

Summary

From genre to image

Self-creations of fashion b(v)loggers on social media

The monograph deals with the topic of image self-creation in social media among fashion bloggers and vloggers as seen from the perspective of literary genology. The aim of the study is to present the relationship between the genre of selected social media channels and the image created by them, and to confirm the hypothesis that each of these social media channels can be defined as a separate genre or macrogenre, which in effect impacts on the type of activities undertaken within it.

Image creation is a highly topical and popular issue, and is associated with many areas of business, science and art. Image has always been important, but in recent years it has increasingly gained attention and prestige. One of the basic tools for creating an image is the Internet, in particular, social media, which are eagerly used by both individuals and companies. Thanks to these tools, which are constantly being improved and transformed, individuals are now able to create their world and even themselves anew. These tools are available to anyone who wishes to use them, but not everyone has the skills to do so. Bloggers and vloggers, who have been using them since their inception, have often honed this art to perfection. The images created by the most popular of these are consistent, credible and authentic, which therefore makes them appealing to a wide audience. None of their actions are free of self-creation, as they report their activities through the filter of their own interpretation, experiences and thoughts. I treat blogs and social media as an important social and cultural phenomenon that changes the contemporary internet civilisation, and that is why I have decided to study them. Each of these social media tools offers different opportunities for self-creation. Due to the multitude of images available today and the numerous possibilities for creating and presenting them, this topic is extremely important.

Using selected examples of fashion bloggers and vloggers, the ways in which they pursue the process of self-creation on their blogs and vlogs and other social media channels are analysed.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first takes up issues related to the concept of fashion as an image-forming field. It answers the question of what image is, how it was defined until the end of the 20th century and how it is defined nowadays. It also presents an outline of the definition of image in sociological thought, the academic field most frequently tackling this subject. The review describes the theories of the most eminent 20th-century sociologists dealing with image and its creation, such as Robert E. Park, Erving Goffman,

Charles Cooley or Catherine Pittman. The next part of the chapter is devoted to an analysis of consumer society, whose successor is the image society. These two trends permeate each other and merge inextricably. Both are related to the social dimensions of consuming and buying, and although trends that oppose consumerism, such as minimalism or slow fashion, appear from time to time, they still deal with the subject of shopping. Consumer goods function as symbols, and this status is accorded to them not only by brands, but also by consumers themselves. By purchasing certain objects and using certain services, they create their image. The selection of objects is a specific domain of *homo eligens* – ‘the man who chooses’. Recalling the theses on consumerism put forward by such scholars as Zygmunt Bauman, Marek Krajewski, Russell W. Beck, John Brewer or Tomasz Szlendak, I conclude that consumption is an end in itself, and its next stage is the image created with its use. The individual becomes a product whose image is shaped with the help of other products. Fashion is an inseparable element of consumer culture. Both are characterised by volatility, dynamism, lack of stagnation, constant driving of consumer needs. In recent years, fashion, as a field of art, has been gaining prestige and significance like never before; its economic, social, cultural and political role is growing. Fashion is present both at *haute couture* shows or in museums and on the street. In this area of research, it is impossible to ignore the achievements of probably the most famous sociologist of fashion, Georg Simmel, who pointed to its bipolarity. On the one hand, fashion enables people to connect with others, while on the other, it allows them to stand out. Thus, it fulfils the two most basic social needs. The principle of combining imitation and individualism in the case of fashion is easily visible on fashion blogs.

Chapter Two is devoted to social media – the tools that help create image on the Internet. Today’s society is a networked society; we live in a dependency network, a web of connections, both offline and online. In this network society, the focus is more on the individual than on the whole; we are in an era of individualisation and the desire to create our individual image. On social media, as in fashion, people seek both to stand out and to connect with others, to feel a sense of belonging and to be part of the greater whole. The essence of social media is to enable users to create and exchange a variety of content. New channels influence writing techniques and new literary genres are created. As Internet researchers point out, it is thanks to the Internet that human consciousness is being transformed: the attitude to time, space, the world and one’s own body is changing. Social media grew out of the need to exchange thoughts, views and expressions. The image of the individual on social media is influenced by everything that appears on his or her profile, not only the content published by the individual, but also what is posted there by other users, whether friends and strangers. In the case of bloggers and vloggers, this information is far more important, as they have thousands of followers and, therefore, hundreds or even thousands of comments may appear under each post. Thus, it can be concluded that social media has changed not only social relations and the perception of reality, but also the ways of creating an image. The last part of this chapter describes the typology of social media: from blogs and microblogs, through social networks, content communities, to virtual social worlds.

The third chapter presents the concept of social media as a space for creating new communication genres. It opens with a review of the main trends in genealogy, from Aristotle, through the research of Stefania Skwarczyńska, Ireneusz Opacki, Seweryna Wyślouch and

other eminent 20th-century scholars, through to the theories connected with the newest, multimedia, genology, represented by such writers as Edward Balcerzan or Emilia Branny, theories which are of the greatest interest for to the subject matter of my work. Over the years, both the definition of genre and how it is perceived have changed, and today no one would doubt that Aristotle's rigid division of genres has lost its *raison d'être*. Genres always exist in a specific socio-cultural context; they are inscribed in social structures, collective memory, ideologies and value systems. At the beginning of the 21st century, the first voices were raised about the need for a new genology. This was due to the emergence of more and more hybrid genre forms, along with problems related to defining them. This is why Balcerzan's multimedia genology came into being. The appearance of new forms, including the Internet, made it necessary to analyse them in terms of their genre, and here, unlike most social media channels, the blog has been repeatedly described as a distinct genre. The genre features of blogs include: anti-chronology, fragmentation, variability, non-fiction, and self-presentational, exhibitionist and communicative functions. The problem with the definition of the blog genre is exacerbated by its complexity and diversity, because blogs can have different forms, topics and structures.

Chapter Four is divided into two parts. The first of these is devoted to phenomena related to image creation by fashion bloggers and vloggers on social media, while the second part is of a practical nature and includes a record of the results of a study I conducted on selected fashion bloggers and vloggers' channels. Fashion bloggers and vloggers constitute a huge phenomenon at present. As research shows, they have more influence on shopping decisions and fashion choices than fashion media or advertising campaigns of shops. However, there is no literature on image creation by fashion bloggers and vloggers. Bloggers become fashion gurus, and are opinionated and controversial at the same time. Bloggers employ such phenomena as livestreaming, attention economy, exerting influence or commercial cooperation in their self-creation processes. The fourth chapter of the study deals with these in detail.

The qualitative analysis of blogs and other social media channels is performed in an interdisciplinary way with regard to the concept of the new multimedia genology. In multimedia genre theory, genre consists of elements such as repetitive combinations, communicative orientation and the dependence of genre on the transmission technique – the medium. This is connected with many methodological doubts, such as problems of a terminological nature, but due to the popularity of new media it seems necessary. Social media space is ambiguous and can be considered from various perspectives, which makes it very interesting research material. As a result of the analysis, it can be noted that Instagram, Facebook and blog or vlog have different functions and tools through which content can be presented. While the genre of the blog has been largely clarified by scholars, the genre of other social media channels raises more doubts. They have evolved from classic literary genres such as the diary, essay, newspaper column, reportage, photography or song, but they also draw on later hybrid forms such as film, podcast or broadcast.

What is the future of the blogosphere and social media genology? This depends on whether blogs adapt to the new online phenomena that are currently gaining popularity. Bloggers and vloggers quickly pick up on novelties and are flexible, thanks to which the blogosphere can continue to develop. In the future, the formula of the blogosphere may change completely: bloggers may increasingly allow ordinary users to collaborate or cre-

ate new sites. They might also change the themes of their blogs as their interests change. The blogosphere and social media are very adaptable environments, not only because they benefit from the latest technological advances, but also because they themselves create them.

Artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things and the ability to perceive content with all the senses will certainly play an increasing role. However, what is important is how the audience of blogs and vlogs will react to these changes. Their creators need to follow these reactions and... also respond to them. This inevitable feedback loop is the basis of communication in the blogosphere and social media.

Translated by Rob Pagett