

Evaluating the Efficacy of Facebook Communities & Twitter Tweets on Brand Equity: An Empirical Study on Fashion Brands

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Abstract—The purpose of the paper is to evaluate the effect of Twitter and Facebook – the top ranked social media sites as marketing strategy to gain a better share in the fashion market. It explores the current state of Twitter and Facebook and how brands fit within this network. It focusses at detailed analysis of customer behaviors in online communication.

The social media websites have made fashion brands more accessible to everyone. Consumers can access wide variety of fashion goods on Internet and also share their reviews and comments with the peers. To

further understand social media as a marketing strategy, the paper examines the relationship between Facebook Communities, Twitter Tweets and Brand Equity (in context of fashion industry).

This paper retests the most popularly adopted brand equity dimensions. It also aims to empirically test and operationalize the customer based brand equity components and how they interact with the fashion brands. It also seeks to examine the practicality and applications of the customer based brand equity model in the fashion industry and also looks at modifying it as per the social media sites – Facebook & Twitter.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion is the most dynamic industry, with new trends coming in every few months. People's tendency to always looking ahead to the newest trends and sharing the same with friends and family is perhaps the reason why social media and fashion are intertwined. Women's Wear Daily describes social media and fashion as "an all-consuming love affair" (Benet Stephenson & Strugatz, 2010).

Interacting with your customers in this business world has become a must, supported by the fact that marketers and advertisers are constantly discussing about changing their panorama, and momentum they are gaining from this. Orcutt 2012 considers the fact that allowing the consumers to have a personal experience with a brand is the reason why social media platforms are growing in popularity. The strategy behind increasing the presence on social media is to bring the brand closer to everyday person. The use of social media is slowly changing the world of communication: information

online reaches a wider audience and everyone can contribute to the global dialogue.

Branding remains the industry's largest source of competitive advantage. This is an area of fashion in which customer's purchasing choices are frequently determined by the celebrities they admire, or the people they follow, and the brands they aspire to wear (Kim et. al, 2012). Facebook is a popular platform in fashion as it allows brands to post variety of content. It may be the recent news releases, the new collection, and celebrity endorsement and so on. Another trendy platform that has become an integral part of making fashion brands more accessible is Twitter. Twitter has gained popularity with fashion brands because of its admiration how company comes closer to the consumer.

The paper therefore elucidates the use of Facebook and Twitter by communicational professionals in the fashion industry. This paper also looks at how fashion brands communicate and engage with the public in an interactive way and henceforth understanding the impact of Facebook & Twitter on Brand Equity. Max Azria, the fashion designer, known for dressing top celebrities, "Today we have to be totally crazy and make stuff that stands out," he said. "It takes so much more to get a consumer's attention because they're more careful about how they spend their money" (Lutz, 2012).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Branding & Fashion Industry

Branding influences consumer decision, numerous studies have been conducted to explain this (Lis&Berz, 2011; Peter & Olson, 2008; Rubinstein & Griffiths, 2001; Wirtz, 2006). The American Marketing Association defined a brand in 2010 as a "name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers." Kotler and Keller (2007) define the act of

branding as “endowing products and services with the power of a brand.”

Branding is highly important in the fashion industry (Reichel, 1994). Fashion is ranked as the fourth largest industry in the global economy (Helmores 2010; Yoganarasimhan, 2012). A study conducted by Bellaicheet. al (2012) states that fashion is a \$300 billion industry.

Newman and Patel (2004) found that “branding messages are reinforced through the promotional activities and advertising in particular”. After the popularization of the Internet and launch of social media platforms, it is clear that researchers were still not aware of the necessity to investigate how communication professionals used online media to reinforce their brand.

2.2 Branding through Facebook & Twitter

(Ahlqvist, et al., 2008) defines the term ‘social media’ as a basis of interactions among Internet users who create, share, and exchange content information via networks. Social media can be viewed in many different forms which include Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro blogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures and video sharing, ratings and social bookmarking (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), as well as social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest that offer a combination of all the media function features mentioned above with an emphasis on the relationships among the users in the community (Agichtein, et al., 2008).

Social media in terms of branding a company are perhaps best defined by Rubinstein and Griffiths (2001): “social media help build a brand personality and make the brand more approachable for customers”. In recent years, the growth of social media has caught fashion retailers’ attention. According to the research conducted by L2ThinkTank, the key indicators of effectiveness in promoting brand value lie in brand presence, community size, content, and engagement (Galloway, 2012).

Technology encourages customers to interact with brands. These customer interactions build the brand by increasing awareness, involvement and engagement, thus increasing the brand recall and loyalty. Consequently the fashion consumer has become more informed and demanding.

Modern social media now helps consumers to shop at will on the Internet, access a wide variety of fashion goods and exchange their experiences. Understanding all of this, Salesforce published a social media data report “Facebook and Twitter guide for the Fashion Industry”. It provides tips for fashion brands looking to use social media as interactive tools.

Salesforce report analysed 90 Facebook pages and 54 Twitter handles of the “world’s largest fashion brands over the course of three months in 2012” (Salesforce, 2012)

Salesforce (2012) notes, “As a highly visual and expressive industry with an engaged consumer base, the increased exposure and interactivity provided by social media lends itself particularly well to brands in the fashion space”

Thus, fashion is a highly visual industry and mediums like Facebook and Twitter allow them to share content with consumers in order to bring them closer to their brand. Henceforth, fashion industry uses Facebook and Twitter to engage and interact with fans and consumers.

In order to earn profit by online connected consumers, “fashion brands need to balance exclusivity with accessibility” (Kemp, 2009).

2.3 Customer Based Brand Equity

Since the term “Brand Equity” emerged in the 1980s, marketers and academicians are growing interest in the subject (Cobb-Walgreen et al, 1995). The meaning of the term brand equity has always been a topic of debate for a number of purposes (Keller, 2002). Brand Equity is the added value endowed by the brand name (Keller, 2002).

Compared to the definition of Brand Equity from a financial perspective as the total value of the brand, customer based brand equity is defined from the perspective of the customer and is based on customer knowledge, familiarity and associations with respect to the brand (Washburn and Plank, 2012).

Berry (2000) has developed a model for creating brand equity for services. He identifies brand equity as “*the differential effect of brand awareness and brand meaning combined on customer response to the marketing of the brand*”, which is his interpretation of Keller’s (1993) definition of brand equity.

The Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model identifies four steps which denote questions asked by customers, and represent a ‘branding ladder’, with each step dependent on achieving the previous one (Keller, 2001). These steps consist of six brand building blocks, with a number of sub-dimensions (Keller, 1993).

Briefly overviewed, the first step of the CBBE model is to ensure the correct ‘brand identity’. Answering the first question customers ask about brands - Who are you? - the purpose is to create an identification of the brand, and an association with a specific product class or need (Keller, 2003). The initial step consists of the brand building block, ‘salience’.

The second step answers the customer question - What are you? - by establishing ‘brand meaning’ in their minds, and linking brand associations with certain properties (Keller, 2001). Two brand building blocks make up this step - ‘performance’ and ‘imagery’. The next step is ‘brand response’ whereby the proper customer responses to the brand identification and meaning are elicited (Keller, 2003). This

step is achieved with the ‘judgments’ and ‘feelings’ building blocks, and answers the question - What about you?

‘Brand relationships’ constitutes the final step in the CBBE pyramid where brand response is converted to an intense, active loyalty relationship between customers and the brand (Keller, 2001). Addressing the customer question of - What about you and me? The final brand- building block and the pinnacle of the pyramid is ‘resonance’.

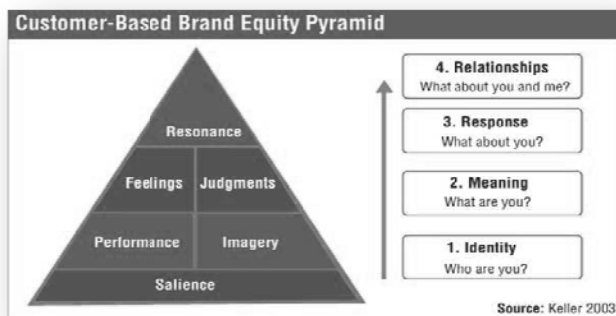


Fig. 1: Keller's Customer Based Brand Equity Model

3. THE RESEARCH MODEL

The principle objective of the paper is to reconstruct the customer based brand equity components, and understand interaction with the fashion brands considering Facebook and Twitter as the key mediums.

Specifically, the paper looks at how five fashion brands used Facebook and Twitter to communicate and engage with the public in an interactive way. In the paper we follow the most comprehensive brand equity model available in the literature i.e. Keller's (1993, 2001, 2003)(Figure1). Brand equity, as defined by Keller (1993), occurs when a brand is known and has some strong, favorable and unique associations in a consumer's memory.

The variables under consideration for formulation of a model are two social media activities i.e. Twitter Tweets and Facebook Community (Wall Page). The variables to evaluate brand equity are Brand Salience (Identity of the brand), Brand Performance & Imagery (Meaning of the brand) Brand Judgment & Feelings (Response from the brand) & Brand Resonance (Brand Relationships).

In order to understand the relation between Social media (especially Facebook and Twitter) and fashion industry dynamics and further relating them with the variables of brand equity, we analyzed fashion brands through their respective Facebook pages and tweet/retweets on Twitter followed by collection of statistical data.

The respondents were recruited via updates posted on Twitter & Facebook, by an email invitation, personalized messages, or

by an online blog post on a fashion blog. After an invitation to participate in the survey, respondents were assigned to online questionnaire through Google Docs. The results were then analyzed to form the predictions for the model elucidating the effect on brand equity.

The questionnaire was broadly divided into 2 categories. The first part was specific to the fashion brand's social media activities and the second part of the questionnaire consisted of questions with multiple measurement tools to evaluate the constructs of brand equity. "Statistical Package for Social Science" (SPSS) packages was used to analyze the collected data.

The respondents fall in 2 different categories – one who religiously follow the selected five fashion brands based on their popularity on social media and the ones who are not active followers of fashion brands on Twitter or Facebook. The respondents of the second group were then asked to give opinion of the brands' social media activities. Next, they were asked to fill in the customer-based brand equity scale. On the other hand, the second group was asked to fill in the customer-based brand equity questions straightaway.

The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions with multiple measurement tools to evaluate the constructs of brand equity and fashion brands activities on Facebook & Twitter. "Statistical Package for Social Science" (SPSS) packages was used to analyze the collected data.

The respondents were asked about their attitude towards the Facebook posts and twitter activities of the brand on a seven-point semantic differential scale anchored by "boring-interesting", "unimpressive-impressive", "unlikable-likable", "unappealing-appealing", "not attractive- attractive" and "boring to read - fun to read" for the respective brand that is followed by them. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha is used to measure the internal consistency to see how closely the set of items are related as a group.

Brand Equity was measured using Keller's dimensions of brand equity. A seven point likert scale ranging from 1= completely agree to 7 = completely disagree was used to measure the questions adapted from Brand Equity Framework.

Henceforth, the hypothesis is formulated as -

Null Hypothesis – H0: Facebook wall page and twitter tweets have no influence on brand equity.

Alternate Hypothesis – H1: Facebook wall page and twitter tweets influences brand equity.

4. RESULTS& FINDINGS

The questionnaire included a total of 16 questions concerning questions related to brand equity variables and the digital media branding on social media websites – Facebook and Twitter. The respondents were also required to fill in demographic information, the scale used to judge their

preference is 7 point Likert Scale. The respondents were divided into two groups - Experimental and Control Group. The control group constituted of 201 respondents who do not use Facebook and Twitter to follow any fashion brands. The experimental group has respondents who are active users of Facebook and Twitter which numbers out to be 216 of which 72% were females which proves that women are more active members on Facebook and Twitter.

Table 1: Univariate Analysis of the Sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	% of the Sample
Sex	Male	155	72
	Female	61	28
Age	Less than 15years	11	5
	15years -25years	28	13
	25years - 35years	63	29
	35years - 45years	89	41
Brands	Zara	56	26.05
	Levis	53	24.35
	Louis Vuitton	44	20.19
	Burberry	42	19.5
	Mango	21	9.9

Out of the ~72% female respondents 26% are homemaker, 43% are working, 10.28% are self-employed, ~17% are studying. On the contrary among 28% of male respondents majority are working ~78%, 12% are studying; the other 10% fall in different social demographic division. With regard to the age of the respondents ~41% lies in the age group of 35-45years.

Table 2 : Reliability Assessment

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's alpha	Mean	Std. Dev.
Brand Salience (BS1, BS2)	2	0.742	2.98	1.64
Brand Performance & Imagery (BPi1, BPi2)	2	0.813	3.64	1.7
Brand Judgment & Feelings (BJF1, BJF2)	2	0.91	3.38	1.76
Brand Resonance (BR1, BR2)	2	0.76	3.6	1.6

Majority of respondents ~88% are Indians, the other 12% are residents of Rome, Germany, Poland, Mexico, London, Canada and Shanghai. Major brands that are followed by respondents on Facebook and Twitter include Zara (26.05%), Levis(24.35%), Louis Vuitton(20.19%) & Burberry(19.50%). With regard to the number of fashion brands followed on Facebook and Twitter the average comes out to be 8-10.

The reliability assessment of the analysis shows a positive value of Cronbach alpha significantly greater than 0.7 indicating a high value of internal consistency for our scale. (Table2)

For hypothesis 1 an ANOVA was used to test whether there was a significant difference between the brand equity measurements of the participants who religiously follow the Facebook page & Twitter tweets of the brand compared to the participants who do not follow the Facebook & Twitter page of the brand. To test whether or not Facebook and Twitter activities influenced the customer- based brand equity correlation analysis was performed.

To test hypothesis 1, the selected sample of 216 active users of Facebook and Twitter (Experimental Group) were compared against a sample of 201 respondents not using Facebook and Twitter (Control Group).

Table 3: Mean Brand Equity Scores (*p<.05)

Element	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Sig.
Following fashion brands on Facebook & Twitter	216	5.31	1.18	0.005*
Not following	201	4.59	1.33	

The respondents were then asked to rate Brand Equity (Brand Salience, Performance/Imagery, Judgment & Resonance) on a Likert scale of 1 to 7, followed by a factorial between group analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Respondents who were active users of Facebook and Twitter rated the brand equity of the brands significantly higher than the participants who didn't follow the Facebook & Twitter page of the brand (Table 3). This was true for all ten brands.

Table 4 shows the mean, standard deviations and inters correlation of the variables. Based on the results from the survey, it is clearly stated that Facebook Wall Posts shows significant positive correlation with most of the elements of Brand

Equity namely Brand Salience and Brand Performance & Imagery ($r=.38$; $p<.05$) whereas Twitter Tweets are more effective for Brand Salience and Brand Judgment & Feelings. However on the contrary Facebook has positive correlation with the Brand Resonance than Twitter.

Based on the findings, there were significant differences between male and female Facebook & Twitter users and the pattern of their usage. The data indicates that female users are more prone to using and engaging with surroundings, and following fashion brands on social media sites than the male users.

Furthermore, the results state that being active on Facebook and Twitter gives an upper hand in maintaining following elements of Brand Equity i.e. Brand Salience and Brand Performance. However, Brand Judgment & Resonance are less affected by the presence on these sites.

The participants were significantly more positive about the brand equity of a brand after viewing and reading their Facebook & Twitter page. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis H1: "Facebook wall page and twitter tweets influences brand equity" is accepted.

Table 4 - Means, SD and Correlation Coefficients (*p<.05) Descriptive Statistics			Correlation Coefficient	
Parameter	Mean	Std. Deviation	Facebook Wall Posts	Twitter Tweets
Brand_Salience1	3.2222	1.75181	0.429	0.471
Brand_Salience2	3.5556	1.70890	0.476	0.423
Brand_Performance1	4.1296	1.62402	0.308	0.315
Brand_Performance2	2.4444	1.79369	0.431	0.218
Brand_Judgment1	3.2778	1.61681	0.065	0.463
Brand_Judgment2	3.7222	1.75974	0.075	0.443
Brand_Resonance1	3.7407	1.67066	0.088	-0.088
Brand_Resonance2	2.6667	1.79714	0.024	-0.047

5. CONCLUSION

It is true therefore that use of Facebook and Twitter mediums for advertising and brand experience can be extremely valuable for creating a consistent, multilayered and integrated brand communication strategy, it is equally true that these mediums can be more advantageous for conducting consumers and trends research. Especially when identifying lifestyle changes and tracking trends over time, researchers can use Facebook and Twitter to build or use existing online communities, web and mobile panels and then treat these as a dynamic, real time instrument to tap into targeted respondents' brains and uncover invaluable insights.

The success of brand's online strategy lies in mapping the behaviors of the target audience as well as mapping their relationship with other users. Although the presence on such sites positively affects the customer based brand equity, it is equally important to strategically maintain the comments and reviews on such sites. Apart from positive peer review, customer's negative experience is also recorded on Facebook and Twitter which can pose negative affect on the brand image.

The standard customer based brand equity model should thus be altered with context of Facebook and

Twitter not merely as social networking sites or marketing strategy but should be now treated as contact points. The new concept of Customer Based Brand Equity thus requires media managers and planners to take on new roles and assume

greater responsibility for helping to create and manage a brand's total communication.

Also to add just a mere presence of a brand on Facebook & Twitter is not the sole reason for high brand equity, managing the brands well is equally important. These sites are open sites and the users' comments or views are open to the complete audience, any negative comment would thus be responsible for negative branding and a fall in brand equity.

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