

STYLE

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Fashion bloggers horn in 'Elle' and 'Vogue'

At a time when fashion magazines have pared staffs and undergone deep cutbacks, blogs have made remarkable strides in gaining both readership and higher profiles

BY ERIC WILSON
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Not everyone thought it was adorable in September when a 13-year-old wunderkind blogger named Tavi Gevinson was given a front-row seat at the fashion shows of Marc Jacobs, Rodarte and others.

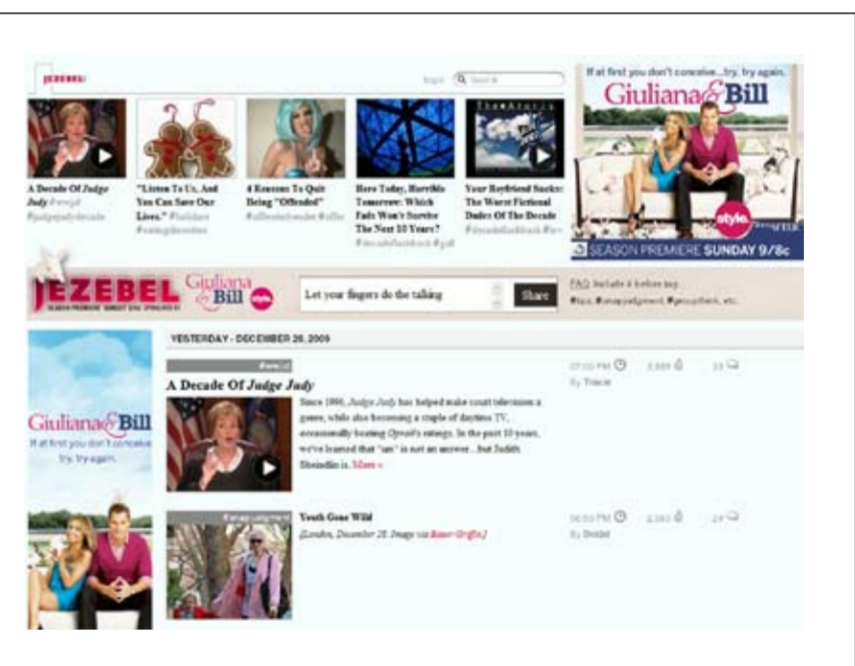
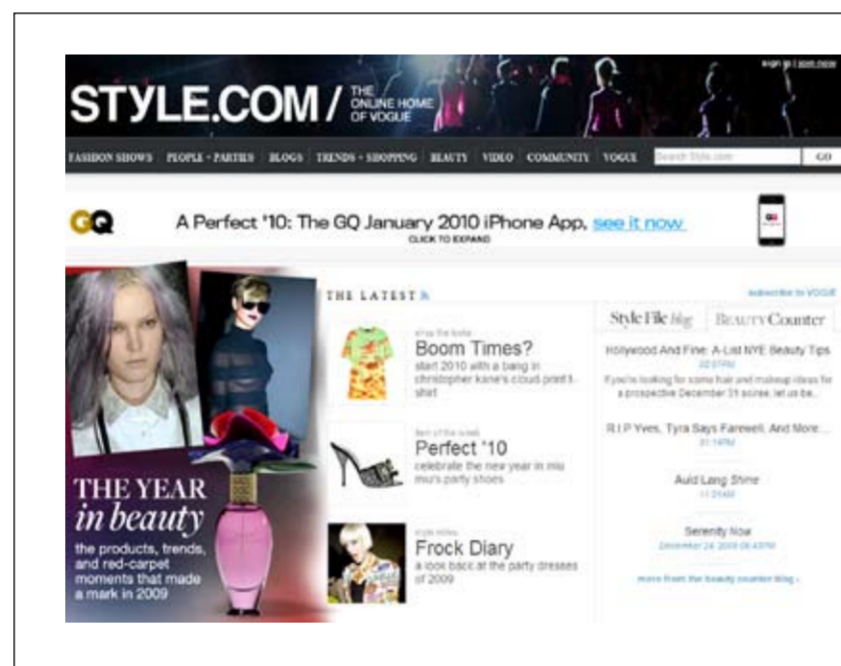
Oh now, don't misunderstand. She was totally adorable. You could have gobbled her up, with her goofy spark plug style — a Peggy Guggenheim for the Tweeting tween set. Her feet, in designer stockings, did not quite touch the ground. Within a matter of months, Tavi Gevinson, the author of a blog called Style Rookie, was feted by designers, filming promotions for Target, flown to Tokyo for a party with the label Comme des Garçons and writing a review of the collections for no less than *Harper's Bazaar*. Kate and Laura Mulleavy, the designers of Rodarte, described her in the pages of *Teen Vogue* as "curious and discerning."

Rather, it was what the arrival of Tavi, as a blogger, represented that ruffled feathers among the fashion elite. Anne Slowey, who has spent decades climbing the editorial ladder to a senior position at *Elle*, dismissed the teenager's column as "a bit gimmicky" in an interview with *New York* magazine. And in an instant, the subtext in her complaint was read by dozens of Tavi's fans as an example of the tension between old media and new, when one leapfrogs ahead of the other.

As a relatively new phenomenon in the crowded arena of journalists whose specialty it is to report the news of the catwalks, fashion bloggers have ascended from the nosebleed seats to the front row with such alacrity that a long-held social code among editors, one that prizes position and experience above outward displays of ambition or enjoyment, has practically been obliterated. After all, what is one to think — besides publicity stunt — when Bryan Boy, a pseudonymous, style-obsessed blogger from the Philippines, is seated at the D&G show in Milan between the august front-row fixtures of *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*, a mere two positions to the right of Anna Wintour?

"There has been a complete change this year," said Kelly Cutrone, who has been organizing fashion shows since 1987. "Do I think, as a publicist, that I now have to have my eye on some kid who's writing a blog in Oklahoma as much as I do on an editor from *Vogue*? Absolutely. Because once they write something on the Internet, it's never coming down. And it's the first thing a designer is going to see."

Perhaps it was to be expected that the communications revolution would affect the makeup of the fashion



▲ Jezebel.com, right, a blog that includes coverage of fashion, surpassed venerable publishing house Conde Nast's fashion site Style.com, left, for the first time this fall with more than a half-million visitors. ◀ *Vogue* celebrated its 90th anniversary this October with an exhibition of giant magazine covers on the Champs-Élysées in Paris.

PHOTOS: TAIPEI TIMES AND REUTERS

news media in much the same way it has changed the broader news media landscape. At a time when magazines like *Vogue*, *W*, *Glamour* and *Bazaar* have pared their staffs and undergone deep cutbacks because of the impact of the recession on their advertising sales, blogs have made remarkable strides in gaining both readership and higher profiles. At the shows this year, there were more seats reserved for editors from Fashionista, Fashionologie, Fashiontoast, Fashionair and others, and fewer for reporters from regional newspapers that can no longer afford the expense of covering the runways independently.

But it is somewhat surprising that designers are adjusting to the new breed of online reporter more readily than magazines, which have been slow to adapt to the demand for instant content about all things fashion. Blogs are posting images and reviews of

collections before the last model exits the runway, while magazine editors are still jockeying to feature those clothes in issues that will be published months later.

So it is not without reason that some editors feel threatened, or that seasoned critics worry that they could be replaced by a teenager. The designers and publicists who once quivered before the mighty pens are now courting writers from Web sites that offer a direct pipeline to potential customers. Sure, magazines and newspapers have started their own blogs and tweets, but reading them, you often sense a generational disconnect, something like the queasy feeling of getting a "friend" request from your mother on Facebook. (From *Glamour.com*: *Dating Tips: Why It's Important to Get That Number.*)

Sites that include readers in the conversation are thriving, in a sense

democratizing the coverage of style, much as designers and retailers — with lower priced fast-fashion collections — have democratized fashion itself. Garance Dore and Scott Schuman, two photographers who have become stars online (and who are a couple off-line), have created popular blogs with the simple idea of posting images of stylish people and opening them to public comment. Now designers are seeking their advice on communications strategies and even design — Dore and Schuman have worked on projects with Gap.

Other sites have gained credibility along with traffic. Fashionista.com had 103,512 unique visitors in November, and Fashionologie.com had 27,125, according to the online tracking agency Compete. Jezebel.com (a saucy blog that includes coverage of fashion) shot ahead of Style.com (the Conde Nast fashion site) for the first time this fall with more than a half-million visitors. These are considered large audiences for dispatches on such trivial developments as models refusing to wear Alexander McQueen's crazy shoes or that such-and-such designer is looking for an intern.

The personalities behind those sites, in turn, are becoming as famous as some magazine editors. Marc Jacobs named one of his bag designs after Bryan Boy, while Sephora asked Lauren Luke, whose makeup videos are an Internet sensation, to preside over beauty contests in its stores.

Designers are thinking differently in response to consumers who want instant gratification. Doo-Ri Chung, for example, describing her new basics collection in *The Financial Times* this fall, said her customer has a "blog mentality, not a magazine mentality."

"The old idea of reading a magazine and planning ahead, that's not something that younger customers do," she said. "It's a different world, and designers have to adapt."

Still, the popularity and novelty of such sites have raised concerns that their writers might be unduly influenced by designers or beauty companies. New guidelines from the US Federal Trade Commission, announced in October, require blogs to disclose in their online product reviews if they receive free merchandise or payment for the items they write about. This bothered some bloggers, and reasonably so, since magazine editors commonly receive stockpiles of the same expensive goodies to review in their pages, and that practice is rarely disclosed even though magazines are beholden to advertisers for their livelihood.

Those guidelines also seem excessive at a time when magazines and newspapers are changing their tone to embrace the online culture. On several fashion sites last week, it was reported that *Vogue* is planning to feature a group of bloggers in its March issue, including Tommy Ton of *Jak & Jil*, Dore and, yes, even Bryan Boy.