Pixelize Me!: a Semiotic Approach of Self-Digitalization in Fashion Blogs

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on Jensen Schau and Gilly’s findings (2003) on self-presentation on personal webspaces, the purpose of this research is to get a better description of how consumers self-digitalize on personal webspaces using specific digital stimuli. Using a semiotic approach on fashion blogs, we demonstrate that consumers self-digitalize to generate authenticity, caricature, fiction or artefact. Strategies employed pertain to exemplarity, “mise-en-scène”, “digital likeness” or “brand overwhelming”. Possible impacts on brand relationship management are further developed, for example, brand-consumer association through self-stereotypes.

INTRODUCTION

Consumption markets have become a place where consumers serve identity projects (Belk 1988; Holt 2002; Levy 1981) through the consumption of “mythic and symbolic resources” (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Favourite possessions help consumers self-present. Self-presentation may be defined as the performance of actions that “symbolically communicate information about the self to others” (Schlenker 2003) and therefore, as a meaning-making process about the self. Accumulating specific possessions may thus carry symbolic meanings that influence the responses of others to self and help self-presentation goals. Literature building on the relationship between possessions and self-construal has mainly considered material possessions (Belk 1988).

However, Jensen Schau and Gilly (2003) have demonstrated that possessions need not be physically material to digitally present the self. Indeed, whereas possessions need to exist physically in the Real Life, constructing a “telepresence” to readers on personal webspaces only requires digital elements consumers do not necessarily possess in the Real Life. Consequently, carefully selected digital items help consumers present a desired “digital self” (Jensen Schau and Gilly 2003) on personal websites. However, even if the authors mention the digital elements used as usually taking the shape of “digital stimuli”, hyperlinks, products and brands, they do not provide further detail on their nature, form, presentation or combination on personal webspaces, and even more important, on their possible meaning.

Personal web sites appear as a “playground for postmodern personalities” and thus appeal to the consumers whose aim is to “invest time to create and maintain identities” (Marcus, Machilek, and Schutz 2006). And yet, consumer research (as opposed to communication research) has hardly addressed self-presentation on personal websites, nor the digital processes through which desired identities are translated from the real life to the personal webspaces. Jensen Schau and Gilly (2003) have reported that consumers usually enact specific and self-valuable real-life selves with which they choose to communicate with other Web participants. The authors have also shown how consumers select digital stimuli, links, products and brands to present themselves on their personal webspaces. That symbolic use of digital possessions reveals highly semiotic in nature, in that digital objects and possessions used as a means for self-presentation may serve as “digital collages” (Jensen Schau and Gilly 2003), hence as “signifiers” for a deeper and more intangible “significant” identity or self-concept. Consequently, semiotics may prove useful to disentangle such a meaning-making process as digital self-presentation and to point out some possible exemplars of selves thus created in a sample of personal websites. Substantial conceptual issues related to the study of identity and self-concept may occur, making the “core” or “real” self hardly tangible for researchers. Therefore, limiting investigation to the level of self-presentation, that is, where identity meaning is made thanks to a combination of digital “signifiers”, may alleviate such conceptual issues while making it possible to focus on the meaning-making processes that lead to generate “exemplars” of identities on those websites.

Personal webspaces and more precisely Web logs (or “blogs”) offer consumers an almost unlimited space for self-expression on the Internet (Kozinets 2006). Blogs are personal websites, “usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video, where entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order” (Wikipedia 2009). Some popular bloggers attract a large audience (346 million readers worldwide and 78 million unique visitors in the United States according to Wikipedia) and are considered by brands a new kind of journalists, or at least influencers who may turn into brands’ advocates thanks to VIP treatments.

Popular bloggers thus reveal a relevant sample for the study of digital self-presentation, especially when it comes, first to defining self-digitalization, second to understanding the role of brands in such processes, where “individualized brand meanings and brand practices is accessible” (Kozinets 2006). The present research focused on popular fashion blogs held by so-called “Fashionistas” for several reasons. First, because popular fashion bloggers highly maintain and improve their personal pages, and particularly through the insertion of digital stimuli, links, products and brands; second, because they ensure daily ongoing and rich nurturance of their webspace; last, because daily visitors are numerous.

The purpose of this research is to get a better description of how consumers organize and process their digital self-presentation (or “self-digitalization”), using specific digital stimuli, hyperlinks, products and brands and therefore to better understand the consumer-brand association processes and their possible impacts on the consumer-brand relationships (Fournier 1998).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Consumers who hold personal weblogs and particularly “fashionistas” usually make use of the Internet to self-present, particularly through their consumption habits of fashion and luxury brands. Literature on self-presentation therefore proves relevant to analyse the “self-digitalization” process.

Self-Presentation in the “Real Life”

Self-presentation in the Real Life is described as a means for an individual to control impressions of themselves towards an audience (Schlenker 2003). In sociology, self-presentation has been popularized by Ervin Goffman. For Goffman (1959), people behave as actors, creating identities by playing different roles on different stages and to different audiences. People thus modify their behavior to influence the impressions other people form about them, and perform self-presentation by doing so. Self-presentation in the Real Life has been much tackled by different research disciplines. In his review of self-presentation literature in the Real Life, Schlenker (2003) reports the major themes and directions that have generated much of the research. They mainly pertain to authenticity and deceptiveness in self-presentation, the automatic versus controlled processes in self-presentation, configuring of self-presentations and the influence and role of others in self-
presentation. How self-presentations are configured and constructed may reveal of high interest for the present study and will therefore be addressed subsequently.

**Self-Presentation in virtual spaces or “self-digitalization”**

Self-presentation in virtual spaces (or “self-digitalization”), has mostly been studied by communication research that either focused on the mere description of personal pages thanks to socio-demographical and psychographic elements (Magnuson and Dundes 2008; Marcus et al. 2006; Schutz and Machilek 2003), or more deeply analyzed the self-presentation strategies developed by personal webpages owners (Gibbs, Ellison, and Heino 2006; Taejin, Hyunsook, and McClung 2007). Descriptive studies thus report the websites’ content such as pictures, links, textual contents, style, self and personality cues or insights on the gender, age and personality traits of the informants selected (Marcus et al. 2006; Schutz and Machilek 2003), or study gender differences in self-presentation in personal webspaces (Magnuson and Dundes 2008). However, they do not mention self-presentation strategies. Gibbs et al. (2006) have addressed self-presentation in the context of online dating and anticipated future offline relationships but only through a successful expected outcome. Indeed, self-presenters were considered to self-disclose in a way that would lead to self-presentation success defined as “the degree to which users feel they are able to make a good impression on others and achieve favorable self-presentation through online dating”. However, self-presenters may also not want to practice such a “selective self-presentation” (Walther and Burgoon 1992) but instead genuinely and authentically self-present, should they make a “not-so-good” impression on others. Taejin et al. (2007) have addressed that issue by making account of the five self-presentation strategies used in the Real Life and developed by Jones (1990), including unfavorable “intimidation” (“I want you to think I am dangerous”) and “supplication” (“I want you to think I am weak and powerless”) that rely on negative self-disclosure to create potentially negatively perceived self-presentation. The authors finally found that bloggers use self-presentation strategies and are motivated in ways identical to those described by Jones (1990). In consumer research, Jensen Schau and Gilly (2003) have made a great contribution to the theory of self-presentation on virtual spaces, bringing valuable insights on the rationale driving consumers to self-present on personal webspaces and describing their self-presentation strategies. However, the authors conclude that individuals seem to always practice favorable self-presentation through “selective self-presentation”, which seems to contradict previous findings. In addition, how the digital self, likeness and associations are constructed thanks to digital stimuli, links, brands and products (or self-presentation configuration), has been partially mentioned. Literature drawing upon configuring self-presentation in the Real Life may serve as a helpful theoretical framework for translating self-presentation configuration in the Real Life to self-presentation configuration in virtual spaces (or “self-digitalization”).

**Configuring Self-Presentation and Self-Digitalization**

“Self-presentations incorporate features of the actor’s self-concept, personality style, salient social roles, and beliefs about their audience’s preferences” (Schlenker 2003). On personal webspaces self-digitalization may then go through the digital actualization or enactment of those features thanks to the combination of digital stimuli (images, pictures, colours, fonts, page organization ...), links, brands and products, to generate meaning about the self. Jensen Schau and Gilly’s findings (2003) about how consumers create a digital self and especially what real features are enacted to become digital ones are consistent with existing research on self-presentation configuration in the real life.

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**Exemplar-Based Self-Presentation.** Consumers may construct a digital self relating to “one or more roles played by an informant” (Jensen Schau and Gilly 2003). Indeed, social psychology reports that individuals have a good knowledge of a vast array of exemplars of identity types (“Clint Eastwood, the tough” for example), social roles (the banker or the hairdresser), or personality traits (introversion versus extraversion). When “self-digitalizing”, informants may thus create “self exemplars” designed to produce exemplar-based inferences within the audience. There has been so far no insight on how those self-exemplars have been created. Hypothesis could be made that consumers exaggerate carefully selected salient features and therefore digitally distort self-presentation to some salient features’ benefit (as would a favorable caricature do). Drawing on that premise, chances are that consumers use “selective self-presentation” (Walther and Burgoon, 1992) by selecting digital features, links, products and brands that help magnify the selected self-exemplar(s). By carefully selecting self-exemplars to manage self-presentation and impressions on others, the consumers might present a self on a continuum starting from a balance between favorable and less positive exemplars describing the self in the Real Life, to an end where selected exemplars are overwhelmingly favorable. Since the literature provides a strong support for the general principle that people search for beneficial self-presentations (Schlenker 2003), the possibility of an existing wholly negative to that continuum has been ruled out. The balanced end of the continuum may pertain to some caricatured presentation of the self, whereas the positive end of that continuum may relate to some “self-myth creation”, see some self-glorification. In their findings, Jensen Schau and Gilly (2003) do not mention the possibility for a “balanced” self-presentation, where favorable and less favorable salient self-attributes are presented on personal websites.

**Presenting a desired self: a transactional view.** In the Real Life, research shows that individuals present a desired (and therefore favorable) self according to motivational goals (Baumeister 1982; Schlenker 2003). The strategies developed differ in their goals and audiences. For Schlenker (2003), any self-presentation integrates the audience’s beliefs of preferences or feedbacks. According to that transactional view, it is important to understand how individuals create a desirable self in the Real Life and why others find those self-presenters desirable or not, so as to understand how to “digitalize” such desirability. Research on self-presentation strategies (ingratiation and self-construction) and self-presentation criteria for desirability (beneficial and desirable) in the Real Life may prove transferable to online spaces.

“Ingratiation” consists in “pleasing the audience” to gain potential reward (Baumeister 1982) such as self-esteem enhancement (Leary and Baumeister 2000; Schlenker 2003), by presenting oneself “favorably” according to an audience’s values and expectations. Alternatively, “self-construction” (Baumeister 1982) or “self-consistency” (Schlenker 2003) consists in both attaining a self fitting one’s ideals and values and impressing others, by making one’s public image congruent with one’s ideal self (Baumeister 1982). Such self-presenters show “good qualities” to others that are equivalent to their own values and ideals.

Two features help define the desirability of self-presentations: is self-presentation beneficial to the individual? Is it believable? Beneficial self-presentations will help the individual reach his or her goals, values and ideals. Literature review on that issue, however, shows that self-presentation need not be favorable or socially desirable. That contradicts Jensen Schau and Gilly’s (2003) conclusion that individuals seem to always want to present a favorable and desirable self on digital spaces. Further investigation should therefore analyse whether personal websites may present unfavorable self-features. In addition, people create desirable self-
image directly, by communicating self qualities and accomplishments, and indirectly, by linking with associates or enemies whose qualities and glory may reflect on them (Cialdini, Finch, and De Nicholas 1990): inference of qualities is made between the concepts that have been linked in the minds of the perceivers. By linking themselves to successful and admirable others, individuals look better to others and feel better about themselves. Jensen Schau and Gilly (2003) have shown that consumers use links as a self-presentation device. Therefore, drawing on the literature about indirect desirable self-presentation, investigation on what links are selected, how, by whom and on what association is made by the self-presenter between him- or herself and the objects linked (people, brands or products for example) may generate further knowledge on consumer-brand association and consumer-brand relationships. Believable self-presentations need to be accurate and honest enough to be perceived as credible. Social norms prescribe that people be reliable and trustworthy and produce obligations for individuals who self-presents to be what they say they are, with the risk of personal and interpersonal sanctions (Goffman 1959). Further investigation is needed to understand how trustworthiness and credibility are created, probably through “authenticity-generating devices”.

METHODOLOGY

The objective of the present study was to gain specific insight about a bloggers’ community of female fashion and luxury brands’ addicts (“Fashionistas”). Since understanding “consumers in the online communal and cultural context” (Kozinets 2006) of fashion bloggers was of main interest, Netnography (Kozinets 2002) has been selected as the methodology most capable of building “Grounded Knowledge” (Kozinets 2002) on Fashionistas and particularly on how such consumers self-digitalize in the blogs they maintain. Observational netnography (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003; Langer and Beckman 2005) was carried out since mere unobtrusive research was intentionally sought for. Because a forthcoming research plans to interview Fashionistas and thus needs “unbiasing” and unobtrusive observation, the selected bloggers did not know they were monitored and no member checks were made. Therefore, only “entrée” and “data collection and analysis” procedures (Kozinets 2002) were followed. Finally, choice was made, for the present study, to focus on visual digital stimuli used for self-presentation. Further analysis focusing on textual elements (usually self narratives) will be presented in a forthcoming research.

Entrée

Why select fashion blogs? Fashion and luxury brands’ addicts were hypothesized to put more effort into self-digitalizing on their blogs than any other kind of bloggers, since fashion addicts carefully self-present in the Real Life. In addition, whereas most bloggers usually do not spend much of their expression space to describe particular consumption habits and brands’ stories (Kozinets 2006), self-brand stories, fashion and luxury products or brands’ consumption habits, brand practices and meanings seem to be more central to Fashionistas in their blogs. A fashion bloggers’ community thus revealed highly relevant for the research question aiming at studying self-digitalization, specifically through digital stimuli, links, products and brands.

Constitution of the corpus. A first corpus of blogs was built up by typing in “fashion blogs” into Google.fr. Results lead to a very active fashion bloggers’ community at that time (www.hautefort.com in June 2006). As time has passed by, many influential bloggers of that community migrated to more efficient blogging platforms in terms of storage and maintenance facilities. However, records and archives where also transferred and such a migration had no impact for the present study. Criteria retained to select bloggers among that community followed those prescribed by Kozinets (2006): high traffic, high number of posts, high level of social interactions (comments and links) and rich self-presentation data (particularly visual material such as pictures, logos and drawings) combined with detailed description of self-brand stories and brand practices. The majority of the blogs selected were linked one to another. The sample turned out to consist of too homogeneous and similar blogs, especially because of imitation behaviors occurred among the fashion bloggers. Since the collected data was to be studied through a visual semiotic analysis, the constituted corpus needed to reach saturation to ensure representativeness. Grémas and Courtés (1979) define saturation as “the model, constructed on the basis of a segment chosen intuitively, is later on applied for confirmation, complement, or rejection to other segments until all the data are used”. The next blogs were thus selected either randomly or because they were frequently quoted in fashion magazines. The variety of the corpus dramatically increased and saturation occurred pretty fast. The sample finally consists in 60 fashion blogs held by Fashionistas.

Data collection and analysis

Netnographic data collection. Direct data collected pertains to the blogs’ content, that is, very diverse visual and textual elements, such as pictures, drawings, logos, wallpapers, texts, colors, videos … Observation data relates to the researcher’s inscribing of the observations about the fashion bloggers’ community. Since self-digitalization through visual digital stimuli was the focus of the study, observation data consists in a synchronic report of how pages are visually configured (combining different visual parts such as banners, wallpapers, pictures, links …) and what similarities and differences appear throughout blogs. Pointing out differences and similarities is required as a first step for any semiotic analysis and shows that structural invariant visual features stand across blogs: for example, personal banners, introducing the blog on the top of the welcome page, wallpapers, side-column tags, links, archives, categories and miscellaneous. A central text body supports written posts, illustrative drawings, pictures or even videos and varies with each post. Reversely, differences may embody for example in the presence or absence of a self-disclosure page and/or picture, of a contact e-mail address, of advertisements’ inserts and commercial links, or of a personal signature (a small sentence describing the content of the blog and sometimes explaining the name of the blog).

Semiotic visual data analysis. Semiotics provides powerful techniques and rich theories to explore consumption behaviors and communication (Mick 1986; Mick and Oswald 2006). “Semiotics analyses the structures of meaning-producing events, both verbal and non-verbal […] investigate[s] the sign systems or codes […] with a more intense focus on meaning” (Mick 1986). Semiotics thus proves highly relevant when it comes to studying self-digitalization in fashion blogs thanks to visual codes fostering symbolic meanings and practices. Semiotics has been used for some time in consumer research (Flohch 2003; Holbrook and Hirschmann 1993; Mick and Oswald 2006; Zhao and Belk 2008). However, the existing research most of the time addresses textual or verbal elements, exploiting semiotic techniques derived from linguists’ work like Saussure (1968) or Barthes, but scarcely studies visual-only elements (Flohch 2003). And yet, Courtés (1995), building upon Saussure’s paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations between words (Saussure 1968), offers insight on how to analyse visual systems. The first step, or paradigmatic analysis (Courtés 1995; Saussure 1968), consists in drawing out similarities and differences across the corpus to designate invariants and more episodic visual stimuli already mentioned as “blog content”. The second step, or syntagmatic analysis (Courtés
1995; Saussure 1968), shows how visual signs combine to provide meanings and values about self-digitalization. Finally, results about visual self-digitalization are presented in a “semiotic square” (Greimas and Rastier 1968), building on the latent values and ideals revealed by the semiotic visual analysis.

FINDINGS

Effects of self-digitalization on audience’s perceptions

How the audience perceives of the bloggers will depend on the self-digitalization process and effects, specifically concerning credibility. The semiotic square presented in figure 1 helps structuring the audience’s different possible perceptions of self-digitalization processed on fashion blogs.

Literature review on self-presentation has shown that credibility (as opposed to desirability) is always required. Consequently, credibility was selected as a semantic plane for self-digitalization. Since it may be attained by presenting a realistic, sincere and reliable self (Schlenker 2003), thus requiring accuracy, the semantic axis opposed “authenticity” to “deceptiveness”, which proved relevant with existing literature on self-digitalization (Walker 2000). “Deceptiveness” describes counterfeiting, imitative and labor self-digitalization processes, or presentations that are not what they seem, introducing the notion of dishonesty. “Non-authenticity” relies on fictitiousness but dishonest intentions are not taken into account. “Non-deceptiveness” is not dishonest and aims at some accuracy but is not necessarily identical to reality, exaggerating salient more or less favorable “Real Life features” translated to the online space.

The semiotic square elaborated on the credibility plane presents how readers may perceive fashion bloggers when self-digitalizing. Self-digitalization may thus be perceived as reliable and realistic, imitative and counterfeiting, fictitious or exaggerative and caricatured by the audience.

How do consumers self-digitalize?

Figure 2 details how fashion bloggers self-digitalize. Drawing upon the credibility semantic plane and semiotic square, digital stimuli combinations were studied, in order to describe self-digitalization methods used by fashion bloggers. Bloggers aiming at authenticity use high digital likeness (Jensen Schau and Gilly 2003), that is translate as many Real Life stimuli as possible to the digital world. Self-disclosure, accuracy and transparency are the blogs’ guidelines. Bloggers are really committed into their blogs and use them almost as a business card. Self-digitalization thus follows the rules of a facsimile. Bloggers who target idealized and fictitious presentation use a mise-en-scène of the self. They try to create evocative settings, personal self-fantasies, private universes. Their blog is a place where they can play with themselves and others, and use their imagination. Self-digitalization here follows the rules of a fiction. Bloggers who are searching for non-deceptiveness and exaggeration carefully select all the Real Life stimuli they chose to translate to their virtual spaces. By being that selective, bloggers self-stereotype through a systematic search for exemplarity. Stress is put on specificities, details and identification to reach typicality and exemplarity of the Fashion addict. Careful selection of brands and links is thus here crucial. Self-digitalization, in that case, follows the rules of caricature. Finally, some bloggers hold personal pages mainly for commercial or business purposes. Of course, they do not so to say pursue deceptiveness but readers do perceive their blogs as such and “flame” those bloggers in the spaces left for comments (when comments are not closed). Those blogs borrow all the codes and stimuli used by the other bloggers. However, cues such as a felt distance, too many commercial links, an overwhelming mentioning of brands and/or events, no clear self-disclosure, mentions that the author is not paid for advertising or comments closed are quite accurate warnings for a deceptive fashion personal blog. Here, self-digitalization follows the rules of artefacts.

DISCUSSION

Authentic blogs in the corpus are mainly composed of fashion experts’ and professionals. “CaféMode” started her blog when she attended Paris fashion school “Institut Français de la Mode” four years ago. She has progressively made herself known as a fashion specialist: she now uses her blog as a window-dressing for her
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consulting and journalist’s activities, and thus for self-consistency. Fictitious blogs comprise blogs where individuals present an idealized self, which makes up for the majority of the fashion blogs we monitored. They set up a mise-en-scène of themselves as would do a fashion magazine with models or celebrities. Those bloggers really love fashion, work in the industry or usually occupy jobs close to arts, marketing or communication. For example, “Pandora” studies the Fine Arts in Paris but want to present as a sharp fashion expert with her own universe and fashion fantasies. Usually, bloggers who managed to present a successful “fictitious” blog quickly gain rewards such as integrating brands’ databases as “influencers” and trendsetters which gives access to prestigious parties, complimentary luxury week-ends, high value gifts or are proposed thrilling positions in the fashion industry. Fictitious blogs therefore seem first, to digitalize self-presenters who pursue ingratiation in order to gain rewards, confirming that ingratiation may be translated to personal webspaces, second, to be the step preceding a “professionalization” of the blog and blogger. They gain credibility because their self-digitalization usually “fits” fashion brands or fashion magazines. Deceptive or counterfeiting blogs are fashion blogs that look like personal ones, but serve the blogger’s or one or several brands’ commercial purposes. For example, “Be fashion” presents and praises pretended loved new products or brands. However, she is also brand strategy consultant and works for many of the praised brands and thus might be prone to interest conflicts. Such blogs are scarce because their strategies backfire on themselves: readers usually violently criticize such hidden commercial purposes and launch “flaming” campaigns in the comments to destroy the blog’s reputation on the Web. Audience reaction to deceptive blogs is consistent with Schlenker’s claim that self-presentation must be credible and trustworthy and confirms that self-digitalization needs credibility and particularly honesty. Caricatured blogs present fashion bloggers both in favorable and less favorable situations. Self-presenters exaggerate their existing “Real Life” features, whether positive or not, to generate either humorous or caricatured self-presentation. For example, “Galliane” presents herself in funny and often ridiculous situations or outfits. This finding somewhat contradicts Jensen Schau and Gilly (2003) in that self-digitalization is not always aiming at favorable self-presentation, at least, at first intent. However, caricatured blogs may use self-deprecation or exaggerated honesty either to attract the readers’ sympathy through humour or to enhance credibility, that explanation being consistent with communication research’s findings on source credibility. Those bloggers are often fashion-addicts who also end up in the fashion industry or in close job positions. They made end up as professionals because they set up credibility on honesty or self-deprecation.

CONCLUSION

The present research builds on Jensen Schau and Gilly’s (2003) previous research. Consistent with their findings, we concluded that “digital likeness” does occur. However, further investigation on that self-digitalization strategy shows that, consumers use full “digital likeness” only when they want or need to stress a specific role or expertise, particularly because they “professionalized” thanks to their blogs. Thus, “digital likeness” may turn to “exemplarity” when bloggers want to self-digitalize as stereotypes such as “fashion-addicts”, or to “mise-en-scène” when they want to self-digitalize as an ideal character they would like to embody on their virtual space. As for personal fashion blogs that end up showing commercial intentions, overwhelming brands, products, situations, and commercial links appear. Such blogs are usually deceptive. In addition, full detail of the digital stimuli combined to self-digitalize depending on the self-digitalization

FIGURE 2
Self-digitalization options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Digital Likeness</th>
<th>BRANDS AND SITUATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Real name, self-introduction, self-pictures and drawings, e-mail address, credible peer links, personal logo, name as self-brand, disclosed selected commercial links, ads inserts (top brands)</td>
<td>Self-disclosure, Transparency, accuracy, Commitment (role)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonyms or several names, no self-introduction or scarce/hidden, no self-picture or partial, borrowed peer links, name as self-brand, numerous commercial links and brands, ads inserts (any brand), comments closed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic</td>
<td>Deceptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-deceptive</td>
<td>Non-authentic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification, Translucence, detail, Exaggeration, deposition, CARICATURE</td>
<td>Idealization, Blur, imagination, Play, FICTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mise-en-scène</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real name or evocative pseudonyms, scarce self-introduction, situational self-pictures, purpose e-mail address, filtered peer links, scarce selected commercial links, selected ads inserts (top brands)</td>
<td>Real name or evocative pseudonyms, filtered self-introduction, half-hidden self-pictures, accumulation of exemplars, e-mail address, filtered peer links, disclosed selected commercial links, selected ads inserts (top brands)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
option has been presented. Important conclusions concerning brand-consumers relationship on the Net appear. Indeed, expert bloggers are more likely not to accept sponsors, or very few, for the sake of credibility and honesty. Caricatured bloggers may accept sponsors who perfectly fit with their self-stereotypes, and not only fashion or luxury brands since incongruency may be a source for self-deprecation or humour. Idealized bloggers may accept only fashion and luxury brands fully congruent with their imagined universe and digital self. Finally, since deceptive sites are subject to flaming and brand cluttering, brands should avoid them systematically.

The “Real Life” self-presentational goals (self-consistency and ingratiation) seem to translate perfectly to virtual webspaces. Particularly, self-consistency may be pursued in authentic, professional and expert blogs, whereas ingratiation may be looked for by bloggers who want to create some idealized character. Results also show that bloggers not always target desirable self presentation on blogs, which contradicts Jensen Schau and Gilly (2003). This might be explained by the fact that individuals may use honesty see self-deprecation to appear more credible. Credibility is indeed a crucial criterion in self-digitalization and relies either on the fit between the self-digitalized and the fashion brands and magazines praised, either on honesty or humorous self-deprecation.

Finally, consumers seem to first self-digitalize either as fictitious fashion characters or as fashion caricatures before entering the small world of experts and professionals if their blogs encounter large audience and success. Self-digitalization may thus imply evolution throughout time needing further investigation.

LIMITATIONS

How readers may perceive of the different self-digitalization options need cross validation through interviews with the readers. In addition, further investigation should be carried out to better understand the brand-consumer association depending on the self-digitalization option. Finally, conclusions show that further longitudinal analysis of self-digitalization is needed.

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