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THE ROLE OF FASHION BLOGGERS AND INFLUENCERS IN SHAPING FASHION TRENDS AMONG FEMALE STUDENTS OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN ENUGU STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined role of fashion bloggers and influencers in shaping fashion trends among youths in tertiary institutions in Enugu state. The researcher adopted the survey research method in carrying out this study. Questionnaire was structured and administered to the sample of 271 respondents derived from the population of 912, using the Australian sample size calculator. Findings from the study showed that to a maximum extent fashion brands use fashion bloggers and influencers to promote their products in Enugu State, and that Interaction with fashion bloggers and influencers stimulates the decision of youths in tertiary institutions in Enugu State on fashion brands. It was recommended that fashion brands should know that there is a strong relationship among influencers, brands, and consumers, and therefore consider the potential negative effects of influencer marketing on consumer behaviour, such as encouraging impulsive purchases or promoting unrealistic beauty standards, while using fashion bloggers and influencers to promote their products. Also, since interaction with fashion bloggers and influencers affect the decision of consumers on fashion brands, brands and influencers need to be mindful of their responsibility to promote products that are ethical and align with the values of society.

KEYWORDS: Role, fashion bloggers, influencers, fashion trends, youths.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry, as a social and cultural phenomenon, is important to the contemporary economy. The advent of the Internet – more especially, Web 2.0 – has changed how consumers think and make purchases. Customers can benefit from the internet at every step

of the decision-making process, from making a purchase to gathering information. (Arriaga et al., 2017). Francois (2012) stated that influencers and fashion blogging are helping the fashion business come back to life. In recent times, fashion blogging has gained popularity as a means of connection between people and bloggers, as well as between designers and brands. People desire a sense of community, and fashion bloggers are doing just that. Fashion bloggers and influencers are encouraging two-way communication between those in the fashion industry and consumers.

According to Kaur and Derashri (2019), “these days, influencers are major participants in the fashion market. Customers and brands alike must adjust to these new, up-and-coming actors who are upending the established norms. With the advent of social networks, people's daily lives now involve a new form of consumption, particularly for first-time buyers. Bloggers and influencers are able to persuade their followers to purchase things by promoting them. Since social networks became popular, fashion businesses have been making significant adjustments. In order to market their product and reach a larger audience, fashion bloggers and influencers are working with brands to implement new sales and marketing strategies.”

The emergence and growth of blogging occurred in the early 21st century, and bloggers are now widely acknowledged as having significant impact over people. The spread of diverse social media platforms has coincided with a rise in fashion blogging and influencer activity. People who are interested in keeping up with the latest fashion trends and styles that well-known bloggers are promoting have recently taken an interest in the idea of fashion blogging. A fashion blogger, according to Derashri and Gogia (2019), is an individual who manages a fashion blog and relies only on the content related to fashion and styling. To put it another way, the majority of fashion bloggers are enthusiasts for both beauty and fashion. As a term, fashion bloggers has become popular after fashion shops and beauty companies started to use bloggers for promoting products and services.

Fashion blogs have been identified as the most significant source of inspiration for purchasing decisions. Fashion bloggers typically use two strategies to market products: first, they use the products to communicate their ideas, and second, they use the things to create videos that are intended to influence their followers' behaviour and desire to buy. One of the fascinating ways that fashion bloggers influence their audience is by encouraging them to adopt and follow particular fashion trends or to emulate particular behaviours (Kaur & Derashri, 2019). Lungeanu and Parisi (2018) asserted that fashion bloggers typically work on posting and disseminating the most recent information about beauty products, clothing, makeup, and fashion trends, as well as instructions on how to use various goods and services.

For instance, fashion bloggers on Instagram have taken on a variety of tasks, such as establishing trends, voicing opinions, producing genuine material, and girls supporting.

Fashion bloggers and influencers have been observed to have considerable influence, which is determined by their capacity to be able to advise, prescribe, and influence readers and followers) (SanMiguel & Sadaba, 2018). Parmentie (2016), Larraufie and Kourdoughli (2014), averred that the form of the blogger has changed: from personal journals to branded professional platforms, they are now an integral part of marketing strategies, co-creating fashion content with prestigious fashion brand.” They are becoming vital players in the fashion industry, bridging fashion companies with consumers.

Since they are seen as being more involved with the brand, fashion bloggers and influencers are becoming more and more partnered with fashion brands in brand marketing and promotion strategies (Mintel, 2020). This helps the business reach huge target consumers in a more effective way (Ki & Kim, 2019). De Veirman et al. (2017), Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), asserted that “fashion bloggers and influencers are playing a bigger role in influencer and fashion marketing. Even if more academic scholars and marketing professionals are embracing influencers and fashion bloggers, many of them continue to concentrate on insignificant characteristics like likes and follow.” Limited studies have examined the core traits – what qualities of the influencer or fashion blogger enable them to amass a considerable number of followers (Ki & Kim, 2019) and form the parasocial relationship with people. Yuan et al. (2016) noted that “the parasocial relationship refers as media-enabled connections between users and media personalities/celebrities, which allows users feel the interpersonal relationships with their favourite media celebrity.”

Influencers and bloggers are used by fashion firms to promote and showcase their products to their target audience. The influencer's social media channel serves as the brand's primary communication channel (Evans et al., 2017). Glucksman (2017) stated that when fashion brands collaborate with influencers and fashion bloggers, they can attract brand consumers' attention and direct them to the appropriate material. As a result, the recent craze for fashion bloggers and influencers has fundamentally altered how those companies interact with consumers, especially when it comes to lifestyle branding. The implication of this according to Belanche et al. (2021), is that a growing number of consumers increasingly turn to fashion bloggers and influencers for guidance and inspiration regarding fashion in recent years. With the rise of social media, bloggers and influencers now have a platform to engage with a wide audience and share their expertise of fashion. It's still unclear, though, precisely how these individuals influence fashion trends. The fashion industry has long recognised the value of

influencer marketing and celebrity endorsements; this study broadens the research domain by incorporating fashion bloggers and influencers. Understanding how these people affect customer behaviour is vital, given their growing significance in the fashion business. This research study therefore investigates how fashion bloggers and influencers shape fashion trends and fashion preferences. The research questions that guided the study are:

1. What is the extent to which fashion brands use fashion bloggers and influencers to promote their products?
2. Does interaction with fashion bloggers and influencers affect the decision of consumers on fashion brands?
3. Is consumer view of fashion trends linked to exposure to fashion bloggers and influencers?
4. What are the features of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice?

2.0 METHODOLOGY

Survey design was adopted. The researcher used a careful probability sampling to provide the respondents equal chances of being selected. The population of this study was drawn from female students of tertiary institutions in Enugu state. A population of 912 female students was selected across three selected tertiary institutions – University of Nigeria Enugu Campus, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu and the Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu. The sample of this study was 271 derived from the population using the Australian sample size calculator. The researcher made use of cluster sampling technique. This technique is relevant to this study considering the fact that the tertiary institutions are made up of various faculties and departments. This technique enabled the researcher to have a proper representation of the levels that fall within the study area and sample. The questionnaire is the tool used to collect data for this investigation. The test-retest approach was utilised by the researcher to determine the reliability of the questionnaire items used in this investigation. The instrument was first validated by three experts in social media, communication and media studies.

3.0 RESULTS

Table 1: What is the extent to which fashion brands use fashion bloggers and influencers to promote their products?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
High	92	33.95%
Very high	105	38.75%
Low	49	18.08%
Very low	25	9.22%
Total	271	100%

The table indicates that 92 of the respondents representing 33.95% said that the extent to which fashion brands use fashion bloggers and influencers to promote their products is high; 105 of the respondents representing 38.75% said that the extent to which fashion brands use fashion bloggers and influencers to promote their products is very high; 49 of the respondents representing 18.08% said that the extent to which fashion brands use fashion bloggers and influencers to promote their products is low; while 25 of the respondents representing 9.22% said that the extent to which fashion brands use fashion bloggers and influencers to promote their products is very low.

Table 2: Does interaction with fashion bloggers and influencers affect the decision of consumers on fashion brands?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	211	77.86%
No	60	22.14%
Total	271	100%

The table indicates that 211 of the respondents representing 77.86% said that interaction with fashion bloggers and influencers affects the decision of consumers on fashion brands, while 61 of the respondents representing 22.14% said that interaction with fashion bloggers and influencers does not affect the decision of consumers on fashion brands.

Table 3: Is consumer view of fashion trends linked to exposure to fashion bloggers and influencers?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	198	73.07%
No	47	17.34%
Can't say	26	9.59%
Total	271	100%

The table indicates that 198 of the total respondents, representing 73.07% said that consumer view of fashion trends is linked to exposure to fashion bloggers and influencers; 47 of the respondents representing 17.34% said that consumer view of fashion trends is not linked to exposure to fashion bloggers and influencers, while 26 of the respondents representing 9.59% have no idea of whether or not consumer view of fashion trends is linked to exposure to fashion bloggers and influencers.

Table 4: What are the features of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Appearance	11	4.06%
Body shape	23	8.49%
Attractiveness	20	7.38%
Passion for the topic	9	3.32%
Credibility	7	2.58%
Trustworthiness	11	4.06%
Fashion	26	9.59%
Qualifications	7	2.58%
Authenticity	17	6.27%
All of the above	140	51.66%
Total	271	100%

The table indicates that 11 of the total respondents, representing 4.06% said that appearance is the feature of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice; 23 of the respondents representing 8.49% said that body shape is the feature of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice; 20 of the respondents representing 7.38% said that attractiveness is the feature of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice; 9 of the respondents representing 3.32% said that passion for the topic is the feature of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice; 7 of the respondents representing 2.58% said that credibility is the feature of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice; 11 of the respondents representing 4.06% said that trustworthiness is the feature of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice; 26 of the respondents representing 9.59% said that fashion is the feature of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice; 7 of the respondents representing 2.58% said that qualification is the feature of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their

fashion choice; 17 of the respondents representing 6.27% said that authenticity is the feature of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice, while 140 of the respondents representing 51.66% said that appearance, body shape, attractiveness, passion for the topic, credibility, trustworthiness, fashion, qualifications and authenticity are all features of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice.

Hypothesis One

H_0 To a minimal extent fashion brands use fashion bloggers and influencers to promote their products.

H_1 To a maximum extent fashion brands use fashion bloggers and influencers to promote their products.

Table 5: Test of Hypothesis One.

Variables	O	E	O – E	(O – E) ²	$\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$
High	92	67.75	24.25	588.0625	8.68
Very high	105	67.75	37.25	1387.5625	20.48
Low	49	67.75	-18.75	351.5625	5.19
Very low	25	67.75	-42.75	1827.5625	26.97
Total	271				61.32

$$Df = K - 1$$

$$Df = 4 - 1$$

$$Df = 3$$

$$\text{Level of significance at } 0.05 = 7.815$$

Decision: The table indicates that the calculated Chi-square value (61.32) is greater than the table value (7.815). The alternative hypothesis (H_1) is therefore accepted, proving that to a maximum extent fashion brands use fashion bloggers and influencers to promote their products.

Hypothesis Two

H_0 Interaction with fashion bloggers and influencers does not influence the decision of consumers on fashion brands.

H_2 Interaction with fashion bloggers and influencers influences the decision of consumers on fashion brands.

Table 6: Test of Hypothesis Two.

Variables	O	E	O – E	(O – E) ²	(O – E) ² E
Yes	211	135.5	75.5	5700.25	42.07
No	60	135.5	-75.5	5700.25	42.07
Total	271				84.14

$$Df = K - 1$$

$$Df = 2 - 1$$

$$Df = 1$$

Level of significance at 0.05 = 3.841

Decision: Since the calculated Chi-square value (84.14) is greater than the table value (3.841), the alternative hypothesis (H_2) is accepted. It therefore holds that interaction with fashion bloggers and influencers influences the decision of consumers on fashion brands.

Hypothesis Three

H_0 Consumer view of fashion trends is not linked to exposure to fashion bloggers and influencers.

H_3 Consumer view of fashion trends is linked to exposure to fashion bloggers and influencers.

Table 7: Test of Hypothesis Three.

Variables	O	E	O – E	(O – E) ²	(O – E) ² E
Yes	198	90.33	107.67	11592.8289	128.34
No	47	90.33	-43.33	1877.4889	20.78
Can't day	26	90.33	-64.33	4138.3489	45.81
Total	271				194.93

$$Df = K - 1$$

$$Df = 3 - 1$$

$$Df = 2$$

Level of Significance at 0.05 = 5.991

Decision: Since the calculated Chi-square value (194.93) is greater than the table value (5.991), the alternative hypothesis (H_3) is accepted. It therefore holds that consumer view of fashion trends is linked to exposure to fashion bloggers and influencers.

Hypothesis Four

H₀ Appearance, body shape, attractiveness, passion for the topic, credibility, trustworthiness, fashion, qualifications and authenticity are not the features of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice.

H₄ Appearance, body shape, attractiveness, passion for the topic, credibility, trustworthiness, fashion, qualifications and authenticity are the features of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice.

Table 8: Test of Hypothesis Four.

Variables	O	E	O – E	(O – E) ²	(O – E) ² E
Appearance	11	27.1	–16.1	259.21	9.56
Body shape	23	27.1	–4.1	16.81	0.62
Attractiveness	20	27.1	–7.1	50.41	1.86
Passion for the topic	9	27.1	–18.1	327.61	12.09
Credibility	7	27.1	–20.1	404.01	14.91
Trustworthiness	11	27.1	–16.1	259.21	9.56
Fashion	26	27.1	–1.1	1.21	0.04
Qualifications	7	27.1	–20.1	404.01	14.91
Authenticity	17	27.1	–10.1	102.01	3.76
All of the above	140	27.1	112.9	12746.41	470.35
Total	271				537.66

$$Df = K - 1$$

$$Df = 10 - 1$$

$$Df = 9$$

$$\text{Level of Significance at } 0.05 = 16.919$$

Decision: Since the calculated Chi-square value (537.66) is greater than the table value (16.919), the alternative hypothesis (H₄) is accepted. It therefore holds that appearance, body shape, attractiveness, passion for the topic, credibility, trustworthiness, fashion, qualifications and authenticity are the features of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice.

4.0 DISCUSSION

In all, four hypotheses were tested for statistical support. Hypothesis one dwelled on the extent to which fashion brands use fashion bloggers and influencers to promote their products. The analysis showed that the calculated Chi-square value (61.32) is greater than the table value (7.815). This proves alternative hypothesis (H₁). The implication is that to a

maximum extent fashion brands use fashion bloggers and influencers to promote their products.

The focus of hypothesis two was on whether interaction with fashion bloggers and influencers influences the decision of consumers on fashion brands. The analysis showed that the calculated Chi-square value (84.14) is greater than the table value (3.841), validating the alternative hypothesis (H_2). The import is that interaction with fashion bloggers and influencers influences the decision of consumers on fashion brands.

Hypothesis three centred on whether consumer view of fashion trends is not linked to exposure to fashion bloggers and influencers. The analysis indicated that the calculated Chi-square value (194.93) is greater than the table value (5.991), authenticating the alternative hypothesis (H_3). The import is that consumer view of fashion trends is linked to exposure to fashion bloggers and influencers.

The discourse of hypothesis four was on whether appearance, body shape, attractiveness, passion for the topic, credibility, trustworthiness, fashion, qualifications and authenticity are the features of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice. The analysis indicated that the calculated Chi-square value (537.66) is greater than the table value (16.919), proving the alternative hypothesis (H_4). This implies that appearance, body shape, attractiveness, passion for the topic, credibility, trustworthiness, fashion, qualifications and authenticity are the features of fashion bloggers and influencers that appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice.

5.0 CONCLUSION

It is evident that fashion bloggers and influencers, particularly with younger generations, have a big influence on consumer behaviour. Fashion bloggers and influencers have an impact on how consumers make decisions and choose what to buy. Customers' inclination to buy has increased due to fashion blogs because they are currently exposed to a bigger number of stimuli. The first step in the information-gathering process is to browse and read the blog. A consumer's opinion of a brand may shift after reading about it on a blog since the blogger or influencer uses and suggests the product. It has been observed that consumers' attitudes towards a brand and their decision to buy are significantly influenced by what influencers wear, suggest, or write on their blogs. Customers are particularly drawn to blogs that cover a wide range of topics, such as lifestyle, travel, and general trends, in addition to fashion brands and cosmetics. Therefore, fashion brands should know that there is a strong relationship among influencers, brands, and consumers, and therefore consider the potential negative

effects of influencer marketing on consumer behaviour, such as encouraging impulsive purchases or promoting unrealistic beauty standards, while using fashion bloggers and influencers to promote their products. Since interaction with fashion bloggers and influencers affect the decision of consumers on fashion brands, brands and influencers need to be mindful of their responsibility to promote products that are ethical and align with the values of society. Fashion brands should always promote decency and morality in their blogs because consumers' view of fashion trends is linked to exposure to fashion bloggers and influencers. Fashion blogs and influencers should strive to use good features that promote good fashion sense since these features appeal to consumers and exert influence on their fashion choice.

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