

# Fashion blogs: How do ordinary consumers harness social media to become style leaders?

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The Internet has given consumers the unprecedented opportunity to reach a mass audience and thereby advance their social position through displays of good taste, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Ordinary consumers were previously limited to sharing their views and tastes within their circle of friends and acquaintances, and only media professionals and others in powerful positions could reach a mass audience. But the Internet has made it possible for ordinary consumers to reach a mass audience or 'grab hold of the megaphone' through blogs, online review sites like [Yelp](#), and user-generated content on sites like [YouTube](#) and Pinterest," write authors Edward F. McQuarrie (Santa Clara University), Jessica Miller (Southern Methodist University), and Barbara J. Phillips (University of Saskatchewan).

The authors studied fashion bloggers who have succeeded in gaining a [mass audience](#) and found that the Internet has made it possible to accumulate cultural capital through public displays of taste. Once a blogger has established a large audience through repeated displays of good taste, this audience begins to attract the attention of the fashion system, and this then provides social and [economic resources](#) to the blogger, further augmenting her audience.

This marks a departure in how we think about what consumers do online. Earlier studies focused on the development of [virtual communities](#) and highlighted consumer efforts to find like-minded

others. The emphasis was on peer-to-peer communities, and what might be called the horizontal operation of taste, where taste displays serve to attract those who share one's cultural preferences.

"There are ordinary consumers who seek to gain a large audience rather than join a community of their peers, and they can do so by making venturesome displays of taste. Likewise, there are many consumers who are happy to provide that audience. Successful fashion bloggers have succeeded because they provided taste leadership. This serves as a reminder that hierarchy, and the elevation of a few above the many, remains a fact of life in contemporary society, at least within spheres such as fashion," the authors conclude.

**More information:** Edward F. McQuarrie, Jessica Miller, and Barbara J. Phillips. "The Megaphone Effect: Taste and Audience in Fashion Blogging." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2013.

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