

Chapter 41

Social Identity Matters: Social Media and Brand Perceptions in the Fashion Apparel and Accessories Industries

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ABSTRACT

Fashion brands' online presence provide a platform for customers to supplement social identity based on associations with brands, and ultimately this can shape brand perceptions among customers through promised functional and symbolic benefits. Social media has matured into the prime channel for regular interactions and the development of brand-customer relationships that enrich social identity. Drawing on social identity theory, the current chapter examines how the evolving social media platforms impact on brand perceptions in the fashion apparel and accessories industries. The chapter focuses on theoretical implications and managerial implications. The concluding section offers some significant roles that social media and social identity may play in keeping up with the design and development of marketing communications programmes.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years, marketing logics and developments have evolved to accommodate a whirlwind of evolving innovations that belong to the fashion industry. The dynamic nature of marketing means fashion companies are relentlessly on guard for the next groundbreaking development (Jayachandran, Gimeno & Varadarajan, 1999; Lusch, 2007; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Webster, 1992). One case of a sought-after phenomenon that has dramatically revolutionised today's society is the technological Millennial approach to communication. Long gone is the reliance on traditional marketing, as one-way communication is rendered obsolete and makes way for the dominance of two-way interchange (Houman Andersen, 2001;

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Ozuem, Howell & Lancaster, 2008). Multinational corporations have, as a result, embraced the likes of Internet technologies along with their varied manifestations, such as social media, in adopting platforms that their brands can use to contribute content to followers (Evans, 2012; Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Zarrella, 2009). This has sparked vast literature on the progression of social media and the potential it has in leveraging various aspects of daily life (Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011; Hoffman & Fodor, 2016; Huy & Shipilov, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011). Other studies have examined the premises of employing social media as part of a brand's marketing scheme (Luo, Zhang & Duan, 2013; Naylor, Lamberton & West, 2012; Simmons, 2008; Tuten & Solomon, 2014).

Kim and Ko (2012) addressed the success of social media marketing activities in enhancing customer equity for luxury fashion brands. The study revealed the degree to which luxury fashion brands have prevailed from employing social media marketing activities including entertainment, interaction, or word of mouth. The findings demonstrated a positive correlation between the application of social media marketing and subsequent purchase intentions and customer equity within the luxury fashion industry. However, the study paid limited attention to a demographic age that is familiar with social media and able to produce pertinent feedback that enhances the accuracy of research results. An annual demographic analysis of social media usage compiled by Pew Research revealed that the highest rate of usage in 2014 was exhibited by those aged between 18 and 29 years (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart & Madden, 2015). In spite of the extensive literature dedicated to expanding the knowledge of social media, few studies have examined how social media has impacted on the fashion industry, particularly within the Millennial generation.

Social media is a development of the World Wide Web that began gaining ground between the late 1990s and early 2000s, gaining worldwide prominence by the late 2000s (Dewing, 2010). Yet before delving into the profound significance social media has exerted globally, the course of events leading up to its inception is considered

The initiation of the World Wide Web began in the early 1990s upon Tim Berners-Lee linking hypertext technology to the Internet. This allowed for one common worldwide foundation to be formed, whereby networked communication was born (Van Dijck, 2013). The consequent evolution of Web 2.0 brought about social media. Web 2.0 is described as consisting of two features that help define it: microcontent and social media. Microcontent comprises pieces of content that express a primary idea. Such pieces cover much less information than websites and may take the form of blog posts, comments, or small images. These are designed for easy upload, reuse, and stimulating participation. The second feature of Web 2.0, social media or social software, consists of platforms organised around the framework of connecting people to one another. The microcontent produced by multiple users creates a page of shared interests that different users can access to bond with one another (Alexander & Levine, 2008). In time, the growth of Web 2.0 prompted the birth of two-way communication platforms and the flow of user-generated content, which is today identified as social media (Arora, 2014; Fuchs, 2014; Gillies & Cailliau, 2000; O'Reilly, 2005).

A study conducted by Statista further affirms the significance social media has gained across the fashion industry (Statista, 2016). This study emphasises the sheer 'clout' that virtual channels have when it comes to the fashion domain through the integration of social media throughout London Fashion Week. The show is a highly anticipated bi-annual fashion trading weeklong event, and in 2014 it generated over half a million mentions on social media. The majority of these mentions emerged over Instagram.

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