

Fashion bloggers and the democratization of fashion in today's digital communication society: A challenge to global media outlets?



Tomislava Tomova
5th May, 2017

Present day digital communication environments establish inclusive platforms, where like-minded individuals gather together to form a digital culture striving for mutual exchange of ideas, inspiration, art, fashion, and style. Challenging the fashion paradigm imposed in big media outlets, fashion blogs substantially contribute to the democratization of fashion and freedom of aesthetic expression. With the growing

influence and presence of the Internet in people's everyday lives, bloggers are able to deconstruct the established authority of magazines. Blogs favor the 'electronic word of mouth', defined as: "Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet." (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p.39)

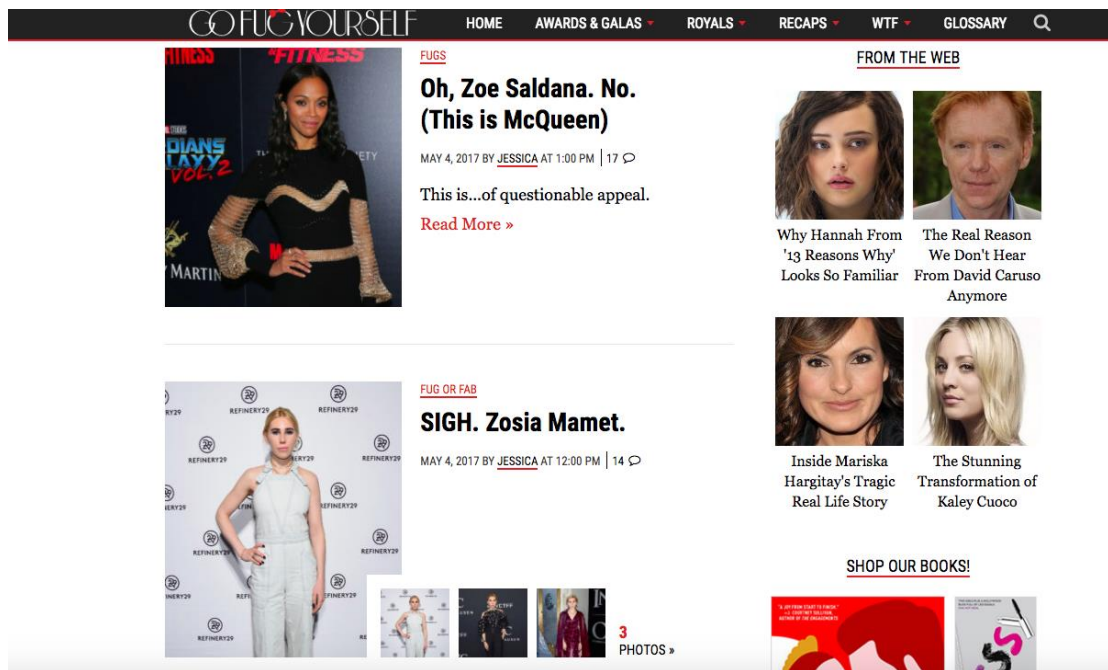
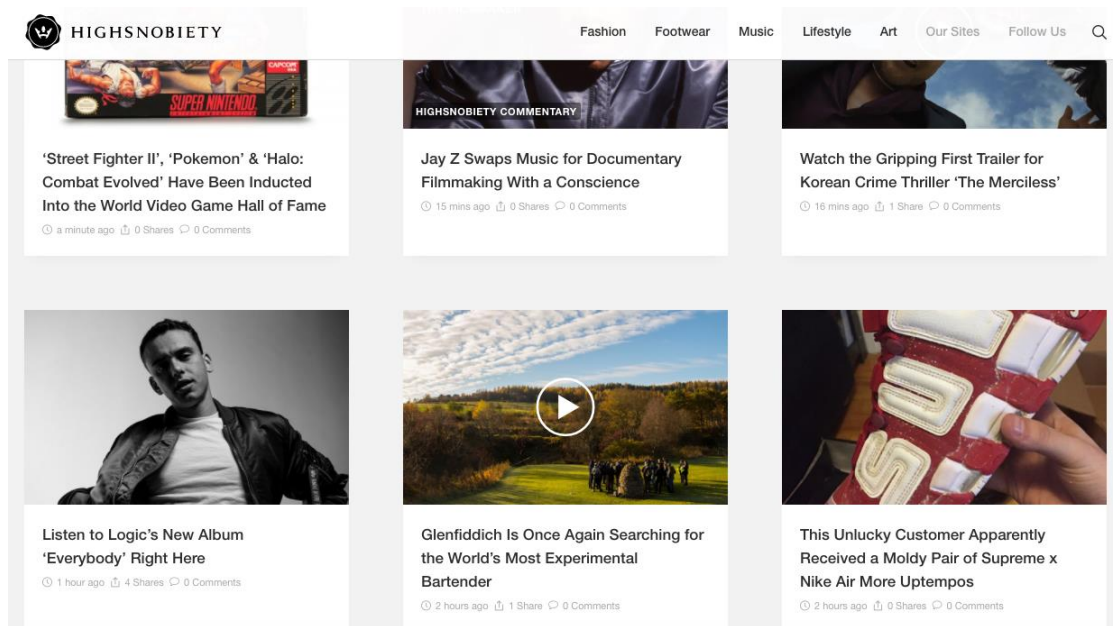
At a more general level, social media and fashion blogs aid democracy through an increase in the number of spaces available for deliberation and dissent. This counters mass media vertical communication systems: blogs produce user generated content and individual bloggers claim their "right to look" by conveying their own view on fashion (Mirzoeff, 2012). Furthermore, Blogs enable ordinary people to bypass established editorial filters and turn their personal sense of style and aesthetics into a source of inspiration for their readers, reducing dependency on carefully crafted and chosen fashion and trends offered by global media. In return, each individual participating in blogs has the power to step in the conversation engaged by bloggers and influence the content produced through a mobile, interactive relationship between both parts.

The endless creative potential of blogs circumvents the rules established by power holders such as investors or media moguls. (Cheong & Morrison, 2008) As a result, blogs have the possibility to showcase a wider variety of clothing and brands, not limited to the ones sponsoring magazines and subsequently being shown in them. Founders of blogs and their creative audience try to establish a degree of citizen control over these abuses and declare their right to freedom of communication without corporate control or interference (Curran, 2012). Even though bloggers might feature sponsored content, they are perceived as more trustworthy and credible than producer generated content (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). Indeed, unlike magazines, blogs are not managed by a team of editors. Viewers can control and judge the honesty of bloggers – and, if they decide to do so – denounce their abuses. They tend, in general, to see these sources as more relatable, and value bloggers for their ability to change the field of fashion. They become trendsetters and include their viewers in the creation of new trends.

Their influence has been measured by numerous studies. Nick Blunden, in "The Economist and Bloom Worldwide report" describes bloggers as: "a cohort of

influencers who both are sophisticated media consumers whose reach is coveted by not only media companies but also brands...They curate, they consume and they create.” (*The rise*, 2017) Addressing the influence of fashion blogs on 18-24 years old females, the study reveals that fashion blogs are not only used as an information source, but also as a measure for personal social acceptance (*Social*). People read blogs to determine which trends or styles to adopt or avoid in order to gain confidence and construct their own identity. This confirms Festinger’s theory on social comparison, which claims that consumers will tend to respond to uncertainty by comparing themselves to others similar to them, this in order to ameliorate their self-esteem (Kang & Park-Poaps, 2011). The influence of blogs occurs at a collective level since readers form their opinions by reading a variety of blogs promoting for instance a particular trend. A participant says: “I was never into the color turquoise until I saw people wearing them on every single blog I followed yeah so it’s that kind of thing, I was never into turquoise until I figured out “oh everyone’s wearing it.” (*Social*)

Fashion blogging is thus making a previously exclusive industry more inclusive to outsiders and is encouraging conversation between consumers. Fashion bloggers are not only giving their readers an insider look into the fashion industry but they influence it and modify it by starting trends and influencing brands. Some blogs however, such as High Snobiety and Go Fug Yourself have transformed into online magazines following a different writing style, layout and social media presence than a normal blog. Both of them are led by several bloggers and have reached professional level attracting greater audience. However, both of them lost their interactive audience and receive less comments than before. The six most recent posts from The Highsnobiety show zero comments, while the two recent posts from Go Fug Yourself saw the number of their comments drop – respectively 17 and 13 comments.



We can deduce here that blog readers appreciate blogger's individual approach over professional developed content developed by multiple people. Blogposts from fashion photographer The Sartorialist can for instance reach over 450 comments discussing the photography or the style of the person in the picture.

COMMENTS

498 comments

[detach comments](#)
[Jump to comment form](#)

Geordie

August 30, 2012 at 3:59 pm

Awsome. But where do you submit 'em?

Reply

Alyssa | The Sartorialist

August 30, 2012 at 3:57 pm

Hi Geordie – you can leave your story in the comments!

Reply

Screaming Mouth

August 30, 2012 at 3:15 pm

Will there be a book signing in LA?

Reply

Mia Marionette

August 30, 2012 at 3:16 pm

The photo is mag!e! Congrats with your second book!!

<http://blog.miamarionette.com/>

Reply

<https://t.co/nBU5Qo0P>
22:20 PM Dec 1th

On the Street...Green & Pink, Milan:

<https://t.co/OxHR7FcUY>
14:46 PM Dec 1th

[Follow The Sartorialist](#)

INSTAGRAM

[Follow The Sartorialist](#)

His “Biography” page says: “Founder/blogger/photographer Scott Schuman began *The Sartorialist* with the idea of creating a two-way dialogue about the world of fashion and its relationship to daily life”. This suggests his desire to invite the audience to engage with the content he posts. *Kayture by Kristina Bazan*, another fashion blog, is known as the first influencer to partner with high luxury brands such as Chopard, Piaget, Cartier and Louis Vuitton. Yet even though she features sponsored content from these brands, her readers are very loyal and she often receives more than 100 comments a post.

HOME CATEGORIES TRAVELS ABOUT FOLLOW

SEARCH

2017 Recap

As always, one of my favorite traditions on Kayture is to do a big yearly recap each first month of the year. It's a nice way to look back on all the achievements, the growth, the experiences, dive back into some heart warming memories, acknowledge the difficulties, challenges,...

READ MORE

f

138 COMMENTS

spread the love

✓ Харесвам 2.1 млн.

Спод

FOLLOW

FACEBOOK

TWITTER

INSTAGRAM

GOOGLE+

BLOGLOVIN

YOUTUBE

The comments cited below demonstrate the deep emotional connection established throughout the years between the blogger and her readership. Kristina Bazan stands out from other bloggers as she often answers to her readers’ comments and builds a loyal community by organizing “Meet and Greet” events where she actually meets her fans in real life.

NICO • 7 JANUARY 2017 / REPLY

I've loved the years I've had the pleasure of watching you grow and change. I loved your year this year and could easily sense that it was a heartfelt departure from previous years. I felt like I was seeing you, rather than you playing you. It was incredible and brave and I'm delighted for you that you are so thoughtful, eloquent and luminous. You're human but ethereal, so young but so intelligent and capable. Thank you for sharing your life with us. I'm sure that is a lot of pressure. Please just know how much we're all in awe of you, the real, evolving, I fits you. Have a magical 2017!!! Thank you always.

AYISHA • 7 JANUARY 2017 / REPLY

The most lasting impact you can have on people is what you say to them. So please Kristina, I urge you to write more online and share some of your beautiful soul with the rest of the world, who so badly need the enlightenment. We're all trying to find our way in this world but life doesn't get easier because I see an image of a beautiful girl standing in front of a mirror taking a selfie. It gets easier when I know I am not alone in my struggles, that real fucked up shit happens to Instagram stars regardless of their positive uplifting content, that love is real and it can be painful, that the deepest passions are found in art, in sharing a fragment of your soul, that being brave enough to share your truth is more important than brand deals. That although we don't have all the answers, we can struggle together through life and fight through the hard stuff with every inch of our breath, knowing that we will all come out winning in the end. All of us. Not just as our pretty personas on social media either but as limitless human beings who are exploring the depths of a short but beautiful life. Write a second book or a kick ass song; make it authentic and true to yourself.
Feel, feel, feel
and then let it go.
With love and respect,
@ayishaogbara

In both cases, even though some bloggers feature sponsored content, they continue to be perceived as trustworthy since they engage with their readers.

The Sartorialist and *Kayture* by Kristina Bazan fashion blogs demonstrate how fashion blogging is impacting social media within the fashion industry on a higher level than traditional media. Brands such as L'Oréal Paris have understood the great potential of bloggers and influencers, who connect with their readers on a personal level. Following the Los Angeles Times, "70 percent of the budget given to one of the PR firms enlisted by L'Oréal goes toward influencers, with just 30 percent relegated to traditional, editorial placement" (Strugatz). Following Alessio Sanzogni, group general manager of Chiara Ferragni *Theblondesalad.com* and Chiara Ferragni *Collection*, "Blogger engagement used to happen only in the digital world, but now it inspires a full integrated communication plan which can be leveraged on the consistency of a genuine story. That's the upcoming way of doing marketing" (Strugatz). As opposed to print media conveying one-sided messages, blogs thus "keep the conversation going" and allow every day consumers to become part of the fashion industry. On 1000 individuals over 16 years, a survey reveals, influencers

content accounts for almost 20% of consumer media consumption, with 57% of people basing their purchases solely on online influencer recommendation. Average consumers spend more than an hour looking at influencer's content a day. (Mortimer, 2017).

Another study "The Role of Social Media in the Fashion Industry: How Fashion Blogging Encourages Two-Way Symmetrical Communication" furthermore underlines the impact of social media on the transformation of brands (Durmaz, 2014). For an industry that's always been elitist, fashion bloggers have forced brands to think differently and focus on engagement with consumers who prefer "authentic, trusted opinion, over and above the voice of the brand itself." (The Rise, 2017). According to Nielsen's latest biennial Global Survey of Trust in Advertising, involving 30,000 individuals in 60 countries, more than 81% people vote "personal recommendation" as the most trusted form of advertising, followed by "consumer opinions online" (58%).

This new form of influence is less about imposing aesthetic norms and values or arguing and coercing a particular point of view, than it is about advocating, engaging with the audience and inviting them to an open debate. In the past, influencers who were generally portrayed in the press and corporate media were primarily celebrities and well-known figures. Today, the space allowed by social media nurtures new kind of influencers who often come from nowhere and build themselves up. John Demsey, executive group president at Estée Lauder Cos claims: "The new celebrities are the social influencers, and quite honestly some make more money than the people who get Emmy Awards." (Strugatz)

Yet a risk occurs when companies offer free products to bloggers in hope that they will share their experience with their audience. (Dunlop, 2010) Even though bloggers can include sponsored content on their websites, they must be very cautious about the products that they recommend and should always label it as sponsored content. British blogger, Jane Cunningham says: "I am well aware that women buy products through links on my site – but selling can never be a primary concern because it changes how and why you blog." (The Rise, 2017) Recognizing the impact they have on their audience, bloggers are careful on what they recommend because they do not want to shift the attention from their own identity and voice to sharing a message about a brand that they do not identify themselves with. Furthermore, bloggers pay attention to the quality of the products that they recommend, in order not

to lose their readership: “even though some of the bloggers used product placement and accepted free products from companies, the participants did not regard them as biased because they believed the bloggers would only blog about products which they believe were good.”

Bloggers have thus become citizen journalists with a fashion twist. They challenge the fashion paradigm set by media outlets and offer a fresh and objective perspective on the industry. Their success lies in their democratization of fashion. Advocating for a two-way communication and debate, they value the opinion of their readers. Although bloggers have been criticized for featuring sponsored content on their platforms, they are still regarded as credible and trustworthy because they put the interest of their audience over the interest of the brand. They empower their readers by encouraging a creative freedom of expression rather than blindly following the aesthetic that traditional media outlets are trying to impose.

Bibliography:

Cheong, H. J. & Morrison, M. A. (2008). Consumers' reliance on product information and recommendations found in UGC. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 8(2), 38-49.

Curran, James, Natalie Fenton, and Des Freedman. "Chapter 5: The Internet of Me (and My "friends")." *Misunderstanding the Internet*. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2016. 153-55. Print.

Dunlop, E. (2010). All keyed up about fashion. Retrieved from http://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article.cfm?c_id=6&objectid=10674866

Durmaz, Leila. "The Role of Social Media in the Fashion Industry: How Fashion Blogging Encourages Two-Way Symmetrical Communication." *Www.digitalcommons.calpoly.ed*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Apr. 2017.

Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., Walsh, G. & Gremmler, D. D. (2004). Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the internet? *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 18(1), 38-52.

Kang, J. & Park-Poaps, H. (2011). Motivational antecedents of social shopping for fashion and its contribution to shopping satisfaction. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*.

Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality*. North Carolina: DUKE UP, 2012. Print.

Mortimer, Natalie. "Influencer Content Accounts for Almost 20% of Consumer Media Consumption." *The Drum*. N.p., 25 Jan. 2017. Web. 05 May 2017.

"Social Influences on Fashion Consumers." *The Why Of The Buy* (n.d.): n. pag. Web.

Strugatz, Richael. "Bloggers and Digital Influencers Are Reshaping the Fashion and Beauty Landscape." *Los Angeles Times*. Los Angeles Times, 10 Aug. 2016. Web. 05 May 2017.

"The Rise of Influencers." *Fashion Beauty Monitor*. Fashion Beauty Monitor and Econsultancy, 21 Feb. 2017. Web. 5 May 2017.