

Transparency in the Fashion Industry:
Social Media Use in Public Relations Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how the instruments of social media in public relations strategies are creating a measurable transparency within the fashion industry. Similar to fashion trends, social media tools are unpredictable and innovative, while constantly being improved upon and utilized. As more fashion professionals take to online media sources, interrelated facets that connect designers to their clients and customers are transforming the industry. These tools have created accessibility into the industry, engaging and informing the public and fashion consumers of industry news. More specifically, this study investigates the benefits of social media on designer and brand reputation, creating careers for emerging fashion bloggers in the industry, and changing the way consumers connect with fashion designers.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Focuses on the public relations for various key players of the fashion industry and how current developments of social media contribute to the growth of transparency into the industry. Interactivity between designers and their consumers has transformed the structure of the industry by incorporating suggested feedback into the creative process of this art. “Social media’s effect on brand and corporate reputation can be instantaneous and far-reaching, [where] the rise of personal publishing, practitioners need no longer rely on media for transmitting those messages and reaching their public” (Taylor, 2010, p. 209).

Traditionally, the fashion industry has had an exclusivity that fostered product output to be created behind closed doors and then embedded into societal culture when debuted each season. Through the incorporation of social media tactics within the public relations profession, consumer visibility into the industry has facilitated a new strategy for designers to remain ahead of the trend.

Background of the Problem

There is a limitation on published sources detailing studies that are conducive for public relations strategies within the fashion industry, and mainly focuses on the impact that social media has on the profession and practices in the public relations field. Where social media is a necessary instrument to achieve a successful public relations strategy in that it “prevails over traditional new releases and media kits” (Taylor, 2010, p. 209).

The fashion industry along with the new advances in social media technology, are analogous to the ever-changing fashion trends. And public relations practitioners within this industry must develop a strategy that incorporates a standard structure with the adaptation of social media interactive outlets to achieve a brand or designer's core objective.

With the growing development of established relationships between designers and clients, it is critical to conduct research on the utility of online mediums as public relations tools by compiling professional insight on the transparency into the fashion industry.

Purpose of the Study

By investigating the impact of social media on the strategy of public relations, fashion professionals will benefit from the interactive relationships formed with consumers of the industry. This new development and implemented trend of technology has created innovative online medium tools, changing society's perception and influence on the fashion industry. Traditionally, this exclusive industry stood on a pedestal with the power to dictate upcoming fashion trends, however, yet today's shift in culture makes social media a necessary tool for fashion public relations and creating brand-to-client relationships.

The fashion is cognizant to art, in which to be an artist or art critic, one can emerge without any formal education or training. The fashion industry recognizes and encourages designers and stylists to self-promote and to rise into a fighting position on the runway. With hundreds of self-identified fashion bloggers, these individuals are able

to not only share their opinion on the fashion news, they are establishing a mode of communication from fashion designers and brands to their consumers. This study investigates the impact that social media has on fashion to provide information and data regarding the development of transparency established within this industry.

Setting for the Study

This study will be conducted as part of the data collection for the completion of a Senior Project at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Interviews will be executed with three fashion industry experts of differing facets: fashion public relations professional, designer, and style blogger. The professionals will each be asked questions formatted based on their specific work fields. The interview content is based on a questionnaire structured to answer corresponding research questions and incorporate additional information to understand the use of social media as a public relations tool in the fashion industry.

Research Questions

This study was structured around the following five research questions that were formulated to answer unfounded holes in published scholarly articles and literature regarding the use of social media as a catalyst to the transparency into the fashion industry. Based on the gathered information resourced from published literature, each research question was designed in order to discover additional data that will give valid insight and recommendations to professionals in the public relations field within the fashion industry.

1. How has social media outlets changed the public relations profession?
2. How does public relations for designers differ from that of fashion bloggers?
3. What benefits do social media tools have on the fashion industry and its consumers?
4. Why are fashion designers, media outlets, and emerging stylists taking to social media?
5. How does social media create a measureable transparency into the fashion industry?

Organization of Study

The study is organized based on 5 successive chapters. Chapter 1 details the investigated problem, its background, and the purpose of the study. Chapter 2 describes social media trends and its influence on the changing structure of the fashion industry. Chapter 3 explains the methodology used to collect data for the study. Chapter 4 includes the gathered data from interviewed sources that is analyzed and compared to data retrieved from current literature based on the original research questions. Chapter 5 serves as a conclusive summary of the study incorporated with recommendations for professionals within the fashion industry to see its transparency as a benefit of social media.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The compilation of published literature focuses on the impact that social media tools have on public relations strategies, the interrelationship social media has with the fashion industry, and the transparency it produces into the industry.

Social Media in the Public Relations Profession

“Social media—a two-way form of media through which users construct personal identities through self-presentation and dialogue—have received extensive attention for the way it empowers the public relations function” (Smith, 2010, p. 329). Social media users utilize all outlets of online media forms as integrated tools for communication, which in this “new media, the distinction between consumer and producer tends to blur...[where] users [have the] ability to take control over production and distribution of content” (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010, p. 350).

According to Taylor (2010) “social media’s effect on brand and corporate reputation can be instantaneous and far-reaching” (p. 209). The influential leaders of subordinates within a group tend to value “social media for themselves personally,” and public relations strategies should instill a “motivation when trying to cultivate” followers (Sweetser, 2011, p. 427). Phillips (2008) explains how “social media has such an immense influence on people because of the human psychology in people’s ‘need to belong’” where they “define themselves through the messages they transmit to others...through the goods and practices that they possess and display” (p. 79).

Public relations help an organization and its publics adapt in a mutual-relationship, and “use social media to increase interactions with publics through a steady flow of inputs and outputs” (Smith, 2010, p. 330).

Social media is transforming the traditional structure of public relations strategies as it has forced practitioners “to adopt new technologies and to adapt to new sociological realities” with a new ambition “to belong to a large number of groups rather than to broadcast in an online group with a large number of members” (Phillips, 2008, p. 82). According to Smith (2010) public relations leaders look at these online “virtual platforms for interactivity and information exchange where issues are debated and defined...users collaborate in content creation, are proactive in searching information, and value control in social media participation” (p. 330).

Difference in Public Relations for Designers vs. Fashion Bloggers

According to Noricks (2010) “Fashion Public Relations Specialists and Publicists help apparel companies and retail stores build and maintain a favorable public image.” Fashion public relations strategies for designers and brands includes: working with the media, an updated Press kit with press release pitch and a fashion photography look book, scheduled media tours/desk sides, celebrity credit promotion, cause marketing, fashion events regarding runway shows and Fashion Week and sales appointments (Noricks).

The emergence of fashion bloggers “had an enormous impact on fashion, [and] affected everything from print publishing to how brands market themselves online” (Lee, 2009). With the benefits of social media as a public relations tool, fashion bloggers have created a unique celebrity-type following for them.

“The social Web has removed the gatekeepers of an industry that was notoriously hard to penetrate and build a name in” (Lee, 2009). An article in the “Financial Times notes that being a style blogger is a perfectly respectable career for someone in the fashion industry” (Lee). The success of these bloggers is due to the content quality, and “while each is unique, they’ve built a cult following around their areas of expertise and passion” (Lee).

The Internet provides these fashion blogs with a capacity to trend globally simply from a generated “buzz” from online fashion-interested consumer followers. The magnitude of followers that these blogs accumulate implies the talent of these fashion style-bloggers, which have “earned industry recognition” (Lee, 2009).

Described by Lee (2009) fashion brands and designers—Dolce & Gabanna, Burberry, Alexander McQueen—along with leading fashion publications such as *Vogue* have recognized talented bloggers such as: Gala Darling, 13-year-old Tavi, Scott Schuman of the ‘Sartorialist’ and Garance Dore. With their largely developed network of followers, the fashion industry professionals have taken notice by requesting these bloggers to “participate in fashion design collaborations and receive front-row, international Fashion Week seats” (Lee). In “How the fashion industry is embracing social media,” the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) and IMG “decided to let bloggers populate the front rows [at New York Fashion Week], and have established Wi-Fi areas instead of [restricting] their coverage” (Prabhakar, 2010).

Whereas social media tools are resources that work most efficiently when interconnected, the components within the Fashion Industry have collaborated together too. According to Noricks (2010) “with fashion blogging gone mainstream, both brands

and bloggers are looking for opportunities [above] the traditional email pitch [by] working with each other to produce and curate content.” For instance, the founder of the photography blog ‘The Sartorialist,’ Scott Schuman was the requested photographer for Burberry’s “Art of the Trench” campaign based on the brand’s understanding of Schuman and his “style of taking photos” (Prabhakar, 2010). The collaboration of the brand’s reputation with Schuman’s photographic vision, “allowed [us] to communicate with the customer on a whole new and very real level” (Prabhakar).

In addition, emerging digital trends has influenced the public relations practices for fashion brands by incorporating the use of style bloggers as curators. Where as described by Noricks (2010) brands are launching self-titled blogs produced by employed existing bloggers. These brand blogs capitalize on the built-in audience network associated to the individual style-blogger, upon its launch.

Benefits of Social Media on the Fashion Industry and its Consumers

“In the fashion world, the use of social media is not merely a marketing strategy but it focuses on studying and anticipating fashion behaviors” (Sanand, 2011). With the emergence of social media, brands were scared “[it] would tarnish brand image” due to an inability to translate associated feelings to a brand into “online traction” (Lee, 2009). But as the influence of social media developed within the fashion industry, interactivity helped to facilitate brand to client relationships.

Kelly Cutrone, owner of the public relations agency People’s Revolution, says, “People want to feel connected. It’s one thing if you are a luxury brand and have been around for 60 years and can weather the retail storm...but if you are a new

brand that's just starting out, innovating through social media is crucial”

(Prabhakar, 2010).

Lee (2009) detailed how “the fashion industry adopted social media as a marketing platform to reach their customers online and reignite brand passion and customer loyalty.”

According to Lee (2009) the establishment of communities—social networks, forums, wikis and blogs—spurred communication between brands and their consumers. Where outlets such as “Facebook and Twitter are now among the most valuable tools for brands to monitor consumer sentiment and provide real-time customer service in the fashion industry” (Lee). Both these media sources can be used for mass marketing, but niche communities developed by fashion brands serve as “their own social network or invitation-only communities” that “sponsor branded contests [that] create opportunities to develop brand affinity and establish relationships with the next generation of shoppers” (Lee).

Online media tools give designers an opportunity to capitalize on user-generated content and the benefits from social engagement. According to Lee (2009) “Crosby Noricks, founder of a top fashion public relations blog, has noticed more brands realizing the collective power of their customers’ network by encouraging fan contributions” of contests and polls.

Additionally, social media trends are constantly improving and developing, and just as the fashion industry must remain in stride with transforming style trends, to be successful the industry must constantly update its social media tools. The improvement

of smartphones and the iPhone, mobile applications developed by brands allow users to shop brand sales, receive style tips, and customize fashion trend news feeds (Lee, 2009).

As an industry, the development of geo-location technology has transformed the structure of “fashion industry events.” Agathou (2011) detailed the WWD Magic fashion tradeshow event and its use of geo-location technology that provided “a meaningful way for brands to connect with shoppers...at the point of purchase.” This new technology gives shoppers the “ability to check-in and find tips, recommendations, offers and prizes at the retailers they love,” which will result in strong “brand loyalty and spread word of mouth” (Agathou). This use of social media interaction tools during tradeshow will “impact the buying and selling cycle for the benefit of both retailers and designer brands” (Agathou).

According to Prabhakar (2010) “by letting the public behind the fashion influencer curtain, [designers] have created and connected to an entirely new audience.” The social media outlets allow designers to “capitalize on the 400 million Facebook users and more than 22 million Twitter users,” which provide “marketing capabilities [that] an advertising budget cannot buy” (Prabhakar).

Social Media: The New Trend in Fashion

Before the use of social media—fashion designers, media outlets and emerging stylists—all facets of the fashion industry were separated. According to Crosby Noricks (2010) the “evolution of editorial retailers and brands” is the result of “digital public relations trends” and the “transition between brands and publishers.”

Fashion houses, designers and retailers “are tweeting, blogging and updating their profiles in an effort to mold their brand personalities on real-time global platforms” (Stephenson, 2009). The designers’ use of social media tools to post videos, commercials, behind-the-scenes footage and fashion shows, serves as “a human voice for the brand” (Stephenson). According to Phillips (2008) “We humans are a complex blend of private and social selves and the textured interconnections offered by social media provide a compelling platform.” In association to Phillips’ psychology of social media, fashion brands use an equation of online mediums to provide consumers with an insight into the differing perspectives that make a brand. For instance, designers not only post coverage regarding the brand, they share photos and personal commentary of their personal life and of their company’s activities via social media. Designer, Charlotte Ronson says, “I hope that my relationship with my customers will become more intimate as they get to know me beyond my designs” (Stephenson).

Fashion brands and retailers are taking to social media outlets to facilitate real-time and genuine relationships with consumers. Alex Bolen, Chief Executive Officer of Oscar de la Renta, says, “Customers can feel like they are part of the brand’s extended family, and therefore the brand itself, [and] the interactive element further deepens that relationship” (Stephenson, 2009).

Social media outlets provide a benefit that “gives brands a chance to be part of a dialogue about their own companies” (Stephenson, 2009). These tools, such as Facebook’s launch of a company page platform creates a “powerful brand advantage [where] the company is now in the middle of a two-way communication with its

consumer” (Stephenson). Social media gives designers the control over releasing their new looks and designs in an image reflective of its integrity and vision.

According to Indvik (2011) Burberry capitalizes on the benefits this control by developing an online experience “on its own behalf [that] doesn’t detract from or diminish the role of traditional media, but provides another channel for consumers to experience the brand.” The London-based fashion house, Burberry, established itself “as much a media-content company as a design company,” through its “3D holographic runway show” and its staged “Tweetwalk” that “premiered every look on Twitter moments before [it] hit the runway” (Indvik). According to Indvik, Burberry’s Chief Creative Officer Christopher Bailey said, “The runway show was ‘a stage from which Burberry was able to broadcast its own story directly to consumers on multiple platforms.’”

The real-time interactivity between designers, bloggers and fashion-oriented individuals has forced fashion media outlets, magazines, to expand their creative thinking when filling print issues. The co-editor of Fashionista.com says, “Magazines need to figure out a way to cover the shows more uniquely in print because by the time the September issue comes out, no one cares anymore” (Prabhakar, 2010).

According to Noricks (2010) just as “brands are creating their own magazines,” publishers are utilizing their online outlets to “editorialize retail.” Online media outlets no longer serve as an extension of the print magazines, but rather as an interactive source for constant fashion news coverage. Members of online style networks are becoming the “new professionals” of the industry, where posted images serve as sources by major brands as well as online social media outlets (Noricks).

Social media in the fashion industry has facilitated the development of “social fashion,” where technology is applied to support art (DiMauro, 2011). This type of fashion utilizes emerging self-identified stylists and fashion bloggers as part of a brand’s merchandising strategy.

A leading brand that illustrates “social fashion” is the Spanish clothing and accessories company, Zara International. Zara is built on the idea of “being ‘fashion imitators’ and are well-known for their ability to spot trends” (DiMauro, 2011). With the influence of social media, the brand company launched ‘Zara People!’ a web site where “Zara selected the best [personal uploaded photo] and features the actual real-people photos on their website as part of their merchandising strategy” (DiMauro). “This example of ‘Social fashion’ uses crowd-sourcing together with the art of curating to encourage self-expression, while still maintaining the control needed to define and maintain [the] brand” (DiMauro).

Social media technologies provide emerging stylists, bloggers and designers a fashion outlet with a capacity to reach globally. “Social Media is Fashion’s Newest Muse,” an article from “Forbes.com,” discussed social media outlets as an opportunity for professional growth and recognition for emerging designers, stylists and bloggers (Bourne, 2010). According to Bourne, web sites and large retailers are using social media outlets as a source for discovering potential fashion designers. Daria Shualy, a former fashion editor, “launched the website ‘Sense of Fashion’ that is founded upon the intention of helping [independent] designers sell their [designs] and better communicate with potential customers” (Bourne). ‘Sense of Fashion’ is an example of how both

designers and stylists can create a career and generate recognition of their work through the use of web outlets.

Transparency into the Fashion Industry

For years, the tradition of the Fashion Industry was that of a secret, and unspoken quiet image that never shared what its proceeding step or upcoming trend might be. Presently, “journalists, fashion incubators, retail gurus and people interested in the industry are weighing in on a topic via social media that has notoriously shut its doors to anyone deemed an outsider” (Prabhakar, 2010).

As seen by Lyons’ communication theory (2009), “communimetrics provides a model of measurement as communication bolsters transparency and ease of interpretation without sacrificing validity or reliability” (p. 32). “Measurement as communication accepts that as humans our ability to understand complex phenomena is facilitated by experience and feedback...[and] recognizes and integrates the interactive and iterative aspects of human learning” (Lyons, p. 9). This theory of communication can be applied to the fashion industry, where social media serves as an interactive channel for consumers to voice their feedback and preferences to the involved brands. According to Lyons, “communimetrics is designed to make thinking processes transparent,” which can directly transpire into the fashion industry where online media has developed a way for consumers to enter into the “thinking processes” of designers, buyers, fashion print media, and retailers (p. 17).

Measurement outputs regarding the communication in “human service enterprise settings,” such as that within the fashion industry, “should be unambiguous, relevant,

easy to translate into intervention planning recommendations, and accessible to providers, consumers, and policy makers” (Lyons, 2009, p. 29). These principles of communimetrics provide a theory for measuring transparency produced from the interaction of communication. When applied to the fashion industry, based on the theory of communimetrics, social media has created an interactivity that has given a transparency to the industry based on the establishment of relationships between fashion brands and their consumers.

Social media is changing the structure and breaking the traditional thinking of fashion professional by providing a transparency into the fashion industry. According to Prabhakar (2010) designer Diane von Furstenberg is an advocate for transparency in the industry where she sees her online and social media presence as “a very organic way for us to communicate online.” Similarly, the Chanel brand pushes its designer, Karl Lagerfeld, to connect with its customers through social media use, which allows the brand “to connect with their customers and monetize on it through awareness, loyalty and engagement” (Prabhakar).

Fashion has transpired due to the adaptation of social media by “encouraging discourse on designers and providing real-time feedback on the looks that work, and the ones that don’t” (Driscoll, 2009). The innovation of the social Web has put fashion designers and retailers in intimate relationships “with customers on social networking sites, [where] many have adopted an ‘ask and you shall receive’ policy” with their design outputs (Bourne, 2010). Web sites “can facilitate relationships through: usefulness of information, feedback loops, ease of interface, conservation of visitors an generation of

return visits...[that] make social media sites like blogs optimum for relationship cultivation” (Smith, 2010, p. 330).

According to Bourne (2010) former fashion editor Daria Shualy idealizes social media in its ability to “create a closeness between customers and designers.” Shualy says, “There is something about fashion that comes across as inaccessible...[but] that’s all changing, [and] today consumers are expecting direct access and a say” (Bourne). Discussed by Bourne there is an “exact correlation on the back end for designers, the more they are interacting with their customers, the more they are selling.”

However, it is important for brands to be “both a reflection of a designer while remaining open to the suggestions of customers” and not lose sight of their own vision and integrity (Bourne, 2010). Social media platforms will keep evolving, proliferating and gaining influence. “The fashion world is shifting, needs are changing and people’s shopping habits are changing...consumers on social media are part of the overall fashion conversation” (Stephenson, 2009).

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter details the methods used to collect data for the study through the use of data sources with professional background in the fashion industry, collection and presentation of the data.

Data Sources

The data compilation for this study mainly focused on interview responses from professional experts in the industry. A fashion public relations practitioner, designer, and style blogger were interviewed based on conformance questionnaires tailored to each field of work. These differing questionnaires were specifically designed to cultivate different perspectives in answering the original research questions regarding the use of social media and the transparency of the fashion industry. The fashion-focused public relations professional selected for the interview was

Participants.

Dana Dramov, publicist and partner of Josh Goldfarb, Inc., a boutique agency based in New York City, NY. The fashion designer selected was Heather Gardner the owner and jewelry designer of her company. The style blogger chosen was Elizabeth Devcich.

Interview Design.

The following questions were carefully tailored based on the interest of the experts interviewed, and served as data sources for the study:

Public Relations Professional

1. How would you, as a public relations professional in the fashion industry, describe the impact that social media has on a public relations strategy for a client?
2. How do you think, have these online mediums changed the way consumers view the output of a designer or brand?
3. What are the disadvantages of relying “too much” on social media as a public relations strategy?
4. With style and fashion bloggers gaining more recognition and publicity, what is your take on fashion designers and their brands collaborating with bloggers as a part of a public relations strategy?
5. DVF has always been an advocate for more transparency into the industry where real-time dialogue between designer and client is created, do you think this new correspondence and relationship is beneficial or does it take away from the mystery and excitement of fashion?

Fashion Designer

1. How would you, as a fashion designer, describe the impact that social media has on creating a brand’s reputation and a viable following of consumers?
2. What outlets of social media are used to promote your brand and connect with your consumers?

3. With style and fashion bloggers gaining more recognition and publicity, what is your take on fashion designers and their brands collaborating with bloggers?
4. How has online mediums changed the way you present upcoming seasonal collections into the industry?
5. DVF has always been an advocate for more transparency into the industry where real-time dialogue between designer and client is created, do you think this new correspondence and relationship is beneficial or does it take away the mystery and excitement of fashion?

Style Blogger

1. How would you, as a style blogger, describe the beneficial impact that social media has provided for up and coming stylists in the fashion industry?
2. How has the trend and popularity of online media outlets opened up opportunities for you after starting your style blog?
3. As a fashion-motivated blogger and individual, what type of media outlets do you prefer when looking for news in the industry or upcoming seasonal collections?
4. Describe how social media has changed the structure of the industry?
5. What benefits or downfalls does this new type of insight and relationship into the industry have on the creativity and innovation of fashion?

Data Collection

The data collection methodology for this study was three individual personal interviews with each expert. The interviews were held during February 2012 for a duration of approximately 30 minutes each. “Since the intensive fieldwork can be time-consuming, the ethnographic approach can adopt a clinical perspective, where qualitative interviews are the main research instrument” (Heding, Knudtzen, & Bjerre, 2009, p. 67). The conducted interviews asked the selected experts questions from a questionnaire specific to their profession of interest to provide responses of differing perspectives to the original research questions while discovering the impact that social media has on public relations strategies in the fashion industry.

Data Presentation

During the interview, the data was collected and documented through the use of audio recordings using a digital voice recorder along with additional written information to clarify quotes and prevent misconstruing assumptions based on the context of the responses. This method presents the data in an objective and informative way, and ensures the validity and accountability of these data sources.

Delimitations

This type of interview method used for data collection creates limitations for this study. The conducted interviews with three different professionals in the fashion industry were asked to give personal responses, based on their field of work, to provide insight into the impact that social media has on the growing transparency of the industry. The

assumption that the responses are qualitative and opinion-based may provide limitations to this study.

Furthermore, while this data collection was conducted during the industry's New York Fashion Week, the interviews with Dana Dramov and Heather Gardner were conducted by phone. With New York City being the heart of fashion and the industry, the possibility of an in-person interview with the selected experts was not feasible nor could be accommodated for the study. Additionally, the interview with style blogger, Elizabeth Devcich, was performed via email correspondence due to her present location in Rome. The restrictions of phone and email interviews created potential limitations of clarity and meaning based on the lack of non-verbal communication and barrier of interaction. Additionally, when inquiring about scheduling an interview with the experts, it was difficult to receive any interest or responses from those in the industry. The lack of correspondence forced the study to take a more local approach and contact independent experts presently emerging into the industry.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Chapter 4 incorporates background descriptions of the interviewed professionals selected for the study along with each of their individual responses to their specified questionnaires. The collected data information will be organized according to the corresponding original research question that it answers, in the form of direct quotations and paraphrased ideas. The chapter will include an analysis of the responses compared with the accumulated existing literature on social media as a public relations tool and the measure of transparency in the fashion industry.

Description of Participating Experts:

Fashion-based Public Relations Professional.

The public relations fashion industry professional selected for the study was Dana Dramov. Dramov has served as publicist and partner at Josh Goldfarb, Incorporated with partner and owner, Josh Goldfarb for two years. The New York City based boutique agency started in 2007 and specializes in public relations, marketing, sales, and brand development with a focus on personality-driven and contemporary fashion brands and designers worldwide. A San Francisco native, Dramov interned at multiple fashion publications such as *Vogue* and *Elle Magazine* after graduating from the architecture school at the University of Southern California.

Fashion Designer.

Heather Gardner was the fashion designer expert selected for the study. Gardner is the owner and jewelry designer of her self-titled business, Heather Gardner, which

started in 2006. Located in Malibu, California, her jewelry business has gained popularity and appreciation from major fashion publications such as *Glamour*, *In Style*, *Lucky*, and *C Magazine*, as well as the interest of celebrity stars for red carpet and social events.

Style Blogger.

The fashion style blogger chosen for the study was Elizabeth Devcich. Since starting in January 2012, Devcich currently serves as a “style guru” contributor to Amy Levin’s created fashion blog, “College Fashionista.” Operating since 2009, Levin created a style blog site that allows campus style gurus to share the latest college fashion styles found on their campus. Devcich is a student at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, CA expecting to graduate with her a Journalism degree in spring 2012. Her interest and specialty in the fashion industry is spurred from her past experiences of interning at Macys.com and at Glam Media. As the past Marketing Manager for Cal Poly’s *Mustang Daily*, Devcich translate her education and skills as a Journalist into her published posts as a “style guru.”

Questionnaires

Each expert was asked to respond to carefully tailored questions based on their specific field of profession:

Public Relations Professional.

1. How would you, as a public relations professional in the fashion industry, describe the impact that social media has on a public relations strategy for a client?

Question #1 was asked to find out how public relations strategies has changed due to the rise of social media popularity. The question was designed to gain perspective on what public relations professionals think of culture's obsession with online mediums.

- Dana Dramov: "I think that social media can be a really good thing and a really bad thing in some way, but in terms of positive impact, if a celebrity were to tweet a picture of themselves wearing an item from one of my clients...it's giving a personal endorsement...giving their personal seal of approval on that item" (Appendix A).

2. How do you think, have these online mediums changed the way consumers view the output of a designer or brand?

Question #2 was tailored to investigate the changing value and perception a consumer may have of a brand due to the direct access that social media provides. This question is extremely important to incorporate because it looks at how consumers can view private look books of designer's upcoming collections and what in the past had been privileged knowledge, is now public knowledge. It asks the public relations viewpoint on how this access is beneficial or necessary to the integrity and value of the brand.

- "A look book is an opportunity for a designer, her/himself, to show the style and the attitude of the collection in their own eyes. I think that having a place that they can put that out there via Twitter or Facebook or their own website or blog, is something that

designers probably really enjoy because they can be in their line of voice” (Appendix A).

3. What are the disadvantages of relying “too much” on social media as a public relations strategy?

Question #3 looks at the negative effects that social media can cause when users rely too heavily on its content. This question provides a valuable realization that social media’s ability to open doors and enable uncensored dialogue between the industry and its consumers can negatively affect the perceptions of those individuals that follow the trends and fall into believing and supporting invalid “noise” and opinion. Social media is a trend that has positioned itself as the media tool to blur all separating lines and its encompassing influence and lack of restrictions has the ability to help and destroy established industries.

- “[Social media] can really hurt a designer. People have power, so it’s just giving the people the opportunity to comment and voice their opinions of the fashion industry...making all this input of which we are supporting or not supporting things...[and] not every opinion is worth being heard” (Appendix A).
- “90% of [bloggers] should just go away because there is so much noise and there’s so much opinion that comes from no education or no understanding of the industry...but right now we’re just inundated, and fashion is one of those things that anyone can comment on because we wear clothes so you feel entitled” (Appendix A).

4. With style and fashion bloggers gaining more recognition and publicity, what is your take on fashion designers and their brands collaborating with bloggers as a part of a public relations strategy?

Question #4 was created to gain insight from the personal perspective of a public relations professional on what the benefits and costs are for a designer or brand to collaborate with a style blogger. This question is particularly important because the vision of a designer is translated through his or her pieces of the collection, which is represented by the integrity and reputation of the established brand. The incorporation of a style blogger's personal reputation and included network of followers to a brand has the ability to expand its target market but can also tarnish it.

- “From a PR standpoint, if [bloggers] have followers, if people like them, if they're going to bring an interest, if they're going to bring a hype, that's desirable and that's something that is hard to pay for” (Appendix A).
 - “It's annoying to have someone who is unqualified talk or say or do things on behalf of the industry when they really do not even know much. I think people like Anna Wintour and real professionals within the industry, who really understand it in its total complete form look down on those types of collaborations because they aren't professionals” (Appendix A).
5. DVF has always been an advocate for more transparency into the industry where real-time dialogue between designer and client is created, do you

think this new correspondence and relationship is beneficial or does it take away from the mystery and excitement of fashion?

Question #5 was designed to measure the transparency occurring within the fashion industry. This question focuses on the growing dialogue established between the industry and its consumers, which facilitates a new structure and type of relationship. This idea of transparency has become a growing trend that designers are looking to expand on and use as a benefit for their brands.

- “I think the fact that you can have an open dialogue through social media is...the great thing about social media. So I think that it creates this open dialogue where people give their personal touch and their personal endorsement on products which is good”

(Appendix A).

Fashion Designer.

1. How would you, as a fashion designer, describe the impact that social media has on creating a brand’s reputation and a viable following of consumers?

Question #1 was designed to gain a fashion designer’s perspective on how the use of social media and its ability to facilitate real-time dialogue with designers’ consumers has changed the way brands are creating their reputations. Online mediums such as Facebook, web pages, Twitter, have allowed brands to stay on trend and remain a high priority in customers’ minds. This question is to learn how brands and designers are utilizing these benefits that come from the use of social media, while also preserving its integrity and core values.

- “With social media, it’s really important for me to...keep in touch with my customers, it’s an important way for them to know the little things that they would never have known without [it]” (Appendix B).

2. What outlets of social media are used to promote your brand and connect with your consumers?

Question #2 is to learn which online mediums are most effective and useful to designers. Social media is constantly changing and the popularized websites and applications gain a similar flood of interest as if a seasonal trend in fashion, and it is important for those brands that are online, are active and stay updated with highly followed online mediums.

- “I just have my Facebook account that is connected to my Twitter account” (Appendix B).
- “I think that a lot of research has to be done [to find] the most effective ways to use social media to [be effective]...I think that there is a fine line to the etiquette of using social media for businesses” (Appendix B).
- “Those businesses that know how to do it properly are going to stand out against the businesses that don’t” (Appendix B).

3. With style and fashion bloggers gaining more recognition and publicity, what is your take on fashion designers and their brands collaborating with bloggers?

Question #3 was created to gain insight from the personal perspective of a fashion designer on what the benefits and costs are for a designer or brand to collaborate with a style blogger. This question is particularly important because the vision of a designer is translated through his or her pieces of the collection, which is represented by the integrity and reputation of the established brand. The incorporation of a style blogger's personal reputation and included network of followers to a brand has the ability to expand its target market but can also tarnish it.

- To help one of my biggest clients, I pitched a promotional idea, that they could post on their associated blog, to do a giveaway with a designer interview to help my customers with the transition of the brand name change...and it helps my client and it helps my company and it helps my customers (Appendix B).
4. How has online mediums changed the way you present upcoming seasonal collections into the industry?

Question #4 was formulated to gain insight on the structural change in the way new upcoming collections are promoted and released into the public. The basic groundwork of the industry follows the structure of new season, new collection, runway shows, sales appointments, and Fashion Week. However, designers are utilizing the endless outlets that social media offers, and are forced to think beyond the ordinary limits of promotion to remain a competing brand within the industry.

- “There are different types of customers with different tastes...just how some people like holding a magazine in their hands versus looking at a magazine online...or even what keep people looking for what’s next on the runway versus a Facebook posting” (Appendix B).
 - “Always looking for ways to promote using social media...you need to be really creative and cost effective, so I think that it’s really great for designers that are doing that” (Appendix B).
5. DVF has always been an advocate for more transparency into the industry where real-time dialogue between designer and client is created, do you think this new correspondence and relationship is beneficial or does it take away the mystery and excitement of fashion?

Question #5 was designed to measure the transparency occurring within the fashion industry along with learning about DVF’s influence for this growing trend in the industry. This question focuses on the dialogue established between the industry and its consumers, which facilitates a new structure and type of relationship. This idea of transparency has become a growing trend that designers are looking to expand on and use as a benefit for their brands.

- “In a way I think it can [take away from it], but I actually think that you can use social media to generate a mystery about the brand as well” (Appendix B).

- “There is that fine line with it...[where] as we go into technology there is always a loss...that the next generation forgets because they don’t even know it existed” (Appendix B).

Style Blogger.

1. How would you, as a style blogger, describe the beneficial impact that social media has provided for up and coming stylists in the fashion industry?

Question #1 focuses on the potential opportunities granted to style bloggers due to the popularity and followed interest collected. It has become a new “connection” and “foot in the door” for fashion-interested individuals wanting to enter into the industry. This question looks to learn how social media and the tools that it offers, provides a gateway to a profession in the fashion world.

- “[It] has opened up the fashion world to anyone with an Internet connection...I’ve heard about numerous sales, appearances, shows, and special collections that I might never have known about” (Appendix C).
- “The blogger network is a tight knit community with each one supporting one another” (Appendix C).

2. How has the trend and popularity of online media outlets opened up opportunities for you after starting your style blog?

Question #2 looks at how online media’s presence has the power to create these communal networks, which are generating a “buzz” around these emerging

fashion stylists and designers. Many fashion bloggers are being contacted by major industry names for collaborations, job opportunities, and serve as a brand's added promotional tool by utilizing the blogger's network of followers to expand its market.

- Blogging has instilled a sense of “confidence in my writing ability...[it's] knowing that I am putting in the effort constantly to produce something I really enjoy” (Appendix C).
3. As a fashion-motivated blogger and individual, what type of media outlets do you prefer when looking for news in the industry or upcoming seasonal collections?

Question #3 looks at the idea that anyone can be a blogger, and according to Hogan (2010) “blogs are not simply about introducing new information but reorganizing information into personally meaningful ways [that] allows people to reinterpret culture” (p. 312). This motivation to start a blog begins at one's interest in a certain industry or field. The idea that prior to becoming a “blogger” these individuals were drawn to the fashion industry solely due to their interest in fashion, and this question was constructed to ask which media outlets a blogger personally goes to when looking for news on the industry. A blogger is a consumer of fashion, and it is interesting to investigate what mediums most customers and clients directly go to. This can provide insight to designers and public relations practitioners when deciding on an effective promotional strategy.

- “[First] Twitter...any designer or stylist with big news will go there quickly after the news breaks” (Appendix C).

- Moving from Twitter to fashion media sites to style blogs, but “at the end of the day there is nothing like a traditional print magazine” (Appendix C).

4. Describe how social media has changed the structure of the industry?

Question #4 was created to gain insight on the changing structure of fashion and its industry, and to learn not only the perspective of a style blogger, but of a fashion consumer. Straddling the industry line, a blogger experiences both the inside look of how social media has affect the industry along with an outside look of how its online presence has on the customer.

- The structure has not changed, but “the way people are able to understand it has,” where designers use online media tools to share personal opinions and aspects of their life, it gives a “human side of the company” (Appendix C).
- “Emergence of flash sales and designer collaborations...due to the viral nature of news” that promotes an upcoming event for weeks, releasing a few pictures of the next collection, prior to leading up to the launch” (Appendix C).

5. What benefits or downfalls does this new type of insight and relationship into the industry have on the creativity and innovation of fashion?

Question #5 pertains to the idea of a developing transparency within the industry, and looks to retrieve information and a perspective of how the relationship between designer and client is a benefit or cost on the creativity of their designs and of fashion. This question was created to investigate the

possibility of causing a detrimental downfall of the originality and nature of how fashion transforms and grows.

- “It’s hard to know what is an original idea and what isn’t anymore...[and] when I think I’m being unique...I’m not sure it that was my idea originally or if I got it from somewhere else” (Appendix C).
- “Social media has made everything so accessible...it’s an amazing asset to the fashion world overall,” because it allows the user to constantly be inspired (Appendix C).

Social Media and Transparency in the Fashion Industry Research Questions

The following five research questions were designed for this study to determine the impact that social media has on public relations strategies for fashion-based clients and the influential effects these online tools have on the growing transparent structure of the fashion industry. For this study, data from literary articles and interviews with three experts of differing professions within the industry were collected to determine how social media is currently being utilized and benefited by each aspect of the industry.

Research question 1: How has social media outlets changed the public relations profession?

- “Socially distributed public relations are online, retrievable communication activities which reflect on an organization... [that to] facilitate social distribution of public relations, practitioners become accessible resources.

Publics have unparalleled reach and access to information, and practitioners can help social media public sort through the clutter” (Smith, 2010, p. 334).

Research question 2: How does public relations for designers differ from that of fashion bloggers?

- “The social web has removed the gatekeepers of an industry that was notoriously hard to penetrate and build a name in... These [blogs] have succeeded because of the quality of their content, while each is unique, they’ve built a cult following around their areas of expertise and passion” (Lee, 2009).
- “Fashion Public Relations Specialists and Publicists help apparel companies and retail stores build and maintain a favorable public image” through strategies of press kits, media tours and desk sides, cause marketing, and special events (Noricks, 2010).

Research question 3: What benefits do social media tools have on the fashion industry and its consumers?

- “By using social media tools, the fashion industry can uncover a goldmine of consumer inspiration and trend-testing. The ability to identify and capitalize on what’s hot and catch rising trends in advance of market saturation can make all the difference to a fashion brand or retailer’s margin. The ability to amplify the buzz of a new look at social’s warp-speed provides even the most leading edge designers with a strategic weapon” (DiMauro, 2011).
- “By letting the public behind the fashion influencer curtain, [designers] have created and connected to an entirely new audience and capitalized on the 400

million Facebook users and more than 22 million Twitter users...[which] is something an advertising budget cannot buy” (Prabhakar, 2010).

Research question 4: Why are fashion designers, media outlets, and emerging stylists taking to social media?

- Social media allows a brand to broadcast ‘its own story directly to consumers on multiple platforms...[and] provides another channel for consumers to experience the brand” (Indvik, 2011)
- “Fashion houses, designers and retailers are tweeting, blogging and updating their profiles in an effort to mold their brand personalities on real-time global platforms and form relationships with a community of customers” (Stephenson, 2009)
- “Gives brands a chance to be part of a dialogue about their own companies” (Stephenson, 2009)

Research question 5: How does social media create a measurable transparency into the fashion industry?

- “Measurement as communication accepts that as humans our ability to understand complex phenomena is a fluid process facilitated by experience and feedback...[and] recognizes and integrates the interactive and iterative aspects of human learning into the measurement process” (Lyons, 2009, p. 17)
- “Journalists, fashion incubators, retail gurus and people who were just plain interested in the industry are weighing in on a topic via social media that has notoriously shut its doors to anyone deemed an outsider” (Prabhakar, 2010).
- “Evolution of social media marketing can help brands and retailers to build brand awareness, engage meaningfully with customers to build relationships, leverage

social communities for product development, research and generate online sales” (Noricks, 2010).

- “Fashion consumers are taking to social media’s two-way communication to voice looks and trends that they want, and Fashion companies and designers are listening” (Bourne, 2010).
- “In this era of the social Web, fashion designers and retailers are no longer operating in an ivory tower...[and] because of the close relationships they now have with customers on social networking sites, many have adopted an ‘ask and you shall receive’ policy with their design outputs” (Bourne, 2010).

Social Media and Transparency Data

Based on the limited amount of available and existing information regarding the topic of social media and the transparency within the fashion industry, it collected data from interviewed experts was a vital aspect to this study. This data was retrieved from conducted interviews with Dana Dramov, a fashion-focused public relations professional, Heather Gardner, a fashion designer, and Elizabeth Devcich, a contributing style blogger. Each expert was asked different questions, specific to their particular profession within the industry, designed to answer the original research questions of the study.

Research question 1: How has social media outlets changed the public relations profession?

- This research question was studied based on the substantial emphasis found within current literature on the utilization of social media as an important new tool that should be incorporated into public relations strategies. According to

research, social media allows individuals to reestablish their own identities by having a voice, and it [has received extensive attention for the way it empowers the public relations function” (Smith, 2010, p. 329). Furthermore, the literature states that public relations leaders take to online social mediums to position and facilitate interactivity and a communication dialogue of debate and acceptance, where “users collaborate in content creation, are proactive in searching information, and value control in social media participation” (Smith, p. 330).

This question was created to formulate a valid response based on the way experts of different professions would describe social media as an important and vital tool for strategies in public relations in the fashion industry. Based on the literature, it is evident that there is a substantial amount of information and research surrounding the influence and impact that social media has on the field of public relations. However, it is apparent that there is a lack of knowledge and valid literature of social media use in a public relations strategy for fashion-driven clients. This question was asked to gain insight on this topic regarding the fashion industry.

Table 1 shows the individual questions associated to answer the original research question regarding the use of social media in this industry as a public relations tool, and illustrates that all three respondents condone the utilization incorporation of social media. All three respondents agree that the incorporation and utilization of social media tools in a public relations strategy produces a benefit resulted from cost-free endorsements and promotional advertising that otherwise would be expensive. Gardner and Devcich both applauded the instant accessibility that users have to information contributes to the more personal closeness felt to the industry. However, Dramov discussed the cost of too much

social media can create noise that can be detrimental to the reputation of a designer or brand.

Table 1

Social Media as a Public Relations Tool in the Fashion Industry

Respondent	Corresponding question	Response	Beneficial tool or detrimental?
Dana Dramov	What is the impact that social media has on a public relations strategy for a client?	Celebrities who tweet give personal endorsement, personal seal of approval; great for client	Benefit in a great way if done right, or can be really bad noise
Heather Gardner	What is the impact that social media has on creating a brand's reputation and a viable following of consumers?	Informs consumers of the little details, and norms of designer; keeps them in touch	Benefit is huge
Elizabeth Devcich	What is the beneficial impact that social media has provided for up and coming stylists in the fashion industry?	Keeps them one step ahead of fashion news launches—the new look, upcoming events; blogger network is “tight-knit”	Provides beneficial information and updates

Research question 2: How does public relations for designers differ from that of fashion bloggers?

- The second research question was looked at in response to literature findings that detailed the different strategy of public relations intended for a style-fashion blogger from that of a fashion designer. Many articles described the collaboration

of bloggers working with designers to find “opportunities [above] the traditional email pitch [by] working with each other to produce and curate content” (Noricks, 2010). This mutually beneficial relationship between bloggers and designers has changed the public relations tactics used for promoting and gaining support of designers.

This question was studied to compare the different strategies and tools of public relations used for fashion designers versus that of style-fashion bloggers, and how they have established a relationship interdependent on the benefits that each field provides for the other. It is evident from the literature that the growing influence and expanding follower network of fashion bloggers has become an important tool in the promotion of fashion designers. This question was asked to clarify and distinguish the difference in public relations tactics for both designers and bloggers.

Table 2 shows three different questions constructed to produce a combined response regarding the difference in public relations for a fashion designer and a style blogger. The responses from both Gardner and Dramov provide both the positive and negative aspects that social media can create for a designer, and it proves that while online media outlets are beneficial, they should not be the only tools used in a public relations strategy for a fashion designer. In contrast, Devcich’s description of her personal growth from blogging proves that the concept of a blog as an online website, serves as the personal public relations for that blogger. It is through a blogger’s network of followers that serves as free advertising.

Table 2

Public Relations for Designers vs. Fashion Bloggers

Respondent	Corresponding question	Response
Dana Dramov	What are the disadvantages of relying “too much” on social media as a public relations strategy?	Hurt designer’s brand; people have power of voice, but not every opinion is worth being heard; the industry is inundated with opinions
Heather Gardner	What outlets of social media are used to promote your brand and connect with your consumers?	Must be done effectively, social media etiquette and knowledge
Elizabeth Devcich	How has the trend and popularity of online media outlets opened up opportunities for you after starting your style blog?	Writing and style confidence; gives others their “moment of fame” online

Research question 3: What benefits do social media tools have on the fashion industry and its consumers?

- This research question was investigated to see how the industry’s use of online applications and website technology has changed the way consumers shop, gather fashion news and view the aspects of the industry. According to collected literature, the establishment of online communities has become a “platform to reach their customers online and reignite brand passion and customer loyalty” (Lee, 2009). Consumers are now being granted the opportunity to voice their opinion and take part in determining what the upcoming fashion trend will be for

the next season, and this participation spurs a deeper client to brand connection and relationship.

This question was formulated to gather information that could provide a response to the beneficial impact that social media has on consumers of fashion. This forces the study to not only look at the effects these tools have on the industry, but on its consumers as well. This question provides responses of new information where this newly developed online technology allows for “ordinary” customers to receive access to behind-the-scene activity at events or even watch virtual video streams of New York Fashion Week runway shows. This question gives consumers the chance to take advantage of the industry’s changing structure and it looks at how their access into the industry affects fashion as a whole.

Table 3

Benefits of Social Media

Respondent	Corresponding question	Response	Benefits
Dana Dramov	How have these online mediums changed the way consumers view the output of a designer or brand?	Produce and promote style and attitude of collection in own way; designers have control	Honest reflection of designer's vision and line
Heather Gardner	How has online mediums changed the way you present upcoming season collections into the industry?	Customers have different tastes, different ways of accesses industry news; designers must stay creative in campaigns	Cost effective, limitless innovative promotional ideas
Elizabeth Devcich	Why types of media outlets do you prefer when looking for news in the industry or upcoming season collections?	Twitter for news, online fashion publications for trends and upcoming collections, blogs for inspiration.	Instantaneous retrieval of breaking news; but print publications continue to hold interest

Table 3 shows that all three respondents agree that in regards to customers, social media provides them with access into the fashion industry. It has changed the way customers view the output of designers, allows them instant retrieval of news, and it has expanded the innovation and creativity of how a designer can connect his/her new collection to the clients.

Research question 4: Why are fashion designers, media outlets, and emerging stylists taking to social media?

- It is important to study the benefits and reasoning behind the use of social media in this industry, and this research question was designed to understand the motivating factors that drive designers, media publications, and emerging fashion stylists to take to online presence. Social media has the ability to connect individuals to brands and products from across the world, and this interactive tool has spurred the establishment of intimate relationships in the industry while remaining in control. Literature shows that social media has allowed brands to create innovative campaign pitches and merchandising strategies, new out-of-the-box collaborations with emerging bloggers and designers.

This question was studied to discover not only how this emerging technology pushes creativity of promotional tools for brand's upcoming collections, but to find out how print publications must adapt to the fast-paced updates surrounding fashion news. With the power of instantaneous updates, online mediums have caused stylists, designers, and media publications to creatively think and design a type of fashion art that will align itself with the next popular trend.

Table 4 shows how the use of online mediums has forced the industry and its designers to expand their thinking in terms of gaining competitive advantage. All three respondents agree that the collaboration of designer with a selected style blogger brings desirable PR that is cost effective and has a widespread outreach.

Table 4

Fashion Industry's Use of Social Media

Respondent	Corresponding question	Response
Dana Dramov	What is your take on fashion designers and their brands collaborating with bloggers as a part of a public relations strategy?	Brings interest, a hype that is desirable for public relations; cost effective/free promotion
Heather Gardner	What is your take on fashion designers and their brands collaborating with bloggers?	Helps a designer, the client, and customers; Low-cost with widespread outreach
Elizabeth Devcich	Describe how social media has changed the structure of the industry?	Designer collaborations, flash sales; people can understand industry better; dialogue and human relationship between designer and customer

Research question 5: How does social media create a measurable transparency into the fashion industry?

- This final research question was studied to understand the effects that social media has on creating a transparency into the fashion industry. A considerable amount of research discussed how the interactive dialogue between designers and their clients is evidence of the transparency into the industry and the shift in culture structure belonging to the fashion world. This question was formulated to find a theory that can quantify and measure the amount of transparency. For instance, literature states that the theory of communimetrics provides a “model of measurement as communication bolster transparency and ease of interpretation

without sacrificing validity or reliability...[and] accepts that to understand complex phenomena is a fluid process facilitated by experience and feedback” (Lyons, 2009, p. 17).

This question was studied to discover a theory of measurement along with valid statistics to quantify the benefit of enabling an open-dialogue and real-time feedback between brand and client. In the past, the fashion industry was traditionally known as an exclusive industry where there was no allowance of interaction with consumers of brands. However, today designers are taking advantage of these opportunities to hear what their customers like and don't like to produce a collection that answers their needs. This question was tailored to define the transparency of the industry and to clarify the change in norms based on the integrated use of social media and fashion's online presence.

Table 5 shows that all of the selected experts support that the development of transparency within the industry allows a dialogue to be developed, which creates an intimate relationship between consumer and the industry. Regardless of the endless capabilities that social media provides, it has changed the traditional norms of the industry.

Table 5

Transparency in the Fashion Industry

Respondent	Corresponding question	Response
Dana Dramov	DVF has always been an advocate for more transparency into the industry where real-time dialogue between designer and client is created, do you think this new correspondence and relationship is beneficial or does it take away the mystery and excitement of fashion?	Creates a dialogue; allows consumers to give personal touch and endorsement on products
Heather Gardner	DVF has always been an advocate for more transparency into the industry where real-time dialogue between designer and client is created, do you think this new correspondence and relationship is beneficial or does it take away the mystery and excitement of fashion?	Allows brand to generate own mystery; can create a loss of tradition in industry; transformed the norm of fashion; technology improvements; changing generations
Elizabeth Devcich	What benefits or downfalls does this new type of insight and relationship into the industry have on the creativity and innovation of fashion?	Originality is muddled, inspires, makes everything accessible

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendation

Summary

Fashion affects all people because everyone wears clothes, clothes that convey a person's preference, attitude and lifestyle; a person's fashion style. This study was piloted in response to the transparent accessibility into the fashion industry due to its all-encompassing utilization of social media. Before the adoption of social media tools, the traditional norms regarding the fashion industry was its exclusivity that was kept behind a curtain to keep anticipating fashion consumers unaware of upcoming collections and the next style trends. Today, the expanding technological developments of the Internet have forced the fashion industry to incorporate social media outlets into its structure to better suit its markets. Most of the present literature had a limited focus solely on social media use in generalized public relations, and it proved necessary to collect data from a public relations professional, a fashion designer and a style blogger, regarding the use of social media in public relations strategies within the fashion industry.

To receive a higher understanding on how the adoption of online mediums has transformed the industry, each professional was interviewed based on carefully constructed questions, that were field-specific, designed to answer the following research questions regarding the study:

1. How has social media outlets changed the public relations profession?
2. How does public relations for designers differ from that of fashion bloggers?
3. What benefits do social media tools have on the fashion industry and its consumers?

4. Why are fashion designers, media outlets, and emerging stylists taking to social media?
5. How does social media create a measurable transparency into the fashion industry?

The questions presented during each interview were created based on the expert's field of interest, to provide a response that corresponded to the intended research question. The questionnaires provided differing responses that related to supporting literature cases on the transparency within the fashion industry resulted from the use of social media.

Discussion

Analysis of the data recovered from Chapter 4 determines that the responses collected during the interviews provides supporting evidence to the existing literature found in Chapter 2, that allows for potential conclusions of the following original research questions concerning the fashion industry's use of social media outlets as part of its public relations strategy.

Research question #1: How has social media outlets changed the public relations profession?

All three respondents agree that the incorporation and utilization of social media tools in a public relations strategy produces a benefit resulted from cost-free endorsements and promotional advertising that otherwise would be expensive. Gardner and Devcich both applauded the instant accessibility that users have to information contributes to the more personal closeness felt to the industry. However, Dramov

discussed the cost of too much social media can create noise that can be detrimental to the reputation of a designer or brand. Where a celebrity's personal endorsement of a specific designer or brand can prove great for the client, yet it also has the potential to create negative noise that inundates the industry and its consumers.

The current literature supports a similar point of view. "Social media has such an immense influence on people because of the human psychology in people's 'need to belong'" where they "define themselves through the messages they transmit to others...through the goods and practices that they possess and display" (Phillips, 2008, p. 79). Dramov's example of a celebrity's "seal of approval" on a new trend or piece from a designer's collection, "goes along way with Twitter followers and people really take that seriously."

It can be concluded that the technology of social media and its expanded popularity in society is transforming the traditional structure of public relations strategies, and when done correctly and actively, these online tools can create interactivity and an exchange of information that is changing the way designers and brands market and position themselves in the industry.

Research question #2: How does public relations for designers differ from that of fashion bloggers?

There are differences between public relations strategies for a designer and for a fashion blogger, yet with the technological development of social media, designers and bloggers are becoming interdependent on each other as part of their public relations promotional plans. The responses from both Gardner and Dramov provide both the positive and negative aspects that social media can create for a designer, and it proves

that while online media outlets are beneficial, they should not be the only tools used in a public relations strategy for a fashion designer. In contrast, Devcich's description of her personal growth from blogging proves that the concept of a blog as an online website, serves as the personal public relations for that blogger. It is through a blogger's network of followers that serves as free advertising.

The literature focuses more on the incorporation and utilization of designers working with fashion style bloggers. "With fashion blogging gone mainstream, both brands and bloggers are looking for opportunities [above] the traditional email pitch [by] working with each other to produce and curate content" (Noricks, 2010). The magnitude of followers that these blogs accumulate implies the talent of these fashion style-bloggers, which have "earned industry recognition" (Lee, 2009).

Overall, the comparison between public relations for fashion designers and fashion bloggers includes the interdependence of working with each other to utilize the advantages of promotion offered by one another. Both rely on the expanding community outreach provided by social media as part of their public relations, however, it is the benefit associated with bloggers' largely developed network of followers, which industry professionals must take notice and collaborate with. While separately, the public relations for fashion designers greatly differs from that of fashion bloggers, both must rely on each other to remain at a competitive advantage in the industry.

Research question #3: What benefits do social media tools have on the fashion industry and its consumers?

All three respondents agree that in regards to customers, social media provides them with access into the fashion industry. It has changed the way customers view the

output of designers, allows them instant retrieval of news, and it has expanded the innovation and creativity of how a designer can connect his/her new collection to the clients.

The present literature conveyed this similar perspective as well. “The fashion industry has adopted social media as a marketing platform to reach their customers online and reignite brand passion and customer loyalty” (Lee, 2009). Gardner commented on the idea that customer have different tastes and they have different ways to access the industry to retrieve news, and this forces designers and brands to constantly create innovative campaigns in promoting their new collections or updates. In support of this idea, Dramov said the use of online mediums allows designers to “produce and promote the style and attitude of their collection in their own way.... [it] gives the designers control” to honestly reflect the vision of their line.

In general, social media technology has not only changed the way consumers receive news regarding the fashion industry, it has allowed designers to transform the way their consumers see and associate their brands by developing creative, instant, and revolutionary campaigns.

Research question #4: Why are fashion designers, media outlets, and emerging stylists taking to social media?

The experts generated differing responses regarding the reasoning behind why fashion designers, media publications, and emerging stylists are implementing the use of social media. Yet, all three professionals agreed that with each aspect of the industry using these online mediums, they are creating relationships through working and collaborating together. This desirable public relations is both cost effective and has a

widespread outreach. Dramov and Gardner both agreed that the use of online mediums has forced the industry and its designers to expand their thinking in terms of gaining competitive advantage. Devcich added that with the industry taking to online mediums, it allows people to understand the industry better by creating a dialogue and human relationship between designer and customer.

The literature reflects supporting responses to the comments made by the experts. Social media in the fashion industry has facilitated the development of “social fashion,” where technology is applied to support art (DiMauro, 2011). Where according to Stephenson (2009) fashion houses, designers and retailers are “tweeting, blogging and updating their profiles in an effort to mold their brand personalities on real-time global platforms.”

Overall, with social media having the ability to connect individuals to brands and products from across the world, this interactive tool has spurred the establishment of intimate relationships in the industry while remaining in control. These beneficial factors motivate designers, media publications, and emerging fashion stylists to take an online presence.

Research question #5: How does social media create a measurable transparency into the fashion industry?

All of the selected experts support that the development of transparency within the industry allows a dialogue to be developed, which creates an intimate relationship between consumer and the industry. Gardner said transparency could cause a loss of tradition in the industry, yet along with changing generations and technology improvements, the norms of fashion are being transformed as well. However, Devcich

adds that while the structure of the industry has not changed, social media makes everything in the industry more accessible.

The current literature on transparency reflects similar data that supports the experts' answers. According to Lyons (2009) "communimetrics is designed to make thinking processes transparent," where this theory of communication can be applied to the fashion industry, where social media serves as an interactive channel for consumer to voice their feedback and preferences to the involved brands (p. 17). "There is something about fashion that comes across as inaccessible...[but] that's all changing, [and] today consumers are expecting direct access and a say," said former fashion editor Daria Shualy (Bourne, 2010). Dramov adds that this idea of accessibility and transparency allows consumer to give their own personal touch and endorsement on products.

Overall, this interactivity and transparency created by the use of social media outlets has proved beneficial through generating more sales and revenue for designers who spur an intimate and personal relationship with their consumers.

Recommendations for Practice

After conducting the study, analysis of the collected data and researched literature concerning the topic, of how the use of social media as a public relations tool has made the fashion industry more transparent, provides intriguing findings and conclusions that must be presented to those working within the fashion industry. A few recommendations for practice include having a consistent active presence online to incur loyal consumers as a brand by developing personal relationships and heard dialogue, utilizing the industry and its professionals for potential collaborations, staying in-tune with Internet trends to

create innovated campaigns and on-line pitches that effectively communicate with the brand's consumers.

Stay active.

The world and society's daily life changes at an inconsistent, rapid pace, in which individuals must have an active presence in order to remain consistent with present developing trends. When it comes to social media, staying current with the evolving technological online outlets is the most essential to a public relations strategy of a fashion expert. "Social media has ushered in a change allowing worldwide, networked communication instantaneous...that utilize technology and enable people to share content, opinions, experiences, insights, and media themselves" (Lariscy, 2009, p. 315). With social media accessible to everyone, the fashion industry is gaining a new outlet of emerging designers, stylists, and fashion-interested individuals who are self-proclaiming their own voice and career. The Internet has created a crucial tool that has facilitated a dialogue between designer and its clients.

As According to Dramov, "If you're going to be in social media, if you're going to have a Facebook or a Twitter, you have to be active." For designers and brands that have taken to online mediums to welcome customers as a part of the brand's extended family, it is imperative for them to stay connected to their customers through quick responses and an active part of the relationship. The benefits that correspond with this newly developed rapport and conversation can only be incurred if both parties consistently participate.

Work as an industry, not as individuals.

Traditionally, the fashion industry was mysterious with an exclusive selection of the players that would determine the direction of new trends and fashions for upcoming seasons. Yet, today with the power of online mediums and social networks, people are using their voices and publishing comments and opinions on fashion because since everyone wears clothes, everyone feels entitled. This enables fashion-interested individuals, with restricted fashion knowledge, to break into the industry due to the recent shift of emerging designer collaborations with fashion and stylist bloggers. “It is an industry where if you’re creative and you have vision and an eye, then you can really do something” (Dramov). No longer is the industry structured by the separation of professions, where big-named designers are expanding their target markets by collaborating with bargain retailers such as Wal-Mart and Target, and infamous designers are employing fashion bloggers to join their team as stylists or campaign photographers. According to Dramov, as part of a public relations strategy, the collaborations with bloggers, “if they have connections, if they have followers, if they have relationships, it’s an amazing public relations stunt” for a client.

Additionally, it is an effective association for brands to create their own publications, for publications to design their own related blogs, and for designers to post their own blogs. By having these different aspects of the industry break into varying outlets, the platform that it sits on expands and allows for a wider outreach to its consumers.

Be innovative and creative

As technology continues to improve and redesign itself, the industry has access to exploit these resources and produce unique and revolutionary promotions and output. Designers are taking to new ways to connect with their customers, where Alexander Wang released his Fall 2011 collection by projecting his campaign video on the sides of high-rise buildings around New York City, and Burberry's Christopher Bailey premiered a runway show by use of a 3-dimensional holographic technology. The industry's numerous designers must initiate inventive campaigns to create a competitive advantage to remain a priority trend amongst its consumers and the industry.

This transformation of the industry to a less rigid and separation of practices has allowed brands to design different campaigns to be released into the fashion world, for their customers to see the brands in a new light. "Burberry capitalizes on the benefits this control by developing an online experience "on its own behalf [that] doesn't detract from or diminish the role of traditional media, but provides another channel for consumers to experience the brand" (Indvik, 2011).

Study Conclusion

In conclusion, provided by the collected findings of the study, there should be qualitative research performed regularly to measure the transparency within the fashion industry based on the application of social media in public relations strategies. Due to the fast-paced trends of both the technological improvements of online mediums and the fashion industry, periodic data research and interviews of industry professionals should be conducted. In the end, the study provided opinions of various fashion industry experts

and public relations practitioners along with an extensive review of current literature on the topic. In contrast, the implementation of these Internet instruments is a relatively new vehicle used in this industry, where this industry is also based on opinion and trends designed on the basis of individual perspectives. Thus, the study and overall recommendations for using social media as a public relations tool in the fashion industry, is of subjective findings and is not applicable to all individuals and experts within the industry. This study is used as an educational tool for those individuals interested in public relations and the fashion industry, and can serve as a starting guide to fashion-focused individuals who are interested in breaking into the industry.

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Appendix A

Interview Transcripts: Dana Dramov

The following interview was conducted to collect professional opinions from the perspective of a fashion public relations practitioner based on a questionnaire about social media and its influence on PR strategies in the fashion industry.

Interviewer: Teri Akahoshi

Respondent: Publicist and Partner at Josh Goldfarb, Incorporated
(Dana Dramov)

Date of Interview: 2/07/2012

Interview Transcription:

Teri Akahoshi: “How would you, as a public relations professional in the fashion industry, describe the impact that social media has on a PR strategy for a client?”

Dana Dramov: “Well, I think that social media can be a really good thing and a really bad thing in some ways, but in terms of positive impact, if a celebrity were to tweet a picture of themselves wearing an item from one of my clients or if they were to tweet, ‘I love my new Happy Socks tights.’ Or ‘I love my Chanel ear muffs’ that’s good for Chanel in a big way, it’s giving a personal endorsement whether it is actually that celebrity tweeting it or not, that celebrity is giving their personal seal of approval on that item, which goes a long way with Twitter followers and people really take that seriously.

TA: “On that point, how do you think that these online mediums have changed the way these consumers view the output of a designer or a brand? Such as them putting their look books online instead of keeping it more towards just the buyers.”

DD: “Well, I think that look books are a way for a designer to editorially show their line. So, for example, mostly designers show their clothing and then editors or stylists choose the product and establish their vision. A look book is an opportunity for a designer, her/himself, to show the style and the attitude of the collection in their own eyes. I think that having a place that they can put that out there via Twitter or Facebook or their own website or blog, is something that designers probably really enjoy because they can be in their line of voice, plus I think with social media now-a-days, if you’re going to be in social media, if you’re going to have a Facebook or a Twitter, you have to be active. And I think that there is only so much you can put out there, so look books are logical because it’s not something private, and it’s easy to put up and just show. And you’re always going to spend the money and time on it anyways because you need to do it, so you might as well put it out there. I think for editors they might appreciate that because editors are always losing look books, so it’s nice to go online and find them, but I think at the same time the look book is not really for the general public. It’s designed as an industry tool. So my personally opinion, I don’t really think it needs to be out there unless it’s so unbelievable that you’re going to make some amazing statement.”

TA: “You know going off of that, I found a quote from DVF saying that the industry should become more transparent, how do you think social media has changed the structure of the industry?”

DD: “Well, DVF loves social media and I think she probably, when she’s referring to transparency she might be eluding to social media including in that. And I think the fact that you can have an open dialogue through social media is...the great thing about social media is you know what I said about the celebrity giving their personal endorsement that motivates the individual, so if you and I are Facebook friends and you say you like some designer or you decided to follow them, and I see that, that’s like you giving your personal endorsement of that product or that designer or that design. So I’ll give it a bigger consideration because I love you and I love your style, and I’ll think ‘Oh well if Teri likes it then maybe I’ll like it.’ So I think that it creates this open dialogue where people give their personal touch and their personal endorsement on products, which is good. I think also it works in the other direction as well so it can always really hurt a designer. But I mean at the end of the day, nobody really cares what Joe-shmo from Kansas City, or whomever is saying, but if there is enough people and there’s enough of a voice, that definitely gets heard. An example is on a non-fashion level, people are controlling through Facebook people got Betty White on SNL. People have power, so it’s just giving people the opportunity to comment and voice their opinions on the fashion industry like in any industry. We do it with food, we do it with the food industry where we are always Yelp-ing what we like what we don’t like what we thought was good or bad. This is an opportunity for people to talk freely through social media whether it’s blogging or Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. Making all this input of which we are supporting or not supporting things, it’s having your opinion out there. With that being said, I don’t think that every opinion is worth being heard. And another issue is the blogger should just go away. I mean 90% of them should just go away because there is so much noise and there’s so much opinion that comes from no education or no understanding of the industry or no real talent, and I think that’s just true of the time that we live in and in every industry and it’ll kind of peter out. But right now we’re just inundated, and fashion is one of those things that anyone can comment on because they well nobody comments on medicine because we aren’t all doctors, but people comment on fashion because we wear clothes so you feel entitled.”

TA: “That leads into my question, with style and fashion bloggers getting more recognition and publicity with their mass amount of followers, what is your take on having fashion designers and their brands doing collaborations with these bloggers or bringing them on their team as stylists because a lot of them don’t have a formal background in fashion but they start generating a large following and with their network it helps the designer but at the same time does it take away from their brand?”

DD: “I think that’s a really good question because I think that it’s a fine line. The fashion industry is not really an industry where you need any formal education. I mean most publicists are trained in PR before they become publicists, most stylists are trained through internships to learn something, but it’s not like you go to a 5-year professional program in styling where you have to pass an exam to become a stylist. I think this is an

industry where if you're creative and you have vision and an eye, then you can really do something. And I think it is also an industry that is very social conscious, I mean what you wear is very connected to the social industry, social world. That being said, these bloggers if they have connections, if they have followers, if they have relationships, it's an amazing PR stunt. I think people like Anna Wintour and real professionals within the industry, who take it really seriously, and really understand it in its total complete form look down on those types of collaborations because they aren't professionals. They aren't people who have been trained, they aren't people even who have had internships, they are just people putting things out there who happen to be liked by the masses. And that is frustrating I think as an industry, it's frustrating for me. Most people I know have to work hard to break into the industry and have to work hard to get their voice heard, and have to work hard to make a name for themselves. It's annoying to have someone who is unqualified talk or say or do things on behalf of the industry when they really do not even know much. But that being said, from a PR standpoint, if they have followers, if people like them, if they're going to bring an interest, if they're going to bring a hype, that's desirable and that's something that is hard to pay for. To have someone who is somewhat of a celebrity or a name brand themselves because people like them come and be involved in your project that's valuable. It's a fine line, and I definitely would do projects where I took on a blogger. There are certain bloggers that I love and adore, and there are a lot of bloggers that are out there that really are trained people who really do know the industry, those bloggers are even more fantastic. But then there are stupid ones like Rumer Willis who wears the same thing everyday, and have a lot of attention, God knows why.

Appendix B

Interview Transcript: Heather Gardner

The following interview was conducted to collect professional opinions from the perspective of a fashion designer based on a questionnaire about social media and its influence on PR strategies in the fashion industry.

Interviewer: Teri Akahoshi

Respondent: Owner and Designer of Heather Gardner Jewelry
(Heather Gardner)

Date of Interview: 2/22/2012

Interview Transcription:

Teri Akahoshi: “How would you, as a fashion designer, describe the impact that social media has on creating a brand’s reputation and a viable following of customers?”

Heather Gardner: “I think it is very important, in fact I think that it is more important or the most important for the upcoming generation, advertising way to brand. You know it’s really important for me to keep my...now that we have the Internet, everything and information comes so fast that people want to know as much as they can about everything, and they have the ability to now. And so for me, with social media it’s really important for me to keep my customers kind of, you know to keep in touch with my customers, it’s just an important way for them to know the little things, that they would never have known without social media. Like I could update them on, how I am currently starting a new studio extension for my jewelry studio, and so I am putting pictures up, or you know putting my new designs up to get their input, which is great. And it allows for me to use these different ways for customer service and...I just think it is really important.”

TA: “Right, and so what types of outlets of social media do you use primarily to promote your brand? Such as if you have a Twitter do you personally write your tweets or do you have someone else on your team write them?”

HG: “Well, at this point, I was considering having my publicist do that, but at this point the added-value isn’t enough for me I don’t think. But what I do, I just have my Facebook account that is connected to my Twitter account, so it is like an automatic update. So that’s all that I am doing right now but I know other companies are more invested in it where they have a couple of tweets a day. I don’t know, I am still trying to figure out how much I want to do because there is a very fine line, even with Facebook, but with social media on how you effectively communicate with people to where you aren’t putting them off or boring them. So I think that a lot of research has to be done by businesses and I am still trying to find that, like what are the most effective ways to use social media to actually effectively brand my jewelry. You know I mean you could put stuff up all day, but do people hear it? Is it meaningful? So I think that there is a fine line to the etiquette of using social media for businesses.”

TA: “So on that note, during my research I came across that DVF has always been a huge advocate for more transparency and the use of social media in the industry, where the real-time dialogue between a designer and the client is created, do you think that this type of relationship is beneficial, or do you think that it is starting to take away the exclusivity of the industry?”

HG: “Do you mean, do I think that social media is taking away the mystery of the brand? You know in a way I think it can be, but I actually think that you can use social media to generate a mystery about the brand as well. So again it depends and it all goes back to how you interact and how you use social media. Where if you use it in a way where it’s like, ‘Check out all our stuff that we sell.’ That doesn’t do anyone any good. So there is a level where it can take away that mystery, or even what keeps people looking for what’s next on runway versus Facebook postings. And I think that, you know just how some people like holding a magazine in their hands versus looking at a magazine online, and I think there are different types of customers with different tastes. Some people want to see that, they want to know, they want to have input, ‘well I don’t like this,’ or ‘I want to have more of this.’ And you know they want to have more of a personal involvement in the line of what’s coming out, or in the brand. But again, it is that fine line, I think that those businesses that know how to do it properly are going to stand out against the businesses that don’t. You know even for me, I know that some of the businesses that I’m following or the stores that I’m following I am like, ‘Okay, I don’t care about this, this is stupid. Why did you post that?’ So, there’s a fine line and I think that it’s up to...it’s a whole new engine, there’s going to be people who...I mean my husband is already doing it, social media for restaurants and he gets paid to do their marketing to help them effectively do it because people don’t always know how to come up with those marketing ideas.”

TA: “Exactly, because it is the idea that if you are going to do social media, you have to do it right.”

HG: “Yes exactly, right right, there is that fine line with it. And I do think that there is, just with everything as we go into technology there is always a loss. You know there is a loss that the next generation forgets because they don’t even know it existed. Where they don’t necessarily know the difference of something because the society of it doesn’t communicate it to the future generation that is coming up. So, I think there will always be people who want a different type of something, but I feel that the way things are going, a lot of businesses just have to know, ‘Okay this is important, it is free, I don’t have to spend a lot of money for an ad, I can use it on Facebook, and people love to use Facebook, so why not.’ It’s a great tool for businesses, I really think that it’s great for them to reach out and make a personal connection. It just has to be done right. I am not saying that I think I do, I by no means do. It will be interesting to see, you should ‘Like’ my new page, I changed my business name to just ‘Heather Gardner’ so my designs are no longer ‘Tiger lily’ By you know I don’t do stuff everyday, and I probably could do it better, and spend more time being active on it. But at this point I don’t have the time and I am not paying someone to take responsibility of it, so you know it’s important but it’s

not my number one thing. And I have a lot of different elements of my business and designs that I want to worry about.”

TA: “Right, and I just have one final question, with style and fashion bloggers getting more recognition and publicity, and their gaining networks of mass followers, what is your take on having fashion designers and their brands collaborating with these bloggers?”

HG: “I personally that is great. You know whatever works for the designer, I know that I really like to encourage, even with my brand name change that is a big deal. You know after 5 years having to change your brand. And for me, some of my biggest clients, and this would be more of an online store, but they do have a blog, so what I did in order to help them show more of my jewelry I said, ‘Why don’t we do a giveaway on the blog, and you could interview me and do a designer interview and I could talk about why I changed the business and this helps the clients to know which helps the transition.’ And you know I think it’s great, and it didn’t cost a thing, it helps them, it helps me, it helps their clients and their customers. You know I think it’s a great way, I’m not currently doing that, but that sounds kind of fun. And I actually have a girlfriend who is building a fashion blog right now and I’m like, ‘Look I have this whole big thing coming out, and this thing on how to style the spring/summer trends from the runway with my jewelry on my website if you would like to feature that.’ So I am always looking for ways to promote using social media, especially in the economy you need to be really creative and cost effective, so I think that it’s really great for designers that are doing that.”

TA: “Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me and giving your opinion on the use of social media.”

HG: “Yes, definitely! Thank you for calling, I appreciate it.”

Appendix C

Interview Transcripts: Elizabeth Devcich

The following interview was conducted to collect professional opinions from the perspective of a style blogger based on a questionnaire about social media and its influence on PR strategies in the fashion industry. The questionnaire was delivered through email correspondence due to location inaccessibility.

Interviewer: Teri Akahoshi

Respondent: Campus “Style Guru,” style blogger, at CollegeFashionista
(Elizabeth Devcich)

Date of Interview: 2/28/12

Teri Akahoshi: 1. How would you, as a style blogger, describe the beneficial impact that social media has provided for up and coming stylists in the fashion industry?

Elizabeth Devcich: Social media has opened up the fashion world to anyone with an Internet connection. I’ve heard about numerous sales, appearances, shows, and special collections that I might never have known about and especially not in time to act on. It really feels like the blogger network is a tight knit community with each one supporting one another. Also, knowing that designers are so interconnected with their clients and customers makes fashion more personal and less intimidating. It also helps me stay one step ahead. So something you will see in the stores next month, I’ve been obsessing over for weeks now.

TA: 2. How has the trend and popularity of online media outlets opened up opportunities for you after starting your style blog?

ED: Personally, I’ve gained confidence in my style and writing ability. Whether or not people actually read what I write seems secondary. Knowing that I am putting in the effort constantly to produce something I really enjoy and am proud of, is a sense of accomplishment really unparalleled. For my position with CollegeFashionista, I take street style pictures of stylish looking students and the great thing is that everyone’s style is special and unique. I get a sense of pride knowing that someone who I’ve featured on the blog was able to share that and have a moment of “fame” as I like to tell them. For my personal blog, it instead has more of a focus on lifestyle. Fashion is just one tier of my lifestyle, the rest includes traveling, people, experiences, food, etc. and I love sharing that others.

TA: 3. As a fashion-motivated blogger and individual, what type of media outlets do you prefer when looking for news in the industry or upcoming seasonal collections?

ED: I truly do get my news from Twitter. Any designer or stylist with big news will go there quickly after the news breaks to share information. But Twitter is just a jumping off point. In 120 characters I get a sense of what to focus on next.

Then I go to all-encompassing style sites like Fashionista.com, WhoWhatWear, Women's Wear Daily, NY Times Style Section, and Refinery 29. This helps me understand overarching trends for upcoming seasons. After that I peruse the blogs of individuals showcasing their personal style. These women make amazing sartorial choices every day and are very inspiring.

At the end of the day, however, there is nothing like a traditional print magazine. I like to have something to hold and reference as I'd like. In December I decided to stack all of my magazines at the foot of my bed. Needless to say, it's already two feet high and made up of Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Elle, In Style, etc. I also like to read magazines from other countries so in that pile I've got Vogue Italia, Harper's Espana, Elle UK. I can't get enough.

TA: 4. Describe how social media has changed the structure of the industry? Please give an example of how the use of social media as a public relations tool creates a transparency into the fashion industry?

ED: I'm not sure the structure of the industry has changed, but the way people are able to understand it has. One huge shift has been the emergence of flash sales and the designer collaborations. Part of that is due to the economy, no doubt, but the other part is the viral nature of news these days. Shoppers start planning months ahead of time for these capsule collections. First there is the announcement, which is made online and then blogged about, tweeted, and talked about non-stop for weeks. Next comes a few photos of the collection and the social media community chirps up again with their thoughts and perceptions of the pieces. Lastly we get a preview of the entire collection and again, this takes the social media world by storm. The days before and after the collection launches are also big and we see mega sites like Target.com crash.

I also think that social media is an awesome PR tool for brands at all ranges of the spectrum. Stefano Gabbana, one half of Dolce & Gabbana, likes to share aspects of his life with Twitter followers. Tory Burch keeps a great blog that gives insights into how she chooses fabrics, why she chooses to support certain charities and so on. Oscar PR girl keeps Oscar de la Renta's image fresh, fun and youthful for him. Other companies like LF Stores and Steve Madden like to interact with Twitter followers. It constantly reminds me that each brand is a company and their goal is to keep customers happy and at the end of the day, make a profit. But it's nice to have a human side of the company.

TA: 5. What benefits or downfalls does this new type of insight and relationship into the industry have on the creativity and innovation of fashion?

ED: I'd have to say it's hard to know what is an original idea and what isn't anymore. It's so easy to read something quickly in a tweet or on a blog and process it without really realizing it. So when I think I'm being unique by wearing two scarves sometimes I'm not sure if that was my idea originally or if I got it from somewhere else. I really do like being constantly inspired, however. There is no lack of support, information, details and

so on available online these days. So whether I'm seeing stacks of jewelry on Instagram, reading an article on neon on a blog, or pinning anything that I like on Pinterest, I feel that social media has made everything so accessible and is an amazing asset to the fashion world overall.