that was not achievable before – concentration and responsibility. Not only that blogging as an activity helped her achieve the desired image of the self, but it still serves as a way to maintain that image, indicating that part of her self-identity strongly related to blogging. As another example, Lea told me that she often receives messages from followers saying “you are a true inspiration” and that it is very important for her that others recognize the passion she has for creating fashion content:

“I made something that I liked, it’s not some haute couture, crazy amazing photos but it makes me happy, I am proud of it and I want people to see it. In general, in life I don’t need confirmations, like I don’t need anyone to tell me that I am amazing and that I do it so well, just to tell me they see that I am trying. That makes me feel good and happy, it motivates me.”

Lea’s desire to have her effort being recognized shows that affirmations have a significant impact on her self-image and triggers her self-motivation, implicating that her followers’ reactions present another way Lea brings her real- to an ideal-self. What strengthen the interpretation that through the blog, Lea reaches the congruence, e.g. actualizes the self, was Lea’s response when asked what would she change about herself:

“I accepted myself, I like who I am. I found something I love, I enjoy, I want to do. And it’s so easy to implement all the blogging stuff into my life in general. I can sit in a coffee bar and edit photos, I can be at home with my boyfriend and my dog and write a post, travel with my family over the weekend and take photos of everything. I can easily combine the blog with other activities, I wouldn’t do anything else or be anything different in life rather than this, it’s what I always wanted.”
4.2. Case II

The results and discussion of the Case II cover five themes that emerged during the data analysis. In chapter 4.1.1. Self-presentation strategies, strategies used to present the self on the blog are presented and discussed, including how was each strategy used and what was intended with it. In chapter 4.1.2. Direct and indirect presentation of the self, other direct and indirect ways of presenting the self found on the blog are presented and discussed. Presenting the public self through clothing is discussed in chapter 4.2.3. Wearing the public-self. In the following chapter, 4.2.4. The self-confidence circle, the constant change in self-confidence level is presented and discussed in relation to the blog and the self-identity. The role of the blog in forming the self-identity is presented and discussed in the last chapter, 4.1.5. Searching for the self. The blogger’s demographics and her blog’s statistics are displayed in the Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Blogging for</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Age 25-35</th>
<th>Posts</th>
<th>Views</th>
<th>Blog statistics/ average per month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Tax practitioner</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>Age 25-35</td>
<td>Posts</td>
<td>Views 2.500</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1. Self-presentation strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content source</th>
<th>Ingratiation</th>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Intimidation</th>
<th>Exemplification</th>
<th>Supplication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperlinks</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design/template</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidebar</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ingratiation patterns

During the analysis of Maria’s blog and the time I spent with her, I noticed that she uses ingratiation with three particular goals and in three particular forms. Interestingly, the forms and goals were paired and occurred as patterns in the blog posts. The first ‘pair’ consisted of the desire to be recognized through the whole blog post. Even though a post of this kind was not found in the analyzed posts, I had an opportunity to observe creation of such a post one day after joining Maria on the fashion show of a particular designer. The blog she created was completely dedicated to that designer and his show. It included the description of the fashion show, photos and the text about Maria’s thoughts on the collection:
“As you know, I love his designs and style so much, it fits to my style. Lightness, casualness and breeziness, are the epithets, which I love dressing in. The collection thrilled me! You can see the whole collection here (hyperlink).”

While this example could present just a preference of a particular style, during the blog post creation, Maria explained that this type of posts related to designers and their shows “worked very well in the past”. When asked to elaborate, Maria told me that two years ago she reviewed fashion shows that she really liked resulting in designers finding and sharing it because she linked their social media in the post. Since that brought her lots of traffic on the blog and new followers, she continued using this strategy, confirming that it became a pattern. Hence, by writing a positive review of the fashion show and including links, Maria aimed to be liked by a particular designer with the hope that her post will be reposted, resulting in an increase of her recognition amongst potential followers but also other designers on fashion shows. The second pattern included sharing a photo and the links of bloggers she did something together with. Sharing the ‘evidence’ that she spent time with particular individuals and including blog links indicated that Maria’s goal was to be liked by her old and new blogger friends. This pattern was found in two out of the six posts and it was also a part of the new post she was creating while I joined her. On our way from the fashion show, Maria explained the importance of this action:

“Great that I managed to get a photo with the girls too, I will add it to the blog post and link to their blogs because we are friends and we always do that. I love this about the blog, it brought me a lot of friends, we hang out sometimes and that’s really nice.”

This finding matches the key finding by Bortree (2005) that teenage fashion bloggers use ingratiation in a form of listing people they spent the day with an intention to be liked more by those individuals. Additionally, this example also presents the usage of competence, which will be discussed in the following chapter. The third ingratiation pattern referred to a suggestion/advice to follow another influencer who Maria does not know personally by using a link to his/her social media. While this ‘pair’ occurred only once during the content analysis, during our causal conversation Maria mentioned two influencers, saying that she shared their link in some blog posts if I want to find them, indicating that this is indeed a pattern. In an example noticed in one of the blog posts, she used this ingratiation pattern as an advice to her followers:

“As today, I finally started to work out after a shorter break. If you need the suggestion or inspiration and you are just looking for something from home, look on the YouTube channel for BOHO BEAUTIFUL (link) and I believe that you will surely find something for yourself, it’s great!”

This pattern is again used with the same intention, to be liked by others. However, in this case, the targeted individuals are other influencers rather than brands/designers and friends.

The fourth pattern refers to the usage of the links leading to the web shops of brands whose items Maria is wearing in the blog post. While some links were related to the collaboration she had, it was interesting that other linked promoted brands she did not work with. Hence, the motive behind this action is to be liked by brands that are potential partners to raise the chance for recognition. The fact that this form of listing all items she wears, including links, is a part of each blog post indicated a pattern on its own.

To summarize, the content analysis showed that Maria uses different patterns to present the self through ingratiation:
Using competence to show skills, qualification and social status

When analyzing Maria’s blog, I noticed that she uses competence through different elements. What I spotted immediately was the title of blog written on the top of the homepage: ‘Fashion Girl, by Maria’ (translated from Croatian). ‘By Maria’ indicates a direct presentation of the self, going hand in hand with another name for competence, self-promotion. Also, naming herself a fashion girl indicated that Maria wanted to show her qualification as soon as possible to the blog visitors. During the go-along, she explained to me that she does feel like someone who ‘lives’ fashion:

“I wanted something that is linked to fashion, I love clothing and fashion, it’s a huge part of me. I started the blog after I had a good following on Polyvore where I created outfits, I even had my own group. Other would also describe me as a fashion girl, for sure.”

Hence, based on her performance on another platform, Maria created the name of her blog directly related to her image of the self, presenting her self as qualified in the fashion ‘world’. Going further into the content analysis, I noticed that she designed the sidebar on the blog. Even though the design was bought because, as she said, she does not have any experience in designing a blog, the own design of the sidebar indicated presenting the self as creative and able to work within the design and platform. The sidebar had many links in different forms, from collaboration banners, other social media channels to links to ‘most popular’ blog posts. Papacharissi (2002) found that individuals who use more links on personal pages are more creative than the ones who don’t. Hence, Maria’s usage of different sets of links can be interpreted as showcasing her creativity. Listing ‘most popular’ blog posts refers to blog posts that most people read, indicating Maria’s accomplishment regarding the content of the blog post. Additionally, by using links leading to web shops of retail brands she collaborates with in both sidebar and blog posts, Maria also presents her accomplishments as a blogger in terms of current partnerships with brands.

The analysis of the homepage and blog posts showed that Maria has many different blog post categories; outfits, wish lists, trends, travel posts and events. Creating many categories and writing about different topics signifies Maria’s skill to come up with creative blog post topics and to create versatile content. That she presents herself as competent through the choice of the blog post topics; Maria confirmed this in the interview when asked to describe her blog:

“You can find many different things, it's a creative space for me. You can see my fashion combinations. You can read advices about clothing, trends, online shopping but also traveling. I advise people on how to travel for less money. Different stuff!”

Indeed, Maria often gave suggestions and advices in her blog posts presenting herself as qualified in relation to fashion and clothing:
“If you lack the spring clothes, you have outgrown it or you easily just don’t like it anymore, now is the time to visit the stores because mid sales started up.”

“This combo is very feminine and chic, you can wear it anytime, to any occasion without fear.”

While she often presented herself as creative, one repeating element on the blog revealed that Maria also presents herself as skilled. Even though her blog had a Croatian name, her blog posts were written in two languages, Croatian and English, Croatian being the first one followed by the translation in English. My observations while Maria was creating a blog post showed that translating is not a natural part of her writing but that she makes an effort to translate each post with the help of a translator since she is not “the best in English”. Hence, even though her real language skills were not enough to successfully translate the blog post, Maria still presented herself as skilled, by using a tool to translate.

The previous chapter described Maria’s use of ingratiation to be liked by friends who are also bloggers. Including photos of friends and linking to their blogs also indicated the intention to present the self as socially competent, e.g. having many friends. Those friends being bloggers additionally indicated that Maria wants to present herself as competent and known in the blogging community. This finding goes hand in hand with results presented by Bortree (2005, p. 36) showing that teenage fashion bloggers “employed this strategy by presenting themselves as socially competent”. It can then be argued that Maria as an adult blogger has the same goal since she is still an uprising blogger searching for recognition amongst followers and other bloggers.

4.2.2. Direct and indirect presentation of the self

The first time I visited Maria’s blog, I noticed the specific design of her blog. It was clean, minimalistic, sophisticated and monochrome with a lot of blank spaces and well organized. Besides the very simple and minimalistic blog design, I noticed a pop of a non-minimalistic element—the title of the blog including her name. The font Maria picked for it was handwritten and the usage of her name was interpreted as direct presentation of the self. After spending three days with Maria, I found that the font used in the title matched her style in the real life while the rest of the design did not. Her outfits were very colorful, with many accessories. All three days she wore patterns, different textures and layers. Her outfits consisted of different items; one day she wore pants, the next day a dress and the day after a skirt. Her hair was also different every day, as so was the make-up. Each day she wore a different lipstick color. In one of the field notes, I described her style as “very chic, romantic and creative”. My description of her personality was also contrasting the blog design; she was “open, excited, talkative, positive and curious”. When I visited her in her home, I noticed that it is very colorful, with many decorations such as flowers, vases, pictures and figures, which matched her clothing style and her personality. That she prefers colors, she expressed while describing what was her last purchase during our visit to the store:

“My style is very versatile but I would say always chic. I like the trends, not all but I follow the trends I like, for example, this spring I really like the trends. I love colors, romantic cuts and garments, floral prints, I love jeans, I have so many jeans. Shoes as well, I love heels and sandals, also many many bags with different applications and patterns. I actually really like my style.”
While her clothing style and an impression of her personality did not match the design, it can be argued that her description of the self as a trend follower did. She told me that many bloggers today have similar design, indicating that it is a trend in the blogging ‘world’. Hence, using a trendy design was a way for Maria to present her self ‘in trend’.

Going further into the content analysis, I noticed that the blog post structure, the textual narratives and the photos capture earlier described the personality and reflect her behavior, as observed during the go-along. The blog posts were quite versatile, with different content and information but very organized. When spending time with Maria, I noticed that she likes to talk about many different topics, share her experiences and exchange knowledge with me, indicating that her open personality is reflected in the content of her blog in terms of topics and information given. Moreover, the blog posts seemed very organized and easy to read design wise, with links being carefully placed. There were exactly twelve photos in each outfit post and posts were always published on two particular days in the week. When I firstly came into Maria’s apartment, I noticed that everything is very organized, carefully placed and taken care of. While working on the photos, I noticed that she carefully organizes and keeps track of every element that will be inserted into the blog post. Hence, her perfectionism was reflected in her blog posts. She noticed that I was paying attention to her folders and described her self in accordance to my observations:

“I like to have an order and be organized and accurate with everything, a bit perfectionistic, I know, I know.”

Her openness to different topics and a desire sharing knowledge and experiences during the days we spent hanging out, was also very much reflected in the style of her texts; storytelling in a diary form. She often shared her experiences, attitudes and thoughts in relation to different topics, not only clothing. Her description of the self showed that she is conscious about this aspect of her personality:

“I love hanging, being surrounded by people. I also think I am responsible and resourceful, since I can remember. And a friendly person.”

Papacharissi (2002) argues that individuals communicate personality traits through textual form, especially the language and the tone used in them, which agrees with presented findings. Hence, Maria does this through the text forms in the blog posts; she communicates her more extroverted personality. Additionally, communicating her personality through textual narratives on the blog indicated that Maria presents herself not only indirectly through the blog post structure and photos but also directly through sharing what is on her mind. While Papacharissi (2002) found that people who engage into direct expression of the self use indirect elements less, this case shows that Maria uses both more or less equally.

Sharing her experiences and opinions as a basis to write about fashion in combination with pictures of themselves in relation to the texts is what Titton (2015) defines as constructing a ‘fashionable personae’. It can be argued that Maria engages in this particular action by regularly creating posts of that kind. It was mentioned earlier that photos on her blog are also the way for Maria to present the self. While clothing matched her real-life style, so did her facial expressions, including lots of smiling and less serious facial expressions, reflecting her playfulness and cheerfulness. The locations also presented her as a social person; many photos were taken on crossroads, with people in the background, restaurants and shops. Moreover, the
background was almost always blurred but still colorful and ‘alive’. Some of the poses on the photos were very spontaneous and could also be understood as presenting the self as a happy, open person. However, some of the poses were static and were repeating, indicating that they are practiced, such as a ‘walking’ pose, which was similar in every post. The practiced poses, e.g. following particular posing “grammar”, is a way to construct the ‘fashionable persona’, according to Titton (2015). Therefore, the findings in this case in relation to the theory by Titton (2015) indicate that Maria engages into construction of the ‘fashionable persona’ through both narratives and bodily enactments.

4.2.3. Wearing the public-self

After meeting Maria, it was obvious that her outfits presented on the blog matched her fashion style in real-life and her personality. However, spending more time with her and having more casual conversations revealed that she sometimes creates particular impressions towards others by using clothing as a cue. The first day I met Maria, I had an opportunity to go with her to the fashion week, which meant public appearance. When asking about the outfit she will wear to this public fashion event, she explained that this is an opportunity for her to stand out:

“I like going to fashion weeks and I love to get ready for it. This is a chance to pull out things from the closet I don’t wear often, I can combine stuff I don’t usually combine because you need to stand out a bit. So I will go for something more challenging and daring than usually. This is actually the first time I am going officially as a blogger, with press accreditation.”

The fashion event presented a special setting and an opportunity to get out of the comfort zone but also to create an impression of a more daring and, in Maria’s opinion, “more fashionable” self. An impression of the “more daring and challenging” person is, therefore, a part of Maria’s outer, public self. Her motivation factor for creating this particular image of the self is the opportunity to present the self as a blogger, indicating that she engages into impression management to differentiate her descriptive-self from the blogger-self. This finding confirmed the theory by Solomon et al. (2016) explaining that individuals have their inner/private and outer/public self and they present it depending on the setting. Even more, the creation of an impression that she is daring when it comes to dressing can be interpreted as a way to reach the ideal-self who is more creative and adventurous (Solomon et al., 2016). Additionally, differentiating from others when it comes to dressing parallels comparing the self with others, which is a factor that determines the relationship between the real- and ideal-self, as presented by Argyle (2008). Maria sees being different from others as a positive thing, indicating that she indeed gets closer to the ideal image of the self. When asked what does fashion mean to her, she responded:

“It’s the way I present myself, creative way to present myself, the way to be different from other people.”

During the creation of a blog post, Maria decided to share attitude towards clothing worn on the blog, which strengthen the impression that she engages into impression management to reach the ideal-self. She explained that wearing a garment twice is something she avoids presenting on the blog, even though she wears it often in a real-life:
“I mean, you can’t wear one thing twice, maybe jeans or shoes yes but dresses or tops no. I never do that, it’s boring to look at, I always try to show something new.”

Hence, an ability to present the self on the blog also presents an ability to ‘edit’ the self in Maria’s case. By never showing a garment twice, Maria ensures the particular image of the self: interesting when it comes to dressing up, adventurous and someone who updates the closet very often. Another situation in which Maria engaged into creating a more daring image of the self was through the choice of clothing for a photo shooting. In one of the analyzed blog posts she wore a romantic, blue and white dress embellished with ruffles. In that post, she described the dress as a piece that completely reflects her preferences in a dress:

“Spring means bright colors. We begin with a beautiful blue and white striped dress from Shein website. I was delighted with it, as it was made by me!”

Even though she created an outfit and presented it to her followers on her blog describing it as the something she would make herself, Maria shared with me that this was only partly true:

“I love the fabric and ruffles and the style and I mean, it looks awesome on me but I don’t feel comfortable in it, it’s tight and short, no way I would put it on, I don’t show as much skin. I anyway put it on the blog, it looks good but it’s not 100% me, I don’t wear those things really but it was a collaboration. Other more casual things and wearable.”

Maria told me that the collaboration agreement included creating an outfit and inserting a link into the post, meaning that the description was purely her choice of words. Based on that, it can be argued that by wearing a shorter, tighter dress Maria intended to create an image of herself that fits the description above – challenging and daring. Therefore, through the choice of clothing for the presentation on the blog, Lea aimed to get closer to the ideal image of the self. Since both her appearance in public and actions taken for the blog indicate the same, it can also be argued that Maria’s self presented on the blog is more a public than a private self (Solomon et al., 2016).

4.2.4. The self-confidence circle

During the time spent with Maria, I noticed something that was not visible while analyzing her blog content and that was the level of her self-confidence, e.g. self-esteem. There were many occasions in which she searched for confirmation by asking questions. Her narratives also implicated to a lower level of the self-esteem. That level was noticeable almost immediately when I met her. She was ‘shocked’ in the beginning that I contacted her by email to participate in the study:

“I didn’t even know why would you pick me. Why me? I mean, I am just a small blogger, there is so many other bloggers!”

When I answered that she fitted my requirements and that I followed her before, she was surprised even more. The immediate impression was that Maria has a lower level of self-esteem regarding blogging and being a blogger. Some of the elements found in the content analysis could then be explained, such as asking followers if they like her outfit. As a part of her ‘about me’ page, which is a direct presentation of the self, Maria wrote: “Hope you will find me
interesting and read my blog.” While this sentence itself could not be considered as a presentation of the self, the support came from the previously described behavior, indicating that it was indeed a presentation of the self as less confident. When asked communication with followers, Maria highlighted that their positive feedback has a positive influence on her self-confidence:

“It means a lot that someone follows, reads. I want to get a feedback, it’s great. I am immediately happier; it gives me strength to continue and that what I do is good and that they like it.”

Hence, through the communication with her followers on the blog, Maria builds her self-confidence. It soon became evident that she seeks for validation of her choices in different occasion, not only related to blogging. She would often ask me if she should wear a particular piece or order a particular item. During the interview, Maria expressed her consciousness about this aspect of the self but she also confirmed that she uses the blog to build the lack of self-confidence:

“The blog helps me. For example, I definitely became less insecure. I can still sometimes be a little bit insecure, for example, can I combine these two garments, or when I don’t have an idea, I ask someone for an advice. Or when I want to order something but I am not sure if I should, like with shoes, I asked you if you remember. I really liked them but my friend said no, the boyfriend said they are ugly so I needed someone to say they are nice. I knew they are but that’s how it is. Just a confirmation.”

Her level of self-confidence and need for confirmations was often verbally expressed and raised by people’s positive reactions which agrees with the findings by Argyle (2008) that other’s reaction is a crucial element that brings our the real-closer to ideal-self. Observing Maria during the attendance of a public event revealed that her lack of self-confidence is a part of her unconscious self-presentation ‘behind the screen’. The field notes made right after the event allow visualization of her behavior in relation to her self-confidence:

“We arrived to the big hall full of people. Maria chose to stand in the middle of the hall, almost avoiding any media, press, photo point or any kind of spotlights and wanting to blend in. She said that she would like to take some photos but that it is too awkward to walk into the photo point now when only big bloggers and celebrities are there. She did not greet or meet anyone, including other bloggers who she, based on her comments, knew personally. We stood at the same spot for almost half an hour after we found our seats. Maria seemed like she wanted to do something to be noticed, maybe walk around, however, she did not take any action.”

Even though she earlier told me that it is important for her to be seen attending the event, Maria was not confident enough to proceed with her intention. Her lack of confidence influenced her performance, agreeing with the theory developed by Solomon et al. (2016) that individuals with lower self-confidence usually perform weaker than the ones with a high positivity level, e.g. higher self-confidence. Even though she builds her self-confidence through the blog, Maria also constantly experiences its downsides, such as slow traffic growth on the blog, due to constant oscillations of her confidence level:

“My audience is really not big and it is growing really really slow, I don’t know why. I don’t know how else to get people on my blog. I think it just happens for some bloggers that they
grow really fast and become big and it doesn’t happen for others. I hardly doubt I will ever be a professional blogger. It just doesn’t happen for me.”

This finding shows that, in Maria’s case, the blog is a space where a circle of self-confidence is developed. While the confidence is constantly build through communication with followers, it is immediately ‘crashed’ by the weak performance influenced by the amount of low self-esteem coming from the real-self. Based on this finding, it can be argued that Maria uses the blog to reach the ideal, confident self while it also presents her real, less confident self.

4.2.5. Searching for the self

The content analysis showed that the blog design does not reflect Maria’s fashion style nor personality, only some segments of it, such as the title font and organized blog elements. While it can be argued that one aspect of her identity, being a trend follower, is displayed through the blog design, her earlier presented lack of confidence and self-description indicate that following the trends is a way to construct the self:

“I think that it’s important for the blog to look modern and for design to be pretty and aesthetic. It attracts people more when design is beautifully set and right now, I like this one. I got it recently but yeah, I maybe don’t like the title, I would like some changes.”

This interpretation was strengthened with Maria’s response on how she creates blog posts:

“I always try to write something, I think it’s interesting and I do it for me. The blogs I read have texts, I read them and use them as inspiration, ones I always follow, then I use it as inspiration. Or when I write about something I google it to see what others wrote about it and I check a bit. I also learn by more known bloggers on how to pose and which angle to use when taking photos.”

Inspiring herself by reading and observing other blogs, borrowing other’s ideas, performing the same poses during photo shooting and similar indicates that Maria’s blogging style is not developed completely and that she is still searching not only for how to present the self on the blog but also for who that self is. This finding revealed the background of the variety of categories on the blog and the large number of different topics from the content analysis. Constructing the self through the blog directly relates to the theory presented by Rocamora (2011) that bloggers construct their self through new technologies such as blogs and the screen as a mirror.

Her struggle to present the self was noticeable during the photo shooting as well, taking a lot of time. Maria asked me to take photos of her with her camera one afternoon. We spent some time while Maria was searching for a location, not knowing which setting would fit her outfit. After settling down with a location where she took photos before, she performed a couple of similar poses, asking for each pose to be photographed a number of times. After each session, she came to check the photos and immediately deleted the ones she did not like. Finally, there were 150 photos out of which, she said, she will pick around 12. Photography, therefore, also presents a way for Maria to construct the self, just as described by Rocamora (2011).
It could be argued that Maria constructed the real-self but aims to reach the ideal-self through blogging activities and create the new self-image. However, after spending three days with her, I noticed that both in casual conversations and in the interview, Maria struggled to respond to questions regarding her self. She often had to think for a long time or gave short answers, which indicated that she does not reflect on her self often. It also indicated that her descriptive-self is still not completely constructed:

“I hate this ‘describe yourself’ question, I don’t know. I am a simple girl. I need time with people. I love hanging out… What else? I really don’t know what to say, was that enough? I can say I am responsible and good I think. And resourceful, since I can remember. I am also sensitive sometimes, I don’t know, I don’t really think about this question so I don’t know.”

Struggling to describe her self, her blog and herself as a blogger indeed showed that Maria is still constructing the self, both online and offline. Her descriptions of the ideal-self throughout the data collection were more defined than others, indicating that she still constructs aspects of the self through reaching the ideal-self. The blog as an online context, including different media and activities, plays a significant role in this process serving as a place to try out different aspects of the self that fit the ideal self-image. This finding confirms the theory presented by Rocamora (2011) that the blog is a space were identity is constructed by using different technologies of the self; screen, blog, photography and fashion. Rocamora’s (2011) definition of blogs as the mirror in which the self is constructed visualizes the presented findings in this case.
5 Discussion summary

In case I, to present the self on the blog, two self-presentation strategies, developed by Jones (1959) and applied to the online context by Dominick (1990), were used: ingratiation and competence. No example of other strategies; intimidation, exemplification and supplication, were found in comparison to teenage fashion bloggers who occasionally used supplication (Bortree, 2005) and the personal website owners who, in rare cases, used exemplification (Dominick, 1999). Competence was used in almost every segment of the blog; in contrast to findings by Dominick (1999) that ingratiation is the most used strategy in personal homepages. Competence was used in the form of media, sidebar content, hyperlinks and blog design to present the self as professional and qualified in the domain of fashion blogging, as a difference to teenage fashion bloggers who present themselves as socially competent (Bortree, 2005). Ingratiation in the form of textual media and hyperlinks, was used with an intention to be liked by individuals, as in the findings presented in the study by Bortree (2005). Additionally, this case showed a strong intention to build personal and business relationships by usage of this strategy in comparison to teenage fashion bloggers who aimed to be liked by friends (ibid). The competence was applied with an aim to present the self as professionally competent, while teenage bloggers present themselves as socially competent (ibid). It can be argued that the presented differences between this case and the teenage fashion bloggers occurred due to the age, the level of establishment as a fashion blogger, e.g. blogging for a living, and the more formed self-identity.

The content analysis resulted in finding that the self on the blog is presented through the personalized domain, the blog template, the post structure and media, including hyperlinks, photos and texts, agreeing with findings by Papacharissi (2002) that the presentation of the self online is achieved by incorporation of many indirect elements. Additionally, usage of the specific tone, language and the style of the textual narratives in the blog posts reflected the blogger’s personality confirming the theory by Papapcharissi (2002) that bloggers communicate personality traits through textual forms. In contrast to the theory developed by Titton (2015), bodily enactments and facial expressions on the photos reflected blogger’s behavior in a real-life context as well as the brief textual narratives showed that there was no motivation to construct a ‘fashionable personae’ through these particular forms.

Furthermore, the findings showed that the elements included in the photo shooting, e.g. location, bodily enactments, facial expressions and clothing, were used with an aim to make an impression of more outgoing, positive and excited person. Managing an impression through photo shooting agrees with Solomon et al. (2016) who explain that, to create a certain impression, individuals use different cues. Using of the go-along method showed the significant importance of the location choice in photo shooting as the cue for the impression management but also as the indirect way to present the self. The impression management was also found in direct presentation of the self online, through minimizing and maximizing different aspects of the self to present the self in the best light depending on the setting. Different aspects of the self were chosen to be presented on different online social media channels such as the blog and YouTube, confirming the theory by Solomon et al. (2016) that individuals change the self depending on a setting. Additionally, the desire to be a role model on the blog confirmed the findings by Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) that individuals minimize and maximize the aspects of the self to reach the ideal-self. Overall, it can be argued that impression management was used to reach the ideal-self. Moreover, receiving a positive feedback from others and being a good role model resulted in satisfaction, confirming the theory by Argyle (2008) that positive
reactions from others and performing our social role well bring the real closer to the ideal-self. The self description revealed the high level of self-actualization due to the congruence, e.g. small gap between real- and ideal-self (Rogers, 1959). Finally, the reflection on the blogging history resulted in finding that the level of the self-esteem was raised through blogging. The success as a fashion blogger confirms the theory by Solomon et al. (2013) that high level of self-esteem results in a good performance. Additionally, the raised level of self-esteem agreed with findings by Rocamora (2011) that the blog presents a space for identity construction. However, the construction of the real-self, in this case, belongs to the first years of blogging. In relation to the same findings presented in the study on teenage fashion bloggers by Chittenden (2010), this case showed that identity can be constructed online in the young adulthood too.

Case II showed the usage of two self-presentation strategies, developed by Jones (1959) and applied to the online context by Dominick (1990): ingratiation and competence. There were no signs of intimidation, exemplification and supplication, in comparison to the teenage fashion bloggers who, besides the mentioned two, occasionally used supplication (Bortree, 2005) and personal website owners who, in rare cases, used exemplification (Dominick, 1999). Competence was used more than ingratiation; contrasting the findings by Dominick (1999) who found a stronger usage of ingratiation. This strategy was used through textual narratives, hyperlinks, design elements and sidebar content with an intention to show accomplishments related to the blog and present the self as socially competent within the blogging community. The social competence was also found with teenage bloggers by Bortree (2005), achieved in a same way as this case showed, by listing friends who are also bloggers. Ingatiation was used in a form of textual narratives and hyperlinks with an intention to be liked by friends, matching the findings on teenage fashion bloggers by Bortree (2005). This case additionally showed the usage of this strategy to target designers, influencers and retail brands with the same goal - getting recognition. It can be argued that the results of this study and the study by Bortree (2005) match due to struggles for the self-identity found in both studies.

Furthermore, the findings showed the presentation of the self through a variety of elements, the strongest one being textual narratives, photos and the post structure. Papacharissi (2002) categorized textual narratives as a direct way to present the self, while the rest are considered indirect, also saying that individuals who present their self indirectly usually do not engage into the direct presentation of the self. However, this case showed the usage of both direct and indirect self-presentation elements more or less in an equal amount. Additionally, rich and resourceful textual narratives reflecting the extrovert personality confirmed that individuals show personality traits through textual forms and its form and language (Papacharissi, 2002). Content analysis resulted in finding the bodily enactment ‘formula’ on photos in each blog post as well as rich fashion experience related texts to those photos. The combination of these two elements indicated the construction of ‘fashionable personae’ on the blog, as explained by Titton (2015). Another element related to photo, the location, was found to play an important role in revealing more about blogger’s personality, confirming that it is an indirect way to present the self.

Further, the findings showed the engagement into creating the impression of the self as more daring and adventurous by choosing particular clothing pieces to the fashion event, never repeating outfits on the blog and describing clothing items more positive on the blog than in real life context. This finding confirmed the theory presented by Solomon et al. (2016) that individuals manage impressions of the self to reach the ideal self but also that they change the self to match the particular setting. A public setting was highlighted in this case, portraying that
individuals divide the self to outer, public self and inner, private self (Solomon et al., 2016). Additionally, the choice of a more daring outfit to stand out at a public fashion event agreed with the theory presented by Argyile (2008) that individuals use comparison to others as a factor that bring their real- to the ideal-self. Further, the findings showed significant impact of follower’s positive feedback on building the self-esteem on the blog. Positive reactions from others also present a crucial factor in achieving congruence (Argyile, 2008). While positive feedback resulted in a higher level of self-esteem, the general lower level of it negatively impacted the performance on the blog in terms of slow traffic growth and the inability to get revenue from it, agreeing with the theory that individuals with lower self-esteem perform weaker than more confident individuals (Solomon et al., 2016). Finally, the findings in this case indicated the ongoing construction of the self-identity parts through dressing, photography, blogging and blog design, in agreement with Rocamora (2011) that identity on the blog is constructed through old (dressing, photography) and new (blog) technologies of the self.
6 Conclusion

This study aimed to provide an insight into the blogger’s presentation of the self-identity through the first research question: How is the blogger’s self-identity presented through the fashion blog and blogging activities? The in-depth analysis of two cases showed the significant level of self-identity presentation through the blog as a platform and activities related to it. In case I, an established, professional blogger presented her simple personality and preference for minimalism and monochrome colors through the design template choice. The same aspects of her self-identity, including calm personality, were often reflected through the process of the photo shooting, including locations and outfit choice, posing, facial expressions and communication with photographer. Her introvert personality was expressed through short textual narratives in the blog posts. The usage of the two strategies, ingratiation and competence, through variety of elements on the blog, showed the presentation of the self as friendly and grateful as well as professionally competent. Overall, this case showed the extensive conscious usage of the blog features and engagement into the blogging activities to present the self. In case II, a hobby blogger unconsciously presented the self ‘under construction’ by choice of the design according to the trend rather than own preferences. Her precision and organization skills were presented through the well-structured blog posts including rich textual narratives reflecting her creativity and social personality. The cheerfulness and playfulness noticed in her behavior were presented through photos in the blog posts, more specifically, through outfits, locations and facial expressions. The presentation of the self as socially competent and successful as a blogger was achieved by using competence strategy in almost every segment of the blog. The usage of another strategy, ingratiation, showed the desire for recognition and presented the self as likeable. Overall, this case showed more unconscious than conscious usage of the blog features and engagement into the blogging activities to present the self.

Furthermore, this study intended to answer the second research question related to blogger’s self-identity: How does the online identity of the personal style blogger presented on the blog relate to the real- and ideal-self? The identity presented on the blog in case I was often found to be matching the descriptive-self and the self observed during the research. The further investigation showed occasional engagement into impression management through photo shooting with an ongoing intention to reach the ideal-self. The interview revealed the struggle between different selves as a part of the personality nature. Moreover, blogger’s history revealed earlier construction of the self through blogging. In conclusion, this case showed that the identity presented on the blog is majorly as reflection of already constructed identity and descriptive self. However, the significance of the blog is seen in the desire to reach complete congruence, e.g. overlap real and ideal self, and to self-actualize. Case II showed that the identity presented on the blog often matched the descriptive-self and the self observed during the research. Real-life behavior and verbal narratives showed practicing fashion through dressing as a blogger with an intention to create the ‘blogger’ identity and reach the ideal-self through it. Through further investigation, the blog was found to be a place for practicing the self-confidence and constructing the self-identity. In conclusion, the online identity on the blog mainly serves as a ‘trial identity’ through which the real-self is yet to be found and defined and through which the ideal-self is constantly reached.

This study contributed to both research and practice. Regarding previous research, this study provides an insight into the contemporary phenomena of fashion blogging and fashion bloggers who are the “key players in the the field of fashion” (Rocamora, 2011, p. 407). By researching
self-identity and self-presentation in relation to the personal style blog of adult bloggers this study provides a contribution to the overall knowledge on adult fashion bloggers and the role of the blog in their lives. Researching this type of the fashion blog also contributes to the knowledge on fashion media produced and used by bloggers. Overall, this study contributes to the small amount of previous studies on fashion bloggers and to the findings from those studies. By applying a new way of studying bloggers – real-life observations – in combination with content analysis and interviews, the study contributes to the research into bloggers’ self-identity and self-presentation both on- and offline. This particular data and method triangulation provides a deep insight into each case and enables comparison and further explanation of the findings, resulting in understanding the broader picture and the background of the particular finding. The usage of the go-along method that was, to my knowledge, never used on fashion bloggers before, shows that following a blogger around highlights the role of the location in self-presentation. The photo shooting location choices were found to be a way to indirectly present the self, specifically the fashion style and the personality. They were also found to be the source of additional findings that ‘cleared the picture’ of aspects of self-identity, especially in relation to impression management. Hence, the go-along method was found to be a useful and an applicable method when studying the self-presentation and the self-identity in personal style bloggers.

Regarding practice, this study contributed to the fashion management area, more specifically to the marketing area. For marketing practitioners who focus on influencer marketing, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding and approaching each blogger as an individual. Fashion bloggers have a great power on consumers, as they spread the word about the brand or the product and increase its recognition, the brand’s online traffic and potentially the revenue as well (Forbes.com, 2017). This study showed the significant role of the product in blogger’s life. Products such as clothing items are used to present the self in a particular way, which not only adds the new attribute to the blogger but also to the product in the eyes of the followers who are at the same time potential consumers. Through the presentation of the self, bloggers also present the product. Hence, self-presentation and blogger’s self-identity can greatly influence the way the product is presented to the targeted consumer. That being said, the understanding of the way the blogger presents the self through the blog and blogging activities can significantly influence the success of the collaboration between the brand and the blogger. Blogger’s self-presentation on the blog could be used as another criterion to select ‘the perfect influencer’. By following the content analysis steps in this study, a simple overview of the blog could provide an answer to which strategies the bloggers use to present their self, narrowing down the selection of the influencer. For example, selecting a blogger who presents the self as professionally competent might ‘fit’ the particular brand/product better than the blogger who presents the self as socially competent. Since there is more research needed on this topic to allow complete usage of results and information from this study in the marketing strategy, this study can be understood as the first step into understanding the importance of blogger’s self-identity and self-presentation when selecting the right influencer for the product or brand promotion.

This study has provided a deep insight into the lives of two fashion bloggers. These two individuals were investigated into details what resulted in rich findings regarding self-presentation and self-identity online and offline. Further research on the same topic should include more cases, which would potentially enable generalizability. Even though there were no intentions to compare, this study showed significantly different results between the established and the hobby blogger. Hence, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study in which more cases would be compared based on their level of establishment as a blogger or some other difference, such as country or sex. Additionally, conducting a similar research in
other areas than fashion could contribute to the existing knowledge related to those areas. Furthermore, the methods used in this study could inspire new studies interested in other social media platforms, such as Instagram, YouTube, Twitter or Facebook. While the main media in this study was texts and graphics, it can be interesting to study self-identity and self-presentation in videos by using the same methods. Finally, it is strongly suggested to research and potentially develop the strategy on how can fashion companies use these and new findings on this topic to build more successful marketing and to strengthen its performance.
7 Bibliography


Chittenden, T., 2010. *Digital dressing up: modelling female teen identity in the discursive - 52 -


Appendices

I. Consent form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

As an author, I, Andrea Simunic, would like to thank you for volunteering to participate in my study which is a part of my master thesis for Fashion Management program at Swedish School of Textiles.

Research topic
FASHION BLOGGER BEHIND THE SCREEN: an exploratory study of self-identity and self-presentation on personal style bloggers

Purpose of the study
The purpose of this study is to get a deeper insight into the phenomena of the fashion blogger as an individual by investigating blogger’s self-identity and self-presentation.

Study procedures
As a participant in this study, I would like to describe you the way the data will be collected and your role in that process. As a first step in data collection, I will be analyzing the content of your blog. By doing that, I will get an insight into your blog and you as a blogger, which benefits further process. Secondly, I will conduct a go-along method. With your permission, I will spend time with you and follow you around as you do regular, daily activities related to your blog. The go-along is aimed to last for as many days as possible (minimum two). During the day, you as a participant can decide when you feel comfortable to be “followed”. You can change the schedule anytime. You are asked to do your regular activities related to blog just as any other. During go-along, I will take notes and will also, with your permission, tape record our conversations. It is important to note that there is no interest your private life, meaning that your private activities will not be covered by go-along sessions.
In the end of the go-along method, you will be asked to participate in the interview. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your blog, experiences related to it and yourself. The interview will last for approximately 1 hour. With your permission, I will record the interview and then transcribe it into the written form.

Both go-along method and interview will be conducted in Croatian. All data later presented in the study is confidential and you will stay anonymous, meaning that your real name will not be revealed anywhere. Finally, you will have an opportunity to read the final report after, check if the transcripts captured your sayings truly and ask for making changes if wanted. You will also have access to the final copy of report if you are interested in it.

Participation
If you agree to volunteer as participant in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. You may decide to remove your data from the study. You may refuse to answer any questions during go-along or the interview without consequences.

Consent
Your signature below indicates your decision to volunteer as a research participant in this study. It also indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above. The signed and dated copy of this consent form will be given to you.
Since the knowledge on fashion blogging phenomena is still limited, your participation in this study will be very helpful.

Participant name

Signature and Date
II. Go-along guide

i. DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUE</th>
<th>GUIDELINES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| FIELD NOTES               | • notes during short breaks about impressions, feelings, ideas etc.  
                           | • detailed summaries about participant’s acts and all information captured “in process”  
                           | • expansion of any record or mental notes into sets of descriptive field notes after completing a go-along session (as soon as possible)  |
| TAPE RECORDING            | • in calmer and more quiet settings (sitting in a bar, at home, during a car ride, etc.)  
                           | • usage of good quality tape recorder  |
| PHOTOS AND VIDEOS         | • if possible, photos and videos of different processes  |

ii. TO KEEP IN MIND

Avoid
• participation in selecting the contents of participant’s narratives
• instructing participant on what to talk about
• ask prepared and ad hoc questions only to sparkle the conversation

Focus on
• asking, listening and observing
• keeping conversational format

Capture
• perceptions, emotions and interpretations and their streams
• visual, auditory, kinesthesia, gustatory, olfactory senses
• appearance (dress, posture, manner of movement, gestures)
• nonverbal and verbal communication (feelings, emotions, reactions etc.)
• spatial practices (environmental engagement)
• biography (sharing memories)
• naturally occurring social interactions (phone calls, emails, meetings)
• anything interesting or different
iii. **OBSERVATION AND INTERVIEW GUIDE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SETTING*</th>
<th>OBSERVATION FOCUSES</th>
<th>TOPICS TO TALK ABOUT***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| FIRST MEETING | • the way he/she introduces herself  
• physical appearance  
• the mood  
• what follows the introduction | • no specific topics  
• ad hoc |
| PHOTO SHOOT | • what is prior to the photo shooting  
• what comes first (outfit choice location or something else)  
• how and when are outfit and location chosen  
• the outfit  
• reactions to the locations  
• the priorities in the process of photo shooting  
• the steps in photo shooting  
• duration of photo shoot  
• blogger’s actions, poses, reactions, facial and verbal expressions, feelings and emotions  
• interaction with photographer  
• interactions with surrounding  
• what follows the photo shoot  
• changes in the mood during and after photo shoot | • the outfit choice  
• the photo shooting process  
• the importance of photo shooting  
• the inspiration for photo shooting  
• ad hoc |
| BLOG POST CREATION | • the choice of location and surrounding  
• the start of the process  
• the way he/she works with taken photos  
• the selection process of photos and other media  
• text writing  
• elements included in the blog post  
• the way elements are chosen  
• the process of creating the post  
• feelings, emotions, facial and verbal expressions, mood | • guiding through the blog post creation (step by step explanation)  
• inspiration  
• content  
• audience  
• information sharing  
• ad hoc |
| ATTENDING THE EVENT (Fashion Week) | • attitude towards the fashion week in form of feelings, emotions, verbal and facial expressions  
• mood  
• behavior when entering the space, especially regarding press, cameras, other bloggers, designers, etc.  
• behavior during the runway shows, especially expressions and reactions  
• signs of roles (blogger vs. not blogger)  
• activities and behavior after the runway shows | • motivation to attend  
• importance of attending  
• the outfit choice  
• the main interests at the event  
• ad hoc |
* interview questions listed below
** listed settings were decided on in advance by participants

iv. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PHOTOSHOOTING

1. You are about to do the photo shooting of this outfit. How did you choose the outfit you are wearing?
2. Tell me about/guide me through the photo shooting process. What do you start with, what comes next?
3. Why are photo shootings important part of your blog?
4. Where do you get the inspiration for outfits, locations, poses?
5. How important is each of those elements?

WORKING ON THE BLOG

1. Could you guide me through creation of the new blog post? What is most important to include in your blog post?
2. Where do you get the inspiration from?
3. What do you usually write about? Why?
4. What about including your personal life into the blog posts, how do you feel about that?

ATTENDING THE EVENT (Fashion Week)

1. Why did you decide to attend fashion week?
2. Why is it important to attend fashion week for you, as a blogger?
3. What are you wearing tonight and why did you choose this outfit?
4. What are you the most interested in tonight?
III. Interview guide

First, thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. During this interview, we will talk about your blog, experiences related to it and you. The interview will last between 45 minutes and 1 hour. You can stop the interview at any time. You can refuse to answer any questions without consequences. I would like to remind you that this interview is anonymous, meaning that your real identity will not be exposed in the final report. Recording the interview is very important and helpful for me to analyze the material. Only I will have access to the recording of this interview and once the study is finished, all recordings will be destroyed.

Are you comfortable if I record the interview?

Let’s start with talking a little bit about your blog.

1. Why do you blog?
2. How did it all start?
3. How did you come up with the name of the blog and what does it present?
4. How often do you blog?
5. About how much time do spend blogging each week?
6. How would you describe your blog?
7. How does your blog differ from other fashion blogs? What are the similarities?
8. How would you describe your followers?
9. Do you interact directly with your followers? In what way? Examples?
10. What do you want your followers to get from reading your blog?
11. What kind of impression do you want to give your readers?
12. What is most important in your blog?
13. What are your favorite post types/topics? Elaborate.
14. How about your personal life, is it also a part of the blog? In which ways?

Ok, I would like to change the topic now and talk a bit about you.

15. What is your background? (education, family, other form of work besides blogging)
16. How would you describe yourself?
17. How do you want to be perceived by others?
18. Does your blog represent who you are? Why? /Why not? Could you give me some examples?
19. Let’s travel in time a little bit. If you picture yourself before you started blogging – has being a blogger changed you in any way? How? Elaborate.
   Sub question: How much did being a blogger influence who you are today?
20. Again, if you go back to the beginning of your blogging career, how has your blog changed? Elaborate.
21. If you could change anything about yourself, what would that be? Why?
22. So, if you wouldn’t be a blogger, what would you do?
23. How about the future, where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years?

   * Additional questions might be added based on collected go-along data

Thank you for the interview! These are all the questions I have for you. Is there anything else you would like to share with me, something you didn’t have a chance to talk about? Thank you once again for participating in this study. Can I get back to you if I have any additional questions?