Chapter 6
Motivations behind Becoming a Blogger and Their Business Implications: The Case of Fashion

Anne-Flore Maman Larraufie
SemioConsult, France & ESSEC, France

Fabien Sommer
INSEEC, France

ABSTRACT

This chapter takes fashion blogs as a case to explain motivations behind becoming a blogger and then to keep being one on the long-term. It wraps up past research findings before presenting the result of an original study conducted recently with authors of successful blogs as interviewees. It presents the typology of motivations but also the nature of potential brand-blogger relationships. Understanding such points is key to successfully use blogs as part of a useful WoM communication strategy. Findings generalizable across other sectors of activity conclude the chapter.

INTRODUCTION

They [Fashion bloggers] are not passing themselves off as journalists. Instead, they’re brand stars whose voices are subjective to what they do or don’t like at the moment — often times dependent on which companies will pay them the most. (WDD, 12-06-2014)

Around 2,000 news blogs would be created each year, on the French blogosphere only. Their authors can earn up to 20,000€ per month thanks to a range of side activities bringing them notoriety and hence revenue. They have completely reframed the fashion universe. As a proof, some bloggers have been the target of legal cases, with Vogue or Glamour suing them for a breach of competitive fairness… Their

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-9449-1.ch006
Motivations behind Becoming a Blogger and Their Business Implications

importance and influence is no more discussed and they are now active components of marketing and image campaigns conducted by brands. As we will see later on in this chapter, their influence on their readers is also very important and the content of their blog is subject to word-of-mouth. According to a recent Novius study, 2.3 billions of people have accessed the Internet in 2012-2013. 1.5 billion among them are social media users, 30% more than in 2011. 77% of Internet users acknowledge reading blogs. This e-trend is particularly true in the fashion sector, with fashion brands embracing the web 2.0 and fashion bloggers influencing others or even brands themselves. The nature of a blog is intrinsically connected to word-of-mouth, and their authors are acknowledged as potential influencers, due to their status of credible opinion leaders. They catch stylists’ attention, and are offered front-row seats during the catwalks (Corcoran, 2010). Hence their potential business interest is recognized and the word-of-mouth they initiate is more and more catching marketers’ attention, for high-street brands or for luxury ones. It is a recognized fact in the psychology community (practitioners & academics) that human beings have a tendency to believe people just like them (Cialdini, 2007). This is particularly true in cultures displaying a low level of power-distance in Hofstede’s five dimensions model to classify and specify cultures. In France, for instance, (ranking average on the dimension) it is quite expectant. Besides, the principle of homophily (Dennen & Myers, 2012) explains the interpersonal virtual bound between a blogger and his/her readers: human beings tend to gather with people who share their interests, beliefs, education, gender and social status, creating more or less long-lasting bonds with them. Trusting bloggers and engaging in some kind of relationship with them, they are likely to act as spokespersons and spread the word around the blog content. This is the definition of word-of-mouth, indeed.

This chapter aims at providing readers with both theoretical and practical knowledge on the blogosphere, taking as a case for observation the fashion sector. It is organized in three parts. The first one summarizes the importance of blogs in the fashion system and presents the state of knowledge accumulated by academic research on fashion bloggers, especially regarding their profiles. The second part presents the findings of a recent and original study conducted in-between January and June 2014, aiming at deciphering the hidden motivations for fashion bloggers to engage in their blogging activity. This exploratory study has been conducted through qualitative research, using semi-structured interview as a data collection method (14 interviewees, carefully chosen for their representativeness). Data has been analyzed using content analysis. The third and last part deals with managerial takeaway, making clear for practitioners how they can reuse the knowledge presented on fashion bloggers’ motivations to cleverly take advantage of it and to avoid pitfalls, especially when trying to get in touch with them. It points out specifically the traits that are not exclusive to fashion, to make the chapter useful for non-fashion-oriented business people.

BACKGROUND: THE PLACE OF BLOGS IN THE FASHION SECTOR

Defining Blogs and Fashion Blogs

The word ‘blog’ comes from the contraction of the words web and log. It stands for specific websites on which individuals write to express their thoughts, on a regular basis (Detterbeck, LaMoreaux, & Sciangula, 2012). They usually follow a chronological display and may include texts, videos, pictures and sounds. Such media offers a two-way communication process (Zhang, 2010) as readers are usually