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The Spread Fashion: an Explorative Research of Italian Fashion Blog

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Abstract

In the collaborative context of the web 2.0 the blogging phenomenon has become one of the most common ways to communicate and share information through its user-generated content. In the blogosphere fashion blogs represent probably one of the liveliest segments. Focusing on fashion brands, fashion products, street style, and personal style, fashion blogs can be written by both fashion professionals and normal people with an interest in the fashion system. This phenomenon has become even more relevant since the fashion brands have recognized the role of fashion bloggers in influencing the final consumers as well as the role of peer – to – peer recommendations in shaping desires and attires of fashion blog users.

The paper presents the preliminary results of a netnographic analysis conducted on some of the most popular Italian ‘non-professional’ fashion blogs in order to map the different approach to this grassroots blog phenomenon, and to categorize and interpret the blog postings and the audience comments concerning fashion product-related information.

Keywords: fashion blogs, community, grassroots, engagement.

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1. Introduction¹

Over recent decades the deep transformations of media systems have changed consumers' role. Thanks to the Web consumers have become ever more capable of creating and sharing digital content. Indeed, users have gradually abandoned the role of passive consumers of materials created by others, becoming, instead, themselves designers of multimedia products (often of semi-professional quality). As Allen (2008) said, *they are users, not audiences*. The specific characteristics of Web 2.0 and the increased easiness of construction and management of digital environments have enhanced the competences of users. Now web users are able to aim specific content toward market *niches*. Thus, the second-generation Web has transformed Internet users into content providers, thanks to the architecture of participation that heightens their ability to build social networks.

As Tim O'Reilly (2007) – one of the first researchers to celebrate the web 2.0's birth – says media consumers are more engaged, active, and performing; they can consume and remix data from multiple sources, increasing the quality and attractiveness of their contributions. Such skills enable postmodern consumers to become *prosumers* – a term first coined in the 1980s by Alvin Toffler. He defined *prosumers* as innovative consumers able to *co-produce* goods and services which are really customized and able to define identity. Thus, the outcomes of co-production are deeply different from the homogenization of mass produced goods (Fabris, 2008).

Perhaps the digital environment that best represents the philosophy underlying the Web 2.0 is the blog. Blogs combine the immediacy of up-to-the-minute posts, latest first, with a strong sense of the author's personality, passions, and point of view (Nardi et al., 2004). They are an evolution of users' personal home pages, which exponentially increased their popularity around the year 2000 (Lovink, 2008; Blood, 2002; Walker Rettberg, 2008). Blogs are polyvalent *places* that act as personal diaries, information pages, and collectors of information; they also foster sharing and collective activism. In fact, they are meant to spread information through social interaction connecting themselves with the readers using a *conversational communication style* (Halvorsen et al., 2013).

According to numerous studies (Laurell, 2014; Rocamora, 2011), fashion and lifestyles are two of the most intensely thematic areas covered by blogs. Indeed, today fashion blogs (FB) form a sizeable portion of the blogosphere,

¹ This paper is a joint work by the two authors. However, in line with standard academic practice, we indicate that Geraldina Roberti wrote the first paragraph and Ariela Mortara wrote paragraph 2. The rest of the paper is a joint work.

enabling fashion bloggers to participate as major players in the fashion system. As McQuarrie, Miller and Phillips (2013: 149) point out: ‘their social position improves as they receive invitations to exclusive parties, runway shows, designer open houses, charity appearances, and mentions in the media. [...] Bloggers succeed in joining the traditional fashion system – they do not establish an alternative community on its margins or attempt to escape the marketplace’.

Moreover, as Laurell (2014) highlighted, an ever-closer proximity with fashion designers and fashion marketers has gradually come about, thus transforming FBs from private diaries into semi-commercial spaces capable of hosting advertising and/or sponsors banners. Accordingly, the fashion blogosphere has affirmed itself as a key space for the production and the circulation of fashion discourses (Rocamora, 2011). ‘Initially, places seem to have been dominated by non-commercial and amateur expressions of consumers. [...] Over time, places in social media have also given rise to digital communities where linking value has been created based on branded goods or services and through collective practices integrating commercial objects’ (Laurell, 2014: 23-24).

Thus the role of bloggers has changed over time. At the beginning, the fashion industry and the experts of the sector considered the first bloggers as *complete outsiders*, treating them with wariness and suspicion. These early blogs had a clearly private profile and their approach was typical amateurish, as opposed to the professional approach of people working in the fashion business. As Findlay (2015) points out, the blog posts consisted of long written texts, with detailed descriptions of outfits worn by the bloggers. They also had very few photos, and the photos have usually been copied and pasted from the Internet. According to Findlay (2015: 162), ‘in part this is attributable to the dominantly text-based user-generated modes of digital communication that preceded and influenced blogging – chat rooms, forums, Multi-User Domains (MUDs) and so on [...]’. Indeed, the first bloggers ‘borrowed’ free fashion pictures from hundreds of brand websites to express their taste judgments about the latest styles and runway shows (McQuarrie, Miller, Phillips, 2013).

After a while, the widening audience of readers and the growing approval of a large part of the fashion system have substantially changed the figure of the fashion blogger. Findlay (2015) mentions two eras of fashion blogging; the first period goes 2004 to 2009 and the second starts in 2009 and is still going on: ‘what marks the difference between these two movements, then, is not necessarily when they were started but the ethos underpinning the blog. The mentality of seeing a blog as an opportunity to generate income, as an “online curriculum vitae,” or to establish a professional platform as an authority on

style (as well as a kind of celebrity status) is one that proliferated post-2009' (Findlay, 2015: 170).

Some bloggers became much more aware of the commercial potential of their role. Indeed, the increased popularity of certain blogs, and the greater professionalism of these bloggers' approach to the fashion system enabled them to become *opinion leaders* who were able to orientate tastes and choices by sharing their personal style. Such bloggers showed to their readers their fashion *expertise* and inspired many users who tended to copy the style or pick a product for their own use (Kulmala, Mesiranta, Tuominen, 2013). Fashion bloggers became *role models* to the extent that they were virtually being considered as a reference group.

Based on the public recognition of their *fashion leadership*, the reputation achieved by the bloggers was now exploited in a strategy of *self-marketing* (Pedroni, 2015) able to promote themselves and to increase the commercial potential of their blog. Nevertheless, according to McQuarrie, Miller and Phillips (2013), when following a blog, consumers are looking for fashion guidance and aesthetic inspiration, thus they become an audience, rather than join a community (Pihl, 2014).

The most followed fashion bloggers become a guide for consumers, influencing their taste and thus contributing to whether or not a brand or a product achieves commercial success. The credibility, which is accorded by consumers to the advice of the more celebrated fashion bloggers, relies on a clear mechanism of trust. On one hand, readers appreciate the personal style of the blogger and recognize its originality; on the other hand, they trust the blogger's correctness and believe his/her suggestions to be independent of any conditioning by the fashion companies. In this way, it is assumed that fashion bloggers can lead their readers into the world of fashion helping them to acquire knowledge and perspectives on trends and lifestyles. However, as numerous studies have highlighted (Halvorsen et al., 2013; Pedroni, 2015), in FBs the boundary between the expression of a blogger's personal taste in clothing and brand promotion is rather blurry. Describing the tendency to display in blog posts the daily outfit Halvorsen et al. (2013: 220) write: '[...] the fashion blogger presents a picture of their outfit, describing it in detail, from the brand to the price of the garment. Through their text, the blogger is indeed advertising the product or brand. The bloggers did not consider this advertising. The practice is utilized to demonstrate to readers the bloggers' own sense of style and fashion [...]. "Outfit of the day" demonstrates how commercial content is very much integrated into the blog content'.

Since, according to many studies (Bone, 1995; Maxham, 2001; Moore, 2010), word-of-mouth (WOM) information is more effective than traditional marketing campaigns in influencing consumers, electronic word-of-mouth (e-

WOM) can as well reduce the perceived risk in making purchase decisions. Indeed, Halvorsen et al. (2013) report that, according to Nielsen data, 89% of European consumers trusted recommendations from others and 64% trusted consumer opinions posted online, but only 28% trusted ads in magazines and 29% ads on Tv.

To encourage and accelerate e-WOM, fashion companies have progressively involved the most popular bloggers in their marketing strategies. Fashion bloggers, as opinion leaders, are good targets of successful word-of-mouth marketing actions, inasmuch as their purchase choices have high visibility and a strong impact on the market (Kulmala, Mesiranta, Tuominen, 2013). According to Pedroni (2015), fashion bloggers independence from the excessive interference of the fashion companies is a key issue. Indeed, the fashion blogosphere is progressively exposed to a process of commodification by companies, which could turn fashion blogs into mere marketing instruments capable of simultaneously selling/promoting a brand as well as the bloggers' image (Pedroni, 2015). Moreover, a sound relationship with the most well-known fashion bloggers offers marketers a continual updating on emerging styles – a sort of *trend monitoring* (Rickman, Cosenza, 2007) – as well as immediate feedback from readers regarding the outfits or the products posted on the blog.

The paper presents the outcomes of an explorative research, which aims at mapping the different approach to the grassroots blog phenomenon and at interpreting the blog postings and the audience comments concerning fashion product-related information. Indeed, author's aim was to verify if the popularity of the most notorious bloggers could somehow change their mode of interaction with platform users, transforming an equal and to-ways communication tool in a top-down relationship. Moreover, authors aimed at understanding the degree and type of interaction between blogger and users, while at the same time investigating the degree of closeness/distance between bloggers and the major actors within the fashion system.

The reminder of the paper is organized as follow. The next section illustrates the applied methodology; then the paper discusses the outcomes of an analysis conducted on a sample of Italian fashion blogs. The last part contains some conclusive remarks and the research limitations.

2. Research method

In order to map the different approach to the grassrooted blog phenomenon, and to categorize and interpret the blog postings and the audience comments concerning fashion product-related information, authors

conducted an analysis on a purposive sample of Italian fashion blogs through a netnographic methodology (Kozinets, 2002, 2006).

The netnographic approach is defined by Kozinets (2002: 62) as ‘a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications’. Thus, netnography adapts ethnographic techniques to analyze and understand consumer behaviors as they emerge from texts that are produced in online environments. The gathered information provides insights into ‘tastes, desires, relevant symbol systems, and decision making influences of particular consumers and consumer groups’ (Kozinets, 2002: 61). Compared to ethnography, netnography is less intrusive and represents a more naturalistic research tool since it observes natural and spontaneous interactions among members of online communities. Moreover, netnography allows researchers to reduce time and cost factors (Kozinets, 2006).

After identifying the appropriate forums and blogs (*entrée*), the netnographic method follows precise stages and allows the direct copying of the posts and images, and of any interactions between members of the community (*data collection*), as well as the qualitative analysis of content (*trustworthy interpretation*) through classification, encoding and contextualization of communicative acts. Through netnography the researcher observes, analyzes, and re-contextualizes the computer-mediated texts that are produced from online interactions.

As any other research method, netnography has some limitations (Kulmala, Mesiranta, Tuominen, 2013). The main shortcoming is that the method is very sensitive to the precise identification of the topic, since the virtual space offers a large amount of data. Moreover, netnography cannot benefit from direct observation of the interactions among people – i.e. body language, tone of voice, and the like – thus the data are somewhat less rich.

Since the Italian blogosphere is quite huge, authors decided to focus their analysis on a purposive sample of ‘non-professional’ and non-corporate (Rocamora, 2011) fashion blogs, which have achieved a certain grade of popularity. In order to select the appropriate blogs, authors have chosen to rely on two different published and quite reliable ranking. The first is presented by the *Les Cahiers*, an online fashion journal (<http://www.lescachiersfm.com>) that maintains to observe the evolution of the fashion blogging phenomenon and to monitor bloggers’ work. The second one is published by *Scenario Magazine* (<http://www.scenariomag.it>), a webzine focusing on luxury, fashion, lifestyles, events, arts, and actuality. As of March 2015, both magazines provide a ranking of 50 independent blogs, excluding

agencies and celebrities' blogs. Authors decided to select the first ten blogs, which appear in both ranking (Table 1).

Since the blogs posts can be freely accessed without registration, researches do not felt compelled (as Kozinets suggests) to inform blog users about the research (Langer, Beckman, 2005). However, they have e-mailed the bloggers to collect some information and at the same time to inform them about the research. Moreover, to collect data authors have mainly observed the online activities thus they have not directly participated to the blogs activities.

TABLE 1. *The analyzed blogs.*

Progressive Ranking	Name	URL
1	TheChiliCool Fashion Blog Italia	http://www.thechilicool.com
2	Myfantabulousworld	http://www.myfantabulousworld.com
3	Nameless Fashion Blog	http://www.namelessfashionblog.com
4	Eleonora Petrella	http://www.it-girl.it
5	Thecutielicious	http://www.thecutielicious.com
6	Wildflower girl	http://wildflowergirlstyle.blogspot.it
7	My Urban Bon Ton	http://www.myurbanbonton.com
8	TheLadyCracy	http://www.theladycracy.it
9	Becoming Trendy	http://www.becomingtrendy.com
10	The AnarChic	http://theanarchic.com

Source: authors' elaboration on Les Cahiers and Scenario Magazine rankings.

According to previous research (Rocamora, 2011), the core of the fashion blogs is the 'outfit section', then authors have collected and analyzed all the posts inside such a section that have been posted in March 2015. Besides, they have analyzed the posts issued in the first month of blog's activity in order to understand if there was a significant change in the bloggers' approach to readers, as their popularity increases.

3. Analyzing the linking value in fashion blogging

Despite the exploratory character of our study that is due to the specificities of our sample, we focused on the relationship between fashion bloggers and bloggers' users in order to understand how fashion blogs engage and earn the loyalty of their readers.

In order to establish a bond with their followers, bloggers maintain a familiar and easygoing atmosphere in their sites; their posts are written in a confidential tone, which is suitable for a conversation among friends.

Last Friday I spent my afternoon with Riccardo walking among stores and coffee shops. Afterwards we went in a supermarket to buy something to eat for dinner, and we also bought a big bag of chips. We love to cook together, even if you must know that my love is a very good cook, better than I! Before having dinner we took this frames, we ate the chips that we had bought at the supermarket because we were hungry! As I promised, I'm going to introduce my babe: he's Riccardo (you can see him at the end of the post). See you tomorrow... (myfantabulousworld_09/21/2010)².

Obviously, the bloggers' communicative style aims to reduce the gap between the blogger and the readers. Thus, readers should perceive the blog's author as a friend – a girlfriend – which is sharing the same interest about fashion. So the blog become a sort of daily tale, which allows bloggers to tell about their daily life, sharing, in the meanwhile, tips about brands and outfits.

It's Friday and the first full week of classes is almost over. Finally babes! I really don't like the classes of this semester and these first days in which there is light until late make me want to be always outside in the sun! Today I'll show you an outfit for a work date. I decided to combine a plaid cape (also perfect as a scarf, you can find it on http://us.sheinside.com/Red-Classic-Plaid-Fringe-Scarve-p-191085-cat-1872.html?utm_source=www.it-girl.it&utm_medium=blogger&url_from=it-girl with an elegant high-waisted trousers, a Saint Laurent bag and a pair of laced up sandals! What do you think about this look? I remind you that you can follow me on Facebook and Instagram! Have a nice weekend (Itgirl.com_03/12/2015).

The posts casual tone is part of a communicative strategy aiming to reinforce the emotional link between bloggers and readers. Bloggers engage readers through a sort of remote dialog; they invite them to interact through direct calls and questions about their own style.

This is the outfit I've chosen for today. Comfy 'cause I'm staying all day in the office (till late) and light 'cause it's really, really hot in Florence. Yes, I know, it's almost too simple but I usually don't wear designer clothes or killer heels on a daily basis :) I'm definitively a "pink lover" but when dressing in pink it is important not to be excessive... the head-to-toe pink look may transform you in a big walking bon-bons. My favorite pieces of

² All the posts were originally written in English; authors have just edited the misprints.

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this outfit are the woven Tara ballerinas. You can find them at Luisa Via Roma in many different colors. This is my personal Tara collection. Which is your favorite color? (namelessfashionblog_06/21/2012).

A collection about the best of fall/winter 2010 BOOTS that I've chosen from the best online shop sites. I wrote under every images the brand, the name of the piece (when I know it) and the price in euro. Sometimes I wrote in pink my opinions too! Which are your favorite? I would like to have them all! ;-)

P.S. Next Saturday a collection of TOTE BAGS (myfantabulousworld_09/25/2010).

Indeed, the emotional involvement of blogs readers is crucial to ensure the success of the platform. The loyal readers become an *affectionate audience*, which is prone to welcome bloggers' tips and suggestions. According to McQuarrie, Miller and Phillips (2013), bloggers have to underline the similarities between them and the readers, in order to maintain a solid relationship with them. Moreover, they have to behave as ordinary consumers, despite their acknowledged positions inside the fashion system. In this sense, they should actively misrecognize their changed status and engage in practices that deny the existence of boundaries that would separate them from the followers. To reach this goal, a blogger can use as discursive practices either *feigned similarity* or *self-deprecation*. Through the feigned similarity bloggers shares with the followers the most ordinary aspects of their everyday life. Thus, they highlight the similarities between their life and the one of readers. Through self-deprecation, bloggers take publicly fun of themselves and highlight their limitations and errors. However, as McQuarrie, Miller and Phillips (2013: 152) points out: 'the self-deprecating language that appears in bloggers' posts may concern physical characteristics, bad habits, or embarrassing moments, but such deprecation never ventures into the realm of fashion. Bloggers do not ridicule their own taste in clothing. [...] A blogger might say she stumbles in high heels, but she would never say she had trouble figuring out which brand and color of heels to buy. Self-deprecation and feigning similarity emerge as strategic practices that misrecognize the blogger's actual social position vis-a-vis her followers [...]'.

Is that the case of Elisa Taviti, author of the *Myfantabulousworld* fashion blog: she can make fun of herself because she appears terrified during a shooting, but she cannot forget to mention the brand that she is wearing in the picture.

Last shots at seaside, next week I'll begin to show you my Autumn/Winter 2010 proposal that I'm preparing in this days. In this post I'm wearing a singlet that I bought last

summer at H&M, it was shown in the "FASHION against AIDS" collection, mine was designed by Cindy Lauper. When I took this photo, there were Riccardo, my official photographer that I'll introduce soon and our dear friend Francesca (in a photo), we had fun and we laughed a lot because I was afraid to climb on rocks, but I was especially afraid to fall! It was terrible! :-s (Myfantabulousworld.com_09/18/2010).

Indeed, the relationship between blogger and readers is lesser equal and horizontal than it might be expected, thus questioning the *grassroots potential* of the blog. Certainly, bloggers use a friendly and confidential tone of voice while posting, in order to show their closeness to users. Nevertheless, while the blog popularity grows, the direct interactions between bloggers and readers decrease and the latter becomes a true fan. Consequently, the peer to peer interaction – that, according to many researches, is typical of grassroots phenomena – is replaced by a top-down relationship, therefore characterized by an increasing one-way flow of communication.

Moreover, the concept of brand community that Pihl (2014) uses to analyze the 20 most-frequently-visited Swedish fashion blogs, is much more appropriate for describing relationships formed among bloggers, than it is for describing the relationships existing among the blog readers. Indeed, the typical elements that build a community – shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility among its members (Muñiz, O'Guinn, 2001) – appear mainly among fashion bloggers. The followings posts highlight the presence of a common feeling among them, the perception of belonging to a same environment, and the habit to mutually comment their posts.

I love these posts!!!!!! I'm a fan of hearts! => I think that I will prepare some little notes, like the one in the first picture, and I will hang them around Milan!!!! It was a great idea to fill the city with these little notes!!!! We bloggers should organize something among us, so everybody will know us! We could launch this idea (Claudia's comment_namelessfashionblog_07/03/2012)³.

Hi, I would like to thank you about your comment in my blog. I really like your blog, I just read your posts, they are amazing! I follow you! If you like it, we could follow each other, I would like it very much! (Azzurra's comment_becomingtrendy_04/27/2012).

³ Authors have translated the following comments, trying to respect the original informal language.

Contrary to what Phil (2014) maintained, even the awareness to share some common rituals – e.g. the participation to the same public events – involves more the relationship among the bloggers than the one with the readers. During the Milan Fashion Week (MFW), most of the selected bloggers have been invited to some fashion shows and this experience becomes the topic of some posts. At the same time, their FBs are full of pictures of the outfits that the bloggers showed off during their participation to the presentations of the fashion collections. Almost as a proof of the existing relationship among the fashion bloggers community, the following post is about an outdoor shooting during the MFW that involves two colleague bloggers.

A break from the blog to concentrate all my energies on the Milano fashion week. These days have been a bit busy, full of events, fashion shows and important meetings. The first day I chose a comfortable look, after dealing with the outward journey, I opted for a wonderful Department 5 skirt, blue shirt and Stan Smith. And since in many have asked it to us, Laura⁴ and I did not agree in advance on the outfits! (myfantabulousworld_03/04/2015).

During these events, the distance between bloggers and readers become even more evident. Users represent the audience, they become almost fans, and bloggers become celebrities⁵, thus modifying the relational mechanisms of a peer community.

The attendance of the most famous bloggers to ceremony like ‘Blogs Award’ – that, according to Phil (2014), is a way to share some rituals with the readers⁶ – conversely highlights the subordinate role of the platforms users. Indeed, users’ unique role is to vote for their preferred blog in order to let it win the contest, thus remarking the different position between the parties

⁴ She refers to the fashion blogger Laura Comolli (<http://www.pursesandi.net>), who appears in the same shooting photos.

⁵ See also Mortara, Roberti (2016).

⁶ As he wrote: ‘the most prominent example of an annual ritual was the “Blog Awards”’. Since 2008, this ceremony has been organized by the weekly magazine “Veckorevyn”. Popular bloggers are nominated in categories as blog of the year, rookie of the year, and fashionista of the year. The nominations are announced on the web and readers vote in each category. The ceremony itself later takes place in the center of Stockholm. The importance of the ceremony, for both bloggers and readers, is evident in blogger comments before and after the event. After the 2009 nominations were published, but prior to the actual event, the majority of the nominated bloggers posted blog entries encouraging their readers to vote for them’ (Phil, 2014: 11).

involved in the relationship.

As Pedroni (2015) points out, the flaunted connections with other fashion bloggers actually represent a very powerful tool to legitimate the blog both in front of the users and the operators. It is a sort of public acknowledgment of bloggers' competence and authority, entailing that they have really become a part of the fashion system. 'Bloggers build their legitimization through their relation with their audience, whose comments represent an important source of gratification and the drive to continue. [...] A second source for legitimization are "colleague" bloggers, those who have a point of view similar [...]; among the limited group of A-listers an experience such as Werelse's (a brand whose collections are designed by Chiara Ferragni and two other internationally famous colleagues, Andy Torres and Carolina Engman) represents an international band of bloggers where protagonists in the field legitimate each other as designers. Legitimization from power holders in the fashion field is, of course, fundamental: magazines opening their doors to bloggers and companies elevating them to the role of interlocutors and testimonial-givers' (Pedroni, 2015: 190-191).

At the same time, thanks to the acquired trust of their followers, bloggers become influential testimonial of brands and products and are able to steer the style of their readers. Thus, marketers and fashion designers try to reach consumers by giving bloggers free products that they could promote and incorporate to their personal outfits (Kulmala, Mesiranta, Tuominen, 2013). However, in order to maintain their readers trust, bloggers should choose only garments that are perfectly coherent with their personal style. The blogger's credibility, which is always at stake, steers the communicative dynamics. This credibility is mostly based on the bloggers independence from brands and on bloggers autonomy in choosing their personal style. So, if a company decides to feed a blogger with a specific product, the risks are higher that the product does not fit the blogger's style and therefore, it is not presented by the blogger, or if presented, can cause negative feedback from the audience (Kulmala, Mesiranta, Tuominen, 2013).

Since some years ago, I'm again the face of the campaign Lux Bag (www.luxbaaagitaly.it). A project that I support from the beginning and that has evolved in time. From the first bag with the internal light, which was a unique model, to a large and always new collection. The Lux Bag FW2015 collection plays with the typical winter colors ... Enjoy the pictures' preview and let me know what are you thinking about it (namelessfashionblog_03/10/2015)⁷.

⁷ Authors have translated this comment, trying to respect the original informal language.

I'm introducing you Vertigo, the beautiful Breil's necklace. In the shots I show you today we wanted to play a little bit, painting like on a canvas, as the last centuries artists... black background and close-up, catching the moment, enriching it adding the precious Breil jewels: Vertigo, not only a necklace, a woven waterfall of steel with a detail in the middle, discreet but present, perfect for women who want to display a refined moderation. At my wrist, then, Liberty, refined with his grey leather wristband and the metal details which give him a particular character (thecutielicious_03/13/2015).

4. From sharing to showing: the evolution of bloggers' style

Even if the oldest blogs have been opened in 2010 and the latest in 2013, the analysis reveals a sort of evolution in the personal blogging style and in the handling of the relationship with readers. As other studies highlight (Rocamora, 2011; Finley, 2015), the posts from the first month of activity show a more conversational style when compared to the last ones. At the same time, the pictures that are taken by boyfriends or friends appear spontaneous and unsophisticated.

Few days ago after a study day, I went out with Richard to distract me a bit. We went to a bar near river Arno, to had a drink and ate a piece of pizza after that we came down along the banks of the river to took pictures and threw stones into the water. Then we sat on the pebbles and we spent a pleasant hour talking. The bag was a birthday present that R. did to me two years ago! I love it! I think that it is perfect in summer (Myfantabulousworld.com_09/27/2010).

Almost all the bloggers declare in their first posts their intention to speak about themselves and to share the personal passion for the fashion world:

Hello people! My name is Fabiola and this is my blog, where I will try to speak about fashion with my outfits... Enjoy! :) (Wildflowergirl_07/12/2012).

Here I am with this blog that is born from my passion for fashion and everything that has to do with the word "creativity". After creating Amelyphotography, I decided to give space to this other passion. I decided to call it "Becoming Trendy" because I think that whatever you do in your life, you should never stop learning and with the rights ingredients, like patience and humility, you can go far. With this blog, I want to share another piece of me hoping to be able to involve you and improve thanks to your opinions :-). Let's start darlings! (Becomingtrendy_04/23/2012).

Over the years, the direct approach and the request of feedback from the readers are part of the bloggers' communicative style. However, the posts content changes according to the professional growth of the bloggers and the request about feedback become a perfunctory one. The bloggers show a more mature and commercial style that points out a clear desire to become part of the fashion industry in a more institutional way.

Indeed, the mature blogger assumes a more didactic tone, she shares her knowledge and not only her style.

Good morning Lady, Today I will tell you the story about the nice polka dots, since pois are one of the coolest spring trend of 2015. You maybe don't know it, but this witty pattern is quite old ... (Theladycracy_03/25/2015).

The growing popularity lets the bloggers distance themselves from their readers, along the road of an increasing professionalization and of the commercial exploitation of their status.

Indeed, with some exceptions, in the first months of activity the bloggers reply to every comment. These replays are often quite simple, but they always acknowledge the role of the readers. The typical exchange is the following:

Too nice this outfit, I have the same T-shirt is amazing!
Xoxo (Valentina's comment_Theladycracy_04/25/2012).
Reply
Thank you: D (Theladycracy_04/26/2012).

After some time, which varies from some months (wildflowergirl.blogspot.it) to one year (becomingtrendy.com), the blogger generally ceases to reply, or reduces even more the level of interaction (just using a smile). Authors suppose⁸ that the *status recognition* granted by a more professional audience allows the bloggers to become less concerned about nurturing the relationships with their readers.

Furthermore, in this more mature phase, blogs become real media platforms. If blogging is one of the most representative phenomena of the web 2.0, the nowadays virtual space cannot exclude the social media evolution. Indeed, since the Facebook's birth in 2004, social networks have earned a very big space in the virtual arena (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011). The analyzed bloggers clearly adopt the idea that 'the higher the social presence, the larger the social influence that the communication partners have on each other's behavior' (Kaplan, Haenlein,

⁸ In order to have something more than a hypothesis further research is necessary.

2010: 61). All the observed sites show the links with the most common social networks Facebook, Twitter, Instagram but also Pinterest, Youtube, Google plus, Flickr, Tumblr, and Blogovin. Bloggers encourage the readers to follow them through different platforms. Moreover, all the posts could be emailed, signaled or shared from the readers on their personal profiles of the most common social networks.

As it happens for the corporate profiles, most of the content is simply transferred from a platform to the others; i.e. Fabiola Tinelli of *Wildflowergirls* posts every week on Instagram a picture that summarizes all the outfits of the week and the same post is shared on the blog and on the Facebook page. Sometime a real management of the content is made for the Twitter account – i.e. *TheChiliCool@chilicoolblog* twits regularly since April 2009, but the content is not directly uploaded from the blog.

Since most of the comments come from others bloggers, they are always proposing to follow each other, thus increasing their number of followers on different platforms. *Exchanging links* on blogs is a very popular and encouraged practice among the bloggers, as they promote their own blogs to reach a wider audience; following each other's blogs, bloggers often copy what they read to their own site (Halvorsen et al., 2013).

I love this coat, it's beautiful, and the color too! I love your blog! Let me know would you like us to support each other by following each other on GFC?

Have a nice day, Sonia Verardo <http://www.trenchcollection.com> (SoniaVerardo's comment_Wildflowergirl 03/18/2015).

Would you like to follow each other? let me know on my blog if you follow me, and I will follow you back after it. Thank you! ^^~

Tom and Tins Blog (MinJungLee's comment_thecutielicious 03/16/2015).

5. Conclusions

Since blogging is generally indicated as a grassroots movement (Conhaim, 2002), whereas everyone with an access to the internet can create their blog in order to share their passions, points of view and personality traits, the fashion blogs should not be an exception. However, the current analysis highlights some fashion blogs characteristics, which cast a shadow on the grassroots nature of these blogs. Firstly, the progressive *professionalization* of the bloggers, as far as content and blogging style are concerned, let them take the distance from a naïve audience of fashion lovers. Secondly, the evidence of the bloggers belonging to a community of pair, which emerges from the practice of cross-reference, seems further away from a true bottom-up movement.

Thirdly, the progressive distance from the readers, which is testified to by the brevity of replies – or the total lack of it – fosters the hypothesis that the fashion bloggers are on the path toward the institutionalized role of fashion icons. An institutional role is the opposite of grassroots. If it is generally true that web 2.0 uses conversation as its principal expressive mode, it is equally true that in the analyzed FBs the conversations proceed more in a top-down model, than through any horizontal flow.

Obviously, the explorative nature of this study and the sample dimension prevent authors from broadening these considerations. Further research is necessary in order to understand if, over time, a grassroots phenomenon such as blogging has really become a more institutional one-way communication tool.

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