When Bloggers become Designers: On the Role of Professions in a Fashion System Undergoing Change

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system, this paper therefore contributes to extant literature within the field of fashion marketing and fashion studies by illustrating the ways through which actors situated outside the system manage to approach it by utilizing social media. This paper also highlights the challenges this development yields for established actors within the fashion system.

KEYWORDS: professions, social media, fashion, fashion system, digitization, fashion blogs

1. Introduction

As a result of the increasing prevalence of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), the rate at which fashion information is spread from various sources throughout multiple media has become one of the characterizing traits of the contemporary fashion industry. Consequently, the fashion system has decentralized (Crane 2000; Entwistle 2000) which can be seen in terms of how diffusion manifests in the increasingly digitized media landscape (Crane 1999; Kawamura 2005). Because of this reason, one of the challenges that fashion scholars face currently is to explain the implications of this development for the conceptual understanding of the professional fashion system (see Kawamura 2005). Increasingly, this has become an issue of which actors should be regarded as professional members within the fashion system and which should be regarded as being situated outside its borders.

Among studies that have approached this issue, social media has been shown to comprise a mix of personal, private and commercial interests that are at times difficult to separate (see Pham 2011; Pihl and Sandström 2013). This mix of personal and commercial content has also been shown to have profound consequences for one of the key professions of the fashion system, namely fashion journalism, which has become institutionally restructured due to the redefining of the professions' practices as they have entered the setting of the social media landscape (Duffy 2014; Laurell and Sandström 2014; Rocamora 2012). Furthermore, these developments have raised the question of how other professions within the fashion system become transformed due to the influence of social and digital media.

An actor group that has been regarded as one of the most influential in the fashion system (Kawamura 2005), where little still is known in relation to the institutional pressures put forth by social media, is the role of designers. As designers have been argued to be the icons of the system, whose participation generates status and reputation not only for themselves but also the system as a whole, this adds to the relevance of continued analysis of the kinds of institutional pressures social media brings to specific fashion professions.

In light of this discussion, the aim of the present paper is to add to the exploration of how the rise of social media challenges the traditional borders of the professional fashion system. This is done by drawing from findings of a study of two fashion bloggers who, in the early developments

early twentieth centuries, fashion designers produced clothing styles that were aimed at expressing the social position of the wearer following the logic of the trickle-down diffusion that was highly interconnected to social class (Simmel 1904; Veblen 1899). This fashion system, which was configured to produce class fashion, needed a centralized system of creation and production where a high level of consensus between its members existed.

When analyzing the contemporary fashion system, Crane (2000) illustrated that fashion had come to undergo a radical decentralization. One of the most illuminating manifestations of this development was that fashion in the late twentieth century no longer originated exclusively from fashion world capitals, nor even from the fashion industry itself. More specifically, Crane (2000) argued that the notion of class fashion came to be replaced by consumer fashion that allowed for a wide stylistic diversity. As a consequence, this undermined the possibility for uniform consensus about what is fashionable at a particular time, as consumer fashion incorporated the tastes and concerns of social groups found across society at large.

As the variety of fashion styles in contemporary society have increased because of the fragmented fashion system and thereby enabled more choices, this has also expanded the ways available to create a meaningful self-identity (Giddens 1991). Relating back to the metaphor of fashion as a mirror of society, the societal importance of both self-image and identity have become fundamental in the conceptualization of fashion. Consumption of fashion increasingly manifests as a form of role-playing through which consumers seek to project conceptions of identity that are constantly evolving (see Kawamura 2005; Pham 2013; Rocamora 2011). Thus, it can be argued that the concept of the fashion system has shifted to become conceptualized as increasingly dynamic, making the role of the consumer increasingly prominent and active in comparison to classical notions (Simmel 1904; Veblen 1899). This development also has consequences for the role of the designer, which has become conceptualized to be "less about clothing production and more about image production" (Kawamura 2005, 65). From such a perspective, designers can be regarded as mere image creators that have found successful ways of navigating post-modern society (see Giddens 1991).

2.2   *The rise of social media and its consequences for the professional fashion system*

In addition to changing consumer behaviors due to the decentralized fashion system, the last two decades have also been characterized by the rise of digital media (see Laurell 2014; Pham 2011; Rocamora 2011). Within the general field of marketing, these structural developments within western society have received much attention. Social media, defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p. 61), has been shown to weaken the borders between professionals and consumers throughout

empirical setting was needed in which social media has been utilized to draw from the professional practices of the fashion system. One example of where such attempts have been carried out is in the Swedish fashion blogosphere. As the fashion industry in Sweden is characterized by consumers' generally high interest in current trends and style, this has also resulted a vibrant social media landscape where the usage of fashion-oriented social media has become particularly popular. Since 2005, fashion bloggers have managed to attract, grow and sustain relatively substantial readerships (Pihl 2011). What also characterizes this empirical setting is that many of the bloggers who started to build readerships a decade ago have also continued their blogging activities even though a plethora of other commercial activities have become integrated in their businesses over time (Laurell 2014).

3.1 Sampling procedures

In order to sample suitable bloggers within the frame of the present study, a previously conducted study (Laurell 2014) on 18 of Sweden's most influential fashion bloggers was utilized in the first step. Within the frame of this study, bloggers exhibiting a relatively high degree of entrepreneurial activity was identified, in as much as the bloggers not only took part in marketing fashion products and brands on their blogs, but also had started to create their own collections. In one case, the blogger had decided to create her own brand; in the two remaining cases, the bloggers created fashion collections in co-operation with two fashion firms.

As all three cases and their respective initiative exhibited an ambition to become a part of the professional fashion industry, the bloggers were therefore reviewed in terms of their potential suitability vis-a-vis the study at hand. As the aim for the present study concerns how social media can be utilized to gain access to the professional fashion system, this review was carried out by establishing whether the bloggers were members of the system at the point in time when they started to blog. In one of the three cases, the blogger started her blogging career in conjunction with employment within fashion journalism. For this reason, she was disqualified from the study in question and two bloggers remained.

Isabella Löwengrip started to blog in 2005, and soon after that became the first blog in Sweden to be operated as a limited company. Over time, an e-commerce business selling a wide range of products, an investment company working with publishing and lecturing services as well as providing venture capital, and finally a magazine was added to the list of ventures that the blogger chose to take part in over the years. In addition to this portfolio, the blogger also owned and operated the fashion design company "Classified" selling the blogger's fashion collection between May 2009 and April 2012. Even though this particular fashion design company is no longer active, it arguably functioned as a stepping stone for the blogger's current activities within the fashion sector in terms of Flattered, a shoe design company launched in 2013, and Style Level, a fashion e-commerce offering their own collections.

4. Results

The results are presented in three steps. First, the case of "Classified" is presented, followed by "Jofama by Kenza". In a third and final section, the two cases are compared with each other with regard to orientations and practices.

4.1 Classified

Isabella Löwengrip, born in 1990 and based in the Swedish capital, Stockholm, started to blog in January 2005 and chose to go under the alias "Blondinbella". At first, the blog did not describe Löwengrip's life but that of Blondinbella and quickly received much attention in social media because of the provocative statements. Between 2009 and 2011, Löwengrip took several entrepreneurial initiatives, well captured in a statement from December 2008:

> The blog is just a platform for whatever I want to do in my life. It helps me to create a brand and to make important contacts. I want to write a book and become a lawyer, and the blog makes it possible for me to do all these things. (Hellquist 2008, 86)

When reviewing the material that concerns the fashion brand in question, Löwengrip revealed the news about the brand to her blog readers in a blog post titled "Classified—Young, preppy, classic but with an edge". The post, published on the May 20, 2009, stated:

> Okay, this is a bit tough actually. To showcase parts of what I have been doing for several months. My fashion brand has become like my baby, but this summer Classified will be launched. I start with a small collection in June, which will then be expanded in August. If all goes well, it's going to continue this winter and next year too. Classified is a budget brand that I have designed and will be in stores, when where and how I will communicate soon ... But you get to see some advertising on TV shortly!

In the period following the announcements of the collaboration, Löwengrip wrote about how the work with the collection progressed. One illustrative example was posted November 20, 2009:

> Yeah! My clothes have finally arrived from Shanghai to Stockholm by boat. Last spring, I sketched on a fashion collection because I thought that the supply of cheap, classic clothes that are a little preppy was just too bad. Unfortunately, there was trouble with the production and when the clothes came to Sweden, they looked like nothing I had imagined and sizes were too small. After much trouble on the other side of the globe, the clothes are here. I am glad I chose classic clothes and not clothes that were fashionable at the time

Table 2
Identified orientations and practices: Classified.

Orientation	Practice	Proportion (%)	Data example
Professional orientation	Designing	5.5	"Last spring, I sketched on a clothing line because I thought that the supply of cheap, classic clothes that are a little preppy was just too bad"
	Producing	2.8	"Unfortunately, there was trouble with the production and when the clothes came to Sweden, they looked nothing like I had imagined and the sizes were too small"; "I have had talks regarding all the adjustments on some of the garments in my clothing line Classified"
	Branding	2.3	"The brand is called Classified and some of the garments also have the logo CLFD"
			"Classified: Young, preppy, classical but with an edge"
	Marketing	19.3	"The model that I have chosen is a really pretty girl who is very happy and funny! I was a little nervous when I was going to find 'the face' for my clothing brand Classified, because it's like giving away your baby [...] very strange feeling, but it feels right and she is perfect!"
	Retailing	15.1	"Today, Bubbleroom.se has a sneak preview of my clothing brand Classified. Today you will find the shirt and jacket, and each day new garments will be presented!"
	Sub-total	45.0	
Professional and personal orientation	Interacting with blog readers	12.8	"Have you bought garments from Classified? Take a picture of you in the garment and send it to info@blondnbella.se as and I will link to your blog!"
	Q&A	5.5	"Q: Hey! What date will your clothing line be available in stores? Can you by it online? A: My clothing line Classified will of course be on our website. I cannot tell you the date yet and exactly which stores around the country, but within three weeks it will be available"
	Competitions	1.4	"Do you want to win a garment from Classified—check out the blog soon!"
	Sub-total	19.7	
Personal orientation	Blogger as model	21.6	"This must be the coolest thing I've ever done. I have taken a today's outfit with a shirt from my own fashion brand! Classified!"
	Family and friends as models	0.9	"My beautiful mother, the jacket is from my brand Classified!"
	Personal affection	12.8	"My clothing line has become like my baby, but this summer Classified will be launched";
			"It really is a mind-blowing feeling to be able to wear your own clothes"
	Sub-total	35.3	

When I started to blog, there were almost no influential bloggers in Sweden. No one understood that bloggers would become the new celebrities [...] The benefits of being a celebrity are fun

in time, the blogger had also managed to start yet another design collaboration, "Wildflower by Kenza". A blog post published September 15, 2010, gives an illustrative example of this discussion:

> Several times now, I have seen my Jofama by Kenza garments and Wildflower by Kenza shoes in various magazines such as Solo, VeckoRevyn, Glaze, Sofi's Fashion and Cosmopolitan. It has happened a time or two that they have included "by Kenza", but most often this is not the case. I think it's really sad because it's my stuff, and it's clear that I want people to know it too, and it reads loud and clear that it is "by Kenza" both in the press photos and inside the clothes / shoes ... yet it is never included. Is there anyone who understands me or do I demand too much? (PS some seem to believe that Jofama and Wildflower are my brands. This is not the case, they are large brands/companies that have been around for a long time. I have only been a guest designer and got my own small collections! They have loads of their own garments and shoes that are not mine).

Table 3 presents the orientations and practices identified across the material that concerns the blogger's collaboration over the studied period of time. As it illustrates, the blogger, similar to the first case, engaged in professional practices while simultaneously combining these with interactive and personally oriented practices.

4.3 Comparing Classified and Jofama by Kenza

Table 4 presents the differences in proportions for both cases' respective orientations and practices. As Table 4 illustrates, considerable similarities between Classified and Jofama by Kenza can be identified with regard to the orientations. In terms of practices, however, a number of considerable differences are present in regards to the retailing, competitions, blogger as model and personal affection practices.

5. Analysis and Discussion

In view of the presented results, both cases illustrate how the bloggers engaged in professional practices drawn from the professional fashion system. In the next sections, the usage of professional practices is analyzed first. This is followed by a discussion on the balance between the professional and personal orientation of the bloggers, and lastly how this balance can be understood vis-à-vis the professional fashion system.

5.1 Bloggers and professional practices of the fashion system

In both cases, the bloggers exhibit a professional approach with regard to their fashion collections. In approaching the professional practices

Table 4
Identified differences between the cases of Classified and Jofama by Kenza.

Orientation	Practice	Classified (%)	Jofama by Kenza (%)	Difference (%)
Professional orientation	Designing	5.5	13.7	−8.2
	Producing	2.8	0.0	2.8
	Branding	2.3	0.0	2.3
	Marketing	19.3	18.3	1.0
	Retailing	15.1	9.2	5.9
	Sub-total	*45.0*	*41.2*	*3.8*
Professional and personal orientation	Interacting with blog readers	12.8	6.1	6.7
	Q&A	5.5	3.1	2.4
	Competitions	1.4	13.7	−12.3
	Sub-total	*19.7*	*22.9*	*−3.2*
Personal orientation	Blogger as model	21.6	28.2	−6.6
	Family and friends as models	0.9	3.1	−2.2
	Personal affection	12.8	4.6	8.2
	Sub-total	*35.3*	*35.9*	*−0.6*

sequential step, branding efforts that sought to present the core attributes that were intended to be associated with the brand in question were also present in the case of Classified. In the collaborative case of Jofama by Kenza, however, illustrations of these professional practices were not present.

At the time that the fashion brand and the fashion collaboration had been launched, both cases exhibit extensive demonstrations of marketing efforts (19.3% and 18.3% of the total material). These efforts were also associated with retailing, where the case of Classified devoted considerable attention to this issue in comparison to the collaborative case of Jofama by Kenza (15.1% compared with 9.2%).

When taken together, the illustrations of professional practices comprise 45% and 41.2% of the analyzed material respectively. This finding shows that professional practices occupy an important role in both cases, and also reveal that the two cases focus considerable attention on other practices that are not solely professional. In the next section, this balance will be discussed in further detail.

5.2 Balancing the professional and personal

In addition to the illustrations that concern professional practices, two additional orientations are present in the material. With regard to the first

system as social media users themselves start to create fashion. This is not solely a question of enacting the role of designers, but arguably combining sets of professional roles. This seems to materialize particularly clearly in cases where independent fashion brands are created (see Table 1). In this context, many professional practices drawn from the value chain associated to fashion become enacted, and as such not only challenge the exclusivity of fashion professionals in terms of the creation of fashion, but also the borders that separate fashion professionals from each other.

In perspective to this development, it can be concluded that social media not only should be explained as a group of Internet-based applications (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010) within the field of fashion marketing and fashion studies but rather as a source of institutional pressures which affect professions (see Duffy 2014; Laurell and Sandström 2014; Pihl and Sandström 2013; Rocamora 2012) and the traditionally well institutionalized distinctions between different professions which up until this point have occupied the professional fashion system. While designers previously have been the icons of the fashion system, it now seems that novel roads to becoming an icon should be expected to open as the institutional pressure brought by social media continues to redefine and restructure the fashion system.

6. Concluding Remarks, Managerial Implications and Directions for Future Research

This article has explored how the rise of social media challenges the traditional borders of the professional fashion system. The presented results have shown how the two cases studied, in their efforts related to their fashion collections, have come to participate in several of the professional practices of the fashion industry and, by doing so, arguably become integrated members of the fashion system. This membership, however, is not a matter of a binary shift but rather a question of a balancing act between professional practices drawn from the fashion system, novel digital practices emerging within the social media landscape and the combination of the professional and personal aspects of these. By illustrating the erosion of the traditional borders of the fashion system as a consequence of digital and social media, this paper contributes to extant literature within the field of fashion marketing and fashion studies by illustrating the ways through which actors situated outside the fashion system manage to approach the professional fashion system by utilizing social media.

In view of the presented results and the associated challenges these yield for established actors, three main managerial implications can be drawn. Firstly, fashion brands should expect increased competition from actors that draw from social media and balance on the border between being consumers and professionals. Because of the emergence of these actors, fashion brands could as a consequence be subjected to competition from what were once their customers. Secondly, fashion brands that want to leverage on the arguably favorable customer intimacy that

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