

RESEARCH TITLE: TO EXPLORE THE SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT ON
FASHION CUSTOMERS' PURCHASE INTENSION

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INTRODUCTION

Fashion market has reached maturity, together with the drastic growth of a number of customers and gradual market scope expansion. As a result of the increased demand for fashion products particularly in the emerging markets like Middle East, India and China, opportunities in the industry make fashion business even bigger more than ever (Clifford, 2011). Lutz (2012) posited that in the past few decades, fashion and luxury companies used to depend on their strong brands and assets and regular customers. However, this has changed with the entrance of more companies into the fashion market resulting into stiff competition hence the changes in the market (Kapferer, 2012). This has obliged companies in this industry to not depend on their brands alone but focus on the legacy of their brands, trustworthy customer relationships, aesthetic values and quality for enhanced competitive advantage in the industry (Lutz, 2012). Thus, in order for fashion companies to be able to constitute customers' assets through constant and up-to-date communication with their targeted audiences, luxury brands have shifted to social media platforms thanks to technological advancement and development of Web 2.0. with researchers and practitioners viewing marketing using social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and You Tubes as instrumental for reaching and interacting with the growing number of online community. In fact, study conducted by Berger and Milkman (2012) found that about 70% of the 2.6 billion internet users have accounts with various social networking sites with majority of young generation population spending 30% of their time online daily. In fact, traditional designer houses like Chanel, Donna Karan and Louis Vuitton have live fashion broadcasting shows in their social networking walls and blogs. Many fashion and luxury companies have created accounts in the social networking sites so that they can communicate with their customers without any restrictions in medium, time and place facilitating a paradigm shift from the traditional one-way communication to two-way interactive communication. Thus the intent of this research is to explore impacts of social media on consumers' purchase intentions in the fashion industry.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

With the incessant use of social media in the fashion industry, it is important to empirically and quantitatively determine impacts of social media on the consumers fashion purchase intention (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Thus, the intent of this study is to determine the impacts of social media on fashion consumers' purchase intentions and how fashion companies have been able to use these platforms to influence the attitudes and perceptions of the fashion consumers towards their products. Despite of the overwhelming influence of social media on the behaviours and attitudes of the consumers, there is still paucity of empirical studies which have been conducted in this field. Hence this study will help in extending of knowledge with regards to the impacts of social media on purchase intentions of the consumers in the fashion industry.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The fundamental objective of this study is to determine the impacts of social media on fashion consumers' purchase intentions. To achieve this objective, the following specific objectives will help in guiding the research.

- ✓ To determine the influence of social media on consumers behaviour in the fashion industry
- ✓ To analyse the most preferred social media for marketing fashion brands
- ✓ To determine strategies which can be used by fashion companies to improve effectiveness of social media in marketing

LITERATURE REVIEW

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONSUMERS BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS FASHION PRODUCTS

Research conducted by Zarrella (2010) found that the use of social media in the fashion industry gained impetus in the early 2009. This has allowed and encourages customers to interact with the brands which help in increasing brand engagement, involvement and awareness hence stimulating purchase intention. Social networking sites like Instagram, You Tube, Twitter and

Facebook provide fashion brands with platforms to connect with their targeted audiences which most of companies viewing these platforms as opportunities for improving relationships with customers and convincing them to endorse the products. One of the companies which have successfully used social media in influencing behaviour of its targeted audience is Gucci's multicultural social media which was successful in launching of its sunglasses collections which were targeting the digital generations (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Gucci has been updating its Facebook regularly and sending tweets hence interacting with its targeted audience on these platforms. Research by Zarrella (2010) found that development of social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook have boosted the use of word of mouth among fashion brands. Brin (2011) defines word-of-mouth as an interpersonal communication between consumers regarding particular products and services where consumers spread the brand related information to their colleagues without any additional cost to the company. In fact Brin (2011) posited that electronic word of mouth has been viewed as the social of product related information to the consumers hence influencing their intention to purchase or reject a particular brand. After placing a WOM over the internet, it become viral regarding whether the information which is being spread is good or bad to the organisation. According to Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley (2010), spread of information over the internet provides consumers with the opportunities to exchange their views and perceptions regarding particular products. For instance, Dunne et al. (2010) posited that fashion worn by celebrities in Lon Angeles has become a global phenomenon as a result of the legitimization of the casual look in the social media. Similarly, jeans and T shirts which are showcased in Vintage stores in the United States are now found worldwide because of the social media.

Dunne et al. (2010) observes that as a result of social media, fashion is now everywhere. Social networking sites and blogs provide consumers unlimited space to be able to express themselves and their feelings regarding particular fashion products which in turn influence the attitudes and behaviour of their colleagues towards the particular products and services. For instance, unlike fashion television-shows and fashion-focused magazines, there are millions of blogs with are regulated frequently with new fashion related information. Effectiveness of information provided through social media as perceived by consumers is the fact that it has strong personal, individual, elitist and popular point of view regarding particular products and services hence influencing

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METHODOLOGY

In order to determine the impacts of social media on purchase intention of consumers in the fashion industry, the researcher has several methods which have been put in place by scholars and researcher to guide researchers in accessing, collecting and analyzing research data. However, Kozinets (2006) posited that availability of alternative methods has come with the major challenge which is facing current researchers which is associated with the suitable method for conducting particular research particularly going by the argument on Creswell (2003) that the validity and reliability of a study is influenced by the appropriateness of methods which used in data collection and analysis. In this regard, in order to meet the objective of this study, the researcher will be guided by research onion model propounded by Saunders et al. (2007) where the study will take positivism philosophy, quantitative design, survey strategy and primary data will be collected through the use of questionnaire.

POSITIVISM PHILOSOPHY

Research philosophy is the beliefs and values which guide the entire study. The two main research philosophies which are used by researchers are positivism and interpretivism. The main difference between the two is their take on reality with positivism dimension being based on the concept that social reality should be objective and singular while interpretivism views reality to be multiple, subjective and influenced by the study context. Thus, for the purpose of meeting the objective of this study in determining how social media influences purchase intentions of the fashion consumers, the research will be guided by positivism philosophy where the researcher will collect general information on social media and consumer behavior to respond to the study objectives. Positivism will help the researcher in maintaining objectivity in the entire study and requires less experience in data collection unlike interpretivism philosophy (Kothari, 2009). For this reason, the researcher will further adopt quantitative design where the study will entail counting and measuring of statistical data regarding social media in fashion industry and consumer behaviour where correlations in the existing variables will be analysed. Quantitative design will help the researcher to collect standardized data from a large population which will be easy to analyse and less time consuming.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

Research strategy is concerned with the methods which are used by the researcher in accessing and gathering data for the study. There are several strategies which can be used by a researcher namely, experimental, case study and survey strategy. However, for the purpose of this study, the researcher will use survey strategy as it will help in collecting statistical data from a large population of the study sample which is easy and saves time (Kothari, 2009).

RESEARCH DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLING

The study will use primary data which has been defined by Mertens and Ginsburg (2009) as the firsthand data tailored to a particular study. Unlike secondary data, primary data will be collected for the purpose of this research hence enhancing the validity and reliability of the study. The study population will be consumers of fashion products whereby students and other people on the street will be surveyed to determine how social media influence their purchase intentions with respect to the information they are sharing on the platforms through WOM. The researcher intends to determine whether there are some consumers who have used information available over the social media to make their purchase decisions. The researcher will use random sampling to recruit 100 customers of various fashion and luxury apparels to determine how social media influences their purchase decisions and how effective companies can use these platforms to constantly interact and provide vital information regarding their products. For data collection instruments, the researcher will use questions where close-ended questions will standardized responses will be administered to 100 consumers of fashion apparels. Questionnaires will be suitable in gathering large volumes of data from a large population which in turn takes less time and easy to analyse. In determining the validity and reliability of the study, the researcher will use pilot test where 10% of the study sample will be engaged in testing research questions.

DATA ANALYSIS

Since the study will be quantitative, the researcher will use SPSS to help in drawing correlations regarding social media and purchase intentions after which data will be presented using graphs and tables.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethical research is conducting a study which upholds the moral standards as perceived by the majority member of the study (Mertens and Ginsberg, 2009). Mertens and Ginsberg (2009) defined ethical research as a study which has been conducted within the constraints of honesty, integrity, non-discriminatory, confidentiality, respect of the human subject, intellectual property, objectivity, non-discriminatory and competence (Gravetter & Forzano, 2011). The researcher will commence the study by explaining to the research participants the importance of the study after which only those participants who will be willing to take part in the study will be engaged. The research will ensure that the data collected will be stored away from reach of any unauthorized individual and both managers and customers will be requested to consent their participation in the study.

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| Activities | APR | May | Jun | Jun | Jul | Aug | Aug | Sep |
|---------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Proposal Outline | | | | | | | | |
| Research Proposal | | | | | | | | |
| Literature Review (Secondary Data) | | | | | | | | |
| Primary Data Collection | | | | | | | | |
| Submission of 1 st Draft | | | | | | | | |
| Submission of 2 nd Draft | | | | | | | | |
| Final Dissertation Submission | | | | | | | | |

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