

Fashion bloggers vs. young women: an overlapped relationship controlled by electronic word of mouth

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Introduction

Since the rise of blogging early this century, bloggers have practiced an increasing influence on youth behaviors. In addition, the increase of social network sites has lent blogging and fashion momentum at least since 2010. The concept of fashion blogging has recently gained popularity among young women, who have been interested in following new fashion and styles promoted by popular bloggers.

A fashion blogger was identified by Derashri & Gogia (2019, p. 10) as “an individual who manages a fashion blog and relies only on the content related to fashion and styling”. In other words, fashion bloggers are mostly ordinary girls interested in fashion and beauty. As a term, fashion bloggers has become popular after fashion shops and beauty companies started to use bloggers for promoting products and services. According to Kaur and Derashri (2019,p.1), fashion blogs have been marked as the most important source of inspiration to make buying decisions. Usually, fashion bloggers promote products in two ways: expressing their opinions in products; and creating videos while using these products, aiming at affecting followers’ purchase intention and behavior. One of the interesting influences of fashion bloggers is driving their followers to imitate specific behaviors.

The task of fashion bloggers revolves usually around posting and publishing the last updates of fashion trends, beauty products reviews, clothes reviews, make-up products reviews and how to use products and services (see figure 1). For example, fashion bloggers on Instagram have practiced several roles, including opinion leading, trendsetting, authentic content creating, and girls supporting (Lungeanu, & Parisi, 2018, p. 28).

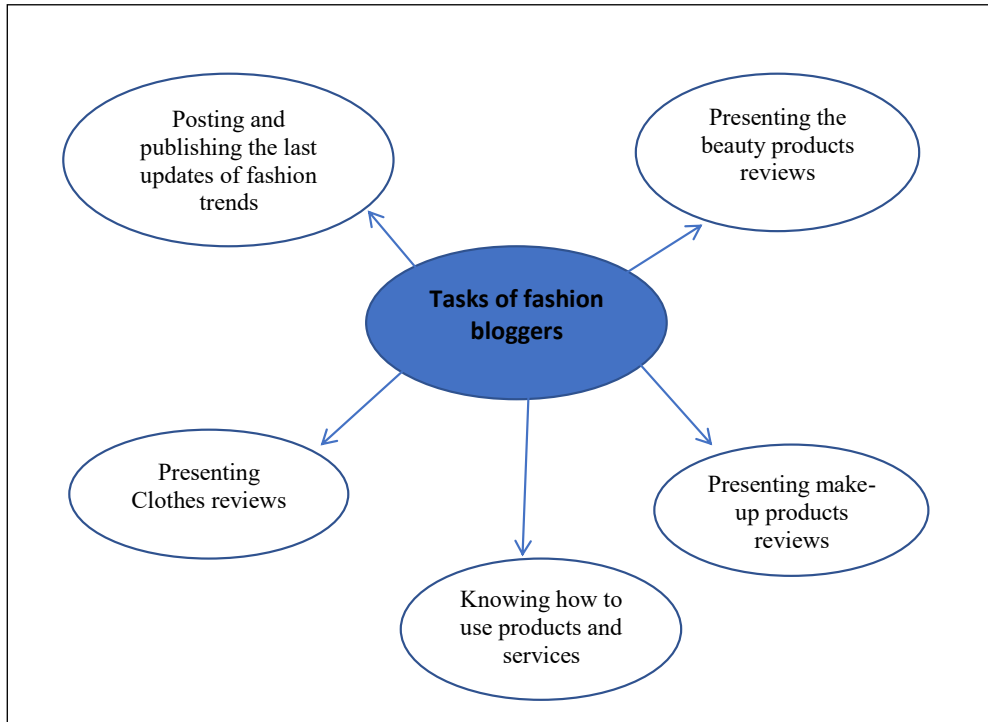


Figure (1): Tasks of fashion bloggers

Moreover, fashion bloggers can play a vital role in interpreting the corporate message, shaping the followers' perceptions (Lungeanu & Parisi, 2018, p.33), attracting attention (especially young ladies), and influencing decision making (Jirakorn, 2014). Another important role that fashion bloggers can play is promoting brands. Casha (2018, p.1) identified eight forms of "blogger-brand collaborations", the most common of which are rewarded vouchers, goods, and discounts.

In a local context, Egyptian fashion bloggers have gained significant importance with the growing interest in their activities by followers. Many young women have become obsessed with fashion bloggers' attributes, such as the colors of clothes,

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accessories, beauty products, latest trends of fashion, and hair products. Examples of Egyptian fashion bloggers include @batootanasr, @saharfoad, @salmaabudeif, @mariamseifeldien, @Marwa Hassan, and @Ayshah Kamel), all of which have enjoyed a large number of followers (see Figure 2).

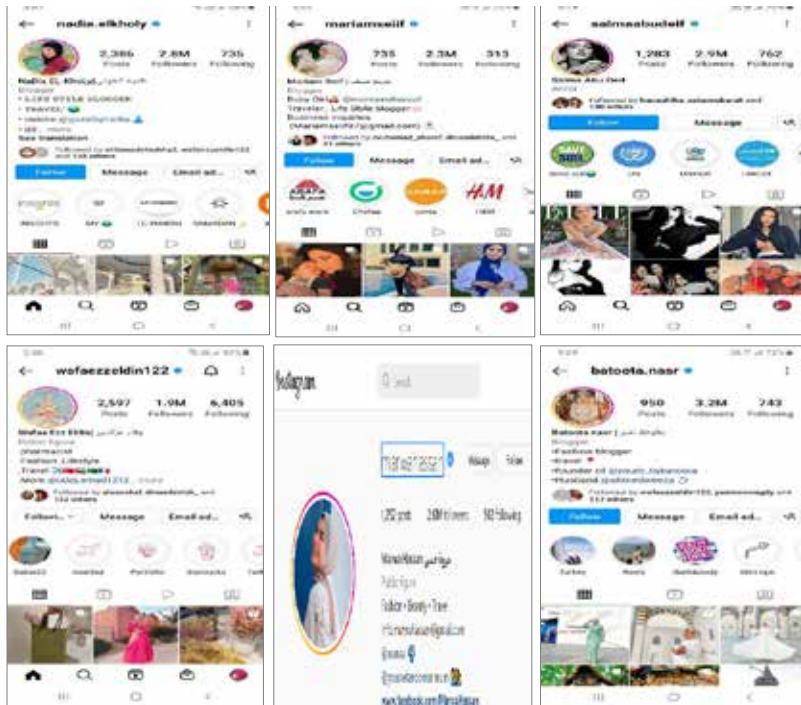


Figure (2): Prominent Egyptian fashion bloggers profiles on Instagram

As fashion bloggers enjoy fame, free products, travelling, and shopping, many young women in Egypt have become fancy of these bloggers. The desire to imitate, or the aspiration to live the same life of, fashion bloggers may make several young women obsessed with specific behaviors.

Interestingly, the content provided by fashion bloggers has developed over years, from styling and makeup to daily routine, travelling, sport, food, etc. In this respect this paper will discuss the influence of following fashion bloggers on young women behavior. Put simply, two influences are investigated in this paper: purchase intention and behavior imitation.

Literature review

The influence of fashion bloggers on purchase intension

The last few years have seen an increasing body of literature addressing fashion bloggers on social media. A large number of studies have dealt with the influence of fashion bloggers on their followers. For example, Sanmigue and Sádaba (2014) found that fashion bloggers have a great influence on followers. Such influences could include, as found by Esteban-Santos and others (2018), purchase intention and assessment of products. In addition, Al-Masri and Yani, (2018) found that most fashion bloggers' followers were more likely to purchase a product they saw at the first time in a fashion blogger's video. Zain and others (2018) found a strong influence of Malaysian fashion bloggers on followers' perception of lifestyle and morals, as well as purchase decision.

However, it should be noted that the effects of fashion bloggers on their followers are not straightforward, there are some factors that control them. For example, Mainolfi and Vergura (2021) found that the credibility of fashion bloggers is decisive for the followers' purchase intention. Similarly, Sanmigue and Sádaba (2014) found that bloggers' personal characteristics influence the probability of their followers to get affected. In addition, Rossi (2016) found four essential elements that fashion bloggers should possess to significantly influence their followers: trustworthiness, expertise, personal relevance, and authenticity. Four other factors were shown, by Zain, et al (2018), to control the effects of fashion bloggers on pre-purchase decision: opinion leader endorsement, eWOM, online community engagement, and dialogic co-certain value. Teng, (2018) found a big influence of Instagram posts of fashion bloggers on consumer's behavior based on some factors like trustworthiness, credibility, strength, immediacy, number, reach, retention and channel.

Some other factors, in contrast, can discourage people from purchasing products promoted on social media. Chen, (2020) found that one of the most reasons that drive people to avoid purchasing products promoted by fashion bloggers is the price of products and the non-relevance to followers' needs.

Motivations of following fashion bloggers have also been a key point in literature, which is considered a stimulus to purchase intention. Esteban-Santos (2018) showed that entertainment and information seeking are the most important motivations that stand behind following fashion bloggers. Similarly, Al-Masri & Yani, (2018) found that younger women, the greatest followers of fashion bloggers, are mainly interested in discovering new items to obtain.

In addition to the studies that addressed fashion bloggers, another part of literature has focused on the influence of social media influencers on purchase decision. Al-Nasser and Mahomed (2020) found that Instagram influencers affect followers' purchase decision in

Saudi Arabia. Some specific elements were found to be crucial for consumers' purchase intention, such as the feedback provided by Instagram influencers (Alotaibi, et al, 2019) and influencers' credibility (AL Salem, 2021; and Fouad Mohamed El Dahrawy, 2019).

Electronic word of mouth and decision making

A large part of studies focused on the effects of the electronic words of bloggers on consumers' decision making and purchase intention. Purwianti and Niawati (2022) found a significant positive effect of e-WOM on purchase intention for beauty products. Chetioui and Lebdaoui (2021) showed that e-WOM on Facebook advertisements affects consumers' attitudes and purchase intention. Firman, et. al. (2021) found that e-WOM of Instagram celebrities has a positive effect on consumers' purchase intention. Trabelsi and Mbarek (2021) found that e-WOM influences positively consumers' purchase intention of cinema tickets. Tien, et al. (2019) showed that perceived usefulness and credibility increase the probability of the adoption of E-WOM messages and purchase intention of cosmetics products.

In addition to the adoption of e-WOM information, Alfina, et.al, (2014) showed that the integrity of the seller is significant variable for purchase intention. Nurittamont (2021) found that the e-WOM has a greater effect on consumers' purchase decision of healthy food products. Tuyu and others (2022) showed that e-WOM affects consumers' purchase decision of store bags. In addition to its influence on purchase intention, Nuseir (2019) found that e-WOM has a significant effect on brand image.

Several studies addressed the factors that control the effects of the electronic word of mouth. Hussain and others (2018) showed that some factors control the effect of electronic word of mouth on purchase intention, including consumers' need for social interaction, economic incentives, and self-worth reinforcement for products. Erkan and Evans study (2016) found some other factors that control the effects of e-WOM, such as quality, usefulness and adoption of information, and attitude toward information. Furthermore, Tajuddin (2020) found that e-WOM quality, e-WOM quantity and sender's expertise have significant relationship with consumer purchase intention.

Moreover, Ho and others (2021) found that three factors of e-WOM positively affect consumers' purchase intention on Instagram: the amount of e-WOM, the source credibility of e-WOM, and the quality of e-WOM, respectively. Sa'ait (2016) found that the influence of e-WOM on consumer's purchase intention is conditioned to e-WOM's relevance, accuracy, timeliness, and comprehensiveness. Iqbal and others (2022) found that e-WOM's credibility, quantity, and format on online shopping platforms have more influence than E-WOM on social media platforms on the consumers' purchase intention toward smartphones.

The literature has also showed contradicted results regarding the direct effect of e-WOM on purchase intention. While Mahmud and others (2020) found that e-WOM has a direct influence on consumers' purchase intention regardless of the trustiness item as a mediator Factor, Dölek and Aydin (2020) found no effect of social media e-WOM on purchase intention.

To sum up, most studies found a significant effect of fashion bloggers and the e-WOM on purchase intention, which refers to the importance of fashion bloggers and social media for marketing. Taking this result as a point of departure, this study seeks to focus on three uncovered areas of research in the context of fashion bloggers: behavior imitation, self-confidence, and the standards of beauty and femininity.

Theoretical framework

This paper is guided by the e-WOM, which is one of the classic concepts in advertising research that was developed in the mid-1990s and has become one of the most effective marketing techniques in the 21st century. The e-WOM is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig, 2004, p. 39).

Simply, e-WOM can be described as providing online information about products and brands to consumers. E-WOM has also been recognized to be a highly transmitter of information, because it allows consumers to easily engage in online conversations. In addition, what can be transferred to consumers through social network sites, according to Cong and Zheng, (2017, p. 544), are people's experiences, views, shares, comments, services, and brands.

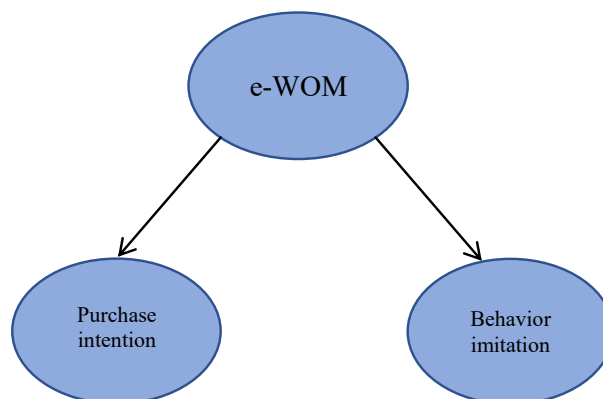


Figure (3): A conceptual framework of the Effect of fashion bloggers word of mouth

Furthermore, the flow of information spread through the internet can reach faster to a wider audience compared to information transmitted through traditional media. Thus, the fashion bloggers' word of mouth, which is the focus of this paper, can be considered important in relation to people's purchase intention and behavior imitation (see Figure 3). However, it should be noted that the influences of fashion bloggers could be controlled by their credibility, quality of products, incentives provided to buy products, credibility of platforms, and users' interactions with the content posted on social media.

Conceptually, purchase intention achieved online is used in this study in referring to consumers' desire to purchase products promoted by fashion bloggers through social media. Behavior imitation is another important concept that refers, according to Liu and Fu (2021, p. 9), to a learning method used to adopt and develop other individuals' skills.

Methodology

Participants and procedures

Participants were selected based on some criteria: using social media, following at least one fashion blogger, and falling in the age category of 18—35. A Snowball sampling technique was used to recruit participants (N=75 females), see Table (1) for demographics. The time of the discussion ranged from 40 to 75 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Arabic language and then transcribed for analysis.

Table (1): Demographic characteristics of the participants

Variables		Number
Age	25-18	42
	35-26	33
	Total	75
Occupation	Employed	20
	graduated	32
	student	23
	Total	75
Type of Education	Private	23
	Public	52
	Total	75
Total		75

The focus groups were conducted at relevant places to participants (universities and special areas at cafes). Some interviews were conducted via Zoom for those who did not have time to meet physically.

In order to enrich the interviews, some examples of famous fashion bloggers were discussed (e.g. @batoota.nasr, @saharfoad, @salmaabudeif, @mariamseifeldien, @Marwa Hassan, and @Ayshah Kamel), all of which are active on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. In addition, some examples of the products promoted by these fashion bloggers were mentioned in the discussion. This procedure helped me to draw the attention of participants and to identify their live impressions during the interviews.

The interviews were audio recorded after obtaining a consent from participants. During the transcription process, all questions and responses were written down, and notes about the meaning of the text were also taken.

Data Analysis and ethical considerations

The transcribed data were coded and analyzed using a thematic analysis, which is commonly used in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 3). Through the thematic analysis, single words were coded and then grouped in specific groups in order to locate the most important themes repeated in the text. The views of participants about the themes were also identified and highlighted.

In order to establish a kind of trust with participants, the following ethical measures were considered:

1. Providing enough information to participants about the purpose of study and its elements.
2. Informing participants that their data and views would only be used for research purposes.
3. Obtaining permission from participants to record the discussions.
4. Anonymizing participants in the study by hiding their full names and place of study/work. Only first names were used to distinguish participants in this paper.
5. Obtaining permission from selected participants to use their photos, in which they appeared while using the products promoted by fashion bloggers. Faces were blurred to maintain the privacy of participants.

Analysis

The analysis showed that participants are following several fashion bloggers, especially the most famous and influential ones, such as menna el_sonny, Sahar ashour, Hany EL-behairy , and Sarah Haady (See Figure. 4), all of which have yielded a large number of followers especially on Instagram that is considered the most important platform for fashion bloggers and their followers.

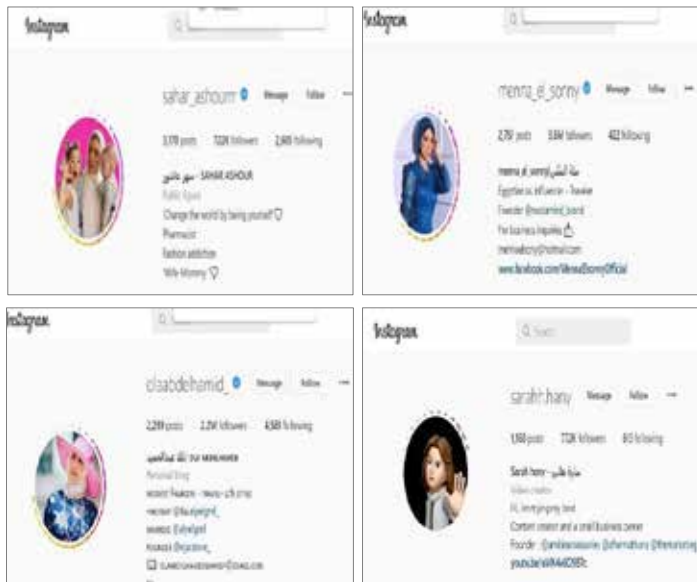


Figure (4): Famous and influential Egyptian fashion bloggers on Instagram

Significantly, fashion bloggers have practiced a magical role on many young women with respect to the extent of attracting attention. Overall, the analysis has shown four categories of influences practiced by fashion bloggers on young women

1. Self-flagellation

Most participants who followed fashion bloggers lack, in different degrees, self-confidence. In this context, some emotions were pinpointed among young women, such as feeling plain and shapeless because of not using promoted products or not following specific fashion tips. Although the disparity between participants in receiving and perceiving fashion bloggers tips, many of them think that fashion bloggers present ideal models of how women should look like. As described by Ashrakat (20 years old): "I have to dress like fashion bloggers to look nice, pretty and fashionable". Mai (34 years old) described what she feels toward fashion bloggers advertising: "when I fail to buy the products promoted by fashion bloggers, I feel unsatisfied about what I have". Similarly, Ghadeer (22 years old) said, "I'm not satisfied with the clothes I have and other staff either, and I feel I want to burn my cupboard when I watch fashion bloggers videos". Jilan (20 years old) stated, "I feel unsatisfied if I didn't buy fashion bloggers' products; that is why I try to save money to buy what the fashion bloggers promote, especially the products I like".

On the other hand, some participants were too satisfied about what they have from clothes, make-up products, and skin and hair care products. These participants, who have shown enough awareness, believe that the stuff promoted by fashion bloggers are only for marketing.

2. Behavior imitation

Several participants expressed their interest in following and learning styles applied by fashion bloggers. They also imitate specific styles, such as choosing appropriate clothing for body shape and recognizing fashionable colors for each season. Nada (22years old) evaluated how others imitate fashion bloggers, “a large number of young women imitate fashion bloggers styles whatever this style is good or bad and whatever it suits our traditions or not”. This vision has been explained by Mai (35 years old), “I like to imitate the fashion bloggers’ styles and the colors of the clothes they use, even if I never tried to dress them up”.

An owner of a Facebook shopping page called Nariman (29 years old) and a psychiatrist called Nourhan (26 years old) also likes to imitate fashion bloggers’ clothing styles and daily skin Routine. Radwa, 22 years old said, “I would like to imitate the fashion bloggers style, and I feel I don’t have any nice clothes after watching the posts and videos of fashion bloggers”. One of the styles imitated and mentioned by Rawan (21 years old) is the way of wearing Cardigan: “I like to imitate the fashion bloggers in some styles like the way I’m wearing my cardigan today, which emulates a fashion blogger named Sherouk Hamed” (see Figure 5). Imitating fashion bloggers’ clothing styles also attracted two other participants Haneen and Nada (22 years old), who like bloggers’ clothing tricks.



Figure (5): a participant (left) imitating the same style of a blogger (right)

Another example of imitated styles is T-shirt wearing; a Jilan (20 years old) stated “I like to imitate fashion bloggers in some styles they wear like straight wears and over sizes. This T-shirt (the one she wears during the focus group) was promoted by a fashion blogger called Sara Hany” (see Figure.6).



Figure (6): a participant (left) imitating the same style of a blogger (right)

Similarly, Ashrakat (20 years old) mentioned another example of how she imitates fashion bloggers: “I like to imitate them in some styles, for example I dress like Amal Abdelhamid [@effah_design], who promotes modest dresses” (see Figure 7). Imitating the modest style has also attracted two other participants -Ashrakat and Doha- (20 years old both), considering it a positive side in bloggers’ life.

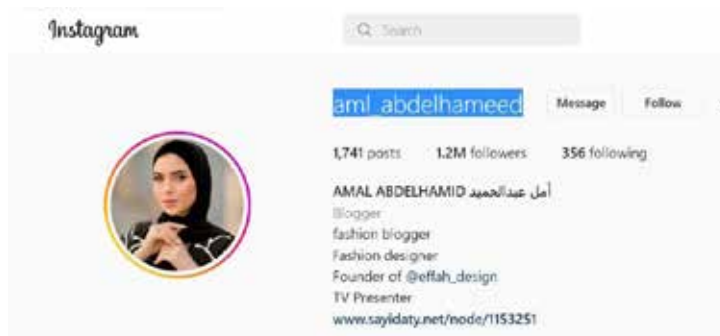


Figure:(7) Amal Abdelhamid blogger, the founder of @effah_design

Imitating fashion bloggers behavior did not confine to styles and makeup, but it also included some characteristics like the way they talk. For example, Fatma (22 years old) stated "I like to imitate them [fashion bloggers] in many situations like their fluency in language [English]". Travelling is another example of how young women like to imitate bloggers; Fatma 20-year-old participant said, "I like to imitate fashion bloggers in their travelling to different countries".

In addition, earning money is another example of how participants like to imitate fashion bloggers. Nada, 25-year-old engineer said, "I like to get much money without making significant effort... Bloggers and influencers created what is called fast profit, which means getting much money without doing much effort. Just through sharing videos they can have everything". Sondos (28 years old) said "I hope to be like fashion bloggers because they can buy everything they want, and I like celebrity". In the same context, Radwa, 22-year-old made a wish: "I hope to be like fashion bloggers, because they get many free staff".

On the other hand, a number of participants (23-year-old dentist, 23-year-old student, 19-year-old student, two 22-year-old graduates, 22-year-old social media page moderator, and 25-year-old engineer) do not like to imitate fashion bloggers in anything, and they think that fashion bloggers present fake and unreal content. Some other participants do not wish to be like fashion bloggers, because of the difficulties they face, such as living under the spotlights and privacy lacking.

3. Purchase intention

One of the most important influences of fashion bloggers is purchase intention, based on which we can identify how much the bloggers are important for marketing. In some cases, developing a purchase intention would occur even if the promoted products were not liked. For example, Aya, 33-year-old stated, "I feel the neediness of trying products promoted by fashion bloggers, even if they were bad". For the type of products bought by followers, skin and hair care products came in the first place (e.g., Derma-tik foundation, Eva Sunblock cream for treating spots, and Clio Sunblock).

Some participants showed much interest in products promoted by fashion bloggers, and they formed a purchase intention. For example, a number of participants (Enas, 22 years old, Rawan 21 years old, and Hanya, 22 years old) mentioned that watching fashion bloggers videos developed a desire to buy products such as skin care.

For other followers, developing a purchase intention was associated with some factors. For example, several participants (Nada, 25-year-old, Yara, 23-year-old, and Mariem, 19 year-old student) expressed their interest to buy the products promoted by fashion bloggers only if they were necessary to them. Ghadeer, Hanya, Enas, Salma, Menna (22

years old) all linked the purchase intention to the type of promoted products. Effectiveness was also another factor, Menna (20 years old) said, "I like to buy products through fashion bloggers if these products were effective only".

In contrast to those who formed a purchase intention, some other participants did not develop a purchase intention as a result of following fashion bloggers. For example, a participant mentioned "fashion bloggers aren't good enough and don't affect my decision to buy a specific product". Similarly, another participant said, "I don't trust fashion bloggers and any products they promote". In addition, Mariem (20 years old) stated, "I don't have any curiosity to try products promoted by fashion bloggers".

In addition to the purchase intention, several participants bought many products promoted by bloggers, such as clothes, skin care products, and hair products. It is also worth mentioning that the trust of some participants in fashion bloggers decreased after they bought products that were found to be of poor quality. For example, a radio announcer called Zahraa (23 years old) stated, "my trust in a fashion blogger decreased after I used a skin cream promoted by her; but I remained following the blogger to get benefited from her in another aspects of life".

4. Standards of beauty and femininity

Scrolling through the pages of fashion bloggers, we can easily locate new styles, clothes, and products, that might help followers obtain information about the standards of beauty. For example, Nariman and Nourhan (29 and 26 years old) stressed that fashion bloggers brought up new standards of beauty and femininity in relation to body shape and face features. Some participants talked about these new standards, such as changing the size and shape of women veils, mixing classic and casual clothes, and the daily skin routines. For example, Amal (26 years old) said, "I changed my style of hijab to Turban after I saw my favorite fashion blogger wearing it". A 23-year-old Radio announcer called Zahra said, "I like to get more information through fashion bloggers about the fitness of the body and the exercises I need ". Fatma, 23-year-old engineer stated, "I got more information about the healthy food and healthy lifestyle from fashion bloggers".

Interestingly, many participants linked the consumption of the products promoted by fashion bloggers to femininity. Yara, 23-year-old journalist said, "I like to replicate fashion bloggers in their ways of capturing photos, the positions they take, and the places they appear in while taking photos and videos".

Conclusion

This paper discussed fashion bloggers' influences through 15 focus groups conducted

on 75 Egyptian young women (aged 18–35 years). The focus groups addressed how young women are attracted to fashion bloggers, what behaviors they imitate, and whether they buy products promoted by fashion bloggers.

The analysis has come up with four interesting categories of influences: 1- self-flagellation, 2- behavior imitation, 3- purchase intention, and

4- New standards of beauty and femininity. Despite the demographic differences between them, most participants were affected in a similar fashion by fashion bloggers.

These four influences seem to shape fashion marketing in at least two ways. **First**, the increased dependence of marketing on fashion bloggers as a key promoter of products. The issue is that fashion bloggers are not only successful in reaching consumers, but they are also effective in convincing them about the importance of specific products. The reason of this effectiveness can be traced back to the interactive relationship between bloggers and followers, that was called by Lou (2021) as ‘trans-parasocial relationship’, which refers to the strength of interaction and trust between both sides. Another reason is that fashion bloggers usually use the electronic word of mouth (Hennig, 2004), which is also considered effective in marketing.

Second, regardless of buying or intending to buy products, fashion bloggers have provided new behaviors that have become common and standard in society. Behaviors like taking photos, clothing, celebrating, eating, exercising, talking, etc., have been carried out in a style that has not been common in society. In such a way, several behaviors have been standardized thanks to many fashion bloggers who give simple behaviors a touch of beauty as they think they do. This have led many young women, as shown in the analysis, to imitate fashion bloggers regardless of the quality of promoted products.

To conclude, this paper proposes that fashion bloggers have not only shaped fashion marketing, but they have imposed new standards of beauty/fashion on society that are going to be consumed many years to come.

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