

How fashion bloggers can influence Generation Y's online behaviour

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine how fashion bloggers can influence Generation Y's online behaviour. Fashion blogs give the fashion industry a unique opportunity to reach out to a target audience in a new, easy, and inexpensive way, however, research on how fashion bloggers can influence Generation Y's online behaviour is still limited. Based on various theories, a model was proposed for the study. A survey involving 300 fashion blog readers as participants was analysed in the empirical study to investigate whether perceived blog design layout, blogger awareness, perceived blogger credibility and perceived value/expertise influence attitude and purchase intention. Structural equation modelling results revealed that the proposed relationships were significant with the exception of blog design layout on attitude. As for blog design layout, marketing strategies could emphasise the importance of user experience and content strategy in influencing the attitude of Generation Y. The study should assist fashion bloggers to understand how perceived blog design layout, blogger awareness, perceived blogger credibility and perceived value/expertise can influence attitude, eventually leading to purchase intention. Brands will therefore need to select bloggers cautiously. This study has implications for bloggers, brands, and policy makers.

Keywords: Online behaviour, blog, blogging, blogger, fashion blog, fashion blogger, fashion blogging, fashion, online marketing, user experience, content strategy, attitude, Generation Y, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Today, the largest segment of the blogosphere consists of fashion blogs, i.e. blogs that focus on fashion brands, fashion products, street style, and personal style (Halvorsen, Hoffmann, Coste-Manière & Stankeviciute, 2013). Fashion bloggers constitute a new player in the fashion industry (Esteban-Santos, García, Carey, & Bellido-Pérez, 2018; Sadaba & SanMiguel, 2016; Rocamora, 2011; Allen, 2009). Fashion bloggers are individuals with a fashion blog, where they write and share information about fashion with their community (SanMiguel & Sádaba, 2018). Fashion bloggers are used to deliver information about brands to the target consumers by assessing and interpreting it in such a way that it will communicate acceptance of the message to the consumer (Cantor, 2014). Bloggers in Africa are doing well across the globe, whether it be fashion, beauty, technology or cuisine (Edoro, 2018). In South Africa, new fashion blogs continue to be on the rise, bringing something fresh to the blogosphere (SAFAdmin, 2019).

Fashion bloggers: a marketing tool

Currently, fashion and trends are mainly driven by inspiration between peers; it is therefore likely that fashion blogs may function as a source of influence to affect consumer behaviour (Halvorsen, et al., 2013). Blogs are therefore an influential social media platform and a powerful marketing tool (Pophal, 2015; Duffy & Hund, 2015; Vineyard, 2014; Hsu, Chuan-Chuan & Chiang, 2013; Hsu & Tsou, 2011). Bloggers inspire the way people dress as they work alongside publishers and designers (Sadaba & SanMiguel, 2016). According to Esteban-Santos, et al. (2018), fashion bloggers should focus on giving accurate and new information, as well as including vivid and interesting content, in order to maintain their reputation and catch the attention of their followers. Blogs are therefore crucial in the decision-making processes of consumers (Al-Masri & Yani-de-Soriano, 2018; Esteban-Santos, et al. 2018; Hsu, et al. 2013), as fashion bloggers' recommendations can modify consumers' attitudes towards brands, influencing how consumers perceive them and therefore, their brand choices (Lee & Watkins, 2016). By sharing their personal style and inspiring their followers with what they wear on popular social media platforms such as Instagram, fashion bloggers have become fashion opinion leaders (Zain, Perry & Quinn, 2018). Both readers and bloggers use fashion blogs as their main source of fashion inspiration (Halvorsen, et al. 2013).

Fashion bloggers and Generation Y of the 21st century

Fashion trends change rapidly in the 21st century as the Generation Y of the 21st century are equipped with more interactive and revolutionising communication links that react faster to international and local trends (Ghemawat & Nueno, 2006). Consumers of Generation Y have immediate access to a wide variety of online goods, exchange brand experiences and are able to purchase fashion freely on the internet through the help of fashion blogs and the rising empire of online shopping companies (Okonkwo, Griffith, Belue, Lanza, Zamrini, Harrell, Brockington, Clark, Raman & Marson, 2007). These consumers are demanding and purchase clothes that really suit their needs and they care about meaning, ethics and genuineness (Djelic & Ainamo, 1999). Marketers must be aware that these young consumers rely more on this non-traditional media, because they look for genuine and honest recommendations formed by peer consumers (Esteban-Santos, et al., 2018) and are influenced by blogs (Bolton, Parasuraman, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayi, Gruber, Komarova & Solnet, 2013).

The purpose of conducting the study and selecting Generation Y is explained next.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

There are over 500 million blogs on the internet, and a new blog post is published every 0.5 seconds (Blogging Statistics, 2019). Some bloggers are reported to have as many as 250 million social media followers (Hsu, Chuan-Chuan & Chiang, 2013), while some have fan bases larger than the blogs and social media accounts of major fashion magazines (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Fashion blogs first appeared in 2001 (Pedroni, 2015). Due to the important influence of fashion blogs and the implication on marketing activities, it is a vital area to study. Attempts have been made to understand how fashion blogs function as a marketing tool in some western and eastern regions (Luvaas, 2013; Halvorsen, et al., 2013), although limited studies have been specifically conducted on how fashion bloggers can influence Generation Y in South Africa. The present study contributes by examining two theories being Brand Equity Theory and the Theory of Reasoned action. The study starts by describing the two theories, after which the hypotheses and conceptual model are developed from literature.

Similar studies have been conducted in the South African context (Van Huyssteen, Strydom & Rudansky-Kloppers, 2015; Bosch, 2012), but there have been few academic studies on fashion blogger influence and Generation Y. In this

study, we answer the calls for further research by focusing on how Generation Y responds to blog marketing (Liljander, Gummerus & Söderlund, 2015). Generation Y grew up with technology and rely on it for information, entertainment and social contacts (Bolton, Parasuraman, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayi, Gruber, Komarova Loureiro & Solnet, 2013). They rely on online product reviews and recommendations (Karrh, McKee & Pardun, 2003), which demonstrates that blogs are an important source of information in their decision making (Liljander, et al., 2015). Hence, the aim of this paper is to investigate how fashion bloggers can influence Generation Y's online behaviour.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

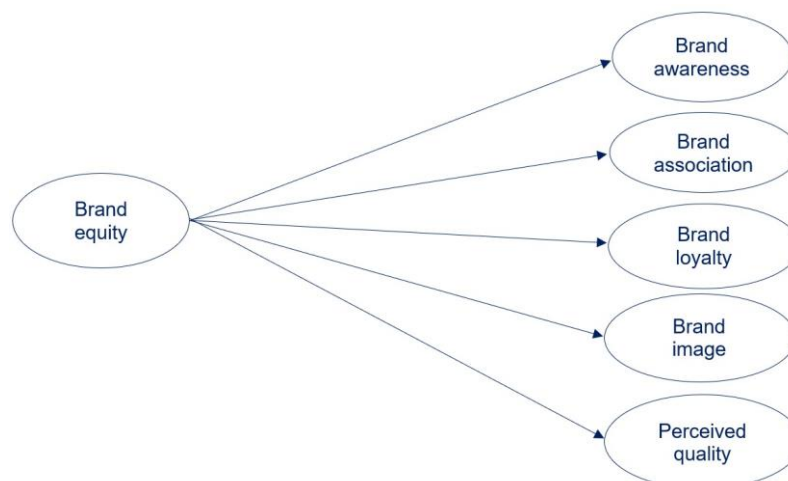
As the objective of the study was to understand how fashion bloggers influence Generation Y's online behaviour, it was considered appropriate to adopt two theories, namely Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Brand Equity Theory (Aaker, 1992) to position the study. The Theory of Reasoned Action was originally developed by Fishbein in the 1960s. It was then expanded by the original author and Icek Ajzen in the mid-1980s. The theory states that a person's attitude or behaviour toward acting in a certain manner are very powerful in determining his or her intention of performing (Xu & Paulins, 2005). The Theory of Reasoned Action focuses on theoretical variables concerned with individual motivational factors as factors of the probability of performing a specific behaviour. The theory assumes the best forecaster of a behaviour is intention, which in turn, is determined by attitude toward the behaviour and social normative perceptions regarding it. Accordingly, Ajzen (1991) added perceived behavioural control to the theory of reasoned action as justification for factors outside an individual's control that could possibly affect intentions and behaviour as it is unclear which theory of reasoned action variables predict behaviour in which cognitive control is reduced.

The second theory; Brand Equity theory, according to Aaker (1991, 1996), has come to dominate the empirical research, perhaps because his framework is more practically useful and more easily operationalised and measured (Anselmsson, Johansson & Persson, 2007).

For the purpose of this study, brand equity can be described as illustrated in Figure 1.

According to Aaker (2018), brand equity comprises brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty, brand image and perceived quality.

FIGURE 1
BRAND EQUITY MODEL



Source: (Aaker, 1991)

Blog design layout

A blog refers to a web page that contains regularly posted inlays that are achieved and arranged in reversed chronological order (Wright & Hinson, 2008). This can include anything from an online diary to a more interactive page (Walker, 2007). A crucial factor regarding a blog, if not one of the most important appearance factors is the blog design layout. It is the first interaction between the user and the blogger and represents the initial first impression (Wright & Hinson, 2008). The characteristics of the blog design layout or visual design include attractiveness, organisation, proper use of font, colour, and attractive use of multimedia. Visual design can be referred to as the way in which the information is presented through the use of elements such as typography, graphical use, colour, and layout (Wright & Hinson, 2008). Blog design layout serves as an indirect voice to a blog and its aesthetic (Rocamora, 2011). The layout is vital and essential in delivering a statement of substance, value and appeal towards the consumer.

Perceived value/expertise

“We read their pieces because we value their opinions and ideas” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 182). Perceived value is defined as a consumer’s opinion about a product’s overall excellence or superiority (Tsiotsou, 2005). According to Zeithaml (1988, p. 14) value is “the consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product or service based on perceptions of what is received and what is given”. Essentially, it can be defined as the consumer’s overall opinion of a brand, product or service’s value in comparison to alternatives (Friedmann, Son & Saleem, 2015). It becomes evident that bloggers need to create a favourable interaction and experience in order to create long lasting value impressions and promote knowledgeable insight in their interactions, therefore perceived value or perceived expertise can also be referred to as the perceived knowledge on a given topic. The value factor in social media blogging is critical in influencing whether a consumer will act upon or support what they observe or not. It further determines whether or not a consumer will be attracted to a blogging source or purchasing intention. If value is not determined or created in any form, the success of the relationship between the consumer and blogger will not be recognised (Walker, 2007).

Perceived credibility of blogger

Fashion bloggers have the ability to influence purchase decisions because they are likely to be viewed as a credible source by their readers (Haugtvedt, Machleit, & Yalch, 2005). Credibility refers to the ability to influence through trust and proficiency (Epega, 2007). A blog is only as worthy as its credibility (Efimova, 2009). Bloggers attract followers, viewers, readers, subscribers, but most importantly, loyalty, through their interactions. Bloggers need to ensure that they always remain true to themselves to ensure they are able to appeal to viewers who can relate to and impart valuable input into their actions. According to Epanga (2007), viewers will promote and retain a blogger’s influence, only through reliability and credibility. Consumers have created the habit of finding bloggers’ recommendations significantly more credible than other media sources (Johnson, 2004).

Awareness of the blogger

Awareness is the ability of potential buyers to recall the brand from its product category when customers are exposed to various specific brand-related stimuli, such as brand name, typefaces, slogans, mascots, and brand characters in which the brand competes and can link products sold under the brand name (Keller, 2001; Aaker, 1996). Awareness can be seen as the degree to which consumers are acquainted and comfortable with the ease of access and convenience of information and knowledge about fashion bloggers. The higher the level of awareness, the higher the blogger’s reputation would be amongst competitors in the marketplace (Malik, Willett & Hu, 2013).

Awareness essentially allows a consumer to experience the brand of a fashion blogger through the use of advertising, publicity, as well as public interaction. Social media creates a platform for fashion bloggers to expose and express their thoughts, ideas and opinions to their followers (Wright & Hinson, 2008). Awareness links into brand awareness and existing knowledge a consumer has on a specific brand, which are brand awareness and brand recall – this assists the consumer in influencing purchase intention (Efimova, 2009).

Attitude

Attitude can be defined as an individual's favourable or unfavorable assessments or feelings towards an idea or object (Aman, Harun & Hussein, 2012). Attitudes are further defined as psychological tendencies that are shown, based on marketing efforts or endorsement towards a particular object with a degree of further favour or disfavour (Aman, et al., 2012). In the context of fashion blogging, attitude is defined as the tendency to favour or disfavour a particular product, brand, idea or object in reaction to a fashion blogger's appeal and persuasion (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011).

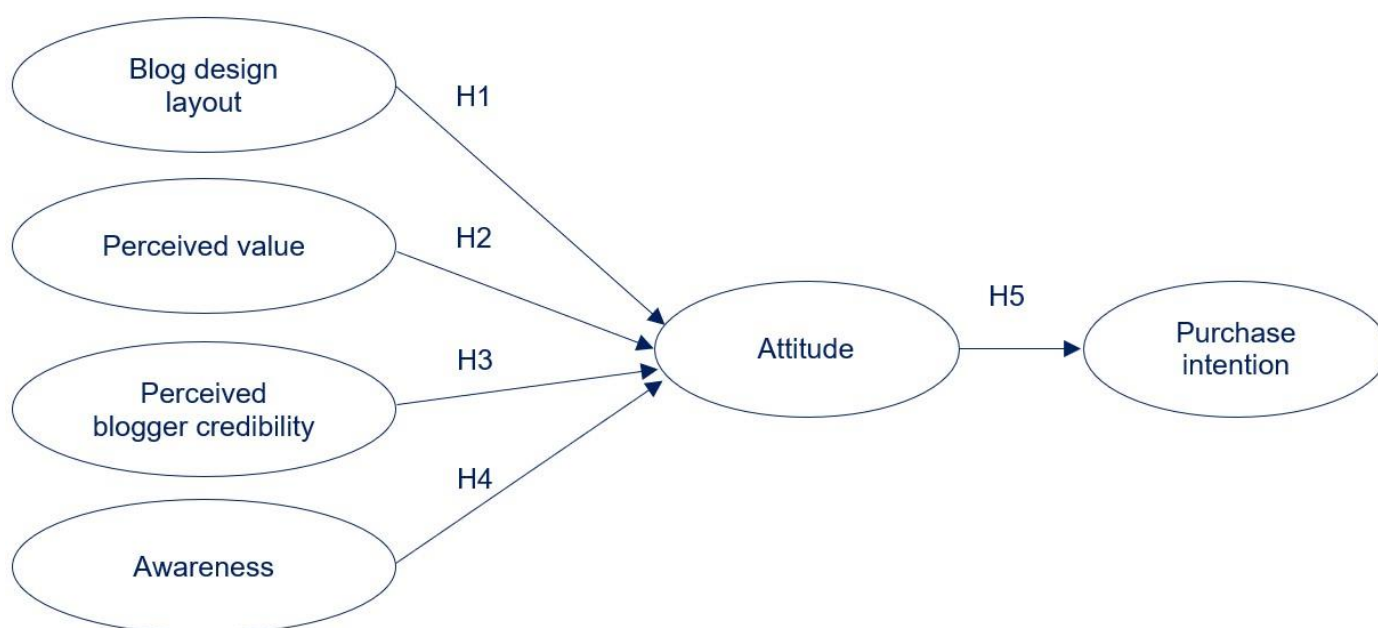
Purchase intention

Purchase intention measures the likelihood that consumers will buy a product after being exposed to a blog and can be defined as a consumer's willingness to learn about and purchase a product or service (Salisbury, Pearson, Pearson & Miller, 2001). According to Kim and Ko (2010), in the context to fashion blogging, purchase intention can be defined as the likelihood and willingness of a consumer to give special consideration to products based on the endorsement or recommendation by a fashion blogger or influencer (Kim & Ko, 2010). According to Mirabi, Akbariyeh and Tahmasebifard (2015), purchase intention refers to the decision making that suggests a reason to respond or buy a particular brand or product or when a consumer plans to buy a specific product, based on specific causes and conditions. Purchase intention can be seen and described as 'evaluations' that consumers make about products which impact on the decisions to be a good or service (Efimova, 2009). Purchase intention also refers to the likelihood that a customer will buy a particular product or service (Fishbein, 1975).

CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Figure 2 presents the proposed conceptual model for the present study, followed by the hypotheses development.

FIGURE 2
CONCEPTUAL MODEL



Source: (Authors own construction, 2019)

Hypotheses Development

Blog Design Layout and Attitude (Hypothesis 1)

A study by Robins, Holmes and Stansbury (2010) on the appearances of web pages indicated that visual design could possibly alter or affect a user's attitude or perception of credibility. Hence, it is beneficial for the blogging industry to have a clear and concise understanding of the impact of visuals on how people reach ideas or initial perceptions and attitudes (Lester, 2006). Because visual images can directly affect emotions (Lester, 2006) and because emotion plays an important role in influencing attitude, it becomes vital for bloggers to generate and preserve visually appealing blogs that allow for the retention of clients. As such, we hypothesise that:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between blog design layout and attitude.

Perceived Value and Attitude (Hypothesis 2)

If value is not established in any form, the success of the relationship between the consumer and source will not be established and therefore attitude will not be affected (Walker & Rettberg, 2007). It is vitally important that bloggers instill value in their users through their interactions, content and knowledge, in order for them to influence the attitudes of their users and ultimately drive purchase intention. As a result, we hypothesise that:

H₂: There is a positive relationship between perceived value and attitude.

Perceived Credibility of blogger and Attitude (Hypothesis 3)

If consumers do not find credibility in the blogger or the content presented to them, they will not be influenced and their attitudes will be negatively affected (Pihl & Sandström, 2013). Authenticity and reliability drive and promote favourable attitudes (Pihl & Sandström, 2013). Consumers have created a habit of finding bloggers' recommendations significantly more credible than other media sources (Johnson, 2004). Many bloggers have created a strong reputation, based on their knowledge of the fashion industry, and are able to maintain this reputation through their imparting of knowledge on brands, trends and general guidance. Therefore, perceived credibility is an important and vital driver of attitude changing. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H₃: There is a positive relationship between perceived credibility of the blogger and attitude.

Awareness and Attitude (Hypothesis 4)

Researchers such as Prendergast, Ko, and Siu Yin (2010) found that the positive attitude towards an online forum strengthens the purchase intention of the products discussed. A study by Ing and Ting (2018) found that a change in perceived usefulness, trustworthiness, perceived benefits and information quality can lead to a change in attitude towards bloggers' recommendations which, in turn, changes the purchase intention. Awareness links into brand awareness and existing knowledge a consumer has on a specific brand, which is known as brand awareness and brand recall – this awareness assists in the influence of purchase intention and attitude (Wright & Hinson, 2008). As such, we hypothesise that:

H₄: There is a positive relationship between awareness and attitude.

Attitude and Purchase Intention (Hypothesis 5)

Numerous studies on social media and fashion blogging have shown a significant relationship between attitude and intention (Kim, Shin & Kim, 2011; Bhattacharjee 2000). In the context of fashion blogging, attitude is defined as the tendency to favour or disfavour a particular product, brand, idea or object in reaction to a fashion blogger's appeal or persuasion (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). Purchase intention is driven by many significant variables, both internal and external (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). One of the most noteworthy drivers of purchase intention is attitude; if one's attitude towards an idea or material object is significantly altered, purchase intention can also be altered alongside the attitude change (Carter, 2016). As a result, we hypothesise that:

H₅: There is a positive relationship between attitude and purchase intention.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study followed a positivist approach in examining the relationships between the dependent and independent variables. The measurement instrument was compiled from numerous existing scales that were adapted for the purpose of the study. Reliability and validity were established, followed by structural equation modelling (SEM) that was used to test the model fit. Hypotheses testing and path modelling was conducted. The descriptive statistics were obtained through SPSS 25 software and SEM was done using Amos 25 software.

Sample and data collection

Data was collected from 300 Generation Y university students in South Africa. Boomsma and Hoogland (2001) suggest that when using Structural Equation Modelling as a measurement model, the minimum size of a sample should be at least 200 to see favourable and realistic results. In light of this, the current study's sample size is 300.

Measurement instrument and questionnaire design

The data was collected through an online self-administered structured questionnaire using Google docs. All scales were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The variables were measured using existing scales; Blog design layout (Al-Qeisi, 2014), Awareness (Pihl & Sandström, 2013), Perceived blogger credibility (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007), Perceived value (Zeithaml, 1988), Attitude (Wu & Lo, 2009) and Purchase intention (Wu & Lo, 2009).

Data Analysis and Results

This section provides an overview of the respondent profile, the scale accuracy analysis, the model fit and hypotheses results.

Respondent Profile

The profile of the participants is presented in Table 1.

The profile indicates that the majority of the respondents (54%) were female, 45% were male, while the remaining 1% preferred not to say. Eighty two percent were between the ages of 18 and 25 years, with 10% between the ages of 26 and 30, while very small percentage (6%) fell into the age group of 31 to older category. The majority (99%) of the respondents use Instagram and at least one other social media platform, 0% of respondents selected that they used none of the above social media platforms, therefore proving that every respondent uses at least one social media platform.

Regarding social media importance, 87% of respondents cumulatively found social media interaction in their daily routines to be important, whereas 9% found social media usage to be slightly important and 2% of respondents did not find it important. Therefore, 98% of respondents find some value or importance of social media in their daily interaction.

The respondents were given options of buying decisions, 48% of the respondents found that social

TABLE 1
SAMPLE PROFILE CHARACTERISTICS

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	136	45.3%
	Female	163	54.3%
	Prefer not to say	1	0.4%
	Total	300	100.0%
Age	18-21	101	33.7%
	21-25	149	49.7%
	26-30	30	10%
	31-35	14	4.7%
	35 - Older	6	2%
Total	300	100.0%	
Social Media Usage	Instagram	297	99%
	Twitter	255	85%
	Tumblr	111	37%
	Facebook	230	76%
	Snapchat	238	79%
	Pinterest	180	60%
	YouTube	184	61%
	None of the above	0	0%
Total	300	100%	
Importance of Social media	Very Important	149	49%
	Important	116	38%
	Slightly Important	28	9%
	Not Important	7	2%
Total	300	100.0%	
Blogger Influence	Yes	243	81%
	No	157	19%
	Total	300	100.0%

media and social media trends influence their buying decisions and 26% of the respondents were influenced by bloggers or influencers, giving a cumulative influence from social media or bloggers of 74% of the respondents.

Scale Accuracy Analysis

The scale accuracy analysis is presented in Table 2 and is followed by a discussion of the measurement scale's reliability and validity.

TABLE 2
ACCURACY ANALYSIS SCALE

Research Construct	Descriptive Statistics				Cronbach's Test		C.R. value	AVE value	Highest Shared Variance	Factor Loading
	Mean Value	Standard Deviation	Item -total	α value						
Blog design layout (BDL)	B1	1.98	0.914		0.612					,643
	B2	1.74	0.877		0.723					,770
	B3	2.24	1.083		0.642					,666
	B4	1.93	0.948	0.95175	0.755	0.894	0.895	0.833	0.408	,795
	B5	2.42	1.093		0.497					,526
	B6	1.83	0.897		0.701					,747
	B7	1.98	0.905		0.748					,807
	B8	1.86	0.897		0.69					,771
Awareness (AOB)	C1	2.09	1.003		0.789					,783
	C2	2.14	1.134		0.743					,792
	C3	2.19	1.027	0.794875	0.767	0.916	0.901	0.729	0.558	,805
	C4	1.95	1.007		0.700					,657
	C5	2.1	0.999		0.776					,750
	C6	2.39	1.161		0.764					,864
Perceived blogger credibility (PCOB)	D1	2.63	1.264		0.838					,832
	D2	2.52	1.132		0.812					,789
	D3	2.41	1.042	0.826875	0.864	0.944	0.942	0.833	0.477	,891
	D4	2.38	1.000		0.800					,899
	D5	2.39	1.014		0.868					,920
	D6	2.39	1.144		0.743					,789
Perceived value (PVOB)	E1	2	0.877		0.619					,702
	E2	2.14	0.947	0.458	0.687	0.84	0.843	0.756	0.591	,794
	E3	2.02	0.931		0.672					,721
	E4	2.12	0.909		0.718					,807
Attitude (ATT)	F1	2.14	1.001		0.723					,760
	F2	2.13	0.959		0.745					,823
	F3	2.12	0.893	0.603875	0.751	0.896	0.902	0.768	0.838	,791
	F4	2.23	0.916		0.756					,805
	F5	2.42	1.062		0.743					,843
Purchase intention (PI)	G1	2.34	1.031		0.843					,885
	G2	2.2	0.96		0.794					,815
	G3	2.7	1.203	0.6635	0.822	0.927	0.922	0.811	0.666	,847
	G4	2.5	1.105		0.84					,877
	G5	2.31	1.009		0.748					,759

NB:CR=Composite reliability; AVE= Average variance extracted

Testing for scale reliability and validity

To assess reliability and validity of the measurement scales for the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the composite reliability test and a comparison between the average variance extracted and the highest shared variance were conducted respectively (Table 2). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients range from 0.84 to 0.944, exceeding the 0.7 threshold as suggested by Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2009). Composite reliability values range from 0.843 to 0.942 which is acceptable as it exceeds 0.7 (Hair et al., 2009). All the average variance extracted values range between 0.729 and 0.833, which is above 0.4 as recommended by Fraering and Minor (2006).

TABLE 3
INTER CONSTRUCT CORRELATION MATRIX

	Blog design layout (BDL)	Awareness (AOB)	Perceived blogger credibility (PCOB)	Perceived value (PVOB)	Attitude (ATT)	Purchase intention (PI)
Blog design layout (BDL)	1					
Awareness (AOB)	.639**	1				
Perceived blogger credibility (PCOB)	.554**	.700**	1			
Perceived value (PVOB)	.587**	.747**	.691**	1		
Attitude (ATT)	.576**	.751**	.828**	.769**	1	
Purchase intention (PI)	.542**	.763**	.816**	.723**	.838**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results obtained in Table 3 indicate that all the inter-correlation values move away from 1.0 and therefore all the correlations can be regarded as significant. The highest difference between two constructs, which is the lowest value and shows that the weakest linear relationship, is that of purchase intention (0.542), as well as perceived blogger credibility (0.554).

Assessing measurement model fit

This section presents the analysis of model fit by means of assessing various indices to determine the degree of an acceptable or good model fit (Table 4). The following indices are examined: normed fit index (NFI), incremental fit index (IFI), Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), goodness of fit index (GFI), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Table 4 presents the results of the model fit indices.

TABLE 4
MODEL FIT INDICES

Model	NFI Delta1	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI
Default model	,880	,865	,930	,921	,930

An exploration of the baseline comparison indices indicates the following observations: The NFI (0.880) falls between 0.8 and 0.9, which explains a marginally accepted and good model fit (Kenny, 2016). The RFI suggests a good model fit with a value of 0.865 and the IFI (0.930), TLI (0.921) and CFI (0.930) are greater or above the suggested threshold indicated in previous literature of 0.9 (Tabachnick, 2007), therefore the model is regarded as being an appropriate good fit.

It is evident from Table 4 that all the model fit indices reach the required thresholds: the RMSEA indicates a value of 0.064, which is below 0.08, as recommended by McDonald (2002). The CMIN, NFI, RFI, IFI, TLI and CFI all meet the recommended threshold of 0.9 (Hair et al., 2009).

Hypotheses testing results

Table 5 presents the results of the hypotheses and path coefficients, followed by a discussion thereof.

TABLE 5
HYPOTHESES RESULTS AND PATH COEFFICIENTS

Hypothesised Relationship	Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	P Value	Outcome
BDL → ATT	H1	-.024	.506	Not supported and not significant
PVOB → ATT	H2	.213	***	Supported and significant
PCOB → ATT	H3	.299	***	Supported and significant
AOB → ATT	H4	.437	***	Supported and significant
ATT → PI	H5	.966	***	Supported and significant

Note: *** = $p < 0.01$

An examination of the results recorded in Table 5 indicates that all of the hypotheses are supported, with the exception of hypothesis one (H1), which examines the relationship between blog design layout and attitude. Contrary to earlier research (Robins, et al., 2010; Lester, 2006), Hypothesis (H1) was not supported, as blog design layout had a non-significant effect on attitude. Interestingly, Hsu, Chen, Yang and Lin (2017), as well as Rocamora (2011), highlighted that blog design layout cannot be isolated from user experience and content strategy.

Hypothesis (H2) indicates a positive relationship between perceived value provided by the fashion blogger and attitude. Students are therefore more likely to have a positive attitude towards purchase intention, if the perceived value provided by the fashion blogger is high. The path co-efficient (0.213) indicated a moderately strong relationship between these two variables. Wu and Wang (2005) contended that the user's perceived value is positively associated with the user's attitudes.

Hypothesis (H3) indicates a positive relationship between perceived credibility of the blog attached to the fashion blogger and attitude. In other words, the greater the perceived credibility of the blog attached to the fashion blogger, the more favourable the students' attitude. The path co-efficient (0.299) indicated a moderately strong relationship between these two variables. This finding is consistent with Ostermeier (1967), who provides clear evidence that the user's perceived credibility of a fashion blogger is positively associated with the user's attitudes. Bloggers' recommendation are perceived to be honest, showing a high credibility, credibility has a significant relation to consumers' behaviour (Esteban-Santos, et al. 2018). Similarly, hypothesis four (H4) indicates a relationship between awareness provided by the fashion blogger and the students' attitude towards purchase intention (path co-efficient 0.437), which is consistent with previous literature by Percy and Rossiter (1992).

Lastly, hypothesis five (H5) shows a strong relationship between attitude and purchase intention (path co-efficient of 0.966). Previous literature by Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, and Füller (2013) supports this, thereby providing adequate evidence that the user's attitudes towards fashion bloggers is positively associated with the user's purchase intention.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study indicate that the blog design layout, awareness of the blogger, perceived value and credibility of the blogger are important variables to users when factoring the influence that a blogger has on its user. Fashion blogging techniques are becoming increasingly popular and social media usage is starting to overtake even that of the internet usage on traditional personal computers (Marketing charts, 2014); it is therefore important for literature to address the possible marketing opportunities that may stem from this emerging technology.

Fashion bloggers and influencers increase awareness of the organisation by acting as self-advertising agents (Martin, 2011), and studies have specified that the inclusion of social media activity by businesses promotes brand loyalty and purchase intention (Park, 2011). The development of traditional marketing campaigns have become a lot more expensive and require considerable time and effort by firms in comparison to outsourcing creativity and expertise from fashion bloggers (Drury, 2008), and therefore it can be said that developing a successful network with fashion bloggers or influencers, which customers will follow and continue to trust, is vital for the business.

LIMITATIONS AND AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study makes some practical and theoretical contribution to consumption behaviour, brand management and digital marketing, it is not without limitations. Firstly, the use of a student sample appears to be acceptable in the online marketing content, however, student samples are generally criticised for not being sufficiently representative of the breadth of the population. Thus, future research should consider replicating these findings using a sample drawn from a wider population. Secondly, a longitudinal research study may consequently be more appropriate to study a longer-term perspective, compared to the cross-sectional study that was applied in this study. Thirdly, the current study was administered only in South Africa and could be conducted in other developed and developing geographies. Finally, additional variables such as user experience and content strategy could also be examined.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study intended to investigate the influence of fashion bloggers on Generation Ys' purchase intention. By means of a quantitative study, online surveys were completed by 300 Generation Y students at a university in South Africa. A conceptual model proposed that blog design layout, awareness, perceived blogger credibility, perceived value, influence the students' attitude towards purchase intention of fashion items. The study established that the relationships were significant except for blog design layout. Literature indicates that blog design layout should be measured together with blog content and user experience. If fashion bloggers design their layout with well-organised content to attract consumers browsing the blog, it may significantly arouse consumers' positive attitudes toward it. The study provides bloggers and marketers of fashions brands with a clear understanding of what factors sway the likelihood of Generation Y to be influenced by fashion bloggers.

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