Refashioning a Field? Connected Consumers and Institutional Dynamics in Markets

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We investigate the participation of engaged consumers in the fashion market through the lens of institutional theory. We develop theoretical insights on the unintended market-level changes that ensue when consumers who are avidly interested in a field connect to share ideas with one another. We find that consumers take on some of the institutional work previously done primarily by paid actors and introduce new forms of institutional work supportive of the field. We show that engaged consumers can precipitate the formation of new categories of actors in the field and the contestation of boundaries between established and emergent actor categories. Further, we propose that new consumer-focused institutional logics gain momentum, even while consumers support and promote preexisting logics through their practices. We compare cases where discontented market actors have brought about market changes with our investigation of one where contented consumers unintentionally precipitated market-level dynamics, and we show that the accumulation of consumers' micro-level practices can have pervasive and profound impacts.

[Tweeting, blogging, and social media usage by consumers] has affected different aspects of fashion tremendously. From commentary to fashion design, communication, and distribution. The fashion Internet community is like a global digital agora tweeting passions and opinions . . . each one is a self-made critic. . . . It obliges anyone in the industry to think in a fresher way. (Hedi Slimane, now creative director for Saint-Laurent Paris [Standen 2010])

In the view of Hedi Slimane, at least, the fashion industry is being profoundly affected by enthusiasts who, in increasing numbers and with an ever-expanding range of platforms for participation, have taken to sharing their passion for fashion with one another. And the field of fashion is not unique. Indeed the phenomenon of engaged consumers sharing their tastes and opinions, and in some way affecting the markets they are part of in the process, can be detected in industries ranging from travel (Scott and Orlikowski 2012) to food (Ashman, Kozinets, and Patterson 2013) to music (Giesler 2008) to movies (Chintagunta, Gopinath, and Venkataraman 2010).

Consumer researchers are increasingly interested in marketplace dynamics—understanding what leads to the creation of new markets (Humphreys 2010a, 2010b; Giesler 2012; Martin and Schouten 2014) or to significant changes in existing markets (Giesler 2008; Sandıkcı and Ger 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). Prior market-level research has examined the role of consumers in market change to a limited extent, often emphasizing marketers as the main agents of marketplace dynamics (e.g., Giesler 2012; Humphreys 2010a). Research that has looked at consumers' roles in these dynamics has largely focused on those who want to challenge the market, either based on ideology (e.g., Giesler 2008; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) or on unmet needs (e.g., Martin and Schouten 2014; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). But to date little attention has been paid to the consequences for markets that may ensue when largely "contented" consumers in an established market interact with one another because of their shared interests about and enthusiasm for a product category.

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Interconnected consumers who are brand enthusiasts have been presented as value creators for particular brands (Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould 2009) and as brand coproducers (Füller, Matzler, and Hoppe 2008), but no prior research has examined the market-level (vs. brand-level) implications of interactions by avid, interconnected consumers. We aim to fill this gap, inquiring about the processes by which the actions and interactions of interconnected consumers lead to institutional level changes in the market. Specifically, we address three broad research questions aimed at illuminating the dynamics in a marketplace where interconnected consumers avidly share their interests and opinions with one another. The first concerns how work that maintains and sustains the market —a type of "institutional work" (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006)—may be affected by the actions of interconnected consumers. The second question asks how boundaries between categories of actors in the marketplace may be impacted by these same actions. And the third explores whether there are implications for institutional logics when consumers become deeply engaged in sharing their tastes and opinions with one another.

It is important to address these research questions because doing so will help to shed light on the unintended consequences for markets of the largely uncoordinated actions of individual consumers. While we know a considerable amount about changes to markets that arise owing to efforts on the part of motivated agents (Giesler 2008, 2012; Humphreys 2010a, 2010b; Martin and Schouten 2014; Sandıkcı and Ger 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), our understanding of marketplace evolution in the face of widely distributed interactions among consumers who have no shared desire for market-level changes is limited. Since there are many fields where passionate consumers interact with one another to share information and opinions without any particular change agenda for the markets they are part of, and since our theoretical understanding of dynamics in such markets is limited, this omission is important to address. A second reason our research is important is that it expands the scope of market-level dynamics to which attention is typically paid. In prior research, the focus has largely been on product types (e.g., casino gambling [Humphreys 2010a], mini-moto bikes [Martin and Schouten 2014]), producers (e.g., community-supported agriculture entrepreneurs [Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007], or brands (e.g., Botox [Giesler 2012]) being introduced or legitimated in a marketplace. While product, producer, and brand dynamics are, of course, important, there are other dynamic facets of markets, such as institutional work, categories of actors, and institutional logics that are also worthy of attention. Our work highlights these.

In answering our questions, we theorize that, in markets like the ones we study, the engagement of consumers can lead to changes, including the augmentation and redistribution of institution-maintaining work, such that new routines and activities supportive of the industry become widely adopted and the work once done by select categories of actors in the industry becomes shared across a wider array of actors. We also posit that consumer engagement can precipitate the formation of new categories of actors in the field and the contestation of boundaries between established and emergent actor categories. Further, our analysis reveals that while consumer engagement can help to reinforce existing logics, it can also help to facilitate the establishment of new logics reflective of perspectives important to consumers.

The context of this study is the fashion industry. We collected multiple types of qualitative data, including field notes from a netnography of an outfit sharing website and fashion web forums, interviews with consumers engaging in various forms of fashion market participation, articles from major fashion magazines and websites, published interviews with industry actors, and consumers' posts from leading online fashion forums and fashion bloggers. To make sense of our context, we draw on neoinstitutional theory (Greenwood et al. 2008) and on elements of theory developed by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984a, 1984b; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) as lenses through which to view the dynamics within the market.

In the sections that follow, we first review relevant prior literature on marketplace dynamics in general and on facets of fashion markets in particular. We next highlight selected concepts from our theoretical toolkits that are particularly relevant to our purposes. We then describe our methodology, discuss our findings, and elaborate on their implications.

MARKET DYNAMICS: THE STORY THUS FAR

Consumer and market researchers have recently demonstrated an increasing interest in understanding how markets change as a result of actions on the part of discontented marketers, consumers, or both (Giesler 2008, 2012; Humphreys 2010a, 2010b; Martin and Schouten 2014; Sandıkcı and Ger 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). Several insights about market dynamics can be distilled from this set of studies.

Research devoted to studying the emergence of new markets has highlighted that, whether the effort is initiated by marketers (Giesler 2012; Humphreys 2010a, 2010b) or consumers (Ansari and Phillips 2011; Franke and Shah 2003; Martin and Schouten 2014), those who are seeking to bring into existence a new product market must engage in iterative processes that enroll other actors in their market creation project if they are ultimately to establish the legitimacy of new offerings. Research focused on efforts to change existing markets has highlighted that consumers may successfully collaborate with entrepreneurial actors in a field to countervail the co-optation of countercultural meanings by mainstream marketers (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) or to support a parallel taste structure within a market (Sandıkcı and Ger 2010). It has also shown, however, that consumers with agendas to change the practices or products on offer within a market may struggle with limited success, particularly if they are marginalized within the larger society

(Scaraboto and Fischer 2013) or if their change efforts provoke powerful marketers to attempt to delegitimate their actions (Giesler 2008).

While these studies have expanded our knowledge immeasurably, they stop short of shedding light on our focal phenomenon: the dynamics that may unfold in markets as a consequence of the interactions between connected consumers who seek neither to establish a new market nor to wreak systemic changes to an existing one. Nor does research on consumption collectives or brand communities fill this gap, which is not surprising given that the goal of such research is generally to provide insight into processes and patterns within aggregations of consumers rather than within markets per se. For example, while Thomas, Price, and Schau (2013) studied consumers who are highly engaged with a consumption activity and who interact with one another frequently, the focus of their analysis was not on market dynamics but rather on those within the collective of consumers. Likewise, while Schau et al. (2009) studied a wide array of brand communities, their focus was on how interactions between consumers increased the value they derived from the brand, not on how their interactions might have affected the broader product market in which the brand was embedded.

In an effort to glean insights relevant to our focal research question, we also examined consumer research that drew on aesthetic products such as art, clothing, or home furnishings as a context. Much previous consumer research that looked at the consumption of such products was concerned with individual-level phenomena, such as identity or embodied experience (Joy and Sherry 2003; Murray 2002; Thompson and Haytko 1997). One recent paper that departs from this trend is of greater relevance to our market level of analysis.

Specifically, McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips (2013) examine the phenomenon of consumer fashion bloggers who have acquired mass audiences by displays of aesthetic discrimination applied to the selection and combination of clothing and who in the process accumulate cultural, and ultimately social and economic, capital. Their paper does not aim to map the market-level effects of the phenomenon of fashion bloggers with wide audiences. It is useful, however, in that it highlights the motivations of at least some of the interconnected consumers who share their opinions with one another: far from trying to change the market they are opining about, these individual consumers rarely have a set goal in mind when beginning their online activities, although they may along the way decide to try to establish themselves as players within the market. Their efforts to accumulate cultural, social, or economic capital are not intended to make market changes; nonetheless, as we will argue in our analysis below, market-level changes may indeed unfold in the face of active engagement by consumers who communicate with one another and share their tastes and interests. Armed with insights from this and other studies, we now outline key elements of institutional theory on which we draw.

OVERVIEW OF KEY THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

Market-level studies in consumer and market research journals have used an array of theoretical lenses. Two that have been used recently, institutional theory and Bourdieu's field theory (Humphreys 2010a, 2010b; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), are particularly well suited to our purposes in this article. Seen through these lenses, a market may be defined as an organizational field encompassing a set of institutions and actors, governed by institutional logics, supported by institutional work, and characterized by institutional boundaries (see Humphreys 2010a, 2010b; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). Many of the major concepts of institutional theory relevant to market-level analysis have been outlined in earlier papers. We review briefly those introduced in prior analyses (legitimacy; see, in particular, Humphreys 2010a, 2010b; Humphreys and LaTour 2013) and institutional logics (see Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), and we elaborate in slightly greater detail concepts not used previously in the marketing or consumer research literature (institutional work and institutional boundaries). As we review institutional theory concepts, we draw parallels and linkages to theorization offered by Bourdieu that also informs our work.

Legitimacy refers to the extent to which an action or entity is characterized by "cultural alignment, normative support, or consonance with relevant rules or laws" (Scott 1995, 45). The conceptualization of legitimacy in neoinstitutional theory is not dissimilar to its use in Bourdieu's field theory. Bourdieu (1984b) conceptualized entities or actions as being legitimate when they are dominant but are not recognized as such. Prior work in our field has sensitized us to the varying legitimacy of actors in the field of fashion, with, for example, the plus-sized consumer having less legitimacy than other categories of consumers and than many categories of actors who are producers (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013).

Institutional logics define the content and meaning of institutions. They are socially constructed and historically patterned assumptions, values, and beliefs by which people in particular contexts provide meaning both to daily activities and to their life projects and experiences (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012). Bourdieu was keenly attuned to logics within fields, and as has been noted previously (Entwistle and Rocamora 2006; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), in his own analysis of the field of fashion, he identified two dominant logics: *the logic of art* and the *logic of fashion* (Bourdieu and Delsaut 1975).

Logics in fields are important because they shape what actors pay attention to when operating within a field. However, actors are typically embedded in varying fields to varying extents, and this can lead to sense-making and to behaviors that do not conform only to the dominant logics within a given field (Thornton et al. 2012, 85–102). In such cases, logics may be imperfectly reproduced. In our consideration of consumers interacting with one another in the

field of fashion, we explore the extent to which they reproduce the dominant logics of the field.

Institutional work has been defined as actions aimed at creating, maintaining, or disrupting practices, understandings, and rules shared by actors in an organization field; Bourdieu's (1990) notions of practice were instrumental in the development of this understanding of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006, 215). Institutional work is informed by institutional logics though not completely determined by them: actors, though embedded within the many taken-for-granted aspects of institutional fields and imbued with understandings informed by institutional logics, still have agency (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006). Their institutional work can help to perpetuate aspects of an established organizational field or it can contribute to establishing new fields or undermining existing ones. As our interest here is in market contexts where the actors of interest (consumers) are not attempting to reshape the field or to establish a new one but rather to participate in a market they find fascinating, we focus in particular on understanding institutional work that typically maintains fields. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) identify several types of institutional work with the potential to maintain institutions. Of particular relevance in the case of consumers (who lack the resources to perform some types of maintenance work, such as creating regulations) is work referred to as "embedding and routinizing," which refers to "infusing the normative foundations of an institution" into the daily routines of actors in the field (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006, 43).

Arguably, the normative foundations of the field of fashion rest on the ongoing and iterative work of designing, manufacturing, publicizing, and selling fashion products and of educating members of the field to perform these tasks (see Entwistle 2002; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). In our analysis, we examine where the work that supports the normative foundations of institutions within the field of fashion has become embedded and routinized.

Institutional boundaries comprise the final theoretical concept we wish to highlight; these boundaries are the distinctions that are recognized by actors in a field between categories of actors, as well as between, for example, categories of objects, practices, and spaces (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Zietsma and Lawrence 2010). Typically, boundaries do not merely demarcate different identities of actors in a field; status hierarchies are constituted and reflected in boundaries between categories of actors (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006). And, as both Bourdieu and neoinstitutional theorists have argued, boundaries may be negotiated and renegotiated over time as, for example, different categories of actors struggle to gain institutional power (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Wacquant 2013) or work toward the legitimization of practices facilitating their cause (Zietsma and Lawrence 2010).

Analyses of the field of fashion (Bourdieu 1993; Entwistle 2002; Entwistle and Rocamora 2006; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013) have identified a number of traditional categories of actors within it. These include clothing fashion designers, stylists, models, manufacturers, and retailers, fashion associations, design and fashion schools, fashion media (including mainstream media that reports on fashion), celebrities, and consumers. More recent work has added to the list of actors fashion bloggers (McQuarrie et al. 2013; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), which signals that dynamics related to new categories of actors must be attended to.

This review of the key concepts to be used in our study helps us to frame the research questions we address, which ask about the dynamics related to institutional work, institutional boundaries, and institutional logics when avid consumers regularly and readily interconnect with one another. This phenomenon of consumers connecting regularly with one another is perhaps the most prominent in the field of fashion, where the interactions between hundreds of thousands of consumers have led to the rise of an online sphere of action for the fashion industry. This made fashion an ideal site to tease out theoretical insights. We now situate the online fashion arena within the encompassing field of fashion and trace key developments of this sphere of action, which constitutes the context for our study.

ONLINE FASHION: AN EVOLVING ARENA IN THE MASS FASHION SUBFIELD

Scholars who have studied the field of fashion as a whole have noted that it has conventionally been characterized by interrelated subfields, notably haute couture and mass fashion (Bourdieu 1993; Entwistle and Rocamora 2006; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). These subfields are distinguished in part by their relative degree of adherence to the two traditional underlying logics of the field: the logic of art and the logic of commerce. The logic of art is characterized by "artistic pressures for distinctiveness," and the logic of commerce is characterized by "business pressures for profits" (Alvarez et al. 2005, 863). These two logics are usually conceptualized as being in tension, and it is understood that cultural producers may need to rein in their artistic expressiveness to cater to a greater audience.

The subfield of haute couture identifies most closely with the logic of art. Within this subfield, clothes are produced in small batches using labor-intensive means of production (e.g., hand weaving, hand sewing, hand dying). Fewer than 2,000 customers per annum purchase haute couture clothing, and the clothes themselves serve as a loss leader for fashion companies, who rely on sales of products such as perfume and accessories to make their profits (*Economist* 2004). The subfield of mass fashion is more deeply entrenched in the logic of commerce. It is today typified by fast fashion brands, such as Zara, where clothes are rapidly mass-produced and distributed in order to generate a profit. Worth noting is that these traditional subfields influence one another directly and indirectly and operate symbiotically (Rocamora 2002). For example, streetwear trends exhibited by consumers of mass fashion are emulated by designers of haute couture, and fast fashion marketers draw on haute

couture and designers' ready-to-wear and diffusion lines as inspiration for their designs (Hemphill and Suk 2009; Polhemus 1994). Moreover, individual companies can be involved in both subfields: Versace, for example, is a foreign member of la Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture and sells its signature line dresses at prices upwards of $100,000; at the same time, it markets a diffusion line, Versus, with dresses starting at $265. Thus, the margins between the subfields are far from fixed, and developments that originate within one often precipitate developments in the other.

We argue that the online fashion arena can be conceptualized as a relatively recently formed "arena of action" within the mass fashion subfield. Within institutional theory, action arenas are defined as spaces within a field where actors interact (Ostrom, Gardner, and Walker 1994). Figure 1 traces the emergence of the online arena of action. As it illustrates, traditional fashion media companies were the earliest actors in the field to move online, with *Vogue.com* and *Esquire.com* leading the way in 1994. It took a few years for *InStyle* and *Nylon* to follow them in 1999. Thereafter, many media outlets followed the lead of these industry pioneers.

The early 2000s saw the emergence of social media fashion websites, often referred to as fashion forums. Many of today's most popular fashion forums started between 2002 and 2004, with *The Fashion Spot* and *StyleForum* as the pioneers of the phenomenon in 2002. Today *The Fashion Spot* gets a million unique visitors a month and *StyleForum* gets 500,000 (in comparison, *Vogue.com* receives about 1.2 million). Some forums have gone beyond collating news and views about fashion to collaborate with brands and create community-related products. For example, Rebecca Minkoff created a handbag in collaboration with members of *The Purse Forum*.

Consumers' personal style blogs, such as those studied by McQuarrie et al. (2013), began to appear at about the same time as fashion forums. Avid fashion consumers adapted the personal weblog to talk about their opinions of the fashion world, share their recent purchases as well as current deals, and connect with other consumers. The growth of fashion blogs mirrored the exponential growth of blogs of all kinds, from a few fashion blogs in 2002 to thousands by 2006 (see Corcoran 2006). By 2010, *Blogger.com* estimated the number of bloggers with a focus on the fashion industry to be more than 2 million (cited in Rocamora [2012]).

In 2005, a related but distinct initiative appeared in the online arena: street fashion photography websites. The street photography phenomenon is perhaps best exemplified by Scott Schuman of *The Sartorialist* fame, whose website as of now rivals *Vogue.com* in terms of web traffic. There are numerous other well-known street photographers, such as Adam Katz Sinding of *Le 21e* and Tommy Ton of *Jak and Jil*, who have both covered fashion events for established companies like *Style.com* and *GQ Magazine*. However, as is the case with fashion bloggers, the majority of street photographers are unpaid consumers who have limited renown.

Outfit sharing websites, another distinct form of participation platform in the online fashion arena, emerged around 2005. On these websites, consumers post pictures of themselves highlighting a piece of clothing or an entire ensemble. Outfit sharing began with dedicated "What Are You Wearing Today" (WAYWT) threads on sites such as *StyleForum* and *The Purse Forum*. Outfit sharing also cropped up within groups created on social media websites such as *FlickR*. By 2008, websites such as *lookbook.nu* and *chictopia.com* were created by consumers especially to share outfits online. Such websites have become immensely popular; *lookbook.nu*, for example, had 1.2 million active members and over 75 million page views a month as of 2013.

The online fashion arena is today situated on most of the popular social sharing platforms, such as Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Pinterest, and Vine. Practices such as outfit sharing have been facilitated by functionalities embedded in these new platforms; for example, hashtags such as #waywt allow consumers to search those social sharing platforms

FIGURE 1

A TIMELINE OF THE ONLINE FASHION WORLD
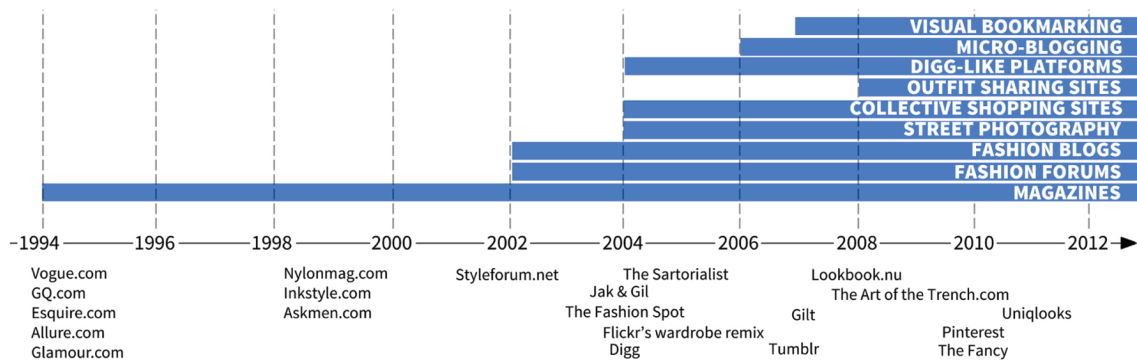
for outfit posts. Hashtags associated with brands, aesthetic styles, or fashion practices, such as #jcrew, #grunge, or #streetstyle, also facilitate the search for consumers with similar tastes as sources of inspiration. These practices are widely diffused; Strugatz (2013) notes that more than 2 million fashion-related "pins" are posted every day on Pinterest. The spread of online fashion across these platforms allows consumers who once interacted primarily around specific websites to access and interact with an even broader array of fellow fashion enthusiasts. It is in this dynamic online arena that our study is situated. We now describe the methods used to investigate it.

METHOD

Data

We collected a combination of archival, netnographic, and interview data to understand dynamics in the online fashion arena and the field of fashion as a whole. Table 1 provides an overview of our data sources and their usage.

To better understand the greater context of fashion and the evolution of the industry, we reviewed books published about the fashion industry, such as Agins's (2000) *The End of Fashion*, Angeletti and Oliva's (2006) *In* Vogue, Phaidon's (2001) *The Fashion Book*, and Thomas's (2007) *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster.*

The archival data we collected also included articles drawn from the fashion coverage in highly regarded mainstream media (the *Wall Street Journal* [*WSJ*] and the *New York Times* [*NYT*]) and from key industry-insider magazines *Women's Wear Daily* (*WWD*) and the *Business of Fashion* (*BOF*). Using Lexis-Nexis and Factiva and deploying search terms such as "fashion forum," "blog," "blogger," "street photographer," "street photography," "outfit sharing," "lookbook.nu," and "online fashion," we identified hundreds of potentially useful articles. After scanning them, we retained the most relevant, which included 18 from *WSJ*, 56 from *NYT*, 26 from *WWD*, and 58 from *BOF*.

Further archival material was amassed by searching online for articles written by three winners of the Eugenia Sheppard Media Award from the Council of Fashion Designers of America: Robin Givhan, Cathy Horyn, and Hilary Alexander. We reasoned that these highly regarded industry insiders would comment on developments worthy of note in the fashion field as a whole. This search yielded 19 articles.

We also searched online for published interviews with market actors in other categories in the field, including less highly celebrated designers, buyers, editors, creative directors, bloggers, and outfit sharing website participants. We reasoned that the perspectives of actors in lower-status categories in the fashion field could provide insights that might differ from those offered by actors in higher-status categories. In total, 66 relevant interviews with industry actors were identified. Those 66 interviews are composed of 51 interviews with less well-known market actors and 15 interviews with well-known ones (e.g., celebrated designers, fashion editors, store owners).

For further archival data relevant specifically to the online fashion arena, we also reviewed the press coverage of the two most prominent outfit sharing websites (*lookbook.nu* and *chictopia.com*); 23 articles were identified as relevant given our research focus. We supplemented this, with the help of a research assistant, by collecting 3 months' worth of posts from 10 well-established fashion blogs. These blogs were identified by comparing several lists of "top" fashion blogs and selecting those that were named in most of the lists. They included *fashiontoast.com*, *garancedore.com*, *cupcakesandcashmere.com*, *theblondsalad.com*, *manrepeller.com*, *fashionsquad.com*, *seaofshoes.typepad.com*, *karlascloset.com*, *iamgalla.com*, and *bryanboy.com*. The time span for data collection from these blogs was December 17, 2012, to April 14, 2013. Including the comments from the blogs' readers, this resulted in some 4,690 single-spaced pages (during analysis, our main focus was on posts, which comprise approximately 30% of these pages, rather than on comments, which make up the remainder).

Our archival data were complemented by netnographic data collected over the course of 3 years of immersion by the lead author in an outfit sharing website (*lookbook.nu*) and five well-established web forums (*styleforum.net*, *superfuture.net*, *stylezeitgeist.com*, *thefashionspot.com*, and *thepurseforum.com*). The lead author not only observed consumers' participation, following Kozinets's (2010) guidelines, but he also participated by posting outfits and forum messages and commenting on outfits and messages. On one website, a community of 307 fans formed around the author, yielding additional insights into the ways that consumers interconnect with one another. On the outfit sharing website and on all forums messages related to fashion and the online world, general comments, and forum-related notices, as well as threads central to the communities, were identified, read, selected, and archived. Searches around central keywords ("blog," "street style," "street photography," "online," "retail," "outfit sharing," "future," "editors," "editorial," "magazine") were also conducted to capture threads and posts that might have been overlooked. Combined, this amounted to some 135 threads, ranging from 24 to 71,968 replies. The selected threads and field notes totaled 390 pages when the pictures were excluded.

To supplement the archival and netnographic data, 19 interviews were conducted (via Skype [2], telephone [2], or in person [15]) with established and emerging industry actors: bloggers, forum participants, outfit sharing website participants, street photographers, fashion buyers, and designers. We first recruited outfit sharing websites participants through our netnography. As our findings developed, we purposefully sampled well-established street photographers and bloggers, as well as local designers and buyers, to gather their perspectives on the phenomenon. We contacted these interviewees directly. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 3 hours, were audio-recorded, and then were transcribed in their entirety. Interviewees were aged between 18 and 38 years old and were either students or held a position related to the fashion industry (e.g., designer, street photographer). Students interviewed were outfit sharing website partici-

TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF DATA SOURCES

Name	Sources	Data set	Purpose of usage
Books on the fashion industry	Examples: *The End of Fashion*; *In Vogue: The Fashion Book*; *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster*	12 books	• Historical understanding of the field of fashion and the workings of the industry
Newspaper articles	*Wall Street Journal* *New York Times* *Women's Wear Daily* *The Business of Fashion*	18 articles 56 articles 26 articles 58 articles	• The fashion context • Media discourse surrounding the phenomenon
Winners of the CFDA Media Eugenia Sheppard Award	Robin Givhan, Cathy Horyn, and Hilary Alexander	19 articles	• Perspective of established market actors
Published interviews with market actors	Designers, buyers, editors, creative directors, bloggers, and outfit sharing website participants	66 interviews	• Perspective of actors from different status categories and professional roles • Perspective of world-renowned and difficult-to-access designers.
Press coverage of outfit sharing websites	*Chictopia* and *Lookbook*	23 articles	• Media discourse surrounding the emergence of outfit sharing websites
Top fashion blogs	Examples: *fashiontoast.com*; *garancedore.com*; *cupcakesandcashmere.com*	10 blogs (posts from December 17, 2012 to April 14, 2013; 4,690 single-spaced pages)	• Review of the practices of bloggers
Netnography	*lookbook.nu*, *styleforum.net*, *superfuture.net*, *stylezeitgeist.com*, *thefashionspot.com*, *thepurseforum.com*	5 forums (58 pages of field notes)	• First-hand experience of consumers' practices and understanding of the online culture surrounding fashion
Archival data from netnographic sites	*lookbook.nu*, *styleforum.net*, *superfuture.net*, *stylezeitgeist.com*, *thefashionspot.com*, *thepurseforum.com*	135 threads (390 single-spaced pages)	• Understanding of forum participants of the changing nature of fashion • Consumer discourse on the phenomenon
Interviews	Fashion bloggers and outfit-sharing website participants Street photographers Designers Buyers	12 interviews 2 interviews 3 interviews 2 interviews	• Phenomenological understanding of phenomenon from the perspective of different market actors

pants and bloggers; they studied business, communications, or some creative domain (e.g., film, photography). The topics covered in these interviews included a biographical narrative of how the person's interest in fashion had developed, what activities in the field they had engaged in, who were their favorite traditional and online field actors, how they used traditional and online media, and how they participated to fashion-related communities. Interviews ended with a reflection on what the interviewee believed was changing in the fashion field.

Analysis

As is customary in qualitative research (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets 2013), our analysis iterated with our data collection. Early in our data collection process, we began to create the historical time line that was discussed in our introduction to the online fashion arena, drawing primarily on the archival data that we were collecting. This allowed us to develop an appreciation not only for the ways in which consumers could and did interconnect with one another but also for the ways that other categories of actors in the field joined in or reacted to the various conversations occurring among consumers as the online fashion arena developed.

Given the theoretical lenses we adopted as our work progressed, our attention focused in particular on institutional work, institutional boundaries, and institutional logics. Each author coded the data sets (archival, netnographic, and interview) aiming at understanding how each was evolving. Our analytic approach is consistent with methodological guidance offered by Belk et al. (2013

INSTITUTIONAL WORK: WHO DOES WHAT, HOW, NOW?

Our analysis suggests that institutional work has been subtly affected in two distinct but related ways as fashion consumers have increasingly connected with one another online. The first is that consumers are increasingly performing many types of work that maintain the fashion market; in effect they are "sharing" institutional work with categories of actors who have typically been paid to perform it. The second effect we have identified is an augmentation in the types of institution-maintaining work that is performed. We discuss each effect in turn.

As mentioned above, there are several types of institution-maintaining work that serve to support the field of fashion. Our analysis suggests that as consumers have moved online, a significant range of such work has come increasingly to be performed by some of those consumers. Of course, paid actors in the field who in the past primarily executed such work continue to do so; now, however, consumers mimicking professionals effectively share in the work. In particular, online consumers are participating in the work done by fashion stylists, fashion photographers, and fashion editors.

Fashion stylists traditionally "curated" looks that would be disseminated within the fashion field by selecting cloth-

ing and accessories worn in fashion shoots. Fashion photographers created the images that were disseminated, for example, through the labor involved in creating or selecting the sets where shoots occurred, arranging lighting, choosing lens, selecting images, and photoshopping selected images to create the final product. And fashion editors have supervised the process of creating, developing, and presenting content for traditional or online media (Granger 2007).

We support the claim that consumers are now sharing such institutional work first with a visual image that illustrates a consumer who has engaged in both curating a look and creating an image in a manner directly comparable to that typically done by stylists and photographers. Figure 2 represents one image posted by user Anouska Proetta Brandon on *lookbook.nu* in September 2012, paired with an image drawn from *iD Magazine* in the same year. We juxtapose these two images in particular to illustrate the similarity of the image created and posted by this outfit sharing consumer with images created and posted by professional fashion stylists and photographers. While space permits us to embed only a limited number of images, we include others in an online appendix.

Were consumers only posting such images without having any audience or influence, we might characterize performances such as these as mere mimicry, as indeed there can be little doubt that mimicry of work done by professionals is involved. However, there is ample evidence that many of the images created and posted by consumers are being "read" by others in the field in much the same way as are the images created by paid professionals. For example, when asked where he gets inspiration for the clothes he wears and the looks he shares with other consumers, interviewee Dustin, a *lookbook.nu* user, replies: "Through blogs a lot, I see certain things so much and I'll be inspired to try it myself. And also, I'm inspired by other users [of *lookbook.nu*] a little if I like that person." Interviewee Lyanna, also a *lookbook.nu* user, likewise reports that she is both inspired and educated by looks she seeks on the site, saying that she goes to the site because "I get inspiration when I see other people's clothes, sometimes I discover new brands through others' people clothes, and I might say 'Oh, I like that dress!' and you know I find a new brand that I can get and shop for it." User Patrick, who regularly posts to *lookbook.nu*, recounts an anecdote that suggests he himself has been influential to others:

> This one time I was working at McDonald's and I was just out of my shift. I was wearing this ridiculous outfit and someone actually recognized me and asked me, "Do you have a *lookbook* account?" And he was like, yeah I saw you, you look really cool!

Elsewhere in the same interview, Patrick elaborates on the two-way flow of influence that *lookbook.nu* users may have on one another.

> People that give me "hypes" [the *lookbook* equivalent of *Facebook* "likes"], I ask them which part of my look did you like, or did you like the entire look? When they comment

FIGURE 2

A LOOK CURATED BY A CONSUMER ON *LOOKBOOK.NU* VERSUS A LOOK CURATED BY A PROFESSIONAL

Note.—*Left*, a look curated by a consumer, *lookbook.nu*, September 2012. *Right*, a look curated by a professional fashion editor, *iD Magazine*, Fall 2012.

on your page, it's communication. . . . I have two friends from *lookbook* and I haven't even met but I'm like friends with them on *lookbook* and on *Facebook* and we talk about fashion, making clothes, designers, shows, and stuff.

The impact of active online consumers on one another has also been remarked upon by those who cover the industry. For example, one journalist wrote:

Whereas a decade ago, suburban girls with a craving for fashion daydreamed via the pages of *Vogue*, today's budding fashionista has access to a world of sick looks on her laptop. Many get inspiration from street style sites like *Face Hunter* and *Flickr*'s wardrobe remix, not to mention all the other tweens in the blogosphere. (Spiridakis 2008)

Another notes:

The viral capability of *Lookbook.nu* (and other outfit sharing networks like *Chictopia* and *Weardrobe*) removes the middle man, offering something print fashion magazines still find challenging: bringing fashion from the runway to the real-world. (McNamara 2009)

While journalists may seem to imply that consumers in

the online arena are more influential than traditional actors who collaborate in work that maintains the field of fashion, our analysis suggests that the institutional work consumers do is continually shaped by, and reliant upon, the institutional work done by professionals. Consumers who are posting looks or opinions to share with fellow consumers have ready access to a vast array of material prepared and disseminated primarily by paid professionals, and these materials influence both what and how consumers share online. However, consumers are not constrained by what they observe, and in participating in the online fashion arena, they may engage in activities that are supportive of the fashion field but that differ in notable ways from work that has traditionally been performed within the field. This observation gives rise to our second theoretical insight regarding institutional work, on which we now elaborate.

In the process of engaging with one another in the online arena, consumers appear to have broadened the category of practices that comprise institutional work supportive of the fashion field performed by bloggers and professionals alike. For example, when professionals were primarily responsible for covering the field of fashion, they rarely wrote about

themselves or the editors for whom they worked. As consumers have engaged in the online fashion arena, however, they have increasingly drawn attention to editors. Tommy Ton, a well-known street photographer, has observed: "Whereas in the past, the icons of the industry were models and designers, today editors are the new fashion icons" (De Rosee 2011). Informant Aron, a street photographer, elaborates on the role consumers have played in drawing attention to this category of actors:

> How fashion editors are viewed now is much different than how fashion editors were viewed 10 years ago. Now fashion editors are in and of themselves their own brand. You have people like Anna Dello Russo and Carine Roitfled and Anna Wintour, although they were known before, they weren't known as these fashion icons, just by their names printed on a page. . . . Now what are they wearing, looking at them smoking a cigarette, talking on their cellphones, their faces are ingrained in everyone's mind. Everyone knows what Anna Wintour looks like now, where they might not have known what she looked like before. . . . I'm behind the camera, very much behind the scene, but they have become much more on the forefront, just with us [street photographers] taking photos of them. . . . They have become very important due to the fact that their photos are being taken by us. It's very ironic: their role has changed due to the invention of our role.

Aron's comments reinforce that, as consumers like him began to take and post pictures of the people that fascinated them, they increased the public profile of fashion editors. In the process, they legitimated such coverage as a form of institutional work. Indeed, consumers seeking images to post on their blogs and other platforms have broadened institutional work even further to include coverage of attendees at premiere fashion events such as Fashion Week. The following article in the online fashion journal *Fashionista* discusses such changes in the field:

> There's no doubt about it: With the advent of street style blogs like *The Sartorialist*, Tommy Ton for *Style.com*, the *Street Peeper*, and *Altamira NYC*, the landscape of Fashion Week has changed. . . . Anyone who's recently attended fashion week—or hell, anyone who's been on the Internet in the past year—will notice that the frenzy surrounding street style during fashion week has reached a fever pitch. Swarms of photographers crowd around the latest street style It-girl, angling (and sometimes shoving each other) to get the best picture. Unknowing tourists stop in their tracks, staring agape at the spectacle—some even start taking their own photos, thinking it must be a celebrity. Industry wannabes, dressed in over-the-top fashions, walk by "casually," desperately hoping to catch the eye of a photographer. (Phelan 2011)

Our observation that consumers may reconfigure institutional work in the process of performing it resonates with observations by Ansari, Fiss, and Zajac (2010). They noted that within institutional fields, even when actors in one category are actively attempting to reproduce existing insti-

tutional work practices of those in another, they may do so imperfectly because of differences between cultural, technical, or normative aspects of the actors' environments. In the case of consumers emulating industry professionals, they may lack access to venues and events that have traditionally been open primarily to professionals, and thus they may turn their attention to documenting those actors and events to which they can gain access. And in the process their practices may come to be regarded as acceptable and even important forms of institutional work, embraced by professionals and consumers alike.

Our findings regarding the distribution and augmentation of institutional work can be compared and contrasted with those of other consumer researchers who have studied aspects of the fashion field. In particular, McQuarrie et al.'s (2013) analysis of popular consumers fashion bloggers emphasized that they demonstrated "connoisseurship" (144) in that they talked about fashion with detailed nuance and asserted a point of view regarding what is and is not fashionable; though their purpose in observing this behavior differs, McQuarrie et al.'s observations converge with ours in that they are emphasizing how (successful) bloggers' performances mirror those of the "traditional, professional sources that govern the determination of what is fashionable" (142). Our analysis goes beyond prior work, however, in that it draws attention to the fact that even relatively low-profile consumers (those with small followings) across diverse online platforms can and do emulate and reinforce the work performed by those who McQuarrie et al., following McCracken (1986), refer to as "insiders" in the fashion industry. Indeed, our analysis challenges the value of considering "ordinary" consumers (as defined by McQuarrie et al. [2013], 142) as outsiders to the fashion industry, given that the cumulative effect of their online activities appears not only to help support the field but also to affect the kinds of work done within it.

EMERGENT AND CONTESTED INSTITUTIONAL BOUNDARIES

Based on our analysis, we identified two dynamics regarding institutional boundaries that unfold as engaged consumers interact online. The first is the emergence of new categories of actors. The second is contestation between traditional and emergent categories of actors. We discuss each point in turn.

The emergence of a category of actors in an institutional field occurs when a distinctive set of behavioral practices comes to be defined as common to members of that group (see Zietsma and Lawrence 2010). Once a bounded category of actors emerges, status differentiation among members of that category typically occurs (Lamont and Molnár 2002). At least two new categories of actors emerged in the field of fashion owing to the conditions under consideration: street photographers and fashion bloggers. As our purpose is to illustrate the theoretical point regarding emergent categories of actors and space is limited, we discuss only the latter.

Prior consumer research has positioned fashion blogging as a "new kind of consumer behavior" (McQuarrie et al. 2013, 136). Building on this observation and looking at fashion bloggers relative to other actors in the fashion field, we can see the actor category of fashion blogger as being composed of a set of micro-level behaviors that have emerged over time as consumers began using the technologies available to them to post words and images online as they engaged with one another. In the section above, we emphasized that some of the practices exhibited by bloggers overlap with those practiced by established categories of actors such as fashion photographers, stylists, and editors: consumers have mimicked professionals using the tools available to them. Those deeply involved in fashion blogging have also, however, developed distinctive practices that set them apart from the established categories of actors they have mimicked. Consumers, who are neither enabled nor constrained by the same commercial imperatives as professionals who must place their primary emphasis on making their living by publicizing and promoting fashion products, have exhibited a variety of playful practices as they have pursued their passion for fashion. Here we highlight some of the behaviors more specific to the new category of actors that helped to define the fashion blogger category.

Some of the most distinctive micro-level behaviors associated with fashion blogging can be traced to early bloggers who have since become prominent, as the following quotation about one of first fashion bloggers reveals:

> Bryan Grey-Yambao . . . who is much better known as BryanBoy, has been blogging about fashion since 2004. . . . He helped establish—or at least propelled into the mainstream—many of the tropes of the fashion-blogging genre, like the blogger's gushy après-shopping post ("I fell in love with this Alexander Wang leather and canvas backpack the first time I saw it when Rumi and I went to the Opening Ceremony store in LA"), the endless starring-in-the-editorial-of-my-own-life photographs of the blogger wearing designer outfits, and the blogger's mainstream media crossover. (Sauers 2012)

As this passage indicates, two of the "tropes" or behaviors that have come to distinguish fashion bloggers are writing posts related to particular shopping trips and revealing personal details of one's life in the course of posting images or text about a fashion item. Other behavioral practices are more purely visual: fashion bloggers routinely post pictures of themselves in what have come to be referred to as the "fashion blogger pose":

> While there is no *single* definitive fashion blogger pose, there is a loosely bound set of gestures and postures idiosyncratic to fashion bloggers and their subjects. Some of the most recognizable body stylings include vulnerable-looking stances, oblique glances, and a single hand on the hip (the teapot), or both hands on hips (the sugar bowl). . . . We can thank British Chinese blogger Susanna Lau (aka Susie Bubble) for first striking the pose. She's not the first ever personal style blogger . . . but traces of Lau's signature pose are everywhere. "The Susie Bubble" is characterized by a cross-legged or pigeon-toed (feet turned inward) stance, one or both hands placed on

the front of the hips, and eyes directed anywhere but at the camera. . . . While some bloggers openly attribute their kinesthetic style to Lau, many others quote all or part of her pose without acknowledging (and perhaps without knowing) their aesthetic referent. (Pham 2013)

Figure 3 illustrates the "The Susie Bubble."

Though not exhaustive, this discussion of the types of behaviors that have come to define the category of fashion blogger helps to illustrate that the group, while situated in the field of fashion, is distinct from other categories of actors within the field in terms of the practices that are coming to characterize it. And while emergence is a process, and the emergence of the fashion blogger category is doubtless still unfolding, there is evidence of its increasing entrenchment. For example, fashion bloggers associations have been established (e.g., Independent Fashion Bloggers), and numerous conferences for fashion bloggers are organized each year. Moreover, as is typical within an established category of actors (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006), status hierarchies have formed. Among fashion bloggers, that status is marked by those who have the largest followings: those with the biggest "megaphones" sit atop the hierarchy (McQuarrie et al. 2013).

Our second theoretical insight regarding boundary dynamics builds on our first and concerns contestation between established and emergent categories of actors. In prior research on institutional boundaries, it has been noted that "occupations fiercely guard their core task domains from potential incursions by competitors" (Bechky 2003, 721). We observe that, to the extent that emergent categories of actors such as fashion bloggers and street photographers have gained recognition for the institutional work they are performing while making incursions on the task domains of established categories of actors, members of those established categories engage in attempts to contest the legitimacy of emergent actor-categories.

One focal point for tension has been increasing allocation of space in the front rows of fashion shows for bloggers and street photographers, perhaps because seating arrangement is acknowledged as reflecting the existing hierarchy of the field of fashion (Dodes 2010). When bloggers (and street photographers) first gained entrée to high-profile shows, both mainstream and social media press were quick to note the fact that the space gained by members of these groups came directly at the expense of members of the mainstream media. The following quotation is typical: "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" (Wilson 2009).

Even as the new categories of actors gained some ground (literally and figuratively), however, traditional actors in the field took steps to differentiate and denigrate members of the new categories. The following quotation helps to clarify how boundary work aimed at maintaining the prestige of traditional categories of actors was enacted.

FIGURE 3

THE "SUSIE BUBBLE"

It's complicated. Dolce & Gabbana put Schuman—along with Doré, Tommy Ton, and Bryanboy—in the front row at a D&G spring/summer show in 2009, even gave them loaner laptops on little podiums, and it was the first time anybody had ever given up that kind of real estate in Anna Wintour territory to the insurgents from the Internet. . . . *Women's Wear Daily* ran a picture of it, which you can still find online. There's Bryanboy, computer-screen light reflected in his trademark Kim Jong-il glasses, which in this context look more like virtual-reality goggles from the '90s, which in turn make Bryanboy look like he's fully embracing the role of blogger sideshow. And here are Garance and Tommy, obviously enjoying the moment to no end, grinning at one of the laptops like they're watching a particularly entertaining kitten video—Tommy's wearing shorts, for God's sake. And here's Schuman on the far right, squinting hard at his iPhone

screen like he's trying to send an e-mail telekinetically. He looks pissed. Humiliated, even. Laptops. On little podiums. Like they were going to be sitting there typing fucking blog posts. Do they give Anna Wintour a mimeograph machine so she can crank out an issue of *Vogue* right there? No, they do not. And actually having a laptop on a little podium in front of him (*a*) made it harder for Schuman to do what he would normally do in that situation, which is take pictures, and—one gets the strong sense that this was the real problem—(*b*) set him apart pretty decisively from the real front-row people, who didn't need some kind of blogger affirmative-action program. I ask Schuman if he felt like he'd been seated at the kids' table, and he says he did. They got a humongous amount of press," Schuman says. "Look, we brought the bloggers in and gave them the front row. Look at the dancing-monkey bloggers! I could barely bring myself to sit down." (Pappademas 2012)

This analysis shows how organizers of elite events like a Dolce & Gabbana fashion show find ways to preserve a distinct, superior status for traditional actors. The mainstream fashion media also take advantage of their own platforms to elaborate on the ways in which the new categories of actors are inferior to traditional ones. In a forum of six *Elle* editors hosted by WFIT (the Fashion Institute of Technology's radio and television broadcasting network) in New York in 2010, *Elle's* creative director John Zee opined:

> The Internet has allowed people to be "couch critics." You could sit anywhere in the world, you could sit in Oklahoma, look at a fashion show on the Internet, you could post your thoughts . . . the Internet has made fashion a lot more democratic in this way. You know, [blogger] Tavi [Gevinson], like her or don't like her, she's 13—whether she even really writes it herself, the idea that she has gotten all this attention, it's because of the Internet, not because of anything else. [At *Elle*] we're talking about people who have really done this their entire lives, who've really covered fashion, who really understand fashion . . . understand the history of fashion, can critique it from a point of view, [can] actually relay it back to something they've experienced and understand. I don't think Tavi even knows what happened 5 years ago. She has every right to [post] on the Internet, she has every right to have the following she has . . . everybody can follow her and find her creative or funny or quirky or inspiring, but the idea is there are people here [at *Elle*] who do know the history. . . . If you don't know what you're talking about, then do you really have the credibility to talk about it? (Quoted in Odell [2010])

The remarks regarding one of the highest profile fashion bloggers, Tavi Gevinson, are clearly not intended to question her credibility alone. Rather, the entire category of actors to which she belongs is being dismissed as "couch critics" who don't really know what they're talking about.

Bloggers are well aware that members of traditional categories of actors regard them as marginal interlopers (Hogan 2014). Interestingly, even some of those with the greatest standing among their fellow bloggers express an ambiva-

lence about the legitimacy of their own actor category that speaks to the impact of the protective boundary work undertaken by the field's traditional elite. Responding to a post that expressed some negativity toward bloggers by the iconic fashion editor Suzy Menkes, Suzy Bubble (February 2, 2013) posted:

> Yes, I am a blogger. Yes, I dress in a way that can be construed as peacocking. But I have also worked at a publication. I now freelance for other publications. I've now been going to shows for a good 4 years and more. Increasingly I've felt conflicted about what it is that I do. I've cowered in embarrassment when I say I have a blog. Depending on who I'm speaking to, I've also had to add that "Oh, and I write for other publications" just to feel like that validates me as someone who isn't a complete fraud. I've also strongly defended my content at conferences. I've hopefully gained some respect from designers, editors, stylists and journalists. You might ask, why does it matter if I've not earned any respect from the industry? Aren't you an independent fashion blogger who flouts the rules? As we all know, that isn't how it works. I don't work within my own parameters, or to put a pun on it, in my own bubble. I have to work with the industry to get the content that I'm after and I'm happier for it. We can talk about the "good and pure" days of fashion blogging, but I remember it as a time when I'd e-mail PRs or designers and get ignored or when I would have to sneakily take some crappy pictures in a shop because it was forbidden to do so. . . . While blogging is supposedly a full-time legitimate profession . . . it has never felt enough to say that it's all that I do. Because the b word has been tarnished—asking us how much money do we make, suspicions that every blog post is sponsored, outfits that have been littered with gifts, accusations that we're poseurs and not fashion critics, lack of journalistic standards—things, which, I along with others have been guilty of to some degree or another. . . . That is my response from the inside, feeling as ever, like an outsider.

The sense of internalized illegitimacy conveyed in a post such as this does not, of course, mean that the boundary work executed by those in traditionally empowered actor categories can prevent bloggers and street photographers from doing the types of institutional work they are currently performing or from influencing the tastes and practices that emerge in the field. What our analysis suggests, rather, is that we can anticipate continuing efforts from actors in traditional categories to position bloggers and street photographers as "poseurs" whose semi-professional status marks them as lesser in authority and standing.

Interesting parallels and contrasts can be drawn between our findings and those of Giesler (2008), who studied the response of traditional categories of actors (mainstream music distributors) to the efforts of an upstart category of actors (music downloaders) when those upstarts began to "share" the institutional work of distributing music. One way in which our findings parallel those of Giesler is that the traditional categories of actors in his study, as in ours, engaged in boundary work that entailed denigrating those in the new

actor category. A key difference between the two studies, however, is that in the music industry, traditional actors were successful in positioning the actions of downloaders as lacking in regulative legitimacy: at various stages of the "war on downloading," the mainstream music industry was able to rely on legal action to shut down the practices of downloaders and effectively marginalize the new category of actors, since the downloaders' distribution tactics could be positioned as violating existing laws. In our context, traditional categories of actors have no grounds for portraying the work done by upstart actors as illegal. The primary recourse of the mainstream fashion press and of other traditional categories of actors has thus been to try to challenge the cognitive legitimacy of street photographers and bloggers by calling into question their knowledge and skills.

INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS OLD AND NEW

Our final research question concerned implications for institutional logics when consumers become deeply engaged in sharing their tastes and opinions with one another. Research in other kinds of contexts has shown that old logics may be threatened and new logics introduced when an event triggers change (e.g., the OPEC embargo and oil crisis precipitated changing logics in the oil industry [Sine and David 2003]) or when internal contradictions create opportunities for entrepreneurial actors to push for changes that advance their interests (as happened in the institutional field of Canadian accounting firms [Greenwood and Suddaby 2006]). Our context, however, is not dominated by either external triggers or entrepreneurial actors with a market change agenda; rather it features enthusiastic new actors who are eager to participate and interact because of their fascination with aspects of the field.

Our theoretical insight regarding the impact on institutional logics in a context such as this is as follows. While consumers who participate in a field out of passionate enthusiasm have no change agenda that opposes existing logics, they may, without any such agenda, help to highlight contradictions between old logics and usher in new logics. In the field of fashion, consumers interacting in the online arena have largely behaved in ways that are consistent with the long-prevailing, yet frequently contradictory (Bourdieu 1996), logics of commerce and of art. However, as participation by consumers in this arena has escalated, a new logic, which we label a "logic of accessibility" (which may partially contradict but also bridge the preexisting logics) has also gained increasing visibility and influence. We elaborate on and offer evidence in support of these claims in the following paragraphs.

One indication that consumers participating in the online arena accept the logic of commerce can be inferred indirectly from the fact that the commercial motives of consumer participants in the online fashion arena go largely unquestioned in online discussions. More direct evidence derives from the fact that most popular blogs and outfit sharing websites have explicit advertising yet attract large and committed followings. The Independent Fashion Bloggers Association, which represents more than 30,000 fashion bloggers, offers 2,600

articles on how to monetize a fashion blog, from advertising to affiliates. Indeed, those bloggers who receive high levels of sponsorships in exchange for promoting specific brands have the highest standing in the fashion blogosphere (see McQuarrie et al. 2013). Ironically, criticism of bloggers who accept sponsorships is more apt to arise from members of the traditional fashion press as they attempt to preserve the boundaries between themselves and newer categories of actors (as discussed above) than from other consumers. More typical of consumer reactions is that of a participant in *The Purse Forum*, user newmommy_va (September 9, 2010), who expresses this sentiment: "I don't have any illusions as to the 'independent' point of view of a fashion or style magazine, nor do I have any illusions of the 'independence' of a blogger who is receiving gifts, sponsorships, and/or advertising." This user does not expect bloggers to be any freer of influence than is the mainstream fashion media. Yet, as an active participant in *The Purse Forum*, newmommy_va exhibits an acceptance of the inevitably of a commercial logic in the field.

Our insight regarding the tacit support by consumers of a commercial logic and its influence on fellow consumers who are receiving sponsorship or gifts can be contrasted with Kozinets et al.'s (2010) findings regarding influential bloggers who participated in a seeding campaign sponsored by a technology manufacturer to promote a new mobile phone. In that study, participation by bloggers in the seeding campaign elicited criticism from fellow consumers in some cases but not others. Kozinets et al. (2010) posit that differences in "communal norms" account for variation in the extent to which consumers criticize bloggers for accepting a new phone in exchange for blogging about the new technology. Our insights would suggest that institutional logics that vary across the fields in which different bloggers are embedded may account for the differences in communal norms. In fields where a commercial logic is entrenched—as is the case in our context and as may be the case in some of those studied by Kozinets et al. (2010)—we would expect consumers to "buy into" the kinds of self-benefit-seeking behaviors that are consistent with commercial logic and thereby to support that logic.

In our context, consumers are similarly accepting of the logic of art. In conformance with it, participants in the online arena often try to create and share images that they regard as "artistic." For example, Nancy Zhang (January 8, 2009), a *lookbook.nu* "top" user with roughly 32,000 fans, states:

> My inspiration comes from movies, arts, photographs, music, and even some nature details. Sometimes I get sparks of inspiration when I'm watching movies. Afterwards I would design some impression drafts based on the movie, and try to create a similar feeling outfit with things in my closet. For example, in one of my looks, I was so inspired by the heroine in *The Lover* that I tried to find a straw hat and plaited my hair! New Wave cinema and Egon Schiele's works also inspire me a lot.

The quotation indicates that Nancy regards the artistic logic

that prevails in fields like cinema and music as also deeply imbricated with the fashion field. She further demonstrates this understanding and helps to contribute to its continuity in the field by adding a hand-drawn image to accompany each look she posts to *lookbook.nu.* See, for example, figure 4.

In contrast to many paid categories of actors in the field, however, consumers typically lack various types of resources that might enable them to express and reinforce the logic of art. For example, their bodies may not conform to the norm among editorial fashion models and their technical skills and tools may be inferior to those of paid professionals. Informant Clarisse, a blogger and *lookbook.nu* user, reports:

> Usually I choose the clothes depending on how I'm feeling at the time, but I'm always trying to pick up clothes that are out-of-the-ordinary. From there, we will take a lot of pictures in a wide diversity of poses, because I'm not the most, well I'm a bit photogenic, but I'm not a model either, I'm not Kate Moss, I don't know how to make a pose in a second. . . . So we will take many pictures . . . and then I'll photoshop them, I'll arrange them, I'll do a montage, and I'll post them online.

Because of their limited resources, the images that consumers create often lack the polish associated with the work of professionals. Even so, given their tacit understandings of the logic of art, consumers like Clarisse strive to create "out-of-the-ordinary" images that conform to the high fashion look they associate with elite models.

FIGURE 4

THE LOGIC OF ART ON *LOOKBOOK.NU*

At the same time, the looks that consumers create and share are only occasionally "avant-garde" in the style associated by Bourdieu and Delsaut (1975) with haute couture. At least as frequently, consumers interacting with one another in the online fashion arena share pleasing images that portray looks other consumers can readily emulate and that might be appropriate in an everyday setting. In doing so, we argue, they are implicitly instantiating a "logic of accessibility" that suggests that fashion should be accessible both in terms of relative affordability and in terms of wearability. For visual examples of images that materialize this logic of accessibility, see figure 5, which includes various outfits posted by popular *lookbook.nu* participants.

Further evidence that a logic of accessibility is informing the actions of online consumers can be detected in the following excerpt from an interview with Peter Sudaraso, a blogger who posts under the name Peter Adrian and who has more than 45,000 fans on *lookbook.nu.* (Gillingham 2013):

> *Interviewer:* What do you think it is about your personal style that people find so enticing?
>
> *Adrian:* It's relatable. I don't wear ultra expensive brands that people can't get their hands on. I also don't wear crazy outlandish outfits (only on Mondays) that people can't wear in public.

In an online interview with *lookbook.nu* in 2012, Adrian elaborates. He boasts of his indifference to elite designers and his affection for second-hand goods and off-brands:

> I know that I should really be into designers, being that I'm a style blogger. But . . . I'm not really good with all that stuff. I'll go into a store, see something I like, and know that I'd wear it, regardless if it's designer or not. In fact, most of my clothes are thrifted and off-brand. So favorite places to shop . . . sorry to disappoint, but I usually shop at the swap meet and thrift stores. Sometimes I'll feel fancy, and I'll shop at Walmart . . . oh the shame. Gotta admit though, I do love myself some good Old Navy/GAP clothes.

Not all consumers active in the online arena share the subtle disdain for designers and expensive brands conveyed by consumers like Adrian. Even those who express their love of expensive high fashion brands, however, frequently emphasize the virtue of less expensive brands that enable the attainment of an attractive look at a reasonable price. In a typical post, Camille Co (January 7, 2012), a *lookbook.nu* participant with over 91,000 fans, notes:

> I like mixing high low brands so the choices are endless! But if I had all the money in the world, my favorites are Alexander Mcqueen, Balenciaga, and Givenchy. For more accessible brands that won't burn holes through our wallets, they are Mango, Topshop, Zara, Miss Selfridge, and River Island. . . . Even random shops on the street are treasure havens!

Posts like these reflect an endorsement of the logic of accessibility even while they honor the "high" brands (like Alexander McQueen and Balenciaga) that are closely aligned with the logic of art.

We argue that the logic of accessibility both departs from and bridges previously established logics. It departs from the logic of art insofar as aesthetic criteria are partially subordinated to functional criteria, that is, wearability. It departs from the logic of commerce insofar as it is decouples the worth of a garment from its price and valorizes sourcing fashionable items wherever they may be acquired. Compared with both previous logics that were anchored primarily on producers' views, it is one that is more consumer focused. That said, it bridges prior logics by supporting the notion that consumers can and should strive for fashionable looks crafted from resources supplied by the market. It must also be said that when avid online consumers endorse the emerging logic of accessibility, they are not attempting to unseat the logics of art or commerce. They are simply giving voice to a logic that makes sense to them given their experiences and perspectives. In their view, whether one shops thrift or fast fashion or high fashion, one can craft fashionable looks.

Our findings with regards to institutional logics can be compared with those in Scaraboto and Fischer (2013). In their study, Scaraboto and Fischer found that plus-size fashion activists (Fatshionistas) deliberately drew on a logic from an adjacent field (the logic of human rights) in their efforts to attempt to challenge what they regarded as discriminatory practices in the plus-sized subfield. In our study, there is no apparent effort on the part of consumers to leverage a logic from outside the fashion field in order to achieve some goal. Rather we observe here a largely unreflective elaboration of a logic that appeals to consumers given their needs and desires. We posit that the origins of the logic of accessibility predate the online consumer dynamics we document. For example, fast fashion brands that provide relatively inexpensive versions of high fashion designs within months or even weeks of the runway debut of those designs stand to benefit from the affordability aspect of this logic and have helped to initiate it. Moreover, privileged actors in the field had sometimes advocated for the wearability aspect of the logic of accessibility (see Borrelli 1997). The genesis of this logic thus does not rest entirely with consumers participating in the online fashion arena, but their embrace of it appears to help to escalate its institutionalization and render it consumer focused.

While some prior research on changing institutional logics has stressed the confrontational replacement of old logics by new ones (e.g., Greenwood and Suddaby 2006; Sine and David 2003), our work aligns more closely with recent research on established institutional fields in which new logics enter in an evolutionary rather than revolutionary fashion, and coexist with prior logics (e.g., Wright and Zammuto 2013). In particular, our work resonates with Wright and Zammuto's finding that "marginal actors" (like consumers in the case of the field of fashion) may subscribe almost superficially to the logics that dominate a field (in our case consumers subscribe more superficially to the logic of art

FIGURE 5

THE LOGIC OF ACCESSIBILITY IN PICTURES

NOTE.—*First row*: (1) Wioletta M. (dress—Chicwish [online retailer], bag—vintage, shoes—Vagabond (revival brand), (2) Ebba Z. (shirt–second-hand, pants–MTWMTFSS Weekday, sneakers—Nike, cluth bag—Primark [fast fashion brand]). *Second row:* (1) Lua P. (shirt—vintage; shorts—vintage; jacket—Tunnel Vision [online designer]); (2) Rachel-Marie I. (sweater—Romwe [online retailer]), boots—thrifted, glasses—Warby Parcker [online eyewear store]).

than do central actors like haute couture designers). Our case further highlights that marginal actors such as consumers may therefore be effective agents for escalating the spread of new logics, though they themselves harbour no particular change agenda.

DISCUSSION

Our analysis has highlighted some of the systematic implications for a field where consumers become increasingly engaged but do so without coordinated intent or concerted

action intended to bring about changes. Specifically, we have developed theoretical insight into the nature of field-level impacts when avid consumers interact with one another because of their shared interests about and enthusiasm for a product category. Our analysis highlights that in such a context, 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.

A question raised by work such as ours is whether the impacts of consumers' actions in such contexts—where there is no intentional change agenda—differ markedly from the effects that we can anticipate in fields wherein consumers adopt an explicit change agenda. Several studies have considered cases where consumers have taken deliberate actions borne out of discontentment, whether because they believed they had unmet needs (e.g., Martin and Schouten 2014; Sandıkcı and Ger 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013) or because they sought to countervail the hegemonic control of mainstream marketers (e.g., Giesler 2008; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). A comparison of some of the higher-order categories of effects found in previous work with those found in ours can shed further light on the scope and variation in marketplace dynamics.

Do Contented Consumers Affect Markets Less than Discontented Ones?

A first category of effect that can be identified in many of the prior studies where discontented consumers took deliberate actions is the opening up of opportunities for entrepreneurial actors who can explicitly collaborate with consumers or at least benefit from their discontent. In Thompson and Coskuner-Balli's (2007) study of the community-sponsored agriculture movement, for example, the collaboration between entrepreneurial actors and consumers appears to have been relatively close and explicit. In Martin and Schouten's (2014) study of the mini-moto market, although profit-seeking was not an initial motive for the consumers who were dissatisfied with mainstream motorcycle offerings, the eventual emergence of the innovative new product category depended deeply upon entrepreneurial actors who decided to create offerings that satisfied the needs, first and foremost, of their friends and acquaintances. In Scaraboto and Fischer (2013), while "fatshionistas" most explicitly desired a greater range of choice from mainstream marketers, upstart online fashion vendors nonetheless managed to benefit from serving some of the demand from plus-sized consumers who sought variety. And in Sandıkcı and Ger's (2010) study, entrepreneurial actors seized opportunities to provide a segment of Turkish women with more tasteful *tesettür*.

In our study, likewise, we observe that opportunities have been created for entrepreneurial actors. For example, those bloggers and street photographers who sought to capitalize on their fame were able to attain access to lucrative options, whether those entailed direct compensation for work undertaken for established actors, such as the mainstream fashion press, or indirect compensation in the form of free apparel, shoes, and/or accessories. Thus, our case study of a market changed by contented consumers parallels those of markets changed by discontented consumers: in both, opportunities emerge for actors inclined to reap profits (see also Baldwin, Hienerth, and von Hippel 2006).

A second category of effects in at least some studies of discontented consumers has been the introduction of alternative channels of distribution. Specifically, in Giesler's (2008) study of music downloaders, file-sharing became, for a time, an alternative form of distribution to the selling of recorded music through traditional vendors. Ultimately that market saw distribution altered dramatically (e.g., consumers can now download a single song through iTunes or listen to an entire playlist through *8tracks.com*) in the wake of the actions taken by discontented consumers. Another illustration of changes to a distribution system can be found in Thompson and Coskuner-Balli's (2007) study. In their case, consumers who preferred the community-sponsored agriculture model could deal directly with the farmers who grew the produce they consumed rather than purchasing through supermarkets or chain stores.

Our investigation likewise reveals instances of change in the dynamics in the channels of distribution. With the growth of outfit sharing websites, for example, consumers have been able to purchase entire "looks" from those whose posts they admire. Nasty Gal, for example, moved from selling vintage finds through eBay and Myspace in 2007 to running a $100 million online retailing empire by 2012 (Perlroth 2013). While conventional channels of distribution are not particularly threatened by such innovations, the fact remains that contented consumers' interventions in fields can help to augment channels of distribution just as can those of discontented consumers agitating for change.

Prior studies of marketplace dynamics in instances where consumers are unhappy with aspects of the marketplace have not paid particular attention to whether the distribution of institutional work (e.g., marketing communications or public relations) or the forms or institutional work (e.g., new types of marketing communications, like those entailed in the coverage of fashion editors by consumer bloggers) are affected by consumers' actions. In part owing to its explicit focus on institutional work, our study of contented consumers' practices has shown that marketing communications can be redistributed and transformed in such contexts. Future research will be required to assess whether similar impacts are observed in markets where dynamics are fueled by discontented consumers.

A final category of effect detected in our study, but not highlighted in prior investigations of market dynamics in other kinds of contexts, is the embrace of a new institutional logic. As we argued above, contented consumers interacting in the online fashion arena have helped to usher in a logic of accessibility. In effect, this new logic (which coexists with but does not replace previous logics) legitimates the establishment of taste regimes where wearable, affordable

clothes are valorized. Our findings here might be regarded as parallel to those of Arsel and Bean (2013), who found that the consumers who interacted through Apartment Therapy helped introduce a new, parallel taste regime. In that study, however, the question of whether a new logic pervaded the relevant field was not under investigation.

Overall, our work suggests that the kinds of changes fostered by contented consumers encompass an extremely wide range, one at least comparable to and possibly exceeding those that can be anticipated when consumers disaffected with existing markets actively attempt to change them. These observations are important not least because the systematic investigation of market-level changes brought about by the unintentional and uncoordinated actions of relatively satisfied consumers is extremely limited. It is clear that across a range of markets, including but not limited to entertainment, food, and travel (Ashman et al. 2013; Chintagunta et al. 2010; Scott and Orlikowski 2012), avid consumers with a deep-seated interest in the products, producers, and trends in those markets are eagerly interacting. While our study has probed the kinds of consequences we might anticipate in a market like fashion, where style and taste are important drivers, we lack investigations of consumer-initiated or consumer-fueled dynamics in markets where innovations rely less upon taste and more upon technology or legislation. Work that investigates such markets is required if we are to extend and amplify our understanding of market dynamics. Work on marketplace dynamics could also benefit from more systematic considerations of the conditions that are likely to precipitate the initiation of market changes by consumers who are not discontented with markets or marketers. To round out our discussion we offer some preliminary insights in this regard.

What Conditions Foster Unintended Market Changes Propelled by Consumers?

While studies in our field to date have largely focused on changes that have been initiated by purpose-driven actors, one by organizational theorists Ansari and Phillips (2011), like ours, deliberately investigated unintended changes initiated by consumers. Specifically, they examined how teenage consumers in the late 1990s and early 2000s innovated the practice of text messaging, using their cellular phones in a manner not intended or envisioned by the suppliers thereof. The practice diffused rapidly among teenagers and eventually adults in spite of the negative affordances of the 12 key, non-QWERTY keyboards. As Ansari and Phillips state: "Consumers created and diffused the practice of texting almost behind the back of the industry that had . . . shown little interest in texting. . . . Given the rapid rise of this new practice, organized actors had to interpret, make sense of, and respond to consumers' behaviors" (2011, 11). This quotation points to the parallel between our case and the one studied by Ansari and Phillips: consumers acting without the intention of changing a market nonetheless profoundly affected it.

Although different in many ways from our study, that by Ansari and Phillips (2011) can be compared with ours to begin to establish an understanding of some of the common conditions that create the potential for consumers to precipitate profound yet unintended changes. Based on this comparison, we suggest that the conditions may include some or all of the following: (1) the existence of "places" (virtual or real) that afford opportunities for consumer interaction, (2) low costs for consumers to experiment with new behaviors, (3) the observability of experimental behaviors, and (4) existing product and technology infrastructures. We review each condition.

In both case studies, the potential for consumer interactions was of central importance. In ours, consumers set up and used by the hundreds of thousands alternative websites, such as outfit-sharing websites, blogs, and web forums. In the case of Ansari and Phillips (2011), the schools and public spaces where teens could compare notes with one another and collaborate in experimentation provided the opportunities for interaction. As Martin and Schouten (2014), in their study of consumer-driven market creation, have noted, places for interaction facilitate the development of shared practices, and it is shared practices like sharing looks or sending texts that cumulatively give rise to unintended market level changes.

Low experimentation costs also make it more likely for consumers to develop new practices, whether the costs are financial, temporal, or social. For example, in our setting, consumers who had Internet access could cheaply and quickly post to follow blogs or outfit-sharing websites. Similarly, Ansari and Phillips (2011, 15) note that the practice of Short Message Service (SMS) benefited from being "easy to trial, learn, and experiment with." Moreover, as vendors had not originally envisioned texting as a practice, the costs of texting were initially quite limited. If places to meet are necessary for initiating new practices, low experimentation costs allow for the consumers-developed practice-innovations to be refined and adapted with relative ease. A study by von Hippel (2007) of the successful emergence of user-innovation networks likewise observes that low-cost experimentation is vital.

Closely tied with the first two factors is the observability of consumers' experimental behaviors. In our study, fans of fashion could access countless examples of blogs, street photographs, or outfit-sharing websites. In Ansari and Phillips's (2011) study, any teenager with a cellphone, or in the company of a friend with one, could readily observe the ways others were sending and responding to messages. If innovative consumer practices can be easily observed by others, it stands to reason that their adoption can more readily spread.

As a final observation, we note that without an existing infrastructure of products and technological capacities, consumers' uncoordinated actions could not proliferate. In our case, consumers needed access to the existing fashion media and to technologies like computers, cameras, and lighting to participate as they did in the novel practices they intro-

duced. In Ansari and Phillips's (2011) study, the fact that early cellphones had SMS capability, even though it was not a feature that producers intended to be used, was of critical importance. Von Hippel (2007, 309) likewise notes that consumers draw "upon inputs and platforms that incorporate commercially manufactured items." He provides as an example users of open-source software, who access the existing infrastructure of the Internet to develop and distribute novel products. Similarly, consumers who inadvertently bring about market level change also rely on a network of material and immaterial actors.

As these final observations suggest, a full understanding of the origins and trajectories of marketplace dynamics, both those that are purpose-driven and those that are unintentionally initiated, will require the accumulation of studies conducted in a range of contexts that differ along key dimensions. 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. However, much remains to be learned about cases where other kinds of conditions and other consumer motivations have prevailed.

DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

The data collection was carried out from March 2011 to March 2014. The first author conducted all the interviews and participant observation. Both authors were involved in the gathering of archival data. The interviews were conducted in cafes, respondents' homes, and via Skype and telephone. Both authors were involved in the gathering of archival data. Data were discussed and analyzed throughout the data collection process by both authors, independently and conjointly. The number of fans mentioned for each consumer was valid as of April 1, 2014.

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