

FASHION BLOGS AS THE INFORMATION SOURCES ABOUT TRENDS AND NEW PRODUCTS IN FASHION MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: The aim of the paper was to indicate the reasons for visiting or avoiding fashion blogs by Internet users, as well as to learn about blogs readers' practices related to browsing and following fashion blogs. Moreover, the study aimed to identify differences between Polish and foreign fashion blogs based on Internet users' opinion. In order to gather the empirical data, an online survey was used by the authors. As a result, 826 questionnaires were completed, 785 were analyzed. The findings revealed that the respondents sometimes bought clothes and accessories which were the same as or similar to those they had previously seen on fashion blogs and this is an important conclusion for marketers responsible for fashion products. Credibility is a factor that greatly affected purchasing decisions of the respondents. Fashion managers ought to, therefore, consider fashion blogs in their strategic management of such products. The most noticeable differences between Polish and foreign fashion blogs, according to respondents, were related to the content of blogs – pictures and brands presented by the bloggers.

Key words: fashion blogs, managing fashion, fashion, social media, shopping online

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Introduction

Internet marketing is witnessing increasing growth dynamics of marketing blogs. Blogs have become important communication channels in social media and could have significant impacts on purchasing decisions of their followers. As such, they ought to be exploited in the strategic management of chosen products. Virtual diaries are kept both by individuals, with the intent of sharing their reflections and passion as well as professional, opinion leaders, representatives of various professional groups (politicians and journalists included) or national celebrities. Blogs have also become significant aspect of business life as increasing numbers of companies make use of corporate blogs to promote their products, communicate with customers, develop relations and to grow customer database. Growing trends in the development of blogospheres relates, amongst others, to the fashion industry, a manifestation of which is the increasing popularity of fashion blogs.

It is possible to identify varied aspects of developments in the online fashion industry, including their interdependencies. First, the Internet is showing growing numbers of blogs run by hitherto unknown persons, who have become extremely

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popular with huge number of followers and readers, and have become very active in social media, while their blogs have turned to be very influential. Bloggers are trend setters as they introduce their own clothes collections, recommend and advice on products, as a result of which they have growing impacts on reader's opinions, their purchase decisions, and even fashion trends. The second area of development are corporate blogs often run on the websites of a given brand, that are not only directly concerned with the company's products, but also relates to general trends, and presentation of latest collections of global fashion shows, while offering professional advice and tips on fashion. The main advantage, from the corporate view-point, of using such blogs for promotional activities is the building of a positive corporate and product image. Since through blogs one can get across to well define target groups, the two aspects of blogging have thus, become interwoven and their increasing interdependence is being observed. Corporate marketers are increasingly dependent on the goodwill of fashion bloggers mainly because these blogs are more popular than corporate blogs and they also enjoy greater credibility among readers. Fashion designers often invite them to their shows and make them sit in most prestigious first rows. Organisers of the biggest global fashion shows, for example the "New York Fashion Week" solicit the presence (attendance) of bloggers. The names of elite bloggers have become brand names that are often equally recognisable as those of renowned designers and fashion journalists. The opinion of bloggers is, for fashion designers, of equal importance as the reviews of "Vogue" or "Harper's Bazaar". Bloggers earn through advert placements and descriptions of products received from companies for testing. Designers lend or hand them gifts of clothing from their collections. They are also often invited as guests of fashion showrooms. Fashion blogs are significant forums for promoting clothing brands in many countries.

The aim of this paper was to indicate the reasons for visiting or avoiding fashion blogs by Internet users, as well as to learn about blogs readers' practices related to browsing and following fashion blogs.

Background

Although fashion is an expression of culture, it has been of recent frequently associated with fashion trends. It is an important channel to showcase one's own patterns, moods and views. Fashion could be controversial, attract or arouse total antagonism; it is nonetheless undeniably a matter often discussed. It is by nature similar to the entertainment industry which is reflected in the marketing strategies of large western and American corporations. In exploiting human needs to talk about tastes, the corporations found ways by means of which these needs can be met, thus contributing to large increases in sales returns. The Social media serves as such a channel.

Contemporary social media play crucial roles in branding (Yan, 2009). Social media is the umbrella term used for all of the Web tools and applications used to socialize on the Web. These tools include social networking sites, message boards,

blogs, wikis, podcasts, instant messaging, online forums, photo and video sharing, e-mail, and more (Miletsky, 2010, Smolağ et al., 2016). Social media provides a platform to reach out to increasingly difficult-to-contact customers and help customers by sharing expertise with audiences rather than trying to use it for direct sales (Smith and Zook, 2011). Social networks have a significant influence on the dynamics of brand consumption and inform our understanding of females' online shopping behaviours (Ruane and Wallace, 2013).

An important aspect of the activities of fashion corporations in the west and USA is the so-called ZMOT (Zero Moment of Truth). This is the time consumers devote to browsing reviews, opinions, blogs, video presentations, statistical data, price comparisons, online shops as well as questions on product awareness on Facebook (Lecinski, 2011).

Blogs are becoming very frequent sources of latest fashion trends. Blog is contraction of "Web log"; it is an online personal journal which is frequently updated and intended for general public consumption (Chittenden, 2010). Blogs might be personal, informal, public, referential, and participatory (through link trackbacks and reader commentary), or they might be commercial devices of promotion and marketing operating as information clearinghouses that are restricted to registered users, or they might encompass some combination of these qualities (Pham, 2011). In terms of gender and blogs specifically, researchers have found that men are more likely to blog about public affairs rather than personal issues (Herring et al., 2004).

A typical fashion blog deals with lots of items such as items of clothing and accessories, apparel market trends, including haute couture, prêt-à-porter, etc., celebrity fashion tastes and the high street fashion trends. They tackle fashion issues across the spectrum of societies beginning from market giants to end with the smallest Indian designers. Several fashion-related blog categories can be distinguished including: blog fashion brands, whose authors mainly present their everyday clothing items and accessories; DIY, where bloggers present cloths and accessories made by themselves; street fashion – photographers (face-hunters) who present interestingly dressed persons they come across in the streets.

Since their appearance at the beginning of the millennium, fashion blogs have become key players in the field of fashion (Rocamora, 2011). The observation of blogs permits the gaining of knowledge on what is becoming fashionable in various parts of the world without having to travel long distances. They also facilitate access to information much faster than via magazines or newspapers. Blogging in general is considered a popular form of online journalism, enjoying the attention of users due to the platform's personal and interactive approach in contrast to standardized treatment through mainstream media. Fashion blogs are perceived as a "street of fashion", as a source of authenticity and a display of the actual use of fashion by the general public (Sedeke and Arora, 2013, Bollier and Racine, 2005). Blogs reveal their effectiveness in searching information, sharing diaries,

and making business deals, allowing consumers to collectively comments on issues regarding products and services (Hsu and Tsou, 2011).

Scholars have found that the emergence and widespread consumption of blogs is due to the demand for a more interpersonal and casual means of communicating and processing information by the current generation geared in the nature of entertainment–education; hence the emphasis on clear and non–jargon styles in communicating and platforms of easy use and efficiency. Another feature that corresponds to current literature on blogging is the valuation of information and knowledge based on first–time experience and trust, privileging authenticity over expertise and institutional linkages (Sedeke and Arora, 2013, Brennan, 2009). Findings of other researches indicate that for blog marketing to be effective and credible, the marketed fashion items, designers, or retailers need to fit the blogger's personal style (Kulmala et al., 2013). In accordance with the findings of the research carried out by Li and Chignell (Li and Chignell, 2010) evidence abound that readers — being able to agree on author personality — are more attracted to authors whom they believe have similar personalities, offering some support to their hypothesis that *"bloggers of a feather flock together"*. Given that readers consistently agree on a blog writer's personality after reading their text and that this judgment affects how they feel about the writer, the role of personality in blogging and online social interaction may be more important than previously thought. Personality metrics may therefore be useful in supporting online social interaction and should be considered in the design of blog communities, content recommendation systems and viral marketing campaigns. Fashion bloggers, by combining and assembling fashion brands and products, articulate and express different style sets, and together with their followers, engage in activities connected to these styles (Pihl, 2014).

In Sweden fashion blogs have become extremely popular among its young readers, typically female, but also male (Findahl, 2010). These blogs could have huge impacts on youth behaviour, e.g., frequent female fashion blog readers reported significantly higher thin ideal internalization, and slightly more consideration of cosmetic surgery (Lunde, 2013). According to Hsu and Tsou greater involvement with blog significantly increases the effect of customer experiences on purchase intention (Hsu and Tsou, 2011). The study carried out by Hsu et al., (2013) revealed relations between perceived usefulness of bloggers' recommendations and trust and blog users' attitude towards and intention to do online shopping. According to the findings, different determinants affected the users of perceived-high-reputation and perceived-low-reputation blogs. These results can be employed by marketers in marketing strategies of their companies and they can provide useful pieces of advice on ways of reaching different segments of blog readers.

It is worthy of note, however, that studies on blogs very often concentrate of the person of blog writers, their motivation for writing, social networking effects, identity construction, and rise in popularity of the personal fashion blogger (Rocamora, 2011; McQarrie et al., 2012; Chittenden, 2010; Pham, 2011).

The rise in number of fashion blogs poses huge challenges for marketers as their increasing significance as marketing communication channels and as source of fashion information for Internet users necessitates the need to follow blog development and being up-to-date on bloggers including their contents in social media. The influence of bloggers on consumer's intention and purchase decision, on the other hand, offer brands new possibilities of promotion and more efficient sales of new products.

Methodology

In general, the aim of this paper was to indicate the reasons for visiting or avoiding fashion blogs by Internet users, as well as to learn about blogs readers' practices related to browsing and following fashion blogs. The emphasis was to determine the indicators of fashion blogs' popularity among Internet users, including their influence on blog readers' inclination to browse for products recommended by bloggers, and to search for more information on companies' websites about products that are advertised through blogs. Furthermore, since an increasing number of Polish fashion blogs' readers now browse foreign fashion blogs, the study aimed to identify differences between Polish and foreign fashion blogs based on Internet users' opinion.

The research questions in the study included the following:

- What are the main Internet users' practices related to browsing fashion blogs?
- What factors influence readers' intention to browse or avoid fashion blogs?
- Do Internet users see differences between Polish and foreign fashion blogs?
- To what extent are the bloggers reliable and credible sources of information about fashion for blogs' readers?
- Do bloggers have influence on purchase of products advertized through blogs?
- Are there any other significant sources of information about fashion for Internet users?

The research was conducted among students from three universities in September 2014. In order to gather empirical data, an online survey was used by the authors. The questionnaire comprised of sixteen questions in total and were divided into two sections, with the first group of questions being addressed to respondents who declared that they visit and browse fashion blogs while the second was for those, who are not interested in fashion blogs. The link to the questionnaire was placed on a few websites including the authors' profiles on the universities' platforms. To promote the survey, word of mouth and mailing methods were used by the authors.

As a result, 826 questionnaires were completed within one week but were reduced to 785 due to the fact that some questionnaires were partially unanswered or contained incorrect answers, thus making them irrelevant. The choice of students as the subject of the study was based on an analysis of fashion blogs statistics in Poland. According to them, 73% of the Internet users who read fashion blogs

in 2013 were between eighteen and thirty-four years of age (*Fashion fans in Internet – IRCenter and LeadR Research*. Retrieved September 10, 2014 from: <http://www.marketing-news.pl/message.php?art=40216>). A report prepared by Public Opinion Research Center in June 2014 revealed that the highest percentage of Internet users occurs in two age groups: 18-24 and 25-34, 96% and 94% respectively. Moreover, nearly every third of Internet users (30%) read blogs regularly and amongst them the younger population was relatively more often (CBOS 2014, *Internet users 2104*. Retrieved September 12, 2014 from: http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2014/K_082_14.PDF). The respondents' group in the research included full time and part time students.

Findings

Among the questionnaire participants, there was a noticeable predominance of women in the study, they accounted for 71.1% of the respondents. Overwhelming majority of the respondents was between 18 and 24 years old and only 4% was over the age of 24. This is obvious limitation to the study and future research would benefit from findings on a different age group, in particular in the age group of 25-34, because according to the statistics, it constitutes second largest group of Internet users. The data also indicates that over half of the respondents live in villages and further 19% in small towns. Only 16% of students declared that they live in big cities (over 100,000 inhabitants).

The difference in the amount of the respondents who claim to visit and avoid fashion blogs is negligible, slightly over half of students did not visit fashion blogs (51%) and 49% claimed that they were fashion blog readers. Similar findings were obtained in studies conducted in Slovakia (Fedorko et al., 2015). The most frequent reason for not browsing fashion blogs was the lack of interest in blogs. Only 6.5% of the respondents perceived fashion blogs as not credible. Slightly over 40% of students claimed that they had their own style and did not need any inspiration from blogs. Nearly every fourth respondent did not know any fashion blogs. Few students answered by giving other reasons, such as the lack of interest in fashion in general and the lack of time. Figure 1 illustrates all the answers.

In the group of the respondents who stated that they visited fashion blogs, only 6.5% of them were represented by men. In general, if analyzing only male answers, among the men who completed the survey, 10.6% declared that they visited fashion blogs. A significant number of the respondents sought the information on fashion blogs several times a month (38%), every fourth of them browsed blogs several times a week and 8% of them did it every day. Nearly every third respondent visited fashion blogs once a month or even less frequently. The respondents were also asked to list the most important reasons why they visited fashion blogs (Figure 2). The overwhelming majority of them claimed that they sought inspiration and interesting ideas (79.2%).

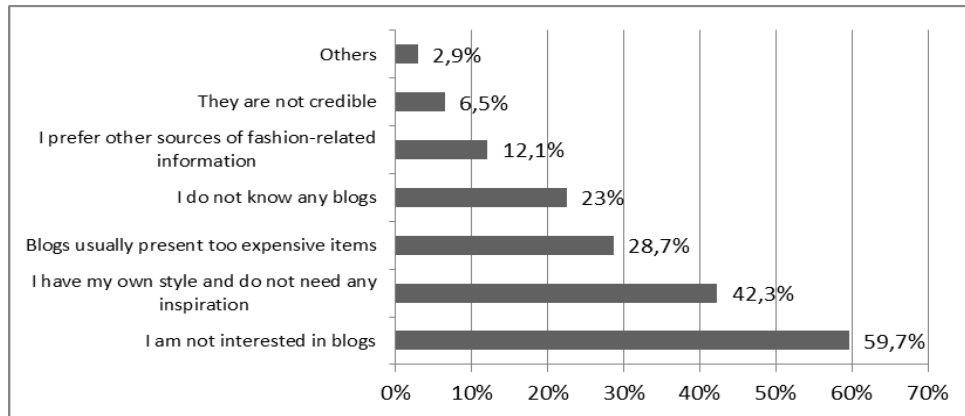


Figure 1. Reasons for not visiting/browsing fashion blogs

Moreover, a large amount of students used blogs as a source of advice and tips on how to combine clothes with accessories (45%), slightly less of them visited blogs for entertainment (40%), to see pictures or to get the information about the latest fashion trends (38%). Only every fifth respondent visited fashion blogs to get information about products and brands.

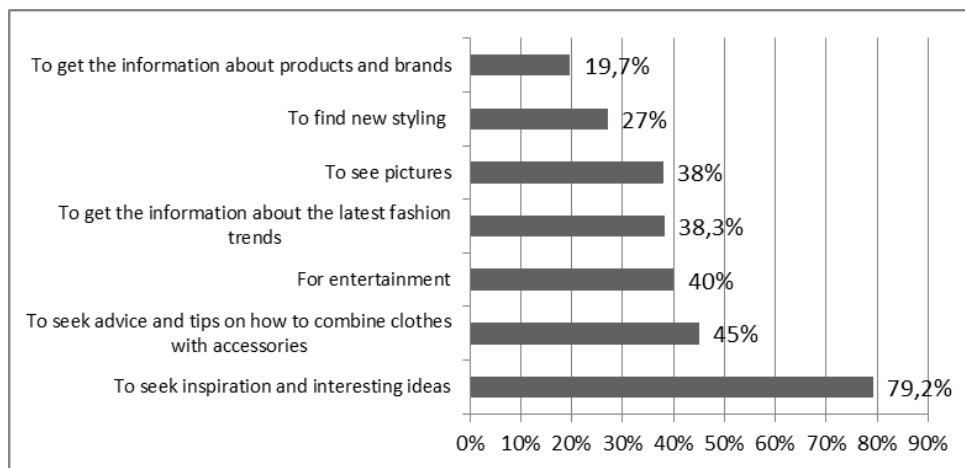


Figure 2. The most important reasons why the respondents visited fashion blogs

The findings of the research revealed that among the most important factors that shaped readers' intention to browse fashion blogs were the popularity of blogs and interesting content. The personality of a blogger had also meaning for the students because every third of them claimed that they simply "like the blogger". Similar group of respondents (30.7%) relied on their friends' recommendations and nearly every fourth of them chose certain blogs because in their opinion those blogs were credible. It needs to be highlighted that the overwhelming majority of respondents

declared that they found the opinions about products and brands, which were presented on the blogs, as credible (they answered “definitely yes” or “rather yes” – 6.5% and 65.8% respectively). On the contrary, only every tenth respondent stated that fashion blogs were “rather not credible” and 16.7% of the surveyed Internet users had no opinion on that issue. Credibility is a factor that greatly affected purchasing decisions of the respondents. Only 17.5% of them claimed that they never bought any cloths and accessories which were the same as or similar to the ones that they had previously seen on fashion blogs, whereas the others declared that they bought such products very frequently or frequently (3.5% and 11.3% respectively) or sometimes (67.7%). To assess if there is any dependence between perceived credibility of fashion blogs and the decision to purchase products presented on the blogs, the test of independence chi-squared was applied by the authors.

The null hypothesis stated that there is lack of relationship between perceived credibility of fashion blogs and purchasing decision.

The P-value was $p=0.00005$ and was less than the significance level ($\alpha=0.05$) so the null hypothesis was rejected, thus confirming the statistical relevance of the relationship between these variables.

Simultaneously, nearly every third student said that he or she never browsed Internet websites of the companies that advertised their products on the blogs they had visited, 57.1% did it sometimes and only a small group, 2.7%, did it very frequently while 9.2% did it frequently. To assess if there is any relationship between this variable and perceived credibility of fashion blogs, the test chi-squared was applied again. The null hypothesis stated that these two variables are independent. Since the P-value (0.00024) was less than the significance level ($\alpha=0.05$) so the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, the authors concluded that there is a relationship between perceived credibility of fashion blogs and browsing the Internet websites of the companies which advertise on these blogs.

Respondents were also found to visit foreign fashion blogs as 41.5% of those, who read fashion blogs in general, indicated having done so. Students’ responses revealed wide range of fashion blogs from different countries that were followed by them. The countries mentioned as blogs’ origin included the USA, Italy, Sweden, Germany, UK, Norway or France, as well as Mexico and Argentina. Some of those fashion blogs can be found on the ranking lists of the most followed fashion blogs in different countries for example, such frequently mentioned blogs, The Blonde Salad in Italy, Swiss blog Kenzas and the Sartorialist from the USA are placed 12th, 30th and 1st respectively on the Style99, a list of 99 most influential fashion blogs in Autumn 2014. [*The Top Global Style Blogs: Fall 2014*. Retrieved October 1, 2014 from: <http://www.signature9.com/style-99>].

The study showed that apart from fashion blogs, respondents used other sources of information about fashion. The biggest group (about 40%) of respondents got their information from fashion magazines and Internet fashion websites. Internet search engines and profiles of bloggers on Facebook were as popular as TV fashion

programs (around 30% of students indicated each of these answers). Other social media (Twitter, YouTube) were important for every fourth respondent. Other sources of information include friends; family, shop displays and “watching the street and people around me” were mentioned.

The most noticeable differences between Polish and foreign fashion blogs indicated by respondents were related to blog contents namely, pictures and brands presented by the bloggers. Respondents agreed that foreign fashion blogs presented more professional pictures than Polish blogs and brands which are more recognizable all over the world. Moreover, in the opinion of respondents, foreign fashion blogs included posts which are more in line with latest worldwide trends (Table 1).

Table 1. Do Internet users see advantages of foreign blogs over the Polish ones?

	1 - I strongly disagree	2 - I rather disagree	3 - I neither agree nor disagree	4 - I rather agree	5 - I strongly agree
they present more professional pictures	4.4%	22.5%	18.1%	40.6%	14.4%
entries posted on those blogs are more interesting	5.7%	23.3%	31.4%	27%	12.6%
they present brands which are more recognizable all over the world	6.3%	6.9%	15.1%	34.6%	37.1%
they are run by more famous bloggers	8.1%	18.1%	25,1%	31.2%	17.5%
they include posts which are more in line with the latest worldwide trends	4.4%	8.7%	16.9%	40.6%	29.4%

In general, the findings of the research revealed that the perception of foreign fashion blogs is better than Polish ones and in blogs readers’ opinion, they have advantages over Polish fashion blogs. The majority of respondents also “rather agree” or “strongly agree” with statements related to bloggers themselves, to their fame, recognisability and more interesting way of blogging.

The findings of studies conducted by the authors of the paper corroborate findings of researches undertaken abroad. The authors also dealt with novel research issues, which had hitherto not been taken care off in publications.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations of this research provide fertile areas for future studies. The research studies were conducted only amongst Polish Internet users, but it is recommended for it to be undertaken in other countries and since culture and lifestyle of bloggers and blog readers differ its findings may be useful and applicable for marketers,

in particular from companies that operate in global markets. Moreover, the limitation to the study is the online survey, and since the study is declaratory in nature, it does not offer assurance of compliance with genuine opinions and behaviours.

Conclusions

Half of the responding students are followers of fashion blogs. The most frequent reason for not browsing fashion blogs was the lack of interest in blogs. A significant number of the respondents sought the information on fashion blogs several times a month. The main reason for visiting fashion blogs is to seek inspiration and interesting ideas. The most noticeable differences between Polish and foreign fashion blogs, according to respondents, were related to the content of blogs – pictures and brands presented by the bloggers. The overwhelming majority of respondents declared that they found the opinions about products and brands, presented on the blogs credible. Credibility is a factor that greatly affected purchasing decisions of the respondents. Moreover, the respondents claimed that they sometimes bought clothes and accessories which were the same as or similar to the ones that they had previously seen on fashion blogs and this is an important conclusion for marketers responsible for fashion products. Students indicated fashion magazines and Internet fashion websites as other important sources, besides fashion blogs, of information about fashion. It can thus be concluded that managers in charge of managing brands, especially in respect of fashion-related products ought to take cognisance of blogs that have turned out to be influential sources of information for customers in their promotional strategies.

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BLOGI MODOWE JAKO ISTOTNE I WPŁYWOWE ŹRÓDŁO INFORMACJI O TRENDACH I NOWYCH PRODUKTACH W ZARZĄDZANIU MODĄ

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu było wskazanie przyczyn odwiedzania lub unikania blogów modowych przez internautów, a także poznanie zwyczajów i praktyk czytelników blogów modowych. Ponadto, celem badań było zidentyfikowanie różnic pomiędzy polskimi i zagranicznymi blogami modowymi na podstawie opinii internautów. W celu zebrania danych empirycznych, przeprowadzono badanie wykorzystując ankietę internetową. W rezultacie otrzymano 826 wypełnionych kwestionariuszy, z których przeanalizowano 785. Wyniki pokazały, że respondenci często kupują ubrania i akcesoria, które są takie same lub podobne do tych, które wcześniej widzieli na blogach modowych, co jest istotnym wnioskiem dla pracowników odpowiedzialnych za produkty związane z modą. Wiarygodność jest czynnikiem, od którego w dużym stopniu zależą decyzje zakupowe respondentów. Menedżerowie powinni, zatem w strategii zarządzania tego typu produktami uwzględniać blogi modowe. Najbardziej zauważalnymi różnicami między polskimi

i zagranicznymi blogami modowymi, według respondentów, były różnice związane z zawartością blogów – zdjęcia i marki prezentowane przez blogerów.

Słowa kluczowe: blogi modowe, zarządzanie modą, media społecznościowe, zakupy online

時尚博客作為關於趨勢和時尚管理新產品的信息來源

摘要：本文的目的是指出訪問或避免互聯網用戶的時尚博客的原因，以及了解博客讀者與瀏覽和關注時尚博客相關的做法。此外，本研究旨在根據互聯網用戶的意見確定波蘭和外國時尚博客之間的差異。為了收集實證數據，作者使用了在線調查。結果，完成了826份問卷，分析了785份問卷。調查結果顯示，受訪者有時會購買與以前在時尚博客上看到的衣服和配飾相同或相似的衣服和配飾，這對於負責時尚產品的營銷人員來說是一個重要的結論。可信度是影響受訪者購買決策的一個因素。因此，時尚經理應該考慮時尚博客對這些產品的戰略管理。據受訪者稱，波蘭和外國時尚博客之間最明顯的差異與博客的內容有關 - 博客的圖片和品牌。

關鍵詞：時尚博客，管理時尚，時尚，社交媒體，在線購物