

Chapter 77

Fast–Fashion Meets Social Networking Users: Implications for International Marketing Strategy

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ABSTRACT

With the emergence of e-commerce, the fast fashion industry has experienced a revolution in terms of its management and how it is marketed. Rapid advancements in internet-related infrastructures and services have propelled explosive growth in what is considered to be one of the fastest growing industries in the global economy. The future of fast fashion is now being influenced by advanced technologies. The growing role of online social media and networks in marketing has important implications for how consumers, channels, and companies interface. Shoppers harness social media and user-generated content to make key purchase decisions. This chapter contributes to the existing literature on the influence of digital marketing on fast fashion, and it provides a number of pertinent marketing recommendations in regard to the practice of apparel retailers.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 25 years, the fashion apparel industry has experienced significant change, which has given rise to the concept of ‘throwaway’ or ‘fast-fashion’. The phrase “fast-fashion” refers to low-cost clothing collections that mimic current luxury fashion trends from runway catwalks to racks in record time (Brooks, 2015). The industry is characterized by high turnover of stock to ensure that shelves are replenished with new styles and fashions in response to real-time demand (Hansson, 2011). Fast fashion is the contemporary practice of designing and manufacturing clothing within a timely manner, at affordable prices, and targeted at mainstream consumers (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Agarwal & Aggrawal, 2012). Fast fashion retailing is a relatively new idea that has been driven by persistent consumer demand

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for high fashion trends. Such trends have been translated into low-priced garments and accessories by mass-market retailers at low cost (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang & Chan, 2012; Choi, 2014). The underlying aim of this chapter is to critically examine the effects of social networking users on fast-fashion.

The purpose of developing a new market for fast-fashion products is to serve the target audience of young adults who prefer cheap, but trendy clothes. The market segment is driven by cost-pressures, mainly due to repetitive purchases amongst lower-income target groups (Atwal, Bryson, & Von Gersdorff, 2010). The key ingredient of fast fashion is the ability to track consumer preferences quickly and help sate the demand for 'cheap luxury fashion' amongst young consumers in the industrialized world (Ertekin & Atik, 2015). Fast-fashion diffuses designs based on the traditional concept of *haute couture* with reasonably priced ready-to-wear pieces, which are important to fashion markets (Amatulli, Mileti, Speciale, & Guido, 2016). In doing so, it captures the essence of time and quickly adopts current trends in the market.

Global retailers have developed fast-fashion business models based on three main pillars: the price of the apparels and accessories, the process and speed of manufacturing, and the style-oriented nature and disposability of garments. Fast fashion companies, unlike conventional clothing retailers, take an *ad hoc* approach towards designing, manufacturing, and releasing new products rather than planning product lines every season (Barnes & Lea – Greenwood, 2010; Lago, Martínez-de-Albéniz, Moscoso, & Vall, 2016). Nonetheless, the fast fashion industry owes its worldwide success to its "out-of-the-box" thinking rationale, which deviates from traditional approaches.

From a product-driven perspective, the fast fashion model originated in Europe in the 1980s. What started off as a basis for a new manufacturing model also referred to as "quick response" later transitioned to a market-based model of "fast fashion" during the 1990s (Lowson, King, & Hunter, 1999; Christopher, Lowson, & Peck, 2004; Barnes & Lea - Greenwood, 2010). Since the turn of the 21st century, the fast fashion industry has occupied a very profitable position in the market. Leaders in the fast fashion industry expanded around Europe and infiltrated the U.S. in the 2000s. The shift from "planned production" to a quick response production system has enabled global fast fashion companies to immediately adapt to the latest trends and prepare inventory for the season in advance to meet consumer demand (Doyle, Moore, & Morgan, 2006; Barnes & Lea – Greenwood, 2010; Joey, 2011). With globalized operations and a focus on dominating emerging markets, the fast fashion industry has experienced a shift from local business to global business.

Moreover, fashion retailers have repositioned themselves in the market as trendsetters instead of trend followers by taking on leadership and innovation practices (Hemphill & Suk, 2009). With the advent of social media, the fast-fashion industry has been vigorously undertaking innovative marketing strategies which continue to influence consumer attitudes towards brands as well as creating brand equity (Kim & Ko, 2012; Godey, Manthiou, Pederzoli, Rokka, Aiello, Donvito, & Singh, 2015; Azemi and Ozuem, 2016). Advertising and promotional campaigns on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, are increasingly influencing brand communications and brand building (Chae, Ko, & Han, 2014). These online marketing communication campaigns are identified by fast-fashion companies as business take-off tools that not only enhance brand-to-consumer relationships, but also amplify consumer-to-consumer communities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This creates an electronic word-of-mouth effect and thus facilitates viral marketing opportunities (Wolny & Mueller, 2013).

Social networking sites combined with user-experienced content facilitate an online interactive environment to exchange ideas and information among consumers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Chae et al., 2014; Ozuem, Patel, Howell & Lancaster, 2017). Through social media engagement, fast-fashion brands

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