Op-Ed | New Kids on the Blog
The final product of my thesis is an article/blog post written for the website Business of Fashion (BoF). This site was created to provide commentary on the business side of fashion via well-researched journalism posted on the site every day. Since the start in 2007 the popularity of the site has grown explosively. A recurrent topic on BoF is ‘Business of Blogging’, in which they shed light on the business side of fashion bloggers. I used these particular articles during my research and therefore discovered the usefulness of such websites. BoF covers specific topics concerning fashion that are interesting and useful for every fashion-minded person.

The category ‘Opinion’ on BoF contains a sub-category ‘Op-Ed’ where people can submit their own opinion Op-Ed articles. The articles in the ‘Op-Ed’ section cover a wide range of topics and the only criterion is a word limit of approximately 800 words. BoF only publishes the articles that meet its own specific selection criteria. BoF's Op-Ed section offers me the opportunity to publish my article.

Please find on the next pages the article I wrote in the typical BoF site design style.

Marlous Nieuwland
Op-Ed| New Kids on the Blog

BY MARLOUS NIEUWLAND 2 JUNE, 2013

In this article it is argued that fast fashion has moved up a gear since the advent of fashion bloggers and that these bloggers are influencing consumers in their buying behaviour as fashion industry catalysts.

Amsterdam, The Netherlands - It appears that the fashion industry in the past few years has witnessed the advent of a new player: the fashion blogger. These web-based ‘fashionistas’ are a growing influential force in the fashion industry. Through the rise in popularity of fashion bloggers they have found a way to monetise on blogging. Hence, the fashion industry is becoming increasingly aware of fashion bloggers’ influence. Fashion bloggers have now risen to the ranks of editor, journalist, stylist and marketer. It seems they are taking over the jobs in the fashion industry.

Nowadays fashion trends seem to spread faster and, simultaneously, more globally. Product trends formerly known as “it-products” appear to be experiencing their revival. Do fashion bloggers have anything to do with this? And if so, what is their influence in the selection process of fashion trends? In an attempt to answer these questions, I have researched the selection process of trends and the role of fashion bloggers in the development of two particular product trends.

My research has demonstrated that fashion bloggers may be crudely divided into three categories: personal style bloggers, curated fashion blogs and street style blogs. Hybrids can be formed between these categories. The
personal style blogs, which are fashion blogs that cover the bloggers’ personal styles, are important players in the spread of trends. Hybrids from the category personal style bloggers are also important because of the personal relationships they have with their readers. These particular forms of blogging are also known as para-social relationships, which means that blog readers know a lot about the fashion bloggers’ personal lives. These relationships invite blog readers to trust the fashion bloggers and to view them as their ‘friends’.

The research shows that modern consumers increasingly make their purchase decisions based on recommendations from friends. Their trust and belief in brands has decreased and they now rely more on people ‘like themselves’. Due to their popularity, fashion blogs have now become serious rivals of peers, experts and friends. The fashion bloggers have earned the consumers’ trust and are viewed as credible opinion leaders. However, their credibility may be questioned, as fashion blogs are increasingly becoming considerable businesses.

Fashion’s selection process comprises three types of selection: market selection, peer selection and expert selection. Market selection means that consumers are able to determine a product’s value themselves. Peer selection entails that consumers make their buying decisions based on the opinions of peers. And the last category, expert selection, means that people who have particular knowledge and expertise valuate products on behalf of consumers. The research showed that the selection process is currently evolving from market selection into peer and expert selection.

In most selection processes the experts have decisive influence on consumers’ buying behaviour. This does not hold true for the fashion industry as there are hardly any situation where selectors determine consumer’s buying behaviour. Therefore, economic selection hardly occurs in fashion, whereas peer and expert influence are more common.

As I have mentioned above, a new influencer has entered the game, i.e., the fashion blog. I analysed two known product trends by looking at readers’ reactions to blog posts written by selected fashion bloggers in order to determine their influence. One of the product trends that was analysed is the tiger sweater by Kenzo. The sweater was all of a sudden visible all over the Internet and mainly on fashion blogs. It started with fashion bloggers posting pictures of the Kenzo collection, then fashion bloggers began wearing the sweater on their blogs and eventually street style blogs snapped people wearing the sweater in the streets. Not long after, the high street brands also discovered this trend and they started creating their own versions of the tiger sweater. The result: the tiger sweater was everywhere.

The netnographic analysis of the two product trends shows that most fashion blogs sensitize their followers to a specific product and provoke a predominantly positive reaction. Consumers are not directly influenced by individual fashion blogs. It is when many fashion blogs reinforce the same message that a trend arises. Fashion blogs can be seen as fashion industry catalysts that intensify and quickly spread trends.

New media such as Instagram and Pinterest have rapidly gained in popularity with both fashion bloggers and consumers. Fashion bloggers use these media to continually stay in touch with their followers. Consumers on the other hand use these media to stay in contact with their friends and also to express their own creativity. This was also discernible with the two analysed product trends. Pictures featuring the Kenzo sweater on Instagram gained a lot more likes and reactions than, for instance, a blog post about the Kenzo sweater. On Pinterest the popularity of the Kenzo sweater was also clearly visible. Thousands of pictures featuring the sweater were pinned on people’s own digital mood boards.

From a fashion business and marketing point of view both Instagram and
Pinterest are interesting and growing in importance. The two media have aided considerably the ease with which we can perform market research. The importance and the power of such new media will therefore grow in the future, perhaps even bigger than fashion blogs itself.

From the research it may be concluded that fashion bloggers deserve a place in the selection system of fashion. They deserve to be acknowledged as big players regarding consumer influence, as they are seen as credible opinion leaders and experts. When any given brand wants to use fashion blogs for their marketing, it is important to appreciate that such collaborations or sponsorships have to be carried out subtly. Modern consumers are critical and the moment they observe a collaboration or a sponsorship relationship between a fashion blog and a brand, the credibility of both parties will decrease. The only way for fashion blogger and brands that want to maintain their credibility whilst doing collaborations or sponsorship to proceed is to be honest about the collaboration or sponsorship, as modern consumers are longing for authenticity and no longer wish to be fooled.

Another important thing for brands to understand is that one fashion blog alone does not create a trend. When fashion blogs together reinforce the same message they can, being catalysts, intensify trends. Brands should therefore focus on multiple fashion blogs to achieve the results they are aiming for. In the end, it seems that fashion blogs have not changed the fashion selection system. They have only enabled fast fashion to move up a gear as the fashion industry’s new catalysts. They are simply new players in the field of fashion; the new kids on the blog.

The information in this article is based on a bachelor thesis written by Marlous Nieuwland for the Amsterdam Fashion Institute.

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