# 11

# Do Fashion Blogs Influence Vintage Fashion Consumption? An Analysis from the Perspective of the Chinese Market

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#### 11.1 Introduction

Vintage has been defined as a rare and authentic piece that represents the style of a particular couturier or era with clothing originating from 1920s to 1980s being normally considered vintage (Gerval and Wardell 2008). It has evolved from being a subcultural phenomenon since mid-1990s to become part of mainstream collective consciousness (Peters 2014).

The vintage trend is linked to different factors such as consumers' different attitudes towards disposing of old and used goods, designers' use of vintage inspirations in their new designs or eco-sustainability awareness (Cassidy and Bennett 2012). Vintage represents a form of alternative consumption that meets the expectations of consumers looking for

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167

more authentic consumption experiences (Fischer 2015) and has been related to the factors of nostalgia, authenticity and identity (Veenstra and Kuipers 2013).

The way of obtaining information about vintage fashion has significantly changed. While movies, advertisements and fashion magazines were traditionally the most common way to get information about vintage items (Jens 2005), now the Internet, and more specifically social media, has taken over as the most popular channel. One form of social medium, blogs, has been regarded as one of the core information sources for consumers with respect to vintage fashion with consequences in terms of consumers' judgements of products and decision-making (Ho et al. 2015). However, the relationship between vintage fashion and fashion blogs has not been considered in the literature before. This research intends to identify the main motivators that could influence consumers' awareness and purchase intention of vintage fashion and to establish the influence of fashion blogs on these motivators and consumer behaviour outcomes through the development and test of a conceptual framework.

#### 11.2 Literature Review

#### 11.2.1 Vintage Consumption

Different motivations have been identified in the literature towards vintage consumption. One of the most relevant ones with respect to vintage fashion is the feeling of nostalgia that those vintage clothes project. Following Davis (1979), nostalgia involves a positive preference for the past and negative feelings towards the present or future. Individuals intend to experience a time they do not belong to through consuming authentic and genuine pieces from that period (Jens 2005). The way that people find their way to the past through vintage items as nostalgia is commonly related to specific objects. Consequently, the intention to purchase vintage clothing could be impacted by nostalgia in both an indirect and direct way (Cervellon et al. 2012). While no age boundaries have been noted in terms of feelings of nostalgia (Holbrook and

Schindler 1996) differences in terms of gender have been identified by previous literature suggesting that women experience nostalgia more than men (Holbrook 1993).

Vintage items express uniqueness and authenticity in a way that cannot be embodied by mass-produced clothes (DeLong et al. 2005). Authenticity has been defined as 'truthfulness, originality and the feeling of being true to one's self or others' (Vannini and Franzese 2008, p. 1621). Consumers highly value garments produced between 1920s and 1930s and vintage pieces from recognised designers or Haute Couture houses especially if they are unworn pieces or emblematic designs of a period. The rarity of such products promotes consumers' desires to have them, which has an effect on purchase intention (Wu et al. 2012). There are three key attributes which distinguish the authenticity of vintage clothing. The first is that these garments are made predominantly made of natural fibres. The second is that they are often hand-crafted and of exceptional quality and the third that they are generally considered to be of a better fit (Fischer 2015).

In addition, Snyder and Fromkin proposed the uniqueness theory in 1977 stating that an individual's desire to be unique is a kind of social need that could be a powerful motivation for consumption. Consumers' need for personal uniqueness has been defined as 'the trait of pursuing differentness relative to others through the acquisition, utilization and disposition of consumers goods for the purpose of developing end enhancing one's social and self-image' (Tian et al. 2001, p. 50). In recent years, marketers have also developed advertising messages to promote consumers' desire to be unique, including product-scarcity appeals, uniqueness appeals and appeals to be outside of the norm of their reference groups (Lynn and Harris 1997). Consumers perceive themselves with a different degree of uniqueness, which determines their different need to be unique. That way, people with high need of uniqueness will be more willing to search for infrequent products and consume fashionable garments with vintage apparel which they consider to be exclusive and unique (Burns and Warren 1995; Amaldoss and Jain 2005).

The Scarcity–Expensiveness–Desirability (S-E-D) model supports this theory as well, stating that consumers endow scarce goods with a higher price, which also confers better quality and higher status in their mind (Lynn and Harris 1997). Products have symbolic meanings,

which are used to demonstrate owners' social status based on others' estimation (Levy 1959; Dawson and Cavell 1987). This, according to Kujala (2009), has the added dimension of contributing to the users' experience privately and publically. Therefore, apparel, as a vital component of the social construction of identity, performs an important role in class distinction and is an evident indication of pecuniary affordability at first glance (Crane 2000; Veblen 2005). The theory of 'conspicuous consumption' or 'status consumption' refers to the behaviour that demonstrates wealth or social status by purchasing and showing costly products associated with status symbols (Veblen 1889). This phenomenon was earlier prominent in developed Western countries and was spread worldwide in recent years with the transformation of economy patterns in developing countries. Vintage garments are considered markers of distinction (Jens 2005), and vintage consumption is associated with shopping for identities and constructing identities that include presenting status in public and revealing our private selves. As a consequence, it can be assumed that need for status is the other important motivation for vintage consumption.

Apart from these main motivations for vintage fashion consumption, there are other drivers that could influence the process such as fashion involvement or environmental-friendly proneness (Veenstra and Kuipers 2013; Cervellon et al. 2012). Consumers with high fashion involvement hold stronger purchase intention to vintage pieces due to the 'trendiness' of the pieces. Also, the development of an 'alternative consumerism' and the association of vintage consumption to a discovery experience have influenced consumers' preference for vintage clothing (Gregson and Crewe 2003).

#### 11.2.2 Fashion Blogs

The development of Web 2.0 and blogs has increased the ways in which people can receive information and evaluate products before shopping (Ho et al. 2015). Blogs are two-way communication platforms that allow both organisations and consumers and consumers and other users to reach each other and to communicate interactively. From blogs, consumers can acquire product advice and suggestions, especially from

people outside their daily social circle (Ballantine and Yeung 2015). Blogs have existed for years as a medium to create personal logs on web pages (Wright 2005). Nowadays they have become one of the most prevalent digital channels and are considered to be an efficient platform for people to exchange personal feelings and viewpoints related to specific events (Hsu et al. 2013). One of the main reasons for this blog expansion relates to enjoyment, navigability, knowledge sharing and social factors (Hsu and Lin 2008).

According to Kozinets (2010), as an information source, blogs can contain rich, detailed, longitudinal data about individuals and their consumption practices, values, meanings and beliefs. Blogs provided an open platform for consumers to reach product recommendation, purchasing experience and suggestions and are regarded to be more believable compared to traditional media and other online communities (Johnson and Kaye 2009). For this reason, consumers' judgments of the product and their decision-making process can be influenced by blogs (Ho et al. 2015).

One of the most important ways to influence decision-making process is through word-of-mouth communication. Traditionally, word-of-mouth (WOM) has been defined as an 'oral form of interpersonal communication about products, brands, or services between a non-commercial communicator and a receiver' (Arndt 1967, p. 3). As a derivative and expansion of the traditional word-of-mouth, electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication refers to any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual and former customers about products or brands via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). It has become a vital form of social interaction allowing consumers to exchange their opinions and comments on products or brands with any other unfamiliar peers on review websites, discussion forums or social networking sites among others (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Cheung et al. 2008; Mangold and Faulds 2009).

Fashion blogs are blogs with specific content related to the fashion industry. Engholm and Hansen-Hansen (2014) have identified four categories of fashion blogs: the professional (established by fashion magazines such as Bazar Report, Stylefile or Vogue), the fashiondustrias

(focused on fashion industry events via a semi-professional and micro-media format), street-style blogs (bloggers taking photographs of 'real people' in the street that aroused their attention to show more credible and less artificial format of fashion) and Narcissus (posted by bloggers with their own photographs and experience, it is the most widespread form of fashion blogs, creating a reflective relationship between fashion bloggers and their readers). According to Peters (2014), apart from vintage consumers and vintage sellers, street-style bloggers represent the core individuals who are 'performing vintage' with their images and text through the fashion blogosphere. These fashion bloggers are opinion leaders in the fashion industry that act as information brokers that contribute to influence consumers' behaviours and more specifically, consumers' decision-making process (Li et al. 2013) including consumers' awareness and purchase intention.

#### 11.2.3 Consumer Awareness and Purchase Intention

The concept of awareness has been considered in different ways in the literature. Lavidge and Steiner (1961) defined awareness as the individuals' knowledge of the existence of a product. Awareness is related to information or ideas including consumers' knowledge and opinion of a product. The main dimensions of awareness are recall and recognition, both of them regarded as the basic stage of a successful marketing strategy. Brand performance and marketing effectiveness could be measured by the degree of awareness as well (Alhaddad 2015).

Awareness relates to the ability of consumers to recognise a brand or a product under different situations and is the result of abundant exposure (Rossiter and Percy 1987). In the field of consumer behaviour, exposure is considered as the first requirement for marketers to change consumer perception, attitude or behaviour (Evans et al. 2006). Consumers are likely to choose the product with higher brand awareness when they are facing diverse merchandises in the same category (Keller 1993). That way, high brand awareness provides consumers with more confidence and trust to the brand (Laroche et al. 1996), which will reduce the perceived risk related to the purchase decision (Ho et al. 2015).

Consumers may recover information about brands or products that hold relevant associations in their minds and use that information to justify purchasing decisions (Aaker 1992).

Different academic models consider the role of awareness on consumer decision-making processes. Lavidge and Steiner (1961) proposed the hierarchy of effects model including the following sequential steps that start with awareness and continue with knowledge, liking, preference, conviction and purchase. The model was expanded and completed including seven sequential steps to the final purchase: exposure, attention, perception, learning, attitude, action and post-purchase (Evans et al. 2006).

Consumers may feel more familiar with the products in their set of awareness if, for example, they get recommendations about them from fashion blogs. This may, at least in part, be because content relevance and integrity of information are important factors to take into consideration when consumers are browsing for product information on the Internet and the source as well as the narrative can influence consumers' awareness (Cheung et al. 2008). The influential relationship between awareness and purchase intention has been proposed by different authors (Ho et al. 2015). Purchase intention was defined by MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) as the consumers' willingness to consume products that are advertised. Notwithstanding that, while purchase intention cannot be considered literally to lead to actual purchase (Young et al. 1998), it remains the best predictor of the final purchase behaviour in that it incorporates the relevant factors that may influence individuals in the consumption context (Fishbein and Ajzen 1977). In terms of the factors that can influence purchase intentions, as stated before, blogs are deemed to be a highly credible source compared to other media, and bloggers' recommendations are considered to be more believable and valuable to consumers than commercial information. Consequently, eWOM is regarded as one of the most influential factors that impact on purchase intention (Sen and Lerman 2007).

In the context of blogs, usefulness, credibility and reputation are the key aspects to influence consumers' shopping intentions. Usefulness is described as the degree to which blog readers believe that bloggers' recommendations may enhance their shopping performance (Hsu et al. 2013). Credibility relates to the source of information. Messages from

highly credible sources are considered to be more persuasive and could arise positive attitude towards the product mentioned in the reviews (Wei and Wu 2013). The source will be perceived as less credible if it is firm-sponsored or associated with specific commercial purposes. Credibility is linked to the concepts of trust and reputation. The reputation of the blog is the reason for trusting the source, which subsequently provides credibility to the content.

# 11.2.4 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

Based on the previous literature review, the following conceptual framework for this research has been developed (Fig. 11.1):

According to the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses will be tested in the research:

H1 There is a positive relationship between vintage information provided by fashion blogs and consumers' nostalgia proneness

H2 There is a positive relationship between vintage information provided by fashion blogs and consumers' need of uniqueness

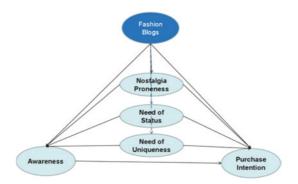


Fig. 11.1 Conceptual framework (authors' own)

H3 There is a positive relationship between vintage information provided by fashion blogs and consumers' need of status

H4 Nostalgia proneness, need of uniqueness and need of status have a significant effect on consumers' awareness about vintage fashion

H5 Nostalgia proneness, need of uniqueness and need of status have a significant effect on consumers' purchase intention of vintage fashion

**H6** There is a positive relationship between consumers' awareness about vintage fashion and their purchase intention towards it

# 11.3 Methodology

The study adopts a positivist research philosophy and a deductive approach through the use of quantitative methods to test the relationship between the variables proposed in the theoretical framework. Data collection has been made through the development of a questionnaire based on validated scales. The constructs measured are nostalgia proneness (Holbrook 1993), need of status (Eastman et al. 1999), need of uniqueness (Tian et al. 2001), consumer awareness (Schlinger 1979; Lastovicka 1983) and consumers' purchase intention (Li et al. 2002; Wu and Wang 2005; Duffett 2015). The wording of the constructs was adapted to the context of vintage fashion.

The questionnaire was released via Chinese social media using Weblog and WeChat. The sampling strategy was based on Chinese consumers with previous knowledge about vintage fashion with no specific requirements in terms of age or gender. A total of 179 valid questionnaires were collected of which 159 respondents were female and 29 male. With respect to age, the largest proportion (136 respondents) falls within the age group 21–25 years old. This is consistent with the key category of social media users. In total, 129 respondents have used fashion blogs to learn about vintage fashion while the 50 remaining respondents elected to use television, magazines or other social media as their source(s) of information. Data were analysed through the use of SPSS 23.

#### 11.4 Results

# 11.4.1 Reliability and Validity

Reliability of scales applied in the questionnaire is assessed through the use of Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The internal consistency of the different scales used and the overall coefficient of the questionnaire are detailed in Table 11.1. All coefficients are above the recommended minimum level of 0.7 (Nunnally 1978).

Construct validity of the scale was confirmed with the use of exploratory factor analysis, applying principal component method with varimax rotation to determine how observed variables were linked to their underlying factors in the multi-item scales applied for both channels (Allard et al. 2009). The total variance explained by the different constructs in the research is 70.55% for nostalgia proneness, 76.05% for need of status, 85.95% for need of uniqueness, 70.95% for consumers' awareness and 71.62% for purchase intention.

### 11.4.2 Hypotheses Testing

Correlation analysis has been used to test hypotheses Q1, Q2 and Q3 related to the influence of fashion blogs on consumers' nostalgia proneness, need of status and need of uniqueness. Pearson correlation coefficients have been used to test the relationship between every 2 variables. Values of Pearson correlation range from -1 to 1 to indicate either a negative (below 0) or positive (above 0) correlation. The Pearson correlation coefficients were 0.563 for nostalgia proneness, 0.031 for need of

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Cronbach's alpha		
Nostalgia proneness	0.714	
Need of uniqueness	0.841	
Need of status	0.806	
Consumers' awareness	0.770	
Consumers' purchase intention	0.838	
Overall coefficient questionnaire	0.849	

Table 11.1 Cronbach's coefficients to test validity of scale (authors' own)

status and 0.024 for need of uniqueness. So for the three variables Q1, Q2 and Q3 are confirmed. Q4 and Q5 were tested through multiple linear regression in order to determine the influence of nostalgia proneness, need of uniqueness and need of status on both consumers' awareness and purchase intention about vintage fashion. The results show a significant level below 0.05 for Q4 with the 3 factors considered altogether, so Q4 is supported, but the significance level goes over 0.05 for Q5, so the hypothesis needs to be rejected. Finally, Q6 is tested through correlation analysis with a significance level of 0.149, so the hypothesis is rejected.

In summary, the quantitative enquiry aimed to test the relationship between the variables developed for the conceptual framework. From the 6 hypotheses proposed, Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 have been supported while Q5 and Q6 have been rejected. Next, the implications of these results are discussed in the context of literature (Table 11.2).

# 11.5 Discussion, Implications and Conclusions

The research has demonstrated that fashion blogs could increase nostalgia proneness in consumers which is considered one important reason to purchase vintage fashion (Veenstra and Kuipers 2013; Cervellon et al. 2012). This way social media becomes an important mechanism for

<b>Table 11.2</b> Results from hypoth	leses testing (authors' own)
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Hypothesis	Status
H1: There is a positive relationship between vintage information provided by fashion blogs and consumers' nostalgia proneness	Supported
H2: There is a positive relationship between vintage information provided by fashion blogs and consumers' need of uniqueness	Supported
H3: There is a positive relationship between vintage information provided by fashion blogs and consumers' need of status	Supported
H4: Nostalgia proneness, need of uniqueness and need of status have a significant effect on consumers' awareness about vintage fashion	Supported
H5: Nostalgia proneness, need of uniqueness and need of status have a significant effect on consumers' purchase intention of vintage fashion	Rejected
H6: There is a positive relationship between consumers' awareness about vintage fashion and their purchase intention towards it	Rejected

spreading information about vintage fashion and to reach consumers in innovative ways. Two other important motivators of vintage consumption—need of uniqueness and need of status—are positively related to information spread by fashion blogs too. Fashion blogs help underpin vintage clothing with the social need of being unique (Snyder and Fromkin 1977) and to promote individual's self-image through the use of vintage items (Tian et al. 2001). Regarding the need of status, vintage pieces featured in premium fashion blogs can make consumers feel in a status position (Jens 2005) with relevant implications for practice. Fashion blogs position themselves as an important medium to promote vintage items, and this promotion can be linked to the different motivations considered in this research. As an example, websites such as Vestiaire Collective that sells secondhand luxury vintage items could be featured by premium fashion bloggers creating an association with the need of uniqueness and need of status motivations. Other vintage brands can follow similar strategies to reach their consumers and generate more sales. Furthermore, this is in line with the prevailing literature on social media with respect to the interconnectedness of the participants.

Regarding the relationship between motivations and consumer behaviour outcomes, the results show that the three motivations considered have a positive influence on generating consumers' awareness regarding vintage fashion. But even if awareness is the first stage that could lead to the final purchase of the product (Lavidge and Steiner 1961; Evans et al. 2006), this research has not found a direct influence between the nostalgia proneness, need of uniqueness and need of status and consumers' purchase intentions towards vintage fashion and either a positive relationship between consumers' awareness and purchase intention. This may be due to the fact that the research has been developed in a specific market context, China, where attitudes towards and availability of vintage clothing may be different to that in a Western context. It would be worthy to replicate the study with different targets and social media in order to determine the applicability of the conceptual framework. In order to promote purchase intention from fashion blogs, some proposals could include to incorporate evident links in social media post regarding availability of vintage items or even direct links for purchasing.

Within the context of China, Li and Su (2007) examine the distinctions between Western and Chinese consumption behaviours and in particular, attitudes motivations. As suggested in the previous paragraph, care needs to be taken that data relating to a Chinese consumer base is not (over-)interpreted using Western values, particularly where the considerable majority of the literature is generated from Western-focused research and built upon Western paradigms. There is, however, one particular area identified by the authors that resonates with this research and that relates to the high demand for status goods. In this context, vintage has been shown to present a source of status and of collective knowingness (a characteristic of social media) that may be highly relevant to the motivations of Chinese consumers. This is what Zhou and Belk (2004) describe as buying for 'face'. The outcome may therefore be the same, but nuanced differently across cultures.

In terms of credibility and reach, it would be worthwhile engaging in collaboration with relevant street-style blogs that have a relationship with the representation and use of vintage by both the general public and fashion insiders (e.g., The Sartorlist). Such collaboration would also extend the potential reach of the research as well as adding a further dimension to its insights. It is also worth stressing that vintage clothing can be the subject of a wide range of blog formats, not just street-style blogs and thus any research development should take cognizance of this. However, all blogs must convey the values of perceived usefulness and credibility (Wei and Wu 2013), the content must be relevant, and the information must be accurate (Cheung et al. 2008). Vintage brands can and do select specific blogs to collaborate with and may even develop their own blogs based on these values. Such own brand blogs can exist in parallel with the brand's presence on non-internalized, brand-controlled blogs.

In terms of implications for theory, this research expands social media research to a specific fashion sector, vintage fashion. It has identified three important motivators that could influence consumers' awareness and purchase intention of vintage fashion and has also established the main characteristics of fashion blogs in order to get that influence. This exploratory enquiry has resulted in a theoretical model that can be applied to different market contexts. Finally, this research is based on Chinese social media, which is under-researched in spite of having a huge number of social media users.

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