

Examining the Role of Bloggers in the Fashion Industry:  
A Public Relations Strategy for New Designers

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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March 2014

## ABSTRACT

In our modern digital society, news consumption has evolved to reflect an increased reliance upon immediate and mass-distributed forms of communication channels. Social media, whether in the form of a personal profile, photo or blogroll, is consistently turned to by most audiences for updates in any market. Specifically within the fashion industry, high-end designers and reputable brands are turning to social media channels to not only inform, but increase, their consumer base through brand exposure. Newly emerging as this visual industry's most trusted influencers, fashion bloggers provide for a means for designers to not only show, but inform, a larger, global audience of their brand and their products.

In applying expert opinion to guide this study, the Social Media Impact theory states that professionals must “position themselves to benefit from fundamental changes that are occurring in the ways people decide on which products and services to consume, and how they actually consume them” (Mir & Zaheer, 2012). Fashion bloggers have become trusted sources of new and emerging trends and products for fashion audiences to rely upon for inspiration and consumption. Because of what Grunig and Grunig refer to as “two-way communication,” a blog's audience is encouraged to incorporate communication to not only lead to their own purchasing behavior, but also inspire all individuals who follow said blog (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995).

With fashion bloggers' increasing influence and followings within the industry, this study reveals how supportive relationships, supplemented with public product reviews and other public relations strategies, can grant the exposure necessary for designers, specifically new designers, to be successful in the industry.

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# Chapter 1

## *Introduction*

### **Statement of the Problem**

Whether an avid follower, or simply someone who chooses to clothe themselves each day, the fashion industry is likely part of each and every modern individuals' lives, making fashion designers quite powerful as businessmen and women. As an industry that is constantly changing and evolving with regard to outside influencers, many designers who are viewed as successful have built their brands into legacies. This, in turn, provides a major obstacle for the many young designers who wish to make their mark on the industry.

Despite education providing courses and majors for those yearning to break into the industry, young designers are up against seasoned professionals who have worked for years to gain their current fame. For instance what began as selling ““whipstitched leather vests, batik T-shirts, and copper bracelets”” in his basement in the 70s, American designer, Michael Kors, was nameless in the industry for 10 years until a “red Lothar’s sundress” made its *Vogue* debut (Designers: Michael Kors). After years of dedication, Kors is now one of the most successful and widely respected designers whose collections are in constant pursuit by the industry’s top clients. Now, with fashion media spread globally and across mediums, designers have evolved their brand exposure in order to maintain consumer communication and successfully publicize their products for sale.

Just as seasoned designers are taking their branding efforts to the internet, social media, etc., young designers must master similar techniques in order to stand up against those already respected individuals. Young designers, who, most likely, do not have a marketing team to assist,

cannot always rely upon themselves and their designs to “make it.” Unlike other forms of strategic marketing, “the difference in fashion’s marketing is that it is not so much reminding the customer of how good the product is, but actually getting the customer to get out of their chair and buy something” making it essential for fashion brands “to be far more innovative and forward looking” in their efforts (Clark, 2009). In addition to tactics on social media, including outreach to influencers and product mentions, young designers have an extraordinary opportunity for innovative marketing by forming relationships with fashion bloggers because these “bloggers are the next generation of media influencers. They are taking marketing and advertising budgets from leading global brands and many are at the forefront of the social media revolution, with hundreds of thousands of followers” (Paton, 2012).

### **Background of the Problem**

Each year, designers create two completely new collections to show on major fashion week runways. Since 1943, New York Fashion Week, in particular, has been one of the most sought after events for fashion’s elite to unite and be exposed to the anticipated collections. “With more than 80 designers shows over 8 days, it is known as the premier event worldwide where style, beauty, supermodels, and celebrities come together to celebrate the best in fashion” (About: Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week). Of the over 200,000 total attendees, including family, friends, celebrities, etc., over 5,000 are registered journalists, photographers and members of the press who, essentially, help foster the success of a designer’s collection in the industry (Berry, 2012). It is at these events, with these influential individuals, that have guaranteed seasoned designers a recurring place as fashion influencers based on their continued

success. Although there are other opportunities for publication outside these major events, many young designers seek out these fashion week showings as definitive of success and respect in the industry. However, in order to do so, a large following and decent exposure must be acquired and maintained.

Public relations practitioners in the fashion industry are taking advantage of these shows to invite bloggers who will expose their new products to the largest consumer network in today's digital society; their followers. No longer are designers' public relations teams solely relying upon traditional forms of advertising or simply allowing fashion magazines and celebrities to control brand exposure. Although these methods are still in place, what's different between blog outreach and other advertising techniques is, essentially, "thinking about people first. What's resonating with them...and connecting those people's stories to your product in a relevant way? Frankly, if you can't actually determine whether it's content or advertising, that's probably the purest form of branded content" (Bazilian, 2012). Designers now rely upon such exposure to guarantee more interaction with consumers and promote conversation about their collections. "A brand-new company is unknown to the target market and its promotional strategy starts from a very low base: it has no profile and no previous perceptions", making outreach to bloggers, who carry out consumer conversation about products daily, vital to building a network of relationships in the industry (Lea-Greenwood, 2013). As our society begins to rely upon social media for news gathering, designers are, in turn, relying on such mediums in order to reach their desired audiences and beyond.

There is little data revealing the impact of blogger outreach in the fashion industry, and no definite way to measure brand and designer success based on this outreach in a public

relations strategy. However, a public relations strategy in any market relies upon business relationships that promote the success of each brand involved. Therefore, building relationships with those individuals, the fashion bloggers, who have already established relationships with fashion consumers, must be enforced to supplement any other public relations techniques.

### **Purpose of the Study**

As public relations becomes more and more significant to brand success in all business ventures, unique forms of strategic outreach and marketing continue to emerge, forcing brands to evolve in their own public relations efforts in order to remain relevant and successful in a given market. In the fashion industry, such forms of outreach that allow for designers' collections to be visually available to foster conversation among consumers are achieved via social media, specifically fashion blogs.

The industry is made up of designers who have been promoted in top fashion magazines and have been showing their collections at fashion weeks for decades, making it increasingly difficult for new designers to appear as relevant. Therefore, in order to begin a respected following of consumers, new designers must recognize that brand building relies upon the "emotional and intellectual connection between people and brands" (Westfield, 2002). With blog followings in the hundreds of thousands, consumers have clearly shown their reliance on bloggers and their sites in order to pursue fashion interests. By building relationships with bloggers, new designers have the opportunity to connect with bloggers' audiences, therefore, expanding brand exposure and awareness.

## **Setting of the Study**

As part of the completion of the Senior Project, this study will be conducted at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, California. Interviews will be conducted with public relations professionals, fashion bloggers and consumers of fashion media in the form of in-person as well as email responses. Each question will be tailored toward each individual's position, but will be geared toward similar themes in order to provide cohesive research. These research questions will reveal how each individual views the impact of blogger outreach to gain a successful following for new brands, particularly in the fashion industry. Information gathered in the literature review and through these interviews will recommend blogger outreach and relationship-building as essential to any public relations strategy in the fashion industry.

## **Research Questions**

1. Why are fashion bloggers accepted and trusted as “trend-setters,” similar to celebrities and editors, and relied upon by consumers?
2. How can fashion bloggers increase brand exposure of a new designer to the fashion industry?
3. How are relationships between bloggers and designers beneficial to both parties, thus, providing for strategic marketing tactics?
4. How have personal fashion blogs accelerated the fashion industry's relativity into a more transparent community for its consumers?
5. Why are these relationships just as, if not more, important to new designers than those developed with seasoned fashion experts in the industry?

## **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined to clarify several of the terms of the topic and assist the reader in providing context for the remainder of the study.

Blog (shortened from Weblog): A frequently updated web site consisting of personal observations, excerpts from other sources, etc., typically run by a single person, and usually with hyperlinks to other sites; an online journal or diary (OED Online)

Brand Awareness: consumer familiarity with the name, image, or distinctive qualities of a particular brand of goods or services (OED Online)

Follower: A person who follows a particular person, group, etc., on a social media web site or application (OED Online)

Product Placement: often in the form of a review, a blog post featuring a specific product, obtained by a relationship between the blogger and brand professionals, leading to mutually beneficial outcomes (Lea-Greenwood, 2013)

Social Media: web sites and applications which enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking (OED Online)

Social Media Impact Theory: the strategic use of social media networks to position brands in a way that leads consumers to decide on what products to consume and how to do so (Mir & Zaheer, 2012)

Trend-Setter: One who or that which establishes trends in dress, thought, etc.

Two-Way Symmetrical Model of Communication: understanding a public's opinion and attitudes, then using public relations communications to accomplish mutually beneficial outcomes (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995, I)

## **Organization of the Study**

This study is based on five chapters to supplement research on the topic of the impact of fashion blogging as a public relations technique. Chapter 1 is the *Introduction* and includes the statement of the problem, background information regarding fashion bloggers and the fashion industry, the purpose and setting of the study, and the research questions to which the study is based upon. Chapter 2 includes the *Literature Review* which consists of research done on current findings of bloggers and their sites as assets to public relations strategies in the fashion industry. Chapter 3 is the *Methodology* in which the data sources and the methods used to obtain information used in the study are included. This will be presented in the form of interview questions, background information of the interviewees, etc. *The Data Analysis* in Chapter 4 is where the data collected from the research and from the interviews are compared and analyzed in order to address the research questions. The fifth and final chapter is the *Discussion and Recommendations* in which the conclusion of the study's findings are detailed as well as any further recommendations for expanding research and data on the topic.

## Chapter 2

### *Literature Review*

The *Literature Review* presents existing evaluations of bloggers, blogs and their inherent impact on brand marketing strategies and on the fashion industry.

Based on current research through the articulated resources, fashion bloggers have evolved into significant assets to brands' and designers' public relations strategies to remain relevant in the industry. Outreach toward these individuals in the form of appearances, product placement and many other tactics provide the conversations and relationships with consumers that designers rely on to maintain and increase brand awareness and profit. These bloggers, marked by their impressively large followings across their social media networks, have qualified themselves as the industry's newest, most reliable trendsetters and brand ambassadors. By making fashion accessible in the form of immediate publication of new products, they have created an ideal form of two-way communication that enables designers to remain present in a competitive industry that relies heavily upon immediate, visual mediums.

While reviewing the literature, I have acknowledged blogging as a tool to supplement and improve public relations and marketing strategies in the fashion industry. No longer are designers, specifically new designers, solely reliant on their own team, websites, single social media networks, etc., but must turn to the influencers and ambassadors that the fashion consumers have deemed as trusted trend-setters. Consumer reliance on social media and honest product reviews of fashion's latest products are what drive purchasing behaviors. Modern purchasing behaviors in the industry start with visual inspiration and mass conversation — unique forms of communication that fashion blogs promote.

The following analysis of multiple resources stems from a perspective which indicates the significance of incorporating fashion bloggers into both new and seasoned designers' public relations strategies, ultimately, to increase brand awareness and success.

### **Blog marketing and the social impact theory:**

With the fashion industry's quick pace, reliance on a unique brand image and established relationships in all aspects of a business venture, fashion blogs have emerged as leading foundations for strategic public relations and marketing. According to Sedeke, "fashion marketing uses common techniques of advertising and market research with the addition of tools specialized for the fashion industry such as product development, branding, pricing and forecasting" (Sedeke, 2013). Blogging enhances these tools as the sites are exposed to large, trusted followings, determined by a combination of fans, email subscribers, page views, comments, etc. When combined with their relationships with fashion designers, their influence extends in the form of vital components to brand exposure. Like most other social mediums, "the network of blogs is performing an important role in creating trends, sharing news and opinion, and spreading information via word-of-mouth" (Ahn, Kim & Park, 2010). Oftentimes, bloggers post new updates at least once a day, making their sites ideal sources for public relations outreach in such an industry whose products and branding moves at a consistently fast pace.

According to the Social Impact Theory, marketers now must understand how to "position themselves to benefit from fundamental changes that are occurring in the ways people decide on which products and services to consume, and how they actually consume them" (Mir & Zaheer, 2012). Consumers in the fashion industry look to social media for trend updates and, specifically,

to fashion blogs where they can reference a product in its true form — being worn or accessorized by a human subject. Despite most bloggers being considered untrained professionals compared to that of traditional media personnel, “consumers believe more in the product-related content or information created which other consumers generate on social networking sites, multimedia sites, blogs and so on than producer or company produced related content, despite being personally unknown or unrelated to the user” (Mir & Zaheer, 2012). Photographs, supplemented with detailed descriptions and/or advice, allow the audience to see a product on a live subject in a unique style, therefore, encouraging online communities and “two-way communication that incorporates comments and encourages followers” (Lea-Greenwood, 2013). In essence, blogs incorporate Grunig and Grunig’s two-way symmetrical model which “can be seen as understanding a public’s opinion and attitudes and then using public relations communications to accomplish mutually beneficial outcomes” (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995).

Fashion blogs dominate this communication in the fashion industry, “enjoying the attention of users due to the platform’s personal and interactive approach versus the standardized treatment through mainstream media” (Sedeke, 2013). Consumers are more likely to be exposed to a product with presence in the blogosphere, relate to and idolize the unique style of a particular blogger and, ultimately, increase brand exposure and profit for the designer.

### **Product placement on blogs as a public relations tactic:**

Whether enforced by a public relations firm or a designer’s in-house publicity team, outreach to the most talked about and relevant fashion bloggers is a direct connection to the vital consumer relationship which drives the fashion industry. Based on the electronic word-of-mouth

perspective, both designers and fashion bloggers benefit from the dissemination of product reviews on blogs due to probable gains in social and consumer interaction, desire for economic incentive, and potential for accelerated self-worth in the industry. For designers, fashion bloggers are the source of the pre-purchasing phase of their products, making them vital to any marketing strategy (Ahn, Kim & Park, 2010). Among other benefits to bloggers, each time a viewer clicks on embedded content or advertising on their blogs, they are paid (Lea-Greenwood, 2013). And for consumers, direct conversation with the community and the blogger advances their own desires for the latest trends in fashion. This, in turn, offers valuable insight into purchasing behavior for the brand and, more importantly, promotes increased interest in current and future products posted on the blog (Marken, 2005). Based on our society's reliance upon the internet, designers and brands are able to listen to these consumer voices "in order to be informed not only about changing consumer needs and trends, but also to hear the customer's opinion about competitors or products" (Gilfoil, 2012).

Among other determinants, fashion bloggers are coined influential based on a successful following across social mediums. Bloggers have thousands, even millions, of viewers each day that are consistent followers, view their sites and social networks and, more importantly, look to these sites for product updates and consumption behavior. When tracking metrics such as unique views and clicks on a site, "the size of a web site's visitor base is positively correlated with visitors' behavioral depth of content consumption on the web site — that is, the number of unique visitors that a web site attracts is positively associated with the average number of pages downloaded by these unique visitors" (I-Ping, Chun-Yao & Chien-Wen, 2010). Therefore, more clicks and page views coincide with more opportunities for the viewers to click on either an

advertisement or embedded link, thus, continuing the purchasing process. Product placement, supplemented with links, either to the product's design house or available retailer, is a feature specific to blogging derived from consumers' reliance upon the internet to purchase products.

Spanning from major cities around the world, the fashion industry is one that is culturally diverse, contributing to the large presence of bloggers on the web. In other words, "blogs provide a channel for reaching a large number of geographically distributed audiences, which in turn increases awareness and boost sales" (Pal & Kapur, 2010). The idea of accessibility contributes to the humanizing quality of blogs allowing users, whether consistent viewers of fashion bloggers or those that simply come across a particular blog due to its large following, to relate and rely upon bloggers for inspiration and purchasing behavior. Bloggers who mention a product expose their ever-growing audiences to designers and brands, therefore, increasing "search engine optimization and improv[ing] traffic to company websites which are normally packed with information" (Pal & Kapur, 2010). Fashion designers rely upon such exposure, specifically on the internet where most modern branding exists, to further advance design efforts and presence in the fashion industry and to consumers around the world.

### **Fashion bloggers as influential trend-setters to be seen and heard:**

Fashion is a consistently changing industry with new products and trends being created and new designers itching to be publicized around the world at any given moment, making identification with loyal consumers and their preferences vital to any amount of success. It is this fact that makes marketing and branding fashion "more complex than in other sectors because of the velocity and vastness of this industry; brands and designers must twice a year produce brand

new collections, containing a variety of items which are often distributed worldwide” (Sedeke, 2013). As a low-cost form of distributing online media, specifically important to new designers whose budgets remain at lower capabilities, bloggers spend their time searching for high-quality information, including products and trends, to supplement a blog post to attract the largest audience possible.

In comparison to traditional forms of fashion media, including iconic fashion magazines, content management comes down to the bloggers themselves, making publication of posts quickly available in comparison to other mediums which require teams who dictate content and production (Online Publishing, 2006). Although major fashion print media is still, and will, remain business influencers, “digital is the future, and it's a future where a multitude of strong individual voices can rival the influence of a more prominent, institutional few” (Fashion Magazines or Fashion Bloggers, 2013). Many people, especially those “outside” the industry, find fashion to be an exclusive group of individuals who have, essentially, made it. In an industry consisting of iconic brands who have built up and maintained their influence over time and those individuals who have contributed to said success, blogging allows for personal voices beyond these select few successes to display a unique, trendy style. When done in a manner worthy of audience attention, a blogger's personal style allows the industry to be more transparent, relatable and available to the masses in a unique, interactive manner, thus, contributing to the significant conversations that blogs provide. Not only important to consumers around the world, but also to new designers who must compete with seasoned professionals, bloggers provide an outlet for the fashion industry to be accessible.

Many bloggers landed their current entrepreneurial success by fulfilling a need for a hobby of interest. What may have begun with photos of their personal, not yet fully embraced style and successful following, some have gained audience numbers in the millions, forcing the industry to realize the apparent “influence of fashion bloggers that take on many roles; including advertiser, promoter and stylist — not just editorial” (Gibbon, 2011). According to *PR Newswire*, “style bloggers have gathered high profiles within the fashion world; many invited by fashion houses and designers to attend events, launches and shows as an influential presence. Responsible for communicating the ins and outs of an ever innovating industry, they play a vital role alongside designers, stylists and fashion journalists in shaping tastes and ideas” (New look and company collaboration, 2012). Most designers “now [have] an employee focusing exclusively on blogs, tracking their impact on sales, among other things,” to decide which bloggers are invited to events and fashion shows as well as who best to reach out to for product reviews and exposure (Dodes, 2006).

Fashion weeks, twice yearly events in which designers display new collections to be bought by retailers and seen by stylists, are no longer dominated by the mainstream media. What used to be a collection of magazine editors and contributors, is now a combination of seasoned guests and the newest contributors to fashion media — the bloggers. Designers’ “staff members research their websites’ reach, visual design, quality of work and presence on social media” in order to determine who should be seated front row (Bauknecht, 2014). This is where bloggers are not only exposed to collections to which they personally would like to review but also allow for their audiences to be exposed to the shows they attend, again, increasing brand awareness. It is important for designers to consider the positions of their guests so as to determine who will

expose their brand and collection to the largest audience possible. Seated beside celebrities, influential media representatives and fashion editors, bloggers are photographed sitting front row so as to pay homage to their influential work and presence in the industry, as well as reflect upon the organic relationships they have maintained throughout their marketing strategies (Bauknecht, 2014).

### **Increasing brand awareness through further collaborations:**

Beyond product placement, “brands seem to prefer influential style bloggers over established designers” regarding collaboration efforts (Blalock, 2013). Results, whether based on profit or increased brand awareness, are incredibly impactful when both bloggers and their collaborated brand share similar taste and consumer relationships. As Wendy Nguyen, founder of successful style blog, *Wendy’s Lookbook*, states, ““personally, I feel that the fashion blogging community has a lot to offer. We help curate, share trends, and have an intimate connection with our readers”” (Blalock, 2013).

Opportunities beyond that of product reviews, as a result of these relationships, become additional means of marketing for fashion’s most elite, and newest, designers. Top bloggers collaborate their sense of style with brands to design and create products, host events and promote their favorite pieces in a current collection. Similar to that of celebrity product endorsements, bloggers’ impressively large followings promote an increased brand exposure and profit as dedicated followers purchase their favorite fashion blogger’s own creations or choice products. Again, trusted relationships combined with consumers’ reliance upon fashion bloggers for the latest trends, turn these bloggers into celebrity figures who influence what is popular. For

instance, creator of the blog, *The Blonde Salad*, Chiara Ferragni has collaborated with *Steve Madden* shoes for a collection due out Spring 2014. With over “1 million unique visitors and 12,000,000 impressions per month,” this Italian blogger’s collaborated collection will undoubtedly be exposed to her own, as well as the brand’s, large audiences for increased brand awareness and profit (Steve Madden partners, 2013). Collaborations often result in advances for both the blogger and brand as both are contributing to their own brand’s increasing conversation and profit. Fashion bloggers also share their collaboration efforts across social mediums and document their unique styles around the collaborated pieces on their blogs, again, increasing conversation and awareness about products and the designers who create them.

#### **Further public relations techniques to enhance a brand image:**

Design houses of the most influential designers in the industry are turning to content marketing to engage with their consumers on a deeper, more impactful, level. Because fashion content varies in style, technique, goals, etc. from brand to brand, marketing is becoming an essential part of building engagement and exposure to the consumers that allow for each brand to be successful in the industry. In comparison to other social mediums and the average voice that most users employ, “bloggers typically have a much more resonant online voice” and “are uniquely qualified to amplify the voice of a brand” (Lea-Greenwood, 2013).

Most, if not all, fashion bloggers are available across social media sites including Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram in order to enhance their own branding and audience outreach. Beyond daily posts on fashion trends or simple lifestyle stories, fashion bloggers have a voice at all times and are available to their audiences at every moment of the day. For this

reason, “tweeting and blogging are also important tools of communication during an event, as influential stylists communicate and drive footfall to a stand or event” (Lea-Greenwood, 2013). These events include store openings, brand promotions, endorsement deals and fashion weeks where “bloggers are becoming as important as the press and celebrity guests on the front row” (Lea-Greenwood, 2013). Similar to paid celebrity appearances, media and consumers are looking to the bloggers for “live streaming from the hottest runway shows, real time shopping” and “tweets from the first row giving to us all a virtual seat” (Agathou, 2011). This reinforces bloggers as trend-setters, guiding business decisions and branding of even the most influential designers in the industry simply because a designer’s goal stems from the consumer impact that blogs generate. The presence of fashion’s newest products, combined with the growing audiences and availability of real-time conversation, has resulted in consumers relying on these “trend leaders and stylists as a source of information and inspiration about trends” (Lea-Greenwood, 2013).

A cohesive social media presence of a fashion blogger is an important determinant in overall influence, reinforcing the idea of a blogger’s voice being readily available at all times. In order to fit in with a marketing strategy, brands reach out to bloggers that are most cohesive “to be an integrated solution across all media, traditional and digital, especially for visually driven industries like fashion and beauty” (Wexler, 2012). Fashion bloggers are able to develop loyal audiences with a passion for conversing about, therefore promoting, designers that would be less available without the online presence of blog sites. Thus, bloggers and their audiences can become a brand’s best advocates if a trusted relationship is formed, without even having to resort to analyzing website metrics. The goal of brand marketing, specifically involving consumer

relationships, is to “significantly increase consumer engagement, brand chatter, and ultimately revenue” (Wexler, 2012). This will be achieved by brands who “focus on whether [a blogger] attracts the right audience, has the right sentiment and are right for brand messaging” (Wexler, 2012).

## **Chapter 3**

### *Methodology*

Chapter 3 details methods used for data collection for this study. Such methods include background on the data sources used, collection of the data and limitations and delimitations during data collection.

#### **Data Sources**

In order to collect data regarding bloggers and outreach to bloggers in the fashion industry, three individuals have been interviewed. Each one, including a fashion blogger, public relations experts and fashion consumer, have been asked questions to further elaborate and support the data presented in Chapters 1 and 2. Although tailored to each individual's perspective position in the study, these questions support the subject matter and research questions to which the study is directed. The questions were designed to enhance current research involving fashion bloggers and their impact on brand marketing and public relations strategies, as well as present any further suggestions for research and tactics for effectiveness.

#### **Participants**

As President and Chief Strategy Officer of *Agency LEAD*, an agency located in Grover Beach, California, Starr Hall represents expert knowledge of the public relations industry as a whole. *Agency LEAD*'s client base consists of hospitality, wellness, merchandise and fashion in which blogger outreach poses as a significant aspect of public relations and marketing strategies to provide for expended brand outreach to consumers. Dana Damato, Founder and President of

*Damato Public Relations LLC*, has experience in media relations, specifically in the form of digital media, for an array of clients in the hospitality, fashion and lifestyle markets. Megan Elliott, creator of blog, *Lush to Blush*, represents expert knowledge of fashion blogging resulting from her substantial following and experience with product placement from various designers. The fourth and final interview was directed toward a fashion consumer, but one that relies heavily upon specific fashion blogs for trend updates and purchasing direction, in order to offer the opposite, yet equally significant contributor to the success of the fashion industry. As a former intern in the fashion industry, Jessica Monteiro of San Jose, California is a consistent follower of fashion blogs and their various social networks, to which she draws inspiration and discovers new products from trusted, as well as new, designers and brands. This perspective is included to expose the true importance of blogger outreach to fashion's most significant audience: the consumers.

### **Interview Design**

The following interview questions have been presented and responded to by the three experts in order to serve as data sources for this study. The questions listed are specifically tailored to the fashion industry, however, when directed toward public relations experts, Starr Hall and Dana Damato, they will have a general focus on blogs as public relations tactics for any branding opportunity. Megan Elliott was also provided with three additional questions so as to retrieve the most data possible on the industry of fashion and bloggers who have become influential as public relations and marketing tactics.

For the fashion blogger and fashion consumer:

1. How do you think fashion bloggers and their sites have changed, whether improved or not, the fashion industry?
2. Would you say fashion bloggers and their blogs pose as influential public relations strategies for brands? How so?
3. Some would say that bloggers are taking on similar roles, if not more significant roles, than other fashion influentials i.e. celebrities and magazines. What do you think of this interpretation? How is blogging different from traditional forms of fashion publicity?
4. How do you think young designers, in particular, benefit from building relationships with fashion bloggers?

Additional questions directed to the fashion blogger:

6. How do you build a relationship with a designer? Does this begin on their end with their desire for a review on your blog? Or are you the one to take lead and reach out toward personally desired designers for their products?
7. How do your relationships with designers help make you successful as a blogger? Do you think your voice and your publicity of a designer's product make them successful as a designer in return? How so?
8. Do you have a favorite designer or brand that you enjoy working with? Why?

For the public relations experts:

1. How do you think bloggers and their sites have changed, whether improved or not, the public relations industry? Would you say bloggers and their blogs pose as influential public relations strategies for brands? How so?

2. Some would say that bloggers are taking on similar roles, if not more significant roles, than other influential mediums, i.e. magazines and press releases. What do you think of this interpretation? How is blogging different from traditional forms of publicity?
3. How do you think new brands, in particular, benefit from building relationships with bloggers?
4. In your opinion, what social medium, including blogs in their entirety, has the most impact on branding in terms of attracting consumers to new brands and their products? Or is it a combination of the mediums?

### **Data Collection**

In order to reach out to fashion bloggers from around the country, these interview questions were sent and responded to via email. The questions were sent to numerous fashion bloggers, specifically in the United States in order to avoid any language barriers, and the chosen interview included in the study best represents that data necessary for the completion of this study.

The interview with the fashion consumer was conducted face-to-face and voice recorded on an *Apple* cellular divide to guarantee correct quotations. The rest of the interviews, to the public relations and fashion blogger experts, were conducted via emailed responses due to various residencies across the country or time constraints. The interviews were held between the months of February and March of 2014 and took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

Each interview was based on the questions detailed in this chapter, and tailored toward each individual's role in the study as well as their specific roles as professionals. The questions were designed to supplement the research on fashion bloggers as public relations strategies and

further support the necessity of such tactics in order for new and seasoned designers to prosper in the industry.

### **Data Presentation**

All individuals who have been interviewed have agreed for their first and last name,s as well as their titles, to be presented in the study. Although using pseudonyms was offered to replace this information, the participants felt no need to keep their true information confidential in order to present the data in this study.

The interviews were conducted via email and in-person in order to guarantee the correct quotations were denoted for this study. The recording, done on an *Apple* cellular device, were transcribed into text versions that were sent back to the individuals who were interviewed in order to eliminate any instances for misunderstandings or misrepresentation. Therefore, the data presented is guaranteed to reflect what the individual wished to present through their respective responses. The emailed questions were responded to by the rest of the experts, with their answers included beneath the questions. The experts were informed that the exact text presented in the email would be used in this study, again to guarantee accuracy and avoid any misrepresentation of what the individual wished to portray with her answers.

### **Limitations**

Current research on the effectiveness of unique marketing and branding opportunities in the fashion industry is limited. Most research focuses on opinionated and individual views, from designers or other professionals in the industry. Because of the time and monetary constraints of

this study, greater responses to the original research questions regarding fashion blogging as an asset to any public relations strategy, and the interview questions, were limited. The location of this study limits the availability of fashion experts to reach out to, therefore, adding to the lack of information presented on this study specifically.

### **Delimitations**

Because of their busy lifestyle as professional fashion bloggers, the interview questions directed at the fashion bloggers themselves were sent to 20 total bloggers. Although there are many more individuals who take on such roles in the fashion industry, a personal choice of these 20 bloggers may have removed the opportunity for more responses had more questionnaires been distributed.

Because these questionnaires were sent via email, the respondents had the opportunity to take more time on answers as well as edit them before being returned. This removes the availability of completely raw and personal data. However, additional time to process the questions has possibly resulted in more professional and knowledgeable answers.

## **Chapter 4**

### *Data Analysis*

Chapter 4 outlines the data collected from the interviewed experts as well as the literature documented in the *Literature Review*. The interview questions will be presented, followed by direct quotations from the subjects to which said questions were directed, supplemented by any applicable information from existing literature. Each interviewee is indicated by their full name, title and qualifications for being included in this study.

The answers and existing literature will then be applied to the original research questions, indicated in Chapter 1 of this study, in order to present research results pertaining to the effectiveness of fashion bloggers and their blogs to all, especially new, designers in the fashion industry.

### **Description of Interviewed Experts**

#### **Fashion-Blogger**

Megan Elliott, *Lush to Blush*

Megan Elliott was chosen to fulfill the position of expert on fashion blogging as she has cultivated a successful following to her fashion, beauty and lifestyle blog, *Lush to Blush*. What began in March of 2012, this young site has generated 1,232 followers on Bloglovin', a site that curates all blogs an individual follows, 5,547 Likes on Facebook and 6,315 Twitter followers. These numbers don't include those who choose not to follow, but still connect with the blog and its efforts via other avenues. Her education and obvious successful following has provided her with other experiences as an editor, creative director and buyer, and even stylist. With daily

updates on her blog and social media network, posts include complete detail on her personal style, style tips and giveaways for her avid followers. Each post generates comments of appreciation for her unique style and true sincerity of her work. She is devoted and passionate about fashion and beauty, making her an ideal expert for this study.

### **Fashion Consumer**

Jessica Monteiro, former intern at *Dana Dromov Showroom*

Jessica Monteiro, a 23-year-old California native, was chosen as an expert to this study as she relies heavily upon fashion blogs to fulfill her consumer and passion necessities. A previous internship in New York City with fashion public relations house, *Dana Dromov Showroom*, increased her knowledge and interest in the industry and her own unique style. As an intern, she was exposed to fashion's competitive market through relations with both respected and emerging designers. Monteiro has since become an avid follower of specific bloggers whose style she relates and is inspired by. Although she still incorporates the act of shopping and online shopping, her ties to social media updates from her favorite bloggers drives the majority of her consumption behavior and knowledge of designers in the industry. She has immediate access to her favorite, and new designers, from bloggers with similar taste, therefore, fostering an increased perception of new trends followed by purchasing behavior.

### **Public Relations Expert**

Starr Hall, Chief Strategy Officer and President of *Agency LEAD*

Author of published books, *Get Connected*, *The Social Networking Toolkit for Business* and *The Social Wave- Why Your Business is Wiping Out With Social Media & How to Fix it*, and seasoned international publicist, Starr Hall has developed authority within public relations, brand

marketing and, especially, social media. Her previous and current work includes “thousands of entrepreneurs and businesses around the planet including corporations, non-profit organizations, authors, CEOs and associations worldwide” (Hall). Her successful business relationships and substantial audience following has provided for her personal, and her clients’, appearances in media outlets “including *Oprah Magazine, LA times, The Wall Street Journal, Good Morning America, the Today Show*” and much more (Hall). By specializing in media coverage, brand awareness and maintenance, social media and internet relationship marketing, Starr has developed a strong voice in this digital age of the public relations.

### **Public Relations Expert #2**

Dana Damato, Founder and President of *Damato Public Relations LLC*.

Serving hospitality, fashion and lifestyle clients from across the nation, Dana Damato’s own *Damato Public Relations LLC*. works to strategically expose brands in our modern digital age. What is maintained by successful business relationships, Damato’s firm creates conversation and attracts consumers to a given client to “achieve long-term success” (*Damato Public Relations*). A media specialist herself, Damato has “headed product launches, client branding strategies, store openings, copy writing as well as traditional public relations and marketing campaigns for clients” (*Damato Public Relations*). Her experience in journalism, editing and social media allows for a “unique and progressive approach to [developing] publicity campaigns” for her clients (*Damato Public Relations*).

### **Fashion Industry-Based Questionnaire**

As fashion a blogger and consumer, Elliott and Monteiro were asked questions tailored to their positions in the fashion industry. These questions were asked to reveal personal impacts that

fashion bloggers and blogging itself have contributed to their knowledge and overall impact to the fashion industry. Each individual represents distinct, yet imperative, sectors of fashion blogging in order to assess its complete impact on the industry.

1. *How do you think fashion bloggers and their sites have changed, whether improved or not, the fashion industry?*

This question was asked to highlight the obvious shift in influential individuals, including media personal, to a more accessible, modern group within the fashion industry. With our society's reliance upon social media and immediate news updates, fashion, being a visually-driven industry, has evolved to incorporate various outlets for brand exposure of the newest trends on the market.

- Megan Elliott: "I think they bring fashion to everyday people like me and you.

Fashion bloggers make fashion accessible." (Appendix A)

- Jessica Monteiro: "Bloggers have created an outlet for almost direct access to what is trending now. I find that I can more easily relate to the industry through bloggers and their postings." (Appendix B)

2. *Would you say fashion bloggers and their blogs pose as influential public relations strategies for designers and brands? How so?*

The experts were asked this question to introduce fashion blogging into the realm of public relations. Not only has blogging become a public device for personal documentation, the conversations and relationships that have erupted make this medium the perfect opportunity for outreach and branding efforts. Specifically regarding fashion bloggers, who are members from around the world with different, unique styles, new

products are placed on blogs for large audiences to reference for fashion inspiration and purchasing habits. Like any form of public relations strategy, it is vital that a brand become recognized by a large audience, attainable through trusted relationships that provide mutually beneficial outcomes.

- ME: “Absolutely! As opposed to professionals and people that gain from you buying their product, fashion bloggers simply share their true, honest opinions without much to gain.” (Appendix A)
- JM: “Yes, bloggers are a very influential PR strategy for brands. Bloggers have essentially created another form of fashion media to which consumers are able to access style ideas.” (Appendix B)

3. *Some would say that bloggers are taking on similar roles, if not more significant roles, than other fashion influentials i.e. celebrities and magazines. What do you think of this interpretation? How is blogging different from these forms of fashion publicity?*

In order to touch on the critique of fashion bloggers as the new “trend-setters” in an otherwise exclusive industry, this question addresses the possibilities that blogging provide for individuals with passions that correlate with the industry. Although very different in their goals, traditional and modern forms of media and uniquely significant to the fashion industry and the success of all designers. Both experts point out the personal qualities that bloggers introduce to those who stand on the outside of the industry, but still take great interest in the market. In essence, blogs provide wider conversation and more transparency which, in turn, result in increased brand exposure.

- ME: “Blogging is different because it's more personal. When it's a celebrity, you don't get to hear their thoughts behind why they chose to wear a certain designer; most likely, it was their stylists decision. In a magazine, it's a whole team of people pulling picks and fitting in paid placements.” (Appendix A)
- JM: “I believe that bloggers are actually taking more of an updated and modern role in the fashion industry, mainly through their use of social media. Many bloggers are actually bringing themselves to be a new type of celebrity-- they are given front row seats at fashion shows, they are interviewed on television and in magazines, and their opinions are highly valued by those that follow them.” (Appendix B)

4. *How do you think young designers, in particular, benefit from building relationships with fashion bloggers?*

This question was directed at the bloggers and fashion consumer to highlight a major difference between blogging and traditional media outlets in providing public relations opportunities for young, new designers who wish to make their mark on the industry. Because bloggers have proven to be the transparent, more personal media personal to foster relationships among consumers, new designers have the opportunity to reach large audiences and begin their brand recognition via a trusted blogger source. This can lead to further advances in brand maintenance and continued relationships among fashion's most elite trend-setters.

- ME: “It's a mutually beneficial relationship where you can build each other up. I think it's so smart for designers to find a blogger that truly appreciates the

- designs. They can get a sort of brand ambassador with a following with tastes similar to theirs, so it makes sense that the readers would like the designer as well. It's the best way for designers to reach a wider audience of potential customers who genuinely appreciate the particular style.”
- JM: “Young designers benefit from their relationships with bloggers because being featured is an incredible way to get immediate exposure to consumers. Bloggers have several thousand people that follow their posting outlets daily, thus bringing immediate interest to all that view.” (Appendix B)

Additional questions for the fashion blogger:

5. *How do you build a relationship with a designer? Does this begin on their end with their desire for a review on your blog? Or are you the one to take lead and reach out toward personally desired designers for their products?*

This question, directed to a fashion blogger, was asked to allow all readers of this study to understand the foundation behind blogger-designer relationships. In an effort to expose a small portion of the work bloggers are exposed to, this question directly identifies blogging as a public relations tactics because of the obvious outreach involved. It also provides background information on how designers approach relationship-building opportunities with bloggers, who are responsible for a significant amount of consumers which the brand relies on.

- ME: “It has been both for me. I am not shy about reaching out to brands like I used to be...I have to make sure it's the right fit to stay authentic and honest for my readers who trust my opinion.” (Appendix A)

6. *How do your relationships with designers help make you successful as a blogger? Do you think your voice and your publicity of a designer's product make them successful as a designer in return? How so?*

This question was included to allow for the blogger to provide her own personal relationships and how they are beneficial to both the designer's and blogger's brand exposure. Because she has developed such successful followings in various communities around the world, any one post of a single product is publicized to individuals who rely on their beloved bloggers for fashion purchases. Again, the relationships formed between designers and bloggers allows for communication and opportunity for increased consumption through the advocacy of a brand on popular blog sites.

- ME: "Like I mentioned before, I think it is definitely mutually beneficial. I share a designer with my readers--someone they may not have really had access to or understood previously--and the designer shares my photos with their followers." (Appendix A)

7. *Do you have a favorite designer or brand that you enjoy working with? Why?*

This question was also provided to include personal businesses inquiries of this blogger. It also reveals her previous, or current, relationships that are examples of how product reviews are public relations strategies for designers and their products. By developing respectful and flourishing relationships with bloggers, designers have the opportunity to create brand advocates who will gladly publicize a product and positive reviews to their many readers.

- ME: “I enjoyed working with Rowley Eyewear a lot. The communication was very friendly, laid-back and straight forward. I also have really enjoyed working with certain PR companies. One company sent me the cutest package and card for my birthday - I just thought that was so sweet!” (Appendix A)

### **Public Relations-Based Questionnaire**

1. *How do you think bloggers and their sites have changed, whether improved or not, the public relations industry? Would you say bloggers and their blogs pose as influential public relations strategies for brands? How so?*

This question was asked of the public relations experts in order to highlight the recent introduction of bloggers and blogging into the digital public relations and marketing techniques. Both experts recognize the value of bloggers’ audiences and potential outreach when exposing a specific brand and its products. When it comes to public relations, exposure, specifically on influential mediums, in this case with a applicable blogger, will always be the most significant aspect of a public relations strategy for any brand in a market.

- Starr Hall: “Just as with any media outlet, it depends on the blogger’s influence and reputation as well as following.”

- Dana Damato: “Bloggers have absolutely helped the public relations industry.

Coming from a PR standpoint, exposure is exposure, and we'll take it!

Although it does also depend on the product and interaction.” (Appendix D)

2. *Some would say that bloggers are taking on similar roles, if not more significant roles, than other influential mediums, i.e. magazines and press releases. What do you think of this interpretation? How is blogging different from traditional forms of publicity?*

Because both experts have worked with various media outlets for their clients, this question emphasizes how different mediums can contribute to an overall public relations strategy. Although traditional publications remain apparent in specific campaigns, digital media has resulted in substantial changes in terms of audience, voice and overall brand recognition. Blogging, being an internet-based form, is particularly significant to public relations because of the relationships they are based upon and the resulting community impact available through exposure and direct communication.

- SH: “Blogging at times can be more personable and raw from the writer him/herself.

Often times traditional media can be more of a large media voice. But, influential bloggers with large community followings can have more of an influence versus print media, etc. Because magazine outlets are going to specific markets and can miss the viewer/reader in between, blogs often catch this area...the middle.”

- DD: “We are in the digital age and I think bloggers are just as valid as any other form of publicity. Every blog that is published has the opportunity to create a massive buzz if it's done right.” (Appendix D)

3. *How do you think new brands, in particular, benefit from building relationships with bloggers?*

Blogging is all about exposure based upon views, “likes”, comments and shares. These continued actions upon a single post about a brand and its product(s) contribute to increased exposure, across all social mediums, and increased number of audience members who become aware of both the blogger and the brand. Blogging promotes brand awareness amongst a large group of individuals who have already been in touch and rely upon a particular blogger’s efforts.

- SH: “When a new brand is looking to get exposure through blogs, the best way to start these relationships is through conversations, the brand following influencers and sending a message at the right time, when it matters.” (Appendix C)
- DD: “The same as above. The more bloggers write about your product, the more views it will receive. It's creating brand awareness in a digital form.”

4. *In your opinion, what social medium, including blogs in their entirety, has the most impact on branding in terms of attracting consumers to new brands and their products? Or is it a combination of the mediums?*

This question highlights how both experts are firm believers in the power of social media as a complete public relations influencer. A brand’s availability to the market and desired audience via all forms of social media networks increases overall awareness of the brand and, therefore, consumption and profit. Providing a cohesive voice, connecting all brand updates together and advocating for consumer conversation across social mediums is vital in our digital age of marketing. Social media use is only increasing,

thus, brands must correlate their public relations efforts to their audience's current wants and needs.

- SH: "Social media is not just a channel, it is the influencer of all channels. What people say, review, rate, share in regard to a product, service or brand overall can be extremely influential in communities, large and small."
- DD: I'd say any digital marketing/publicity. If someone does a YouTube review and puts it on their blog, than share the link on social media."

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions, as indicated in Chapter 1, *Introduction*, were created to guide research both in the *Literature Review* and formatting the interview questions for the public relations and fashion industry experts. These questions were designed to highlight the significance of fashion bloggers and their sites in assisting a designer and their brand in successful public relations and marketing campaigns. The below findings were retrieved from scholarly articles, books and journals to correlate with the designated research questions and, ultimately, reveal how bloggers are a modern and vital aspect to public relations in the fashion industry.

5. *Why are fashion bloggers accepted and trusted as "trend-setters," similar to celebrities and editors, and relied upon by consumers?*

This question was asked to introduce the appeal of bloggers and their sites to the desired audiences of fashion designers; the consumers. Similar to product placement on a movie or television star, the public is more inclined to approach a brand if it's name is recognizable, i.e.

has been showcased on a known individual. Increased product placement in correlation to increased perceptions of blogger influence on the fashion industry have resulted in blogger styles being idolized and desired by their large audiences. Just as with a magazine or celebrity spotting, designers are exposed to their desired consumers from the visual posts that bloggers produce. This contributes to their emerging style and trend-setting abilities and, ultimately, increased brand awareness and increased profit.

- In terms of public relations and marketing “digital is the future, and it's a future where a multitude of strong individual voices can rival the influence of a more prominent, institutional few,” specifically blogging in its immediacy and promotion of personal, unique styles and trends (Fashion Magazines or Fashion Bloggers, 2013).
- According to Gibbon, designer-blogger relationships allow for “fashion bloggers that take on many roles; including advertiser, promoter and stylist - not just editorial” (Gibbon, 2011). Bloggers often play roles as brand advocates which not only promotes a specific designers, but provides for products to enhance their own personal style, therefore, their own branding and business opportunities.

Table 1

*Bloggers as Influencers*

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Response</b>
Megan Elliott	Blogging makes fashion more accessible for everyday people. When a product is combine with the blogger’s style, it becomes more personal for readers.
Jessica Monteiro	Bloggers provide direct, immediate access to trends through various mediums, like Instagram. They can be reached at any given moment during the day without even posting on their blog sites.
Starr Hall	Bloggers offer a more personal, raw form of media exposure. They have created large media voices that are heard.
Dana Damato	Blogging increase brand exposure by grabbing the viral attention of the masses.

6. *How can fashion bloggers increase brand exposure of a new designer to the fashion industry?*

In an effort to expose fashion bloggers as essential to public relations and marketing campaigns, this question focuses on generating consumers at the onset of a new designer’s business venture. The fashion industry has often been described as exclusive and reliant upon large publications, whose relationships are difficult to create, in order to provide for a lasting position in the industry. New designers are forced to compete with seasoned professionals who have developed successful brands over the course of a decade and have developed relationships that result in their brand’s consistent exposure across influential fashion publications. Therefore, without a team of public relations professionals and in order to foster a way into influencer

territory, new designers must pursue and embrace relationships with bloggers who can expose their products immediately to a large audience, sometimes comparable to that of fashion's largest publications.

- With digital media's increasing role in all forms of communication, "the network of blogs is performing an important role in creating trends, sharing news and opinion, and spreading information via word-of-mouth" (Ahn, Kim & Park, 2010).
- New designers, especially must "position themselves to benefit from fundamental changes that are occurring in the ways people decide on which products and services to consume, and how they actually consume them," which is through digital media (Mir & Zaheer, 2012).
- Blogs present an accessible way to capture Grunig and Grunig's two-way symmetrical model of public relations which "can be seen as understanding a public's opinion and attitudes and then using public relations communications to accomplish mutually beneficial outcomes" (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995).

Table 2

*Increasing Brand Exposure*

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Response</b>
Megan Elliott	Bloggers often pose as brand ambassadors for designers which they review and publicly post on. Readers are not exposed to new products, but unbiased review of said products without having to resort to traditional mediums.
Jessica Monteiro	The immediate access of bloggers across social mediums increases their exposure through various audiences and their chosen social media channel.
Starr Hall	Because traditional media outlets have specific markets of audiences, blogs can catch the viewers/readers that are often missed.
Dana Damato	Our digital age of marketing makes blogging just as, if not more, valid as any other form of publicity in reaching a brand's desired audience(s).

7. *How are relationships between bloggers and designers beneficial to both parties, thus, providing for strategic marketing tactics?*

In any public relations strategy, practitioners and brands thrive from their trusted relationships within a given industry. In order for a brand to be welcomed, recognized and contributed to, relationships within all aspects, including the media, financially, consumers and other influencers, are essential for a brand to maintain positive sentiment, drive the profit necessary for stability and further success. Building relationships allow for a brand to be exposed to its desired audience in order to maintain all public relations and marketing strategies. In the fashion industry, one that relies heavily on influencers and media exposure, consumers look to

visual and digital aids for designers' updates. Therefore, blogging not only contributes to a blogger's own personal brand, but the branding of the designers and products featured on a post.

- According to Pal and Kapur, “blogs provide a channel for reaching a large number of geographically distributed audiences, which in turn increases awareness and boost sales” as well as boosts a designer's or brand's search engine optimization, therefore, improv[ing] traffic to company websites which are normally packed with information” (Pal & Kapur, 2010).
- In relation to the impact of a blog's following, “the size of a web site's visitor base is positively correlated with visitors' behavioral depth of content consumption on the web site - that is, the number of unique visitors that a web site attracts is positively associated with the average number of pages downloaded by these unique visitors” (I-Ping, Chun-Yao & Chien-Wen, 2010).

Table 3

*Beneficial Relationships*

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Response</b>
Megan Elliott	Relationships between designers and bloggers are beneficial when both parties are building each other up. Designers often choose bloggers who have similar taste to their designs, and vice versa.
Jessica Monteiro	The relationship between a blogger and designer is more obtainable than that with a traditional, large publication. When created, these relationships offer more immediate exposure of a product to consumers.
Starr Hall	Building lasting respect and transparency in any market furthers all PR efforts.
Dana Damato	Designers can often obtain more views and exposure of their products on blogs and/or social media. Blogger following is, in turn, increased with that particular brand's following.

8. *How have personal fashion blogs accelerated the fashion industry's relativity into a more transparent community for its consumers?*

As indicated by the research and direct quotations from the interviewed experts, fashion blogs offer a more personal look into what appears to be an exclusive industry. There are various consumers of fashion from various style, economic and interest levels, however, with fashion blogging making its impact on the industry, there are more now avenues for consumers to relate to fashion. In addition, blogs are not as limitedly available to the masses as apposed to a fashion show, viewing or even widespread fashion magazines. With our reliance upon digital media,

bloggers who take one social media personas across networks are continuously making themselves and their style efforts available to their followers and the general public. Blogging has inspired a large group of trend-setters to join in on the craze and expose their passion via networking and digital techniques that double as business and relationship-oriented ventures. For an industry like fashion, which relies heavily on consumer perception of a brand, a more transparent interpretation of designers and their products is necessary to accelerate as well as maintain beneficial relationship with influencers of the masses.

- Because the fashion industry is “more complex than in other sectors because of the velocity and vastness of this industry; brands and designers must twice a year produce brand new collections, containing a variety of items which are often distributed worldwide” (Sedeke, 2013). Therefore, blogger’s immediacy, whether through blog posts or real time social media updates, makes this task more easily obtainable.
- Specifically significant in our digital society, “consumers believe more in the product-related content or information created which other consumers generate on social networking sites, multimedia sites, blogs and so on than producer or company produced related content, despite being personally unknown or unrelated to the user” (Mir & Zaheer, 2012).
- Despite traditional fashion publications, i.e. *Vogue*, *Elle*, *Marie Claire*, etc., remaining major influencers in determining and publicizing trend updates, “digital is the future, and it's a future where a multitude of strong individual voices can rival the influence of a more prominent, institutional few” (Fashion Magazines or Fashion Bloggers, 2013).

Table 4

*Transparency*

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Response</b>
Megan Elliott	Bloggers are more relatable and accessible to everyday fashion followers. Their opinions are honest, reflective to their similar lifestyles to fashion consumers.
Jessica Monteiro	Bloggers' posts pose as inspiration to followers of similar style and taste. It is a more accessible form of fashion for us.
Starr Hall	The availability of direct communication with the public provides for a unique inside-look of exclusive markets.
Dana Damato	Information is not private or exclusive, but rather, available to larger audiences in a more open form.

9. *Why are these relationships just as, if not more, important to new designers than those developed with seasoned fashion experts in the industry?*

Again displaying the effectiveness of granting new designers access into this competitive environment, this question highlights somewhat of a necessity in forming blogger relationships simply as a result of their growing influence on the industry as a whole. By forming relationships with bloggers, new designers welcome the opportunity for immediate exposure, rather than waiting upon the approval of a large team of associates working for a large publication. Designers are also welcoming the exact audience to which they tailor their brand via bloggers that share similar tastes and style to the designer's products. Bloggers are publicizing reviews in new, unique, yet modern ways that are available to their substantial following. Designers must

embrace the true significance of consumer reliance on bloggers for trend updates if they wish to obtain their desired audience members and, ultimately, guarantee enough profit for continued survival.

- More accessible and welcomed to review features, “style bloggers have gathered high profiles within the fashion world; many invited by fashion houses and designers to attend events, launches and shows as an influential presence. Responsible for communicating the ins and outs of an ever innovating industry, they play a vital role alongside designers, stylists and fashion journalists in shaping tastes and ideas” (New look and company collaboration, 2012).
- By creating relationships with bloggers, designers are welcoming the exposure of their products across that blogger’s social networks. “Bloggers typically have a much more resonant online voice” and “are uniquely qualified to amplify the voice of a brand” (Lea-Greenwood, 2013).
- Forming relationships is essential when planning a strategic public relations and/or marketing plan. In order to “significantly increase consumer engagement, brand chatter, and ultimately revenue,” designers must incorporate modern forms of outreach that have proven successful to the industry (Wexler, 2012).

Table 5

*The Old and the New*

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Response</b>
Megan Elliott	Fashion is consistently changing and designer success relies upon brand ambassadors and exposure. All designers need to provide their audiences with consistent updates in order to stay relevant.
Jessica Monteiro	Blogging is a new form, but one to which dedicated consumers in our modern society rely upon for trend and brand updates.
Starr Hall	With bloggers, brands have the opportunity to form and maintain relationships to benefit both businesses in current and future PR strategies.Enable
Dana Damato	Bloggers' use of social media, combined with consumers' reliance upon social media for purchasing behavior, provides for an ability to grab the attention of consumers across channels.

## Chapter 5

### *Summary and Discussion*

#### **Summary**

Since the emergence of increased internet and social media consumption, the fashion industry has evolved to embrace these digital forms in order to advance their brands' exposure and maintain success in the market. Prior to our society's reliance on modern digital media for all media consumption, fashion designers and reputable brands were forced to engage in relationships with traditional, large publications that were often difficult to come by. Designers were faced with "make-or-break" moments twice a year, in the form of fashion shows, without the ability to grant large media outreach in between. Therefore, online and social media have proven to be ideal sources of outreach and publicity in which brands can engage with large audiences who may have been missed had only traditional forms been considered. This is specifically important to new designers who must face the competitive, exclusivity of an industry built upon its seasoned designers.

Vital to brand success in the fashion industry, the literary analysis highlights Grunig and Grunig's two-way symmetrical communication as the foundation for conversation amongst consumers, and with brands, about their desires. In addition, the Social Media Impact Theory supports the use of social media platforms as promoting overall purchasing behavior. Fashion bloggers have emerged as the industry's trend-setters by combining their personal style with these exact strategies, making them ideal to any designer's public relations strategy. This study presents the necessity of designer relationships with fashion bloggers who can and willingly promote products to a large audience following, specifically involving new designers to the

industry. These relationships result in branding opportunities for both parties in order to maintain awareness, which ultimately drives profit.

Based off similar ideas and themes, two questionnaires were developed for both fashion blogging experts and public relations experts to weigh in on the significance of blogger outreach to any public relations campaign. Both questionnaires were presented to answer the original research questions:

- 10. Why are fashion bloggers accepted and trusted as “trend-setters,” similar to celebrities and editors, and relied upon by consumers?*
- 11. How can fashion bloggers increase brand exposure of a new designer to the fashion industry?*
- 12. How are relationships between bloggers and designers beneficial to both parties, thus, providing for strategic marketing tactics?*
- 13. How have personal fashion blogs accelerated the fashion industry’s relativity into a more transparent community for its consumers?*
- 14. Why are these relationships just as, if not more, important to new designers than those developed with seasoned fashion experts in the industry?*

## **Discussion**

By analyzing the data collected in the individual questionnaires with industry professionals, combined with the research on existing literature presented in Chapter 2, it is possible to draw conclusions in order to present answers to the original research questions.

5. *Why are fashion bloggers accepted and trusted as “trend-setters,” similar to celebrities and editors, and relied upon by consumers?*

As an active follower of specific bloggers, to which she relates her own personal style and finds inspiration from, Jessica Monteiro, values the immediate availability of bloggers. Not only their blogs, but also across social media channels, “bloggers have created an outlet for almost direct access to what is trending now” (Appendix B). From new seasons, to new trends, to what’s in or out, the fashion industry is constantly changing. Therefore, the immediacy and complete devotion that fashion bloggers have in producing visual media, across channels, makes them more accessible to designers’ desired audiences. Designers and other industry influencers have recognized consumer dependence on immediate exposure to the newest products, therefore, contributing to fashion bloggers’ appearances at events and fashion shows. This has contributed to the “influence of fashion bloggers that take on many roles; including advertiser, promoter and stylist — not just editorial” (Gibbon, 2011).

In comparison to traditional forms of fashion media, i.e. large magazine corporations, “digital is the future, and it’s a future where a multitude of strong individual voices can rival the influence of a more prominent, institutional few” (Fashion Magazines or Fashion Bloggers, 2013). Fashion bloggers develop unique styles which are translated through each blog and social channel post, personal branding techniques used to gather and maintain a following. These dedicated followers find constant inspiration from more personal, honest product use and reviews. According to *PR Newswire*, “responsible for communicating the ins and outs of an ever innovating industry, [bloggers] play a vital role alongside designers, stylists and fashion journalists in shaping tastes and ideas” (New look and company collaboration, 2012).

6. *How can fashion bloggers increase brand exposure of a new designer to the fashion industry?*

A bloggers' influence on a public relations strategy ultimately stems from the idea that "influential bloggers with large community followings can have more of an influence versus print media" (Appendix C). Public relations expert, Starr Hall, goes on to express how blogs reader markets that are often missed by traditional forms of media — "the middle" (Appendix C). This is increasingly important to new designers who are forced to compete with seasoned and trusted professionals, with teams devoted to public relations outreach, due to bloggers' accessibility and inherent outreach potential. By reaching out to bloggers, with styles similar to that of a specific designer's aesthetic, bloggers become brand ambassadors whose sites "reach a wider audience of potential customers who genuinely appreciate the particular style," according to Elliott (Appendix A).

Unique to blogs and blogger appearances across social channels, consumers have the ability to converse with other consumers, or even the designer and/her the brand's team, in order to increase availability of honest product reviews and overall awareness of a particular product. New designers, especially, prosper from and enjoy the "attention of users due to the platform's personal and interactive approach versus the standardized treatment through mainstream media" (Sedeke, 2013). Exposure in any form contributes to branding techniques, specifically those which involve audience participation like within fashion.

7. *How are relationships between bloggers and designers beneficial to both parties, thus, providing for strategic marketing tactics?*

According to Elliott, when the relationship is the “right fit to stay authentic and honest for [her] readers who trust [her] opinion,” it becomes mutually beneficial to both the designer and the blogger (Appendix A). A designer and product are shared with a blogger’s readers, accelerating exposure of the designer, and the designer then has the opportunity to share said blogger’s experience with the product across social media channels, offering the blogger a position similar to that of a brand ambassador. Referred to as electronic word-of-mouth marketing, bloggers can be the source of purchasing behavior for consumers (Ahn, Kim & Park). In return, bloggers receive payment each time a viewer clicks on the content, whether relative to the product featured or even simple advertising (Lea-Greenwood, 2013). By increasing the exposure of both the blogger and designer among each other’s audiences, each individual benefits in the form of payment as well as in their overall marketing strategy for brand success.

Due to the fashion industry’s pace and frequency for change, it’s marketing efforts are “more complex than in other sectors because of the velocity and vastness of this industry; brands and designers must twice a year produce brand new collections, containing a variety of items which are often distributed worldwide” (Sedeke, 2013). Obtained from either the blogger’s or the designer’s outreach to the other, “the more bloggers that write about [a] product, the more views it will receive. It’s creating brand awareness in digital form” that is immediate and effective (Appendix D). Fashion bloggers’ ability to “significantly increase consumer engagement, brand chatter, and ultimately revenue” is ideal for designers who wish to remain relevant and maintain success in the industry (Wexler, 2012).

8. *How have personal fashion blogs accelerated the fashion industry’s relativity into a more transparent community for its consumers?*

According to *PR Newswire*, “style bloggers have gathered high profiles within the fashion world; many invited by fashion houses and designers to attend events, launches and shows as an influential presence” (New look and company collaboration, 2012). This combined with their availability and resonance across social media channels, allows for larger audiences to gain access into a rather exclusive industry, an important feature to the industry’s emerging designers. Previous, yet still effective, marketing efforts, mostly large media corporations and fashion events themselves, do not allow the same viral and immediate exposure that fashion bloggers do. In addition, due to the widespread reliance and use of digital media for all media consumption, “blogs provide a channel for reaching a large number of geographically distributed audiences, which in turn increases awareness and boost sales” (Pal & Kapur, 2010). Again, larger outreach to missed audiences contributes to increased brand awareness, even globally.

As founder of *Lush to Blush*, a successful fashion and lifestyle blog, Megan Elliott notes how her own blog “bring fashion to everyday people . . . and make fashion accessible” (Appendix A). Developing unique styles and providing honest commentary of featured products, bloggers have developed trusted followings that rely on these sites for all fashion inspiration. Oftentimes, “consumers believe more in the product-related content or information created which other consumers generate on social networking sites, multimedia sites, blogs and so on than producer or company produced related content, despite being personally unknown or unrelated to the user” (Mir & Zaheer, 2012). Ultimately, the availability and development of trusted relationships between bloggers and their readers provides for increased access into the fashion industry.

9. *Why are these relationships just as, if not more, important to new designers than those developed with seasoned fashion experts in the industry?*

Again, fashion designers must “position themselves to benefit from fundamental changes that are occurring in the ways people decide on which products and services to consume, and how they actually consume them” (Mir & Zaheer, 2012). Consumers, specifically those of fashion media and products, are increasingly reliant upon immediate access to what is new and what is on trend season to season. Therefore, bloggers, and their additional appearance across social media channels, provide for more attainable forms of marketing efforts both for those designers who wish to stay relevant and those who wish to begin their journey of success. Fashion bloggers’ product reviews, appearances and collaborations “significantly increase consumer engagement, brand chatter, and ultimately revenue” — ideal for designers, both seasoned and new due to their large audiences and their emergence as brand ambassadors (Wexler, 2012).

Previous reliance upon traditional media forms, often not available to the masses, like fashion magazines, Monteiro notes how a “feature would take several months to appear in the magazine, and in some cases the feature would be cut and never make it to the magazine in the first place” (Appendix B). This is where a trusted relationship with a blogger, whose style reflects that of the designer intending to work with him/her, can be advantageous to a designer’s effort in immediate public exposure. In achieving these relationships, bloggers additionally provide a marketing strategy “across all media, traditional and digital, especially for visually driven industries like fashion and beauty,” with their extended appearance across digital media (Wexler, 2012). For all brands, young and old, any public relations or marketing tactic is

designed to gain one thing — exposure. Fashion bloggers achieve just that through their large and widely influential following.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

After completing the study, substantial data surrounding fashion bloggers and their emerging significance to modern public relations strategies has been presented and analyzed. Given the amount of information collected, highlighting the most important components of this study can assist future public relations marketing professionals in the fashion industry. Some recommendations include choosing the right blogger at the right time, monitoring the audience conversation prior to publication on a blog and tactics that can be used to not only produce, but maintain successful relationships for long-term success.

#### **Who and When**

The most effective asset of blog marketing in any industry is its ability to promote “two-way communication that incorporates comments and encourages followers” (Lea-Greenwood 2013). Fashion consumers rely on their chosen bloggers for unique inspiration, therefore, have become reliant upon the immediately-available images and opinions that bloggers have to offer. Once a designer, new or seasoned, incorporates blog reviews into his/her marketing efforts, their audience is increased to include that particular blog’s dedicated following. This not only continues that brand conversation, but increases brand awareness to larger audiences.

Because fashion bloggers develop their own personal styles and aesthetic across their posts, oftentimes “they do not take on sponsorships that they are not truly passionate about” (Appendix B). With that in mind, designers must reach out to bloggers who “match” their

design aesthetic and have similar style tastes because their audiences will most likely reflect so as well. According to Elliott, it is the “best way for designers to reach a wider audience of potential customers who genuinely appreciate the particular style” (Appendix A).

Particularly with new designers, bloggers pose as a more accessible means for exposure to large audiences. According to Hall, “the best way to start these relationships is through conversations — the brand following influencers and sending a message at the right time” (Appendix C). In order to do so, a designer must carefully approach those bloggers who are not only willing, but who *can* launch a product in the most effective manner — this includes examining their following. This is because “the size of a web site’s visitor base is positively correlated with visitors’ behavioral depth of content consumption on the web site - that is, the number of unique visitors that a web site attracts is positively associated with the average number of pages downloaded by these unique visitors” (I-Ping, Chun-Yao & Chien-Wen, 2010). Bloggers do not accept every collaboration to which they are exposed, therefore, designers must do so effectively and in a manner that is attractive to the chosen blogger.

It is particularly important for young designers to incorporate a marketing strategy as soon as their products are ready for public release. For seasoned designers, maintenance of established relationships with designers can foster long-term successes for both involved. Applicable to all designers, relationships with bloggers must be available prior to large fashion events, i.e. the fashion weeks, in order to secure a designer’s presence across social mediums during the industry’s most trying times. When these relationships are formed and maintained, the “influence of fashion bloggers [can] take on many roles; including advertiser, promoter and stylist — not just editorial” (Gibbon, 2011).

## **Monitor Digital Conversation**

With the availability of bloggers across social media channels, therefore, amongst a variety of users who make up the overall audience, designers can use these published conversations for further “understanding [of] a public’s opinion and attitudes and then [use] public relations communications to accomplish mutually beneficial outcomes” (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995). Blog followers of any markets use this media form, among other reasons, to read and communicate personal opinions, which plays a major role in driving purchasing behavior. When a product is posted on a fashion blog, the blogger includes links to the designers’ or brands’ online websites, offering their audience the opportunity for purchase. Therefore, when viewed on a relatable individual, the blogger, and commented on by other followers or actual owners of the particular product, the designer can “be informed not only about changing consumer needs and trends, but also to hear the customer’s opinion about competitors or products” (Gilfoil, 2012).

This is especially beneficial to new designers who may have yet to find their true voice, therefore, must listen to what their fashion consumer wishes to see and purchase. New designers are forced into competition with seasoned designers and, oftentimes, their teams of public relations professionals in these modern marketing strategies, therefore, must embrace and excel in the most effect ways to “expose themselves, keeping their brand extremely relevant” (Appendix B). Bloggers are “taking more of an updated and modern role in the fashion industry” through their large online presence, making their sites an ideal opportunity for designers to showcase their unique products and obtain the largest audience possible (Appendix B).

## **Employ Tactics for Long-Term Success**

In addition to maintaining consistent conversation with consumers in order to recognize both their praises and concerns, designers must provide a foundation for a lasting relationship with their blogger(s) of choice for marketing purposes. Because the fashion industry relies so heavily upon the twice yearly fashion events known as fashion weeks, invitations sent to bloggers for a designer's show represents respect and support for their work as an influential blogger in the industry. Designers understand how successful fashion bloggers are responsible for communicating the ins and outs of an ever innovating industry," therefore, their presence as well as any publication of product reviews on their site, "play a vital role alongside designers, stylists and fashion journalists in shaping tastes and ideas" (New look and company collaboration, 2012). When provided with a coveted seat in the front row and appreciation from designers who inspire them, bloggers are more likely to be available and willing to produce future product reviews on their sites.

After forming a successful foundation in the industry, designers can incorporate these relationships into larger design collaborations. According to Elliott, "if we like each other enough to collaborate, then our styles are similar, meaning our followers would enjoy hearing about the other" (Appendix A). Again, once a trusted relationship is formed and consumer conversation is positive from both audiences, designers can consider lasting collaborations. Some bloggers, like Chiara Ferragni, whose design collaboration is detailed in the Chapter 2 *Literature Review*, can offer their creativity to designers and design their own product line. This will not only lead to a larger audience willing to purchase these products from the brand, but also "reflects upon the organic relationships they have maintained throughout their marketing strategies" (Bauknecht,

2014). This is the foundation for continued relations that are mutually beneficial to both the blogger and the designer.

It is essential for designers to incorporate these brand ambassadors, who are influential in terms of getting the attention of the desired audience, to maintain exposure throughout seasons. Therefore, designers must take on consistent blogger outreach with various bloggers. According to Damato, “we are in the digital age and I think bloggers are just as valid as any other form of publicity. Every blog that is published has the opportunity to create a massive buzz if it's done right” (Appendix D). Designers must understand that bloggers also have their own brands to manage, therefore, outreach to bloggers often results in successful collaborations. Designers mustn't rely on the bloggers to form these relationships, but rather promote the relationship themselves. And in doing so, mutually beneficial relationships based on respect and authentic passion for industry will showcase each individual's strongest assets, ultimately, leading to brand success on both ends.

## **Conclusion**

Given the data collected in this study, it can be concluded that fashion blogs have emerged as ideal tactics in the overall public relations strategies of fashion designers, specifically new designers to the industry. Continued research on additional tactics beyond that of product placement on blogs, public appearances and ambassador-like relations can guide further analysis and understanding of this technique to public relations professionals. Due to the wide variety of designers in the industry and the competition that new designers face when entering an industry where seasoned professional reign, evaluation of what is successful and what has failed with

blog marketing may be difficult to monitor. However, the parallels between the research and expert opinions presented in the study recognize our society's reliance upon digital forms of marketing, specifically blogging, in order for brands to remain relevant and increase their exposure to the large audiences who rely upon these channels. This study can guide fashion public relations strategies toward this modern form of digital marketing and aid in determining specific outreach and publication tactics for future practices. Although this tactic may be embraced in various forms amongst new and seasoned designers in the industry, the study suggests how fashion bloggers have emerged as universal brand ambassadors, fashion trend-setters, and market influencers who have the ability to increase brand exposure and audience awareness for designers in the fashion industry.

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## Appendix A

### *Interview Transcript: Megan Elliott*

The following interview was conducted to collect expert opinions for the perspective of a fashion blogger. The interview and its corresponding responses are transcribed below and are based upon the questions detailed in Chapter 3, *Methodology*. The interview was conducted over email due to the expert's residence in another state. These questions focus on fashion blogging as a mechanism for public relations and brand marketing strategies in the fashion industry.

Interviewer: Paige Thornley

Respondent: Creator of *Lush to Blush* (Megan Elliott)

Date of answers received: 02/26/14

#### *Interview Transcription*

Paige Thornley: "How do you think fashion bloggers and their sites have changed, whether improved or not, the fashion industry?"

Megan Elliott: "I think they bring fashion to everyday people like me and you. Fashion bloggers make fashion accessible. They are not rich celebrities (for the most part) and they show how designer pieces can be worn in an everyday setting."

PT: "Would you say fashion bloggers and their blogs pose as influential public relations strategies for designers and brands? How so?"

ME: "Absolutely! As opposed to professionals and people that gain from you buying their product, fashion bloggers simply share their true, honest opinions without much to gain. The vast majority of bloggers (myself included) do not take on sponsorships that they are not truly passionate about. Readers can get unbiased reviews of products, brands, or designers without all the fluff you get through traditional advertising."

PT: "Some would say that bloggers are taking on similar roles, if not more significant roles, than other fashion influentials i.e. celebrities and magazines. What do you think of this interpretation? How is blogging different from these forms of fashion publicity?"

ME: "Blogging is different because it's more personal. When it's a celebrity, you don't get to hear their thoughts behind why they chose to wear a certain designer; most likely, it was their stylists decision. In a magazine, it's a whole team of people pulling picks and fitting in paid placements. But with blogs, you kind of get to know more of a back story and can actually interact directly with the source in the comments section."

PT: "How do you think young designers, in particular, benefit from building relationships with fashion bloggers?"

ME: “It’s a mutually beneficial relationship where you can build each other up. I think it’s so smart for designers to find a blogger that truly appreciates the designs. They can get a sort of brand ambassador with a following with tastes similar to theirs, so it makes sense that the readers would like the designer as well. It’s the best way for designers to reach a wider audience of potential customers who genuinely appreciate the particular style.”

PT: “How do you build a relationship with a designer? Does this begin on their end with their desire for a review on your blog? Or are you the one to take lead and reach out toward personally desired designers for their products?”

ME: “It has been both for me. I am not shy about reaching out to brands like I used to be. When I was working in marketing for an e-commerce fashion site, I realized that I did not have time to scour the internet all day long searching for bloggers to work with; I loved it when bloggers reached out to me for collaboration. So I started doing the same thing. Most of the time, we do end up working together, as was the case with Rowley Eyewear. I do also get emails on a daily basis. Like I mentioned before, though, I do not accept all offers. I have to make sure it’s the right fit to stay authentic and honest for my readers who trust my opinion.”

PT: “How do your relationships with designers help make you successful as a blogger? Do you think your voice and your publicity of a designer’s product make them successful as a designer in return? How so?”

ME: “Like I mentioned before, I think it is definitely mutually beneficial. I share a designer with my readers--someone they may not have really had access to or understood previously--and the designer shares my photos with their followers. If we like each other enough to collaborate, then our styles are similar, meaning our followers would enjoy hearing about the other. I love sharing my passions and discoveries with my readers, and I think that’s one of the main reasons why they follow me!”

PT: “Do you have a favorite designer or brand that you enjoy working with? Why?”

ME: “I enjoyed working with Rowley Eyewear a lot. The communication was very friendly, laid-back and straight forward. I also have really enjoyed working with certain PR companies. One company sent me the cutest package and card for my birthday - I just thought that was so sweet! I generally work with more established brands as opposed to emerging designers, but I’d definitely welcome that! I have noticed that a lot of the independent designers that I work with aren’t as knowledgeable when it comes to marketing and how blogger relations work. I think it’s important for those designers that aren’t as business savvy (which, of course, there is nothing wrong with!) to hire someone to manage publicity and marketing for them.”

## Appendix B

### *Interview Transcript: Jessica Monteiro*

The following interview was conducted to collect expert opinions for the perspective of a fashion consumer, specifically obtained through blog following. The interview and its corresponding responses are transcribed below and are based upon the questions detailed in Chapter 3, *Methodology*. The interview was conducted in person. These questions focus on fashion blogging as a mechanism for public relations and brand marketing strategies in the fashion industry.

Interviewer: Paige Thornley

Respondent: Fashion consumer and former intern at *Dana Dramov Showroom* (Jessica Monteiro)

Date of interview: 02/28/14

#### *Interview Transcription*

Paige Thornley: “How do you think fashion bloggers and their sites have changed, whether improved or not, the fashion industry?”

Jessica Monteiro: “In recent years bloggers have been able to greatly expand their influence through the help of social media, which has brought change to the industry. Personally I follow several fashion bloggers via Instagram, which gives me a direct view into their daily lives, postings, and newest trends. For example, if there are a pair of shoes posted by a blogger that I like, I will take time to look them up. Bloggers have created an outlet for almost direct access to what is trending now. I find that I can more easily relate to the industry through bloggers and their postings.”

PT: “Would you say fashion bloggers and their blogs pose as influential public relations strategies for designers and brands? How so?”

JM: “Yes, bloggers are a very influential PR strategy for brands. Bloggers have essentially created another form of fashion media to which consumers are able to access style ideas. Instead of flipping through a magazine, consumers can visit bloggers web site's to see the newest styles. Bloggers also are able to reach their followers through social media venues like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter—which is crucial considering how much our generation uses these outlets. Product placement via blogging is a very trendy way for brands to expose themselves, keeping their brand extremely relevant.”

PT: “Some would say that bloggers are taking on similar roles, if not more significant roles, than other fashion influentials i.e. celebrities and magazines. What do you think of this interpretation? How is blogging different from these forms of fashion publicity?”

JM: “I believe that bloggers are actually taking more of an updated and modern role in the fashion industry, mainly through their use of social media. Many bloggers are actually bringing

themselves to be a new type of celebrity-- they are given front row seats at fashion shows, they are interviewed on television and in magazines, and their opinions are highly valued by those that follow them. Personally, I enjoy looking through bloggers postings because I find that they are very easy to relate to, as compared to fashions of celebrities and models. In reality, bloggers are just like us-- with just a few more thousand followers, and the ability to get attention from major designers and brands. Bloggers have given us more of an accessible form of fashion publicity.”

PT: “How do you think young designers, in particular, benefit from building relationships with fashion bloggers?”

JM: “Young designers benefit from their relationships with bloggers because being featured is an incredible way to get immediate exposure to consumers. Bloggers have several thousand people that follow their posting outlets daily, thus bringing immediate interest to all that view. For a young designer that is not able to afford the expense of being represented by a PR company, contacting a blogger directly is much more affordable and reliable in comparison to being featured in a magazine. During my internship at *Dana Dramov Showroom*, a PR and Sales company in NYC, I realized how difficult it was to get a feature in a magazine. We would send many of our clients products to different magazines (*GQ*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Lucky*, etc.) to be featured in spreads, but the return rate was hardly predictable. It was possible that the feature would take several months to appear in the magazine, and in some cases the feature would be cut and never make it to the magazine in the first place. Reaching out to magazines felt like a very dated approach as compared to reaching out to bloggers. I felt like we had more immediate gratification when reaching out to bloggers.”

## Appendix C

### *Interview Transcript: Starr Hall*

The following interview was conducted to collect expert opinions for the perspective of a public relations professional. The interview and its corresponding responses are transcribed below and are based upon the questions detailed in Chapter 3, *Methodology*. The interview was conducted over email due to the expert's busy schedule. These questions focus on blogging as a mechanism for public relations and brand marketing strategies in various markets.

Interviewer: Paige Thornley

Respondent: President and Chief Strategy Officer at *Agency LEAD* (Starr Hall)

Date of answers received: 03/03/14

#### *Interview Transcription*

Paige Thornley: "How do you think bloggers and their sites have changed, whether improved or not, the public relations industry? Would you say bloggers and their blogs pose as influential public relations strategies for brands? How so?"

Starr Hall: "Just as with any media outlet, it depends on the blogger's influence and reputation as well as following."

PT: "Some would say that bloggers are taking on similar roles, if not more significant roles, than other influential mediums, i.e. magazines and press releases. What do you think of this interpretation? How is blogging different from traditional forms of publicity?"

SH: "Blogging at times can be more personable and raw from the writer him/herself. Often times traditional media can be more of a large media voice. But, influential bloggers with large community followings can have more of an influence versus print media, etc. Because magazine outlets are going to specific markets and can miss the viewer/reader in between, blogs often catch this area...the middle."

PT: "How do you think new brands, in particular, benefit from building relationships with bloggers?"

SH: "They can benefit if an authentic relationship is built; one of respect and transparency. When a new brand is looking to get exposure through blogs, the best way to start these relationships is through conversations, the brand following influencers and sending a message at the right time, when it matters. One blog post from a "top 10" blogger can launch a brand overall or into new market."

PT: "In your opinion, what social medium, including blogs in their entirety, has the most impact on branding in terms of attracting consumers to new brands and their products? Or is it a combination of the mediums?"

SH: “Social media is not just a channel, it is the influencer of all channels. What people say, review, rate, share in regard to a product, service or brand overall can be extremely influential in communities, large and small.”

## Appendix D

### *Interview Transcript: Dana Damato*

The following interview was conducted to collect expert opinions for the perspective of a public relations professional. The interview and its corresponding responses are transcribed below and are based upon the questions detailed in Chapter 3, *Methodology*. The interview was conducted over email due to the expert's residence in another city. These questions focus on blogging as a mechanism for public relations and brand marketing strategies in various markets.

Interviewer: Paige Thornley

Respondent: Founder and President of *Damato Public Relations LLC*. (Dana Damato)

Date of answers received: 03/04/14

#### *Interview Transcription*

Paige Thornley: "How do you think bloggers and their sites have changed, whether improved or not, the public relations industry? Would you say bloggers and their blogs pose as influential public relations strategies for brands? How so?"

Dana Damato: "Bloggers have absolutely helped the public relations industry. Coming from a PR standpoint, exposure is exposure, and we'll take it! Although it does also depend on the product and interaction. I wouldn't provide a whole shipment of free products/clothes/etc to a brand new blogger to review with little to no following. However, if it is a blogger who has been around for years with a large following reached out to me requested to review products, or a destination I'd absolutely work with him/her. Regardless, there's a fine line between traditional PR and modern PR. Traditional PR (magazines, newspapers, etc...) is still important, however you're likely to get more views and exposure on a blog and social media."

PT: "Some would say that bloggers are taking on similar roles, if not more significant roles, than other influential mediums, i.e. magazines and press releases. What do you think of this interpretation? How is blogging different from traditional forms of publicity?"

DD: "We are in the digital age and I think bloggers are just as valid as any other form of publicity. Every blog that is published has the opportunity to create a massive buzz if it's done right. Now, the thing I will say about how it differs from traditional media is this - it's not as exclusive and may not be as much of an authority for whichever area it covers. Think about a private/exclusive club you want to be a part of, but can't because it's only available to a specific crowd. The more we can't have something, the more we want it, the more value it appears to have. The same goes for media. If someone has a fashion line, the *creme de la creme* is getting a feature in *Vogue*, *W Magazine*, etc. They are the fashion authority and as great as bloggers are, I don't see bloggers having as much of a say as much as these publications. Bloggers may be able to grab viral attention to hundreds of thousands of readers, but as soon as you slap a name on a page in *Vogue* or *W Magazine*, it gives it the product a real name for itself."

PT: “How do you think new brands, in particular, benefit from building relationships with bloggers?”

DD: “The same as above. The more bloggers write about your product, the more views it will receive. It's creating brand awareness in a digital form.”

PT: “In your opinion, what social medium, including blogs in their entirety, has the most impact on branding in terms of attracting consumers to new brands and their products? Or is it a combination of the mediums?”

DD: “I'd say any digital marketing/publicity. If someone does a YouTube review and puts it on their blog, than share the link on social media.”