# Fashion Blogging and Personal Style Bloggers:

The Evolving Enterprise

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Abstract This study examines existing literature and uses case studies to identify the scope of fashion blogging and the evolving role of the personal style bloggers in the fashion business. Information on six popular personal style bloggers has been gathered to demonstrate the evolving business of these bloggers and their scope of operations that are relevant to fashion. The case of these six bloggers were drawn from popular media publications such as CNN, Wall Street Journal (WSJ), Time, Women's Wear Daily (WWD) and The New York Times. The case study of these six bloggers reveals that these personal style bloggers have used their reach and influence on the blog audience to procure and access business opportunities to grow their enterprise. The findings indicate that affiliation, partnership or collaboration with brands or established designers adds more value to a personal style bloggers resume. However, the findings also indicate that the popular fashion bloggers provide a new opportunity for marketing and promoting fashion brands and products to the younger generation.

Key words Fashion, Blogging, Personal style blogger, Web log, Opinion leader

#### Introduction

In the apparel business fads and trends are not considered deterrents but an opportunity to be capitalized in order to increase profits. The phenomenon of fashion blogging and the swift rise of the fashion bloggers to celebrity status have presented an opportunity for marketers to promote their brands and businesses. With their unlimited internet reach and immense commercial influence, bloggers are the newest opinion leaders of postmodern times. Thus, the objective of this study is to examine the impact of fashion blogging and the role of fashion bloggers, particularly the influence of the personal style bloggers on the fashion business.

Technorati (2013) reported that among the 150 brand marketers that participated in their study pertaining to digital influence, about 60 percent predicted an average increase of 40 percent in spending towards social media for 2013. The report states that currently only an average of 10 percent of the digital spending of these companies goes towards social media. Out of this budget more than half goes to Facebook, followed by YouTube and Twitter. Only 11 percent of their social spending goes towards overall spending on blogs and influencers. Out of the 11 percent, a meager 6 percent is spent on influ-

encers and balance 5 percent is spent on advertising on blogs. Although blogs and influencers do not get a large portion of brands' digital spend, they rank high with consumers for trust, popularity and influence. When making overall purchase decisions, for consumers, blogs trail only behind retail and brand sites. With regard to overall sources for information on the internet, blogs rank among the top five "most trustworthy" sources (Technorati, 2013).

In October 2011 blogpulse.com estimated there were over 170 million blogs worldwide and approximately 100,000 being added per day. Web logs (Blogs) appeared in the mid-1990s and are one of the leading tools in Web 2.0 (Singh, Veron-Jackson, & Cullinane, 2008). The independent blogs are personal internet sites that are regularly updated with posts (texts) in reverse chronological order. Independent or personal blogs are a way for the author of the blog to express feelings, thoughts, and opinions on a given topic. Subscribers to a given blog can exchange ideas and express their own thoughts and beliefs with the author and fellow readers by posting comments or simply clicking on "like" for each post. Thus, by allowing readers to participate in a two-way communication, blogs have created a platform in the cyberspace that brings together groups of individuals to form a community around shared experiences, beliefs and interests.

### Fashion blogging

According to Dirk Standen, editor-in-chief of Style.com, the blogosphere where many fashion bloggers are operating has had a positive impact on designer fashion as it has made designers globally famous and designer brands now have a wider reach. The idea is further argued by Uri Minkoff, CEO of Rebecca Minkoff, who stated that in the old format the seasonal fashion shows catered exclusively to the editors and buyers. The buyers would place their orders and editors would discuss the designers' collections and their inspiration in their reports, and four to six months later when the leading retail stores displayed their selected fashion pieces in the store windows the customer would get to see what was in fashion for the season. In the old system the consumers were kept unaware of trends until it was ready at the retail floor. But all this has changed with social media, whereby the moment the designer or the brands shows their line of products for the new season, consumers can access this information through social media platforms (like Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest) and in exchange the designer or creators of these pieces can access immediate feedback from the consumers (Grinberg, 2012).

The number of individuals accessing the Internet is constantly growing, thus increasing the user volume, and enabling a widespread reach. Growing information exposure through the Internet leads to rapid awareness of new styles at all levels of the fashion system. Regular updates on fashion blogs allow fashion consumers to keep abreast with the latest fashion fads, trends and styles. In the postmodern era, it appears that the role of fashion designers is not necessarily to develop new and original designs but to be able identify trends among subcultures that they think will resonate with a broader audience. The consumers, on the other hand, choose from a wide range of products to create a look that is compatible with their identity.

The fashion blogosphere is comprised of both independent and corporate sites. Independent blogs allow average individuals to create sites that reflect their personal style and taste or to provide information on current fashion trends. The popularity of independent fashion blogs is determined by consumer interest in the topics discussed and the narratives composed by the individual blogger. The popularity of these independent bloggers is capable of driving sales and building brands (Born, 2012). Corporate sites are maintained by a brand, label, or store for the sole purpose of expanding the brand experience (Corcoran, 2010). A corporate blog could be a fashion publisher, a fashion retailer, or any institutional voice in the business fashion (Rocamora, 2011).

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Broadly speaking fashion blogs can be categorized into: (1) street fashion, which captures the styles of individuals (non-celebrities) that seems visually appealing to them, (2) personal style, in which the individual puts images of themselves in clothing items (current fashion or vintage items) to show their individualistic interpretation of fashion/style (3)"Do-it-Yourself"(DIY), in which the individual discusses how to make fashion items by themselves using simple skills sets and tutorials in form of videos, narrative and pictures (4) product blog, the site features a particular type of commodity like jewelry or shoes (5) celebrity blogs, the focus is the fashion and style of a specific celebrity (6) industry blogs, the emphasis is industry events and news, and (7) corporate blogs, the company can generate information specific to its brand (Mareata, 2009).

Prior to the explosion of Web 2.0, the fashion opinion leaders included editors of leading fashion magazines, society women and celebrities. But in recent years, fashion bloggers have assumed a major role in the dissemination of fashion trend and style information (Khodadad, 2010; Singh, Veron-Jackson & Cullinane, 2008). The present article concentrates exclusively on bloggers of personal style. These independent bloggers upload written content, photographs and/or videos of their personal style on a regular basis combined with a narrative that involves personal storytelling (Woodside, Sood & Miller, 2008) engaging the postmodern consumer. With their unlimited internet reach and immense commercial influence, personal style bloggers are the newest opinion leaders in the realm of fashion.

#### Personal (style) blogs and commercial impact

The booming blogosphere, a term used to describe a collection of all blogs on the Internet (Singh, Veron-Jackson & Cullinane, 2008), is a dynamic and interactive arena where opinionated communities have replaced the previously institutional fashion authorities in favor of real persons that inspire consumers (Mareata, 2009). Blogs that offer reviews of products, services and technologies, hold a crucial position in the marketplace especially when readers trust the author. Published without the restrictions of editorial oversight, bloggers have an authentic appeal similar to a word-of-mouth channel of communication. Blogs engage readers and subscribers in the creation, delivery, and dissemination of marketing messages (Singh, Veron-Jackson & Cullinane, 2008), thereby allowing businesses to overcome customers' resistance to traditional ways of marketing in which customers are bombarded with persistent advertisements and sales pitches. Furthermore, companies have found that endorsements from bloggers often appear more

genuine than traditional advertising (Smith, 2012).

Personal or independent blogs are online sites in which an individual publishes text (called posts) that express his/her thoughts, opinions, beliefs accompanied by photographs, video and other relevant material consistent with the particular genre of blog. The boom of the blogosphere may be attributed to the daily updates on these sites and in real time at low cost (Mareata, 2009). Another crucial aspect is the candid narratives and conversational tone of blogs which creates interest among the readers about the blogger's personality (Grant, 2006). Independent bloggers are able to capture, maintain the audience's interest and persuade their readers (Born, 2012; Ghazisaeedi, Steyn & Heerden, 2012).

Emily Schuman (*Cupcakes and Cashmere*), Leandra Medine (*The Man Repeller*), Rumi Neeley (*Fashiontoast*), Bryan Grey-Yambao (*Bryan Boy*), and Aimee Song (*Song of Style*) are examples of current personal style bloggers that have reached near celebrity status. These blog celebrities are part of new phenomenon that appears to embody a democratic power and influence in today's popular culture. The blog celebrities are continuing to gain prominence. For instance when discussing the effect of her online fame, Emily Schuman claims that her followers want the "inside scoop," like where she dines, shops, and relaxes (Brown, 2012). Businesses are looking for ways to exploit blogs and bloggers because the blog readers seem to value the information in blogs (Hsu & Lin, 2008) and raise some of these bloggers to a celebrity status.

The Technorati (2013) findings indicate that blogs are the third-most influential digital resource (31%) when making overall purchases, only behind retail sites (56%) and brand sites (34%). Besides, blogs are the fifth-most trustworthy source overall for information on the internet and many consumers' access blogs before making their purchase (Technorati, 2013). Companies have found that endorsements from these bloggers often appear more genuine than traditional advertising (Smith, 2012). Validation from popular bloggers can be beneficial to companies as these bloggers can exert substantial influence over their followers. Fashion brands leverage the persuasive quality of popular bloggers to create and sustain brand loyalty. Retailers/companies are now willing to pay popular bloggers for advertising, endorsing, promoting and/ or validating their brands (Strugatz, 2012).

Blogs can be categorized as monetized blogs and non-monetized blogs. When the blogger is paid a fee for the number of page hits that accrues while the merchant's advertisements appears on the blog or blogs that charge a fee or accept products and services in exchange for mentioning the companies name or branded goods on their blog are 'monetized blog' and a blog that do not display advertisements or promote commercial use in exchange for a fee or products or services are 'non-monetized blog'. According to Technorati (2013), nearly two-thirds of influencers say they make money from blogging, but more than 80 percent say it's less than \$10,000 per year. Only 11 percent of bloggers report making more than \$30,000 per year. Most bloggers' reported income was a result of advertising (61% banner, 51% text). Affiliate programs (41%), sponsored content (24%), sponsored product reviews (19%) also were top earning methods. Partnerships between blogger and brands have become commonplace. For instance, Gap featured Susie Bubble in a campaign, DKNY hired the photo blogger Jamie Beck to shoot behind the scenes at its recent runway show and Sunglass Hut held a heavily promoted contest for a

full-time blogger (Kurutz, 2011).

Fashion bloggers today have expanded their operations to writing sponsored posts, selling ad space on their sites, working as brand ambassadors, making personal appearances and creating design collaboration (Kurutz, 2011). The fashion bloggers are expanding their operations from writing for their blogs to writing books, to being magazine editors, to designing products, posing as models, and taking on the role of brand consultants. David Duplantis, Coach's executive vice president of global Web and digital media presents their position on fashion bloggers; "We see bloggers as editors, influencers and entrepreneurs who reach a very specific and unique audience." (Strugatz, 2012). Other forms of publicity such as blogger-hosted events seem to also become a popular marketing strategy that many brands and publishers are utilizing as it brings the blogger's audience into the store. Coach has been was one of the earliest brands to start collaborating with bloggers in 2009. In the past Coach has enlisted bloggers such as Leandra Medine (*The Man Repeller*), Hanneli Mustaparta, Emily Weiss (*Into the Gloss*) and Kelly Framel (*The Glamourai*) to design, style, blog and even appear in its ad campaigns, (Strugatz, 2012).

Companies often send samples of their branded items in the hopes of getting online recognition, a process called "bloggertising" (Born, 2012). However, Strugatz (2012) informs that it is difficult to measure blogging and its return on investment in comparison to other traditional media advertising outlets. He gives the example of Neiman Marcus and its process of measuring the success of a campaign on a particular blog "by tracking page views, uniques, impressions, referral traffic, as well as engagement through "likes," comments, retweets, replies, brand mentions, shares and increases in in-bound and out-bound links" (Strugatz, 2012). There is a lack of uniform metrics to effectively measure the success of influencer marketing campaigns. At present, brands primarily look to comScore/Nielsen ranking for identifying and selecting influencers first, yet influencers are not well represented in these indices (Technocrati, 2013).

#### Evidence of personal style bloggers and their influence on fashion

Technorati.com indicates that majority of Internet users read one or more blogs (Winn 2009).Unlike the fashion editors and fashion journalists who are paid by the publishing agencies for their services, fashion bloggers are independent writers creating commercial opportunities for themselves. Information was collected on popular personal style bloggers to understand the role and impact of fashion blogging, particularly how it influences the fashion business. The search was restricted to personal style bloggers that had been featured on Time, WWD.com (Women's Wear Daily), CNN.com, The New York Times and WSJ.com (Wall Street Journal) because these source are credible and capture the most current and impactful bloggers. The initial research contained both bloggers of men and women's fashion but the final selection was restricted to bloggers of women's fashion. In the following section a list of popular bloggers are presented along with their brand affiliations and the scope of their operations to demonstrate their influence on fashion primarily based on their credentials as a personal style blogger and their readership:

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With the development of social media, a blogger can create their profile on several different platforms such as Pinterest, Facebook, Instagram, bloglovin, Tumblr and others. Followers may access these blogs using either of the above listed platforms making it difficult to assess the actual number of followers these bloggers have. In the following section to assess the followers of the bloggers, we chose bloglovin website, a platform where many different blogs can be accessed. We accessed the six fashion blogs that were shortlisted for the purpose of this study.

Case 1: Kelly Framel. She started the blog 'The Glamourai' in 2008 that has 45733 (on bloglovin) followers as on March, 2013. In the past, she has styled the BCBG Max Azria ready-to-wear resort collection. She also co-hosted dinner in New York City for the company (Strugatz, 2012), was featured in Teen Vogue and is the brand ambassador for FLIRT! Cosmetics.

Case 2: Aimee Song. She started the blog 'Song of Style' in 2008 that has 51653 (on bloglovin) followers as on March, 2013. She has worked with brands like Seven For All Mankind, True Religion, Fossil, Levi's, Smart Car and Macy's all for compensation. Aimee teamed-up with Macy's bar III brand, and has been at store hosting. She has collaborated with Polyvore, a project with Harper's Bazaar (Strugatz, 2012). Companies such as DVF loves Roxy invited her to cover their photo shoot of 2013 surf wear. She was invited to attend the 2013 New York Fashion Week and the 2013 H&M's fashion show in Paris. She also hosted an event at Karen Miller store as a stylist in 2013.

Case 3: Emily Schuman. She started the blog 'Cupcakes and Cashmere,' started in 2008 that has 45 followers (on bloglovin) as on April 2013 but has 74929 followers (onWebstagram). She has designed a bag for Coach, has attracted over five hundred of her blog followers to her book signings and since promoting Estée Lauder, the brand's sales expectations have doubled (Brown, 2012).

Case 4: Tavi Gevinson. She started the blog 'thestylerookie' in 2008 that has 26832 followers as on April 2013 (on bloglovin). She has appeared on magazine covers, has styled photo shoots, promoted Rodarte's line of clothes for Target, she has founded an online publication called Rookie magazine catering to young women (Time, 2011). She has been feature on BBC news magazine written column for NPR in 2012.

Case 5: Bryan Grey-Yambao. He started the blog bryanboy.com in 2004 and has 5766 followers (on bloglovin) as on April 2013 but has 377213 followers (on Twitter). He is one of the most influential fashion bloggers. His website generates online-advertising revenue from companies such as *Net-a-Porter, Gap, shopbop, Karl Lagerfeld*. He has been featured in *Women's Wear Daily* (a trade journal), *Vogue, Teen Vogue, Elle* magazine and others. He has also been featured in videos for the fast-fashion retailer *H&M*, and he has guest-tweeted for luxury brands such as *Burberry*. He is well known among designers such as Alexander Wang and Prabal Gurung. Designer Marc Jacobs named a bag *BB*, after him. He also was the first blogger to set the standards for designer "gifting" and disclosed it on his blog. He made it acceptable for fashion blogger to accept perks such as international airfare, accommodation, designer goods. He was the one of the first blogger to accept 'appearance fees' from the major brands to write about them on his blog (Yan, 2011; Sauers, 2012), thereby establishing a celebrity

status for himself. Bryan is a judge on the TV show *America's Next Top Model* (Grinberg, 2012). He is invited to all the New York Fashion Week and the fashion shows at Paris to blog about styles shown. Most recently he has collaborated with Adrienne Landau to create unisex fur accessories.

Case 6: Leandra Medine. Started the blog 'The Man Repeller' in 2010 and has 972 followers (on bloglovin) as on April 2013 but has 130762 followers (on Twitter). Her blog was listed on top 25 blogs in October issue of 2012 Time magazine (McCracken, 2012). Medine has utilized her blog's popularity and her reach with the audiences to create business opportunities such as her collaboration with e-tailer Bauble Bar for which she created events to encourage sale. She was remunerated for styling Christian Louboutin shoes for Saks Fifth Avenue's store window and she was also remunerated by Maje for styling their store windows. She also maintains a partnership with Shopbop (Strugatz, 2012). Medine has received remuneration in exchange for writing, styling and modeling for a few brands and retailers outside of her blogging activity. She also worked with Michael Kors on a video that helped launch the brand's new lifestyle store in New York and, she has hosted a promotional event for Stuart Weitzman. Medine collaborated with Danielle Snyder, the co-founder of eclectic New York-based jewelry line Dannijo. Medine also worked on the outerwear label Gryphon to create a trench coat that was sold out item in stores. Medine launched a fashion line with PJK in February 2013 (Kansara, 2012).

**Table 1.** Characteristics of Fashion Blogs Sampled

Blogger	Fashion blog	Year started	Followers	Featured in Magazine & Newspaper	Economic Opportunities
Kelly Framel	The Glamourai	2008	45733	Teen Vogue; Elle	Styling for BCBGMaxAzria
Aimee Song	Song of Style	2008	51653	Teen Vogue; WSJ; WWD	Seven For All Mankind, True Religion, Fossil, Levi's, Smart Car and Macy's, collaborations with Polyvore (a project with Harper's Bazaar)
Emily Schuman	Cupcakes and Cashmere	2008	158123	Elle; Teen Vogue; Huffingtonpost;	Promoting Estée Lauder; designed a bag for Coach; Wrote a book compiling her blog posts.
Tavi Gevinson	thestylerookie	2008	26997	Teen Vogue; WWD; Huffingtonpost; Time; Vogue, UK; NYtimes; NPR; CNN; Chicago Tribune; The New Yorker	Promoted Rodarte's line of clothes for Target; partnered with Borders & Frontiers to design and sell t-shirt; styled photo shoots, she has founded an online publication called Rookie magazine
Bryan Grey- Yambao	bryanboy.com	2004	5782	Vogue; New York Observer;WSJ; Teen Vogue	H&M Burberry; D&G Marc Jacobs who named a bag, called BB (for Bryan Boy); collaborated with Adrienne Landau to create unisex fur accessories.
Leandra Medine	The Man Repeller	2010	992	WWD; Teen Vogue; WSJ; Huffingtonpost; Time	Collaboration with e-tailer Bauble Bar; styling Christian Louboutin shoes for Saks Fifth Avenue's store window;

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IJCF			styling Maje partnership with Shopbop store windows; worked with Michael
Vol.13 No.1			Kors on a video for the launch of the
			brand's new lifestyle store in New
			York; launched a fashion line with PJK

Sources: CNN, Wallstreetjournal.com (WSJ), Time.com, Women's Wear Daily (WWD; trade journal), businessoffashion.com, New York Times (nytimes), observer.com, Huffingtonpost, Teen Vogue, Vogue

The analysis of these blogger's influence is not intended to be exhaustive. It is merely to demonstrate the expanding influence of the selected bloggers on fashion and economic opportunities it presents the bloggers.

#### Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of these blogger's influence is not intended to be exhaustive. It is merely to demonstrate the expanding influence of personal style bloggers on the fashion landscape. These bloggers have demonstrated that blogging could be turned into an enterprise once they establish a substantial readership/followership. Personal style bloggers are a new breed of entrepreneurs, leveraging their claim to fame in the blogosphere. In todays decentralized and consumer-driven business system, personal style blogger has gained massive influence in the fashion sphere by effectively engaging an audience in a discourse on fashion that on the surface appears to be democratic. These bloggers are aspiring to be elitist as they engage in setting trends that their readers/ audience are seeking on a regular basis. Names of big brands like Louis Vuitton, YSL, D&G, Versace and many others are used in posts by these bloggers to communicate their extraordinary taste and access to high fashion to differentiate them from other bloggers in the same genre. Re-arranged

The contents of the posts on these blogs indicate that the bloggers start up as aspirational trend setter or fashion enthusiasts. Personal style bloggers represent not only important agents that disseminate fashion information but also individuals capable of setting fashion trends and provide information on the creative use of products available in the marketRe-arrangesd. With the evolution of the social media and its reach, the Personal style bloggers could be safely called the fashion opinion leaders of the millennial generation. The findings indicate that all the popular bloggers studied for the purpose of this study have been featured on Teen Vogue. It can be argued that because publications like Teen Vogue are catering to the interests of younger fashion consumers (or millennial consumer) who are also consumers of social media, the topics pertaining to fashion bloggers are more likely to generate readerships.

The bloggers may start as independent and non-institutional members providing discourse on fashion by posting their democratic views on fashion. But the institutional or corporate/brand affiliation provide these bloggers with further recognition and provides them with other venues to grow their careers. Until now bloggers enjoyed loyalty and trust as their audience considered them unbiased and a voice that was both independent and democratic that were not courted by institutions or agencies. But with the commodification of fashion bloggers similar to other media celebrities the nature of independent blogging as we know has been altered. However, in a celebrity obsessed culture of postmodern era this trend pro-

<sup>\*</sup>The number of followers of each blog was derived in March- April 2013 from bloglovin website.

vided new marketing opportunity to marketers of fashion products. Re-arranged

Based on the information collected on the six bloggers for this study, it appears that each of the bloggers have evolved from being creators of independent/ individualistic style to the endorsers of brands. When the big brands and fashion companies seek the services of these bloggers, it is obvious that the narratives on the blog reflect their allegiance to them. The exchange between the brands/ company and bloggers are of many kinds and compensation could be monetary or in-kind for the blogger's services (mentioning the brand in the blog postings or hosting an event): (i) company may pay a fee for advertising on the blog, (ii) company may remunerate the blogger (iii) the company may send free fashion products to bloggers, (iv) social perks like paid trip to a fashion show in London, Paris, Milan, New York. It also seems as though personal style bloggers are the newest breed of celebrities with their own audience (readers of their blogs) and hence the latest trend among the bloggers has been to seek representation of themselves by agency or agent such as Creative Artists agency (CAA; Kurutz, 2011).

From the findings it can be observed that the latest trend among these bloggers is collaborating with established brands to design or develop a product (a garment or an accessory). It could be seen as the brand's marketing strategy to draw the attention of the younger consumers and to familiarize these consumers to the brand and its other offerings. Also this is an interesting marketing strategy to access the blogger's audience who may be willing to demonstrate loyalty to the blogger by purchasing the product designed by the blogger. For future research, it would be valuable to investigate if association with the independent fashion bloggers gives the major fashion brands a fashion forward image. Studies could also focus on understanding if the brands /corporations lend the independent bloggers a sense of legitimacy in the minds of the blog audience.

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