

Chapter 7

Social Media, Online Brand Communities, and Customer Engagement in the Fashion Industry

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ABSTRACT

Fashion brands have shifted communication to social media as part of evolutionary modern-day marketing approaches to reaching consumers. Brands have adjusted to a vocal customer through back-and-forth interchange on social media platforms that have progressively facilitated for online brand communities. Social media brand communities serve to engage audiences in interactive settings that resonate with individual consumers across different levels. As brand awareness is augmented, brand impressions are conceived, brand-customer relationships are formed, and a sense of community is fostered around a brand, consumers exploit association to such social media brand communities in advancing social identity. The following chapter explores the impact of social media brand communities on Millennials in the fashion industry, while considering the social identity theory. The chapter focuses on theoretical and managerial implications. This chapter considers the influence social media brand communities and social identity may have on a fashion brand.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing advancements have continued to mature as contextual disciplines dependent on factors such as the economy, society, technology, globalisation, or emerging markets, among other elements (Sheth, 2011; Sheth & Sisodia, 1999; Zinkhan & Hirschheim, 1992). These external realities allow for ever-evolving marketing logics that industries venture to embrace (Jayachandran, Gimeno, & Varadarajan, 1999; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The Internet is a paramount example of a revolutionary influence that has radically transformed interaction in today's society. The modernised Millennial take on communication

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marks the extensive assumption of Internet manifestations, such as social media, that have facilitated dynamic interchange. Social media platforms have notably crept into marketing operations as lead tools in reaching, sharing and interacting with customers (Hudson, Huang, Roth, & Madden, 2016; Chappuis, Gaffey & Parvizi, 2011), as traditional marketing regresses from providing the active two-way interchange social media encapsulate (Houman Andersen, 2001; Ozuem, Howell, & Lancaster, 2008). Brands have accordingly adjusted to online communication channels in the chase to ensure timely prominence among consumers within an inviting setting (Evans, 2012; Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Over the years, the fashion industry among others has invested in social media presence in hopes of reaping the benefits direct, two-way interchange promises to provide through online brand-customer interactions (Kim & Ko, 2012; Phan; Thomas & Hein, 2011; Helal & Ozuem, 2017). Expansive literature has been produced on the development of social media in routine interactions and its potential leverage on consumer intentions (Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Hoffman & Fodor, 2016; Huy & Shipilov, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Qualman, 2013). Additional studies have examined the principles of applying social media within a brand's marketing strategy (Habibi, Laroche & Richard, 2014; Naylor, Lamberton, & West, 2012; Simmons, 2008).

Kim and Ko (2012) examine the success of luxury fashion brands utilising social media activities, including interaction or word-of-mouth, in securing encouraging customer intentions. The findings reveal a parallel relationship between the two factors as greater application of social media activities resulted in positive purchase intentions and overall customer equity in consumption of luxury fashion brands (Kim & Ko, 2012). Nevertheless, the study was performed on a broad age pool that gave limited attention to the leading social media demographic age to yield relevant responses that produce precise results. Habibi, Laroche, and Richard (2014) address the evolution of brand communities to online platforms by exploring the building blocks of a social media brand community in impacting brand trust. The results revealed a generally positive link between social media brand community interaction and consequent brand trust. However, the study was performed on a broader age group on a wide range of brand communities from various industries. This paid limited attention to an age pool that has most integrated social media into different branches of daily life. It also posits limitations since a general sample of brand communities and industries was used, which may result in lenient definitions of what constitutes a brand community and being a part of it, thus producing general results. An annual demographic analysis by PewResearch Center demonstrated that the highest percentage of social media usage was exhibited by ages 18 to 29 years between years 2006 to 2018 (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Among the current vast literature examining the evolution and implementation of social media, few have investigated the influential use of social media brand communities on Millennials in the fashion industry.

The discipline of marketing has been on an evolutionary path from a tangible focus on commodities to an emphasis on an intangible approach of service marketing (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Lusch, 2007; Vargo, Lusch, & Morgan, 2015; Hunt & Madhavaram, 2015). Marketing practices have progressed to a logic that places power on creating value and relationships with customers (Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). Lusch (2007) dissects the development of marketing practices into three stages over the past 100-year period. The first stage begins with “to market”, which involves the idea of the supplier and buyer once being separate and marketers working to bring products into the market to bridge that gap. The expansion of the industry sector advanced marketing focuses to “market to”, involving generating demand from customers. Finally, the third stage, “market with”, transforms the customer from a mere receiver of promotion and persuasion to a contributor of value through brand-customer interaction (Lusch, 2007). Brands have recognised the significance of creating consequential

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