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The Value of Fashion Photography in the Culture of Social Media

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Despite the essential function of fashion presentation and visual communication, fashion photography appears to be a relatively neglected research topic. This research aims to examine the impact of social media on the perceived value of fashion photography in Hong Kong. The perceived values were initially categorised into six domains: identity expression, artistic expression, fashion trend diffusion, taste leadership, bloggers' self-branding and fashion branding. This study adopts Rose's (2012) visual methodology for collecting data that pertains to the three sites of the image: the site of image production, the site of image audiencing and the site of the image itself. A theoretical framework is proposed, which illustrates the current fashion communication scenario of Hong Kong and how fashion bloggers build their self-identity as a self-branding process. The findings suggest an urgent need to develop a new curriculum in fashion studies and may serve as a practical guide for supporting the fashion media industry in Hong Kong.

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THE VALUE OF FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE CULTURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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Ph. D

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

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The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
School of Design

The Value of Fashion Photography in the Culture of Social Media

Choi Sau Wai Athena

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November, 2016

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ATHENA CHOI

ABSTRACT

Fashion photography exists alongside the fashion industry but is a world to itself in its “fantasy making” capacity. Despite the essential function of fashion presentation and visual communication, fashion photography appears to be a relatively neglected research topic. While fashion photography exists in the form of fashion blogging, fashion blogger’s self-produced visual images comprise a key influence in the phenomenon of “users-turned-producers” in the digital culture. The aim of this mixed method study was to examine the impact of social media on the perceived value creation of fashion photography in Hong Kong. The perceived values were initially categorized into six domains: identity expression, artistic expression, fashion trend diffusion, taste leadership, bloggers’ self-branding, and fashion branding.

Four objectives were identified for this study: (1) to identify the key perceived values of fashion photography and how it creates value in social, cultural, and commercial contexts; (2) to construct a conceptual framework to investigate fashion photography; (3) to formulate the interrelationship of the key elements of the perceived values in the context of fashion blogging; and (4) to construct a framework of fashion communication under the new value creation system of fashion blogging. This study adopted Rose's (2012) visual methodology in collecting data pertaining to the three sites of the

image: the site of image production, the site of image audiencing, and the site of the image itself. The study used three data collection methods, including qualitative measures of in-depth interviewing of 20 fashion image producers, including professional fashion photographers, stylists, and editors in Hong Kong; and a focus group with 43 college students majoring in fashion discipline from a design institute, who were among the Hong Kong audience of fashion bloggers. These participants were able to shed insight into the changes in fashion photography in correspondence to the site of image production and the site of image audiencing, respectively. Then a content analysis was used to examine the visual content of 10 fashion oriented Instagram pages hosted by Hong Kong fashion bloggers.

The findings proposed a theoretical framework for the value system created by fashion communication and demonstrated a pathway for how fashion lovers could enter the fashion industry by successfully engaging in fashion blogging. The integrated theories were formulated and developed into four sections: (1) identity construction: A “creative self” as a means of self-branding; (b) the changing aesthetic expectation of the networked visual world; (3) clustering of fashion trend diffusion and taste leadership; and lastly, (4) a digital networked value creation system of fashion communication. This framework interprets the current fashion communication scenario of Hong Kong and how fashion bloggers build

their self-identity as a self-branding process. The findings contribute to (1) the fashion industry by providing insights for both professional fashion image producers and young fashion lovers in adapting to the new digital culture of fashion communication; and (2) education and policy makers. The findings suggest the pressing need for developing new curriculum in fashion studies, and may serve as a practical guide for supporting the fashion media industry in Hong Kong.

PUBLICATIONS

Choi, A. (2016). Fashion Photography on Social Media: Insights from Hong Kong Fashion Image Producers, *International Journal of Management and Applied Research*, *3*(4), 130-144. https://doi.org/10.18646/2056.34.16-011

Choi, A., & Au, R. (2016). “The Parisian Light?” The myth of superiority signified by the imagery of the fashion cities. *In B. Ayhan. Proceedings of CONTEMPHOTO’16, III International Visual Culture and Contemporary Photography on Identity Issues in Relation to Photographic Image and Visual Culture* (pp.109-119) Istanbul: TR: DAKAM.

Choi, A., & Au, R. (2016). The value of fashion photography: A new genre on social media. *In C. Bernada, & D. Minchella. Proceedings of The 3rd European Conference on Social Media* (pp. 457-464) Caen, Normandy: Academic Conferences and Publishing International Limited (ACPI).

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Fashion photography exists alongside the fashion industry, but is a world unto itself due to its “fantasy making” capacity. As such, fashion communication via its images would be expected to have an impact on consumers. Fashion communication refers to a broad sense of visual presentation by a variety of means, both tangible and virtual (Barnard, 1996; Barthes, 1967; Crane, 2000; Davis, 1992; Lennon et al, 2014; McCracken, 1985; Wolbers, 2009). As we currently live in the information age, we no longer rely merely on tangible products of fashion to express ourselves. We are able to simply create an image and share it online. In this regard, fashion photography depicts a vivid picture of the fantasy world of the fashion system. Despite the essential function of fashion presentation and the value of media communication to consumers, fashion photography appears to be a relatively neglected topic among the numerous academic studies on fashion and fashion-related subjects (Derrick, 2002; Shinkle, 2008; Williams, 1998, 2008).

This study focuses on fashion photography as an essential means of fashion communication in the information age, and one of its aims is to investigate its ability to create value in its various functions: artistic expression, trend setting, and advertising. Advancements in technology have wrought changes on the development of fashion photography. The three key and interrelated elements that form the foundation of this research study are: (1) fashion photography, (2) the value creation, (3) new media technology.

The technology that most affects fashion photography is the advent of the social media; such new technology enables users to generate content and empowers the "ordinary" fashion consumers to become fashion image producers. The proliferation and popularity of social media has changed the structure of communication among individuals and the social and commercial sectors in a profound way. The statistics on social media are astonishing and continue to increase: in 2008 there were over 180,000,000 blogs (Chittenden, 2010), in 2014, reports estimated 300,000,000 monthly active users of Instagram (Ferrara et al, 2014; Fiegerman, 2014), while in 2016, estimates of active Facebook users numbered 1,650,000,000 monthly (Facebook, 2016). Among these users, research suggests teenagers are the major consumers of social media (Huffaker and Calvert, 2005).

Social media promotes creativity and identity expression of amateur users turned producers through its very nature: that of connectivity and community (Chittenden, 2010; Rocamora, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013). The hallmark feature of social media, *user-generated-content*, allows social media users to post fashion images on an interactive platform, and these content providers can also interact with other online users. Further, the distinguished visual nature of these fashion images on the social media could often be identified as fashion snap shots or "selfies." The amateur, self-portrait, photographic style gives fashion a new visual genre, which is distinctively different from the traditional fashion photography presented on printed fashion magazines.

The numerous user-generated fashion photography content providers that have emerged on social media have been gaining much attention from fashion brands and business entities; industry practitioners see their content as a new media communication model in brand building, marketing, and public relations. Hence, such practices of users turned content producers further challenges the traditional notion of a media communication model in which the dominating traditional role of generating fashion images moves from brand owners to consumers (Berthon et al, 2012). Similarly, the image creators shift from professional elites to "ordinary" readers.

Although the notion of consumers turned producers is not particularly new, the idea of how such consumers become producers or image creators and the impact of such images on fashion communication has not been addressed in previous research. While there are proclamations that social media has democratized the fashion world (Hughes, 2011; Pham, 2011), the relationship between fashion brands and fashion bloggers is interdependent once the blogs of these new producers become popular. Research has suggested that there is a career pathway for bloggers (McQuarrie, J. Miller, & Phillips, 2012).

Whether or not fashion bloggers truly recommend the fashion items they display in their images or whether the fashion bloggers merely enjoy their "moment of celebrity" when being photographed is often in question. Thus, the consensus among many researchers in this area is that the contribution of the fashion blogging phenomenon to the fashion world is trivial. However, the proliferation of social media has created a significant impact on the visual interpretation of images, and therefore it influences the perceived value creation of fashion photography in the digital culture. As fashion photography exists in the form of fashion blogging, the key elements of this research subject are further refined to (a) perceived value creation, (b) fashion photography and (c) social media and fashion blogging,

and this study focuses on how these elements form a new fashion communication system.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the study on fashion photography and social media. Details of the background of the study are also presented. This includes the definitions of various terms in fashion photography and the different types of social media. The section further identifies the justification for developing and understanding the influence of social media on the value creation of fashion photography and sets the ground for the whole research study development, which includes the research aims and objectives, research questions, and significance of the study.

1.2 Aims and Objective of the Study

The overarching aim of this study is to examine the impact of social media on value creation in fashion photography. As mentioned previously, this new media has wrought changes in terms of the perceived value of fashion photography due to the free accessibility of the social media digital platform. The research focuses on how such new ways of fashion presentation changes viewers/consumers' responses in the digital culture and to interpret the meaning of the visual representation from the perspective of each value created by fashion photography in the social, cultural, and commercial context. Hence the objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the key perceived value of fashion photography from its development and its value creation in terms of social, cultural, and commercial contexts;
2. To construct a conceptual framework to investigate fashion photography;
3. To formulate the interrelationship of the key elements of the perceived values on fashion blogging;
4. To construct a framework of fashion communication under the new values creation system of fashion blogging.

1.3 Definition of Key Research Subjects

1.3.1 Defining the terms and the interchangeable nature

While the various terms related to this topic are often used interchangeably, it is essential to define the terms used in the study and to explain how these definitions are applicable in the context of this research. The keywords to be defined in this study include *fashion communication system*, *computer mediated communication*, *social networking sites*, *social media*, various terms for *social media platform and fashion images*.

Fashion Communication System

Numerous scholarly works on fashion describe fashion as a form of communication (Barnard, 1996; Barthes, 1967; Crane, 2000; Davis, 1992; Lennon et al., 2014; McCracken, 1985; Wolbers, 2009). Roland Barthes, in his renowned works, *The Fashion System* (1967) and *The Language of Fashion* (2004), analyzed fashion and its meaning to the society. He wrote that the meaning of fashion is communicated not merely through tangible clothing products, but also through the visual images of fashion and the text describing the item. He termed this process of communication by the semiotic approach, *the fashion system* (Barthes, 1967; 2004). Another popular work often cited in fashion studies is Barnard's (1996), *Fashion as Communication*. In it, Barnard has provided a thorough interpretation of

fashion in a wide range of cultural and social theoretical perspectives. It is by nature the ability to *communicate* that differentiates "fashion" from "clothing." Embedded in the word "fashion" is a more abstract concept regarding the expression of clothing items that convey meaning to individual audiences and to society.

Today, the definition of fashion communication extends to a broad range of fashion presentation formats, including tangible materials, text, printed visual images, and moving images (Díaz Soloaga, & García Guerrero, 2016; Ekström, 2009; Wolbers, 2009). The term fashion communication is sometimes used interchangeably with fashion media communication and fashion marketing communication when a study has a more specific focus on a layer of communication, such as media form or marketing aspect (Lea-Greenwood, 2013; Tse, 2014). This study revolves around the question of how fashion creates meanings in the society and adopts Wolbers' (2009) definition of fashion communication in referring to the explanation, exploration, enhancement, promoting, and selling of fashion in multiple layers from fashion materials, fashion items, or presentation of fashion in media. In another sense, this study uses the term *fashion communication system* to refer to the system in which fashion is presented and represented in various ways to create meanings in social, cultural, and commercial arenas.

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

Today, the terms *online social media, online social networking, online social network sites* are frequently used interchangeably; they refer to the online platforms that enable users to establish connection (American Society for Training and Development [ASTD], 2010; Boyd & Ellison, 2007). While the ASTD (2010) referred to Facebook as one form of social media, according to Boyd and Ellison (2007), Facebook, along with other popular online platforms, MySpace, Twitter, Cyworld, and Bebo, are defined as Social Network Sites (SNS), which belong to the stream of computer mediated communication (CMC). The term CMC refers to the digital technology that enables communication or information exchange via electronic means, which includes email, text messaging, wikis, and blogs (Birnbaum, 2008; Kear, 2011; Okdie et al., 2011). The term CMC was widely used after being described as *the province of the innovators* by Moore, in his book, *Inside the Tornado* (1995), but this term is now used less frequently (Kear, 2011).

Social Networking Sites (SNS)

The earliest, most widely used definition of social network sites (SNS) was provided by Boyd and Ellison (2007):

> [SNS are] web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct

> a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (p. 211).

Boyd and Ellison (2007) provided a relatively stricter definition of SNS by leaving out the term *networking* based on the rationale that the word networking contains the meaning of taking initiative in making connection, often by strangers, while social network sites initiate networking activities but are not only limited to initiating network by strangers. Thus, a vast majority of research studies have adopted the term, *social network sites* since then (rather than *social networking sites*). However, the terms network and networking are still being used interchangeably in various recent studies (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Correa et al., 2009; Hum et al., 2011; Morgan et al., 2010; Stutzman, et al. 2010). In short, the definition of SNS could be summarized as a computer-mediated means of communication and collaborative tool to exchange information by allowing individuals to create personal profiles, share text, images, and photos, and to link with other group members within the network (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Lin & Lu, 2011; Pfeil, Arjan, & Zaphiris, 2009).

Social Media

Building on Boyd and Ellison's definition on SNS, Brunty and Helenek (2013) further elaborated the definition of social media as a social medium that "encourages its users to communicate with other users who are part of that network and/or the site creators themselves" (p. 2) and that "creates an environment for users to share content and/or connect through their similar interest" (p. 2). In a broader sense, SNS was classified as just one type of social media site, along with blogs, microblogs, and virtual game worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) because social media is a technology designed to facilitate social interaction, communication, and sometimes publishing (ASTD, 2010; Correa et al., 2009; Morgan et al., 2010;). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media, a term that is used for MySpace and Facebook, was coined after the creation of SNS, and thus, became the term referring to all of these online interactive sites with user generated content.

Blogs and Blogosphere

The term blog originated from two words, *web* and *log*, from the early form of an online diary in which writers could post their online written and visual entries in a reverse chronological order. Blogosphere is a term that describes the community that links all blogs together (Blood, 2002; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Poyntz, 2010; Ringmar, 2007). It was not until a blogger jokingly turned to the phrase "we blog" that the term gained popularity

(Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Blogs are defined as an interactive platform where readers can leave comments to the content (Ringmar, 2007). The earlier popular blog sites included *Blogger, Livejournal, Xanga,* and *Blogspot.*

Social Media, SNS, Blogs and the Interchangeable Relationships

In recent years, as the research body surrounding this topic continues to grow, the line distinguishing social media and SNS has been blurred, due to these terms being often confused by commercial sectors and academia who categorize these online collaborative user generating content sites differently (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This is evident in various studies that categorize the same group of online tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, blogs, weibo, either as SNS (Boyd, 2011; Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Ellison et al, 2007; Lin and Lu, 2011), or social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Brunty and Helenek, 2013; Khang, et al, 2012; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Branthwaite & Patterson, 2011). Thus, it is evident that SNS and social media are interchangeable terms, and the prefix online is no longer needed, as the terms SNS and social media automatically suggest an online nature.

Fashion Blogging

Fashion blogs or fashion blogging originally referred to the activity of

blogging which is mainly focused on fashion images, news, or fashion-related content (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. BryanBoy. (2017). Example of a cover blog page of a well-known fashion blogger, BryanBoy. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of bryanboy.com

Today, the fashion world generally refers to someone hosting fashion blogs as a *fashion blogger* (Chittenden, 2010; Hughes, 2011). The recent trend, which is changing rapidly with the new media technology, shows that bloggers do not merely focus on blogging, but that users constantly move between various platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, to Instagram,

Trumblr or Pinterest, and they normally host several social media platforms simultaneously (Figure 1.2) (Dumenco, 2012; Shaughnessy, 2013). The current study focuses on independent fashion bloggers and has therefore adopted the term *fashion blogging* to refer to the activities of online presentation of fashion photographic images using various social media platforms. The research explores these online visual sharing platforms in terms of the image representation and users' behavior, rather than the technology device itself.

Figure 1.2 (a). Susie Bubble. (2017). Example of a well-known fashion blogger, Susie Bubble, main blog's page with linkage to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of stylebubble.co.hk.

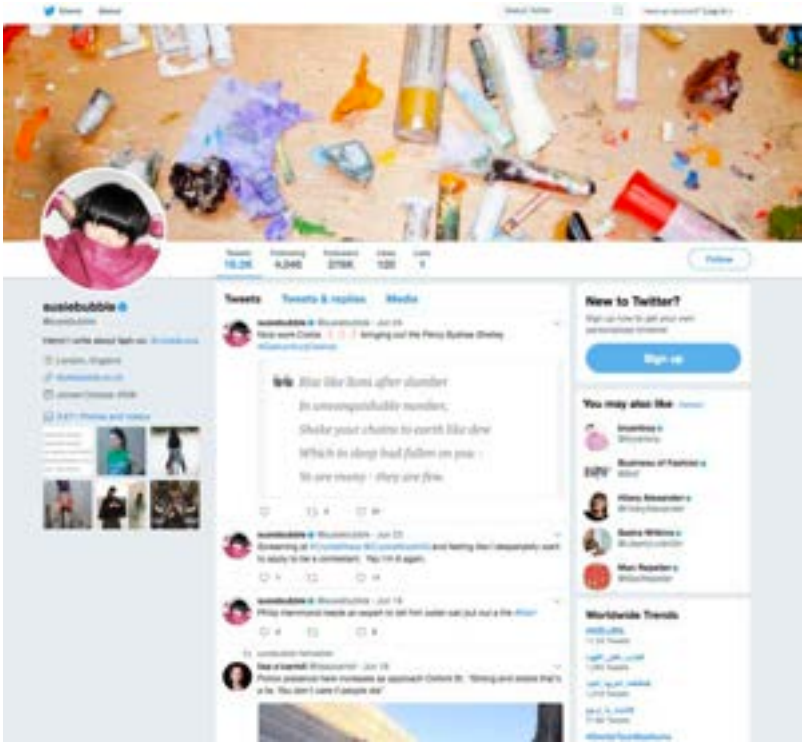

Figure 1.2 (b). Susie Bubble. (2017). Susie Bubble's Twitter page. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of twitter.com/susiebubble

Figure 1.2 (c). Susie Bubble. (2017). Susie Bubble's Facebook page. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of facebook.com/Style-Bubble-145766678813305/

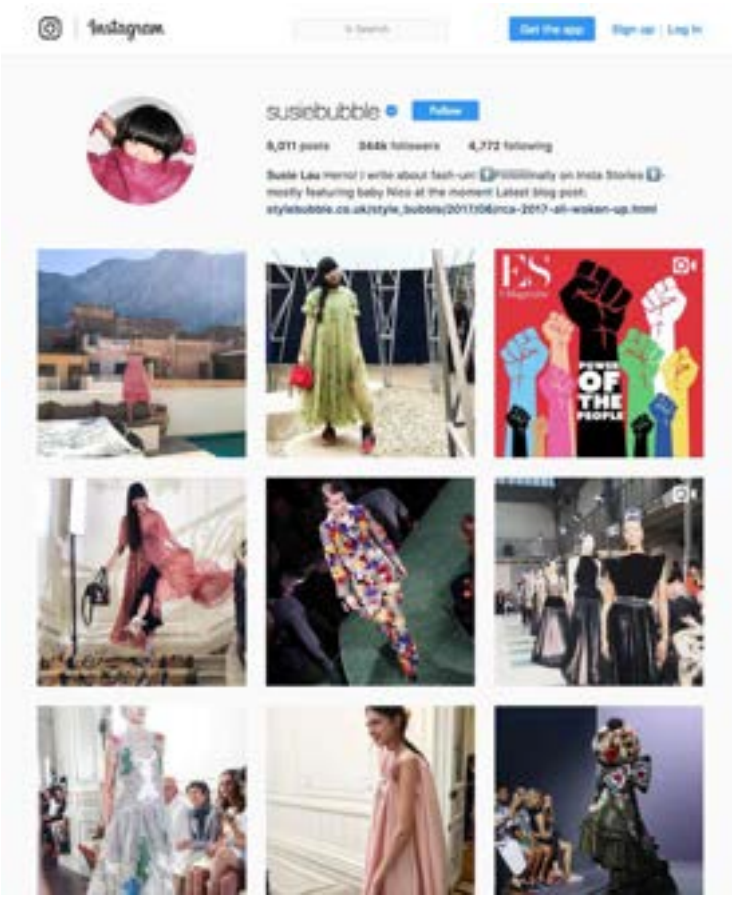

Figure 1.2 (d). Susie Bubble. (2017). Susie Bubble's Instagram page. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of instagram.com/susiebubble/

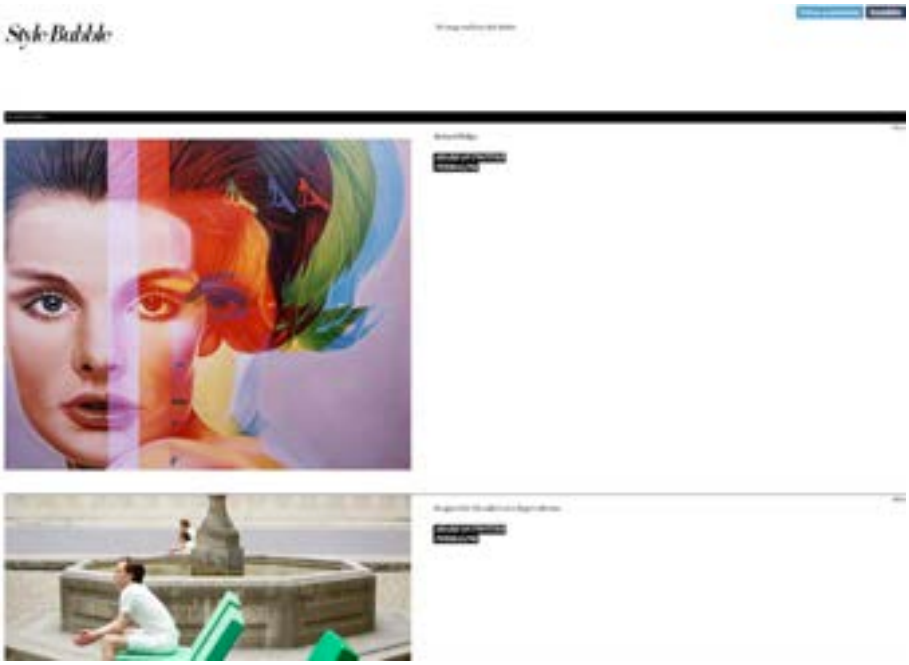

Figure 1.2 (e). Susie Bubble (2017). Susie Bubble's Trumblr page. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of susiebub.ble.tumblr.com/page/2

Types/Definitions of Fashion images

The term *fashion images* in this study refers to the photographic images displaying fashion items and encompasses a wide range of visual presentation of fashion, which includes *fashion photography*, *fashion advertising*, *image shot*, *product shots*, *look-book*, and *catalogues*. Each of these terms is defined in following section.

From the functional perspective in the commercial sector of fashion industry, images or photographs containing fashion products refer to a wide range of definitions according to the various purposes of the images. For example, fashion advertising is defined as one of the paid forms of communication tools in the category of promotion in the classic theory of the marketing mix of 4Ps: product, price, place, and promotion (Jackson & Shaw, 2009) and was modified in a more updated term as an essential part of brand communication (Hameide, 2011). These images often appear in the form of paid media, such as magazines, newspapers, outdoor billboards, or websites (Jackson & Shaw 2009). In this respect, fashion photography in its broadest and most basic definition is a vehicle for illustrating and selling clothes (Goldworthy, 1988); later, the term was lifted to a higher level in the context of creating a dream and sparking interest in it (Hamide, 2011). To further complicate the glossary list, fashion images presenting products of a full collection for public relations purposes are often referred to as the

look-book in the Western fashion market but are more commonly called the *catalogue* in Hong Kong fashion field. Images that contain products only will be classified as *product shots* in the current study.

In academic research, the terms fashion advertising, fashion images, and fashion photography are generally used interchangeably in describing photographic images depicting clothing items (Adomaitis & Johnson, 2008; Brooks, 2006; Goldsworthy, 1988; Hamide, 2011; Marshall, 1988; Perthuis 2005; Phillips & Mcquarrie, 2010; Ruggerone, 2006; Smelik, 2006). For instance, in Brooks' (2006) study, the images in mail-order catalogues of Bloomingdale's were considered to be a form of fashion advertising, as Bloomingdale's was one of the few cases of mail order catalogues that had images produced by famous fashion photographers like Guy Bourdin. However, fashion photography is not the only way to present fashion; fashion illustration was once the only medium that performed this function before fashion photography technology developed and became popular (Au, 2004; Smith 1988).

1.3.2 Defining fashion photography: The threefold nature of value creation

In order to understand the change in the meaning of fashion photography in social media, this study will begin with the study of fashion photography. Based on previous literature on this topic, this section defines the perceived value of fashion photography in three dimensions. Each of these dimensions is identified based on the different functions of fashion photography and is referred to as *the threefold of value creation*.

1.3.2.1 Value creation one (VC1): A form of expression

Artistic expression is one of the core values of fashion photography, because aesthetic elements of fashion presentation play an essential role in fashion communication (Díaz Soloaga, & García Guerrero, 2016). This is a relatively niche area in academic research in terms of analyzing the photograph's visual content and its cultural meaning (Jobling, 1999; Perthuis, 2005; Rocamora, 2011; Ruggerone, 2006; William, 1998, 2008). The primary focus of research thus far has been on examining fashion editorial images from printed fashion magazines (Jobling, 1999; Shinkle, 2008a; Smedley, 2000). In this respect, fashion photography is nothing more than fashion editorial images. The function of the fashion editorial is to present fashion styles or products and to introduce new styles and trends (Figure 1.3). Thus, the content of such fashion photography is often driven by the editorial style of the hosted fashion magazines.

Figure 1.3. Joseph Paradiso and Yuki. (2017). Fashion Editorial 'Street Star', Vogue Taiwan edition, July 2017, p.212-219. [Digital Image] Retrieved from: https://models.com/work/vogue-taiwan-street-star

Generally, fashion photographs that are strongly expressive in terms of art and creativity are quite often produced by image producers who are able to create such images free from having to consider commercial impact, and these are normally commissioned by fashion editorials of noncommercial entities or nonmainstream fashion magazines, which are usually referred as edgy, or cult magazines, such as *i-D (Figure 1.4)*, *Dazed and Confused (Figure 1.5)*, and *LOVE* (Figure 1.6), located in the UK. There has been previous research in this areas mainly conducted through qualitative research methods focusing on image production (Jobling, 1999; Shinkle 2008).

Figure 1.4. Chen Man. (2012). Cover page of i-D magazine. [Photograph] pre-Spring 2012.

Figure 1.5. Paolo Roversi. (2013). Cover page of Dazed and Confused magazine. [Photograph] July, 2013.

Figure 1.6. Mert Alas and Marcus Piggott. (2011). Cover page of LOVE magazine. [Photograph] January, 2011.

Changes in the artistic expression of fashion shootings often leads to new perceptions in terms of evaluating the aesthetics of such images. One good example would be the emergence of *straight up* fashion photography in the 90s, which first appeared in *i-D* magazine. Straight up photography produced images taken in everyday life of “ordinary looking” people (Figure 1.7). This was a new trend dominating fashion photography in the 1990s, and it gradually altered the perception of ideal standards of beauty (due to the appeal of somewhat ordinary looking people), and even the appraisal of *heroin-chic*. The classic example would be Kate Moss, an iconic figure in the fashion world, who began with a type of “girl next door” (Figure 1.8) appeal to become a supermodel with her unconventional beauty (Smedley, 2000).

Figure 1.7. Steve Johnston. (1980). 'Straight Up' style fashion photography. [Digital Image] First issue, i-D Magazine. September 1980. Retrieved from: https://www.wgsn.com/blogs/flashback-i-d-magazines-first-issue/

Figure 1.8. Corinne Day. (1990). 'The Third Summer of Love' featuring the teenage model Kate Moss. [Digital Image] The Face Magazine. July 1990. Retrieved from: http://www.libertylondongirl.com/2010/01/02/kate-moss-by-corinne-day-in-the-face-1990/

Today, fashion photography that appears on social media platforms could be viewed as a new form of straight up photography, but there is a major distinction between the two types of photography. While the original straight up photography in the 90s was created by professional photographers who were commissioned by fashion magazines to intentionally create images that gave the sense of photographing real people in genuine circumstances, fashion photography on social media today takes this concept even farther. On social media platforms, content producers are

somewhat ordinary people in that they may be amateur with regards to their photographic technique, or they may be people who shift from being a producer of images to the subject of the photos; in other words, they are fashion bloggers who become fashion icons. Thus, apart from the value of artistic expression, fashion photography on social media generates a new spectrum of expression for the *presentation of the self* as in Goffman's notion (1959) with the platform changed from social interaction to digital means.

1.3.2.2 Value creation two (VC2): A form of trend setting

The second value of fashion photography is its obvious influence on fashion trend diffusion. In this form of fashion photography, its representation in mainstream fashion magazines generally performs a function of indicating and identifying trends, where consumers look at fashion magazines, such as Vogue, Elle, Bazaar, to get an idea of what will be in trend in the fashion season. This area of study also ties into the function of fashion editorial pages as trend-setters. This was the original conception, in the *fashion diffusion theory* of how fashion spreads (McCracken, 1985; Simmel, 1904; Veblen, 1991). The *trickle across theory* explained how the new fashion trend was introduced from the editorial choice of fashion magazines (King, 1963). In this respect, social media generates opportunities for numerous fashion bloggers to become the new trend-setters and this phenomenon

challenges the traditional fashion authorship of high-end fashion leading magazines. Therefore, this will be the second focus of this study, whether there is a change in the value of fashion photography on social media as a new force of trend-setters and a new interpretation of the photography from trickle-down, trickle across, to trickle up theory (Chittenden 2010; Crane, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Pederson 2011).

1.3.2.3 Value creation three (VC3): A form of advertising

The third value creation of fashion photography is proposed as a form of advertising in this study. Fashion photography serves the function of advertising the products or the brands portrayed in the images. This area of research into fashion images is comprised of a large body of research drawing on various theories by looking at the impact of the fashion photography from the perspective of advertising, including how fashion images affect consumer response, the consumer's perception of his or her own body image, consumer's purchase intention, effects on luxury consumption, and social status identity. In addition, numerous studies have included the perspective of cultural differences. In some recent research on online advertising, the main focus was on consumer purchase intention in relation to the online web layout design. No previous research has focused

on analyzing the image style itself based on fashion web pages as a commercial entity.

A major research area on the influence of advertising images on consumers is the focus on the model's appearance. Body images in fashion advertising and how they affect viewers' identity and self-satisfaction is a complex issue involving sociological and cultural study about the influence of ideal beauty standards on one's self and one's body weight. In this respect, the theory of social comparison was frequently used in previous studies. Thus, the current study will also draw on social comparison theory to study the change of fashion representation by ordinary looking people instead of professional fashion models on social media and explore the impact of the ways in which fashion photography affects consumers' perception of their own body image.

1.3.2.4 Fashion Photography: Artistic versus commercial

There is a thin line between fashion photography as a form of art and a form of commercial medium to sell clothes; the argument is similar to the debate of whether fashion itself is a form of art or merely a material product meant to provide body protection. Dwelling on such debates would lead one to focus on a wider spectrum of research on the appreciation of fashion

photography from a cultural and social perspective, which involves the evaluation of the aesthetic value and visual representation.

In a conventional respect, items exhibited in museums are considered art pieces, and studies on the relationship between fashion photography and the museum have discussed the artistic value of fashion photography (Williams, 2008). Fashion theorist, Entwistle (2002) introduced the concept of the aesthetic economy of the fashion model, the essential component of the fashion photography, and hence indirectly suggested fashion photography carries aesthetic value through the representation of fashion model; thus, Entwistle suggested that the fashion editorial possessed higher aesthetic value than commercial fashion shooting in advertising. In general, fashion editorials allow image makers, that is, fashion photographers, more freedom in the artistic and creative direction on the visual output and therefore is considered more artistic (Entwistle, 2002). However, this notion is not always true. Sometimes fashion brands project a very expressive and creative image in a bizarre or outrageous style. This photographic style was classified as *grotesque* by Phillips and McQuarrie's (2010) study. In the study, they investigated a new form of advertising engagement from the perspective of aesthetic evaluation.

The degree to which fashion photography is defined as a form of artistic expression varies according to viewer, as image representation relies on the viewer's own experience, as well as social and cultural background, and knowledge (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009, p. 49). In fact, artistic and commercial aspects of photography may not be in direct opposition to one another (Shinkle, 2008b). Thus, the purpose of justifying fashion photography as an artistic expression in this study is to construct the research framework with respect to the different value creations of fashion photography. The artistic expression of fashion photography in this study also refers to self-expression, creative aspects, and any photographic ideas that are free from commercial consideration or limitations. This leads to the next argument about the aesthetic value and the critical assessment of the fashion images posted on the platform of social media, from the perspective of user generated content on social media: "Is photography taken by fashion bloggers considered fashion photography?"

1.3.2.5 Defining photographic images on fashion blogs

Given the ease of producing fashion images and visual sharing online, user-generated-content represents a significant change in the business versus consumer relationship. Everyone can be consumers and everyone is able to become content providers. Individual fashion lovers are able to produce

images and are able to start new trends in fashion media (fashion blogs) or as fashion business owners (fashion page on Facebook). Hence, various forms of fashion images emerge in the social media platform that have never been displayed in traditional fashion media; for instance, images with snapshot styles and self-taken photos or selfies. These types of images create a sense of the amateur and unprofessional. However, these images may still be considered acceptable or genuine in the culture of image sharing as a source of user-generated-content.

In summary, this study initially identified the perceived value creation (VC) of fashion photography into three domains: VC1. A form of expression. VC2; a form of trend setting; and VC3. A form of advertising. Figure 1.9 illustrates this framework as the first step in investigating the threefold of value creation of fashion photography.

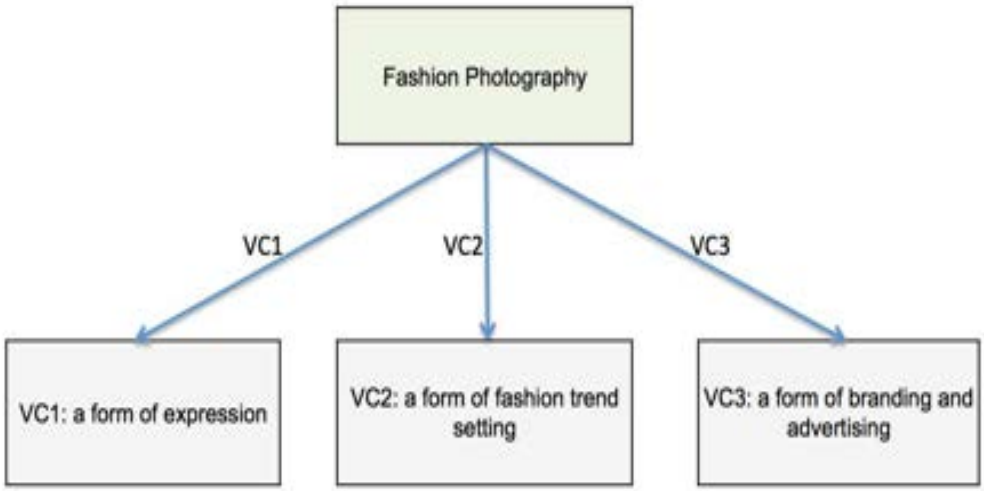

Figure 1.9. The threefold nature of value creation in fashion photography.

1.4. Research Problem and Questions

The launch of social media has been a change agent of the communication system of fashion. Based on the extensive and critical review of literature, several key theories were identified that help to explain the effect of social media on fashion communication. This literature helped shape the preliminary classification of value creation in key domains, with each value domain further redefined into two categories, which yielded a total of six domains as the dependent variables: VC1, the form of expression, was redefined into VC1a identity expression and VC1b artistic expression. VC2, the form of fashion trend setting was redefined into VC2a fashion trend diffusion and VC2b taste leadership. Finally, the third domain, the form of branding and advertising, was defined further into VC3a blogger's

self-branding and VC3b fashion branding.

Hence, the research problem is constructed as: “In what way does the new phenomenon of social media influence fashion photography in terms of artistic expression, fashion trend diffusion, and branding perspective? How would the changing digital culture of social media influence the fashion communication system?”

This study intends to answer the research questions on the future development of fashion photography: What will be the impact of social media on the fashion photography industry in Hong Kong? How will social media affect fashion leadership among the young creative generation? How will social media alter the culture of digital fashion communication? The results are thought to provide fresh insights into how the visual representation of fashion photography is being shaped. These insights and understanding with regard to fashion communication should prove to be useful for researchers and educators in fashion and image studies and fashion industry practitioners especially in the Hong Kong market.

Therefore, the research questions were refined as follows:

Research Question 1a: What is the impact of social media on the perceive value of identity expression (VC1a) of fashion photography?

Research Question 1b: What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of artistic expression (VC1b) of fashion photography?

Research Question 2a: What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of fashion trend diffusion (VC2a) of fashion photography?

Research Question 2b: What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of taste leadership (VC2b) of fashion photography?

Research Question 3a: What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of fashion bloggers' self-branding (VC3a) of fashion photography?

Research Question 3b: What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of fashion branding'(VC3b) of fashion photography?

1.5. Research Approach

This study adopted a triangulation approach of visual methodologies in examining fashion photography in three major visual areas: the site of production, the site of the audience, and the site of the image itself. Three methods were adopted that corresponded to each of the sites in order to examine the phenomenon of fashion photography in social media. The findings of each method are compared according to the principles of the grounded theory approach to formulate a new theoretical framework in

explaining the phenomenon of visual communication through the practice of user-generated fashion photography in social media.

The research approach consists of three steps of methodological procedures. First, an in-depth interview with fashion image producers was conducted. These image producers included 20 practitioners in the fashion industry, including fashion photographers, stylists, editors, or media project directors. From the site of production, interviews with these fashion image producers provided the grounds for evaluating the value of fashion photography from the perspective of the industry and mapped a traditional fashion communication model in the local context. The interviews also provided insights into the current development of the fashion media industry and the perceived impact of social media on the image production sector. The responses to the interviews were coded and analyzed to identify the key variables in the perceived values of fashion photography that would be mapped into the next research method with respect to examining the perception from the image audience.

The second step of the research was to conduct a focus group; the purpose of the focus group was to gather data from the visual audience. Image producers identified the variables of value creation of fashion photography from industry standards. Eight focus groups were conducted with college

students who are studying fashion-related discipline areas and are frequent users of social media. The findings of the in-depth interviews and focus group were constantly compared in order to develop a new theoretical framework. Then, the research questions were further refined for content analysis for the site of the image itself. The findings of focus group identified Instagram as the most popular social media platform among fashion readers, and provided snowball sampling for content analysis.

Hence, based on the findings of in-depth interviews and focus group, the research questions for content analysis were shaped in correspondence to the descriptions of the characteristics of fashion Instagram pages:

1. What are the characteristics of the fashion images on Instagram, and how do these characteristics contribute to the value creation of fashion photography?
2. What differences and similarities are displayed among these fashion images on Instagram?
3. How are these fashion images categorized into a representation of different types of fashion instagramers (IGers)?
4. What is the inter-correlation between the types of fashion bloggers and categories of images?

In response to the research questions of content analysis, the visual data of the selected samples from Instagram were further categorized and defined into the following codes: (1) the classification of fashion bloggers on Instagram: Self-expressive, fashion expression, and lifestyle expressive as a structure of content analysis for fashion images study for social media, (2) image categories: fashion and style, lifestyle and self-branding.

The research approach of content analysis provided further evidence of the content of current fashion blogging trends. Because the responses of both image producers and image audience have frequently referred to the content of the images, the approach of content analysis served to validate the findings. The last research method also examined the research study in order to provide triangulation for all aspects of fashion images. The approach aimed to verify the findings from the two qualified methods of data collection: in-depth interview and focus group. Eventually, this study aims to develop a new theoretical framework of the value creation system for fashion photography in the social media culture.

1.6 The Significance of the Study

Among the various studies reviewed that focus on fashion photography, there was a salient theme: the topic has been neglected generally due to its

being regarded as ephemeral by nature, a subject that does not warrant serious attention (Derreck, 2002; Jobling, 1999; Shrinkle, 2008a; Williams, 1997, 2008), and its association with commercialism and materialism; fashion photography is therefore considered to be of less value as a topic of study compared to other forms of photography (Hall-Duncan, 1977). Thus, the first contribution of this study is to provide an in-depth understanding of the study of fashion photography and to draw the attention to the valuable contribution of fashion photography, not only to the commercial sector, but also as a unique subject of academic research. Further, in its identification of the threefold areas of value creation as a first step, and its further development of a research model in the context of social media, the second contribution will be to pioneer this field in order to formulate a research framework on this relatively niche topic of social media. This would be the first study providing a thorough investigation of fashion photography in the context of social media in social, cultural, and business aspects.

From a branding perspective, brands lose control of the message they want to deliver on social media platforms, whereas direct selling of brands is often not welcome in the culture of web 2.0 (Fournier & Avery, 2011). The nature of consumer generated content of social media has induced a dramatic change in consumer culture on how business entities interact with their consumers, and yet this change is still being neglected by many

business executives, simply because “they do not understand what it is” (Kietzmann et al, 2011, p. 241). Consumers no longer rely on the traditional branding tools, fashion ads, and the press news delivered by public relations departments. Instead, they turn to fashion blogs and Instagram pages to search for updates in fashion news. Thus, this study aimed to provide new insights for branding professional, advertisers, and industrial practitioners in fashion image production in the context of the new arena brought into being by social media platforms.

Finally, the study aimed to contribute to the creative industry of fashion photography or image making for the Hong Kong market. The lack of influential fashion media in Hong Kong often leads to the lack of market opportunity for the producers/image makers of fashion photography in Hong Kong and China. Hence, the research findings aimed to fill the gap in studies on fashion photography in Hong Kong and to provide insights into how the fashion photography industry could adapt to the sharing culture in the digital era. Finally, the investment of such creative production of fashion photography requires a long term vision to cultivate Hong Kong as a fashion creative hub. Policy makers, fashion leaders, and educators look for the essential value of fashion photography as a form of art that is worthy to promote. Therefore, further investigation will, no doubt, focus on future developments of fashion image production by bloggers or other, new

emerging types of social media practitioners, especially in the Hong Kong professional market. A summary of the significance and contribution of this study is as follows:

1. To provide an in-depth understanding of fashion photography;
2. To construct a research framework of fashion photography in the context of social media;
3. To explain the impact of social media on the value of fashion photography;
4. To provide new insights for branding professionals, advertisers, and industrial practitioners of fashion photography in the context of fashion blogging;
5. To provide evidence and justification to policy makers and educational sectors of the importance of nurturing those of the succeeding, creative generations who will be the image makers in the field of fashion photography in Hong Kong.

1.7 The Structure of this Thesis

This thesis is comprised of eight chapters. Chapter One provided an overview of the research topic on fashion photography and social media. Chapter Two will present the literature review on the historical development of fashion photography and social media. Further, the chapter will present relevant cultural, social, and branding theories in relation to the value

creation of fashion photography and social media, and finally the study will identify the research gap in the studies of fashion photography focusing on fashion blogging.

In Chapter Three, the conceptual framework will be formulated base on the anticipated changes in perceived value creations of fashion blogging in six domains. The second half of the chapter will provide the justification for the research design in triangulating the study through adopting three types of methods in correspondence to the three sites of fashion images. The last section of this chapter will discuss the grounded theory approach for data analysis.

Chapter Four discusses the research methodology of triangulation for the study, with an explanation of the rationale of using three types of methods in respect to the three sites of images. These methods include in-depth interviews for the site of image production, focus group for the site of image audiencing, and the content analysis for the site of the image itself. Consideration of research validity and reliability will also be presented.

The report of findings will be divided into Part I for qualitative measure and Part II for quantitative measure in Chapter Five and Six respectively. Chapter Five will report on the findings of in-depth analysis and focus

group, whereas Chapter Six will report on the findings of content analysis. The comparison of the results from all three methods will be discussed thoroughly in Chapter Seven. In this chapter, a newly emerged integrated theory of networked value creation in fashion communication is constructed and explained in scrutiny.

Finally, Chapter Eight will be the conclusion on the impact of social media on the value creation of fashion photography. The end of this chapter will also include the discussion on the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research opportunities based on the findings.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this study is to identify the key perceived values of fashion photography, especially in terms of its social, cultural, and commercial contexts; to construct a conceptual framework to investigate fashion photography; to determine the interrelationship of the key elements of the perceived value in fashion blogging, and finally, to construct a framework of fashion communication under the new value creation system of fashion blogging. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the research framework on fashion photography in the context of social media culture. This chapter provides the literature review that supports this study. The literature review will be divided into three major sections. The first section will begin with the historical development of fashion photography and the research on fashion photography in its cultural, social, and commercial contexts. Next, the historical overview of social media development is provided. This will be followed by theories of digital culture relevant to the communication model. The third section will encompass the major discussion on framing social media in the context of fashion communication, fashion blogging, and communication studies. Finally, these discussions will lead to a review of the relevant literature related to the six domains of values surrounding

fashion blogging (see Figure 2.1 for structure of literature review).

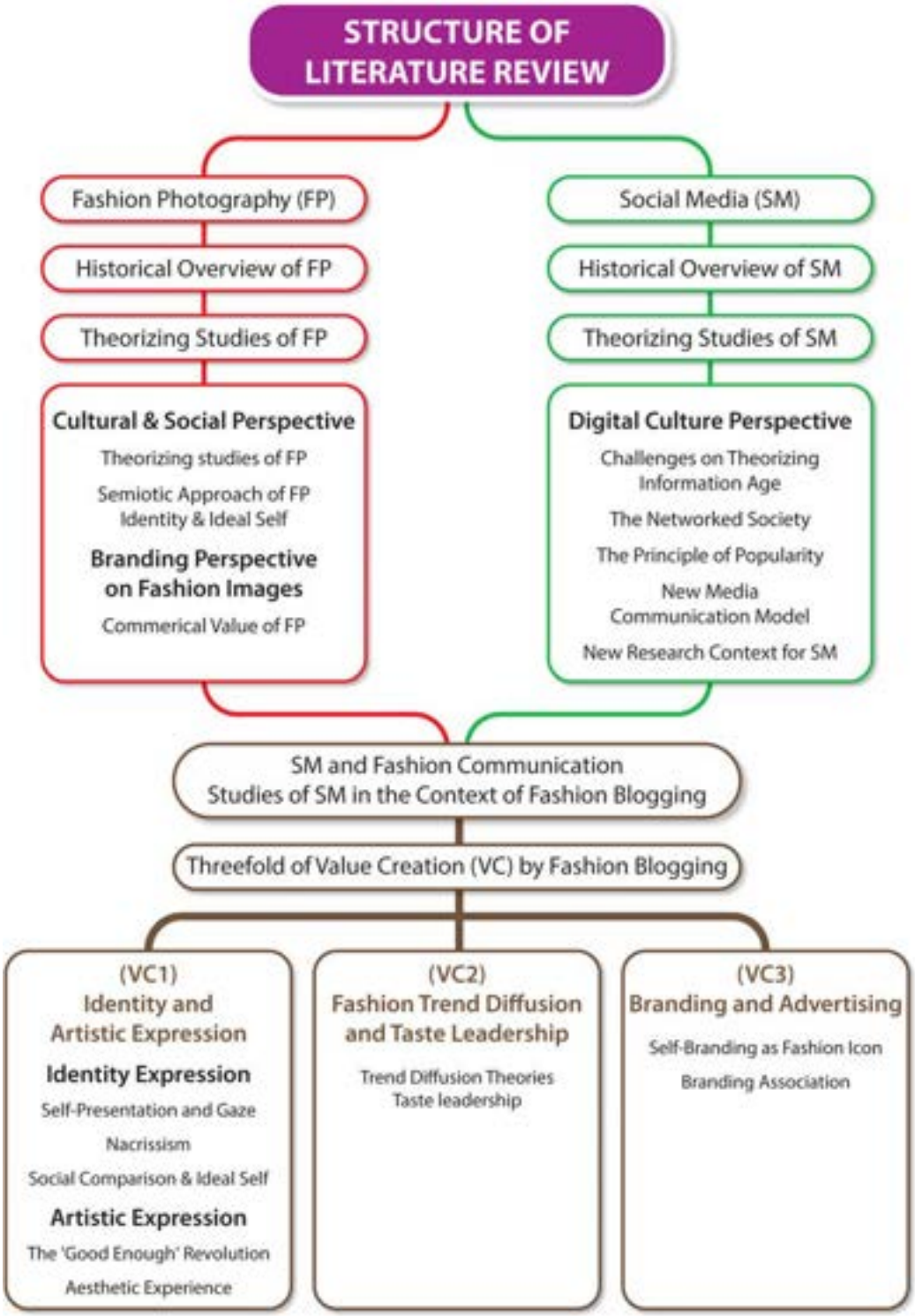

Figure 2.1. Structure of literature review

2.2 Fashion Photography

2.2.1 Historical Overview of Fashion Photography

2.2.1.1 The beginning of fashion photography

The historical development of fashion photography dates back to as early as in 1850s, when the main purpose of fashion photography was fairly straightforward: to produce apparel items in image format to show and sell to consumers. In the early 20th century, fashion photography was sometimes difficult to distinguish from general photography, because at that point, photography was an activity engaged in by high society's celebrities, who were the main subjects of photos. The major distinction between fashion photography and other photography was the focus on the styling of dress rather than the other features portrayed in a photograph, such as the setting, the portrait, or a focus for the purposes of selling sex (Hall-Duncan, 1977).

The evolution of fashion photography from a strict focus on garments for sale into a form of fashion photography recognizable today was due to the technological breakthrough of the halftone printing process, a technique that enabled a single photograph to be reproduced in mass quantities. This technological breakthrough assisted the development of photography from a

prestigious activity of high society portraits to the next level of commercializing fashion images to the public, allowing fashion photography to grow along with fashion magazines. The printed magazines became available between the 1880s to 1890s which was half a century after the introduction of photography in 1839 (Hall-Duncan, 1977).

The ups and downs of the fashion photography are often tied in with the development of the fashion industry, and the depiction of the fashion photography was closely related to the fashion movement. Moving along with the development of fashion trends in the history, the content of fashion photography has changed much of the general perception about female beauty since the early century (Hall-Duncan, 1977). Later on, the discourse around contemporary fashion photography mainly stemmed from the fashion genre of the British fashion magazines where London acted as the center of the contemporary fashion cities. Many iconic fashion styles from the 60s, such as the mini skirt (Figure 2.2) and Mod Look (Figure 2.3), as well as Space Age (Figure 2.4) and punk styles (Figure 2.5), originated in London and contribute an essential chapter of the history of fashion as well as providing a rich context for fashion photography as well. As according to Williams (1997), “It is not so much a history of fashion photography, but rather a study of fashion’s avant-garde flourishing in Britain since the early Sixties” (p. 99).

Figure 2.2 (a). Terry Smith. (n.d.). Fashion designer Mary Quant framed by mini-shirted models. [Digital Image] Source from: The LIFE Images Collection/Getty Images. Retrieved from: http://www.gettyimages.com/license/50451144

Figure 2.2 (b). Alexis Waldeck. (1967). Singer-actress Liza Minnelli wearing black mink minicoat, black lace stockings, and black felt fedora by Mary Quant. [Digital Image] Source from: Conde Nast Collection via Getty Images. Retrieved from: http://www.gettyimages.com/license/526039134

Figure 2.3 (a). Peter Knapp. (1966). Mod Look style. [Digital Image] Source from: French Vogue, 1966. [Digital Image] Retrieved from http://hollyhocksandtulips.tumblr.com/post/17830422051/photo-by-peter-knapp-paris-vogue-1966

Figure 2.3 (b). Willy Rizzo. (1966). Mod Look style fashion designed by André Courrèges. [Digital Image] Retrieved from: https://blog.colettehq.com/inspiration/andre-courreges-master-of-mod

Figure 2.4 (a). John French. (1965). Space Age styles, Pattie Boyd and Celia Hammond in Edward Mann dots and moons helmets. [Digital Image] Retrieved from: http://www.bluetramontana.com/2009/01/famous-photographer-john-french.html

Figure 2.4 (b). Peter Knapp. (1965). Space Age styles designed by Pierre Cardin. [Digital Image] The Sunday Times Magazine. 16 January 1965. Retrieved from: http://www.vintag.es/2015/07/space-age-futuristic-fashion-designed.html

Figure 2.5. Paola Kudacki. (2011). Fashion editorial showing contemporary punk fashion styles. [Photograph] Source from: i-D Magazine, May 2011, p.166-167.

Apart from the close relationship of fashion photography and fashion itself, fashion photography also coexisted with the fashion media industry, that is, the fashion magazines. Fashion magazines have had a dominant influence on the fate of fashion photography since the invention of photography. The leading fashion magazines, such as *Vogue of Conde Nast* publication and *Harper's Bazaar*, played an important role in nurturing numerous 'star' fashion photographers, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, Helmut Newton, Guy Bourdin, and many others. The publication houses for *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, were the few influential media companies established studios in all three fashion cities, Paris, London, and New York (Hall-Duncan, 1977:12).

2.2.1.2 The changing styles of fashion photography in the 20th Century

This section provides a quick overview of the historical development of fashion photography throughout the century. As mentioned previously, in the early stage of fashion photography, its main goal was to achieve an actual documentation of fashion items for sale. This practice was changed by the first American fashion photographer, Adolf de Meyer, who is best known for his contribution to the aesthetic advancement of *pictorialism* in fashion photography in the 1910s (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6. Baron Adolf de Meyer. (1920). Helen Lee Worthing. [Platinum print] The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Source: from Hall-Duncan, 1977, p. 34.

Pictorialism emphasized the stylistic expression of the image and had limited color tones to create suggestive moods. This movement lifted fashion photography from a straightforward documentation of fashion shooting to a form of artistic expression. The soft-focus moody pictorialism was then replaced by a new style of modernism from the 1920s to 30s; this new modern style was introduced by Edward Steichen (Figure 2.7). The style suggested clean geometric lines, and encouraged experimentation in concordance with the European modernist art scene. Steichen's avant-garde Parisian style work bought him into an association with Paul Poiret, who was considered the first fashion designer; his designs frequently appeared in Steichen's photographs.

Figure 2.7. Edward Steichen. (1925). Art Deco gown photographed in the apartment of Nina Price, New York. [Photograph] Reproduced in Vogue, June, 1925, p.70. Source from: Hall-Duncan, 1977, p. 45.

In the 1930s, the dominant influence in fashion photography is known the *age of realism.* This kind of photographic style was introduced by Martin Munkacsi, who was a Hungarian sports photographer commissioned by Harper's Bazaar. Due to the nature of outdoor sport photographs, Munkasci conveyed a realistic effect, giving a sense of spontaneity and documentary style to sportswear images (Figure 2.8). This realistic approach to photography may appear to be like the earliest version of today's snap shot photos on social media.

Figure 2.8. Martin Munkacsi. (1933). Mercury cape in green jersey. [Photograph] Reproduced in Harper's Bazaar, December, 1933, p.47. Source from: Hall-Duncan, 1977, p. 71.

Alongside the realism in the 30s was surrealism, which was in direct contrast to realism and influenced by the art movement (Figure 2.9). Fashion designers like Coco Chanel often worked closely with artists and painters like Salvador Dali in the Parisian art circle. Surrealism created an important chapter in fashion photography in that it allowed for creative and artistic expression in the images such that an innovative visual impact was created (Hall-Duncan, 1977).

Figure 2.9. Man Ray. (1934). Augustabernard's New Line: The Gown Billows at the Bottom. [Photograph] Reproduced in Harper's Bazaar, October, 1934, p.52. Source from: Hall-Duncan, 1977, p. 87.

World War II followed these movements, and the development of fashion photography and magazine publication were both inevitably disturbed (Hall-Duncan, 1977; Williams, 1997). In addition to the lack of supplies and difficult conditions to create photos, fashion photography was criticized as an unnecessary and nonserious form of photography during war-time. Photographic style turned away from flamboyance to functionality. Yet, fashion photography during war-time served as an important method of reporting, contributing to the historical and social documentation of the society during a time of war. While the effects of war mainly ravaged European fashion cities, such as London and Paris that suffered from bombing, fashion photography in New York was technically unaffected; the United States' inland cities were not bombed and ruined despite the country's active role in WWII. This situation laid the foundation for the shift that occurred in New York becoming a leading creative center for fashion (Hall-Duncan, 1977). One of the most significant fashion photographers was Louise Dahl-Wolfe, whose worked remained fashion oriented (Figure 2.10); she escaped from the difficulties of war, and bought to the American fashion industry images that had a touch of a metropolitan view of cities (Arnold, 2002); this was her signature style of "environmental" fashion photography, creating images of free, easy, and exotic new American women (Wilson, 2000). During her career from 1930s to 1960s, she worked for Harper's Bazaar and Vogue magazine (Arnold, 2002;

Wilson, 2000).

Figure 2.10. Louise Dahl-Wolfe. (1941). Model in suit by Nettie Rosenstein. [Digital Image] Retrieved from: https://pleasurephoto.wordpress.com/2012/12/24/model-in-suit-by-nettie-rosenstein-photo-by-louise-dahl-wolfe-harpers-bazaar-1941/

With the end of WWII, a dramatic rebellion in fashion was observed in the creation of the *new look* by Dior (Figure 2.11); this new look was symbolized not only as a change in fashion style but also a reaction to the social and political changes after the war. Thus, the 1950s opened up a new chapter for the fashion world's glamorous in both the design of clothes and the images that were produced. At the same time, this new chapter embraced the international success of ready to wear American designs and

became the dominating scene for fashion photography (Hall-Duncan, 1977).

Figure 2.11. Willy Maywald. (1947). The New Look, designed by Christian Dior. [Digital Image] Retrieved from: http://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/designers/g5139/christian-dior-1940s-photos/?slide=1

Fashion photography in the 50s was tied to influential fashion photographers, such as Richard Avedon and Irving Penn, whose work remained significant for several decades. Avedon evolved his style from vocation to life to sophistication and experimentation in the 50s (Figure 2.12), and another leading figure, Irving Penn, was acclaimed for his luxurious style with elegance (Figure 2.13), tasteful touch which was in contrast to the spontaneity and experimental style of Avedon. These were

influential to creative expression for fashion photography though out the 50s (Hall-Duncan, 1977).

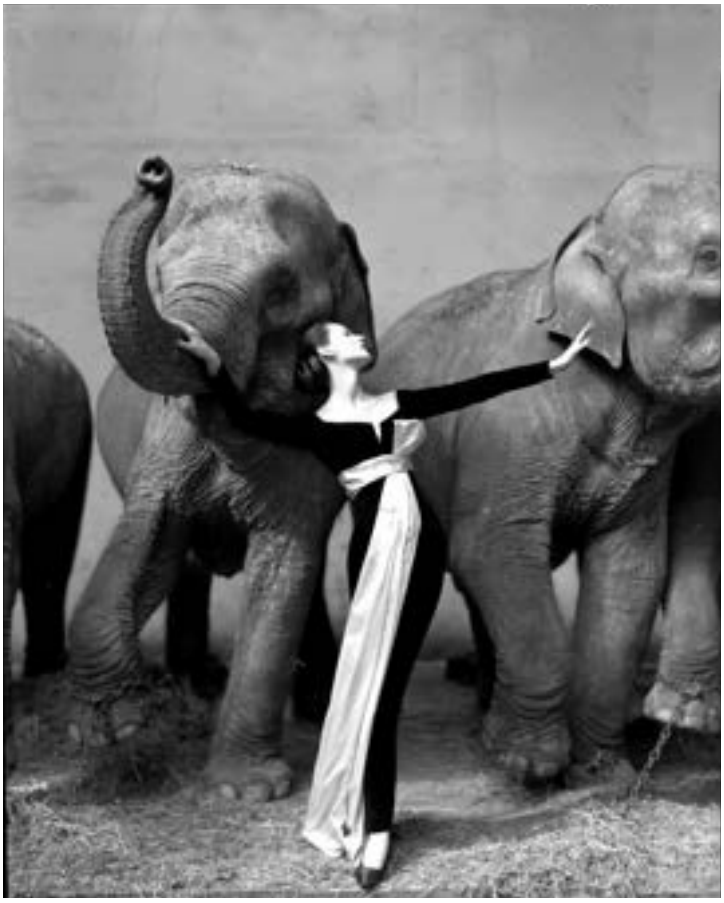

Figure 2.12. Richard Avedon. (1955). Evening dress by Dior. [Photograph] Source from: Hall-Duncan, 1977, p. 137.

Figure 2.13. Irving Penn. (1952). Woman in Moroccan Palace. [Photographed] Reproduced in Vogue, January 1952. P.132-33. Source from: Hall-Duncan, 1977, p.146.

The 1960s was an age of social movements, including anti-war demonstrations, women's liberation, the sexual revolution, and a rising awareness of African American rights, social rights, and other political issues. Fashion photography often conveyed this awareness through its images. The themes and depictions of fashion photography were radical and were marked by creative diversity. Choice of fashion models were also a breakthrough from the conventional standards of beauty to more unconventional body and clothing types. Photographer's collaboration with models also brought fame to fashion models who stepped onto the stage of fashion photography as an important symbol. In his later work in the 60s, Avedon's choice of models, Twiggy (Figure 2.14), became so well known

that it redefined the world's sense of beauty (Hall-Duncan, 1977). The London fashion scene also painted a vivid picture of iconic fashion designs and styles, Mary Quant's mini-skirt, the MOD look, Space Age style, Punk subculture (see Figure 2.2-5), street styles, with the youth market; the 60s art scene was a driving force in fashion, and all of these served as the inspiration for contemporary fashion photography.

Figure 2.14. Richard Saker. (1966). British Model Twiggy (Lesley Hornby), the fashion icon in 1960s. [Digital Image] Source from: Popperfoto / Getty Images. Retrieved from: http://www.gettyimages.com/license/571928947

New York's leading role in fashion photography gradually lost ground to its European counterparts in the 1970s; despite the large circulation of the American fashion magazine, *Vogue*, the French *Vogue* took the lead in creativity by giving creative freedom to the two renowned fashion photographers, Helmut Newton and Guy Bourdin (Garner, 2010; Hall-Duncan, 1977, 2010). The famous fashion photograph, "Le Smoking,"

(Figure 2.15) by Helmut Newton portraying a female model in a Yes Saint Laurant menswear tailor suit alongside a bare breasted woman, suggesting both androgyny and homosexuality was one of the iconic fashion photographs of the 70s (Hall-Duncan, 1977; Jobling, 1999). Alongside Bourdin and Newton, other world famous names in fashion photography included Deborah Turbeville (Figure 2.16), Sarah Moon (Figure 2.17) (Hall-Duncan, 1977).

Figure 2.15. Helmut Newton. (1975). 'Le Smoking', the iconic photo depicting an androgynous model in tuxedo suit designed by Yves Saint Laurent. [Digital Image] Original source from: French Vogue, September, 1975. Retrieved from: http://www.thisisglamorous.com/2014/05/le-smoking-hedi-slimane-2014-version-of-yves-saint-laurents-signature-look/

Figure 2.16. Deborah Turbeville. (1975). Fashion photography in editorial feature 'There's more to a bathing suit than meets the eye'. [Photograph] Source from: Vogue Magazine, May 1975. p. 132-133.

Figure 2.17. Sarah Moon. (1973). Fashion photography by Sarah Moon. [Photograph] Reproduced in French Vogue, February 1973, p. 114-115. Source from: Hall-Duncan, 1977, p.210-211.

At that time, fashion photography was no longer only significant in the editorial pages of magazines; it was also seen in creative fashion advertising, such as Charles Jourdan's shoe ad campaign by Guy Bourdin (Figure 2.18), who incorporated a wide spectrum of inspiring themes and enriched the creative value of fashion photography. His photography was in part inspired by Hollywood films, including scenes of violence, nudity, sexual expression, homosexuality, all of which made a strong and controversial visual impact on the audience (Figure 2.19). This type of photography emphasized the female body as an object of desire (Jobling, 1999) and of sexual fantasy (Lynge-Jorlen, 2012). This trend marked a significant change in the way fashion photography contributed to the fashion world by bringing in new innovative ways of creating commercial advertising through photography. Most often, the presentation was linked to other promotional tools, such as window displays, catalogues, or look-books (Brooks, 2006; Hall-Duncan, 1977). Fashion photography in essence was no longer limited to the fashion editorial but embodied a wide range of visual presentation in the industry.

Figure 2.18. Guy Bourdin. (1979). Charles Jourdan Spring 1979 shoe advertising campaign. [Digital Image] Retrieved from: http://magazine.toniandguy.com/article/259/image-maker

Figure 2.19. Guy Bourdin. (1975). Charles Jourdan Spring 1975 shoe advertising campaign, visual creative suggesting a crime scene. [Photograph] Reproduced in French Vogue, Spring/Summer 1975. Source from: Hall-Duncan, 1977, p.191.

The fashion photography scene from the 1980s to the 1990s was even more diverse; it was transformed due to a new launching of avant-garde fashion

magazines, such as the *Face, i-D, Dazed and Confused,* which targeted the youth market. These magazines were filled by the work of young talented fashion photographers who explored various themes in creative yet often controversial expressions. Fashion editors, such as Anna Wintor of American Vogue, also played a significant role in fashion photography (Jobling, 1999). While the 80s saw the remaking of the golden age of the supermodels (Figure 2.20), where the ideal standards of beauty dominated fashion photography, photographs of iconic supermodel Kate Moss led to a breakthrough of an opposite trend of minimalism; she was photographed by her friend, Corinne Day, at her apartment with a minimalist back drop (see Figure 1.8). The photographs, portraying a toned down simplicity in setting and styling, became the genesis of the infamous, powerful images of the notorious heroin-chic, which even received attention from the President of the United States Bill Clinton, who addressed the powerful but negative influence of fashion photography on American teens (Jobling, 1999; Smedley, 2000). Later, the simplistic style emanating from these photos dominated the whole 90s minimalist fashion world (Derrick & Muir, 2002).

Figure 2.20. Herb Ritts. (1989). 'Supermodels', from Left to Right: Stephanie Seymour, Cindy Crawford, Christy Turlington, Tatjana Patitz, Naomi Campbell. [Digital Image] Retrieved from: http://voicesfilm.com/herb-ritts-supermodels-1989-image/

2.2.1.3 Fashion photography today

The historical development of fashion photography ends in the 90s in this study as it was only a century development, and not many systematic studies focusing in this area have been conducted on the following century. At the closing of her work on the history of fashion photography, Nancy Hall-Duncan (1977) remarked how unclear the future of fashion photography was by end of the 70s and cited critic Hilton Kramer, “The idea of exhibiting fashion photographs will undoubtedly change the way fashion photographs consider, take, print and preserve their images” (p. 220). This reiterated the fact that for the most part the fashion photography developed in consort with image presentation. The two important fashion

magazines, *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, no doubt dominated the visual culture of fashion representation in the 20th century (Krause-Wahl, 2009) until the emergence of niche and avant-garde magazines, such as *i-D*, *Dazed and Confused* of the 80s (Jobling, 1999) and *Tank* of late 90s (Lynge-Jorlen, 2012). Today, fashion photography moves from printed material, which relied on the success of certain magazines titles, to digital platforms, such as the fashion blogs where individuals can create their own platforms. Recently, fashion photography has evolved to embody a new trend of moving images, such as SHOWstudio (Figure 2.21), established by renowned fashion photographer, Nick Knight. This phenomenon has further blurred the boundary when it comes to defining fashion images, because images are no longer simply represented in still photographic format but are found in moving formats (Khan, 2012). This latter phenomenon is a topic for future research into fashion visual representation and is outside of the scope of this study. The following section reviews the research on fashion photography with respect to contemporary social, cultural, and commercial contexts.

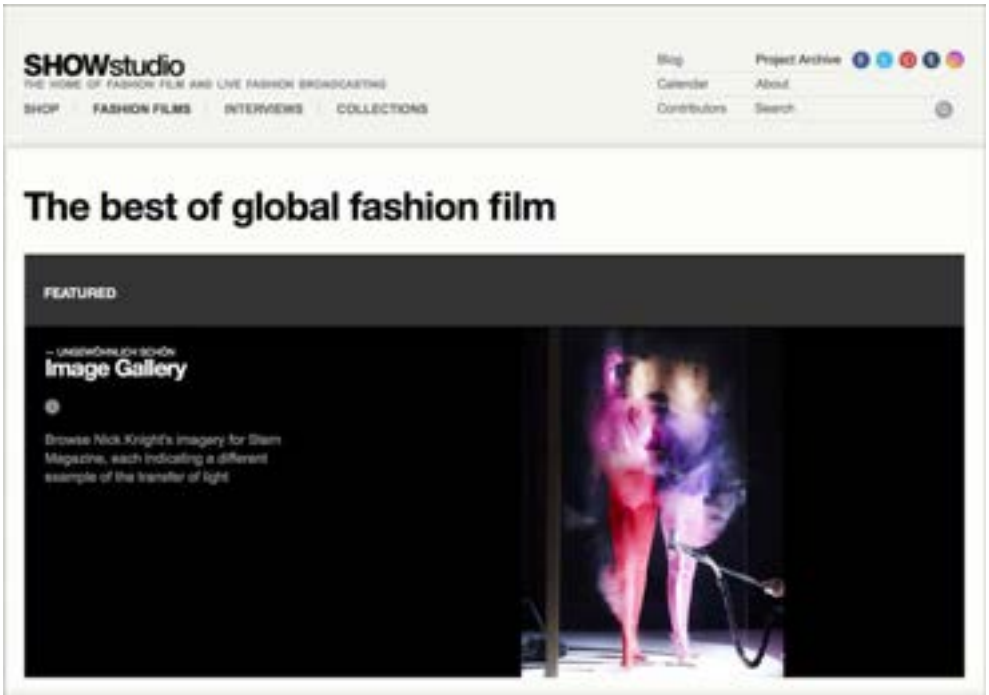

Figure 2.21. Nick Knight. (2017). Cover page of website: Showstudio.com. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of http://showstudio.com/projects/tag/fashion_films

2.2.2 Research on Fashion Photography

Fashion photography has generally been regarded as ephemeral by nature and not a serious subject in the realm of academic research (Jobling, 1999; Derreck, 2002; Shrinkle, 2008a; Williams, 1997). Fashion photography may have been considered to be less valuable compared to other forms of photography because of its commercial uses (Hall-Duncan, 1977:9). This accounts for why there may be limited literature focusing on fashion photography.

While most of the books on fashion photography have focused on the technological aspects of producing photographs of fashion items, scholarly studies about fashion photography are scattered and limited in scope. Hall's

The History of Fashion Photography (1979), capturing the development of fashion photography from the early century until 1970s, is considered to be the most comprehensive and complete narrative study on the historical overview of fashion photography (Au, 2004; Jobling, 1999; Williams, 2008). Later works by Jobling (1999) and Shinkle (2008) comprised the few unique resources that gave a critical review specifically on fashion photography regarding cultural and social production in the contemporary fashion context; as Williams (2008) argued that fashion photography plays an essential role in museum exhibitions and democratizes its audience. The value of fashion photography in commercial realms began to emerge in the 60s with the blossom of the fashion industry in the West in studies covering the controversial issues that fashion photography brought into being, such as pornography, body weight issues, and heroin chic in the 1990s (Jobling, 1999; Smedley, 2000; Williams, 1997). One of the common criticisms of fashion photography was the *unreal* depiction of the photography, which set it apart from the documentary function of general photography, and its potential negative influence in distorting the reality of its viewers.

In contrast, critics have also argued that the significance of fashion photography lies in its social value. This point was argued by Roland Barthes (1990), who stated fashion was significant to how garments are worn, and the representation of them has cultural significance. Hall-Duncan

(1977) also argued that fashion photography contains within itself artistic integrity and social importance, and “a wealth of social and cultural implications” (p. 13). In accord with both Hall-Duncan and Barthes, Jobling (1999) noted fashion representation through photography goes beyond the simple purpose of selling clothes, and creates fantasies and have a “profound impact on the social and cultural scene” (p 3).

2.2.2.1 Study of fashion photography from a cultural and social perspective

In the study of fashion images, another major area is the investigation of how readers interpret the images, whereas the notion of representation is at the center of cultural studies (Barker, 2008). The interpretation of fashion images is often linked to the study of semiotics, which originated from the linguistics study of Saussure (1966) and was later applied to visual interpretation of fashion by the pioneer in the field, Roland Bathes (1990), in his famous work, the *Fashion System*. In Saussure’s conceptual system of signs, there are two levels of reading signs, the *signifier* and the *signified*. The signifier refers to the physical part of an object, a sign or a word, whereas the signified refers to the mental interpretation of that sign, object, or word suggested. Hence, Saussure suggested that the process of signified meaning is arbitrary and is often driven by the cultural lens of the interpreter (Barnard, 1996). Following Saussure's notion of sign, Barthes (1990) further

developed a sophisticated system of *denotation* and *connotation* to analyze the meaning of fashion. Although Barthes' work was often misinterpreted or considered to overcomplicate fashion communication, his notion on analyzing fashion as a sign system has helped to form a significant foundation for the understanding of fashion representation (Barnard, 1996).

In evaluating the various means of interpreting fashion, Barnard (1996) emphasized that the genre includes photographic or other visual forms of fashion that create meaning. Referring to *fashion as communication*, he mentioned that both denotation and connotation may be used to explain and analyze the production of meaning in drawings, films, and photographs, as well as in actual garments (Barnard, 1996). However, his further analysis of fashion communication only focused on the clothing items as the means to create meaning and did not further elaborate on the other visual elements of a fashion image that may contribute or alter the meaning. The visual elements apart from the clothing were neglected in his discussion of fashion communication. His main interest was to interpret the meaning of fashion from the clothing item itself. This seems to have led to the predominant emphasis on the clothing item as the main visual subject in earlier studies on fashion communication. However, an image of fashion can include various elements other than the clothing itself, such as the fashion model who wears the clothes, the posture of the fashion model, the background of where the

images are taken, props, and the setting. Together, these visual elements play an essential role in constructing the synthetic idea and production of meaning (de Perthius, 2005; Kleiner, 2001).

In the recent past, researchers developed various theories to explain and categorize fashion images. Researchers have built on this framework to develop theories on fashion and identity, noting that fashion images have contributed to the industry not only with respect to visual communication, but they have also played a significant role for readers (consumers) who may identify with the images and develop their unique psychological response (whether positive or negative) in association to the ideal self (Adomaitis & Johnson, 2008; Ivas, 2002; Jung, 2006; Kang, 1997; Perthuis 2005; Ruggerone 2006). These studies involve evaluating a fashion image in the context of a wider spectrum, which includes the physical appearance of fashion model. These images began to be regarded in the context of their profound influence on women's identity, their influence with respect to social identity, such as ethnicity, their shaping of the consumer culture, and even the general society at large (Adomaitis & Johnson, 2008; Brooks 2006; Phillips & Mcquarrie, 2010; Ruggerone 2006; Smelik, 2006).

2.2.2.2 Study of fashion photography from advertising and branding perspective

The commercial value of fashion photography is no doubt the main reason for the existence of fashion photography. Editor-in-Chief of American Vogue, Anna Wintor, is one of the most powerful women in the fashion world. When she was asked what the function of fashion photography was, she stated, “Obviously . . . to show clothes,” (Jobling, 1999, p. 24). Although previous studies have seldom highlighted fashion photography as a key research subject, numerous studies have focused on advertising research in relation to fashion images and analyzed the content of fashion photography as part of their research focus. In fact, the commercial aspects of fashion photography is actually a popular area of research. For example, the model images in fashion advertising comprised several key areas in (a) body image research regarding social comparison theories (Ivas, 2000; Martin & Kennedy, 1993; Richins, 1991); (b) the fashion photographic style of fashion brand advertising on consumer engagement regarding consumer culture theories (Adomaitis & Johnson, 2008; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010); and (c) fashion advertising on luxury consumption (Venkatesh et al, 2010). Today, fashion photography has extended its commercial value to co-marketing with other sideline products due to its ability to stylize an image. Certain products types, such as cigarettes, which are considered

hazardous to health, are positioned strategically as a sideline product in a fashion photography in order to *wash away* the negative impression; these tactics even stylize smoking behavior as an aspiration for consumers, especially the younger generation (Amos, 1998). However, despite its value in the commercial sector, this kind of beautifying nature of fashion photography has also received criticism as it is sending a misleading message to readers (Amos, 1998).

With the advancement of technological development of media production and distribution, studies further incorporated the impact of new technology on advertising, such as websites and online shopping (Kim & Lennon, 2010a; Kim & Lennon, 2010b); again, the involvement of fashion photography was encompassed in varies academic studies related to fashion industry.

2.2.3 Conclusion of Fashion Photography Historical Development and Research

The historical overview of fashion photography provided a brief glimpse of the development of the visual representation of fashion throughout the century. The historical background showed the fashion photography's development from being considered strictly a representation of items for

sale to the wider spectrum of fashion photography's influence in the social and cultural realms. A research gap was thus revealed in the lack of academic research on the interpretation of fashion images. This sets up the foundation for this study to further understand what fashion and its presentation means as well as the value it creates.

2.3. Social Media

Since the advent of social media, various scholarly works have been dedicated to theorizing the social media phenomenon and to formulate a more structural discourse on this topic. This section will start with the discussion of the historical development of social media followed by a critical review of the literature on social media in relationship to digital culture, fashion industry, and to more recent studies on fashion blogging.

2.3.1. Historical Overview of Social media

The social media phenomenon has been growing at an accelerated rate and has become an essential part of everyday life; consequently, it is also a popular topic of research in the business and scholarly arena in the past 5 years. Social media was thought to come into existence about 20 years ago when the first social network game, SixDegree.com, launched in 1997 (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Brunty & Helenek, 2013). The timeline could date

back to 1979 according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), with the creation of the first worldwide discussion system, named the Usenet, which allowed online users to communicate through public posts. However, the development of such a system lacked further research support, and it is generally agreed that the era of social media started somewhat 20 years ago around 1995. The following two figures (Figure 2.22, 2.23) show the development timeline from two main sources of social media history.

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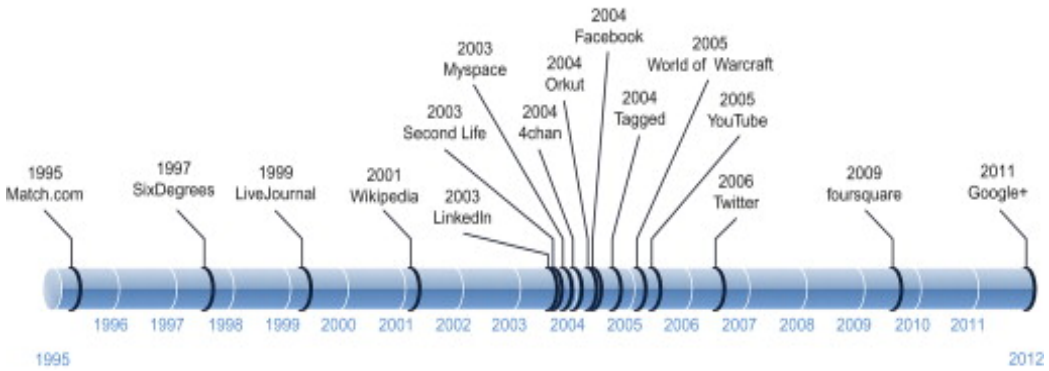


Figure 2.22. Social media development timeline. Source from: Brunty & Helenek, 2013, p.3

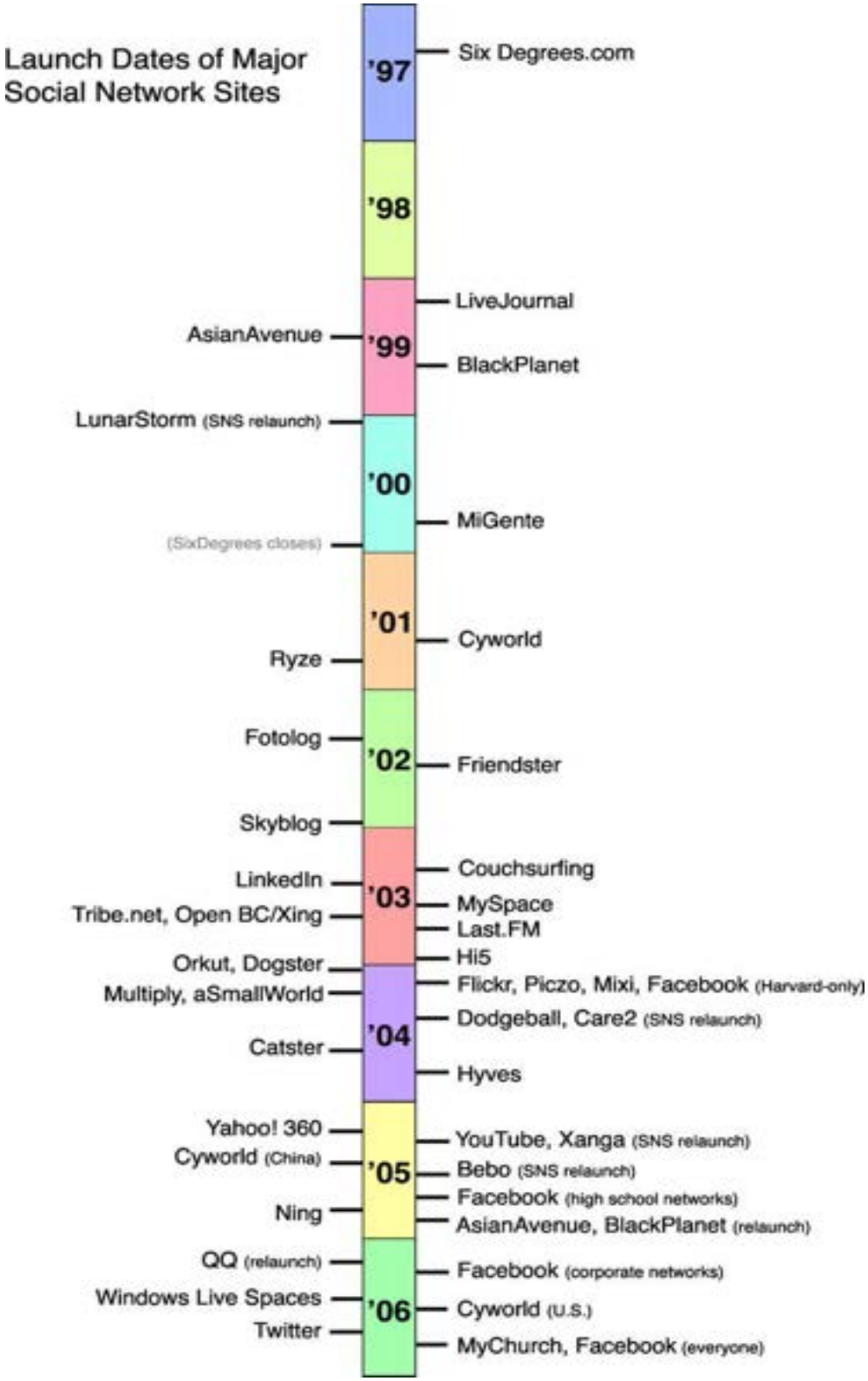


Figure 2.23. Timeline of the launch dates of many major SNSs and dates when community sites. Source from: Boyd & Ellison, 2007, 13, pp. 210-230.

As mentioned previously, what made social media unique is that it enabled individual users to link together, and it allowed the users to contribute to the content generated by themselves; whether they are friends, business networks, or total strangers, they were able to share common interests, hobbies, skill, games, and personal profiles. At the earliest stage, most of these sites focused on social networking for leisure purposes, such as connecting with friends, dating. In this capacity they were referred to social networking sites (SNS; Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Although the functions of these SNSs differed to a large degree in terms of features and user base, they had generally specific targets with respect to ethnic groups, regional base, gender, age, and educational level, and hence user cultures were generated among the SNS communities (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The second wave of SNS development started around 2001 when a group of more business networking sites such as Ryze,com, Tribe.net and Linkedln, soon emerged to tie in with business professionals.

It was not until 2003, with the launch of MySpace.com, that SNSs started to gain the attention of the mainstream market via the U.S. media. At the same time, Chinese QQ instant messaging service had shown China's great potential market by instantly becoming the largest SNS worldwide (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The blogging services, such as Xanga, LiveJournal, and Vox, had also became mature with the support of the SNS feature and gained in

popularity (Kietzmann et al, 2011). By 2006, the proliferating expansion of Facebook.com from college students to the mass public made social media a global phenomenon (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Facebook.com continued to expand to a giant kingdom with more than 1 billion monthly active users by 2012 and acquired another popular social media site, Instagram the same year (Facebook, 2013). Technorati.com, a blog search engine, reported that there were more than 100 million blogs in the blogosphere, while more than 90 million tweets were sent by more than 145 million users by 2011 (Kietmann et al, 2011; Technorati.com 2011). The list could go on.

Today, news on the development of social media continues at an accelerating pace, with numerous new designs of social media sites replacing previous ones. It would be unrealistic to include the most updated statistics for the social media industry at the time of this study. While Boyd and Ellison (2007) constructed the first comprehensive study on the history and overview of social networking sites, and in so doing, laid the foundation for further relevant research in this field, Kaplan and Healein (2010) summarized the essential statistics of the development of social media in their study, which further contributed to how social media is defined. In their study social media was categorized into six areas, of which SNS are part of; these catagories were later adopted by other researchers (Brunty & Helenek, 2013; Kietzmann et al. 2011). The six different types of social

media are as follows: (1) collaborative projects, (2) blogs, (3) content communities, (4) SNS, (5) virtual game worlds, and (6) virtual social worlds (Kaplan & Haelein, 2010).

One of the common phenomenon observed in social media trends is its extremely short life cycle. At time of this writing, Facebook was already facing the challenges of being abandoned by teens (Shaughnessy, 2013), and teenage users were moving from a web-first apps platforms like Facebook to the new platform of mobile-first apps, such as Instagram (Dumenco, 2012; Shaughnessy, 2013). While Dean (2010) proclaimed the death of blogging as early as the year 2010, he further explained that bloggers move from individual blogging activities to corporate blogging activities; by 2009, 70% of bloggers reviewed said that they blogged about brands instead of themselves. Nevertheless, these remarks did not presage the end of social media development. The rapid changing nature of social media inclined researchers to focus on the diversity and changes of social media, instead of studying a particular type. Today, the usage and design of social media varies greatly according to region and culture (Shaughnessy, 2013).

The technological advancement of Web 2.0 has made a major contribution in providing ease of use. In terms of blogging activity, what makes a blog a

blog is not the technology but the ease of use (Ringmar, 2007:17). As Bell (2007) argued, from the cyberculture theorist's point of view, ordinary users are not included in the story of technology, as the group is only passively receiving, or on the user end of, technology that has been well developed for their use. The popularity of Web 2.0 and social media definitively altered the nature of producer-to-user relationship; on the other hand, companies and brands are often not comfortable with losing control of information thrown from their hands to the consumers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In the next section, more discussion on the study of social media in the context of the digital culture, fashion, fashion photography, and business will be explored.

2.3.2. Theorizing Social Media in the Digital Culture

As discussed in the previous section, since its launching, social media has evolved into various forms with different functions. Not until recent years has the term social media emerged in the common vocabulary as a new form of digital communication platform. The era of the digital age creates fundamental changes in life; it alters the way people communicate and interact with each other relative to time, space, and community. The discourse on social media is generally linked with the discussion of digital communication and digital culture. The term digital culture is often used

interchangeably with the terms cyberculture or new media culture (Levy, 2001; Nayar, 2010a, 2010b), and it is commonly discussed together with digital media and digital communication. All these terms refer to the technological advancement in enabling interactive communication on an online platform (Levy, 2001; Nayar, 2010a). This section begins with the early stage of scholarly works on digital culture, and then proceeds to cover the relevant theoretical models of social media.

Among various discussions pertaining to social media, one common agreement among researchers was the difficulty in theorizing about this topic as an academic discipline due to the extremely fast pace of technological development and lack of previous theoretical support (Lovgink, 2011; Nayar, 2010). As Lovingk (2011) claimed, doctoral "research cannot keep up with the pace of change and condemns itself to capturing vanishing networks and cultural pattern[s]" (p. 6). Perhaps this statement is too pessimistic, but it reflects the pressure on researchers who undertake academic research on a topic that is tied to Internet technology with so many undefined terms and variables. These sentiments were captured in the words of Bell (2007), who described the field of cyberculture as "too undisciplined to be called a discipline" (p. 52).

The digital age is said to constitute a revolutionary change from the

previous post-industrial society; it is an era that emphasizes intangible values of knowledge and information. Key economists and sociological theorists, such as Manuel Castells (1996, 1997, 2001), David Bell (1979, 2001, 2007), and Van Dijck (2013, 2006), have contributed to the discourse of the network society, formulated new perspectives to explain the social transformations shaped by the information age, and refined the concept of post-industrial society to information society. The key concept is the paradigm shift of a tangible production-oriented economy to an informational exchange society, in which Castells (1996, 1997, 2001) referred as *informationialism* in his trilogy, *Information Age*.

The ambitious work of Castells attempted to formulate a theoretical construct with regard to economic, social, political and globalization changes wrought by the information age; his concepts of *network society*, *space of flows*, and *timeless time* has become the key discussion topics pertaining to cyberculture (Bell, 2007; Miller, 2011; Nayar, 2010). In *Space of Flows*, he discusses globalization as a form of networked nodes. The flow of space needs certain nodes to be connected, but these nodes do not necessarily need to be real cities; he introduced the metaphor of *informational city* (2005). The notion of timeless time is closely related to the idea of space of flows, with the emphasis on the dimension of speed and instantaneity (Bell, 2007).

According to the above theories of the information age, Castells agreed that products in the digital age have transformed from tangible goods to information and knowledge. The classic economic theory about values being determined relative to production scarcity no longer applies to the new information age. In the information age, products exist in the form of data and could be reproduced without cost of tangible resources. The value of products is driven by the popularity of the sources instead of its scarcity.

In agreement with Castells, Van Dijck (2013) took this concept further in the context of social media by referring to the phenomenon of the *popularity principle*. In the arena of social media, the value is measured by the popularity, or namely, the likeability, and the determining data are transformed to the number of *followers*, *friends*, or content that is *liked*. The expression, *like*, refers to an original function on Facebook that allows users to click the like button to express their attitude towards the content on their friends' page. The like button has been extended to almost all other social media devices, such as Instagram, blogs, and Twitter, and has become a crucial indicator of popularity for social media content. The action of clicking the like button does not involve a quality assessment in terms the network members' evaluation of the content. As Van Dijck (2013) observed, "The choice for a 'like' button betrays an ideological predilection: it favors

instant, gut fired, emotional, positive evaluations" (p. 13). However, the accumulation of likes could also be manipulated. The larger the network in the community, the more likely the contents to receive likes. The content that accumulates a substantial quantity of likes would have the potential to become a trend. This structure of the *popularity principle* underpins the network culture on social media (Van Dijck, 2013).

The popularity principle forms the groundwork for fashion images on social media as an indicator of readership, and the mechanism of accumulated popularity later becomes a crucial factor in building up the celebrity status of fashion bloggers. This notion of popularity principle challenges the traditional concept regarding the aesthetic evaluation of art and design. The leadership of fashion media generally holds authority when determining and introducing what is trendy, fashionable, or artistic for the mass market. However, in the culture of social media, there may not be a direct link between creative value and the number of likes on a fashion blogger's images. How, then, does this principle of popularity affect the value of fashion images that was lacking in previous research?

Mass reproduction of images leads to the problem of how to judge value for creative work and art. The other major issue is the influence of lack of context for appraising these works; while the digital era brings the

convenience of digital mass reproduction of art and photography, this leads to a new era which there is no context; there is the loss of the context of time and space. The Internet was still in its infancy when Walter Benjamin's (1999) produced *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*; however, he predicted this lack of context due to mass production, and his work has become one of the most frequently cited work in discussions of art and photography in the context of digital age (Gumbrecht & Marrinan, 2003; V. Miller, 2011; Peim, 2007).

The phenomenon of the digital culture has had a broad influence both socially and economically, and the literature reviewed thus far creates a foundation from which to frame social media and its influence on fashion photography. In this study, the focus is on media communication and fashion images; therefore, the next section will focus on the influence of modern communication model, the notion of the self, the influence on art appreciation based on mass reproduction, and the dynamic interaction between leaders and followers.

2.3.2.1. New media communication model

One of the most prominent changes created by the interactive digital media is the communication pathway from one way directional to networked

multi-directions. The work of Poster (as cited in Miller, 2011) has been considered one of the first scholarly studies on the theories framing the emerging phenomenon of digital media communication. He argued that the Internet has transformed the traditional broadcast one-directional model to a multi-directional model (Figure 2.24).

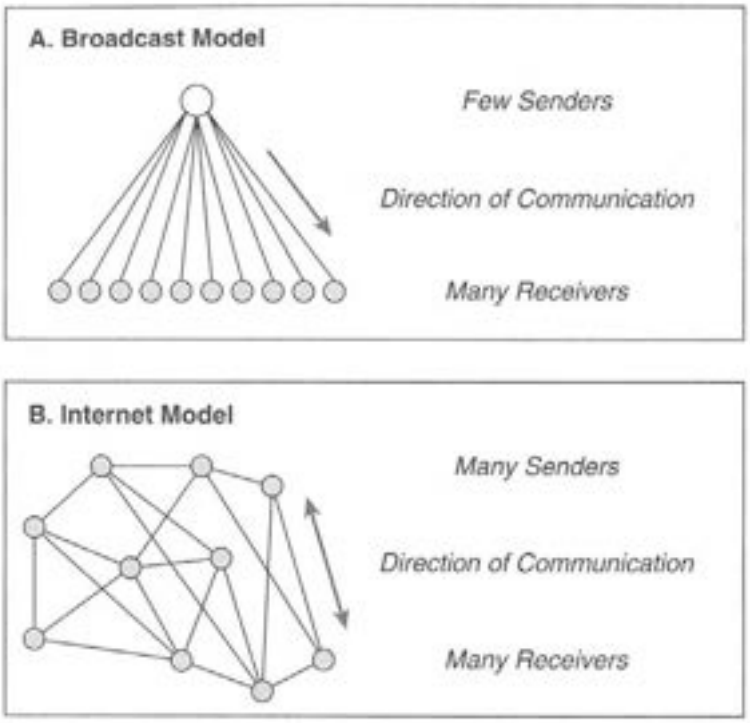


Figure 2.24 Broadcast versus Internet conceptual models. Source from: Miller, 2011, p. 13.

Poster's model has been proven to be prophetic in principle. Two decades later, his model reflects the conclusions of various media analysts on social media communication and illustrates the diffusion structure of media systems in Figure 2.25 (Anthique, 2013).

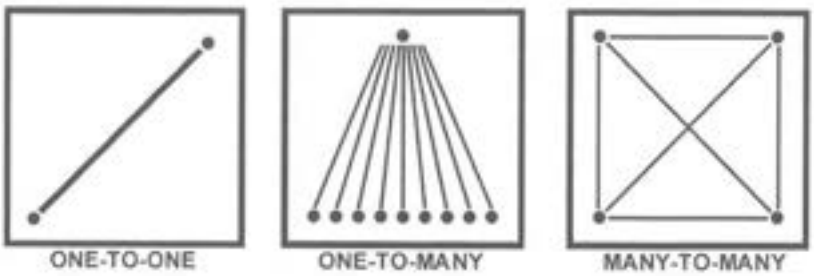


Figure 2.25. Diffusion structure of media systems. Source from: Anthique, 2013, p. 55.

The implication of such change restructured the hierarchical structure that had existed between message senders and their audience. In the traditional model, the media are controlled by a small group of elite member in the society who hold the power at the top of hierarchy system. This notion challenged the Frankfurt school's philosopher such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1991), in their critique of modernity in media influence, where the one-way diffusion of media communication appeared to promote a passive audience as the message receivers. In contrast, the new media model of social media breaks down the hegemony of media diffusion, which then is transformed to a network communication system (Athique, 2013; Levy, 2001; Miller, 2011). Various theorists have attempted to construct the features of the digital media framework in order to explain the phenomenon. Miller (2011) has summarized the key features into six domains: (a) digital, (b) networked, (c) interactive, (d) hypertextual/hypermediated, (e) automated, and (f) databased. This leads to a crucial effect on a networked

Internet society, and the features of this new social order are discussed next.

2.3.2.3 New research context for social media

Despite the relatively short development stage of social media since the past decade, numerous studies have already been dedicated to the investigation of the uniqueness and influence of the new user interactive culture; this study will refer to it as the culture of online social sharing. The majority of social media studies focused on the users' behavior, motivation (Joinson, 2008, Lin & Lu, 2011), the uses of social media (Papacharissi, 2009), peer influence, the interpersonal influence on social media (Heide, 2011; Papacharissi, & Mendelson, 2008), and the social consequences of social media, or the risks of the changes brought about by social media (Wink, 2010). Studies expanded as the development of social media soon extended to the realm of networking for the purposes of business as well as for social and the combination of the two. This area has also emerged into a significant topic for marketers, public relations firms and brand experts to understand how business entities could utilize and be benefit from this platform (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Zhang, 2010), such as consumer's decision with respect to SNS (Lee et al. 2011), and cultural influence on consumers' use of SNSs (Pookulangara & Koesler, 2011). Research on social media and fashion images mainly refers to the

blogs and fashion leadership (Chittenden 2010; Pederson, 2011), and their influence on fashion trends from a social and cultural studies perspective. This leads to two different schools of thought with respect to theories about social media and fashion photography: social media and fashion business, and social media and cultural studies.

2.4 Social Media and Fashion Communication

While the features of social media vary greatly according to each specific purpose, they share a unique characteristic: the ability of users to share and connect users to a community. The fact that the connection is publically recognized is a crucial element of social media, and the new communication practice blurs the lines between *public, networked public,* and *personal* (Boyd, 2011; Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Walther et al., 2011); in fact, this form of digital communication is also referred as *masspersonal communication* (O'Sullivan, 2005). Another unique feature that makes social media so popular is the image sharing aspect that allows users to upload photo images and generate instant messages or comments (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011). This special feature leads to various business opportunities for industries that depend heavily on visual presentation, such as the fashion industry does. On the other hand, the user turned content provider phenomenon, which is often referred to as

user-generated content (UGC) or *consumer-generated media* (CGM) (Berthon et al, 2012), also introduced a drastic change in consumer culture regarding how business entities interact with their consumers; yet this platform is still being neglected by many business executives, simply because "they do not understand what it is" (Kietzmann et al, 2011, p. 241). Consumers no longer rely on traditional branding tools, fashion ads, and news delivered by public relations for information, instead, they turn to fashion blogs and Facebook pages to search for updates in the realm of fashion. Micro-blogging platforms, like Twitter, enable users to post fashion updates in real-time, which further accelerates the spread of news, and the creditability and trust between consumers to fashion leaders become a challenge (Berhon et al, 2012; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Pederson, 2011). Given this rationale, Thomas and Peters (2007) explored consumers voice on Myspace.com using theories of community on branding, but their focus was more on what the bloggers say, not the visual elements the users' post; however, the current study serves as a useful groundwork for gaining a deeper understanding of fashion trend information.

2.4.1 Studies on Social Media in the Context of Fashion Blogging

Social media certainly accelerates the trend of user turned producers of fashion photography online and further blurs the role and the function of

professional fashion photographer versus individual fashion bloggers. Today, technology enables amateur camera users to produce somewhat professional-like photographs, credited to the popularity of online photo editing tools available, such as the Instagram apps. These apps allow users to add visual effects to the photos; whereas in the past, such editing was a skill used solely by professional photographers in dark rooms or graphic designers who through their skills in photo editing were able to upgrade the visual value or quality of the output (Dumenco, 2012). Hence, this is one of the reasons that this is a significant area of research interest: social media is becoming an influential phenomenon, which challenges the tradition fashion photography industry.

Research on the relationship between social media and the fashion industry blossomed in recent years. Fashion blogs, the images they generate, and their cultural and social influence on the fashion industry has been a primary focus of research in the area. At the time of this writing Technorati.com (2013), one of the most popular search engines dedicated to blog searching (Kietzmann et al, 2011), noted that up to 11,000 blogs are classified in the category of fashion. Fashion blogs represent a free platform that encourages millions of fashion lovers, mostly teenagers, to express their identity, tastes, share their fashion photos, and a few of them, like Susie Bubble and Bryant Boy, turned from ordinary teenagers to internationally famous fashion celebrities and opinion leaders (Griffith, 2011).

Researchers turned to study how these fashion blogs influence teen identity (Chittenden, 2010) and the anticipated changes in authorship of fashion news in the future (Pederson, 2011); from this research, a new theory was developed to address the relationship between the media and viewers (Manovich, 2002). Thus, fashion blogs changed the fashion leadership of trend diffusion, consumers' response to images from no brands, and individual fashion image creators (Pederson, 2011). Although studies that focus particularly on fashion images and fashion blogs are still scarce, and this is a relatively new academic area, during the past few years, there have been several studies dedicated to the specific area of the phenomenon of fashion media; these studies have drawn from several cultural and social theories, by theorists such as Foucault, Bourdieu, and Goffman, in an attempt to interpret fashion blogs and their influence (Rocamora, 2011; McQuarrie et al, 2012; Chittenden, 2010). The following section provides a critical review on theories that have developed to explain the phenomenon of fashion blogs as fashion photography in the three ways they create value.

2.4.2 Three Ways Fashion Blogs Create Value

2.4.2.1 Value creation one (VC1): Identity and artistic expression

Identity Expression

Identity is one of the key concepts in cultural studies and has been widely adopted in numerous research studies on fashion and identity construction (Crane 2000; Davis, 1992; Kraiser, 2012). Among the various theoretical definitions in terms of culture, Barker (2008) provided a definition of self-identity in our everyday language: “the verbal conceptions we hold about ourselves and our emotional identification with those self-descriptions” (p. 215); Barker referred to social identity as “the expectations and opinions that others have of us” (p. 215). Hence, identity construction is informed somewhat by social expectations. With the digital platform, expression moves from everyday life to a virtual space via social media. Thus, how one expresses himself or herself on such a platform has yet to be further investigated.

Self-Presentation

Self-presentation is a popular research topic for social media, and this has spun-off into different kinds of *self*, such as the *digital self* (Miller, 2011) and the *celebrity self* (Marwick, 2012) and the *narrative self* (Tierney, 2013). Fashion bloggers use blogs as their platform for artistic and self-expression; the interactive feature of these platforms enables bloggers to express

themselves and construct identity in a new form of *public space* (Chittenden, 2010; Kietzmann, et al,, 2011; Rocamora, 2011). They share their fashion interests, their preferences about fashion styles; some bloggers combine fashion information with their lifestyle interests, such as food, architecture, and travel, and thus their blog becomes a kind of *lifestyle* blog. A major phenomenon is the activity of fashion bloggers posting their daily style images on the blogs and thus adding to its unique feature that alters the visual representation of fashion images. These fashion bloggers create their own fashion styles, photograph themselves, and regularly share these images online as form of self-expression, "turning individual original fashion lovers into a new genre of actors: The bloggers" (Rocamora, 2011, p. 408).

Studies have shown that the majority of the bloggers are teenagers (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005). Fashion blogs tend to be visually based and dominated by teenagers; Chittenden (2010) drew on Bourdieu's field theory to examine teenage fashion bloggers' cultural and social capital exchange in developing their own identities through the online space. Fashion photography therefore becomes a mean of visual representation carrying specific *codes* in a field in Bourdieu's theory (1993). This visual display, in the form of fashion photography, becomes the teenage blogger's cultural

capital (Chittenden, 2010; McQuarrie et al, 2012; Rocamora, 2011) and hence, constructs their identity.

Fashion bloggers construct their identity through the online community; without knowing who their audience is, bloggers reveal themselves to an unknown mass on the basis on masspersonal communication, a term that was referenced previously (O'Sullivan, 2005). This activity relies on interactive features that act as a key catalyst between the creator and the audience to make identity visible and present. Research suggests that the identity constructed through social media does not necessary reveal true identity, but that fashion bloggers may create a desirable identity, which is a yearned for identity. This idea introduces another issue, in that the teen fashion bloggers manage their identity through an *impression-management* process (Chittenden, 2010; Goffman, 1959). Even in daily life situations, fashion bloggers in some ways are all actors creating desirable images of themselves and attempting to control how they are perceived by others.

This notion of impression management echoes a similar notion: that of the celebrity self, which was proposed by Marwick (2013). Displaying fashion tastes functions as a form of self-presentation to achieve a status of *micro celebrity*. Marwick coined the celebrity self to connote this phenomenon and described the process of how bloggers develop themselves as a

branding process to achieve online status (Marwick, 2013). In fact, the creators of blogs thus need the audience to endorse their presence in identity construction. To “whom” these bloggers unveil their identity to, and how such notion influences identity construction becomes another unique relationship between social media and fashion photography, which will be discussed next.

Gaze and spectatorship

The act of self-presentation in the digital culture is also linked to another concept: *gaze*. Gaze is the acting of looking and was made popular by John Berger’s (1972) famous writing, “Men act, women appear” (p .47), in his influential work on image reading, *The Way of Seeing.* This idea forms a basis of the conventional notion of fashion and gender study. Traditionally the actor/spectator role was a binary relationship between active/men and passive/women. The idea was interpreted on the basis of Freud’s (1997) psychoanalytic theory about visual impression for heterosexual desire and pleasure (Barnard, 1998; Sturken & Cartwright, 2009). Nevertheless, this traditional notion of male-gaze has been considered an outdated concept and has been questioned and challenged (Kaplan, 1984; Ponterotto, 2016; Ruggerone, 2006). The argument lies in the rationale that females also take an active role regarding female desire and visual pleasure; similarly, the male gaze may serve as visual pleasure for gay men. The advertising images

for the fashion brand, Abercrombie & Fitch (A&F) is a well-known example of the manipulation of the male gaze in promoting embedded sexual message to gay men and women in their marketing campaign (Appleyard, 2011; Spurgin, 2006).

The idea of gaze involves the actions of both presenter and spectator. In such practice, fashion bloggers' self-presentation is embedded the context of a wearer/spectator relationship. Since women are generally depicted as the object of the gaze in the conventional notion of male gaze, the women's gaze in fashion images are often indirect or downcast as a visual code, while males depicted in visual images are often looking at the audience directly as a code of an active role. The direction of the gaze in fashion advertising is a hidden code in terms of gender representation. For example, in a fashion advertising image where the female model is presented with her eyes gazing directly at the audience may suggest that she is the one *in control* (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009). In Goffman's (1979) famous study on gender advertising, in which females and males are depicted in the images, there were stereotypes in the way males and females were positioned. This serves as an essential basis for understanding of gender and advertising images. His framework categorized six different kinds of male-female positioning in an advertising image and is still a popular framework for the study of advertising images (Goffman, 1979).

In the digital culture, the masspersonal communication blurs the boundary between audience and presenter. Fashion bloggers are generally modeling themselves in their own fashion shooting. Whether they are acting as the subject of the gaze or taking the dominant role in gazing back to the audience, the images they generate may suggest a new perspective in the viewing of these types of images. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is no previous research that examines at how fashion bloggers depict themselves and hence leaves a research gap in this area.

From self-presentation to narcissism

The notion of self-presentation resembles the new emerged phenomenon of narcissism on social media (Davenport et al., 2014; Moon, E. Lee, J-A. Lee, Choi, & Sung, 2016; Leung, 2013; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). The theory of narcissism stems from psychology. Narcissism is a personality trait in which an individual has an inflated self-concept and a tendency towards grandiosity (Moon, et al., 2016). Research suggests that social media is an ideal platform for narcissistic self-presentation due to the nature of the environment, which is highly controlled by the users and allows generally suitable context for shallow social relationships (Buffardi & Campell, 2008).

There is direct link between the level of narcissism and the frequency of use of social media. In the relationship between narcissism and the engagement of Instagram, the level of narcissism is especially high in the millennium generation (Moon et al, 2016). Studies also show that Instagram is more suitable for showing personal identity than relational identity, in comparison to Facebook, where more interactive communication is encouraged. The nature of Instagram focuses less on social relationships and works well for self-promotional acts, such as selfies (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). In general, studies on narcissism and social media mainly focus on interpreting the motivation of use and the behavioral pattern (Moon et al, 2016; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016); these studies in general use narcissism as an identification for users as a measure of their behavioral patterns. Although the psychological underpinning of narcissistic acts on social media is not the focus of the study, some descriptions of narcissism traits fit in the characteristics of fashion bloggers. For example, narcissists are more likely to have high frequent use of photo editing functions, they rate themselves with higher physical attractiveness (Moon et at, 2016), and the content is often highly self-centered, built around bloggers' own personal life (Engholm & Hansen-Hansen, 2014). Hence, it is worthwhile to understand whether the representation of the selfies and self-promotional images create meaning or are merely being perceived as narcissistic.

Social comparison and the influence of ideal beauty in fashion images

The presentation of products is an essential component of fashion images, whereas in most of the cases, fashion products are generally worn by human models as the presenters in fashion advertising. Therefore, fashion models become a significant influential factor of the product. Ruggerone (2006) provided a precise rationale as to why it is the norm for fashion advertising to employ human models to present their products, "Advertisers are aware of the strong links between dress and personal identity, garments are never shown by themselves in commercial photographs, but almost always worn by human models" (p. 355); she further argued that human models perform the role of communicating specific messages regarding the clothes they are wearing. This notion was widely adopted by other researchers and they went further in investigating the meaning of the messages models has carried, that is, the notion of *ideal beauty* (Adomaitis & Johnson, 2008; Moeran, 2010; Venkatesh et al., 2010).

A vast majority of prior research has stemmed from Festinger (1954), whose *theory of social comparison* investigated the human tendency to compare oneself to others. The theory originally focused on comparing one's wellbeing, individual opinions, or abilities. Later on, the theory was applied to the comparison of physical appearance, and in this case, the way that models in advertising create a kind of ideal beauty. In this particular

application, the theory focuses on an individual's tendency to compare one's own attributes and abilities with others, and thus evaluate themselves against others. The theory has also been frequently applied to research on body image with respect to people evaluating themselves in relationship to the exposure to images in mass media, such as magazine and TV commercials (Grabe et al., 2008, Martin & Kennedy, 1993; T. G. Morrison, Kalin, & M. A. Morrison, 2004; Ogden, Smith, Nolan, Moroney, & Lynch 2011). In fact, the idea of social comparison could be further extended to the study of behavior of teens towards SNS; For example, Chittenden (2010) conducted a study to investigate teen's online visual representation through fashion blog and their offline identity.

Adomaitis and Johnson (2008) applied Rudd and Lennon's (1994) study of social comparison in their research to explain young adults' association of their own images with that of the ideal images portrayed in fashion advertising. According to Rudd and Lennon, individuals compare themselves with the social ideal and thus generate different level of self-esteem. The result of Adomaitis and Johnson confirmed that young adults not only compare themselves to the ideal images of fashion models, but they also generate a sense of inadequacy when comparing themselves with those ideal images. Such results align with previous studies about young women's dissatisfaction with their own body, which is influenced by

the ideals of thinness depicted in media (e.g., Grabe et al, 2008; Gulas & McKeage, 2000; Ogden et al, 2011). Fashion images that portray models with more average looks have been criticized for not meeting the ideal standards of beauty. Results from these studies further validated the findings of previous research by Crane (1999), Martin and Kennedy (1993) and Richins (1991), which indicated a long-term phenomenon that has consistently appeared in fashion industry over the past decades. Yet, the research raises a significant implication that even though viewers may find the ideal standards of fashion images unrealistic and unachievable, such unrealistic ideal standards actually generate positive buying intention. Thus, these results imply two very different views in support of the ideologies on the influence of ideal models in fashion advertising: one, these ideals are considered to be positive for branding, and the other, that they also have a negative impact on young adults' self-esteem from a sociological or psychological perspective (Grabe, et al, 2008; Durkin & Paxton, 2002; Morrison, et al, 2004; Richins, 1991).

Social Comparison in the Realm of Social media

As discussed in the previous section, social comparison is a popular topic when investigating consumer behavior and readers' identity shaped by fashion photography. More recent studies have applied this theory to the context of social media. The findings of these research studies have

confirmed that social media provides numerous opportunities for social comparison (de Viries and Kuhne, 2015; Lee, 2014; Lim & Yang, 2015; E. Vogel et al., 2014; R. Vogel, Okdie, & Franz, 2015). The focus of these studies was on the comparison of oneself with respect to status, which induces further psychological impacts on readers' self-esteem. There is no research that has addressed the effects of social comparison on fashion bloggers' readers. In fact, the question is raised, what does this phenomenon of social comparison have to do with the value creation of the fashion images? This will be further discussed in the next chapter that presents the conceptual framework.

Artistic Expression: From Good Enough Revolution to Aesthetics Experience

The artistic expression of fashion images on social media concerns the aesthetic values created by the photographic images of fashion blogging. Compared with the more popular theme of identity issues with respect to social media, past literature on artistic expression of fashion photography, especially in the context of fashion blogging, is scarce. This may be due to the difficulty of measuring the aesthetic value of an image. The complexity of the philosophical nature of discussions of the notion of aesthetics has further added to the challenges in framing artistic expression in discussions of the fashion blogosphere.

Engholm (2010) has conducted one of the few studies that contribute to researchers' understanding of the aesthetics of digital artefacts in user experience. The study observed that the trend of technological advancement has brought to the surface a new concept of a *good enough revolution* in design movement particularly with regard to the digital artefacts (Capps, 2009; Maney, 2009). Such a good enough movement advocates a new interpretation of aesthetic value that challenges the tradition viewpoint on design principle and consideration.

The good enough revolution that has emerged in the new digital culture refers to the phenomenon of the acceptance of lower design and production quality products by online users; it also refers to their shift in focus to other features, such as popularity and availability. The feature of good enough refers to the requirement of a product quality to barely pass a minimum standard, but the common trait of these products is that they are produced and delivered at low or zero cost, and they aim at reaching as many users as possible. In other words, as long as the output is good enough, it is more important that it is able to reach the masses. Examples include users' self-produced short films on YouTube and selfie images on Instagram that are shown on the tiny screen of an iphone. These outputs would be considered unacceptable under the traditional design standards, but they still

receive a high hit-rate and number of likes by online users. Observation of such trends has prompted a new perspective on the way that digital artefacts are evaluated that overthrow the traditional design theory with its emphasis on high quality and value-adding features. Engholm (2010) observed this phenomenon and contextualized this drastic change by proposing the new definition of aesthetics as *aesthetic experience* in digital culture.

The theory of aesthetics has evolved over time with the changes that have been wrought by technological advancements. The traditional perception of aesthetics was discussed from a philosophical perspective on sensory perception on the work of art and beauty (Baumgarten, 1750; Kant, 1987). During the later stage, the understanding of aesthetics has been broadened to include our sensuous evaluation of everyday experience and society (Shusterman, 1999), but was still centered around the sensuous experiences of visual forms (Venekatest et al, 2010). This has evolved to the modern day of pragmatic view of aesthetics experience (Dewey, 2005, Lam et al, 2016; Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008).

Drawing on these theories, Engholm (2010) concluded that aesthetics value is understood by one's sensuous experience, including emotions, feeling, enjoyment, and satisfaction, which is not only limited to art and design aspects, but also one's experience as a viewer or user. This notion forms the

basis of aesthetics experience in digital artefacts, and designers have aimed to understand the new standard or requirement for product design and development. The conventional consideration of design elements, such as form, appearance, technological aspects, and functionality would have to shift to the new dimension that considers users' experience.

In Engholm's (2010) study, the value of digital artefacts is driven by the ability of such artefact to mediate user experience, and thus it performs as a platform for network interaction in a meaningful way. This observation has shifted the concept of aesthetic evaluation from production qualities or appearance to the sensational aspect of the social context, which is subject to users' evaluation. In this sense, users are involved in the production and evaluation of aesthetics, in which users step in to contribute to a *sense-making* process and draw on their own experience and use their own emotions in making sense of the aesthetic output. The study used two digital artifacts, a Notebook PC and blog, as case studies in analyzing how the aesthetic experience is achieved; however, the research was from the perspective of the researcher's judgment of the users' experience considering the users' comments.

Engholm (2010) argued that as long as the features of the design are good enough, the characteristics of the digital artefacts create value for users in

terms of their aesthetic experience. This study provided an insight into how aesthetics production is reconsidered in the context of digital culture. On the other hand, digital artefacts have their own aesthetic value that may be apart from the consideration of design elements, such as form, color, texture or the overall appearance.

2.4.2.2 Value creation two (VC2): Fashion trend diffusion and taste leadership

Traditionally, fashion photography plays a key role in fashion media in delivering fashion images to the audience. Consumers look at fashion photography in fashion magazine editorials in search of information pertaining to upcoming fashion trends. Hence, editorial shootings and image reports on the latest catwalk in fashion magazines carry this essential function in the fashion system and make fashion editors the gate-keepers in trend setting and taste leadership (E. Kim, Fiore, & H. Kim, 2011). The next section explores previous studies on fashion trend diffusion and application of theory to fashion photography and fashion bloggers.

Trend Diffusion Theories

Trickle-down theory refers to the way in which fashion trend diffuses to the society; this diffusion was once dominated by the prestigious members of

high society who possessed the privilege to access the most exclusive fashion, generally luxurious items, which were then passed to the mass market (McCracken, 1985; Simmel, 1904; Veblen, 1991). Thorstein Veblen (1991), a sociologist and economist, first coined the concept of *conspicuous consumption* in his influential book, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, in which the social elite class displayed their wealth and status through excessive consumption. Fashion is obviously a most distinguished item category to make this kind of consumption visible (Veblen, 1991; Carter, 2010; Kaiser, 2010; Kim et al., 2011). Therefore, such practice of conspicuous consumption of fashion items became a motivation for those in lower social class positions to look up to, and attempt to emulate these fashionable looks by affording a cheaper version of the item made with cheaper fabric. The fashion styles and trends then diffused down the social hierarchy in trickle down style. Veblen and Simmel (1904) later on enriched the theory by suggesting two more perspectives, *differentiation* and *imitation*, which explained how the upper social class intended to differentiate themselves by their continual invention of new fashion styles after the previous ones were adopted by the lower class, while the lower class tried to imitate the upper class in adopting the new styles; this creates a catch and chase cycle, which then creates the momentum of fashion changes (McCracken,1985).

The theories were further developed into a *trickle-across* theory by King (1963) and a *trickle-up* theory by Field (1970), who argued that the trickle-up theory oversimplified the society into classes and failed to explain how fashion trends diffused in the context of the modern fashion world (Crane, 1999; Davis, 1992). The trickle-across theory explained how consumers within one class influenced each other in terms of new styles, and that the trend then trickled horizontally in one class, instead of top down. Therefore, this pattern was also referred as *mass-market theory* or *simultaneously-adoption theory* (King, 1963). On the other hand, Field (1970) added another dimension in which there is a *bottom up* movement of fashion trends. The theory explained the phenomenon of subcultures creating unique image styles, with the purpose of group identification and differentiation from the mainstream, which then became influential inspirations that were adopted by fashion designers to spread up the social ladder in the fashion world. Thus, this theory was also named *status float phenomenon.* Crane (1999b) revisited all these theories, adding into the context of today modern society, *globalization*, and the complication of the fashion communication system, such as the power of fashion editors, fashion designers, where merely social class could not explain how the fashion trends diffused according the original theories on fashion trend diffusion.

Taste leadership and Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital

How trend diffuses is often associated with the notion of *taste*; as the upper classes are often associated with *good taste*. Fashion trends are often linked to the notion of taste, as fashion is highly visual. The concept about what is good taste is somehow even more abstract then what is in trend. The notion of taste was the genesis of a philosophical debate on aesthetics (McNeil & Miller, 2014), and the assessment of goodness or satisfaction (Kant, 1987). In more recent discourse, the discussion on fashion and taste is often entangled with the argument of how to define beauty, and more importantly, whether the judgment of taste can be communicated or understood by the others (La Caze, 2011). Yet, there is a thin line between ideas about being trendy and tasteful. There is a system in the fashion industry in which from a cultural perspective involves how people depend on a source for searching fashion trends and styling associated with good taste.

According to Bourdieu's (1984) theory on culture and social habitat, individuals acquire a certain level of taste according to the person's social class, and such judgment of taste is related to the cultural capital that the person possesses. Bourdieu (1986) developed three types of capital: *social, cultural, and economical.* In this respect, Bourdieu's theory of cultural and social capital has often been applied to explain the concept about fashion diffusion from high society to the mass public. The social elites generally

possess privilege to access to exclusive high fashion; for example *haute couture* was only available in very limited supplies, and as such, the elite groups were considered to have the social and cultural capital of high fashion and the taste. This was the classic notion about cultural implications of fashion: how one dresses him or herself and what fashion taste one posesses would indicate the social class the person belonged to (Entwistle, 2000; Rocamora, 2002).

However, recent research has indicated that bloggers blur traditional lines of taste and trends. McQuarrie et al. (2012) conducted an in-depth research on taste leadership of fashion blogs, where fashion blogs acquire cultural capital by their display of taste through their fashion photographs of everyday looks. Pulitzer Prize winning fashion writer and former blogger, Robin Givhan, used the terms *autocratic* versus *democratic* to highlight the impact on the fashion industry by social media, where fashion blogs contribute to the fashion industry by allowing everyone access to stylish fashion (Pham, 2011). The study by McQuarrie et al. suggested a new fashion system in which ordinary consumers become a mass audience that creates a *megaphone effect* by the public display of taste distinction.

2.4.2.3 Value creation three (VC3): Blogger's self-branding and fashion branding

Fashion blogging generates value for the bloggers' self as a form of identity construction. Such identity construction has been much discussed in previous sections. In this section, the discussion focuses on the tangible value or benefit created for the fashion bloggers through the self-branding process. Alternatively, fashion brands are expected to seize the opportunity of the rise of social media in order to be benefit from the trend. These two ways fashion blogs create value are discussed next.

Fashion Bloggers as Self-Branding

Kretz and Kristine's (2010) research on fashion blog used *consumer storytelling theory* to explain the concept of *self-brand association*. Their research was based on *brand-consumer storytelling theory* (Woodside, 2010; Woodside, Sood, & K. Miller, 2008) to examine how fashion bloggers include their experience with brands through written and visual means, resulting in self-brand and associated identities. The results suggest that fashion bloggers achieve self-brand association by implicitly embedding brand information in their narrative presentation and explicitly presenting the brand's iconic features, such as logos and signature design. The study concluded the importance of brands to realize the two-way communication between bloggers and readers, and the mutual interdependence relationship between bloggers and brands. Such findings concurred with Pihl and Sandstrom's (2013) findings regarding value recreation of social media, in

which fashion bloggers possess high creditability in information flow to consumers, and gain revenue from their indirect advertising of fashion brands. Griffith (2011) noted that fashion bloggers "are not the future of fashion magazines. They're the future of fashion branding. Oh, and they like you to pay them, please" (Griffith, 2011, p. 58).

Self-branding as fashion icon

The era of *prosumers* leads to the next concern about the content quality of fashion photography, as social media enables the publication of a diversity of content quality (Agichtein, 2008). The main purpose of fashion photography is to create desire; everything projected in the fashion images is supposed to be an ideal, and thus, apart from the clothes, the body carrying fashion items performs an essential visual element as well. Thus, the fashion model becomes another key aspect of research concerning the visual representation of fashion items on the ideal body shape. However, the emergence of fashion bloggers and their growing status in the fashion industry turns these fashion lovers who are ordinary people into fashion icons, and the major difference between these bloggers and fashion editors are their highly publicized own images in which they model their own styles. Unfortunately, there is no previous research support that helps to make sense of the phenomenon of bloggers-turned-fashion models or how their audiences view it.

From a cultural perspective, the fashion modeling industry creates its own *aesthetics economy* in cultural capital (Entwistle, 2002). Numerous studies have focused on the body representation in media and the perception of consumers on self-identity using Festinger's social comparison theory (Martin & Kennedy 1993; Richins 1991). Fashion photography has often been criticized as being sinful in displaying models who are extremely thin and underweight, and this has distorted the self-perception and self-esteem, especially among teenage females. In fact, the phenomenon of fashion bloggers acting as their own models in their daily display of fashion looks challenges the perception of the ideal body shape (Rocamora, 2011). Studies have suggested that those fashion bloggers who tend to display themselves as the models have a higher chance to be successful and being accepted by their audience (McQuarrie et al., 2012).

Fashion branding

There is a general consensus among researchers that social media trends have been developing faster than brands can keep up with (Kaplan & Haelein, 2009; Kent, 2008; Singh et al, 2008). McQuarrie et al. (2012)'s megaphone effect, as discussed in the previous section, challenges not only who dictates taste, but also the traditional role of fashion photography, which is generally controlled by professional industry insiders, such as

fashion designers, fashion stylists, and fashion photographers. Brands lose control of the message they want to deliver on this platform; where direct selling of brands is often not welcome in the culture of Web 2.0 (Fournier & Avery, 2011).

Recent studies have investigated the potential benefits creates by fashion brands and bloggers' collaboration and have attempted to discover how best to promote brands through this digital culture. One of the major findings has indicated the social media platform has produced a closer relationship between message senders and receivers. The content producers are also the users, and messages created and delivered by these users-turned-producers are generally considered to be more authentic (Kulmala Mesiranta, & Tuominen, 2012); these bloggers appear to be forming a sense of intimacy with their customers or audience (Phil & Sandstrom, 2013).

From a branding perspective, one of the most important factors influencing a brand's image is word-of-mouth (WOM). WOM resembles the megaphone effect, and fashion blogs produce an amplified electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication about the fashion brands; this occurs when marketers launch a campaign that encourages online users to speak about the brands and induces customer-to-customer interactions, which is a form of viral marketing (Kulmala et al., 2012). Studies show that

fashion brands create *blogger's sponsorship* by offering actual gifts or gift vouchers to fashion bloggers, so that bloggers will use their own words to give comments, generally positive comments, of the brands or products. Although some readers may be skeptical about the obvious fashion brands-blogger's collaboration, the recommendation of products would appear to be more authentic, as the blogger's manner in describing the brands and products is more personal and is very different from marketing language (Kulmala et al, 2012).

In agreement with Kulmala et al.'s (2012) study, Phil and Sandstrom's (2013) study on fashion bloggers concluded that the ability to incorporate brand information into bloggers' daily life is the major difference between blogging and traditional branding. This study further classified value creations into "reducing search cost and information cost." (p. 319) This finding was based on the sample that most bloggers had already gained the status of celebrities and were thus considered knowledgeable about fashion.

Fashion bloggers and fashion brands have developed an interdependent relationship in the blogosphere by the tactic known as *brand association* (Camiciottoli & Guercini, 2013). Marketers observed that the power of online community in promoting brand awareness by eWOM is an essential tactic of linking consumers' memories with brand knowledge, including the

product's attributes (Keller, 1993). In a higher level of brand association, the association includes user experience, perceived benefits, and users' emotional reaction about the brands (Keller, 2003).

In summary, the key implications of fashion bloggers-brands value creations are summarized as follows: (a) bloggers are considered trustworthy and authentic key opinion leaders (KOL), (b) bloggers act as role models because of their personal styles (c) fashion brands can get closer to their potential consumers by associating with fashion bloggers; hence, brand association could be mutually beneficial for both the fashion bloggers and the fashion brands. Finally, (d) fashion brands have less control of their branding message in the blogosphere, and the publicity generated during product sponsorship or brands-bloggers association can result in both positive and negative publicity.

2.5 Limitations of Existing Research

There has been a major debate with regard to the value of photography, and there has been a consensus that the value is in its authenticity in presenting the truth. To be more precise, the truthfulness of the image refers to the representation of the moment the shutter captures the reality. Scholars have contributed to the discourse on the reality presented by photographic images

(Barthes, 2000; Berger, 1972; Hamilton, 1997; Sontag, 1971). Much of the criticism with respect to photography was on the true meaning of the image; however, for fashion photography, the intention has been to create fantasy, and the creative concept drives the intended meaning; thus research studies on fashion photography tend to focus more on either the evaluation of aesthetics production and the cultural meaning or the values produced for the commercial sector. Social media breaks this boundary between advertising images and individual snap shots, and this new digital platform blurs the line between commercial and individual. This notion echoes Jean Baudrillard's (1988) idea of simulacrum dating back to the late 80s; his proclamation of postmodernity suggests that it is no longer possible to distinguish what is real and reality. The context in which images are produced and the way they are viewed alters the way people see them. Therefore, the conceptual framework of this study was built on a framework drawing on a wide spectrum of visual research studies and an understanding of these fashion photographic images in the context of the new digital era of the social media platform.

From the perspective of fashion communication, fashion photography encompasses a major part of the fashion media industry; namely, the image-making industry (Amos, 1998) where studies of fashion media mainly focus on textual analysis rather than image-based research

(Rocamora, 2012). Rocamora (2012) considered blogosphere a space of hypertextual information flow; she was interested in the network's ability to link fashion text to hyperreality. Due to the changes in technological development, fashion image presentation has been moving away from traditional fashion medium of printed material to the online platform. This study focuses on the shift in how visual communication of fashion photography has been traditionally disseminated: from a top-down manner, beginning with professional elites, to a bottom-up diffusion in which ordinary people as fashion bloggers produce snap shot self-portraits. On the other hand, the lack of influential fashion media results in a lack of market potential and academic attention of fashion photography in Hong Kong. Most of the academic studies about fashion photography have been mainly driven from a Western perspective. Hence, a research gap is identified in the lack of research of fashion photography in Hong Kong, and the media industry of fashion photography is transformed as it attempts to adapt to the sharing culture of the digital era.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive review of the literature on fashion photography and social media; by doing so, theories relevant to fashion images have been framed in the context of digital culture and were

further developed into a focus on the three ways that fashion blogging creates value. The chapter has been structured into three sections.

The first section reviewed the historical development of fashion photography over the past century. In presenting the existent literature pertaining to the influence of social media on fashion photography, this overview clearly brought into view the gap in research this study attempted to fill. The review on the study of fashion photography contextualized this subject by presenting previous theories on semiotics, identity and ideal images, and the commercial value regarding image building for brands and products. These theories and studies laid a theoretical foundation from which to introduce how they may be applied to fashion blogging.

The second part of the literature review focused on social media. The section began with historical overview of social media, and relevant digital culture theories. These included a review of the notion on information age, the networked society, the principle of popularity, new media communication model, and a new research context for social media in fashion communication.

The third section drew on the previous discussed theories and the literature relevant to fashion blogging as it is the focus for this study. Relevant

theories or studies regarding each of the three ways value is created by fashion blogging were reviewed in scrutiny. The value creation of identity expression considered past literature on digital self-presentation, the concept of the gaze, narcissism in fashion blogging, and the application of social comparison theory to digital consumers. In terms of artistic expression, a relatively new concept of the digital good enough revolution and aesthetic experience were introduced and examined. Fashion trend diffusion and who dictates taste were also covered. Theories on the classic notions about fashion trend diffusion and taste were contextualized in the area of fashion blogging, which has had an influence on these concepts within fashion. Finally, the third value creation concerned the issue of fashion branding. The interdependent relationship of fashion bloggers and fashion brands were discussed on the basis on bloggers' self-branding approach and brand association strategy.

Chapter 3: Conceptual framework and Research Design

3.1 Chapter Introduction

The previous chapter provided an in-depth review of the background for this research subject, including relevant theories and recent studies on the topic. This chapter will map out the conceptual framework by introducing the research design, which was developed to answer the research questions. The rationale and justification of the research design will be provided, methods of data collection, and the data analysis approach to the collected data.

3.2 The Conceptual Framework

As noted previously, this study first identified three areas of value creation (VC) in fashion photography: (1) VC1 is a form of expression; (2) VC2 is a form of fashion trend setting; and (3) VC3 is a form of branding and advertising. The theories discussed with regard to these three ways value is created in fashion photography are not mutually exclusive, but in fact, they form a certain link, with respect to who dictates taste and the manner of fashion trend diffusion, and how these might have an influence on one's identity. Hence, based on the literature review, this section proposes a conceptual framework on the threefold nature of value creation in fashion photography and further proposes two sub-values, specifically in the context

of fashion blogs. Each of the areas of these value creations will be further elaborated and identified in two research questions. Finally, the conceptual framework of this study will be mapped out.

3.3.1 Value creation (VC)1: Identity and artistic expression

The original form of fashion photography evolved from the practice of lens based image production by a group of professional photographers in order to present fashion in a visual form. The image producers have traditionally acted as a third party that determines how fashion is expressed. The expression is often driven by the image producers' artistic sense, creativity, and technical skill. This mechanism forms the preliminary understanding of the values created by fashion photography as a form of artistic expression. In this sense, the form of artistic expression reflects the aesthetic values of the fashion images created from a third person's angle. Today, the culture of users-turned-producers is thought to be interfering with how this fashion communication system works (Duffy, 2015). The practice of self-portrayed fashion images helps to distinguish the key expressive differences between traditional fashion photography and the fashion images produced by users. The producers no longer just stand behind the camera lens to express fashion. A vast majority of literature in the previous chapter provided evidence that the notion of self-expression emerges as a major concern

when focusing on the way fashion images and self-portraits are merged in the digital culture.

The new culture of self-modelling fashion images express fashion from a first-person perspective. Based on the detailed review in the previous chapter, the heavily discussed topic of identity in cultural studies has been a popular concern in the digital culture and social media. Various recent studies on digital culture were keen on investigating what the concept of self is all about, with a special interest in discussing the meaning of the self in the context of a networked society. Hence, in the value production of fashion images, the value of networked identity expression seem to override the attention on other visual attributes of fashion images.

Given the discussion in the literature, the first value domain at the early stage of this study, VC1: a form of expression, for fashion photography, has been further developed into two sub-values: VC1a: a form of identity expression, and VC1b: a form of artistic expression. One of the major changes of social media with respect to fashion photography is its value in constructing identity as a form of self-expression, which has become particularly influential in fashion blogs. The new technology of online social media allows fashion photography to become a means of expression

for individual users and alters the perception of identity and the traditional notions of gaze in fashion images.

3.3.1.1 Identity expression in the networked society

Fashion blogs have altered traditional notions of publicity, audience, and gaze that were so important to fashion photography. According to Rocamora (2011), the computer screen acts as a mirror in a form of surveillance in the modern technological era; Rocamora drew on Foucault's theory of the *technology of self* (1988) to interpret the surveillance system on fashion blogs. The notion about surveillance in a public space then shifted from reality to virtual reality (Rocamora, 2011). Such ideas challenged the male gaze inherent in Western concepts about female beauty (Berger, 1972), and they also challenged the traditional beauty of the fashion world. It is worth noting that most of the fashion bloggers who perform as the models normally do not possess traditional standards of beauty or have figure like professional fashion models. In the universe of the web blogosphere, those who seize the computer screen, namely the mirror with a critical mass audience seizes the power. The users-turned-producers phenomenon also alters the producer's angle from traditional male's angle in fashion photography to *blogger's centric self-presentation* (Ruggerone, 2006).

The new genre has moved to a different creative orientation: that of a first person angle in the idea of *self-presentation.* The expressive self-promotion behavior has also provoked much scholarly attention towards the trends of online narcissism and social comparison. Among these two domains, social comparison has long been a research topic in that the idea that one compares oneself to the ideal standards of beauty portrayed by fashion models has had a negative influence on the consumer of fashion photographs. This has moved to the new trend in which bloggers and teen users compare themselves. On the other hand, the trend of narcissistic self-promoting obsession is unique in fashion blogging. These theoretic notions have added to the complexity in evaluating the perceived value of fashion blogging. Hence, on top of the identified value of artistic expression by fashion photography, the value creation of fashion photography in social media was proposed in respect to the sub-value of (VC1a) identity expression, and hence a research question was proposed: Research Question 1a: "What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of identity expression (VC1a) of fashion photography?"

3.3.1.2 Aesthetic experience towards digital artefacts

As defined previously, the form of artistic expression (VC1b) refers to the aesthetic value created from fashion editorials or the paid form of fashion advertising image. The self-produced fashion shots from fashion bloggers have created a new genre of aesthetics evaluation in the digital culture. Fashion bloggers are seemingly considered to be teenagers who are amateur in fashion knowledge or photographic technique (Duffy, 2015; Engholm & Hansen-Hansen, 2013; Keen, 2007). The self-portrait type fashion images add to the dimension of amateurism in fashion modeling in both the physical appearance and modeling technique of the person modeling (Duff, 2015). Essentially, the images are created with a disregard for commercial constraints. In the networked society, there is a new standard in determining a blogger's readership and popularity. What differentiates bloggers' popularity is the new phenomenon of aesthetic experience in the digital age (Engholm, 2010).

The sub-value (VC1b) artistic expression will remain the same as the original value creation in artistic expression, but there are anticipated changes in terms of the perceived values in the digital culture; hence, the second research question was constructed: Research Question 1b: "What is

the impact of social media on the perceived value of artistic expression (VC1b) in fashion photography?”

3.3.2 Value creation (VC) 2: Fashion trend diffusion and taste leadership

In the traditional fashion communication hierarchy, authorities in fashion media or fashion designers are considered to be the key leaders in trend setting. Setting the trend is considered unique, and professional assistance has been traditionally required in the form of fashion editors who provide advice on upcoming trends. As described in the literature review, fashion bloggers accumulate mass audiences by displaying individual preferences regarding tastes and styles rather than being a creator of new fashion items. There is no evidence so far that there are any new specific fashion trends that have been created by fashion bloggers. Hence, it is more appropriate to redefine the term trend setting to trend diffusion and taste leadership.

The original identification of trend setting as a way to create value in fashion photography is further refined into two sub-values: Value creation (VC) 2a: fashion trend diffusion, and Value creation (VC) 2b: taste leadership. As discussed in the literature review, it is worth noting that there is only a thin line between the concept of trend and taste, and the conceptual

backdrop of this value creation may draw on the same set of academic works that discusses these two domains as one subject. The rationale of dividing the value into two domains is to allow new discoveries in the context of fashion blogging that may fulfill each of the domains.

3.3.2.1 Fashion trend diffusion

How fashion trend diffusion is influenced by fashion blogging is relatively less discussed in previous literature. As explained in the previous chapter, the dated theories on class system can no longer explain fashion trend diffusion in the context of globalization and the complexity of the digital information flow. A research gap is revealed in terms of how the rise of social media alters the top-down fashion trend diffusion hierarchy. A common theme is that social media democratized fashion by allowing everyone to perform as a fashion journalist (Givhan, 2007; Pham, 2011). Studies have suggested the need of a new theory to explain the new phenomenon with respect to social media becoming a fashion media (McQuarrie et al., 2012; Pederson, 2011). Hence, it is suggested that fashion blogging may defy the hierarchical way fashion trends have trickled down to consumers, and instead the trickle up theory may be more relevant in the context of social media culture; the trickle up theory currently exists in a less influential manner with respect to fashion trend diffusion. The diffusion

system should be discussed in view of the new communication model in digital culture theories; a focus on how information flows in the networked society would be the relevant in the context of explaining trend diffusion. Therefore, the value creation of fashion photography in social media was proposed into the sub-value of (VC2a) fashion trend diffusion; and the following research question was constructed: Research Question 2a: “What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of fashion trend diffusion (VC2a) in fashion photography?”

3.3.2.2 Taste leadership

While the value creation 1b of artistic expression refers to the perceived value of the aesthetic output of a fashion image as a whole, the taste leadership in value creation two focuses on the evaluation of individual taste on fashion items; in other words, how individuals dress themselves or create fashion styles.

McQuarrie et al.’s study (2012) introduced a megaphone effect as the basis of how fashion blogs affect consumer culture, and the megaphone effect is basically a metaphor for fashion bloggers seizing the power of the web based fashion blogs as authors of fashion media, in a way that someone would grab hold of a megaphone (McQuarrie, et al 2012; McQuarrie &

Phillips, 2014). The study suggested that social media altered the concept of Bourdieu's class system through how images are produced and received in fashion photography. Fashion bloggers are able to displaying their own taste, and such activities enable ordinary fashion consumers to accumulate cultural and social capital.

It should be kept in mind that fashion bloggers display their fashion items by means of fashion photography, but they do not necessarily own the items; they use the items to create a visual image only; therefore, the motivation of such a practice would not be conspicuous consumption, but to rather display conspicuous taste, or cultural capital in Bourdieu's terms. However, according to Bourdieu, cultural capital is linked to the class system, and displaying cultural capital is still a reflection of one's social class. Thus, in today's online space, the benefits of displaying one's social class online may be questionable, as the display is only an image representation. These theories ignore the fact that such visual display does not required the bloggers to possess the actual capital as required in the traditional notion. As Schau and Gilly (2003) referred to digital association; bloggers could create a digital self-presentation by associating themselves with material objects that they do not actually own.

The counter argument on fashion image in social media is whether the accumulation of the cultural capital reflects actual *good* taste? As research has pointed out, fashion blogs may also be viewed as having a negative impact from a professional stand point of fashion forecasting (Gaimster, 2012), which implies a question of the taste displayed and spread by fashion bloggers even as they have accumulated the cultural capital to do so. Hence, the sub-value of value creation (VC) 2b is defined as taste leadership, and the research question is proposed: Research Question 2b: "What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of taste leadership (VC2b) in fashion photography?"

3.3.3 Value creation (VC) 3: Blogger's self-branding and fashion branding

Advertising and branding for fashion are key values in fashion photography; thus the third way that fashion blogging creates value is with regard to a form of branding and advertising. Previous studies were built on the traditional platform of mass media or media communication model. In the digital culture, the notion of public interpersonal messages posted on social media platforms refers to messages addressed to the individual but also posted on a public platform; O'Sullivan (2005) labeled the phenomenon, masspersonal communication. Whether the users of social media consider the platform a mass media or somewhat more personal or both may play a

significant role of how they accept the fashion images as a standard commercial means. The masspersonal space of the blogosphere serves as a platform for direct interaction between fashion brands and fashion bloggers. This creates an open space for fashion bloggers' self-branding, and for fashion brands, this platform works for direct brand association for brand building. Based on these conceptual backgrounds, the third value creation is further divided into two sub-values: Value creation of blogger's self-branding (VC3a) and value creation of fashion branding (VC3b).

3.3.3.1 Blogger's self-branding

There is evidence that some successful bloggers turn themselves fashion icons by modelling in their fashion images; they create a unique genre by displaying alternature female ideal beauty since everyone could be a fashion blogger (Duffy, 2015). The phenomenon even affects the aesthetic standards of the traditional fashion model industry (Park et al, 2016). A vast majority of studies in the field of advertising have centered on the effects of ideal fashion images on readers, especially young female consumers. It is worth noting that the term, *media exposure*, in all these studies refers to the traditional means of mass media, such as fashion magazines and TV commercials, and the most commonly used research methods involved experimental research. To give an example, survey studies ask the

participants being exposed to various advertising images from fashion magazines, or images on TV programs about their effect on them (e.g., Crowther, 2009; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Gulas & McKeage, 2000; Ogden et al. 2011, Morrison et al., 2004; Myers & Smeester et al. 2010).

Bloggers' unique form of self-branding on social media platforms have garnered the interest of more recent academic research (Duffy, 2015; Marwick, 2013). If a blog becomes well known when acquiring a large enough audience base, the fashion blogs are able to gain an economic return from the bloggers (McQuarrie et al., 2012); this may become a career path for an individual who may then turn to commercial fashion blogs (Kretz & de Valck; 2010; Pihl & Sandstorm, 2013). Hence, the value creation is further defined as the sub-value of VC3a: Fashion blogger's self branding, and the following research question was formulated: RQ3a: "What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of fashion blogger's self-branding (VC3a) in fashion photography?"

3.3.3.2 Fashion branding

The rise of direct fashion brands and bloggers interaction raise a question of whether or not there is a need for fashion advertising in the sharing culture of a networked society. The visual communication process turns into an era of *prosumers*, a term that is derived from producer plus consumer

(Chittenden, 2010; Khang, et al, 2012) or produsers (Hermes, 2009). Images appearing on fashion blogs vary to a great degree; a fashion blogger could choose to take more dominant role as the image producer, or to act as a fashion model to present the styles, while another blogger may prefer to act as a fashion editor by reposting the existing fashion images, catwalk photos on their own blogs, and many of them work in all these roles. These independent fashion bloggers generally do not aim at advertising or selling clothes. However, once the bloggers became successful, such bloggers start to generate an economic return by receiving advertising from brands (Phil, 2013; McQuarrie et al., 2012). At the same time, fashion brands gain brand awareness by giving sponsorship to well known fashion bloggers as a branding association tactic. Therefore, the study does not intend to analyze the existing fashion advertising posted on blogs, but instead, in whether such fashion photography by individual blogs define any new value creation from a branding association perspective. The last value creation was proposed into the sub-value (VC3b) fashion branding and the following research question was developed: RQ3b: “What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of fashion branding (VC3b) in fashion photography?”

3.3.4 Summary of the conceptual framework

Figure 3.1 presents the research framework of this study. The upper part of the figure illustrates the three ways fashion photography creates value. Seven components were constructed: (a) fashion photography on social media, (b) the six sub-values proposed under each area of value creations of fashion photography in the context of social media, namely: VC1a. identity expression, VC1b. artistic expression, VC2a. fashion trend diffusion, VC2b. taste leadership, V3a. blogger's self-branding, V3Cb fashion branding. The first component, fashion photography in the context of social media is the independent variable, while the other six components of value creations are the dependent variables. Six research questions (RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2a, RQ2b, RQ3a, RQ3b) were built according to the VCs in order to investigate the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variables. Due to the rapid changing nature of social media life span, this research does not attempt to investigate one particular function site or mobile phone application (i.e., app) as the tool, but instead studies the relevant apps that enable posting of fashion photography as a phenomenon in general. Blogs or bloggers are just a term that refers to the users who participate in such activities, as observation and interview confirmed that these blogs normally host various social media accounts simultaneously, and these vary between different regions and cultures.

The research questions are listed as following.

- RQ1a: What is the impact of social media on the perceive value of identity expression (VC1a) of fashion photography?
- RQ1b: What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of artistic expression (VC1b) of fashion photography?
- RQ2a: What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of fashion trend diffusion (VC2a) of fashion photography?
- RQ2b: What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of taste leadership (VC2b) of fashion photography?
- RQ3a: What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of fashion blogger's self-branding (VC3a) in fashion photography?
- RQ3b: What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of fashion branding (VC3b) in fashion photography?

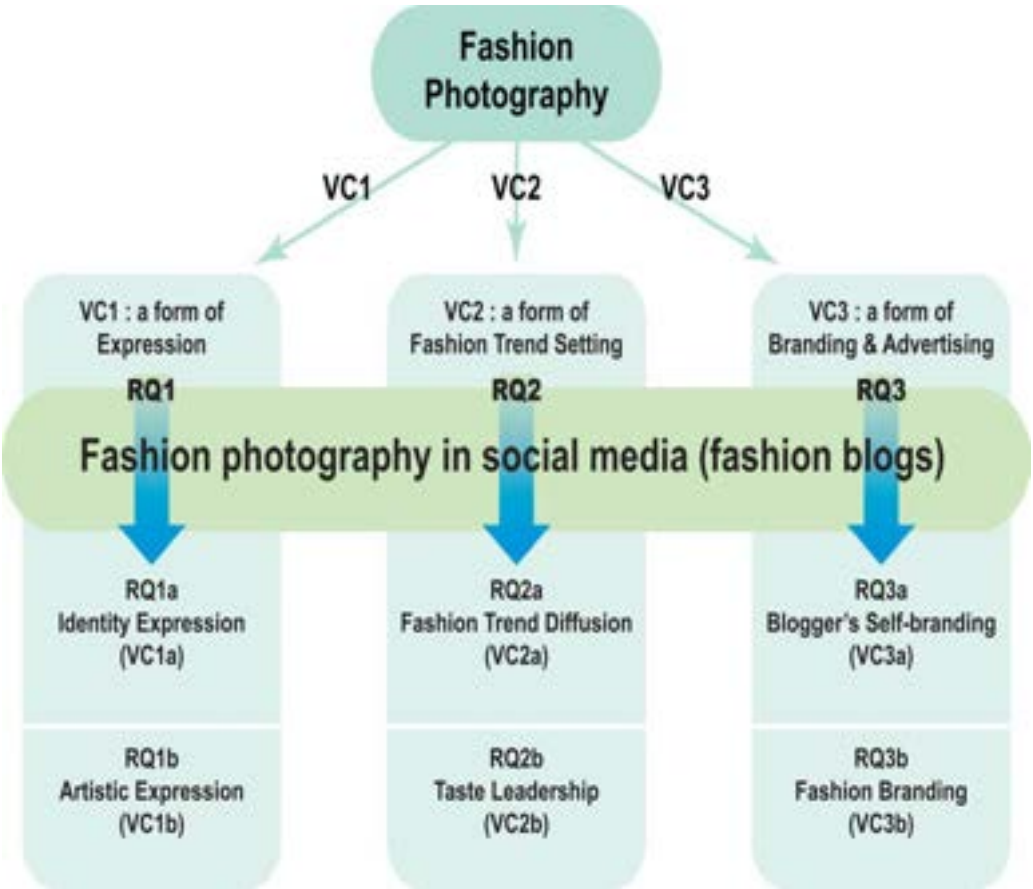


Figure 3.1. The conceptual framework of this study.

3.4 Research Design

This section introduces the research framework for the study that was designed to answer the six research questions. This section first discusses the rationale of the research design and introduces the critical visual methodology framework, which looks at visual images from three perspectives: the sites of production, the site of audiencing, and the site of the image itself. These three sites will be justified by the rationale of the triangulation approach of a mixed-method design including in-depth

interview, focus group, and content analysis of each of the sites. Each of these methods will be addressed in detail in the next chapter. The last part of this section will introduce the data analysis approach of grounded theory.

3.4.1 Research design and justifications

The research design aims at providing a framework and the series of steps regarding how the methods will be conducted to yield the relevant results of research study (Andranovich & Riposa, 1993; Collins, 2010; Krippendorff, 2004). The core research subject of this study is the visual image. The research design of study was inspired by Gillian Rose's (2012) widely adopted work, *Visual Methodologies*. She introduced a critical visual methodology framework in consideration of different aspects of a visual element. It has been long debated that the study of visual images is subjective, they lack scientific instruments to measure them, and the validity and reliability of visual interpretation have often been questioned. Although recent research has focused on novel technological aspects of processing visual data as part of studying image representations (Dhara & Chanda, 2011; Ding et al, 2015; Pandey, et al, 2015; Raveaux et al, 2013; Zhan, et al, 2015), and these studies contributed to developing scientific and mathematical approaches in scanning and calculating visual data, the interpretation of the meaning of the images and how that meaning relates to

the society or cultural construct was neglected. The term *visual representation* used in these studies possessed different meaning from the Western cultural theoretical framework on visual studies and visual representation, such as Stuart Hall's (1997) theory on cultural representation. Here, we see a vast divergence on studies and understanding of visual images, leading Rose (2012) to conclude, "the theoretical sources that have produced the recent interest in visual culture and visual research methods are philosophically, theoretically and conceptually diverse" (p. 19).

It is essential to clarify that the theoretical framework for the study of visual images in this research: it was based on the knowledge acquired by the studies of scholars in Western cultural studies (e.g., Hall, 1997; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, Manghani, 2013; Mirzoeff, 2009; Rose, 2012; Sturken & Cartwright, 2009). Among these significant works, Rose (2012) provided a critical analysis on both theories and practice, drawing on a wide range of scholastic works to develop a comprehensive guide on the various methodologies.

According to Rose's framework of critical visual methodology, there are three sites for studying visual materials at which the meaning is produced: the site of production, the site of the image itself, and the site of audience. Each of these sites was further developed into three aspects to consider,

which she termed *modalities*: technological, compositional, and social. The research design of this study is based on the insight gleaned by looking at visual images from different perspectives of where the meaning is made, and therefore in this section, we will take a closer look of Rose's explanation of the three sites of images:

3.4.1.1 The site of production

The site of production refers to the making of the image, meaning that the visual representation of an image may be affected by the way it is produced. In this respect, technological aspects play an important role in the production of visual images. Whereas, photography was once thought to capture the *truthfulness* of reality, with technological changes in the way photography is produced, the representation of its meaning has been diversified. The second modality of compositionality places much attention on the genre in which the photograph is situated; in new media, one photograph could be presented in various genres on different websites or on a social media platform. The original concept of producing an image according to a specific genre blurs along with the changes in the methods by which a photo circulates from site to site online. Hence, the site of production provides insight into the meaning a photo was intended to create.

3.4.1.2 The site of the audiencing

The interpretation of the image relies on the audience's reception of the meaning. Rose (2012) adopted the term *audiencing* from Fiske's (1994) observation of the process by which the meaning is created and renegotiated by the audience; the interpretation relies on the particular audience's background and how they look at the image in the particular situation and period. The consideration of the site of audience involves all three modalities of technological, compositional. and social aspects; among these, the social aspect would be the most important modality, because viewing of images depends on the social practice of different audiences, and such practices affect the perception of the audience towards the particular images. Much of the emphasis on site of audiencing is in the context of images. The same image appears and reappears in various situations and often changes the way an audience perceives its meaning. In his groundbreaking work, *Way of Seeings*, Berger (1972) suggested that changes in ways of seeing challenge the notion that the technological reproduction of images alter the way people view visual images.

3.4.1.3 The site of the image

The site of the image suggested that the meanings of images are found in the meaning itself. This is a relatively more straight forward concept of

interpreting visual images. By looking directly at the image content itself, the study of the visual meaning is found in the composition of the image, such as the color, the angle, the photo effects, and that all of these elements form the modality of compositionality which becomes the most prominent attribution of the image.

The design of the research methodology of this study adopted the framework of the critical visual methodologies in terms of the consideration of all three sites of production, the image itself and the audiencing (Rose, 2012). However, this study did not strictly follow the method suggested by Rose in accordance to each particular site in the framework, except content analysis for the site of the image itself. This does not mean that the researcher rejects the methods suggested by Rose, on the other hand, many scholars in the field of visual studies have agreed there is no absolute way of doing visual research. It is also important to understand the changes, if there are any, in the value of fashion photography in the context of social media, which creates a new genre of image presentation in which there is little in the way of theoretical explanation.

The study adopted a mixed-methods model to conduct several data collecting processes from qualitative and quantitative methods; three different methods were chosen in response to the sites of visual study

explained above:

1. The site of production: In-depth interviewing
2. The site of audiencing: Focus group
3. The site of the image: Content analysis

The framework examining the three sites of production, image, and audience was further justified by the triangulation approach and is presented in Figure 3.2.

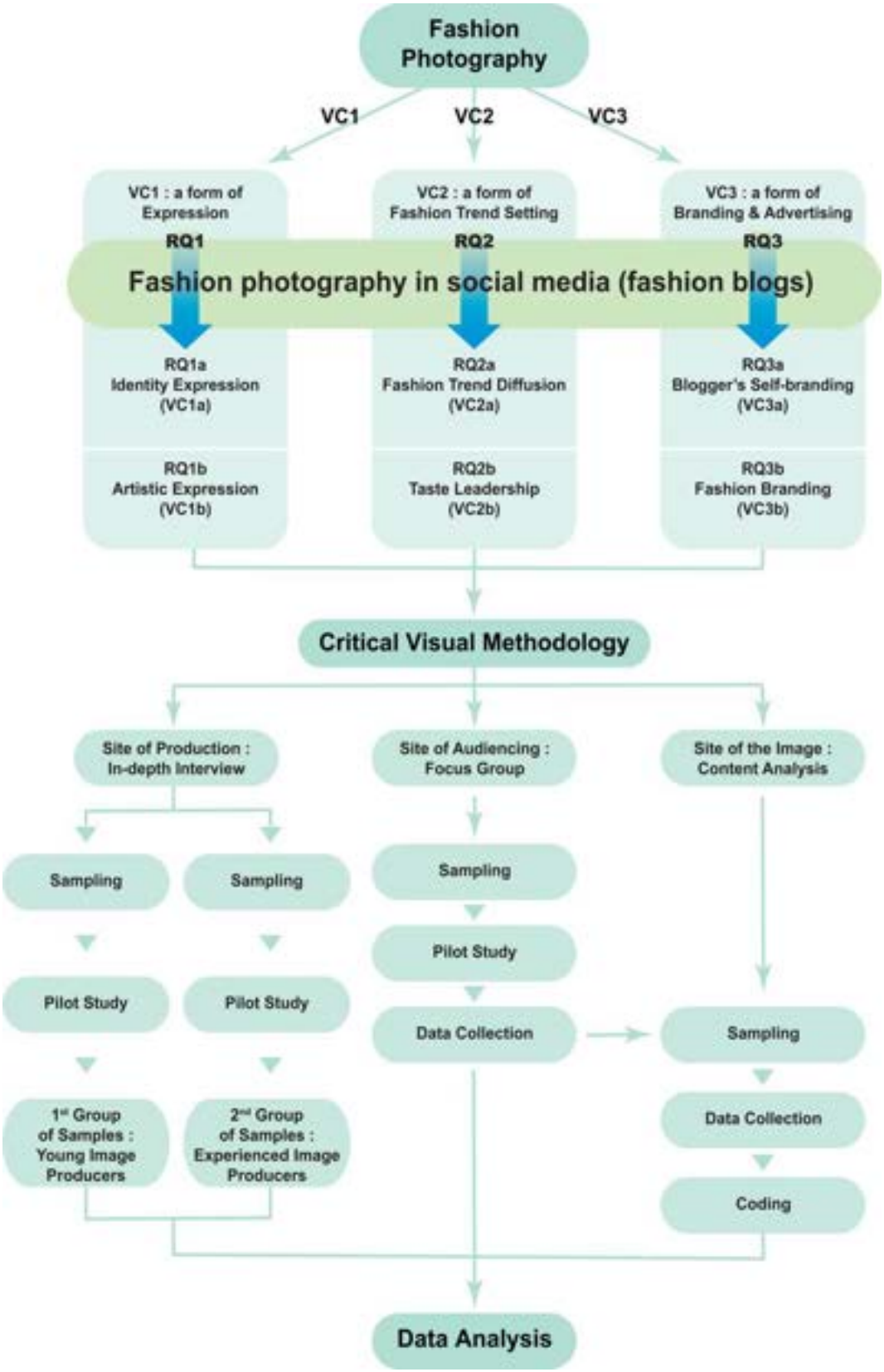


Figure 3.2. Research design

3.4.2 Triangulation

The concept of triangulation originated from a survey process in which two points are taken as a measurement to determine the distance to a third point (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The term was adopted by Denzin (1978) with respect to sociological research in which the concept of triangulation could refer to four types: (a) the use of several data sources for a study which is called *data triangulation*, (b) the use of several investigators which is called *investigator triangulation*, (c) the use of different perspectives in the study's interpretation which is called *theory triangulation*, and at last, which was applied to this study, (d) the use of several methods for the study of a research problem, referring to *methodological triangulation*. Triangulation is important to ensuring the validity of the data; the results generated from various data collection approaches enhances the level of validity, and thus, helps to ensure the reliability of the results (Denscombe, 2007; Kawamura, 2011). As Denscombe explained, "They [multiple methods] do not prove that the researcher has 'got it right,' but they do give some confidence that the meaning of the data has some consistency across methods" (p. 85).

The rationale for triangulation approach for this study is that since the area of social media research is relatively new, and this study involved the

investigation of the phenomenon of social media relative to different aspects of value creation, the data generated from both narrative descriptions and statistical information shall further strengthen the reliability of the study; as stated by Kawamura (2011) triangulation approach shall be the future requirement for fashion studies. Among these studies, content analysis is a popular method for interpretating blogs' images and posts, but there were other methods, including in-depth interviews, netnography, and survey approaches. The prominent feature of research methods related to this topic is the diversity of them, and no particular research method has been found to tie in closely with this area. Hence, previous research studies formed the useful references for this study in designing a mix-methods research approach, in order to enhance the validity of the findings due to triangulation.

The next section of the methodology will explain the data analysis involved in the methods of data collection: the in-depth interview with fashion industry practitioners; focus group for readers of fashion photography on social media; content analysis of the fashion photographs on social media. Each of these methods focus on one aspect of the sites of visual images, and the results drawn on these three methods will be able to answer the questions from the three ways fashion photography on social media platforms create value.

3.5 Data Analysis: Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss' (1967) ground theory was drawn on to analyze the data collected from interviews. Further details in the analysis will be discussed in the next chapter of the research findings.

3.5.1 Grounded theory

Data analysis adopted an inductive approach from grounded theory developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Coding strategy was a two-level coding according to the principles outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). The first level of codes (open coding) was first developed based on the research framework of the three value creations of fashion photography, (a) artistic expression, (b) trends diffusion, and (c) branding. The three areas provided the grounds for the preliminary coding system built around the framework. As the study progressed along this inductive approach, new insights emerged from the data, and the list of codes was then reviewed and revisited again. A final structure of codes was then redefined, and this list is presented in Table 5.1. This followed the research process suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the list of the codes has been re-constructed according to the four steps *filing in, extension, bridging,* and *surfacing*. The first level of coding refers to *open coding*. The codes were then reconfigurated into the level two of emerging concepts for further analysis,

namely *axial coding*. The final stage of the analysis is to compare categories emerging from axial coding to the integrated theoretical framework, which is referred to as *selective coding* (Iglesias, Sauquet, & Montana, 2011). Given the nature of the interview questions, the in-depth interview and focus group shared the same coding scheme in Table 3.1, while content analysis developed a separate coding list for image counting; this will be explained in more detail in the next chapter. These sets of codes function as the first level of analysis for the next step of inductive approach for grounded theory.

Table 3.1.

Initial 1st level Coding for In-depth Interview and Focus Group

	Reason of Use	
RU	Convenience & anytime	RU-CONV
RU	Free of charge	RU-FREE
RU	Fast	RU-FAST
RU	Consolidated resourced	RU-CONS
	Searching Method	
SM	Online	SM-ONL
SM	Random browse	SM-ONL RAND
SM	Key Words	SM-ONL KWORD
SM	Various link	SM-ONL VARL
SM	Printed Magazine	SM-PRI
	Reason for following (or not following)	
RF	Like the style	RF-STY+/-
RF	Like the person	RF-PER+/-
RF	Like the theme	RF-THE+/-
RF	Follow other Followers	RF-FOF
	Elements of positive comments	
PC	Frequent upload	PC-FRE
PC	Effort input	PC-EFF
PC	Appearance	PC-APP
PC	Information	PC-INFO
PC	Style Reference	PC-REF
PC	Photo Quality	PC-PHOQ
PC	Closer to the mass	PC-MASS
PC	Language	PC-LANG
PC	Good Networking	PC-GNET
PC	Truth comments on brand	PC-TRUC
	Elements of negative comments	
NC	Show-off	NC-SHO
NC	Boring, too personal	NC-BOR
NC	Incomparable with models	NC-INCM
NC	Lack of fashion knowledge	NC-NOKW
NC	Lack of techinical skill	NC-NOSKI
NC	Hard sell	NC-HSELL
NC	No details	NC-NDET
NC	Too commerical	NC-TCOM
NC	Fake lifestyle	NC-FAKE

	Aesthetic Expression	
AE	Background Location	AE-BKGD
AE	Color tone	AE-COL
AE	Mood	AE-MOOD
AE	Angle	AE-ANG
AE	Style	AE-STY
AE	Composition	AE-COMP
AE	Creative concept	AE-CREV
AE	Model	AE-MODEL
	Self expression	
SE	Attention drawing	SE-ATTD
SE	Individual Angle	SE-IND
SE	Subjective	SE-SUB
SE	Share lifestyle	SE-SLIFE
SE	Promote themselves	SE-PROM
SE	Special style	SE-STY
	Trend diffusion	
TS	Fastest	TS-FAST
TS	More approachable	TS-MAPP
TS	Style Reference	TS-REF
TS	Some special style	TS-SPEC
TS	Display variety of style	TS-VAR
TS	Notice of new trends	TS-NEWT
TS	Filter trends	TS-FILT
TS	Push by brands	TS-BRD
	Branding and advertising	
BG	Self-brandings	BG-SELB
BG	Empower by brands	BG-EMPB
BG	Help the brands	BG-HELP
BG	Became celebrites	BG-CEL
BG	PR activities	BG-PR
BG	Network in the industry	BG-NET
	HK VS foreign IG Comparison	
CP	Difference	CP-D
CP	HK fixed style	CP-D HKFIX
CP	Foreign-exposure	CP-D FOREX
CP	HK Imitate Foreign	CP-D HKIMT
CP	No difference	CP-NODIF
	Impact on Fashion photography	
IFP	No direct impact	IFP-NO DIR
IFP	More variety	IFP-MOREV
IFP	Networking for image prc	IFP-NET
IFP	Mutual influence	IFP-MUT
IFP	Reference for amaturer	IFP-REF

After codes were created and coding was completed, the pattern of codes were further analyzed using inductive grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is an inductive theoretical construction approach, which originated from social science research developed by Glaser and Strauss (1965). The unique feature of this approach is that theories are constructed after data are collected rather than having apriori theoretical assumptions to be proven. In this approach, theories are grounded in data analysis procedures, which gives the data analysis procedures the name grounded theory. The unique approach of this method is that the data are collected from a variety of means and analyzed in an interrelated process. The data sets are then analyzed using the process of constant comparison; this study has data from both in-depth interviews, and focus groups; by constantly comparing these data sets, similarities and differences were identified and further developed into concepts and themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). It should be mentioned that the third method of data collection will be analyzed with content analysis and these results will be interpreted with the thematic results of the qualitative analysis.

During grounded theory analysis, a key process is developing memos and diagrams. Accordingly, ideas were formulated by writing memos according to the information from a piece of data code. The memos are then further categorized into concepts and integrated into theories, and finally a diagram

is configured to illustrate the new theory constructed. Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.4 illustrates the framework of grounded theories analysis of this study. Table 3.2 demonstrates an example of memo construction according to a piece of interview data of this study. Figure 3.5 shows the grounded theory data analysis and interpretation process model (Daengbuppha et at, 2006; Iglesias et al, 2011,).

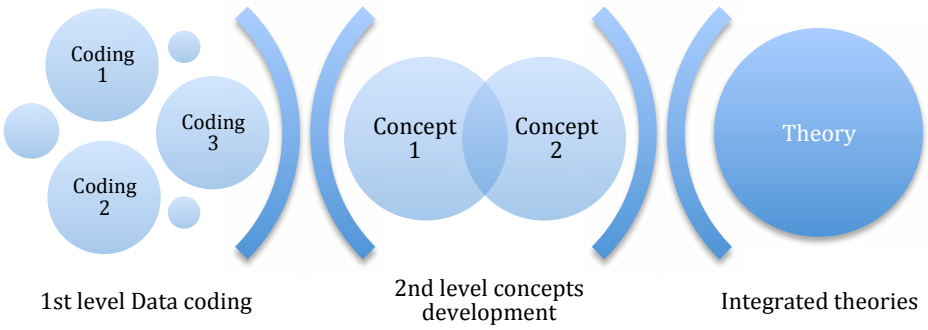


Figure 3.3 Framework of grounded theory analysis

Table 3.2

Example of a Memo Constructed for this Study

Data source: In-depth Interview:

Respondent C, Line 26

Coding: BG-EMPB

I think that it is those who already have the power in fashion world to 'name' which blogger is good. And then people 'realise' those are good instead of the bloggers are being so good to gain so many followers. This identity is enabled by another powerful figure in the fashion world.

Memo:

Concept: Identity empowerment

This information discusses how bloggers gain their identity. There are leading figure in the fashion industries who are influential. These figures include fashion editors of key leading fashion magazines, fashion designers, or fashion directors of famous brands. The power game in the fashion system appears to be strong in the phenomenon of social media culture. Bloggers need to be endorsed by authority in the hierarchy of the fashion world to become a significant figure, ie. identity of a fashion insider. The new system of social media breaks the traditional hierarchy in fashion communication system. Bloggers and fashion industries leaders established a mutual interdependence relationship. Fashion brands and media PR are aware of the powerful readership leads by bloggers, and at the same, bloggers gain access to the fashion industries by constantly posting fashion photographs and accumulated the numbers of followers and 'like'. Respondents questioned the professionalism of bloggers in presenting the fashion information or the production quality of the fashion photography.

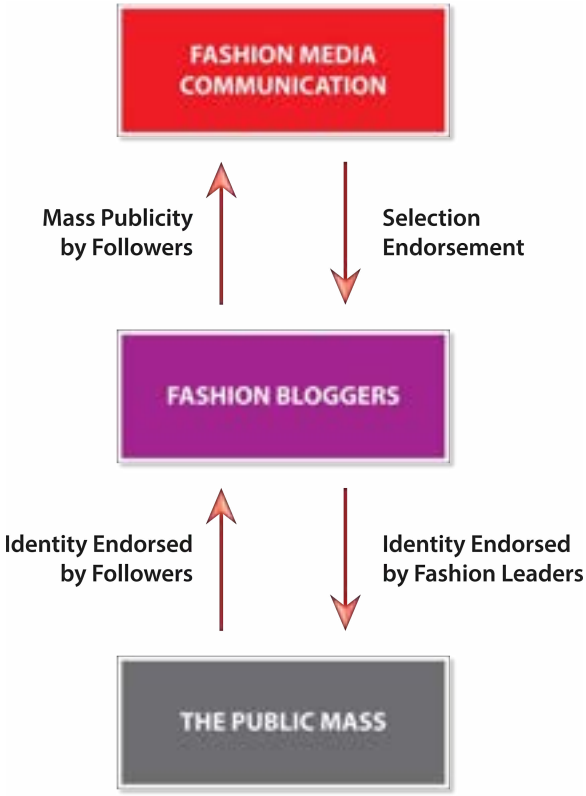
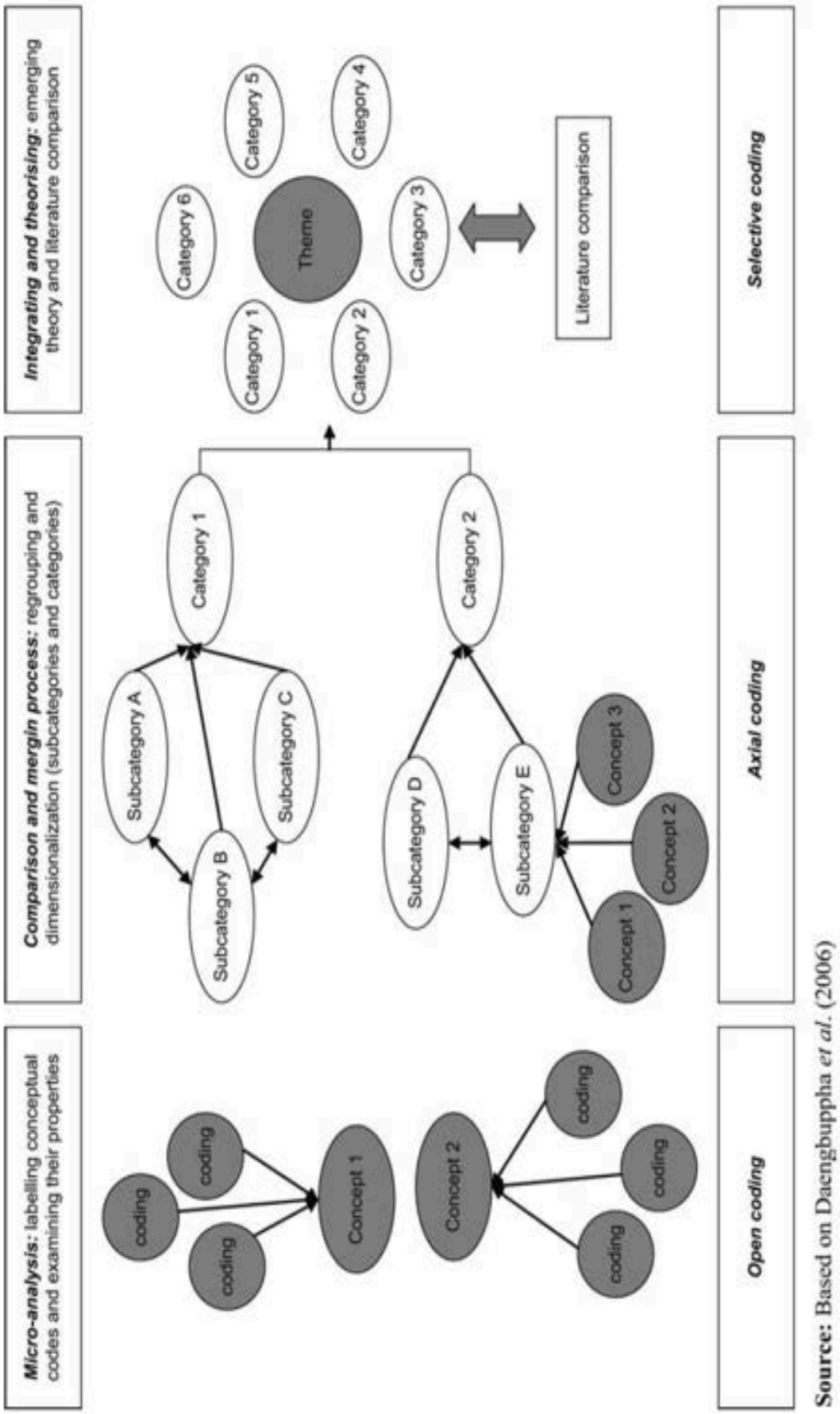


Figure 3.4. A diagram on identity empowerment according to the sample memo

Concepts: Identity empowerment in Fashion media Communication.

The diagram illustrates the power hierarchy between leaders in fashion media and the bloggers becoming image producers. The analysis continues for each methods on each site of images, and will be discussed in details next.



Source: Based on Dacngbuppha *et al.* (2006)

Figure 3.5 Data Analysis and interpretation process using grounded theory

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the conceptual framework and the research design. The conceptual framework emerged from the critical review of the literature review, which further explained the value creation of each domain and how the sub-values of each domain informed the research questions. Eventually, six research questions were formulated and mapped into the conceptual framework. The second part of the chapter presented the research design and the data analysis strategy using the grounded theory approach. The study was designed by using the triangulation approach in its various methods of data collection in investigating the topic from all three aspects of images. This approach was inspired by Rose's (2012) *Visual Methodology* in order to examine images from three perspectives: the site of image production, the site of image audiencing, and the site of the image. Finally, the data analysis procedure was explained according to the principle of grounded theory, coding methods, and an example of conceptual forming was also presented.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the conceptual framework and the research design, which triangulated the data of three methods of data collection. This chapter introduces each of the research methods in correspondence to each of the image sites. Research method one is the in-depth interview approach for the site of the image production; research method two is the focus group approach to examine the site of the image audiencing; and the third research method is the quantitative approach of content analysis of the site of the image itself. The theoretical background, rationale, and procedures of each of the methods will be discussed in detail.

4.2 Research Method 1: In-depth Interview - Site of Production

In terms of the site of production, Rose (2012) discussed the influence of the modalities of technology, compositionality, and social aspects on the production of images that create meaning. Among the three modalities, technology advancement in the digital era marked a substantial change in the production of images, which was the incentive for this study. The image producer in general is the one who has the full knowledge of the three modalities of image production. Fashion photographers understand how to create the genre of the images. They act as the creative director to produce the desired visual creation according to the aesthetics of the fashion images. In-depth interviews of image producers were adopted for

the method in this study, and the next section provides the justification.

4.2.1 Theoretical background and justification

The qualitative method of in-depth interviewing was used to examine the site of production. According to Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, and Alexander (1995), the theoretical background of in-depth interviewing has a long history which developed from a broad range of philosophies from the Enlightenment, followed by positivism, utilitarianism, and scientism, in an attempt to understanding the underlying processes life. Other philosophical underpinning for this method have often been associated with hermeneutics, ethnography, phenomenology, and social psychology. The method of in-depth interview is closely linked with the interpretative approach (Minichello Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995). Drawing on a wide range of philosophical contexts, Minichiello et al. (1995) gave a very broad overview of historical and theoretical development for the background of in-depth interviewing. However, the overview appears to be more relevant when theorizing the interpretive approach in social research rather than in-depth interviewing as a prominent research method. Other studies discuss in-depth interviews as part of current practices in qualitative research methodology. Much of the discussion focuses on the rationale and the guidelines for conducting the interviewing approach (Denscombe, 2007; Minichiello et al., 1995; Seidman, 1998; Silverman, 1997).

The rationale for adopting this method is to understand from the image producers' perspective, the experience, mindset, and the knowledge of

creating fashion images, and the changes they perceive are taking place in the context of the digital era. Since the core of in-depth interviewing is to understand the others' perspectives, the use of in-depth interview is to understand the experience of others in order to provide the meaning of the relevant behavior (Denscombe, 2007; Minichiello et al, 1995; Seidman, 1998). As Seidman (1998) observed, "At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth. That is why people whom we interview are hard to code with numbers" (p. 3).

Photography is generally considered a niche profession in the market, and the fashion image production is even a smaller sector within Hong Kong fashion industry. Most of the fashion image producers in Hong Kong work on a freelance basis, and there are no official statistics reporting the number of professional photographers working in this field (H.K. Census Department); in-depth interviewing was selected because it is important to understand the experience and underlying opinions of this niche group. One of the studies that has adopted this approach for the site of image production was Meyers' (2012) study on bloggers. Meyers' study examined celebrity gossip blogs and their role in celebrity culture in the late 2000s, and the researchers interviewed bloggers in order to investigate the audience and producers' position on blogging. Since the nature of the study is to investigate the underlying attitude, preferences, or motivation regarding the specific topic of fashion photography and social media, in-depth interviewing was thought to enable the flexibility and the depth needed to achieve the research objectives (Collins, 2010; Gillham, 2005).

4.2.2 Sampling

The sampling strategy is called *purposeful sampling*, which is used when there is a need to find participants who have experience that can shed light on the topic of study (Densombe, 2007; Seidman, 1998). According to Seidman (1998), the basic principle in selecting participants for in-depth interviewing is to draw a connection from the experience among the interviewees. Seidman further elaborated on Patton's (1989) suggestion that *maximum variation* sampling would be the most effective way. Denscombe (2007) also suggested that the selection of interviewees tends to be nonprobability sampling. The sampling should be either to choose a representative sample in order to generalize the results for a larger context, or identify the key players in the field in order to conduct exploratory investigation on a specific situation.

Based on this purpose, this study adopted a purposeful principle recommended by Seidman's (1998) and Denscombe's (2007) discussion of representative samples and key players. There were two groups being sampled: the first group targeted the young generation of image producers in Hong Kong. This group served as the representative sampling for the larger group of young image producers. The second group of samples targeted the key players in the field. The detailed sampling procedure of each group is described in next section.

4.2.2.1 Young generation of image producers

The participants of the first group of interviewees were identified from the researcher's personal connection with fashion industry's practitioners who graduated from college in fashion styling and photography specialism. All of them were from a Hong Kong based, young generation of professional practitioners in the fashion media industry with work experience of approximately 1 to 2 years, who were in their mid-20s. All respondents had actual professional experience and knowledge of fashion shooting and had experience with it in different roles, including stylists, editors/reports, and photographers. Each of them was familiar with social media and engaged in a certain level of readership of fashion images through social media. Eleven interviewees received a formal education at the degree level of fashion styling and photography, while one of them holds a higher diploma in a fashion image design discipline.

4.2.2.2: Experienced professional image producers

The sampling of second group of in-depth interviewees was based on Denscombe's (2007) notion of selecting the key players in the field in order to explore a specific situation. The sampling targeted experienced professional image producers in Hong Kong. In order to identify the key players of the field of fashion photography in Hong Kong, the researcher approached Hong Kong Institute of Professional Photographer (HKIPP), one of the largest and most recognized organization for professional photographers in Hong Kong. HKIPP has around 110 members. Among them, 65 photographers have experience in fashion photography (hkipp.org). The President of HKIPP agreed to participate and to further

introduce two committee members of HKIPP for the interviews. Three key players representing professional and experienced fashion photographers were selected. The researcher further contacted five more interviewees in order to allow anticipated opposites views on the topic (Denscombe 2007). Another three respondents were experienced fashion photographers in the fashion media industry who were not members of HKIPP. Finally, two more respondents representing fashion media included a PR Director of a Hong Kong based, leading fashion magazine and a senior editor of another Hong Kong based female fashion magazine.

Eventually eight face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted. The second in-depth interviews aimed at respondents at the professional level with more work experience, while the first stage of interviewing was with the young generation. The professionals had more than 10 to 20 years of professional knowledge in image production and fashion media. They were familiar with social media but less engaged in the interactive activity on social media in comparison to the younger generation. Both groups of interviewees were instrumental in understanding the phenomenon of value creation of fashion photography in the digital era.

Table 4.1

Profile of In-Depth Interview Respondents

Job Title	Company	Nature of the company	Education	Year of experience
Fashion Reporter	MilkX Magazine	A local fashion magazine in Hong Kong	Degree	2 years +
Fashion Reporter	MilkX Magazine	A local fashion magazine in Hong Kong	Degree	2 years +
Freelance Fashion stylist	Elle Magazine	Hong Kong edition of an International fashion magazine	Degree	2 years +
Freelance fashion photographer	A fashion company + freelance		Degree	2 years +
Assistant Costume	Film Production	Hong Kong film's production	Degree	2 years +
Assistant Photographer	Elle Magazine	Hong Kong edition of an International fashion magazine	Degree	2 years +
Stylist Intern	Elle Magazine	Hong Kong edition of an International fashion magazine	Degree	2 years +
Assistant Fashion Editor	Zip Magazine	A local fashion magazine in Hong Kong	Higher Diploma	2 years +
Fashion Co-ordinator & fashion stylist	Calvin Klein, freelance	International Fashion brand HK office	Degree	2 years +
Fashion stylist & make-up artist	self-employer for film Production & fashion media	Film Productionin Hong Kong	Degree	3 Years +
Fashion Reporter	Oriental Daily	Fashion Reporter, Oriental Daily	Degree	1~2 years
Fashion Reporter	Flash On Magazine	A local fashion magazine in Hong Kong	Degree	1~2 years
Fashion Photographer	Self-employed		Degree	20 years +
Fashion PR Director	MilkX Magazine	A local fashion magazine in Hong Kong	Degree	20 years +
Fashion Photographer	Ming Pao Weekly	A local fashion magazine in Hong Kong	Degree	10 years +
Fashion Photographer, President of HKIPP	Owner of his photography company	Owner of his photography company	Degree	20 years+
Photographer, member of HKIPP	Owner of his photography company	Clients include large local fashion brands	Degree	20 years +
Photographer, freelance	Self-employed	Clients include Zip magazine, fashion editorial	Certificate	15 years +
Executive Editor	Zip Magazine	A local fashion magazine in Hong Kong		10 years +
Fashion Photographer, Member of HKIPP	Self-employed			10 years +

4.2.3. Data Collection

4.2.3.1. Pilot study

Prior to conducting the actual interviews, two separate interviews were conducted as part of the pilot study. One interviewee was a young generation fashion styling intern and another interviewee had work experience in the fashion industry for 10 years. The purpose of the pilot study was twofold: (a) the interviews served as the basis for refining the questions and methodology for the rest of the interviews; (b) the pilot study provided the snowball sampling for the other participants to interview. The result of the pilot study affirmed the adequacy of the interview questions, as well as the optimum length for the interview, and therefore, the question set was adopted for the rest of the interviews. The result of the pilot interviews also provided insights into ways to refine questions related to the current development of Hong Kong fashion photography industry, especially for those in the young generation who want to pursue a career in the creative industry.

4.2.3.2. The interview process

See Table 4.1 for the list of the background of the interviewees. Each interviewee was well-informed of the research purpose and volunteered to join. It should be added that no specific concern of confidentiality was raised because no specific question was personal, and the interviewees could express themselves freely regarding their view on fashion photography and social media. Hence, consideration of research ethics in

confidentiality and anonymity was taken into account (Oliver, 2010; Rose, 2012).

The interviews consisted of semi-structured questions lasting for an hour. This allowed for flexibility in asking follow up questions and clarification for some ambiguity in the responses (Gillham, 2005; Kawamura, 2011:73); the interviewer could then further investigate and elaborate the questions built on the responses by interviewees (Denscombe, 2007).

A mobile phone was used to show the fashion images from the discussion, or to demonstrate a specific social media device. This proved to be effective in facilitating the discussion. Both the researcher and respondents used the mobile phone to explain the image instantly when the discussion referred to specific social media device, fashion images, or bloggers. This helped the participants to understand the meaning referred by each other about some abstract terminologies on aesthetic or creative elements, such as mood or feel.

The interview questions are listed in Table 4.2; the questions were adjusted and varied according to the flow of each interview. Although the interviews were conducted in semi-structured flow, participants were asked to respond to a set of open-end questions covering several topics: (1) their own experience in fashion industry and fashion shooting project; (2) how they do research in creative production for fashion images with social media; (3) their point of view about social media and fashion images. Section 3 presents the main discussion of the interview. Discussion

focused on respondents' professional point of view as image producers in Hong Kong about the current market situation and the trend of fashion blogging.

Table 4.2

In-Depth Interview Guided Questions

In-depth Interview Guided Discussion Form

Interviewee:_____
Date: _____
Time: _____
Venue:_____

Questions

1. Demographic information, and work experience in fashion shooting
   - Q1. What is your profession/employment in the fashion field? Which company?
   - Q2. Have you ever participated in the production of a fashion shooting?
   - Q3. What is your role? Please share with me your experience in fashion image creation.
   - Q4. How long have you been working in this field?
2. Research in creative production for fashion images with social media
   - Q1. How do you obtain your fashion information/reference for inspiration?
   - Q2. Do you check out the fashion information from the following?
     - Fashion blogs, Instragam, any other form of social media?
     - Fashion magazines
     - Fashion websites, which one?
     - any others?
3. Opinions on social media and fashion images
   - Q1. From professional point of view, which fashion blogs do you like?
   - Q2. Any reasons? Any specific areas you look at?
     - The styles of photos?
     - The blogger's physical appearance?
     - The background & location: Paris, London, Hong Kong, China?
     - Does the place where these bloggers located important?
   - Q4. What is your point of view about fashion bloggers becoming fashion celebrity/icon?
   - Q5. From your observation, what are the successful criteria for a fashion blogger to become popular or famous?
   - Q6. What is your opinion about the overall trend of fashion blogging?
   - Q7. What is your point of view about the impact of social media on professional fashion image production sector of Hong Kong?

4.3. Research Method 2: Focus Group - Site of the Audiencing

A focus group was conducted to address the critical visual methodology framework from the perspective of the site of audiencing. Understanding how the audience looks at the images and what the audience sees is crucial in understanding the values created by fashion photography on social media as perceived by the audience. According to Rose (2012), given the diversity of research methods in measuring visual material from the perspective of the sites of production and the image itself, the site of audiencing has received relatively less attention. The site of audiencing mainly involves the consideration of the social modality of images, in which the audience plays an essential role in renegotiating the meaning of a visual image. The audience does not necessarily interpret the same meaning that the producers intend to deliver. Instead, the images appear to facilitate a decoding process from the audience. The same image appears in different contexts to be reinterpreted by the audience with various meanings.

The audiencing studies that Rose (2012) discussed were mainly focused on TV audience and fans, which dealt with a large number of group members, and there were particular behavioral characteristics which distinguished fans from audience. The discussion focused on two popular methods of interview and ethnography of moving images on TV or Youtube, with TV perceived to be the dominant source of moving images with an impact on a large audience. However, the new trend of audiencing in studies of visual images on social media was neglected.

Recently, methods studying audience response on social media include both quantitative and quantitative approaches, such as survey (Lampe at el, 2006, Joinson, 2008; Lunde, 2013; Ross at el, 2009) and interviews (Chittenden, 2010), or a mixed approach of combining both survey and interviews (Zhao at el, 2008). While numerous studies on social media employed survey as a direct approach which draws a large amount of data for measuring audience response, Branthwaite and Patterson (2011) suggested that the effectiveness of qualitative research is its superiority in terms of *listening*, *interactive conversation*, and *identifying underlying narratives* from respondents on social media, and that the addition of qualitative methods to quantitative methods can strengthen the validity of the study. Among the qualitative methods, focus group was listed as one of the classic methods in measuring online communities and cultures (Bowler, 2010; Branthwaite & Patterson, 2011). Hence, the use of the focus group was adopted in researching the site of audiencing for this study. A targeted group of active social media browsers with knowledge and interest in fashion images provided a direct source from which to understand how the audience interprets fashion images in the context of digital media.

4.3.1 Theoretical background and justification

The focus group is widely adopted in social science research and is a prominent method to understanding media communications (Stewart et al, 2007). Before it gained popularity in academic social sciences research during the past 2 decades (Morgan, 1996), the focus group was widely

adopted in the business sector and has retained a steady growth of usage in marketing studies (Stewart et al., 2007). This approach has been constantly discussed in comparison to other forms of interviews in behavioral qualitative research (Berger, 1998; Denscombe, 2007; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1997; Stewart et al., 2007). The major argument for using a focus group methodology lies in its emphasis on techniques regarding *how to conduct*, rather than academic and theoretical consideration of *why to conduct* (McCracken, 1988; Stewart et al., 2007).

In view of the lack of academic study on focus groups, Stewart et al. (2007) extended the examination of focus groups in constructing theoretical underpinning with academic studies, while Krueger and Casey (2000) provided comprehensive guidelines for conducting focus groups widely adopted by academic research. According to Stewart et al., the focus group was originally termed a *focused interview*, which possesses a long history that can be dated back to the early century when researchers adopted this early form of group interviews in various behavioral science disciplines to study group behavior, underlying meanings, and social interactions and opinions. While the early contribution made by focus groups was primarily in the fields of sociology and social psychology, this method may not be as important in academic social psychological and communication research as other experimental and quantitative approaches. It was not until the recent decades that focus group regained its prominent places in academic field for audience reception and media research (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996).

In term of marketing research, the focus group as a methodology has

received wide acceptance in practice, and traditionally, the theories in marketing literature for focus groups involve two schools of thoughts, the Freudian and neo-Freudian thought. These schools of thought are reflected in a focus on the exploratory and interactive nature of clinical psychological groups, whereas a more purpose-driven direct questioning style has been often the main focus of social psychological groups (Stewart et al., 2007).

Stewart et al. (2007) concluded focus group theory has four criteria, which draw on the integration of theoretical grounds bridging social and clinical psychological traditions as well as marketing literature. The four criteria are focused research, group interaction, in-depth data, and humanistic interview. This method could be used as the main source of data; second, it could be used as a supplementary data source to other primary methods; or thirdly, it could be conducted as one part in a multi-method studies (Morgan, 1997). Finally, the focus group could also serve as a pilot study where preliminary data can be drawn in evaluating a draft for further primary research, such as interview or survey (Oliver, 2010).

In this study, the focus group served as one of the multiple methods in triangulating the three sites of critical visual methodology and also as a supplementary data source to the other primary methods. One of the questions in the focus group asked the respondents to identify their favorite social media sites for browsing fashion photography; this provided the snowball sampling for targeted social media sites for the next research method of the content analysis for the site of the image itself. This

provided the most authentic sources for audience choice of popular social media sites for fashion photography by Hong Kong fashion lovers. Lastly, the focus group was considered to be a self-contained method as one of the main sources of data.

4.3.2 Recruitment of participants

As explained in the previous section about sampling for in-depth interviews, the principle of purposeful sampling was also applied to the recruitment of focus group members. The rationale was similar to that of in-depth interview in which the target respondents could serve as the representative of a larger cohort, in this case, young fashion lovers who are active audience of fashion images on social media. Young adults are the prominent group for fashion consumption, in the site of audiencing, focus group provided an adequate platform in examining their motivation for looking at fashion images on social media, and their behavioral response in terms of fashion consumption influenced by the fashion images. Since most of them were teenagers or young adults, the method of focus group was effective in allowing these young adults to take part in the discussion in an interactive way. This is based on the rationale that focus group differs from group interview on its reliance on interaction, where group interaction could produce data which is less likely to be accessible by other means of research methods (Morgan, 1997); and the dynamic created between group members allow researchers to observe individual responses (Stewart et al., 2007; Oliver, 2010). Researchers could also play a less directive role in facilitating the discussion and allowing subjects ample

opportunity to express their own ideas (Krueger, 1994).

Targeted participants were selected in consideration of the characteristic of the group members who would be able to provide critical insight into the topic (Kruger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1997; Stewart et al, 2007). The target subjects were recruited from one of the design institutions in Hong Kong. The students who study fashion-related disciplines at the higher diploma level or degree level, such as fashion design, fashion image styling or fashion business, were invited to participate in the focus group. The participants were active users of social media and constituted an audience for fashion images on various mediums, including printed material and social media. Eventually eight focus groups of students from the Fashion and Image Design Department of Hong Kong Design Institute (HKDI) participated in the research. Each group had five to six participants, and the duration of the discussion lasted approximately 1 hour. Table 4.3 shows the profile of the focus groups' respondents.

Table 4.3

Profile of Focus Group Respondents

Profile of Focus Group Respondents					
	Respondents Group	Number of respondents	Background of groups	Usage on Social Media	Years of joining Instagram
1	A	5	Students in BA (Hons) Fashion Business	frequent users	3~4
2	B	5	Students in BA (Hons) Fashion Business	frequent users	3~4
3	C	5	Students in BA (Hons) Fashion Business	frequent users	3~4
4	D	5	Students in Higher Diploma in Fashion Image Design	moderate users	2~3
5	E	6	Students of BA (Hons) Fashion Styling and Photography	frequent users	3~4
6	F	6	Students of BA (Hons) Fashion Styling and Photography	some are frequent users/ some are moderate users	3~4
7	G	5	Students of BA (Hons) Fashion Styling and Photography	frequent users	3~4
8	H	6	Students of BA (Hons) Fashion Styling and Photography	frequent users	3~4

4.3.3 Data Collection

4.3.3.1. Pilot study

Prior to the actual group, there was a separate focus group conducted as the pilot study. A group of four students majoring in fashion discipline were recruited from the same design institute of the participants of the main round of focus groups. The purpose of this pilot study was twofold: (a) the discussion served as basis of refining the interview questions and

the methodology for the rest of actual focus group; (b) the pilot studies could serve to provide snowball sampling for target fashion Instagram for content analysis. The result of the pilot study affirmed the adequacy of the interview questions and provided an estimate for the length of the discussion. The question set was adopted in the main for the rest of the focus group research. The result of the pilot focus group provided additional insights on sampling for the next step of research using content analysis, and the discussion indicated that the respondents were familiar with popular social media sites for fashion information, and hence the suggestion that Instagram would be the main research target for readership on social media.

4.3.3.2. Focus group procedures

Similar to the procedures of the in-depth interview, the researcher began the conversation by introducing herself. Then the researcher explained the background of the research, the purpose of the focus group, and the expectation for respondents: to answer the questions authentically, and that there was no need to provide responses for questions that they did not have knowledge on. All respondents were informed clearly that they had the right to express themselves freely or to stop the conversation whenever they felt uncomfortable or for whatever reason did not want to respond to a question. Respondents were also told that nothing would be reported that revealed their actual identity as individual respondents, and that all the answers would be reported in aggregate from each focus group. Each group would be identified using a letter of the alphabet in the final report.

Since the questions did not involve any sensitive issues, such as respondent's own privacy, and focused only on fashion related discussion, respondents appeared to be very open with their comments and were willing to express themselves and engage in the topic. The responses formed an important basis from which to analyze and understand the site of image audiencing.

Following the procedure that was used in the in-depth interview, the mobile phone was also used as a research tool to show the fashion images to the focus group. Respondents frequently used mobile apps to show fashion Instagram pages that they referred to and to explain their preference for the various fashion images. Both the researcher and respondents used the mobile phone to explain the images instantly when the discussion referred to specific social media device, fashion images, or bloggers.

The discussions followed a list of guided questions preset by the researcher, and validated by the pilot study. The questions were preliminarily categorized into three sections: (a) respondents' demographic information and their interests in fashion images; (b) user habits and readership on social media; and (c) main body of the research question related discussion. The questions of focus group discussion are listed in Table 4.4.

Demographic Information, and Interests in Fashion Images

After the researcher's self-introduction, the researcher first built rapport with warm up questions regarding respondents' demographic background and their interests in fashion related information. This procedure served as an ice-breaking process to create a friendly and relaxing "chit-chat" environment for the group discussion. Generally, respondents felt more relaxed after the ice breaking process and became more active in discussion.

User Habits and Readership on Social Media

After rapport was built, the questions and discussion turned to a focus on social media readership. An obvious agreement emerged among respondents in that their common interest was their preference of Instagram among all other social media platform for viewing fashion images. This led to further discussion to gather more detail about their users' habits, preferences, and comments regarding the fashion Instagram pages. This finding was an important basis for targeted sampling for the third research method of content analysis.

Main Body of Discussion Related to Research Questions

This section occupied the majority of discussion time. There were preliminary questions related to the six domains of fashion photography. As the discussion did not necessarily follow the sequences of the questions, the researcher served as the facilitator to make sure that the discussion covered respondents' opinion around the six domains of artistic expression, identity expression, trend and tastes, blogger's self-branding, and fashion branding.

Table 4.4

Focus Group Guided Questions

Interviewee:_____
Date: _____
Time: _____
Venue:_____

Questions

1. Demographic information, and interests in fashion images
   - Q1. What are you currently studying at?
   - Q2. What is your major, discipline?
   - Q3. How old are you?
   - Q4. Where do you get your fashion information, such as fashion news, brands, trends and styles?
   - Q5. Do you like to look at fashion images?

2. User habits and readership on social media
   - Q1. Do you browse fashion news, fashion images or related information on social media?
   - Q2. How long have you been browsing social media?
   - Q3. Which social media platform do you like most, such as: fashion Blogs/Instagram/Tumblr/Pinterest/Facebook...? Why?
   - Q4. (follow up question on Q3) How do you know get to know these bloggers?
   - Q5. (follow up question on Q4) What are the criteria that you 'like' or 'follow' a social media account?

3. Main body of the research questions related discussion
   - Q1. Describe what do you think about their image photos from HK fashion blogs
     - Aesthetics and creative expression
     - Self-expression
     - Taste leadership
     - Fashion trends leadership
     - Branding themselves
     - Advertising for the fashion brands
   - Q2. If you don’t have any particular HK blogs you like, please discuss what is important for you to look at these images on social media?
     - fashion news
     - fashion styling
     - fashion trend for him or herself?
   - Q3. Does the blogger’s physical appearance affect how you view the fashion images?
   - Q4. How do these images compared with international/overseas blogs?
   - Q5. What do you think about the impact of these images of social media on traditional fashion photography?

4.4. Research Method 3: Content Analysis - Site of the Image

In considering the site of the image, the third method of this study adopted the quantitative approach of content analysis. This is a research method originally developed for the interpretation of textual and spoken content (Rose, 2006). Its definition has been varied and evolved from its introduction in the social and behavioral research field 60 years ago (Holsti, 1969). Krippendorff (2004) described a comprehensive historical background of content analysis in which the concept could be dated back as early as 17th Century when the Church systematically inquired about textual content in printed matter for any nonreligious material. It was not until the 1940s that the term content analysis was coined (Waples & Berelson, as cited in Krippendorff, 2004). The previous form of early content analysis was described as quantitative newspaper analysis in the early century due to demands to have systematic analysis of newspaper content for journalistic argument. Later, the research categories expanded from newspaper to various printed matter, including textbook, visual materials, such as comics, and print advertising (Krippendorff, 2004). With the advancement of technology, images no longer remain static, and the categories of content analysis extended to moving images on all means of mass media, such as TV, films, and the Internet (Bell, 2001; Rose, 2012).

4.4.1. Theoretical background and justification

The core essence of content analysis has centered on the communication

content, by means of looking at verbal and textual communication; the approach aims to gather and interpret the communication data in a scientific process, in order to understand human interaction and social behavior. According to Holsti (1969), “Content analysis is a multipurpose research method developed specifically for investigating any problem in which the content of communication serves as the basis of inference” (p. 2). Content analysis began to be widely adopted by psychologists after World War II in four major areas. The first was the analysis of the verbal record of motivational, mental, or personality features. The second was the gathering of verbal data in open-ended interviews, focus groups, or various verbal responses in research tests. The third was the focus on the process of communication integrating the content of verbal exchange as part of data during the process. The fourth area pertained to the generalization of measures of meaning in various circumstances and cultures (Krippendorff, 2004). Krippendorff (2004) further provided a list of disciplines in which content analysis was considered relevant, which included political science, literature, history, anthropology, and linguistics. He discussed the pros and cons of such a divergence of multidisciplinary adaptation of the method by first arguing that such proliferation of the wide adaptation of content analysis in various disciplines has resulted in a loss in focus. On the other hand, he counter argued that “this trend also broadened the scope of the technique to embrace what may well be the essence of human behavior: talk, conversation, and mediated communication” (p. 12). With such observations, Krippendorff has been in agreement of Holsti’s (1969) conclusion on the advantages of content analysis in terms of its purpose, subject issue, and technique. The next section discusses the diversity of

further adaption of content analysis in media context.

Content Analysis for Visual Image Research

Today, content analysis is widely applied in studies of mass media where visual content is a major source of data. The method aims at understanding the representational meaning of images by interpreting and generalizing the frequency of the appearance of categorized visual codes (Bell, 2001; Bell & Milic, 2002; Krippendorff, 2004; Rose, 2006). As described by Krippendorff (2004), communication has been extended to include not only textual and spoken means of communication but also images and interfaces. Content analysis has a close association with mass media (Bell, 2001; Rose, 2012) and is used frequently in visual image research, particularly for magazines images. The method is popular in media studies, with visual content source from TV, printed materials, and in contemporary context of Internet.

Content Analysis for Fashion Images

Numerous previous studies have adopted content analysis in fashion magazines as a mean of social research. Popular themes in researching fashion magazines with content analysis includes depiction of women images in fashion magazines (Lindner, 2004); the appearance of fashion models (Ashmore, Solomon, & Longo, L., 1996); stereotypes of ethnicity of fashion models (Millard & Grant, 2006); the relationship between fitness and fashion models (Wasylkiw, 2009); the poses of fashion models and representation of sexuality (Um, 2012); body image of aging women's responses to fashion images (Lewis, Medvedev, & Seponski, 2011),

feminist messages in fashion magazines (Budgeon & Currie, 1995), and display of sexuality of teenage models in Hong Kong (Chu, 2013). The method allows a systematic way of scanning through printed material of fashion images, with time to select, and in most cases, there is a clear target profile for readers, which sets up a perfect frame for research studies. The method is particularly suitable with respect to Goffman's (1979) gender studies in advertising research. Goffman's theoretical framework of categorizing gender stereotypes in advertising has become the classic framework for coding images and was widely adopted for the study of the representation of women in fashion advertising (Bell, 2001; Bell & Milic, 2002; Kang, 1997; Lindner, 2004). In recent years this method has become popular in research on fashion blogs (Choo & Yoon, 2012; Huffaker, 2005; Thomas & Peters, 2007).

4.4.2. Description of the method

The main procedure for content analysis includes sampling, categorizing images for coding, coding the images, an analyzing the results. This section describes in detail the steps for performing a content analysis on the visual images of this study according to the framework of Rose (2012) and Krippendorff (2004).

As explained earlier, content analysis was chosen for this research as this method aims to learn the research target's behavioral pattern, values, attitudes by examining what they write (Berger, 1998). Content analysis is also widely used to analyze visual based data, such as advertising images,

and the images of mass media, which are not limited to traditional media types, such as TV and newspaper; but also relevant to online social media sites, such as YouTube, Flickr, and Facebook (Rose, 2012).

The study aimed to investigate the value of fashion photography on social media, and this third approach examined the impact from the site of the image itself, which refers to the fashion photographs depicted on these social media sites.

Instagram was chosen as the appropriate site for analyzing images produced by fashion photography. This assumption was validated by the results of focus group of this study. When asked which social media platform the respondents often chose for the purposes of browsing fashion photography, all of the respondents identified Instagram as the main source. Instagram was introduced in 2010 as a mobile phone app for photo sharing and video sharing. The company was acquired by Facebook in 2012, and it has been operated under Facebook since then. Instagram users can upload unlimited numbers of photos and short videos. The distinctive feature for Instagram was the square size of images which resemble of "polaroid" style, and the photo retouch application that enable users to edit the images to enhance the mood and aesthetic appearance. Another unique function, *hashtag #,* allows users to tag photos with relevant words or even made-up words by users, so that the images can be searched by other users using the same hashtag words. These features create a huge photo sharing online community and links users with similar interests together. The trend of selfie, a form of self-portrait, is also proliferated by Instagram.

Today, Instagram has become one of the most popular photo sharing sites of social media, and the number of users has reached over 300 million monthly active users as of December 2014 (Blake, 2014). The popularity of Instagram in Hong Kong is also reflected in the responses from the focus group members of this study; all respondents replied that Instagram was their main source for browsing fashion photographs. They refer to "IG," and the people who set up their pages in Instagram, the *IGer*. The term IGer is an equivalent term as when one refers to people engaged in blogging as bloggers. Respondents of the focus group also commented that Instagram is particularly appealing to Hong Kong young adults due to its image oriented system, since Hong Kong young generation is less tolerant of text reading. Therefore, they considered Instagram to be their most preferred mobile app; they enjoyed the convenience and instant accessibility of it.

4.4.3. Sampling: Hong Kong based fashion Instagram accounts

The first step of sampling for the content analysis was to identify relevant Instagram accounts, namely, the IGers. This section discusses the approach to sampling IGers and the images within each selected IGers; snowball sampling was adopted in selecting Instagram accounts, and stratified sampling was adopted in selecting images within each Instagram account.

This study focused on Hong Kong fashion blogs, and therefore, Instagram fashion bloggers (IGers) were selected according to the recommendation

of respondents of the focus group. The rationale for this recruitment method was that there is no specific searching mechanism for fashion Instagram pages according to the number of followers. The only searches available was through the hashtag #; however, most of the well-known fashion IGers do not include the word “fashion” in their account names or the images posted, which does not allow a search to trace fashion IGers, or IGers created by Hong Kong fashion bloggers. Therefore, the research design for focus group of this study aimed at providing a reliable source for popular IGers. Questions regarding how respondents search for fashion IGers was prompted as the warm up questions at the beginning of the focus group. This approached also provided a snowball sampling from the Instagram audience. When asked how the respondents searched and selected IGers to follow, all of them replied that they would trace the list of *following* from the IGers they followed, and that this creates a snowball effect of promoting IGers through a network of followers. The response from the focus group provided the representative list of active Instagram accounts created by Hong Kong fashion IGers. According to the respondents from the focus group, originally there were around 20 fashion IGers highlighted; after eliminating the IGers set up by fashion insiders, such as professional fashion editors, photographers, and the celebrities, 10 IGers mentioned by focus group respondents with audiences in the top 10 number of followers were identified for this content analysis. The cover pages of the selected 10 Instagram accounts are shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 (a). Cover page of eva_pinkland Instagram account, May 2015. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/eva_pinkland/

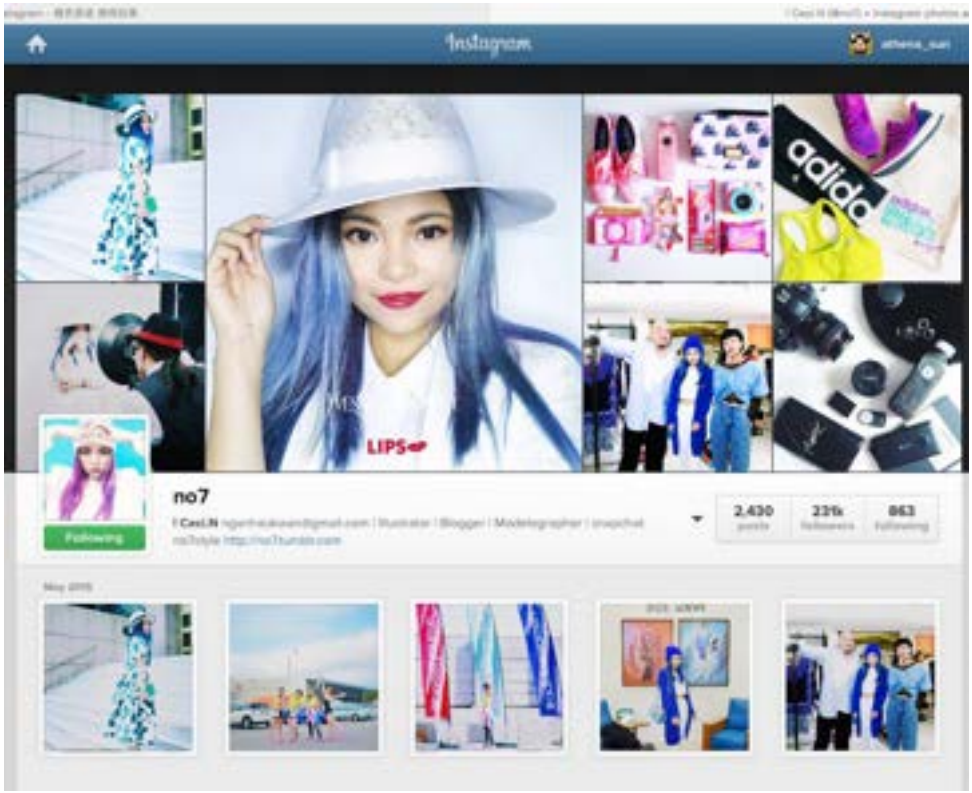


Figure 4.1 (b). Cover page from no7 Instagram account, May 2015. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/no7/

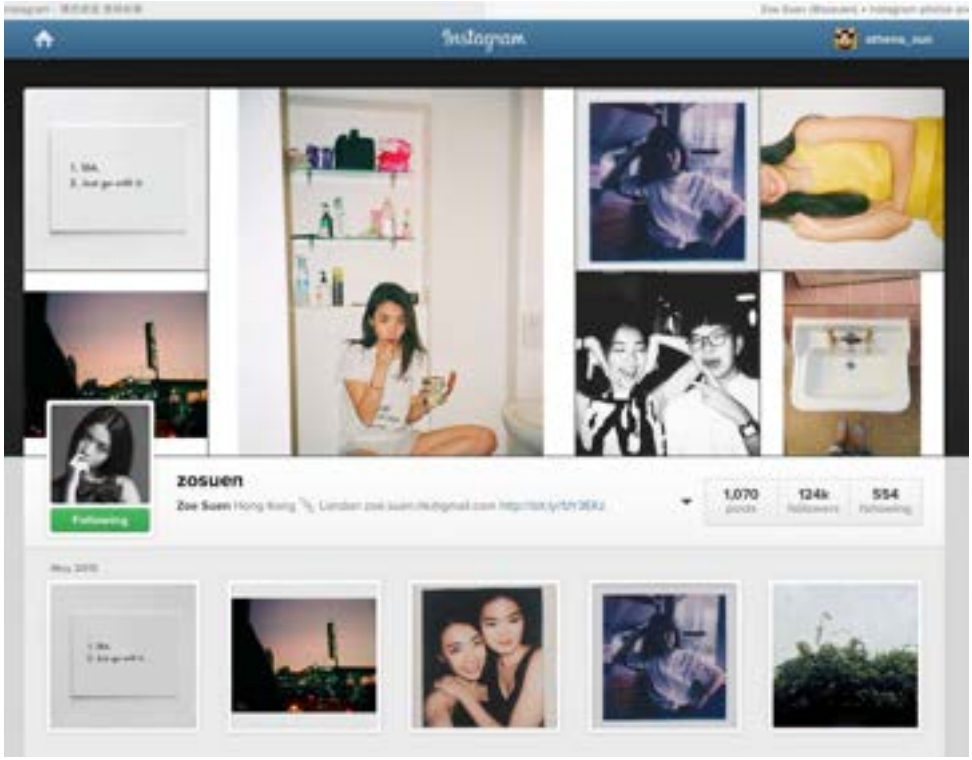


Figure 4.1 (c). Cover page from zoesuen Instagram account, May 2015. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/zosuen/

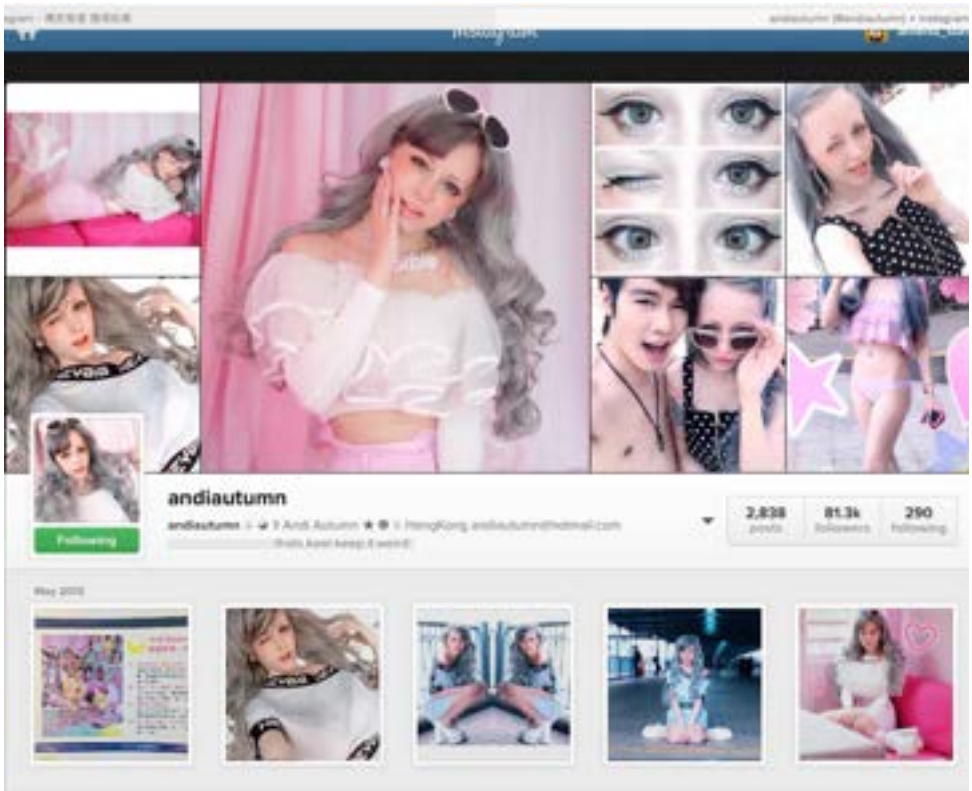


Figure 4.1 (d). Cover page from andiautumn Instagram account, May 2015. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/andiautumn/

Figure 4.1 (e). Cover page from tinawzq Instagram account, September 2014. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/tinawzq/

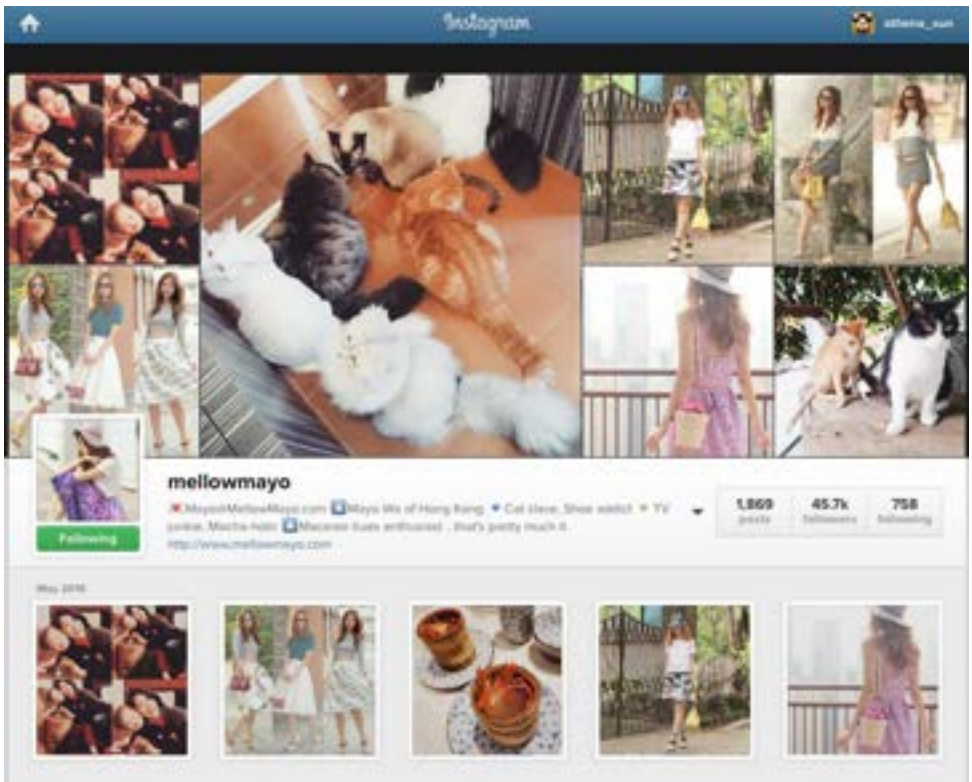


Figure 4.1 (f). Cover page from mellowmayo Instagram account, May 2015. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/mellowmayo/

Figure 4.1 (g). Cover page from laizas Instagram account, May 2015. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/laizas_/

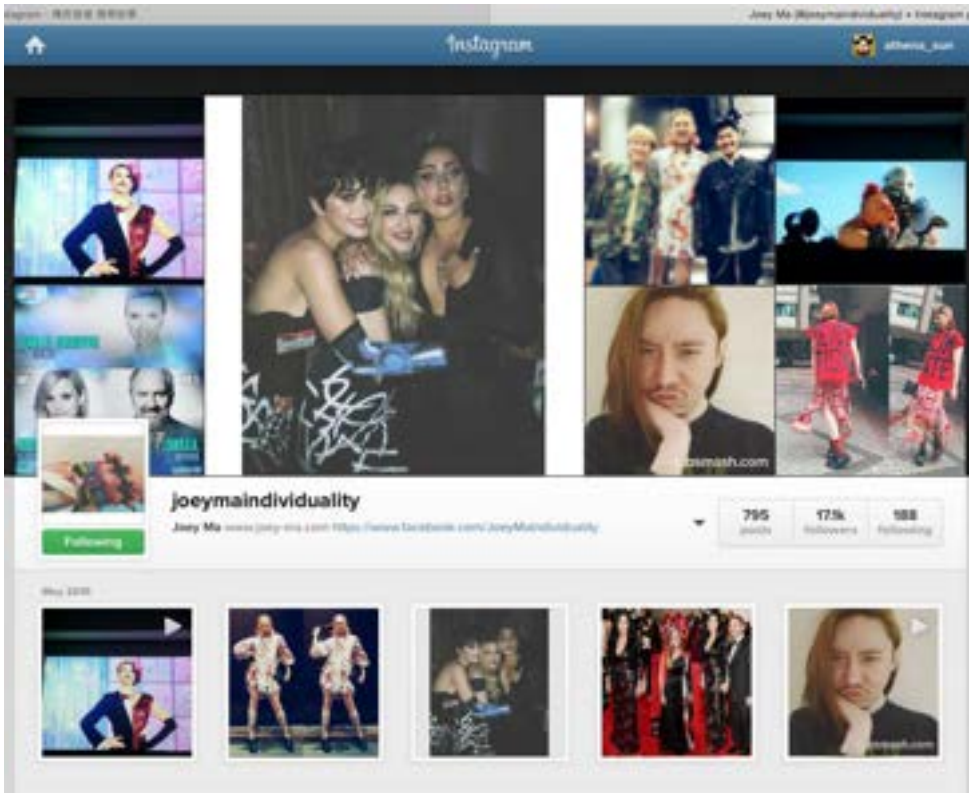


Figure 4.1 (h). Cover page from joeymaindividuality Instagram account, May 2015. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/joeymajoeyma/

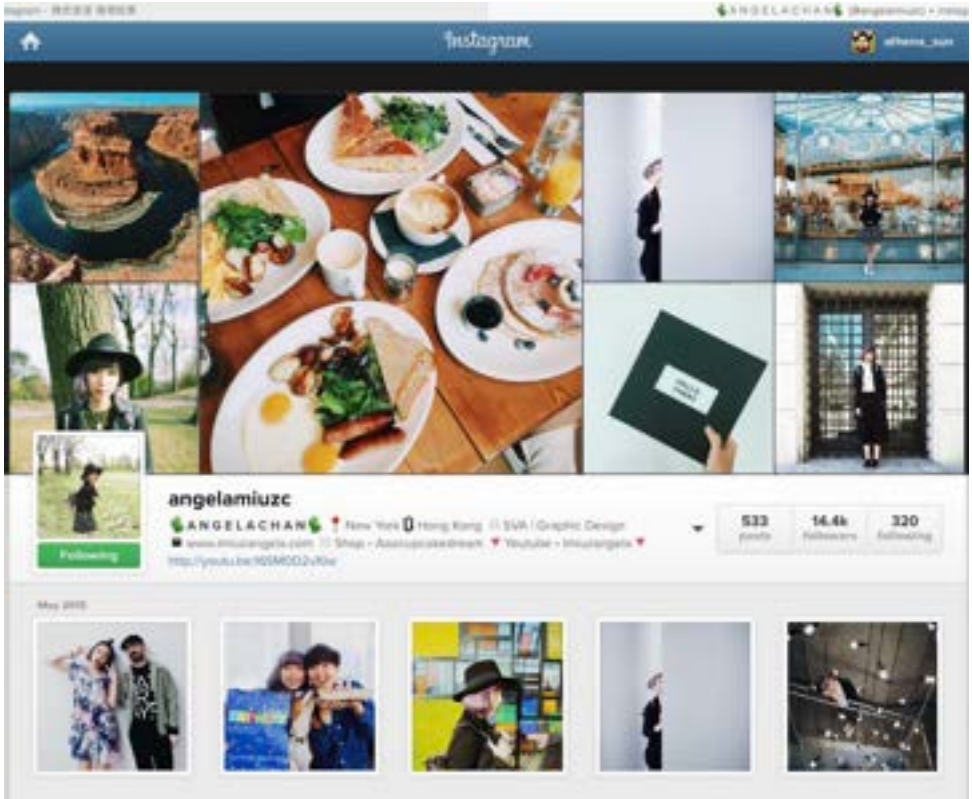


Figure 4.1 (i). Cover page from angelamiuzc Instagram account, May 2015. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/angelamiuz/

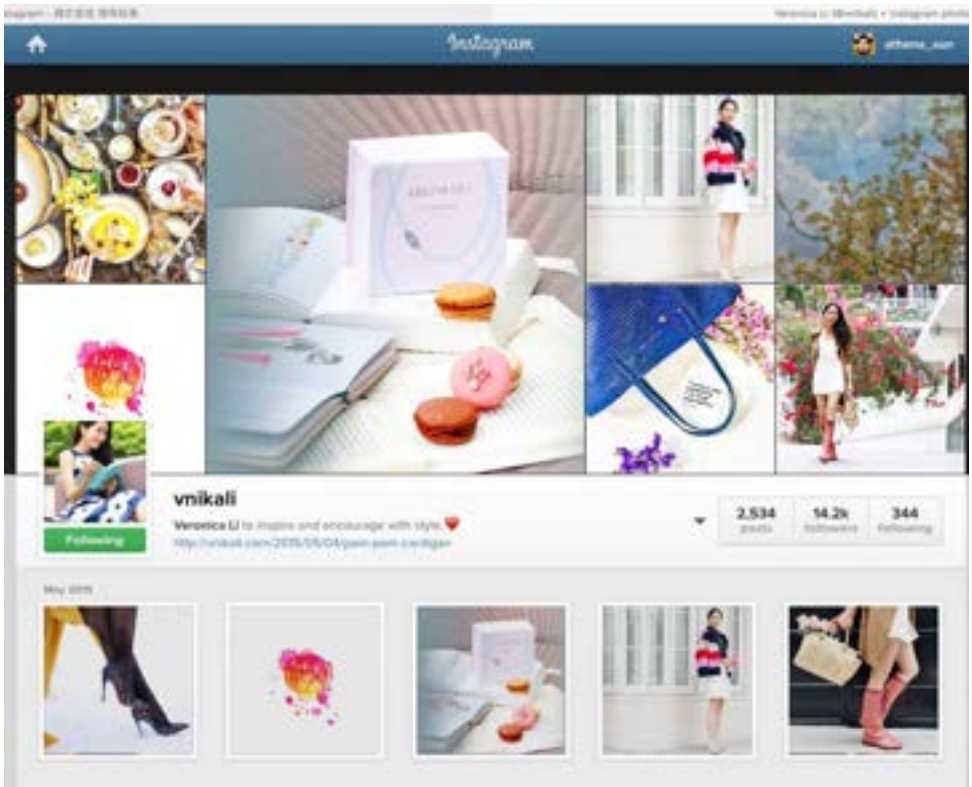


Figure 4.1 (j). Cover page from vnikali Instagram account, May 2015. [Digital Image] Source from: screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/vnikali/

The second step of sampling was the selection of images from each of the IGers. This step follows Krippendorff (2004) approach in stratified sampling. The number of images posted varies in large quantities, ranging from 545 posts to 2829 posts from the set up date up to the first of May 2015, and the set up dates of each IGers was different (see Table 4.5). This yielded 14,373 images, which was deemed to be too large to for analysis in terms of time and financial constraints. This required further sampling to reduce the number of images to a size adequate for this study. The approach stratified the sampling within each subgroup (each IGers), and then each sample unit belonged one stratum, and the selection within each stratum was systematically sampled for each IGers. Table 4.5 shows the total number of posts of the IGers from the date of set up until the first of May, 2015. The number of posts for each IGers was calculated based on 10% of the total posts from each IGer, during the set up dates to 1 May 2015. Then, each of these numbers of posts was evenly divided by 12 months, which stands for one year of image posts, covering the period between May, 2014 to April, 2015. This yielded the *N* of images selected for each month from each IGer. The selection was then conducted by counting the number of photos from the last day of each month within the period. Finally, 1500 images were selected representing 10% of the 10 IGers with images evenly distributed covering a year of time.

Table 4.5

Hong Kong Based Instagram Accounts

						number of followers	number of post		number of posts evenly distributed in 12 months, 'N'	round up number of post
	Name of the Instagrame account	Name of the host	code for citation	Location	Decriptions	1-May-15	as of 1 May 2015	10%	12	10% sample selected
1	Eva_pinkland	Eva Cheung	EC	no mention	Personal statement: '80s, fashion, pink, rainbow, MJ, My little pony' and contact information	302,000	879	88	8	96
2	No7	Ceci.N	CN	no mention	Persoanl description: 'illustrator, blogger, modelographer', and contact information	231,000	2,429	243	21	252
3	ZoeSuen	Zoe Suen	ZS	Hong Kong, London	Contact information	124,000	1,067	107	9	108
4	andiautumn	Andi Autumn	AA	Hong Kong	Persoanl Statement: 'that' s.kool.keep.it.weird' & contact information	81,300	2,828	283	24	288
5	tinawzq	Tina Wong	TW	Hong Kong	Personal Description: 'shop.tinaswardrobe'	47,300	545	55	5	60
6	mellowmayo	Mayo Wo	MW	Hong Kong	Personal Statement: 'Cat slave, shoe addict, TV junkie, mocha-holic, macaron hues enthusiast, that's pretty much it' and contact information	45,700	1,868	187	16	192
7	Laizas_	Laiza S	LS	Hong Kong	Personal Statement: 'Love is all around, Love coffee/travel/life/photography' and contact information	41,300	946	95	8	96
8	joeymaindividuality	Joey Ma	JM	no mention	contact information	17,000	751	75	7	84
9	angelamiuzc	Angela Chan	AC	Hong Kong, New York	Personal Description: 'Graphic design, shop.aaacupcakedream and other' and contact information	14,300	531	53	5	60
10	vnikali	Veronica Li	VL	No mention	Personal statement: 'to inspire and encourage with style'	14,100	2,529	253	22	264
	Total						14,373	1,437	125	1,500

4.4.4 Coding with semiotic analysis approach

Coding is the crucial criteria in content analysis. In visual research, the coding of the elements in images involves *semiotic interpretation* (Bell & Milic, 2002). Bell and Milic's (2002) study aimed at combining the semiotic approach in image analysis by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) with the classic categorization of Goffman's (1979) gender stereotypes in his study of feminine representation in advertisements. Bell and Milic provided a comprehensive explanation of the three principal dimensions of visual semiosis relating to images: (a) the representational dimension, (b) the interaction between the viewer and the image, and lastly, (c) the layout or composition of the image. Taking the inspiration from Bell and Milic's study, the content analysis of this study developed the category of codes in consideration of the semiotic interpretation according to the above three principals and also in accordance to the research questions asked (Rose, 2012). Any video clip or illustrations were discarded from coding as this type of image was not included in the study. The research questions of this study centered around the representation of fashion images on fashion Instagrams, and the categories of the coding were structured according to the three value creations: (a) creative-expression elements (self-expression, artistic expression, lifestyle), (b) trend leadership (display of update trend items, personal styles), (c) brand advertising (display for tagged brands and association with fashion activities). The coding process required researchers' professional knowledge in fashion industry to be able to identify the fashion items.

It should be noted that content analysis has its own limitations in terms of understanding the meaning of the images, as Rose (2012) argued; the content analysis method only concerns the site of the image itself and tends to neglect the other two sites of image in critical visual methodologies, which refers to the site of audience and the site of production.

4.4.5. Inter-coder reliability

According to Rose (2012) and Krippendorff (2004), it is essential to ensure the reliability of content analysis with replicable codes. This involves testing the reliability of the results of the coding process by using two coders. Two coders, including the researcher, decoded each of the images according to the codes defined below. While the researcher has full knowledge in the subject area of the study, the second coder had professional experience in producing fashion photography and digital graphic design for fashion advertising and was trained in the coding scheme without knowing the actual hypothesis of the study. To further strengthen the reliability of the coding scheme, this study adapted the inter-coder practice conducted by Lindner (2004), a random selection of 100 images from the sample pool was coded together by the researcher and the second coder.

The purpose of this pilot coding procedure was to allow the second coder to become familiar with the research process and to testify whether the code is generally recognizable by repeated measure. As Holsti (1969) noted, the prior training for the coding scheme to coders can substantially increase the agreement level of codes between coders. The result of this pilot test only

yielded a 70% agreement on the codes, which suggested that the original codes may have been too complex or confusing to repeatedly use the codes. The researcher revisited the codes and consolidated some of the codes that were considered ambiguous, such as *unclassified* and *mood*. Finally, the codes were streamlined down from 16 codes to 12 codes, with a greater category distinction; these are listed and explained in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Image Category and Codes for Content Analysis

#	Image category	Code	Code Description	Definition
1	Fashion and style	GD	Gaze directly at viewer	The blogger is modeling the clothes and gazes directly at viewers
2		GA	Gaze away from viewer	The blogger is modeling the clothes and gazes away from viewers
3		WO	With others	The blogger is modeling the clothes and at the same times posts with another person, or has another person model to display the clothes
4		PT	Product shots	Only products are being displayed; it could be just products placed in a setting, or showing part of the body wearing /holding the products
5	Lifestyle	TA	Travelling to nonfashion cities	The post suggests that the blogger has been travelling out of Hong Kong
6		TFC	Travelling to fashion cities	The post suggests that the blogger has been travelling to one of the fashion cities, Paris, London, New York, or Milan
7		EX	Expression	Some other images or anything unclassified, but suggesting an expression of the blogger's personal taste, interests, or lifestyle
8		FD	Food	Display of food and drink
9		FG	Friends gathering	The blogger is posing with other people, but the image suggests that it is a friend's gathering
10	Self-branding	TG	Tagging	Either tagging the image with fashion related brands or hashtag '#' with fashion related brands in the description of the post
11		FE	Fashion event	The post shows that the blogger attending a fashion event, engaging in fashion related activities, such as fashion photo shooting
12		PR	Public relations	Display of a press clipping about the blogger

The 12 codes were further grouped into three image categories based on the visual content represented by each codes: fashion and style, lifestyle, and self-branding:

1. Fashion and style (GD, GA, WO, PT): for this image category, fashion and styling are the obvious visual content. These images mainly display the fashion items, either modeled by the fashion bloggers, or simply displayed as product shots. The main image is the fashion and styling of the fashion.
2. Lifestyle (TA, TFC, EX, FD, FG): This image category shows a strong display in lifestyle-related visual elements, such as photos showing the bloggers travelling, enjoying food, and participating in art and culture activities.
3. Self-branding (FE, PR, TG): These images mainly show bloggers' self-branding activities, for example, the images of products #Hashtag with fashion brands, bloggers attending fashion events, and some publicity of the bloggers.

The inter-coder reliability was then tested again by the two coders independently. Each coder coded the selected images between January to May 2015 for five fashion accounts (i.e., Eva_pinkland, No7, andiautum, Laizas, and angelamiuzc) from the sample pool of Instagram accounts. This yielded 792 images equivalent to approximately 50% of the total sample images. The two coder's coding results were then compared to calculate the inter-coder reliability based on Holsti's (1969) guidelines, and the final results of the agreement yielded an average of 0.93 (Laizas 0.93, Eva_pinkland: 0.92, andiautumn: 0.96, No7: 0.90, angelamuizc, 0.90).

Because this inter-coder rater agreement established a high reliability, the researcher then coded the remaining images using the confirmed codes. Examples of image coding are listed in Figure 4.2.

	GD IG post from andiautumn account, October 2014. Source from screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/andiautumn/
	GA IG post from tinawzq account, September 2014. Source from screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/tinawzq/
	WO, also coded as TG IG post from Eva_pinkland account, August 2014. Source from screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/eva_pinkland/
	PT IG post from mellowmayo account, November 2014. Source from screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/mellowmayo/

Figure 4.2 (a). Examples of Image Coding: Fashion and Style Category

	TA, also coded as GD IG post from vnikali account, March 2015. Source from screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/vnikali/
	TFC, also coded as GA, TG IG post from no7 account, April 2015. Source from screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/no7/
	EX IG post from Laizas account, December 2014. Source from screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/laizas_/
	FD IG post from Zoesuen account, January 2015. Source from screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/zosuen/
	FG IG post from angelamiuzc account, December 2014. Source from screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/angelamiuz/

Figure 4.2 (b). Examples of Image Coding: Lifestyle Category

	TG, also coded as FE, GD IG post from joeymaindividuality account, January 2015. Source from screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/joeymajoeyma/
	FE, also coded as TG, GD IG post from Eva_pinkland account, August 2014. Source from screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/eva_pinkland/
	PR, also coded as GA, TG IG post from no7 account, August 2014. Source from screenshot of https://www.instagram.com/no7/

Figure 4.2 (c). Examples of Image Coding: Self-branding Category

4.5. Reliability and Validity

The reliability of the three research methods was justified by the clearly defined research approaches. The principle of reliability of research concerns whether the research will yield the same results when repeating the same method (Denscombe, 2007; Minichiello et al, 1995; Silverman, 2004). The procedures in conducting the three research methods were documented in detail in this chapter in order to allow other researchers to observe the anticipated impact of the decisions made when conducting the same methods in the future. For qualitative methods in in-depth interviews and focus groups, the main challenges lie in the researchers being a tool of the researcher; hence they must be aware of their potential effect on the interpretation of the data. Therefore, extra cautions was paid to be objective in conducting the process. As stated in the research limitation sections, the relationship between the researcher and the respondents was taken into account for the potential this relationship had in affecting the objectivity of data coding and analysis.

In terms of validity, the argument for validity of qualitative research lies in whether the researcher conducts the methods with adequate techniques and avoids bias when analyzing and interpreting the data (Minichiello et al., 1995). Tactics, such as conducting pilot interviewing, probing, and cross-checking, were employed in this study to enhance the validity of the research. In addition, this study employed three different approaches in examining the visual images from the three perspectives, and the

triangulation of methods also strengthens the validity of the research. As Minichiello et al (1995) argued, multiple research methods are the popular strategy to strengthen the validity of the research.

4.6. Summary of Methodology Chapter

In this chapter, the background of each research methodology was revisited to underpin the validity of the triangulation approach of the research design correspondence to the different aspects of visual studies. The sampling method and data collection procedures were described in detail for both in-depth interviews and focus groups. Finally, the steps of content analysis were explained. This includes the procedure, sampling of targeted Instagram pages, coding of the visual elements, and inter-coder reliability testing. After justifying and describing each of the three methods in details, the final section discussed research reliability and validity. In doing so, the aim was to construct the foundation for the investigation in the following chapter.

Chapter 5. Findings: Part 1 Qualitative Study

5.1 Chapter Introduction

The previous chapter explained the three research methods of collecting data pertaining to the research questions, and described in detail the two qualitative methods and one quantitative method corresponding to the three sites of the visual image: in-depth analysis for the site of production, focus group for the site of audiencing, and content analysis for the site of the image. This chapter reports in details the findings of analysis of data gathered for the qualitative research methods: in-depth interview and focus group. Figure 5.1 portrays an outline of data analysis framework for all three methods of data collection.

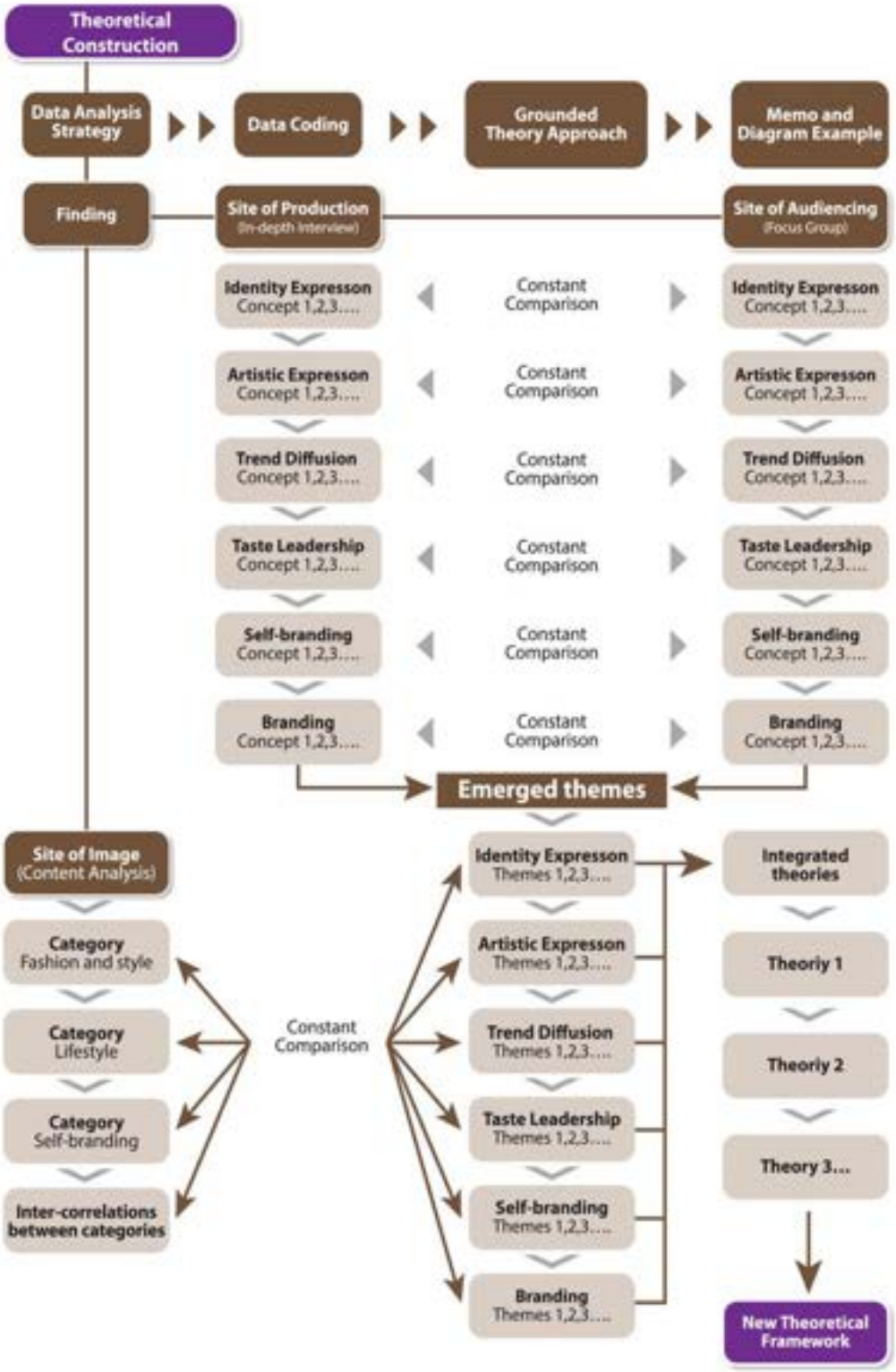


Figure 5.1. Outline of data analysis framework.

5.2 Findings 1: Site of Production: In-depth Interview

Twenty respondents participated in the in-depth interviews. They provided valuable information from which to answer the research questions. Since the interviews were semi-structured, free flow discussions helped to gain rapport and warm up the conversation, and the researcher asked how the respondents produced fashion images and how they evaluated the images. These questions led to further discussion on their comments regarding the impact of fashion blogging. The findings of the qualitative data served to address the first research objective of mapping a fashion media communication system in Hong Kong and to address directly the perceived values of fashion photography on social media.

Among the 20 respondents, 12 respondents were of the younger generation of fashion image producers with 1 to 2 years' experience. Eight respondents had been in the industry for at least 15 years. Despite the apparent differences in age and working experience of the two groups, result showed a considerably similar pattern in their responses. In terms of the usage of social media, the experienced respondents expressed that they seldom browsed for fashion photography from social media, such as Instagram, blog, or Facebook, while the younger respondents were also frequent users of Instagram, and tended to reference more from fashion bloggers. Result show that the more experienced group was generally less keen on participating in Instagram and not as interested as the younger group in searching for visual references from social media platforms.

5.2.1 Hong Kong Fashion Media Communication System

The interviews began with a discussion on the mechanism of image creation in the Hong Kong fashion media. According to respondents, traditional printed magazines are still the main current production sites for professional fashion photography. A majority of the respondents are still active in engaging in different creative roles in fashion photography. Respondents revealed that a hierarchical system exists in the fashion image production process that influences the visual content and production output of the fashion photography; there is always a power negotiation between stakeholders, such as the brand owners, designers, and company investors in terms of the expectations for visual elements. The creative team includes fashion photographers, stylists, fashion editorials, who perform as change agents and the producers of the image. Besides aesthetics judgment and professional technical expertise, there is also anticipated change in this fashion communication system under the culture of social media. Figure 5.2 illustrates a traditional fashion media communication model, which emerged from the descriptions of participants.

Figure 5.2. Traditional fashion media communication model.

A couple of descriptions of the Hong Kong fashion media by participants and some intimations of the influence of social media are below:

> Now it is cross media competition, the situation is chaotic, depends on how you see as bright side or dark side. (Respondent P, Line 81)
>
> There is still room for Hong Kong fashion media, but not in printed. Everything goes very quick. Fashion is a very fast pace industry by nature. The social media makes it even harder to follow. (Respondent D, Line 62)

A common observation that emerged regarding the fashion media industry in Hong Kong is that the market for traditional printed media is shrinking, but

that it will not be totally replaced by online media. The tighter advertising budget in the fashion industry created a golden opportunity to nurture the growth of fashion blogging. Compared to the huge budgets in producing advertising photographic images, the sponsorship for fashion bloggers is considered much more cost effective to fashion brands. Much of the discussion focused on the fashion images created by bloggers in comparison to the fashion photography produced by professional team.

> Actually it [a career that only focuses on fashion photography] is really difficult in Hong Kong; to us, in Hong Kong, the distinction will not be that detailed. Of course, everyone wants to do fashion photography in this industry, as fashion is really fun to do, and everyone wants to just focus on fashion. However, in Hong Kong, this is difficult to sustain . . . you need to shoot lots of other stuff. (Respondent, R, Line 13)

> In terms of the market for Hong Kong . . . . I think it is still ok. I think that Hong Kong people don't have a very strong sense on our identity because we are Western and Eastern mixed culture . . . . As we may not be proud of our country or our national identity. So we will express our ego in creating our identity [referring to the production of selfie]. And there is room for Hong Kong, as our market is small. With limited budget, we may use fashion icon[s] to sell clothes, which fit in our market situation, instead of investing to do fashion adv. (Respondent, I, Line 94)

An interesting finding that emerged from the interviews with the respondents was the respondents' insistence on defining what *professional fashion photography* (PFP) is. According to image producers, fashion photography is not merely a technical term in describing photographic images that display fashion items, but rather a conceptual term of how fashion is represented in contextualization or presented with aesthetics and conceptual design. For example:

> I won't define these as fashion photography. Snap shot[s] and fashion photography is different. Snap shot is only a record of what style, more individual style. Fashion photography needs planning, creative design, teamwork, with some message to express. (Respondent E, Line 59)

> I will only consider these [fashion bloggers] are people in the industry, I won't consider those photos taken by bloggers "fashion photography." So for

> example if I dress up and then do a self portrait of myself, I won't consider that photo is fashion photography. I will only consider this a dress up snap shot. I think that fashion photography and snap shots are two separate things. (Respondent, I, Line 52)

Most respondents emphasized that in order to produce an image that qualifies as fashion photography, the production should involve the creative concept (PFP-CREV), consider the context, technical skill (PRP-TECH), and the resource support (PFP-RES). Some respondents stated that fashion only applied to high-end fashion brands (PFP-BRANDS) with seasonal trends and images, and the rest should be referred to as clothing. Such perceptions on fashion have framed their attitudes towards photographic images produced by the fashion bloggers. Figure 5.3 illustrates a diagram of the components of fashion photography defined by professional image producers, which emerged from the study, and Table 5.1 lists the coding for participants' responses regarding fashion images on social media. A participant noted:

> I am very clear on this . . . Causal wear is one thing, like YISHION [Chinese name:以純, a well-known causal wear brand in China], fashion is another, like IT [a well known fashion boutique in Hong Kong, carrying top International luxury fashion brands], there is image, to be considered fashion; that is why in HK there isn't many photographers doing fashion photography. (Respondent Q, Line 57)

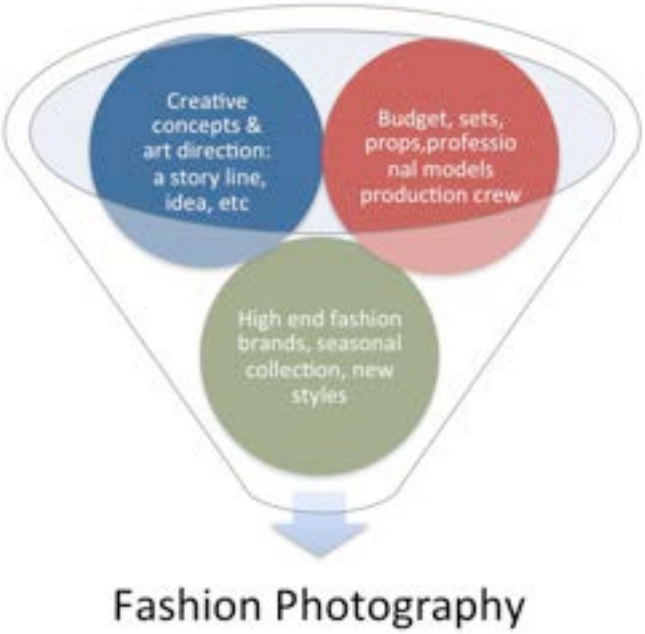


Figure 5.3. Components of fashion photography according to participants

Table 5.1

Coding for Comments on fashion images on social media

Reason of Use	**RU**	**Searching Method**	**SM**
Convenience	RU-CON	Online	SM-ONL
Free	RU-FREE	Random browse	SM-ONL RAND
Fast	RU-FAST	Key Words	SM-ONL KWORD
Consolidated resources	RU-CONS	Various link	SM-ONL VARL
		Printed Magazine	SM-PRI
Mechanism of Hong Kong Image Creation		**Professional Fashion Photography**	**PFP**
Power Hierachy	MIC-POWH	Creative Concept	PFP-CREV
Negotiation with clients	MIC-NCLT	Image Composition	PFP-ICOMPO
Consideration of stakeholders	MIC-CSTK	Mood / color tone	PFP-MOOD
Job opportunity by referral	MIC-REF	Planning	PFP-PLAN
Consideration of aesthetics	MIC-CAES	Production Crew	PFP-PRODC
Consideration of professional outcome	MIC-CPROF	Technical skill	PFP-TECH
		Resource Support	PFP-RES
		Top Fashion brands	PFP-BRANDS

The professional image makers tend to be more critical and skeptical in evaluating the perceived value of fashion Instagrams, and these attitudes influenced what they noted was positive or negative about the fashion

Instagrams. They tended to focus on what made an Instagram page good or bad. The analysis from in-depth interviews was then categorized according to the six domains of research questions: *identity expression, artistic expression, trend diffusion, taste leadership, self-branding,* and *branding.* Their critical evaluation embedded positive and negative comments on good or bad fashion in Instagrams with respect to the six domains. Several concepts were generated from each domain, and these concepts are discussed in following sections.

5.2.2. Identity expression

Table 5.2 presents the codes regarding RQ: 1a*:* Identity expression.

Table 5.2

Coding of In-Depth Interview: Identity Expression

1st level Coding		2nd level: Categorization: Concept development
SE-ATTD	Attention drawing	
SE-IND	Individual angle	
SE-SUB	Subjective	
SE-SLIFE	Share lifestyle	
SE-PROM	Promote themselves	
SE-STY	Special style	
		1. A creative space emphasizes 'the self' 2. 'showing off' culture turns into collective narcissism 3. self-aspiration for other producers 4. Identity empowering by authority

Theme 1: Identity expression: A creative space emphasizes "the self"

From the respondents' perspective, the nature of a networked free entry public space provides a sharing display platform for amateur image

producers. Unlike traditional fashion media, where one will face rigorous competition in order to get into the industry, social media allows everyone to exhibit their own creative works, including fashion photo shoots. There is no constraint of the content in relation to the context of the medium and the consideration of stakeholders or fashion trends. The content posts on social media could be purely personal or have an alternative style, but the key element to establish a personal style is to be consistent in what one is doing:

> I think that blog is really [an] individual thing; you can do what you like, but it only depend[s] if someone appreciate[s] you, otherwise, no one knows you; but for magazine[s], you may need to go to [an] event, you will meet different people, you will face new things. (Respondent K, Line 62)
>
> Yes, [social media] enables people to have their own platform, unlike websites, the [Instagram] system could check readership, and even fashion editors need to adapt this trend [blogging]. (Respondent A, Line 81)
>
> Maybe [the] image is different than design, for designer . . .normally they won't want to be famous, but for image stylist . . the blogger, they want to make themselves famous. So they are not creating some new design, [they] just want to show themselves, what you see from their styles is actually they own images. (Respondent E, Line 48)

Theme 2: Identity expression: "Showing off" culture turns into collective narcissism

The phase *showing off* appeared quite frequently from the younger group of respondents. The phase showing-off hinted a sense of negativity when respondents expressed this. They referred to the act of showing-off to the behavior of narcissism. Respondents stressed the implications of frequent exposure of self-modeling fashion images, the omnipresent selfies, and everyday activities that may induce a feeling of negativity from readers. There may be the sense in this feedback that as image producers, they view these narcissistic images with a sense of jealousy, because these bloggers

have achieved something that they want to achieve, and therefore they refer to it as showing off. They concluded that the fashion blogging becomes a platform for displaying narcissism collectively. The professional image producers generally review the blogging practice from a skeptical position:

> There were more and more bloggers who just post their own stuff, showing-off all the time, I really see that is boring. I would rather like those bloggers look cool themselves, but they also like to take snap shots for other people. These blogs upload frequency is much higher, and have more 'stylish stuff'. (Respondent A, Line 12)

> I believe that the reason why they keep doing photo shooting for themselves is due to their ego. They are 'self-expand' (ego), they have strengthened their self-identity. They will name themselves fashion icons, and they will throw that really 'bold' stuff on themselves and to draw attention to express their fashion perspective. (Respondent I, Line 45)

> This is jealousy. People look at this [fashion blogs] with jealousy' in Hong Kong, we call this type of people "the sour citizen (酸民)," [referring the "sour grapes" from the Aesop's fables]. If you are professional, why don't you do this in a professional way. Those who are amateur gain so much 'like[s],' but those professionals were unknown by the public. (Respondent J, Line 130)

Theme 3: Identity expression: Self-aspiration for other image producers

The younger generation of respondents tends to read other fashion IGers' accounts for in order to refer back to themselves. They compared their own work to the well-known bloggers, and tried to learn from these bloggers' their successfully tactics. They wanted to examine why the bloggers gain popularity on Instagram or other media platforms. Their observations fell into common themes. Besides the visual elements, bloggers who accumulate a substantial number of followers and number of likes are generally those who put much effort into running the account like a business. "It is actually a full time job," respondents remarked. There is a certain period of time during the day for posting images that would generate more likes. They follow other

bloggers who have similar styles, and their “follow for follows” are also effective in generating more popularity. In addition, bloggers’ real life social network also helps spread their account exposure.

Hence, social media acts as a platform for self-aspiration for young generation of fashion image makers who want to participate in fashion blogging as a stepping stone to get in the industry.

> I subscribe their Instagram pages rather than their blogs. Like just Bryant boy, he will keep updating, and I see that really fun, and interesting, they are really updated. As a media person, what I look at is different. And the way they try are really in-depth…starting from their network, and also a group of famous person hang out with famous people is interesting… and to know what they have been up to…to know what they have fun, what event they go, and what is the after party….the world they present make you feel interested. (Respondent L, Line 50)

> Networking, maybe you know that they are doing something like this, and when you chat with others, you will know. (Respondent I, Line 23)

The younger generation tended to examine these fashion blogs from the angle of how to achieve a good outcome. They focused on the elements that they considered to be positive for some of the good fashion blogs. The quality of the images appeared to be the key to attract the readership, and this criterion is no different from printed media. On the other hand, the experienced image producers tended to be more skeptical about this trend and were rather negative towards the performance of blogging as a career path:

> Yes, it is. Not just photography . . . for editorial . . . they are really serious in doing this; sometimes it is even more serious than our industry people . . . . I don't think that there is competition; it is more a mutual influence or mutual benefits, like some impact on each side. (Respondent O, Line 59)

> Bloggers are annoying, a group of parasite[s], to live by the fashion industry, they don’t have anything to offer. They just get things to put on themselves,

> to up grade themselves . . . . It is a career that they don't have their own idea. (Respondent Q, Line 118)

Theme 4: Identity expression: Identity empowered by authority

Respondents revealed that eventually fashion bloggers need the leading figures in the fashion industries to endorse their fashion status. These leading figures include fashion editors of key leading fashion magazines, fashion designers, or fashion directors of famous brands. In this respect, the power game in the fashion system appears to remain strong in the phenomenon of digital culture. Bloggers need to be endorsed by someone higher up in the hierarchy of the fashion world to become a significant figure, that is, have an identity of a fashion insider. Bloggers and fashion industry leaders establish a mutual interdependent relationship. Fashion brands and media public relationship representatives (PR) are aware of the powerful readership bloggers have, and at the same time, bloggers gain access to the fashion industries by constantly posting fashion photographs and accumulating their popularity.

> I think that it is those who already have the power in fashion world to 'name' which blogger is good. And then people 'realise' those are good instead of the bloggers are being so good to earn so many followers. This identity is enable by another powerful figure. (Respondent A, Line 26)

5.2.3. Artistic expression

Table 5.3 illustrates the coding for Research Question 1b: Artistic expression.

Table 5.3

Coding of In-Depth Interview: Artistic Expression

1st level Coding		2nd level: Categorization: Concept development
AE-BKGD	Background location	
AE-COL	Color tone	
AE-MOOD	Mood	
AE-ANG	Angle	
AE-STY	Style	
AE-COMP	Composition	
AE-CREV	Creative Concept	
AE-MODEL	Model	
		1. The expectation: The professionalism of blogging 2. The expectation: 'Value-adding' 3. Change of Aesthetic judgment
CP-D	Difference	
CP-D HKFIX	HK fixed style	
CP-D FOREX	Foreign-exposure	
CP-D HKIMT	HK imitate foreign	
CP-NODIF	No Difference	
		4. Foreign equals to superior?

Theme 1: Artistic Expression: The expectation: The professionalism of blogging

In the culture of social media, popularity overrides professionalism. Respondents questioned the professionalism of bloggers in presenting fashion information or the production quality of the fashion photography. Since entry for social media is free, everyone can have their own Instagram account to post their images. Based on this rationale, the quality of the fashion images posted may not be the first consideration for readers. Readers may only spend a few seconds looking at an image. Readers will not expect in-depth information from these Instagram pages. The quality of the photography will not be able to be seen on a tiny screen. With the help of

some filter device of Instagram, it is easier to edit the photos to become more "moody." As a result, respondents observed that the readers tend to be more "tolerant" of the lower quality of the images posted on blogs. What appears to matter most is whether or not the content of the image interests them, which could be the overall fashion style, the mood of the photo, the background, or the event that shown in the image:

> I categorize these fashion images very clearly. Editorial and blogging have great difference. I think that people do not read blog photos in details. Their "requirement" for blogs' photos will be lower. Readers only consider the clothes, and the look of the bloggers whether she looks pretty or not . . . . It's only a lifestyle picture! (Respondent A, Line 75)

> You need to understand that they [fashion bloggers] are not starting as fashion editors; they are not traveling editors either. They are just sharing their lifestyle with their friends. (Respondent N, Line 50)

> Fashion bloggers are not professional. They like beautiful things and they may identify beautiful things, but they are not media, and they will not educate the people. They will only tell you what they like, if their market positioning is getting broader and become commercial, that means they will lose their unique position. (Respondent N, Line 108)

Theme 2: Artistic expression: The expectation: "Value-adding"

Respondents also reflected that from an industry insider's perspective of comparing the information of bloggers with the professional fashion media, such as style.com, there are obvious differences in terms of the expectation of the output of fashion bloggers and the professional. There are two layers of information presented from bloggers: "gathering information" and "offering things to sell." Just gathering information could not satisfy readers. If the bloggers put on a "full set of fashion catwalk outfits," this is considered to be "boring" by many participants. There would be no value-added function of such blogger's image. Thus, the concept of

“value-adding: emerged:

> I have categorized different types of blogs to read. Some are blogs with gathered information, like “all the pretty birds,” another kind is like “net-a-porter,” which offers things to sell. There are already various products, which I don’t need to look at those bloggers [who only show their own photos]. I think that during these recent years the practice that bloggers just put on the full set of fashion catwalk outfits on themselves is pretty boring; this is another verison of fashion catwalk models but replace the head with the bloggers’ head. Then why don’t I look at style.com? I think
> “all the pretty bird” is not wearing whole set, it is more fashionable. The editors chic. (Respondent A, Line 17)

Theme 3: Artistic expression: Change of Aesthetic judgment

Another obvious change in terms of the readership of fashion photography on social media pertains to aesthetic judgment. Respondents considered that overwhelmingly social media has lowered the level of aesthetic judgment of readers. As long as the images look good enough on the mobile phone screen, the images are acceptable. This alters the traditional concept of professional design and standards of creativity. Respondents in general considered that this is a negative influence of the social media trend; it is due to the availability of unlimited uploads of fashion images. Readers cannot distinguish what is a higher standard of aesthetic, and they gradually lose the ability to judge the aesthetics of the images produced:

> Yes, on blogs, we will be more “tolerant,” easier to accept, there used to be a standard we learnt from kids that fashion magazines have. For example, according to the standard from fashion magazine, you got to be like 9-head body type model (a model figure of head to body ratio), but for blogs, you just need to post snap shots; this seems to be more of a everyday habit, so you can accept the imperfect (photo standard) like that. (Respondent G, Line 65)

> Things are considered valuable when it is scarce. The printed out version of fashion photography looks more impressive, and creates more satisfaction for me as the image producer. You will see that images look more attractive from printed materials. However, for digital world, since there could be unlimited amounts of uploads, no one will treasure that. For readers, it is just something posted online, not really special. (Respondent I, Line 12)

> bloggers' photo . . . is not artistic. But for fashion editorial, the whole thing creates mood. In terms of a snap shot, it doesn't have the mood . . . or maybe edited by Instagram's photo edit function. The mood is not produced from the creative work. (Respondent B, Line 72)

Theme 4: Artistic expression: Foreign equals superior?

An interesting observation was about the impression of superiority by associating some elements of "foreign exposure" in fashion images:

> Yes, it looks better in [a] foreign country; the foreign people will see Hong Kong as a beautiful place. . . We are too familiar with our city. . . . We don't see our city beautiful (Respondent H, Line 90)

One respondent suggested that there is a jargon, "the Parisian light," coined by local fashion media insiders. The Parisian light refers to the idea that local fashion media generally desire to achieve an impression of foreign looking images, as if the light shedding from Paris, the world's fashion city, is superior to the light of Hong Kong. There is the idea that achieving an image resembling a foreign country may be becoming a beauty standard.

> There is "Parisian light," yes. There is preference for foreign. Editors of my magazine keep saying that we need to present like "foreign" thing. There is a sense if the output looks like something from European and American region, the whole things look more "high class." (Respondent G, Line 92)

5.2.4. Fashion trend diffusion

Table 5.4 presents the coding for RQ: 2a: Fashion trend diffusion.

Table 5.4

Coding of In-Depth Interview - Fashion Trend Diffusion

1st level Coding		2nd level Categorization: Concept development
TS-FAST	Fastest	
TS-MAPP	More approachable	
TS-REF	Style Reference	
TS-NEWT	Notice of new trends	
TS-FILT	Filter trends	
TS-BRD	Push by brands	
		1. blogging makes fashion more approachable to mass 2. blogging diversifies fashion trend diffusion

Theme 1: Fashion trend diffusion: Blogging makes fashion more approachable to the mass

In the traditional fashion media system, fashion editors serve as gatekeepers to select and recommend new items and introduce to the public what is trendy. In the context of the digital sharing platform, bloggers replace professional editors and bring the fashion news and fashion items instantly to the public; since these bloggers are free from the constraints placed by fashion brands or concerns for marketing, what they choose will be from their personal taste. Respondents observed that these bloggers are actually making fashion more accessible to the public at large, since the bloggers are originally representing mass market tastes:

> There are some followers, ordinary people, to read, instead of reading magazines. It feels more "close to the mass," more "friendly," because the magazine's angle will be an editor to discuss an issue, but for bloggers, it feels like they have experience [of] the issue, then they will discuss their subjective [personal] opinion. Although magazines maybe more objective, when people read those [blogs], they will feel like there is interaction, followers can give comments. So for those who do not understand fashion,

> they will know what [the] fashion industry is doing. (Respondent S, Line 41)

> Looking at bloggers, it looks like someone has already digested the information for you. For trend information, checking at style.com, trend book, or WGSN.com would be the fastest way. But if you look at how bloggers interpret it [wear it], it feels like someone has already filtered [it], and it seems like someone has helped you to realize the style that could be [a] mix and match like this. (Respondent K, Line 48)

Theme 2: Fashion trend diffusion: Blogging diversifies fashion trend diffusion

Social media not only brings high fashion to the masses faster, but it also diversifies the diffusion in different directions. It allows the diffusion of alternative fashion styles as a trend; whereas in the past, fashion trend diffusion concerned only mainstream fashion styles, social media provides a public space for alternative styles to be displayed. Respondents emphasized that bloggers have to be persistent in posting the alternative styles to establish their individual style:

> Yes . . . people can see the trend easier through blogs. The trend in Hong Kong is too flashy [flowing]. It is hard to find a particular style in Hong Kong. There isn't a particular direction. But blogging got a powerful advantage in the way it could be faster than any other channel. (Respondent B, Line 67)

> They will help bring up the trend for young people. It will be the fastest way to reach the mass[es]. So it looks like these bloggers bring up the trend, they are like the middle person, for those who don't know fashion or mass consumers. But bloggers are not the one who create trends (Respondent E, Line 57)

> Bloggers are faster than news . . . if we are talking about speed. (Respondent O, Line 24)

Respondents also commented that fashion blogging has to be viewed as a whole group to become a phenomenon. As one respondent pointed out, "As readers, you will not just look at one single blog and to be influenced" (Respondent N, Line 149). The influential power of a single blogger is not

big; the public will only see a single blogger as celebrity:

> There is no doubt, this is a trend now, to me, these groups are not "fashion people," . . . . They could post the insider's [fashion show] information quickly; you can consider these as the "afterward" [peripheral] news. Why I would say this? Because, they are not originally working in the fashion industry; for blogs, you need to understand that they are more individual, personalized, they do not need to know what the readers like, or the trend. They only need to share what they like with their readers or friends, and this becomes a very personalized style. (Respondent N, Line 33)

> Yes, it used to be from professional fashion insiders to introduce to the mass about fashion news. Some brand background stories, some functional aspect of the clothes, will be featured in the article . . . but now it is not the case. Now it is reciprocal. (Respondent J, Line 138)

5.2.5. Taste leadership

Table 5.5 presents the coding for RQ: 2b: Taste Leadership

Table 5.5

Coding of In-Depth Interview - Taste Leadership

1st level Coding		2nd level Categorization: Concept development
TS-REF	Style Reference	
TS-SPEC	Some special style	
TS-VAR	Display variety of style	
TS-NEWT	Notice of new trends	
		1. Fashion blogging displays a variety of tastes 2. Taste leadership will gradually fade away due to boredom

Theme 1: Taste leadership: Fashion blogging displays a variety of tastes

In general, respondents agreed on the point that a variety of tastes are displayed on fashion blogging. Tastes that are considered strange or unacceptable could be shown, as there is no screening process or threshold.

Some respondents appreciated that even though there are awkward styles, they may find some inspiring idea. Sometimes, new alternative taste would create stronger impact on the mainstream fashion scene.

> Just like art, i.e. Mona Lisa, not everyone will appreciate it, and now it is determined by the mass, and not by those who has the authority. Now, it is determined by the 'like' given by the mass, in the past, it is the professional who determine, and to bring the information to the mass…(Respondent J, Line 136)

> I believe that it is not about the taste, it is about us, the professional, knowing how to do more research, from the mass, they only know from the surface…. For professional, we will search it from various angles…. This is what the professional knowledge is….(Respondent J, Line 152)

> I mainly focus on styling… because there is some daily wearing or some awkward styling, which is quite inspiring. Even though it may not be high fashion….and may be inspire me some new thing. (Respondent I, Line 27)

Theme 2: Taste leadership: Taste leadership will gradually fade away due to boredom

Respondents are generally quite skeptical in terms of the sustainability of the blogging phenomenon. They considered the blogging phenomenon a trend and believed that their influential power in terms of fashion trends and taste will gradually fade away. Since the bloggers represent themselves only, their taste and style preference is limited to themselves only. The judgment of tastes from the public masses would be arbitrary, and driven by the follower's interests during a particular period.

> They have lost their uniqueness; like this group of bloggers, around 10 people, it is talking about different brands have invited all these 10 bloggers in different time. (Respondent N, Line 38)

> You will notice that the whole market trend has changed, it has already been spoiled; why it was spoiled, because there are different fashion bloggers have been invited by various brands, that's why they are not particularly special... in the past, they are special, they have their own character. (Respondent N, Line 37)

> Yes, this is just like fast food culture, blogging it is free. This is about psychology, it is very different when you need to pay. If you need to pay, the cost is very different from what you don't have to pay. (Respondent O, Line 23)

> It will become blur… just like the magazine I work for, when I asked the editor, where does your topic come from? They said…well….just look at the trend, just shoot whatever the trend is hit. Without the channel of magazine, the trend will become blur when the snap shot is the only channel, there used to be signature trend in each era, but now it is getting blur….(Respondent C, Line 58)

> And you will only read one person, the variety will not be much, unless they are models, so there is limitation for bloggers, it will be boring soon. (Respondent I, Line 102)

5.2.6. Blogger's self-branding

Table 5.6 displays the coding for RQ: 3a, blogger's self-branding.

Table 5.6

Blogger's Self-Branding

1st level Coding		2nd level Categorization: Concept development
BG-SELB	Self-branding	
BG-EMPB	Empower by brands	
BG-CEL	Became celebrities	
BG-PR	PR activities	
BG-NET	Network in the industry	
		1. 'The power system: bloggers vs brands' 2. A new culture of 'like' and 'follow'

Theme 1: Blogger's self-branding: The power system: bloggers vs brands

Self-branding was one of the major topics respondents agreed on; they considered that the reason bloggers keep sharing their own images is to build up their identity in fashion industry, and become a celebrity, namely a fashion icon, or collectively, fashion people.

> They are selling a product, which are themselves, they brand themselves. (Respondent Q, Line 148)
>
> Yes, she brands herself, and also commercial. (Respondent Q, Line 184)
>
> So they brand themselves . . . Which is a good thing, but how could they sustain? As the brand is themselves? How long can they last? (Respondent Q, Line 152)

The discussion indicated that there is a power system in the fashion industry, and if the bloggers receive endorsement from key fashion media or fashion brands, the bloggers gain creditability and fame. This pathway will further accelerate if the endorsing fashion media or fashion brands are influential:

> I think that it is still "sponsored by brand," the trend of blogging would be more influential when the trend began a couple years ago. If the bloggers become famous they will get sponsored. Bloggers will list the outfits that are sponsored by which brands. (Respondent A, Line 51)
>
> The hidden rule in social media is that bloggers copy and compete with each other and try to get the attention from those at the top of fashion hierarchy. (Respondent P, Line 63)
>
> I start to have the feeling that whether these blogs are getting paid to advertise what they say, it is more and more commercial. At the beginning, it is more relaxing to read these, looking at what events they go [to], what news . . . and gradually, there is a sense of hard sell. (Respondent K, Line 40)

Theme 2. Blogger's self-branding: A new culture of "like" and "follow"

The most important things to determine the success of an IGer is the number of followers, and likes on a post. The function of like on social media represents the key indicator of how popular the post is. Bloggers need this indicator to build up their identity and creditability; they need to accumulate the number of followers and likes strategically, and they will need a real life network to support their online accounts. For example, "#f4f" means "follow for follow," which means, if you follow me, I will follow you back. Some users may have several accounts using different set-up data, which could

multiply the quantity of followers or likes. The action of the follow key replaces the circulation readership of printed material with the main difference being the cost. In the age of digital era, everyone is able to be generous when pressing the like button in order to endorse a post and to follow an account on social media. There is no monetary cost to taking this action. Users do not need to reveal their true identity for pressing the like or follow buttons.

> I think that is why so many people follow is because for example, my current job is digital, from my angle, especially foreigners, those followers are being quite "generous" to follow . . . . Online things . . . My name is not real, what I "like" doesn't represent my true identity, not really reflecting your true favour, and preference. Whereas buying magazines involves costs; then you will choose your most favorite things. (Respondent A, Line 22)
>
> Bloggers get many "likes." It is different than buying magazines, because you need to pay, so you will be more loyal; for online, it is very easy to click "like;" maybe you never visit again after you like it! (Respondent C, Line 67)
>
> Yes, you could accumulate lots of followers, and hardwork is very important, if you don't post anything, no one will follow. (Respondent K, Line 89)

5.2.7. Fashion branding

Table 5.7 displays the coding for RQ: 3b: fashion branding.

Table 5.7

Coding of In-Depth Interview - Fashion Branding

1st level Coding		2nd level: Categorization: Concept development
BG-EMPB	Empower by brands	
BG-HELP	Help the brands	
BG-CEL	Became celebrities	
BG-PR	PR activities	
BG-NET	Network in the industry	
		1. New system in PR brand management

Theme 1: Fashion Branding: New system in PR brand management

Respondents revealed that fashion brands systematically manage bloggers as part of the brand's PR activities. While currently there is no industry standard to determine the market price or a rate for bloggers' services (Burns, 2012), according to the respondents, there are agencies in Hong Kong and China representing fashion bloggers that manage their job appointments, and they treat these bloggers like celebrities. Fashion media houses sometimes appoint their fashion editors to work as fashion bloggers. Therefore, the industries are placing various tactics to manage the fashion blogging strategically in order to better manage their brand on the social media.

> Blog's images will not affect the industry, but will influence other bloggers. They will continue to work in this mode. Magazines need to change in order to create more space for survival. There is [a] difference between local magazines and foreign magazines. Local magazines are more celebrity driven. (Respondent A, Line 84)

> I think that these are two issues. Bloggers may be able to inspire those street people of the mix and match. Maybe they inspire those industry insiders to get some ideas. However, most of the time, they consider themselves celebrities, and mainly act as fashion icons to present at the fashion event. There will be lots of collaboration with brands for new products, or crossover with stylists. They will name themselves as a brand, fashion icon, fashion insider. Just like Hilary Tsui. It is a business. (Respondent I, Line 35)

> This will be getting more popular, will help more people to get into the industry. People will not input that much money to do a creative job. Normally, the brand will invest money to do fashion advertising image. But now fashion brands can promote through blogging, world of mouth . . .this proves to be more effective. Then they would invest less money to produce fashion shooting. This will lead to more "ego expansion" for fashion bloggers. In the future, people may get bored, imagine looking at same bloggers wearing clothes, in 10 years . . . as it is still one person's platform. (Respondent H, Line 75)

5.3 Finding: The Site of Audiencing: Focus Group

The analysis of focus group data provided the background information of the changing reading habits of visual images on social media. This section

begins with descriptions of this new culture of reading habits, and follows with the detailed analysis of data coding according to each of the six research domains: identity expression, artistic expression, trend diffusion, taste leadership, branding, and self-branding.

5.3.1 Reading habit of fashion photography on Instagram

When asked where the respondents browse for fashion information, all of the respondents' said it was from online sources: "Instagram" and "Pinterest" were the most immediate responses. The main reason was obvious: Browsing on the social media apps is convenient, free of charge, and fast. It is no surprise that Instagram was identified as the main source for fashion photography due to its original design as a mobile phone app, and its visually oriented nature.

Respondents considered browsing fashion images to be a leisure activity. They could click on the mobile phone app anytime, such as when traveling, especially when they are waiting for public transport like MTR, bus. Browsing through Instagram is a way to "kill time" that does not require people's full attention or deep thoughts. This is somewhat different from traditional formats, because even through browsing fashion magazines is considered to be a leisure activity, the action requires the readers to take an active role in choosing and purchasing a preferred magazine. The most important idea here is the criteria of cost. Respondents explained that if they have to pay for the magazine, and therefore, the selection becomes much more thought out. For Instagram, reading changes from a leisure activity to a

more passive activity: a way to kill time.

Secondly, the Instagram app serves as a personal archive of a users' photo album; respondents commented that they can consolidate their preferred fashion sites, bloggers, and any other accounts for random browsing, instead of searching through various websites or blogs; Instagram images pop up and appear to them frequently. As the audience, the most important changes in their habit of looking was the way the image appears to the readers; unless they intentionally click to a certain IG account, generally they can only browse the images that are most recently posted; the images that were earlier posts are unlikely to be seen. Respondents refer this as "the posts that sank into the bottom." Therefore, in the past, the audience needed to take an action to search and look for the fashion images. Today, the images come to the readers.

In terms of the reason or method for choosing a fashion IG to follow, all respondents explained they do not have a specific method or intention when searching for fashion IGs. In the beginning, they engaged in random browsing, and then respondents started clicking some images they liked and followed, and then they further discovered more IGs by browsing the IG account's list of "followers" and list of "following IG." Respondents emphasized that they normally found similar styles through the network of followers. As respondents observed, bloggers who have similar styles tend to follow each other. Some of these bloggers are friends in real life, and some are just networking on social media.

> If they are popular, they have their own circle. You will find those from the blogs they follow, or they will tag each other. They will create some online shop, and those will give them clothes to wear, and they will post on Instagram, and then they will have more to follow. (Group B, Line 79)

In terms of the comments on the fashion photography, there were several themes that emerged with interrelated factors concerning audience reception of the visual images. The categories emerged from the audience's main interest in looking at fashion images; the initial concept development was built around the six domains of the research questions: Identity expression, artistic expression, fashion trend diffusion, taste leadership, branding and self-branding. Each category is discussed in detail below.

5.3.2. Identity Expression

Table 5.8 presents the coding for RQ: 1a: Identity expression from focus group members responses.

Table 5.8

Coding of Focus Group - Identity Expression

1st level Coding		2nd level: Categorization: Concept development
SE-ATTD	Attention drawing	
SE-IND	Individual angle	
SE-SUB	Subjective	
SE-SLIFE	Share lifestyle	
SE-PROM	Promote themselves	
SE-STY	Special style	
		1. Social media allows Expression of self and individuality 2. Identity empowering by self-establishment 3. Social comparison as self-aspiration vs narcissism

FG Theme 1: Identity expression: Social media allows expression of self and individuality

Instagram provides a channel for fashion lovers to share their interests. Bloggers may begin as a hobby, constantly posting selfies of fashion photos and sharing them with their friends. The sharing culture enables these fashion lovers to express themselves in individual styles, and they generally keep posting similar styles to establish a consistent image. Respondents observed that this act was to draw attention, to create an identity of having a specific lifestyle or fashion style.

The bloggers whom respondents were interested in following were those acting as the models in their own fashion images. This will be discussed further in artistic expression section. Respondents observed that in order to stand out from the huge numbers of fashion IGs, bloggers need to be unique in a certain way, either in their own images, or their photographic styles.

> You need to have some very unique character, otherwise, others will see you as a very ordinary person. (Group F, Line 147)
>
> They want to project themselves what kind of person they are. (Group B, Line 63)
>
> I think that in social media, this is the way you have to do [it], because you need to stand out yourself, because there are too many, too many, you need to stand out from millions . . . .you are either very beautiful, or you are really rich. All the stuff are luxury to create the atmosphere, or else you need to be really alternative; otherwise, people cannot spot you out, couldn't spot your existence. (Group C, Line 141)

FG Theme 2. Identity expression: Identity empowering by authority

Gradually, these bloggers start to accumulate a substantial number of followers, either through their friend's network and followers' network, and

then they begin to be noticed by fashion media or fashion brands, and gain their "fame" in fashion circles. Therefore, respondents observed that there is a trend in how ordinary fashion lovers become fashion bloggers. This could be both unintentional and intentional. Once fashion bloggers get the attention of fashion brands, they start to receive invitations or sponsors from the brands to attend various fashion shows, events, or promotional activities. With frequent updates of the fashion photos showing the bloggers attending these events, they establish their identity in association with the fashion world and indicate that they are "part of it;" in this way they gain an identity of a fashion insider, or namely that they are among the "fashion people" in Hong Kong.

> Yes, and then the brands will spot you, and realize the blogger got lots of followers, and then they will align the blogger to produce a post. (Group C, Line 117)
>
> There are lots of people– they do not originally intend to become a blogger, but eventually because their popularity is great, and lots of brands appoint them to become bloggers. (Group C, Line 134)

Most respondents commented that whether these projected lifestyles were a true reflection of the reality had nothing to do with the viewers. Respondents were not concerned about the authenticity of the lifestyle projected from the bloggers' images. They were concerned more about the truthfulness of the comments bloggers made on the fashion products. From this observation two further themes emerged about how viewers look at Fashion IGs: *social comparison as self-aspiration* and *social comparison as narcissism,* which are discussed next.

FG Theme 3: Identity expression: Social comparison as self-aspiration

One of the key themes that emerged from the responses was the "self-aspiration" in reading fashion photography on Instagram. Respondents enjoyed browsing through fashion IGs because they would be able to refer back to themselves when viewing the visual content; this is one of the elements that determined whether viewers liked a particular IG page or not.

> Perhaps it is the lifestyle I want to have, what I expect, because I cannot achieve [it], then I will look at others. . . .Yes, [agreed another respondent], to be our target, maybe you aim to have their lifestyle. (Group B, Line 170)
>
> Like to look at HK, coz it is closer to me, and I can see what they are doing, if they could do that, I can do that as well. (Group E, Line 165)
> These IGers, [most] because it is more relevant to us, and I feel like I can do something like this as well. For traditional model, they are super tall . . . . I feel like it doesn't fit me (Group F, Line 322)
>
> Some, depends, maybe for travelling, and they see something interesting and post it, which I have never experienced; then I will be interested to look at. But for those just posting what they eat daily, I am not interested. (Group D, Line 349)
>
> Just being nosy (laughs) and also I am pursuing that [lifestyle] . . . . Sometimes I want to have that kind of lifestyle. . . Like if I am eating the same food, then I will become her, or enjoying the same thing, then I feel like I am related to her [the blogger]. (Group C, Line 68)

These comments suggest that whether or not they are a true reflection of bloggers' lifestyle, the photos of fashion bloggers created an aspiration for the viewers. Most respondents, except for one group, agreed that they do not resist fashion IGs that include lifestyle photos, such as travel, food, and architectures. These images could serve as a space in the overall visual layout, similar to the function of a page break in printed magazine. Most essentially, these lifestyle photos provide some lifestyle ideas for viewers, just like the lifestyle features in magazines. The main reason they enjoyed looking at the lifestyle images in H.K. IGs was that they could relate these

lifestyles back to themselves; sometimes they searched for the places or restaurants in the IG posts. For foreign IGs, they felt that there was a sense of distance, more like travel photos. Respondents saw these lifestyle images on fashion IGs providing them with an "imaginative space" that represented what the audience would like to achieve in real life, or even if they could not achieve it, those photos represented an ideal lifestyle that they looked up to, and that was one reason they preferred to look at Hong Kong IGs.

FG Theme 4: Identity expression: Social comparison as narcissistic expression

There was one group that held the opposite opinion on the sharing of lifestyle images. This group of respondents demonstrated a strong resistance towards the overwhelming habit of displaying fashion and lifestyle as a status symbol. They placed more emphasis on the authenticity of the identity displayed by these images and questioned whether the blogger was faking an ideal lifestyle of being wealthy and trendy.

> We don't read HK IGers, because . . . you know, in HK, you will not get European sunshine, that you will know they are trying to pretend the images we like, then you will know it is fake, that's why we don't follow HK IGs, we prefer to follow the original, in which the photos are really taken in the Western countries. (Group G, Line 175)
>
> Yes, like why you have spent so much time to pretend a lifestyle that you don't have, than why do we just go follow those [with] real lifestyles like that? (Group G, Line 177)

Respondents noted that this generation tends to be more narcissistic and individualist. The social media platforms provide an optimum channel for the millennial generation to express themselves (Bergman et al, 2011). Respondents often link the narcissistic selfies with the idea of authenticity.

These bloggers may only be representing an ideal identity of a fashion icon.

> Yes, they [fashion bloggers] create [image appears to be very rich] purposely. It is an identity symbol; it may not mean that it is real for that person in real life . . . They want to promote themselves and make others envy [them], or maybe they are just having the same living standard as we are in real life. (Group B, Line 65)

> For their personal stuff, I am not interested, but there are beautiful photos and they put [these] together with their personal stuff, then I browse [them] together, and sometimes I think that it is interesting; but personally I did not add those because of their personal stuff, [it] is because I notice their work, and then notice their personal stuff (Group D, Line 48)

> They just need to have a talking point, need to be known (Group C, Line 143)

5.3.3. Artistic Expression

Table 5.9 presents the coding for RQ 1b: Artistic expression.

Table 5.9

Coding of Focus Group - Artistic Expression

1st level Coding		2nd level: Categorization: Concept development
AE-BKGD	Background location	
AE-COL	Color tone	
AE-MOOD	Mood	
AE-ANG	Photographic angle	
AE-STY	Photographic style	
AE-COMP	Composition	
AE-CREV	Creative Concept	
AE-MODEL	Model	
		1. The expectation: Creative concept 2. Preference towards blogger's self modeling 3. Aesthetic fatigue

FG Theme 1. Artistic expression: The expectation: Creative concept

When asked what the first element in a fashion photo attracts viewers, all respondents stated the following simple but straight-forward criteria: “Visual comes first.”

> I follow them because I think the photos are beautiful (Group F, Line 18)

> No preference, as long as [it looks] beautiful (Group E, Line 21)

> The 1st priority is the beauty of the photo, then the IG attracts you to follow (Group H, Line 280)

Since respondents are not professional fashion image producers, much discussion focused on the visual elements in the photos with regard to what they considered to be a creative image process. Respondents seemed to understand that for traditional fashion photography in printed magazines there is a storyline from the editorial series, and this is considered to be a creative concept. In terms of social media, respondents indicated that a list of elements to be included in the visual composition are, "background location," "color tone," "mood," "photographic angle," "photographic style," "composition," and "model." There was no clear indication of how to evaluate the aesthetics value according to each individual component. For example, a beautiful mood for Respondent A may refer to a dark visual appearance, while Respondent B may consider a clean bright visual appearance. Respondents stated that if there is a noticeable arrangement of the above elements in the photo, it is considered a special layout, and hence expresses a creative concept. This leads to the next discussion about the perceptions of fashion models and beauty. However, the respondents provided no specific guidelines of what is a good creative concept; the evaluation of a "good" visual was based on their personal own preferences:

> I normally look at the composition; if the composition is really good, I notice that they are really putting an effort into doing the layout, and I will look at the photographic technique, colors, tone, how they tune the photos. (Group D, Line 26)

> They are just packaging themselves as fashion, but actually they don't have the knowledge of product, history, or culture, or just put beautiful fashion on themselves, and then become fashion[able], but this is actually very basic. (Group G, Line 75).

> The outfits, street snapshots, the clothes, the composition of the image . . . . For example although .[they] dress up really nice, . . .[they] only take photos in front of a mirror, just like taking the photo at home, then there isn't a "feel" created. but you take it on a street... [interrupted by another respondent] . . . yes just like an editorial . . ..like a street snap, like those from fashion week, it will [make] those look. . .more professional. (Group B, Line 25)

FG Theme 2: Artistic expression: Preference towards blogger's self-modeling

Traditional fashion models who have perfect figures are considered the standard of beauty (Perthuis, 2005); the body appearance is generally considered a crucial factor in fashion image aesthetics (Venkatesh, Joy, Sherry, & Deschenes, 2010). As Venkatesh et al.'s (2010) study noted, "As a measure of the deep impact of the fashion world, our informants look to fashion models as incorporating aesthetic values while at the same time they are troubled by the unattainable goals projected by the models (p. 467)." Surprisingly, the physical appearance of the fashion bloggers was not the top priority in terms of how respondents evaluated the aesthetics value of a fashion photo. Given the fact that bloggers are mostly nonprofessional fashion models, respondents commented that they are more interested in observing how ordinary people, the bloggers, could produce beautiful fashion images by acting as the fashion model and the producer. This idea does not reject the fact that traditional fashion models are of no value on social media; if readers prefer to look at the professional fashion models, they are able to just search and follow the IG account of professional fashion models. Therefore, the numerous choices on Instagram provide readers with a variety of key fashion photography components for appreciation:

> I used to just look at the professional fashion model, whether she was pretty or not,

> her body. . . but now I find that even for fat people, the fashion is also worthwhile to look at. In the past, my aesthetic sense is just following the public mass; now I will look for something special. (Group D, Line 34)

> I think that if the blogger herself is already a model figure, she will look good whatever she wears; indeed, there won't be any feeling that actually if you see that if the person is not perfect, maybe a similar height as myself, but her style could give such kind of effect which if she is not this height [seems taller], I think this is more impressive. . . . Yes, I follow her because I realize that oh . . . she is just a similar height as [myself], if she could wear this, I could wear this as well . . . . Agree, I feel I have the chance to look that good as well. (Group C, Line 80)

> Yes. She is actually not model figure . . . So it is just because she would carry these and look so nice, so you will think that you can also achieve that [look]. (Group C, Line 82)

> No, fashion blogger does not necessary be a professional model. On the contrary; I like to look at those nonprofessional bloggers, who got the "feel." (Group E, Line 83)

FG Theme 4: Artistic expression: Aesthetics fatigue

The term "aesthetics fatigue" was raised by several respondents to refer to the overwhelming availability of visual images on Instagram. Readers do not have time to digest or appreciate the aesthetics elements of an image. The overall perceived visual image gives only an impression from browsing. According to the respondents, they learned how to appreciate fashion from high-end fashion magazines, because they know that these images are produced by professionals, and images should be high quality in order to be displayed in leading fashion publications. However, there is no screening criteria for images on the digital platform; they rely on their own interests or artistic sense to judge. Sometimes looking and evaluating the visual on Instagram brings on exhaustion due to the difficulty of evaluating the images aesthetically.

> I feel that it is a bit "aesthetic fatigue 審美疲勞;" at the beginning, everyone uses IG; if there is a style pop up, like a trend for white frame, then everyone follow[s], so it is very easy to get tired of aesthetics thing. (Group G, line 44)

5.3.4. Fashion trend diffusion

Table 5.10 presents coding of RQ 2a: Fashion trend diffusion.

Table 5.10

Coding of Focus Group - Fashion Trend Diffusion

1st level Coding		2nd level Categorization: Concept development
TS-FAST	Fastest	
TS-MAPP	More approachable	
TS-REF	Style Reference	
TS-NEWT	Notice of new trends	
TS-FILT	Filter trends	
TS-BRD	Push by brands	
		1. blogging makes fashion more approachable to mass 2. blogging accelerates fashion trend diffusion

FG Theme 1: Fashion trend diffusion: Blogging makes fashion more approachable to masses

"Style-reference" was a key content the viewers focused on. Respondents agreed that they can receive fashion trend information from the fashion IGs, and this is the fastest way to update trend information; as many fashion bloggers are invited to fashion shows, they post the runway photos instantly during the show time. In terms of indicating fashion trends, this theme further breaks down into *trend setting* and *trend diffusing*. Respondents observed that fashion IG acts as a new platform for a variety of styles to emerge. To a certain extent, fashion bloggers act as the fashion editors in recommending the trendy items of the season, but with a more personal touch, as they are the ones who actually wear the items and present them visually, making fashion, especially high fashion, appear to be more

approachable. Most fashion bloggers perform as the filter for trendy items and new styles. In fact, most respondents were also aware of the fact some bloggers are paid to demonstrate the items from fashion brands; in this way, fashion bloggers are merely performing a human advertising space for product placement, and this is why, in general, respondents do not consider fashion bloggers to be trend-setters; they are not the "innovators" in the classic fashion diffusion model, but the "early adopters:"

> Because I think that if the blogger herself is already a model figure, she will look good whatever she wears; indeed, there won't be any feeling to me. Actually if you see that the person [model] is not perfect, maybe a similar height as myself, but she could style and give such kind of effect, as if she is not this height [seems taller], I think this is more impressive.....Yes, I follow her because I realize that oh . . . she is just similar height as I do, if she could wear this, I could wear this as well.....agree, I feel I got the chance to look that good as well. (Group C, Line 80)

> I think that you cannot find fashion trends from fashion bloggers. You are just follow[ing] those who will put runway show[s] on their account. (Group G, Line 57)

FG Theme 2: Fashion trend diffusion: Blogging accelerates fashion trend diffusion

Fashion bloggers are generally considered to be "closer to the masses," and respondents will reference back to their own style and prefer to reference the Hong Kong bloggers because they could chase the fashion brands through the "hashtag" of the items and purchase the items or style themselves in similar way:

> I like to look at the local blogs, I can find out the items in HK through the tag of the images; we can find it, and I need to be able to get the stuff from the blog! (Group A, Line 113)

> When I browse IG, normally I look at those styles similar to my own . . . during the trend of Harajuku, I looked at Eva, and Ruby. . . [and] Andiautumn,

> because that is my style, so I could reference them, and then I will know more of the culture, and learn more on that fashion [Harajuku]. (Group H, Line 122)

5.3.5 Taste leadership

Table 5.11 presents the coding for RQ: 2b: Taste Leadership

Table 5.11

Coding for Coding of Focus Group - Taste Leadership

1st level Coding		2nd level Categorization: Concept development
TS-REF	Style Reference	
TS-SPEC	Some special style	
TS-VAR	Display variety of style	
TS-NEWT	Notice of new trends	
		1. Social media displays a variety of style 2. Social media gathers fans for alternative tastes

FG Theme 1: Taste leadership: Social media displays a variety of styles

One of the most frequent responses was the variety of styles these fashion bloggers can present. Respondents tend to follow the fashion IGs who have a similar style to their own. Unlike the limitations of editorial pages in printed magazines, the free space in IG enables fashion bloggers to post unlimited fashion style photos online, and they produce a wide variety of special styles that would generally be considered alternative or noncommercial, or even strange when considering the mainstream fashion media. Most respondents expressed that they appreciated fashion bloggers who have their own individual style, and will be inspired by those unique styles in respondents' own styles.

> So we look at a lifestyle belongs to her, or like ABC style, like MarySo; I always look at her lifestyle, but she will not follow the trends; but those she

> wears, the activities she engages, really fit her style. . . . each IGer, bloggers got their own individual style. So we look at them due to their own individual style. (Group H, Line 130)

> And for HK bloggers, they don't really follow trends; they all have very strong personality to become famous. (Group G, Line 60)

FG Theme 2: Taste leadership: Social media gathers fans for alternative tastes

According to respondents, sometimes people follow certain IGs due to the "strange" tastes displayed. The strange tastes refer to the styles that are generally not accepted by the mainstream and that receive negative comments from the viewers or the followers under the IG accounts. Respondents commented that they do not appreciate the tastes but sometimes people follow these IG accounts for the sake of entertainment to laugh about the alternative styling or tastes of ugly clothing items. On the other hand, respondents appreciated the persistence and courage of bloggers who display alternative tastes that are generally rejected by mainstream, but continue to run their accounts anyway. Respondents observed:

> Yes, maybe on IG we saw someone maybe not following the trends, but she got her own style, but very special, maybe our generation; we like to look at very extravaganza, very special, and very different from others, or alternative. (Group H, Line 129)

> I think that if this kind of taste [referring to a blogger with reputation for very strange tastes] could still get many followers, that will affect people's taste. I think that it is peers' influence. I don't want to see this happens in Hong Kong. (Group E, Line 106)

5.3.6. Blogger's self-branding

Table 5.12 presents the coding for RQ 3a: Blogger's self-branding.

Table 5.12

Coding of Focus Group – Bloggers' self-branding

1st level Coding		2nd level Categorization: Concept development
BG-SELB	Self-branding	
BG-EMPB	Empower by brands	
BG-CEL	Became celebrities	
BG-PR	PR activities	
BG-NET	Network in the industry	
		1. Key indicator of success: the number of likes and followers

FG Theme 1. Bloggers' self-branding: Key indicator of success: the number of like and followers

Bloggers apparently became the major beneficiary from the fashion brand-blogging relationship. Instagram enables bloggers to set up their own display platform, and gradually they accumulate followers and gain popularity. Most respondents termed this as self-branding: Bloggers brand themselves. Respondents have identified several tactics which bloggers use to successfully brand themselves. While the aesthetics evaluation on the fashion images is quite subjective, the key successful element is to gain popularity, which is measured by the number of followers. Therefore, fashion bloggers are referred to as fashion celebrities instead of fashion professionals, as they gain their status by popularity. Figure 5.4 illustrates the self-branding process of fashion bloggers.

> I think that those who are famous on Instagram, most of the time it is not because how good they are, it is the people, the team behind them; a network to work together, who they work with, and who they know. There are lots of "likes" to their photos or just a photo; then they got 1000 likes. (Group E, Line 110)

Figure 5.4. Self-branding process on social media emerging from results.

They perform as their own online media. Much of the discussion focused on the tactics of gaining "likes," such as frequent uploads, consistent image styles, having an extensive network in real life. Despites the criticism raised against the hidden practice of purchasing "likes," the number of followers serves as the indicator of popularity, just like circulation figures of fashion magazines. In social networks, "like" is a free practice, and the figure could range from a few thousand to millions. With these figures as an asset, fashion bloggers become celebrities. Bloggers follow the pathway of branding practice. They maintain a consistent image as their own brand identity. They display themselves as a branded commodity carrying sponsored products:

> It is like running a business, self-branding. (Group G, Line 88)
> It is a media that [is] not operated by a company, and there are lots of different readers. (Group G, Line 38)
>
> Like fandom, like whatever the idol does, and then you will follow; so now it is not necessary a star, but the bloggers. (Group F, Line 40)

> So they [IGers] just [become] famous celebrities on IGers; we will not see them as fashion professionals, but they are just fashion celebrities. (Group G, Line 43)

5.3.7. Fashion branding

Table 5.13 presents the coding for focus group responses pertaining to RQ 3b: Fashion branding.

Table 5.13

Coding of Focus Group: Fashion Branding

1st level Coding		2nd level: Categorization: Concept development
BG-EMPB	Empower by brands	
BG-HELP	Help the brands	
BG-CEL	Became celebrities	
BG-PR	PR activities	
BG-NET	Network in the industry	
		1. Increase brand awareness 2 The power system: bloggers vs brands

FG Theme 1: Fashion branding: Increase brand awareness

In terms of branding, all respondents agreed that fashion IGs would be definitely beneficial to fashion brands. Respondents are generally quite neutral in terms of receiving branded information from the fashion images. Respondents talked about both their own personal perspective and a general mass perspective. From a personal perspective, they would make negative comments on this branding approach if the phenomenon became too overwhelming. They all agreed that eventually the brand awareness would be increased, and believed that there ought to be certain group in the "general mass" who will accept that.

> So at least they can make business (I.T. Fashion Group), There ought to be lots of followers. (Group F, Line 54)
>
> We are just a picky group, but there are lots of fans really buy it. (Group G, Line 57)
>
> Yes, they can promote the brand, as they have already a base; they got exposure, and then when people like, they can see it, that mean they like the way they wear it, and will be influenced from them to buy those products. They will always wear most updated styles, where the store may not have yet. . . maybe. (Group B, Line 80)
>
> We are just saying that we won't follow (those bloggers), doesn't mean that it is not good. (Group G, Line 60)
> And actually, the purpose is to commercialize, so this should be useful so that the brand will sponsor them. (Group G, Line 62)

The brand information received was generally limited to brand names through the "hashtag" function attaching the brand name to the photos. Unlike fashion editorials, where more in-depth information about the brand, history, or design concept is described in the magazines, viewers of fashion images on Instagram tend to focus on the visual and neglect the text. Respondents agreed that this may also reflect the readership culture of Hong Kong's young generation. They stated that being young adults themselves, they do not prefer to read so much text.

FG Theme 2: Fashion branding: The power system: bloggers vs brands

In general, fashion brands and fashion bloggers mutually benefit through fashion photography on Instagram, and respondents expressed that in most of cases, they could not afford the high-end fashion products that were displayed by the bloggers, but at least they learn about the brand names. Eventually, this helps to increase brand awareness from a marketing communication perspective. At the same time, the bloggers are empowered

by fashion brands, and bloggers appear to gain much benefit from branding themselves on top of building an awareness of the fashion brands.

Given the fact the respondents are aware of the sponsorship activities for bloggers to wear branded fashion items, the response rested in two directions. While some respondents considered this to be a more soft-selling approach from a branding perspective, other groups expressed dislike for the hard-selling approach. One of the most frequently raised comments was the authenticity of the fashion bloggers, and whether the brands were hard-selling. Even respondents expressed that they resisted the hard sell approach on sponsoring bloggers:

> And the magazine gives you a feeling that it is so commercial, just to sell to you, but for these [bloggers] . . . even maybe you know at the end there may be sponsors, but at least, you will think that the way the bloggers present the items will let you feel more easy to accept the issue [the selling of products]. (Group C, Line 72)

Some respondents expressed concern about whether the bloggers fake their comments and lie to their audience. They preferred bloggers who do their blogs wholeheartedly with passion. It is important that bloggers recommend the product honestly, or to dress and do the mix and match in their own style, instead of putting all sponsored items on their body.

> Because advertising is just what it is; it is paid [for] by the brand; but you [the brand] gives [stuff] to other [bloggers] to promote, as if like asking [the] other to lie, like you have cheated me to click in to read your ad, but original[ly] I read that blog because I want to see how the bloggers style themselves, or her personal stuff, not to see the brands. I really dislike this practice, I will dislike the brands more
> There is a feeling that the brand cannot sell the stuff, so they have to do this for hard sell . . . . So you ought to be a problem that the stuff is stuck . . .Otherwise you will not need to use this method (Group F, Line 73)

On the other hand, respondents who held more neutral positions in terms of the authenticity of bloggers mainly focused on the visual appearance of fashion. They expressed that as long as the overall image looks good, they do not mind where the fashion items come from. Fashion is comprised of purely visually oriented products, and the fashion items are represented by bloggers in various personal images through photographic images. During the discussion, none of the respondents expressed concern about the functionality of the items, such as comfort or durability. This differs from cosmetic products in which the consumers rely on descriptions and comments on functional features, and these difference makes cosmetic blogs more essential to have authenticity. Therefore, the comments on whether the fashion blogs are faking or hard sell mainly affected respondents' impressions of the brand's image and the bloggers' image, rather than affecting the actual user experience of the products.

> But she has done the styling all over . . . You will still "buy" her look . . . for cosmetics; if they get paid, you really need to think whether they have used it, whether the product they sell is good to use, but for fashion, it is not the case; as long as the styling they have done is pretty, you like their style, I don't care where the clothes come from . . . . And the company pays them is mainly aim for exposure; let the people see the clothes, and if they see that is pretty, then they will just buy it. If not . . .just skip to the next photos.(Group C, Line 111)

5.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed in detail the findings of the two qualitative research methods: in-depth interviews for the fashion image producers and a focus group methodology for the fashion image audience. The first half of the chapter presented the findings of the in-depth interviews by reporting the

overview of the image production scenario of the Hong Kong fashion media market. The detailed findings of the responses of each research question were reported. The second half of the chapter presented the findings of the focus group. The section began with the report on the reading habits, and the culture of the Hong Kong young fashion readers on social media. The focus group responses to each of the six research questions were reported. All the data were analyzed and developed into first level of coding and further generated to a second level concept development. The findings were reported according to each concept development, or theme, for all research questions.

Chapter 6: Findings: Part II Quantitative Study

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reported in detail the findings of the analysis of the two qualitative research methods, the in-depth interviews and focus group, which corresponded to the site of image production and the site of the image audiencing, respectively. This chapter presents the finding of the content analysis in order to answer the research question regarding the site of the image, that is, the characteristics displayed in fashion photographic images on Instagram. Ten Hong Kong fashion Instagram accounts were used as part of the study's sample. The content analysis method involved performing analyses on key components of the images in order to determine the symbolic significance from the selected fashion bloggers' IG accounts in terms of value. Specific visual elements were coded based on semiotics interpretation of the categories. The research questions were further defined for content analysis:

1. What are the characteristics of the fashion images on Instagram, and how do these characteristics contribute to the value creation of fashion photography?
2. What are the differences and similarities displayed among these fashion images on Instagram?
3. How are these fashion images categorized into a representation of different types of fashion IGers?
4. What is the inter-correlation between the types of fashion bloggers and categories of images?

The results will be compared with the themes identified from the in-depth interviews with image producers and the focus groups with image readers. In order to compare the characteristics of the selected fashion IGs, the 10 fashion IGers were initially categorized into three types of groups: (a) self-expressive, (b) fashion expressive, and (c) lifestyle expressive. The classification was based on textual interpretation of the self-description by each fashion blogger in their profile, and then verified by semiotic interpretation of the image impression of the posts from these IGs. This step was essential in classifying image type for content analysis. When conducting a content analysis with traditional print media, there is generally a clear positioning of what the magazines target (Lindner, 2004; Um, 2010). On Instagram, however, each individual blogger performs as his or her own online media, and sometimes the blogger may not be intentionally putting forth a consistent image or style of communication. However, the results from focus group members indicated that a consistent style is an important element for attracting followers of similar interests. The influential bloggers are generally those with distinctive overall image styles. Hence, the selected 10 fashion IGs contained distinctive overall styles that could be examined and classified.

Table 6.1 shows the classification of the bloggers' type, and the interpretation based on the self-descriptions column.

Table 6.1

Selected Instagram Accounts for Content Analysis and Classification

								number of followers
	Name of the Instagrame account	Name of the host	code for citation	Location	Self Description	Classification of the bloggers' type	Interpretation	1-May-15
1	Eva_pinkland	Eva Cheung	EC	no mention	Personal statement: '80s, fashion, pink, rainbow, MJ, My little pony' and contact information	self expressive	description suggests self expressive message	302,000
2	No7	Ceci.N	CN	no mention	Personal description: 'illustrator, blogger, modelographer', and contact information	fashion expressive	description suggests personal branding, fashion related message, attempts to establish industry network for potential jobs	231,000
3	ZoeSuen	Zoe Suen	ZS	Hong Kong, London	Contact information	lifestyle expressive	no information, need to examine the images	124,000
4	andiautumn	Andi Autumn	AA	Hong Kong	Personal Statement: 'that' s.kool.keep.it.weird' & contact information	self expressive	description suggests self expressive message	81,300
5	tinawzq	Tina Wong	TW	Hong Kong	Personal Description: 'shop.tinaswardrobe'	lifestyle expressive	description promotes her own label, need to examine the style of the label	47,300
6	mellowmayo	Mayo Wo	MW	Hong Kong	Personal Statement: 'Cat slave, shoe addict, TV junkie, mocha-holic, macaron hues enthusiast, that's pretty much it' and contact information	fashion expressive	description suggests personal branding, fashion related message, attempts to establish industry network for potential jobs	45,700
7	Laizas_	Laiza S	LS	Hong Kong	Personal Statement: 'Love is all around, Love coffee/travel/life/photography' and contact information	lifestyle expressive	emphasizes more on interest in lifestyle related message	41,300
8	joeymaindividuality	Joey Ma	JM	no mention	contact information	self expressive	no information, but account name hints that individuality is highlighted	17,000
9	angelamiuzc	Angela Chan	AC	Hong Kong, New York	Personal Description: 'Graphic design, shop.aaacupcakedream and other' and contact information	lifestyle expressive	introduce skill sets other than fashion	14,300
10	vnikali	Veronica Li	VL	No mention	Personal statement: 'to inspire and encourage with style'	fashion expressive	highlights 'style' as the core vision	14,100

For bloggers who emphasize *self-expression*, their descriptions contain messages that highlight their individuality and more personal interests. In terms of their image styles, the self-expressive type bloggers mainly display a strong personal style instead of trendy items. For example, the fashion bloggers, Joey Ma and Eva Cheung, are two well-known Hong Kong fashion bloggers; they are famous for being distinctive style icons of androgyny and harajuku style, respectively (Wong, 2011, "Eva Cheung Wearing Jenny Fax on the Street in Harajuku," 2016).

In term of *fashion expressive types*, this type is obviously a group trying to associate themselves with the fashion industry, and to establish themselves as fashion insiders. Their messages represent strong association with fashion and style, and their photographic images tend to show more trendy fashion items. Finally, the line between the *lifestyle expressive* types and the other two types appears to be slightly blurred, but it is distinguishable. The descriptions tend to emphasize personal interests or skill sets other than fashion, and their visual images generally depict a lifestyle feel related to aspects of art and culture. Some respondents from the focus group described this type as *Wenyi qingnian* or simply *Wen qing* (pronunciation in mandarin). This phase refers to a type of young adult who loves art and culture, enjoys his or her life, and likes to write poetic phrases to

supplement the photos posted on blogs or Instagram. Their fashion styles are more towards the Japanese simplicity style.

With respect to the first research question, “What are the characteristics of the fashion images on Instagram, and how do these characteristics contributed to the value creation of fashion photography?” Table 6.2 shows the categorization of images posted. According to Table 6.2, out of 1500 posts, 77% display *fashion and style* related images (1148 out of 1500, 77%), while the *lifestyle* posts comprised only 31%, which is less than half of the total posts (461 out of 1500, 31%). The display of *self-branding* posts on the other hand, is nearly half (43%) of the total posts (651 out of 1500). This shows that in order to give an impression of fashion, the fashion bloggers have to post substantial quantities of distinct photographic images related to fashion and style. In contrast, these fashion bloggers show images other than fashion to demonstrate their lifestyle, such as travel experience, their taste in food, and interest in art and culture activities. The various types of image representations depicted in the table, such as *gaze direct* (GD), *gaze away* (GA), *with other* (WO), and with *products* (PT), will be explained in the next section. Also note other categories that were calculated: *traveling to nonfashion cities* (TA), *traveling to fashion cities* (TFC), *expression* (EX), *food* (FD) and *friends gathering* (FG).

Table 6.2

Image Categories

		Fashion & Style		Lifestyle		Self Branding	
Name of the Instagram account	Images Category	GD+GA+WO+PT		TA+TFC+EX+FD+FG		FE+PR+TG	
Total no of post = 1500		no of post	%	no of post	%	no of post	%
Eva_pinkland	Self expressive	82	85%	13	14%	37	39%
andiautumn		259	90%	31	11%	58	20%
joeymaindividuality		65	77%	25	30%	32	38%
No7	fashion expressive	198	79%	84	33%	184	73%
mellowmayo		166	86%	50	26%	101	53%
vnikali		169	64%	115	44%	163	62%
ZoeSuen	lifestyle expressive	70	65%	48	44%	34	31%
tinawzq		46	77%	18	30%	23	38%
Laizas_		55	57%	45	47%	15	16%
angelamiuzc		38	63%	32	53%	4	7%
		1148	77%	461	31%	651	43%

*Note.*GD= gaze direct; GA= gaze away; WO= with object; PT= product; TA = traveling to nonfashion cities; TFC= traveling to fashion cities; EX= expression, FD= food; FG= friends gathering; FE= fashion event; PR= public relations; TG= tagging; FE= fashion events

6.2. Image Category: Fashion and Style

The second research question was, “What are the differences and similarities displayed among these fashion images on Instagram?” Table 6.3 displays the breakdown of images posted in the category of fashion and style. This category consists of four types of image representation: gaze direct (GD), gaze away (GA), with others (WO), and products (PT). Comparing the categories in total, around half of the images displayed the fashion bloggers presenting themselves as the fashion models either gazing away (431 posts, 29%) from viewers or gazing directly (342 posts, 23%) at viewers. These two categories constitute 773 posts, or 51% of the total posts. This suggests that fashion photography on these individual fashion bloggers generally present themselves as self-modeling the fashion style. Adding these categories with WO, the bloggers posing with another person in the images, that constitutes 919 posts, or 61% of the total posts. Compared to posts displaying products only (229 posts, 15%), the percentage of posts in which fashion bloggers perform as fashion models is 85%, which indicates that being their own model is essential tactic to gain popularity on social media.

Table 6.3

Data of Image Category Fashion and Style

Instagram Account code for citation	Blogger's Type:	Sample size 10% sample selected	Images category: Fashion & style related								sub total	
			GD		GA		WO		PT		GD+GA+WO+PT	
				%		%		%		%		%
EC	Self expressive	96	58	60%	8	8%	10	10%	6	6%	82	85%
AA		288	132	46%	32	11%	74	26%	21	7%	259	90%
JM		84	36	43%	14	17%	9	11%	6	7%	65	77%
CN	Fashion expressive	252	35	14%	104	41%	24	10%	35	14%	198	79%
MW		192	2	1%	92	48%	1	1%	71	37%	166	86%
VL		264	26	10%	66	25%	10	4%	67	25%	169	64%
ZS	Lifestyle expressive	108	23	21%	35	32%	2	2%	10	9%	70	65%
TW		60	14	23%	23	38%	8	13%	1	2%	46	77%
LS		96	5	5%	32	33%	7	7%	11	11%	55	57%
AC		60	11	18%	25	42%	1	2%	1	2%	38	63%
		1500	342	23%	431	29%	146	10%	229	15%	1148	77%

Note. EC = Eva Cheung; AA =Andi Autumn; JM=Joey Ma; CN= Ceci N; MW= Mayo Wo; VL = Veronica Li; ZS =Zoe Suen; TW= Tina Wong; LS= Laiza S; AC=Angela Chan; GD= gaze direct; GA= gaze away; WO= with object; PT= product.

6.3. Comparison Between Bloggers' Types

The third research question asked, "How are these fashion images categorized into a representation of different types of fashion IGers?" In examining the four image representations among the different blogger categories in more detail, self-expressive bloggers displayed more frequently GD images. In the following categorization of images, the bloggers will be referred to with their initials: Eva Cheung (EC); Andi Autumn (AA); Joey Ma (JM); Ceci N (CN); Mayo Wo (MW); Veronica Li (VL); Zoe Suen (ZS); Tina Wong (TW); Laiza S (LS); and Angela Chan

(AC). Eva Cheung (EC) had 58 (60%) GD posts, while AA had 132 posts (46%); JM had 36 posts (43%). When comparing these to fashion expressive types (CN: 35 posts, 14%; MW: 2 posts, 1%; VL: 26 posts, 10%) and lifestyle expressive types (ZS: 3 posts, 21%; TW: 14 posts, 23%; LS: 5 posts, 5% and AC: 11 posts, 18%), these two types of fashion bloggers display relatively less GD approach in their fashion presentation.

Comparing GD and GA posts, since the bloggers can only be either gazing directly or gazed away from the audience, these two conditions are mutually exclusive.

All bloggers of the self-expressive type demonstrated a higher frequency of images with GD than GA (EC: GD 58 posts, 60% > GA 8 posts; 8%; AA: GD 132 posts, 46% > GA 32 posts, 11%; JM: 36 posts, 43% > GA 14 posts, 17%); on the other hand, all bloggers in fashion expressive type and lifestyle expressive type showed more images in GA than GD. This finding suggests that gazing directly at viewers is associated with representation of self-expression among the fashion bloggers. In traditional fashion photography, fashion models tend to gaze away from viewers. In contrast to Goffman’s interpretation from a gender perspective, and Berger's notion of being the subject of gaze, these fashion bloggers take a dominant role in expressing their identity, and establishing a new genre in visual representation of to see and be seen on fashion photography.

Further, *fashion expressive bloggers* showed more photography of themselves either gazing away from viewers or products only. Adding the posts of GA and PT, fashion expressive type shows the highest frequency of these posts, which ranged from 50% to 85% of their total posts (CN: GA 104 posts, 41% + PT 35 posts, 14% = 157 posts, 55%; MW: GA 92 posts, 48% + PT 71 posts, 37% = 163 posts, 85%, VL: GA 66 posts, 25% + PT 67 posts, 25% = 133 posts, 50%). Comparing these percentages with other types, *lifestyle expressive* bloggers showed fewer photos of themselves gazing directly at audience or displaying products. This finding suggests that fashion expressive bloggers tend to imitate the format of fashion photography, and they tend to adopt the traditional approach in producing fashion photographs that resemble professional photographs.

6.4 Image Category: Lifestyle

Table 6.4 displays the breakdown of images posted for the category of *lifestyle*. This category consists of five types of image representation: Traveling to nonfashion cities (TA), traveling to fashion cities (TFC), expression (EX), food (FD) and friends gathering (FG). Among these five categories, expression (EX) accounts for a higher frequency of posts (164 out of 1500 posts, 11%) than other categories; the images included in this category cover a wide range of visual content. There are images showing the

bloggers attending art and culture activities, some images show a pattern, a graphic, mood and lighting only, unidentified locations, landscapes and architecture, or reposting of images from other sources, such as film, fashion, or celebrities. This tactic creates a realistic representation of the blogger's diary (Engholm & Hansen-Hansen, 2014).

Among the variety of the visual content, a common theme emerged in the indication of the bloggers' taste and preference in their lifestyles. The visual images appeared to be a careful selection of consistent photographic styles, or certain types of visual content in order to establish a consistency of the overall style of their account. The same tactic seems to apply to the category of food (FD); this refers to the visual element of food to signify that the bloggers are enjoying their life. The photos have been retouched or filtered to create a mood or style that is aligned with their overall style. The reason that food (FD) is classified as one single category was that its frequency accounts for the second highest number of posts, next to EX (103 out of 1500 total posts, 7%), and thus emerged to be a unique lifestyle theme.

Table 6.4

Data of Image Category: Lifestyle

Instagram Account		Sample size	Lifestyle (indirect related with fashion)										sub total	
code for citation	Blogger's Type:	10% sample selected	TA		TFC		EX		FD		FG		TA+TFC+EX+FD+FG	
				%		%		%		%		%		%
EC	Self expressive	96	2	2%	0	0%	3	3%	5	5%	3	3%	13	14%
AA		288	0	0%	0	0%	17	6%	14	5%	0	0%	31	11%
JM		84	6	7%	0	0%	13	15%	3	4%	3	4%	25	30%
CN	Fashion expressive	252	9	4%	44	17%	21	8%	8	3%	2	1%	84	33%
MW		192	2	1%	3	2%	28	15%	15	8%	2	1%	50	26%
VL		264	40	15%	10	4%	33	13%	32	12%	0	0%	115	44%
ZS	Lifestyle expressive	108	6	6%	13	12%	11	10%	12	11%	6	6%	48	44%
TW		60	6	10%	0	0%	5	8%	0	0%	7	12%	18	30%
LS		96	10	10%	0	0%	21	22%	11	11%	3	3%	45	47%
AC		60	12	20%	0	0%	12	20%	3	5%	5	8%	32	53%
		1500	93	6%	70	5%	164	11%	103	7%	31	2%	461	31%

Note. EC = Eva Cheung; AA =Andi Autumn; JM=Joey Ma; CN= Ceci N; MW= Mayo Wo; VL = Veronica Li; ZS =Zoe Suen; TW= Tina Wong; LS= Laiza S; AC=Angela Chan; TA= travelling to nonfashion cities; TFC= travelling to fashion cities; EX= expression; FD= Food; FG= friends gathering.

Travelling emerged to be as equal in importance as a theme as expression did. Adding the posts of travelling to nonfashion cities (TA) and travelling to fashion cities (TFC), the results yielded 163 post and accounted for 11% of the total, which is equal to the expression category posts.

6.5. Comparison of Blogger Types

Fashion expressive and *lifestyle expressive* bloggers are obviously more keen on sharing their traveling experience than *self-expressive* bloggers.

One of the fashion expressive bloggers showed frequent images of herself travelling to fashion cities, which accounted for 17% of her posts (CN: TFC 44 posts); while one of the lifestyle expressive bloggers displayed 12% (ZS: 13 posts) of her posts dedicating to travelling to fashion cities. Other bloggers in these two category types generally displayed a certain percentage of their posts showing their traveling photos, ranging from 1% to 20%. In terms of *self-expressive* type, none of the bloggers showed any images travelling to fashion cities (TFC: 0 posts, 0 %), and only a few percentage of their total posts showed images of then travelling to nonfashion cities.

This finding suggests that the traveling experience represents an essential form of *lifestyle expression* on social media. The images of travelling to fashion cities displayed in these samples are mainly Paris and London, the two most iconic places symbolizing fashion world. It is no surprise that fashion expressive bloggers will demonstrate more images of themselves in association with fashion cities. However, it may be due to external constraints, such as high travelling costs or rare chances of being invited to attend fashion week that the frequency of these images was not higher.

In terms of expression (EX) and food (FD), *lifestyle expressive* bloggers showed a slightly higher frequency (LS: 21 posts, 22%; AC: 12 posts, 20%)

of EX compared to *fashion expressive* bloggers (MW: 28 posts, 15%; 33 posts, 13%). For friends gathering (FG), none of the blogger categories displayed any large differences in the number of posts between them. Among *self-expressive* types and *fashion expressive* types, they posted a relatively low percentage of FG posts(0% ~ 4%). One blogger in *lifestyle expressive* type showed a slightly higher percentage of these posts 12%.

Interestingly, *self-expressive* bloggers showed a low frequency on all categories of the lifestyle-related images. This may imply that *self-expressive* bloggers are more keen on displaying photographs of themselves in order to establish strong personal images or fashion styles, rather than building their images through their lifestyle preferences. *Self-expressive* bloggers presented themselves as the main interest of the photos, and their individuality and personal style played a dominant role in the entire visual presentation. A strong identity statement is made and there is no need to present themselves with other supporting lifestyle activities.

6.6. Self-Branding

Table 6.5 shows the breakdown of images posted on the category of self-branding. This category consists of three types of image representations: fashion event (FE), public relations (PR), and tagging (TG). Fashion events

(FE) demonstrate the bloggers' experience of being invited to local fashion brand activities, such as fashion shows and shop opening events. Public relations (PR) refers to the press clippings of bloggers, where bloggers appear in editorials or interviews in fashion magazines.

Tagging (TG) means that the image contains products of a fashion brand, and then it was tagged with the relevant fashion brands or #hashtag in the text. Tagging of online images needs to be cautious in some occasions; the tagging of the images may not be relevant to the tagged image content, and some users may only want to enlarge the audience base to tag the images with a vast variety of "wording" (Rose, 2012). This phenomenon is especially popular in Instagram sharing culture, where users like to #hashtag the images with various words or to create some unique hashtag wording. Therefore, extra caution was paid in counting the taggings of the branded images in this study. The researcher checked each individual tag and #hashtag to make sure that the tag was associated with the correct fashion brand in the images; only those that were correct were counted. This was also verified by checking each of the linked pages for the relevant product brands. Results showed that fashion bloggers were very authentic and accurate in tagging relevant fashion brands with the products presented.

Table 6.5

Data of Image Category Self-branding

Instagram Account		Sample size	direct self branding						sub total	
code for citation	Blogger's Type:	10% sample selected	FE		PR		TG		FE+PR+TG	
				%		%		%		%
EC	Self expressive	96	8	8%	6	6%	23	24%	37	39%
AA		288	2	1%	1	0%	55	19%	58	20%
JM		84	7	8%	0	0%	25	30%	32	38%
CN	Fashion expressive	252	18	7%	6	2%	160	63%	184	73%
MW		192	1	1%	6	3%	94	49%	101	53%
VL		264	8	3%	0	0%	155	59%	163	62%
ZS	Lifestyle expressive	108	0	0%	1	1%	33	31%	34	31%
TW		60	3	5%	0	0%	20	33%	23	38%
LS		96	1	1%	0	0%	14	15%	15	16%
AC		60	0	0%	0	0%	4	7%	4	7%
		1500	48	3%	20	1%	583	39%	651	43%

Note. EC = Eva Cheung; AA =Andi Autumn; JM=Joey Ma; CN= Ceci N; MW= Mayo Wo; VL = Veronica Li; ZS =Zoe Suen; TW= Tina Wong; LS= Laiza S; AC=Angela Chan; FE= fashion event; PR= public relations; TG= tagging; FE= fashion events.

Among these three categories, tagging (TG) demonstrates the highest frequency (583 out of 1500 posts, 39%), while fashion event (FE) and public relations (PR) only accounts for 3% (48 posts) and 1% (20 posts), respectively. The low frequency of these two categories implies that the selected bloggers have not been gaining status in the industries yet. One interesting observation is the large discrepancy between TG versus FE and PR. It would appear that the effort in tagging fashion brands does not seem to help the bloggers to gain entry to fashion events or publicity opportunity.

6.7 Types of Bloggers and Tagging

As expected, *fashion expressive* bloggers are obviously the group most keen on tagging (TG) fashion brands; all bloggers of this category showed a higher percentage of posts in which they tagged in tagging fashion brands in their photos or hashtag in their posts (ranging from MW: 94 posts, 49% to CN: 160 posts, 63%) compared to the other two types (ranging from AC: 4 posts, 7 % to TW: 20 posts, 33%). This would seem to indicate that *fashion expressive* bloggers in general will put more effort in associating themselves with fashion brands in order to establish their image style as fashion oriented IG. Overall, all selected bloggers tag their posts or photos with fashion brands; one of these 10 bloggers tagged four photos which accounted for only 7%, the rest of the bloggers demonstrated a tendency to tag fashion brands more highly.

6.8. Inter-correlations

6.8.1 Image category vs followers

This section further examines the relationship between image posts and the number of followers and also investigates the inter-correlations between different image categories. Taking the number of followers as dependent variables and the number of each image category posts as the independent variables: fashion and style (GD+GA+WO+PT), lifestyle

(TA+TFC+EX+FD+FG) and self-branding (FE+PR+TG), Table 6.6 gives the data for analysis, and Table 6.7 displays the results:

Table 6.6

Variables Entered/Removed[a] for data analysis

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	TG, GD, PR, FE, FG, TA, TFC, FD, WO[b]		Enter

Note. a. Dependent Variable: number of followers; b. Tolerance = .000 limit reached

GD= gaze direct; GA= gaze away; WO= with object; PT= product; TA = traveling to nonfashion cities; TFC; traveling to fashion cities; EX= expression, FD= food; FG= friends gathering; FE= fashion event; PR= public relations; TG= tagging; FE= fashion events.

As indicated from Table 6.7, the self-branding category shows that this category of fashion photography, namely the combination of fashion events(FE), public relations (PR), and Tagging (TG), has significant ($p < 0.5$) influence on the number of followers. From the number of posts, this category comprises only a small portion of the total posts. Surprisingly these types of fashion images have the largest impact on popularity among the readers. This result suggests that if the bloggers want to attract more followers, they need to post more self-branding images. As the data in the previous section reflects, the majority of the posts in this category comes from tagging of fashion brands, while the other two categories, fashion events (FE) and public relations (PR), contribute only a very small portion

of the images; these two latter categories are subject to external invitations to bloggers. Since bloggers do not have control of number of posts for FE and PR, this leaves tagging (TG) as the sole factor they can control and the core influential factor for attracting readers. This finding aligns with the networking habit of social media users. One of the readers' searching habits is to browse the hashtags. When bloggers tag fashion brands, this increases their chance to be searched by other readers who browse the fashion brands with the hashtag, and thus enables the bloggers to accumulate more followers. The effectiveness of hashtag has proven to be stronger in helping the bloggers to gain more followers than to gain entry to fashion events.

Table 6.7 *Results of Analysis to Determine Influence of Types of Posts on Followers*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	85403.202	43074.373		1.983	.104
	number of post	595.194	355.758	5.306	1.673	.155
	GD+GA+WO+PT	-5955.290	3573.504	-4.598	-1.667	.156
	TA+TFC+EX+FD+FG	-5837.649	2831.718	-1.852	-2.062	.094
	FE+PR+TG	15251.007	3994.127	1.133	3.818	.012

a. Dependent Variable: number of followers

GD= gaze direct; GA= gaze away; WO= with object; PT= product; TA = traveling to nonfashion cities; TFC; traveling to fashion cities; EX= expression, FD= food; FG= friends gathering; FE= fashion event; PR= public relations; TG= tagging; FE= fashion events.

6.8.2 Image Categories' inter-correlations

Table 6.8 shows the inter-correlations between different categories. There were very strong positive correlations between GD and WO ($p < .001$), which suggests that bloggers like to show themselves looking directly at viewers and also like to pose in fashion photos with others. On the other hand, GA, PT, and TG are all significantly correlated with one another ($p < .001$), which implies that bloggers looking away from viewers tend to also show more products shots and tag the image with fashion brands. This is no surprise, as fashion expressive bloggers seem to be more keen on displaying photos imitating professional shooting, which typically shows models looking away from viewers. They also post more product shots, and then tag the products with relevant fashion brands, in order to build up fashion oriented account images. In addition, GA, TFC, and EX demonstrate significant correlations ($p < .05$), which indicates that bloggers who gaze away from viewers tend to show more images of travelling to fashion cities and also like to display their preferences of taste and lifestyle by EX photos.

Table 6.8

Inter-correlations of the Coding Categories

	GD	GA	WO	PT	TA	TFC	EX	FD	FG	FE	PR	TG
GD	—	-.216	.926**	-.119	-.276	-.061	-.156	.073	-.496	.116	.043	.026
GA		—	.005	.805**	.242	.720*	.739*	.465	-.414	.450	.519	.863**
WO			—	.002	-.232	.060	.050	.133	-.547	.121	-.011	.159
PT				—	.459	.289	.878**	.790**	-.646*	.212	.370	.818**
TA					—	.161	.583	.711*	-.310	.213	-.355	.520
TFC						—	.280	.133	-.155	.768**	.446	.722*
EX							—	.819**	-.690*	.140	.050	.737*
FD								—	-.672*	.044	-.052	.661*
FG									—	-.354	-.239	-.620
FE										—	.481	.665*
PR											—	.401
TG												—

Note.GD= gaze direct; GA= gaze away; WO= with object; PT= product; TA = traveling to nonfashion cities; TFC; traveling to fashion cities; EX= expression, FD= food; FG= friends gathering; FE= fashion event; PR= public relations; TG= tagging; FE= fashion events;

**.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed);
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

PT and EX, FD, TG all display strong correlations ($p < .001$), which suggests that the function of tag is mainly associated with product shots. PT and FG are negatively correlated with one another ($p < .05$), which suggests that when products are displayed there is less likelihood of having friends gathering displayed too. Food (FD) and friends gathering (FG) also have significant negative associations ($p < .05$). This may suggest that bloggers pose with friends but are less likely to pose with food when they do. Finally, FG and EX has a negative correlation also ($p < .05$). In general, friends gathering is not a main focus of fashion IGers. Bloggers tend to show themselves, which may explain the negative correlations with FG. This may mean that bloggers are selective in the images they show gathering with friends because they believe this will diminish their image as a fashion icon or a potential professional image.

TFC and FE are strongly, positively correlated ($p < .001$), while TFC and TG are also significantly, positively correlated ($p < .05$). It is no surprise that traveling to fashion cities is strong correlated to fashion events, as TFC image content mainly displays the fashion events during the key fashion weeks, and thus bloggers travel to fashion cities to attend this fashion shows. Therefore, the inter-correlations of these three categories together depicts a message that the blogger is being invited to attend fashion shows (FE), traveling to international fashion week (TFC), and receiving some souvenir

(door gifts) by that fashion brand (TG), which eventually creates an impression that the blogger is a fashion insider.

EX and FD show strong a significant, positive correlation ($p < .001$). As discussed in the previous finding section, food is associated with a lifestyle expression, and this explain the strong correlations between these types of images. EX is also positively, significantly correlated with TG ($p < .05$) which indicates that bloggers like to post images of expression are also more likely share photos of tagging fashion products. Finally, TA and FD, and FE and TG also show significant correlations ($p < .05$), which suggests food images are usually part of the travelling journey theme to display, while fashion events in general are linked with the tagging of the fashion events.

6.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter reported in detail the findings of the content analysis for the selected 10 Hong Kong based IG accounts. Results were reported according to the four research questions developed for content analysis. The fashion bloggers were classified into three types, *self-expressive, fashion expressive, and lifestyle expressive*. The findings provided the characteristics for each type of fashion blogger and insights into the visual elements represented by

the Hong Kong IG accounts. The results of this chapter will form the ground for constant comparison of the themes emerged from the finding of qualitative methods. This will further serve as part of the triangulation approach in the theoretical construction to be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: The Digital Networked Value Creation System of Fashion Communication

7.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the findings from the constant comparison technique of the two qualitative methods: interviews with image producers and focus group with audience. The analysis includes the concepts formulated from the open coding of the data of each research method and the emergent themes. The themes were further compared with the results of the content analysis of the fashion Instagram images. Results demonstrate a certain degree of consistency in the perceived values of the six domains of fashion photography defined in this study between the producers' and audiences' perspective. The findings indicated an interrelated relationship of all attributes from the six research domains to formulate a new theoretical framework of value creation system for fashion communication. The new theoretical framework of consists of four integrated theories, and each of the theories is analyzed and discussed next. The implication of this new framework will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

7.2. New Integrated Theory 1: Identity Construction: A "Creative self" as a Means of Self-Branding

In answering the Research Question 1a: The perceived value creation on identity expression, a new theory is emerged. The comparison of the identity expression produced three key levels of value creation (Table 7.1), (a) a creative space for self-expression, (b) social comparison versus the self in the networked space, (c) self-branding by the empowerment of authority. These three categories of value are interlinked together to create a model of fashion bloggers' self-branding process. At the first level, the networked space enables the creative expression of the self that lays the foundation for bloggers' creative identity expression. The second level indicates the phenomenon of social comparison responses toward the display of the creative self, and the third level explains that the self-branding is a collective construction of the fashion identity. Hence, the process emerged into the first integrated theory as *Theory 1. Identity construction: "A creative self" as a means of self-branding.*

The finding of content analysis is summarized in Table 7.2 and is compared with the integrated themes developed from the findings on the site of production and the site of audiencing. A detailed discussion of each of the emerged themes in formulating the theory will follow.

Table 7.1

RQ1a: Identity Expression: Comparison: Image Producers Versus Image Audience

Image Producers	Image audience	Integrating and theorizing: emerging theory
1. a creative space emphasizes "the self"	1. social media enables expression of self and individuality	1. Fashion photography as a means for identity expression on social media.
2. "Showing off" culture turns into collective narcissism	2. Social comparison as narcissistic expression	2. The identity expression induces the behavior of social comparison, the comparison could be either positive as an aspiration for others, or negative as a form of narcissism.
3. Self-aspiration for other producers	3. Social comparison as self-aspiration	
4. Identity empowering by authority	4. Identity empowering by Self-establishment	3. Identity empowerment is an interdependent relationship between fashion authority and fashion bloggers

Note. New integrated theory: Theory 1. Identity construction: "A creative self" as a means of self-branding.

Table 7.2.

RQ: 1a: Identity Expression: Constant Comparison: Content Analysis Versus Emerged Themes

Image Category: Fashion and Style	Constant Comparison	Verifying the themes
1. Fashion bloggers as models is essential to gain popularity	Fashion readers are more interested in fashion bloggers modeling themselves, as essential elements of identity expression.	1. Fashion photography performs as a tool for identity expression on social media.
2. Self-expressive bloggers tend to display more image gazing directly to audience, while fashion expressive bloggers display more image of themselves gazing away from viewers	Constant analysis verifies different types of fashion bloggers in expression of self	2. The identity expression induces the behavior of social comparison; the comparison could be either positive as an aspiration for others, or negative as a form of narcissism.
		3. Identity empowerment is an interdependent relationship between fashion authority and fashion bloggers

7.2.1 Creative Space for Self-Expression

The first theme indicates that the networked space provides a platform for the creative-expression of the self. The crucial factor is the technology enabling an interchangeable identity for fashion bloggers to move from image audience to image producers. Figure 7.1 shows an interchangeable relationship of fashion bloggers' identity from image audience to image producer. This observation is aligned in both respondents from image producers and image readers and is further supported by the hi-frequency of self-expressive images from content analysis result. Thus, the study proposes a new notion of self as a *creative self*, which is built on the interchangeable identity, which eventually leads to a self-branding process. In the fashion system, the idea of self-expression emphasizes the creative side of image production in fashion, and is based on a visual image icon of a fashion identity that is a digital version of the self.

Fig 7.1. Interchangeable identity of fashion bloggers.

The Creative Self as a Visual Form

The networked space works particularly well for generating visual forms of the creative self, whereas fashion photography performs as the medium for identity expression for the individual. Recent studies have advocated various notions in explaining the phenomenon of fashion blogging, and their primary focus is on the cultural production of identity (Chittenden, 2010; Duff, 2015; Engholm & Hansen-Hansen, 2014; Marwick, 2015; Paechter, 2013; Titton, 2015). These studies have shown how identity is constructed by the means of fashion presentation. Hence, the main difference between the real life fashion consumption and the online fashion representation lies in the fact that online bloggers who wear the fashions do not necessarily need to own the fashion products. Such a virtual online visual creation practice deviates from the school of thought built on a tangible world, which are observed in philosophies such as Marxism, Bouridieuian or Fordism (Lovink, 2011; McGuigan & Manzerolle, 2014). The blurring of real life and online identity is not a new discovery in the genre of social media (Paechter, 2013).

Collaborative Creativity

As the fashion bloggers become more professional, fashion bloggers seldom work alone but collaborate with a creative team to produce the fashion shooting. The finding from both producers and audience suggests that a

collaborative production crew supports the elaborately constructed identity of fashion bloggers. Results from this study indicate a collective effort behind the visual production of the creative self. Design elements in the visual creation were emphasized according to respondents. The final outputs are often the perfect outcome of calculated and carefully planned image production projects.

Creativity Versus Authenticity

On the other hand, findings also show that fashion bloggers need to be authentic to attract the audience (Marwick, 2013; Duffy, 2015); in this they portray their true face, which literally refers to the face of the blogger. Whether they are revealing their true self might be debated when attempting to understand bloggers' presence in the networked world (Seidman, 2013). To some readers, authenticity was an asset of fashion bloggers to appeal to the public (Marwick, 2013). However, this study argues that fashion consumers who have more knowledge of fashion may be more concerned about the visual presentation and less concerned about authenticity; the importance is how the bloggers act and comport themselves. Consumers are aware that fashion items presented in fashion photography could be merely a form of an aesthetics ideal. With the ease of web technology, the final outcome of a fashion image could be a photo shot after many tests and trials, not to mention the retouching and filtering function that stylize and beautify

the photography output quality (Alper, 2014). In networked fashion communication, the creative visual presentation of fashion products is rated as more important than the functionality of the product or the information presented.

7.2.2. Social comparison versus the notion of "ideal-self" in a networked space

The second level of the value creation system discusses the relationship between the self and others in the context of a networked global environment. The digital environment could easily display images that give an impression of one's ideal self-presentation, and thus they inevitably invite the behavior of social comparison (de Vries & Kuhne, 2015; Vogel et al., 2014; Vogel et al., 2015). The finding of this study supports the argument of previous studies by demonstrating a strong tendency of comparing oneself to others. The nature of open access platform and frequent exposure of the creative self displayed by fashion blogging activity provides an ideal medium for social comparison. Examination of social comparison generally focuses on the influence on the self-evaluation of respondents after comparing oneself with the comparison subject (Vogel et al, 2014; Vogel et al, 2015).

It is worth noting that initially, social comparison was not the main focus of this study. The research design did not include an empirical measure to access the impact of social comparison on respondents' self-esteem. The interview questions of the in-depth interview and focus group did not ask about respondents' self-evaluation in comparing themselves with the fashion bloggers. However, respondents' answers revealed a tendency to compare themselves with the bloggers: thus social comparison was found to exist between image producers and image audience towards the fashion bloggers. The findings help to explain the theory on how the new fashion communication system works, as social comparison is part of the readers and image producers' incentives in continuously engaging the activity. From a positive perspective, social comparison would induce self-aspiration for respondents to continuously seek for further inspiration from social media.

For image producers, social comparison occurred when respondents compared their achievement status with the well-established bloggers. For image readers, respondents compared themselves with the bloggers in terms of both lifestyle wellbeing and physical appearance. In terms of physical appearance, instead of generating a sense of inadequacy while looking at the professional fashion models with ideal body sizes, audiences looked for ordinary people acting and running the fashion blogs. Given the findings of

this study, what interested fashion readers most were the fashion bloggers performing as fashion models; it was precisely such personal fashion identity that aroused the audience's interest to follow. Self-modeling is an essential element founded in the fashion IG post, and this validated the findings regarding how they chose to gain popularity.

In terms of wellbeing of status achievement, image producers compared and evaluated the successful bloggers as to refer back to their own aspiration and motivation for doing their own blogs. The image audience would also compare their lifestyles image as a wellbeing status for readership interests. In addition to the qualitative measure of wellbeing status from the self-expressive images, the quantitative information of social media often induced another main source for comparison; this refers to the open record of number of followers which hint at the social comparison of how popular the bloggers are (Vogel, 2014). The record of followers on Instagram pages becomes an open accessed data of image producers for checking up on how well the other fashion bloggers are doing. On the positive side, some respondents belonging to image producers considered this as an aspiration, as a form of upward comparison. On the other hand, they sometimes viewed these images with a sense of "sourness" and jealously, with the idea that if this person can do this, why not me? This induced a new trait of social comparison influence: *online narcissism.*

Narcissism in Fashion Blogging

Respondents commented quite frequently that the constant upload of selfies resembles the act of narcissism, and they will compared the images of bloggers with their own appearance. It should be noted that this study also did not intend to examine narcissism from a clinical psychology perspective. Narcissism emerged as the perceived impression of fashion bloggers from respondents' point of view. The findings aligned with previous studies in suggesting social media, Instagram in particular, provides an ideal platform for displaying narcissism (Barry et al, 2015; Leung, 2013; Moon et al, 2016). Narcissistic is one of the most popular forms of fashion blogs, which refers to the blogger's visual diary of self-promotional content, such as modeling themselves, showing their dairy life, and their traveling experience (Engholm & Hansen-Hansen, 2014; Murray, 2015).

As respondents noted, what makes fashion blogs interesting is the blogger performing as the model themselves; the readers are then able to use this as a self-reference, or appreciate how successful the bloggers have become, while at the same time being skeptical and criticizing them for how narcissistic they are or how badly the bloggers present themselves. Both image producers and image audience seemed to agree that the narcissism of self-promotion the images conveyed had a negative impact. It should not be surprising that the high frequency of narcissistic self promoting images

displayed on the blogs would produce a negative response, as some respondents remarked that such actions are merely a form of bolstering bloggers' ego (Bergman, 2011). However, it was an interesting finding that even though respondents of the image audience claimed that they had a negative view towards the narcissistic bloggers, they would still keep browsing their pages out of curiosity.

From Narcissism to the Direct Gaze

The respondents suggested that because the fashion bloggers are of average size, weight, and height and ordinary looks, they felt more comfortable in relating to them. Some respondents commented that the self-expressive bloggers who frequently posted their selfies and gazed directly at the audience may create a sense of narcissism, and at the same times attract many "eye balls." One of the remarkable results from content analysis was the characteristic about the model's gaze in these fashion images. There are images of bloggers gazing directly at the audience, which represent a mode of self-expressive bloggers, and the gazing away from the audience, which represents a mode of fashion expressive bloggers. This finding, when compared with the other two methods, supports the notion of self-modeling as a tactic with respect to identity construction for bloggers. The direct gaze of self-expressive bloggers on the one side projects an impression of narcissism, on the other hand, such direct gaze also suggests a new genre of

bloggers being assertive in taking control of their self-presentation in fashion photography. This practice resembles a feminist stand against the traditional practice of male gazed fashion photography portraying fashion models with indirect gaze and standard body figures (Ponterotto, 2016; Sturken & Cartweight, 2009).

The new value creation system represents a paradigm shift from the mass communication hierarchy model to a network of scattered community fashion sites. The media communication model becomes more complex and dynamic in the context of the digital era. The networked technology encourages one to focus on the self. Fashion photography, by all means, provides an ideal medium for constructing such a visual self for presentation. Figure 7.2 demonstrates the impact of a *creative self-presentation* on fashion blogging; these impacts serve to be the consideration of image producers and fashion brands in understanding the audience response of self-presentation in fashion blogging.

Figure 7.2. Impact of the 'Creative self' presentation on fashion blogging.

7.2.3. Self-branding by the empowerment of authority

Identity construction on social media seldom works alone but rather represents a collaborative process (Paechter, 2013). This study argues that such self-presentation identity is *a creative self.* The blogger carefully calculates the tactics when constructing the personal blogging business. As the trend evolves at an accelerated speed, the competition for amateur bloggers in the fashion field become much more rigorous. Bloggers need to establish a unique identity and become a fashion icon through calculated self-branding strategy. This calculated creative self is similar to the celebrity self coined by Marwick (2013) in the way of presenting to interactive fans and celebrity relationship; by achieving this, the celebrity self focuses on self-commodification in order to create a “publicizable personality (p.117).”

Alternatively, the creative self differs from the celebrity self in terms of a holistic branding strategic that the bloggers input. To create the creative self, bloggers work in collaboration to achieve professionalism in photo shooting, image styling, hair and make-up, lighting, and set up.

The results from the triangulated examination of fashion photography from this study point to an obvious path for bloggers to uniquely express themselves in terms of identity to gathering identity empowerment from fashion brands (Figure 7.3). What seems to be considered most in the identity building process is the pathway to gain attention from fashion authority. The interchangeable identities of fashion bloggers between image producers and image audiences gives them the advantages of fully understanding how the system works.

Figure 7.3 demonstrates the model of the fashion bloggers' self-branding model through their interchangeable identities in the system.

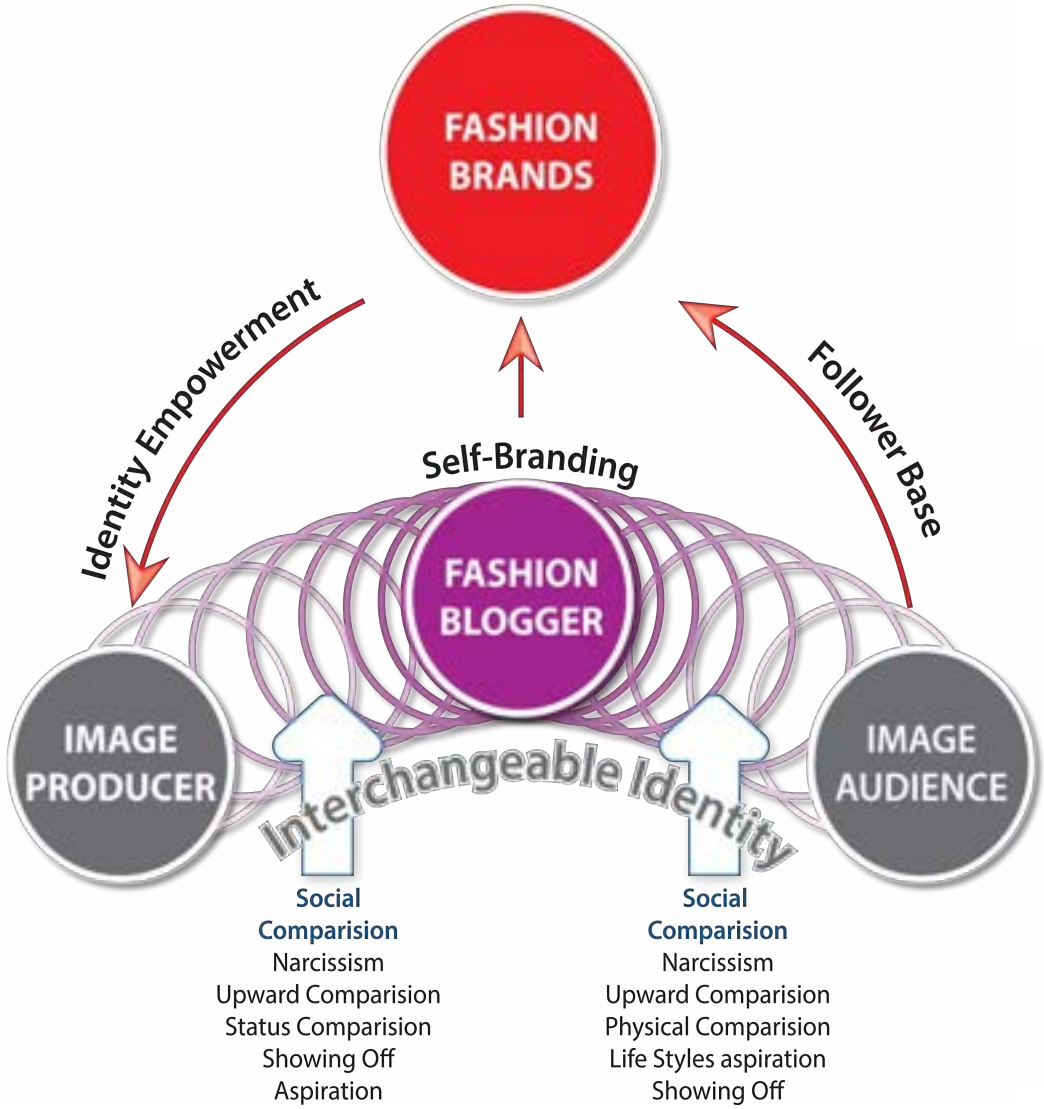


Figure 7.3. Fashion bloggers' self-branding model

7.3. New Integrated Theory 2: The Changing Aesthetic Expectation of the Networked Visual World

In this section, the findings in response to the research question 1b: the perceived value of artistic expression, is grounded into the second theory of the value creation system: the changing aesthetic expectation of the networked visual world. Three themes emerged: (a) social media creates a platform for alternative styles and different levels of professionalism; (b) the expectation of "value adding" created by fashion photography's shift from professional production value to "good enough" digital artifacts; and (c) the overwhelming number of images available on social media creates aesthetic fatigue and redefines beauty concepts or how visual components of fashion images are judged, such as fashion models as well as foreign elements versus local contexts. Hence, the process emerged into the second integrated theory as below: *Theory 2. The changing aesthetic expectation of the networked visual world*

The constant comparison of the findings between in-depth interview and the focus groups in formulating the new themes is listed in Table 7. 3. The comparison of the findings of the content analysis with the new themes is listed in Table 7.4; Detailed discussion is presented next.

Table 7.3

RQ: 1b: Artistic Expression Comparison: Image Producers Versus Image Audience

Image Producers	Image Audience	Integrating and theorizing: emerging theory
1. The expectation: The professionalism of blogging	1. The expectation: 'Creative concept'	1. From professionalism to 'good enough revolution'
2. The expectation: 'Value-adding' 3. Change of Aesthetic judgment	2. The expectation: 'Visual come first' 3. Preference towards blogger's self modeling 4. Aesthetic fatigue	2. The expectation of value adding to aesthetic experience
4. Foreign equals to superior?		

Note. New integrated theory: Theory 2. The changing aesthetic expectation of the networked visual world

Table 7.4

RQ: 1b: Artistic Expression: Constant Comparison: Content Analysis vs Emerged Themes

Image Category: Lifestyle	Constant Comparison	Verifying the themes
1. Fashion bloggers display lifestyle photos to indicate their tastes and artistic preference		1. From professionalism to “good enough revolution”
2. Self-expressive bloggers are less keen on showing lifestyle images and tend to display images of themselves	Self –expressive bloggers tend to display alternative styles	2. From the expectation of value adding to aesthetic experience
3. Fashion expressive bloggers display more images of travelling to fashion cities	No direct relationship	

The finding of this study proposes a new interpretation regarding the perceived value of the artistic expression of fashion photography on social media; the phenomenon needs to be examined within the changing context of the image sites. In the digital culture of social media, with the changing reading habits and image production practice, the expectation of perceived value has changed in several respects: (a) from professionalism to "good enough revolution," and (b) value adding to alternatives in aesthetic production.

7.3.1 From Professionalism to a "good enough"

The findings suggest that respondents of both image producers and image audience agreed that there is a common understanding of artistic standards for professional fashion photography, and these standards are derived from a learning process of artistic sense influenced by the hierarchy of fashion communication to the public masses.

In the digital age of social media, fashion photography itself becomes the commodity on display for evaluation. Producers and readers take advantage of this free, accessible platform that produces and displays images for viewing pleasure. Gradually, the aesthetic evaluation has been changed in the digital sharing era. This study provided empirical research evidence to

support the new notion of “good enough” revolution of digital design artifact (Engholm, 2010).

The “good enough” concept of digital artifacts was confirmed by respondents’ observations on the lower quality of fashion images on the mobile phone screen. According to the respondents, fashion readership in Hong Kong tends to be image based, and the mobile phone apps of Instagram support the reading preference of Hong Kong fashion readers. Visual space for viewing images is limited by the size of a mobile phone, and the value of providing convenience overrides the value of the visual output of the images.

It is no surprise that image producers criticized the free entry of social media system in that it lowers the expectation of professionalism in terms of photographic technique, as these belong to the group with professional training and knowledge of traditional design education. Respondents did not express their acceptance of such “good enough” culture, but reflected that this is an inevitable trend. On the other hand, due to the lack of the knowledge regarding how to professionally evaluate the photography, the image audience mainly focused on the idea of professionalism from the perspective of the image audience, and their acceptance of fashion bloggers who are not professional fashion models has reflected a new perspective on

the “good enough revolution.”

Although the content remains an important factor on the digital media platform, the importance of content has been overridden by the organization of content, which refers the technological infrastructure of the digital platform (Andrejevic, 2014; Engholm, 2010; Manzerolle, 2014). The proliferation of information has shifted the focus from professionalism to specific content, of which all respondents addressed: the expectation of value adding (Figure 7.4).

7.3.2. The expectation of value adding to aesthetic experience

The overwhelming images available on social media induces the phenomenon of aesthetic fatigue and redefines beauty concepts with regard to judgment of the visual components of fashion images, such as fashion models and foreign elements versus local contexts. Although traditional standards of beauty still dominate the mainstream fashion world (Perthuis, 2005; Venkatesh, et al, 2010), social media opens up a new perspective on fashion content in the networked visual world. Aesthetic fatigue is a new finding from the research, which was mentioned by the image audience. According to the respondents, this term originally came from a popular Chinese slang, which refers to the fact that readers simply get tired of the

overwhelming visual display that exists online, and they lose their interest in aesthetics. With the tendency to aesthetic fatigue, image audience respondents said they sought alternative aesthetic experiences.

This study argues that the perceived aesthetic value of fashion images on social media has changed due to the changes wrought in the site of the image and the way images are produced. Fashion images are no longer conveyed via a top-down delivery model and are more diversified in terms of direction. The expectation of *value adding* created by fashion photography shifts from professional production value to other alternative content that is not available in traditional media. The results of this study further contribute to the definition of aesthetic experience as "other alternative content," which is subject to an individual's unique self-interest (Engholm, 2010; Lam, 2016). Whereas readers enjoy the pleasure of viewing alternative visual information that appeals to their individual preferences, image readers are autonomous in what they choose as relevant content, and this could be a nonprofessional fashion model, alternative fashion styles, or some additional lifestyle images. Given the lower expectations in terms of the professionalism in image production, the above content must be considered to have additional value for the image audience.

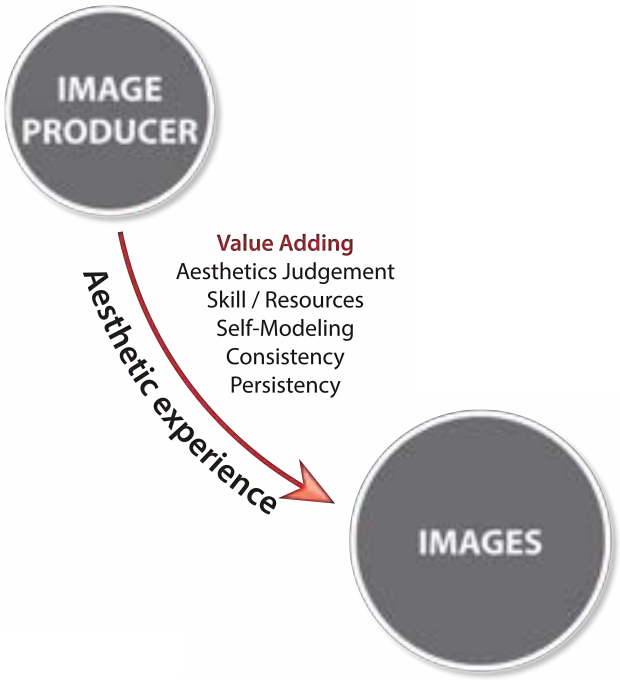


Figure 7.4. The new expectation of value adding for fashion image production.

7.4 New Integrated Theory 3: Clustering of Fashion Trend Diffusion and Taste Leadership

The third theory that emerged from the results with regard to the value creation system is the clustering of fashion trend diffusion and taste leadership. As explained previously, there is a thin line between the distinction of "being trendy" and "being tasteful" in the fashion world. The findings in response to RQ2a: "What is the perceived values on fashion trend diffusion," and RQ2b, "What is the perceived values on taste leadership?" demonstrate a certain level of interrelated perceptions about what is tasteful and what is trendy. The respondents repeatedly referred to the idea of displaying a variety of fashion items, no matter whether these items were trendy or tasteful. This leads to the emergent concept of a "clustering" pattern of ideas on the digital culture. Therefore, the findings of these two research domains are integrated into one new theory: *Theory 3: Clustering of fashion trend diffusion and taste leadership*

The constant comparison of the findings between in-depth interviews and the focus groups in formulating the new themes is listed in Table 7.5 in response to RQ2a, and Table 7.7 in response to RQ2b. The comparison of the findings of content analysis with the new themes is listed in Table 7.6 and Table 7.8 in correspondence to fashion trend diffusion and taste

leadership, respectively. A detailed discussion will be presented next.

Table 7.5

RQ: 2a: Fashion Trend Diffusion: Comparison: Image Producers Versus Image Audience

Image Producers	Image Audience	Integrating and theorizing: emerging theory
1. Blogging makes fashion more approachable to public	1. Blogging makes fashion more approachable to public	1. Social media accelerates fashion trend diffusion by making high fashion more approachable to the public
2. Blogging diversifies fashion trend diffusion	2. Blogging accelerates fashion trend diffusion	1. Blogging accelerates fashion trend diffusion; the direction of diffusion changes to a scattered pattern

Note. New integrated theory: 3. Clustering of trend diffusion and taste leadership

Table 7.6

RQ: 2a: Fashion Trend Diffusion: Constant Comparison: Content analysis versus Emergent themes

Image Category: No relevant category	Constant Comparison	Verifying the themes
Season of displayed items are unidentified from the photos.	No direct comparison	1. Social media accelerates fashion trend diffusion by making high fashion more approachable to the mass

Table 7.7.

RQ: 2b: Taste Leadership: Comparison: Image Producers Vs Image Audience

Image Producers	Image Audience	Integrating and theorizing: emerging theory
1. Social media displays a variety of style 2. Taste leadership will gradually fade away due to boredom	1. Social media displays a variety of style 2. Social media gathers fans for alternative tastes	Fashion photography on social media displays a variety of styles, and alternative tastes in fashion, which are generally rejected by traditional fashion media.

Note. New integrated theory: 3. Clustering of trend diffusion and taste leadership

Table 7.8.

RQ: 2b: Taste Leadership: Constant Comparison: Content analysis vs Emerged themes

Image Category: No relevant category	Constant Comparison	Verifying the themes
Items of non mainstream styles, such as Harajuku are displayed, no direct counting of these Items is available	No direct comparison	Fashion photography on social media displays a variety of styles, and alternative tastes in fashion, which are generally rejected by traditional fashion media.

In accordance with Poster's (1995) prophetic insight in early digital cultural theory, the communication model breaks down the hierarchy of the top down model and becomes a decentralized network model. This study confirms the insight and adopts it in theorizing fashion trend diffusion patterns in the digital era. Such a changing landscape even affects how fashion designers design clothes; as one designer pointed out, they will need to consider how the fashion item looks on a post on Instagram instead of being dressed on the consumers (Schneier, 2014). This new practice decentralizes the information control of the insider elites and reflects the previous notion of social media's ability to empower the individual (Hinton & Hjorth, 2013).

The decentralized information flow forms a clustering of fashion trend diffusion patterns, according to respondents; in Hong Kong, there is no clear distinction of a mainstream fashion trend, and the proliferation of fashion information on social media gathers both image producers and image audiences together who have similar fashion interests; these combined interests form various clusters. The clustering network on Instagram allows not only the mainstream fashion styles to be diffused in radiation format (see Figure 7.5), but also the forming community of alternative styles, which could be classified as sub-culture fashion. This leads to the next discussion on the changing landscape of taste leadership.

Figure 7.5. A changing pattern in fashion trend diffusion on social media

Taste, as a cultural capital in Bourdieuian theory, explains the reason for success when bloggers accumulate followers as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). From this notion, artistic appreciation is a learnt experience from high society to the public, and previous studies have characterized the effect of fashion bloggers taking a leading position in promulgating their fashion tastes and seizing an enormous base of followers as the megaphone effect (Mcquarrie, 2014). One of the key findings from the content analysis supports this notion; self-expressive bloggers do not follow mainstream fashion trends, they persistently post they own fashion tastes, and they gain popularity through this.

As explained in theory 2, since fashion images are overwhelmingly

available on social media, aesthetic fatigue becomes a new phenomenon for visual appreciation. The aesthetic evaluation towards the overall visual images is often linked to the perception of the fashion audience taste preference towards alternative fashion items or styling. Hence, the cultural production of taste differentiates the concept of taste from the conventional notion of aesthetics appreciation. Alternative tastes in fashion that would be generally rejected by mainstream fashion media therefore are allowed to have a voice. Instead of taste leadership, it is argued that such fashion images perform as "tastemaking" in the blogosphere (Duffy, 2015). The new expectation of value adding is illustrated in Figure 7.6.

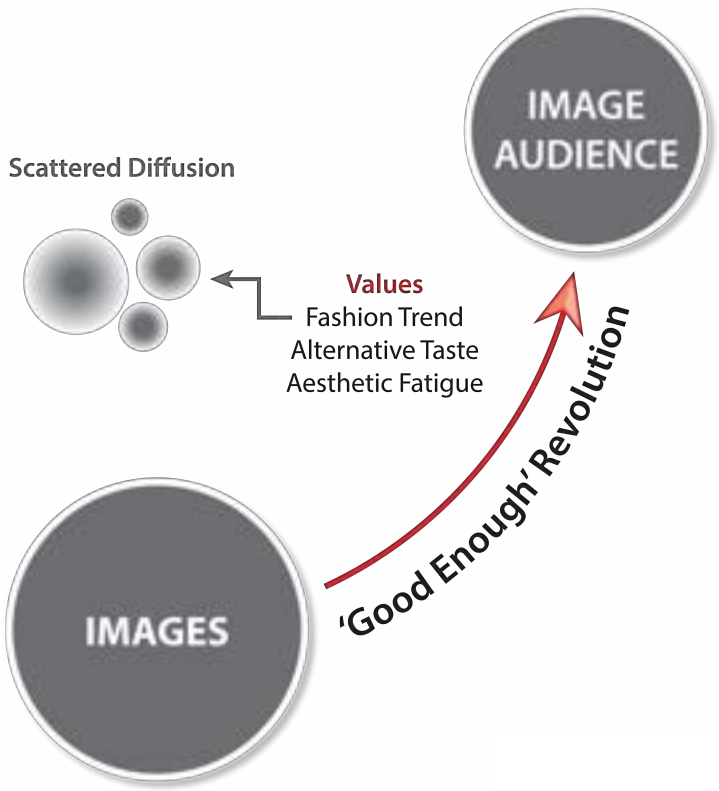


Figure 7.6. The new expectation of value adding perceived by fashion image audience

7.5 New Integrated Theory 4: A Digital Networked Value Creation System of Fashion Communication

Finally, the fourth theory that emerged in the value creation system focuses on blogger's self-branding and branding domain, and there are three emergent categories that formulate a new integrated theory, A new system emerges in fashion communication on social media. The 3 categories are listed as follows:

1. *Blogger's self-branding:* A new system emerges in the fashion world on social media; bloggers' self-branding activities rely on the interdependent relationship between fashion brands and bloggers. It is the power game transfer from the traditional hierarchy in fashion communication to social media.

2. *"Popularity management:"* The "principle of popularity" determines the career path for fashion bloggers.

3. *Brand awareness by brand association*: Fashion photography creates value for fashion brand awareness by brand association on social media. A new brand management emerge in the power negotiation between fashion bloggers and brands.

The constant comparison of the findings between the in-depth interview and the focus groups in formulating the new themes is listed in Table 7.9 in response to RQ3a, and Table 7.11 in response to RQ3b. The comparison of

findings of the content analysis with the new themes is listed in Table 7.10 and Table 7.12 in correspondence to bloggers' self-branding and branding, respectively. A detailed discussion is presented next.

Table 7.9.

RQ: 3a: Bloggers Self-Branding: Comparison: Image Producers Vs Image Audience

Image Producers	Image Audience	Integrating and theorizing: emerging theory
1. 'The power system: bloggers vs brands'	1. Key indicator of success: the number of like and followers	1. A new system emerges in fashion world on social media, bloggers' self-branding activities relies the interdependent relationship between fashion brands and bloggers. It is the power game transfer from traditional hierarchy in fashion communication to social media.
2. A new culture of 'like' and 'follow'	2. A fast track career path for bloggers	2. 'Principle of popularity' determines the career path for fashion bloggers

Note. New integrated theory: 4. The networked fashion communication

Table 7.10

RQ: 3a: Bloggers self-branding: Constant Comparison: Content analysis vs Emerged Themes

Image Category: Self-branding	Constant Comparison	Verifying the themes
1. Tagging with fashion brands is a common tactics for self-branding 2. Fashion expressive bloggers tag more frequently with fashion brands Inter-correlations: Image Category vs followers 3. The effectiveness of self-branding tactic of tagging images is proven to be stronger in helping the bloggers to gain more followers	1. Fashion bloggers self-branding by tagging their own photos with fashion brands	1. A new system emerges in fashion world on social media, bloggers' self-branding activities relies the interdependent relationship between fashion brands and bloggers. It is the power game transfer from traditional hierarchy in fashion communication to social media. In order to be successful in self-branding, bloggers need to gain attention by building up identity

Table 7.11

RQ: 3b: Branding: Comparison: Image Producers Vs Image Audience

Image Producers	Image Audience	Integrating and theorizing: emerging theory
1. New system in brand management	1. Increase brand awareness 2. The power system: bloggers vs brands	1. Fashion photography creates value for fashion brands awareness by brand association on social media. A new brand management is emerged in power negotiation between fashion bloggers and brands.

Note. New integrated theory: 4. The networked fashion communication

Table 7.12

RQ: 3b: Branding Constant Comparison: Content analysis vs Emerged themes

Image Category: Self-branding	Constant Comparison	Verifying the themes
1. Tagging with fashion brands is a common tactic for self-branding 2. Fashion expressive bloggers tag more frequently with fashion brands	1. Fashion brands increase exposure being tagged by bloggers	The traditional key function of fashion photography exists as advertising fashion brands turn into interdependent activities between fashion brands and customers, where social media creates a new space for brand's association with fashion bloggers to increase brand's awareness.

The first integrated theory of blogger's identity building emerged as self-branding through a "creative self" tactic, and gives insight into how the creative space of social media allows fashion bloggers to construct a desirable visual identity. This section discusses further this self-branding process based on the principle of popularity. Hence, the last integrated theory completed the construction of the networked fashion communication system by discussing the topic from a fashion branding management perspective.

7.5.1. Bloggers' self-branding

The findings aligned with previous studies that showed that bloggers' self-branding association approach was proven to be effective in value creation for bloggers (Kretz & de Valck, 2010). The findings from the response of fashion image producers reveal how the mechanism works in managing the product association activities with fashion bloggers. Most importantly, the response is validated by the image audience angle in this research. This study also fills the previous research gap in terms of the perspective from audience reception regarding the brand association activities. In order to be successful in self-branding, bloggers need to gain attention by building up identity, and they need to carefully manage their popularity on the networked environment. However, both image producer

respondents and audience respondents were skeptical on the sustainability of such bloggers' stardom effects. Figure 7.7 illustrates the fashion bloggers identity empowerment tactics.

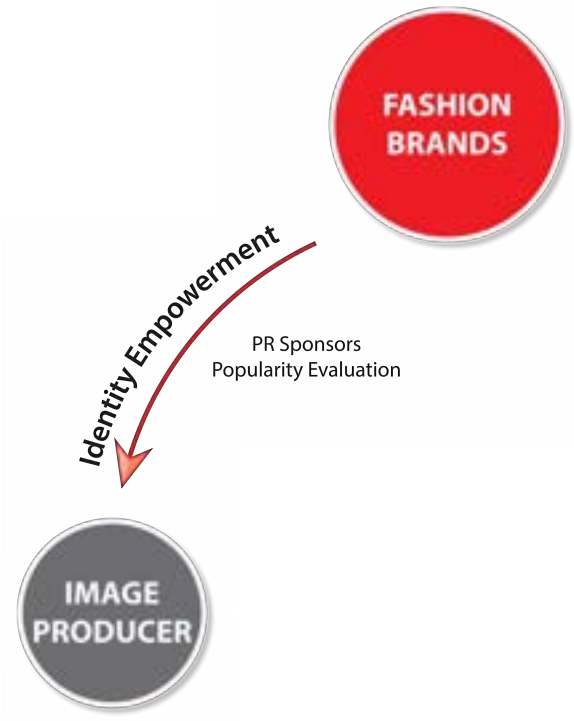


Figure 7.7. Identity empowerment by fashion brands

7.5.2. Popularity management

The new spotlight of success indicators shifts to achieving a remarkable audience base as the evidence for a well-known identity and how the constructed online identity brings attention from the authority of the fashion world. Identity empowerment has been mentioned in Theory 1; this section focuses on how the bloggers accumulate popularity.

The magic lies on the phenomenon of clicking "like" and "follows." It is

free to click “like,” and takes no effort, but such frequency of likes and followers become the capital of bloggers. The authenticity of the follower base or the relationship between supporters and the identity created is seldom discussed. The concept of the virtual self in the global network varies between the perception of the real life identity and the virtual identity. For the audience, the virtual self performs as a mask of one’s true identity. The anonymous nature of the self enables free expression for the networked members. As respondents’ commented, one of the key distinctions for showing a preference on Instagram was the fact that the followers express their comments freely without revealing their true identity. Hence, giving “likes” or following someone has no associated costs. This reflects the notion of a privatized public space, where individuals interact with each other in the form of the networked platform at the same time remaining private when expressing one’s opinion or response. Figure 7.8 demonstrates the popularity management by fashion bloggers.

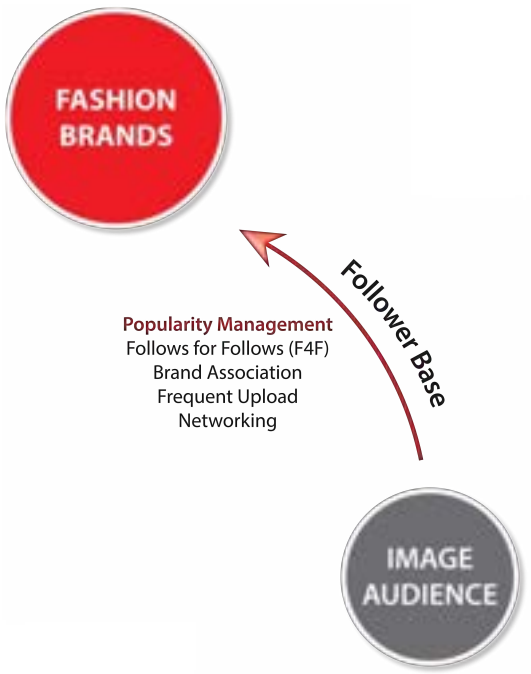


Figure 7.8. Popularity management of fashion bloggers

7.5.3 Brand awareness by brand association

The final category emerges a framework of the value creation system of the fashion communication on social media, and completes the grounded theory of a value creation framework. The traditional key function of fashion photography exists as a top-down branding approach of advertising, which creates interdependent activities between fashion brands and customers; in contrast, social media creates a new space for brand association with fashion bloggers to increase brand awareness. This situation is especially suitable to the environment of Hong Kong; due to the relatively tighter fashion image production budget, fashion brands tend to prefer to shift the budget as a PR sponsorship for fashion bloggers as a soft selling approach.

Respondents show a high level of acceptance of brand associations with fashion images, based on the notion that fashion consists mainly of visually oriented products, and authenticity is not as important on this medium; this makes fashion an optimum product type to be promoted on a visual-based online platform. On the other hand, the visual based nature of Instagram limits the effectiveness of value creation on fashion branding at the brand awareness level. Results revealed that Instagram has a much higher popularity than blogging; young fashion readers are more keen on looking at visual images only and ignore the text. Therefore, the visual presentation shows only limited information from the brands, and respondents of the image audience commented that they generally get to know more fashion brands on Instagram. However, no further in-depth information about the brand story could be learnt from the fashion Instagram.

Content analysis is proven to be effective in testing the brand awareness level of the perceived value of fashion branding association tactics. The result are aligned with focus group responses that they could generally acquire information about the brand name from the #hashtag of Instagram page. However, the brand information is considered to be very limited from the channel of Instagram.

Finally, the completion of the framework illustrates the power game transfer from traditional hierarchy in fashion communication to the interlinked visual presentation on social media. The completed diagram of the value creation system is shown in Figure 7.9.

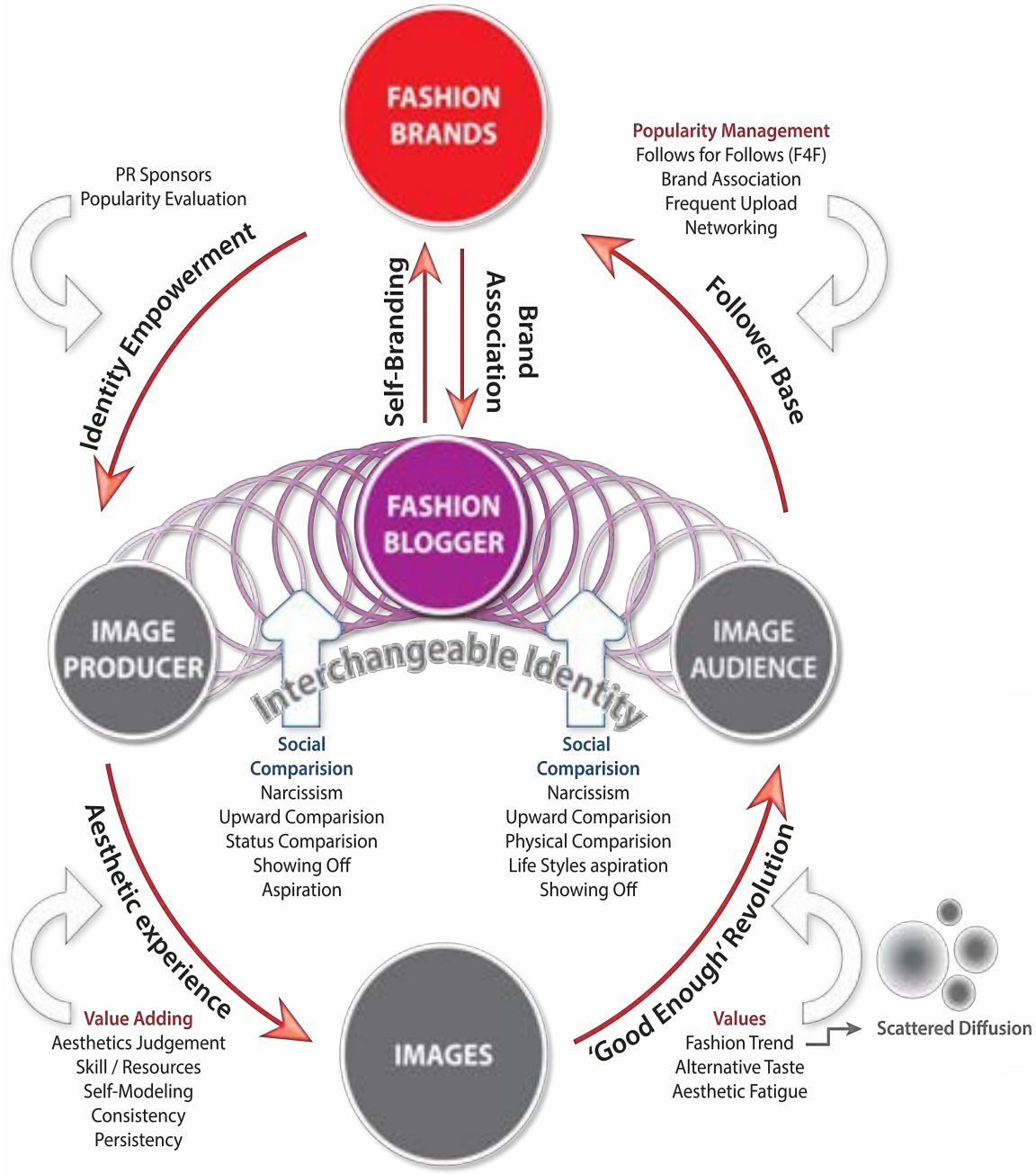


Figure 7.9. The digital networked value creation system of fashion communication.

7.6 Implication of the New Model of Digital Networked Value Creation System

Figure 7.9 illustrates a mechanism of how the new value creation system works. This study does not suggest that this model would replace the traditional model of fashion communication, but it does provide a model to explain fashion communication and value creation in the context of the digital culture. The model considers the perspectives of professional views, image audience, and the examination of images from the most popular social media platform, Instagram.

This framework is targeted for fashion brand marketing and PR agency to understand the current digital culture of visual communications on fashion. Whereas fashion bloggers appear to be the main beneficiary of this system, the framework illustrates the criteria and the considerations needed to engage in fashion blogging. In the beginning of the process, the social media provides a platform for fashion bloggers to engage in interchangeably identities between image audiences and image producers by displaying self-produced fashion images. Meanwhile, these fashion images create changes in cultural production from the perspectives of identity construction, aesthetic appreciation, and trend diffusion.

The system illustrates the elements and process during value creation; these elements and processes include identity construction of the “creative self” to self-branding, new expectations from aesthetics judgment to “good enough;” aesthetic evaluation, aesthetic experience, social comparison between audience and bloggers, and image producers and bloggers; these elements compile a spectrum of the impact of the creative self-presentation, which the image producers and fashion brands should pay attention to. The tactic of popularity management to identity empowerment provides practical guidelines in bloggers’ capacity to develop successful fashion blogs.

This framework demonstrates how the value created by fashion photography in the digital culture has extended from intangible values of cultural reproduction to a tangible return, such as monetary return. According to one well known blogger in Hong Kong, an Instagram post could gain HKD 50,000 in actual monetary return (Chan, 2016). The focus of values system moved from fashion photography in itself to the stakeholders participating the whole fashion communication system, and thus the discussion focus was on the fashion bloggers as they blur the role between the audience and producers. As previous studies have indicated, the value creation by fashion bloggers is based on the creditability and the

enormous audience base (Phil & Sandstrom, 2013).

Today the audience of fashion photography on social media is more skeptical about trusting the information presented on Instagram or other means of social media. Young fashion Instagram's audience understands the mechanism of fashion blogging, and have a high degree of autonomy in following fashion IGers; they choose which IGers to trust. Audiences could identify the brand association of fashion products from different IGers, and therefore, it is essential for fashion brands' PR to revisit the creditability or the reputation of the fashion bloggers for brand association activities. This is because the brand association could result in both positive and negative effects depending on the audience's perception of the images displayed by the fashion bloggers.

7.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the qualitative findings concerning the two sites of image: the image producers and the image audience, as well as the quantitative analysis of the site of the image itself. Constant comparison of the findings were conducted and mapped into the tables for the identified six domains of perceived values: identity expression, artistic expression, aesthetic appreciation, trend diffusion, bloggers' self-branding, and fashion

branding. The comparison of the findings of each domain has generated several new concepts and eventually emerged a new grounded theory for interpreting the value creation system of the fashion photography in the genre of social media.

A new theoretical model of fashion media communication was therefore constructed. The model presents the interchangeable identity of fashion image makers and the fashion image audience and demonstrates the interactive relationships of fashion photography in the context of social media culture. Fashion bloggers play a dominant role as the subject of fashion photography, unlike the traditional fashion photography, where fashion models perform as the medium in presenting the fashion items. The social media platform turns the interests of users from the public to individuals, from the elite to the ordinary, from the scope of society to the scope of a personal public space. This finding aligns with the notion of "networked individualism" advocated by Castells (as cited in Bell, 2007, p. 67). The "me-centered networks" create an ironic situation, where the Web 2.0 links the world together, but at the same time, results in the creation of personal space within a global network. In this interconnected world, net-citizens occupy a small space around their individual interests, and this reflects a sense of narcissism of where they can present and display

themselves.

The model also incorporates criteria of the new values generated by fashion photography. The theoretical framework of value creation system is comprised of four integrated theories:

1. Identity construction: A “creative self” as a means of self-branding;
2. The changing aesthetic expectation of the networked visual world;
3. Clustering of trend diffusion and taste leadership;
4. A digital networked value creation system of fashion communication.

Each of these integrated sub-categories was discussed in detail to show how the categories contribute to the value creation system that was laid out in this chapter.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how the value of fashion photography is perceived or altered in the context of the digital era, specifically, social media. Fashion photography performs a unique function in its role of a visual medium for fashion communication. Despite its century long history of development and involvement in fashion communication, the value created by fashion photography has often been considered superficial or trivial, and hence it has been neglected in academic studies. A research gap was identified in the academic studies investigating the phenomena surrounding fashion photography: how the value of fashion photography has been shaped or influenced in the context of social media. The other gap concerns the limited literature on this phenomenon in Hong Kong. Questions had gone unanswered: How does the value created by fashion photography contribute to fashion communication in Hong Kong? What is the impact of the images created in the new digital culture of “users turned producers” on the landscape of fashion media industry? This research study was designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the key perceived values of fashion photography from its development and its value creation in social, cultural, and commercial contexts;
2. To construct a conceptual framework to investigate fashion photography;
3. To formulate the interrelationship of the key elements of the perceived values on fashion blogging;
4. To construct a framework of fashion communication under the new value creation system of fashion blogging.

This chapter will first review the research objectives and questions and then summarize the research findings and discussion. The significance and contributions of this study will be addressed next. Finally, future research recommendations will be provided to conclude this thesis.

After succinctly reviewing the literature, the initial framework of the six domains were formulated in order to examine the ways in which fashion photography creates value. These domains included identity expression, artistic expression, fashion trend diffusion, taste leadership, fashion branding, and self-branding. Six research questions were constructed in correspondence to each of the domains of perceived values. The investigation was framed in critical visual methodology on three aspects of

visual images: the site of image production, the site of image audiencing, and the site of the image itself. The research design triangulated the data by utilizing three methods of data collecting and analysis. Data regarding the site of image production was collected through in-depth interviews; data collected on the site of image audiencing was collected from focus group participants who were among the young generation of online fashion readers. These data were analyzed qualitatively using a grounded theory approach. Finally, data regarding the site of the image itself were collected through images produced on 10 Instagram accounts. A content analysis of these data was performed. Finally, new theories representing a changing landscape of the value of fashion photography in the culture of social media was proposed.

8.2 Review of research objectives and findings

Objective 1: Identify the Key Perceived Values of Fashion Photography From Its Development and Its Value Creation in Social, Cultural, and Commercial Contexts

This study began with identifying the values of fashion photography. The study's background helped define three ways value is created in fashion photography: (1) a form of expression, (2) a form of fashion trend setting,

and (3) a form of branding and advertising. The literature review further identified key theories regarding cultural, social, and commercial aspects of fashion photography in the context of social media. Each of the three values were further redefined into two categories: 1. The form of expression was redefined into 1a identity expression and 1b artistic expression. 2. The value of fashion trend setting was redefined into 2a fashion trend diffusion and 2b taste leadership. Finally, 3. The third form of branding and advertising were redefined into 3a blogger's self-branding and 3b fashion branding. These six domains of value creation for fashion photography laid the ground for constructing the conceptual framework of the study and formulating the research questions.

Objective 2: Construct a Conceptual Framework to Investigate Fashion Photography.

The literature review provided the background of both fashion photography and social media. The review of previous studies revealed that there is an interrelated link between these two key research elements; social media acts as a change agent and induces technological advancement regarding digital visual presentation and image making. Such changes have made an impact on the perception on the values of fashion photography. Initially, *fashion blogging* was identified as the key, newly developed form of fashion

photographic images and the focal point for constructing the conceptual framework. The framework was mapped out to illustrate how fashion photography is situated in the context of social media. Fashion photography was then considered to be the independent variable, while the six domains of value creation acted as the dependent variables. The study's objective was to understand how the dependent variables were changed by the value creation in the context of social media.

The perceived values in the context of social media were measured by qualitative research methods of in-depth interview and focus groups, and further underpinned by a quantitative approach of content analysis in examining the fashion images. Initially six research questions were formulated to help gather the necessary qualitative data regarding the perceived value of fashion images on social media; respondents included fashion image producers and fashion image audience. These two groups of respondents were chosen for their experience of producers and audience. The respondents included 20 Hong Kong fashion image producers with professional experience between 2 to 20 years, and 43 participants representing the fashion image audience. These were students recruited from fashion-related disciplines from a local design institute. The majority of the respondents were females in their early 20s. They were asked about

their opinions on the visual presentation of fashion images on social media. Their perceptions of the visual images and the entire phenomenon were expressed and captured. According to the responses from the focus group respondents, the key research subject was further changed to Instagram instead of blogging in the particular market situation of Hong Kong.

Objective 3: Formulate the Interrelationship of the Key Elements of the Perceived Value of Fashion Blogging

The research findings were initially reported in correspondence to the six research questions, and several conceptual themes emerged in each value domain. Some of these themes were interrelated in a sequential pattern, and they eventually formed a value creation system for fashion communication. For instance, the expression of a "creative self" was found to be one of the key contributions of the identity expression domain of fashion images. The value is perceived initially as a contribution for users' expression of their self-identity. As the professionalism and popularity of fashion Instagram grows, the value of *self-identity building* gradually shifts from the "creative self" to the "self-branding," which eventually benefits the bloggers in terms of gaining attention from fashion brands. Moreover, the success of fashion bloggers' self-branding process is made achievable due to the changing expectations of the readers regarding the way they evaluate aesthetics. The

success is also attributable to bloggers' popularity management tactics. These values are interlinked and form a value creation system. The details of how each of the key value creation elements is constructed into the theoretical framework will be summarized in the next section.

Objective 4. To Construct a Framework of Fashion Communication Under the New Value Creation System of Fashion Blogging

Objective 4 was answered by the research findings regarding the six research questions and the new theoretical framework of the value creation system of fashion communication. The integrated theories consisted of four sections that were formulated and developed into a value creation system of fashion communication.

1. Identity construction: "A creative self" as a means of self-branding;
2. The changing aesthetic expectation of the networked visual world;
3. Clustering of trend diffusion and taste leadership;
4. A digital networked value creation system of fashion communication.

Each of the four integrated theories on the value creation framework is summarized below.

1. Identity construction: "Creative self" as a means of self-branding

This theory emerged in answer to the Research Question 1a: *What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of "identity expression" of fashion photography?* The identity construction of fashion bloggers was found to be a creative self, which then transforms to the new identity of self-branding. There are three components that create the context for the emergence of a creative self to a self-branding identity: (a) a creative space for self-expression; (b) social comparison versus the self in the networked space; (c) self-branding by the empowerment of authority. Together these three components formulate the first theory on the identity construction of fashion bloggers through their expression of a "creative self."

1. *A creative space for self-expression*: Social media provides a creative space for fashion photography as a tool to express the "self." The concept of self is a very specific domain, which emphasizes the creative side of fashion bloggers and is generally the collective process of a visual creative team.
2. *Social comparison versus the self in the networked space*: This concept refers to the relationship between the notion of "self" and the others in the a network digital culture. With a constructed self-identity, the behavior of social comparison is inevitable. The identity expression induces the behavior of social

comparison, and the comparison can be either positive as an aspiration for others or negative as a form of narcissism. This notion explains the general preference of the young fashion audience towards the self-modeling of fashion bloggers and why they are interested in viewing fashion images on social media.

3. *Self-branding by the empowerment of authority*. Identity empowerment is an interdependent relationship between fashion authorities and fashion bloggers; the elements involve complex components, including visual content, popularity management, and number of followers.

2. The changing aesthetic expectation of the networked visual world

The second theory emerged in answer to Research Question 1b: "What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of 'artistic expression' of fashion photography?" The findings suggest a hidden change in the standards of aesthetic judgment regarding artistic appreciation of fashion photography in the digital culture. The changes in aesthetic expectations involve two areas: (1) from professionalism to "good enough revolution," and (2) value adding to alternatives in aesthetic production. Social media creates a platform for alternative styles and different levels of professionalism. The audience's expectation of "value adding" created by fashion photography has shifted from professional production value to the

notion of ‘good enough’ alternative aesthetic experience. The overwhelming availability of images on social media create a sense of aesthetic fatigue and redefines how visual elements in fashion images are judged and the concept of beauty. Eventually, alternative aesthetic production becomes a new value-adding element in the networked visual world.

3. Clustering of trend diffusion and taste leadership

The third new theory was integrated from the responses to the two parts of the second research questions “What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of fashion *trend diffusion* (2a) and *taste leadership* (2b) of fashion photography?” Social media accelerates fashion trend diffusion by making high fashion more accessible to the public. Fashion photography on social media displays a variety of styles and alternative tastes in fashion that would be generally rejected by traditional fashion media. The diffusion of trend or leadership of taste no longer works in a clear directional format but rather in a clustering pattern under the new culture of social media.

4. A digital networked value creation system of fashion communication

The last theory was integrated from the findings of the two components of Research question: “What is the impact of social media on the perceived value of fashion bloggers’ *self-branding* (3a) and *fashion branding* (3b) of fashion photography?” This theory completed the framework of a digital networked value creation system of fashion communication. The last theory

is interpreted by three components: (1) It is the power game transfer from traditional hierarchy in fashion communication to social media. (2) Popularity management determines the career path for fashion bloggers. In order to be successful in self-branding, bloggers need to gain attention by building up identity. (3) Fashion photography creates value in fashion brand awareness by brand association on social media.

8.3 Significance and Contribution

The significance of this study lies in its contributions to in five specific areas, which will be elaborated below.

8.3.1. An in-depth understanding of the study of fashion photography

Fashion communication is traditionally understood in the context of visual communication presented by wearable, tangible fashion items (Barnard, 1996); as such, it has received limited consideration from academic literature due to its being considered a less valuable form of photography (Hall-Duncan, 1977). This study contributes to the academic discourse in the study of fashion photography, particularly in the context of Hong Kong fashion market. The significance of fashion photography was justified by drawing on a wide range of theories that suggest its impact with respect to

cultural, social, and commercial aspects.

8.3.2. Construction of a research framework of fashion photography in the context of social media

This research proposed a framework of how fashion photography could be investigated within the context of social media. By defining the six domains in which fashion photography creates value, the framework served to develop one of the first research models that show how the value of the images of fashion photography are altered within the context of social media. The findings of the theoretical value creation system provide an interpretation of how the fashion communication system generates value for the participants, including the image producers, image audience, and the fashion brands.

8.3.3. An understanding of the impact of social media on the value creation of fashion photography

The research findings contribute to the interpretation of the recent Hong Kong fashion communication scenario. The construction of the value creation system is significant in its theoretical contribution to a holistic understanding of fashion images, by revisiting earlier theories in

interpreting fashion image's expression, trend diffusion, and branding. The study provides new insights into how the whole phenomenon of fashion blogging is redefined and interpreted within the context of social media, while incorporating digital culture theories on user's behavior, communication model, and visual representation of the images.

There is a new insight that emerged: the finding introduced a specific interpretation for Hong Kong market and the reader's habit towards fashion. Unlike previous studies in Western countries, the perception of foreign elements being superior stands alongside the Hong Kong scenario; due to the scope of this study, the cultural implications of how those in the East may reference the West could be further explored, and this will be discussed more in future directions.

8.3.4. New insights for branding professionals, advertisers, and industrial practitioners

These findings offer insights for branding professionals, advertisers, and industrial practitioners regarding fashion image production in the context of the digital era. There are practical implications for the commercial sector, and the knowledge gained in this study's findings can transfer from the academic domain to the commercial sector. The findings of the focus groups

revealed the opinion and readership preference of fashion Instagrams in the Hong Kong market. The results may serve as a valuable guideline for branding professionals and industrial practitioners in understanding the young generation of fashion readers and potential consumers' mindsets, reading habits, and preferences.

For fashion brands, the results reveal rich information from the readers' perspectives on their preferences, aesthetic evaluation, and reading behaviors. The findings may serve as a guide for how to conduct PR activity with fashion bloggers and for a greater understanding of the kinds of associations that are being perpetuated about their brand. The responses to bloggers' images on Instagram may induce both a love or hate reaction towards the brand, depending on the images produced by the bloggers, and whether the readers consider the bloggers' tactics a hard sell approach. Implications for fashion PR would be the careful examination of fashion blogger's reputation and their visual creative ability with respect to branding tactics.

For fashion bloggers, the framework maps out a pathway of how to develop oneself from constructing a self-identity to the self-branding process; this involves several elements: popularity management, the creative self, and the

value adding principle in order to become successful. Social comparison is often induced when readers compare themselves with the bloggers, so it is important to be aware of the level to which one engages in producing an abundance of selfies, which may convey to their audience a sense of narcissism.

8.3.5. Implications for policy makers and education sectors

Evidence and justification in advocating for a new direction in nurturing the young creative generation in image making of fashion photography in Hong Kong

According to the industry classification by the Census and Statistics Department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, fashion design services (including accessories) is the only category in the fashion industry to be identified as a *design discipline* in the estimation of employment figures (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2013). These figures may imply an under-estimation of overall demand of image making practitioners in the fashion industry. Hence, this study serves as a pioneering research for understanding the Hong Kong fashion industry; the study attempted to provide a holistic view, which included a niche sector of fashion image making and communication.

The data collected during the in-depth interviews present one of the most comprehensive exploration to date of insiders' perspectives of fashion image making in Hong Kong. Evidence was provided in terms of how the industry works and the recent challenges the digital culture presents to the traditional print-centered fashion media industry. These findings will hopefully assist policy makers in assessing the current situation of the fashion market and identifying the pressing needs in nurturing fashion image making as part of the creative industry.

For education sectors, these findings suggest that there is a pressing need in curriculum design and training in both academic subjects and vocational training for those of the young generation who are interested in fashion communication, fashion image making, and social media sectors. The subject area of fashion design and fashion business, which are part of the conventional core curriculum in tertiary or vocational training should adopt new theories, technical training delivery models, and pedagogy in the context of the digital culture of social media.

8.4 Limitations of Research

This study has the following research limitations related to the nature of the subject matter, scope of research, and the nature of the research methods.

One of the most apparent limitations of this study lies in the rapidly changing nature of the social media phenomenon. The extremely fast pace of the social media development in terms of technological devices and the introduction of different functions or various apps may make it difficult to contextualize the research findings in a future context if there are dramatic changes in the digital culture environment. At the beginning of this research, Facebook was considered to be the main target research subject, and later on fashion blogging had replaced Facebook to become more popular for fashion news and the display of images. Finally, Instagram was confirmed as most recent popular device for local young fashion readers, and it was predicted in the qualitative findings that this mobile device would remain popular until the next new device was introduced. There were no major changes in Instagram development during this research period, and thus this aspect posed no immediate impact on the validity of the results. However, if the overall environment of the social media changes drastically, the relevancy in making comparisons to the findings of this study to a future study may be limited.

The scope of this study focused only on the fashion market of Hong Kong, where Instagram was identified as the most popular social media device among the young fashion image audience; therefore, there are limitations to

this study in generalizing the results to other geographic locations where the users' cultural background and behavior are very different due to potential preferences for different social media devices. For example, in China, the most popular social media devices are considered to be wechat and weibo. Research methods may need to be adjusted in order to adapt to the different forms and features of social media devices in future research.

In terms of the research methods, there are several limitations that restrict the scope of sampling for content analysis. The first limitation was the constraint in including all the images produced by the selected Instagram pages for content analysis; and there was no search engine to conduct a representative search of Hong Kong based fashion Instagram pages. The sampling of the Instagram pages mainly relied on the comments from the focus group respondents, and this may limit the results to the background and preferences of the focus group respondents. The respondents of this study were students recruited from fashion-related disciplines in a local design institute; the majority of the respondents were females in their early 20s. The sample of Instagram pages may be very different from the samples identified by respondents with different demographic backgrounds, for instance, a group with mature age range or a group with a majority of males.

Another restriction for content analysis was the limitation to verify certain qualitative values on research domains of trend diffusion and artistic expression with the other two qualitative methods. Unless specific textual trend information was provided alongside the images on the Instagram page, the identification of trend items may involve subjective judgment from the researcher. Therefore, coding of trend diffusion and taste leadership was excluded from the content analysis of this study. The content analysis of this study did not indicate a verification of fashion trend diffusion for the images. The same rationale applies to the judgment of artistic expression; the coding for artistic values would be too subjective in a content analysis. As a result, content analysis in this study was adopted to provide supporting evidence for verifying the blogger's self-expression, self-branding, and fashion branding association. Suggestions for further adjustment in the research design to tackle this limitation will be discussed next.

8.5 Future Directions for Research

A key distinctive feature of studying technology-related subjects is the rapidly changing nature of technological development. In this study, both fashion photography and social media are, by nature, undergoing changes over time. A priority for future research direction would be to expand the study to include the newest form of fashion images, video clips or moving images. With the ease of image making technology updates, user generated content of fashion images has extended to moving images, such as short fashion films. Moving images would be a future trend in fashion communication (Díaz Soloaga & García Guerrero, 2016). It is recommended that future research explore this new form of fashion visual presentation format.

A second research recommendation is for future research to incorporate textual analysis alongside visual interpretation in the content analysis of fashion Instagram pages. As discussed in the previous section, this study was limited due to the scope of content analysis which relied on coding of the visual content only. The trend information and artistic expression could not be verified by purely examining the visual content. By incorporating textual analysis of the text information posted alongside with the fashion images, the data could provide evidence for identifying trend items. In terms

of artistic expression, the textual analysis could include the textual comments from the followers and hence further interpret the perceived artistic value.

As the scope of this study was restricted to visual analysis only, it is recommended that future studies could include textual analysis, the focus of which would be the exploration of reading and writing habits for fashion bloggers and their audience. The findings of this study indicate a preference for the English written text as an impression of internationalization, and it would be interesting to know whether Chinese written text would be more appealing to the China market. Therefore, a textual analysis could investigate the importance of text in relationship to the success of a fashion Instagram page.

Another future direction would be a comparison study adopting the research design to several regions. It would be interesting to discover whether a similar value creation system could be found in other regions, such as China. It would be worthwhile to expand the study to the greater China region, so that results could serve as the guideline for the young generation of fashion image makers who are interested in developing their career in the China market.

Finally, it is also suggested that in the future, the study on perceived value on branding could extend to the measurement of purchase intention. This could further explain whether preferences regarding aesthetic evaluation of the visual presentation would eventually lead to actual purchase intention.

8.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has drawn this whole research study to an end by readdressing the background of the study and restating the research questions and gaps. The research objectives were reviewed and evaluated in the context of the literature review and research findings. All of the four research objectives were fulfilled. The first objective pertained to the initial identification of the value of fashion photography. The second objective had to do with constructing the conceptual framework, which was completed through a thorough review of the literature. Objective 3 and 4 concerned the interrelationship of key values and the new framework of the value creation system; these were addressed by the research findings, which ultimately produced the new theoretical framework of the value creation system of fashion photography in the digital era in Hong Kong.

The significance of this study rests on its pioneering contribution in

theoretical model for the fashion image creation industry of Hong Kong. The findings provided sound evidence based on empirical research data from the industry's professional insiders, young fashion image audience, and images from the most popular visual sharing platform, Instagram. The theoretical framework of the networked fashion communication offers valuable insights for industry practitioners, educators, and young fashion lovers in understanding how the new communication system works in the digital culture of fashion blogging. Future research could expand this study by addressing its limitations. More research is needed on the value of moving images, extending the study to the value of the text in the blogs, on differences in language preferences, and extending the research geographically to include regions, such as China, as a research study comparison. Finally, it is important to explore the link from perceived value of branding to purchase intention.

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