Exploring Effective Use of Social Media Marketing by Fashion Brands

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The social media platforms have offered a wonderful opportunity of marketing for fashion brands globally. Both emerging and established fashion brands are using social media for marketing functions and growing sales in market. Digital marketing has transformed brand promotion paving the way for globalization of fashion. Present research explored how effectively fashion brands are utilizing sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for their marketing using qualitative phenomenology as a research design. Branded entertainments used on social media by fashion brands were explored with the help of semi-structured interviews. Non-probability purposive expert sampling technique was used to select eighteen participants for semi-structured interviews. Our results showed that fashion brands can achieve great exposure due to smart utilization of social media as a marketing strategy. We found that effectively designed marketing content for social media can achieve better brand engagement, brand image, customer-value, and most importantly competitive advantage among competitors. People use social media almost 24/7. Therefore, companies upload their information three to four times per day, or according to their desired schedule. Facebook is a great medium to increases brand out-reach, whereas Instagram is more effective in effectively reaching the desired target market. Previous studies have highlighted that commercial advertisements on Facebook can give much superior results in comparison to other web advertisements. Traffic is directed to brand website by providing cross-links on the Facebook or Instagram posts. Presence of brand on social media increases its credibility as it is ranked among top five social media platforms.

1. Introduction

Social media has acquired an important place in the field of fashion marketing. Fashion brands are using social media for promotion and sales. Year 2009 saw marked use of social media for fashion brand promotion (Singh & Diamond, 2018). Colachetpinyo in 2004 defined Fashion as "Fashion is a style of an appreciated concept in dressing that is temporarily adopted and socially identified by a number of people". According to Muturi (2024) social media is so effective at promoting brands, companies of all sizes and types are using it. Over the past ten years, it has shown to be an effective form of advertising, giving marketers countless opportunities to manage their brands. "Social media marketing (SMM) generally refers to strategies that focus on social networks and software applications to improve brand awareness or publicize particular products" (Niessing, 2014). Brand communities are part of online marketing, facilitating customer awareness, brand engagement & loyalty. Customers can engage with brands by leaving comments on videos, brand messaging, or discount codes. "Online interaction includes activities such as sharing photos and videos or liking and commenting on community page" (Úblová, 2014).

Facebook may be utilized for branding in a number of ways including brand communities for achieving customer involvement, interacting with fans and word-of-mouth recommendations. For this purpose promotion of brand events on Facebook can be fruitful. Instagram is a site for sharing photos and videos. In his research, Chen & Lin (2018) refers to it as a "content community" since its members share a certain kind of content. Instagram is mostly used for uploading pictures from mobile devices. A brief caption and a hashtag are applied to each picture (Harris, 2014). Twitter is a platform for microblogging. It is the most well-known microblogging platform by far. Twitter is utilized for news and event communication as well as direct market outreach. It's been noted that public personalities, journalists, politicians, and celebrities frequently use Twitter. Hashtag feature involves consumers on twitter (Shafaat et al., 2020).

This study attempted to fill gaps in the literature and provide a solid understanding of successful social media marketing tactics used by fashion firms. This study will contribute to the fashion marketing literature and guide future researches. Social media technological advancements have drastically changed marketing and advertising. Fashion business has undergone a transformation, with discernible variations observed as a result of new communication channels. In the present study we have strived to fill gaps present in literature. We looked into how social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, & Twitter are being used by fashion apparel brands as part of their marketing strategies. We found and categorized the promotional content they are posting in the form of social media posts.

1.1 Research questions

1) How fashion brands are effectively using Facebook for marketing purpose?
2) How fashion brands are effectively utilizing Instagram for marketing?
3) How fashion brands are using effectively utilizing Twitter for marketing?
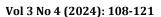
2. Literature Review

According to recent marketing research, fashion firms in particular need to use innovative social media marketing techniques to engage clients directly and personally (Le & Luong, 2019). According to Habibi et al. (2014), it has given fashion firms a platform to expand their brand communities and communicate visual material to potential customers. According to research 1% rise in the use of social media can result in a 20% growth in fashion sector (Ahmad et al., 2015). Social networks, primarily Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, offer a variety of communication channels for reaching target consumers (Gigauri, Z. (2024). Fashion clothes manufacturers are now utilizing social media to influence customers' decisions to buy products in a favorable way. Social media's visual communicative element, which mostly consists of reiterating the brand message across several platforms, aids in the effective development of brand value and attitude management (Jin & Muqaddam, 2019). 2019). Given that modern consumers expect to receive value for their money, social media is seen to have a significant role in shaping consumers' perceptions of the worth of fashion goods (Michaela & Orna, 2015).

2.1 Social Media Sites: Facebook, Instagram & Twitter

Social media presents the products of a company to millions of viewers in a friendly environment, which has the potential to improve sales. Social networks facilitate a broader, 2 way communication among consumers and brand, opening new channels of communication for spreading brand awareness (Thorbjørnsen et al., 2015). Since anyone can create a profile, their growing popularity is a result of their free accessibility to users (Chen & Lin, 2018). Many sites that were first popularized in 2003 enabled social connectivity at the mass level (Silvia, 2019).

Facebook is the most widely used social media platform, with 483 million active members (Loggerenberg, 2017). Nearly all commercial businesses have Facebook pages as part of their marketing mix due to the platform's massive user base. In order to stay relevant with the rapidly changing fashion business, fashion clothing brands have integrated Facebook completely to their online marketing campaigns. Prior to making a physical purchase from a company, around 64% of consumers browse their website social media profiles (Vavrová, 2024). Thus, more people visiting a brand's website may result in more sales. Facebook is being used by brands in many different ways. For example, the global fashion company Burberry gave its followers the opportunity to "sign in" on Facebook in exchange for a complimentary sample of the brand's scent (Silvia, 2019).

In essence, Instagram is a picture blog. Photos are published with a brief explanation. With the advent of digital photography in the early 21st century, picture blogs started to appear (De & Findlay, 2019). As photo blogs were easy to create, eliminated the need for additional film processing labor. The fashion business has made use of its inherent visual content, and the majority of fashion brands currently use photo blogs. Photo-bloggers typically take a lot of pictures, but their blogs feature the best ones. People can understand images despite any

language barriers all around the world. Although it has a facility for sharing videos as well, but are the primarily used content type (Le, & Luong, 2019).

A microblogging sites i.e. Twitter was introduced in 2006 (Hviid & Jakobsen, 2013). "A microblog allows users to exchange small elements of content such as short sentences, individual images, or video links" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Twitter is mostly used for news reporting, information sharing, daily updates, and chats. Primary motivations for using Twitter are relational benefits. Defined as "a relational benefit is personal perception; knowing what others are doing and things that are happening around" (Zhang & Lee (2019). A tweet, for example, can provide information about a brand's future product or deal before it appears in a fashion magazine (Jin & Muqaddam, 2019). Microblogs can influence consumers' purchase decisions; they are acting as word-of-mouth marketing. Word-of-mouth promotes trust, which is a basic component of marketing. In 2009, Twitter introduced the hashtag function, and subsequently, other websites adopted it as well (James, 2012).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Sampling

The analysis of this study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative strategy emphasizes analysis of data which is not in the form of numbers. Information was collected from 18 subject specialists working in various professional institution. The driving force behind choosing this design choice was to learn about the latest practices in the field of fashion from professionals. Purposive expert sampling with non-probability was used to choose the sample. Expertise and professional experience in the field of fashion was the criterion for interviewee selection.

3.2 Measurement Instruments and Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were employed to gather qualitative data. The researcher self-conducted open-ended interviews. The interview questions were prepared with consideration for the existing body of literature pertaining to the topic of fashion marketing. On average, 45 to 60 minutes were spent in each interview. The interviews were videotaped, then transcribed for examination.

3.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis technique was employed for analysis. The rationale behind selecting this approach was to discern recurring themes and patterns of social media marketing by fashion firms. Themes were developed following a thorough examination of the data. Peer review was used to confirm these themes, ensuring the validity of qualitative data.

4. Results and Findings

Participants for semi-structured consisted of educationists, fashion designers, textile designers, and marketing experts. Our results reveal following trends.

Table No 1: Use of Facebook for Marketing

Code	Category	Thematic Category	*F*	*%*
Code1	Key marketing tool			
Theme 1		Influential marketing tools	12	67%
Theme 2		extensive users	5	28%

Theme 3		old site	3	17%
Code 2	Brand-Growth			
Theme 1		Smart progress of brand	6	33%
Theme 2		value addition to organization	5	28%
Theme 3		Increased profits & sales	4	22%
Theme 4		Virtual shopping & delivery options	4	22%
Theme 5		Sponsored advertisements links	3	17%
Theme 6		Traffic is diverted to brand website by posting links	3	17%
Theme 7		Influence customer buying decision	2	11%
Theme 8		Regular update of brand posts	1	6%
Code 3	Target market			
Theme 1			8	44%
Theme 2		Users check brands profiles regularly	6	33%
Theme 3		User friendly for customers	6	33%
Theme 4		Maximum out reach	11	61%
Theme 5		Middle adults & older adults are users	3	17%
Code 4	Demerits			
Theme 1		Fake accounts	4	22%
Theme 2		Less posts in comparison to Instagram	2	11%
Theme 3		Less focused on marketing in comparison to Instagram	2	11%

Table 1 highlight emerging themes related to the use of Facebook as a marketing tool.

Table No 2: Use of Instagram for Marketing

Code	Category	Thematic Category	*F*	*%*
Code 1	Significant Marketing tool			
Theme 1		Widely used by Fashion brands	14	78%
Theme 2		Better marketing in comparison to Facebook	8	44%
Theme 3.		Trendy	6	33%
Theme 4.		Latest fashion updates	6	33%
Theme 5.		Latest marketing tool	2	11%
Theme 6.		Organized & effective	2	11%
Code 2	Brand Growth			
Theme 1.		Increased profits & sales	4	22%
Theme 2.		Value addition for brand	3	17%
Theme 3.		Online shopping and delivery options	3	17%
Theme 4.		Smart brand growth	2	11%
Theme 5.		Influence customer buying decision	1	6%
Code 3	Target market			
Theme 1.		Reach target market	6	33%
Theme 2.		Target Young adults & teenagers	5	28%
Theme 4.		Smart customer targeting	2	11%
Theme 5.		Serious Clients on Instagram	2	11%
Code 4	Photo-blog			
Theme 1.		newsfeed and stories for 24 hours	3	17%
Theme 2.		Communication through visuals	2	11%

Theme 3.		Small written contents	2	11%
Code 5	Effective promotional strategies			
Theme 1.		Focused on visual content sharing	7	39%
Theme 2.		Posting event related content in real time	7	39%
Theme 3.		Effective communication of brand message by visuals	6	33%
Theme 4.		Traffic converted to brands website by posting links	5	28%
Theme 5.		Active and up-to-date profiles	4	22%
Theme 6.		Sponsored adds & links	3	17%
Theme 7.		Current Algorithms	2	11%
Theme 8.		Brand recall to buy checked items by adds	2	11%
Theme 9.		Efficiently track community members demographics	1	6%

Table 2 shows prominent themes related to use of Instagram for marketing purpose.

Table No 3: Use of Twitter for Marketing

Code	Category	Thematic category	*F*	*%*
Code 1	Important Marketing tool			
Theme 1.		Fashion brands maintain active profiles on twitter	7	39%
Code 2	Brand Growth			
Theme 1.		Grow customers	6	33%
Theme 2.		Add value to brand reputation	4	22%
Theme 3.		Improved sales &profits	1	6%
Theme 4.		Smart brand growth	1	6%
Theme 5.		Influence consumer purchase decision	1	6%
Code 3	Target market			
Theme 1.		Reach potential customers on twitter	3	17%
Code 4	Effective promotional strategies			
Theme 1.		Brand events Announcement	6	33%
Theme 2.		Retweets of celebrities as word of mouth	5	28%
Theme 3.		News for fashion customers	4	22%
Theme 4.		Announcement of discount offers	4	22%
Theme 5.		Announcement of new collection launch	4	22%
Theme 6.		Announcement of awards	4	22%
Theme 7.		Celebrity following	1	5%
Code 5	Demerits			
Theme 1.		Less pictures & videos	4	22%
Theme 2.		Less frequent posts for updates	3	17%

Theme 3.	Fashion followers don't follow twitter regularly	3	17%
Theme 5.	Small posts (150 characters)	2	11%
Theme 6.	Less features for advertisements	3	17%

Table 3 displays the themes identified in questions about role of twitter in social media marketing.

4. Discussion

Since the current study concentrated on fashion apparel brands, we found that social media plays a critical role in the marketing of fashion brands. Fashion firms may use social media to quickly accomplish their marketing objectives. The strategic value of sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter has risen.

4.1 How fashion brands are effectively using Facebook for marketing purpose?

When it comes to brand outreach, Facebook is regarded as the best tool. Facebook has the most potential for brand visibility among social networking sites. Because of its enormous user base, Facebook has been included by most businesses in their marketing mix (Rup et al., 2021). In terms of users, it accounts for nearly the whole user base of social networking sites on social media. On Facebook, the greatest number of people may be found virtually at all times. According to one respondent:

> *"Marketing your product on Facebook ensures that you are reaching maximum target market".*

Facebook has the second-highest audience engagement rate in terms of consumer involvement, right behind Instagram. According to Ahmed (2016), Facebook also provides the second-highest volume of user interactions with brands. Facebook has been used by local fashion firms into their marketing mix, which has significantly influenced consumers' decisions to pick products or services. Fashion brands that are well-represented on Facebook boost revenue, enhance organizational value and facilitate intelligent brand expansion. While Facebook and Instagram are both utilized for business and online commerce, marketers' main issue when using social media for advertising is figuring out which social networking site their target market uses. Instagram has emerged as a competitor to Facebook, which was formerly the sole major social networking site. Some participants claimed that when it comes to marketing of fashion brands, Facebook is less focused than Instagram. Facebook is more focused on connecting users with friends and family than it is on being a fun and entertainment platform. According to a respondent,

> *"Less fashion designers and clothing brands are present on Facebook and profiles of some brands were observed to be less maintained".*

Facebook's combination of photo sharing and microblogging makes it a fun social networking platform. By motivating consumers, it enables firms to share videos, online catalogues, and photo sessions on social media, reaching a wider audience for fashion apparel. Facebook's engaging and enjoyable interface makes it a good platform for fashion advertising. Since buyers of fashion come from a variety of backgrounds. Many customers of designer apparel

are white-collar professionals from the upper middle class. Thus, the best marketing channel for designers of apparel is visually appealing and captivating displays that convey trendy items in a little amount of time (Shafaat et al. 2020).

Among teenagers and young adults, particularly those in the 18–29 age range, Facebook is an extremely popular social media site (Duggan, 2015). Other age groups have started using social media in recent years. Compared to Instagram, middle-aged people are more common on Facebook. Similar to Instagram, Facebook is more popular among women than men. Facebook is used by 66% of male and nearly 77% of female social media users. On Facebook, there are even elderly people. This shows that half of the generation uses Facebook, indicating that Facebook is useful for connecting with internet users of all ages.

Nearly every brand has a Facebook page with possibilities for purchasing online and delivery. Customers could ask questions from the branding team. By posting a link on their Facebook or Instagram profiles, marketers typically redirect their Facebook visitors to their websites. It establishes a connection between consumers and brands. Facebook facilitates connection building and target market interaction. According to one respondent,

> *"Facebook is more effective as compared to Instagram".*

Studies have indicated that commercial advertisements based on Facebook yield significantly better results than standard web advertisements. Using the brand's website, a customer may place an online order and check for updates on the brand all in the same tab. Fashion firms have the ability to boost the number of customers that visit their website (Muturi, 2024). Increased sales are a result of increased website visits as a result of traffic directed from brands' Facebook pages. Fashion brands that focus on effective customer interactions can reach their target audience and profit from Facebook's massive user base, which increases profits.

4.2 How fashion brands are effectively utilizing Instagram for marketing?

Instagram has become significantly in importance for fashion marketing recently. This is because it is a targeted kind of content dissemination with visual components. Nowadays, some fashion firms solely have an Instagram presence, while others maintain more recent and active pages than those on other platforms. Fashion firms can benefit from using Instagram in their marketing mix in a number of ways. It has been demonstrated to favorably affect consumers' intentions to make purchases. Because Instagram is so popular, a lot of sponsored and paid ads are run there. According to a respondent,

> *"I think that Instagram is very much in. Marketing efforts on Instagram are yielding greater benefits as compared to Facebook and Twitter".*

In comparison to other websites, Instagram has a vast reach. It's perfect for businesses to increase visibility because of the more targeted audience. This website is also used by over a million advertisers for marketing and advertising (Ahmed, 2016). Instagram accounts for fashion brands are more up to date, informative, and well-maintained. You can see the most current feeds from fashion pages on Instagram if you have followed them.

Instagram is the best website for marketing because of its extremely active user base. With about 95 million photographs and videos posted every day, it has emerged as the top

platform for sharing material. Compared to Facebook, it is more focused on rapid posts and content sharing. It has greatest audience engagement in comparison with all other social networking platforms. The majority of Instagram users check for stories at least once a day because they are live for 24 hours. Brands use paid advertising to promote their posts. Its posts show up on Instagram's news feed and suggestions. According to one respondent,

> *"Brands prefer Instagram because it has serious clients as compared to Facebook having large number of fake accounts. Even if you have 1000 likes on Facebook, most of them will not belong to right target market".*

In addition to having more interesting social media material than other websites, Instagram has a higher percentage of highly engaged users. Compared to other websites, brand website visitors from Instagram spend an average of 192 seconds there. Instagram is more fascinating and engaging for the fashion audience because of its visually appealing photo and video content. The audience is not required to read paragraphs.

Fashion firms must carefully consider their target audience when selecting a social networking platform. Facebook and Instagram are both utilized for business and online purchasing; therefore, when a brand is advertising on social media, their main goal is to determine which social media platform their possible target market uses most frequently. They want to pick the social media platforms that fashion purchasers frequently use. Our results were consistent with earlier studies that suggested a higher proportion of female Instagram users than male users.

However, the majority of Instagram users are young adults in the eighteen to twenty-nine age range. However, among its users are teenagers as well. Instagram is therefore a useful tool for connecting with younger target consumers (Duggan, 2015). An excellent tool for influencer marketing is Instagram. Instagram users who like and check out similar products on these sites are frequently shown sponsored advertisements by firms. Sponsored ads are displayed based on the interests of the customer, encouraging them to purchase things they have already looked at. According to one respondent,

> *"I believe being a social media manager Instagram has displayed better results in targeting right audience. Its targeting is much better than Facebook. Instagram algorithms are more effective and if a person checks a dress posted on Facebook and Instagram on Google Chrome same dress with its price and image will appear. So Instagram better track its member's age, gender and pages of interests".*

4.3 How fashion brands are using effectively utilizing Twitter for marketing?

Twitter is one of the top five sites for social networking. It's an authentic social networking platform. The credibility of these sites is increased by the presence of celebrities and companies. In addition to Facebook and Instagram, local fashion firms incorporate Twitter into their marketing mix to enhance their brand identity. Brands aim to draw a diverse range of followers on Twitter by maintaining a consistent presence. Brands utilize it to tweet news about their most recent launch events and sales.

Influencer marketing, new seasonal apparel collection launches, discounts, and event announcements are all shared on Twitter. Its growth has been quick since its launch. Because it is a microblog with a character limit of 140, its users find it unique and engaging. When using Twitter, the content's quality is crucial. Twitter marketing is distinct from that of other websites. It involves more than just periodically tweeting and hoping for audience participation. According to Feehan (2018), status updates didn't do well in every industry, but customers were definitely hungry for them on Twitter in the fashion space.

Worldwide, there are about 330 million active Twitter users each month. Twitter gives marketers the opportunity to reach willing participants in their audience. Despite having fewer features than Facebook or Instagram, this platform's distinct quality makes it extremely valuable for marketing. When something is posted on Twitter, it instantly shows up in everyone's news feed who is online. Twitter now offers tools for sharing live videos as well. Live videos and tweets covering events can engage customers with brands. During an event, live tweeting is a fantastic way to increase Twitter engagement (Barker, 2018). Influencer marketing phenomena are perfectly suited for Twitter. Even with a small following, a well-known influencer's retweet of your fashion brand can reach thousands of individuals with its message. Influencers with a sizable following can thus be used as a productive means of interacting with customers (Oliveira et al., 2019). According to a respondent,

> *"Twitter focuses on celebrities and important people and their personal opinions can in same ways promote brands".*

The quantity of likes and retweets on a tweet indicates its popularity on Twitter. Retweeting a tweet that resonated well with the audience allows for maximum engagement. To boost visits, fashion businesses include links to their websites in the majority of their Tweets. Which may increase brand sales. Fashion firms can boost brand engagement by raising retweets and clicks through their tweets that link to their website and other social media accounts (Barker, 2018). Fashion brands specifically use this platform to connect with followers who are exclusively on Twitter. On Twitter, there are people with a wide range of occupations, including fashion bloggers, designers, celebrities, actresses, models, politicians, athletes etc. most of the brand's Twitter profiles don't have as many daily updates as their Facebook pages. However, there seems to be a trend where firms tweet about future events, sales, and other notable company news. According to one respondent,

> *"The role of Twitter is negligible in Pakistan. Although fashion brands have their accounts on Twitter but fashion clients do not use this site commonly. While fashion Pakistani bloggers do follow Twitter to some extent".*

4.4 Branded Entertainments used by Fashion Brands

Through our analysis we identified different types of visual elements as a content used in social media posts of fashion brands. These visual elements validates the branded entertainment construct studies by Hudson & Hudson (2006), who states that "it consists of two ingredients i.e. entertainment and information about a brand". Branded entertainments recognized through our thematic analysis were photos, catalogues, videos, discounts, advertisements, interactive posts, downloads, events, and contests/sweepstakes/games. These

categories were also reported by Zhang (2010) in his research. To boost brand reach and foster customer interaction, branded entertainment is utilized on social media platforms (Zhang & Lee, 2019).

5. Conclusion

In the context of branded entertainment, social media marketing has become a crucial component of branding, playing a key role in enhancing customer value and image of the brand. Social media is a constantly developing marketing channel that has affected nearly all areas of branding. Social media posts' visual format has greatly benefited the fashion sector. According to recent study, fashion firms are working very hard to interact with clients on social media. Due to this distinct functions, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are all significant marketing platforms. For fashion firms to have the most visibility on Facebook, they must keep their profiles current. Because Facebook profiles combine photo-blog and micro-blog features, they can effectively engage customers. Facebook's enjoyable interface makes it an ideal advertising tool for individuals of all ages. Because Instagram is a photoblog, clothing brands are using it more and more frequently. Because of its quick posts and sharing of visual content, it is not only the most engaging social media platform but also has the most engaged users. The 24-hour stories feature on Facebook and Instagram is a valuable tool for fashion firms to engage their customers. Twitter is an effective platform for conversations, information sharing, news reporting, and daily updates. Because microblogging uses fewer characters and is based on real-time, it is seen as more credible. Every day, hundreds of posts by fashion firms, artists, designers, consumers, and everyone else interested in fashion may be found using a popular hashtag like #fashion. Links that are cross-posted across social media pages and brand websites can be used to redirect visitors. Future potential of branded entertainment marketing is explained by fashion brands' e-commerce and online promotion. According to Zhang (2010), it is imperative that brands research appropriate branded entertainment that effectively encourages customers to participate on online platforms. It is encouraged when customers participate in online forums to display group membership. Traditional ways of advertising did not allow for this element. Online selling and advertising activities explain future prospects of branded entertainment marketing. It is essential for firms to identify suitable branded entertainments that will better engage consumers. Users are appreciated to show membership with group and express their experiences online. This element was previously not possible with traditional advertising.

5.1 Future Recommendations

More researches need to be conducted to increase literature related to online marketing of fashion firms, and studies can improve our understanding. Future research should examine other possible intervening variables that influence effectiveness of social media marketing remains paramount.

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