

**From Style Rookie
to the
Face of Fashion Blogging**

A Study of Fashion Blogs and Tavi Gevinson's Online Rise to Fame

by

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Introduction

As Oscar Wilde once put it, “Fashion is a form of ugliness so intolerable that we have to alter it every six months.” (Kumar, 67) However, in the modern days of the world wide web, fashion is not merely limited to changing every six months. These days, fashion trends can spread all over the Internet in only a matter of days, or even hours, thanks to the speed of online communication.

One genre of fashion-related online communication in particular has undergone huge development over the past decade, and has rapidly developed from a form of online diary into a form of new media which offers instant updating, reviewing and sharing of fashion trends: fashion blogging.

This dissertation will discuss the concept of fashion blogging and its history, with a focus on personal blogs. It will explore the concept of fashion blogging in great detail, highlighting the aspects which make a fashion blog successful and appealing to readers. It will also go into the forms of social media and online networks that have been an either immediate result of the success of blogging in general, or have been explicitly designed for the fast-growing fashion blogging community.

Finally, the theory discussed in the first two chapters will be applied to a case study of Tavi Gevinson’s rise to fame, who was one of the first fashion bloggers to be singled out by the fashion industry, and invited to the most important fashion weeks of the year. She was also one of the first bloggers to be covered by mainstream media, once fashion blogging became a more widespread phenomenon. The case study will not only discuss and illustrate which methods she used to gain online fashion fame, it will also evaluate how she used this relatively novel online medium as a way into the more traditional fashion and magazine industries.

Chapter 1

Fashion Blogging Explained

1. Fashion Blogs

1.1 The Phenomenon

The term ‘fashion blogging’ – or even ‘blogging’ in general – is rather illusive, since the phenomenon is only a little over a decade old, and there are many different definitions around. “Blog” is short for weblog: a series of electronically published articles on a website by “individuals seeking to establish an online presence” (Zelizer, Allen, 11) According to Detterbeck et al, “blogs are internet sites on which individuals regularly publish their thoughts on a particular subject”, which means that a fashion blog is a website which consists of articles on fashion, written from a subjective point of view. (4)

1.2 A Brief History of Blogging

The online medium emerged in the late nineties, mainly as a form of online diaries. The term ‘blog’ was coined in 1997, and with the launch of Blogger.com in 1999, anyone with an Internet connection had the opportunity to chronicle his or her life online. (Lovink, 5) (Walker Rettberg, 22-30)

Fashion blogs largely fit into this description of weblogs, with an additional emphasis on the visual aspect of blogging, which mainly consists of a large number of photos, videos and a detailed layout. As with fashion magazines, fashion blogs are predominantly written by – as well as aimed at – women. The earliest fashion blogs, such as *She She Me* and *New York Fashion Blog*, appeared on the Web in 2002. (Sinclair) The genre kept growing in popularity, and received more and more mainstream media attention from approximately 2009 onwards, when the likes of *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Guardian* started to take interest in successful bloggers such as Tavi Gevinson and Bryan Grey Yambao. (McQuarrie et al, 136) (Widdicombe) Right now, fashion blogging is only one of the few genres of blogging “that is rapidly growing as other genres are diminishing in popularity”. (Marwick, 15)

2. Personal Blogs and their Online Image

2.1 Street Style Blogs vs. Personal Blogs

Broadly speaking, fashion blogs exist in two forms: street style blogs and personal blogs. Street style blogs, like *The Sartorialist* or *Jak and Jil*, mainly consist of photographs of people wearing inspirational outfits. Such blogs lean heavily on the visual aspect, with authors merely providing minimalist captions to photographs. Personal blogs are slightly more complex and diverse, since they are journal-like and the focus on text goes beyond captions. These blogs were essentially derived from columns, following the same concept of expressing and publishing personal opinions on news, events or contemporary issues.

However, blogs have one distinctive feature, which sets them apart from columns. According to Pham, personal blogs “usually consist of text, links, photos, and, with increasing frequency, videos. They are time- and date-stamped, ordered in reverse chronological order, and published on a *nonregular schedule*.” (4) The fact that most blogs are published according to a non-regular schedule makes them distinctly different from columns, which tend to be published at set times or dates. In the case of fashion blogging, this non-regular schedule is a very convenient factor, since fashion blogs are able to offer the reader constant posts and online updates around important events, like the biannual Fashion Weeks.

2.2 The Persona

Personal blogs are often written by one author, and revolve around diary-like entries concerning fashion, trends, beauty, and self-styled outfits. (Zelizer, Allen, 11) Personal blogs tend to have a distinct voice and cover topics, which correspond with the fashion blogger’s hobbies, interests and above all, style. Consequently the blog functions as an extension of the blogger’s personality, through which the individual tries to establish “online presence”, as noted above. (Zelizer, Allen, 11) Right now, over two million weblogs are spread all over the World Wide Web, of which the majority will remain unnoticed and lack a significant amount of followers. (Detterbeck, LaMoreaux and Sciangula, 6) Those considered rather successful, like *Fashion Toast* or *Style Bubble*, receive somewhere between 30,000 and 90,000 hits per day. (Elizabeth) Similar to magazines, successful fashion blogs have a distinct ‘voice’ and

matching lay out. For example, Leandra Medine's *The Man Repeller* is known for its light, humorous tone. The author refuses to take trends and fads too seriously, and often makes a mockery of her own obsession with fashion, as the title already suggests. This is the place where readers can expect a daily dose of fashion and humour. The blog's layout is a matching no-nonsense black and white, and photos often feature a clear background. On the other end of the layout spectrum is Susanna Lau's *Style Bubble*. Again, the blog's title reflects its content, since the best way to describe Susanna's blog would probably be 'bubbly'. The weblog is an explosion of colourful photos, quirky outfits, and naïve contemplations about life.

In order to acquire a large following and online popularity, bloggers have to find a certain readership with similar style and interests. According to Marwick, *authenticity* is the key to attracting followers. She claims that the online image the bloggers create of themselves is a very important factor of successful blogging, because readers are looking for someone they can identify with: an accessible person. Fashion bloggers are the indie bands of the fashion press: the 'real' boy or girl behind the fashion blog possesses "the value of authenticity" the mainstream media and its thin models lacks. (11) The blogger either aims or claims to have personality their readers can identify with, and functions as a style inspiration. However, the genuineness of this 'authentic persona' can be questioned. (James et al, 33) McQuarrie et al state the following: "bloggers feign similarity with their followers by referring to mundane and ordinary aspects of their lives that downplay the glamour and rarity of being a fashion insider, with its special access and privileges." (17)

Whether it is real or not, bloggers with a successful online persona can essentially turn into someone readers look up to and wish to imitate. They can become an authority, or even celebrity, within a certain niche of fashion. "They are the microcelebrities, the spiritual successors of flash-in-the-pan reality-TV stars," states Wolverson. Ten years ago, such an accomplishment was probably unimaginable, since "ordinary individuals lacked access to the mass media and could only gain that access by successful performances in specified institutional settings" before the invention of blogs. (McQuarrie et al, 3) From this perspective, blogs almost appear as a counterculture, which offers an alternative to mainstream fashion media, and opens up opportunities for talented young people.

3. Subjectivity

3.1 Controversy

A fashion blog basically functions as an online magazine for a comparatively small readership. The concept is reminiscent of that of fanzines: weblogs have a comparatively small audience and feature a niche subject: namely the style which the blogger carries out. “I spotted a gap and filled it”, is how Susanna Lau from *Style Bubble* phrases the phenomenon. (Elizabeth) The fashion blogger writes, edits, and often even photographs everything on their blog themselves. This means that they have to do their own reporting, editing, art directing, manage their PR, and often even take care of advertising all on their own. Most owners of a personal blog do not have an editor or colleague to proofread their articles, which often leads to controversy regarding their objectivity as a form of fashion press.

Many professional fashion journalists, who work in traditional media, resist to the notion of the blogger as credible fashion press. This is probably due to the relative novelty of the blogging phenomenon, compared to the established reputation fashion journalism has built up. A recent article by Suzy Menkes in *The New York Times’ T Magazine* – in which fashion bloggers are dubbed ‘peacocks’ – illustrates this contemporary controversy. According to Menkes, “with the aim now to receive trophy gifts and paid-for trips to the next round of shows, only the rarest of bloggers could be seen as a critic in its original meaning of a visual and cultural arbiter.” The fashion blogosphere received the piece rather negatively, and several prominent fashion bloggers posted angry replies on their personal blogs. (Menkes) (Fenner) Another example of criticism comes from the Huffington Post, in which journalist Robin Givhan “argues that bloggers lack the appropriate insight and experience when it comes to critiquing designer collections” and believes that this is partially because they are “too cosy with designers”. (Graham) (Wilson)

3.2 Gifts

This criticism leads to another point of criticism within the fashion blogging genre, namely the practise of receiving gifts. Like fashion journalists, bloggers mainly rely on their extensive network of contacts for news and information. (Zelizer, Allen, 42) This network often consists of founders of similar fashion blogs, which can be found in their blogroll, and

people from the fashion industry. The latter category can even include well-known fashion designers like Karl Lagerfeld, in the case of extremely popular blog owners, like Tavi Gevinson from *Style Rookie* or Bryan Grey Yambao from *BryanBoy*. (Rosman)

However, unlike fashion journalists, successful bloggers often also receive gifts from people in the industry: brands or designers who would like to have their clothes showcased on a fashion blog. Fashion bloggers also often pitch a (clothing) brand which suits their overall image, style and readership. When the brand decides to sponsor the fashion blog in question, the blogger receives samples in the form of clothes or accessories. The owner of the fashion blog either reviews these items or organises a giveaway for their followers, in exchange for having their article, blog or website shared on other social media. Since December 2009 – when fashion blogs started to become more and more popular – bloggers have been obliged by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission to disclose products they received for free. (Arango) The Federal Trade Commission website phrases the rule as follows: “The revised Guides specify that while decisions will be reached on a case-by-case basis, the post of a blogger who receives cash or in-kind payment to review a product is considered an endorsement. Thus, bloggers who make an endorsement must disclose the material connections they share with the seller of the product or service.” Menkes’ controversial article condemns taking free items as unprofessional behaviour, and states

“Adhering to the time-honored journalistic rule that reporters don’t take gifts (read: bribes), I am stunned at the open way bloggers announce which designer has given them what. There is something ridiculous about the self-aggrandizement of some online arbiters who go against the mantra that I was taught in my earliest days as a fashion journalist: “It isn’t good because you like it; you like it because it’s good.”” (Menkes)

Sauers mentions another closely connected rule, which fashion blogging often ignore when collaborating with a brand: “one of the most basic rules of journalism is never send copy to a source for approval”.

3.3 Journalism Ethics

These two examples refer to fashion blogging as ‘journalism’, yet fashion blogging may not tick all the boxes when it comes to the definition of journalism. According to Franklin et al., journalism is “informing society about itself”, and journalists as the people who do so.

Journalists are supposed to “impartial”, “critical” and rather “reliable”. (129) Zelizer et al state “journalism is expected to be a reliable and honest broker of information about the world”. (63) However, they also argue that “who is a journalist proves to be increasingly difficult to specify as journalism’s functions continue to proliferate across multimedia platforms”, which is exactly the issue with defining new forms of media. (64)

According to Kovach and Rosenstiel’s *Elements of Journalism*, the ethics of professional journalism can be summed up as follows:

1. Journalism’s first obligation is to the truth.
2. Its first loyalty is to citizens.
3. Its essence is a discipline of verification.
4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power.
6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.
8. It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional.
9. Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.

(Bellamy Foster, McChesney, 2-3)

Since fashion bloggers basically monopolise the entire content of their website, and also accept gifts from sponsors, their methods are in conflict with the fourth journalistic rule of ethics, which means they can not be identified as authentic journalists in the traditional sense of the word, no matter how honest their intentions are. As mentioned before, blogging is technically a form of vanity publishing, derived from the kind of columns which exist in traditional media. Online weblogs are an easy way to get your point across on the Internet, after all. However, according to Zelizer and Allen, the kind of ‘post-objectivity’, which is associated with blogging, is a typical example of shifting values in a world which is digitalising more and more. (98)

Chapter 2

New Media

1. Social Media

1.1 Social Media Explained

In order to promote and share their posts on different platform, fashion bloggers often make use of social media. Boyd and Ellison define social media as “web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.” In practice, this often means that social media are a mode of online communication, which allows web users to share content within their network of friends or acquaintances.

According to Van Dijck, “*Myspace* (2003), *Facebook* (2004), *Flickr* (2004), *YouTube* (2005), *Twitter* (2006), and a wide array of ensuing platforms began to offer web tools that sparked old and new online communication tactics.” (7) As these dates suggest, social media emerged slightly later than the blogging phenomenon, which already began to take shape as early as the late nineties. Hoffman argues that they are therefore “the veritable offspring of the blogging movement”. (34)

These days, social media is predominantly about interaction with followers and – through that interaction – the possibility of attracting even more followers and consequently more attention. The more often a website is shared on the likes of *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Pinterest*, *Instagram* and *Tumblr*, the larger the audience it reaches becomes: the so-called snowball effect. In the case of fashion bloggers, a large audience – or a large number of followers on several platforms – means more exposure and acknowledgement from other bloggers, advertisers and even the mainstream press. In short, “once a blogger has established a large audience through repeated displays of good taste, this audience begins to attract the attention of the fashion system, and this then provides social and economic resources to the blogger, further augmenting her audience.” (Journal of Consumer Research)

1.2 Immediate Coverage

However, bloggers' use of social media is not merely a matter of showering their readers with articles whilst hoping they will pass on the information to their connections. Sifferlin argues that "the whole scene has become far more digital and social with minute to minute updates", since modern technology in combination with instant (mobile) internet access are able to offer readers something which traditional media lack: live blogging and an immediate response from followers.

For instance, a blogger who is invited to a fashion show could use an array of social platforms to cover the event at the moment it is actually happening. He or she could post an announcement on *Facebook*, use *Twitter* to live blog the entire event, meanwhile take photos with *Instagram* and upload a video to *Youtube* afterwards.

This possible scenario illustrates how different forms of social media can be used side by side to announce, cover and recap a certain event. Additionally, during the event the blogger will even be able to receive immediate feedback, in the form of comments on pictures or 'mentions' on *Twitter*. Through all these kinds of online media – in particular the likes of *Youtube*, *Flickr* or *Instagram*, since they are capable of getting the important visual aspect of fashion across – fashion bloggers are able to optimise their followers' experience, and actually make them part of the event by means of live interaction.

2. Networks aimed at Fashion Bloggers

2.1 Tying Bloggers Together

With approximately 200,000 blogs scattered all over the Internet, it seems likely that active fashion bloggers need a kind of online platform which ties them together, so that they can find like-minded fashion people, share experiences, and exchange information. (McQuarrie et al, 140) Apart from social media like *Facebook* or *Twitter*, which were designed for a very general audience, there are several social networks which aim at fashion blogging in particular.

These websites were either designed for fashion bloggers, like *IFB*, or predominantly used by their community, such as *Lookbook.nu*. Such networks offer users a platform, on which they encourage interaction within the online fashion community. Through these

networks, fashion bloggers are able to connect with other, similar-minded bloggers, and collaborate with them. Collaboration can mean writing a guest post, but also putting someone's website on their blogroll, which grants them more exposure. (Walker Rettberg, 8) Bloggers can even prove that they are part of a certain network, as social networks provide bloggers with a customised 'button' – which is basically a picture which links to the community in question – to copy and paste onto their website.

2.2 *Lookbook.nu*

The *Lookbook.nu* community was founded by Yuri Lee in April 2008, and started off as an exclusive invite-only network. (Nguyen) Lee was inspired by the “eruption of the [fashion] blogosphere”, and decided to create a platform where people could share their style. After a couple of years the website changed to an open network policy, yet has remained rather fashion-fanatic exclusive, of whom many own a fashion blog. (Thompson)

In essence, *Lookbook.nu* does what the title suggests – the website is one large look book, compiled, styled and shot by its own users. People can post self-styled outfits, tag where they bought them, and discuss fashion-related topics on the website's forum. Users can give each other points for their looks, which are called 'hypes'. (Oshiro) The most-hyped looks are awarded with a prominent place on the home page, so that visitors to the site immediately perceive which clothing trends are most popular.

2.3 *Bloglovin'*

A slightly different example of an online fashion network is the Swedish website *Bloglovin'*: a place where all blogging content is brought together and neatly sorted for the *reader's* benefit. Like most social media associated with blogging, *Bloglovin'* was founded during the blogging boom of the late 2000s – another perfect example of the “veritable offspring” of fashion blogging. (*Fashionsign Magazine*) (Hoffman, 34) When users sign up to *Bloglovin'*, they are able to subscribe to blogs and receive updates when new articles are posted, so that they can check every website they follow at a single glance.

2.4 Independent Fashion Bloggers

Independent Fashion Bloggers is a community, which was founded in 2007 by Jennine Tamm, a blogger herself. She wished to create “a community of shared knowledge” for “a better blogging experience”. (Yap) Fashion blogger can sign up to the *IFB* community, which focuses on connecting and helping fashion bloggers all over the world.

The network is generally aimed at traditional one-person fashion blog, similar to the ones discussed in this dissertation. It features articles, which treat blogs like small businesses: the main emphasis lies on writing tips, boosting traffic and – in particular – attracting advertisers.

3. Advertising

3.1 A Source of Income

For apart from “partnering with brands, styling shoots, receiving payment (or free product) for writing posts or getting commission on the sale of items they post about”, advertising sales are probably the main source of income for most successful and professional fashion bloggers. ‘Professional’ in this case means that running a website is the blogger’s main source of income, one which “can range from \$100,000 a year to hundreds of thousands more.” (Wolverson)

Although fashion blogs may profit from this source of income – as the owner will be able to spend more time and money on it – readers will not necessarily regard it as a positive factor. Phelan argues that there is only a thin line between being genuinely enthusiastic about a product and exploiting blogs as well as other social media as a form of advertising, and “as blogs make the transition from personal style diaries to profit-turning businesses, some readers have begun to feel that original and unbiased content, once the keystone of what made blogs so relevant, has taken a hit.”

Chapter 3

Case Study: Tavi Gevinson

1. The Case of Tavi Gevinson

1.1 Case Study

Now that the concept of fashion blogging and all its additional features has been defined, the following case study will apply the theory to probably the most successful fashion blogger to date: Tavi Gevinson. This seventeen-year-old girl from Chicago is considered one of the pioneers of the blogging genre, since she was among the first bloggers who received attention from the mainstream press as well as the fashion industry, after it had become an online success. This chapter will give a brief summary of Gevinson's online history, analyse which methods she used to acquire her current success, and how her online fame offered an alternative way into more traditional industries.

1.2 Short History of Success

Eleven-year-old Tavi Gevinson started her blog *The Style Rookie* back in 2008, not expecting much from it, if one is to believe her first post. (Gevinson) Despite these low expectations, she managed to become one of the most influential fashion bloggers– if not *the* most influential – in the world within a couple of years, with her personal website receiving tens of thousands of hits per day. However, her online fame did not just stop there. By 2010, the fashion industry had fully embraced Gevinson's extravagant style, and she was personally invited to Paris Fashion Week. (Widdicombe)

Gevinson kept updating her personal blog regularly until Autumn 2011, when she launched her own online magazine for teenage girls: *Rookie Mag*. (Fishman) With this online magazine, the famous young blogger is now paying more attention to the business-side of online media. "Independently owned, [...] the site is a mix of personal essays, nostalgic musings and cultural tidbits with a feminist slant, and counts more than 40 contributing writers. Advertisers have included Target, Urban Outfitters and MTV." (Bazilian)

The most remarkable aspect of the young blogger's case is probably that she managed to achieve her current reputation almost entirely unaided, without help of professionalised institutions. In the words of McQuarrie et al, "This blogger got hold of the megaphone by means of her actions—not by birth or through institutional position." (136).

2. The Elements of Success

2.1 The Blogging Boom

In Gevinson's case, her online fame started off with the launch of a personal fashion blog, called *The Style Rookie*. This weblog basically matched the description of personal weblogs discussed in the first chapter: it mainly consisted of inspirational photos, her own outfits, and diary-like entries in which she shared her thoughts on fashion as well as described situations at home or – when she became more successful – at fashion events.

Gevinson became "the single most famous young fashion blogger", partially just because the young blogger was in the right place at the right time. This means that she started her blog at the brink of the so-called fashion blog boom. As explained in the first chapter, from late 2009 on fashion blogs started to attract attention from mainstream media. In Gevinson's case, this phenomenon occurred approximately two years after her first blog post – after the fashion industry had already started to notice her. In 2010, *The New Yorker* published a long feature on Gevinson's achievements, comparing her to other young bloggers like Bryanboy and Susie Bubble. From that moment on, other newspapers started to take an interest in the teenage blogger as well. By the end of 2010 she "had been profiled in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Guardian*, and other publications, and her blog posts were read by tens of thousands." (McQuarrie et al, 136)

However, *The Style Rookie's* popularity was not simply a matter of fortunate timing: the girl from Chicago managed to single-handedly incorporate several important factors which contributed to *The Style Rookie's* fame. (McQuarrie et al, 140) Through the following elements, she managed to create a successful online persona, which successfully conquered the world of fashion blogging.

2.2 Authenticity

A second important factor which contributed to Gevinson's fame was the seeming authenticity of her personal blog: something which manifested in the fact that most shots were taken in and around her parents' house, as well as frequent references to her daily life in her blog posts. In the words of Schulman, from the young age of eleven "Ms. Gevinson shared ruminations on everything from Proenza Schouler to gym class, and posted unsmiling self-portraits taken at her home, in Oak Park, Ill[inois]". At the beginning of most blog posts, Gevinson briefly summarised what had happened in her life since her last entry. These texts were often accompanied with pictures of – for example - events she had attended, or parcels she had received, as well as her thoughts regarding such occurrences. Since the blogger had only just entered her teenage years when she started her website, Gevinson has had the opportunity to chronicle her teenage years online, and therefore her "blog [seemed] to breathe more meaning to the stages and cycles of her life that would otherwise be forgotten in the hubbub of everyday life." (Au-Yeung)

This very method of recording her teenage life online was in accordance with Marwick's theory of "authenticity", mentioned in chapter one, which stated that the most important aspect of a blogger is that he or she comes across as a "real person" readers can take advice from, as opposed to the less personal "magazines and television, which are seen by many bloggers as pushing mindless consumption [...] rather than what fits an individual aesthetic". (11,12)

Gevinson's references to her normal daily life made *The Style Rookie* authentic and valuable to readers, as it allowed them identify with the fashion blogger. Additionally, they were able to see her evolve from an eccentric eleven-year-old into a successful young role model over the years.

2.3 Engaging Writing Style

The third key element of *The Style Rookie* was Gevinson's unique style of writing. She invites her reader to regard topics from an original point of view, with her sharp and witty observations, which are even prevalent in her use of Twitter and other social media. Gevinson tended to link concepts and objects together, which most people would not immediately pair up, and give a kind of bizarre quality to her writing. This resulted in

sentences, like “REALLY into this print, kind of reminds me of clay beads and painted sidewalk benches!” as part of her description of a multi-coloured dress, or she would describe a February 2010 Marc Jacobs show as follows: “The models resembled the tiny graceful figurines that spin in an opened jewelry box, or the human sums of numerous collages crafted by young dreamers out of magazine clippings and backyard finds. There was a clear air of foggy nostalgia that drifted throughout the room, clinging to coattails in shades of pale yellow and grey. [...] Some powers really can only be found in grey, 3/4ths-length, woolen skirts”. (Gevinson) (Gevinson)

Another example of a humorous, slightly bizarre description is the following: “tried scanning my outfit but after hours spent trying to curl myself up to fit within the scanning frame, I decided I should scan my school folder collages for inspiration instead. Ignore those weird duct tape-looking marks, they're just cracks from when I attempted lying in fetal position on our printer”, to explain that she does not have a camera at hand at the moment. (Gevinson) Gevinson’s particular style of writing is often described as “far too clever, too sweet-bordering-cynical, too witty”, “spunky, discerning”, or written in a “youthful but preternaturally mature voice”. (Harzog) (Schulman) (Anyal)

Gevinson’s voice was actually so mature, that during *The Style Rookie*’s first years of existence, several fashion journalists accused Gevinson of not writing her own pieces. (Odell) Back then, Sauers claimed that “The Tavi Gevinson backlash has officially begun, with big-name editors like Elle’s Anne Slowey and prominent fashion writer Lesley M. M. Blume leading the charge”, predicting that Gevinson’s career as a much-hyped fashion blogger had come to an end. However, Gevinson’s online popularity continued, and she was offered to write a column for Harper’s Bazaar January 2010 issue, which launched her rise to more mainstream success. (Odell)

2.4 Choice of topics

In addition to Gevinson’s developed style of writing, the particular range of topics she covered was another important aspect of *The Style Rookie*. Originally, most of her post revolved around fashion, but over the years, these interests grew from mainly fashion-oriented topics to a much broader spectrum of social and cultural interests. As Gevinson herself started to grasp in January 2009, less than a year after she started blogging: “There

seems to be this idea that fashion bloggers are huge airheads, but the most well-respected ones have interests in a wide range of other things-photography, books, film, politics, art...and translate their diverse pool of interests into fantastic outfits.”

From then on, she gradually developed a particular taste in films and music, making “comparisons [...] between fashion and movies, ‘60s icons, and Bob Dylan songs”, which added to her ‘authentic online persona’. (Wells) Angyal summarises the process as follows: “Tavi started blogging about fashion and style at the age of 11. Now 15, she still writes about those things, and in a thoughtful and entirely un-frivolous way, but she’s also begun blogging about gender, and culture, and what it means to be a young woman both inside the fashion world.”

The teenage blogger also wrote, and actually still writes, with a striking “feminist slant” – something already touched on at the beginning of this chapter – which has worked its way into the young blogger’s writing over the years, just like her pop culture interests. (Bazilian) Over time, *The Style Rookie*’s readers could see Gevinson form her own ideas regarding the way she interprets feminism, inspired by a range of other ‘feminist’ sources, like websites *Hello Giggles* and *Jezebel*, obscure zines like *Pamflet*, and nineties magazines covering the *Riot Grrrl* movement. (Gevinson)

For example, in a post from February 2010 called “Thurston May Love The Who, But Raf Loves The Anna” – the title refers to Sonic Youth’s Thurston Moore and sixties band The Who, as well as Vogue editor Anna Wintour and Jil Sander designer Raf Simons – Gevinson states her approval of the latest Jil Sander collection, which she links with the feminism-related Riot Grrrl movement and the signature look of Anna Wintour, the most powerful woman in fashion. Six months and numerous posts later, she had evolved from writing about feminist clothing to actually wearing a multi-coloured jumper with the word ‘FEMINIST’ on it to school. The jumper was given to her by Bikini Kill lead singer Kathleen Hanna, who had contacted Gevinson after she read her blog posts on gender from previous months. Hanna introduced the fashion blogger to feminist punk zines: a topic which, from then on, returned in her blog posts from time to time. (Gevinson)

This rather unique combination of combining blogging about fashion with feminism – two topics which are often regarded as mutually exclusive, as “fashion and beauty practices have been a major target for feminist critique” – has received much criticism. (Hollows)

(Gerstein) However, according to the young blogger, “fashion and feminism can be friends. I even think that fashion can be a tool of feminism and of self-expression and individuality and empowerment. But clearly, there are flaws with the industry that still really grind my gears.” (Sauers)

2.5 The (Affordable) Look

The final element which contributed to Gevinson’s successful online persona is the clothing style she displayed in her blog. Her unconventional look was a mix of old and new, with references to pop culture and slightly misplaced retro items. Widdicombe describes the blogger’s style as follows: “Tavi’s look is frequently described as cute, but there is also something jarring about it. This is partly an accident of her youthful appearance, and partly calculated. She is drawn to things that combine the innocent with the evil.”

The young blogger’s clothing style was eccentric enough to catch the fashion industry’s attention less than a year after she started blogging, long before she had caught the attention of the mainstream press, excluding some high-fashion magazines. From that moment, she managed to get invited to all the important fashion events, such as Paris Fashion week – which is still *the* most influential Fashion Week in the industry. (Widdicombe)

Yet the fact that she was one of the first bloggers to be invited to Fashion Weeks also meant that she encountered negative responses, similar to the ones she had received before, regarding her writing style. According to Gevinson “[p]eople were confused about my being there for a few reasons. One was that I was a blogger. The word itself, blog -- it’s kind of an ugly word. It doesn’t really sound very legitimate, and fashion as an industry has been really behind on being online, and so I think people were confused and angry that someone younger than them had kind of figured it out.” (Krupnick)

Once Gevinson started to attract attention from the industry, she began to receive designer pieces from expensive brands, starting with a pair of hand-knitted tights by Rodarte’s Mulleavy sisters. (Gevinson) Yet despite her online fame the fashion blogger did not switch to exclusively wearing designer outfits, but kept up her affordable style – based on and hand-me-downs and second-hand finds – instead. According to Marwick’s theory regarding authenticity, this would be a good example of “the importance of an authentic personal style that is not overly influenced by trends or sponsors” and remains “affordable”,

as this meant that her fans and followers would still be able to copy her outfits without having to spend a generous amount of money – since the latter is something that teenagers generally do not have. (11)

3. From Personal Blog to Online Magazine

3.1 Rookie Mag

In Autumn 2011 Gevinson decided to move away from her personal blog – even though the latter was still not diminishing in popularity – to pursue a career as editor-in-chief of her own online magazine named *Rookie Mag*. The website launched in October 2011, and “broke [one] million page views in under a week.” (Goodman)

The magazine can be regarded as a spin-off of Gevinson’s personal blog, written in the same “jokey yet oddly articulate tone”. (Widdicombe) The topics covered are still similar to the ones Gevinson covered on her own website, and the feminist angle she employed has also worked its way into *Rookie Mag*. This mainly manifests in open-minded and empowering articles regarding women’s sexuality, in which topics like the much-discussed issue of “slut shaming” and problems regarding the “sexy” way some teenagers dress are discussed. (Doyle, Gevinson)

Also, just like her personal blog “seemed like an escape from the Abercrombie, pre-teen scene”, *Rookie Mag* is an alternative to magazines aimed at a readership which mainly consists of teenage girls. (Twohey) Schulman formulates this as “[i]n reaching out to young girls like herself, Ms. Gevinson seems to be positioning *Rookie* as a kind of antidote to what they are reading elsewhere.” In that aspect, *Rookie Mag* continues in the countercultural tradition of fashion blogging, as described in the first chapter.

3.2 Back to Tradition

However, as opposed to Gevinson’s personal blog, the form which *Rookie Mag* has taken is actually surprisingly traditional, as it bears several similarities to traditional monthly magazines which appear in print. For example, *Rookie Mag* features a new theme every month; one that has been selected by Gevinson herself. (Goodman)

Another striking feature is that the schedule which *Rookie* employs is reminiscent of columns – which, as explained on chapter one, can be regarded as the predecessors of fashion blogs – in the fact that *Rookie Mag* has adopted a regular schedule of updating. Gevinson’s website now updates three times a day on every weekday, namely “around after-school, dinnertime and bedtime”. (Bazilian) With this regular schedule – as opposed to most blogs’ “non-regular schedule” – and use of monthly ‘themes’, *Rookie Mag* mimics physical magazines much more than *The Style Rookie* did, and moved away from the electronic live-blogging novelty which is the trademark of fashion blogging.

In fact, *Rookie Mag* even launched “a hard-copy scrapbook of the best pieces from the site” on the magazine’s one-year anniversary in October 2012. (Goodman) Gevinson and her team of writers decided to name the first print edition of the magazine *Rookie Yearbook One*. In June 2013, it was announced that a second yearbook is scheduled for October 2013. (Burns)

3.3 From Personal to General

A further deviation from the ‘authenticity’ of fashion blogging to one associated with more traditional media, is the shift from a very personal narrative to a more general one. As opposed to *The Style Rookie*, *Rookie Mag* is no longer written from the point of view of merely one person, but created by a team of writers writing in the same style as Gevinson did instead, since that particular style of writing had proved successful. The main focus shifted from Gevinson’s *own* cultural taste, clothing style and personal life to a more general range of topics which interest teenage girls *like* Gevinson: *Rookie Mag*’s readership.

3.4 The Novelty of Advertising

Apart from the change to a more traditional-looking form of media, the launch of *Rookie Mag* meant another form of professionalisation of Gevinson’s work. The teenager decided to switch to displaying advertisements on the website of *Rookie Mag*, something which *The Style Rookie* lacked. Nevertheless, this lack of advertising on her personal blog has been a clever decision, since – as mentioned in the second chapter - readers will not necessarily regard advertising on a fashion as a positive factor, and it may harm the blogger’s image.

However, these days advertising sales are needed to support a team of writers currently working for *Rookie Mag*. Yet since “on the advertising side, [Gevinson] decides what the site will and won't accept”, not just any company is allowed to advertise on the website: advertisements and sponsored posts must be related to the site's content and readership, since *Rookie Mag* has “vetoed some things, like anti-aging” advertisements. (Sauers) (Bazilian)

In practise, this statement seems to be quite accurate, and the amount of advertising on *Rookie Mag*'s website seems moderate. On Tuesday 18 June 2013, for example, the only advertisement displayed was an ad for *Rookie Yearbook One*. Also, *Rookie Mag*'s most recent sponsored post was an article sponsored by HBO's “Girls” – a TV series mainly aimed at teenage girls and young women, which means it overlaps with *Rookie Mag* in terms of readership – from 22 April 2013. (*Rookie Mag*) Thus, the website's ads seem to be attuned to its readership.

4. Blogging: an Alternative Way into more Traditional Industries

4.1 Fashion Industry and Magazine Industry

After observing the progress Gevinson made over the years, the following conclusion can be drawn: by employing the new media of fashion blogging cleverly, Tavi Gevinson managed to use it as a tool to enter more traditional industries.

First of all, she managed to enter the fashion industry, although she received negative feedback – in the form of mocking articles – from those who did not take her seriously, due to the novelty of being a fashion blogger. The young blogger herself defined this method of entering the fashion industry as result of running a successful fashion blog as having “figured it out”: she had found a yet undiscovered path into the world of fashion. (Gevinson)

Secondly, *The Style Rookie* paved Gevinson's way into the magazine industry, as her large following allowed her to create and promote a magazine aimed at teenage girls. By falling back into more traditional forms of publishing, which include scheduled updates, advertising, abandoning the personal perspective and a print version of the magazine – *Rookie Mag* meant Gevinson's admission into the traditional magazine industry.

Conclusion

As illustrated by Gevinson's case, by using a fashion blog cleverly, a blogger can achieve online fame in a relatively short time. Since these blogs are largely centered around one person, fashion bloggers are more likely to attract a large following by creating a believable, authentic and above all identifiable online persona, with a mindset slightly different from the kind most women's magazines offer. This is particularly the case when bloggers also make use of social media to expand their network and give as well as receive immediately feedback during live events, such as Fashion Week catwalk shows. Gevinson managed to create an effective image mainly based on her particular, entertaining style of writing, and her choice of topics, which included a kind of fashion-conscious feminism.

One pitfall is the fashion blogosphere's policy regarding gifts they receive, something which made several professional fashion journalists criticise and question fashion bloggers' ethics. The amount of advertising on a blog may also affect readers' view of the blog, as they could start distrusting the blogger's reliability and authenticity. Gevinson managed to avoid this trap by not placing advertisements on her personal blog, and still keeping her style affordable. She, however, did also receive negative publicity from professional journalists regarding her credibility, once she started to receive tickets for fashion weeks, as a direct result of her online success.

However, Gevinson's case shows that her career did not merely stop once she had ensured her Fashion Week tickets and received attention from the mainstream press – to her, fashion blogging meant a way into established industries which were hard to enter without experience or knowing the right people. *The Style Rookie* was Gevinson's backstage pass into the fashion industry, and also offered her credibility in the world of magazines, since she had already built up a base of followers before she even launched her own online magazine. With this online magazine, *Rookie Mag*, Gevinson returned to a more traditional approach to fashion writing, with advertisements, scheduled updates and even a print version of the magazine. Still, the most impressive aspect of her story is that she managed to get the most out of a new online medium, and above all, that she actually did – and still does – everything on her own.

Appendix: Index of Influential Fashion Blogs

BryanBoy

<http://bryanboy.com>

Fashion from a male perspective; Bryanboy was one of the first fashion bloggers, alongside Tavi Gevinson, to be picked up by the mainstream press.

Fashion Toast

<http://www.fashiontoast.com/>

Fashion Toast was founded by Rumi Neely, and leans heavily on the visual aspect of fashion blogging, with large photos and an emphasis on self-styled outfits.

Style Bubble

<http://www.stylebubble.co.uk/>

A ‘bubbly’ fashion blog by the British Susanna Lau, whose website as well as clothes are often decorated with multi-coloured clashing prints.

Style Rookie

<http://www.thestylerookie.com/>

Teenager Tavi Gevinson’s personal fashionblog, which is extensively discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation.

The Man Repeller

<http://manrepeller.com>

A fashion blog founded by Leandra Medine, who is best known for her satirical writing style and inability to keep a straight face in photographs.

The Sartorialist

<http://www.thesartorialist.com/>

A street style blog founded by professional photographer Scott Schuman, focused on street style in rustic colours. Schumann published a couple of photography books after his blog became a success.

Recommended Further Reading

Source	Content
Gevinson, T. Homepage. <i>The Style Rookie</i>. Web.	<i>For a more in-depth look into the history of Tavi Gevinson's rise to fame, and her writing over the years, her personal blog would be the best source of information.</i>
Walker Rettberg, J. <i>Blogging</i>. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008. Print.	<i>This book is excellent for further research regarding blogging in general, as it provides the reader with a full history of weblogs in all its forms, in clear and non-technical language.</i>
McQuarrie, E.F., Miller, J., Phillips, B.J. "The Megaphone Effect: Taste and Audience in Fashion Blogging." <i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>, 6 Dec 2012: pp. 136-158. Print.	<i>This academic piece focuses on the novelty of fashion blogging, and the tactics bloggers use to receive online attention.</i>
Marwick, A. "Conspicuous and Authentic: Fashion Blogs, Style, and Consumption." <i>International Communication Association Conference</i>. Boston, MA, 2011. Web.	<i>Marwick's article describes the online persona fashion bloggers create, and why these are considered authentic.</i>

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