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Topic : Conceptual study of Social Media marketing and its influence on fashion industry (special reference to fashion brands)

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Domain: Digital Marketing

Objectives:

The following are the objectives of the study,

- I. Conceptual understanding of social media.
- II. To study the influence of social media marketing on consumer.
- III. To study the role of social media marketing in fashion industry .

Abstract:

In the past decade, social media has redefined the world we are living in. What began as a means to communicate, maintain contact, or reconnect with old friends, has slowly but surely evolved into a crucial part of our daily lives; severely altering the way business is done. One specific area of business that has been particularly affected by the social media revolution is the fashion industry. Through the institution of social media, what was once only available to elite insiders is now accessible by the masses. For example, because of a designer's Facebook page, Twitter feed, or Instagram account, those previously unconnected to high fashion can now watch live footage from Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week taking place in New York City, an opportunity that was once only limited to industry insiders, celebrities, and socialites.

The fashion industry, as most business by and large, has been intensely affected lately by the presentation of social media. Internet based life has changed the manner by which individuals impart, yet in addition how firms publicize and arrive at their customer. The motivation

behind this exploration was to investigate the manners in which web based life impacts style utilization, explicitly among the female, school age segment.

Key Words : Competition , consumer behavior , Perception , attitude formation , marketing strategies.

INTRODUCTION

While the adaptation to changing technologies is vital to all types of retailers, Fashion retailers should take special notice. In some sense, fashion is a product of our environment. That is to say, trends constantly come and go and fashion is largely ever changing. From the consumer's perspective, it is easy to see how social media could be a vehicle to expedite communication of these trends. However, from a retailer's perspective it is vital to remain not only completely informed, but also very connected, in order to better serve customers' needs.

It is no secret that the role of social media in a college town would be magnified. Today's college demographic is conceivably the first generation to grow up utilizing social media from an early age and to have the Web serve as an integral part of their social lives. More precisely, it seems as though females are more active on these social media outlets and coincidentally are the ones most likely to follow fashion trends religiously.

The study focuses on consumers who follow brands on social media and in particular case of fashion brands. Whereas the study's aim is to find the reason why consumers share the content, the study is at the same time limited by people who are active fans of fashion brands and share picture, video or just comment with others. The study is not addressed to any specific demographic group, however, the data gathered through the questionnaire include significantly higher number of female respondents compared to men and the same happened in age group, because the study failed to collect data from people who are older than 35 years. Despite the fact that the study was not limited to any social media platforms, Facebook belonged to the most mentioned tools for following brands, therefore the author is not able to distinguish between consumer behaviour on Facebook and the rest of social media platforms. Hence, there is a space for further research on analyse the differences of consumer engagement between users of different social media sites. Its main focus was to identify if and at what level social media influences the decisions of the consumers.

We used the sample size of 20 people to carry out a survey based on consumer pattern and the influence that social media has on the decision making process of followers of fashion brands. But we received 17 complete responses to study. This in turn would reveal how important it is for fashion brands to stay relevant on social media and take steps market their products in the right way while still maintaining brand image.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Article - An Updated Examination of Social and Emerging Media Use in Public Relations Practice: A Longitudinal Analysis Between 2006 and 2014

By Donald K. Wright and Michelle Drifka Hinson

The basic concept the article focuses on is how blogs and other social media is impacting Fashion brands. Out of the several points made throughout the article the main one was centred on blogging and social media used by the employees and the organisation. Around 56% males and 44% females mainly from North America, Europe and Asia participated in this study. Blogging is highly efficient method in communicating with audiences as claimed by 59 percent of CEO's from all over the world. They said blogging is "a good, very good, or excellent corporate communications tool for internal audiences." (Wright, 2008). According to the study, the three main reasons that an employee blogs is to become an expert, to personalise relationships and to test out ideas see if they get feedback. A lot of people believe that blogging and social media has changed the way that companies communicate nowadays. It has facilitated the two-way communication process and has opened up more channels between the organisation and the public. It has empowered employees and has given them a new platform to interact with their clients and incorporate the best use of technology. knowing the correct audience or the correct sample of people is highly essential as it has to be directed only at them. Traditional fashion platforms were magazines, radio and television where it was very difficult and time consuming to reach the correct target audience. Blogging and social media has reduced the turn-around time and social media has helped public relations practitioners to build effective relationships with certain target public. Another finding was that the growing trend of blogging has changed the way people communicate internally and externally. Also, about 75 percent expect traditional news media to be honest, tell the truth and be ethical, but only 44 percent hold these same expectations for blogs and other social media. There is also greater transparency, encourages quick responses and has "opened up a new group of stakeholders with which to engage, as well as new vehicles for reaching them" as stated by one of the respondents.

This article mainly talks about how PR is being impacted by social media. However, there isn't any mention of the names of Facebook, Twitter or other social media platforms. The impacts of each platform would differ from employee to employee. This was a major gap in the article. The switch from traditional media to social media and the implications of it also haven't been clearly mentioned which makes it a blank space. The topic chosen by me will do a more in-depth study of the way Instagram and Facebook can be used for fashion forwarding of different organisations.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND BRANDS

Social media includes online applications, platforms and media which facilitate interactions, collaborations and the sharing of the content. Social media is being used by almost all companies regardless of their size or their type of business to advertise and promote themselves. The number of companies with an account on social media continues to grow. Many companies start to use social media in marketing, public communication or a similar department, where it is necessary to ensure to have a direct link between company and customers. Customers can engage with companies for example by posting comments on companies' profiles. Furthermore, it is a way to increase awareness among customers who are beyond reach of traditional media. In short, many companies are searching for customer engagement and they see social media as the way to do it.

The usage of social media was initially challenging for fashion brands. They were worried how their brand would be perceived since being available on social media seemed as almost too much for them because they felt too much exposed. However, today advertising and marketing strategy would definitely be inadequate without using social media. The time when fashion shows were a closed event only for buyers and press without any celebrities in the front row, is gone. The collections are now presented not only to the chosen

few, but to all customers around the world thanks to the advanced technology. Furthermore, fashion lovers, who are hungry for the latest trends, do not have to rely on the last edition of Vogue, because social media has enormously changed the situation of fashion business. Followers of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Pinterest accounts are flooded with live-streams, tweets, posts and pins and they are informed about the latest trends immediately. The old one-way communication through traditional media was replaced by innovative interactive two-way communication and thus fashion companies that do not appear on social media, definitively lose their competitive advantage.

Brands and customers started to communicate with each other without limitation of time or place. The interactive two-way direct communication enabled brands and customers to cooperate on development of new products, services, business models and values. The main advantage of social media marketing is the opportunity to decrease misunderstanding and prejudice towards brands and increase brand value by establishing a platform, where people can exchange their ideas and information among themselves online.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Social media marketing is dependent on three major considerations. The first goal is to get the fans or followers, but to have fans is not enough. The companies need to make a few steps to preserve and improve the brand base, so that the company reaches a positive return on investment for social media. Before anything else, companies have to communicate one core message, because for instance on Facebook there are algorithms that decide which ads will be shown to which friends, therefore if the company wants to reach its fans, followers or friends, it needs to understand who its fan base consists of, and then secondly, to analyse who is engaging with which ad. The better ad with better topic the company will post, the more consumers will talk about that content. Those indirect messages will be sent to friends of fans and that is one of the reasons why companies keep investing money in social media. Company fans, followers or friends are spreading companies' messages which leads to the higher final impact of the company. The brands need to be sure that they will reach the group of fans that is engaged by and interacts with their content. It is crucial to publish content which keeps fans, followers and friends interested in order to maximize the reach and depth of engagement on social media. An active dialogue with fans ensures the understanding of consumer perceptions of the brand due to analysis of the word-of-mouth conversations on social media. The knowledge given by such an analysis can be used to promote the brand's image, to respond to exact customer service requirements and to explain misunderstanding and false rumours that could damage brand reputation.

ADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Today, social media is the primary source of information, and businesses make the most out of it by changing their marketing strategies, in ways to make effective use of their online social media presence, and boost their sales. The fashion industry, particularly, is benefitting the most through social media, around the globe fashion marketers figure out new ways through which social media platforms can make them successful and help them grow online.

Here are 5 of the many benefits that social media has given to the fashion industry.

Customer Service

Providing satisfying and effective customer service is the main goal of all fashion business owners — social media is that one medium, which makes providing great customer service an easy task.

Through social media platforms marketing professionals are allowed to; see and analyze the needs of their potential customers, understand what they are looking and talking about, and learn about their likes and dislikes. This analysis helps marketers design their social media marketing strategies accordingly. For a successful fashion online business, it is crucial to cater the needs of your customers, and social media is the best source to gain that information.

Effective customer service means happy and loyal customers, they help reach your brand to new and more customers. If a customer is happy with your brand, they will recommend it to their friends and family. You can improve your customer service by giving links to FAQs or places where customers talk to someone related to their queries and get immediate replies. Make the customer feel important and valued.

Increased Inbound Traffic

More traffic means more sales. For fashion brands that do not use social media, their inbound traffic becomes restricted, meaning only the current customers visit their websites or people who search for certain keywords that are already linked to your site. This stops you from reaching out to new people.

Social media gives you the chance to increase inbound traffic, as it reaches out to a large number of people and new customers. Social media drives more people to your webpage, but only interesting content is what keeps them hooked up. If your content is boring, then a consumer might not visit your website, and even if they do they won't be lured to look at more than your homepage.

Traditional Advertising

Blogs and customer engagement are popular ways of advertising, but social media opened up several more paths for traditional advertising, resulting in great benefits for the fashion industry. Through different avenues of traditional advertising, fashion brands target groups according to demographics, and only offer them items they are interested in.

This has led to brands boosting their sales, because now instead of marketing every fashion item in their store, they reach out to customers by marketing individual products. Google, is

one excellent example of how traditional marketing works — it allows businesses to use keywords to target ads to consumers who search for related items.

Similarly, Facebook allows advertisers to target audience of a certain demographic through ads. In target advertising, advertisers are allowed to use cookies to track the internet usage of consumers and then provide them with ads according to their internet searches, for example if someone searches for a red bag, yellow outfit or something to wear at a wedding, then through targeted advertisements, they get to see ads related to all of these things.

Effective Brand Recognition & Increased Brand Awareness

Brand recognition is one of the most important goals for any business, as a consumer only buys brands that they recognize. Call it human psychology or the ways our society works, but most of the people only buy from brands that they trust and that trust only comes through brand recognition.

This is where social media plays a great role, as it allows your brand to build its recognition through several platforms. This is the reason why today social media is one of the most powerful methods of digital marketing for increasing brand awareness and visibility.

Social media has a broad audience of potential customers, by using effective social media marketing strategies you are able to connect with that large audience and highlight your brand. Today, several fashion brands use these strategies to increase awareness about their brand.

According to a report, by just spending few hours a week on social media, 90% marketers were able to increase their brand awareness in a small amount of time. Start with making social media profiles of your company, then interact with customers and provide them with engaging content. Good content helps increase brand awareness and builds a profitable reputation. You can also ask your employees, business partners, friends, family and sponsors to like and share your social page, to get the word out.

Improved Brand Loyalty & Customer Engagement

In today's market, it is very important for fashion brands to have customer loyalty, as there are several brands who sell products. According to a survey done by the Texas Tech University, brands that connect with their customers on social media platforms have more loyalty from their customers.

Social media allows you to interact with recent customers and old customers, but what keeps them loyal? It is the content that you post on your social media platforms. For a brand to hold on to their customers, and to attract new ones, it is crucial for them to create interesting posts,

this keeps consumers engaged and loyal toward your brand, they will not choose another brand if you give them what they want.

Social media can help fashion industries improve their reputation. If done well, it can be a cost-effective way to get your message to a large audience. However, it can be tricky to guarantee success. The Limitations of social media related to fashion industries are as follows:

- **Influence** – Results from the research show that many a times the audience is not influenced by the influencers on various social media platforms and it turns out to be less persuasive compared to normal advertisements. Any damage to the influencers image can cause damage to the reputation of the organization and its relations.
- **No direct control** – unlike advertising, you can't exactly control how your business is portrayed by the media, when your message will appear, and where it will be placed.
- **No guaranteed results** – you may spend time and money on writing a press release, getting suitable photography and speaking with influencers, bloggers and the social media handlers but you can never guarantee your story will be published. This can result in a poor return-on-investment.
- **Evaluation** – it can be difficult to measure the effectiveness of PR activities. You can count media mentions and published stories, but it's harder to determine the impact this has on your audience.
- **Expensive** – Managing Public relations activity can turn out to be expensive and consists of added expenses due to the constant change in trends.
- **Rapid change** – The changes are so rapid that PR practitioners are scrambling to adjust.

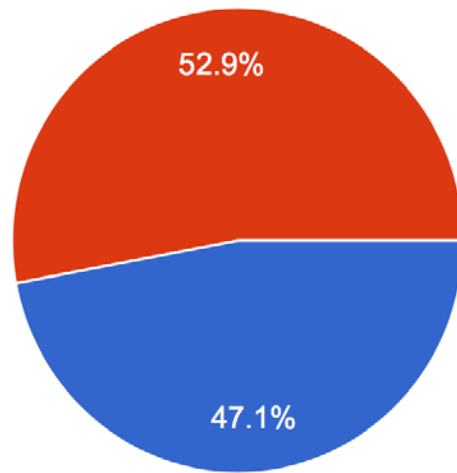
SURVEY BASED ON RESEARCH

A survey with sample size of 17 was conducted to analyse how social media has an effect on the consumers behaviour and their perception towards fashion brands. The sample size mainly included individuals below the age of 25 who used social media on a daily basis.

Following are the results of the same:

What is your gender?

17 responses

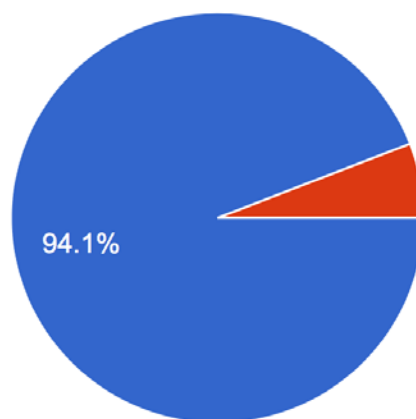


- Male
- Female
- Other



What is your age?

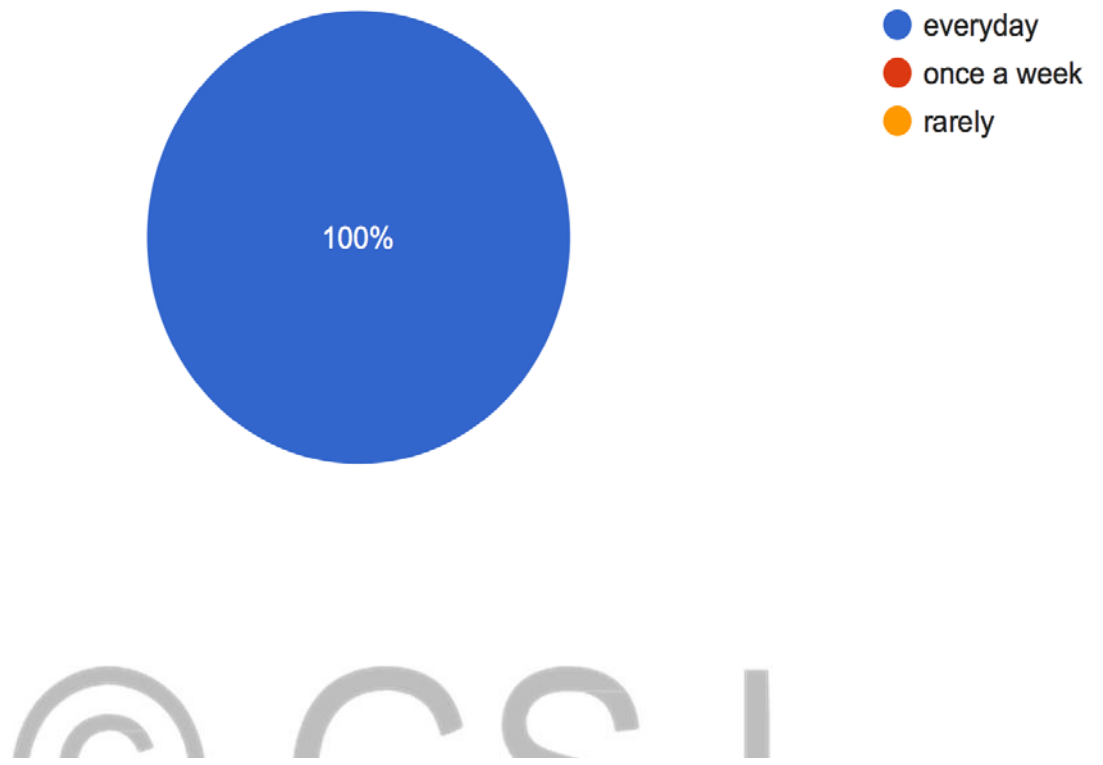
17 responses



- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45 above

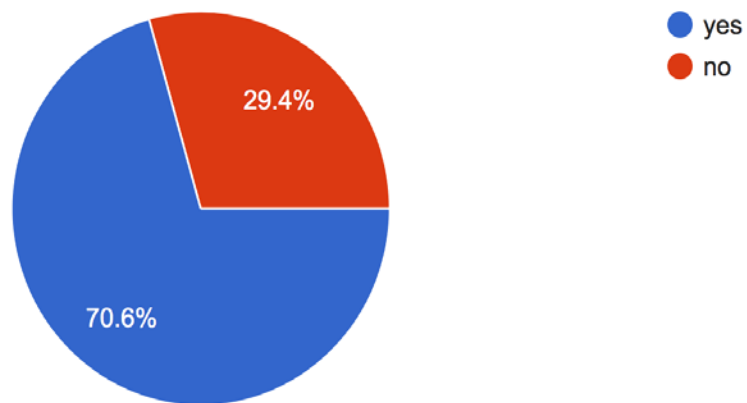
how often do you use social media? (Facebook, Instagram, twitter etc.)

17 responses



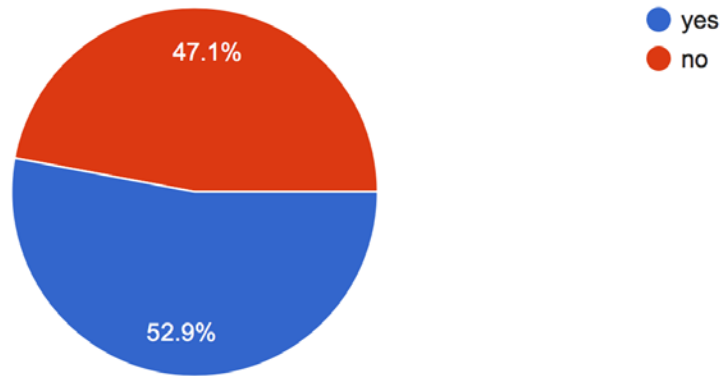
do you follow any fashion brands on social media?

17 responses



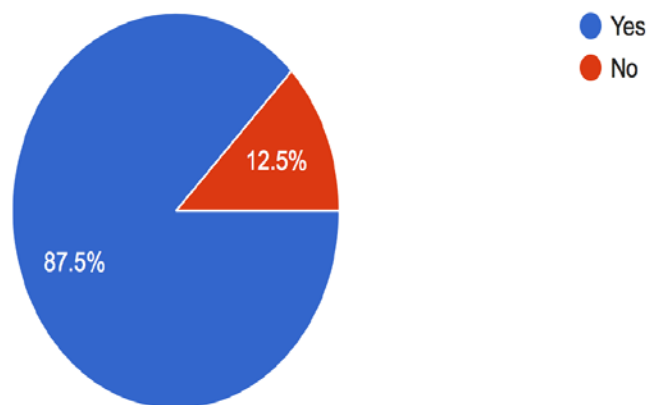
Do you follow any fashion magazines on social media? (such as cosmopolitan, vogue etc.)

17 responses



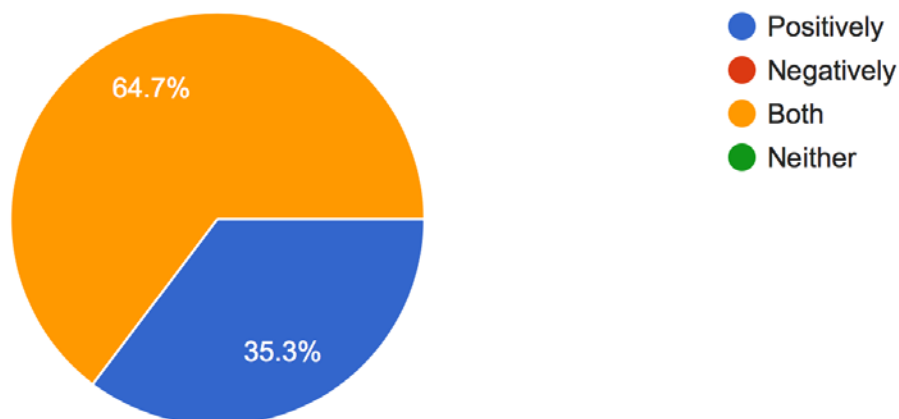
Would you say Social Media affects your fashion style , preferences and purchase decisions ?

16 responses



How do you think Social Media influences fashion industry?

17 responses



The following data showed that not only do people use social media on a daily basis but even their buying patterns are influenced by the same. The influencers and celebrities that promote fashion brands too have a great impact on consumer behaviour. We don't rely on the latest issue of Vogue to tell us what's hot anymore. It's all about social media — what products are online retailers pushing this season? What dresses are all your friends wearing in their latest tagged photos? And, what're the bloggers and influencers on your news feed into this month?

Marketers should be aware that Millennials are not very trusting of advertising. They're often perceived to be over-planned and misleading. In the world of fashion, this means that magazines and advertising campaigns don't have the influence that they once did — they're now seen as quite distant from the reader, as many are aware of the editing that goes on behind one shot.

Instead, peer recommendations are more valuable and accessible than they once used to be. Of course, we've all heard of the power of word-of-mouth, but with social media and its ability to spread at a rapid speed across countries, it's more important than ever before. Of Instagram's total audience, 200 million users follow at least one fashion account; 45% of Instagram users in India say they follow these fashion accounts to gain inspiration for looks they can buy or create themselves. This research helped in understanding the concept of

social media with practical result and helped researchers in concluding the importance of social media marketing aspect .

The purpose of this research was to explore the ways social media affects fashion consumption, specifically in an area dominated by the college-age demographic and small boutique vendors. In order to accomplish this, researcher performed general exploratory research regarding fashion consumption and social media usage. Researcher used findings to tailor interview questions to gain further understanding regarding how the two are connected through qualitative measures. Finally, administered a survey to achieve quantitative statistics and draw significant conclusions regarding the effects of social media on fashion consumption. Results indicate that social media certainly impacts fashion consumption. Not only through trend setting and disseminating ideas and styles, but also in a business manner. Retailers should focus on achieving a presence on major social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram). They also should utilize these platforms to not only share discounts and promotions, but also stay in touch with consumers and build a connection with their prime demographic. Based on research, it seems as though Pinterest might be the latest and most effective way to utilize social media to drive fashion purchases in a retail environment.

