Student Identification of Societal and Fashion Trends Through Blogs

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Dubbed the *new celebrities*, bloggers have recently emerged as societal influencers. Bloggers have gained traction with consumers worldwide by posting relevant information on a myriad of topics, which can include fashion and lifestyle posts. Blog posts reviewing products have produced measurable interest and sales for many brands (Strugatz, 2016). To analyze the influence that bloggers have on societal and fashion trends, a senior-level capstone course compared and analyzed two blogs for underlying trends. Students also considered the authenticity of sponsored content.

The objective of the Blog Analysis for Underlying Trends assignment is to 1) use critical thinking skills to create relevant relationships between popular blog content and societal trends, and 2) to use problem-solving skills to consider the authenticity of blog content. Students select two blogs that are of personal interest. Once students have identified their blogs, they are to read through one year of blog posts for each blog. The two blogs need to encompass the same topic (i.e. fashion, beauty), but blog posts do not need to be similar. Students are expected to analyze each blog's dissemination style, consumer reach, societal impact on trends, and authenticity of each blog. The identification of underlying future trends are also identified.

Two blogs are analyzed, which enables students to compare various styles of disseminating blog content, such as through visuals or text. Completed assignments are an average of four pages in length, which includes the students' analysis of societal and fashion trends, as well as an analysis of the authenticity of each blog. Students are also required to accurately cite supporting literature, the textbook, and the blog.

Grading criteria for this assignment include the ability to thoughtfully consider how the disseminated information could impact both societal and fashion trends. When students describe and analyze the blog for societal and fashion trends, students are to use appropriate terminology to describe trend impacts. Such terminology is identified in course lectures, supplemental readings, and the textbook Fashion Forecasting by Divita and Brannon (2015). Students are also expected to use appropriate grammar, spelling, and APA formatting. All students were familiar with blogs before the start of the course and 81% of students stated that they regularly followed one or two blogs. Blogs used for this assignment were self-selected by the student.

Over the past two fall semesters, students have identified the Blog Analysis for Underlying Trends assignment as a useful tool for identifying societal and fashion trends. Students have also stated the usefulness of this assignment through an open-ended, anonymous, and online survey on Qualtrics. Students in this course provided voluntary responses, in which a combined 92% response rate was obtained. The open-ended questions were coded and analyzed

by the instructor for overarching themes. Two themes were identified, which include *Be Cautious of Sponsored Posts* and *Blogger Relevance in Societal Trends*.

The theme, *Be Cautious of Sponsored Posts*, reveals how students' perceptions of authenticity have changed due to their analysis of two different blogs. Students determined that sponsored posts may not provide an authentic viewpoint from the blogger. Interestingly, a majority of students stated that they had not thought about sponsored posts in the past, but are now cognizant of how free products or monetary incentives could influence a blogger to alter his or her true opinions of products or fashion trends.

The theme, *Blogger Relevance in Societal Trends*, provides insight into how students determine future societal and fashion trends. Based on student reactions, many were surprised to identify bloggers as social influencers. Since the influence of bloggers is relatively new, many students had not considered how bloggers have impacted society and the fashion industry. Students were able to identify underlying societal and fashion trends based on blog posts and the style of information dissemination, which is mostly visual in nature.

A majority of students stated that completing the Blog Analysis for Underlying Trends assignment provided awareness on the importance of bloggers in the fashion industry, as well as in society. The assignment also shed light on the authenticity of blogger content, as many popular blogs have sponsorships or provide free products to the blogger for his or her public review. The assignment also exposes students to the changes occurring in the industry regarding how product information is disseminated.

The Blog Analysis for Underlying Trends assignment initiates critical thinking and problem-solving skills for students. Using these skills, students are able to determine the importance of bloggers in the industry, as well as in overarching society. Students are also able to analyze the authenticity of content by reviewing bloggers' writing style, the typical method of disseminating information, and the availability of product information. The popularity of this assignment is due to the exposure and relevance of blogs to each student, as well as the interest in understanding societal and fashion trends. Adaptations to this assignment could include other forms of social media and user-generated content, both of which are expected to grow in popularity over the next ten years.

References

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