

Effective Fashion Blogs and Their Impact on the Current Fashion Industry

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Master Thesis

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Abstract:

Despite the fact there is plenty of academic material, concerning with the use of social media and blogs in business, very little research has been done in the area of fashion blogosphere in sense of exploration the character of contemporary most popular/efficient blogs and their potential use in fashion marketing and brand management. This thesis firstly summarizes the emergence and current nature of social media and their impact on business communication in general and subsequently in fashion industry. In order to provide proper understanding of current fashion industry the nature, basis principles of operating and challenges are explained as well as its recent transformation due to emergence of Web 2.0 and ICT's, and sociocultural changes. In the second part of the literature review the position and potential use of social media and especially blogs in fashion industry is demonstrated, including the explanation of the lack of proper research concerning this problematic, and relevance of this research. The central aim of this research is summarized into general Research Question; "What determines an effective blog in contemporary fashion blogosphere?", and further specified in three Sub-Questions, concerning identity and background of current popular bloggers, culture of spaces of their blogs and nature of actual or potential presence of public relations. Those areas are explored through inductive content analysis, which was chosen as an optimal methodology for this research. Collected data are summarized into several categories, representing common patterns for all analyzed blogs. Concerning identity of bloggers; no background in fashion industry and young age of analyzed bloggers were found as the key findings of this area. Concerning culture of spaces; personal approach, first time experience, and dominance of visual over written content were found as the key findings and patterns shared by all those blogs together with multidirectional discussions present in commenting sections of those blogs, and slight preference of Twitter over other social network sites. Lastly, concerning those blogs as a tool of fashion marketing and brand management; no obvious forms of public relations was visible at majority of those blogs, however features with certain potential for purposes of marketing and brand management were found. In the second part of the thesis those and other found

patterns are explicitly presented, illustrated on examples, and discussed within the wider context of theoretical frame. Additionally limitations of the research and collected data are admitted and areas for future research are suggested. In the concluding chapter key knowledge of social media, blogs, fashion industry, and fashion blogs are summarized together with the key finding of the research. Final summarization leads into the conclusion, concerning nature of analyzed blogs and their implications and possible use in fashion public relations, marketing and brand management.

Key Words: Social Media, Fashion Blogs, Culture of Space, Fashion PR, Marketing and Brand Management

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1. Introduction

Social media is a recently emerged media with the wide impact on personal as well as business communication. A communication model where addresser sends messages to passive receivers has been replaced by a new dynamic model where all participants have the opportunity to actively interact during the entire communication process. Concerning the business sphere, there is a hesitance to start fully communicating on this level as the character of this kind of media brings potential risk of losing full control over the information spread within the Web 2.0 sphere.

Despite a certain reticence within the business sphere, social media can be very beneficial in areas of public relations and marketing, particularly in an industry like fashion where recognition and identification with customers as well as building up strong image and corporate culture has always been essential, and due to recent social developments has become even more emphasized. Within last couple of years fashion has become a global industry composed of variety of local markets diverse in lifestyle, religion, and culture which makes the recognition and identification with particular customers more complex (Easey, 2002). Simultaneously the revolution in communication caused the global information spread where any users can easily follow and discuss any trends and fashion news distributed world-wide as well as easily search for any collections and purchase them online. Those practices underlined the importance of strong corporate image and culture which would differentiate brand from its competitors, supply additional value and raise loyal customers.

Because of the character of social media, and particularly blogs which are the main object of this thesis, and because of the character of contemporary fashion industry, start using this kind of media as a communication tool might seem as a natural development. However as it will be demonstrated fashion industry is reserved in using this kind of media. It does not mean though that social media and blogs do not concern fashion industry. In fact fashion blogging has become phenomenon with a great impact on the industry itself.

Blogging in general is considered as a new form of online journalism, enjoying great attention of users, based on a personal and interactive approach, which

according to some brings advantages over mainstream media. Critics object that blogs cannot clarify as a form of journalism as it lacks proper journalistic practices, guaranteeing quality and credible reporting. As it will be illustrated blogs are based on very different principles than classic journalism, and rather than multiple angular reporting cooperating with variety of sources the authentic presentation based on own experience is appreciated (Lichtenstein, 2009).

According to some fashion blogs are enjoying great popularity because they offer an alternative opinion for anybody to actively create or consume fashion without requirement of any kind of costs. Thus fashion blogs are perceived as a “street of fashion”, as a source of public opinion and display of actual use of fashion by general public (Bollier and Racine, 2005). For those reasons fashion blogs can be assisting not only as an inspiration during the creation process, but also as a source of public opinion, interests and preferences in fashion public relation and marketing. Nevertheless for certain reasons established and well-known fashion brands and designers do not incorporate blogs into their corporate communication (Okonkwo, 2007, Guzelis, 2010), which however it does not mean that fashion blogs have no impact on the industry. There are bloggers, providing content valuable enough that they managed to build up wide audience, and even influenced mainstream media and the fashion industry. As those bloggers do not come from the industry itself, it addresses a question; who are they?, and how do their blogs look like?. Even though there is plenty of research, concerning blogs and blogging, practically no research has been done in area of contemporary fashion blogging which would provide satisfactory answers to those questions. The aim of this thesis is to fulfill this gap and explore the area of contemporary popular/efficient/top fashion blogs divided into three general parts; identity of those bloggers, culture of space of those blogs, and their actual or possible use as a tool of fashion marketing and brand management.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Media

At the end of 2010 Facebook, the online social networking application, reached the limit of 600 million active users, and Twitter, the micro blogging social network, registered 175 million users. To put those numbers in perspective, the entire population of the USA and Germany consists of about 300 and 80 million inhabitants which is twice lower than the amount of all Facebook and Twitter users (Royal Pingdom, January 12th 2010). Simultaneously 35 hours of video material are being uploaded to the video sharing platform You Tube every minute, and the image hosting site Flickr providing access to over 3 billion photographs makes the world-famous Louvre Museum's collection of 300,000 objects seem tiny in comparison (Ibid).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) claim that 75% of Internet surfers started using social media in the second quarter of 2008 by joining social networks, reading blogs, or contributing reviews to shopping sites; which represents a significant rise from 56% in previous year (2007), and it is therefore reasonable to say that social media represent a revolutionary new trend that should be of interest to companies operating in online space-or any space, for that matter. On the contrary they admit that not many firms seem to be comfortable in the environment where consumers can freely communicate with each other and thus they have increasingly less control over the information concerning their business activities in the Web 2.0. Nowadays, if an Internet user types the name of any leading brand or corporation into the Google search, what comes up among the top five results usually includes not only corporate websites. Public relations executives and managers have no chance and sometimes either knowledge or even right, to control the information, concerning their companies (pp. 59, 60). Faulds and Mangold (2009) agree that the opportunity of communication between hundreds or even thousands of people about the products or services without any control of the company itself can be threatening, and that the impact of consumer-to-consumer communication has been greatly magnified in the marketplace. However they argue that social media should rather be seen as a hybrid element of the

promotion mix, because it enables companies to talk to their customers (traditional sense of the promotion mix) as well as it enables customers to talk directly to each other (nontraditional sense of the promotion mix). *“Even though the content, timing, and frequency of social media conversations are outside of managers’ control, they must learn how to shape consumers discussions in a manner that is consistent with the organization’s mission and performance goals”* claims Faulds and Mangold (2009). They further add that the network platforms, blogs, social media tools and other promotional tools, communicating and potentially even engaging customers should be seen as an opportunity and challenge rather than threat as they are key to a contemporary market (p. 357).

Last but not least it is important to note that social media do not represent certain menace only for corporate public relations and marketing but no rarely also for their users. As Kuzma (2011) claims there are mechanisms, collecting personal and sensitive information about Web 2.0 users which are further used as a highly valuable data for marketing purposes (he calls this kind of data gathering “third-party collections”). Kuzma (2011) particularly points out “cookies” and “Web beacons” as commonly used softwares, capable to not only to collect information about user’s online behavior (number of his visits of particular site, visited links, amount of spent time en cetera) but also to analyze his activities, interests and even shopping habits presented on social media (most likely on Facebook). Those technologies further allow the targeted advertisements to be sent to users, complementing to the particular profile without their consent or even (p.76).

Although there is a certain hesitance among business sphere to start fully using social media in corporate communication, obviously these media do have the potential to be very beneficial in marketing, public relations and advertisement. The hesitance is thus the evidence of lack of deeper knowledge and proper understanding of social media, so they will be no longer threat but valuable tool of corporate communication. It does not mean there is no research concerning this kind of media, in fact there is plenty. However when it comes to fashion industry and social media, particularly the exploration of the contemporary presence of professional fashion among social media,

there is very little literature, concerning with this problematic which underlines the significance of this research.

2.1.1. Social Network versus Social Networking

„Social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site“ claim Boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 212) and underline the use of the term network instead of networking with the further argument that these two terms are often used interchangeably in public discourse even though they do not represent the same meaning; while networking primary represents any kind of connections (often between strangers), network symbolizes a more complex stable relationship usually based on latent ties. What makes social network sites (further just SNS´s) unique is that they enable their users to articulate and make visible network kind of relationships, which also what differentiates them from any other forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC). However it does not mean that there is no networking on SNS´s, conversely there are many purely online based connections that would not otherwise be made, but as Boyd and Ellison (2007) argue that is not the primary goal of SNS´s; *“On many of the large SNSs, participants are not necessarily “networking” or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network. To emphasize this articulated social network as a critical organizing feature of these sites, we label them social network sites.”* (p. 213).

While social networking and social networks represent online communication channels, despite the amount of various definitions, in general social media represent any user driven platform allowing online interaction. In relation to social networks social media represent a superior term as is illustrated in Picture A1. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argue that a formal definition of this term firstly requires full

understanding of two related concepts that are frequently named in conjunction with it: Web 2.0 and User Generated Content (further just UGC).

Web 2.0 is a term, describing new platforms where the content is no longer created and published exclusively by professionals, and where any user has the opportunity to participate on a creation process of the content. Although Web 2.0 does not refer to any specific technical updates of WWW, a set of basic functionalities is necessary needed; Adobe Flash (allowing animation and audio/video streaming), RSS (Really Simple Syndication – web feed formats used to publish frequently updated content - such as blogs, in standardized format), and AJAX (Asynchronous Java Script – a technique retrieving data from web servers). Whereas Web 2.0 represents the technological foundation, UGC can be seen as the term, describing a variety of forms in which people make use of social media, and in which media content is created. Nevertheless, they state that simultaneously to the Web 2.0 there are certain requirements which need to be fulfilled to consider any media content as such. First, it needs to be published on a publicly accessible website, second, it needs to show a certain amount of original creative effort, and third, it needs to be created outside of professional practices (p. 60).

Based on those brief clarifications of Web 2.0 and UGC, it is possible to give a more specific definition of the term social media –the definition of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) has been chosen as an optimal definition for the purposes of this thesis claiming, that: *“Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of UGC.”* (p. 61).

2.1.2. Use of Social Media in Business

The emergence of social media has transformed the rules and pattern of business, communication and dissemination of information; Internet-based media made possible for one person to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other people about products or services, and the companies which provide them. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) state that social media can be beneficial in business, particularly

because of the possibility of direct communication with end-consumers with relatively low costs, within a relatively short time period, and at a higher level of efficiency comparing to traditional communication tools. Because of those features social media are suitable not only for multinational companies, but also for small local firms or nonprofit and government institutions.

However, they further add that there is a wide range of various social media which have different qualities and are suitable for different aims. Concretely blogs, which are the main subject of this thesis, dispose by high level of self-presentation and self-disclosure, are commonly used to gather information concerning one specific subject or topic, and allow online interaction of readers interested in particular topic through posting comments. In business blogs can be useful to update employees, customers, business partners et cetera on important developments, and to improve the transparency of the company. On the other hand possible risks of blogs stand in posting eventual negative comments and virtual complains. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) conclude that social media in general have the potential to be very beneficial in business, though the benefit comes hand in hand with potential risks; particularly limited control over UGC. OECD (2007) talk about the negatives of social media more in detail and claim that by using this kind of media, brands are risking the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of their messages, or even the loss of control over their messages and over the content of their sites. Moreover brands and their products or services can become the subject of unjustified rumors and defamations, endangering their image and reputation (pp. 34, 35). Mangold and Faulds (2009) approve that there is no direct control over the online conversation and information spread; nevertheless they argue that those potential risks can be solved by shaping the discussions in a manner which is consistent with company missions and performance goals through interactive blogs and networking platforms providing engaging content and credible information, ideally combined with the support of classic forms of advertisement and offline media (pp.362 – 364).

Despite their negatives and potential risks, social media are indisputably part of the future of virtual communication; there are scholars such as Tim O'Reilly and Jim

Battelle (2009) who see the general future in the Internet based technologies and claim that any real world object will have its information shadow in cyberspace; books will have information shadows on Amazon, Google Books, Twitter and countless amount of blogs, songs will have information shadows on iTunes, Spotify and You Tube, each person will have information shadows in emails, instant messaging, Facebook posts, micro blogging and blogging posts etcetera (p.7). There are also scholars such as Chris Anderson (September 2010) who see the future of Internet technologies as a virtual sharing of knowledge using videos as its main feature, and, than there are skeptics such as Evgeny Morozov (2011) who warns that the spread of the Internet technologies is not uniform among the globe and there are areas where Internet based technologies are strictly censored, controlled and in some cases even misused which rapidly limits their power and global impact.

The purpose of this sub-chapter was to explain current character of social media, their general principles and implications on business communication. Because even though social media are often perceived as a menace of business communication, and there are skeptics such as Morozov, it is certain that social media and other Internet based technologies are huge phenomenon and the locomotives of the train which take interpersonal communication to the future and any business, including fashion, should not miss that train.

2.2. Fashion Industry and Social Media

Fashion is a social feature and thus mirrors actual lifestyle, trends and developments among society. In the past it was for instance Great Depression which brought minimalistic cuts and clean lines, emergence of cinematography which brought elegance and glamour inspired by Hollywood icons, certain music styles such as Rock and roll in 60's or Disco in 80's en cetera. Contemporary it is the advent of the Internet and digital technologies what influences current fashion. As Easey (2002) claims the Internet has not brought certain style in sense of design but has transformed the environment where this industry operates; it has made it global, targeted, direct and

interactive. Current fashion marketers operate globally, they more than ever have to build a strong image and corporate culture, target their customers, identify with their needs and preferences, and arouse in them loyalty towards the brand. Simultaneously they have to deal with a new nature of communication which has become more dialogical and direct as was described in previous section. Despite the fact that social media dispose by features which can be assisting in this new communication model, fashion industry hesitate to incorporate them as a tool of publicity and communication, and uses them rather as an additional tool, supporting corporate official websites (Easey, 2002, Fionda and Moore, 2008, Hauge, 2006). Simultaneously there is a new insurmountable phenomenon emerged from developments of SNS's and UCT's which, although does not come from the fashion industry itself, has impact on it - fashion blogs. Despite the rapid development and world spread of fashion blogs there is no research deeply exploring this phenomenon, even despite the fact that current fashion is facing several issues where blogs can be very useful as it will be illustrated in this sub-chapter.

2.2.1. Fashion and Fashion Marketing

„Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street, fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening.“

- Coco Chanel

Fashion is an ongoing changing process which in regular cycles brings new trends into practically any human activity; from medicine to music (Easey, 2002, p. 10). It is a product of the time and must be viewed within a broader cultural context such as designers' ethnic and social background, social mores and attitudes, technological innovations, and the economic and political conditions (English, 2009, p. 6).

For fashion as a continual change two abilities are essential; creative design skills and identification with customer preferences. While design skills are a matter of talent, identification with customers is a matter of marketing which can provide additional knowledge and the skills needed to ensure that the creative component is

used to the best advantage, allowing business to succeed and grow. Easey (2002) argues that because of the nature of fashion industry, where change is crucial, practices of fashion marketing are slightly different from other marketing areas. Fionda and Moore (2008) further develop Easey's theory and claim that marketing and branding fashion goods is more complex than in other sectors because of the velocity and vastness of this industry; brands and designers must twice a year produce brand new collections, containing variety of items (many brands do not focus just on clothing but also on accessories and shoes, and often do not only produce female lines but also male and children) which are often distributed worldwide. It is important to add that Fionda and Moore's study focuses on major international brands such as Tom Ford and Gucci which production and distribution is very extensive, and thus their marketing is far more complex than marketing of emerging designers or local brands.

Beside the factors mentioned above (creative design skills and precise knowledge of niche customers), another essential component is a strong brand image. As Lee et al. (2009) argue why people talk about particular brands in a certain way and why they buy (or do not buy) its products is to some extent a matter of brand image. Image is more than a name, logo, slogan and design. It is the whole concept containing symbolic meaning, induced associations, ideas and attitudes of the brand. For instance: *"A jeans brand Levi's is not just an eye-catching red label; it has developed core urban-hip user imagery in youngsters' minds"* claim Lee et al. (2009) and further argue that fashion market strongly depends on creating or maintaining a distinctive, desirable and constant image, bringing additional value and brand differentiation (pp. 60-64). Hitt, Ireland and Hoskisson (2009) complement that the key task for fashion marketing is to achieve competitive advantages by the differentiation of the brand from their direct competitors. Differentiation in general can be based on products, services, channels or people but in fashion it is most likely based on the overall brand image, comprising general qualities of the brand and determining its initial position at the market (p. 133).

Another reason why brands and designers need to build up strong image is the lack of copy rights protection. As Blankley (2010) states there is no intellectual

property protection in fashion industry, which means that anybody can copy any design from anybody and present that as his own. The result of the lack of legislative coverage of this issue together with an ongoing pressure of establishing collection after collection is the collaborative character of fashion industry - haute couture designers commonly search for the inspiration at other culture fields (especially at music and film industry), at street fashion or at vintage collections old several decades, and are subsequently copied by mainstream brands. According to Blankley (2010) this mechanism determines the emergence of new global trends, and leads into democratization of fashion. However she further notes that as designers cannot rely on legislative support they can solve this issue by copying themselves and directly cooperating with mainstream brands (as for instance custom collection of Versace for HM), or by creating strong image characteristic for particular brand which copy would be perceived as an obvious fake (as for instance red sole typical for Christian Louboutin or checkered pattern typical for Burberry).

Under the circumstances briefly demonstrated above, fashion marketing can be clarified as a management process concerned with anticipating, identifying and satisfying actual customer needs in order to meet the long-term goals of an organization, and continuously building or maintaining strong corporate image characterizing the brand in the market. In order to reach those goals fashion marketing uses common techniques of advertising and market research with the addition of the tools specialized for fashion industry such as product development, branding, pricing or forecasting (Easey, 2002). However based on the theoretical knowledge of social media, and particularly blogs, they should be included in this list as their features have the potential to be assisting in managing basic task of fashion marketing and brand management which were demonstrated above. Moreover there are several relatively new issues which even increase the significance of use of social media and blogs in fashion industry as it will be discussed in following section.

2.2.2. Transformation of the Fashion Industry

Fashion, its trends and developments have always mirrored current lifestyle and trends among society determined by technological inventions. For instance; in the 30's the emergence of cinematography caused the advent of fashion trends copying Hollywood icons such as Katharine Hepburn or Marlene Dietrich simultaneously with the frugality in designs required by world economic situation after the Great Depression (Easey, 2002). In the 50's fashion was strongly influenced by the Rock and roll music, Jacqueline Kennedy as a prototype of modern sophisticated lady, and Marilyn Monroe as a sex symbol. In the 70's the birth of lifestyle magazines caused the turn from fashion trends dictated by major designers to the individual selective styles, combining haute couture with mainstream and vintage fashion. Currently the character and development of fashion industry is influenced by the global demographic structure, concern for the environment, and the further adoption of new digital technologies (p. 19).

With the gradual removal of trade barriers on a global scale and growth of the Internet, the fashion industry has become a global business. As Graph B1 and B2 demonstrate, while in 2004 major fashion events were centralized in the US, UK, France, Italy and newly emerged Japan powered by the 'youth culture', in 2008 major fashion events took place also in South Africa, Brazil, Russia, UAE, Singapore and India. This shows the recent emergence of new centers of fashion and the global character of current fashion industry which demands international brands to use adequate marketing techniques with the ability to operate at an international level and to deal with a variety of sociocultural differences between local markets. For instance; Seidel (January 7th, 2010) in her analysis focuses on Western luxury brands operating in India and argues that despite the high potential of the Indian market, the profit of those brands is poor, especially because of the lack of sufficient knowledge of the Indian market, and because of the use of uniform mass marketing strategy which has not been localized. *'Brands have to go further than just putting an Indian print on a bag or collaborating with a local celebrity. A multitude of cultures, languages, religions, festivals, colors and tastes make up this land of 1.1 billion people. So, it is about*

understanding the difference between the flamboyant nature of a Punjabi customer and the more reserved nature of a Gujarati, and speaking to each of them in the specific cultural register that they respond to' (Seidel, January 7th, 2010). It is important to admit that there are certain brands which started to localize their communication strategies to local markets (Eastern markets foremost). For instance Louis Vuitton has localized their approaches, identifying important events and celebrations among potential clients and arriving with personalized gifts (Rawi, May 16th 2011). In 2011 H&M has for the first time ever adjusted his promotional pictures used in the Middle East to the clothing etiquette of Muslim culture – as Picture A2 and A3 illustrates, the Photoshop adjustments were done particularly to hide the uncovered chest and shoulders of the model (Ibid).

These examples briefly demonstrate the complexity of current fashion industry due to the advent of the global market, and the need of corresponding marketing practices. Okonkwo (2007) concludes that traditional business used among the entire fashion industry used to be based mostly on intuition, focusing exclusively on product development and advertisement, but the current rapid development and complexity of the global environment require modern and more sophisticated practices. Beside the global character of the contemporary fashion market, he additionally points out the technological innovations as one of the key components, shaping the nature of this industry, and claims that ICT's has transformed the landscape, altering customer behavior, business conduct and fashion management. Particularly the Internet developments have empowered consumers more than ever before and have raised their product and brand expectations. As a result, the task of retaining the attention and loyalty of consumers has become an increasing challenge (p.41). Guzelis (2010) expands Okonkwo's (2007) argument with the claim that because of the nature of the Web 2.0, tools such as social media and fashion blogs have changed the information flow among the fashion industry – fashion trends and news are no longer passively received, they are rather being commented, discussed, exchanged, and ultimately even recreated. Such an information flow where users are in an empowered position has a natural impact on the entire industry, which needs to learn how to operate in

this new environment, and more over how to start profiting from its newly transformed character. It is assumed that in order to reach those goals the biggest adjustment would involve fashion public relations as it is the area directly relating with corporate communication and publicity.

2.2.3. Fashion Public Relations and It's Use of Social Media

Public relations in general are the tool of marketing communication, forming and influencing opinions, attitudes and behaviors. The founder of modern PR, Edward L. Bernays (2004), claims that public relations is not just publicity, press agency, promotion or advertising but a continuing process of social integration, adjustment of private and public interest. In terms of common practices, fashion PR does not differ from general routines of any other kind of public relations. Jackson and Shaw (2006) state that fashion PR usually deal with the communication with journalists, press and brand campaigns, product placement, celebrity dressing and other practices which often overlap into marketing responsibilities, as differences between practices of fashion PR and fashion marketing are often blurred (p. 204). Brown (1999) simply states that the main goal of fashion PR is to build and further maintain a favorable public image through positive publicity which is usually managed by an active communication with the public and a good relationship with key fashion journalists and style editors. It is important to note that Browns article was published in the year of 1999, thus before the advent of the Internet technologies which have profoundly transformed the nature of public relations. In fact with the advent of the Internet, public relation as well as marketing and business communication became more direct and personal, interacting with niche customers through targeted messages. Massive advertisement has been replaced by focusing on getting the right message to the right people at the right time (Scott, 2007, p. 67) and recently emerged features of Web 2.0 particularly social media and blogs provides new opportunities to implement this goal. Diga and Kelleher (2009) claim that the information which PR practitioners gain from using social media network sites may be used as a strategic tool, empowering the company's position on the market, and build prestige social capital by having the

virtual relationship with influential “followers” or “friends” through sites such as Twitter or Facebook. Nevertheless, in order to be able to do so, the proper understanding of how social media work, what kind of information is relevant for the organization, and how to interact and engage with the public is essential (p. 442). Stein et al (2009) complement that social media undoubtedly belongs to the contemporary practices of public relations, especially because of the ever-growing request for online interactivity, its wide impact, efficiency and easy use. They further claim that the next task for PR practitioners should be incorporating micro blogging and blogging into their every-day routines as the demand of public for direct communication will only increase in the near future (pp. 87-89).

Despite the wide impact of emergence of social media on public relations, it seems that fashion industry is resistant when it comes to these media platforms. In fact in fashion industry Internet technologies in general are used as a distribution channel rather than as a communication device. Hines and Bruce (2007) state that fashion retailers use the Web primary to display the most up-to-date collection and sell them online directly to their customers, and that despite the continued speculation about the limited abilities and disadvantages of online distribution (some designers and brands do not enable international online purchase because of the high cost in case of reclamation and eventual complication with intercontinental transport) the volume of clothes, accessories and foot wear sold via the Internet has grown steadily – from 25 to 30 per cent a year since 2000. As the online purchase has become a profitable distribution channel, the central attention of fashion marketers and PR executives is paid to the corporate websites where the online shopping is concentrated as well as the corporate publicity and communication. Among the fashion industry the social media devices are used very sporadically; mostly as an additional tool, promoting the official websites and to supporting public knowledge of the brand (p. 265). Hines and Bruce (2007) criticize this practice and note that fashion marketers should be aware of the transformation of the fashion industry, and the contemporary need of more elaborated customer segmentation and identification. They further explain that commonly used segmentation tools and methods rely on the

recognition of specific qualities of customers such as their place of residence, age, gender, religion, income and so on. However, this kind of segmentation provides only statistic descriptive information (social identity) and do not allow companies to identify with actual needs and preferences of their customers (self-identity). It does not mean that this kind of information is unusable; segmentation strategies are very useful under the conditions that markets are static and consumer behavior is consciously predictable. However as fashion industry has become more dynamic, it has become an environment where brands need to maintain strong image and corporate culture, and where consumers have become individualities, requiring interactivity and participations. This market is no longer predicable and statistic descriptive information are not that valuable. In other words, under contemporary circumstances caused by technological innovations marketing tools and techniques, enabling proper segmentation and identification with customer self-identities, are required (p. 81, 82).

“We gotta do larger sizes”, tweet from Robert Duffy (CEO of Marc Jacobs) which reached more than 26,000 followers and caused the reaction of Jacobs himself re-tweeting “I’m with you, as soon as I’m back to NY I’m on that”, demonstrates the power and impact of social media establishing a new kind of relationship between designers and brands, and their customers (Boure, 2010). Guzelis (2010) complements with the claim that in the current environment it is extremely important for brands to know and be able to influence ‘what’ and ‘how’ people talk about product or brand, and what influences their buying decisions (p.16). For those purposes social media can play a mediator role between the fashion industry and its consumers. However after reviewing the nature of current fashion industry and used practices in fashion marketing, brand management and public relations, it is obvious that Marc Jacobs should be perceived rather as an exception than as a role. Despite the fact that the emergence of ICT’s and other Internet technologies has changed the conditions under which fashion industry operates, it seems like the industry itself has difficulties to adjust to those new conditions. Interesting is that beside the resistance of fashion industry towards ICT’s there is a new phenomenon which although does not come from the industry itself has a huge impact on it – fashion blogging.

2.3. Blogs

“A Blog is a type of website, consisting of entries or posts arranged in a chronological order, providing short paragraphs of text with eventual links to other websites, included photos, video, or audio content”

- Yang, 2006

Statistics about blogosphere are spectacular. In 2006, Technorati (Internet search engine for blogs) posted 49.8 million blogs with more than 2 billion links – approximately 75 thousand new blogs and 1.2 million posts were created every day, and as the Institute of Policy Development claims, blogs are projected to double in number every six months (Guzelis, 2010, p. 19). According to statistics published by Royal Pindgom (2011), the total amount of blogs on the Internet recently reached 152 million.

Nardi et al. (2004) in their study focused on the reasons why people blog and propose five general motives - documenting one's life, expressing deeply felt emotions, forming community forums, providing commentary and opinions, and articulating ideas through writing. Boram, Sookyoung and HaeJung (2010) complement that the initial motive which makes people to start blogging always comes from their self-reflection, self-actualization, and/or self-satisfaction, thus from own needs. Nevertheless they further claim that with the acquisition of blogging experience and increasing audience the motivations for blogging are getting more complex and can be classified as a goal directed behavior divided into two general categories - digital engagement and e-shopping blogging behavior. Digital engagement is a type of blogging, producing information which further leads into positive feedback and approval from other users, and eventually even into dynamic social interactions. Contrary e-shopping blogging behavior is a task-oriented online conduct where bloggers act as independent agents resulting from task achievement rather than the gratifying nature of the experience itself (p. 10). As online fashion contains a wide range of various blogs, thus it is not possible to clearly define which category is more applicable for fashion blogs in general. Scholars such as Shao (2009) and Leung (2009)

see engagement as a key feature of blogs giving the explanation for its recently acquired popularity, and state that people consume UCC (Users Created Content) for the same reasons why they watch television; they use it to fulfill their recognition, entertainment, and cognition needs - *“The respondents believed that through the content-generation online process, they would have the opportunity to be recognized, gain respect, publicize their expertise, learn more of the world, socialize with friends and be entertained”* (Leung .2009, p. 1337).

Another feature which is specific for blogs and for UCC’s in general, and which is highly appreciated by users is the time efficiency, easy-use, and multidirectional communication. Modern users are facing decrease of their free time and thus appreciate the character of blogs based on simplicity and efficiency, as well as many-to-many nature of communication specific for this media, bringing high levels of interactivity and space for discussion and sharing opinions (McMillan, 2006; Kuhn, 2007, Shao, 2009). Because of the nature of communication blogs can be considered as a new electronic form of word-of-mouth (e-WOM) enabling a wide spread of valuable information among the blogosphere, or even as a new form of agenda setting; *„The network structure enables that any interesting information, case or argument can appear on the top of blogosphere, and if a critical number of elite blogs raise a particular story, it can catch the attention of mainstream media outlets and even transmit public opinions”* (Farrel and Drezner, 2007, p. 24).

Despite the unquestionable fact that blogs are a huge phenomenon with a certain powerful potential, it is important to note that most blogs are abandoned soon after the creation (from 60 to 80 per cent of blogs even within the first month), and that most of the blogs are rarely pointed to by others, since they are read only by family, friends, fellow students or co-workers of the author and thus stay practically without audience (Caslon, 2009). The reason why most blogs stay in anonymity, lies in the continuous growth of blogs considerably exceeding the amount of Web users. With the assumption that there are about 152 million of blogs and 1.97 billion Web users (Royal Pindgom, 2011), to reach 1000 subscriptions per each blog, 152 billion blog readers would be needed. As there are ‘only’ 1.97 billion Web users, to reach

1000 subscription, each Web user would have to follow approximately 77 blogs. Assuming that an average reading of one blog post takes about three minutes, to reach this number, each Web user would have to spend 3 hours and 51 minutes by reading the blog posts. This is a rough and strictly hypothetical an example demonstrating the current nature of the Internet and how challenging it is to take the blog out of anonymity in such an environment.

At last it is important to mention that blogs concern specific group of users rather than mainstream audience. As Caslon (2009) claims, writing as well as reading the blogs is a matter of young generation – 90% of bloggers are in their 20's and 79% of blog readers are younger than 40. In fact, as the results of a survey conducted by DBB London concerning with the knowledge of new technologies among middle class society of United Kingdom showed that 70% of the British middle class society is not sure what a blog even means (Caslon, 2009) which limits the power and impact of blogs especially when they are considered as a marketing tool.

2.3.1. Digital Culture of Blogs

There are scholars such as Lievrouw and Livinstone (2002) who argue that as people are surrounded by new media their communication becomes empowered and extended. Deuze (2006) objects that such „new media“ approaches are based on the assumption that humans and machines are implicated in one another rather than influencing each other, and further claims that popularity, commercialization and penetration of those technologies into our work and even private space should be rather seen as an emergence of digital culture. In his theory he sees digital culture as a culture where individuals interact in the context of ever-increasing computerization and digitalization of society. Such a culture thus has implications on a shared social level, online as well as offline, and is characterized by three general features; remediation as a remix of old and new media, bricolage as a highly personalized and autonomous mediated reality, and participation as a necessary feature for maintaining human agency in this social context. Deuze (2006) adds that it does not mean that complex social networks did not exist before, but recent technological developments

have afforded their emergence as a dominant form of social organization, and concludes that blogs, online publishing and other forms of online journalism must be seen as an expression of this recently emerge phenomena (p. 66).

Lichtenstein (2009) complements that those forms of online journalism (and blogs in particular) contemporary represent an important source of information and knowledge for members of the public. Which naturally address the question of information credibility and reliability of blogs sources. Moreover Blood (2003) objects that blogs cannot serve as an information source equal to journalistic pieces because of the lack of original reporting which she considers as the heart of journalism, and adds that even a blog written by a journalist does not necessarily qualify as journalism, as it is the practice that defines the practitioner, not the other way around (p. 61). Although she admits that certain blogs can serve as a great source of accurate information, she claims that blogs will never be able to replace journalistic mandate to assemble a fair, accurate and complete story which can be understood by general public.

Lichtenstein (2009) claims that there is a disorder in valuating information; certain scholars and professionals see blogs and other forms of online published knowledge as an undermining the truth and belittling expertise, experience and talent, while bloggers appreciate quite different aspects of knowledge. They referred to the value of having witnessed events in person, the value of having local knowledge, and value of being a trustworthy person. Some bloggers even hold strong negative opinion of experts as elitists who cannot be trusted to be honest in their opinions and who serve to control information and knowledge flow. Which does not mean that bloggers doubt expert knowledge, they rather mistrust experts as people, assign them traits such as elitism and inability of independent unbiased thinking (p. 1041).

A former reporter of the Washington Post, Thomas Edsall, disproves the second general criticism addressed by Blood (2003) and argues that when it comes to writing techniques and styles blogs have even certain advantages against classic journalism; *“We in journalism, there is an orthodoxy to our thinking. Blogs can break the ice and make clear that there is something pretty strange or pretty unique or pretty*

interesting or pretty awful about something .They open up a lot of doors.” (in Farrel and Drezner , 2007, p.25). Bollier and Racine (2005) expands Edsall’s argument and claim that concerning fashion blogs they function much like “the street” in fashion. As it was described in previous section of this thesis, fashion is constantly being innovated by fresh trends and thus creativity is essential in this industry. However as Bollier and Racine (2005) note designers do not create brand new ideas but rather search for inspiration in the past and in street fashion, and refresh those already once existing trends and styles. They claim that blogs are as well as streets an open, bustling place filled with unpredictable new ideas and thus a rich and important source. It is a decentralized marketplace where are no high costs, talent, intellectual or any other restriction preventing participation. Of course there are a lot of bad ideas but the aggregated power of large numbers of people on the street, or in the blogosphere, is a creative force that cannot be ignored (pp. 29, 30). The example of Twitter interaction (between Robert Duffy, Marc Jacobs and random followers) described in the previous section of this thesis illustrates the real use of Bollier and Racine’s theory and practically demonstrates the shift in limitations and barriers in communication brought by digital culture.

2.3.2. Fashion Blogs

Being “fashionable” requires certain features – keeping up with the latest collections of right brands and designers, going to the right places, communicating with right people en cetera – and it is definitely not for everybody. It fact fashion is greatly privileged and it’s accessing costs are high. However the emergence of UCC’s allows participation in this specific subculture with no material limitations and makes fashion more accessible and democratized. Although electronic-based fashion is without barriers and practically anybody can express and spread his fashion ideas it does not mean that there are no costs at all. *“Studies on the active blogging movement illustrate how rapidly a fashion cycle transpires online. Ideas circulated on blogs are generated, discussed, embellished, and forgotten on a quotidian cycle”* explain Liu and Donath (2006) and further claim that major costs in displaying high-quality electronic-based

fashion lie in accessing the freshest and most salient information, and since the distribution of information online is low-cost, more time and effort must be invested into finding high quality information. As a result of this requirement fashionable bloggers spend enormous amount of time each day reading other blogs, seeking obscure websites, and writing posts in attempt to be ahead of the fashion cycle (p. 2). For a variety of reasons which were outlined above blogs became extremely popular, and regardless the dilemma if bloggers can or cannot be considered as a professionals, the fact is, that since 2006 when bloggers were officially invited to New York Fashion Week they have become part of the fashion industry. Moreover within the short period of time bloggers moved to the front rows alongside Anna Wintour (editor in chief of American Vogue), Suzy Menkes (Fashion Editor of International Herald Tribune), and other globally influential fashion journalists as it is illustrated in pictures A4 and A5 taken during the New York and Milan Fashion Week - fall/winter 2012/2013.

Farrel and Drezner (2007) even argue that blogs can act as a leading indicator of future news coverage, and paraphrase The Ford Motor Company's director of public affairs: *"The real value of searching the net, including blogs, is that you get a live picture of what people are thinking about certain issues. It means that you can predict if there is going to be an issue that's going to grow and become something you need to respond to before it gets to the mainstream press."* (in Farrel and Drezner , 2007, p.25). Hauge (2006) adds the blogs share on a coverage of digital fashion news is rapidly increasing and disposes several advantages over classic media. Blogs can quickly react and respond to the current happenings (depending on how often they are updated) which suits well to fashion news and even determines impact on the fashion scene. For instance in Sweden, one of the most profiled journalists and writers mentioned in her blog how much she liked a certain brand and why, the brand appreciated that and sent her one of their garments. She reported that on the blog and started a discussion and buzz on this particular brand. The company later claimed that it was in fact very good and efficient marketing (Hauge, 2006, p. 18). Guzelis (2010) concludes that the power of blogging is that people talk with each other about topics of their mutual interest, and moreover, blogging is not a fad, as it provides people with the opportunity and

power to actively communicate and interact which underlines the most important factors of this medium – awareness, participation and engagement in conversation. For those reasons blogs seem as a very useful and effective publicity and marketing tool, creating engagement and communication with customers (pp. 20, 21).

Despite the qualities of blogs there are only few fashion brands which incorporate them into their publicity tools. In November 2009 The Times informed about the blog campaign Burberry as the very first campaign of fashion brand using this medium. As was claimed the campaign had enormous success and reached about two million page visits on an average 1,500 tweens every day (Leitch, November 14th 2009). However it is important to note that Burberry as well as previously mentioned Marc Jacobs is an exceptional user of those technologies among fashion industry, and as brief analysis showed that majority of well-known designers or brands such as Christian Dior, Chanel or Versace still do not use blogs in any way.

To conclude, current online fashion can be seen as a space where designers and brands stand at the one side, facing the recently altered environment, and fashion blogs as a new phenomenon, standing at the other side. Due to social developments, particularly the innovations in interpersonal communication and the emergence of global markets, designers and brands are expected to adjust their communication models and start operating on local levels with highly targeted niche customers on one-to-one interactive level. Despite the fact that social media and blogs dispose by features which can make this adjustment easier, fashion industry in general hesitates to start using the full potential of this kind of media. To look at the other side, blogging has become a huge phenomenon, offering many until now impossible opportunities to any web user, and to some extent even altering fashion consumption. Despite the fact that there are no material or any other costs required by blogging, it does not mean that there are no requirements at all. Actually leading a successful blog requires to devote a lot of time and effort in order to provide unique content which would be valuable enough to be able to find and engage its audience. In fact most of blogs do not succeed and stayed in anonymity without any followers. It is important to remember that none of those two elements (fashion brands and fashion blogs) exist in

vacuum, in fact they strongly depend and influence each other, although not directly. Despite the challenges of fashion blogging there are bloggers who did manage to find their audience, and provide content valuable enough that they even become part of fashion journalism, and thus can be perceived as a bridge between those two at the first glance separated worlds of virtual fashion and fashion industry. Which address the questions; who are these bloggers? and what determines their success?. A lot of research has been done in area of general blogging – its motives, business opportunities, comparison with classic journalism, impact on followers en cetera, but practically no research has been done in the area of contemporary fashion blogosphere, in sense of proper identification of those blogs and providing an explanation on what determines those particular blogs to appear on the top of fashion blogosphere.

3. Methodology

Based on the theoretical framework the aim of the empirical part of this thesis was summarized into general research question and three additional sub-questions. The inductive content analysis has been chosen as the most suitable technique in order to explore contemporary fashion blogs supported by the guidance of Elo and Kyngöis (2007), providing a clear explanation of the technique, its practical use, nature of collected data as well as its eventual risks and limitations. For the sampling the ranking list "The 10 best...Fashion bloggers" assembled by Alice Fisher, a style editor of The Observer, published in February 2010 was chosen as it was clarified as a suitable and credible ranking, containing an optimal amount of blogs manageable for research realized within time period of three months.

3.1. Research Question and Sub-Questions

After reviewing the complex role of social media in business, concretely as a tool of marketing and public relations, and particularly the composite position of blogs in the fashion industry, and their eventual use as a tool of fashion marketing and brand management, the exploration of blogs appearing in the top ranking list of the fashion blogosphere was determined as a main objective of this thesis, expressed by the following Research Question; What determines an effective blog in the contemporary fashion blogosphere?.

In order to be able to fully explore this topic, the term "an effective blog" must be specified in greater detail. McDonald and Ounis (2008) claim that an effective blog is a blog which appears on the top of search engines and thus allows to be discovered by random users, searching for information of their mutual interest. Yang and Lim (2009) objects that a prime goal of blogging is building an interacting and engaging community with the common interest, and thus rather than on technological aspects bloggers should focus on the salience of narrative structure, credibility, and interactivity. For the purpose of this thesis an effective blog is simply the blog which found its engaging audience, and have become visible in the cyberspace.

Another aspect of the empirical part of this thesis was to explore; the identity of authors (1), and culture of space of those blogs (2). In order to examine the first aspect, the professional and educational background, gender, age, place of residence, institutional affiliation and purposes of blogging of those bloggers were observed, and question; Who are the bloggers within the top rank in the fashion blogosphere? was determined as a Sub-Question 1. The second aspect of the study focused on the culture and content of those blogs, and examined topics, writing style, graphic layout, division into rubrics, character of accompanied photos and videos as well as nature and level of interaction and engagement with the audience through comments, discussions, content sharing, and presence of those blogs at social networking sites. All those features were explored in order to answer the Sub-Question 2; What is the culture of the blog?.

As the core of this thesis was to explore the character of fashion blogs, appearing in the top ranking list, and their possible use and implications in fashion marketing and brand management, the question; To what extent do blogs serve as a tool of fashion marketing and brand management? was stated as a Sub-Question 3. To answer this question the actual or potential presence of promotional strategies of certain brands or designers which can be considered as an external marketing tool was examined.

3.2. Methodology and Sampling

To be able to properly explore issues addressed above, and to be able to give a satisfactory answer to the Research Questions and to all Sub-Questions, qualitative content analysis was chosen as an optimal method to analyze written, verbal or visual communication messages, and classify them into related categories, sharing the common meanings and patterns (Cavanagh, 1997). *“Content analysis is a research method, enabling to make replicable and valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts and a practical guide to action”* claim Elo and Kyngöis (2007, p. 108) and further add that the aim of this method is to attain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon

described in several categories. However they also note that content analysis can be used in qualitative or quantitative as well as deductive or inductive way, and that the particular approach should be determined by the purposes of the research, as each of those approaches provides different kinds of data. For the purposes of this study the inductive approach was chosen as an ideal way to analyze data without previous comprehensive knowledge or hypothesis which would be tested, and contrary allowing to make general statements based on specific knowledge (p. 109).

During the data collection the guidance of Elo and Kyngois (2007) was followed claiming that inductive content analysis starts by reading through the content how many times is necessary, and writing down the margins to describe all aspects of the content. These margins are further generalized and divided into sub-categories and categories according to their common patterns and underlying meanings. Dey (1993, in Elo and Kyngois, 2007) points out that creating categories does not mean bringing together observations which are similar, instead, data are being classified as belonging to a particular group. The purpose of creating categories is to provide a means describing the phenomenon, to increase understanding and generate knowledge (p. 110). After data collection the categories and sub-categories are being simplified and general patterns are stated. To reach reliable, credible and trustworthy finding data collection as well as demonstration of results must be as much in detail as possible, containing links between data and results such as tables and authentic citations. To facilitate transferability, the researcher should give a clear description of the context, selection, data collection and analyzing process (p. 113).

The limitations of this technique might be a subjective data interpretation of the researcher influenced by his own perspective, and eventual excessive simplification of data. Both possible confines were taken into account during the data collection and data interpretation to achieve the most valid and reliable results.

For sampling the ranking list “The 10 best...Fashion bloggers” assembled by Alice Fisher, a style editor of The Observer, and published by The Observer and by the Guardian.co.uk on Sunday 21st February 2010 was chosen as the most suitable chart for this research. Even though the criteria of selecting blogs for this ranking were not

found, the fact that this chart was published within the settled rubric (The 10 best...) of respectable and credible publication was a compelling enough. Another ranking which was considered as the source of sampling for this research was the "Top 50 fashion blogs" assembled by Blog Rank. Although the criteria of this ranking were, unlike the Fisher's ranking, known and clearly explained, the chart was not used because of the inclusion of blogs such as Style.com or Fashionista.com - blogs conducted by more than one blogger, with the lay-out similar to online magazines, including advertising banners. At such blogs it is a question if they are still blogs or online magazines. As the aim of this thesis is to explore efficient fashion bloggers, conducting their blogs themselves without making any profit from it, the additional assortment would be necessary in case of using the Blog Rank. Another reason why Blog Rank was not chosen for the sampling was the extensive number of included blogs. Blog Rank includes fifty blogs while only ten blogs were needed for this research which means that additional criteria, excluding four fifths of blogs in Blog Rank would be needed.

Thus in the end Fisher's ranking was chosen for the reliability of its origin, optimal amount of included blogs, and the nature for included blogs, suiting to the aim of this research. Complete list of blogs included in this ranking is attached in the Appendix B3.

4. Results and Discussion

The inductive content analysis showed that the blogs included in Fisher's ranking contains a wide range of blogs, covering diverse topics. However the aim of the research was to find general underlying patterns common for all those blogs, initially concerning their authors, culture of space, and potential use in a fashion public relations, marketing and brand management. This chapter explicitly demonstrates generally shared patterns and features, regarding not only areas covered by Sub-Question 1, 2 and 3, but also several additional discoveries. Key findings are illustrated at the examples of blogs which it is believed that demonstrate particular features in the most suitable and precise way.

4.1. Identity of Bloggers

The first part of the research focused on providing valid, reliable and satisfactory answer to the Sub-Question 1; Who are the bloggers within the top rank in the fashion blogosphere?. In order to answer this question professional and educational backgrounds and identities of those bloggers were analyzed. It was found that fashion bloggers do not represent any specific social group, sharing common characteristic or patterns. Contrary results showed that the chosen ranking consists variety of bloggers; high-school students, emerging journalists and writers as well as formal photographers, or even film makers, within a wide age range (17 – 53), and place of residence situated in United States or Europe. However based on the findings illustrated in Table 1 it is claimed that the feature which is shared by all top ten fashion bloggers (according to chosen ranking) is that they collectively come outside the professional fashion industry, and do not work for any designer or brand in any position.

Table 1. - Blogger's profile

Name of the Blog	Name of the Blogger	Gender	Age	Place of Residence	Blogging Since	Background
The style rookie	Tavi Gevinson	Female	17	Chicago	2008	High school student
Gary.card.iology	Gary Card	Male	28	London	2009	Setdesigner
The Sartorialist	Scott Shuman	Male	41	New York	2005	Fashion photographer
Style Bubble	Sussana Lau	Female	26	London	2006	Writer
High Snobiety	David Fisher	Male		Switzerland	2005	
What Kettie wore	Joe Sinclair and Katie Mackay	Females	27,28	London	2009	Marketing specialists
Go Fug Yourself	Jessica Morgan and Heather Cocks	Females		USA	2004	
Young Fat Fabilous	Gabby	Female	22	USA (Chicago, now NYC)	2008	Student of journalism
Cycle Chic	Mikael Colville-Andersen	Male	42	Copenhagen	2007	Film maker and photographer
A suitable wardrobe	Will Boehlke	Male	53	San Francisco	2006	

4.2. Culture of Fashion Blogs

In order to give satisfactory, valid and reliable answer to the Sub-Question 2; What is the culture of these blogs?, second part of research focused on analysis of page layout, selection of topics, writing style, and level of interaction and engagement with the audience at those blogs. In this section the found patterns, concerning these features will be presented, discussed and illustrated.

4.2.1. Simplicity and Personalization

Concerning the page layout, selection of topics and writing style of posts the common patterns visible at all analyzed blogs was the simple clear layout and highly personalized content. The analysis showed that bloggers keep their blogs simple; use clear black and white layout, simple fonts, and division into sections only according to date of publishing of particular posts. Selection of topics purely belongs to blogger's personal preferences and interests as well as the nature of the post which usually mirrors blogger's personal convictions and opinions. Based on the analysis it seems like topics for posts are often generated by blogger's every-day life as they regularly pertain with events in which the bloggers recently participated, people whom they met, and things which they did. However fashion and style still dominate to the entire posts, presented in informal way, using trenchant humor, colorful expressions,

metaphors and idioms, as it is illustrated at the example of randomly chosen post of Gabi Fresh named “Fatkini 2012”, posted on April 22nd 2012;

I just got back from a fantastic trip to Vegas with my boyfriend (don't worry, no drive-through wedding)! We had the best time, and of course I couldn't wait for an excuse to break out this year's bikini. I wore a vintage-inspired black and white striped one from SimplyBe that makes my enormous boobs look even bigger but I don't care--I loved the pattern too much to pass it up! With the white shades I was totally channeling my inner Wendy Peffercorn.

The diary style of those posts is underlined by the “I” form in which are all posts of analyzed blogs written, and by the nature of accompanied photos (in some cases even videos), usually made by the blogger himself, or provided by other bloggers with the blog concerning similar topics, but seldom from official media or public relations source, as it is demonstrated at randomly chosen post of Style Rookie published on May 3rd 2012;

Claire and two friends both named Alex and me performed at V-Day, a good, loud celebration of vaginas. Autumn took those photos. The last one is me in the last hour of my 16th birthday a couple weekends ago. I am wearing my friend's sweater, a skirt I got to keep from the Wren shoot, and a jacket gifted to me by Risto.

The personalization of the content is further multiplied by sections “About me” which seem to be regular part of fashion blogs, giving basic personal and background information about the blogger along with his particular motives for blogging, and reasons for choosing particular blog orientation, as it is illustrated at the example of “About me” section of Style Bubble, which was chosen as the example representing this feature as it includes the most detailed information from all analyzed blogs;

Ten things about Susie Bubble...

 *I'm British Born Chinese by way of Hong Kong - though often get mistaken for being Japanese/Korean by fellow Hong Kong-ers.*

 *I grew up eating my way around the world because my parents are obsessed foodies - I will literally try everything and anything. Kangaroo steaks? Yum. Fried cicadas? Hmmm hmmm.*

 *I have a disturbing weakness for period dramas - especially BBC ones!*

The simple clear layout and diary writing style with omnipresent information from bloggers private lives bring the personal approach and authenticity to posts, enabling readers to identify with bloggers and their subjective interests and opinions, and in some cases even encourage them into dynamic interactions as it will be demonstrated later on.

4.2.2. Background Information and Unusual Approaches

Beside the personalized approach the analysis of culture spaces of those blogs showed the selection of posts and their content covers different kind of information and approach than classic mainstream media. As it was claimed above, bloggers included in Fisher's ranking do not professionally come from the fashion industry, however some of them cooperate with fashion brands and designers (such as photographer Scott Schuman or set designer Gary Card), or started to cooperate thanks to increasing popularity of their blogs (such as Tavi Gevinson, author of Style Rookie, or Gabriel Gregg, author of Young Fat and Fabulous). Thanks to their professional/semiprofessional activities they have the access to background information from fashion industry which are often published through their blogs. For instance; set designer Gary Card on his blog Gary.card.iology regularly informs about his newest sets and installation, including information about what kind of instruction

he got from his clients, what he found challenging, what inspired him and so, as it is illustrated in the excerpt from one of his randomly chosen post from March 31st 2012;

...I had absolutely no idea what I was coming in to paint was so exciting, the risk involved really interested me. The only thing I had to go on was black, white and red, the rest was totally improvised...

...public also became part of the creative process with me, tapping on the glass, cheering me on, sometimes coming into the store to talk to me about what I was making...

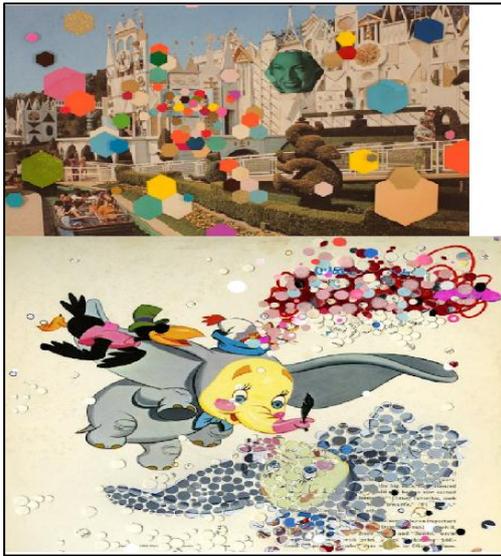
Other bloggers focus on creation process of fashion, and actual use of fashion in every-day life. To give a concrete example; great part of posts of Tavi Gevinson are



Picture 1 taken from the post Technicolor concerning inspiration for upcoming trends, published by Style Rookie February 1st 2012.

visual illustration of the origins of actual trends. For instance; randomly chosen post named "Technicolor" published on February 1st 2012 informs about the

open statements of designers that the inspiration of trends for upcoming season comes from the retro style of 60's and 70's. Rodarte was more concrete and even specified old Disney movies as their main inspiration for actual season. Tavi Gevinson used this information and searched for clear evidence proving those statements. Thus in the posts readers are informed about what specifically was the inspiration for particular collection with visual illustration proving this fact (see Picture 1 and 2).



Picture 2 taken from the post *Technicolor concerning inspiration for upcoming trends*, published by *Style Rookie* February 1st 2012.

It is important to note that mentioned posts published by Gary Card and Tavi Gevinson were exceptional, and that no other analyzed bloggers provided these kind of posts.

However the aim of pointing out these two posts was to demonstrate the different kind of information which are provided by bloggers included in Fisher's ranking, and which are very different from coverage of other media (particularly mainstream fashion magazines).

Because even though other bloggers do not have access or ability to provide such an unique

kind of information, their approach to fashion is still different from approaches of other media. They focus on every-day use of fashion (by themselves or by random people), on combinations of different styles and fabrics, on emerging designers, vintage boutiques, and other aspects which are standing outside of media attention. For instance blog *The Sartorialist* which was launched in 2005 by 41 years old fashion photographer, Scott Schuman. In the fashion industry Schuman is a respective photographer, who worked for brands and designers such as Burberry, DKNY or Gap, covered events like New York Fashion Week or shows of Saks Fifth Avenue, cooperated with American, French and Italian Vogue, and who also published his entire portfolio in a comprehensive book named after his blog. However on his blog Schuman mainly publishes pictures of random every-day people which he meets at the streets of world's metropolis such as London, Paris, New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong (and many other cities which he visits because of his profession), and which he finds fashionable and stylish. Thus his blog can be seen as an extensive photo album of people spread round the world whose appearance and particularly use of fashion got Schuman's attention.

The last example, illustrating the unusual kind of coverage and unique approach to fashion noticeable at all analyzed blogs, is the blog *Young Fat* and

Fabulous, nowadays known as Gabi Fresh launched by Gabriel Gregg. This particular blog was chosen as the example because of its unusual content and approach to mainstream fashion. Gregg started blogging when she graduated from college (in Chicago got degree in journalism) and could not find a job as a fashion journalist. Her first blog Young Fat Fabulous documented her personal life as a plus sizes girl with the passion for fashion. Gabi was posting pictures of herself, ignoring all “rules and tips” concerning fashion for plus sizes women, demonstrating that an extra weight is not an obstacle to follow fashion trends. In the section “About” she literally says; *“If you love fashion but you're sick of being told to wear A-line skirts, wrap dresses, boot cut jeans, and slimming prints, this is the blog for you”*.

To conclude, the content of analyzed blogs disposes by different kind of information than readers can get from classic mainstream media. Unlike fashion journalists these bloggers provide information from background of professional fashion, their personal view of fashion and style, and every-day use of fashion of ordinary people. Thus those blogs can be perceived as another source of information, filling the gap in the contemporary fashion journalism.

4.2.3. Shift in the Nature of Posts

The analysis of selection of topics and writing style also showed the common nature of posts of those blogs. In general those blogs follow format; straight-up photos taken by blogger himself or sometimes provided by other blogger, scan of fashion shoots and vintage magazine, accompanied by personal opinion and chirpy comments. Part of the analysis of culture of spaces of those blogs was to explore if there is a shift in a nature of posts within an increasing age of the blog, in other words if the character of post has changed since the beginning of the blog. In order to reach this kind of findings the one post published in every year of blog’s existence was analyzed. To simplify the selection of posts, the very first post of the particular year was always chosen.

The comparison of currently published posts (in 2012) and posts published in previous years showed that there is no radical shift or change in the subject of post, writing style or lay out. Even posts of Gabriel Gregg or Tavi Gevinson, who become

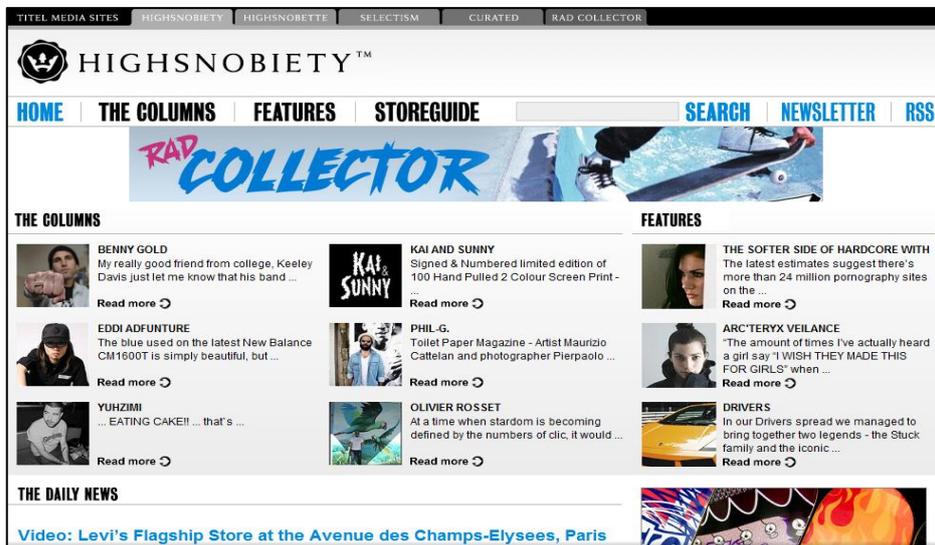
respected figures in fashion industry (in her 13 Gevinson was invited as a special guest to New York Fashion Week, appeared on the cover of Pop magazine, and was interviewed by New York Times, BBC, CBS, Teen Vogue, French Vogue) did not radically change. Since their beginning analyzed bloggers have been using the very same layout, choosing the same kind of topics, and writing in the same style. Contrary greater difference was observed in a ration of text and photos, and quality, size and amount of accompanied photos. While at the beginning of blogging bloggers based their posts on the text, and used photos only as an illustration, with their increasing blogging experience photos have become the core aspect of the posts, and their size and amount has rapidly increased. For instance; at the beginning of its existence (spring 2006) The Style Bubble's posts contained on average only two photos of the size an about 12 – 15 cm², while contemporary there are on average from fifteen to twenty photos of the size from 225 - 375 cm², whereas the amount and quality of text has stayed without any greater transformation.

Contrary to The Style Bubble which was chosen as the example as the amount of photos at this blog has increased the most, two blogs went through radical change since their beginning, concerning not only use of photos, but also writing style, layout, division into sections, and social media presence. Concretely it was blog High Snobiety (in the Picture 4) and Go Fug Yourself which within their existence have become more online magazines than blogs.

High Snobiety as well as Go Fug Yourself are currently led by several cooperating bloggers, creating variety of posts divided into sections corresponding to the content of posts. Interestingly while those blogs expanded and reached professional level they lost one feature which seems to be essential for all analyzed blogs – interactive audience. As it will be demonstrated in following section, analyzed blogs generally dispose by colorful commenting sections, operating as discussion forums.

Nevertheless, a feature of multi-directional discussion was not noticeable at High Snobiety and Go Fug Yourself, where commenting sections were almost empty (maximum number of comments of analyzed posts was three). On the other hand even though those two blogs do not dispose by rich commenting sections like other

analyzed blogs, it does not mean that lost their audience, in fact they both enjoy great popularity on social media; High Snobiety has more than 50.000 Twitter followers and more 80.000 likes on Facebook, Go Fug Yourself has more than 63.000 Twitter



Picture 4 demonstrates a current home page of the blog High Snobiety.

followers and almost 30.000 Facebook likes. The comparison of High Snobiety and Go Fug Yourself with other

analyzed blogs gives the impression that blog readers/followers appreciate blogger's individual approach over professional development which causes a loss of interactive audience. This part of analysis also showed that although bloggers from Fisher's ranking do not rapidly change character of their blogs, transformation in quality of photos was noticeable among all those blogs. This fact leads to a conclusion that effective fashion blogs currently focused more on visual than on written content.

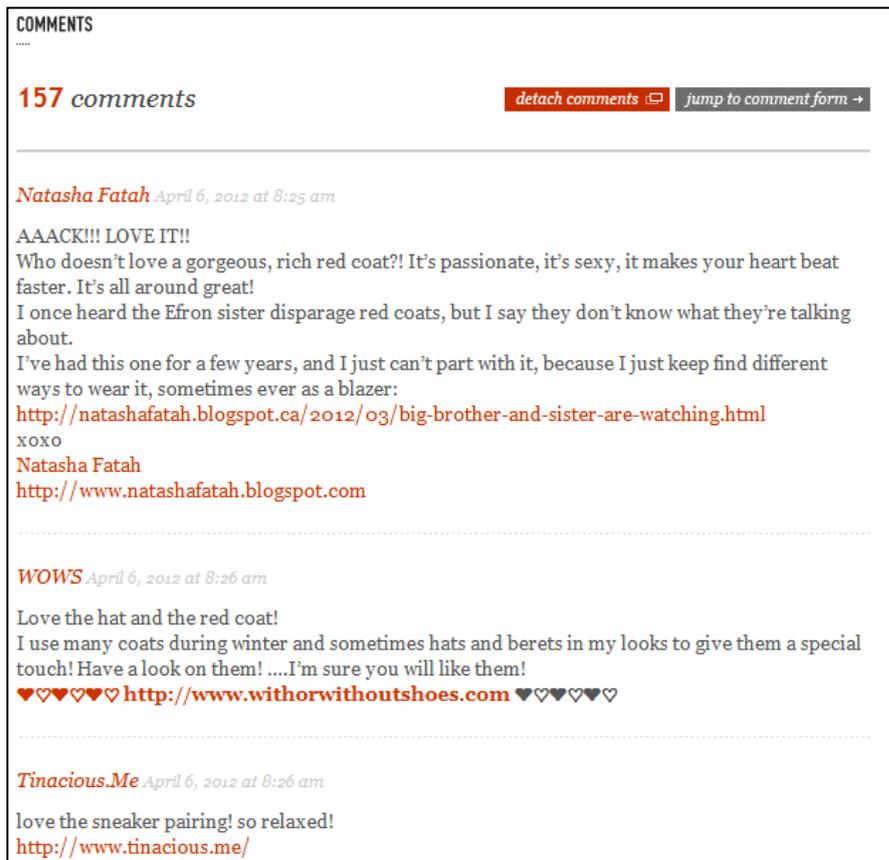
4.2.4. Interactivity and Social Media Presence

Last part of the analysis of culture of space of blogs in Fisher's ranking was to explore the nature of interactivity and social media presence of those blogs. This section will demonstrate findings of content analysis of commenting sections and social media accounts of those blogs which were analyzed in order to fully explore culture of space of blogs included in Fisher's ranking.

As commenting sections of those blogs dispose of an extensive amount of comments (no rarely more than 100 comments per single posts), analysis focused only on first ten comments of posts published within February, March and April 2012. In

general the nature of analyzed comments was positive, giving complimentary feedback, showing excitement and interests in the topic of the post, and sometimes also sharing own opinion on particular subject. The commenting sections stay without any moderation or management of the blogger; to be able to leave a comment users do not have to register, and their comments are immediately posted without any selection of comments with negative content. Even though bloggers themselves mostly react on comments only if they contain question directly addressed to them, commenting sections often operate as a multidirectional discussion. Readers/followers of the particular blog share their opinions, react on each-others comments, and often even include links to their own blogs, concerning similar or related issues. As the example, illustrating this feature, blog The Sartorialist was chosen as it reaches the highest number of comments from all analyzed blogs (usually 120 and more), and as it is the only blog which does not contain any text.

Blog The Sartorialist was already introduced in previous section, it is the blog



Picture 3 displays randomly chosen discussion post at the blog The Sartorialist

led by fashion photographer Scott Schuman, focusing on street fashion around the world. Interesting feature of this blog is the limitation, and sometimes even complete lack, of any broader comment which would give more

information about posted photos. Instead the only texts which accompany Schuman's posts are the headlines, concerning where the series of pictures was taken, for instance; *"On the street...Grand Street, New York"* or *"On the street...Le Marais, Paris"*. Nevertheless it does not mean there is not text at the Sartorialist, in fact there is plenty, but all the text comes from section "Comments", where on average 100 users (per post) share their opinions about particular picture and the styling of the person in that picture as it illustrates Picture 3, displaying randomly chosen discussion post.

In the section "Biography" Schuman claims that he began The Sartorialist with the idea of creating a two-way dialogue about the world of fashion and its relationship to daily life, which is exactly what this blog is about, maybe with a slight difference - as there are an about 100 users, interacting and sharing their opinions, dialog has become multidirectional debate, which has been expanded to social networking sites Twitter and Facebook, where The Sartorialist reached almost 100.000 followers and 65.000 likes. Such an extensive amount of Twitter followers and Facebook likes was not nevertheless an exception among analyzed blogs. For instance; Style Rookie has more than 60.000 Twitter followers, Style Bubble has almost 60.000 Twitter followers and more than 20.000 Facebook likes. Bloggers themselves are generally very active at their social media profiles. Particularly on Twitter they tweet several times a day and follow hundreds of Twitter accounts. Part of the research was the analysis of social media presence of those bloggers. As their Twitter and Facebook accounts dispose by such an active presence, the analysis was limited to first twenty Twitter followers, first twenty Twitter following, and first twenty Facebook likes. It was found that simultaneously to their commenting sections those bloggers are followed and liked by other fashion bloggers (but not exclusively!) who actively interact with each other (re-tweet each other, give each other Facebook likes, comment each other). Analysis also showed the dominance of Twitter as an exclusive social networking site where all analyzed bloggers have accounts and where they all actively communicate. Even though the Facebook profiles of those blogs were not rare as well, in fact eight out of ten bloggers did have Facebook profile, the nature of those profiles and present discussions were in comparing to Twitter lukewarm. Facebook posts were exclusively

devoted to the blog posts, literally copying their headlines and accompanied photos, while on Twitter bloggers also shared more colorful tweets, concerning random things which caught their interest, and happenings from their every-day, further follow and re-tweet each other. Not mentioning that while the frequency of new posts on their Facebook profiles is on average several times a week, on Twitter it is several times a day. Some bloggers also used other social media beside Twitter and Facebook, namely Tumblr, Flickr and Google Plus. However none of those social networking sites reached a greater attention of the audience.

Another noticeable feature was the Twitter account of Marc Jacobs, a creative director of Louis Vuitton and his own lines Marc by Marc Jacobs, which was commonly followed by most of analyzed bloggers (seven out of ten). Furthermore he was the only well-known designer or fashion icon which was followed by the greater amount of analyzed bloggers. This fact led into detailed analysis of his Twitter account and his entire social media presence in order to find an explanation of special position of Marc Jacobs among those bloggers, distinguishing him from other designers and fashion workers. The analysis showed that unlike other designers, who use PR practitioners Marc Jacobs communicates on Twitter himself, tweets messages not only concerning his profession but also his personal interests and every-day life, and no rarely he re-tweets other Twitter accounts. It seems like personalized approach and interactive nature of Marc Jacobs Twitter account is generally appreciated, and does not only bring a new level of corporate communication, and eventually even changes the creation process in fashion industry as it will be discussed later on.

To conclude, this entire subchapter demonstrated findings concerned with the Sub-Question 2; What is the culture of these blogs?, and showed that blogs included in Fisher's ranking dispose by clear simple layout, and highly personalized content based on bloggers own (subjective) opinions and experience. Posts of those bloggers generally focus on every-day use of fashion by ordinary people, unusual styling, and in some cases even on unique information from background of professional fashion. Within their blogging experience those bloggers do not rapidly change nature of their posts (layout, selection of topics, writing style). The only one feature which has

collectively changed was the character of accompanied photos, which amount and size has increased, and become dominant part of current post of those blogs. The analysis also showed that followers of those blogs tend to prefer individual approach over professional development. Which does not mean that blogs which reached standards of online magazines lost their audience (on social media they are still very popular) but they lost the communicative audience (based on empty commenting sections). On the other hand as most of analyzed blogs (eight out of ten) dispose by rich commenting sections with the presence of interactive discussions (hold mostly by other bloggers) they can be perceived as a forums, building up community of allied bloggers sharing the same interests. These “communities” are not however concentrated only around blogs, as the results showed analyzed bloggers are very active on social media, where their profiles dispose by great amount of interactivity as well. When it comes to social media presence of those bloggers, analysis showed the dominance of Twitter over other social network sites. Unfortunately content analysis does not include techniques which would enable to find out reasons for richer activity of those bloggers on Twitter than at other social network sites, especially on Facebook. Additional found feature was the collective following Twitter account of Marc Jacobs and his active presence at this social network site.

4.3. Presence of Public Relations, Marketing and Brand Management

One of the main aims of this research was to explore a presence of public relations at blogs include in Fisher’s ranking, and their potential use in fashion marketing and brand management, as it was covered in a Sub-Question 3; To what extent do blogs serve as a tool of fashion marketing and brand management?. In order to explore this problematic the last part of the analysis focused on any kind of presence of features which can be considered as a tool of public relation, marketing and brand management, for instance; mentioning particular brands and designers, informing about fashion events and news from fashion industry en cetera.

The analysis of the topics of posts, used writing style, and character of accompanied photos showed that those fashion blogs do not use any official sources

and based their posts exclusively on their own experience. Consequently even major events such as Fashion Week do not appear in posts of those bloggers unless the blogger attend the event. Concretely, New York Fashion Week Fall and Winter 2012/2013 was covered only by blogs Style Rookie and The Sartorialist as their authors - Tavi Gevinson and Scott Schuman – did participated in this event while all other analyzed bloggers left it behind. However the coverage of official events such as Fashion Week at those blogs is different than coverage at other media, as it is illustrated in the excerpt from posts of Style Rookie published on February 15th 2012, concerning New York Fashion Week;

Alley of Stylelikeu had this long wool coat-dress that I wish I'd gotten a better picture of -- you can kind of see that the right side is scalloped to fit the shape of the buttons. If I were a cartoon character and had to have copies of the same outfit in my closet and no other options, I'd want it to be this dress. Keiko's hair-glasses combination was already impeccable, but the striped sweater with a leopard print bag realllllly got to me.

Even though this post concerned New York Fashion Week, its central focus is on people, attending this event, and their personal styling rather than on designers and their collections presented on runway. Which underlines the claim mentioned in previous subchapter, that analyzed bloggers are primary interested in every-day styling and individual use of fashion which they share at their blogs as an inspiration for others. The inspiration can come from random people, who they meet at the street as well as from participants of fashion events. As those bloggers are focused on what people are wearing rather than on who they are wearing, their posts hardly contain any forms of direct public relations, marketing or brand management.

Even though this fact was found as a common pattern for most of analyzed blogs, there were few bloggers whose posts did contain information which could be considered as a form of publicity. One of these blogs was The Style Bubble led by Sussana Lau. The Style Bubble focuses on British emerging designers, talented school

absolvents, small boutiques outside the London center, alternative Fashion Weeks en cetera. In her posts she very specifically explains why she likes particular designer or boutiques, what kind of clothes he makes/they have, and where people can buy. No rarely she inserts short interview with the designer or owner of the boutique, and accompanies a lot of self-made photos. It is necessary to note that even though Style Bubble started informing solely about London fashion, as its audience increased Sussana Lau become respective fashion blogger, attending fashion events around the world, and some of her contemporary posts (published in 2012) also inform about designers or events outside the United Kingdom.

Beside The Style Bubble which provides certain form of publicity to local emerging designers and small boutiques which mostly stay out of media attention, two other analyzed blogs dispose by posts certain level of public relations in their posts - Young Fat and Fabulous and A Suitable Wardrobe.

4.3.1. Young Fat and Fabulous and A Suitable Wardrobe

Young Fat and Fabulous (since 2011 renamed to Gabi Fresh) is a blog led by Gabriel Gregg, focusing on fashionable styling for plus size women. In her posts Gabi openly propagates ignoring all “recommended rules and tips”, regarding dressing for plus sizes women, and demonstrates that even full figured women can be fashionable. Her posts regularly contain several pictures of herself in a styling, corresponding to recent trends. As she admits that following current trends can be more difficult for plus sizes women as not all brands offer bigger sizes, written part of her posts contain not only to what occasion and why she was dressed in particular way, but also what exactly is she wearing and where she bought that, as it is illustrated at randomly chosen post from March 2012;

Confession: I'm obsessed with neon. It was huge last year, and thankfully the trend isn't going away anytime soon. Today I met up with friend and fellow blogger Christina of Profresh Style, and we coincidentally both ended up wearing neon and black! My tulip dress is again from Very.com; the dress in my last post was by Love

Label and this one is by the brand South. Since it was a bit cooler today, I paired it with one of my classic black trench coats.

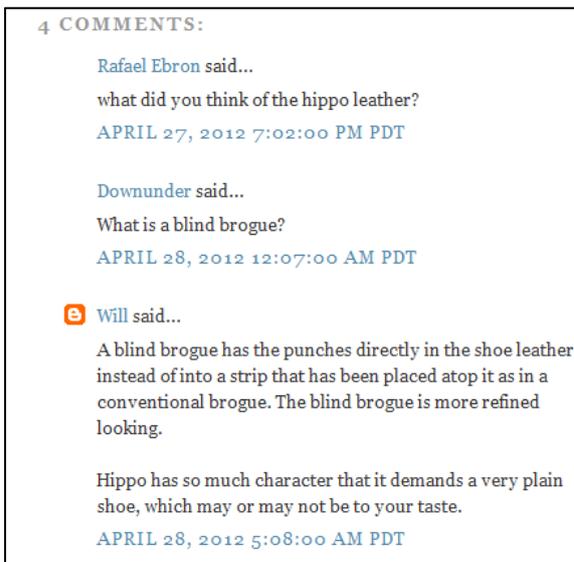


The main aim of mentioning this blog was to point out an open mentioning of fashion brands which is not present at other analyzed blogs, and which can be considered as a form of public relations.

Picture 5 illustrating one of several pictures accompanied previously paraphrased post with the information of brand identities of clothes in the picture.

Beside an open mentioning of brands in the posts blog also contains a list of Gabi's favorite brands and shops permanently placed on the right panel of the central blog page, and in a commenting section provides tips regarding online shopping at brands mentioned in posts. For instance; how to determine the correct size at foreign brands, what kinds of payments are available at particular foreign brand, or how does it go with reclamations. Analogous discussion, serving as a publicity tool, communicating with niche audience was noticeable at another blog - A Suitable Wardrobe led by Will Boehlke.

A Suitable Wardrobe is a blog, focusing on classic men clothing, serving as the guider, giving the advices how to choose proper suit, how to dress to particular occasions, what kind of tie is suitable to what kind of suit en cetera. Similar to Young Fat and Fabulous the commenting section contains open questions, asking for advices concerning styling (illustrated in Picture 5), and no rarely also advices concerning shopping and it's related issues, such as online payments at particular brand, their system of delivery, and reclamations.



Picture 5 demonstrates questions from readers, asking for further information regarding the issue discussed in the post.

Even though the content of post does not mention any brands, designers or shops, and deals exclusively with classic men styling, the central page of the blog offers lists of tailors which are presented as favored sources and contributors. Beside this form of publicity A Suitable Wardrobe also offers small areas placed on the right panel, which are used as advertising banners, promoting several tailors. One of those banners is even direct link to the web-shop.

The last part of the research showed that in general there is no presence of direct public relations, marketing or brand management at analyzed blogs. Those bloggers tend to avoid naming brands and designers, even their coverage of major events such as Fashion Week does not include any naming. However within Fisher's ranking there were several blogs which were exceptional and which included certain naming in their posts. Closer examination of those blogs showed that those bloggers provide publicity to designers, brands and boutiques which stay out of greater media attention as they do not correspond with mainstream fashion (1), or provide publicity to mainstream and internationally operating brands which they put into brand new context (2).

5. Conclusion of Results and Discussion

The previous chapter demonstrated variety of findings provided by content analysis of fashion blogs included in Fisher's ranking as the most effective blogs in a year of 2010. The simplicity, personalization, valuation of first time experience, unusual coverage and approach to fashion, dominance of visual content, interactive multidirectional communication, rich social media presence, preference of Twitter, were found as a key findings collectively shared by those blogs. In the following chapter those feature will be deeply discussed and put into wider perspective.

5.1. Identity of Fashion Bloggers and Culture of Their Blogs

Based on the results of the research presented in the previous chapter individual approach, dominance of visual content, unusual approach to fashion and style, rich commenting sections are key features blogs included in Fisher's ranking. As it was already mentioned Deuze (2006) sees blogs as a natural development of communication form emerged in digital culture, which general features naturally correspondent to an overall character of this culture based on remediation (remix of old and new media), bricolage (autonomous mediated reality) and participation (p. 66). Based on his theory features observed during the research may not be perceived only as a specifics of those blogs, but also as a general qualities of communication in digital culture.

For other scholars emergence and especially wide spread of blogs are results of transformation of interpersonal communication caused by the advent of Web 2.0 and particularly UCC's, which are perceived as a new source of information and entertainment sought-after by modern generation, requiring such a communication forms, and appreciating it's easy-use and efficiency (McMillan, 2006; Kuhn, 2007; Shao, 2009; Leung, 2009). This theory gives the explanation for the detected tendency among analyzed blogs to use clear lay outs, humble fonts, and simple division into sections only according to date of publishing, as well as the measured average age of analyzed bloggers 31,5. Despite the fact that three bloggers (out of analyzed ten) were

older than 40, findings underline the claim that blogging is a phenomenon of predominantly young generation (Caslon, 2009). The analysis of the places of residence of those bloggers showed that despite the recent emergence of “new fashion centers”(South Africa, Brazil, Russia, UAE, India and several others) the contemporary most popular blogs still come only from United States and Europe. On the other hand it is important to note that an average age of analyzed blogs was five years, and as the emergence of “new fashion centers” is an issues of last four years, it might be too soon for those new markets to influence the top ranking of fashion blogs.

Another found feature, corresponding to the theoretical framework is the valuation of the information and knowledge based on first time experience of trustable and identifiable person. As was argued by Lichtenstein (2009) bloggers and their followers appreciate personally acquired or witnessed information more than information coming from official source, and thus unlike other forms of online journalism credibility of blogs is not guaranteed by reliable sources but by authentic presentation and identification with the author of the post. More over fashion blogs offers different approach than classic media. For instance the coverage of New York Fashion Week 2012; firstly it is important to mention that those bloggers who covered this event were only those few, who actually participated in that, which underlines the claim stated above that bloggers based their posts on their own experience. Secondly the comparison of the coverage of NYFW 2012 written by Suzy Menkes, famous fashion journalist and critic, and style editor of International Herald Tribune, and Tavi Gevinson, author of Style Rookie, showed that against classic media blogs are less opinioned and more interactive. While Gevinson tuned her posts affirmatively, pointed out things which she caught her attention without stating any stronger comment, and put emphasis on authentic photos which took by her-self, Menkes provided text heavy critical evaluation of the entire event with the stress on parts, which she found particularly weak and insufficient. Additionally while Menkes informed solely about happening on runway, Gevinson provided her point of view how she experienced this event with the focus on people which she saw and met there, and the emphasis on what whose people were wearing. This comparison shows that mainstream media and

blogs diverse in a quality of coverage and approach, and this might be also consumed for different reasons.

Edsall (in Farrel and Drezner, 2007) claims that there are features which advantage blogs against classic media, namely informal, direct and relaxed writing style as it creates casual atmosphere, engages readers, and even encourages them to participate and interact. The comparison of blogs High Snobiety and Go Fug Yourself with the rest of analyzed blogs supports this argument, as it showed that simple led blogs dispose of much greater level of interactive discussions than blogs with a design, coverage of topics, and writing style reaching standards of professional online magazines. It seems like the growth and development of blogs toward the standards of mainstream media is compensated by the depersonalization and retreat of the blog content, leading into the loss of an interactive audience and multidirectional communication. This fact might be also the reason why appearance and nature of the most analyzed blogs (eight from ten) did not radically change since their beginning, and why bloggers keep their blogs without any greater transformations.

While the general nature of blogs stay without any radical change, within the analysis there was a noticeable shift in the quality of accompanied photos which sizes and amount rapidly increased. As was claimed in the previous chapter the ratio of a text and audio content has changed since the beginning of their blogging. Within the existence of analyzed blogs audio content has become central message of their posts (in some cases visual content entirely replaced text, for instance the blog The Sartorialist). Claypool et al (1999) see the increase of multimedia as natural development of online technologies as they are based on the ability to simultaneously combine text, images, video and audio content, and as it is something what online users expect and demand from this kind of media. Sundar (2000) believes in the positive effects of the use of images, and states that the use of visual illustrations in online content increases memorability of the website, and even positively influences its re-visiting, engagement and involvement. The particular reason for the shift in a use of images of analyzed blogs was not unfortunately findable within this research, and

thus the causes and effects of this modification create the possibility to future research.

5.2. Interactivity and Network Structure

Another observed feature of analyzed blogs was the ubiquitous interactivity. As it was already mentioned above one of key characteristics of successful fashion blog is the presence of rich comments, leading into multidirectional discussions. Picard (2000) explains that the emergence of ICT's enabled reader/listener/users to have more choice, flexibility, and control over the communication process, in which they can now actively participate and cooperate. Those changes create significantly different relationship than used to exist between users than traditional media. In this communication model reader/listeners/users are empowered and advantaged, which



Picture 6 illustrating nature of contemporary fashion blogosphere.

engages them into communication, and encourage them to invest their time and eventually even money in it (p. 60). Going back to the results of the analysis of commenting

sections of those blogs, as the most of such an ardent commentators actively participating in those discussions, are bloggers themselves, including links to their blogs or posts, fashion blogosphere can be seen as an interconnected network with several dominant blogs which serve as a joining points, and connect blogs with the same interests, and eventually build up community of collaborative bloggers, as it is illustrated in Picture 6.

Though collaboration is not a quality which would be strange in a fashion industry, Johanna Blakey (2010) stated that as the trademark label is the only designed item which can be protected by copyrights collaboration is an inherent part of creative process, causing cyclical returns of certain trends shared by designers and brands among the entire industry. Between fashion blogs collaboration is expressed by the exchange of visualizations. No rarely analyzed bloggers mentioned another blogger as the original source of accompanied photos or videos. Furthermore in some cases analyzed bloggers mentioned another blogger as a coauthor of the posts.

However, it is important to note that related fashion bloggers are not the only consumers of those blogs, and that there are certainly users, following those blogs with completely different intentions. Liu and Donath (2006) claim that fashion blogs offer an alternative option for those who want to actively participate in fashion, as well as for those who want to actively consume fashion. To certain extent blogs open up many until now closed doors, and give practically anyone the opportunity to express latent creativity and feeling for fashion and style as well as the opportunity to consume fashion news in the empowered way in the sense of Picard's theory.

5.3. Social Media Presence and Potential of Public Relations

During the analysis the active social media presence was noticeable at all analyzed blogs. As it was said in the previous chapter, those bloggers are generally active on variety of social media, including recently emerged sites such as Flickr, Mashable, and Google plus. However prim still play Facebook and Twitter, where most of analyzed bloggers have profiles. The comparison of their Facebook profiles and Twitter accounts brought an interesting finding; even though Facebook profiles of analyzed bloggers generally reach high amounts of likes, their Facebook's walls contained posts, solely concerning their blogs, using even the very same headlines and photos, with the frequency of new posts reaching a span of several days or even weeks. Contrary on Twitter those bloggers tweeted several times a day, and their tweens concerned not only their blogs but especially random things of their interest and every-day experiences. Consequently, in comparing to the Facebook profiles, Twitter accounts of

those bloggers give the impression of more vivid interactive environment. Zhao and Rosson (2009) explain that Twitter teems with a number of advantages over Facebook – particularly the greater control over the dissemination of private information, the ability to effortlessly reach thematic information labeled by hashtags, and the possibility to unlimitedly follow and interact with anyone, without the need of his permission. By those features nature of Twitter corresponds to the nature of fashion blogs which can be reasonable explanation for observed dominance of Twitter over Facebook. Thus those fashion blogs and their Twitter accounts offer the unlimited access and the open alternative possibility for anybody to participate or consume fashion without the need of financial, material or any other kind of costs. Furthermore the openness of Twitter enables any user to follow and interact with any personas from high fashion, such as Marc Jacobs.

Marc Jacobs, an established designer of haute couture, and simultaneously the most common designer followed on Twitter by analyzed bloggers. This fact led into the deeper analysis of Marc Jacobs' social media presence. Particularly on Twitter Marc Jacobs is more active than his other colleagues from fashion industry (namely Karl Lagerfeld -Channel, Paul Gayten – Christian Dior, and Emanuele del Fabbro – Giorgio Armani, whose social media presence was analyzed as well in order to put Marc Jacobs into wider perspective). Similarly as analyzed blogger, rather than tweens, immediately concerning his brands and collections, he tweets about happenings from his every-day life (professional and private), and furthermore re-tweens other Twitter users, including fashion journalists, students, interns, and bloggers. Consequently Marc Jacobs built up community of 98. 567 followers consisting of fashion professional as well as random enthusiastic fans, whose Twitter activity has even influenced the creation process of the brand Marc by Marc Jacobs. As it was illustrated in the theoretical part of this thesis at the example of tween, concerning idea of plus sizes, which got so much attention and positive re-tweens that even Marc Jacobs and his team decided to start making plus sizes. Magazines Forbes (June 9th 2010) informed Marc Jacobs is not the only designer using the potential of social media to communicate with his audience, for instance Ann Taylor, the CEO of Kay Krill, stated

that they use social media and blogs to identify with customers, their preferences and needs, and that they have used the feedback from those media during the finishing process of their last collections. Juch and Stobbe (2005) add that blogs represent inexpensive but efficient communication tool for any kind of companies and corporations as the high degree of network enables rapid spread of information, reaching broad public and no rarely even mainstream media, which increasingly use blogs as their sources, representing public opinion. Furthermore blogs dispose by the opportunity to obtain specific target group, and thanks to the dialog and personal character of this medium, also valuable response and feedback. Bernoff (2009) conducted research on the sources of information that people trust, and found that 77% of people trust information which comes from person who they know. Part of his research, comparing credulity of different media, showed that trustworthiness of social networking sites (34%) and blogs (37%) is slowly reaching the trustworthiness of television (38%) and magazines (39%). Bernoff (2009) claims that as exchange of information at social networking sites, and not rarely also at blogs, is based on no anonymous relations, the level of credibility of these media has potential to increase within the near future. However he further notes that there is a trust issue at blogs which are being used as the tool of public relations and marketing, as they are presented as a company blogs, which raises a feeling of press release which is not credible for general public, and bloggers in particular as was stated in theoretical chapter of this thesis and further illustrated at the results of the research.

6. Limitations of the Research

Critical reflection over the research process and the evaluation of the results revealed limitations of this research, influencing the validity and reliability of the collected data. How was already mentioned in the methodology chapter, great limitation of a content analysis, which was chosen as the research technique for this thesis, is a subjective data interpretation. Even though the analysis primary focused on unquestionable features such as topics of posts, amount of photos, number of comments, as this research was conducted by the only one researcher there is a possibility that data collection, categorization and further interpretation was to some extent influenced by the subjective perceptions of the researcher. Regrettably the purpose of the research did not allow cooperation of more researchers, consulting during the entire process in order to increase validity of findings.

The second limitation of chosen technique and certainly also limitation of this particular research is the simplification of collected data. During the research variety of diverse fashion blogs have been analyzed but in order to find out general patterns common for all those blogs some specific qualities observed had to be omitted.

Even though the aim of this thesis was to find out character of an effective fashion blogs – the nature of authors, culture of space and social media presence, and their potential use in fashion public relation, marketing and brand management – it is vain to think that such an inductive content analysis would possible bring enough data to fully understand this problematic. However, within the three-month time frame more extensive analysis was not manageable. Because of this time period the research had to be limited to analysis of posts (of blogs included in Fisher´s ranking) published only within February, March and April 2012, including only first ten comments in commenting sections. Restriction also had to be done in the analysis of posts published in previous years - only one post in each year was analyzed - as well as in the analysis of social media presence of those blogs - only first twenty Twitter accounts and first twenty Facebook likes were deeper analyzed. Despite those limitations it is believed that enough data needed to provide valid and reliable findings were collected, and that the results of the research did show underlined patterns and common characteristic of

blogs included in Fisher's ranking. Nevertheless in order to explore this problematic more in detail content analysis could have been additionally combined with statistical data concerning those blogs, interviews with those bloggers, and/or survey among their followers. Additional techniques would provide different kind of data and enabled deeper exploration of this problematic, for instance; bloggers' personal criteria, influencing selection of topics of their posts, or motives of readers to follow particular blog.

This research certainly opened a space for variety of future researches. First, key results can be used as a hypothesis for quantitative research which would test their validity on greater amount of fashion blogs, and generalized those finding to the entire fashion blogosphere. Second, social media presence of those blogs opened several opportunities, for instance; exploration and explanation of the dominance of Twitter over Facebook among those bloggers and their followers, or case study of social media usage of Marc Jacobs, providing an explanation for his general popularity among those bloggers. Lastly, the identities of bloggers, particularly the places of their residences, opened a space for future research. As it was found despite the emergence of new fashion centers, bloggers from Fisher's ranking come from major cities only in United States and Europe. This fact addresses the questions such as; why the most efficient/popular fashion bloggers come only from big cities?, And how the development of new fashion centers will influence the fashion blogosphere in the near future?.

7. Conclusion

Within last five years ICT's went through massive development; amount of Facebook profiles has achieved twice as much than the number of United States citizens, amount of images hosted on Flickr is thousand times bigger than the museum collection Louvre, and 48 hours (two days!) of video content are being uploaded on You Tube every minute (Royal Pingdom, January 12th 2010). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) in 2008 75% of Internet surfers were users of social media, actively joining social network sites, following blogs, and uploading their own content. Naturally such a revolutionary trend has a great impact on society and on the way how society communicates. ICT's brought empowered passive users, brought interactivity, and changed the nature of interpersonal communication. Despite the rapid development and expansion of ICT's business sphere still hesitates to fully incorporate those technologies into their communication models as they are afraid of the loss of control over the information spread among the Web 2.0. Faulds and Mangold (2009) admit the justification of this concern, however they further object that ICT's should be rather than a threat of corporate communication perceived as a new hybrid element of promotion mix – they enable companies to talk to their customers (traditional sense of the promotion mix) as well as they enables customers to talk directly to each other (nontraditional sense of the promotion mix) – as a beneficial tool to contemporary marketing, public relations and advertisement.

Concretely blogs can be used a tool of self-presentation and self-disclosure, gathering information helpful to update employees, customers, business partners and others on important developments, and to improve the transparency of the company (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Of course the use of blogs in corporate communication does not come without potential risks; particularly the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the blog posts and negative comments in the discussion sections (OECD, 2007). Mangold and Faulds (2009) argue that those potential risks can be solved by shaping the discussions in a manner which is consistent with company

missions, and by providing engaging content and credible information, ideally combined with the support of classic forms of advertisement and offline media.

Particularly in fashion industry blogs can be used for identification with the customer and to consolidate strong brand image. Strong brand image as the concept, containing symbolic meaning, induced associations, ideas and attitudes of the brand, bringing additional value and brand differentiation (Lee et al., 2009) is essential in any industry, however in fashion it's significance is underlined by the lack of copyright protection. Lack of legislative, guaranteeing the authorship of designs forces designers and brands to maintain characteristic image and corporate culture, differentiating the brand from their competitors, adding additional value, and arising loyalty in their customers (Blankley, 2010). Moreover global market space and recent emergence of new fashion centers further underlined the significance of a strong brand image and corporate culture, and forced marketing to incorporate techniques capable to deal with sociocultural differences of local markets and customers. For those reasons it would be assumed that ICT's might be very assisting in the contemporary fashion industry, nevertheless from all features of Web 2.0 the only one commonly used among the entire industry is online purchase (Hines and Bruce, 2007).

Alongside the hesitance of fashion industry, there is a phenomenon which has indirectly great impact on fashion – fashion blogs. Blogging in general is a boom, concerning particularly young generation (90 per cent of bloggers are younger than 40) who used blogs to fulfill their recognition, entertainment, and cognition needs (Leung, 2009). Blogs as other ICT's are based on simplicity and efficiency, as well as many-to-many nature of communication specific for this media, bringing high levels of interactivity and space for discussion and sharing opinions (McMillan, 2006; Kuhn, 2007, Shao, 2009). Because of the nature of communication, blogs can be considered as a new electronic form of word-of-mouth (e-WOM) enabling a wide spread of valuable information among the blogosphere, or even as a new form of agenda setting (Farrel and Drezner, 2007). Simultaneously it is important to note that from 60 to 80 per cent of blogs are abandoned within the first month of their existence, and that most of the blogs are rarely pointed to by others, since they are read only by family,

friends, fellow students or co-workers of the author and thus stay practically without audience (Caslon, 2009), which limits the potential power and impact of blogs as a tool of public relations and marketing.

Fashion blogs are perceived as an alternative option for consuming and creating fashion as it is greatly privileged and it's accessing costs are high. Although electronic-based fashion is without barriers and practically anybody can express and spread his fashion ideas, it does not mean that there are no costs at all. Since the distribution of information online is low-cost, more time and effort must be invested into finding high quality information. Despite the fact that fashion industry hesitates to use ICT's fashion blogs became extremely popular, and regardless the dilemma if bloggers can or cannot be considered as a professionals, the fact is, that since 2006 when bloggers were officially invited to New York Fashion Week, they have become part of the fashion industry. Despite the qualities of blogs and the increasing significance of fashion bloggers there are only few fashion brands which incorporate them into their publicity tools. In November 2009 The Times informed about blog campaign Burberry as the very first campaign of fashion brand using this medium. Even though the campaign had enormous success and reached about two million page visits on an average 1,500 tweens every day (Leitch, November 14th 2009), it is important to note that Burberry is an exceptional user of those technologies among fashion industry. As brief analysis showed that majority of well-known designers or brands such as Christian Dior, Chanel or Versace still do not use blogs in any way.

To summarize current fashion, it can be seen as a space where designers and brands stand at the one side, facing the recently altered environment, and fashion blogs as a new phenomenon, standing at the other side. None of those elements exist in a vacuum, in fact they strongly depend and influence each other, although not directly. Despite the challenges of fashion blogging there are bloggers who did manage to find their audience, and provide content valuable enough that they even become part of fashion journalism, and thus can be perceived as a bridge between those two at the first glance separated worlds of virtual fashion and fashion industry. Which address questions, specifying the main aim of this thesis; who are these bloggers? and what

determines their success?, summarized in the central Research Question; “What determines an effective blog in the contemporary fashion blogosphere?”.

In order to answer those questions and to deeply explore contemporary effective fashion blogs – the identity of their authors, culture of spaces, and their potential use as a tool of fashion public relations and marketing - inductive content analysis was chosen as an optimal technique for this research. In order to collect valid reliable data the guidance of Elo and Kyngöis (2007) was followed, providing clear explanations of the technique, its practical use, expected nature of collected data as well as its eventual risks and limitations. For sampling the ranking list “The 10 best...Fashion bloggers” assembled by Alice Fisher, a style editor of The Observer, and published by The Observer and by the Guardian.co.uk on Sunday 21st February 2010 was chosen as the most suitable chart for this research. Even though the criteria of including particular blogs into this ranking were not found, this ranking was chosen was the reliability of its origin, optimal amount of included blogs, and the nature for included blogs, perfectly suiting to the aim of this research.

This research focused on three general areas; identity and background of bloggers, culture of spaces of those blogs, and actual or potential use of those blogs as a tool of fashion public relations and marketing. The first part of analysis summarized in Sub-Question 1; “Who are the bloggers within the top rank in the fashion blogosphere?” showed that that authors of analyzed blogs dispose by variety of backgrounds, however they collectively do not come from fashion industry, most of them are in their twenties and live in big cities in United States or Europe.

Second and the most extensive part of the analysis, focusing on culture of spaces of those blogs (Sub-Question 2) found that those blogs are based on simple clear layout, personal approach, and dominance of photos over written content. All information as well as accompanied images and videos originate exclusively from blogger himself, in some cases from another blogger, but never from official media source. Knowledge and information based on the first time experience together with authentic approach ensure the credibility of those blogs, and cause different approach and coverage of fashion than other media. Another key feature common for all

analyzed blogs was the presence of interactivity. Particularly commenting sections of those blogs dispose by the multi directional discussions of readers/followers of those blogs, exchanging their opinions. As most of active participants in those discussions are bloggers themselves, leaving links to their blogs, concerned with the similar or related thematic, great part of the readership of those blogs can be perceived as a community of bloggers interested in the same topic. Those communities do not interact only in commenting sections of analyzed blogs but also on variety of social network sites, principally on Twitter. Unlike other social network sites (Facebook in particular) Twitter's accounts of analyzed bloggers gave the impression of colorful interactions and multidirectional communication flow. Simultaneously to blogs Twitter disposes by the unlimited access which enables participations to anybody which might be one of the reasons why those bloggers tend to interact on Twitter more than on other social network sites.

The last part on the analysis explored the presence of public relations at those blogs in order to find out to what extent those blogs serve as a tool of fashion marketing and brand management (Sub-Question 3). The results showed that there is a very little content which can be consider as an obvious form of public relations. However it does not mean that those blogs do not dispose by the potential to be used as a tool of fashion marketing and brand management. As it was illustrated at the example of Marc Jacobs, ICT's in general can be very assisting as a source of public opinion. In case of blogs, thanks to their interactive environment and network connection of thematically related blogs, they can be used to reach specific (targeted) groups and get practically immediate feedback. The network structure would guarantee that valuable information would be widely spread over the particular blogosphere based on the principle word-of-mouth abundant on credibility and reliability. Thanks to the interactive nature and rich colorful discussions between those bloggers, commenting sections would provide feedback on particular message.

In the context of incorporating blogs into fashion public relation, marketing and brand management it is important to note that more efficient than launching company blog would be building up proper relationship with key bloggers. Concretely with those

bloggers, whose blogging interests and audience complement to the interests and customers of the brand, and who managed to established strong position among the particular blogosphere and serve there as a trustworthy gatekeepers. Even though bloggers generally do not use official sources and do not spread messages of public relations, it does not mean that they do not serve as an indirect tool of publicity. Many analyzed bloggers promote brands and their products indirectly (display the products but do not name the brand), or present them in different contexts and connections, but most of all bloggers display those products because of their personal enthusiasm, excitement and interest, which is desirable form of promotion for any brand. Moreover as many of those bloggers serve as an credible opinion leaders, it is about time for marketing and brand management to accept blogs as an another form of communication and powerful source of public opinion.

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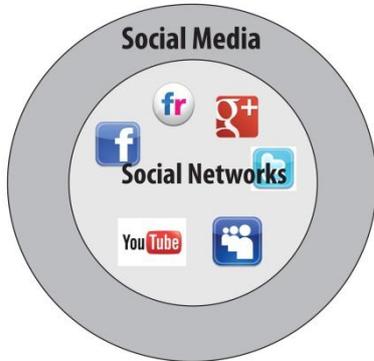
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8. Appendix A - Pictures

Picture A1 – The illustration of the relationship between the term social media and the term social networks.



Picture A2 – Adjustments of international HM campaign in Middle East.



Picture A3 - Adjustments of international HM campaign in Middle East.



Picture A4 – Blogger Tavi Gevinson at the New York Fashion Week – fall/winter 2012/2013.

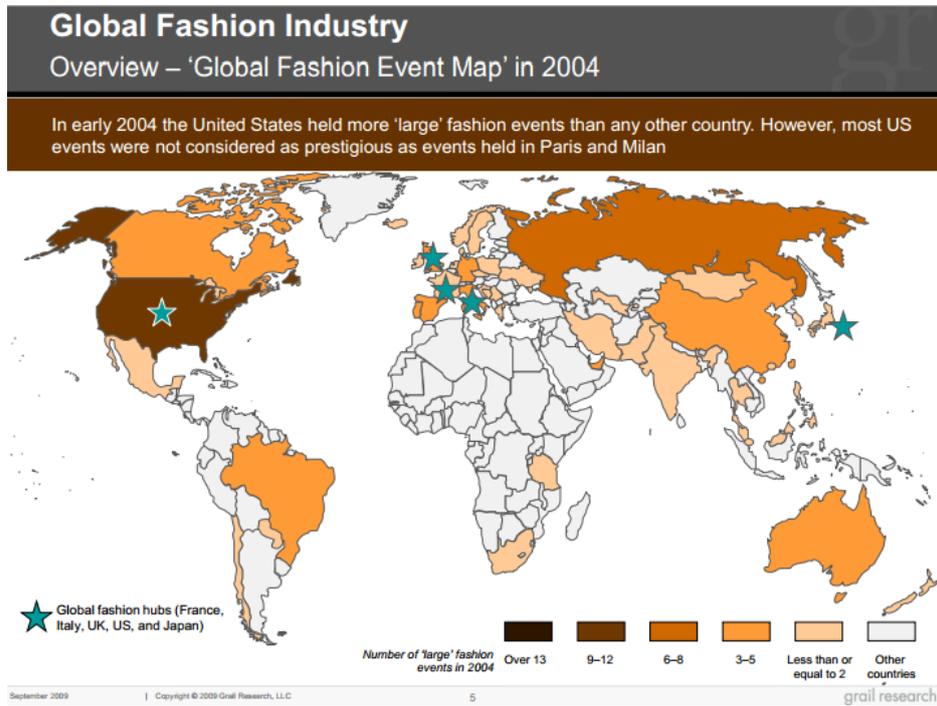


Picture A5 – Blogger Bryan Boy (third from left) and Tommy Ton (first from right) Milan Fashion Week – fall/winter 2012/2013.

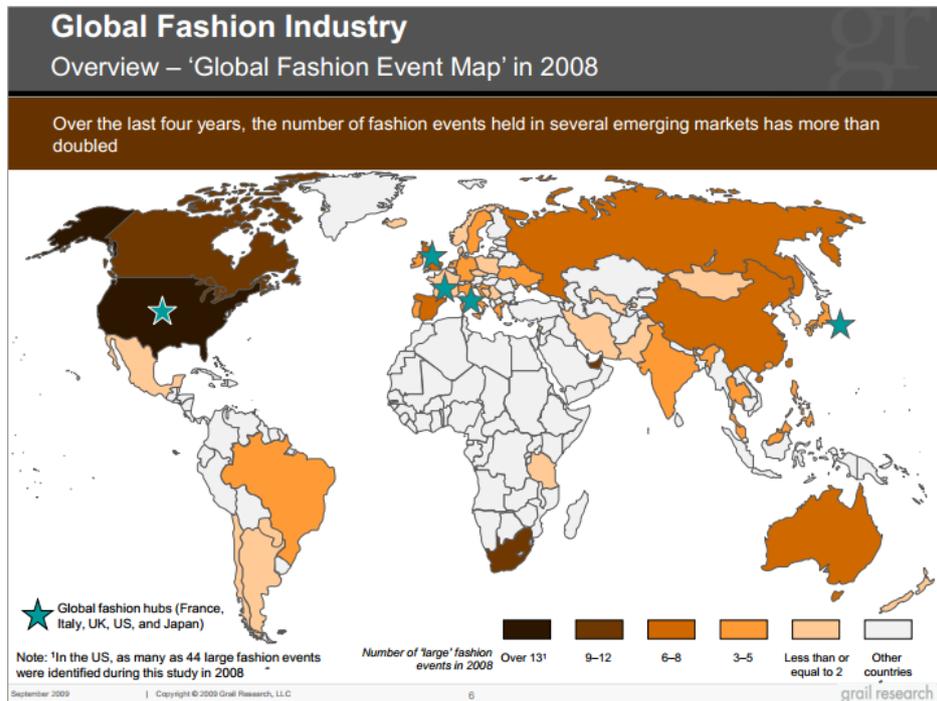


9. Appendix B – Graphs and Tables

Graph B1 - Global fashion market in 2004.



Graph B2 – Global fashion market in 2008.



List B3 – List of analyzed bloggers taken from the ranking compiled by Alice Fisher and published by The Guardian February 21st 2010.

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1. Tavi Gevinson - tavi-thenewgirlintown.blogspot.com
 2. Gary Card - garycardiology.blogspot.com
 3. Scott Schuman - thesartorialist.blogspot.com
 4. Susanna Lau - stylebubble.typepad.com
 5. David Fischer - highsnobiety.com
 6. Joe Sinclair and Katie Mackay - whatkatiewore.com
 7. Jessica Morgan and Heather Cocks - gofugyourself.celebuzz.com
 8. Gabi Gregg - youngfatandfabulous.com
 9. Mikael Colville-Andersen - copenhagencyclechic.com
 10. Will Boehlke - asuitablewardrobe.dynend.com
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