



## **Effect of Psychological Closeness on Consumer Attitudes Toward Fashion Blogs: The Moderating Effect of Fashion Leadership and Interpersonal LOV**

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Fashion blogging has become a new way of branding. Indeed, a number of major fashion brands have embraced blogging and other forms of social-media engagement, using them to connect to their consumers or reach out to potential customers (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011). Even though fashion blogging is now one of the most popular advertising tools for many fashion brands, few studies have examined the dynamics of blogs in terms of consumer perception and behavior. Only a small number of research studies on blogs to date have focused on blogger motivations (Huang, Shen, Lin, & Chang, 2007), blog content (Chu & Kamal, 2008), and social-media marketing narratives (Kozinets et al., 2010). These previous studies have not focused on the individual consumer connection to a specific blogger and how the strength of that connection affects consumer attitudes toward fashion blogs in general and purchase intentions for the products presented by an individual blogger. Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) posits that people assign themselves to certain social categories to help define their own identity. This focus can lead many to respond favorably to stimuli (e.g. fashion bloggers) that they identify closely with as individuals. The concept of psychological closeness has been defined as perceived similarity or feeling at home (Kreilkamp, 1984). There is a feeling that one can really talk to someone specific and indeed has something in common with that other (Kreilkamp, 1984). Psychological closeness of the relationship between blog readers and bloggers is somewhat different from traditional psychological closeness, as blogging can produce both one-sided and two-sided relationships, depending on the reader's activity level on the blog. Therefore, to measure the psychological closeness of individuals to a personal fashion blogger, the current study employs Parasocial Interaction Theory (PSI). Based on Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Parasocial Interaction Theory (PSI), this study examines an individual's psychological closeness to a fashion blogger and its influence on that individual's attitude toward a fashion blog and one's purchase intention toward the fashion products displayed by the fashion blogger. Further, fashion leadership (Gutman & Mills, 1982) and the interpersonal List of Values (LOV) developed by Kahle (1983) are examined as moderators that can influence the strengths of these two relationships. Finally, the influence of attitude toward the fashion blog and then actual purchase intention is studied.

A convenience sample of 171 female college students in a U. S. university provided usable responses to our survey. The instruments were adapted from previous studies to measure psychological closeness (Theran, Newberg, & Gleason, 2010), purchase intention (Mackensie et al., 1986), attitude toward the presented fashion blog (Bouhleb et al., 2010), fashion leadership (Gutman & Mills, 1982), and the List of Values (LOV) (Kahle, 1983). The research hypotheses were tested using a set of regression models whose parameters were estimated using the ordinary

least squares (OLS) method. The results show that psychological closeness makes an important contribution to attitude toward the fashion blog ( $\beta = .30, p < .001$ ). The effect of interaction terms between psychological closeness and fashion leadership was also significant ( $\beta = .32, p < .05$ ). These results show that psychological closeness makes a significant contribution to purchase intention ( $\beta = .25, p < .001$ ). However, the effect of the interaction between psychological closeness and LOV interpersonal influence was not significant ( $\beta = .06, p > .10$ ). Lastly, a simple regression analysis was performed for attitude toward the fashion blog as the independent variable and purchase intention as the dependent variable. These results yielded a significant impact of blog attitude on purchase intention ( $\beta = .28, p < .001$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $F(1,170) = 14.50, p < .001$ ).

The findings of the current study reveal the important roles of psychological closeness to a fashion blogger when grounded in PSI and a direct influence on both attitudes toward a fashion blog and purchase intention toward the fashion products displayed by the fashion blogger. The current study suggests theoretical and practical implications for those researchers and marketers who seek to understand the behavior of today's young consumer behavior, as it relates to involvement with fashion blogs.

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