

## The Influence of Fashion Bloggers on the Pre-Purchase Decision for Online Fashion Products among Generation Y Female Malaysian Consumers

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**Abstract :** This study explores how fashion consumers are influenced by fashion bloggers towards pre-purchase decision for online fashion products in a non-Western context. Malaysians rank among the world's most avid online shoppers, with apparel the third most popular purchase category. However, extant research on fashion blogging focuses on the developed Western market context. Numerous international fashion retailers have entered the Malaysian market from luxury to fast fashion segments of the market; however Malaysian fashion consumers must balance religious and social norms for modesty with their dress style and adoption of fashion trends. Consumers increasingly mix and match Islamic and Western elements of dress to create new styles enabling them to follow Western fashion trends whilst paying respect to social and religious norms. Social media have revolutionised the way that consumers can search for and find information about fashion products. For online fashion brands with no physical presence, social media provide a means of discovery for consumers. By allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content (UGC) online, they provide a public forum that gives individual consumers their own voices, as well as access to product information that facilitates their purchase decisions. Social media empower consumers and brands have important roles in facilitating conversations among consumers and themselves, to help consumers connect with them and one another. Fashion blogs have become an important fashion information sources. By sharing their personal style and inspiring their followers with what they wear on popular social media platforms such as Instagram, fashion bloggers have become fashion opinion leaders. By creating UGC to spread useful information to their followers, they influence the pre-purchase decision. Hence, successful Western fashion bloggers such as Chiara Ferragni may earn millions of US dollars every year, and some have created their own fashion ranges and beauty products, become judges in fashion reality shows, won awards, and collaborated with high street and luxury brands. As fashion blogging has become more established worldwide, increasing numbers of fashion bloggers have emerged from non-Western backgrounds to promote Islamic fashion styles, such as Hassanah El-Yacoubi and Dian Pelangi. This study adopts a qualitative approach using netnographic content analysis of consumer comments on two famous Malaysian fashion bloggers' Instagram accounts during January-March 2016 and qualitative interviews with 16 Malaysian Generation Y fashion consumers during September-October 2016. Netnography adapts ethnographic techniques to the study of online communities or computer-mediated communications. Template analysis of the data involved coding comments according to the theoretical framework, which was developed from the literature review. Initial data analysis shows the strong influence of Malaysian fashion bloggers on their followers in terms of lifestyle and morals as well as fashion style. Followers were guided towards the mix and match trend of dress with Western and Islamic elements, for example, showing how vivid colours or accessories could be worked into an outfit whilst still respecting social and religious norms. The blogger's Instagram account is a form of online community where followers can communicate and gain guidance and support from other followers, as well as from the blogger.

**Keywords :** fashion bloggers, Malaysia, qualitative, social media

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