Fashion blogs: comparative analysis

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Abstract – Nowadays it's possible to notice an increasing dependence of the new communication technologies, particularly the ones that are related to the online universe. This evolution allowed fashion blogs to exponentially increase their audience, which then made their authors influent personalities in the business of fashion. The main focus of this study is a comparative evaluation of several fashion blogs, which were selected taking into consideration their relevance, visible through their blog fan base and in their social media ranking as well. Beyond the comparative analysis, it became necessary to make an opinion inquiry, both national and international, directly to the readers of the fashion blogs, to understand the reasons that causes the blog to have a faithful audience. The frequency and consistency with which they create new and innovative content also becomes important to keep the readers interested so that they visit the blog often.

Keywords: Fashion, Blogs, Fashion Communication, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

The fast development of new technologies of communication allowed the society to grow dependent of the immediate access to all kinds of information, that can be accessed anytime anywhere. Because of this reasons, the traditional form of media, such as journals and magazines, are rapidly becoming obsolete and so, its importance to gain a broader comprehension of the new types of media, the digital media.

One of the more important forms of digital media is the blog, which gained popularity very quickly because it allows a democratic and personal exposition, which means that anyone can manage a blog according to their interests.

Soon, fashion blogs were created that consisted, in most cases, in representations of the bloggers, that is, what they wore, what they bought, what product they used, among other personal topics.

The fact that bloggers write more personal content than other forms of media, allows their readers to respect their opinions and interests, slowly becoming respected authorities in the fashion business, with the advantage that they create a more faithful fan base.

FASHION BLOGS

Blogs started to appear online in 2001 and their content was, mostly, text with very few images which is a big difference when compared to most blogs nowadays. The fact that they were based on textual content allowed the readers to discuss and give their opinions on the subject, creating a closer relationship and a bigger sense of community [1].

Due to the weak relationship of fashion brands witharly fashion blogs, their appearance was more alternative and personal, influenced only by the author's personality and taste. It was their unique style that motivated several fashion magazines to start collaborating with bloggers [2].

With the expansion of social media, bloggers became more visible to a broader audience, showcasing their makeup skills, what they eat, what they visit and, more importantly, what they wear.

Some bloggers even have thousands of followers which earned the bloggers a credible and respected position among the fashion industry [3].

Due to their growing fan base, the bloggers are often invited by several fashion brands to go to their runway shows and exhibits, because their work gets published in real-time in the blogs and their social media pages, showcasing their work to a broader audience [4].

The closer relationship between the blogger and the readers allows an immediate feedback of their opinions and interests, which is a very important tool to understand the target audience.

The huge diversity of blogs allows the readers to select the ones that share their interests, choosing bloggers that they can relate in a more personal level [5].

Fashion Blogs and Social Media

The social media continues to evolve, changing the forms of communication used by the society, one of those examples being the fashion blogs.

A recent phenomenon that's happening nowadays is the fact that a lot of bloggers are becoming well-known not because their blog but because of their social media accounts, like Instagram. Liza Darwin explores this concept in her article entitled "The Newest Fashion Bloggers Don't Even Have Blogs" [6], where she explores the idea that since the content shared is visible to a much broader audience it easily becomes popular, allowing a much bigger number of followers.

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The easy access to Instagram, when compared to a traditional blogging platform, allows an easier and quicker sharing of content, which is why it's gaining in popularity by many brands [7].

Many of these new type of bloggers become famous due to theirs alternative style and personality and, although many maintain collaborations with brands, they don't intend to make it into a business, like the author of the Instagram account The_Salty_Blonde, Halley Elefante [6]. According to Elefante her photographs are popular because of their authenticity, "No makeup, no professional photographer, no shoot, and the more tropical, the radder" [6].

It's possible, however, to understand that both platforms have different objectives, according to blogger Nicolette Mason "If readers are only looking for pretty photos or style and shopping inspiration, then yes, Instagram might be all they need. But, if they're looking to join the bigger conversation and engage with really authentic content, they'll still keep coming back to the site." It's because of this reason that fashion brands continue to use both platforms as a form of publicity [7].

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FASHION BLOGS

The comparative analysis was made by elaborating comparative charts of several fashion blogs, to understand their similarities and differences and the way those affect the readers.

To make the comparative charts it was necessary to select the blogs to analysis, according to a pre-define set of parameters, to obtain objective results. It was also necessary to define the comparative parameters with which the blogs would be examined.

Two comparative charts were created, a quantitative chart and a qualitative chart that would examine different parameters about the content and aesthetic of the blogs.

Fashion Blog's Selection

For the development of the two charts it was essential to select the blogs according to a rigorous set of parameters, which were nationality, world ranking, social media and professional career.

The nationality was an important factor because it was a way to compare the way different cultures influence the bloggers' style. So, on average two blogs of each country were selected, being the studied nationalities North-American, Brazilian, French, Portuguese, English and Italian. The countries were selected taking into consideration the main fashion capitals of the world: London, New York, Paris, Milan and Rio de Janeiro.

The world ranking of the blogs was determined by the website Top Fashion Influencers [8], through an algorithm that calculates the combination of the influence of a blogger's social media presence and their ability to generate interactions. The ranking was an important part of the selection because it was relevant for the study to choose bloggers with a strong influence and a big number of followers.

The presence of bloggers in social media becomes an important way to promote the blog, because it encourages an immediate interaction with the readers and it's an easy way to gain more followers.

Lastly, the professional career allows the evaluation of how fashion related jobs influence the development of the blog and its contents. The bloggers professions vary from merchandising, designer, stylist, journalist, writer, editor, model and illustrator.

The combination of these four variables allowed a more uniform selection so that the comparison is based only in factors related to the composition of the blog.

Fourteen fashion blogs were selected and they were Atlantic-Pacific, Gary Pepper Girl, The Chryselle Factor, Samantha Maria, Cupcakes and Cashmere, Amlul, Glam4You, Blog da Thassia, Mini Saia, Stylista, Garance Doré, The Cherry Blossom Girl, MDV Style and AdR Factory.

Comparative Parameters

To organize the comparison between blogs it was important to decide the parameters that would be evaluated and were relevant to the study. These describe several characteristics of the blogs, for example, information about the author, aesthetic qualities, the existence of advertisement and several other factors.

Two distinct charts were created in order to allow a better organization of the information, given that they analyze different types of content. The first chart includes general elements about the blogs, which were the nationality and profession of the author, the ranking, their social media presence, the type of content which described the themes of their posts that could be fashion, lifestyle, interior design, beauty, food, travel, DIY (Do It Yourself) and news, the existence of their own brand, newsletter, adds, collaborations with brands and finally the domain of the website.

The second chart explores all elements associated with the design and appearance of the blog, such as the text size and the fonts used, the presence of editors and the type of writing, the photographs or illustrations, videos, music, the color palette used, embellishments and other decorative elements, the background of the blog, the layout, if it's user-friendly and, finally, if the blogs has search and archive tools to help the readers' navigation in the website.

Results' Analysis

The quantitative comparison chart was divided in three parts and the first evaluated the parameters that referred to the social media that the bloggers used. It's possible to verify that the most popular social media among the bloggers is Facebook, given that all the blogs studied have a Facebook account connected. Instagram is also a very popular form of social media although the blog The Cherry Blossom Girl is the only blog that doesn't have an Instagram account.

The most popular content in fashion blogs is "Fashion", with the exception of Atlantic-Pacific because this blog only has look of the day type of posts. Since "Beauty" is a category related to fashion, twelve of the fourteen blogs that were analyzed approach this thematic, being the only exceptions Atlantic-Pacific and AdR Factory.

Finally, it's also possible to verify that twelve of the fourteen blogs collaborate with brands although only three have permanent adds on their website.

The objective of the second chart was to study the content that had qualitative characteristics, like the design and appearance of the blog. It was divided in five parts: text, images, videos, blog aesthetic and functions.

The text was analyzed taking into consideration four distinct parameters: size, the existence of editors, guest authors and style of writing. These are all important because it helps define the relationship of the writer and its readers. So, half the bloggers opt to write medium-sized texts (between 100 and 300 words) and only two blogs have editors reviewing the texts. Guest authors are an interesting way to expand the blog's readership and the blogs that do so are Cupcakes and Cashmere, Glam 4 You, Amlul, Garance Doré and AdR Factory. Finally, the style of writing differs according to the blog and most of the blogs have a casual and informal style of writing, with Atlantic-Pacific and AdR Factory being the only exceptions.

The next aspect of the blogs that was compared was the existence of photographs and illustrations by the bloggers and it can be verified that all the blogs have photographs but only two have illustrations done by the authors, which are Garance Doré and The Cherry Blossom Girl.

When it comes to videos, most blogs have videos directed or associated with the blogger although none of the blogs have music in their web page.

There are many parameters to define the blogs' aesthetics, such as the color palette used throughout the blog. All the blogs studied use a palette based on black and white, some using another color for accents. Since most blogs have a minimalist style, very few have any decoration with the exception of Mini-Saia, The Cherry Blossom Girl and AdR Factory, which have decorative elements. Also, most of the blogs' background is simple and white with the exception of The Cherry Blossom Girl, whose background is black and white and illustrated.

The typography helps the reader have an easy read of the texts, and it can have a serif or not. Half of the blogs studied use both types of typography in order to have a bigger distinction between the titles and the text.

The blogs' layout allows the reader an easier interaction with it and the first element studied was the number of columns in which the blog is organized. After analyzing all the blogs, it's noticeable that they are organized in a maximum of two columns. Blog da Thassia, MDV Style and AdR Factory are the only exceptions to this since the number of columns in their blogs is not constant. The layout is also influenced by the number of posts per page and seven of the fourteen blogs have more than ten publications in each page.

All the blogs are user-friendly, which means they're easy to navigate, which makes the blog more attractive for the readers.

Lastly, it was explored if the blogs had the "Search" and "Archive" tools that facilitate the reader to finds themes of their interest. All the studied blogs have the "Search" tool but only six have the "Archive" tool.

INQUIRY ABOUT FASHION BLOGS

The objective of the inquiry was to discover the readers' opinions as a form of validation of the success of specific topics in fashion blogs, with the final goal being the discovery of what makes a blog successful.

The questionnaire was divided in four distinct blocks of questions and each approached different contents that can be found in fashion blogs.

The questionnaire was published online so that it was easy to access and simple to promote, so a big number of responses could be achieved. It was also promoted with the help of the blogger Mónica Lice, author of the blog Mini-Saia and in the personal blog Charlotte James to allow more international answers, since unlike Mini-Saia, is written in English.

When all the answers were collected they were analyzed to draw the possible conclusions.

Questions

One of the objectives of the inquiry was to gain a better understanding about the habits of blog reading and also, which of the contents has a better feedback from the readers.

The questionnaire was divided in four blocks, the first approached all personal information about the person being questioned, the second was about general habits of blog reading, the third about specific content found in fashion blogs and, lastly, the fourth block was about advertisement in blogs.

The first block of the questionnaire was composed by four personal questions, in order to gain a better understanding about the person being questioned. And so, the questions were about gender, age, career and nationality.

The objective of the first question of the second block, which studied the reading habits of blog readers, was to understand what fashion communication media was more popular nowadays: the blogs or the magazines. The second question was about social media and what platforms were more used by blog readers: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Bloglovin and Other. The third question attempted to find out if a lot of blog readers had their own blog and the next questions how many blogs were followed by the readers and how often. The sixth question of this group had as its primary objective to understand if people followed more national or international blogs or both and then it was asked how many of the blogs studied above were followed by them. Finally, the last question was asked in order to find out why the readers followed fashion blogs.

The specific content of fashion blogs was studied in the third part of the inquiry, where the first question was about the themes that are more attractive to the readers and then the types of tutorials that are more popular. It was also important for the study to understand if the readers thought it's important to create a relationship with personal posts, where the bloggers shares several aspects of their personal life. Lastly it was inquired how many times the reader made a purchase based on a blogger's opinion in order to understand if they have the power to influence which products and brands are in trend.

Due to the growing trend of brands wanting to collaborate with bloggers in order to reach a broader audience, the last block was entitled "Advertisement in Fashion Blogs". In this

part of the questionnaire it was explored mainly, three aspects important to the study, which were if the readers though it was correct for the bloggers to be paid for advertisement, if they thought the bloggers' opinions were trust-worthy when they are being paid and, finally, if the existence of adds influenced the readers visit to the blog.

Results' Analysis

The questionnaire was online for a period of two weeks and had 114 responses, mostly of a Portuguese audience, due to the collaboration with the Portuguese blogger Mónica Lice of Mini-Saia.

The responses were mainly from a feminine audience (94.7%), from ages from 18 to 30 (62.3%). Most of the people inquired have a career outside of the fashion business (44%) and are students (30%) and, like it was mentioned above, most of the audience is of Portuguese nationality.

When it comes to the readers' favorite form of fashion communication the blogs are preferred over magazines (89.5%) and Facebook (89.6%) is the favorite platform of social media. Most of the readers don't have a blog of their own (80.9%), although they visit, mostly, one to five blogs (50.9%) or five to ten blogs (32.5%), on a daily basis (51.8%).

Most of the readers visit both national and international blogs (65.2%). Because most of the people inquired are of Portuguese nationality the most popular blogs were Mini-Saia (72.9%) and Stylista (41.4%). The most popular blog, other than the two mentioned, was Cupcakes and Cashmere.

When inquired about the reasons that make the readers visit fashion blogs, the answers obtained were because of inspiration for looks (67.9%), interest in the newest trends (64.3%) and product reviews (53.6%). However, the favorite type of posts to read in fashion blogs were look of the day (66.4%), product reviews (61.1%) and beauty posts (60.2%) and beauty tutorials are the most popular content in tutorials (84.7%).

Most of audience inquired thinks it's important to have personal posts for the readers to relate to the writer (86.7%) and they bought products advised by the bloggers one to five times (72.6%).

Finally, the readers think the bloggers should be paid to advertise products (69.9%) although they believe their opinions are biased when they do (69.4%). Most of the readers state that if a blog has adds it doesn't influence their visit (63.7%).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Nowadays it's noticeable a constant evolution when it comes to social media and the digital universe that makes the society more dependent of the new means of communication.

More than ever there's more information online that can be access by anyone and, anyone can create and share content as well. The easy access allows a larger audience to share information and common interests, often showcased in blogs.

Despite the growth of new forms of social media and their popularity, fashion blogs maintain a cult status, parallel to fashion magazines that, in the past, were the only references when it came to fashion. However, the future of fashion blogs is interlined with social media, since it helps in blog advertisement and it's easier to share contact and, therefore, maintain a large number of readers.

Fashion blogs nowadays, evolved from the past and their main characteristics shifted, giving room to a more focused and business-like mood. They are minimalist and user-friendly in order to attract readers to their blog and have more photographs than written content, because most blog viewers look for inspiration for clothes and beauty.

Because blogging is seen as a business, partnerships and collaborations with fashion brands are very frequent, since they ally the style and popularity of the blogger with a product, increasing their sales. Despite believing that the bloggers have a biased opinion when they are being paid for advertisement, product reviews is one of the most popular topic among blog readers.

Along with the evolution of fashion communication fashion blogs are going to evolve alongside, focusing more and more their content to suit the needs of the readers by obtaining their instant feedback thanks to the platforms facilitating the contact between bloggers and readers.

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