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**IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON FASHION
INDUSTRY IN ITALY**

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Industry in Italy**



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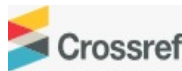
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Abstract

Purpose: The study sought to analyze impact of social media marketing on fashion industry in Italy

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The results show that Social media has done a number of incredible things for the fashion industry, including creating fashion icons, heavily influencing fashion trends and ultimately reforming the way people go about seeking jobs in the field. Social media have turned from a simple communication tool into a huge power that influences many industries. And fashion is one of the most intertwined niches. Social platforms impact fashion, changing trends and setting the mood for haute couture and mass market segments.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practices and Policies: McLuhan's media theory and Chaffey's may be used to anchor future studies in the Fashion design sector. The study results will also benefit other stakeholders such as the policy makers as well as researchers and scholars from different parts of the world. The top management of fashion industries in the country will also use the study findings to improve social media coverage performance in all their activities and programs. The study recommends that the adoption of effective fashion development policies in the media will help to improve efficiency in their major operations and activities.

Keywords: *Impact, Social Media Marketing, Fashion Industry, Italy.*

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INTRODUCTION

Social media marketing refers to the use of social media platforms by fashion designers and users to promote and participate in trends. The emergence of social media has transformed the world and its entire way of functioning, bringing the world and its people closer. Fashion industry to connect with their customers using the latest social networking technology. The fashion industry is using social media to study trends and anticipate fashion behaviors. It is embracing social media, which has enabled it to emerge in the forefront as a phenomenon (Mohr, 2013). Through social media, they spread the message and gained attention to their production as a result having a chance to win the love of the consumers and shake the ground under the mass market. The costs for running a successful promotion campaign are lesser, and due to the analytical instruments and prospecting, small brands can get more profit as they reach the accurate target audience. Gone are the days when you had to take a bus and a train to find the latest styles. Humans are naturally very social beings and the way we communicate is a vital aspect of our lives (Ahmad, 2015). More importantly, communicating over long distances is something that people once struggled with, but thanks to recent advances in technology, it is much easier for us today. Where we once relied on smoke signals and even carrier pigeons, we have many more options now. During the 1800s, there was a rush among inventors to develop new and better ways to allow long distance and mass communication (Dewi, 2022). In the 1800's there was an explosion in the ways we communicated globally. Telegraphs, radio, and telephones made a dramatic difference in how information can be conveyed. The continuous search for the innovative ways of communication leads us to the development of different social media. But social media has taken it a step further. Shopping has gotten so much easier! Consumers can click through to the brand's website, or checkout via Instagram if they want to purchase.

Traditionally, before social media, becoming a fashion icon was next to impossible. Someone in the fashion industry had to see you and think you were incredible. They had to build your brand from scratch. Unless you had fame from other experiences, your journey entailed audition after audition, deal after deal, catwalk after catwalk, and after all of which you would still only have the slightest chance of becoming a recognizable fashion figure (Michaela, 2015). But social media has changed the game. Numerous social media platforms are used to promote fashion trends, with Instagram and Tiktok being the most popular among Generation Y and Z. Instead of waiting for someone to discover them, users are getting themselves discovered. With new tools like Instagram, users are building their own brands and finding their own fans and followers. Instagram has given average people exposure to opportunities that they otherwise would not have. In 2015, Rihanna recruited a person to star in her music video by sending her a direct message saying that she liked her style. New York retail agencies and brands are able to easily find self-made Instagram models that match their brand and have large followings to promote their products (Sudha, 2017). Social media has allowed users to build their own online fashion. Over the past several decades, the development of social media has increased along with its usage by consumers.

Social media has created new channels of advertising for fashion houses to reach their target markets. Since its surge in 2009, luxury fashion brands have used social media to build interactions between the brand and its customers to increase awareness and engagement. The emergence of influencers on social media has created a new way of advertising and maintaining customer relationships in the fashion industry (Hsiao, 2020). The overall impact of social media in the

fashion industry included the creation of online communities, direct communication between industry leaders and consumers, and criticized ideals that are promoted by the industry through social media. Social media created a whole new career path in the fashion world. When people start using social platforms to share a glimpse of their lives and curated content, it attracts interest, attention, and views. The high demand for videos, pictures, and shared information brought to life the job of influencing. Marketers and companies are currently comfortable with using social media as part of their marketing strategy (Chu, 2020). Fashion industry is not an exception to this. Just like fashion, where style inherently is shared as a representation of one's self-image, social media allows the reflection of people's personality and emotions. The adoption and use of social media marketing among fashion companies or brands have therefore become ubiquitous. Italy has been known as a major center of the European fashion industry and it has many worldwide leading brands in luxury fashion, such as Gucci, Prada, or Dolce & Gabbana, to mention some. The European fashion industry is a vibrant one, and also an important contributor to the European Union (EU) economy. Within the luxury sector, Italy is the third largest market in the world (Ananda, 2017). The Italian luxury goods industry orbits around local craftsmanship and artisans. Many of the vertically integrated brands or companies started from the traditional small-business structure with the support of local artisans with global players developing a strategy known as global and local. Hence, it is interesting to observe how both type of fashion companies big global brands and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are conducting their social media marketing.

Adopting an exploratory approach, we present cases of two Italian luxury fashion brands with different company sizes, Gucci and The Bridge. The two cases are used as representative examples in order to investigate how luxury fashion brands use social media as a marketing tool, and how they connect with their target market, by assessing their activities in different social media platforms. (Hu, 2022). The two companies included in this study are fashion brands that target the luxury segment, but they are very different in terms of size and sales, and offer slightly different types of fashion products. Gucci is one Italian fashion giant that actively uses social media marketing. It is among the top 10 firms in the Fashion index, as of September 2014 (Nadeem, 2015). Fashion measures digital presence for example buzz generated in social media, influencers, trends and brand impact as well as business results. Moreover, Gucci was listed as the third world's most valuable fashion brand in 2011. On the other side, The Bridge is a Florence-based SME company that manufactures and markets premium and high-end luxurious leather bags and accessories. The Bridge also has an active presence in social media platforms with marketing purposes. One thing both companies have in common is that they state that they highly value the Made in Italy craftsmanship (Matarazzo, 2020). Magazines once controlled the latest news in fashion. Now, social media reigns as the one-stop shop for all kinds of fashion-related information, from controversies to rising designers and trends. Instead of cutting out magazine pages of inspirational looks, people pin and save their favorite outfits and style ideas to their digital fashion board.

Social media influences fashion trends by offering a place for a trend to grow and then continuing its surge of popularity. It collects the latest looks and style tips, spreading them to the mass of people with access to the web. Without social media's influence, trends wouldn't catch on as fast nor switch as much as they do now (Yasa, 2021). One of the most significant changes that social media has made to fashion is the people who influence consumers. Bloggers, models, comedians

and social media personalities have taken over and content is critical. Whether that content is on YouTube of someone sharing their food recipes, someone playing a video game on Twitch, or a viral dance on Tiktok. These new types of online celebrities are called influencers. 70% of teens trust influencers more than traditional celebrities, according to Google's research. Every influencer has a fan base, and they create content tailored for them. This skill goes hand in hand with their ability to market themselves. As a result, brands often ask them to sell their products to their audience (Chun, 2018). With the ability to pick and choose which names in the fashion they wear, influencers have a considerable impact on their legions of fans. Many influencers launch their clothing brands if they have a broad enough market. Still, it is a race for clothing businesses to get influencers to share their products. These individuals are one of the critical social media marketing channels you should be looking to use to advertise your clothing. As Social media is the primary source of information, the fashion industry seems to make the most of it. The rapid growth of social media makes it easier for people to cultivate their own brands (Tripathi, 2019). People start with an account and after some time (and a lot of effort) they gain a decent following, and boom! It's the beginning of building a fashion community. Brands start approaching influencers for collaborations and endorsements, and here making a difference in fashion choices. Social media provides new pathways for trends and styles to circulate (Abudular, 2020). An influencer or a celebrity wears a pair of animal-print trousers with a crop top in a video for their Instagram story. It's seen by one, two, 10,000 people and the next thing you know it's a new trend. It goes viral all over the globe in a matter of hours. Remember e-girl fashion trends? That's the perfect example as it emerged in 2019 and went viral soon after. Heavily inspired by K-pop and anime, a typical e-girl look involves igari-style makeup, facial stamps and winged eyeliner. Most e-girls also switch up their hair color: lime green, blue, or pink tresses, a regular sight on Tiktok..

Statement of the Problem

Over the last decade, Social media has become an effective marketing tool. It has not only created a new dimension of marketing, but has also provided many opportunities to the marketers to create brand awareness among consumers. It is now considered as the most transparent, engaging and interactive form of public relations. Social media is a compilation of online platforms and communication channels that are used by people to share information, profiles, assumptions, observations, apprehension, and media itself; it facilitates communication and interactions between different groups of people from all across the world. The world has become a Global Village & with the advent of information technology, the ways of communication and work have been revolutionized completely. One of the most noticeable influences on the fashion industry is the swiftness of trend changes. Nowadays, in particular, Instagram is a well-known platform to promote and examine new trends in clothing. With the fast reaction of the communities online, each trend finds its target audience and lives long enough to make a profit out of it. They are endless opportunities for customers or others to criticize a company's products on the internet. Unfavorable reviews genuine or orchestrated can appear on multiple websites and dampen demand for a particular product. A customer may complain to her friends on Facebook about an ill-fitting garment or post photos on Instagram of a product that arrived damaged. Some social media commentary involves a brand or company as a whole. Commenters may object to a company's business practices or even the personal activities or political opinions of a CEO or a celebrity endorser. In a time of polarized views, it may be impossible to avoid negative reactions altogether.

The challenge for companies is to capture this information and respond to it quickly. If social media commentary is based on incorrect information, this requires correcting customers' misperceptions. If the negative commentary is valid, it offers an opportunity to fix the problem for example, by redesigning a style for better fit or by publicly committing to change business practices that customers object to. When there is no way to counter negative perceptions, a company may have to engage in costly demand shaping extra marketing activities, price reductions, or special promotions to clear the excess supply. In all cases, the information about reduced demand should be quickly applied to planning and forecasting to avoid building up excess inventory.

Studies have been done on impact of social media, marketing and fashion industry. Artha (2018) conducted a study to analyze how fashion brands implement their social media marketing strategies. The research includes a qualitative study, combined with a content analysis of brands' posts on their Facebook brand-pages. Kisato (2014), conducted a study to investigate the utilization of E-Marketing tools in Fashion MSEs and how entrepreneurial orientation (EO), internal and external forces influenced utilization of E-Marketing. This study used a cross section analytical survey research method. A validated questionnaire was used to collect data from 156 fashion enterprises that had an online presence by December 30th 2012. This studies presented both a geographical and methodological gap that our study tends to fill by focusing on impact of social media marketing on fashion industry in Italy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

This Study will benefit from the McLuhan's Media Theory which was proposed by McLuhan (1995), Chaffey's theory by Chaffey (2012)

McLuhan's Media Theory

The McLuhan's Media Theory was proposed by McLuhan (1995). This theory states that the media itself, rather the actual content of the media, will transform people and society. The actual messages people are communicating won't be any different on the new media; the interactivity and frequency of new communication pattern will change our behavior forever (Abdular, 2020). Thus, the media's effects on society are much greater than the content of the media. As business managers and consumers, one needs to realize the changing behavior due to the usage of new social media services and adopt an attitude of acceptance toward those technologies and behavior. Monitoring and facilitating customer's interaction, participation and sharing through digital media to encourage positive engagement with a company and its brands leading to commercial value. McLuhan believed that people should observe not only the media itself but "the ways in which each new medium disrupts tradition and reshapes social life." He believed that the social impact of the media was that they became an extension of the human senses, and alter the social world.

Chaffey's Theory

Chaffey's theory was proposed by Chaffey (2012). This theory states that to exploit the advantages of online networking it is imperative to begin and take an interest in client discussions. These can be identified with items, advancements or client benefit and are gone for adapting more about clients and offering help so enhancing the way an organization is seen. The web-based social

networking technique has turned into a center component of the computerized business procedure. However, making a web-based social networking or client engagement procedure is trying since it requires an adjustment in the outlook for the organization since they may need to surrender some control on their side to empower them to speak with clients viably (Kisato, 2014). Most organizations, then again, just know how to talk in the mitigating, humorless monotone of the statement of purpose, promoting handout, and your-call-is-essential-to-us occupied flag. Same old tone and same old falsehoods. Obviously, more than an adjustment in mentality is required to accomplish change on this scale requires senior administration sponsorship, venture, and changes to procedures and apparatuses, as portrayed in the following part on change administration. This theory urges supervisors to change their way of life and give procedures and apparatuses to empower workers of an association to interface with and tune in to client needs mindfully.

Empirical Review

Artha (2018) analyzed how fashion brands implement their social media marketing strategies. The research includes a qualitative study, combined with a content analysis of brands' posts on their Facebook brand-pages. The results suggest that perceived importance of social media as part of corporate marketing strategy is the main driver for brands' social media marketing implementation, and that brand awareness is the main objective SMEs would like to achieve. The three Spanish brands and one Italian brand appear to take a transactional marketing approach, while the other two Italian brands adopt a hybrid transactional/relational approach. SMEs focus primarily on representation actions; more specifically, promotion and sales.

Omwaga (2018) determined the effect of strategic management practices employed by managers in local garment making MSEs with respect to the product concept and the price concept in Kenya. The study adopted a cross sectional descriptive research design to collect data, analyze and present. A pre- test was carried out on 10 MSEs at the Nairobi Textile who were not included in the final study. The pre-test was carried out to ascertain reliability of the data collection instrument. The study found out that marketing management practices employed by managers of local garment making MSEs had a statistically significant effect on competitiveness. Price and Product were found to be the highest contributors to local garment making MSEs competitiveness, while Promotion and Place were the least. The uniqueness in garment designs as well as strategies to handle complaints arising from the locally made garments are the variables within the product concept that promoted competitiveness the most. The study also revealed that product branding and package branding were the practices least utilized by local garment making MSEs. R² (Coefficient of determination) was found to be at .7136, which implied the marketing mix variables contributed to 71.36% of MSEs competitiveness.

Wandaka (2016) analyzed the use of social media marketing and its effect on performance in fashion enterprises in Kenya. Random sampling method was used to select a sample size of 170 enterprises. Descriptive statistics was generated to describe the demographics of the respondents, characteristics of the enterprises and utilization of social media. Regression analysis and one-way ANOVA was used to examine the linear relationships between social media use and performance. The main findings of the study were that Facebook marketing significantly influenced customer retention while twitter marketing significantly influenced return on investment, social media marketing was useful to increase market share in fashion enterprises.

Nadeem (2015) studied how online shopping via Facebook, peer recommendations, and website service quality affect consumer trust, attitudes and loyalty intentions in e-tailing. An online survey was conducted with Generation Y Italian consumers who used Facebook searches of various websites to shop for clothing online. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to validate the constructs, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypotheses. Findings confirm that website service quality and consumers' predispositions to use Facebook for online shopping directly and positively affect consumer trust toward an e-tailer. In contrast, peer recommendations affect attitude directly rather than indirectly via trust.

Kisato (2014) investigated the utilization of E-Marketing tools in Fashion MSEs and how entrepreneurial orientation (EO), internal and external forces influenced utilization of E-Marketing. This study used a cross section analytical survey research method. A validated questionnaire was used to collect data from 156 fashion enterprises that had an online presence by December 30th 2012. The study revealed that, there was a statistically significant relationship between internal forces and performance: return on investment (RoI): ($F=6.962$, $p=0.00$, $R^2=0.30$) and customer retention rate: ($F=2.691$, $p=0.006$, $R^2=0.142$). External forces had a statistically significant relationship on performance (RoI: $F=6.600$, $p=0.000$, $R^2=0.264$), customer conversion ($F=2.853$, $p=0.006$, $R^2=0.134$) and customer retention rate ($F=3.295$, $p=0.002$, $R^2=0.152$). EO had a statistically significant relationship on performance: RoI: ($F=5.492$, $p=0.000$, $R^2=0.253$), and customer retention rate: ($F=3.738$, $p=0.000$, $R^2=0.137$). There was a statistically significant relationship between utilization of E-Marketing and performance: RoI ($F=2.156$, $p=0.024$, $R^2=0.129$), Net profit: ($F=2.812$, $p=0.03$, $R^2=0.162$), customer conversion ($F=3.431$, $p=0.000$, $R^2=0.191$) and customer retention rate ($F=3.879$, $p=0.00$, $R^2=0.211$)

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library

RESULTS

The results were grouped into various research gap categories namely as contextual, and geographical and Methodological gap.

Contextual and Geographical Gap

Studies by Artha (2018), Omwaga (2018), Wandaka (2016) and Kisato (2014) had geographical gap because they were not conducted in Italy. This implies that the results may be inapplicable in Italy since the social economic environment of Italy and other countries differ. The current study seeks to address this gap.

Methodological gap

Methodological gap presents itself in this study, for example, Artha (2018) conducted a study to analyze how fashion brands implement their social media marketing strategies. The research includes a qualitative study, combined with a content analysis of brands' posts on their Facebook

brand-pages. Kisato (2014), conducted a study to investigate the utilization of E-Marketing tools in Fashion MSEs and how entrepreneurial orientation (EO), internal and external forces influenced utilization of E-Marketing. This study used a cross section analytical survey research method. A validated questionnaire was used to collect data from 156 fashion enterprises that had an online presence by December 30th 2012. This two studies presented a methodological gap since our study will utilize a desktop research methodology.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study found out that Social Networking Sites are fast emerging as powerful and unparalleled tools to share information, shape opinions, connect people across domains and cultures, bring participation, and above all to communicate as never before. This is just the beginning. Social Networking Sites are still at a very nascent stage and communities across the world are just beginning to understand the potential of this medium to impact discourse and communication. This study viewed the impact of social networking sites and how the social networking sites influence youth in their fashion preferences. Since Social Networking Sites can provide all the ways and means to develop personal and social aspects, the young people have to explore the potentialities of these sites. Social Networking Sites influence the lifestyle of youth so that the fashion brands and fashion industries can exploit the space of Social Networking Sites to promote their fashion styles trends among youth.

Established clothing brands are eager to buy Instagram live views and widen their target audience to impeccable heights. Today, it is practically impossible to imagine fashion without being highlighted on social media. The world has become a global village and with the advent of information technology, the ways of communication and work have been revolutionized completely. The emergence of social media has transformed the world and its entire way of functioning, bringing the world and its people closer. In general, having a connection with a wider variety of brands of different scales improves modern consumers' demand. People have a wider choice and feel satisfied with their self-expression through clothes, shoes, and other fashion items. One of the most noticeable influences on the fashion industry is the swiftness of trend changes. Nowadays, in particular, Instagram is a well-known platform to promote and examine new trends in clothing. With the fast reaction of the communities online, each trend finds its target audience and lives long enough to make a profit out of it.

Recommendations

Since the lifestyle of youth in regard to fashion is affected by Social Networking sites, the fashion industries and brands can give their advertisements in Social networking sites in more attractive and authentic way to attract and create awareness among youth. Creative and talented youth can also utilize this opportunity by developing their own creative products and opening new fan pages for such sites in Social networking sites.

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