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Chapter 3

Social Media and Social Identity in the Millennial Generation

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ABSTRACT

The active presence of fashion brands online serves as a channel for customers to connect with brands for different intentions. This connection acts as an outlet customers employ in furthering social identity through brand associations. Brand perceptions are accordingly formed among consumers based on the promised functional and symbolic benefits consumption of that brand guarantees. Social media has assumed an integral role in fostering brand-customer relationships that ultimately augment social identity. The following chapter examines the role social media has played on brand perceptions in the fashion apparel and accessories industry from a social identity theory perspective. 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 programs.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing logics and developments have comparably and effectively progressed over the years to parallel the whirlwind innovations that primarily define 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. Traditional marketing has gradually lost bearing, as the rigid likes of one-way communication is superseded by active two-way interchange (Houman Andersen, 2001; Ozuem, Howell, & Lancaster, 2008). The shift in communication has consequently encouraged worldwide organisations to assume the likes of Internet technologies along with their varied manifestations, such as social media,

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as an outlet allowing brands to produce content for followers (Evans, 2012; Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Zarrella, 2009). An abundance of literature has consequently surfaced examining the evolution social media has enthused in routine 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). Further studies have explored the application of social media within a brand's marketing strategy (Luo, Zhang, & Duan, 2013; Naylor, Lamberton & West, 2012; Simmons, 2008; Tuten & Solomon, 2014).

Kim and Ko (2012) addressed the promising relationship between social media marketing and resultant customer equity among luxury fashion brands. The study aimed to demonstrate the success luxury fashion brands gain from employing social media marketing activities including entertainment, interaction, or word of mouth. Based on the findings, the study concluded that the use of social media is directly correlated with subsequent enhanced 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 analysis conducted by a statistic portal, Statista, on the worldwide daily usage of social media found that the highest degree of daily social media usage in 2016 was held by global users aged 25 to 34 years old (Statista, 2016). A more recent study revealed the highest time consumption of visual activities on social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram to be among ages 16-34 years, while preceding generations demonstrated fewer percentages of average time spent participating in such activities (Statista, 2017). The Millennial generation outruns other age groups as the leading social media user. Albeit the current extensive literature investigating social media, few studies have examined the use of social media in the fashion industry, particularly on the Millennial generation.

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

The initiation of the World Wide Web began in the early 1990's 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, and these are *microcontent* and *social media*. *Microcontent* comprises of 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 organized around the framework of connecting people to one another. The *microcontent* produced by multiple users creates a page of shared interests 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 emphasizes 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

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