

Blogging in the Fashion Industry:
A Descriptive Study of the Use of the Two-Step Flow Communications Theory
By Professional and Citizen Bloggers to Become Opinion Leaders

A Senior Project presented to
The Faculty of the Journalism Department
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Bachelor of Science in Journalism

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June 2014

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the differences between professional and citizen bloggers in the fashion industry, and their use of the two-step flow communications theory and certain tactics to become opinion leaders in the industry. With the rise of blogging as a popular medium for consumption of fashion news, thousands of bloggers have begun blogs hoping to become part of the fashion industry. With this rise comes bloggers with different levels of expertise and experience. With this comes a blurring of lines between a professional blogger with credible knowledge of the fashion industry, and a citizen blogger with no formal training or tie to the fashion industry. Knowing that professional bloggers have an impact in driving the fashion industry, ultimately becoming opinion leaders, we can compare the tactics used by professional and citizen bloggers, to see precisely what sets them apart. This study investigates these differences, to see if citizen bloggers use tactics similar to professional bloggers, giving them the same abilities to be an opinion leader as a professional blogger.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

With its start in 2001, blogging has continued to grow exponentially as a medium for companies, journalists, and the average citizen to reach out to its audiences about a specific issue. Platforms such as Blogger and Wordpress have continued to become available, giving easy options to create a favorable design and layout, where the writer only has to worry about submitting content. Today, there are an estimated 31 million bloggers in the United States, with 60% of businesses having a blog (Bullas).

The fashion industry has benefited greatly from blogging, with growth in independent and professional fashion blogs that act as the opinion leaders of the fashion industry. With easy access to the Internet and blogging platforms, anyone who feels inclined can post content about the fashion industry. Though their content may seem professional and their blogs have a similar appearance, some bloggers are citizen journalists who are using their independent opinions and content to create an influence in the fashion industry.

Background of the problem

Fashion bloggers began to create content and create a following from the beginning of blogging. Being able to take information sent out by fashion industry designers that was once inaccessible to the public, package it into outfits and trends that were able to be worn by the general public made fashion bloggers seem more trustworthy than moguls in the industry.

With their popularities growing, hundreds of fashion blogs were created, presenting regular posts of new outfits, fashion trends, and tips. With this increase of fashion bloggers, the lines between who was a professional blogger and citizen journalist began to blur. Bloggers such as Emily Schuman, who started the now famous fashion blog *Cupcakes and Cashmere*, started as an independent, citizen fashion blogger who has created contracts with Este Lauder and Juicy Couture. As more of these citizen journalists became professional bloggers, the lines became even more blurred as to who was creating content for fun, or for a profession.

Purpose of the Study

By analyzing the difference of professional and citizen journalists in using the two-step flow communication theory, we can see how successful opinion leaders (professional journalists) create and produce content, which we can then compare to how citizen journalists use this same theory. Being able to distinguish the difference between these two kinds of journalists and their use of communications theories will better distinguish the line between professional blogger and citizen journalist.

In further distinguishing the lines between citizen journalist and professional blogger, the fashion industry can be better understand who influences growth of their industry and who they should communicate and collaborate with. It will also help consumers in the fashion industry understand the difference between the two kinds of bloggers and why they produce certain content.

Setting for the Study

This study will take part as data collection and research for a Senior Project at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Interviews will be done with one citizen journalist fashion blogger, one with a professional fashion blogger, and one with a public relations specialist. These bloggers will give insight on fashion blogging based on their level of experience, while the public relations specialist will give insight on fashion blogging from the viewpoint of the two-step flow communication theory. The interview content is from a questioner that will be formed around a series of research questions and any additional knowledge the subjects can provide about the difference between professional and citizen journalists in the fashion blogging industry.

Research Questions

This study is structured around research questions that were created based on literature and articles based on professional bloggers, citizen journalists, the use of bloggers and the two-step communication theory, and the world of fashion blogging. Each question was crafted to provide insight on what makes each particular kind of blogger an opinion leader, and how to distinguish the difference between the two.

1. What is a professional blogger?
2. What is a citizen journalist/blogger?
3. How has credibility affected citizen journalists in the fashion industry?
4. How are the lines being blurred between citizen journalists and professional bloggers in the fashion industry?
5. How do fashion bloggers use the two-step communication theory?

6. What makes a professional and successful fashion blog in the fashion industry?
7. How does a fashion blogger connect to the mainstream fashion media?
8. How does a fashion blogger create a connection and receive feedback from their audience?

Definition of Terms

Blogging: The act of posting content on a blog (web log or online journal) or posting comments on someone else's blog (Duermyer).

CMS (content management system): An online system to help manage your content, such as making new posts, uploading photos and graphics, modifying posts, updating content (Cabrera, 2013).

Credibility: the quality of being believed or accepted as true, real, or honest (Credibility).

Fashion blogs: a 'street of fashion,' as a source of authenticity and a display of the actual use of fashion by the general public (Sedeke & Arora, 2013).

Social Media: a new form of interacting that allows any individual to become a source of information via new technologies that do not require any prior experience (Elmore, 2010).

Two-Step Flow Communication Theory: This theory asserts that information from the media moves in two distinct stages. First, individuals (opinion leaders) who pay close attention to the mass media and its messages receive the information. Opinion leaders pass on their own interpretations in addition to the actual media content (Two-Step Flow Theory).

Organization of the Study

This study is separated into five chapters that help guide the reader from receiving background information about fashion blogging to the data collected and interpreted in this study. Chapter One states the problem of this study and gives information about what the study is about. Chapter Two is a literature review of the difference between professional and citizen bloggers in the fashion industry and their use of the two-step flow communication theory to influence the fashion industry and its audience. Chapter Three explains the methodology used during the data collection of the interview subjects. Chapter Four includes each research question, the data that was collected for that research question, and a comparison of all the recipients' responses. The last chapter, Chapter Five, summarizes the findings of the study and gives recommendations for practice in the fashion industry.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The literature review examines existing literature on blogging in the fashion industry and its uses to affect its audiences. This literature review focuses on the difference between professional and citizen journalists, and the differences between the two in terms of becoming affective opinion leaders in the fashion industry.

What is a professional blogger?

The definition of a professional blogger has many meanings in the digital age. Each piece of research supplies different interpretations of the qualifications of one defining themselves as a professional in the fashion industry. With a platform that is based around creating personal content and free viewing, there are several different approaches to the viewpoint.

Some see a professional blogger being linked to a major company. A professional blogger, Susanna Lau, states, "you have to collaborate with certain labels and get involved in projects," (McVeigh, 2011). " These collaborations give a direct connection from the actual fashion designer to the blogger, making the blog professional. "As a brand, Coach was one of the first to partner with bloggers to design, style and blog about new product and to have them appear in its ad campaigns. Many of the designers and fashion brands themselves host fashion blogs. These blogs are considered professional because they are linked to an actual business. Free people, Roxy and Juicy Couture are just a few of the many fashion

brands and designers that have a blog connected to their brand, in which bloggers they have hired write articles using their clothing and fashion image.

A professional blogger can also be seen as one once the blog has become a career. A story on blogger Heather Armstrong states, “her blog started generating enough advertising revenue to become the main source of income for her family...blogging as a small business,” (Going Pro, 2006). According to Going Pro (2006), states a professional blog, “are explicitly run as businesses, with paid staff doing the writing and sales departments selling advertising.”

A large following can also constitute for a professional blogger. A large following can lead to a larger chance that that blogger is a opinion leader in the industry. Joe Clark refers to professional bloggers as “A-list” bloggers, stating that, “recognition, in this case, is a synonym for audience, and, in the time-honored tradition of star-struck social climbers, the A-list bloggers are the ones with the biggest audiences,” (Clark, 2001).

A professional blogger can also contrast to a smaller, independent blogger by gaining the readership and following without paying for it. “Once you have a lot of readers, however, the bandwidth costs become significant, and most medium-sized blogs cannot afford to hire the sales people needed to generate sufficient revenue,” (Going Pro, 2006).

What is a citizen journalist/blogger?

With the rise of the blogging industry, access to publish original content became easy and, for the most part, free. This increase in blogging brought about a news kind of “journalist;” the citizen journalist. Once again, with the continuous

development of the blogging world and Web 2.0, the definition of citizen journalists continues to change.

Citizen journalism began with regular people reporting on their surroundings, such as a fire or a car accident, when a regular journalist took a while to get to the scene. Some citizen journalists were lucky enough to snap a picture of a celebrity, and post it onto their own blog, where viewers interpreted the content as professional (Tilley, E., & Cokley, J., 2008). Definitions of the term are broad from, “gathering, writing, editing, production and distribution of news and information by people not trained as professional journalists,” (Curtis, 2012), to, “When the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another,” (Rosen, 2008).

With blog growing to 120,000 news sites per day, some material by citizen journalists is either equal to, or outnumbering that of journalists (Tilley, E., & Cokley, J., 2008). While the content grows, “together form a colossal phenomenon. Its growth has been so rapid that the language used to describe the whole phenomenon has not always kept pace. There are numerous terms circulating, with different meanings for different users,” (Tilley, E., & Cokley, J., 2008).

How has credibility citizen journalists affected the fashion industry?

Citizen journalist credibility started off low, but has developed just as its definition has. Once regarded as misreporting the facts and adding bias that “professional” journalists would never succumb to, mainstream media is taking blogging seriously. According to Tilley, E., & Cokley, J., “Some mainstream publishers have paid large sums to absorb these kinds of sites, turning alternative citizen

sources into highly-valued commodities,” (2008). Edmonds (2011) also states, “traditional media have roused from their slumber and are indulging in the most sincere form of flattery, getting urgent about bringing blogs or citizen-written sites into their mix,”(p.1). Because of this, bloggers are also driving content. “Agenda-driven bloggers can seize upon an issue and drive the terms of the debate beyond the control of political elites and mainstream media,” (King, 2006).

This shift towards respect for the citizen journalists is seen in their credibility with their publics, because of their connection to their publics.

“Online citizen journalists may be more accountable to their community, and the credibility of their reports is associated with their willingness to answer questions of the public...Perceived credibility of citizen journalists may occur when people look to citizen journalists not to be the expert in deciphering information, but rather experts in knowing where to find information on the reported issue or event”(Carpenter, 2007).

The fashion industry started with distaste for fashion journalists. Editors of top magazines and buyers for big name clothing stores were the only one’s passed down fashion news. "It used to be where the editors would come in, whether they liked the collection or not, they would have a certain point of view, and that's what everyone saw," (How social media has changed fashion week and revolutionized the industry, 2014).

Head directors of Fashion Week, IMG, even considered banning bloggers from fashion week. ““It was becoming a zoo. What used to be a platform for established designers to debut their collections to select media and buyers has

developed into a cluttered, often cost-prohibitive and exhausting period for our industry to effectively do business," (Wang, 2013). Head designers and fashion icons were sure that these bloggers were a nuisance more than a fashion opinion leader.

As time grew on, leaders in the fashion industry discovered bloggers were a bigger influence than once believed. Some designers are requesting more bloggers at their Fashion Week shows, and have endorsed certain bloggers on their websites.

"Fashion bloggers have become some of the most influential people in fashion. Invitations to fashion week used to be reserved for editors of fashion magazines...but now more and more bloggers are getting first looks at the season's collections and passing them on to their readers," (Cobb, 2013)

How are the lines being blurred between citizen journalists and professional bloggers in the fashion industry?

With the forever increasing blogging industry, an increase of "citizen" or "amateur" journalists have come to pop up in the fashion industry. "...The rise of the fashion blogosphere has resulted in the coming to prominence and the growing influence of individuals who had no institutional affiliation to the field of fashion when they started their blog," (Rocamora, 2014). Arnold (2012) also stated, "this new phenomenon of lowered barriers to participatory fashion journalism is best illustrated by the blogosphere, with its recent explosion in fashion content created in large part by amateur 'citizen journalists,' "(p.3).

Fashion designers and companies have created their own blogs, as stated before, but many other fashion blogs have started just for the love of the industry. With an emergence of blogging opportunities, the lines have been blurred.

This increase in the use of blogging has caused a liquidation of boundaries set in the journalism industry, including fashion journalism, causing a disconnect in professional and citizen journalist. "...a blurriness that has paved the way for a concept of citizen-journalism... that has allowed independent fashion bloggers to enter the field of fashion and claim legitimacy," (Rocamora, 2014).

Some of those blogs have even come out of the blurred lines, becoming professional seeming blogs, with sponsors and income. These blogs, however, started as small independent blogs, and still sometimes take on that persona, further blurring the lines. Take for example, Susanna Lau. Starting as a citizen journalist, her blog "Stylebubble," went from being small to highly popular. Lau even admits there are times when "professional" bloggers want to stay seemingly independent, continuously blurring the lines.

"There's no way it's that simple, especially in fashion. You have to collaborate with certain labels and get involved in projects in order to make a living, but also hang on to your integrity and be true to your own voice. It's tricky to navigate. I have advertising on my blog but it doesn't affect the overall tone," (McVeigh, 2011).

How do bloggers use the two-step flow communications theory?

The two-step flow communications theory is a long used communication theory, developed by "Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet in *The People's Choice*, a 1944 study," (Two-Step Flow Theory). The theory has two steps. Mass media continues to send out information to the public. The first step of the process is for opinion leaders in the industry to take that direct message from the

mass media, process it in some way adding their opinions and personal influence, and transmit the information to the audience. Ultimately, the opinion leader controls the audience's reaction to the information put out by the mass media.

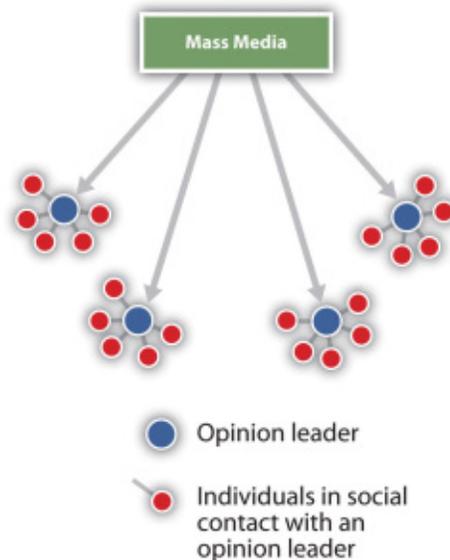


Figure 1. exemplifies the two-step flow theory.

Fashion bloggers are seen as the opinion leaders in the fashion journalism industry. "Information is flowing in many directions through different media channels and filtering through new opinion leaders, such as fashion bloggers," (Wengenmeir, 2013). Fashion bloggers help synthesize the information put out by fashion designers, brands and stores. Their ability to continuously produce content gives them the increased ability to constantly influence the audience of the fashion industry. According to Polegato and Wall, "...a specific type of opinion leader...In effect, the leader plays an important role as an instigator of mass acceptance of a new clothing style. It is the leader's acceptance of a style which influences others to follow," (1980).

Danny Chung sees the obvious connection that makes fashion bloggers opinion leaders. "...Bloggers tend to have a preexisting connection with their readers that brands can't create through advertising or traditional promotions. Readers connect with bloggers 'because they have similar interests or similar style,'" (Cobb, 2013).

What makes a professional and successful fashion blog in the fashion industry?

Everything from content, to design to readership affects a fashion blog. As readers are searching through thousands of fashion blogs on the Internet, there are different variables that will catch their attention. With the continual blurred lines between professional and citizen journalist, the look of a professional fashion blog may not be the same on the back end.

According to Pauline Cabrea, there are twelve steps to creating a successful fashion blog, such as creating a reliable domain and CMS (content management system), have an attractive theme with quality photos, be consistent in your content, use social media for exposure, and to join communities to stay updated, (Cabrea, 2013).

Building your brand as a fashion blogger comes along with professionalism and success. "Building your brand as a fashion blogger comes along with professionalism and success," (Lewis). Aimee Song continues this point by showing us that creation of a brand comes with good content. "It doesn't matter how well your blog is designed or how fancy it is; if the content isn't good, people won't have

a reason to visit it. Your voice and content have to be original and authentic," (Lewis).

The successfulness is a mix of attractive layout, original and consistent branding and content, and connection to an audience, which will be discussed in later sections.

How does a fashion blogger connect to the mainstream fashion media?

As opinion leaders, fashion bloggers must get their content from the mass media in the fashion industry. When bloggers use credible and authentic content, it allows them to create original outfit pairings and reviews of clothing. The three main ways bloggers do this is by attending fashion shows and events held by designers, collaborations, and researching other bloggers.

Online bloggers account for 40% of the press members in attendance to fashion week (Nichols, 2010). Head of New York Fashion week stated that, "fashion bloggers have gained precedence over industry buyers when it came to seating," (Wang, 2013). The article continues on to say, "we're pretty sure that bloggers who actually are able to turn their attendance into real promotion and sales for the designers.....sitting in the front row," (Wang, 2013). And with sales and consumerism driving the fashion industry, designers need fashion bloggers to be those opinion leaders to reach the masses.

"Indeed, in a trend-driven industry like fashion, where historical sales data rarely results in consistently better commercial decisions, it seems that what buyers need most is a crystal ball that helps them better gauge consumer

demand to maximize profit and minimize loss. Well, here's your crystal ball: bloggers and social media," (Certo-Ware, 2014).

Many bloggers receive connections to large fashion labels by collaborations. As stated in the first section, a professional blogger needs to make collaborations to gain accreditation. Mainstream media sources also connect to bloggers to continue to cycle their information to their audiences.

"the March 2012 issue of *Glamour* featured a full article on Hillary Kerr, founder of *whowhatwear.com*, while *Teen Vogue* profiled Stephanie Mark and Erin Kleinberg of the blog "The Coveteur" in its January 2012 issue. The website for *Marie Claire* devotes an entire section to "Blogs We Love," providing links to a handful of recommended sites," (Arnold, 2012).

Some bloggers also receive information from other bloggers. It creates another two-step flow theory. "As a result of this requirement, fashionable bloggers spend enormous amounts of time each day reading other blogs, seeking obscure Web sites, and writing posts in an attempt to be ahead of the fashion cycle," (Sedeke, 2013).

How does a fashion blogger create a connection and receive feedback from their audience?

As stated above, one of the largest factors in creating a professional, accredited fashion blog is the following. "The people that are going to get the numbers ... are the ones that are going to have a point of view, insight and are credible," (Nichols, 2010). Fashion bloggers, as opinion leaders, need to create a

genuine connection with their audience to create credibility and grow their reader base.

Fashion bloggers connect to their audience because they are part of the audience themselves. In the fashion world, it is the designers and then everyone else. A fashion blogger is reliable to the consumer. "While editors can often be motivated by influential friends or loyalty to advertisers, we are free agents. While there are exceptions, we generally don't appear on our blogs Photoshopped or wearing outfits worth thousands of dollars," (Certo-Ware, 2014).

This means a genuine connection needs to be made with the readership. "If you want to become more influential with your online community, focus on providing value, building strong relationships (with your followers and other trusted bloggers)," (Redsicker, 2013).

This idea that a blogger is the same as the audience gives the readers an idea that they are getting the true story; the best trends in the fashion industry. "Bloggers and tweeters are becoming even more important as they provide consumers an inside look into the latest trends and styles,"(Nichols, 2010).

So what makes a connection? Bloggers need to be able to create these relationships, evaluate the status of their readership, and also gain readership by spreading their content. The answer is social media and comments.

Bloggers utilize all traditional and upcoming social media sites to create more traffic to their blog. Utilizing Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, Youtube and Pinterest to link back to their blogs are key in increasing readership, in turn making a credible blog. "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,” (Influence of Social Media in Fashion & Lifestyle-Mumbai).

Fashion bloggers participate in not only traditional forms of media, but also fashion communities. “I gain readers when I actively participate in online fashion communities, such as Lookbook.nu and Chictopia. Sites like these usually generate quite a bit of traffic depending on how much you post,” (Nichols, 2010).

Comments also create an outlet for spreading a bloggers information. “..sharing content that generates interaction (likes and comments) and draws in more fans,” (Redshicker, 2013). Bloggers can also increase their following by being active in comments. “Bloggers react mainly to comments which contain questions directly addressed to them,” (Sedeke & Arora, 2013).

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter, we will cover the methodology used to collect data for the study using interviews with professionals in the fashion industry, as well as a citizen fashion blogger, and data presentation.

Data Sources

The data collection for this study comes from three different test subjects. One source is a professional fashion blogger, who blogs exclusively for a fashion boutique. The second source is a citizen journalist, running an independent fashion blog. The third source is a professional in the public relations and branding industry. The interview questions were crafted to create responses that would narrow gap in the understanding of the difference between professional and citizen fashion bloggers.

Participants

Participants include Jordana Shiau, Mary Carr and Crosby Noricks. Jordana Shiau is a professional blogger and the main fashion blogger for the San Luis Obispo based boutique, Bella B. Mary Carr is an citizen journalist and creator of the fashion and lifestyle blog, *Rough and Refined*. The third participant is Crosby Noricks, who is a public relations expert in the fashion and beauty industry, and owner of the award winning company PR Couture, a fashion branding and public relations blog and consulting firm.

Interview Design

The following questions were given to each participant, with the exception of some questions having additional parts for the fashion bloggers only. These questions were focused around the study's research questions to understand the difference between citizen journalists and professional fashion bloggers in their use of the two-step flow communications theory to become opinion leaders in the fashion industry. This will further decrease the gap in our knowledge of the difference between professional and citizen fashion bloggers.

Questions

1. What would you define as a professional fashion blogger? Can you give examples of what their qualifications would be? Can you give an example of a professional fashion blogger?
2. What would you define as a citizen or "amateur" fashion blogger? Can you give examples of what their qualifications would be? Can you give an example of a professional fashion blogger?
3. Do you view a citizen fashion blogger to be credible? Why or why not? How do you think the fashion industry as a whole see's the credibility of fashion bloggers?
4. In the fashion industry, how are the lines being blurred between citizen and professional bloggers? By looking at a fashion blog, can you tell if one is a professional fashion blogger or if one is not? What would you look for?

5. How do fashion bloggers effectively use the two-step flow communication theory? If you are a fashion blogger, what do you think are the attributes to be an opinion leader in the fashion industry?
6. What makes a professional and successful fashion blog? Can you give concrete examples of things a professional fashion blogger needs to have (for example layout design, brand consistency, large following, quality images etc.)? If you are a fashion blogger, what CMS system do you use? Do you have a logo, quality images and original content? What kind of content do you produce (for example tutorials, outfit collages, etc.)?
7. How does a fashion blogger successfully connect to the mainstream fashion media? Where would a professional fashion blogger receive credible information from the fashion industry? If you are a fashion blogger, where do you get your information/ inspiration from the fashion industry?
8. How does a fashion blogger create a connection from their audience? How do they receive feedback? If you are a fashion blogger, how do you connect to your audience? Do you have a following, and if so, how many?

Data Collection

The data collection methodology for this study will be three separate interviews done in through email. The three interviews will be emailed. The interview asks general questions and personal opinions of the fashion blogging industry, and also asks for personal antidotes from the fashion bloggers.

Data Presentation

Communication took place through a variety of mediums. One interview was conducted over the phone, where the data was recorded. Another interview was conducted through email as the industry professional lives in Los Angeles, and the information to the questions was sent back. One interview was done in person ...

Delimitations

There are a number of boundaries for research done through interviews. The first delimitation is the research and literature that is already presented to this topic. Blogging has only emerged as a large media tool in the last 13 years. With an increasing ability to create a blog, the difference between professional and citizen bloggers, especially in the fashion industry, has become blurred. The opinions of the difference between these bloggers are different to each interviewee, which could create a difference in the data.

Another boundary is the location. San Luis Obispo is not a hub for the fashion industry. It lies about 200 miles from both Los Angeles and San Francisco, the large metropolitan areas of California, where much of the fashion industry resides. That left the interviews to be conducted through email or over the phone, which does not give the participants as much time to develop their answers, or give the best environment for accuracy of documentation.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Chapter 4 will give be given in short sections, including description of the participants, their answers to the questionnaire, information presented from the literature in Chapter 2 that correlates to the research questions, and finally documentation of how participants and the literature from Chapter 2 correlate to the research questions. Each interview was conducted through email, therefore the information will presented through direct quotations or paraphrased responses of the participants.

Description of Participating Experts and Citizen Bloggers in the Fashion

Industry

Citizen or “Amateur” Fashion Blogger.

Mary Carr is a resident of Los Angeles county, a booming area for the fashion industry, where she came to pursue her love of fashion. Starting with a year job at the popular clothing company, Anthropologie, Mary learned styling techniques, styling clients, fashion and company branding, as well as fashion basics such as shapes, materials and color combinations. After this, Mary continued to do styling for a number of independent photo shoots, music videos, and now an independent movie that will be submitted to the Sundance Film Festival. Mary is currently pursuing a degree in Fashion Merchandising from FIDM University in Los Angeles. Most recently, Mary has started her original fashion blog *Rough and Refined*, which explores her different daily styles, Do It Yourself fashion projects, and different themed fashion shoots.

Professional Fashion Blogger.

Jordana Shiau is a fashion guru who has blogged for the San Luis Obispo based boutique Bella B. As a blogger for the boutique, Jordana took clothing from various designers and brands presented in the store and used them in different blog posts to create fashion inspiration. She created original content, created the clothing pairings, and created original graphics for the website.

Jordana is now contracted by Classic Specs as a Customer Experience Associate, where she is becoming acquainted with the optics and accessory portion of the fashion industry.

Public Relations Practitioner:

Crosby Noricks is an expert public relations practitioner specializing in the fashion and beauty industry. Crosby was titled the “West Cost ‘It’ Girl” by YFS magazine and has a large fashion resume to prove it. Out of graduate school, Crosby lead an in-house PR department for a fashion jewelry company. Crosby also worked for 5 years at Red Door Interactive, growing their social media program and leading it. Crosby has now started and focused on her own company, PR couture, which provides the fashion industry with public relations, social media, marketing and job information. She has also hosted workshops helping industry members break into the world of fashion pr, such as Fashion PR Confidential. Crosby has also released the book, “Ready To Launch: The PR Couture Guide to Breaking Into Fashion PR: How to Begin a Successful Career in Fashion Public Relations,” giving advice to anyone entering the industry.

Fashion Blogging Questioner

Each participant was asked to respond to the following questions regarding fashion blogging, the difference between professional and citizen bloggers, and their ability to become opinion leaders.

1. What would you define as a professional fashion blogger? Can you give examples of what their qualifications would be? Can you give an example of a professional fashion blogger?

Question #1 was asked to understand how the participant viewed a professional blogger. This will further clarify what the difference between the two is, to then discover how they may use the two-step flow communications theory similarly or differently.

- Mary Carr: “I would define a professional fashion blogger as somebody whose main job is running a fashion blog, or they are sponsored and funded by a larger company. Their qualifications could be a current job in the fashion industry, a student of the industry, or simply a writer or photographer who has a keen sense of the industry.” (Appendix A)
- Jordana Shiau: “I believe that having good quality work (photos, writing, styling, etc) is key in conveying a professional feel through a fashion blog. If these things are achieved, they can lead to opportunities in which someone could turn their blogging into a profession. Someone like Sammi from <http://www.beautycrush.co.uk/> just has a very professional feel to her blog. She has gained a lot of popularity and notoriety among the blogging and YouTube world, which has turned into partnerships with different fashion

companies and make up companies, which has turned her lifestyle/fashion blog into a profession.” (Appendix B)

- Crosby Nicks: ““A professional fashion blogger is someone whose primary source of income comes directly or indirectly through their blog... a professional fashion blogger typically has an engaged audience, a strong ability to influence that audience, and the interest of fashion brands who work with the fashion blogger through traditional advertising, brand ambassadorship, collaborations and consulting.” (Appendix C)

2. What would you define as a citizen or “amateur” fashion blogger? Can you give examples of what their qualifications would be? Can you give an example of a professional fashion blogger?

Question #2 was asked to understand how the participant viewed a citizen blogger. This will further clarify what the difference between the two is, to then discover how they may use the two-step flow communications theory similarly or differently.

- Mary Carr: ““I would define an amateur fashion blogger as somebody whose main source of income is a different job and their blog is designed to fit around her other priorities. They don’t have to have any qualifications, necessarily, other than a passion for fashion.” (Appendix A)
- Jordana Shiau: “Maybe the one difference could be the fact that many “professional” bloggers are bloggers who make a living off of blogging and have gained professional partnerships and relationships through their blogging. But, they all started off as amateur bloggers in the beginning, so it’s

hard to say that there's a defining factor that sets the bar between amateur and professional." (Appendix B)

- Crosby Noricks: "A citizen or amateur fashion blogger is someone who either doesn't blog with the intention of turning it into a business, or someone who is currently in the process of growing their blogs influence with the goal of being able to transition to blogging full-time." (Appendix C)

3. Do you view a citizen fashion blogger to be credible? Why or why not? How do you think the fashion industry as a whole see's the credibility of fashion bloggers?

Question #3 was asked to be able to see how each participant feels about citizen journalists having the ability to be opinion leaders. By knowing if they are viewed as credible, we can see if they have the ability to influence opinions in the industry.

- Mary Carr: "I absolutely see citizen blogs to be credible. Fashion is about expression ones style, something about oneself, in an aesthetically pleasing manner. Everyone has a different way of doing so - you don't have to be expert in order to express your style in a 'credible' manner." (Appendix A).
- Jordana Shiau: "Yes, I think citizen fashion bloggers can be credible. It certainly depends on what you're looking for in a fashion blogger. Citizen fashion bloggers can provide objective opinions about fashion brands that some professional fashion bloggers can't due to partnerships. Also, citizen fashion bloggers may also have more unique or genuine posts. What outfits they may post are strictly what they enjoy wearing and what they wear on a regular basis. They don't tend to have fashion companies sending them items

that they have to feature in certain blog posts, like some professional bloggers do. I think citizen fashion bloggers provide a more raw and unbiased take to fashion which I think can be very credible.” (Appendix B)

- Crosby Noricks: “I’m not concerned with the credibility of citizen fashion bloggers’ content - a blog is a platform for all sorts of expression, including exploring an interest in clothing, personal style or the fashion industry. I am concerned that such a fashion blogger be ethical, honest and transparent. The fashion industry has come (begrudgingly) to accept fashion bloggers as a core audience, but there is still a large disparity between fashion bloggers with industry experience and connections and those without.” (Appendix C)

4. In the fashion industry, how are the lines being blurred between citizen and professional bloggers? By looking at a fashion blog, can you tell if one is a professional fashion blogger or if one is not? What would you look for?

Question #4 was designed to further explore the difference between citizen and professional journalists, to see if the participants thought there was a difference. Knowing if there was a difference, or how the lines are becoming more blurred, will allow to understand if one can become an opinion leader and one cannot, or if they are both opinion leaders because the difference between the two is not astronomical.

- Mary Carr: “The lines are being blurred by the general public recognizing citizen blogs as credible. The rise of street fashion has also played a role. People don’t want to be ruled by trends. Sometimes, it can be difficult to tell if a blog is professional or not, but a dead giveaway is the quality of

photography and layout of the website itself. Professional blogs aren't going to use a generic Wordpress layout." (Appendix A)

- Jordana Shiau: "These days, it is sort of hard to determine who is a "professional" fashion blogger. There are so many fashion blogs out there covering so many different niches and speaking for so many different voices that the line between amateur and professional is sort of blurred...But, they all started off as amateur bloggers in the beginning, so it's hard to say that there's a defining factor that sets the bar between amateur and professional." (Appendix B)
- Crosby Noricks: "I would read the about section to find out more about the blogger and see if she discloses that this blog is her full-time profession, as well as her social media audience, particularly Instagram followers. I would skim through the content to look for paid content and brand collaborations, as these are often indicative of a blogger who is getting paid well for her platform." (Appendix C)

5. How do fashion bloggers effectively use the two-step flow communication theory?

If you are a fashion blogger, what do you think are the attributes to be an opinion leader in the fashion industry?

Question #5 was designed to see what participants thought constituted as a fashion blogger using the two-step flow communication theory. By seeing the exact tactics used, we can further determine if professional and citizen bloggers alike can utilize the theory to become opinion leaders, therefore, influencing the industry in

the same ways. If a citizen blogger is able to hone in on these same skills, they will be able to become opinion leaders as well.

- Mary Carr “Bloggers effectively use this theory simply by going themselves to every media outlet. The attributes of an opinion leader are often exposure to the most amount of people and confidence in their own opinion.” (Appendix A)
- Jordana Shiau: “I think one of the most important things in being an opinion leader is to be credible. If you’re a fashion blogger who does everything based on sponsorships and freebies from companies, you aren’t a credible source for opinions. I think someone who obviously has passion for and knowledge of fashion are ones who are the most influential in the industry. It’s fairly clear when a blogger is passionate and when a blogger is just blogging for sponsorships. I think readers can see past those certain bloggers.” (Appendix B)
- Crosby Noricks: “Fashion bloggers are absolutely seeking to impart information to their readers - whether that is simply visual inspiration, wardrobe expertise, or fashion industry news. In this way, they can potentially offer the same third-party credibility that has traditionally been the role of mass media. However, because they are outside of the mass media machine, they are also able to engage with their readers as an opinion leader, driving trends, purchase decisions and awareness of new brands. In order to be an opinion leader you must have an opinion that others find valuable and helpful. This can be accomplished through a variety of means including a

strong voice and point of view, powerful visuals and photography, tips on how to wear trends, outfit suggestions/inspiration as well as providing access to events, interviews and giveaways.” (Appendix C)

6. What makes a professional and successful fashion blog? Can you give concrete examples of things a professional fashion blogger needs to have (for example layout design, brand consistency, large following, quality images etc.)? If you are a fashion blogger, what CMS system do you use? Do you have a logo, quality images and original content? What kind of content do you produce (for example tutorials, outfit collages, etc.)?

Question #6 was asked to see what makes a good professional blogger. A professional blogger is an opinion leader, they are recognized in the industry. If a citizen journalist is doing this exact same thing, then they too can be seen as opinion Leaders.

- Mary Carr: ““Quality photography and a beautiful layout are extremely important... I use Wordpress. Though I don’t have a logo, I typically use a professional photographer. All of my content is original. I produce tutorials, outfit collages, and thoughts on trends.” (Appendix A)
- Jordana Shiau: “I think some of the most important factors that make a successful fashion blog are: a clear voice and high quality posts. I think if there is a clear voice for readers to get behind, there’s a much higher chance to get more followers. If you don’t even know what your voice is, people aren’t going to be able to follow your posts and there won’t really be anything for them to relate to or support. Good quality images and good

quality writing are also important, but that's sort of applied to any sort of professional setting... We have a logo that we have consistently across all of our social media, website, business cards, tags, etc. We also shoot all our photos professionally and use all original content... People really like consistency and predictability. And focusing on having those things in a blog make it much more relatable and likable from a public's standpoint."

(Appendix B)

- Crosby Noricks: "I would say that predominantly, a professional and successful fashion blog needs impressive traffic and page views as well as an engaged audience who promotes posts through social media, leaves comments, etc. The blog needs to have a strong visual and written direction, with branded elements and a signature look." (Appendix C).

7. How does a fashion blogger successfully connect to the mainstream fashion media? Where would a professional fashion blogger receive credible information from the fashion industry? If you are a fashion blogger, where do you get your information/ inspiration from the fashion industry?

Question 7 was formulated to see how a successful blogger would connect to the mainstream media. A successful opinion leader takes information from the media, uses its own opinion to change it slightly, and then distributes it. If citizen and professional bloggers use the same media outlets, they may both be able to be opinion leaders.

- Mary Carr: "A professional blogger would receive credible information from inside people they know, fashion shows that they gain access to, and fashion

- articles. I gain information and inspiration from a multitude of sources - I follow many other professional blogs, as well as reading up on trends in magazines and newspapers.” (Appendix A)
- Jordana Shiau: “I get a lot of my information and inspiration through sites that I find credible but also relatable. Magazines like NYLON or websites like Refinery29 are both really credible and knowledgeable sources that also hold the same aesthetic that I do... Fashion bloggers sort of work in the same way. They connect to the mainstream fashion media sort of based on their look/aesthetic/audience. Someone like Eugenie Kim of Feral Creature is much more of a cool, trendy, fashion forward blogger, so she connects to media outlets like NYLON. But, someone like Wendy from Wendy’s Look Book that has much more of a girly, feminine and classic style may go to a completely different media outlet that suits her aesthetic.” (Appendix B)
 - Crosby Noricks: “Attending fashion blogging conferences put on my mainstream media as well as affiliate programs and blogging networks is a good way to connect directly to media. Participating in things like the Lucky Community and working with a publicist to get coverage in traditional media is another tactic. Bloggers receive information through press releases and pitches in their inbox, reaching out to brands directly, and paying attention to what other bloggers and editors are writing about.” (Appendix C).

8. How does a fashion blogger create a connection from their audience? How do they receive feedback? If you are a fashion blogger, how do you connect to your audience? Do you have a following, and if so, how many?

Question #8 was designed to evaluate the second half of the two-step flow communication theory, which is the opinion leader connecting with its audience. If a citizen blogger connects to its audience in the same way, and reaches the same kind of audience as a professional blogger, they are more likely to also be opinion leaders. Knowing this will further narrow the blurred lines between professional and citizen bloggers in the fashion industry.

- Mary Carr: ““A fashion blogger creates a connection by prompting comments through their content and have a presence on other social media platforms (i.e. Twitter, Instagram, Facebook). They receive feedback through those other platforms as well as comments on their actual posts. I connect with my audience through comments and emails, as well as Instagram. I have an actual following of 27, though most of my posts are read by about 300.” (Appendix A)
- Jordana Shiau: “Fashion bloggers are social media junkies. A lot of the time, being connected through all forms of social media creates the most success. This allows your audience to reach you at any given time, on any given form of media, with any questions or comments they may have. I think the most successful fashion bloggers are ones that engage with their audiences. If you’re just seen as a robot who just puts out outfit posts every day but doesn’t engage their audience or respond to their audience, people will quickly lose interest.” (Appendix B)
- Crosby Noricks: “In the beginning this was done primarily through comments, though these days direct engagement happens through social

media as well. Personally I connect to an audience of 100k+ through social media, email and through the content we produce.” (Appendix C)

Fashion Blogging Research Questions

The eight research questions were created to further determine the blurred lines between professional and citizen blogger in the fashion industry, and their use of the two-step flow communications theory to become opinion leaders that influence an audience.

Research Question 1: What is a professional blogger?

- “You have to collaborate with certain labels and get involved in projects,” (McVeigh, 2011)
- “her blog started generating enough advertising revenue to become the main source of income for her family...blogging as a small business,” (Going Pro, 2006).
- “Recognition, in this case, is a synonym for audience, and, in the time-honored tradition of star-struck social climbers, the A-list bloggers are the ones with the biggest audiences,” (Clark, 2001).

Research Question 2: What is a citizen journalist/blogger?

- “gathering, writing, editing, production and distribution of news and information by people not trained as professional journalists,” (Curtis, 2012).
- “When the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another,” (Rosen, 2008).

Research Question 3: How has credibility citizen journalists affected the fashion industry?

- “Traditional media have roused from their slumber and are indulging in the most sincere form of flattery, getting urgent about bringing blogs or citizen-written sites into their mix,” (Edmonds, 2011).
- “Online citizen journalists may be more accountable to their community, and the credibility of their reports is associated with their willingness to answer questions of the public...Perceived credibility of citizen journalists may occur when people look to citizen journalists not to be the expert in deciphering information, but rather experts in knowing where to find information on the reported issue or event”(Carpenter, 2007).

Research Question 4: How are the lines being blurred between citizen journalists and professional bloggers in the fashion industry?

- “...The rise of the fashion blogosphere has resulted in the coming to prominence and the growing influence of individuals who had no institutional affiliation to the field of fashion when they started their blog,”(Rocamora, 2014).
- “...a blurriness that has paved the way for a concept of citizen-journalism... that has allowed independent fashion bloggers to enter the field of fashion and claim legitimacy,” (Rocamora, 2014).
- Some of those blogs have even come out of the blurred lines, becoming professional seeming blogs, with sponsors and income. These blogs, however, started as small independent blogs, and still sometimes take on that persona, further blurring the lines. Take for example, Susanna Lau. Starting as a citizen journalist, her blog “Stylebubble,” went from being small

to highly popular. Lau even admits there are times when “professional” bloggers want to stay seemingly independent, continuously blurring the lines. "There's no way it's that simple, especially in fashion. You have to collaborate with certain labels and get involved in projects in order to make a living, but also hang on to your integrity and be true to your own voice. It's tricky to navigate. I have advertising on my blog but it doesn't affect the overall tone,"(McVeigh, 2011).

Research Question 5: How do bloggers use the two-step flow theory?

- “Information is flowing in many directions through different media channels and filtering through new opinion leaders, such as fashion bloggers,” (Wengenmeir, 2013).
- “...Bloggers tend to have a preexisting connection with their readers that brands can’t create through advertising or traditional promotions. Readers connect with bloggers ‘because they have similar interests or similar style,”(Cobb, 2013).
- “ ...a specific type of opinion leader...In effect, the leader plays an important role as an instigator of mass acceptance of a new clothing style. It is the leader’s acceptance of a style which influences others to follow,” (Polegato and Wall, 1980).

Research Question 6: What makes a professional and successful fashion blog in the fashion industry?

- There are twelve steps to creating a successful fashion blog, such as creating a reliable domain and CMS (content management system), have a attractive

theme with quality photos, be consistent in your content, use social media for exposure, and to join communities to stay updated, (Cabrea, 2013).

- “Building your brand as a fashion blogger comes along with professionalism and success,” (Lewis).
- “Your voice and content have to be original and authentic,” (Lewis).
- One of the largest factors in creating a professional, accredited fashion blog is the following. “The people that are going to get the numbers ... are the ones that are going to have a point of view, insight and are credible,” (Nichols, 2010).

Research Question 7: How does a fashion blogger connect to the mainstream fashion media?

- Fashion Shows/Week: Online bloggers account for 40% of the press members in attendance to fashion week (Nichols, 2010).
- Collaborations: “The March 2012 issue of *Glamour* featured a full article on Hillary Kerr, founder of *whowhatwear.com*, while *Teen Vogue* profiled Stephanie Mark and Erin Kleinberg of the blog “The Coveteur” in its January 2012 issue. The website for *Marie Claire* devotes an entire section to “Blogs We Love,” providing links to a handful of recommended sites,” (Arnold, 2012).
- Other Fashion Blogs: “As a result of this requirement, fashionable bloggers spend enormous amounts of time each day reading other blogs, seeking obscure Web sites, and writing posts in an attempt to be ahead of the fashion cycle,” (Sedeke, 2013).

Research Question 8: How does a fashion blogger connect to the mainstream fashion media?

- A fashion blogger is reliable to the consumer. “While editors can often be motivated by influential friends or loyalty to advertisers, we are free agents. While there are exceptions, we generally don’t appear on our blogs Photoshopped or wearing outfits worth thousands of dollars,” (Certo-Ware, 2014).
- “If you want to become more influential with your online community, focus on providing value, building strong relationships (with your followers and other trusted bloggers),” (Redsicker, 2013).
- Social Media: “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,” (Influence of Social Media in Fashion & Lifestyle- Mumbai).
- “I gain readers when I actively participate in online fashion communities, such as Lookbook.nu and Chictopia. Sites like these usually generate quite a bit of traffic depending on how much you post,” (Nichols, 2010).
- “...sharing content that generates interaction (likes and comments) and draws in more fans,” (Redshicker, 2013).

Fashion Blogging Data

In this study, it is important to compare the answers from the citizen or “amateur” blogger, the professional blogger, and the public relations professional to further explore if the citizen blogger has the same attributes as the professional

blogger and public relations professional, and therefore, can have the same influence as an opinion leader using the two-step flow communications theory. The following tables present the participants answers to a questioner in relation to the original research questions.

Research Question 1: What is a professional blogger?

This literature question had a very unanimous answer. A professional blogger has rarely been defined in the world of blogging, however, there were a few consistent themes. The biggest theme was having enough money to make blogging your career, or be making a salary off of blogging. “her blog started generating enough advertising revenue to become the main source of income for her family...blogging as a small business,” (Going Pro, 2006). Having a large audience also constituted as something a professional blogger needed. “Recognition, in this case, is a synonym for audience, and, in the time-honored tradition of star-struck social climbers, the A-list bloggers are the ones with the biggest audiences,” (Clark, 2001).

This research question was used to get background information on the topic of professional versus citizen bloggers. By understanding what the literature and the participants think a professional blogger is, we can then use this to define how a professional blogger may use the two-step flow communications theory and see if it compares to that of the citizen blogger.

Table 1 summarizes the answers to this question from the three participants in the study.

Table 1

What is a professional blogger?

Respondent	What is a professional blogger?	Example of a Professional Fashion Blogger?
Mary Carr	Somebody whose main job is running a fashion blog, or they are sponsored and funded by a larger company	Emily Schuman, of Cupcakes and Cashmere
Jordana Shiau	good quality work (photos, writing, styling, etc) is key, turn blog into a profession	Sammi from http://www.beautycrush.co.uk/
Crosby Noricks	A professional fashion blogger is someone whose primary source of income comes directly or indirectly through their blog, typically has an engaged audience, advertising, collaborations with large fashion brands	Emily/Cupcakes & Cashmere

Research Question 2: What is a citizen journalist/blogger?

This research question also had varied answers, because of the continual blurring of lines between professional and citizen bloggers. Some saw citizen bloggers as not being trained in the field of journalism. “Gathering, writing, editing, production and distribution of news and information by people not trained as professional journalists,” (Curtis, 2012). They were also once part of the audience.

“When the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another,” (Rosen, 2008).

This research question, again, was used for background information. If we can see how the participants feel about each type of blogger, we will know if the participants qualify as such, which will therefore, give us even more information if the citizen and professional blogger can be equal when using the two-step flow communication theory. If they have the same qualifications, then they are closer to being the same kind of blogger than what their blogging “title” tells them.

Table 2 summarizes the answers to this question from the three participants in the study.

Table 2

What is a citizen blogger?

Respondent	What is a Citizen blogger?
Mary Carr	Main source of income is a different job, no qualifications
Jordana Shiau	Do not make a living of blogging, all professional started as citizen
Crosby Noricks	Does not blog with intention of making it a business, growing blog with intention of transitioning to full-time blogging.

Research Question 3: How has credibility citizen journalists affected the fashion industry?

The literature for this question indicates that there have been mixed feelings from the fashion industry on citizen journalists, and bloggers in general. What started out as animosity towards this booming type of media has turned into respect. “Traditional media have roused from their slumber and are indulging in the

most sincere form of flattery, getting urgent about bringing blogs or citizen-written sites into their mix,” (Edmonds, 2011). Citizen bloggers are also seen as more credible to their audience because they seem to be on the same level as their audience. “Online citizen journalists may be more accountable to their community, and the credibility of their reports is associated with their willingness to answer questions of the public,” (Carpenter, 2007).

This research question was formulated in order to decipher if the publics reading citizen journalist blogs view them as a credible source. If they view them as a credible source, then they can be a source that can influence them.

Table 3 summarizes the answers to this question from the three participants in the study.

Table 3

Are citizen journalists credible?

Respondent	Credible, Yes or No	Why or Why Not?
Mary Carr	Yes	Fashion is expression of style, everyone connects to different styles
Jordana Shiau	Yes	Objective opinions, unique/genuine posts
Crosby Noricks	N/A	Ethics: honesty, transparent

Research Question 4: How are the lines being blurred between citizen journalists and professional bloggers in the fashion industry?

“...A blurriness that has paved the way for a concept of citizen-journalism... that has allowed independent fashion bloggers to enter the field of fashion and claim legitimacy,” (Rocamora, 2014). This quote says it best, now that the blogging

platform has become very popular, citizen journalists can create a fashion blog and claim legitimacy, and prove legitimacy, for that matter. “...The rise of the fashion blogosphere has resulted in the coming to prominence and the growing influence of individuals who had no institutional affiliation to the field of fashion when they started their blog,”(Rocamora, 2014). As their prominence continues, more and more citizen bloggers will become influencers, and therefore, opinion leaders in the fashion industry

This research question finally gets to the core of our problem in this study, is there really a difference between professional and citizen bloggers in the fashion industry? We have gotten all the background information we need to make our own judgments, but knowing how the lines are blurred further narrows the line in our knowledge of the two, and begins to explore how they could be more similar than we think.

Table 4

How are the lines being blurred between citizen and professional bloggers?

Respondent	How are the lines being blurred	Examples of tactics used to blur lines
Mary Carr	General public seeing citizen blogs as credible, rise of street fashion, trends unappealing	Quality photography, layout of website
Jordana Shiau	All professionals started out as amateur bloggers, different voices for different niches	n/a
Crosby Noricks	Must look for information about the blogger, read their about section and look at social media presence	Social media (Instagram), paid content, brand collaborations

Table 4 summarizes the answers to this question from the three participants in the study.

This research question was important to find out how the citizen blogger interviewed and professional blogger interviewed see if they use the theory, and how they can effectively implement certain tactics that make them an opinion leader. If they view the theory as similar and exhibit similar attributes, they may be able to both be opinion leaders.

Table 5 summarizes the answers to this question from the three participants in the study.

Table 5

Effective use of the two-step flow communication theory by fashion bloggers

Respondent	How is it used effectively	Examples of opinion leader attributes
Mary Carr	Going to every media outlet	Exposure to large audience, confidence in their opinion
Jordana Shiau	Should not be based on sponsorships and freebies to exhibit opinion,	Credibility, passion for/knowledge of fashion
Crosby Noricks	Impact readers, drive trends and purchasing decisions and awareness of new brands, opinion that others find valuable and helpful,	Strong voice/point of view, powerful visuals and photography, tips on how to wear trends, outfit suggestions/inspiration, access to events

Research Question 6: What makes a professional and successful fashion blog in the fashion industry?

Many things make a professional blogger successful. The literature states there are many concrete items that must be in place such as, “such as creating a

reliable domain and CMS (content management system), have a attractive theme with quality photos, be consistent in your content, use social media for exposure, and to join communities to stay updated,” (Cabrea, 2013).

Brand and voice are also popular components important to professional bloggers. “Building your brand as a fashion blogger comes along with professionalism and success,” (Lewis). “Your voice and content have to be original and authentic,” (Lewis).

The last and most important component is audience. Having a following insures that your blog is growing towards professionalism. “The people that are going to get the numbers ... are the ones that are going to have a point of view, insight and are credible,” (Nichols, 2010).

Table 6

What makes a professional and successful fashion blog?

Respondent	What makes a professional and successful fashion blog	Concrete examples of tactics the blogger uses
Mary Carr	Quality photography, beautiful layout	Wordpress custom layout, professional photographer, original content, tutorials/outfit collages/thoughts on trends
Jordana Shiau	Clear voice, high quality posts/ images, consistency and predictability	Professional photos, quality writing (original content), consistent logo through blog and social media,
Crosby Noricks	Impressive traffic and page views, engaged audience through social media/comments	Social media, pageviews, strong visual/written direction, branded elements, signature look

This question was important in finding what makes a successful blog. We know now what a professional blogger is, but we need to know how specifically they are seen as such. By finding out what a professional blogger needs to have on their physical blog, then we can see if the citizen blogger also contains those attributes.

Table 6 summarizes the answers to this question from the three participants in the study.

Research Question 7: How does a fashion blogger connect to the mainstream fashion media?

Literature answering this question is sporadic and inconsistent, however, there are two themes that stick out. Fashion shows/Fashion Week, collaborations and other fashion blogs seem to be where fashion bloggers can get information straight from the source. Online bloggers account for 40% of the press members in attendance to fashion week (Nichols, 2010). According to Arnold 2012, large fashion magazines have made connections with fashion bloggers that they felt provided the same voice and style the magazines were trying to convey. Fashion bloggers also get information from other bloggers. “As a result of this requirement, fashionable bloggers spend enormous amounts of time each day reading other blogs, seeking obscure Web sites, and writing posts in an attempt to be ahead of the fashion cycle,” (Sedeke, 2013).

This question was formulated to understand how fashion bloggers with influence utilize the first step in the two-step flow communications theory; gathering information from the mass media. If professional and citizen fashion bloggers are gathering information from similar outlets, then they can distribute

information of importance, further influencing the same communities in similar ways.

Table 7 summarizes the answers to this question from the three participants in the study.

Table 7

Fashion bloggers connecting to mainstream media in the fashion industry

Respondent	How do they connect to mainstream media	Examples of where bloggers get information
Mary Carr	Inside people bloggers know, fashion shows, fashion articles	Professional blogs, magazines, newspapers
Jordana Shiau	Connect to mainstream fashion media based on personal look/aesthetic/audience	Magazines (NYLON), websites/fashion blogs (Refinery29)
Crosby Noricks	Fashion blogging conferences put on by mainstream media, affiliate programs, blogging networks, press releases, reach out to brands directly, pay attention to other bloggers, editors	Use tactics stated previously

Research Question 8: How does a fashion blogger connect to the mainstream fashion media?

Fashion bloggers can reach their audience multiple ways. A blogger influencing an audience, however, uses certain tactics because their audience is so large and prominent. First of all, fashion blogger has to be relatable in order to connect to their audience. “If you want to become more influential with your online

community, focus on providing value, building strong relationships (with your followers and other trusted bloggers),” (Redsicker, 2013).

Tactics fashion bloggers utilize to stay connected with their audience is social media prevalence and comments. All forms of social media are very important, but there are two form that have been around longer than the others, therefore, have longer created connections to an audience. “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,” (Influence of Social Media in Fashion & Lifestyle- Mumbai). Interaction on the blog itself is also important. “...sharing content that generates interaction (likes and comments) and draws in more fans,” (Redshicker, 2013).

Table 8

Fashion bloggers connecting to their audience and receiveing feedback

Respondent	How fashion bloggers connect	Examples	Following of Blogger
Mary Carr	prompting comments through their content, social media	Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, emails, comments	Social media- 27 Readers per blog post- 300
Jordana Shiau	Social media, comments, engage audience	Social media, comments, Instagram, Facebook	
Crosby Noricks	Comments, social media	Social media, emails, original content to reach out to audience	Connect with an audience of 100k+

This question as the last step in analyzing if a citizen blogger can be an opinion leader by seeing if they reach out to their audience the same way a professional blogger would.

Table 8 summarizes the answers to this question from the three participants in the study.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendation

Summary

Blogging has risen to become a popular medium for spreading information since its start in 2001. With the ability for anyone to put information out on the Internet, information of all types became more accessible. With this came a rise in “citizen journalism,” where members who were once the audience became those making the news. With this rise in blogging, came the rise of its use in the fashion industry to promote trends, “street wear,” and create fashion icons independent from major fashion brands.

Because of this, many fashion bloggers have entered the industry, relaying their personal styles onto the blogosphere. With bloggers blogging for fashion designers, blogging independently, or collaborating with certain brands, the lines are being continuously blurred between who is a true citizen blogger and who is a professional blogger. With accessibility to creating a high quality looking blog, it is hard to distinguish between the two. Much of this has to do with the way bloggers communicate with their audience, using the two-step flow communication theory.

To get a larger understanding of understanding of the difference between professional and citizen bloggers in the fashion industries, and their tactics used to become opinion leaders of fashion industry followers, three fashion industry members were interviewed. One is a citizen or “amateur” fashion blogger, one a professional fashion blogger, and one a fashion PR expert.

Each fashion industry participant were sent a questioner with questions designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What is a professional blogger?
2. What is a citizen journalist/blogger?
3. How has credibility affected citizen journalists in the fashion industry?
4. How are the lines being blurred between citizen journalists and professional bloggers in the fashion industry?
5. How do fashion bloggers use the two-step communication theory?
6. What makes a professional and successful fashion blog in the fashion industry?
7. How does a fashion blogger connect to the mainstream fashion media?
8. How does a fashion blogger create a connection and receive feedback from their audience?

Discussion

In analyzing the data collected in Chapter 4, conclusions can be made between the information found in the literature from Chapter 2 and the responses given by the research participants. This further helps us distinguish the blurred lines between professional and citizen journalists, and how they each use the two-step flow communication theory to become opinion leaders.

Research Question 1: What is a professional blogger?

Each participant believed one thing to be true, that blogging had to be the sole profession and income provider for the blogger to be a professional. Shiau also agreed that quality work such as writing and photos were needed to make a blog

professional. Noricks also saw a need for a large and engaged audience, as well as collaborations with brands.

This is right in line with the literature. There are three things that were touched on by the participants that are stated in the literature. The literature states you need collaborations. “You have to collaborate with certain labels and get involved in projects,” (McVeigh, 2011). The literature also recognizes the blogger must solely be employed as a blogger, making an income when discussing a professional blogger. “her blog started generating enough advertising revenue to become the main source of income for her family...blogging as a small business,” (Going Pro, 2006). The final component is having an engaged audience. “Recognition, in this case, is a synonym for audience, and, in the time-honored tradition of star-struck social climbers, the A-list bloggers are the ones with the biggest audiences,” (Clark, 2001).

Overall, it can be concluded that a professional blogger is one that gains their income from being a blogger, has collaborations with known brands, and also has a large and engaged audience. This is how you would initially distinguish a professional blogger from the rest.

Research Question 2: What is a citizen journalist/blogger?

All three participants had varied answers, however, there was a common theme. Citizen or “amateur” bloggers are not making their income off of being a blogger. Carr stated, “They don’t have to have any qualifications, necessarily,” (Appendix A). Shiau stated that all professional bloggers started as citizen bloggers, therefore proving that one needs to make a living off of blogging to be a

professional, however, blurring the lines between professional and citizen bloggers further. Noricks commented, “someone who is currently in the process of growing their blogs influence with the goal of being able to transition to blogging full-time,” (Appendix C).

The literature is also very mixed on this topic, stating that they are just members of an audience who do not have any formal training, but do not touch on the topic of generating an income from blogging. Curtis, 2012, states that citizen journalism is, “gathering, writing, editing, production and distribution of news and information by people not trained as professional journalists.”

In conclusion, it can be seen that the definition of a citizen blogger is unclear in literature and to industry members. They could just be bloggers that do not receive their sole income from blogging. They could be bloggers that have no journalist training. They could also be a fashion industry member trying to create a blog that will be professional, but has yet to make collaborations. This shows that without a clear definition, it makes it more difficult for readers to distinguish who is a professional blogger and who is not. It also shows that with any blogger not making their sole income not off of blogging, the realm of “citizen” bloggers is large and they potentially have the ability to create content and affect an audience similar to that of a professional blogger.

Research Question 3: How has credibility citizen journalists affected the fashion industry?

Knowing the credibility of citizen journalists in the fashion industry is important, because without this, citizen journalists could never become the opinion

leaders their professional counterparts can be. Literature shows that traditional media, including the fashion industry, has taken these journalists into account for they know with their community and audience they are credible. Carpenter, 2007, states that online citizen journalists are more accountable to their community, increasing their credibility. That got traditional media's attention. "Traditional media have roused from their slumber and are indulging in the most sincere form of flattery, getting urgent about bringing blogs or citizen-written sites into their mix," (Edmonds, 2011).

Participants saw this in the same light. Carr and Shiau saw citizen bloggers as more credible because they are tied to their audience, they are raw, and not certain brands. With each fashion blogger being unbound by a brand or designer, they were able to show their own style. With style being unique and a preference to each person, it was agreed that it is hard to call one citizen blogger credible and one not. . Fashion is about expression ones style, something about oneself, in an aesthetically pleasing manner. Everyone has a different way of doing so - you don't have to be expert in order to express your style in a 'credible' manner," (Mary Carr, Appendix A).

There is, however, still some judgment in the fashion industry between those who have made a name for themselves as a blogger and those who haven't. Noricks explains, . The fashion industry has come (begrudgingly) to accept fashion bloggers as a core audience, but there is still a large disparity between fashion bloggers with industry experience and connections and those without," (Appendix C).

Overall, citizen bloggers can be seen as even more credible with the fashion audience, dispersing information sent out by the fashion industry and giving honest opinions, because of their lack of ties. The fashion industry, however, has its concerns when it comes to bloggers without ties in the industry, which can be seen as a way to protect their brand. Citizen journalists, being seen as credible from an audience, can then use the two-step communication theory to be opinion leaders, because of their respect from an audience.

Research Question 4: How are the lines being blurred between citizen journalists and professional bloggers in the fashion industry?

As stated above in the summary, the fashion industry has allowed for blogging to become a trend, and with its easy access, thousands of bloggers are joining on to share their opinions and personal style. As the literature stated, "...The rise of the fashion blogosphere has resulted in the coming to prominence and the growing influence of individuals who had no institutional affiliation to the field of fashion when they started their blog,"(Rocamora, 2014).

With this comes a line being blurred between professional and citizen fashion bloggers. With fashion being a subjective topic, anyone can post information or creative styles online, and create a following. "...a blurriness that has paved the way for a concept of citizen-journalism... that has allowed independent fashion bloggers to enter the field of fashion and claim legitimacy," (Rocamora, 2014).

The participants could see this problem emerging, mainly because it is hard to define a professional and amateur blogger. "But, they (professional bloggers) all started off as amateur bloggers in the beginning, so it's hard to say that there's a

defining factor that sets the bar between amateur and professional.” (Jordana Shiau, Appendix B)

Not only did bloggers have to start out from an amateur status, but there are so many different forms of fashion blogs, that appeal to and are credible to different eyes in the fashion industry. “There are so many fashion blogs out there covering so many different niches and speaking for so many different voices that the line between amateur and professional is sort of blurred,” (Jordana Shiau, Appendix B).

In order to contain these blurred lines, participants offered some help in being able to distinguish the two. Carr states, “Sometimes, it can be difficult to tell if a blog is professional or not, but a dead giveaway is the quality of photography and layout of the website itself. Professional blogs aren’t going to use a generic Wordpress layout,” (Appendix A).

Noricks thinks a consumer should look into the bloggers profile to see if they blog full time or not (Appendix C). “I would skim through the content to look for paid content and brand collaborations, as these are often indicative of a blogger who is getting paid well for her platform” (Appendix C).

In conclusion, the lines are being blurred between the two because of the accessibility of blogs, a large spectrum of fashion niches where bloggers can be experts in, or a lack of understanding a concrete difference between the definition of a professional versus citizen blogger. All of these things need to be taken into account for consumers when they are reading a blog, but also for the industry to be able to see who is influencing the industry. They can no longer just examine bloggers working for well-known brands and designers.

Research Question 5: How do bloggers use the two-step flow theory?

The two-step flow communication theory is drawn out very simply in the literature. Each outlet concludes that, “Information is flowing in many directions through different media channels and filtering through new opinion leaders, such as fashion bloggers,” (Wengenmeir, 2013).

Though the process may seem simple, the way that each blogger uses this theory can affect how they can become opinion leaders in the industry. Each participant was asked what makes a blogger an opinion leader. Each had a different answer. In comparing the citizen and professional blogger, Carr saw an opinion leader as, ...”exposure to the most amount of people and confidence in their own opinion,” (Appendix A). Shiau saw this as being credible (Appendix B). This does not conclude that one is an opinion leader and one is not, it just shows differing opinions.

Noricks explains that being an opinion leader, one needs to have, “strong voice and point of view, powerful visuals and photography, tips on how to wear trends, outfit suggestions/inspiration as well as providing access to events, interviews and giveaways.” (Appendix C)

Overall, an opinion leader needs to not only have the credibility and tools to provide a professional looking blog, but they also need to have a large exposure. With each participant having differing opinions, each may

Research Question 6: What makes a professional and successful fashion blog in the fashion industry?

This question goes along with understanding what a professional blogger, however, gives more physical components needed of a professional blog. In looking at what a professional blogger uses to make a blog professional, then looking at what a citizen blogger uses, we can compare in order to see if the citizen journalist has potential to influence an audience as a opinion leader.

The literature was varied in its responses. Some thought the physical layout of the blog was important for professionalism, such creating a reliable domain and CMS (content management system), have a attractive theme with quality photos, be consistent in your content, use social media for exposure, and to join communities to stay updated (Cabrea, 2013). An authentic, strong and original voice is also important in seeming professional (Lewis). In the end, a professional blog also needs to have a following, who are going to “get the numbers,” (Nichols, 2010).

Each participant saw one of these things as important. Carr explained that quality photography, beautiful layout and original content was important. On her personal blog, *Rough and Refined*, she stated in her posts she, “use(s) a professional photographer. All of my content is original. I produce tutorials, outfit collages, and thoughts on trends” (Appendix A).

Shiau, a professional blogger, saw a professional blog as having “a clear voice and high quality posts” (Appendix B). Along with a clear voice comes consistency, predictability and a higher following (Appendix B). High quality posts include good quality images and good quality writing. Shiau says in her blog , “We have a logo that we have consistently across all of our social media, website, business cards, tags, etc.

We also shoot all our photos professionally and use all original content” (Appendix B).

Noricks see’s many variables that contribute to a professional blog, such as impressive traffic, audience who engages in social media of the blog, and strong visuals and signature looks (Appendix C). All of these things together can make a blog professional.

Overall, each participant agreed that a blog needed quality posts, and branded elements or original content, something that will give a clear and strong voice. Every element from the literature was touched upon by at least one candidate. It can be seen that while the citizen blogger has all of the physical elements to her blog that the professional blogger does, she does not have the large following called upon by the literature. It can be concluded that the citizen blogger has a professional looking blog, giving her the ability to be the same kind of opinion leader as a professional blogger, however, her audience may not reach as far as that of the professional blogger. A blog’s following will be discussed under Research Question 8.

Research Question 7: How does a fashion blogger connect to the mainstream fashion media?

Connecting with the mainstream fashion media is extremely important in the two-step flow communications theory, insuring that opinion leaders (fashion bloggers) are collecting and then dispersing credible information. In the literature, though sparse, it can be seen that bloggers can attend fashion shows to gain raw insight on recent fashion trends. Bloggers can also partake in collaborations with

brands and designers in order to gain information straight from the source. Lastly, reading other fashion blogs gives bloggers inspiration and insight to what is circulating around the fashion industries audience already. “...fashionable bloggers spend enormous amounts of time each day reading other blogs,” (Sedeke, 2013).

Each participant touched upon points brought to the literature, but had differing opinions. Carr believed that bloggers get information from people they know in the industry, fashion shows, and articles. Carr gains her information from multiple sources. I follow many other professional blogs, as well as reading up on trends in magazines and newspapers” (Appendix A).

Shiau saw getting her information, and credible information, from magazines or websites (Appendix B). “Magazines like NYLON or websites like Refinery29 are both really credible and knowledgeable sources that also hold the same aesthetic that I do” (Appendix B). All fashion bloggers, however, have a right to use the sources that their personal style connects with. “Fashion bloggers sort of work in the same way. They connect to the mainstream fashion media sort of based on their look/aesthetic/audience” (Appendix B).

Along with fashion shows, Noricks believes that fashion bloggers should join networks and fashion blogging conferences put on by the mainstream media to stay connected (Appendix C). Along with this, bloggers who are connecting to the mainstream media will get press releases, talk to the brands themselves, and also pay attention to other blogs and editors (Appendix C).

Overall, each participant touched on one aspect of the literature, showing that there are multiple ways a blogger can connect to the mainstream media.

Showing that the citizen blogger and professional blogger connect to the same type of mainstream media sources, online blogs and magazines, it can be concluded that the citizen blogger can find just as credible information as the professional blogger, making her more like a professional blogger in that regard. It gives a citizen blogger the same ability to be an opinion leader in this regard.

Research Question 8: How does a fashion blogger connect to the mainstream fashion media?

First and foremost, a fashion blogger connects to an audience because, they are themselves reliable to the consumer. They were once part of the audience, and if they are free agents, they are appealing to the audience because of their similarities with their audience (Certo-Ware, 2014).

To gain that trusting and strong relationship with your audience, there are two tools the literature describes to do so. Social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, allow a blogger to connect to their audience, answer questions, and evaluate what content they create is valuable and receptive to the audience (Influence of Social Media in Fashion & Lifestyle- Mumbai). You can also get more connection to the audience by sharing and creating content that generates comments on the blog and social media pages (Redshicker, 2013).

All participants were in agreement that social media is the way of the future for fashion bloggers reaching their audience, and creating a larger following. Shiau states that, "Fashion bloggers are social media junkies. A lot of the time, being connected through all forms of social media creates the most success" (Appendix B). Noricks agrees comments are important, but all bloggers are moving towards social

media. “In the beginning this was done primarily through comments, though these days direct engagement happens through social media as well” (Appendix C).

As far as use of these tools, Carr and Shiau both use all forms of social media to connect with their audience. Carr says, “I connect with my audience through comments and emails, as well as Instagram. I have an actual following of 27, though most of my posts are read by about 300.” (Appendix A). Noricks also states that with her blog and company website, PR Couture, she connects with, “an audience of 100k+ through social media, email and through the content we produce” (Appendix C).

In conclusion, the use of social media is most important in regards to connecting to an audience, the second step in the two-step flow communication theory. In regards to ability of citizen and professional bloggers to connect to their audience, the citizen blogger uses the same tactics as professionals, just reaches a smaller audience. This concludes that they have the ability to affect an audience, making them a small opinion leader in the fashion industry. The size of the audience, however, does limit how many people they can connect to, which can decrease the magnitude in which they can be a forerunner in the fashion industry.

Recommendations for Practice

Through the collection and analysis of the data, it has become clear that as the fashion blogging industry continues to grow exponentially, different classifications of fashion bloggers will continue to come to the surface. Fashion bloggers have the ability to affect the fashion industry as a whole, but with so many niches in the fashion industry, and different types of audiences, the ability of that blogger to affect the industry is subjective to many factors, and may forever be hard

to define the difference between a professional and citizen blogger.

Recommendations for practice include keeping a strong, original and consistent voice, stay connected with your audience, and to remember that your audience is dependent upon your personal style.

Strong, Original and Consistent voice.

Having a strong and consistent voice allows for a blogger to stay credible with their audience, and continue to create a professional looking blog that will grow their following. “Building your brand as a fashion blogger comes along with professionalism and success... Your voice and content have to be original and authentic,” (Lewis).

This was agreed upon by every participant in the study in some way. Whether it creating original content, having branding tools such as logos and consistent themes, or having quality images, your blog needs something that will make it consistent and show your personal style.

Having an original and strong voice is important in fashion blogging, because ultimately, you will create a strong audience if you are staying true to your style and exemplifying that through your posts and content. Fashion is subjective to personal style, your audience will connect to you if they believe in what you have to say, which will ultimately allow you to become an opinion leader. “If you don’t even know what your voice is, people aren’t going to be able to follow your posts and there won’t really be anything for them to relate to or support” (Jordana Shiau, Appendix B).

Stay Connected with Your Audience

Through this study, it became clear that the main difference between a professional and citizen blogger in becoming a strong opinion leader is audience, and most importantly, size of your audience. Noricks stated exactly what the literature tells us, “a professional and successful fashion blog needs impressive traffic and pageviews as well as an engaged audience who promotes posts through social media, leaves comments, etc” (Appendix C).

A citizen blogger can be an opinion leader. They do influence and audience, and take information from the same place and put their opinion in to influence a group. So yes, they have the ability to technically be opinion leaders. However, they are constantly working to grow their audience to become an opinion leader that actually drives the fashion industry, not just contributes to it. Shiau points out that most professional bloggers, “started off as amateur bloggers in the beginning” (Appendix B).

Social media should be the first tool any blogger becomes comfortable with and use to promote themselves. The literature points to having a strong social media following in order to connect with the audience, but also get feedback from the audience. This tool is only becoming more and more prominent in the industry, and it is what separates an opinion leader from just a blogger. Shiau states that, “the most successful fashion bloggers are ones that engage with their audiences. If you’re just seen as a robot who just puts out outfit posts every day but doesn’t engage their audience or respond to their audience, people will quickly lose interest” (Appendix B).

Study Conclusion

In conclusion, with the data collected from the study, it can be seen that the differences between professional and citizen bloggers in the fashion industry is dependent on multiple factors, mostly being using blogging as a form of income or full-time career. Citizen bloggers seem to follow the same steps in the two-step flow communication theory as professional bloggers, and use the same tactics to make their blogs professional and original. The determining factor in the ability to be an opinion leader seems to be having an audience, and having a large audience.

Overall, it can be seen that a citizen blogger in the fashion industry can be an opinion leader and has the same abilities to reach an audience and influence them like a professional blogger does. The size of their audience, however, determines whether or not they are actually changing the fashion industry and its designers and brands as a whole, or just contributing to an audience that will be receptive to their information, but not necessarily drive the industry.

It can be recommended that any blogger start with a strong, consistent and original voice, and utilize tools to connect to an audience. Both of these things will continue to grow their audience size, eventually making their information a forerunner in the industry, driving trends and designers as a whole, not just influencing a small group of fashion industry followers.

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Appendix A

Interview Transcripts: Mary Carr

The following interview was conducted over email to get an opinion of a citizen or “amature” fashion blogger based on a questionnaire about the difference between professional and citizen bloggers and their impact as opinion leaders in the fashion industry.

Interviewer: Mia Mendola

Respondent: Mary Carr

Date of Interview: 5/13/2014

Interview Transcript:

Mia Mendola: “What would you define as a professional fashion blogger? Can you give examples of what their qualifications would be? Can you give an example of a professional fashion blogger?”

Mary Carr: “I would define a professional fashion blogger as somebody whose main job is running a fashion blog, or they are sponsored and funded by a larger company. Their qualifications could be a current job in the fashion industry, a student of the industry, or simply a writer or photographer who has a keen sense of the industry. One example that jumps to mind is Emily Schuman, of Cupcakes and Cashmere

MM: “What would you define as a citizen or “amateur” fashion blogger? Can you give examples of what their qualifications would be? Can you give an example of a professional fashion blogger?”

MC: “I would define an amateur fashion blogger as somebody whose main source of income is a different job and their blog is designed to fit around her other priorities. They don’t have to have any qualifications, necessarily, other than a passion for fashion. (did you want another example of a professional or one of an amateur? I would describe Allison McGregor, behind Four Leaf Clover, as an amateur blogger).”

MM: Do you view a citizen fashion blogger to be credible? Why or why not? How do you think the fashion industry as a whole see’s the credibility of fashion bloggers?

MC: “I absolutely see citizen blogs to be credible. Fashion is about expression ones style, something about oneself, in an aesthetically pleasing manner. Everyone has a different way of doing so - you don’t have to be expert in order to express your style in a “credible” manner.”

MM: In the fashion industry, how are the lines being blurred between citizen and professional bloggers? By looking at a fashion blog, can you tell if one is a professional fashion blogger or if one is not? What would you look for?

MC: "The lines are being blurred by the general public recognizing citizen blogs as credible. The rise of street fashion has also played a role. People don't want to be ruled by trends. Sometimes, it can be difficult to tell if a blog is professional or not, but a dead giveaway is the quality of photography and layout of the website itself. Professional blogs aren't going to use a generic Wordpress layout."

MM: How do fashion bloggers effectively use the two-step flow communication theory? If you are a fashion blogger, what do you think are the attributes to be an opinion leader in the fashion industry?

MC: "Bloggers effectively use this theory simply by going themselves to every media outlet. The attributes of an opinion leader are often exposure to the most amount of people and confidence in their own opinion."

MM: What makes a professional and successful fashion blog? Can you give concrete examples of things a professional fashion blogger needs to have (for example layout design, brand consistency, large following, quality images etc.)? If you are a fashion blogger, what CMS system do you use? Do you have a logo, quality images and original content? What kind of content do you produce (for example tutorials, outfit collages, etc.)?

MC: "Quality photography and a beautiful layout are extremely important. You don't even need that many words, necessarily. Fashion can speak for itself if you arrange it in a compelling way. I use Wordpress. Though I don't have a logo, I typically use a professional photographer. All of my content is original. I produce tutorials, outfit collages, and thoughts on trends."

MM: How does a fashion blogger successfully connect to the mainstream fashion media? Where would a professional fashion blogger receive credible information from the fashion industry? If you are a fashion blogger, where do you get your information/ inspiration from the fashion industry?

MC: "I think it takes a while for a fashion blogger to build enough of a following to really connect to the mainstream fashion media. Emily Schuman had her blog for a couple years before she was called upon for larger projects. A professional blogger would receive credible information from inside people they know, fashion shows that they gain access to, and fashion articles. I gain information and inspiration from a multitude of sources - I follow many other professional blogs, as well as reading up on trends in magazines and newspapers."

MM: How does a fashion blogger create a connection from their audience? How do they receive feedback? If you are a fashion blogger, how do you connect to your audience? Do you have a following, and if so, how many?

MC: "A fashion blogger creates a connection by prompting comments through their content and have a presence on other social media platforms (i.e. twitter, instagram,

Facebook). They receive feedback through those other platforms as well as comments on their actual posts. I connect with my audience through comments and emails, as well as instagram. I have an actual following of 27, though most of my posts are read by about 300.”

Appendix B

Interview Transcripts: Jordana Shiau

The following interview was conducted over email to get an opinion of a professional bloggers based on a questionnaire about the difference between professional and citizen bloggers and their impact as opinion leaders on the fashion industry.

Interviewer: Mia Mendola

Respondent: Bella B boutique blogger (Jordana Shiau)

Date of Interview: 5/13/2014

Interview Transcript:

Mia Mendola: What would you define as a professional fashion blogger? Can you give examples of what their qualifications would be? Can you give an example of a professional fashion blogger?

Jordana Shiau: "These days, it is sort of hard to determine who is a "professional" fashion blogger. There are so many fashion blogs out there covering so many different niches and speaking for so many different voices that the line between amateur and professional is sort of blurred. However, there are ways to make an amateur blog SEEM professional and convey a sense of authority and knowledge without exactly having a certain amount of qualifications. I believe that having good quality work (photos, writing, styling, etc) is key in conveying a professional feel through a fashion blog. If these things are achieved, they can lead to opportunities in which someone could turn their blogging into a profession and actually generate some revenue from blog views, etc. Someone like Sammi from <http://www.beautycrush.co.uk/> just has a very professional feel to her blog. She has gained a lot of popularity and notoriety among the blogging and youtube world which has turned into partnerships with different fashion companies and make up companies, which has turned her lifestyle/fashion blog into a profession. "

MM: "What would you define as a citizen or "amateur" fashion blogger? Can you give examples of what their qualifications would be? Can you give an example of a professional fashion blogger?"

JS: "I sort of addressed this question in the previous answer, but I will reiterate that I believe that the lines between professional and amateur are blurred in the blogging community. Maybe the one difference could be the fact that many "professional" bloggers are bloggers who make a living off of blogging and have gained professional partnerships and relationships through their blogging. But, they all started off as amateur bloggers in the beginning, so it's hard to say that there's a defining factor that sets the bar between amateur and professional."

MM: "Do you view a citizen fashion blogger to be credible? Why or why not? How do you think the fashion industry as a whole see's the credibility of fashion bloggers?"

JS: “Yes, I think citizen fashion bloggers can be credible. It certainly depends on what you’re looking for in a fashion blogger. Citizen fashion bloggers can provide objective opinions about fashion brands that some professional fashion bloggers can’t due to partnerships. Also, citizen fashion bloggers may also have more unique or genuine posts. What outfits they may post are strictly what they enjoy wearing and what they wear on a regular basis. They don’t tend to have fashion companies sending them items that they have to feature in certain blog posts, like some professional bloggers do. I think citizen fashion bloggers provide a more raw and unbiased take to fashion which I think can be very credible. I think the fashion industry looks down on the blogging community as a whole. It has gotten a bad rap in recent years because many fashion bloggers have become more prominent than people who really, truly work in fashion. Coveted front row spots at fashion shows have been given to fashion bloggers over prominent fashion editors or fashion publicists, which has been taken in bad taste among the fashion community. “

MM: “In the fashion industry, how are the lines being blurred between citizen and professional bloggers? By looking at a fashion blog, can you tell if one is a professional fashion blogger or if one is not? What would you look for?”

JS: “(See answers for questions 1 and 2!)”

MM: “How do fashion bloggers effectively use the two-step flow communication theory? If you are a fashion blogger, what do you think are the attributes to be an opinion leader in the fashion industry?”

JS: “I certainly think that fashion bloggers are influential enough to be effective in the two-step flow communication theory. I think one of the most important things in being an opinion leader is to be credible. If you’re a fashion blogger who does everything based on sponsorships and freebies from companies, you aren’t a credible source for opinions. I think someone who obviously has passion for and knowledge of fashion are ones who are the most influential in the industry. It’s fairly clear when a blogger is passionate and when a blogger is just blogging for sponsorships. I think readers can see past those certain bloggers.”

MM: “What makes a professional and successful fashion blog? Can you give concrete examples of things a professional fashion blogger needs to have (for example layout design, brand consistency, large following, quality images etc.)? If you are a fashion blogger, what CMS system do you use? Do you have a logo, quality images and original content? What kind of content do you produce (for example tutorials, outfit collages, etc.)?”

JS: “I think some of the most important factors that make a successful fashion blog are: a clear voice and high quality posts. I think if there is a clear voice for readers to get behind, there’s a much higher chance to get more followers. If you don’t even know what your voice is, people aren’t going to be able to follow your posts and

there won't really be anything for them to relate to or support. Good quality images and good quality writing are also important, but that's sort of applied to any sort of professional setting. No one is going to take you seriously, in any job, if you cannot produce high quality work.

For the company blog I run, we make sure that our blog posts are consistent and have a clear voice. The Bella B voice is one that is extremely friendly, relatable, and girly. Our audience tends to range from women 14 – 45. So just making sure that our voice speaks to that range is important when blogging. We have a logo that we have consistently across all of our social media, website, business cards, tags, etc. We also shoot all our photos professionally and use all original content.

For the blog, our photos were all shot with Bella B staff members, either me or our past photographer, Josie. We had consistent photo editing (presets on Adobe Lightroom) that led to a consistent look to all of our blog posts. For collages, we used the same font names, font colors, and borders. When writing, our voice was consistent throughout all blog posts. Every blog post had the same layout, same feel, same look, just with different content. I believe that allows the reader to have something to hold on to and almost expect. People really like consistency and predictability. And focusing on having those things in a blog make it much more relatable and likable from a public's standpoint. “

MM: “How does a fashion blogger successfully connect to the mainstream fashion media? Where would a professional fashion blogger receive credible information from the fashion industry? If you are a fashion blogger, where do you get your information/ inspiration from the fashion industry?”

JS: “I get a lot of my information and inspiration through sites that I find credible but also relatable. Magazines like NYLON or websites like Refinery29 are both really credible and knowledgeable sources that also hold the same aesthetic that I do. A more sophisticated fashion blogger may go to a magazine like Elle for their fashion news/inspiration. It all depends on what your personal aesthetic and taste is. Fashion bloggers sort of work in the same way. They connect to the mainstream fashion media sort of based on their look/aesthetic/audience. Someone like Eugenie Kim of Feral Creature is much more of a cool, trendy, fashion forward blogger, so she connects to media outlets like NYLON. But, someone like Wendy from Wendy's Look Book that has much more of a girly, feminine and classic style may go to a completely different media outlet that suits her aesthetic. “

MM: “How does a fashion blogger create a connection from their audience? How do they receive feedback? If you are a fashion blogger, how do you connect to your audience? Do you have a following, and if so, how many?”

JS: “Fashion bloggers are social media junkies. A lot of the time, being connected through all forms of social media creates the most success. This allows your audience to reach you at any given time, on any given form of media, with any questions or comments they may have. I think the most successful fashion bloggers

are ones that engage with their audiences. If you're just seen as a robot who just puts out outfit posts every day but doesn't engage their audience or respond to their audience, people will quickly lose interest. Being able to see someone that may be famous or notable online as a real person really can bring an audience in. People tend to get very invested and involved in bloggers' lives if the blogger opens up more to the audience, and that draws in a really loyal fan base that will keep coming back. "

Appendix C

Interview Transcripts: Crosby Noricks

The following interview was conducted over email to get an opinion of a public relations practitioner based on a questionnaire about the difference between professional and citizen bloggers and their impact as opinion leaders in the fashion industry.

Interviewer: Mia Mendola
Respondent: Crosby Noricks
Date of Interview: 5/13/2014

Interview Transcript:

Mia Mendola: "What would you define as a professional fashion blogger? Can you give examples of what their qualifications would be? Can you give an example of a professional fashion blogger?"

Crosby Noricks: "A professional fashion blogger is someone whose primary source of income comes directly or indirectly through their blog. There aren't any specific qualifications, but in order to make significant money from a blog, a professional fashion blogger typically has an engaged audience, a strong ability to influence that audience, and the interest of fashion brands who work with the fashion blogger through traditional advertising, brand ambassadorship, collaborations and consulting. Popular professional fashion bloggers include Leandra/The Man Repeller, Emily/Cupcakes & Cashmere, Chriselle/The Criselle Factor."

MM: "What would you define as a citizen or "amateur" fashion blogger? Can you give examples of what their qualifications would be? Can you give an example of a professional fashion blogger?"

CN: "A citizen or amateur fashion blogger is someone who either doesn't blog with the intention of turning it into a business, or someone who is currently in the process of growing their blogs influence with the goal of being able to transition to blogging full-time. There are thousands of blogs that fit into this category - many of whom are members of Independent Fashion Bloggers."

MM: Do you view a citizen fashion blogger to be credible? Why or why not? How do you think the fashion industry as a whole see's the credibility of fashion bloggers?

CN: I'm not concerned with the credibility of citizen fashion bloggers' content - a blog is a platform for all sorts of expression, including exploring an interest in clothing, personal style or the fashion industry. I am concerned that such a fashion blogger be ethical, honest and transparent. The fashion industry has come (begrudgingly) to accept fashion bloggers as a core audience, but there is still a large disparity between fashion bloggers with industry experience and connections and

those without. This is possibly why so many of the fashion bloggers we hear about already had previous experience in traditional fashion media, or are well connected to the industry with friends and family members working as designers, editors etc.

MM: In the fashion industry, how are the lines being blurred between citizen and professional bloggers? By looking at a fashion blog, can you tell if one is a professional fashion blogger or if one is not? What would you look for?

CN: I would read the about section to find out more about the blogger and see if she discloses that this blog is her full-time profession, as well as her social media audience, particularly Instagram followers. I would skim through the content to look for paid content and brand collaborations, as these are often indicative of a blogger who is getting paid well for her platform.

MM: How do fashion bloggers effectively use the two-step flow communication theory? If you are a fashion blogger, what do you think are the attributes to be an opinion leader in the fashion industry?

CN: Fashion bloggers are absolutely seeking to impart information to their readers - whether that is simply visual inspiration, wardrobe expertise, or fashion industry news. In this way, they can potentially offer the same third-party credibility that has traditionally been the role of mass media. However, because they are outside of the mass media machine, they are also able to engage with their readers as an opinion leader, driving trends, purchase decisions and awareness of new brands. In order to be an opinion leader you must have an opinion that others find valuable and helpful. This can be accomplished through a variety of means including a strong voice and point of view, powerful visuals and photography, tips on how to wear trends, outfit suggestions/inspiration as well as providing access to events, interviews and giveaways.

MM: What makes a professional and successful fashion blog? Can you give concrete examples of things a professional fashion blogger needs to have (for example layout design, brand consistency, large following, quality images etc.)? If you are a fashion blogger, what CMS system do you use? Do you have a logo, quality images and original content? What kind of content do you produce (for example tutorials, outfit collages, etc.)?

CN: I would say that predominantly, a professional and successful fashion blog needs impressive traffic and pageviews as well as an engaged audience who promotes posts through social media, leaves comments, etc. The blog needs to have a strong visual and written direction, with branded elements and a signature look.

MM: How does a fashion blogger successfully connect to the mainstream fashion media? Where would a professional fashion blogger receive credible information from the fashion industry? If you are a fashion blogger, where do you get your information/ inspiration from the fashion industry?

CN: Attending fashion blogging conferences put on my mainstream media as well as affiliate programs and blogging networks is a good way to connect directly to media. Participating in things like the Lucky Community and working with a publicist to get coverage in traditional media is another tactic. Bloggers receive information through press releases and pitches in their inbox, reaching out to brands directly, and paying attention to what other bloggers and editors are writing about

MM: How does a fashion blogger create a connection from their audience? How do they receive feedback? If you are a fashion blogger, how do you connect to your audience? Do you have a following, and if so, how many?

CN: In the beginning this was done primarily through comments, though these days direct engagement happens through social media as well. Personally I connect to an audience of 100k+ through social media, email and through the content we produce.

