

Identifying Characteristics of Successful Fashion Bloggers and Their Influence on Consumer  
Purchase Decisions

by  
Marisa Chen

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

Honors College

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Merchandising Management  
(Honors Associate)

Presented June 3, 2020  
Commencement June 2020



## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Marisa Chen for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Merchandising Management presented on June 3, 2020. Title: Identifying Characteristics of Successful Fashion Bloggers and Their Influence on Consumer Purchase Decisions.

Abstract approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Kathy K. Mullet

Fashion bloggers have become a changing force of the retail industry over the past decade, redefining where consumers look for fashion inspiration, product reviews, and brand credibility. Despite the widespread popularity of fashion bloggers, there is little industry consensus as to what characteristics make a fashion blogger successful and to what extent they influence consumer purchase decisions. This study investigates the role of fashion bloggers, how they are perceived, and their effectiveness at influencing consumer purchase decisions. An online survey was distributed and a total of 76 individuals aged 18 and older participated in this study. The results indicated that the commonalities between fashion bloggers are that they serve as style and aesthetic inspiration. Online shopping is a common trait amongst the respondents but there is a clear gap in their buying choices and the products shared by fashion bloggers because only 57.53% of respondents have purchased an item a blogger recommended. The survey responses showed that the most common reasons an individual does not purchase a blogger's recommendation is price or doesn't fit with their needs/wants. We can hypothesize that fashion blogger's serve as an inspiration figure rather than a personal seller to the majority of their audiences.

Key Words: fashion bloggers, social media marketing, influencer marketing, personal branding,

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project of Marisa Chen presented on June 3, 2020.

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

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Marisa Chen, Author

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
Purpose of Study .....	3
Objectives .....	3
Definition of Terms .....	4
Chapter 2 Review of Literature .....	6
Marisa Kay .....	11
Chapter 3 Methodology .....	14
Chapter 4 Results .....	16
Chapter 5 Discussion .....	38
Chapter 6 Conclusion .....	42
Recommendations and Limitations .....	43
References .....	45
Appendices .....	47



# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

Fashion bloggers have become a changing force of the retail industry over the past decade, redefining where consumers look for fashion inspiration, product reviews, and brand credibility. This change in consumer behavior has retailers and marketers alike turning their attention and resources towards building relationships with fashion bloggers to increase sales and brand awareness (Gould, 2010).

The concept of ‘fashion blogging’ began in the early 2000’s with magazines and fashion leaders publishing opinion-based fashion articles and blog posts. The emergence of platforms like MySpace, Blogger, etc. enabled the average consumer with an affinity for fashion to share their personal style. The first wave of fashion bloggers quickly grew in awareness and audience size as social media apps like Facebook and Instagram grew at exponential rates in the years 2010-2016 (Shah, 2016). What started as women taking outfit pictures with their camera and tripod has evolved to editorial fashion shoots, the monetization of ‘OOTD’ posts (outfit of the day), and a new consumer that will continue to transform the way we know retail.

It is integral to the retail industry and all of its complements to understand the role of fashion bloggers as we enter the era of social shopping (Abbamonte, 2018). Social shopping describes a new trend amongst consumer behavior that utilizes technology and social media to influence the completion of an individual’s purchase. Consumers are looking at new outlets and fashion figures to influence their shopping habits that retailers

utilizing traditional marketing strategies should see as new markets of entry, not competition.

Fashion bloggers can be categorized by their audience size, the type of content they produce, and the platforms they use to publish content. The term ‘fashion blogger’ is more of an industry construct than a technical term. Fashion bloggers can have an audience size from 1000 individuals to one million, publish on platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, or personal website to speak exclusively about fashion, or cover other lifestyle topics like beauty, travel, and home décor. Because the term ‘fashion blogger’ has evolved so much due to the diversity within the industry, I will briefly define the characteristics of the some notable fashion bloggers.

The most popular fashion bloggers who are known by mainstream media have made a full-time career out of blogging. As entrepreneurs, nearly all functions of their business are done solely by the individual. This would include business strategy, accounting, marketing, content strategy, photography, and legal to name a few of the necessary components. Some bloggers will larger followings, typically 100,000 followers and above, will hire an influencer marketing agency, brand partnerships coordinator, personal assistant, or photographer to assist in the day-to-day operations of the business. These bloggers with large numbers of followers typically produce two types of content. The first is original content that can come in the form of blog posts, social media posts, photos, or videos, and are intended to support their personal brand. This content reinforces their brand message, contributes to the blogger’s overall identity, and is not in partnership with a brand. The second type of content is brand sponsored content, which is the largest component of the blogger’s revenue. Bloggers and brands will partner with the

purpose of the blogger promoting a specific product, service, or brand to their followers. Brand's seek out bloggers with a combination of large, influential, and engaged followings that aligns with the brand's target market. Bloggers play a key role in sharing the brand's key message with their followers in an original and authentic way. A blogger's unique style can come across in the campaign in a variety of ways like through the pairing of different clothes, shoes, and accessories, incorporating recent fashion trends, design, or photography.

### **Purpose of Study**

Since the early 2000s, bloggers have changed consumer shopping habits. Through the use of social media marketing, fashion search engines like LikeToKnowIt and Shopstyle, and creating their own brand identity, bloggers have quickly become the most influential tool for brand marketing. The purpose of my study will be to identify what aspects of a blogger are most successful to brand marketing and their influence of consumer purchasing decisions.

### **Objectives**

1. To develop a Qualtrics survey based on personal knowledge of fashion blogging and influencer marketing
2. Analyze survey data to identify popular fashion bloggers, how they are perceived, and their effectiveness at influencing consumer purchase decisions

3. To use data to make recommendations to enhance a personal fashion blog;  
marisakay.blog

### **Definition of Terms**

**Brand sponsored content**— promotion that is paid for by a brand or advertiser, created and shared by an influencer or blogger that features products from the brand or advertiser

**Fashion blog:** Fashion blogs are blogs that cover the fashion industry, clothing, and personal style

**Fashion blogger:** The modern use of the title ‘blogger’ now refers to someone who produces original content to post on their website and/or social media, that supports their business

**Influencer marketing:** a form of social media marketing involving endorsements and product placement from influencers, people and organizations who have a purported expert level of knowledge or social influence in their field

**Electronic word of mouth (eWOM)**— form of marketing where consumers share or exchange information about goods and services using online or mobile platforms

**Lifestyle brand**— a brand that embodies the interests, values, and attitudes of a group for marketing purposes by appealing to aspects of the consumer’s way of life

**Original content**— content including pictures, video, and spoken or written comments produced by a blogger or influencer that is new and unique, and has never been published before

**Personal branding:** the conscious and intentional effort to create and influence the Public’s perception of an individual by positioning them as an authority in their

industry, elevating their credibility, and differentiating themselves from the competition.

**Social media**— websites and other online means of communication that are used by large groups of people to share information and develop social connections. Social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Literature**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the characteristics of popular fashion bloggers and assess their overall influence on consumer purchasing decisions. These results will be used to infer how new methods and strategy can be applied to my personal blog, Marisa Kay. The review of literature will concentrate on existing research and analysis of fashion bloggers, their role in industry, their relationship with their audience, and how they influence consumer purchase decisions.

Before fashion blogging became known within the fashion industry as a career, it began with fashion enthusiasts and brand loyalists posting fashion content on their personal blogs. This concept is known as “vigilante marketing,” which defined as unpaid advertising and marketing efforts undertaken by brand loyalists (Laurell, 2013). The emergence of this form of marketing illustrated the potential influence of new and inexpensive marketing strategies on online and social media platforms. As the audience size of these personal blogs grew to thousands of monthly viewers, brands began to seek out these fashion enthusiasts for their ability to speak credibly and influentially about products. This transition from vigilante marketing to the co-creation of brand marketing between businesses and bloggers was the beginning of fashion bloggers as we know them in 2020, at the time this paper was written.

Fashion blogging is amongst one of the most commercially successful uses of digital media. Published by the Journal of Global Fashion Marketing, “Can Fashion

Blogs Function as a Marketing Tool to Influence Consumer Behavior? Evidence from Norway,” explores the extent to which fashion blogs can function as a marketing tool to influence consumer behavior. The authors suggest that, “Information overload has led consumers to become less interested in brand messages delivered through traditional advertisement.” (Coste-Maniere, Hoffman, Stankeviciute, 2013). Coste-Maniere and his co-authors propose that blogs and social networks have become an alternative communication tool for brands to build and strengthen their relationship with consumers in the hopes of influencing their purchase decisions. The distinct difference between traditional marketing channels and blogs is that they engage in customer conversation which allows customers to take the initiative when being exposed to brand promotion and learn about them in an interactive way. As noted by Coste-Maniere and his co-authors, fashion bloggers are assumed to be one of the reference groups representing the important sources of influence in users’ decision-making process specifically for fashion products.

The act of building a fashion blog is also known within the industry as ‘personal branding’ because it requires a deep understanding and strategic positioning of self-branding to strategically position one’s self within the industry. As explained in “Personal Branding Through Fashion Blogging”, personal branding is modeled after product branding, by establishing a unique personal identity, communication with a target market, and evaluating the value the individual offers to satisfy their audience’s wants and needs (Safitri, 2017). Branding of self-presentation through social media profiles, blogs, and personal websites is becoming a common practice. For those who are most successful at it, leveraging their personal brand within the fashion industry has led to

immense career success. It is important to understand the role personal branding plays in the success of a fashion blog because the individual, or the fashion blogger, is essentially the product selling the brand. Their personal style, how they portray themselves, and their unique voice, are all aspects of brand identity that their audience relates to or aspires to be like. When we analyze the role of personal branding in successful fashion blogs we may find commonalities in the characteristics of these individuals and what characteristics are most attractive to amass a large social media audience.

One facet of fashion bloggers that make them incredibly valuable to consumers and brands alike is their ability to amass not only a large online audience, but also a community. Fashion bloggers are amongst some of the most effective leaders at monetizing an online community. The relationship between fashion bloggers and their audiences have evolved overtime with the emergence of social media. However, the depth of this online community only extends so far. As noted in “The Megaphone Effect: Taste and Audience in Fashion Blogging”, it was found that fashion bloggers provide aesthetic inspiration and exemplary taste, fashion guidance that consumers cannot get from professional and institutional sources like brand advertisers (McQuarrie, Miller, Phillips, 2012). McQuarrie and her coauthors, goes on to explain that, “What bloggers offer, then, is not a supportive community, or a badge of group membership, but an exemplar of taste. Bloggers are engaged in an enterprise of distinction... Bloggers establish themselves as better at style than others— leaders, not fellow members of a community. This taste leadership appears to be what makes a blog sufficiently valuable to other consumers to build the blogger an audience”. McQuarrie et al. has a unique perspective of fashion bloggers as an elite fashion consumer who because of their large



following, is now distinguished in their status and personal style from the common consumer. This interpretation of fashion bloggers closely mirrors the view consumers have of celebrities, who are also powerful online figures often leveraged by brands to influence consumer purchases.

The widespread use of the Internet has led to a new form of word of mouth, electronic word of mouth (eWOM). This new vehicle for sharing recommendations as well as negative reviews has proven to be extremely influential amongst consumers, business, and the general population. The spread of eWOM is due to, “Consumers increasingly [using] online tools (e.g., social media, blogs, etc.) to share their opinions about the products and services they consume... These tools are significantly changing everyday life and the relationship between customers and businesses” (Answers, 2020). To appeal to new consumer behaviors, companies are tapping into eWOM as a new opportunity to listen to customer needs and also promote their products or services with the goal of increasing their return. What makes eWOM so attractive to brands is, “... the speed at which it spreads and the ease of access to it” (Answers, 2020). Consumers can easily turn to the internet or online media to inform their purchase decision, and if brands want to remain at the top of mind, they will need to effectively utilize eWOM to reach customers in a fast changing and saturated digital market.

Brands are constantly looking for new and effective ways to reach the new digital wave of customers through eWOM. Cited in “Impact of Fashion Bloggers on Consumer Purchase Decisions,” one of the downsides of eWOM generated by the population at large is the lack of credibility (Answers, 2020). This is due to the anonymity between the communicator and receiver of the information. This challenge has seamlessly been

addressed by fashion bloggers rising in popularity as one of the most credible outlets of eWOM. Their credibility is built through their fashion expertise, length of time they have been blogging, number of followers they have, and relationship built with their followers. As experts and industry leaders, they are able to disseminate information to a large audience quickly and with credibility. Industry research has found that bloggers are becoming more influential than celebrities. In a study conducted by Business News Daily in 2011, it was found that 55% of U.S. female blog readers have purchased a product that the fashion blogger recommended. In the same study, it was also found that 20% of women who use social media were motivated by a blogger's endorsement versus only 13% who were motivated by celebrity endorsements.

Looking further into how social media platforms have become an essential medium for businesses to market to consumers, the information communicated on social media platforms influences the consumer's decision-making process and knowledge-based decision support system. Social media platforms have also expanded businesses' ability to share brand promotions, brand marketing, and product diffusion to a large audience at a fast rate (Arora, Aswani, Bansal, Dwivedi, Kandpal, 2019). While social media platforms have recently become a popular marketing strategy it is noted in, "Measuring Social Media Influencer Index—Insights From Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram" that the "High volume data is changing the landscape of digital marketing and raised great challenges to turn this brand marketing data into business insights using analytical modelling and management techniques." (Arora, Aswani, Bansal, Dwivedi, Kandpal, 2019). Arora and their coauthors goes on to explain that social media influencers are one strategy through which brands can market to a large and relevant

audience. Social media influencers are defined in this article as users who have highly established credibility for a specific industry— these individuals have a large audience that trusts them due to their authenticity and position. The methods by which social media influencers use their social media accounts and the relationship they have with their audience is very similar to a fashion blogger.

The widespread acceptance of fashion bloggers as credible opinion leaders may also be due to the historic methods of traditional advertisements. There has been a trend amongst consumers that lose interest in traditional advertising outlets that bombard them with brand messages. Because of this general turn away from traditional advertising, fashion bloggers are even more appealing to consumers as a new means of brand advertising due to the more interactive, communicative, and relatable nature of brand messaging created by fashion bloggers.

### **Marisa Kay**

An objective of this study was to use the data collected to enhance and further the of develop my personal fashion blog: Marisa Kay. An overview of this blog and its current state is provided by the researcher: Marisa Chen.

I started my fashion blog, ‘sincerelymar.com’ in September of 2016. As a design student with an entrepreneurial spirit, I felt compelled to share my interests in fashion and business in a unique portfolio format. My blog began as a portfolio opportunity to demonstrate my applied abilities in curating outfits and business strategy. I chose a fashion blog as my portfolio format due to the many fashion bloggers I followed on social media who inspired me to share my creative abilities.

The fast-growing nature of social media platforms and business opportunities within those platforms, quickly transitioned my blog from a portfolio to a part time job. Within 12 months of starting my blog I was regularly publishing original and brand sponsored content, dedicating around 15 hours of work a week. Two years after ‘sincerelymar.com’ was founded, I rebranded my website and social media platforms to a new name, ‘Marisa Kay.’ Marisa Kay expanded beyond my initial fashion blog to my personal brand, sharing style inspiration, travel, and life advice. The goal of Marisa Kay is to inspire the modern young woman through ‘Everyday Elevated’ fashion and digital storytelling. ‘Everyday Elevated’ is Marisa Kay’s motto to describe the ways Marisa elevates her basic style through quality and attention to detail. As of November of 2019 Marisa Kay reaches over 750,000 individuals every month across Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, and marisakay.blog. Over the last three years I’ve partnered with nearly 50 brands and businesses including Abercrombie & Fitch, Boohoo, Forever21, Hilton Hotels, Lulu’s, and ZARA.

With over three years of experience in the blogging industry, it has become clear that the majority of brands are becoming increasingly reliant on fashion bloggers and influencers in their marketing efforts. Marketing is no longer limited to traditional outlets like print, TV, magazines, and radio. Brands are utilizing social media channels, bloggers, influencers, and content creators to create more engaging, authentic, and on trend marketing.

I have also seen a transition in the consumer’s perception of fashion bloggers. Ten years ago, fashion bloggers were seen as opinion leaders or fashion mavens. Today, due

to their growing audience size and presence on digital platforms, bloggers are seen more as public figures and businesses, which creates the need for a more strategic approach.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Objective 1**

1. To develop a Qualtrics survey based on personal knowledge of fashion blogging and influencer marketing.

Based on the review of literature and personal knowledge an on-line survey was developed. A recruitment email advertisement was developed and approved by the Oregon State IRB (Appendix A). This email was posted on the College of Business Student newsletter, posted on two course Canvas sites for Design Courses, and promoted through the author's business Instagram account, @itsmarisa\_kay. The goal of the online survey was to target 18-35 year olds and examine these consumer's perceptions of bloggers and what attributes influence their shopping decisions. The survey included questions about blogger profiles, social media content, and consumer shopping habits. The survey and the cover letter are in Appendix B.

The survey and recruitment materials were approved by Oregon State University IRB board as an exempt study.

#### **Objective 2**

2. To analyze the survey responses and identify popular fashion bloggers, how they are perceived, and their effectiveness at influencing consumer purchase decisions.

Descriptive statistics will be used to analyze the data from the survey.

### Objective 3

3. To use data to make recommendations to enhance the author's personal fashion blog; marisakay.blog

The researcher will review the data collected and make recommendations based on her personal experience with the fashion blog. These recommendations will be discussed in the Chapter 6 Discussion.

## Chapter 4

### Results

The link to a twenty question survey was posted in an online college publication for two design classes, the College of Business Student newsletter, and promoted through the author's business Instagram account, @itsmarisa\_kay. Participants self-selected if they would complete the survey. No incentives were provided for taking the survey. The purpose of the survey was to measure how many people follow popular fashion bloggers on Instagram, why they follow those bloggers, what the respondent believes contributes to that blogger's success, and if bloggers influence that consumer's buying decisions. The insight from this survey will then be interpreted and applied to my fashion blog, Marisa Kay, to better inform my business strategy.

The survey received 76 responses between the dates of May 2019 and June 2019. The results of each question are presented below. If all of the questions of the survey were not completed, the partial results were not included in the dataset.

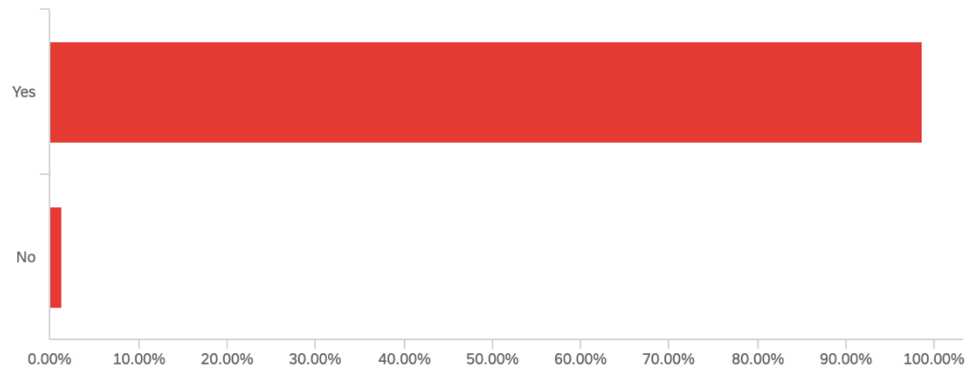
1. Do you use Instagram? Figure 1

- Yes 99 percent

- No 1 percent



Figure 1: Use of Instagram



#	Field	Choice	Count
1	Yes	98.68%	75
2	No	1.32%	1

76

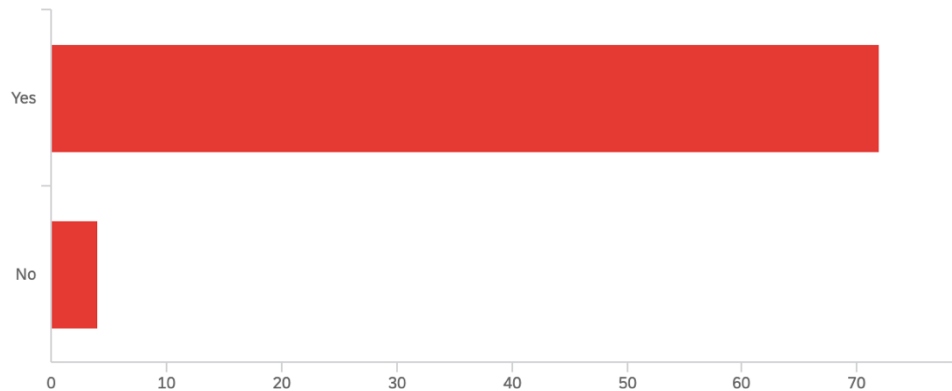
Results: 99 percent of respondents use Instagram. This data implies that Instagram is a commonly used social media platform among the survey respondents and likely has a large audience for fashion bloggers to market to.

Purpose: The purpose of this question is to survey how many responders actively use Instagram.

## 2. Do you follow any bloggers on Instagram? Figure 2

- Yes 95 percent
- No 5 percent

Figure 2: Instagram usage of respondents



#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	94.74% 72
2	No	5.26% 4
		76

Results: 95 percent of respondents who responded ‘yes’ to question one follow bloggers on Instagram. This data implies that bloggers are a common category that Instagram users follow.

Purpose: This question segments the survey responders based on what they use Instagram for and determines what questions they will receive for the rest of the survey.

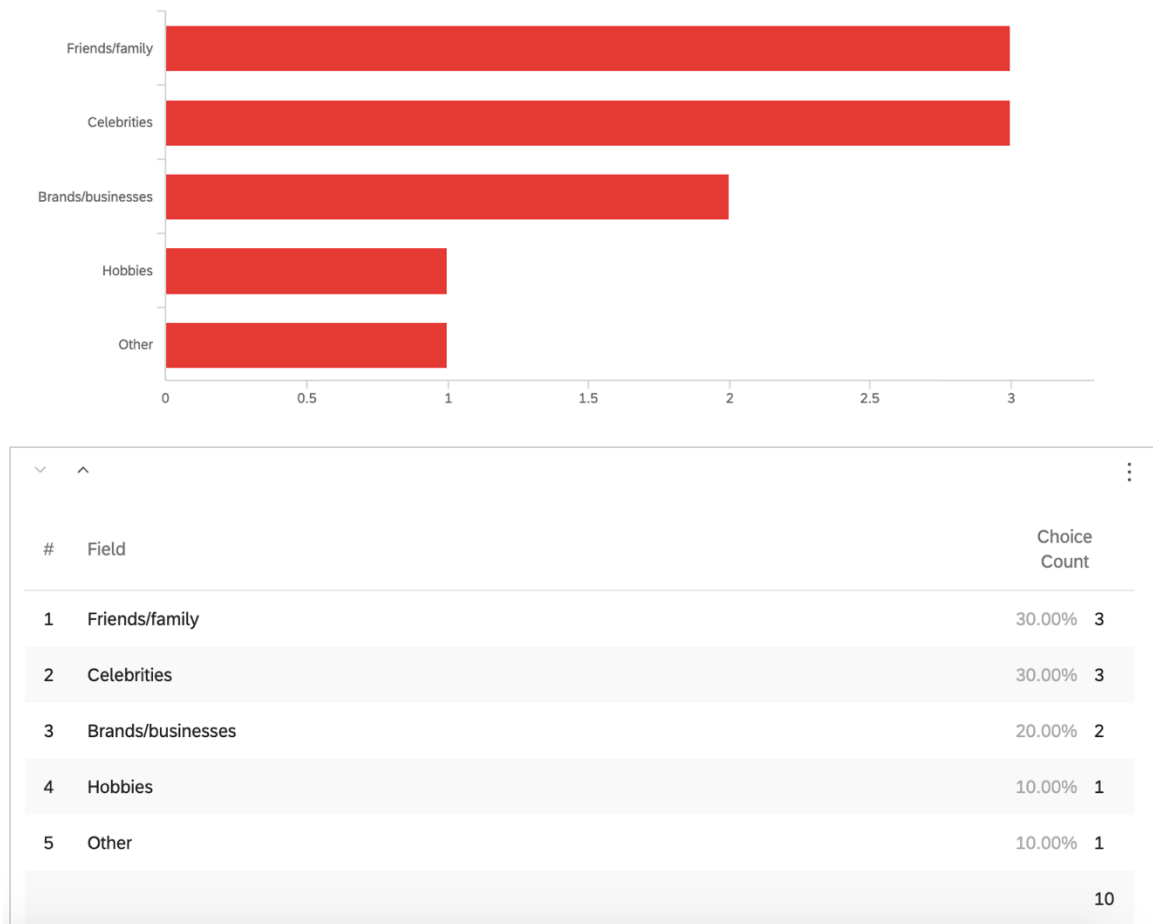
If respondent replied “no” to question #2, they were asked the following question:

3. Who do you follow on Instagram? Select all that apply Figure 3

- Friends/family 30 percent
- Celebrities 30 percent
- Brands/businesses 20 percent

- Hobbies 10 percent
- Other 10 percent

Figure 3: Who respondents follow on Instagram



Results: Instagram users who do not follow fashion bloggers instead follow a variety of accounts that range from personal to business.

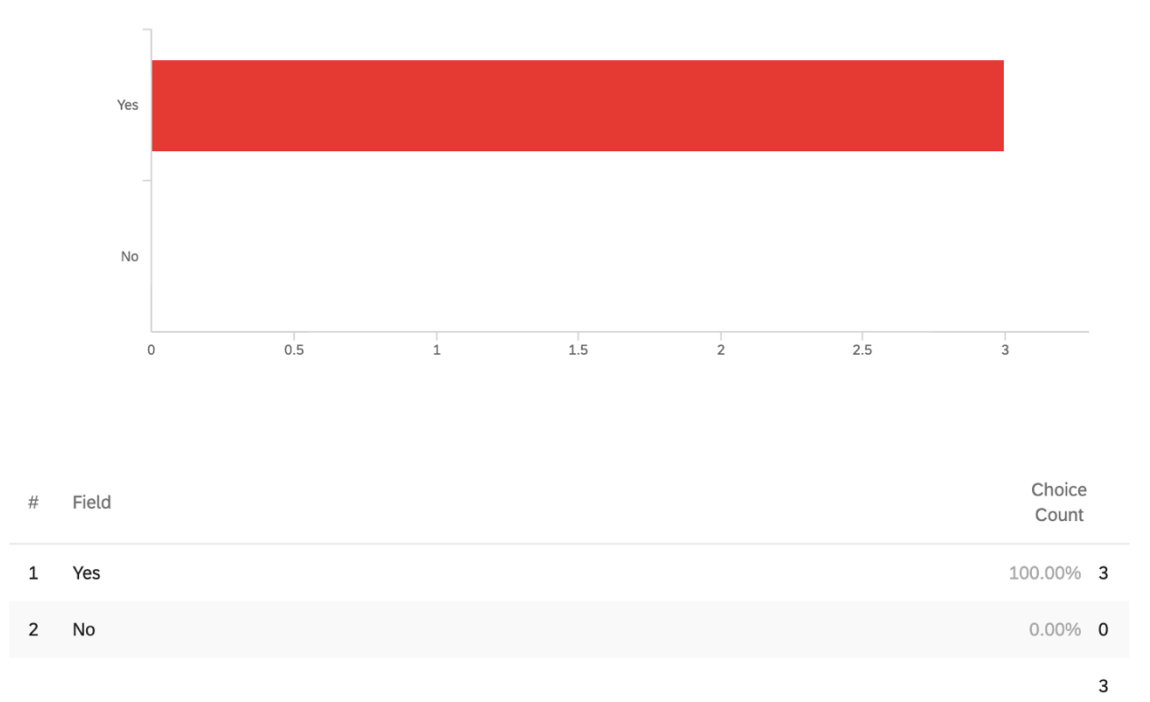
Purpose: This question was only given to those who responded “no” to question two. It is designed to measure what type of accounts people follow on Instagram.

If respondent replied “no” to question #2, they were asked the following question:

4. Are you interested in fashion? Figure 4

- Yes 100 percent
- No 0 percent

Figure 4: Respondent interest in fashion



Results: 100 percent of respondents who responded ‘no’ to question two are interested in fashion.

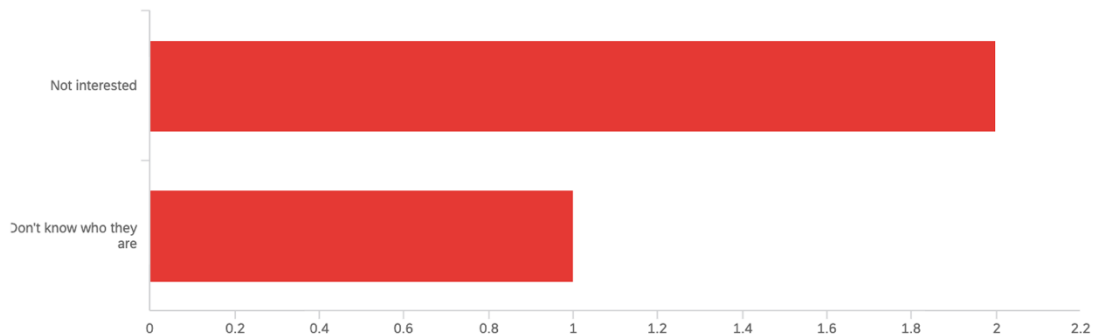
Purpose: This question was only given to those who responded “no” to question two. It helps us identify if the respondents who do not follow any bloggers on Instagram are still interested in fashion.

If respondent replied “no” to question #2, they were asked the following question:

5. Why don’t you follow any fashion or lifestyle bloggers on Instagram? Figure 5

- Not interested 67 percent
- Don’t know who they are 33 percent

Figure 5: Why respondent doesn't follow fashion or lifestyle bloggers on Instagram



#	Field	Choice Count
1	Not interested	66.67% 2
2	Don't know who they are	33.33% 1
3		

Results: Respondents who do not follow fashion bloggers on Instagram are primarily not interested in following that category of accounts or are unaware of who they are.

Purpose: This question is only given to those who responded no to question two. The purpose of this question is to identify why the responder doesn't follow any fashion or lifestyle bloggers on Instagram.

If respondent replied "no" to question #2, they were asked the following question:

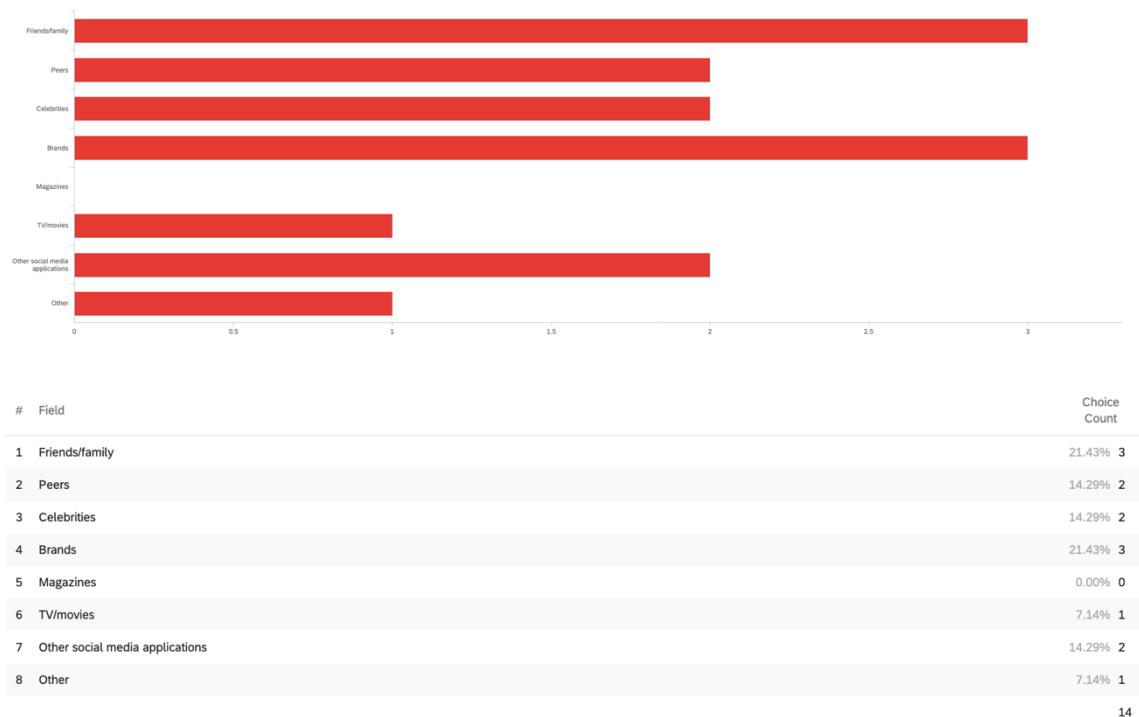
6. Where do you get your fashion content from if it isn't bloggers? Select all that apply

Figure 6

- Friends/family 21 percent
- Peers 14 percent
- Celebrities 14 percent

- Brands 21 percent
- Magazines 0 percent
- TV/Movies 7 percent
- Other social media applications 14 percent
- Other 7 percent

Figure 6: Who respondents get fashion content from



Results: Respondents who don't follow fashion bloggers on Instagram instead receive fashion based content from a variety of outlets.

Purpose: This question was only given to those who responded no to question two. It helps us identify what the most common outlets for receiving fashion content is aside from bloggers.

The following question was asked if answer to Q#2 was "yes"

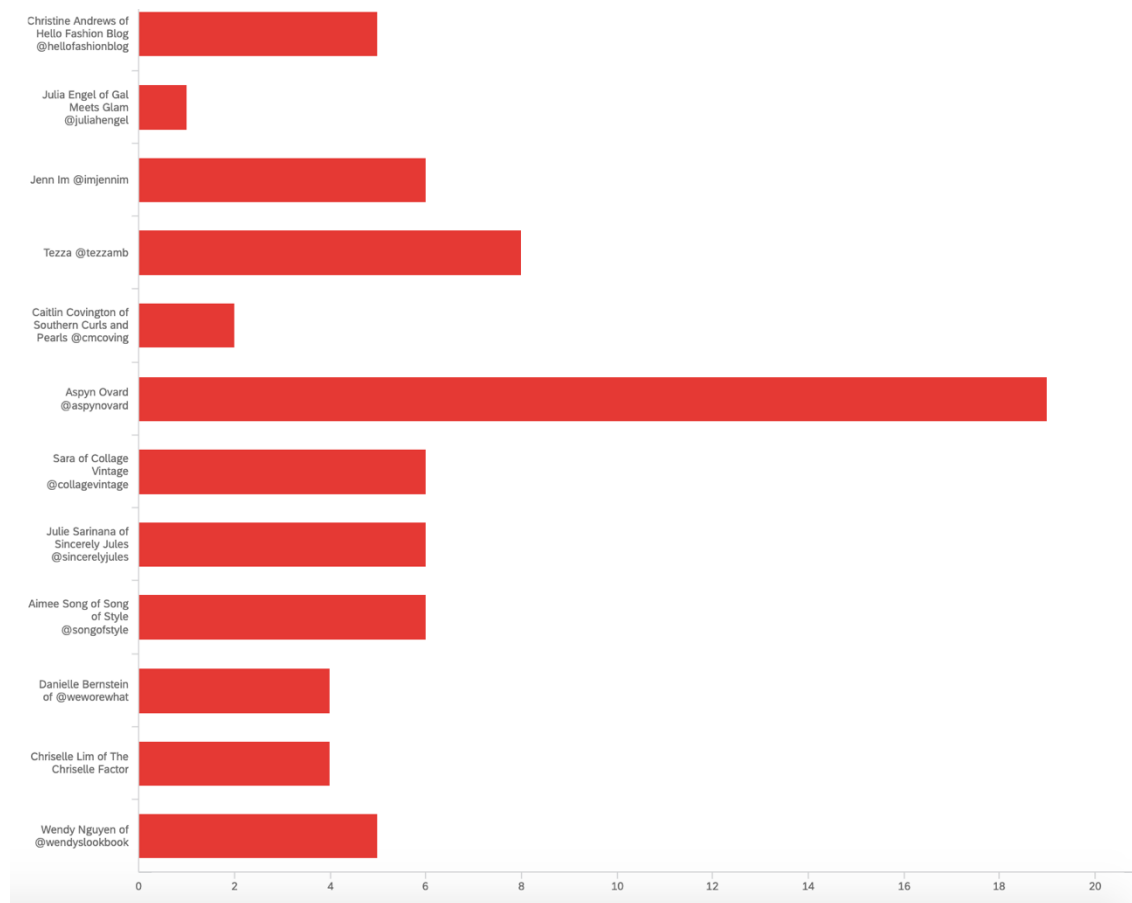
7. Do you follow any of these bloggers on Instagram? Select all that apply Figure 7

- Christine Andrews of Hello Fashion Blog @hellofashionblog	7 percent
- Julia Engel of Gal Meets Glam @juliahengel	1 percent
- Jenn Im @imjennim	8 percent
- Tezza @tezzamb	11 percent
- Caitlin Covington of Southern Curls and Pearls @cmcoving	3 percent
- Aspyn Ovard @aspynovard	26 percent
- Sara of Collage Vintage @collagevintage	8 percent
- Julie Sarinana of Sincerely Jules @sincerelyjules	8 percent
- Aimee Song of Song of Style @songofstyle	8 percent
- Danielle Bernstein of @weworewhat	6 percent
- Chriselle Lim of The Chriselle Factor	6 percent
- Wendy Nguyen of @wendyslookbook	7 percent

Figure 7: What popular fashion bloggers respondents follow on Instagram

1	Christine Andrews of Hello Fashion Blog @hellofashionblog	6.94%	5
2	Julia Engel of Gal Meets Glam @juliahengel	1.39%	1
3	Jenn Im @imjennim	8.33%	6
4	Tezza @tezzamb	11.11%	8
5	Caitlin Covington of Southern Curls and Pearls @cmcoving	2.78%	2
6	Aspyn Ovard @aspynovard	26.39%	19
7	Sara of Collage Vintage @collagevintage	8.33%	6
8	Julie Sarinana of Sincerely Jules @sincerelyjules	8.33%	6
9	Aimee Song of Song of Style @songofstyle	8.33%	6
10	Danielle Bernstein of @weworewhat	5.56%	4
11	Chriselle Lim of The Chriselle Factor	5.56%	4
12	Wendy Nguyen of @wendyslookbook	6.94%	5

72



Results: Respondents who follow fashion bloggers on Instagram follow a variety of individuals with different fashion, price points, and lifestyles. Respondents selected multiple fashion bloggers which indicates that they follow multiple on one platform and are not limited to following one specifically. The most commonly followed fashion blogger amongst the survey respondents was Aspyn Ovard. It can be hypothesized that due to the primary age demographic of the survey respondents (18-22) who are college educated, Aspyn Ovard, who primarily shares affordable fashion, beauty, and home décor, would be a commonly followed fashion blogger from the individuals provided. In comparison to some of the other fashion bloggers like Danielle Bernstein or Chriselle Lim who share high end and designer fashion, Aspyn Ovard's relatable fashion and lifestyle would be popular amongst the survey respondents.



Purpose: This question was only given to those who responded “yes” to question two. It is designed to identify which fashion and lifestyle bloggers are most popular amongst the respondents. This list of bloggers was informed by the author’s knowledge of popular American fashion blogging figures and industry articles including, “The Twenty Most Influential Personal Style Bloggers Right Now” by fashionista.com and “Best Fashion Bloggers 2019” by popsugar.com. Bloggers included on this list at the time of publication had an Instagram following of at least 500,000 individuals.

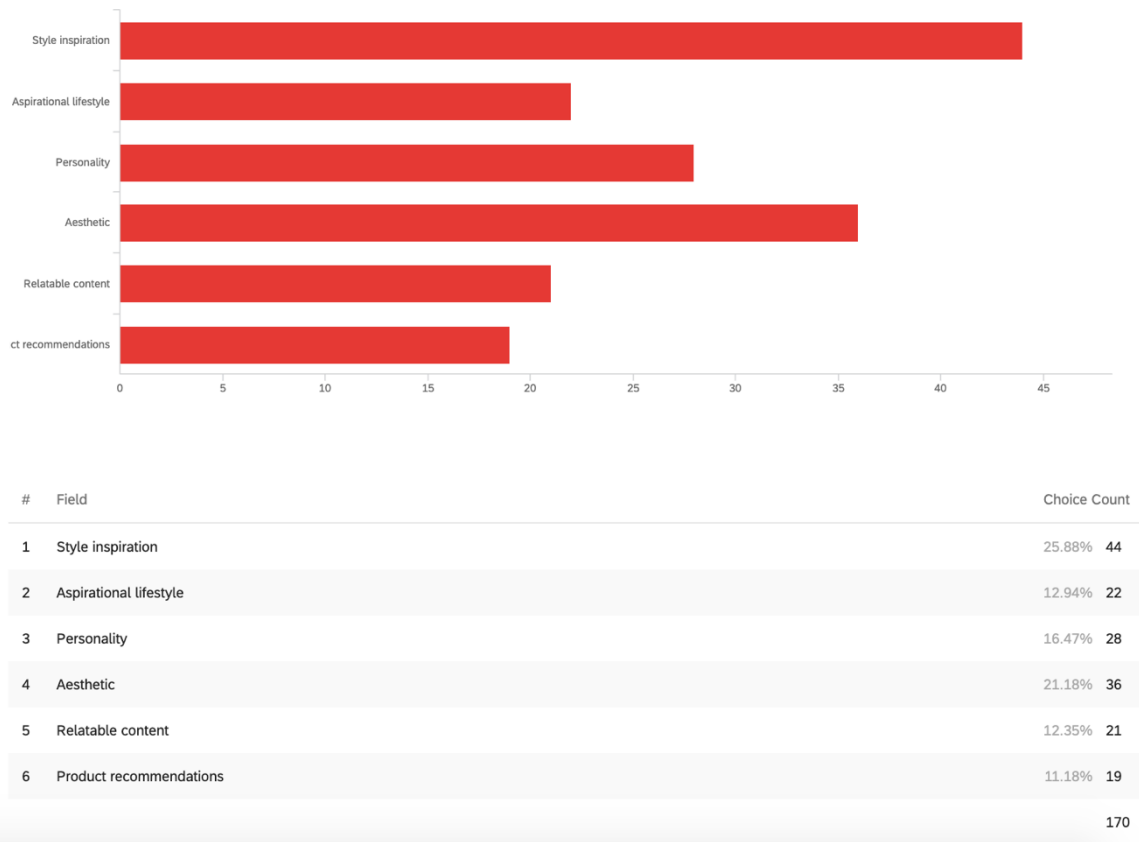
8. Why do you follow these bloggers? Select all that apply. Figure 8

- Style inspiration	26 percent
- Aspirational lifestyle	13 percent
- Personality	16 percent
- Aesthetic	21 percent
- Relatable content	12 percent
- Product recommendations	11 percent

Results: Respondents primarily follow fashion bloggers for style inspiration and the blogger’s overall aesthetic. Both of these are visual factors which implies that the overall visual presentation of the blogger in their style and content is important to their audience.

Purpose: This question was only given to those who responded “yes” to question two. It helps to uncover what purpose fashion bloggers serve to their followers.

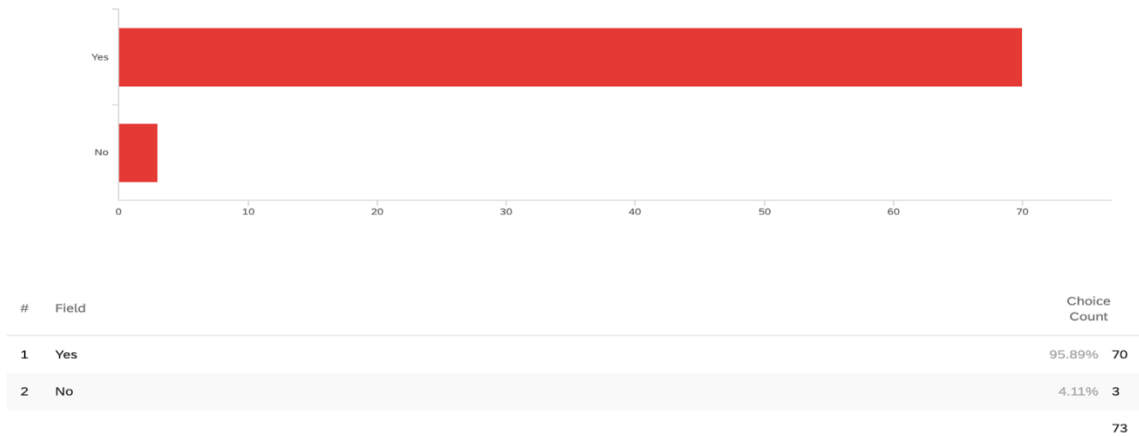
Figure 8: Why respondents follow these bloggers



9. Do you shop online? Figure 9

- Yes 95.89 percent
- No 4.11 percent

Figure 9: Respondents who shop online



Results: 96 percent of respondents shop online which is important for bloggers who primarily market the products they feature via online channels for their audience to purchase.

Purpose: This question is only given to those who responded yes to question two.

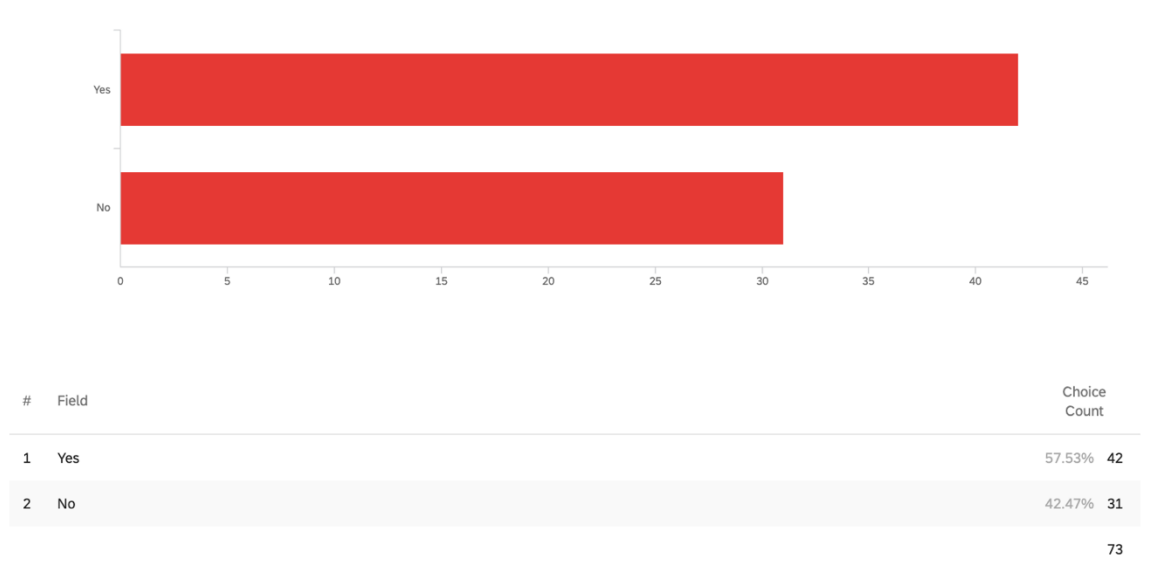
Because most product recommendations that are made by bloggers are purchased online, it is important to identify if the respondents generally shops online.

10. Have you ever purchased something because a blogger recommended it? Figure 10

- Yes 58 percent

- No 42 percent

Figure 10: Respondents who have purchased a blogger recommendation



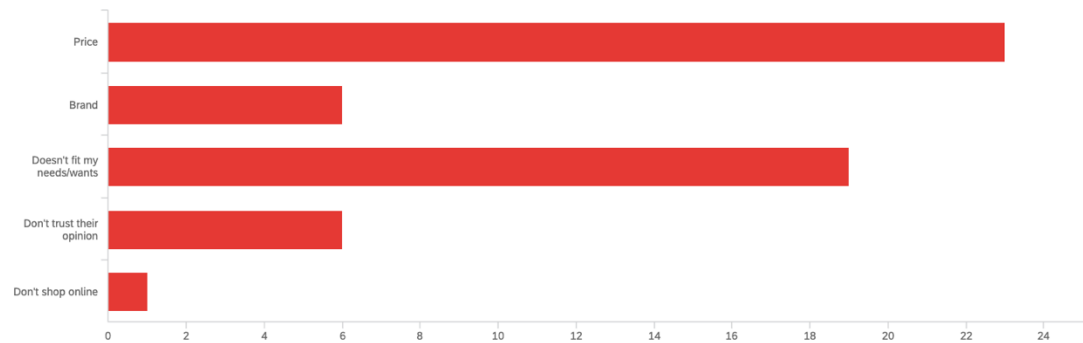
Results: Although 96 percent of respondents shop online only 58 percent have purchased something because a blogger recommended it. This implies that there is a gap between the products that bloggers feature or the way they feature them and the actual purchasing preferences of their audience.

Purpose: This question was only given to those who responded “yes” to question two. It measures how many people have purchased something because a blogger recommended it.

11. Why haven't you purchased anything a blogger has recommended? Select all that apply. Figure 11

- Price 42 percent
- Brand 11 percent
- Doesn't fit my needs/wants 35 percent
- Don't trust their opinion 11 percent
- Don't shop online 2 percent

Figure 11: Reasons respondent has not purchased a blogger recommendation



#	Field	Choice Count
1	Price	41.82% 23
2	Brand	10.91% 6
3	Doesn't fit my needs/wants	34.55% 19
4	Don't trust their opinion	10.91% 6
5	Don't shop online	1.82% 1
		55

Results: The most common reasons the respondents haven't purchased something a blogger has recommended is because of the price and/or the product does not fit their needs/wants. This may imply that fashion bloggers are more of an aspirational figure than someone relatable for consumers to follow on Instagram.

Purpose: This question was only given to those who responded "no" to question 10. It is designed to identify the most common reasons a consumer has not purchased something that a blogger recommended.

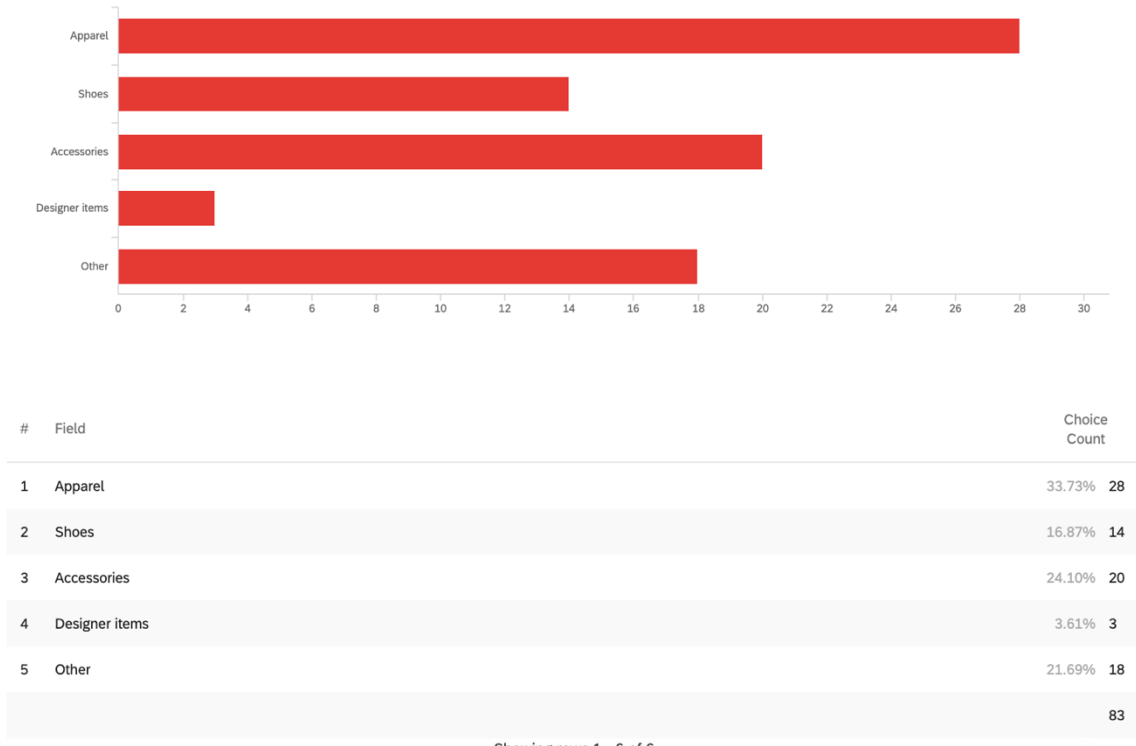
12. What did you purchase because a blogger recommended it? Select all that apply

- Apparel	34 percent
- Shoes	17 percent
- Accessories	24 percent
- Designer items	4 percent
- Other	22 percent

Results: Apparel and accessories were the most commonly purchased products recommended by a blogger. This may be because of the large variation in style and price that makes the product more desired by this group of respondents. Figure 12

Purpose: This question was only given to those who responded "yes" to question 10. It is designed to identify the most common product categories of items purchased because a blogger recommended it.

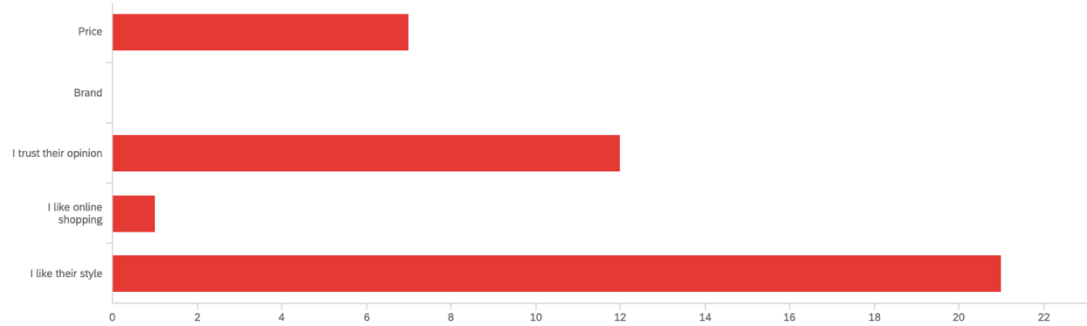
Figure 12: What type of product respondent has purchased



### 13. Why did you purchase something that a blogger recommended?

- Price 17 percent
- Brand 0 percent
- I trust their opinion 30 percent
- I like online shopping 2 percent
- I like their style 51 percent

Figure 13: Why respondent purchased a blogger recommendation



#	Field	Choice Count
1	Price	17.07% 7
2	Brand	0.00% 0
3	I trust their opinion	29.27% 12
4	I like online shopping	2.44% 1
5	I like their style	51.22% 21
		41

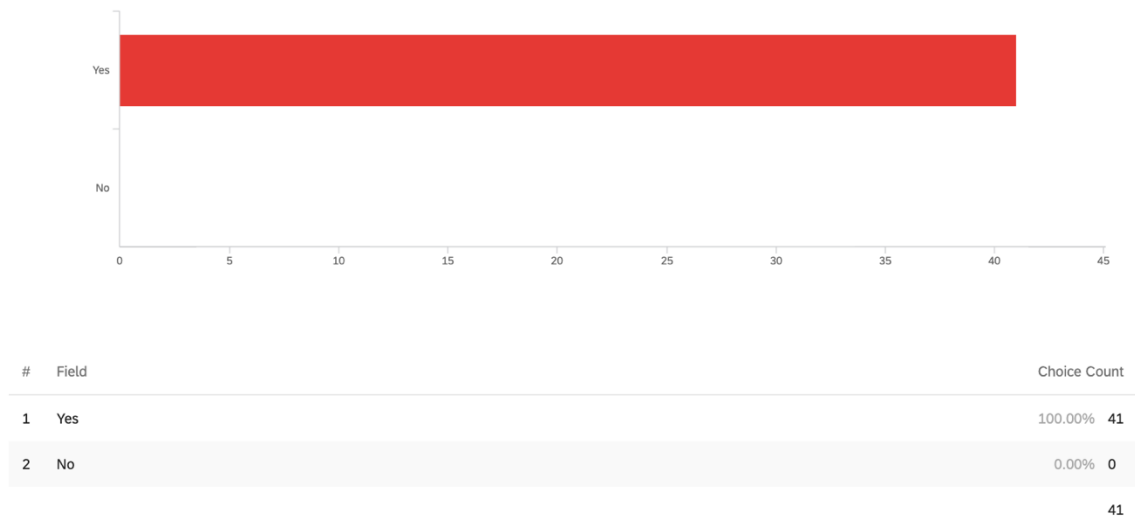
Results: The most common reason a consumer purchased a product recommended by a blogger is because they like the blogger's style. This result provides support for the idea that most fashion bloggers are most commonly seen as figures of fashion inspiration on social media. The second most common factor of purchase is the consumer trusts the blogger's opinion. This reasoning suggests that bloggers build trust with their audience that they have the credibility and expertise necessary to influence their audience's purchase decision.

Purpose: This question is only given to those who responded yes to question 10. It helps to identify why someone purchased a product recommended by a blogger.

14. Were you satisfied with your purchase? Figure 14

- Yes 100 percent
- No 0 percent

Figure 14: Satisfaction with purchase



Results: 100 percent of respondents who purchased a product recommended by a blogger were satisfied with their purchase. This data suggests that blogger recommendations meet the expectations of the consumer post purchase.

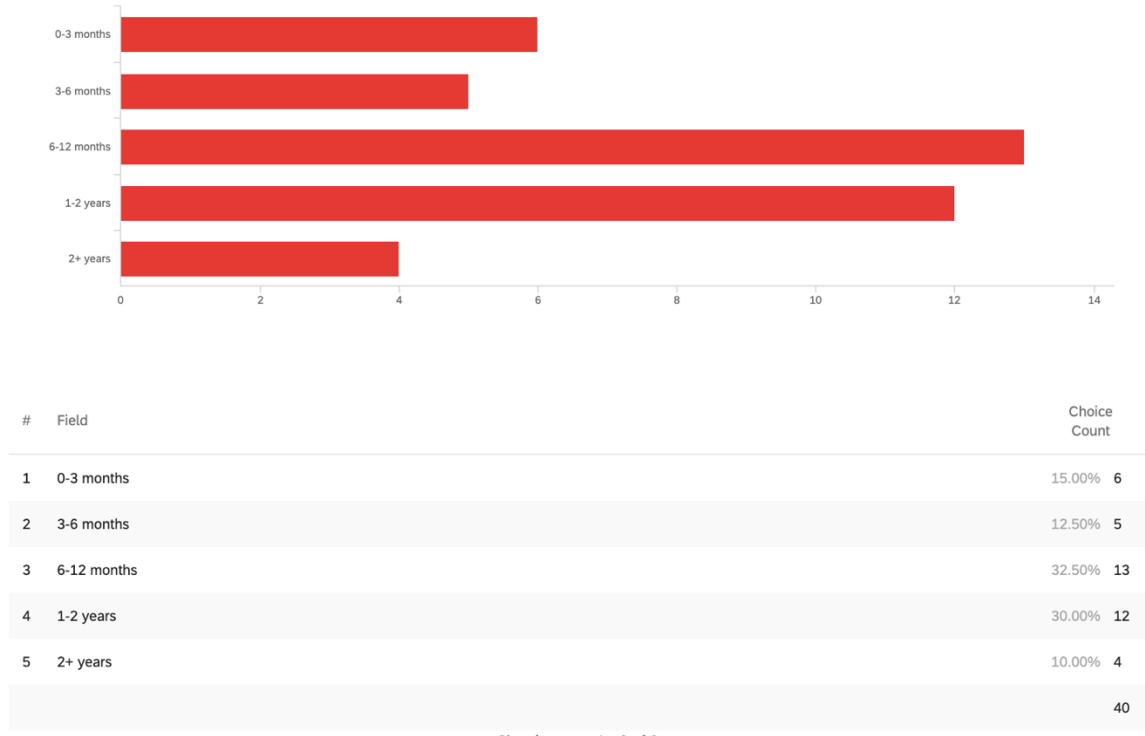
Purpose: This question was only given to those who responded “yes” to question 10. It measures how many people were satisfied with the product they purchased due to a blogger’s recommendation.

15. How long have you been following that blogger? Figure 15

- 0-3 months            15 percent
- 3-6 months            12 percent
- 6-12 months           32 percent
- 1-2 years                30 percent
- 2+ years                10 percent



Figure 15: Duration respondent has been following blogger



Results: Over 70 percent of the respondents have been following the blogger who influenced their purchase decision for over six months. The length of the relationship suggests that it takes several months to greatly influence a consumer's purchase decision and the consumer is more likely to purchase a blogger recommendation the longer they have been following.

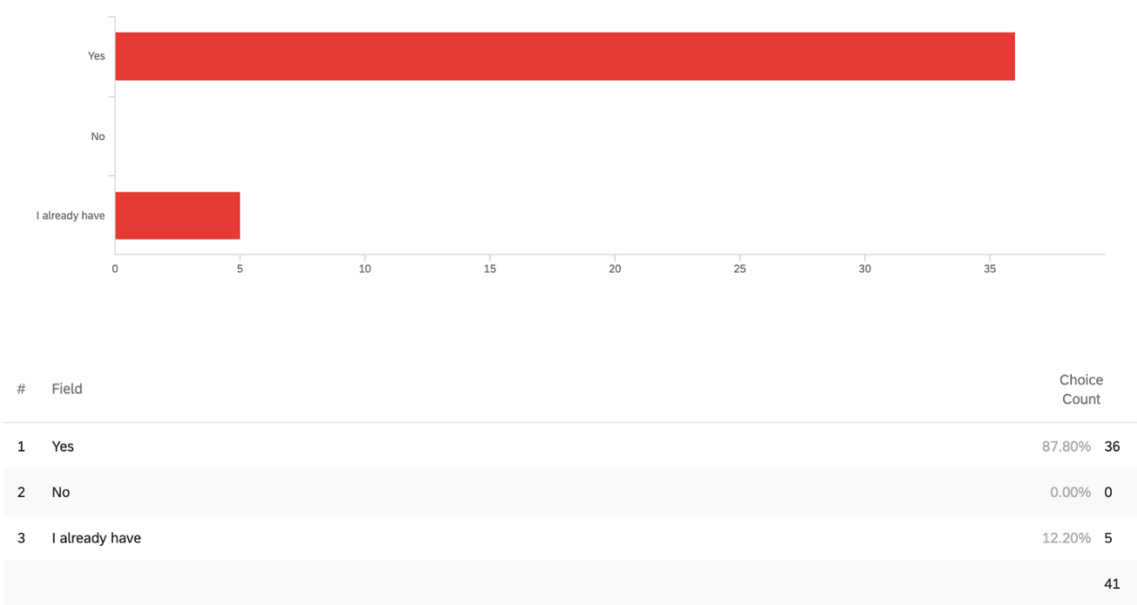
Purpose: This question was only given to those who responded "yes" to question 10. The purpose of this question is to compare the duration of the relationship between the blogger and their follower and if that has any impact on how likely the follower is to purchase a recommended item.

16. Would you buy something that blogger recommends again? Figure 16

- Yes 88 percent

- No 0 percent
- I already have 12 percent

Figure 16: Likelihood respondent would purchase another blogger recommendation



Results: 88 percent of respondents who have purchased a blogger’s recommendation stated that they would purchase something the blogger recommends again which indicates a relationship of trust between the blogger and their audience. 12 percent of respondents have already purchased another item which is a positive indicator that a blogger’s recommendation can influence consumer purchasing decision more than once.

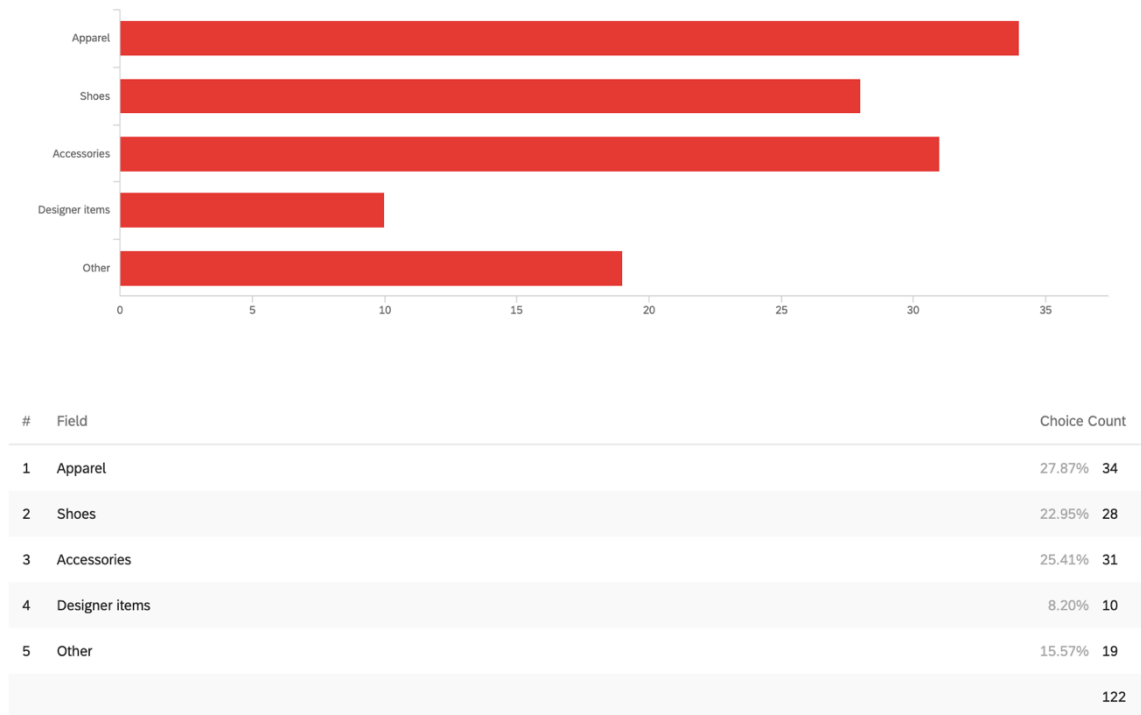
Purpose: This question was only given to those who responded “yes” to question 10. It tells us the likelihood that the consumer will purchase another product recommendation by the blogger.

17. What would you purchase from a blogger in the future? Select all that apply. Figure 17

- Apparel 28 percent

- Shoes 23 percent
- Accessories 25 percent
- Designer items 8 percent
- Other 16 percent

Figure 17: Future product categories respondent would purchase



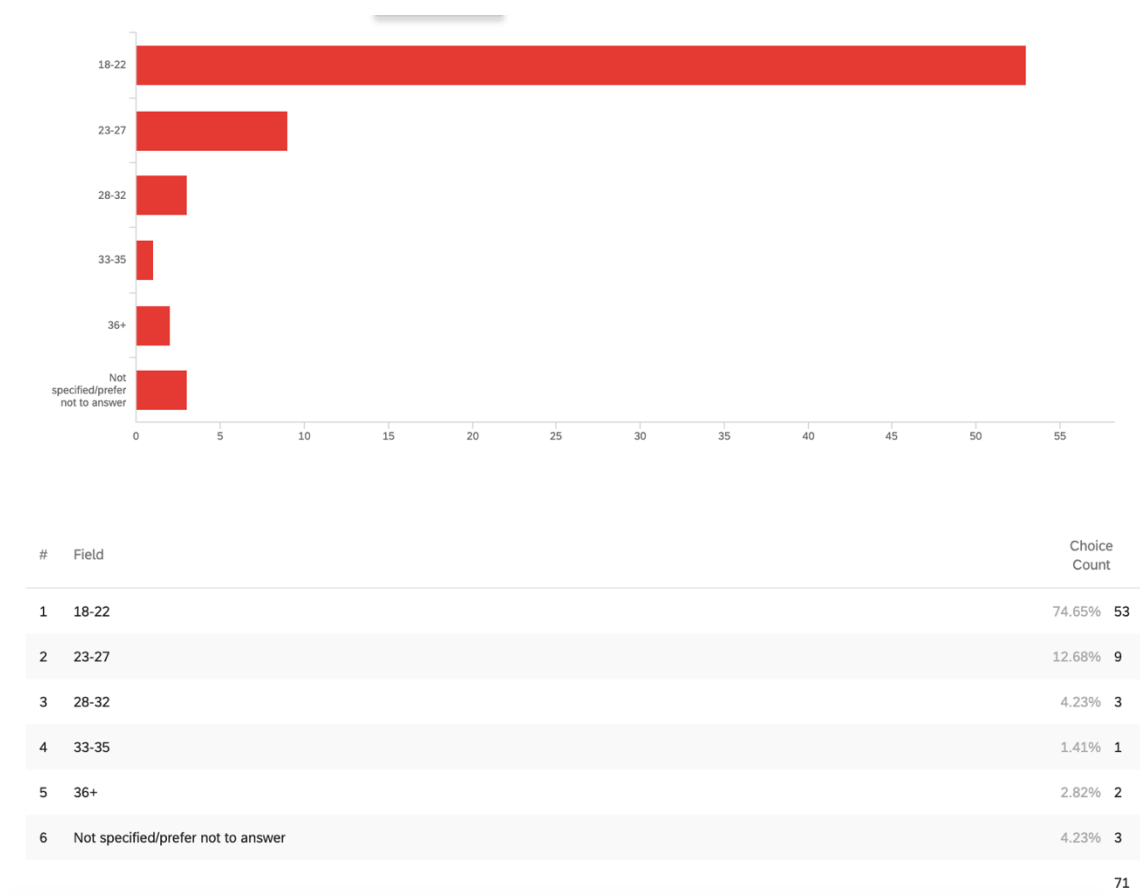
Results: Apparel, shoes, and accessories make up over 76 percent of the product category that consumers would purchase from per a blogger’s recommendation. Higher priced categories like designer items have the least likelihood of being purchased due to their lack of attainability by most college students.

Purpose: This question was only given to those who responded “yes” to question 10. It is designed to measure what product categories are most likely to be purchased from if recommended by a blogger.

## 18. Age Figure 18

- 18-22 75 percent
- 23-27 13 percent
- 28-32 4 percent
- 33-35 1 percent
- 36+ 3 percent
- Not specified/prefer not to answer 4 percent

Figure 18: Age of respondents



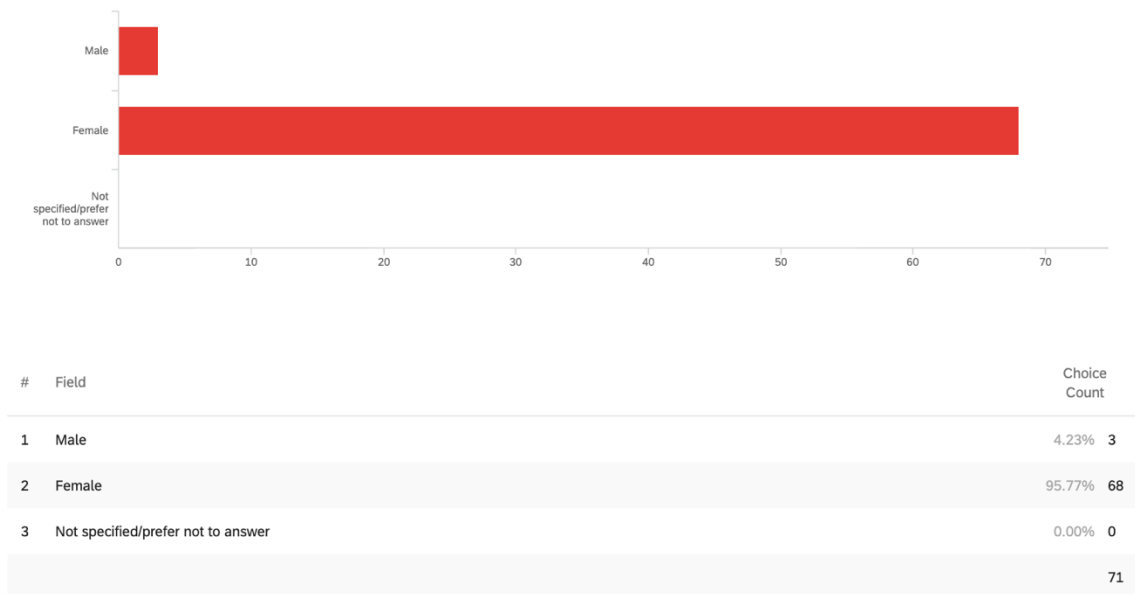
Results: 75 percent of respondents are between the ages of 18-22 years old.

Purpose: This question identifies the age group of the responder.

## 19. Gender Figure 19

- Male 4 percent
- Female 96percent
- Not specified/prefer not to answer 0 percent

Figure 19: Gender of respondents



Results: 96 percent of respondents identify as female.

Purpose: This question identifies the gender of the responder.

## 20. If you follow fashion or lifestyle blogs, would you be open to a follow up interview?

Please provide an email you would like to be contacted at.

- Blank form

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

The information collected from the survey was used to better inform Marisa Kay with relevant and target audience specific data about consumer perceptions of fashion bloggers. Key insights inferred from the survey were to be implemented into business strategy and best practices to create content that satisfies Marisa Kay's target audience and aligns with the current state of fashion blogging.

The first key insight collected from this survey is that the majority of respondents use Instagram (98.68%) as one of their social media platforms and almost all of those users follow fashion bloggers on that platform (94.74%). This data shows that fashion bloggers are a popular account category for females ages 18-35 to follow on Instagram. It also signifies the mainstream familiarity and popularity of following fashion bloggers amongst this age cohort.

Further investigating the relationship between Instagram users and fashion bloggers, question seven identified that users follow a variety of bloggers for a number of reasons and are not bound to one individual due to the widespread variance in blogger selection for this question. This data can be used to Marisa Kay's advantage because it indicates that consumers are still interested in following a diverse pool of bloggers that satisfy their different wants and needs. Although Marisa Kay has a relatively small following compared to the bloggers listed in question seven, there is still an opportunity to capture those user's attention because they are not bound to one specific blogger. This

data also poses a challenge for Marisa Kay and all fashion bloggers because audience retention is a common challenge. It is important to build and maintain a strong competitive advantage to not only grow but more importantly retain followers in a saturated market.

Question eight identifies the purpose fashion bloggers serve for their audience. Users responded that they most often follow fashion bloggers for style inspiration (25.88%), aesthetic (21.18%), and personality (16.47%). These characteristics are often unique to each fashion blogger and present the opportunity for bloggers to build an online brand and presence that is strategically different from their competitors. This data will help inform Marisa Kay's business strategy and branding by emphasizing how important overall aesthetic and visual content is to the consumer. Providing high quality and frequent style inspiration and aesthetic content satisfies nearly 50% of respondents' interests in following a specific fashion blogger.. Because the visual appeal of a fashion blogger is integral to the satisfaction of their audience, Marisa Kay will dedicate additional time and resources to creating high quality, aesthetic, and entertaining content. Components of an image like background, lighting, image resolution, outfit, and color scheme are all important things to consider when creating and publishing online content.

The final key insight from the survey suggests that blogger's have more influence on their audience through inspiration versus direct selling. Question nine identified that 95.89% of respondents shop online but only 57.53% have purchased something that a fashion blogger recommended. With a near 40% difference in overall online customers and online purchases per a blogger's recommendation, there could be a disconnect in the blogger's product suggestions and audience's actual purchase preference. Questions 11-

17 further questioned the influence fashion blogger's have on their audience's purchase decisions. These questions identified that 'price' and 'doesn't fit my needs/wants' are the two most common reasons a consumer doesn't buy the product recommendation. The lower conversion rate could also be a reflection of the audience age and lifestyle of respondents because nearly 75% of the survey respondents are ages 18-22. Individuals in this age demographic who are in college, typically have lower discretionary income and may not have the same spending power as the blogger's they follow. This insight is extremely important to Marisa Kay's business model because the current audience of Marisa Kay is 40% ages 18-25 with similar attitudes, preferences, and lifestyle to the survey respondents. Marisa Kay's content should be geared towards providing overall inspiration versus direct product selling to appeal to the wants and needs of her target audience. Revenue streams like affiliate links or direct selling should not be primary means of revenue at this time because the conversion rate is not at a significantly profitable ratio. Revenue streams like brand sponsorships which pay to promote overall brand awareness are more suited for this audience. This data could also suggest that in the future there will be a greater opportunity for affiliate links and direct selling as Marisa Kay's audience ages and increases their discretionary income.

The insights that resulted from this survey will be used to inform the overall strategy of Marisa Kay and pivot previous methods to appeal to the current market. This survey showed that the survey respondents are highly interested in following fashion bloggers and actively seek out new accounts to follow. Marisa Kay can leverage this by creating a strong and unique online presence focused on fashion and lifestyle inspiration. There is a clear gap in the market between aspirational and relatable fashion bloggers that



Marisa Kay can fill by being a college student and young professional. Marisa Kay can still provide high quality and aesthetic content but deeply relate to her audience through overall lifestyle and spending habits.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

We gained valuable data of how bloggers have affected consumer shopping habits. The data established the role bloggers play in product promotion and differentiate their influence from traditional marketing strategy. Once their role was defined, we examined what attributes of a blogger are most successful at engaging their followers, growing conversion rates, and brand partnerships.

It is clear that amongst the survey respondents, fashion bloggers are a commonly followed figure on Instagram. Although these content consumers are not tied to following a specific individual, the commonalities between the fashion bloggers they follow are that they serve as style and aesthetic inspiration, and gain interest based on their personality. Online shopping is a common trait amongst the respondents but there is a clear gap in their buying choices and the products shared by fashion bloggers because only 57.53% of respondents have purchased an item a blogger recommended. The survey responses showed that the most common reasons an individual does not purchase a blogger's recommendation is price or doesn't fit with their needs/wants. We can hypothesize that amongst this survey respondent set, fashion blogger's serve more as an inspiration or aspirational figure than a personal seller to the majority of their audiences.

## **Recommendations and Limitations**

The methodology to this process produced some limitations. Limitations of the survey include but are not limited to: wording of the questions, selection of questions and multiple choice answers due to author's personal experience in the fashion blogging industry, number of respondents, primarily surveying students at Oregon State University, promoting the survey to author's personal blog audience, Qualtrics survey unable to record what individual respondent was referred to the survey by, and only offering the survey via technology could have produced bias. If further research was to be conducted, it would be recommended that the survey pool is broadened to include a more diverse age group, geographic region, and offer the survey in different formats to gain more varied responses.

While we recognize the limitations in the survey to produce an industry wide response to fashion bloggers, the specific data set was ideal to help inform marisakay.blog due to her hyper-localized Oregon audience of females primarily of college age. Because the majority of the responses were familiar with fashion bloggers, the survey produced conclusions from an informed pool of individuals who are in Marisa Kay's target audience. From these conclusions we are able to draw insight to strengthen Marisa Kay's business strategy.



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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Recruitment Email for Research Study: Brand Marketing through Lifestyle Bloggers**

**Following or interested in Lifestyle Bloggers?** We are seeking individuals to participate in a short questionnaire. This survey is in support of undergraduate research to explore brand marketing through lifestyle bloggers.

## Appendix B

**Study Title:** Brand Marketing through Lifestyle Bloggers

**Principal Investigator:** Dr Kathy K. Mullet

**Study team:** Marisa Chen

**Version:** April 9, 2019

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this study will be to identify what aspects of a blogger are most successful to brand marketing and relationship building with consumers.

**Activities.** You are being asked to complete an online survey in which you will provide the researchers with your experiences with online bloggers.

**Time.** The survey will take no longer than 20 minutes.

**Voluntariness.** Participation is voluntary; there is no penalty for choosing not to participate or for leaving the study at any time. You are free to skip any questions or activities. Your decision to take part, or not take part in the research will not impact your grades, your relationship with your professors nor your standing at the university

**Contact information:** You may contact Dr Kathy Mullet, the PI and course instructor, if you have questions regarding this study. Dr Mullet's email is [Kathy.mullet@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Kathy.mullet@oregonstate.edu). If you have questions about your rights or welfare as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at [IRB@oregonstate.edu](mailto:IRB@oregonstate.edu)

**Consent:** By continuing with this online survey, you consent to your anonymous answers being used to complete this study. Thank you.

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Q1 Do you use Instagram?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q2 Do you follow any bloggers on Instagram?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

**Skip To: Q3 If Q2 = No**

**Skip To: Q7 If Q2 = Yes**

Q3 Who do you follow on Instagram? select all that apply

- ☐ Friends/family (1)
- ☐ Celebrities (2)
- ☐ Brands/businesses (3)
- ☐ Hobbies (4)
- ☐ Other (5)

Q4 Are you interested in fashion?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q5 Why don't you follow any fashion or lifestyle bloggers on Instagram?

- ☐ Not interested (1)
- ☐ Don't know who they are (2)

Q6 Where do you get your fashion content from if it isn't bloggers? select all that apply

- ☐ Friends/family (1)

- ☐ Peers (2)
- ☐ Celebrities (3)
- ☐ Brands (4)
- ☐ Magazines (5)
- ☐ TV/movies (6)
- ☐ Other social media applications (7)
- ☐ Other (8)

**Skip To: Q9 If Selected Choices  $\geq$  1**

Q7 Do you follow any of these bloggers on Instagram? select all that apply

☐

Christine Andrews of Hello Fashion Blog @hellofashionblog (1)

☐

Julia Engel of Gal Meets Glam @juliahengel (2)

☐

Jenn Im @imjennim (3)

☐

Tezza @tezzamb (4)

☐

Caitlin Covington of Southern Curls and Pearls @cmcoving (5)

☐

Aspyn Ovard @aspynovard (6)

☐

Sara of Collage Vintage @collagevintage (7)

☐

Julie Sarinana of Sincerely Jules @sincerelyjules (8)

☐

Aimee Song of Song of Style @songofstyle (9)

Q8 Why do you follow these bloggers? select all that apply

☐

Style inspiration (1)

☐

Aspirational lifestyle (2)

☐

Personality (3)

☐

Aesthetic (4)

☐

Relatable content (5)

☐

Product recommendations (6)

Q9 Do you shop online?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q10 Have you ever purchased something because a blogger recommended it?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

**Skip To: Q11 If Q10 = No**

**Skip To: Q12 If Q10 = Yes**

Q11 Why haven't you purchased anything a blogger has recommended? select all that apply

- ☐ Price (1)
- ☐ Brand (2)
- ☐ Doesn't fit my needs/wants (3)
- ☐ Don't trust their opinion (4)
- ☐ Don't shop online (5)

**Skip To: Q18 If Selected Choices >= 1**

Q12 What did you purchase because a blogger recommended it? select all that apply

- ☐ Apparel (1)
- ☐ Shoes (2)
- ☐ Accessories (3)
- ☐ Designer items (4)
- ☐ Other (5)

Q13 Why did you purchase something that a blogger recommended?

- ☐ Price (1)
- ☐ Brand (2)
- ☐ I trust their opinion (3)
- ☐ I like online shopping (4)
- ☐ I like their style (5)

Q14 Were you satisfied with your purchase?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q15 How long have you been following that blogger?

- ☐ 0-3 months (1)
- ☐ 3-6 months (2)
- ☐ 6-12 months (3)
- ☐ 1-2 years (4)
- ☐ 2+ years (5)

Q16 Would you buy something that blogger recommends again?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ I already have (3)

Q17 What would you purchase from a blogger in the future? select all that apply

- ☐ Apparel (1)
- ☐ Shoes (2)
- ☐ Accessories (3)
- ☐ Designer items (4)

☐

Other (5)

Q18 Age

- ☐ 18-22 (1)
- ☐ 23-27 (2)
- ☐ 28-32 (3)
- ☐ 33-35 (4)
- ☐ 36+ (5)
- ☐ Not specified/prefer not to answer (6)

Q19 Gender

- ☐ Male (1)
- ☐ Female (2)
- ☐ Not specified/prefer not to answer (3)

-----

**End of Block: Default Question Block**

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