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How Are Ordinary Consumers Transforming the Fashion Business?

One of the most important shifts of the 21st century is the ability of consumers to participate in markets they love such as music and fashion. A new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#) reveals how ordinary consumers have changed the inner workings of the fashion business by sharing their passion for fashion on a wide variety of websites.



“The accumulation of rather small, individually incremental, innovations in existing practices by consumers can cumulatively help to usher in important market-level changes in the institutional work that supports a market, the categories of actors within it, and the underlying logics that inform it,” write authors Pierre-Yann Dolbec and Eileen Fischer (both York University).

By studying highly engaged fashion consumers such as bloggers and members of web forums and outfit sharing websites, the authors identified three important changes resulting from the participation of ordinary consumers in the fashion market.

Consumers have taken on some of the work that was previously done exclusively by professionals such as stylists and photographers by curating looks and creating images on outfit sharing websites. The online activities and interactions of consumers have also fueled the emergence of popular fashion bloggers who now attend fashion shows alongside industry insiders, collaborate with designers, and write for magazines. Lastly, highly engaged consumers have helped cement a new logic of accessibility whereby fashion should be accessible both in terms of relative affordability and wearability.

Websites such as YouTube, Tumblr, Twitter, Vine, Lookbook, and Vimeo are offering increasing opportunities for consumer participation. As a result, ordinary consumers ranging from Ikea hackers and food bloggers to Instagram photographers and amateur movie and music critics are increasingly participating in a wide range of markets.

“Across a range of markets, consumers with a deep-seated interest in the products, producers, and trends in those markets are eagerly interacting. Our investigation has helped to push the boundaries of our understanding of market dynamics in fields where engaged consumers were afforded easy opportunities to interact,” the authors conclude.

Pierre-Yann Dolbec and Eileen Fischer. “Refashioning a Field? Connected Consumers and Institutional Dynamics in Markets.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2015. For more information, contact Pierre-Yann Dolbec (pydolbec@yorku.ca) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.

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