

# FASHION BLOGGERS

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## Abstract

The rise of fashion blogging has had an impact on the fashion industry and consumption. As readers across the globe can now easily (and without the cost of a monthly magazine) access a wide array of fashion, including elite brands or subcultural styles that may have otherwise been previously outside of their reach, bloggers become the mode that helps shape how people respond to, consume, and adapt changing fashions. The ease of access to, and increased popularity of, fashion blogs has shifted blogging from a hobby to a full-fledged business model and transformed bloggers into fashion icons that are a part of the fashion industry directly. Bloggers now sit front row at fashion weeks, are featured and contribute to other fashion media, and communicate brand loyalty to larger audiences.

Tracking the rise of two influential fashion bloggers, Kathryn Finney of The Budget Fashionista and Scott Schuman of The Sartorialist, shows how fashion bloggers have etched a space of authority in the fashion industry and a platform for partnering with advertisers to connect consumers to products in new ways. One such innovation of fashion blogging is addressed in a brief snapshot that considers how blogs have not simply replicated print media, but rather have produced their own generic conventions for engaging audiences and communicating about fashion. That genre posts such as “What I Wore Today” (WIWT) or “Outfit of the Day” (OOTD) span many different types of fashion blogs, suggests the legitimacy of blogging as a dynamic space for creating new ways for communicating fashion trends.

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“Blogging,” the term assigned to the act of keeping a Weblog, started in the late 1990s when the popularity and use of the Internet rose. Blogging largely started as a way for writers to self-publish personal essays and diaries online. These first blogs would be considered clunky by the standards of the twenty-first century, and often required more advanced coding skills; by the turn of the new millennium, blogging platforms such as Blogger, LiveJournal, and Open Diary offered hosted Web space for any user to create similar content without the need to code. These sites also offered users rich interactive and searchable communities, where bloggers with shared interests could interact through embedded hyperlinks and comments. With advances in technology that made blogging platforms more user-friendly and growing access to the Internet across the world, the popularity of blogging grew at a rapid pace.

The ease of these platforms provided users with access to a low-stake entrance into a digital community of like-minded individuals. Many users, but particularly women, took to blogging as a form of self-expression and for exploring personal style. As such, blogs entirely dedicated to fashion quickly grew in popularity and eventually transformed into an entirely new form of

fashion communication. By 2003, fashion blogging sites like SheSheMe, New York Fashion Blog, and The Budget Fashionista had established huge online followings and influenced many others to start their own blogs.

According to [Alice Marwick](#), an assistant professor of communication and media studies at Fordham University, fashion blogs largely fall into three categories: personal style blogs, curated fashion blogs, and street-style blogs. As fashion blogging has rapidly increased in the early twenty-first century, the divisions between these genres have blurred considerably. Yet, each type retains the most basic qualities specific to its specific form. Personal style blogs, such as ManRepeller, construct narratives about the blogger's specific styling practices and bloggers photograph themselves wearing their own outfits. These are distinguished from curated fashion blogs, as with They All Hate Us, which draw content from mainstream fashion sources across the Web and often comment on trends. Street-style blogs, like The Sartorialist, photograph real people in city spaces in stylish outfits. The photos on street-style blogs may or may not be accompanied with product information or be interested in documenting trends, but these blogs typically span a much wider range of cultural styles. All fashion blogs may feature product reviews, monetized advertisements, and a wide variety of related content in the form of hyperlinks, videos, and images. In addition, fashion bloggers largely have irregular blog schedules, though as blogging evolves and more and more blogs become a solid income source, this is changing. Regardless of the posting schedule, fashion blogs have distinguished themselves from mainstream fashion media sources by their ability to post more content, allowing a quick assessment of, and commentary on, upcoming fashion trends. Readers and bloggers connect in the comments of posts and site visitors are offered a more immediate interface with their style icons than in print.

This image shows an example of a fashion image that would be featured on a street style blog. These photos are typically taken spontaneously in public areas, allowing for a diverse range of styles to be documented. Getty/Alfie Goodrich/Stringer.

As fashion blogging has grown into big business for many, bloggers have been quick to adapt mainstream media genres to fit their own goals and needs. For example, blogs might feature the familiar conventions of "how-tos," do-it-yourself tutorials, or styling tips popularized by magazines, but blogs also have the ability to span a much larger spectrum of styles than print media. By drawing on print conventions, blogs have legitimized their content. As such, bloggers have been able to produce content that is similar to print media, but more quickly and with more direct audience engagement than traditional fashion outlets.

Similarly, just as magazines are branded for specific audiences, bloggers have also carefully tailored their online personas to better connect their content with readers. In fact, bloggers have positioned themselves as counter to mainstream media and played up their "girl next door" brands. The strategy, as [Marwick](#) notes, is effective as fashion bloggers are often seen as in opposition to mainstream media outlets that limit representations of women, certain brands, or even the appearance of certain styles. Blogs cater to these niche interests by adapting and perfecting "authentic" online identities that offer more diverse fashion content. These identities position bloggers as both relatable and trustworthy, a key to building a stronger reader base. Successful bloggers may even downplay their success or glamorous aspects of blogging in order to continue to seem down to earth and relatable for the average reader. As bloggers sculpt their online identity, they also work to compose a recognizable brand that they use across social media platforms, making their specific content available to readers in multiple forms, more often. Thus, successful bloggers often have linked Twitter, Facebook, Vine, and Instagram accounts that supplement main blog posts with similar content.

## Impact on the Fashion Industry

As fashion blogging quickly moved from small-scale personal diaries to full businesses with distinct brands, the fashion industry was quick to take note. By 2009, bloggers were routinely featured in main media outlets like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. This influence continues to be seen as fashion blogging manages to be one of the fastest growing blog genres on the Web, even as other kinds of blogs are in decline. Currently, there are more

than 50,000 fashion bloggers affiliated with the Independent Fashion Bloggers' coalition and countless more that are not affiliated with other similar networks. The number of bloggers alone does not adequately speak to the popularity of the Web content, but a consideration of readers helps to illuminate the figure. For bloggers, success is rated in page views and some of the most highly successful fashion bloggers can receive more than 4 million unique page views a month.

Clearly, the popularity and rapid growth of fashion blogging suggests that consumers are eager for new ways of interacting with what they see as fresh and authentic style sources. The form has also been considered more democratic, offering unrestricted access to those who may not be represented by mainstream media. Further, fashion blogging allows multiple voices and perspectives the opportunity to communicate directly about their specific fashion interests. Blogging also offers constant, free access to style at any time, allowing readers autonomy in accessing information rather than having to wait for the next issue. Readers who follow specific blogs are able to enter into discussions about blog content, allowing bloggers to tailor their content to readers' interests and demands. In this way, these dialogues feel personal to their audience but do not risk their brand. Thus, consumers consider bloggers to be more authentic, independent, and trustworthy than other sources. Fashion blogs are also able to reflect a much wider range of styles and engage in their readers' specific interests, as with blogs that take up specific subcultural styles. For example, blogs may feature modest fashion (Clothed Much; No More Mom Jeans), plus-size fashion (Fatshionista; Cupcake's Clothes), or queer fashion (Qwear; DapperQ).

As such, it is not surprising to find that blogging has become a fixture of mainstream magazines like *Vogue*, which hosts its own blog called "Vogue Daily" and the "Vogue Influencer Network" that teams with famous fashion bloggers to generate shared content for their blog and related publications. Fashion bloggers have also become a fixture at runway shows, forging the same palpable relationships with designers that have been traditionally reserved for magazine editors. Indeed, as early as 2003, The Budget Fashionista was live-blogging from New York Fashion Week and countless other bloggers were recruited by media outlets to comment on catwalk styles. By 2009 bloggers were not just present at fashion weeks: they were sitting in the first row at shows like Dolce & Gabbana and Marc Jacobs.

At present, fashion bloggers receive much more than the prime seats at fashion weeks. In the early twenty-first century, they have grown into fixtures of the fashion industry and become trusted style sources for millions, and many bloggers have used their success to expand their online brands into partnerships with designers, print and TV advertisements, and even TV shows. The rapid growth of fashion blogging and the rise of celebrity bloggers have encouraged hobbyist fashion bloggers to seek out ways to profit from their own blogs. As such, many blogs use ad space, sponsored content, and other corporate partnerships to make revenue. In fact, much of the income generated by fashion blogs is related to company sponsorships and advertisements. Often, blogs are affiliated with companies that require bloggers to agree to post ads in return for a small sum of money for every visitor who clicks on a sponsored link, and an additional profit if visitors purchase an item from a sponsor. Even blogs with a small readership can earn up to \$200 a month from these ads alone. Professional fashion bloggers with a much larger reader base can stand to make an income of upwards of \$100,000 a year from ads.

Aside from ads, one of the most common forms of payment is when bloggers partner with companies to review their products and services in exchange for free merchandise. Companies sometimes approach bloggers with gifts to attempt to capitalize on a given blogger's word-of-mouth advertising and authentic personal connections. Such gifts often come with attached expectations of positive reviews or general praise for the company, although Marwick notes that bloggers maintain that honesty about products and authenticity comes before such perks. By 2008, the practice of corporate partnerships and gifting to bloggers was so widespread that the Federal Trade Commission mandated that bloggers had to disclose any cash or payment in kind for products or services featured, and obligated bloggers to publically disclose all corporate endorsements.

Despite the growth of fashion blogging and the presence of influential bloggers at high-fashion events, some are skeptical about the role of bloggers in the fashion industry. With the growth of monetized blogs and paid reviews, readers' trust in bloggers' perspectives can be increasingly difficult to establish. Many bloggers attempt to ease potential distrust by paying careful attention

to how the products they endorse fit into their own branding. Many bloggers attempt to offset potential distrust from readers by featuring explicit claims that they only accept free products from their favorite companies and also feature reviews for products they have purchased themselves. Aside from the potential for undisclosed company partnerships and biased content, fashion bloggers have also been the subject of criticism from the fashion community. As designers vie for the attention and name recognition of influential bloggers, who are often displacing editors from their front-row seats at fashion weeks, critics suggest that traditional fashion coverage risks being thrown to the untrained. Fashion journalists have argued that fashion bloggers lack the experience and insight needed to be a credible fashion source. [Robin Givhan](#), fashion editor of *The Washington Post*, argues that highly professional bloggers who forge tight relationships with advertisers and designers risk losing the objectivity and criticism of traditional fashion journalism, a major tradition that she finds to be generative and useful for both designers and the fashion industry. In other words, critics like Givhan worry that as bloggers become linked in complex brand partnerships, their already limited knowledge of the fashion industry may not provide the criticism and pushback that designers need to truly innovate.

Influential bloggers are now key figures in the fashion industry, even attending major fashion events with critics and designers. Here, blogger Bryan Yambao of BryanBoy sits front row at the Lacoste fashion show during Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week in fall 2015. Getty/Desiree Navarro/Contributor.

## Influential Fashion Bloggers

As fashion blogs have experienced an explosion in readership, so has their influence. As [Marwick](#) observes, bloggers with dedicated fan bases and wide name recognition are offered opportunities to participate in the fashion community, becoming figures of style in their own right. Many bloggers have been able to parlay their brand into book deals, TV contracts, and clothing and makeup lines. These bloggers move rapidly from the world of Internet fame to outright name recognition as they are profiled in, and contribute to, mainstream media outlets. As such, uncovering new and influential bloggers preoccupies many media outlets and with so many fashion blogs published on the Web, it is not surprising that blogs and magazines publish multiple lists of top fashion blogs. By far the most comprehensive and oldest list has been published by Signature9.com, an online fashion magazine well known for publishing a ranking of the top ninety-nine style blogs using factors such as data on reader traffic, page views, content quality, and social media shares. Between 2009 and 2013, the number of blogs considered for the list grew from 250 to over 15,000, indicating the explosion of fashion blogs during this time. The returns are huge for bloggers who rise to the top of such lists as they achieve celebrity status, generating a boom in page views and thus more income. Similarly, the mainstream fashion media routinely publish lists of the top fashion bloggers on their Web sites and in print; some even feature print space dedicated to blog trends or profiles of top bloggers. Newspapers like the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* feature content by top fashion bloggers and host their own fashion blogs. While simply ranking high on lists of top fashion bloggers can increase traffic, winning an award for blog content or style can quickly legitimize a blogger. Magazines like *Cosmopolitan*, *Allure*, *Elle*, and *Marie Claire* feature blog awards as nominated by readers. Similarly, Stylight.com features the largest bloggers' award ceremony, which is called the Fashion Influencer Awards and hosted during New York Fashion Week. It issues awards for categories such as "Most Creative Fashion Blog" and "Most Promising Fashion Blog."

## The Budget Fashionista

Widely regarded as one of the first fashion blogs, Kathryn Finney's blog The Budget Fashionista (TBF) illustrates the growth of fashion blogging from an individual style journal to a full business model attracting more than 13 million visitors a year. Finney, a Yale graduate with a degree in epidemiology, credits her hefty student debt and love of fashion as reasons for starting her blog in 2003. When TBF was featured in a 2004 Associated Press article on sample sales, her

reader base expanded and Finney quickly left her job to blog full time. With growing name recognition, Finney was among the first bloggers asked to attend New York Fashion Week. As her blog grew, she became heralded as a guru of bargain shopping, appearing on TV shows and writing content for mainstream media sources like the *New York Times*.

Originally, the blog featured fashion-specific content, including news about upcoming sales, advice about particular brands and products, coupons, interviews, and shopping guides for cities across the United States. By 2006, Finney's growing fame had landed her with the chance to transform her blog's budget shopping and style tips into a book called *How to Be a Budget Fashionista: The Ultimate Guide to Looking Fabulous for Less*. Finney created her own limited liability company, the TBF Group, which included the Simply Good Media Blog Network, a collection of blogs (including TBF) that the blogger founded. While she continued to write and publish nearly all of her own content for TBF after the release of her book, growing success and readers' demand for content led her to expand her business and hire freelance contributors to produce content for her blog in 2007. At that point, TBF expanded to include beauty advice, blogging tips, and personal finance advice alongside the budget-friendly fashion tips readers had come to expect. At that point, the TBF Group was bringing in an estimated \$150,000 a year and growing.

In 2011, Finney became CEO of BlogHer Inc., a company that networks together communities of female bloggers to help monetize and market their Web sites. Clearly, Finney's brand has expanded since her first foray into blogging. She has delivered speeches and conference lectures about money and debt management and successful blogging techniques. In 2012, Finney founded Digitalundivided.com, a "social enterprise that develops programs that increase the active participation of urban communities, especially women in the digital space." Her work with the organization earned her a 2013 Change Award and a place on *Ebony's* "Power 100" list of the most influential African Americans in the United States.

## The Sartorialist

Credited with being one of the first street-style blogs, The Sartorialist, founded by Scott Schuman, is known for strong photography and images of subcultural styles. Schuman, a graduate of the fashion merchandizing program at Indiana University, worked for big fashion names like Valentino before opening his own fashion showroom, but left the industry in 2005 for personal reasons. Shortly after leaving his job, Schuman began photographing people on the street in New York City and created a blog of eye-catching styles. Schuman calls his blog an attempt to create a "two-way dialogue about the world of fashion and its relationship to daily life." Posts are sometimes captioned with Schuman's thoughts about an outfit or ruminations about why a particular item attracted his attention, but largely the images speak for themselves. The simple premise—photographing interesting people in everyday situations—has earned him widespread recognition. His site receives well over 13 million views a month and an estimated income of well over a million dollars a year from his blog alone.

After one year of blogging and a growing reader base, Schuman signed a contract with Condé Nast's Style.com to cover the street styles of New York Fashion Week attendees. He recalls that the partnership between a blogger and mainstream media company was considered risky, but his coverage was successful and he quickly became a big name in the fashion industry, renewing his contract with Style.com for three consecutive years. By 2007, Schuman's images had already earned him a spot on *TIME* magazine's "Top 100 Design Influences" and placed him as one of forty-nine men of the year on AskMen.com. The following year, a collection of Schuman's images was exhibited at the Danziger Gallery, where his prints sold for up to \$4,000 apiece. While Schuman is a self-taught photographer, the [Danziger Gallery](#) notes that his images have a "feeling for time and place ... [a] particular way of relating subject and background ... [H]e can create a work of resonance in the short amount of time he is afforded."

Scott Schuman's street style blog, The Sartorialist, is known for his casual approach to capturing his subjects on their daily commutes on the busy sidewalks of New York City. Getty/Jacopo Raule/Contributor.

Schuman's growing success and unique style earned him praise in the blog world, as he has ranked number one on every Signature99 "Top 99 Blog List" since 2009. His success was realized in print in 2009 when he published his first book, *The Sartorialist*. The book was made up of a collection of favorite images that had been featured on his blog, with commentary about fashion and photography. The book was a huge success, selling over 100,000 copies and ushering in a second book deal. In 2012, Schuman released *The Sartorialist: Closer*, a collection of images featuring diverse global styles captured on his travels.

The blogger has also worked as consultant and photographer for several fashion brands, such as Burberry, and magazines, such as *Vogue* and *GQ*. Yet, the bulk of his profit continues to come from ad revenue from his blog, a skill he says he built over time to be more in line with the practices of "real ad agencies" rather than the affiliate programs used by other bloggers. Even though his blog earns more than a quarter of a million dollars through banner ads from brands like American Apparel and Net-A-Porter, Schuman contends that the companies do not influence his content.

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