

Chapter 9

Fashion Blog's Engagement in the Customer Decision Making Process

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ABSTRACT

Little but increasing research has been done about the influence of blogs in the consumer decision-making process. This paper tries to shed some light on this new scenario, analyzing how bloggers are now a key player in the fashion industry, and explaining how they create a closer and more qualified relationship with customers, so they can be more influential. Based on a case study, and considering different approaches to bloggers influence, this article makes it clear that measuring the engagement between bloggers and readers is significant for brands and their marketing strategies with bloggers.

INTRODUCTION

Fashion bloggers constitute a new player in the fashion industry. As far as fashion brands are concerned, fashion bloggers have changed the rules of the game, having become a new factor to take into account in brands' marketing strategies, replacing or coexisting with traditional media.

Today, the largest segment of the blogosphere consists of fashion blogs, i.e. blogs that focus on fashion brands, fashion products, street style, and personal style (Halvorsen et al., 2013). Bloggers inspire the way people dress and they work alongside publishers and designers. They have also begun to play an increasingly important part at catwalk shows, showrooms and other fashion events (Belch & Belch, 2011; Okonkwo, 2010; Rogers, 2003).

There are few but an increasing number of studies on fashion blogs' real influence on the fashion scene and, specifically, on the consumer decision-making process (Kulmala et al., 2013; Hahn & Lee, 2014). In spite of the important developments that have been witnessed, there is still little concrete data

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for marketing managers to work with. There is a lack of literature and, as some authors claim, “more research is needed to better understand how social media has altered brand relationships, in particular how it influences consumers to make choices and recommend products to their social media” (Kontu & Vecchi, 2013, p. 211).

This chapter seeks to shed some light on this new scenario by analyzing how the customer decision-making process works today, following the emergence of fashion bloggers. In this respect, an analysis of what blogger influence means and how it operates is clearly required. Although we have taken into account studies on the profile of *who* influences the fashion scene (Sádaba & Sanmiguel, 2014; Vernet, 2004; Summers, 1970), in this case our attention focuses on *how* this influence is exercised.

This chapter is divided into five sections. After this introduction, the second section provides the background for the chapter, including definitions of important concepts for this paper, beginning with the concept of blogs. Furthermore, we highlight the main characteristics of blogs, we offer a typology of different blogs and an explanation of fashion blogs in particular. Then we analyze the idea of “engagement” and define this as the key concept for the customer decision-making process, considering the specific case of online engagement, and blog engagement. In order to conclude this section, a discussion regarding the different approaches that exist to measure engagement and blog influence is presented.

In the third section, as a proposal for fashion brands and their marketing campaigns with bloggers, we suggest an equation to measure blog influence. The fourth section considers a case study in order to demonstrate how this equation works. The chapter ends with some conclusions about how bloggers create closer and more qualified relationships with their readers, so they can be more influential. In this sense, this paper presents multiple consequences for brands, assisting them in their campaign strategy with bloggers.

BACKGROUND

Web 2.0, with its social and participatory characteristics, has generated virtual communities where users share their ideas, knowledge, experience, opinions and even media content, such as forums, wikis, social media, media sharing or blogs (Akritidis et al., 2009). When blogs appeared, the communication field witnessed a transformation. Blogs were perceived as a new form of journalism created by ordinary people in the late 1990's (Findlay, 2015; Penttala & Saarela, 2012; Singer, 2005; Wall, 2005; Blood, 2002). The development of blogger activity has produced new ways to consider what blogs are and what they are useful for, considering their capacity to reach individual interests and to create communities around them. Rogers (2003) explains that mass media channels reach out to more people, but interpersonal channels, such as blogs, are much more effective in changing attitudes and influencing any decision to adopt or reject a new product.

Definition of Blogs

Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Johnston and Mayer (2006) define web logs or “blogs,” emphasizing that they provide an easy method of regularly publishing web pages, which are best described as online journals, diaries or news events listings. They may include feedback (trace-back) comments from other sites or contributors to the site. Frequency can be hourly, daily, weekly or less frequent, but daily updates are typical (Penttala & Saarela, 2012).

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