

The Shift from Traditional Blogging Platforms to Micro-Blogging
Platforms in Lifestyle & Fashion Blogs

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INTRODUCTION:

The advancement of the digital age has paved the way for many new technological advances that have been made to improve the life quality and add convenience to a person's life. Generally, the trend for technology involves creating smaller, but more powerful tools for the sake of portability and mobility. A smartphone for example, is now more powerful than computers were only a few years ago, all while being a much smaller size and designed to be greatly portable. This trend has spread into many fields of technology, including the world of digital communication. One of the many amazing creations that have developed with the development of the internet, is the platform from which blogs were created. Andrew Sullivan defined a blog as being "...the first journalistic model that actually harnesses rather than merely exploits the true democratic nature of the web. It's a new medium finally finding a unique voice." A blog is a form of journaling that gives its writers absolute freedom over the content that they wanted to release and produce. A blogger is someone who engages in blogging, and participate in these actions by their own deliberate desire. A blogger can write on any topic they want to, and can choose the kind of audience they want to have access to their writing. Similarly, they can choose to cater their writing to the audience that follow them.

Blogging has been a growing form of digital communication, and for thirty years, have only become more integral in people's lives. With the sheer size of the internet, anyone is able to find a blog that pertains to their interests, which makes the internet and blogging a platform that can be enjoyed by any demographic. As with any technological instrument, there will be periods of change that occur in an attempt to revolutionize the technology. In the world of blogging, the introduction of micro-blogs became this revolution. A micro-blog is essentially blogging on a

smaller scale. While a normal blog can be virtually limitless in content and word count, popular micro-blogging platforms such as Twitter and Instagram set a limit on the amount of content their users can share. On Twitter, this is a limit of 140 characters, and on Instagram, a single photo uploaded is viewed as a single micro-blog post. These platforms are also commonly referred to as social media platforms, but they also share the characteristics of a classic blog. Similar to the idea of taking a large memory storage system and reducing to a small but equally spacious chip, the micro-blog is the smaller, condensed version of a blog. The impact of the micro-blog, while different, can also hold the same volume of a traditional blog post. What I aim to understand with my research, is the reason why the micro-blogging platforms have been able to grow so rapidly, to the point that traditional bloggers feel threatened that they are losing the influence they originally had. Many traditional bloggers have learned to adapt to the new trends, and have moved their content onto these micro-blogging platforms as well. There are both negative and positive outcomes from this shift, and I will be covering both sides in my research.

RESEARCH SUBJECTS:

One of the categories of blogging that has experienced the biggest change since the micro-blogging boom, is the Lifestyle and Fashion category. This category is typically written by females, for females, and covers topics that range from beauty, fashion, home decor, cooking, and general lifestyle experiences. The content on these blogs tend to be largely photographs, with a focus on pleasant aesthetics to appeal to visual desires of people. Chiara Ferragni, Italian owner and founder of the TheBlondeSalad blog and merchandising, has been a top influencer in this category since the opening of her blog *theblondesalad.com* in 2009. Drawing in hundreds of thousands of readers from Europe and America monthly, Ferragni, 28 has been creating visually

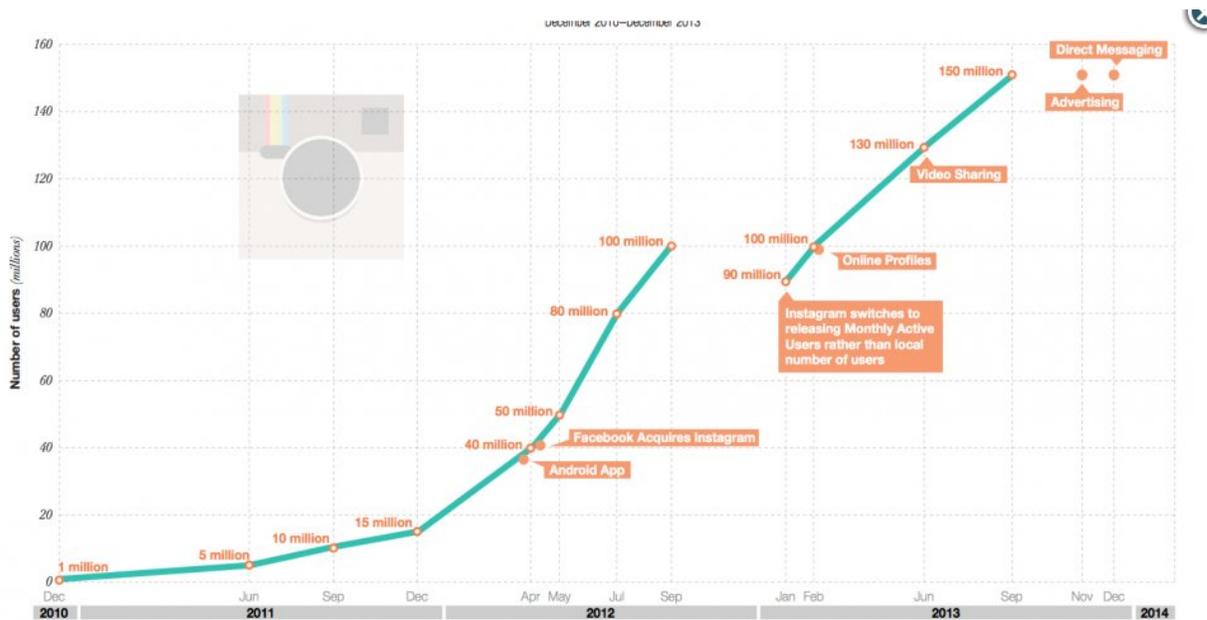
stunning blog posts, where she displays her classic yet bold and original fashion style, along with her lavish life in fashion (Alexa.com). Readers who follow her blog have described it as being able to live vicariously in a life that they believed to be more exciting than theirs (Kanaki 2013). Along with being a place for ideas and conversations, blogs can also be used as a platform for escape. Through strong visuals and intimate descriptions, a reader can be whisked up into the life of anyone, and be part of a world they might not typically be able to join. By 2011, Ferragni's blog had received over one million unique views, and over 12 million total views a month, but it wasn't until she made the switch to the micro-blogging platform Instagram that she became a globally known influencer. At 3.6 million followers as of March 2015, with a follower base that spans the entirety of the globe, Ferragni is a prime example of a blogger who transitioned from a traditional platform into a micro-blogging one with great success.

Another well-known blogger in the Lifestyle & Fashion category is Wendy Cheng, commonly known by her pseudonym Xixue, of *xixue.blogspot.sg*. Winner of the several prestigious blogging awards such as the Most Influential Blog in the Asia-Pacific Blog Awards, since she began blogging in 2003, Xixue has been on the forefront of blogging and exploring the potential of the written word in a free-for-all platform. Known for her provocative and often controversial writing style, Xixue has taken to using her blog as both a place to vent her relatable frustrations in a comical manner, or to share fashion and lifestyle ideas that appeal to a wide range of female readers. As a person who made a living solely off of her blog, Xixue played a primary example of a blogger who was swept away by the incoming trend of a new blogging platform. Xixue was another blogger that managed to make a transition that gave her

even more success on the new platform, however her transition resulted in a significant change of content in the new platform.

THE TRANSITION FROM TRADITIONAL BLOGGING TO MICRO-BLOGGING

Instagram came into fruition in October of 2010 as a hybrid mobile-photo-sharing and social media platform through the creativity of Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. The application was made to be only used through a mobile device, and was not originally designed to be used on a computer. The exclusivity of this social media platform during a time when smartphones were less accessible and affordable with data plans; the iPhone had just gained 4G capabilities and the first Samsung Galaxy was released in 2010, gained it a steady following of curious users.



L2 Intelligence Report

Source: Business Insider

Smartphones were being built with greater camera capabilities than ever before, and many users had switched out from carrying a separate camera, to using the convenient feature right from their phone. Instagram became the platform that users could use to easily share the photos that they take, without having to go through the traditionally long and tedious work of moving the files from a camera's memory card onto a computer and then manipulating it from there. Instagram afforded these users an easy and light-weight way to share moments of their lives within their social network.

For the users who had not originally been involved in blogging or sharing moments of their lives in a journal form, Instagram eased them into the process in an unthreatening manner. Bloggers typically rely heavily on their ability to clearly convey their ideas to keep a captive audience, a skill that not all people have. Having the option to share a single photo with a short caption was easy enough for anyone to do, and exciting enough to allow anyone to share their lives. For seasoned bloggers like Xiaxue who would consistently put out posts topping 900 or 1000 words, this new platform allowed her to put out shorter posts, without the concern or feeling that she was not taking her blog seriously. The simplicity of a single photo took out the pressure of a full-blown blog post. The quickness of a single photo also allowed for real-time and more consistent updates into a person's life. An event that would not be significant for a blog post could be submitted to Instagram as a simple share. These are all the appeals that Instagram brought into revolutionize the world of blogging.

Blogging has over time developed into a viable form of generating an income. The income that the blogger would make is tied to the number and the kind of audience that their blog attracts. A part-time blogger with a small following of 500 readers can be earning \$300 for

a product review post, while a more reputable blogger with a following of 20,000 viewers could be earning free vacations in exchange for a review on their blog (Faw 2012). The main form of income for bloggers is through advertisements and sponsorships. The transaction would normally involve the companies to send out their products with or without extra monetary compensation, so that the blogger would put the product in a post that would reach out to the advertisers' desired audience. This is an especially lucrative business for Lifestyle & Fashion bloggers, because they create content for others to find inspiration in or to emulate. This creates the mindset in the readers that if they were to use the same products, or dress in the same style as the blogger, that this would bring them closer to the often picturesque lifestyles of these influencers.

Blog posts require time and effort, and readers deliberately seek out the blogs for content. When a blogger makes a post, solely raving or showing off a single product, the fact that the blogger is making the advertisements is often transparent. Through Instagram, where the content is constant and the users are more passive in their retrieval of material, the opportunities for advertisers to share their product through popular influencers are greater and less transparent. With the effort of taking and posting a single photo with a caption, a micro-blogger is able to create an advertisement for their sponsor and sell a product with minimal effort. Popular Instagram photographer @alinatsvor explained the simple process.

“ If the company treated her to a night above the town, she would snap photographs on her iPhone and share at least one (with a caption including the helicopter company's name) with her 55,000 Instagram followers.” (Rosman 2014) Minimal effort required on both ends, with powerful effects. This new business plan that many modern companies have been adopting for their marketing has helped to increase the popularity and success of Instagram as a blogging

platform. Bloggers and advertisers benefit greatly from the relationship that Instagram forms between them, another factor that has been drawing traditional bloggers to make the transition into micro-blogging platforms.

In the case of Lifestyle & Fashion blogs, where the content lies in visual appeal, the language barrier is broken on a platform like Instagram. A caption is not always necessary to express the contents of a photo, making the content easily digestible by people of from all different countries. A blog typically involves more text than a micro-blog post, which would limit the reach of the blog to only the people who are able to read and speak the language. When photos are used as the main piece of content, the reach that this post has stretches beyond country borders. Chiara Ferragni had only been known by English and Italian readers, but now her fame has stretched to followers from Asia and Africa. Even if the readers are not able to understand her written word, they are able to appreciate her style and photos regardless. Instagram brings a global connection to the art of blogging.

THE POSITIVE RESULTS OF THE SWITCH TO MICRO-BLOGGING

Micro-blogging platforms share both the characteristics of a blog, and a social media platform. Users are able to broadcast their lives, while being in a space where open communication and conversations are encouraged. In the Instagram platform where popular influencers are sharing more and more details of their lives, the readers are able to feel a greater sense of closeness to them as a person. Not only are the readers able to see more of the influencer's lives and be part of their lives more, but the blogger is able to feel the same intimacy with their followers. A person is able to comment on a blog despite not having a blog, but comments can only be left on Instagram by other Instagram users. Rather than having a

conversation with an anonymous figure, the blogger is able to put a face on their readers, and if curious, can even explore the micro-blog of their reader.

While Taylor Swift is classified more as a celebrity than an online influencer, she is known for seeking out her fan's Instagrams and leaving comments on their posts, just as they would for her. In terms of digital communication, having such an open space for conversation has allowed readers to have a more active interaction with online content. Rather than passively consuming media, people are given the opportunity to talk back to it on these platforms. Younger generations are able to be in a setting where their words have an impact, and they can receive positive feedback on the words that they say. In order to be able to confidently express ideas on platforms such as Twitter, micro-bloggers have been continuously honing their ability to clearly and concisely express their ideas. The increase in engaging conversations has been shown to make this generation's youths more articulate than previous. A comparison between papers written by freshmen in 1917, 1986, and 2012 has shown a significant increase in writing quality and quantity. The average paper written by a freshman in 1917 had 162 words, and were described as being simple "personal narratives". In comparison, a paper written by a freshman in 2012 averages around 1,038 words, with complex argumentative statements being utilized (Thompson 2013). This data can not solely be attributed to the usage of micro-blogging platforms, they do have a large presence in the lives of this generation's youths, so their influence should not be overlooked.

Because Instagram and Twitter displays content through a feed, users are able to view photos and posts as soon as they are posted. This immediacy has been a great resource in spreading news and information to the world. With their growing number of users, Twitter has

often been hailed as the news outlet for the 21st Century (Coyle 2015). When an influencer posts breaking or important news, this news can be spread from influencer to reader, and then from reader to more readers in a matter of minutes, creating an extremely effective method of news alerting. A traditional blogging platform would not have the same capabilities to spread information so quickly.

THE NEGATIVE RESULTS FROM THE SWITCH TO MICRO-BLOGGING

Using the two bloggers that I had researched in depth, I have drawn several comparisons between their blog posts from when they were solely traditional bloggers, to the content of their blog posts after they became more involved with micro-blogging. From the results, the transition between the two platforms can be seen as a trade-off between quality and quantity.

From a statistical standpoint, the number of posts being made to the traditional blogging platform have decreased significantly. Xixue had been consistently posting between the range of 80-100 posts a year from 2006-2010, and as the Instagram began growing in popularity, the amount of content that she would post to Instagram increased post count wise, while the content she posted on her blog decreased post count wise. From the beginning of 2013 to now, she has posted a total of 32 blog posts (statistics all taken off of xixue.blogspot.sg). The quality of content of her blog has stayed consistent, but she has been putting out less posts in favor of posting more pictures on Instagram. On average, Xixue posts 90 Instagram posts a month. Of the 90 posts made for the month of March, 54 of them were photos of her child, 30 were selfies, and the other 6 were of food and animals. Xixue is known for her controversial posts and her candid attitude on heavy matters, and for an influencer who's words are her greatest weapon, the readers are losing the blogger they had originally become a fan of (Bianca 2012). While it is a

positive thing that now readers are able to see a more human and typical side of Xiaxue besides her blogger image, the content that had originally gained her followers is now being changed out into content that is more suited to new followers who are more used to Instagram's style of micro-blogging.

The posts that are being put out by both Xiaxue and Chiara Ferragni on the micro-blogging platforms are often repetitive and shallow. No longer are these bloggers sharing long editorials or tutorials, but rather they are sharing several selfies a day, or posting about mundane moments in their lives, such as a photo of the cappuccino drink that they were consuming. The amount of posts that a reader consumes from them is much greater than before, and being involved in the mundane aspects of their lives show a more normal view into their typical picturesque lifestyles.

In Chiara Ferragni's case, her switch from her traditional blog to Instagram has reflected more negatively for her traditional blog. Her most popular series of blog posts revolve around the various Fashion Weeks that happen yearly all over the world. In order to better understand the changes in her blogging style from her traditional blogging days to her micro-blogging days (she is also currently one of the top fashion Instagrams, with over 3.6 million followers), I will be drawing a direct comparison of her blog coverage of the first day of Milan Fashion week from 2010, to her coverage of Milan Fashion week in 2015.

Her coverage of Milan Fashion Week on February 26, 2010 (<http://www.theblondesalad.com/2010/02/my-start-of-fashionweek-in-milan.html>) included a 306 word blog post, that came with an Italian translation of her English entry, and 25 various photos of her time during the event. Her photos ranged from shots of her outfit, to photos of her

with her friends at various restaurants and stores. This post received 155 comments from her readers, a few of which are from her responses to her reader's comments. In terms of the content of the blog post, it was a simple summary written by Chiara on the events she took part in that day, along with details of the people she had met and were inspired by during the events.

Fast forward 5 years, and we have her coverage of Milan Fashion Week on February 25, 2015 (<http://www.theblondesalad.com/2015/02/chiara-all-over-1st-look-of-mfw.html>). The blog post contained 38 words, which simply listed the details of the clothing/designer that she wore, and included a 9 photo slideshow of the single outfit she wore on that day. This post gained 61 comments, none of which were responses from Chiara herself. On top of this, the post itself was written by 'The Blonde Salad Crew', a group of ten writers who run her publishing company, meaning Chiara had nothing to do with the creation of the content in the post herself. On her Instagram (@chiaraFerragni), Chiara had posted a total of 10 photos on February 25, 2015, with the photos chronicling her first day at Milan Fashion Week. The photos ranged from her outfit shot to the fashion shows she attended, to a final photo of her resting in bed with her dog. These photos amassed a total of more than 1,067,800 "likes" on Instagram, and over 3.5k comments.

From a statistical standpoint, in terms of her original blogging platform, Chiara has shown a great drop in the quantity as well as quality of her posts. From posting bilingual descriptive entries on her experiences at the event, to having a team of writers put together a short slideshow for her latest experience with the event, her involvement with the creation of the creative content on her blog is now very minimal. However, we can see that she has shifted from

sharing her experiences through complete paragraphs on her original entries, to posting several images throughout the day for us to follow her time at the event as it happens.

With the number of followers that both Xixue and Chiara Ferragni reach on a daily basis, they are able to create a lot of positive influence and inspire a large group to partake in more interactivity and communication. Their traditional blogs reflected a lot of their values and their work ethic, but this had reached significantly less people. Now, people are exposed to the more shallow aspect of Lifestyle & Fashion blogging, and because of their popularity, view this behavior as the ideal for success.

CONCLUSION

The growth of technology in today's society is great reflection of humankind's innovative spirit and ambition for success. Anything digital can and will be improved upon to best suit people's needs and wants, and this applies to any and all fields within technology. In the world of blogging, the creation of micro-blogs revolutionized the way people communicate and share content. For influencers such as bloggers, their power and influence is dependent on the strength of their readership, and it is required of them to be able to adapt to the wants and needs of their readers as well. In the case of blogging, this meant that they had to switch platforms to put themselves in a position where they are better able to connect with their readers.

Instagram provided many new features that increased its appeal tremendously in the face of traditional blogging, and has changed the way that users share their lives online. There are both positive and negative results that come from this, with the ultimate trade-off between the two being the decision between quantity over quality. With an increase in quantity of content, the

quality of the individual content drops. The trade-off is very apparent in the category of Lifestyle & Fashion blogging, but for the needs of the current generation of media consumers, the idea of quick and easy entertainment is more appealing in their fast-paced environment.

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