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Consumer Behaviour in Online Environments

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ISBN 978-3-030-03616-4 ISBN 978-3-030-03617-1 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019931956

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Foreword: An Introduction to Social Media and Social Commerce

Social media—when did we all get so obsessed with it? I remember the first few months after Instagram's launch, when everyone applied sepia filters, light leaks and literally snapped a photograph before hitting publish a second or so later. There was no real curation back then and it was just a social way to share what you were doing, what you were reading or what you were eating.

Before that, we were all writing in code to modify our Myspace pages and adding cringeworthy selfies taken on actual cameras, rather than phones. That is before Facebook came along and we could choose to portray ourselves in a more structured, somewhat professional manner. Back then, social media was fun, frivolous, easy and yet extremely addictive. And this addiction just led us all to get hooked on the next platform, and then the next: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, plus all the rest. Social sharing moved past the human being behind the account, into a curated, selective profile of a person's daily life. Everything just got more serious, beautiful and perfectly designed. And the world became more addicted than ever.

With beautifully designed content comes a commercial opportunity, and of course it was only a matter of time before brands realised the worth in social influencer content. Brands are able to tap into audience groups that they may otherwise not have any access to, via a voice that relates and connects to that audience on a personal level. If a brand can get their product into the right hands—of a person with a real and engaged audience of people who appreciate and trust their reviews and opinions, they can reap greater rewards than any other form of advertising. The key audience is at their fingertips, with intent and interest unlike any other sporadic audience that the brand could try to target, to a lesser success rate. Whether a brand wants to grow its audience on social media, hopes to promote a particular product to a wider consumer group or aims to increase its brand awareness online, working with social stars, 'Instagrammers,' 'influencers' or other, they are sure to meet their goals if they plan their collaborations effectively.

But a brand's social media account is just as important. It should be an up-to-date gateway to a brand's latest products, brand messaging, visuals and values. A brand touchpoint for the audience to follow, for inspirations, news and updates. And so, maintaining that channel and ensuring it is correctly managed is paramount.

Similarly, the way that bloggers and Instagrammers utilise their own social media pages should also not be taken so lightly. With thousands, if not millions of people watching their every move, they have a duty of care to behave appropriately, to represent the brands they are promoting in a professional manner and to grow their own brands in the process. In doing so, the content is often altered depending on the platform—the voice is changed, the content style is altered and the audiences across various channels often want something completely different. The Facebook user is not the same as the Instagram user, and so brands and bloggers have to strategise for a particular audience on every channel they manage. Facebook is more video based, Instagram more image based and Twitter is primarily opinion and news based, and so the content must be tailored for each type of platform and the varying audiences. It is getting that right and understanding the differences that sets apart a successful social media channel to another not-so-successful creator.

With the recent integration of shoppable Instagram posts comes an entirely new retail channel. Items displayed in imagery can be bought directly from a tap on the image. No more searching or scrolling, just impulsive purchases from audiences on their mobile phones. Instagram is an enormous selling channel for the majority of brands, mainly via styling inspiration and product recommendations; so to add shoppable links into the mix, makes Instagram potentially one of the most important selling platforms for a brand. And so growing a following on social media has never been as important for brands as now.

What will happen next is a mystery, that I wish I was able to figure out myself. But with the audience only demanding more, at a faster speed and in an efficient format for various activities from shopping to information, it appears that social media will only become a higher priority for brands in the future.

London, UK Victoria Magrath

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Notes on Contributors

Abrar Al Sharif recently successfully defended her PhD at Glasgow Caledonian University, which examined electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on behavioural intention, specifically exploring attitudes, individual differences and the need for cognitive closure. Prior to undertaking her PhD, she undertook MA Design and Branding Strategy at Brunel University. Prior to this, Al Sharif worked in marketing in Saudi Arabia. She has presented at international conferences.

Liz Barnes is Senior Lecturer at the University of Manchester, with expertise in the field of design management and fashion marketing. Most recently her research interests have focused on the concept of 'fast fashion' in relation to supply chain management, omnichannel retail, fashion marketing communications and the fashion retail environment. She is on the Editorial Advisory Board of the *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* and has been guest editor for two 'fast fashion' special editions of the journal. Barnes holds a number of external posts and is Deputy Chair of the International Foundation of Fashion Technology Institute.

Marta Blazquez is Lecturer in Fashion Marketing at the School of Materials, University of Manchester. She holds a BA in advertising and PR and has developed a career in the advertising of marketing industry for more than 10 years. She was awarded European PhD in Marketing with Cum Laude mention. Her research interest includes omnichannel retail, experiential retail, channel integration, in-store technology, social media marketing, mobile marketing and consumer behaviour. She has written articles in leading journals, contributed to edited books, and presented her work at various national and international conferences. Blazquez has been visiting researcher in the Oxford Institute of Research Management (OXIRM), University of Oxford, and has been invited lecturer on several occasions in China and Spain. She supervises a number of PhD and MSc students in the areas of fashion marketing and retailing.

Rosy Boardman is Lecturer in Fashion Business at the University of Manchester. Her research primarily focuses on digital strategy and innovation in the retail industry. In particular, her research specialises in e-commerce, digital marketing, multichannel/omnichannel retailing, m-commerce and consumer behaviour utilising eye-tracking technology and qualitative research methods. Boardman regularly attends academic conferences presenting her work and has written articles for peer-reviewed academic journal papers. She has also worked in industry as a fashion buyer and a marketing assistant.

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Courtney Chrimes graduated with a BSc (Hons) in Fashion Buying and Merchandising from the University of Manchester, where she was further granted an EPSRC studentship and is completing her PhD in the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences. She is also a teaching assistant on a number of units in the School of Materials, involving Fashion Buying and Merchandising, Marketing, and Strategy. Chrimes has three years of experience working as a merchandising at Topman, where she became accustomed to issue of online apparel clothing returns, which motivated her to undertake research within this area. Her research interests include online retailing, s-commerce and body shape.

Tony Conway is Professor of Marketing at Manchester Metropolitan University. He lectures in Relationship Marketing and Experiential Marketing. He has produced journal articles, text contributions, and conference papers on Public Sector, Relationship and Experiential Marketing. Many of these have focused on the Arts and Heritage sectors and his doctorate specifically dealt with the application of Relationship Marketing in the subsidised performing arts. He was guest editor for a Special Arts and Cultural Edition of *the International Journal of Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* and has been Editorial Board member of *the Journal of Non-profit and Public Sector Marketing* since 2003.

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Victoria Magrath is the editor of the UK's top fashion blog 2018, Inthefrow.com, which she started in 2012. It has gone on to win numerous awards and amass a following of over 1.8 million across the Inthefrow channels. During the time that she started the blog, she wrote her PhD thesis at the University of Manchester and went on to lecture in Fashion Retailing up until the point where she moved into full-time blogging. Magrath now lives in London and works with some of the largest global fashion and beauty brands.

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Helen McCormick is Senior Lecturer in Online Fashion Retailing and Multichannel Strategy at the University of Manchester. She is a specialist in retail marketing and conducts research in the area of social media marketing, consumer behaviour, m-commerce, e-commerce and s-commerce, retail design, and also areas that include new technologies and their use particularly to support sustainability, for example, augmented reality, virtual reality, and innovative technologies used in retail. McCormick has undertaken many roles within the University including Director of Undergraduate Studies for Fashion Business within the School of Materials and more recently as a line manager for the academic staff within the Fashion Business group. She is passionate about teaching and learning, the student experience and researching the changing retail environment in the UK and globally focusing on how technology can support and develop sustainable processes in retail.

Christopher J. Parker is a lecturer in UX Design at Loughborough University Design School, UK. He obtained his PhD in Human Factors Design in 2012 before gaining industrial experience as a UX Architect. His research focuses on how user interaction with technology directs consumer behaviour through perceived value.

Neil Robinson has research interests in dark tourism, terrorism, and contemporary issues in business and heritage. Other research interests include the role played by technology in the dissemination of music associated with place.

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Delia Vazquez is Senior Lecturer in Retail Marketing. She has written 50 papers on aspects of e-commerce and retail design management. She has consulted with fashion online companies and has extensive retail management experience. She has 15 postgraduate student research project completions on varied aspects of the online consumer experience.

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Tianran Zhang graduated from the University of Manchester with an MSc in International Fashion Marketing in 2017. Zhang's master's dissertation focused on social commerce (s-commerce) and its effect on consumers' browsing motivations and purchase intentions in the UK fast fashion industry.

Xiaoli Zhao has gained her MSc in Management from the University of Sheffield, Management School. She has developed a keen interest in entrepreneurship and business development and has founded her own successful entrepreneurial venture Nucode Hair, an innovative hair extension business, headquartered in the UK.

Shuang Zhou is a third-year PhD student at the University of Manchester. Her research project is about the narrative strategies used by fashion opinion leaders to create eWOM messages about luxury brands on social media to persuade consumers. Her main research interests lie in the broad areas of fashion marketing communication, social media marketing, and online consumer behaviour, with particular focus on eWOM, luxury fashion marketing communication, and cross-cultural consumption. She worked as Graduate Teaching Assistant in E-Fashion Retailing and Multi-channel Marketing in the School of Materials at the University of Manchester.

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The Historical Development of Social Commerce

Nina Bürklin, Claudia E. Henninger, and Rosy Boardman

Introduction

This chapter contributes to knowledge by exploring the roots of social commerce (s-commerce) and provides an overview of what s-commerce is and how it may develop in the future. As such, this chapter seeks to:

- explore the origins and roots of s-commerce;
- examine definitions of s-commerce; and
- investigate the potential of the s-commerce concept.

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_1

S-commerce remains a relatively new phenomenon with research interest in the topic starting to gain exponential increase from 2004 onwards, with the emergence and popularity of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Wang and Zhang 2012; Lin et al. 2017). To date, the concept lacks a clear-cut definition and can thus be best described as *fuzzy*, which "possess two or more alternative meanings and thus cannot be identified or applied reliably by different readers or scholars" (Markusen 1999, p. 870; Liang and Turban 2011). The following sections will first review the historic roots and foundations of s-commerce, which allows for providing an explanation as for why it remains *fuzzy*, before exploring its definitions, and moving on to a future outlook.

The Role of Social Media Today

Today it is almost unthinkable to live a life without smartphones and the internet. We are connected on a 24/7 basis and exchange information on a real time scale with people living almost anywhere in the world. Being online and available implies an opportunity not only to communicate with others, but also to indulge in consumption behaviour wherever we are. This has led to the dot.com business idea booming in the 2000s, which saw the creation of a manifold of companies, some of which are still in existence today (e.g. Leiner et al. 1997; Investopia 2018). Continued research and development activities into wireless technologies and electronic devices, as well as improvements made in the area of electronic commerce (e-commerce) have fostered the creation of mobile commerce (m-commerce) (Senn 2000). Consumers now have shopping platforms literally at the tip of their thumb, scroll through providers' apps, save their favourite products, add them to wish lists, and indulge further in a buy-now-see-now shopping culture. S-commerce goes even further in that it involves a variety of consumer tools to socialise and share commercial-related information (Lin et al. 2017).

Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, have further changed the business world (Fraser and Dutta 2008). Companies are no longer broadcasting their messages as a monologue, but are (ideally) actively engaging into a dialogue with their consumers. Businesses can share their videos, blogs, and product information, or even pose questions and polls to encourage responses in an effective and efficient way, reaching a global audience, whilst consumers have the opportunity to share this content or create their own, comment on links, like pictures, or share their concerns instantaneously and in real time. Our world has changed to becoming increasingly transparent, with every action causing an even greater reaction that is broadcasted globally, with everyone watching (e.g. Doherty and Delener 2001; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

Origins and Roots of S-commerce

Figure 1.1 provides a visualisation of the key milestones and historic developments leading to the s-commerce concept. The 1970s laid the foundations for s-commerce, with the emergence of the internet or Web 1.0, which was commercialised in the 1990s and gained increased importance in our daily lives (e.g. Leiner et al. 1997; Investopia 2018). It is at the same time that s-commerce was born, with authors (Curty and Zhang 2011; Friedrich 2015) insisting that the roots of s-commerce can be

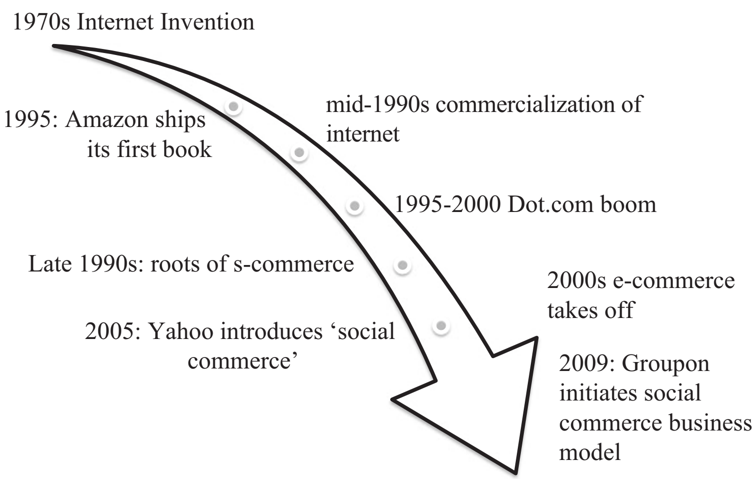

Fig. 1.1 Key milestones in s-commerce development

traced back to the late 1990s. Increased investments in technology and its subsequent infrastructure have fostered the creation of Web 2.0 and the development of e-commerce opportunities (Leiner et al. 1997; Lai 2010; Investopia 2018), which allowed Amazon.com to ship its first book, which was purchased online, in 1995 (Olenski 2015).

In a similar vein, research on s-commerce can be traced back to the late 1990s. Nevertheless, the explosive growth of this field of study only started in 2004, the same year in which Facebook and many other social media sites were founded (Lin et al. 2017). According to Lin et al. (2017), the earliest scholarly publication on social commerce was written in 1999, even though the term 'social commerce' was first used in this context in 2007. Since then, it has grown proportionally alongside social media research in terms of a number of publications. Zhou et al. (2013) report an increasing trend of publications on s-commerce from 2003 to 2012. Over the last decade, the number of academic publications on s-commerce has grown exponentially (Lin et al. 2017; Zhang and Benyoucef 2016).

A majority of research focusing on s-commerce is contextualised in the area of information technology (e.g. Shanmugan and Jusoh 2014; Wang and Zhang 2012; Zhou et al. 2013), yet lacks application in marketing and management. Yet, past studies predominantly focus on consumer behaviour, for example on customer experience and web design (Busalim and Hussin 2016). Research on s-commerce is almost always underpinned by social-related theories, which indicates the important role of social aspects brought by the social nature of s-commerce (Busalim and Hussin 2016). This is related to customers and the impact of social interactions on purchasing intention or the decision-making process in s-commerce. According to Lin et al. (2017), dominating topics in the s-commerce remit are organisation, advertisement, and word-of-mouth. Despite its high relevance across the entire decision-making and consumption process, the majority of publications on s-commerce centre on the post-purchase phase (Zhang and Benyoucef 2016).

The Concept of S-commerce

Definitions and Characteristics of S-commerce

Broadly speaking, e-commerce refers to any economic activity that is transacted online and encompasses a wide variety of technologies, including, but not limited to e-mail, telephone, and mobile devices (e.g. tablets and mobile phones), and/or social media (Niranjanamurthy et al. 2013). Social media and Web 2.0 (Lai 2010; Lin et al. 2017) have led to the emergence of s-commerce, and facilitated a shift from product-oriented platforms, which are typical in e-commerce to platforms, to those that are strongly customer-oriented (Wigand et al. 2008; Huang and Benyoucef 2013a). In 2005 Yahoo firstly termed 'social commerce', when they created a feature on their online platform that allowed their end-consumers to create, share, and comment on product lists (Wang and Zhang 2012).

S-commerce can be considered "an interdisciplinary subject that concerns business models and strategies, consumer and organization behavior, social networking technologies, analytical techniques, system designs, business practices, research methodologies, and prospective and retrospective assessment of business value" (Zhou et al. 2013, p. 2). A range of current definitions are displayed in Table 1.1 (Definitions of s-commerce), which are discussed below.

From the definitions in Table 1.1 it becomes apparent that the concept of s-commerce remains fuzzy until today. Definitions consider s-commerce to be "a multi-user-based e-commerce" (Yamakami 2014, p. 285), "technology-enabled shopping experiences" (Shen and Eder 2011, p. 29), or "a various types of commercial and social activities" (Liang et al. 2011, p. 69). Aside from the differences, when looking at s-commerce as an emerging category of e-commerce (Kim 2013), four themes seem to be common ground to characterise s-commerce, namely social media, interactivity, extension of commercial activities, and new participants in online commerce.

Zhang and Benyoucef (2016) state that s-commerce combines *social media* with commercial activities. This implies that social networking

Table 1.1 Definitions of s-commerce

Author	Definition
Marsden (2009b)	[…] social shopping is the new motor driving the social commerce trend. Promotes purchase decisions primarily through the 'liking' social intelligence heuristic allowing people to shop with people they know, like, and trust. Adds emotion into the e-commerce mix, and enables real time recommendations
Stephen and Toubia (2010)	[…] social commerce and social shopping are forms of internet-based 'social media' that allow people to actively participate in the marketing and selling of products and services in online marketplaces and communities
	An emerging trend in which sellers are connected in online social networks, and where sellers are individuals instead of firms
Curty and Zhang (2011)	In social commerce, people do commerce or intentionally explore commerce opportunities by participating and/or engaging in a collaborative online environment
Liang et al. (2011)	The increased popularity of social media sites, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, has opened opportunities for new business models of electronic commerce, often referred to as social commerce (SC). Social commerce involves using Web 2.0 social media technologies to support online interactions and user contributions to assist in the acquisition of products and services
Shen and Eder (2011)	[…] social commerce is defined as technology-enabled shopping experiences where online consumer interactions while shopping provide the main mechanism for conducting social shopping activities
Wang and Zhang (2012)	Social commerce is a form of commerce mediated by social media and is converging both online and offline environments
Baghdadi (2013)	Social commerce is doing commerce in a collaborative and participative way, by using social media, through an enterprise interactive interface that enables social interactions
Dohoon Kim (2013)	More fully, social commerce is a subset of electronic commerce that uses social media, online media that supports social interaction and user contributions, to enhance the online purchase experience
Hajli (2013)	The current development in e-commerce opened a new stream, entitled social commerce, which is using social technologies to create an environment for generating social interactions
Dar and Shah (2013)	Social commerce is the use of social networking in the context of electronic commerce or even mobile commerce

(*continued*)

Table 1.1 (continued)

Author	Definition
Smith et al. (2013)	S-commerce refers to the conduct of e-commerce activities using social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) to aid in encouraging online purchases
Sturiale and Scuderi (2013)	Social commerce is a special kind of e-commerce that allows the interaction between merchants and consumers in a social environment such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.… It plays on the interactivity among users both in terms of experience sharing and support/advice to make the right choice, up to the order. In short, it is the evolution of Web 2.0 of online commerce, allowing a greater interactivity and participation among and of customers by means of blogs, wiki systems, and sharing of articles written by the very community members
Zhou et al. (2013)	[…] social commerce involves the use of internet-based media that allow people to participate in the marketing, selling, comparing, curating, buying, and sharing of products and services in both online and offline marketplaces, and in communities
Hajli (2014)	The notion behind s-commerce is that social media benefits commercial transactions of vendors by developing closer relationships with customers, enriching the quality of the relationship, increasing sales and encouraging loyalty to the business
Yamakami (2014)	A multi-user-based e-commerce that involves multiple people during an e-commerce transaction
Hajli and Sims (2015)	Individuals are using SCCs [social commerce constructs] and social tools to perform social interaction with peers in social networking sites (SNSs), which creates a social climate with the emergence of online social support
Wu et al. (2015)	Social commerce can also be defined as word-of-mouth applied to e-commerce (Dennison et al. 2009), and it involves a more social, creative and collaborative approach than is used in online marketplaces (Parise and Guinan 2008)
Busalim and Hussin (2016)	[…] social commerce activities combine both commercial activities and social activities
Lin et al. (2017)	[…] social commerce involves a variety of commercial activities that are able to assist in consumers' pre-purchase product evaluation, shopping decisions, and post-purchase behaviours

sites (SNS), such as Facebook, contain more social functions (e.g. like, share, comment, and react), which distinguish s-commerce from e-commerce. Thus, s-commerce is mediated by SNS, not only by electronic platforms as is the case for e-commerce (Marsden 2009a; Wang and Zhang 2012; Zhou et al. 2013; Shen and Eder 2011; Smith et al. 2013; Hajli and Sims 2015). Key platforms that have opened up new business opportunities and business models are LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter (Liang et al. 2011).

Contrary to e-commerce, s-commerce is characterised by a high level of *interactivity* (Busalim and Hussin 2016). The use of modern technology and use of Web 2.0 support and facilitate online interactions (dialogues) and user contributions in the process of acquisition through s-commerce (Liang et al. 2011). SNS allow consumers to react to messages broadcasted and thus, fosters greater participation across the entire consumption process (Baghdadi 2013; Sturiale and Scuderi 2013). To reiterate this further, product reviews are communicated in through comments made by friends on SNS (Busalim and Hussin 2016), which implies that s-commerce is a more social and collaborative approach to creating content than traditional online marketplaces as individuals are involved in the information exchange (Lin et al. 2017).

S-commerce brings forward a *new range of commercial activities* that can be integrated and conducted (Stephen and Toubia 2010; Wang and Zhang 2012; Zhou et al. 2013; Lin et al. 2017), which include not only the information, acquisition, and after-sales process, but also comparing, curating, sharing relevant content on products or services. Examples of the latter activities encompass word-of-mouth, advertising, co-creation, user-generated content, information sharing, and purchasing (Busalim and Hussin 2016). A new customer experience is created and delivered (Lin et al. 2017), which has the power to build closer relationships with customers, to increase sales, and to foster loyalty towards the business (Hajli 2014). Lin et al. (2017) highlight that bricks-and-mortar firms use social media in this context to increase their overall business performance (Lin et al. 2017).

S-commerce further encourages *new participants to enter the electronic marketplace*. Through the integration of social media peer-to-peer sharing emerges as a megatrend, with organisations such as Airbnb and Uber emerging dominantly in the marketplace (Stephen and Toubia 2010). Yamakami (2014) describes this phenomenon as a multi-user-based type of e-commerce, which goes beyond the traditional company-buyer relationship. This online community building aspect in which peer-to-peer sharing is dominant is a unique characteristic of s-commerce (Busalim and Hussin 2016).

Similarities and Differences to Related Concepts

A key question that thus far remains unanswered is in how far s-commerce differs from e-commerce and m-commerce, as the concepts are closely related. M-commerce is a subset of e-commerce and implies that business is conducted through mobile devices, such as smartphones, tablets, or any other portable electronics (Senn 2000; Sharma and Crossler 2014). It fosters hyper consumption by allowing consumers to shop anywhere, whether this may be on a train, in a café, or on the beach (Meola 2016; Allen et al. 2017; Parker and Doyle 2018).

Similar to m-commerce, s-commerce has evolved as a subset of e-commerce, which harnesses social media platforms and Web 2.0 technologies (Liang and Turban 2011; Huang and Benyoucef 2013a; Sharma and Crossler 2014). Authors agree on the fact that s-commerce can be considered an evolution of e-commerce (Kim 2013; Busalim and Hussin 2016). Yet, it does not rely on electronic platforms only, but integrates SNS and enables a close interaction between the parties involved (Zhang and Benyoucef 2016). Thus, s-commerce could be described as a special kind of e-commerce that incorporates interactions in a social environment such as Facebook or Instagram (Sturiale and Scuderi 2013). Especially social and/or relational aspects become relevant in s-commerce as opposed to simply transactional aspects in e-commerce. This is mirrored by Wu et al. (2015) who consider s-commerce to be personal recommendation behaviour amongst peers, namely word-of-mouth, applied to the concept of e-commerce. This interconnectivity has led to an increased sharing behaviour, which sees consumers being exposed to more deals, discounts, and trends than ever before (Stephen and Toubia 2010). Hajli (2014) highlights that this type of sharing behaviour has changed the relationship between customers and brands in that the bonds are closer than ever before, resulting in increased transactions and subsequent profits. To reiterate this further, a majority of brands have set up social media fan pages (Facebook), Live Stories (Instagram), or Twitter profiles that also direct interaction with customers and real time responses to queries thereby creating a continuous communication flow and innovative way of conducting business (Amblee and Bui 2011; Michaelidou et al. 2011; Hajli and Sims 2015; Lin et al. 2017).

Authors (e.g. Stephen and Toubia 2010; Kim 2012; Zhou et al. 2013; Hajli and Sims 2015; Huang and Beneyoucef 2013b) indicate that a key difference between e-commerce and s-commerce is an observable shift in bargaining power from the seller to the end-consumer, with end-consumers being able to utilise internet-based media to share, compare, like, sell, and buy in a variety of online marketplaces. While e-commerce mostly focused on the company-consumer relationship, s-commerce is multi-user-based (Yamakami 2014). As such s-commerce is different from social shopping, in that the former implies that sellers are connected through a digital platform, whilst the latter suggests that customers are connected with each another to communicate. This implies that the role of the customer varies from being a seller by offering products and/or service through platforms such as eBay, to actively generating content by writing reviews on purchases and creating recommendations (Stephen and Toubia 2010).

Authors (e.g. Liang et al. 2011; Ng 2013) have highlighted three trends that developed within e-commerce and led to the newer concept of s-commerce:

1. Selling through social media, by for example including commercial tools on already existing social media channels
2. Enhancing e-commerce website (e.g. ASOS, Net-a-Porter, Boohoo.com) by adding additional social media features
3. Incorporating social media to enhance overall business performance of brick-and-mortar retailers (offline), to, for example, further develop their customer service

Stephen and Toubia (2010) further insist that sellers create a unique customer experience by creating personalised online shops, which can be interconnected through hyperlinks, and individuals are operating on a commission basis, which provides an incentive to performing well and continuously innovating their online shops.

Implications and Outlook

Strategic Goals and Potential Risks

With new developments as in the case of s-commerce, there are always specific strategic goals linked to them. According to Stephen and Toubia (2010), managers want to make use not only of social value, but also especially of economic value generated from s-commerce. This includes the ability to make informed decisions based on social media data (Busalim and Hussin 2016). Building on increased assistance throughout the consumption process, they aim to increase sales through s-commerce (Lin et al. 2017). Since Web 2.0 and social media lead to more social and interactive shopping experiences (Friedrich 2015), companies seek to improve the relationship quality to their customers. The same holds true vice versa: those companies that have already established high-quality relationships with their customers expressed through commitment, trust, and satisfaction have the potential to enhance s-commerce intention (Hajli 2014). As s-commerce involves the sharing of personal stories and experiences with products and services, companies want customers to be brand advocates (Busalim and Hussin 2016) and thereby use for example user-generated content to increase awareness for the brand.

Nevertheless, there may also be potential risks in the application of s-commerce. If not done effectively, advertisements on social media will lead to higher advertisement avoidance rates than conventional advertising (Kelly et al. 2010). Furthermore, there is a relatively easy entry to s-commerce which in turn can lead to a fierce competition in the industry (Zhou et al. 2013) and make it hard to differentiate one company's service from the other. Moreover, it must be noted that consumers' demographics (e.g. gender or age), personal traits such as price consciousness may vary the potential effect of s-commerce on marketing-relevant outcomes such as customer satisfaction or increase in sales (Zhang and Benyoucef 2016). The same holds true for the characteristics of content used in s-commerce as these antecedent factors could vary the impact of s-commerce under different conditions.

Future Developments and the Potential of S-commerce

Extending current trends, the future of s-commerce might be reflected in mobile marketing and, thus, m-commerce, or even virtual commerce (Lin et al. 2017). This would open up new spaces for the application of s-commerce where consumers would enter new types of shopping experiences. Moreover, boundaries between social interactions and new types of commerce will fade and create new chances for close relationships to customers.

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2

Social Media's Evolution in S-commerce

Claudia E. Henninger, Nina Bürklin,
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Introduction

This chapter explores social media's evolution in s-commerce. More specifically, we provide an overview of a variety of social media channels (*MySpace, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter* and *Second Life*) and highlight how these have shaped current s-commerce platforms, as well as what reasons were that some are no longer in use.

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_2

The twenty-first century has seen a digital evolution with Web 2.0's emergence that has forever changed the way businesses run, moving away from only using a *bricks-and-mortar* setting to creating a complex web of platforms (Lin et al. 2017). Bürklin et al. introduced social commerce's evolution (s-commerce) in Chap. 3 of this work. However, to date there has been no clear-cut definition of s-commerce, subsequently resulting in its description as a *fuzzy* concept (Liang and Turban 2011).

Within this chapter we define s-commerce as a *"multi-user-based e-commerce"* (Yamakami 2014, p. 285) that provides a technology-enhanced and enabled shopping experience (Shen and Eder 2011) and features a variety of commercial and social activities (Liang et al. 2011). As such, key characteristics associated with the concept are (1) the option to sell through social media platforms, (2) adding features to existing electronic commerce (e-commerce) websites that allow user interaction (such as rating products or leaving comments), and/or (3) sharing content with people, who have a similar interest (Liang et al. 2011; Shen and Eder 2011; Kim 2013). The s-commerce concept can be described as a sub-category of e-commerce, with interactive 'social' features (e.g. liking, sharing, commenting, and re-tweeting).

E-commerce was kick-started by *Amazon* in 1994, with the first shipment of an online purchased book (Olenski 2015). Yet, since then social media platforms empathetic to every niche in society are mushrooming out of nowhere, thereby providing new business opportunities (Chahal 2016). Despite early criticism of e-commerce and social media being both unstable and detrimental to the culture of society (Gilmartin 2003; Keen 2007, 2012), both innovations in retail and interpersonal communication have flourished to such saturation that they embed almost every part of our life to the point of obsession (Song et al. 2004).

S-commerce implies that products can be showcased, posted, blogged, and tweeted instantaneously and at the same time reach a global audience. This provides an opportunity to home in on these social media platforms and capitalise on their potential (Taylor and Pentina 2017).

Since the early 2000s we have seen an increase in dot.com businesses and the emergence of a variety of social media platforms (Leiner et al. 1997; Investopedia 2018). This implies that businesses have an opportunity to engage with new platforms and capitalise on their features for their own economic benefits. Whilst selling online through social media may sound like an easy task, it is a complex endeavour. Social media platforms have come and gone (e.g. *MySpace*, *Second Life*, *Friendster*), with some representing personal or professional networks (e.g. *Facebook*, *LinkedIn*), some being heavily visual (e.g. *Pinterest, Instagram*) and others generating viral posts in seconds (e.g. *Twitter*) (Garrahan 2009; LinkedIn 2015; Smith 2015). Furthermore, social networking apps make up only 2.11% of apps on the Apple App Store, with shopping at a minuscule 1.37%, dwarfed by the 24.93% share of games alone (Statista 2018). While UK e-commerce revenue is forecast to be worth over £97 million by 2022 (Carroll 2017), the platforms available (and their individual strengths and weaknesses for the retailer) are decreasing in number.

The different platform features, their uses, and their timeliness imply that it is vital to stay on top of new trends, engage with platforms that are promising to be the most effective for commercial purposes, and (ideally) introducing new platforms to current offerings. Yet, organisations often struggle to keep up-to-date, as it is not always workable to invest time and money in social media platforms (Henninger et al. 2017). Similarly, some accounts are set up only to be abandoned shortly after, as resources and/or time might be missing, or simply for realising that these social media platforms were the wrong fit.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate different s-commerce platforms and provide an overview of why some may have been more successful than others, as well as highlight insights that may be of use for organisations when deciding to make use of these s-commerce platforms. In order to address this aim and the problems and the outstanding questions in academia, two key Research Questions emerge:

1. Are there any differences in terms of social media usage between the UK and Germany?
2. Does it pay to be an avant-garde leader and risk the potential of failing to use social media platforms to their full advantage?

As such, this chapter contributes to knowledge by proving that social media interest has a geographical influence, with Germany having a statistically greater preference for *Second Life, Pinterest* and *Instagram*, with the UK preferring *MySpace* and *Twitter*; see section "RQ1: Geographic Differences in Social Media Popularity". Key features of social media platforms related to s-commerce are explored to provide a country comparison between the UK and Germany. We provide insights into how culture can shape preferences for use of social media channels, which can have an impact on the communication strategy used, as well as Integrate Marketing Communications.

This chapter raises questions on social media's use within an s-commerce context, whilst at the same time provides an insight into the individual platforms evolution to either become ever more sophisticated or vanishing in the ether of the universe. In doing so, this chapter provides a snapshot of platforms such as *MySpace, Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Pinterest,* and *Second Life*.

Background of Social Media Cases

As indicated previously, this chapter focuses on *MySpace, Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Pinterest,* and *Second Life* and in how far these are used within the s-commerce context, and if there is a difference between the UK and Germany. Although it could be argued that we should have included *Facebook* in our chapter, as it has the most users globally at 2.2 billion (Statista 2018a), we have made a conscious choice not to include *Facebook*, as past research within the context of s-commerce predominantly focused on *Facebook* (Huang and Benyoucef 2013; Wu et al. 2015). Yet, other social media sites, such as *MySpace*, *Twitter*, *Instagram, Pinterest,* and *Second Life* can be considered highly relevant, but currently lack research.

The UK was chosen as it has the highest social network penetration within Europe as of January 2018, with a total of 66% (Statista 2018a). Germany however is often described as having a reserved relationship with social media; reflected in only having a 46% social network penetration (Davies 2017; Statista 2018a). This provides for an interesting comparison of social media platforms used in both countries and highlights their (social media platforms') key features of their successes and failures.

Table 2.1 Social media usage

	% of daily users		Active users (in million)
Platform	Germany	UK	Globally
MySpace	Not available		
Twitter	17.5	33	330
Instagram	30.1	33	813
Pinterest	7.8	16	200
Second Life	Not available		

Adapted from eMarketer (2017a, b) and SimilarWeb (2017)

Table 2.1 provides a summary of the five platforms under investigation, highlighting the differences between the UK and Germany in terms of daily users, and provides an insight into how many users are active on these websites globally. From Table 2.1 it becomes clear that *Twitter*, *Instagram,* and *Pinterest* are used more in the UK as compared to Germany, which can have key business implications.

RQ1: Geographic Differences in Social Media Popularity

To address Research Question 1 and determine if social media engagement is influenced by geographic location, data was collected representing search interests in the UK and Germany relative to the greatest number of Google searches between 01/01/2004 and 28/06/2018. Data was gathered via Google Trends (Google 2018a, b) and analysed with SPSS (IBM 2016). All data and analysis are freely available from https://figshare.com/s/6f0f130363f20c780db8.

To visualise the data (Fig. 2.1) a series of line charts were created where "a value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means that there was not enough data for this term" (Google 2018a). Scales were normalised to the search frequencies within the respected countries to remove the influence of population differences.

To evaluate the difference between the UK and Germany (DE) in their Google search trends for the social networking sites *Second Life, MySpace,*

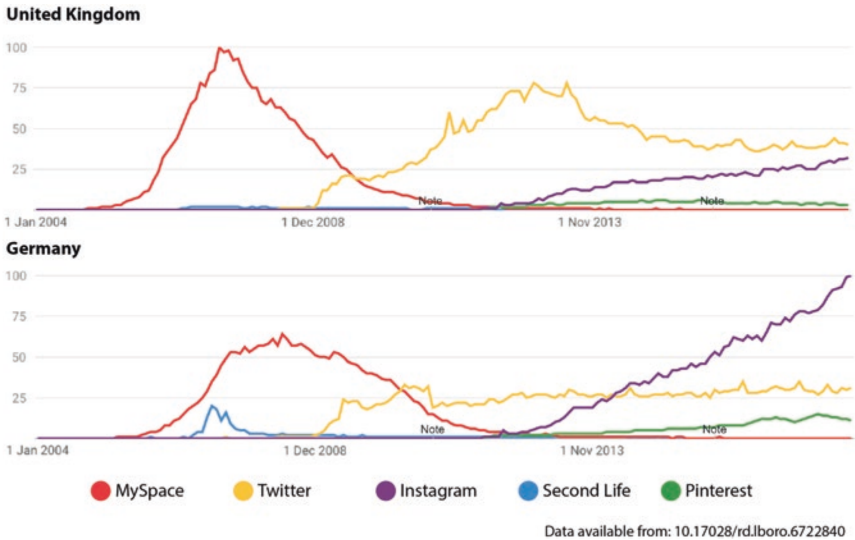

Fig. 2.1 Search interests in the UK and Germany relative to the greatest search interest 01/01/2004–29/06/2018. (Data Sources: Google 2018a, b)

Table 2.2 Paired-sample t-tests for social media sites; variable 1 = UK, variable 2 = DE

	Mean	SD	95% Confidence interval Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Second Life	–0.76	2.45	–1.13	–0.39	–4.02	169	0.000
MySpace	1.65	16.18	–0.79	4.10	1.34	170	0.184
Twitter	14.82	15.92	12.15	17.49	10.97	138	0.000
Pinterest	–2.15	3.77	–2.93	–1.37	–5.48	91	0.000
Instagram	–20.83	20.98	–25.15	–16.507	–9.57	92	0.000

Twitter, Pinterest, and *Instagram* a series of paired-sample *t*-tests were conducted. To remove the influence of long periods of disinterest in both countries (such as in the case of *MySpace*), values of 0 were treated as missing values, excluding cases analysis by analysis.

As shown in Table 2.2, there was a significant difference in the platforms *Second Life* (UK: M = 0.78, DE: M = 1.53; eta^2 = 0.09 Moderate), *Twitter* (UK: M = 36.12, DE: M = 21.30; eta^2 = 0.42 Large), *Pinterest*

(UK: $M = 3.52$, DE: $M = 5.67$; $eta^2 = 0.25$ Large), and *Instagram* (UK: $M = 14.62$, DE: $M = 33.45$; $eta^2 = 0.50$ Large). However, there was no significant difference between the UK and Germany in Google search habits for *MySpace*.

RQ2: Case Studies of S-commerce Engagement in Social Media

Although a difference in social media interest has been verified, the activities that made those platforms so successful require qualitative reflection. Therefore, to address RQ2, we present case studies of the five individual social media platforms. Furthermore, we highlight opportunities and challenges for both corporate and private users.

Case 1: *MySpace*

Who does not remember having a customised *MySpace* 'pet' on their profile page that their friends could see? Or belonging to different groups, getting news bulletins, and voting on different polls (Fontein 2016)? *MySpace* no longer exists in its original form in terms of the logo (three blue mannequins and blue lettering spelling the name) and the actual page layout, but rather has been 're-vamped' to attempt recovering some of its past profitability. Yet, this was unsuccessful, compared to its past glory. Nevertheless, it is an interesting social media platform to investigate as it can be seen as being avant-garde and thus, ahead of its time, having used polls and groups to foster social interactions and gaining insights into consumer preferences. These can best be described as key features that characterise an s-commerce site's beginning (Kelleher 2010).

MySpace was founded in 2003 and peaked in 2005, when the social media webpage received more traffic than Google (in the USA) (Bennett 2013). As previously showed, *MySpace* was on the forefront of what is now known as the s-commerce phenomenon, as it allowed individuals globally to connect with one another over common interests such as music, films, and popular culture (Garrahan 2009). Further, it fulfilled all characteristics of s-commerce (Busalim and Hussin 2016) in collaborations and interactivity amongst its users, whilst also contained community and social aspects. Yet, *"MySpace, like everyone else in 2004, wasn't sure what would make a social network click. So it let its members figure it out (…). The result was a wasteland of cluttered and annoying pages"* (Kelleher 2010). One aspect however that was carried on from the *MySpace* platform was the 'digital friend' trend, whereby anyone could be accepted to be part of one's community or be deleted from 'the list' (Bennett 2013). This innovation's importance cannot be underestimated since it represents the most powerful conduit of innovation diffusion (Rogers 2003), allowing almost unfiltered interpersonal connection between uses on themes and ideas which they find emotionally seductive. Furthermore, the power of the friend feature was the central motivation and tool behind one of the world's most crippling cyber-attacks—the Samy worm (Mann 2007).

From an everyday user's perspective, it allowed one to increasingly interact in an online world, by seemingly demonstrating one's popularity through the numbers of friends on their *MySpace* account—an aspect that has not changed until today. Even though the old *MySpace* platform no longer exists, this feature was successfully adopted by its predecessors, such as *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *Twitter* (Bennett 2013; Telegraph 2015). This has led to a 'friendship paradox', as people on these social media sites cannot be relied on in times of crisis, yet it makes individuals feel better (Telegraph 2015).

From a company and/or entrepreneurial viewpoint, *MySpace* enabled self-promotion on the one hand, and on the other spreading content globally within seconds (Garrahan 2009). The platform allowed sharing and liking music videos and group posts; thus provided great opportunities for emerging artists and creator. This was especially true for musicians, who released their songs on *MySpace* to be picked up by their fans and local radio stations, and in the case of the music duo 'The Ting Tings' snatch a record label deal (NPR 2009). These core functions have been adopted and are provided by platforms, such as *YouTube* and *Spotify*, both of which revolutionised the industry through new forms of music consumption.

In 2006 *MySpace* was rated the number one social media site, valued at $12 billion, which allowed striking an advertising deal with Google further enhancing its visibility and profitability (CBSNews 2003). Although *MySpace* has celebrated successes, *Facebook*, *Twitter,* and other social networking sites have taken its place, forcing it to change dramatically. But why?

Myspace's deal with Google (CBSNews 2003) seemed a dream come true, especially for its owners. Yet, something was not quite right, although some cultural entrepreneurs capitalised on the website, other businesses did not feel the need to include a *MySpace* link on their homepage. This holds true for most countries in which *MySpace* was available, including the UK and Germany. Is the reason simply that *MySpace* was too avant-garde for its time? Did neither private nor corporate users grasp the value that lied in spreading and exchanging content through an online networking site? Or might it have been the relatively clunky interface that was not necessarily user-friendly and/or could best be described as a cluttered mess (Garrahan 2009; Kelleher 2010)? Whatever the reason may have been, *MySpace* provided a pathway for other social media sites that copied some of its features (e.g. 'friends' and 'profile pages'), yet transformed the interface to make it more user-friendly and provide opportunities for any type of business to get easily engaged with its global consumer base.

Case 2: *Twitter*

Not much younger than *MySpace*, *Twitter* (or *Twttr*, as the 1.0 version was known as) emerged in 2006, a platform famous for its 140-character messages that allows people sharing aspects of their everyday lives, news stories, or other events (Alpe 2015; Greenberg 2016). *Twitter* is used by both private individuals and businesses with the aim to interact with their audiences by fostering dialogic communication and providing targeted advertising messages to their user groups (Maina 2018). *Twitter* introduced the @-reply, which allows users to gear their responses to specific *Twitter* account holders, and the #-tag, which links individual tweets to broader topic areas. To provide an example, the #EthicalHour hashtag was introduced to link *Twitter* users with a similar interest and provide a global platform to discuss ethical issues across a variety of industries or share best practices.

A side effect of tweets that are #-tagged and thus exposed to a global audience is that these can go viral rather quickly, by simply re-tweeting the original message (Carlson 2011; Alpe 2015). The most prominent example of a photograph that has gone viral in recent years is Ellen DeGeneres' #Oscar selfie (a selfie shared by Ellen DeGeneres starring 11 actors, including Julia Roberts, Channing Tatum, and Lupita Nyong'O), which was re-tweeted 779,295 times within only 30 minutes (Smith 2014). With these side effects and the potential to global exposure it may not be surprising that the economic worth of the company has steadily increased reaching $5 billion in 2011 and an all-time high in 2013 when it reached $40 billion (Hempel 2016; Reeves 2017). Although its initial concept may be humble, *Twitter* has become a proxy global voice. As a platform, it has the ability to make or destroy international foreign policy, and (as the prolific and at times cathartic tweets of President Donald Trump have shown) must be considered on a par with the most prestigious and formal communication channels of our age (Joh and Mars 2018).

On a daily average 500 million tweets are tweeted, some of which are original tweets, others @-replies, or simple re-tweets (Alpe 2015). The @-reply moves *Twitter* to the forefront of s-commerce platforms, as it allows direct interaction with individuals and companies thereby engaging in conversations. Interestingly, past research has predominantly focused on *Twitter* as a tool used during times of health emergencies (Young et al. 2018), or as a tool to foster political campaigns (Haynes and Sattler 2017), rather than as a potential platform for s-commerce. Hence, *Twitter's* potential as a means of corporate communication has become clear, while the commercial opportunities are still to be discovered by companies.

Yet, whilst *Twitter* is popular in the UK, Germans seem to be more reluctant to engage with this social media platform (Economist 2013; Coleman 2014), which is further illustrated in Table 2.3. One reason for this could be cultural. Germany is known for developing business relationships over long periods of time, whereby trust is slowly built up,

Table 2.3 *Twitter* statistics: Germany and UK

Country	Population	*Twitter* accounts	Usage
Germany	82 m	4 m	4.9%
UK	63 m	45 m	71.4%

Adapted and complemented from Economist (2013) and Coleman (2014)

whilst the UK is more instantaneous, with businesses creating relationships a lot quicker (Coleman 2014).

The AC Powercoaching founder Agnes Cserhati indicates in an interview with Forbes (Coleman 2014) that *"Germans tend to view the Internet as a source of information, and use it more as a passive form of communication"*. She continues, highlighting that especially small business owners seem to be unconvinced that they can communicate a meaningful message within the constraints of 140 characters. A question that can be raised here is whether this may further be enhanced through the fact that German words can be relatively long and sentence structures can be rather complex, especially when seeking to convey a specific message (Economist 2013).

Moreover, *Twitter* seems to have fostered a 'complaints culture' whereby companies have set up specific *Twitter* accounts to deal solely with unsatisfied customers (Bachelor 2012; Wallis 2014). Seeing as tweets can go viral and are seen on a global scale, companies have no other option but react fast to these messages for fear of losing customers and/or their reputation. As such, it could be argued that *Twitter* may not necessarily be a social media platform that fosters selling, but rather deals with customer complaints, spreading news, and providing snipped information that (ideally) grab the reader's attention and leads them to the company's website for further information.

Case 3: *Pinterest*

Pinterest is not only a relatively new platform, having only been created in 2010 (Maina 2018), but it is also fundamentally different from other platforms. Rather than seeking to connect people globally *Pinterest* can best be described as an "*innovative visual discovery engine*" (Amand 2016) allowing users to discover new products and gain new ideas that can be saved on pin boards. Pin boards are an individual collection of images that are saved from the internet and can be shared with other users. Often, the images 'pinned' on pin boards give first ideas of the content that is provided on the URL link, for example cooking recipes, DIY ideas, or fashion advice. Individuals can comment on these pin boards and actively 'follow' other users and/or friends, yet interactions between users are rather low compared to other social networking sites, such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*. Moreover, the websites that contain these pinned images can be directly accessed through the social network platform, which provides commercial opportunities for companies as users are directed to the respective e-commerce website. Yet, only 2% of business-to-customer (B2C) companies worldwide actually use *Pinterest* for their marketing (Statista 2018b). This might change with the introduction of 'Ad Pins', which are promoted images by companies—a function already available in English-speaking countries, though not in Germany (Pinterest 2018).

Pinterest recently announced that they had gained 100 m users, most of whom are female (Maina 2018), which provides an opportunity especially for businesses that target a rather young, female audience. Although *Pinterest* has a relatively low user rate, it is seen to be one of the key drivers of s-commerce, which "drives 16% of social revenue despite an audience of 6.5 times smaller than Twitter" (Business Insider Intelligence 2016). This could be because *Pinterest* functions as an image search engine; designed for targeted searches. When individuals find a product on *Pinterest* that they like, the likelihood that this transforms into an actual purchasing act is high (Business Insider Intelligence 2016). This is further echoed by Jason Goldberg, SVP of Sapient Razorfish, who states: "*if you look at how many people Pinterest sends to an e-commerce site, it's not a huge amount, but the people that they send have a much higher buying intent because they've already discovered something they want to buy, so it's disproportionately affecting sales*" (Alcantara 2018).

From a company perspective, the effects of *Pinterest* on sales and revenue are mostly indirect as brands rarely have their own channel or accounts as is the case with *Twitter* or *Instagram*. By contrast, they often rely on the users' integration of product and advertorial images (and content) based on the brand's communication media into their personal pin boards. Only very few freelancers or small companies actively use *Pinterest* to inspire and engage their customers and, thus, induce purchases. Nevertheless, *Pinterest* is predominantly coined by its perception as a rather creative platform that exchanges specific ideas as opposed to more business-oriented networks like *Twitter* or *LinkedIn* and still leaves room for strategically planned s-commerce.

Case 4: *Instagram*

Instagram and *Pinterest* are very similar in nature, in that they are both highly visual platforms, allowing individuals and companies to post photographs of their products and/or experiences online. Moreover, both platforms were established in 2010, highlighting that compared to other social media platforms they are relatively young. Whilst *Pinterest* has only attracted 100 m users, *Instagram* has an active user base of six times more (equating to 600 m monthly active users), who predominantly post images of travel, fashion, food, and art (Johnson 2017; Maina 2018). A key distinguishing feature is the fact that *Instagram* allows users to manipulate their photographs by using its unique set of filters, which are not only easy to use but also allow to make fun changes. A prime example of this is the 'face filter', which allows to for example add bunny ears to a person (Haselton 2017; Instagram 2018). People mostly use this platform to exchange images with friends, family members, or acquaintances. Additionally, 42% of the users engage in specific searches for images (Statista 2018c) that is facilitated by the widespread use of #-tags. A less well-known fact is that *Instagram* is owned by *Facebook*, and thus, 95% of *Instagram* users also have an active *Facebook* account, which allows them to share their pictures across both platforms instantaneously (Maina 2018).

Although *Instagram* has a large follower base and individuals are getting engaged with sharing images, in the past its effectiveness of driving sales activities for retailers was relatively low (Business Insider Intelligence 2016). This appears surprising as most of the s-commerce criteria introduced by Busalim and Hussin (2016) are fulfilled, namely interactivity, community, and social aspects. Nevertheless, *Instagram's* development shows the steady turn towards a more commercial platform. While there were only 'organic' postings at the beginning, *Instagram* introduced sponsored images to offer an advertising option to companies, allowing them to get greater exposure. Moreover, the focus on static photographs was changed towards a more experiential use of visual content, through introducing short video sequences. This was further enhanced by *Instagram* stories' development, including photos or videos only available for 24 hours, a feature adopted from the app *Snapchat*. Hence, this led to companies increasingly seeing the value of cashing in on shoppable *Instagram* stories (Johnson 2017). This means that companies can now integrate direct marks/tags on images or videos that link to the respective e-commerce site.

Contrary to *Pinterest*, *Instagram* has attracted companies as they often have their own account to spread content towards relevant target groups. For example, the share of Fortune 500 companies that use *Instagram* rose from 9% in 2013 to over 50% in 2017 (Statista 2018c). Furthermore, companies focus on 'visual storytelling' in their use of this platform as they seek to increase brand awareness, improve their brand image, or spread their campaigns.

Case 5: *Second Life*

So far, the four case studies have presented unequivocal successes,; if only for a brief period. Also, they have represented initiatives, which were evolutionary of existing online trends rather than being true revolutions. Therefore, this chapter must turn to *Second Life*, a platform once held as the perfect intersection between games, social engagement, and retail. However, it is now all but a barren shell of its former self.

First launched by Linden Labs in June 2003, *Second Life* represented a virtual world, built and populated by the user community. Instead of forging an identity through a personal profile (as *MySpace* pioneered), users created virtual avatars to represent themselves in a virtual world of infinite space. Divorced from reality, a man could be a woman with total anonymity as they teleport (or fly) between virtual streets, representing in painstaking detail everything from Amsterdam's historic centre to a nightclub, a beach or Dracula's castle. In these worlds, avatars interacted with objects (e.g. sitting on a chair) or wearing custom-coded apparel paid for with Linden Dollars—a virtual currency with an exchange rate tracked to the US dollar. While possessing the character of a video game, the infrastructure and intention for s-commerce linked to real world brands were established early on through marketing capabilities and the sale of physical goods paid for through the Linden Dollar.

By 2005 the platform generated an income of $4 million (Reiss 2005), growing to $64 million the following year (Newitz 2006). By 2007, prestigious universities including Harvard had run classes within *Second Life* (Duranske 2007; Warburton 2009), and technology giant IBM heralding the platform as the future for conferences worldwide (Gandhi 2010; Shiao 2009). In the retail domain *Second Life* was being foreshadowed as the next evolution in brand communication and virtual commerce (v-commerce) (Jin and Bolebruch 2010). Fashion items were identified as particularly suitable for this new and evolved form of e-commerce. For example, luxury fashion brand Armani combined indulgent seduction with social interaction in the virtual world (Kaplan and Haenlein 2009), joining American Apparel, Dell, and Reebok in their cybernetic storefronts. It seemed that the world was simply theirs for the taking, with then CEO Philip Rosedale predicting that within ten years *Second Life* would dominate all internet activities (Metz 2007). But for all of the computer-generated shopping mall's expectation for connecting the physical with the fantastical, the promises failed to materialise.

Despite the initial burst of excitement, the corporate losses came fast, and they came hard. With virtual worlds requiring a cool $500,000 a year to run, and meeting spaces requiring $10,000 for a single day, it is easy to see how third party Return on Investment (ROI) was practically zero. For example, only 28 people may visit your virtual storefront, as happened with Coca-Cola's 'Virtual Thirst' pavilion (Rose 2007). Linden Lab's revenue streams driven by corporate purchasing of virtual estates was not met with a similar increase in consumer brand engagement. This meant for those retailers that entered into the expensive simulated world that there was little to no profit to be made. By 2010 *Second Life* had entered a rapid spiral of decline, resulting in 30% of their workforce being laid off

(Kawamoto 2010). As Clendaniel (2007) described "*there were never any employees at stores like Dell and Reebok when I visited, nor were there any customers. But that wasn't that shocking because (for the most part) there seems to be no one in Second Life at all*".

Ultimately, *Second Life* created something with enough mystique and excitement to draw in consumers just long enough for them to explore the promised offerings in a magical environment. Yet, it wasn't enough to make them stay. With such seduction, who could blame some of the greatest brands seeking to leverage the latest technology to dominate retail's future? But something was missing. While the God of the Abrahamic Religions saw Noah's building of the Ark as sufficient effort for the animals to come, such a prophecy cannot be for mortal men. Rather than discover the as yet untenable desires of social interaction and their retail opportunities, Linden Labs were content to sit back and watch as previously unheard-of wealth rolled in from *Second Life* without questioning if their approach was valid. After all, with a GDP of $567 million (Korolov 2015), they were the world's 202nd largest economy, eclipsing nations such as Dominica and Tonga (United Nations 2017). But their revenue was based on over-inflated prices of virtual estates that cannot last when ROI is so low.

The full potential of a virtual store was there, but they had simply not developed the retail engagement methods for companies to use. Assuming their developers would create user experiences, Linden Labs' research and direction was too limited and too late. Instead, once the magic was gone, and the Emperor was shown to have no clothes, the crown of social media's future was taken violently away by *MySpace*. The reason why? Simple. They understood what makes human interaction so deeply enjoyable in a way compatible with our desires and motivations as humans. The spectre of v-commerce is however alive, as evidenced by the oculus rift stores teased by Chinese retail monolith Alibaba (Stevens 2016). However, except for tightly controlled and orchestrated runway showpieces, industry is acting with caution; once burnt by a false promise and now dubiously shy.

Commenting on the failure of *Second Life*, Chris Green (CEO of the public relations, marketing and business strategy group DMG Europe) stated: "*A lot of organisations realise that after the initial novelty factor of* *second life wore off, the people that they were hoping to engage with in the environment simply drifted away, they drifted off to other newer and emerging (and easier to engage with) social networking platforms. Realising they would be throwing good money after bad a lot of companies cut their losses and walked away*" (Howell 2013).

Conclusion/Outlook

This chapter was set out to focus on two key questions: to investigate whether it does payoff to be an avant-garde leader and whether there is any difference in terms of social media usage between the UK and Germany.

Answering Research Question 1, this analysis proves that interest in social media platforms has a significant geographic bias, controlling for population size and periods of disinterest once the platform is no longer in vogue. Furthermore, it is not that one country is more or less invested in social media, but rather each country has a personal preference. Explicitly, during the greatest periods of interest, Germany demonstrated a greater preference for *Second Life*, *Pinterest,* and *Instagram*, with the UK preferring *MySpace* and *Twitter*. Importantly, lower preference does not represent disinterest, as shown by the German interest in *Twitter* being comparable to the UK's interest in *Instagram* in June 2018.

In answering Research Question 2, we found that social media platforms that are too far ahead of their time, such as *MySpace* are unable to communicate clearly what they wanted to convey. This results in the platform completely changing their objectives from the original intentions. For consumers it is easier to try new social media platforms as they can experiment with different features and see how they like interacting with others (or not). Contrarily, companies do not have this liberty, as consumers are quickly discovering new technologies and do not necessarily allow any leeway in terms of errors.

From reviewing the platforms and providing a summary of the key features, it becomes clear that consumers may use social media platforms for different reasons. Whilst *Pinterest* can be described as inspirational and allows individuals to find what they are looking for through portraying images, platforms such as *Twitter* allow to quickly and effectively communicate news and force companies to respond to consumer complaints. Conversely, *Second Life* failed to clearly articulate its purpose beyond the fantastical and seductive shroud of a virtual world. A key aspect that should be investigated further is in how far these core features (e.g. inspiration, news outlet, etc.) can be translated into economic value for companies.

The implications of this chapter are that companies need to further be mindful of cultural differences (such as language, habits, and traditions) that can influence social media platforms. As was showed, *Twitter* only allows writing 140 characters, yet the German language is known for words that are rather lengthy,[1] thus, this may not be appropriate to convey the intended message. Similarly, add-on features are not available simultaneously in different countries. *Instagram* for example introduced its shoppable feature in English-speaking countries first. This action poses the question whether 'prototype' features should only be transferred into other languages if they prove to be successful, or whether they should be available globally at the same time to attract even more users to the platform. With today's sophisticated A/B testing techniques coupled with immensely powerful (and free) analysis tools such as R (2018), the limitation is not if the research experiment can be executed, but if the potential backlash to negative features is worth the risk? Through this chapter, we have showed that the rise and fall of social media platforms capable of fostering strong s-commerce capabilities is not due to a collection of individual features, but instead the quality of emotional interaction they can foster with the audience. Failure to invest in developing social intercourse (Knapp 1978) at an increasing rate can only result in a competitor reaching that goal first, and in time stealing the lucrative s-commerce market. Technology and change is therefore the friend, and not the enemy.

Future research needs to answer if there are any implications of closely integrated platforms, such as *Instagram* and *Facebook*, in terms of value

[1] For example, Rechtsschutzversicherungsgesellschaften (meaning insurance companies providing legal protection) is the longest German word in everyday use, clocking in an impressive 39 characters.

increase for companies and users. Should the fact that these are jointly owned be advertised further or should these platforms be considered to be separate? A question that could further be investigated in the future.

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3

Cultural Considerations in Social Commerce: The Differences and Potential Opportunities in China

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Introduction

Social media has been widely adopted by retailers and consumers, changing the nature of communication between them (Shi et al. 2016). However, there is a lack of understanding about social commerce (s-commerce) due to its early stage of development (Wang and Zhang 2012) particularly in terms of different markets and cultures. It is important to understand consumer behaviour in an s-commerce context in order to inform retailers' strategies and make them more effective. As a result there have been increasing numbers of consumer behaviour studies examining the impact of social media in a business context—studies that can now be built upon further with the advancement of s-commerce. However, the majority of existing studies investigate Western consumers and Western social media sites, and so an understanding of consumers' social media behaviour in different cultures is lacking (Lin et al. 2016),

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_3

particularly for China, who has different social media sites than Western countries. Consumers from different cultures may react differently to the same content delivered by retailers on social media and so a type of behaviour observed in one country may not be generalisable to others. Therefore, a review of the impact of culture on social media and s-commerce is necessary, which this chapter provides, specifically focusing on the Chinese market.

According to PwC (2017) online sales in China reached 1.4 trillion RMB (approximately $215 billion) in the first quarter of 2017, an increase of 32.1% compared to 2016, making it the largest e-commerce market in the world (eMarketer 2016). The future development of e-commerce in China is driven by consumers' preference for mobile devices, s-commerce innovation and digital payment infrastructure (PwC 2017), highlighting the potential opportunities that China holds for brands in these areas. However, due to political issues, popular Western social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are restricted in this market. Hence, to reach Chinese consumers on social media, retailers need to adapt and have a good understanding of the local social media channels, such as Weibo, WeChat and Little Red Book (Xiaohongshu). As a result, this chapter reviews s-commerce development in China and identifies any potential differences between the Chinese market and the West in terms of e-commerce, social media and s-commerce.

What Is Social Commerce?

S-commerce is the combination of e-commerce, e-marketing, social media and technology (Turban et al. 2015). More specifically, s-commerce can be defined as "exchange-related activities that occur in, or are influenced by, an individual's social network in computer-mediated social environments, where the activities correspond to the need recognition, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of focal exchange" (Yadav et al. 2013, p. 312). In line with Yadav et al. (2013)'s conceptualisation of s-commerce, Huang and Benyoucef (2017) identified two main themes in s-commerce research: (1) Activities that are related to the exchange of information and (2) a computer-mediated social environment (e.g. a social network facilitating interaction and communication). Hence, there are two interpretations of s-commerce: (1) E-commerce features on social media sites and (2) social media features on e-commerce sites. For the context of this chapter, the former definition will be applied whereby s-commerce refers to the social business activities and electronic commerce delivered through social media (Liang and Turban 2011) and is, therefore, regarded as a subset of e-commerce.

The concept of s-commerce was first introduced in the late 1990s (Curty and Zhang 2011) when Amazon and eBay enabled consumers to write reviews and rate their products and services (Friedrich 2015). However, it was only in 2005 that the term "s-commerce" was actually coined by Yahoo! to describe a new feature on its website which enabled consumers to create, share and comment on products (Wang and Zhang 2012). Following this, Flowers.com launched the first Facebook shop in 2009, which is regarded as a milestone for s-commerce (Busalim et al. 2016). The evolution of s-commerce has consequently flourished, particularly with the rapid development of Web 2.0 and social media channels, enabling its successful application to existing e-commerce business and their adaption to the changes necessary (Curty and Zhang 2011; Friedrich 2015; Kim and Kim 2018).

As opposed to e-commerce, which only enables one-way communication during shopping, s-commerce facilitates two-way communication between consumers, creating communities around the brand (Huang and Benyoucef 2013). Through the use of Web 2.0 features, social behaviour is encouraged on websites and social media sites, and has resulted in an increase in user-generated content (Berthon et al. 2012). Huang and Benyoucef (2013) categorised s-commerce activities into four dimensions: (1) individual activity, (2) a conversation where information is exchanged, (3) a community for support and (4) connections and commerce. This highlights the opportunities that s-commerce possesses compared to e-commerce, as these four dimensions can create significant added value for businesses (Hajli et al. 2017). Therefore, s-commerce is regarded as an extension of e-commerce, but with higher level of social interaction (Sharma and Crossler 2014), reshaping retailers' business models and the consumer shopping journey (Wang and Yu 2017). With the increasing complexity of brands' offerings, consumers are searching for connections with brand experts or other experienced consumers to assist them in their decision-making (Godes et al. 2005), which is why s-commerce is key for retailers to consider going forward.

However, research shows that consumers are concerned about trust, security and privacy when exchanging information online (Kim and Park 2013; Liang and Turban 2011), which is a challenge for the development of s-commerce. Nevertheless, early signs indicate that s-commerce may improve consumers' confidence in shopping online as the product information that they receive from other customers on social media is perceived to be more trustful (Kim and Park 2013). Yet, s-commerce brings new challenges, particularly for emerging markets where the use of social media is restricted by technological infrastructure, government intervention and cultural values (Coleman et al. 2016). Therefore, whilst international companies note the potential of emerging markets such as China for s-commerce, they should consider the cultural norms and communicative preferences of the target market first and foremost (Coleman et al. 2016). For instance, social media has been welcomed by the Chinese market as a tool for communication and so demonstrates a great opportunity for s-commerce growth; however, the same cannot be said for Italy, where people prefer face-to-face communication above virtual communication (Coleman et al. 2016). This shows that, in order to be successful, it is necessary for brands to consider cultural norms and values when adopting social media and s-commerce strategies internationally.

Cultural Differences

Culture can be regarded as a collective characteristic that distinguishes one member of a human group from another by the specific values they hold (Hofstede 1984). Culture is to a collective what personality is to an individual; character traits affect the response of a human group to its environment, just as a personality determines the identity of a person (Hofstede 1984). The demands of consumers from different cultural backgrounds are diverse, and these differences must be considered for s-commerce strategies, as in any other business strategies. Although social media sites enable people to communicate with people all over the world, cultural differences still affect the individual's perception of social media and their behaviour on it (Gupta et al. 2018). By analysing how cultural differences affect consumer behaviour on s-commerce platforms, retailers can understand the needs of their target consumers more comprehensively, and adjust their strategies to ascertain long-term benefits.

The Chinese Market

To enter the Chinese market without considering the distinct characteristics of online retailing, social media channels and Chinese consumers could lead to failure. In China, the e-commerce market is dominated by a few big third-party platforms (PwC 2017). Notably, Alibaba (parent company of Taobao and Tmall) is one of the world's largest e-commerce corporations, dominating the market in China with a 53% market share (Euromonitor 2016). JD.com is regarded as the strongest competitor to Alibaba, particularly since its partnership with Google in June 2018, aimed at improving the consumer shopping experience through the "creation of next generation retail infrastructure solutions" (JD 2018). With JD's expertise in supply chain and logistics and Google's technology excellence, it will be interesting to see how this partnership will influence the future of e-commerce in China.

Moreover, research reveals that only 10% of online sales come through brands' own websites in China (PwC 2017). Thus, with third-party e-commerce companies owning a much higher market share than brands, it is crucial for companies entering China to identify a suitable third-party retailer to partner with, rather than launching their own website. Furthermore, with the dominance of third-party retailers in China, brands only have limited access to the big data that can be gathered about consumers, which has weakened the brand-customer relationship for a lot of companies (PwC 2017). As brands' official websites are neither well-developed nor largely embraced by consumers in China, website-based s-commerce is much less attractive for brands than s-commerce employed through local social media sites, such as Weibo and Little Red Book. Thus, as social interaction is deeply integrated into consumers' shopping experiences in China, engaging with consumers through social media is seen as the key to success (PwC 2017). This is an important distinction between the Chinese market and Western markets, and one to be aware of when considering launching an s-commerce business in China.

Chinese Consumers

Chinese culture is very different from Western culture and so Chinese consumption may not be the same as it is in Western countries (Li et al. 2012). China's economy has witnessed rapid growth over the last decade and its associated middle class with large purchasing potential has significantly increased as a result (Deloitte Millennial Survey 2018). This new middle class group has demonstrated a high willingness to consume overseas products to meet their aspirations for a high quality of life (Dudarenok 2018a, b). Chinese consumers' brand attitudes and brand loyalty are believed to be stable (Bain and Company 2017). However, about two-thirds of millennial consumers say they will switch to another brand if they received more than a 30% discount in price (Bof and McKinsey 2016) and so this level of brand loyalty may be lower than previously believed (Bain and Company 2017). The millennial generation (those born between 1980 and 1995 approximately) in China has gradually matured and become the backbone of consumption. Due to the government's implementation of the "One-Child-Policy" during the years 1979–2016. Chinese millennials are all only children and have grown up during a time of economic reforms and the opening up of borders (Wang 2017), making their situation unique and one that cannot be generalised to other countries. Chinese Millennials are generally confident and are happy to demonstrate their independence through consumption (Barton et al. 2013). They have been described as people who are "privileged", "entitled" and those who "enjoy a good life", and, as a result, are very demanding in their consumption habits (Wang 2017). Compared with Western millennials, Chinese millennials are freer in their spending habits as their parents pay for everything (Wang, 2017), which explains their large contribution to the Chinese luxury market. Indeed, Millennials and Gen-Z will account for 45% of the luxury market by 2025 (eMarketer 2017a, b). In addition, compared with millennials in the Western countries, Chinese millennials rely more heavily on the Internet for socialisation and entertainment as they do not have any siblings (Wang 2017), and represent the biggest proportion of social media users. According to Weibo (2017), millennials represent approximately 66.8% of all users and their behaviour on social media sites already highlights some differences to Western consumers. For instance, Weibo users are more likely to post positive messages than Twitter users (Gao et al. 2012). Furthermore, whilst only 41.8% of US millennials create original content on their social media accounts, 76.6% of Chinese millennials would like to create and share their own content on social media (eMarketer 2017a, b). This shows that brands need to adapt their social media and s-commerce strategies in order to better target Chinese consumers, and that they cannot simply transfer their existing strategies on Western social media sites to Weibo or Little Red Book.

Social Media in China

Chinese social media can be categorised into two main types, namely microblogging (e.g. Tencent and Weibo, analogous to Twitter) and social networking sites (e.g. Renren and Little Red Book, analogous to Facebook) (Chiu et al. 2012). The following sections will provide a detailed overview of two of the biggest sites in each category: Weibo (microblog) and Little Red Book (social network).

Weibo

Microblogging was invented in 2005 with the term *microblog* used to describe new social media sites Twitter and Weibo (Boyd and Ellison 2007). Weibo allows users to express themselves with no word limit and a variety of multimedia features, such as photos and videos. As of April 2018, the number of monthly active Weibo users exceeded 390 million, an increase of 67%, compared to the previous year (Statista 2018a, b). Weibo users consist of regular users, verified users (with an orange "V" logo), organisations/corporations (with a blue "V" logo) and paid VIP users (China Internet Watch n.d.). Users are able to view the information feed, search for aspects that they are interested in, interact with people on the "object pages", which contain a wide variety of content, browse the "trend" section, which includes the hot topics of the day, and explore the "discovery channels", which put the hot topics into categories (Weibo 2017). Weibo allows businesses to track and improve online advertising campaigns and other marketing activities on the platform by providing an analytical assistant. The services for ads and marketing clients include a clickable ad display, promoted feeds, promoted accounts and promoted trends, all of which increase their presence to users (Weibo 2017). The largest proportion of Weibo's revenue is generated by advertisements; Weibo's net revenue reached 426.6 million in 2018, an increase of 68 percent year-on-year from 253.4 million in 2017 (China Daily 2018).

There are a number of benefits that can be gained by businesses by utilising social media marketing, such as enhancing brand reputation (Ngai et al. 2015), brand collaborations (Mangold and Faulds 2009) and improving brand equity (Godey et al. 2016; Kim and Ko 2012). It appears that many multinational companies consider Weibo to possess these types of benefits with more than 1600 B2C e-commerce retailers having signed up to Weibo (Weibo Data Center 2015). The key players include "key accounts, Alibaba/e-commerce merchants, SMEs and individuals", all of which expect to increase brand awareness, profitability, sales and brand loyalty through Weibo marketing (Weibo 2017). This highlights the fact that Weibo can enhance brand awareness, help users to obtain information, influence customers' opinions and decision-making as well as their post-purchase communication and evaluation (Zhou and Wang 2014).

Little Red Book (Xiaohongshu)

Little Red Book—Xiaohongshu in Chinese—was launched in January 2014 as an app for people to review purchases. The company adopts a so-called social and business model whereby e-commerce businesses are built upon social communities (Soo 2018). Little Red Book is a combination of Instagram and Amazon whereby users share photos and videos, write posts and tag items in their pictures that link to e-commerce listings (Deng 2018). Hence, the platform provides users with a place to communicate with brands and the opportunity to build relationships. The social interactions between consumers stimulate purchasing behaviour (Deng 2018). Little Red Book has two sections: the user community (social) and the e-commerce (business) platform (Dudarenok 2018a, b).

Unlike Western social media platforms, such as Pinterest and Instagram, Little Red Book has business at the core of its design. The main difference between Little Red Book and e-commerce platforms is the high level of participation of the user community which is based on trust and reputation, with the quality and diversity of content the primary focus (Dudarenok 2018a, b). For instance, once an item has been purchased, the application will not allow anonymous product reviews or default high scores. On the contrary, Little Red Book encourages long product review articles, which are called Notes (笔记) (Dudarenok 2018a, b). On Little Red Book users are willing to connect with each other and exchange exclusive tips, and they are not primarily looking to make a purchase, but they want to know the latest trends and items recommended by other users (Dudarenok 2018a, b). This highlights that it is the social nature, the community aspect and user-generated content that are key to the success of Little Red Book. Indeed, the number of downloads of the Little Red Book app in the Apple App Store worldwide as of April 2018 was 1,285,007 and the company has been valued at approximately 3 billion US dollars as of June 2018 (Statista 2018a, b). The success of this type of company highlights the huge potential of s-commerce in China.

Social Media and Celebrities in China

Another phenomenon that is important to note when considering entering the Chinese market through s-commerce is the importance of celebrity endorsements. The rapid rise of social media has resulted in a prevalence of social media influencers, so-called Internet celebrities, or as they are known in China, “wanghong”. These Internet celebrities attract millions of online fans, shaping the attitudes of people by creating and sharing content on social media, and many have even become independent third-party spokespersons for particular brands and products (Freberg et al. 2011). Indeed, the value of the Chinese Internet celebrity market reached RMB 58 billion (USD8.76 billion) in 2016 and is expected to surpass 100 billion RMB in 2018 (Business Insider 2017). Celebrity endorsements on social media are particularly appealing to Chinese millennials, whose purchasing decisions are significantly influenced by them (Hung et al. 2011). Therefore, brands need to be aware of these “wanghong” as they could be very important players in determining the success of an s-commerce strategy in China.

Social Commerce in China

Chinese e-commerce sites (e.g. Taobao) are now in their mature stages, so companies are seeking new opportunities and ways of appealing to consumers. Thus, an increasing number of companies have signed up to Weibo or WeChat and collaborated with them in order to communicate better with consumers. For example, Tencent (the parent company of WeChat) has entered into a strategic partnership with JD.com (PwC 2017), making JD.com the only shopping channel available on WeChat, resulting in a huge increase of customers (JD 2017). The effect of these types of collaborations is set to be even more significant in lower-tier cities in China, which have been identified as having huge potential for the future growth of e-commerce and s-commerce markets (PwC 2017). Indeed, according to e-commerce marketing firm Advangent, China’s s-commerce market is predicted to reach US$150 billion, and by 2020 there will be 24 million merchants selling on social media platforms (Deng 2018).

In terms of developing s-commerce in China, social engagement is key (PwC 2017). Alibaba has added features that allow consumers to participate in social communities on Taobao. In addition, in order to try to naturally engage consumers with brands on social networking sites, the ratio of advertising to non-advertising content is only 1%, compared with 7–10% on Facebook (PwC 2017). Therefore, brands must consider reducing the amount of paid advertising they do on social media if using this platform to enter the Chinese market as it is less prevalent there than in the West.

Furthermore, in April 2013, Weibo and Alibaba announced the establishment of a strategic alliance to cooperate in important areas, including account links, data exchange, online payment and Internet marketing (Weinswig 2017). Since then, user-centric product recommendations have begun to appear on Weibo, and users can browse Taobao products that they are interested in when using Weibo. Links to each account allow Weibo users to log on to Taobao for purchasing and payment, and Taobao users to log onto Weibo to share products. Thus, consumers can shop online whilst on their social media platform without having to switch platforms, making the process easy and convenient for them. This social business experience not only facilitates the direct contact with hundreds of millions of consumers for Alibaba sellers, but also reduces marketing costs. Weibo ads will become customisable, targeted and predictable; users will receive sellers' ads only when they choose to "like" their Weibo page, increasing the likelihood of converting it to a purchase.

Conclusion

The Chinese online market and s-commerce landscape is a unique one and one that must be understood in depth by companies before entering into it in order to increase their likelihood of success. Whilst s-commerce is still in its developmental stage in China, the use of social media for marketing communications is well-established and is a major part of life for Chinese consumers, particularly millennials. This chapter highlights the forms that s-commerce is starting to take in China with the collaborations between the big e-commerce players and the main social media sites and provides a greater insight into particular social media sites and strategies being used currently by companies.

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4

Personalised and Participative Branding Through Fashion Blogging

Jenny Cheung, Delia Vazquez, and Tony Conway

Introduction

As online diaries, blogs can be considered as a medium for self-expression and can be defined as an online space for individuals to showcase themselves and their interests and share knowledge (Wu et al. 2013). Fashion and lifestyle blogs have dominated the blogosphere (Halvorsen et al. 2013), with UK fashion and lifestyle bloggers engaging audiences of 11 million readers and viewers on social media platforms and YouTube on a

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_4

daily and weekly basis. Engagement levels are high, and fashion and lifestyle bloggers have been identified as being public figures (Arsel and Zhao 2013). Consumers are seen following blogs as a source of inspiration and product information.

Blogs could be seen to be the artefact that has become the platform and evidence of bloggers' personal identity (McQuarrie et al. 2013). Bloggers create an online identity that can be considered to be a *personal* brand, a brand that encapsulates the personality of the brand creator (Ko 2012). This chapter aims to conceptualise fashion and lifestyle blogs as personal brands of fashion bloggers, and identifies the dimensions of personal branding that are relevant in developing engaging online content.

Fashion blogs have become significant platforms for diffusing information about fashion and style to large audiences (Pham 2011) and provide content on fashion brands, trends, products, e-commerce, street style and personal style (Halvorsen et al. 2013). A fashion blog written by a consumer reflects the blogger's daily life, her/his outfit choices, shopping and lifestyle items encountered (Chittenden 2010). Blogs are very personal mediums of depicting daily life, fashion identity, consumption behaviour and choices presented through self-taken photographs (McQuarrie et al. 2013). Popular A-list bloggers have been embraced by brands wishing to sponsor product placements, featuring prominently in magazines, as well as being hired as photographers or writers (Ko 2012; Pham 2011). Many fashion brands have harnessed the power of bloggers' large audiences by developing blogger collaborations for example Suzie Lau (Style Bubble), Zoe Sugg (Zoella) and Victoria Magrath (Inthefrow). These bloggers are recognised as icons and public figures promoting fashion, beauty and lifestyle. Fashion bloggers can be perceived through their blog as a brand—a personal brand, that promotes themselves and their identity (Labrecque et al. 2011). It is also evident that high-profile bloggers in the fashion sector have begun establishing their own product lines using their blogger name. For example, Zoella's beauty product range is sold in national chain drugstores across the UK (Mintel 2016).

Blogging has enjoyed widespread popularity among Generation Y—the generation widely acknowledged as those who were born from the mid-1970s to mid-1990s (Horovitz 2012) and have been completely immersed in and surrounded by technologies and the Internet from birth. Mintel (2015a) shows that the growing phenomenon of blogs and vlogs (e.g. YouTube) has become a favoured social medium of option for younger Generation Y who are more likely to consider bloggers' recommendations and fashion trend-led than fashion magazines. Luo et al. (2011) note that online experiences in online communities allow members to engage in producing strong beliefs and attitudes about a brand, and arguably for blogs as well that portray a personal brand. Good experiences can facilitate network building among community members and an online community can provide a comfortable environment for members to interact, and feelings and emotions generated during interactions can impress members deeply (Yang 2010).

Seventy per cent of consumers researched for information that was relevant to up-to-date beauty trends and styles via social media with females between 16 and 24 years being more likely to consider blogger's recommendations and fashion inspiration than fashion magazine content (Mintel 2015a, b). Similarly, consumers tend to believe blogger reviews may diminish the risk of consumption, especially buying a product of which they have little knowledge (Euromonitor 2016). Furthermore, interaction with customers through social networks, particularly on Facebook, builds a greater awareness among the younger audience even affection towards brands and influence on consumer buying behaviour (Gamboa and Goncalves 2014).

Customers can now be considered as co-producers of service processes and they can create value for themselves. Although value co-creation can be defined as customers co-creating value in a dyadic way with "producers" (Vargo and Lusch 2004), value co-creation can be applied in the realm of online communities and in the context of blogging. Rather than co-creation taking place between consumer and producer/company it can take place between audience and blogger. Online brand communities significantly contribute to the co-creation of a brand and the contents of a brand (Schau et al. 2009) and brand community members are both providers and beneficiaries in the co-creation process. Thus, they engage in activities such as providing virtual word-of-mouth, generating product ideas, and contributing to brand value for other members (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). The most significant contribution is that this motivates consumers to give instant feedbacks and devote themselves to the online brand community so that it is beneficial for idea generation and innovation (Lorenzo-Romero et al. 2014).

Numerous studies also indicate that the value co-creation process enhances the interactions of online brand community members. In return, closer relationships of members can increase connections to the brand. Moreover, these connections may have an influence on people's future brand choice (Zaglia 2013; Luo et al. 2015).

Blogs as Personal Brands

In the digital marketing landscape, consumers and prosumers, individuals who actively participate to produce and consume information and content (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010), have gained access to social media and blogging platform communication tools, which enable them to create and share content about their brand interests (Crewe 2013). These tools have enabled bloggers to create their own online personal brand identities that they use to promote trust and loyalty from a mass audience of consumers (Crewe 2013). A plethora of digital consumer communication tools are part of the blogger brand, and they are also used to communicate detailed personalised aspects of the products being featured. The blogger reviews products and in the process of doing so also creates his/her own personal brand with knowledge, expertise and trust associated with the blogger's brand.

Personal Branding Concept

A personal brand is about the self and one's personal attributes formed through a personal branding process which concerns the ways individuals present and communicate the self to others (Labrecque et al. 2011). Montoya and Vandehey (2008) outline that a personal brand is the clear, powerful and compelling public image about the self in the mind of others. In other words, the notion of a personal brand essentially draws on self-concept theories, such as self-image, self-identity and the social self. An individual's image and identity perceived by others can therefore be regarded as a prominent theme in creating a personal brand. However, besides image and identity, a personal brand is also concerned with promises and building relationships (Montoya and Vandehey 2008), building brand authenticity (Rampersad 2008), and can also entail a mix of factors such as reputation, trust and attention (Harris and Rae 2011). Personal brands should be distinctive, relevant, specialised, consistent and essentially convey two key pieces of information about the self to the target market: (1) who the individual is as a person, and (2) what the individual specialises in (Montoya and Vandehey 2008; McNally and Speak 2011).

Labrecque et al. (2011) propose that personal branding comprises three key dimensions: personal identification, promotion/communication and relationship management, which occur as a process. This chapter adopts Labrecque et al.'s (2011) process view of personal branding to conceptualise fashion blogs as a form of personal brand as depicted in Fig. 4.1 The following sections elaborate on these dimensions.

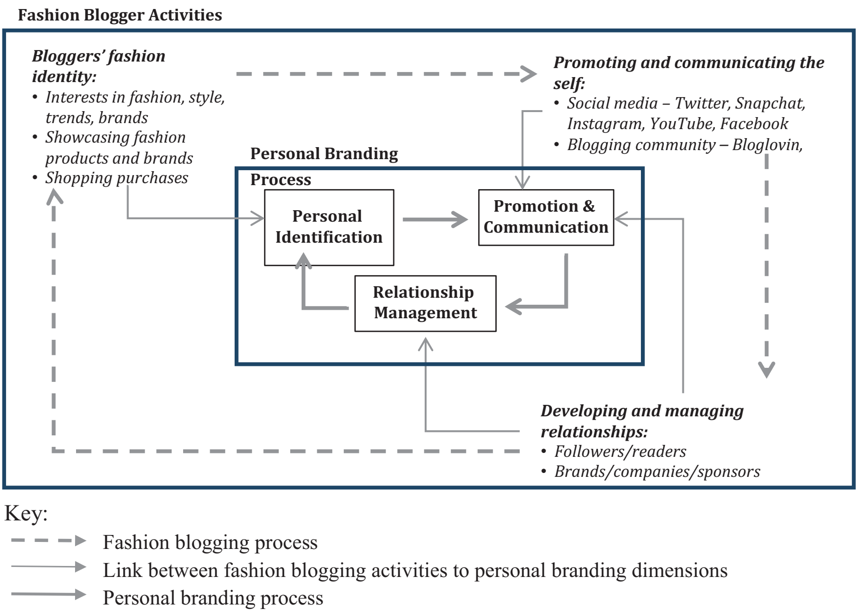

Fig. 4.1 Conceptualising fashion blogs as part of a personal branding process

Personal Identification

The first stage of personal branding, and arguably the key element of developing a personal brand is the process of identifying the self (Labrecque et al. 2011). It is where individuals need to identify self-attributes, competences, standards and styles that must go into the relationships an individual has with other people (McNally and Speak 2011). This involves identifying personal values, personality competences, standards and styles that make an individual unique (Harris and Rae 2011). Creating a strong self-image comes into play at this stage (Montoya and Vandehey 2008). Self-reflection and development would be undertaken by such individuals on a regular basis (Wee and Brooks 2010).

Promotion and Communication

After identifying the self, the next stage of the personal branding process is where individuals promote and communicate their strengths and uniqueness to a target audience (Labrecque et al. 2011). Social media platforms and blogs have been emphasised as the most common communication tools for individuals to communicate and express the self. These tools are now available in the web 3.0 culture and include personal and micro-blogs, video and photo sharing sites, commentary forums and social networking sites (Harris and Rae 2011).

Relationship Management

Managing and maintaining good relationships with the audience to whom the personal brand is targeted (e.g. blog readers and brands) is a critical dimension in developing a successful personal brand. Providing brand consistency and brand promises are important aspects (Montoya and Vandehey 2008; McNally and Speak 2011). It is thereby important for bloggers to be consistent with the content and messages they choose to post onto their blog as it would in turn become part of their personal brand, and communicated to their audiences. Moreover, creating an authentic personal brand is argued to be a fundamental aspect of personal branding (Wee and Brooks 2010). It concerns the degree of "truth" expressed about the self. In other words, when managing and maintaining relationships with others, bloggers should be truthful about themselves and express their true values and beliefs in order to gain trust in their relationship with readers and brands. Personal branding is therefore also about relationship management, which is a two-way process as bloggers not only express their views and opinions and identity, but also need to take into consideration the values of the readers (what readers prefer to see, read and watch) (Jancic and Zabkar 2002), and also the value of brands and retailers they work with.

Conceptual Model: Fashion Blogs as a Personal Brand

This chapter proposes that fashion blogs can be perceived as the blogger's personal brand co-created with consumers using product brands as value currency. In today's social media driven consumer culture, technology and the Internet have facilitated the development of the personal branding concept by providing platforms and space for consumers (Harris and Rae 2011). Figure 4.1 conceptualises the personal brand creation through fashion blogging.

The model firstly identifies the fashion blogging activities in which bloggers are engaged with, such as posting about their daily life, outfit choices, shopping purchases and lifestyle items encountered (Chittenden 2010). The content of these posts is generally personal and unique to each individual. The act of posting such content can be seen as the personal identification stage to creating a personal brand. From here, fashion bloggers communicate their blog posts and its content to others, as a means of promoting their blog and themselves through social media in order to gain larger readership and audience. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat have evidently provided and progressed opportunities for self-presentation (Schau and Gilly 2003). In addition to the main social media channels, blogging communities such as Bloglovin.com and Lookbook.nu for fashion, can also be used as mediums to promote the fashion blog. Thirdly, as the blog develops, fashion bloggers may aim to develop a strong readership base that is followers, which can create opportunities for collaborative relationships with brands (Ko 2012). In the branding literature, it is important for brands to build and maintain relationships as it allows companies not only to develop more sustainable brands with greater financial value, but also to build brand loyalty for consumers (Hwang and Kandampully 2012; Park et al. 2010). Understanding the significance of the relationships with blog readers and collaborators would ultimately influence the content of what is posted on the blog, and thereby the growth of the personal brand. This study investigates the activities of fashion blogging to identify how fashion blogs can be perceived.

Methodology

This UK study investigates the extent to which the proposed conceptual model (Fig. 4.1) is a valuable framework for depicting fashion blogging as part of personal branding. In order to understand and interpret how fashion blogging activities can entail personal branding elements, semi-structured in-depth interviews were adopted as the data collection method, and informants were asked to discuss and elaborate on their fashion blogging practices. A series of open-ended questions were asked so that informants could freely describe their fashion blogging process, and express their views regarding the key themes (King and Horrocks 2010): personal identification, promotion/communication and relationship management. Probing techniques were used in order to extract more detail of the phenomenon where interesting ideas or significant relationships between the themes emerged during the course of the interview (King and Horrocks 2010).

The study recruited bloggers from a large fashion community (www.LookBook.nu) with over 1.2 million active users and 3 million visitors per month (Lookbook 2017). The informants were all UK-based fashion bloggers chosen based on their fashion blogging involvement, which was a minimum of one-year fashion blogging experience in the apparel and accessories category. It is noted that informants with greater experiences can offer greater information value to the research (Halvorsen et al.

2013). Informants were contacted via email and invited to participate in the research. The number of participants was determined after reaching saturation level where no new information could be observed (Guest et al. 2006).

A total number of ten interviews were conducted via Skype. The informants were all female between the ages of 18 and 25, with one to two years of blogging experience, and were either students or in full-time employment. The sample supports similar studies exploring fashion blogging (e.g. Park et al. 2010; McQuarrie et al. 2013). This particular segment of consumers is recognised to be highly fashion-orientated individuals with high levels of fashion consumption (McQuarrie et al. 2013). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Following the process suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), a three-stage open-axial-selective coding technique was utilised (Breazeale and Ponder 2013).

Findings and Discussions

The key themes that emerged from the data analysis are presented below; these include the three main themes from the extant literature: Personal Identification, Promotion/Communication and Relationship Management.

Personal Identification Through Fashion Blogs

Informants were asked about the fashion style they portrayed on their blog. It was found that respondents reflect on their real fashion selves that is actual self, because the outfits they post reflected what they wore in real life, for example:

> *My blog is very much what you see is what you get. I don't have a particular image to uphold so I say what I like and wear what I like. […] My blog pretty much reflects what I'm like in 'real life' and it isn't like an alter ego or anything it's just very much, me*. (Blogger 6, age 21)

Fashion bloggers post realistic content about themselves and their fashion consumption. They identify themselves through who they are in real life and their daily fashion consumption. As one respondent pointed out, they would not present anything on their blog if they didn't actually wear it in real life:

> *I wouldn't wear something on my blog that I wouldn't wear in real life*. (Blogger 4, age 20)

Nearly all respondents emphasised that they are not concerned about what others think of them or their fashion, and would not dress to accommodate the opinion of their viewers. Their blogs expressed who they are and their own opinions of fashion and style, for instance:

> *I do think others' opinions are important, but sometimes I think my own opinions come first as it is my style and me that is being expressed through my blog*. (Blogger 3, age 20)

Subsequently, if the blogger was to follow what others suggested, the blog would not be reflecting her own styles, and critically, her image, identity and even confidence would be inconsistent:

> *I think if I was constantly trying to conform to the styles and likes of the people that read my blog, then my clothes, and confidence, would be all over the place*. (Blogger 4, age 22)

It was evident that building a strong personal identity and image through a fashion blog formed their blog's image for professional recognition from other high-profile bloggers, but also commercial brands and companies. The results revealed that if respondents were recognised by "popular" fashion bloggers or "high-profile bloggers", it can stimulate emotional exhilaration and gratification.

> *If a high-profile blogger (like Susie Lau or Rumi Neely) commented on my blog and said they liked something, then I'd probably be really flattered and it would be a proud moment*. (Blogger 6, age 21)

Furthermore, in order to achieve recognition by respectable brands and companies, maintaining popularity and high readership numbers could lead to fashion blogs being valued by brands, companies and magazine or editorial organisations where sponsorship and magazine featuring are offered. One respondent stated that having more sponsors can increase professional recognition for her blog:

> *[…] brands and companies are an additional bonus group I consider important to my fashion blogging because they provide me with additional content to blog about, and the more sponsors I have it makes my blog more professional and recognised by others*. (Blogger 1, age 18)

Promotion and Communication

Informants were asked how they promoted their fashion blogs to others. A range of blog directories and social media were identified from informants' answers, for instance:

> *I regularly upload my photos onto Lookbook, Chictopia, ASOS Fashion Finder and Tumblr to share my blog and increase audience traffic. […] I also use Twitter, Instagram and Facebook to promote my blog*. (Blogger 7, age 18)

Social media platforms, such as Twitter, were frequently used as a promotional platform, typically when bloggers have new posts or fashion content to share:

> *Twitter is a good place to promote my styles and update followers about new postings*. (Blogger 1, age 18)

Twitter provided a quick way to update and promote new blog content. Instagram and blog directories (e.g. Lookbook.nu and Bloglovin) were used for sharing styles and outfits to a larger community of bloggers and likeminded others because of ease of access and convenience for posting photographs of outfits and styles.

> *I use sites like Lookbook, and using mobile apps like "Instagram" and "Pose" more often to post my styles because it's convenient to do on the go, and there are more people who use them.* (Blogger 5, age 22)

Although respondents do not appear to consciously acknowledge the promotion of their fashion blog, it is evident, that self-marketing and promotion are taking place. It suggests that fashion bloggers are promoting their blogs like a personal brand (Wee and Brooks 2010; Labrecque et al. 2011).

Relationship with Blogging Community and Readers

Informants were asked about the relationships they developed through their fashion blogging. Two key groups emerged: the blogging community, for example other bloggers and readers, and fashion brands/retailers or professionals in the industry. Maintaining a positive relationship with other bloggers and blog readers was the first group that fashion bloggers acknowledged. For example

> *I get a lot of readers who read and follow my blog so I've developed some really good friendships with them, and it gradually builds up. I guess it's like a little community of close friends who share the same interest in fashion and styles.* (Blogger 3, age 22)

Blogging is a social activity which involves interpersonal interaction (Keng and Ting 2009) and community connectedness (Ko 2012). Shen and Chiou (2009) propose that blogs are different from other Internet services because blogging communities are places where community members can communicate and form friendships. The openness of the blogosphere essentially allows bloggers to visit friends' and other people's blogs and leave messages and comments (Ko 2012). Consequently, managing blogger to blogger relationships, as well as follower relationships is necessary if bloggers want to maintain their blog's popularity. One informant stated that blogging is not "easy work" because of the time and energy required to visit other bloggers' websites and leave informed comments:

> *I've become good friends with several of my readers and followers so friendship is something I have developed. But it is not easy work because you have to put time and energy into visiting other people's blogs, leave comments, maintains contact as well as promotes your blog a bit.* (Blogger 8, age 20)

This finding supports the argument that interactive engagement through blogging does lead to positive development of social relationships such as friendship, and also followers, in the online community (Park et al. 2010). This confirms that community engagement is also part of fashion blogging. More significantly, these findings indicate that there is a similarity between fashion blogging and personal branding in terms of relationship management. Just as an individual needs to maintain relationships with target audiences in order to promote his/her personal brand (Wee and Brooks 2010), fashion bloggers need to maintain their relationships with other bloggers through communication and commentary messages in order to promote their blog.

Commercial Relationship with Fashion Brands, Retailers and Companies

Commercial relationships with brands, retailers and companies were also identified as a common theme. Informants discussed their relations with brands who provided them with clothes to blog about, or as one informant referred to as "free content":

> *I have developed some relations with brands who offer to send me clothes in return for posting about them on my blog. Such brands include Glamorous, Madam Rage, Love Clothing, Koi Couture, and Oasap.* (Blogger 9, age 18)

The findings suggest that bloggers are actively participating in marketing activities with selected fashion brands and companies, and vice versa. This participative behaviour and engagement by consumers with brands and companies (and vice versa for brands and companies to collaborate with bloggers) in the marketing process suggests online marketing has reached a new phase—Marketing 3.0 (Kotler et al. 2010), where online marketing activities involve interactive two-way relationships between and amongst marketers and consumers. It is evident from the findings that fashion brands seek to work with independent fashion bloggers to generate greater brand awareness across the blogosphere to online consumers (Pham 2011). Organisations recognise the diffusion power that bloggers hold (Ko 2012). Indeed, the types of commercial relations identified for fashion bloggers with organisations are sponsorships and product placement, where fashion bloggers are sponsored by brands and fashion companies with free sample clothing or accessories to try, test and review on their blog. Miller (2011) states that blog product placement is a marketing and PR reality. Fashion bloggers have been offered incentives such as free clothing, shoes, accessories, shopping discount codes for readers and features in magazines. Indeed, one respondent stated that even if no monetary benefits were involved, she still saw her relationship with the brand/company as being mutually beneficial as she had received free clothing to blog about, and the company gained free publicity and advertising for its brand:

> *[…] a brand has sent me a sample of their clothing to review on my blog. I'm not contractually obliged or paid to do this, but considering the mutual benefits (free clothing and blog content for me and publicity/advertising for the brand) it is definitely an incentive for me to continue blogging*. (Blogger 1, age 18)

Working with brands was in fact a motive for fashion bloggers to blog, and fashion bloggers hold positive attitudes towards working with brands as part of their fashion blogging activity.

Authenticity

Authenticity emerged from the findings as an important theme when investigating bloggers' fashion blogging activities. In the literature, authenticity was acknowledged as a characteristic of the personal branding process (Wee and Brooks 2010), and these research findings present reinforcement of this for fashion bloggers. In the personal branding literature, the role of the three dimensions of personal branding can be perceived to be of equal value. However, the findings in this study suggest authenticity, as part of the relationship management dimension, is a significantly more important aspect of a blogger's fashion blogging activity and thus the personal branding process. Being authentic and unique is a key driver to fashion blogging success as the majority of informants commented on their authenticity in their blogging practices. For example:

> *[…] being unique in fashion is important because it makes you different [….] People do not want to be seen wearing the same clothes as others when you go out…in my fashion blogging I would also want to be authentic because […] I would not be expressing any creativity […] or independency in my fashion styling if I was simply copying […] without adding my own personal touches.* (Blogger 1, age 18)

In the personal branding literature, value and authenticity of the self can only be exploited in strong personal brand building if one is truthful of who he/she is not only to others, but also to the self (Wee and Brooks 2010; McNally and Speak 2011). This research indicates that bloggers do seek to be truthful and authentic about themselves and their fashion creativity that is not copying others. This plays an important role in developing their fashion identity or "brand":

> *I think being unique and authentic is a huge part of fashion blogging – it's all about finding your niche and creating a platform from there. Although I draw inspiration from other people, it is wrong to copy. Wanting to be someone else is a waste of who you are.* (Blogger 7, age 18)

> *The styles and outfits I put together expresses my personality so it is unique and authentic to me, even if it was inspired from catwalk trends […] I was the one who choose what pieces to use, where from and how to put it all together.* (Blogger 3, age 22)

As individuals have freedom to create multiple selves and numerous accounts (Labrecque et al. 2011), providing clear and consistent messages and creating an air of authenticity are important when developing a personal brand. Successful personal branding derives from authenticity which captures a slice of the real self (Labrecque et al. 2011). In fashion blogs, it is evident that bloggers, whilst managing their relationships with both blog readers and brands, must maintain a degree of authenticity in order to establish a unique selling point for their blog's content and essentially the brand being curated through the blog.

Conclusions and Managerial Implications

This study contributes useful information on fashion blogging and online marketing for future research development. It explores and provides insight and knowledge to an emerging personal branding concept co-created by consumers. Blogs have been repeatedly acknowledged as ideal platforms for personal brand building (Montoya and Vandehey 2008; Wee and Brooks 2010; Harris and Rae 2011). The current study further justifies that fashion blogs are part of a blogger's Personal Brand that incorporates their personal identity, including fashion interests, aesthetics and personal taste.

Online companies and brands have been working with bloggers through sponsorships or product placement by providing incentives for bloggers to help create brand awareness in the online fashion community. Previous research has identified that fashion businesses have implemented retail blogs into their marketing strategies (Pham 2011). However, collaborating with independent fashion bloggers who are actively engaging with their large network of global audiences through a social network, their blog could be a more effective marketing strategy. This study offers fashion brands, retailers and companies' insight into how fashion bloggers promote their fashion blog and by working with fashion bloggers, the communication of the brand or company can be promoted further into the online community. Moreover, the research has also identified that retailers can develop marketing strategies to work more with independent fashion blogs/bloggers providing mutual benefits to both parties.

By using the key elements of personal branding identified from the literature and subsequent research along with a consideration of where the focus lies- self/individual or others, it is possible to present a modified version of the original conceptual framework (see Fig. 4.2). Initially, there is a tactical, short-term focus which orientates around the individual in establishing a personal identity, but over time, this can become a strategic consideration offering more long-term opportunities. Figure 4.2 illustrates the Strategic Blogger Development Matrix (SBDM) which shows the short- and long-term focus of blogging to personal branding, orientated around an individual and "other" self. The matrix presents the idea that, initially, blogging can be perceived as a short-term hobby concerning the individual self, but can then move on to involve the "other" (or social) self where blogging then becomes strategically focused on short-term promotion/communication activities of the self. Eventually, the establishment of relationships and managing these relationships with readers and brands can be perceived as long-term commitments to blogging, and the beginning of forming a personal brand.

At the promotion/communication and relationship management stages of the blogging-personal branding process, retailers and brands can

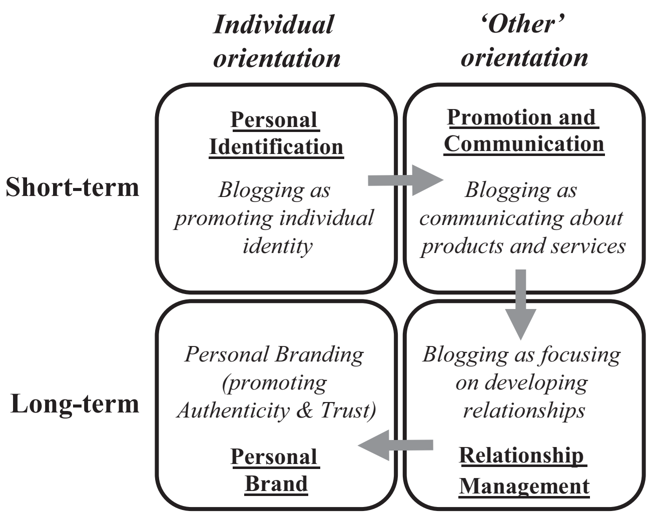

Fig. 4.2 Strategic blogger development matrix (SBDM)

have significant input to assist in the development of a blogger's personal brand creation. At the promotion/communication stage, retailers may identify with potential bloggers and provide content (i.e. sponsorships) to create product awareness or communicate promotions for short-term marketing objectives. Shepherd (2005) notes that to be effective, it is important to honour the marketing principle that is be customer/audience oriented. However, our research here indicates that the audience or consumer is not particularly considered in the initial stages of communication. An alternative perspective could involve consideration of two fundamental processes in human exchange interactions—the process of friendship building and the opposite process of power relations (Jancic and Zabkar 2002). It is likely to be the former when dealing with fashion blogging and that the latter comes later on a more long-term basis, for example in the relationship management stage. Once a relationship has been developed with the blogger, retailers could engage in long-term marketing goals for example entering commercial collaborations, where brands can co-create new products and brands. Here, the audience and consumer must be considered in order to be successful and create meaningful relationships. Jancic and Zabkar (2002) believe that for a relationship to truly exist, interdependence between parties must be evident.

In the long run, blogging can develop into the creation of a personal brand where authenticity and trust play an important role. This emerges from the relationships formed in the previous stage and reflects on the blogger at their individual orientation state. Authenticity could be viewed as the key that distinguishes blogging for fun or pass time and blogging as a brand. It could be said that authenticity is linked to core brand values communicated via various platforms to generate brand awareness (Chronis and Hampton 2008; Leigh et al. 2006; Rose and Wood 2005). More recently, authenticity's relationship with the "human brand" has been researched and particularly as it relates to "celebrity" (Kerrigan et al. 2011; Preece 2014). It is evident there has been successful bloggers with perceived "celebrity" statuses for example Chiara Ferragni (The Blonde Salad) and Zoella, who have developed their own authentic identity (and even products), and thus essentially, a personal brand. For Preece (2014), careful management of various "personas" that communicate the same brand values and produce social attraction generates authenticity. Brown et al. (2003) believe that authenticity can be the "essence" of what the brand stands for and this would seem to be particularly important for the personal brand concept via blogging. Indeed, there has been a call for more research into authenticity when looking at human brands (Thomson 2006; Beverland and Farrelly 2010).

Limitations and Further Research

This exploratory study utilised a sample of ten UK fashion bloggers, and future research could widen the frame of reference of the study by examining bloggers from different cultures and different sector contexts. Additionally, an in-depth case study of some best practice and highly successful individual bloggers could provide additional future insights for the area. Further research could also focus on the mechanisms for relationship management utilised by lifestyle bloggers.

Relationships developed through fashion blogging is a significant area for further research. For example, the relationship of bloggers with brands, but also the notion of developing and managing the blogger's authenticity within their relationship with others. As Kozinets et al. (2010) noted, online marketing has progressed towards embracing participatory and collaborative consumer practices, which means further research on the relationships fashion bloggers have with fashion brands and retailers or vice versa, can generate useful marketing strategies and recommendations for managerial strategies in the digital era.

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5

Video Killed the Radio Star: A Review of Social Commerce Music Platforms in Facilitating Production Dissemination

Neil Robinson, Crispin Dale, and Alex Fenton

Introduction (Light My Fire)

The role of music in society should be in no way underplayed (pardon the pun). Indeed a society without Beethoven, The Beatles or Bauhaus, is a society bereted of feeling. This dystopian image of a future without music, an Orwellian big brother collective where individuality is frowned upon and where the musical rhythms of life are suppressed, is surely one that cannot be contemplated. Contemporary history has shown us that music and society are interlinked and often reflect the political and cultural reference points in society (1950s Beetnik generation, 1960s peace & war, 1970s punk movement, 1980s political changes/Thatcherism and social unrest, 1990s alternative media and girl power). Whilst society and

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_5

its relationship with music have not always made great bedfellows, its legacy and cultural dynamics associated with place, fashion and performance should not be underestimated. The notion of music, its creation, delivery and consumption whilst ever changing in sound and style, has traditionally followed a tried and tested format that has been dictated by the producers (a term used by the authors, to describe those who involved in the management and distribution of the corporate musical product). This format and production style has historically seen the corporate giants controlling the creative flow and distributing it through the traditional distribution outlets of printed media, vinyl, fanzines, merchandising and the concert. Whilst it was argued that the ultimate consumer (i.e. the fan) had little involvement in the creative process (Gilbert 2012), history is itself punctuated with examples when consumers (the fans) have taken some control and ownership of the product (homemade fashion apparel, bootleg recordings and the creation of independent record labels, such as Creation and Sarah records to name but a few). At this point it is wise to note that as with all things that move in a cyclical nature, technology of recent years has greatly empowered the musical devotee and has put them squarely back in control.

Cash from Chaos (Riders on the Storm)

Though creativity is a key driver and raison d'être for musicians, the bottom line of money will always dictate the extent to which they can fulfil their ambitions. If the performer is not able to generate sufficient income from what they are doing this may potentially lead to personal dissolution and withdrawal. For record labels, revenue enables them to market and distribute the artists' material to consumers. However, in recent years the music industry environment has become increasingly challenging. A number of factors in the music industry are driving these economic challenges for a range of industry stakeholders.

First, the evolution of the music industry into streaming music has generated concerns about the risk of cannibalization of other distribution channels, such as downloads and CDs, and might reduce overall revenues (Marshall 2015; Wlömert and Papies 2016). With the increases in alternative modes of music distribution and consumption, in-store music retailers have encountered downward pressure. The closure of high street music retailers such as HMV stores has highlighted these pressures (BBC 2013). Furthermore, streaming channels can also drive down the revenue streams for artists who have predominately generated income through CD sales and download purchases (Wlömert and Papies 2016).

Second, copyright has increasingly become a crucial aspect for ensuring the protection of rights for the musician. Indeed, with digital music bypassing the traditional structures, the industry's attention has evolved from production to the creation of rights (Phillips and Street 2015). In the light of these issues copyright law has refocused to acknowledge the behaviour and attitudes of the consumer (Phillips and Street 2015).

Third, in the age of music streaming, the number of industry stakeholders demanding a "slice of the pie" has grown exponentially (Sinnreich 2016). Therefore, technology has brought with it a host of additional web- and media-based operators that are also making a claim for revenue. Indeed, the growth of social commerce generated by technology has created new opportunities for operators to play a key role in the development of the music industry.

Technology and Music (Break on Through, to the Other Side)

The relationship between music and technology is extensive and multilayered. Its role has profoundly influenced the industry in production, distribution and consumption. From an artist's perspective, technology has been used to advance their musical prowess and further the boundaries of musical creativity. Some of the early adopters included The Beatles and The Beach Boys who began to popularize the use of Moog synthesizers in song creation. Others, such as Kraftwerk during the 1970s, pioneered technology as the core component of their music material. It has also been the catalyst for generating movements such as New Romanticism and Big Beat during the early 1980s and late 1990s, respectively.

From a purely performative perspective, technology has greatly enhanced performance and the ability of the artist to deliver a more professionally polished live product. The utilization of sampling techniques and recording devices has ensured that artists can produce near studio quality performances under the direct scrutiny of a live audience. From a distribution perspective, technology in the form of the Internet and social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Spotify have enabled users to access music and interact with like users on a global setting.

So as to ensure maximum exposure and increased revenue yields, many artists themselves have started to better understand the ramifications of using social media as an artist distribution system. Indeed, many additional benefits exist for artists using social media platforms in an attempt to showcase themselves and to break new markets. The traditional business model saw the artist release music in vinyl/audio cassette/video format, with the music being the main revenue generating tool. The employment over recent years of social media has ensured that costs associated with the physical distribution of the product are reduced, when focusing on single sales. Indeed, technology has generated lower fixed costs of production and changed the nature of competition in the industry (Essling et al. 2017).

Running parallel to this, the artists' brand affiliation is also greatly enhanced as social media enables end users to interact much more with the artist in comparison to marketing techniques pre the advent of social media (Franklin 2013). Many artists have utilized social media less now to physically increase record sales/downloads and more to raise their own media profile and live performances that can in some cases far outnumber music sales in monetary terms. Justin Bieber is a good example of this. Discovered via YouTube in 2008, he now has more than 110 m twitter fans. His financial worth not based solely upon stock sold, but upon media exposure, fan base, online followers and merchandising rights.

Music Platforms and Society (When the Music's Over)

Technological developments have "disrupted" the way music has been distributed and purchased (Wikström and DeFillippi 2016) leading to the disintermediation in the music industry (Tschmuck 2012; Bernardo and Martins 2014). These disrupters have come in the form of online streaming services that enable listeners to access music on demand. There are two types of services (Thomes 2013): the streaming service that enables free access with advertising; and enhanced services that offer additions such as no advertising, access to a wider music catalogue and so on (Wlömert and Papies 2016).

Aguiar (2017) describes streaming services as acting as product discovery tools. With the development of app-based technologies, music can be streamed on the go at any time and in any place. These streaming services have included home-grown entities such as the Swedish company Spotify and its French equivalent Deezer; corporate players such as Amazon Music, Apple Music and Google Play Music; and artist created services such as Tidel developed by rapper JayZ. These companies generate revenue from downloads, ad display and by offering a paid premium service. The corporate players have been able to expand the connectivity of their streaming services with other mobile and home devices. This includes, for example, the Apple iPhone and HomePod, Amazon's Alexa and Google Home. For consumers, the advantage of these services is the breadth of music they provide and the storage of music digitally in the cloud without having to worry about physical storage space (Wlömert and Papies 2016).

The use of streaming services can be argued to prevent music piracy (Aguiar 2017). This, you would consider, may advantage artists with the minimizing of royalty loss. However, this has not always been the case. Artists have protested against streaming services and the lack of revenue that they generate (Marshall 2015). For example Fish, the lead singer with Marillion, claimed he would "have to get seven million streams to buy a pint at my local" (Telegraph 2018). Other artists such as Taylor Swift also opted away from streaming service, Spotify. Conversely, some artists, such as Radiohead, who were previously averse to streaming services, now provide the majority of their music via steaming.

Spotify (Business Case Study 1)

Launched in 2008, Spotify is a podcast, music streaming and video streaming service working on a freemium model. Anyone can download Spotify onto a computer, tablet or smartphone and enjoy a library of over 35 million songs. The free version allows music to be listened to with some adverts and some restrictions over the order in which tracks can be played. Upgrading to the premium version removes these restrictions, increases quality and enables tracks to be downloaded within the software. Spotify works in 65 countries and as such has attracted a huge 170 million active monthly users in May 2018. A significant 75 million of those are paying customers who have subscribed to the premium service. This is forecasted to double to 150 million by 2020 (Franck 2018). Although streaming music existed long before 2008, Spotify has become one of the best known streaming services and has disrupted the music consumption market once again. People now are less inclined to download tracks as they did in the past. A report by the IFPI in April 2018 showed that downloads had dropped dramatically in favour of streaming music. A post by the Outline claimed that downloads were now more archaic than Vinyl (Gaillot 2018).

Spotify has a somewhat controversial way of remunerating the artists. The previous physical sale and download models paid artists royalties based on sales of singles and albums. Spotify on the other hand pays based on the proportion of songs streamed. What that means is that Spotify pays 70% of the fees to rights holders who then pass this on to artists. Unsurprisingly, some artists are unhappy with their tracks being played and not getting what they consider to be their fair share. In a couple of high-profile cases, artists have withdrawn their entire collections from Spotify, but then ultimately they have come to some agreement. This withdrawal could therefore be seen as a means to negotiate a better deal. It also demonstrates the disruptive nature of this business model, which is having a significant impact on download providers and artists royalties.

Another notable feature is Spotify's change in policy in 2018 to remove music that "expressly and principally promotes, advocates, or incites hatred or violence against a group or individual based on characteristics, including, race, religion, gender identity, sex, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, veteran status, or disability". The impact therefore is that its 170 million users and rivals who also adopted the same position, would be unable to listen to this type of music (Hann 2018). In fact, Spotify went a step further and promised to remove from the library any artists whose "off platform" behaviour did not match the values of Spotify. It will remain to be seen what kind of impact this will have on artists and listener behaviour in the future.

Consumption (People Are Strange)

The acquisition and listening to music has evolved significantly and in doing so has changed the way consumers engage and interact with artists and their music. From a supply perspective, consumers can access the song freely or by purchase via download or streaming service. In the context of album releases this has generated what Essling et al. (2017) refer to as "forced unbundling". A situation where consumers can make their own decisions about what tracks to access and purchase without having to buy the entire album.

Streaming can therefore be used as a pre-purchase sampling process (Wlömert and Papies 2016). Indeed, Wlömert and Papies (ibid) recognize music as an "experience good" which consumers can sample prior to outright purchase. When exploring music consumption habits across digital music platforms, Datta et al. (2017) found users listen to an increased diversity of music via streaming platforms and are also more likely to purchase music.

File sharing in the form of unsolicited music distribution has become a feature of the industry in its own right. This behaviour is often associated with the current young generation who are argued to have "more relaxed social and ethical norms concerning both property rights and online behaviour" (Krawczyk et al. 2015, p. 32). This counterculture rebellion is not novel and has occurred at other periods during the lifetime of the music industry. Rather like recording music tracks from the radio or albums on tape cassettes and sharing them as compilations with your peers (Carpenter 2010; Fenby-Hulse 2016). However, in today's context these counterculture protagonists have been described as "first seeders" who subsequently file share content to "seeders" and "leechers" who distribute to other users (Cox et al. 2010).

The Grateful Dead (Business Case Study 2)

The Grateful Dead (GD) are America's foremost quintessential rock royalty originating in the 1960s and whose music has sold more than 35 million album sales worldwide. Their music genre can be best described as a mix between rock, psychedelia, jazz, country and folk to name but a few musical influences. This case study is less to do with their on and off stage musical performances and more to do with their business model and those mechanisms used to enhance fan base, merchandising and record sales.

The GD were formed in California (San Francisco Bay area) in 1965 playing many of the local west coast venues and quickly establishment themselves as key contenders in the burgeoning rock scene of the day. The founding members include Jerry Garcia (lead guitar), Bob Weir (rhythm guitar, vocals), Ron McKernan (keyboards, vocals), Phil Lesh (bass, vocals) and Bill Kreutzmann (drums). Whilst all members had played in other bands in the locality, it was their affiliation and membership of the GD that they would be remembered for. Whilst evidence of their ascent to rock and roll fandom was faint, their business acumen and strategic thinking was for the time exemplary and rather than following the traditional sex, drug, rock and roll mantra as displayed by many of their musical contemporaries of the time, the GD were business visionaries and as knowledgeable as any Harvard MBA graduate. As a starting point the GD management culture was almost socialist in style with each band member having an equal say in the band's running, although Jerry Garcia tended to deal with the day to day running of the musical outfit.

From a business perspective the GD were fully aware of the business environment in which they operated. First and from a fan base perspective, their fans were fully committed and supportive of the band's operational dynamics (deadheads, was the name given to GD fans) were themselves the first to benefit from the band's liberal business style. As a starting point the GD fans were greatly spoilt by the establishment of bespoke telecom links (albeit tame by today's standards, but none the less visionary), fans who registered with the band via a postal address had access to a telephone hotline that alerted fans to a touring schedule ahead of any public announcement/release, with reserved seating, VIP access to all areas and capped prices all via the band's telephone hotline and in-house mail order business (the equivalent to Ticketmaster at the time). In addition, whilst many fans who followed other bands of the day had to queue for tickets (fans in downtown Baltimore would traditionally have to travel to Sacramento to get their gig ticket), the GD circumnavigated this by sending gig tickets to registered fans irrespective of where they lived in the States and without the requirement of fans having to travel to buy gig tickets (the ticket was sent to the consumer via the postal delivery system). Whilst tame by today's standards (or is it?), the GD were ahead of the game and rather than operating a top down managerial system (as conducted by many of today's multinationals) the GD placed much importance on the role of technology (albeit in telephonic manner) in putting the customer first. Indeed, by the late 1960s or early 1970s equivalent standards the GD showed great business prowess, at a time when many of their contemporaries were losing money on equivalent concerts/promotional activities. The GD were rocking the house, both in a physical and financial perspective.

Second and from a managerial perspective the band members were savvy in terms of managerial direction and ownership. Early on the band established a board of directors made up of performers and operational staff including sound engineers, band members and road crew (roadies). Furthermore, a non-permanent chief executive officer position was created, which was rotated on a monthly basis giving band members the opportunity to implement their own ideas and direction of the band.

Third and from merchandising and performance perspective, the GD saw huge revenue opportunities for t-shirt sales and related band apparel that were sold at concerts and further cemented the band's name in the minds of its fans. Running parallel to this the GD actively encouraged fans to record the gig/show on audio cassette. This was a shrewd business idea that resulted in fans sharing tapes of the show and this in turn further helped develop a wider audience base for the band. This resulted ironically in increased record sales as the sanctioned bootleg cassette (that cost nothing to produce) enabled fans to experience the GD sound without any cost to them and then follow up with an official album purchase if they liked the GD sound (a try before you buy concept). The authorized recording of gigs by fans was itself light years ahead in terms of platform distribution. We have seen earlier on in this chapter that file sharing via the various social platforms by first seeders, seeders and leechers is something that the industry it trying to limit, this might actually be a mechanism to increase fan base, enhance overall album sales and facilitate other revenue streams.

Market Structures (The Crystal Ship)

The structure of the Internet has changed. We have become unchained from the desktop computer with a slow connection to an always on, ubiquitous culture of smartphones and apps powered by superfast broadband and data connections. This shift in technology also creates a parallel shift in behaviours and of course music creation and consumption. Not only do these technologies allow us to consume more, from anywhere, but smartphones and apps allow us to create more, which include video, photographs and audio. This digital revolution therefore enables unknown and famous artists to create music and media from anywhere. For example, Craig David racked up hundreds of thousands of YouTube views performing one of his songs ad hoc on a bus in London. This was filmed and shared by people on the bus. Unknown New York Subway brass bands Lucky Chops and Too Many Zooz were filmed by a fan who posted on YouTube and received many millions of views. The technology, therefore, enables people to become prosumers and co-creators.

With this in mind, the forces of co-creation in the music industry have influenced its dissemination to a wider network of audiences whilst also generating a plethora of marketing opportunities. Indeed, according to Gamble and Gilmore (2013) the traditional structures of firm/customer, buyer/seller and producer/consumer will evolve to form partnerships where value can be created and shared. This includes strategies that involve viral, user generated and vigilante marketing. To survive industry players will need to become savvy with influencing networks through the use of social media and blogs/vlogs. This to some extent can be developed through sponsored relationships and affiliation marketing techniques. Nevertheless, the end user will ultimately govern the degree to which the final listening and purchase choice can be influenced.

The discussion has already acknowledged how changing market structures have resulted in a process of disintermediation and reintermediation in music distribution. The evolving dynamics of market structures in this context has been described as generating "hyper-choices" amongst consumers (Benghozi and Paris 2016). The vast array of channels and media that consumers are exposed to results in challenges with disaggregation. As Benghozi and Paris (2016) contend consumers "need to be guided and receive advice, information, or tools that enable them to make choices among a limited number of options, such that the decision is cognitively manageable" (p. 77). Players in the music marketplace will have to develop strategies that clearly define their offering to consumers. This may be in the form of the music genre provided or the pricing model adopted.

Marshall (2015) contends that "rather than Internet technologies providing liberation from old industry dynamics, what we may be seeing is a consolidation of long-established power structures" (p. 25). This is particularly the case when major labels are shareholders in music streaming services. Market structures, therefore, will need to consider the different relationships between live performances, streaming music and fan affiliation to the artist. Where live music is viewed as the strongest for building connectedness between the fan and the artist (Brown 2011), this is becoming the main revenue generator for artists and record companies.

For artists, an alternative means of generating sources of income for music creation may be sought through, for example, crowdfunding. Since the development of sites such as ArtistShare and PledgeMusic, the democratizing influence of crowdfunding has, to some extent, enabled artists to counter the power structures of the dominant industry players. In this context, artists have a greater degree of influence over the music they create and its distribution. However, it is argued that even though crowdfunding has had some influence the degree of its power has still been tempered with access to greater marketing budgets by the main music companies (Galuszka and Brzozowska 2016).

Conclusion (the End)

Contemporary pop music has changed greatly over the last 40–50 years, with Pandora's box being well and truly opened to the glare of public scrutiny. As to the long-term evolution of music and its relationship with society, one could argue that this is very much dependent upon consumer interface and ease of application. Those applications that offer users the opportunity to interact and dictate preferences will themselves succeed. We have already seen how smartphone app technology has enabled the user to become an integral part of the musical performance and bask in a continued 15 minutes of fame. If we are to predict the future evolution of the socio-musical environment, it will be greatly influenced by end user consumption and less driven by the large multinationals. This is not to say the likes of YouTube, Instagram and Facebook will no longer be involved in distribution, but that the end users will have greater power associated with choice, selection and in the case of performers, royalty payments will be greater skewed in favour of the cottage industry artists. Whilst many predicted the demise of the music industry with young people in the 1970s and 1980s recording Top of the Pops on TV or on their video or cassette recorders, this did not result in the demise of the music industry. It can be argued that in many cases it strengthens it as new musical product genres became more accessible, resulting in a wider audience/fan base.

Rather than performing a public exorcism on the ghost in the machine, industry producers should be actively encouraging end users to distribute the product on to additional users, further extending its life cycle and developing a cradle to grave affiliation with related branded musical merchandise. Indeed, such a business model has been created and tested by the likes of Dr Dre and the Beats headphone, which has acted as part of a catalyst for his entrepreneurial projects and extending the artists' shelf life, whilst at the same time creating artist brand awareness in the eyes (or ears, in this case) of the consumer. For the music product to evolve and compete with other social media products, it must become a savvier beast. Music and the social media platforms that distribute it must identify the market that best suits its plumage. For example, the evolution of social media has greatly influenced lifestyles, fashion, image and merchandising. One might ask, where exactly does it position itself and in which market, only then can it play to its full strength and further continue its evolution.

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6

Exploring the Effects of Social Commerce on Consumers' Browsing Motivations and Purchase Intentions in the UK Fashion Industry

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Introduction

The concept of social commerce (s-commerce) makes reference to the use of online media that supports social interactions to assist on the sale of products and services (Stephen and Toubia 2010; Turban and King 2011). S-commerce needs to be differentiated from the use of advertisements or sponsored messages on Twitter or Facebook and from the use of viral competitions and images in order to direct traffic to a brand's website and generate brand awareness (Marsden 2010). Furthermore, it is different from customer reviews despite the fact that they can be used as a tool for s-commerce (Liang et al. 2011).

The term s-commerce was first introduced by Yahoo in 2005 and was initially referred to as a feature that allowed online users to review

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_6

products (Baethge et al. 2016). Since then, the scope of s-commerce has expanded in various directions including product referrals, peer recommendations, team buying, shared shopping lists, deal of the day, or firm-controlled online communities (Liang and Turban 2011).

S-commerce facilitates the engagement between customers and brands based on customers' social behaviours (Kim and Park 2013). S-commerce generates consistent growth in a brand's audience due to the spread of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and interactions that are facilitated by the social aspect in s-commerce (Allsop et al. 2007; Curty and Zhang 2013). It is precisely this social aspect that motivates online shoppers to browse through websites and to learn about new brands, their functionality, alternatives, and so on (Zhou et al. 2013). It has been noted that browsing through a website or online stores does not involve an effective purchase due to factors such as trust or perceived risk, which may affect online purchase decisions (Hajli 2012). However, the fast fashion industry relies on s-commerce (Chahal 2016) as consumers use social media to view products, explore new ranges, get inspiration, and stay up to date with fashion trends.

Thus, this study aims:

1. to investigate s-commerce factors that affect browsing motivation and purchase intention in the fast fashion industry,
2. to explore the impact of s-commerce on browsing motivation and purchase intention,
3. to identify the s-commerce strategies that can help organisations in the UK's fast fashion industry to enhance customer purchase intention and browsing motivation.

Literature Review

Social Commerce Features

Wang and Zhang (2012) noted that s-commerce is beneficial for both companies and consumers. It provides consumers with adequate information about products, enabling them to compare them with other substitutes and as a consequence, make better informed purchase decisions. It is also relevant to brand marketers as it is an effective tool to create brand awareness and to encourage conversions (Luo 2008).

The main features of s-commerce are content, community, and commerce (Afrasiabi Rad and Benyoucef 2011; Zhou et al. 2013). The need to find valuable content is one of the main reasons why customers, stakeholders, and prospects engage in social sharing and interactions through s-commerce. These interactions take place on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, or WeChat and facilitate s-commerce due to the presence of influencers, who might dictate purchase behaviours among other members (Zhou et al. 2013). Lastly, commerce refers to the ability to fulfil customer needs through a transactional web presence. In addition to these three features, Liang et al. (2011) added context, connection, and conversation. Context is a crucial element to s-commerce as it refers to the link of a real world event and an online data entity. Connections through s-commerce are also important because they result in the development of social relationships. Conversations indicate demands and needs that could be fulfilled.

Social Commerce Theories

Social Exchange Theory

The social exchange theory is a psychological theory that attempts to explain the social factors influencing the way people interact within a mutual relationship. According to Cook et al. (2013), social exchange theory is based on a set of principles. First, actors have a set of goals, values, or purposes and their behaviour is consistent with them. Second, interaction with others is based on self-interest and is voluntary. Last, interpersonal contact is based on fair giving and receiving. In view of that, this theory is relevant to understanding the motives of people participating in s-commerce activities. Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2012) applied social exchange theory to investigate how trust influences s-commerce. They found that trust was used to estimate the perceived cost of a given social interaction, and thus, plays an integral role in enhancing s- and e-commerce.

Social Network Analysis Theory

Social network analysis describes the process of examining social structures through the use of networks (Prell 2012). It has been noted to be relevant for s-commerce research for different aspects. First, peer support, as social networks are comprised of individuals who support each other through information sharing and interactions. Second, social network analysis can help to identify individuals and subgroups who play the role of influencers in social networks (Liang et al. 2011). Lastly, it is useful to identify problems in social networks and solve them quickly.

Social Support Theory

Online communities developed from social media platforms are sources of social support (Hajli 2014). However, this support is intangible in nature and includes emotional and informational support (Ng 2013). Informational support relates to messages in the form of advice, knowledge, or recommendations that can be useful in solving problems, while emotional support relates to messages that involve emotional concerns such as empathy and understanding. Both types of support encourage community members to share recommendations and commercial information as an extension of their sharing of supportive information (Hajli and Sims 2015). Also the frequency of support could enhance the development of relationships and trust among users, which could further increase intentions to conduct commercial activities (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon 2012).

Psychological Heuristics of Social Commerce

The concept of s-commerce can also be explained through psychological constructs such as reciprocity, community, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity (Featherman and Hajli 2016). Based on the concept of *reciprocity*, individuals will feel the need to return a positive gesture either by giving feedback about the company in social networks or by becoming loyal customers. Thus, some firms thrive through reciprocity, especially from the influencers that they may work with in order to give recommendations about their products (Metzger et al. 2010). The heuristic of a *community* is built on the development of a network based on shared likes, beliefs, and values (Metzger et al. 2010). Individuals feel more connected to communities where they feel accepted. Hajli (2014) added that communities enhance the development of commitment and trust and such commitment enhances the acceptability of new ideas introduced within the community. The construct of *social proof* reflects the significance of the feedback that is generated through s-commerce. This is based on the fact that an individual is likely to give positive feedback to a company when they have social proof that other people are buying in the same way and they like the same things they do. Also, consumers are more willing to purchase products that have *authority* in the market. This authority is gained through many user reviews about a given product (Wang and Zhang 2012). Moreover, consumers trust products that attract many *likes* through s-commerce. In addition, consumers assign greater value to products that they perceive as being in high demand or in short supply, in other words, *scarce* (Wang and Zhang 2012).

Browsing Motivations

Definitions of motivation are varied, but it is generally agreed that they are responsible for moving individuals to a desired state (Maslow et al. 1970). Motivation *'refers to the process that lead consumers to behave as they do'* (Solomon and Rabolt 2004, p. 120) and are considered to be the 'motor' component of human needs. Motivations can be classified as intrinsic (when it comes from within) and extrinsic (when it comes from an external stimuli) and also as hedonic and utilitarian. Ha and Lennon (2010) investigated the impact of utilitarian and hedonic motives on product browsing and eWOM finding that some utilitarian motivations such as convenience, selection, and information availability were relevant for browsing intentions. Ono et al. (2012) support the role of convenience as the perception of convenience in s-commerce facilitates the appeal and process of the browsing activity. Ha and Lennon (2010) also found that a wide selection of products and services influences browsing motivations. This concurs with Kim and Hong's (2011) research, which argues that a wide selection of goods/services can encourage product browsing and facilitates better product choice, since people have more access to comparable items. Information availability on websites and social media motivates people to continue browsing for products or services (Kim and Ko 2010; Chen et al. 2010; Thamizhvanan and Xavier 2013).

In the specific case of s-commerce, factors related to the online community such as informational support and community commitment have a strong influence on browsing motivations (Wang and Zhang 2012). Accordingly, Huang and Benyoucef (2013) note that individual behaviour is motivated by social factors that encourage communication and collaboration among members. Thus, s-commerce promotes strong relationships between the members of an online network, resulting in commitment to that network.

Informational support has been defined as the views that individuals provide in the form of recommendations or even experiences associated with the use of a given product or service (Akman et al. 2017). Three types of informational support have been identified in online settings including advice, personal opinions, and factual information, which are helpful in decision-making and problem-solving. In specific s-commerce contexts individuals share information in the form of experiences about delivery, packaging, product features, and experiences using the product which demonstrates the relevance of informational support as a motivator for browsing.

Community commitment also influences browsing motivations (Wang and Zhang 2012). Previous research has demonstrated that a strong commitment towards an online community results in a higher participation of the individuals that make up that community which in turn means that the browsing activity is more regular (Park et al. 2012; Huang and Benyoucef 2013). This is based on the fact that s-commerce provides a platform where individuals can share their experiences about products and services and can find the recommendations of other users using that platform.

Online environments are characterised by high levels of uncertainty which makes trust a key aspect to develop long-term and successful relationships. Thus, *trust* has been regarded as one of the main factors motivating browsing behaviours (Lal 2017). Trust can be related to the members of a community or to the s-commerce community itself (Lal 2017). In the first case it refers to the willingness to count on the views and suggestions of other members of the social community. This trust is visible in the way members communicate and in the way they are ready to help each other in case of problems or issues involving decision-making (Lin and Lo 2016). The trust towards an s-commerce community is related to the community's ability to meet the expectations of its members (Ong et al. 2013) which in turn means that if a member has a positive perception about a social community they will be more motivated to browse through it.

Finally, evidence shows that the *quality of s-commerce* websites also influences browsing motivations (Ono et al. 2012; Wang and Zhang 2012). It has been noted that the search for information is one of the main reasons to browse on s-commerce sites (Ling et al. 2010). According to Ono et al. (2012), website quality is determined by the ease of navigation which, in turn, plays a fundamental role in the effort needed to browse through the website. However, quality also applies to service quality including its reliability during online transactions (Mikalef et al. 2013) or the support received via a website (Gorla et al. 2010).

Online Purchase Intentions

Featherman and Hajli (2016) highlight that intention represents an individual's conscious motivation to make an effort in order to perform behaviour. Similarly, Kim (2012) noted that the intentions among individuals are usually influenced by their perceptions about behaviour.

Different theories have been applied in order to gain a better understanding about online purchase intentions. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) relied on the Theory of Reason Action to explain the factors that influence online purchase intentions. Whilst trust, perceived risks, and ease of use were identified as the main factors affecting overall intentions of consumers to purchase products and services online (Yu-Hui and Barnes 2007; Pookulangara and Koesler 2011; Rose et al. 2011; Davis 1989), it is not clear how they apply to s-commerce contexts.

Previous literature has established the relationship between s-commerce and purchase intentions. According to Ng (2013), when consumers perceive that an s-commerce site is easy to use, they develop positive attitudes towards it and become more open to purchase products through the website (Weisberg et al. 2011; Shin 2013). Also by providing a platform where online communities offer social support to their members, s-commerce influences purchase intentions and decisions (Wang and Chang 2013). This is because s-commerce enables users to obtain information and experience positive emotional responses which promote interactions between an user, other members of the community, and even an online retailer (Lin and Lo 2016; Huang and Benyoucef 2013; Akman et al. 2017). According to Stephen and Toubia (2010), the perception of social support in s-commerce is positively associated with user purchase intentions. Figure 6.1 provides the theoretical framework of this chapter.

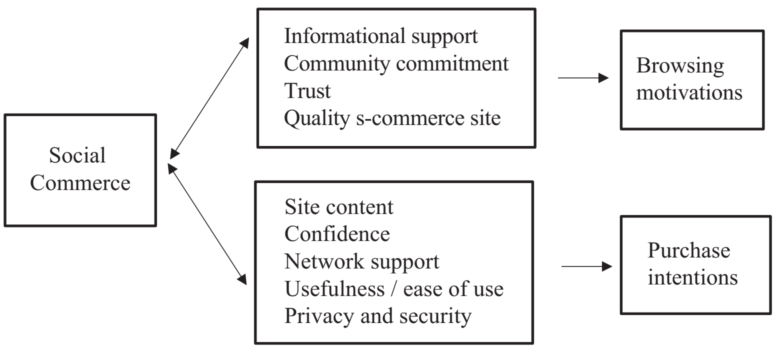

Fig. 6.1 Theoretical framework

Methodology

This study adopts a deductive approach through the use of quantitative methodology to address the objectives of this chapter. A questionnaire was designed to test the theoretical framework proposed.

The target sample for the research is young consumers based in the UK, 18–25 years old, who are the most active target group of social media and ecommerce sites (Birtwistle and Moore 2007). The questionnaire was posted on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WeChat. Respondents were asked to share the questionnaire link to other respondents with similar profiles using a snowball sampling technique to get a significant sample (Scheaffer et al. 2011).

The questionnaire was built on the previous literature review and included a total of 30 questions. Some of these questions were open-ended in order to get rich insight into the topic studied. A total of 182 valid responses were obtained.

Analysis of Results

The Data was analysed through the use of descriptive statistics and hypotheses were tested through correlation analysis. In terms of demographics, the sample was balanced in gender representation with 52.2% of females and 47.8% of males.

Validity

Validity refers to the degree to which an instrument measures what it intends to measure. The validity of a research instrument is concerned with its soundness and how well it could be applied (Thomas and Magilvy 2011). Validity influences the credibility of findings; this means that the failure to ensure validity of research instruments, for example, compromises the credibility of research findings (Kimberlin and Winetrstein 2008). Validity was achieved in this study by ensuring that the data collection instrument contained questions which were truly representative of the theory reviewed.

Reliability

Reliability shows the extent to which a research instrument is consistent, dependable, and stable. The reliability of the data collection instrument in this study was examined using the test-rest technique. When examining the reliability of a research instrument using this method, the research instrument is usually administered twice to the same group of subjects, and then the correlation in their responses is determined. A strong positive correlation in this case is a sign of a high reliability of the instrument (Cohen et al. 2013). The researcher sent the links to a selected number of respondents twice, and obtained the correlation between the responses. The coefficient obtained was 0.79, signifying a reliable instrument.

Social Commerce Versus Fast Fashion

A question was included to determine the respondents' interest in fast fashion, finding that 84.6% of them had bought fast fashion in the last three months and 48.4% spent five–eight hours weekly browsing fast fashion brands. Respondents claimed that they choose fast fashion brands because they are trendy (40.1%) and, to a lower extent but still significant, 21.4% because they are accessible online which makes them accessible in terms of s-commerce purposes. Other reasons are variety (23.1%) or affordability (9.9%).

Regarding where consumers find information about new trends or inspiration for fashion shopping, 57.1% of respondents claimed that they get this information from the internet whilst 20.3% insisted that they get it from friends. When they need to make purchase decisions, 83.5% of respondents rely on the opinion of other consumers, which is especially relevant for s-commerce.

A question was included to determine if respondents use s-commerce to gather information about fast fashion, which was confirmed by 79.2% doing it. A significant percentage also considered s-commerce as a catalyst for interaction with fashion brands (75.3%) with only 4.4% of respondents strongly disagreeing.

Social Commerce Factors That Motivate Browsing Intentions

Overall, informational support (54.9%) and community commitment (26.4%) had the biggest influence on s-commerce and browsing motivations. On the other hand, trust was mentioned by the least number of respondents (7.7%).

The influence of each of these factors on browsing motivations was individually considered through the use of Likert scales to measure the degree of agreement. Regarding availability of information, 32.4% of respondents strongly agree and 50.5% agree with its influence on browsing motivations, totalling to 82.9%, whilst only 4.4% of participants strongly disagreed. The influence of community commitment on browsing motivations was recognized by 69.7% of respondents whilst 21.9% disagreed. Next, the quality of the s-commerce site does not show determinant results with 53.3% considering that it is an important factor that influences browsing motivations whilst 31.8% disagree, which indicates that it may not be that relevant in terms of impacting browsing motivations. Similarly, trust was seen as a relevant factor by 53.3%, but surprisingly, 33% did not have a clear positioning about it (neither agreed nor disagreed).

The relationship between browsing motivations and s-commerce factors—information availability, community commitment, trust and quality of s-commerce—was tested through correlation analysis. Correlation coefficients show that all s-commerce factors have a strong and positive relationship with browsing motivations. Consequently, an increase of information availability, commitment, trust and quality of s-commerce sites will result in increased browsing motivations amongst fast fashion consumers in the UK market. Among these factors, community commitment shows the most significant influence on consumer browsing motivations. Consequently, the different analyses are consistent in terms of results.

Social Commerce Factors That Motivate Purchase Intentions

The content of s-commerce sites was mentioned by 88 respondents as the s-commerce factor that motivates their online purchase intentions. Notably, there were almost an equal number of respondents who mentioned website confidence (33), privacy and security (31), and ease of navigation (30) as the factors that influence their purchase intentions.

Following the same procedure as the browsing motivations analysis, the influence of each of these factors on purchase intentions was individually considered through the use of Likert scales to measure the degree of agreement. First, the importance of confidence for purchase intentions was indicated by 77.1% of respondents, with 17.8% of them showing disagreement. Regarding the relevance of providing a platform where online communities can offer support to members, 84.1% of participants agreed on their influence on purchase intentions, which demonstrates its key influence for s-commerce. It is not evident for usefulness and ease of use where respondents provided mixed answers with 61% agreeing on its influence on purchase intentions and 25% disagreeing. Lastly, privacy and security issues are important to 137 out of 182 respondents while 25 disagree and 20 neither agree nor disagree.

Furthermore, the relationship between s-commerce factors and purchase intention was statistically tested. Based on the output of the correlation analysis, all these factors have a positive relationship with online purchase intentions. This implies that assuring the privacy and security of consumers, providing useful content and good navigation, increasing confidence with an s-commerce website, and increasing the network support from other members of an online community will result in an increase in online purchase intentions amongst fast fashion consumers in the UK market. In this case, network support from other members of an online community as an s-commerce factor has the most significant influence on consumer online purchase intentions.

Discussion and Conclusion

Results show that the views and experiences provided by other users along with the commitment of s-commerce users to provide information and respond to queries from other users have the most significant influence on consumer browsing motivations. Here, information is obtained from other s-commerce users expressing their views, suggestions, and experiences about fast fashion products. According to Akman et al. (2017), the views that individuals provide in the form of recommendations, advice, or even experiences associated with the use of a given product or service are defined as informational support.

This research confirms Wang and Zhang's (2012) theories related to the three types of informational support provided in online environments: advice, personal opinions, and factual information. More specifically, individuals in s-commerce contexts share information in the form of experiences about delivery timing, packaging of products, product features, and experiences using the product. Such informational support becomes a motivating factor for individuals to browse for information on s-commerce platforms. Hence, informational support is the s-commerce factor that mostly influences browsing motivations amongst fast fashion consumers in the UK. Other s-commerce factors such as the quality of s-commerce websites and communication were also found to play a role in influencing browsing motivations amongst the UK fast fashion consumers.

According to the findings of this study, the s-commerce factor that mostly influences online purchase intentions among the UK fast fashion consumers is the support from other members of a community created through s-commerce which confirms previous studies (Liang et al. 2011; Wang and Chang 2013; Zhou et al. 2013). Also the content of the site is crucial, which is supported by Jung's (2014) research that establishes the importance of content over other elements such as a user's confidence with an s-commerce site.

Thus, the findings of this study imply that those who rely on s-commerce for the sale of products and services should focus more on the provision of adequate information rather than on enhancing the visual characteristic of the s-commerce site. Thus, no matter how visually appealing a website is, it could be useless if consumers cannot find the information to make informed decisions.

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7

Attitudes Towards Brands' Facebook Pages Across Different Age Groups

Rosy Boardman

Introduction

Facebook originated as a platform that enabled people to connect with their friends, family and acquaintances. As the number of Facebook users has grown rapidly, this once personal social media site has evolved significantly and witnessed an increasing number of brands using it as a digital marketing platform. Indeed, it cannot afford to be ignored by brands in the present market, with 2.19 billion monthly users and growing, Facebook is the world's most popular social network (Mintel 2018; Statista 2018; Chaffey 2018). With over half of Facebook's users visiting the site several times daily (Mintel 2018), the potential for social commerce on Facebook is immense (Drapers 2017). Social media marketing can be used by brands to include consumers in their design process, share news and information about their goods and services, and announce the launch of new products, creating a sense of immediacy, convenience, and relevance to consumers, whilst at the same time raising brand awareness

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_7

and publicity for the business (Pentina et al. 2012). Thus, as social media increasingly plays a major role in business, success or failure can be determined by consumer feedback and their engagement on these platforms (Ramanathan et al. 2017).

This chapter explores how consumers feel about the increased presence of brands on Facebook as well as how much they engage with brands and their motivations for doing so. Furthermore, the chapter investigates if age influences consumers' attitudes towards brands' Facebook pages, and whether younger users are more likely to engage with them than older users for instance. This is important to research as not all age groups have the same attitudes towards social media or shopping, and so previous studies looking primarily at younger users may not be generalisable to older age groups. In order to compare different age groups' attitudes towards brands' Facebook pages, 50 qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with customers aged 20–70 years of a well-known fashion brand who had an established Facebook page.

Social Media

Social media can be defined as '*a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content*' (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p. 61). The most popular social media platforms are Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and Snapchat (Phua et al. 2017), and Chinese social media sites Sina Weibo and WeChat (Taylor and Kent 2014). Due to the advent of smartphones, there has been a huge increase in social media usage over the last few years, with sites such as Facebook now being at people's fingertips on these handheld computers, facilitating instant and frequent access (Morrow 2014). Despite the current trend to cut down on social networking and to have a 'digital detox', more people than ever are using social media (Mintel 2018). Indeed, the number of social media users worldwide in 2018 has reached **3.196 billion**, which is an increase of 13% year-on-year (Chaffey 2018). This highlights the ubiquitous nature of social media and the potential marketing and sales power it harnesses for brands across the globe.

Research shows that consumers perceive social media sites to be more trustworthy sources of information, likely due to an erosion of confidence in the information received via traditional advertising (Mangold and Faulds 2009; Christodoulides et al. 2013). As a result, brands are retreating from one-way communications of their messages via non-targeted advertising in traditional media (e.g. TV, radio, magazine and direct mail) to use social media as an implicit advertising tool that shapes two-way communications between brands and customers, reaching large numbers of customers in a short time and for low cost (Keller 2009; Tiago and Veríssimo 2014; Scott 2015). Hence, in order to boost profits, brands are focusing more of their efforts on social media and trying to improve their communication and relationships with consumers on these platforms (Grizane and Jurgelane 2017).

Brands utilise social media to market their goods and services and to manage their relationship with consumers (He et al. 2017). They can build and maintain these stakeholder relationships through information sharing and personalised recommendations, as well as by encouraging word-of-mouth about products and services (Yadav and Rahman 2017). As a result, consumers are now using social media channels to search for products and source information about brands and products in place of traditional media (Mangold and Faulds 2009; Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold 2011; Li and Bernoff 2011; Christodoulides et al. 2013).

Fashion brands can take advantage of social media sites' extensive user bases by connecting to their target consumers on there, facilitating stronger and more direct interactions with them (Touchette et al. 2015). Indeed, studies have found that attitudes towards hotel brands' social media sites have an influence on customers attitudes towards the hotel brand and their subsequent intentions to book a room and spread electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Leung et al. 2015). This suggests that there could be influences in attitudes towards fashion brands as a result of their social media marketing activities, an aspect that will be explored further in this chapter.

Facebook

Facebook was launched in 2006, and is now the largest social network (Mintel 2018; Chaffey 2018). As of the first quarter of 2018, there are approximately 1.45 billion daily active users (DAUs) and 2.19 billion monthly active users (MAUs) (Statista 2018; Facebook 2018), the most DAUs of any of the social networks (Chaffey 2018). Indeed, Facebook continues to grow year-on-year (up from 1.9 billion active users at the end of 2016) despite concerns over 'fake news' content and data security following the Cambridge Analytica scandal, which led to the hashtag #DeleteFacebook to be trending on Twitter (Mintel 2018). This growth shows no signs of slowing down, with younger users signing up for new accounts each year, it continues to be the most used social media channel by quite some distance and looking likely to remain so going forward (Mintel 2018). Furthermore, with a 10.7% average post reach versus page like and 26.8% average paid post reach versus total reach, Facebook presents a huge opportunity for fashion brands in terms of social media marketing and social commerce (Chaffey 2018).

Brands use Facebook to attract consumers' attention, keep them updated and involved in the life of the brand and aware of any events taking place (Kim and Ko 2010), establishing a community around the brand (Shen and Bissell 2013). Facebook allows brands to post interesting content such as videos, recent news, articles, pictures, events, celebrity endorsements and showcase new collections (Sharma and Sahni 2015; Phua et al. 2017). Thus, fashion brands can capitalise on Facebook's popularity through targeted advertising and consumer interaction (Mintel 2018). Facebook continues to evolve and facilitate marketing and sales opportunities for brands, such as through the introduction of online shops, virtual fitting rooms and the live-broadcast of catwalk shows on their pages. Providing interesting and exclusive videos in particular will motivate consumers to spend longer on a brand's social media site (Mintel 2018). In 2009, Louis Vuitton was the first brand to post a live catwalk show on their Facebook page showcasing their latest collection (McCormick et al. 2014) and many brands have subsequently followed suit showcasing their live catwalk shows at the biannual Fashion

Weeks—some even facilitating the immediate purchase of items through the innovative see-now-buy-now model introduced by Burberry. Yet, the challenge for brands is to post relevant, engaging content that consumers can interact with (Mintel 2018). Thus, if brands find out what consumers want to see on their Facebook, and what they do not want to see, then it will help them to create effective social media marketing and social commerce strategies. The present study aims to uncover what different ages of consumers want/do not want from Fashion Brands on Facebook so will provide this insight.

Different Age Groups

An ageing population has witnessed an increase in older people shopping online (Kuo et al. 2012) which highlights the need for inclusivity in website designs and social media strategies. Despite popular misconceptions, older consumers do not feel like there are more risks associated with shopping online than younger consumers do (Kwon and Noh 2010) and the study by Boardman and McCormick (2018) shows that all ages from 20 to 70 years are now shopping online regularly, and that all except the 60s age group browse on their mobile phones for clothes. This is also true for social media usage: despite Facebook usage declining with age, it is still very popular amongst all age groups, peaking among 25–34-year olds with 83% of people in that age group using it, primarily because they were the main adopters from the launch in 2006 (Mintel 2018).

Yet, despite an increasing number of older people using the internet and shopping online, there may still be differences in their behaviour and attitudes towards online retailing and brands on social media. For example, Zimerman (2012) found that millennials (those born approx. 1980–1999) used websites including Google and Wikipedia much more than older users, which suggests that younger users may look for information more than older users online. Moreover, Goodrich (2013) found that older users paid more attention to online banner ads than younger users. Furthermore, research shows that consumers have different attitudes towards brands and shopping. For instance, Parment (2013) found that for millennials, their interest in the product influences their purchase involvement more than it does for Baby Boomers, which suggests that millennials are more emotionally involved when buying products. Moreover, Parment (2013) found that millennials are much more concerned about how others perceive them, whereas Baby Boomers are less interested in what others think. Millennials are more flexible and less brand loyal than Baby Boomers, and do not need as much help from sales assistants when buying products, whereas Baby Boomers prefer to shop at just the one shop as much as possible. This highlights that different ages of consumers have diverse attitudes towards shopping and differ in their shopping behaviour, which may have interesting implications for whether they follow brands on social media, particularly as some are more brand loyal than others.

Duffett (2015) found that advertising on Facebook can positively affect millennial consumers' purchase intention and purchase behaviour. However, Duffett (2015) did not investigate whether Facebook would affect other age groups and whether their attitudes would be different to millennials. On the other hand, Ozimek and Bierhoff (2016) found that there is a negative association between age and the frequency of Facebook activity. The present study will see if this holds true for loyal customers of brands who are all active on Facebook. Both these studies and the overwhelming majority of research into social media, and Facebook in particular, use quantitative survey methods. Therefore, there is a lack of qualitative research on Facebook, providing rich data sets exploring why consumers follow brands on there and their attitudes towards the brands' social media pages. The present study will fill this gap in the literature.

Method

As this research is exploratory in nature, a qualitative interpretivist enquiry was adopted. Fifty qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with customers aged 20–70 years of a well-known brand who had an established Facebook page in order to gain a greater insight into consumers' attitudes towards fashion brands' Facebook pages. The research used non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, as participants were selected based on the fact that they were regular customers of the brand (had purchased an item within the last three months) and were all Facebook users. As it was a womenswear brand, all the participants were women. The questions focused on exploring consumers' experiences with brands' Facebook in order to determine their attitudes towards this (Saunders et al. 2015). The rich qualitative data sets allowed for patterns and clusters to emerge organically. Coding, a methodical process of finding and grouping relevant points in data sets (Smith 2015), generated meanings from the data and an understanding of participants' attitudes towards Facebook.

Results

In order to gain a further understanding about participants' overall social media usage, the researchers asked which social media channels they were active on. All the participants aged 20–70 years used Facebook (as it was a requirement when recruiting the sample) but, although all the 20s and 30s also used Twitter, only half of the 40s age group used it, with 1 of the 50s and none of the 60s, highlighting a clear decline in Twitter usage and age. Similarly, the 20s all used Snapchat and Instagram, whereas the 30s all used Instagram, but only half used Snapchat, and none of the 40s–60s used Instagram or Snapchat at all. Future research could investigate whether consumers use social media sites differently and facilitate different relationships with the brand. This study focused on consumers' attitudes towards brands' Facebook pages and the findings that emerged from the in-depth interviews are discussed later in this chapter.

Access to discounts and offers was the primary reason why consumers followed brands on Facebook across all age groups: '*…on Facebook sometimes it will tell you if there's a sale coming up, 10% discounts…*' (p. 48, 20s), '*…that way you get any offers, any offers it comes up on Facebook*' (p. 29, 50s). Indeed, consumers found Facebook to be the most convenient way of seeing the latest offers and discounts: '*…if they've got offers you're going to see them there first*' (p. 43, 20s) and they regularly checked brands' Facebook pages as a result, therefore encouraging visits to the brand's social media site. The results showed that this often led to consumers going to the website: '*…for deals, like a deal of the day and then I can just go straight to the website from that click*' (p. 38, 20s), and even purchasing the items that were seen: '*…they'll have a special offer on and I've bought quite a few things because they'll say this is a tenner for today or whatever'* (p. 12, 30s). Thus, providing discounts/offers and targeted items through photographs on Facebook can encourage consumers to follow brands on Facebook, increasing engagement and repeat visits, as well as encouraging purchasing behaviour.

The 20s in particular were very price-driven and they followed brands on Facebook in order to enter competitions in the hope of winning items: '*…you can enter a lot of competitions if you like them or you know you share the comments. I think there was a competition on Facebook that if you liked something on Instagram you could win it… so yes it's mainly competitions*' (p. 35, 20s). Therefore, running competitions is an aspect that brands targeting people in their 20s could consider in order to increase engagement. Yet, the 20s were the only age group to mention this as a motive for following brands on Facebook, it was not considered by other age groups.

The other central reason for following brands on Facebook by consumers across all ages was to see the latest products and collections: '*…Just to see if there's any new dresses that come in or any new clothes, because they usually show them on their Facebook page…'* (p. 48, 20s), '*yes… it tells you what's coming in stock…'* (p. 10, 40s). This emphasises that keeping their Facebook pages up to date with the latest items is essential for Fashion brands in order to increase regular visits and engagement.

Similarly, all ages reported that they followed brands to get fashion information and inspiration: '*Yes I do because that can give you some ideas of what to buy which you might not have thought about*' (p. 50s, 50s), '*… like I said about them making the full outfit… If I see something I like I'd go and have a look at it in more detail. Because I'm no good at accessorising and things like that so if they did a full outfit like that dress with a little cardigan, some nice shoes, and like a necklace, some earrings, a hat… I might have a* *look at that and see…'.* (p. 44, 20s), *'…to get the latest fashions… what they've got in…'* (p. 15, 60s). Thus, fashion brands should capitalise on the fact that consumers want fashion inspiration from social media by providing posts featuring items such as stylist's picks, styled outfits, consumer/blogger outfits, vlogs and videos using influencers and brand ambassadors.

The 30s used Facebook to read other customer comments and reviews about items: '*…because there's customers on there that have actually bought the outfit and put their own reviews*' (p. 22, 30s). Yet, they were the only age group to mention interacting with other customers on Facebook. This suggests that consumers are not following brands' Facebook pages to build relationships with other consumers, contrary to previous research (e.g. Laroche et al. 2013). Although the 30s said they wanted to interact with other consumers on the brands' Facebook page, it was more to see their evaluations of items that they had bought in the form of product reviews. Hence, their motivation was focused on the product and to help them in their decision-making, not in building relations with other consumers.

Furthermore, the 20s and 30s used Facebook as a way to keep up to date with the brand: *'…so you can actually see what's coming up… It's good to be in the loop'* (p. 48, 20s), '*…there might be something on there about a new store opening, news and offers really*' (p. 22, 30s), '*Yes… Just because they put little things on, like little tit bits, just like "this is coming in soon" or whatever, I just like being nosy really…'* (p. 12, 30s). This shows that brands can build relationships and facilitate interaction with consumers by keeping their social media pages up to date with their latest news and events, an aspect that is particularly important to younger consumers who want to 'be in the loop' and discuss it with their peers.

However, the 20s were the only age group to report that they used Facebook to contact the brand directly: '*…you can get direct contact with a representative if you have got something wrong … I want to be able to get in touch with the actual brand direct through Facebook rather than ringing them up*' (p. 43, 20s). Indeed, Facebook and Twitter were the 20s preferred method of contacting the brand in general, which has wider implications for the future of brand-consumer communication.

Reasons for Not Following Brands on Facebook

The study found that consumers were less likely to follow brands on Facebook the older they got. Some of the older age groups (40+) did not want to follow brands on Facebook due to security concerns: *'I go on Facebook but not for this reason…I don't think I'd like them to have any of my details through Facebook. I wouldn't like to shop through the Facebook website because I don't think they're safe enough. I wouldn't do it'* (p. 8, 40s). The 40s+ were also reluctant to follow brands on Facebook due to privacy reasons, as they did not want people knowing where they shopped: '…*I'm quite private about things and I don't really like the idea that everybody would know where I was shopping and what I was buying*' (p. 6, 40s), '*I don't tend to follow stores… I don't want everybody knowing where I shop*' (p. 9, 50s). When people like a brand's Facebook page, or like/comment on a post by them, it comes up on their friends' news feeds, thereby informing their friends of their affiliation with the brand. This was an aspect that consumers aged 40+ were not comfortable with and preferred to keep this information private.

A further reason why consumers aged 30+ did not follow brands on Facebook was because they did not want to be bombarded with posts: '*….I don't really like pressing "Like" on things on Facebook because you get that much stuff coming up, you know like all the advertising and stuff… everyday I'd click on and there was like reams and reams of stuff so I just took them off. I don't want to be looking through loads and loads of adverts to find one thing that my friend might have said … it is interrupting my news feed*' (p. 5, 50s), '*I just don't… because sometimes it tends to take over your Facebook page and then it just gets really annoying and you can't do what you want with it… when you Like something like that then you get bombarded with stuff…'* (p. 14, 50s). This was emphasised by these consumers in their statements about Facebook being for personal use only: *'I use it for keeping in touch with friends, that's the main thing really'* (p. 5, 50s), *'…I wouldn't want them on Facebook because Facebook for me is the one that I would just use for communicating with friends, I don't do any advertising stuff, whereas Twitter is the one that I follow bars and restaurants and clubs* *and you know all stuff like that, the companies rather than doing it on Facebook*' (p. 3, 30s). This has wider implications for brands' social media strategies; they must not post too much content as they do not want to annoy consumers and bombard them, otherwise consumers will unfollow them. This was not mentioned as a concern by consumers in their 20s, however, which is interesting, suggesting younger age groups may be more tolerant of brands' posting frequently and social media advertising, an aspect that could be explored further by future research.

Discussion and Conclusion

Table 7.1 summarises the reason why consumers followed brands on Facebook and the aspects that heightened their engagement with the brand:

Findings highlight the particular importance for brands of providing fashion inspiration and the latest items (new in) in their collections, as well as discounts/offers on their Facebook pages. Including these aspects is likely to encourage engagement with consumers and potentially lead to increased purchasing behaviour. There were some differences between age groups and attitudes towards brands' Facebook pages. Interestingly, only the 30s mentioned interacting with other consumers as a reason for following brands' Facebook, which contradicts the study by Laroche et al. (2013) who found that the customer-customer relationship was important for building brand trust and brand loyalty on social media brand communities. Yet, the 30s were not necessarily interested in building relationships with other consumers, but rather wanted to see user-generated

Table 7.1 Reasons for following brands on Facebook across different age groups

Motivation for following brands on Facebook	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s
To receive discounts/offers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Competitions	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Inspiration	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
To see new products	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
To contact brand directly	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
To keep up to date with the brand	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
To see product reviews/evaluations by other consumers	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗

content in the form of product reviews and images on the brands' Facebook page, in order to help them in their decision-making. This is an aspect that could be explored further, as consumers are coming to Facebook to see user-generated content in order to help them in their purchasing decision. This implies that the information provided on the website is not as helpful as it could be and future research could see whether this type of user-generated content could be featured on websites, or capitalised on in social media pages, in order to help consumers in their decision-making and preventing future returns. This has interesting implications for the future of social commerce and highlights of social media in the apparel decision-making process and shopper journey. Furthermore, the 20s age group was the only age group to use Facebook, and indeed other social media sites, to contact the brand directly. Other age groups preferred to contact the brand via email or phone. This has important implications for the future of brand-consumer communication.

The present study found that all ages of consumers used Facebook regularly, disagreeing with Ozimek and Bierhoff (2016) that there is a negative association between age and frequency of Facebook activity. This suggests that social media usage has increased since their study and is now much more prevalent across all age groups. However, the present study suggests that there may be a negative correlation with age and usage of Twitter and Instagram, an aspect that may also change going forward and would be an interesting area for future research. Results also showed that age did influence whether people followed brands on Facebook however. Consumers in their 40s+ were more concerned about security and privacy issues and became more easily annoyed about being bombarded by too much information, which made them less likely to follow brands. This is summarised in Table 7.2:

Table 7.2 Reasons for not following brands on Facebook across different age groups

Reasons for not following brands on Facebook	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s
Security	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Privacy	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Do not want to be bombarded by information/posts	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Personal use only	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓

Shopping is a very personal concept and some people, particularly those aged 40+, were not comfortable showing their brand affiliations to their peers. This is interesting as it implies that older people are more self-conscious about where they shop than younger people. This is something that should be considered by brands, and whether there is an option to keep this private.

Table 7.2 also shows that people do not want to be bombarded by brands' Facebook posts, concurring with market research that found that 51% would unfollow brands on social media if they posted annoying posts and 27% said they would mark/report the brand and page as spam and block them (Chaffey 2018). Results of the present study showed that irritating posts put consumers off liking the brand on Facebook and made them only want to use it in a personal capacity. This indicates the necessity for brands in positing relevant, interesting content that resonates with their target market in order to increase their reach and engagement with potential customers (Chaffey 2018). Yet, the study shows that younger consumers (20s) may be more tolerant of brands bombarding them as this was not raised as an issue by them. This is a positive sign for advertisers.

Finally, the study concurs with market research conducted by Mintel (2018) that trust in Facebook is lower after the Cambridge Analytica scandal. The present study found that this was particularly prevalent for consumers aged 40+, as some did not want to follow brands' Facebook pages for security reasons, and did not want the brand or Facebook to be able to collect data about themselves. This is a concern for brands and for social commerce in general, and thus efforts must be taken to reassure consumers about their safety and privacy.

Managerial Implications

This chapter provides practitioners with a greater understanding of what consumers want from their social media, how it affects their purchasing behaviour, how engaged they are with current Facebook strategies and how they can appeal to different target markets through Facebook. Offers/discounts, showcasing the 'new in' items and providing fashion inspiration are key to creating successful social media marketing campaigns targeting all age groups. On the other hand, bombardment was the biggest deterrent for people not following brands on social media overall, followed by privacy and security concerns for consumers aged 40+. These are important aspects to consider for brands targeting specific age groups on Facebook.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study focused on the UK market and therefore the results might be considered to be specific to this country. Future research could replicate this study on another market/country to see if there are any significant cultural differences. This study focused on Facebook as it is the largest social media site, but future research could also explore whether these findings are applicable to other social media sites, such as Twitter or Instagram, or even culturally different social media sites such as Weibo. Finally, as this was an all-female sample, it would be interesting to replicate this research with an all-male sample.

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8

Unravelling a Mystery: Selling an Entrepreneurial Perspective Through Instagram

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Introduction

This chapter seeks to unravel the mystery of Instagram as a social commerce (s-commerce) tool for entrepreneurs. We provide an insight into the use of Instagram from the point of view of an entrepreneur, more specifically the founder of New Hair Design (NHD), an entrepreneurial venture established in 2016, which specialises in hair extensions, and from a design perspective, based on academic theory. Thus, key questions that are addressed are: (1) Why do entrepreneurs use Instagram and

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_8

s-commerce in more general terms; and (2) what is key to creating an effective Instagram feed?

NHD is a young and dynamic business, which operates in the global hair extension market that seeks to "give women everywhere the confidence and self-belief they deserve through beautiful hair" (NHD website 2016). The founder had to make some tough choices, when it came to social media engagement and s-commerce, a buzzword of the twenty-first century, including, but not limited to what channels to use, how much time and effort to spend on them, and how to engage your audience in a way that leads to s-commerce and a high conversion rate. When choosing the social media channels, the founder focused on four key aspects:

1. Ease of use—to ensure updating social media channels is quick and efficient and does not take up too much time that could be spent on any other part of the business;
2. Accessibility—from anywhere at anytime through mobile devices and web platforms;
3. Popularity—to ensure her audience is attracted to media used and thus, the likelihood of engagement is increased; and
4. Potential for s-commerce, fostered through shopping options, such as the Facebook marketplace or Instagram's newest cart option.

After taking these considerations into account, the founder decided on four social media channels for NHD: Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Pinterest.

This chapter provides a brief overview of what s-commerce means for the founder as an entrepreneur. The chapter continues by honing in on the mystery of Instagram, its drawbacks, and opportunities from an entrepreneurial perspective, thereby highlighting key implications and learning points for other new business entrepreneurs, before moving onto analysing NHD's Instagram account from a design theory perspective.

Background and Entrepreneurial Insight

S-Commerce: Definition

S-commerce is a widely discussed topic that emerged in the twenty-first century. As indicated in the name, s-commerce implies a 'social' aspect that is fostered through social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat (to name but a few). These relatively new forms of media allow individuals to create consumer-generated content by liking, sharing, or commenting on messages and/or posts, or products and services (Wang and Zhang 2012; Lin et al. 2017). Consumers have thus moved from simply being passive receivers of advertising to becoming actively involved in creating positive or negative messages and engage globally in conversations with strangers who are interested in similar topics. This global interconnectedness sees both benefits and drawbacks—consumers can access more information and make comparisons of products/services, whilst companies are able to reach a wider audience. On the other hand, the world is increasingly becoming transparent—and as described within the Butterfly Effect—every action, whether it is something as banal as a move of wings, can cause an even greater reaction (Doherty and Delener 2001; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Lin et al. 2017). This implies that both consumers and organisations need to carefully manage their social media profiles and keep these up to date in order to foster engagement and dialogic communication. Although the concept of s-commerce emerged in 2004 with social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, making their début, the phenomenon is still relatively new, and thus far no clear-cut definition has emerged (Liang and Turban 2011).

From an entrepreneurial point of view, s-commerce is a cheap and cheerful way to engage with potential consumers, seeing as signing up for social media accounts such as Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, and Instagram is free of charge. Although they are also paid for opportunities whereby companies can pay a fee to have their advertisements placed on social media feeds of their target consumers, companies do not have to engage in this activity, if they feel this is not the right move for them.

Whilst generally speaking social media is free, it is costly to maintain, especially for entrepreneurs. Henninger et al. (2017) point out that micro-organisations often struggle to have a fully integrated communication strategy, with various social media accounts being initially set up and abandoned shortly after, either due to lack of time for maintaining the platform, or due to realising that the platforms attract an audience that does not match their consumer groups. Whilst it is expected of companies to move away from simply using web platforms and physical store environments and start thinking outside the box and integrate up-to-date and trendy social media platforms, such as Instagram, to market and sell their products, a lack of engagement can have negative consequences (Henninger et al. 2017). Seeing as any message creates a digital footprint even messages from closed or deleted accounts can still be traced, making it even more challenging for entrepreneurs.

Although research exists that investigates individual social media platforms and their usefulness in influencing consumers and their purchase intention, as well as studies on specific social media platforms and their potential to sell products, little is known about the struggles and opportunities entrepreneurs face when first setting up their company. This chapter provides a practitioner's insight into the mystery of using Instagram as a key selling channel to market products to a global audience.

Brief Overview of NHD's Instagram Use

As the CEO of NHD the founder decided on four social media platforms to enhance her s-commerce activities, which were chosen purposefully, as all four platforms are highly visual and allow posting pictures, graphics, and video clips. The founder highlights that whilst the hair extension market is a lucrative business, it is a tough one that is heavily reliant on word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth, and showcasing products visually.

This chapter hones in on the mystery of Instagram for various reasons:

1. Instagram is a key channel for NHD to promote their products, as it is a very visual channel and allows tagging images;

2. The recently introduced shopping feature on Instagram makes it even more attractive as an s-commerce channel, due to consumers being able to stay on the app rather than moving to a different platform, when wanting to make a purchase decision;
3. Instagram is owned by Facebook, which implies that the majority of Facebook users are also on Instagram, which increases reach (Maina 2018);
4. Currently NHD struggles to transform interest in their Instagram account into conversion rates. Thus, whilst the platform is attractive, the company currently cannot maximise its potential.

Even though it is a challenge to gain conversion rates, the founder indicates that Instagram is one of the key channels for her business, as "Instagram is one of the most popular social platforms, which allowed us to connect and engage with our fans". The Instagram feed showcases a mix of promotional messages (e.g. monthly discounts and festival promotions) and images of either NHD products or models styled with NHD products. The visualisation of what wefts and bundles can look like is vital for the founder's business, as it allows engaging consumers in dialogic communication with anyone interested in purchasing hair extension products. The founder further insists that she tries to use a variety of hashtags that not only link her products to a variety of lists, but also provide further information to potential consumers. Currently NHD specialises in hair extensions for African hair, by tagging #curls #straighthair, #longhair, or colour options, such as #brunette, #blond, or #brown, individuals gain a better understanding of what products are available. Apart from 'product descriptors' the founder also uses a variety of other hashtags, such as #picoftheday, #hairextension, or #fashion, to try and broaden her audience. Although some of the hashtags used may not be an obvious fit (e.g. #picoftheday), it provides exposure and ideally increases interest in the product. Images posted under the #picoftheday hashtag are an amalgamation of different topic areas, ranging from showing picturesque landscapes, to food, to fashion outfits, to artistic photography, and hair. Instagrammers following this hashtag may scroll through the feed and find the NHD image, click on it, and be guided to the company's Instagram profile. Yet, seeing as there are over 407m posts to date, the likelihood of this happening may be rather slim, which further justifies the founder using a variety of different hashtags.

A further observation is that the founder uses different hashtags on each of her images, for example her promotional messages do not feature #picoftheday, but rather only those that are related to hairstyles, for example #insthair, #hairfashion, and #hairstyles. Whilst it could be argued that this is a lack of consistency, the founder insists that she purposefully did not use the same hashtags, as individuals, who look at #picoftheday may get annoyed with promotional advertising, but may enjoy a nice image of a styled model. As previously highlighted, using different hashtags can also lead to "increase our followers from strangers immediately". The founder further emphasises that "the lead time is short to manage". To explain, once someone sees the product and likes it, they may also share it with their friends and tag them in posts. The founder mentioned that they previously worked together with fashion bloggers and renowned hairstylist, which increased exposure tremendously. Images were widely shared and information requests, as well as page viewing statistics went up drastically. As such, Instagram is also a vital tool that fosters cross selling and promotions, without having to go through too much trouble. The founder indicates that it was easy to get connections going, as Instagram is a highly visual medium and opinion leaders and bloggers were able to see whether they are interested or not.

Yet, working with celebrities and key opinion leaders is a costly affair, and not always possible for entrepreneurs. As even short video clips that may only briefly mention the brand name can be thousands of pounds. Although exposure and site traffic increase once opinion leaders and/or celebrity stylists have mentioned the company's brand name, it may not necessarily lead into consumers' purchasing products. A potential reason may be that the products are more expensive than the ones that consumers are already using, shipping times may be too long, or individuals are simply curious of what is on the market. Even if consumers are intrigued and make a purchase, there is no guarantee that they will be repeat customers. A further risk for entrepreneurs is that images displayed can easily be taken off the platform, and if not watermarked, used for other purposes. This implies that entrepreneurs may have paid a small fortune for a photo shoot resulting in beautiful images, which are then taken by others.

Whilst there are a lot of opportunities and benefits of using Instagram, there are also significant drawbacks and challenges, the most dominant being converting followers into repeat customers. As highlighted, effectively managing social media accounts can be a timely affair and may not always be viable for an entrepreneur, especially, when the business is in its infancy—as other activities, such as making connections, shipping products on time, and answering queries take priority over posting an image and hashtagging it. The following section analyses NHD's Instagram account from a theoretical perspective, by further providing insights into what could be changed in order to overcome the company's current challenge of increasing the conversion rate.

Theoretical Analysis

In order to support the founder in their quest to enhancing her social media, and more specifically Instagram, performance, it is essential to review the profile as a whole and focus on some of the images in more detail.

When reviewing the Instagram page, it becomes apparent that NHD is an entrepreneurial enterprise that has grown and re-shaped its company image over time. A process that is natural, seeing as organisations need to adapt to current market conditions and consumer demands. Entrepreneurial ventures in particular may change parts of their identity (especially visual and communicational aspects) within the first couple of months (Chasserio et al. 2014; Werthes et al. 2018). As a result, it is not surprising that NHD's Instagram feed has changed over time, with not all imagery conveying the re-branded luxury look associated with the bold gold and black colours.

First impressions are vital, especially within the hair extension market, which is forecasted to see exponential growths in the next years, with individuals becoming increasingly conscious about their physical appearance (QY Research 2017). Within this highly competitive market environment, in which the quality of both synthetic and real hair extensions is increasing, it becomes vital to distinguish oneself in order to gain an increased market share and hinder consumers from simply switching brands. A company's brand image and visual communication becomes a vital asset, as images can convey a million words in one visualisation.

As indicated, NHD has seen some changes in its branding efforts, which implies that the visual identity conveyed may seem somewhat incoherent and inconsistent, especially when comparing the first posts with more recent posts, which may be one reason for currently having a relatively low profile. Yet, NHD's Instagram profile can easily be revamped and enhanced by applying simple design principles, which could foster more consumer engagement, as it could be made more visually attractive.

The first images potential consumers will see when entering the Instagram account are the profile and cover picture (Fig. 8.1). Whilst the image at first glance may look corporate and clean, at a second glance it lacks clarity. The image consists of a range of NHD business cards that have been carefully aligned and photographed, yet the company name is not legible and the photo has not been designed to fit within the round shape of the Instagram profile picture format. As such, it may be challenging for consumers to make immediate associations with NHD brand and the intended identity it wants to convey.

Fig. 8.1 NHD Instagram profile image. (Reprinted with permission from company founder)

A recommendation on how to improve the initial image of the Instagram account is to provide the company name NHD clearly, together with the logo (or as part of the logo), as well as imagery of the product. This would enable the consumer to make an instantaneous link between NHD and hair extensions situated within the beauty market. Having clear imagery can foster trust in the brand and enhance brand recall.

From a design perspective it is vital to pose four questions prior to posting any images on Instagram:

1. What do I want to convey with the image that is about to be uploaded on Instagram?
2. What do I want to say about the brand by uploading the image?
3. What is the purpose of the post uploaded on Instagram?
4. How many people (current and potential customers) do I want to reach with the Instagram post?

In order to enhance the aesthetic appeal on the Instagram feed, it is essential to adhere to basic design principles, which are explored in the following. The six design principles, which are used for analysis in this chapter, are used to guide viewers' eye direction (gaze) in order to ease the assimilation of information (Evergreen and Metzner 2013; Bradley 2014).

The Six Principles of Design at a Glance

Principle 1 is alignment, also often referred to as unity/harmony. Alignment implies that each component of an Instagram post should connect to one another and create a clean and organised output, which fosters professionalism and trust (Williams 1994; Sameer 2014; Evergreen and Metzner 2013; Bradley 2014).

Principle 2 is hierarchy and helps to determine, which component of a post is the most important one and thus, should be in the spotlight. Being aware of this hierarchy and using this principle further guides the viewer's gaze to the most important information (Williams 1994; Sameer 2014).

Principle 3 is contrast, which can be achieved by for example using contrasting colours, shapes, lines, or fonts. It has to be emphasised however that the contrast needs to be kept simple in order to be efficient and effective (Sameer 2014; Evergreen and Metzner 2013).

Principle 4 is repetition, which helps in strengthening the overall look/appearance and visual consistency by using similar colours, fonts, or symbols (Williams 1994; Bradley 2014). To reiterate this further, a brand should reinforce its image by, for example, using the same colour scheme throughout its postings.

Principle 5 focuses on colour, which needs to be carefully considered each time a post is made. Any colours used need to be aligned with the business' colour guidelines and cannot change, as this would lead to an inconsistent and incoherent image (Sameer 2014; Evergreen and Metzner 2013).

The final principle, Principle 6, is space. The use of space is detrimental when presenting text and/or images. Whilst there may be a temptation to fill the entire space available in a post, negative space or empty space, is as important as written text, as it allows for clarity and a clean image. Having negative space further implies that messages have been conveyed in a succinct and efficient manner, which could provide consumers with confidence that the brand knows what they are doing (Williams 1994; Sameer 2014; Evergreen and Metzner 2013; Bradley 2014).

Analysis: A Design Perspective

Principle 1: Alignment

Figure 8.2 visualises NHD's company logo, which resonates a luxury feel, due to the colour chosen: gold. This differs from the font that has been used, which can be associated with a sportier feel that may attract a younger generation, emphasised through the way the logo is designed. It could be argued however that this decision reflects current market trends,

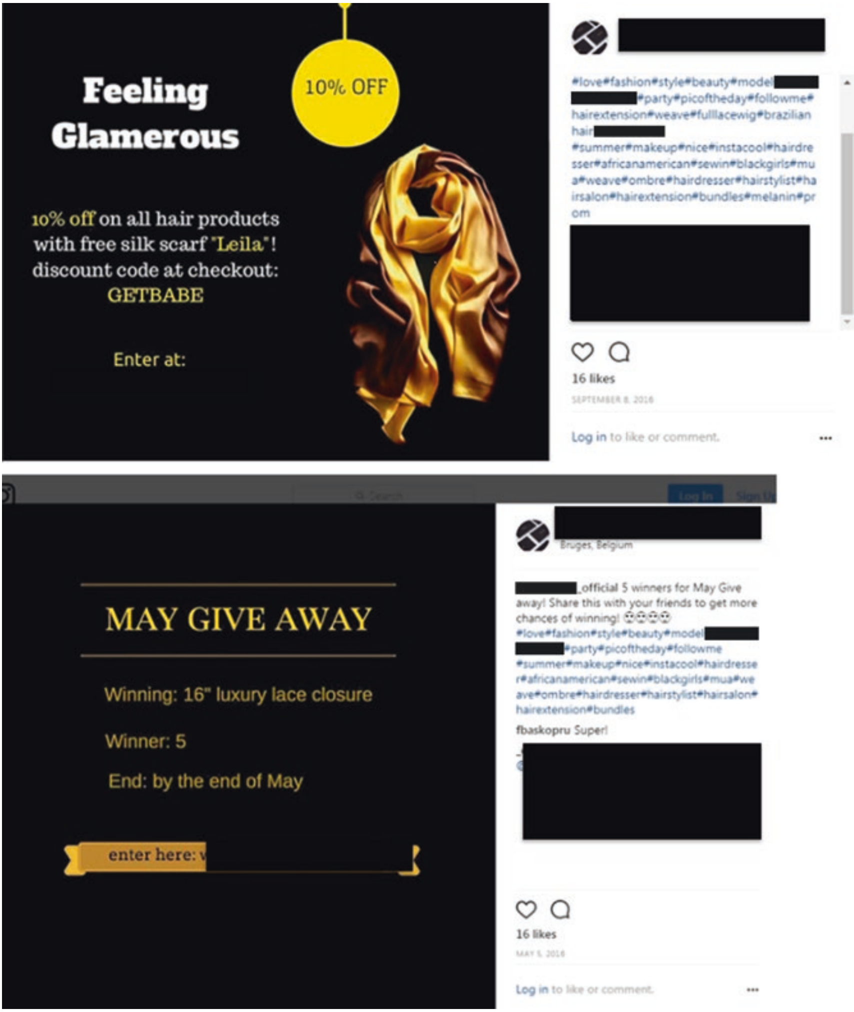

Fig. 8.2 NHD Instagram posts. (Reprinted with permission from company founder)

which sees the emergence of a new luxury consumer, who is often described as a millennial (Goldstone 2017).

The identity of the brand not only needs to align in itself, but also with other businesses, whilst at the same time stand out in order to ensure individuality. As such, it is recommended to not only undertake a competitor analysis, but also create an industry analysis of luxury brands and understand how they are portraying themselves. Reviewing company profiles from luxury brands such as Louise Vuitton, Gucci, and Chanel, it becomes apparent that their brand image is consistent, in terms of logo, font, and colours used, whilst at the same time convey a luxury image. As such, it is vital to not only know who the competition is, but also how other hair extension brands place themselves aesthetically.

Principle 2: Hierarchy and Principle 6—Space

As previously alluded to, information and space are essential aspects when designing an Instagram post. The information provided needs to be carefully managed, in terms of what the key points are that the receiver of the message should take away, whilst at the same time ensuring that the space does not seem too crowded.

Figure 8.2 provides two sample posts utilised within this chapter for the purpose of analysis. Aside from font and colour aspects, which are discussed in the next section, it is vital to review what the message is that is conveyed.

When focusing on the left post, the readers' attention is drawn to the following phrases: 'Feeling glamorous', '10% off', 'Leila', and 'getbabe', none of which highlight the company name or product. Whilst individuals on the Instagram profile may be aware of what the company is selling and trying to achieve, due to the variety of hashtags used, people, who may come across the image through a hashtag may be unaware of the key message. Similarly, the post on the right hand side places a lot of emphasis on 'May give away' thereby also lacking to reiterate the brand name and product. With any advertising post, it is also vital to ensure that no spelling and/or grammar mistakes are present, as these can have negative implications on a consumer's trust in the brand. In comparison the left post received 4 likes, whilst the right post gained 16 likes, which further supports the Principle 6—space, seeing as the left promotional post may feel rather crowded and hard to decipher, whilst the right post has a slightly clearer structure that makes use of negative space (Williams 1994; Sameer 2014).

Fig. 8.3 NHD's 'Deal of the Week' Instagram post. (Reprinted with permission from company founder)

Figure 8.3 provides a third type of promotional post used by NHD, which has received more attention (35 likes) from its followers. A reason could be that the hierarchy of messages is more visible. Overall, from a design point of view, the composure of the post is balanced, with the main message being centred and secondary information carefully aligned. Simply highlighting 'Deal of Day' with a clearly visible website pay also stimulates the viewers' interest to explore the company's website and find out what the deal is. The font used within the post further aligns with the company's image of being modern and bold, compared to the fonts used in Fig. 8.2's post examples, which could be classified as out-dated and traditional.

Principle 3: Contrast and Principle 5—Focus

Figure 8.4 provides two example postings from the NHD's Instagram feed posted approximately one month apart from each other, which are analysed in the following.

One of the first observations that can be made is the fact that the two posts are very different, and thus lack consistency. In looking back at the six principles, Principle 3 focuses on contrast, which implies that fonts and sub-fonts need to be clearly defined, whilst each of the posts indi-

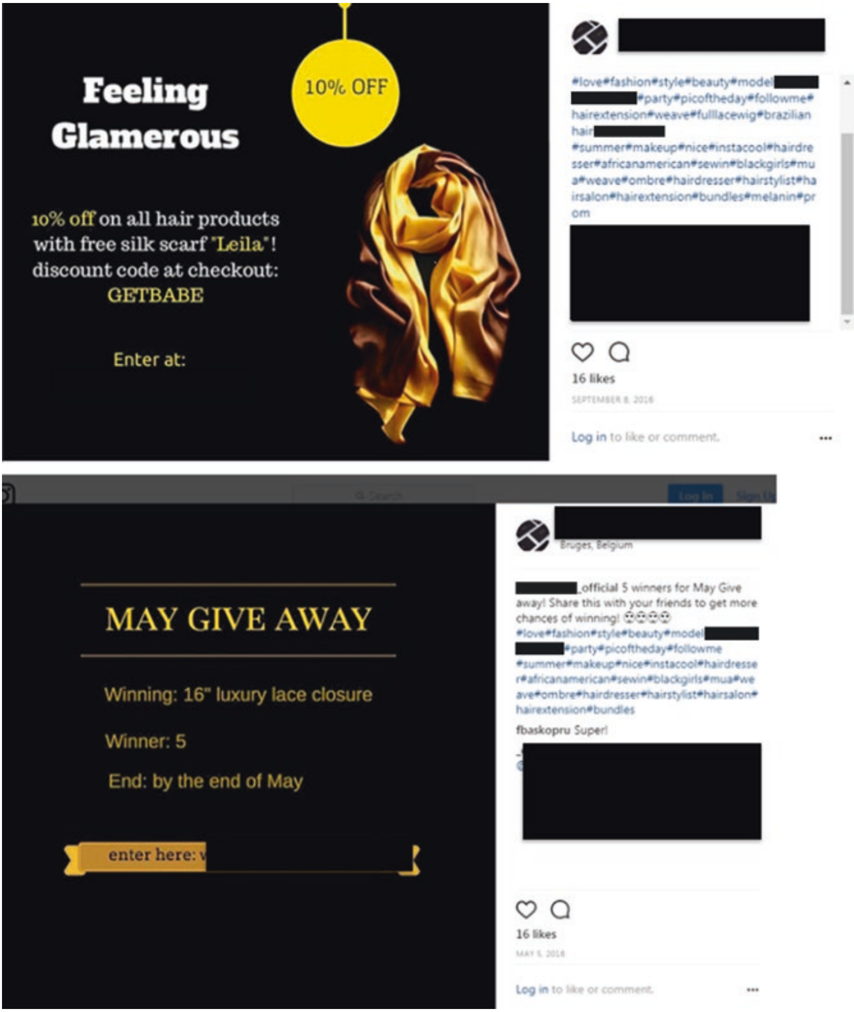

Fig. 8.4 NHD Instagram posts. (Reprinted with permission from company founder)

vidually uses similar fonts within the post, they differ dramatically in the 'Feeling Glamorous' and 'May Give Away' post. Similarly, Principle 5 indicates that colour schemes are vital. Honing in on the brand's website, each of the posts uses a different type of yellow, which do not necessarily seem to be in the corporate colour scheme. In order to overcome this challenge of inconsistent brand posts, it is advised to create rules as to which fonts are used for primary headings and sub-headings, as well as create a corporate colour scheme that allows individuals to choose from a dedicated colour array, and thus, overcomes inconsistencies in displaying promotional material.

Summary of Observations

Our Instagram post observations highlight that NHD's posts hardly change in terms of the style of images used. To reiterate posts either contain text or are heavily image based, yet there are posts that rarely combine both imagery and text. In order to attract more views and engagement it is suggested to use more overlapping images, using transparency and hierarchy to clearly convey messages. A company colour scheme and corporate font should be created in order to ensure that all posts are coherent and the message broadcasted portrays a united and strong image that fosters trust and brand loyalty. As such, the following aspects need to be carefully considered:

- Logo usage and placement (size, space, and positioning);
- Core colour palette (gold, black);
- Typography (font, primary and secondary typeface), each of which needs to convey a modern, sporty, yet luxurious image;
- Imagery/photography style;
- Graphics/illustrations.

Whilst developing brand guidelines can be a rather lengthy process, it allows in creating a clear communication strategy and visual identity (internally and externally), which will further be beneficial when expanding the business.

Images shown on the Instagram feed should all be branded, which further overcomes one of the key challenges highlighted by the founder: other brands taking images and using it for their own benefit. By trademarking all images, a more authentic brand image will be conveyed, which also fosters a more authentic visual aesthetics. Similarly, the style of photographs posted on Instagram is key. There is a clear trend on social media in posting still life, domestic, intimate genre of photographs, which aim to share one's day-to-day experiences. However, for a brand to convey this aesthetic does require a lot of planning and key photography principles.

When posting brand content imagery on Instagram storytelling and narrative are important, as these can intrigue the viewer to wanting to learn more about the brand. The images should stimulate the viewers to investigate the image and create an emotional bond. This is a potential that NHD could capitalise on a lot more, as the images currently posted, whilst aesthetically pleasing, do not necessarily foster this relationship, which could be one of the reasons why the conversion rate currently remains low. A majority of the images currently posted are shoots of models, which lack to fully exploit the brand's persona, values, and story. As such, it is recommended that NHD conveys stronger imagery messages that relate to their target audience and company's mission: "to give women everywhere the confidence and self-belief they deserve through beautiful hair" (NHD 2016). Key questions that thus need to be asked are: 'Who are these women? And what do they stand for?'

Seeing as NHD operates in a highly competitive market environment, it is essential to provide both still-life images highlighting the products and lifestyle images. Thus, it would be beneficial to hone in on photographic principles, which could further ensure a successful composition.

Framing is one of the most prominent photography principles, which also links to Design Principle 6—space. As was highlighted, the relationship between positive and negative space is currently unbalanced. Thus, it is recommended that the product in itself is depicted in its full aesthetics, whilst furthermore it is clearly separated from its background. In general terms, there is a tendency to place the subject of the image in the middle of the frame, leaving little space around the object and/or subject. However, in order to make the image come alive and become more interesting, it is advised to use the rule of thirds: the centre of interest should be placed at the intersection of lines that divide the frame into thirds from top to bottom, and from left to right. The rule of thirds is a good aid that could be too regular in its proportions to produce exciting results. An alternative to the rules of thirds is the use of dynamic symmetry, which determines the focal point using diagonals rather than a grid.

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9

Capturing the Moment on Instagram: The Case of Successful Storytelling in Huawei's S-commerce Campaign

Nina Bürklin and Katharina Faber

Introduction

Social media like Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat have found their way into consumers' everyday lives and radically changed the ways people interact. For example, Instagram has become a relevant communication medium for more than 800m people worldwide (Statista 2018b). As consumers are becoming more connected and more mobile, companies have to explore creatively how to use social media in winning their attention and building relationships. Still, many businesses are lagging behind in practices that react appropriately. This chapter seeks to close this gap by discussing an illustrative case study in the context of social commerce

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_9

(s-commerce) for practitioners. Specifically, we aim to answer various calls for empirical research by investigating one best practice case of influencer marketing through social media. This study analyses electronics supplier Huawei's storytelling campaign #ShowWhatYouLove, examining s-commerce characteristics in the use of Instagram and complementing the analysis with rich industry data by Social Match, a German influencer marketing agency. Further, this chapter draws conclusions on the specific implications the study has for planning, structuring and conducting a storytelling campaign aimed at increasing brand awareness and reputation.

The Role of Social Media in Everyday Life and in Research

For the past few years, social media like *YouTube* or Instagram have affected our daily lives and business practices remarkably, especially our communication and purchasing behaviour. Currently, 23% of all active users access social media platforms on a daily basis (Statista 2018c). While the increasing relevance of social media for consumers is apparent, companies are battling to truly embrace this new development and incorporate s-commerce into their integrated marketing strategy. In their report, Cecere et al. (2010) show business practitioners' attitude towards s-commerce: only 20% of the companies they investigated had an s-commerce strategy, while 86% of those companies indicated that they were planning such a strategy for the future. In comparison to other marketing budgets, funds earmarked for social media marketing are still limited to less than $100,000 annually, although more than half of the surveyed marketers indicated plans to spend more in the future (Solis 2017).

Research mirrors this lack of innovative ideas and concrete application of s-commerce in the small number of studies on specific cases. Despite the exponential growth in numbers of publications on s-commerce in the past decade (Lin et al. 2017), the benefits and potential risks for companies have not been thoroughly explored and discussed yet. The majority of studies in this field focus on consumer behaviour, although attention to specific phases of the consumption process appears to be imbalanced. Analysing previous research on s-commerce, Zhang and Benyoucef (2016) found that only one study in their review attended to the consumers' 'need recognition' phase, while seven studies attended to the 'search' phase, 33 to the 'purchase' phase and 49 to the 'post-purchase' phase. Specifically, there are no explicit analyses of s-commerce applied in practice nor of the resulting implications for companies. Busalim and Hussin (2016) reviewed 110 studies, of which only five focused on a company's s-commerce 'adoption strategy' on an organisational level. This is surprising as social media usage is perceived to be a lucrative marketing strategy for businesses wanting to increase sales by retaining current customers and recruiting new customers (Hajli 2015).

Conceptual Background: S-commerce and Influencer Marketing

S-commerce can be defined as the "exchange-related activities that occur in, or are influenced by, an individual's social network in computer-mediated social environments, where the activities correspond to the need recognition, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of a focal exchange" (Yadav et al. 2013, p. 312). Unlike traditional e-commerce where consumers usually interact with online shopping sites directly, s-commerce involves online communities that support user interactions as well as user-generated content, rather than simply buying and selling (Kim and Srivastava 2007). Social media like Snapchat or Instagram empower users to share their shopping experiences and knowledge of products with consumer peers in an s-commerce environment. This becomes especially important in times of information overload where 84% of consumers trust their peers above all other sources of advertising (Nielsen 2013). Hence, consumer-generated content provides a background against which people evaluate products, which in turn influences their online purchasing decisions and shopping experiences (Cecere et al. 2010; Dennison et al. 2009). Broadly speaking, s-commerce combines social activities like word-of-mouth, co-creation and user-generated content, and commercial activities such as actual purchasing (Busalim and Hussin 2016).

Influencer marketing can be considered one specific application of the new s-commerce phenomenon, even though the idea of opinion leaders and market mavens as distributors of market information is not new (Feick and Price 1987). Long before the industry coined this social media-related term, consumers looked to experts for guidance or inspiration. Only after the advancement of Web 2.0 and social networking sites did influencers' impact reach a whole new level. Social media allows influencers to scale their opinions and allows people to access these opinions more quickly and easily (Traackr 2017). In view of the potential of influencer marketing, in 2017, about 39% of all US marketers stated their intentions to increase the budgets they devoted to influencer marketing in the next 12 months (Statista 2018a). Today, influencers are characterised as individuals who have a significant impact on social media, with such impact being calculated by, amongst other features, the number of followers they have. Thus, influencer marketing can be defined as online marketing which companies use in advertising on social media with the help of influencers (BVDW & Infury 2017). Some of the leading goals of influencer marketing are to improve brand advocacy, expand brand awareness, reach new targeted audiences and improve sales conversion.

While s-commerce contains a whole variety of marketing tools, influencer marketing can be considered one of the most relevant ones. Companies then use the influencer's reputation and publicity to reach their communication and marketing goals. Influencers, for their part, use the branded product or service, recommend it to their followers and create content suited to the presented brands, which creates value for both sides. Recommendations are usually made on social media such as *YouTube*, Snapchat or Instagram. The most relevant influencer marketing feature is that the sender of the advertising message is not the company itself but an independent private person (Hermann 2017). In contrast to conventional advertising, influencers are perceived as more authentic and their recommendations are less aggressive than those put out on TV spots or commercials. Also, divergence losses are considerably smaller as only very specific target groups receive the messages. Currently, influencer marketing can be a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Depending on the marketing goals, different influencer strategies can be followed. Figure 9.1 gives an overview.

	INFLUENCER STRATEGY		
	INFLUENCER ADVERTISING	INFLUENCER MARKETING	INFLUENCER RELATIONS
CHARACTERISTICS	short-term tactical focus influencers as media platforms	short to medium-term tactical & strategic authentic, strong faces & stories	long-term strategic focus influencers as partners, clients, fans
OBJECTIVES	reach awareness sales	permanent, efficient reach & brand building; sales content creation	relationship nurturing with influencers, authentic testimonials, establishment in community

INFLUENCERDB

Fig. 9.1 Influencer strategies. (InfluencerDB 2018. Reprinted with permission from Influencer DB Tech)

Depending on the company's objectives, collaboration with influencers can be used on a short-term or long-term basis. These range from increased awareness or sales to content creation and deep relationships with influencers that function in highly recommending a brand.

Case Study: #ShowWhatYouLove

This research is based on a case study (Yin 2013; Siggelkow 2007) of a specific Instagram campaign intended to provide insight into the new and fast-evolving area of s-commerce. This particular route has been taken since alternative approaches to such a new field of research may be insufficient to provide accurate and complete understandings (Zhang and Benyoucef 2016; Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). Specifically, we investigate the case of Huawei's storytelling campaign to shed light on the application of s-commerce using influencer marketing.

Huawei: An Electronic Supplier Illustrating Best Practice in S-commerce

In 2017, the China-based producer of electronic supplies initiated an Instagram campaign as part of the launch of its newest product, the Huawei P10 smartphone. At the time, it was one of the most elaborate devices regarding its Leica dual camera with a multitude of manual settings. In order to raise awareness and induce purchases, Huawei partnered with the German influencer marketing agency Social Match in developing an Instagram campaign that would run for a period of five months. This seemed especially promising due to the unique selling proposition of the Huawei P10 being its camera and, furthermore, photography being at the core of this social media network. We chose this case as it serves as a good example for s-commerce. According to Busalim and Hussin (2016) s-commerce is characterised by collaboration, interactivity, community and reliance on social relations. Huawei's approach was to enable collaboration between the company and relevant influencers on Instagram. They achieved interactivity by means of regular interaction between the chosen influencers and their audiences, which Huawei had planned to be not only virtual but also personal during four different workshops. The community aspect of their s-commerce became manifest through different (niche) communities the influencers and their followers had constructed, each concentrating on one specific topic of interest, such as travel or beauty. Finally, the social aspect of the campaign was attended to in discussions of participants' workshop experiences with the smartphone as well as them sharing the images they had taken with the smartphone's Leica camera. In contrast to conventional advertising, this campaign aimed at highlighting personal experiences and not merely providing functional information. The title of the Instagram campaign 'Show what you love' emphasised this relational, strongly emotional approach.

Strategic Planning and Implementation of Huawei's Campaign

According to Huawei, the Leica dual camera gives its users more than simply smartphone photographs, with features that allow them to enter the realm of professional photography. Three key attributes associated with the Huawei P10 are creativity, passion and photography. Due to these three characteristics, influencer marketing was taken to be the ideal strategic route, as influencers define themselves and their role in the social media universe following similar criteria. Hence, these three attributes provide an immediate foundation for an influencer-focused marketing campaign that aims to raise awareness for the Huawei P10. To develop the Instagram-based campaign, Huawei and Social Match identified four different themes, which are all strongly represented in the Instagram sphere and cater to the smartphone's listed key attributes. The themes chosen for this campaign were fashion, food, travel and people.

The Huawei P10, Instagram as a visual platform and influencers that belong to one of the four themes all have their focus on photography in common. Assuming such shared focus, Social Match came up with the idea of organising workshops between professional photographers and Instagram influencers using the Huawei P10 to improve the influencers' photography skills. At the same time, influencers could learn about the Huawei P10's distinguishing feature—the Leica dual lens camera. Thus, the main campaign goal was geared towards establishing awareness for Huawei as the number one choice for professional smartphone photography. Social Match summarised the core concept as follows:

> It's about each and every influencer's passion and their personal photo love story. Each passion is guided by different aspects and acted out in an individual way. The workshops are in a format that helps the influencers to refuel and leverage their passion by learning new skills, finding new angles and changing perspective. This way, the influencers become acquainted with a new way means of showcasing what they love. (Social Match 2017)

This strategy illustrates how Huawei and Social Match centred the campaign on a strong authentic story rather than only adapting a product focus. For each of the four workshops, Huawei and Social Match selected the participants who were made up of one professional photographer, one lead influencer (influencers with an established standing and large following), as well as nine influencers (on average) per workshop.

The lead influencers as well as the other influencers were selected according to a number of different qualitative and quantitative criteria:

Qualitative Criteria:

- **Brand and thematic fit:** The influencer and the brand each embody a certain image among consumers. For a collaboration between brand and influencer to be considered authentic, the overlap between the two images should be as high as possible. For the particular campaign, Social Match selected influencers that had demonstrated considerable interest in photography and that fitted one of the four workshop themes (people, fashion, food and travel).
- **Brand environment:** This criterion analyses how influencers position themselves within the influencer marketing sphere, considering which brands they worked with in the past. Taking into account that a smartphone is a high-quality product that owners usually keep for more than two years, Social Match excluded influencers who had repeatedly worked with lower-quality products.

Quantitative Criteria:

- **>15 k followers (as relevant reach):** As an important campaign aim was to generate awareness of the newly launched product, Social Match determined that each influencer participating in the campaign had to have a significant reach of at least 15 k followers, and ranging up to 1 m followers.
- **55% audience fit Germany:** As a further aspect of the campaign aim was to generate awareness for the Huawei P10 in the German market, Social Match identified an audience fit with German followers as a key metric. The larger an influencer's follower base gets, the more likely it is that they have an international following. Social Match and Huawei worked with four high-reach influencers (the lead influencers, whose reach ranged from 450 k to 1 m) which impacted the overall audience fit. Hence, an audience fit of 55% was deemed appropriate.
- **5.5% *like* follower ratio (as relevant engagement rate):** This metric measures the number of *likes* an influencer generates on average, in relation to the number of followers they have. Influencers with a high engagement rate have an audience that interacts actively with their

postings. The more interaction postings generate, the more it is likely that users understand the brand message implied in the postings.

- **89% audience quality:** Audience quality refers to the value of an account's followers compared to all other Instagram accounts worldwide. An account with a high audience quality suggests that the account has few fake followers (called *bots*), and that the followers actively use Instagram and engage with content regularly. An audience quality of 89% means that the influencers selected for the campaign are amongst the top 11% of influencers internationally based on the quality of their followers.

Overall, the campaign was planned and implemented in four phases: a planning phase, teaser phase, main phase and final campaign phase. Figure 9.2 gives an overview.

The **planning phase** formed the foundation for a close collaboration between the electronic supplier Huawei and the influencer agency Social Match. During six weeks of planning, the campaign goals were defined and the different phases were carefully planned. Further, during the planning phase, various brainstorming sessions took place and desk research was done in order to establish thorough ideas for the overall concept of the campaign, as well as specific characteristics, such as the topics of interest. The two most relevant components of the planning phase were

Fig. 9.2 Overview of the influencer campaign phases. (Social Match 2018. Reprinted with permission from Social Match)

organising and preparing the photography workshops, selecting and contacting the professional photographers, lead influencers and influencers, and negotiating terms for each collaboration.

The main purpose of the **teaser phase** was to generate awareness of the four workshops and gain momentum for the campaign itself. The influencers announced their participation while also promoting a follower contest in which for each workshop one user could win a wildcard for free attendance. In order to win, the users were invited to post photos relating to the specific workshop themes using the hashtag #ShowWhatYouLove and a theme-specific hashtag (#huaweilovesfashion, #huaweilovestravel, #huaweilovesfood, #huaweilovescreativity) as well as tagging @huaweimobilede in the posting.

To consolidate all media engaged during the **teaser phase** and the **main campaign phase**, the campaign also featured a publicly accessible microsite (http://showwhatyoulove.de) that showcased all Instagram postings, videos introducing the lead influencers, product videos as well as information related to the contest. This microsite summarised the most important user interactions of the campaign and thus created a one-stop shop for the campaign itself and all content created throughout its duration.

One of the most important ideas for the **main campaign phase** was to bring in a storytelling element to emotionally charge as neutral and visually less appealing a product as a smartphone. This phase consisted of the four different workshops that took place in locations specific to each theme: Leica HQ in Wetzlar, Germany (the people workshop), the *Laube, Liebe, Hoffnung* restaurant in Frankfurt, Germany (the food workshop), Messner Mountain Museum at Kronplatz, Italy (the travel workshop) and Bodega Sommos vineyards in Huesca, Spain (the fashion workshop). In terms of content generated, the main focus was on Instagram postings as well as Instagram stories. In contrast to mostly static and permanently saved images, Instagram stories are usually short videos that provide exclusive insight into the company or user, and are only available for 24 hours. They serve as a means of giving followers a sneak peek on a special theme, and have a much more authentic feel than carefully curated images.

During the main phase, the influencers were specifically asked not to focus on the phone itself in their content but rather to 'show what they love', utilising the Huawei P10 and the associated hashtag #ShowWhatYouLove. Such an approach generally allows for a much more authentic and emotional campaign, and has greater potential for drawing audiences than campaigns that primarily showcase the product itself. Followers were to be convinced by the product's features rather than by blunt advertising. This strategic approach was taken considering that users go through different phases before they make a purchase. Current models of decision-making processes suggest that awareness of product features and the customer's desire has to be established before a purchase, in this case a smartphone, is actually made. This particularly applies to high-involvement products (various electronic devices, including smartphones and cars). Bearing this in mind, Huawei and Social Match arranged with the influencers to post five to seven postings each during the main campaign phase, thereby creating a basis for a more product-focused campaign wrap up.

The end of the main campaign phase was marked by a thorough analysis and evaluation of the campaign in terms of the previously defined aims. This included developing an influencer scorecard which summarised a number of different key performance indicators (KPIs) utilised to identify the value of working with every influencer in the main campaign phase. Only the influencers with the highest scores were invited to participate in the final phase of the campaign. In terms of KPIs, the final phase was particularly centred on increasing the follower base of the Huawei Germany Instagram account (@huaweimobilede). After generating both awareness and engagement by means of the teaser and the main campaign, the final phase focused on conversion. Conversion registered in immediate sales is rather difficult to achieve for high-involvement products such as smartphones so that generating followers for the brand account is seen as an important aspect of the customer journey.

The product focus of the **final campaign phase** was made apparent in the new hashtag the influencers introduced, namely #CapturedOnP10, which shows a much less emotional and much more product-oriented focus. Each influencer posted up to three images of the P10 and uploaded stories specifically identifying their favourite features of the smartphone.

By raffling 30 smartphones to the influencers' followers, the campaign came full circle.

The outcomes of the storytelling campaign varied depending on the respective phase as Huawei had different goals for each of them. By spreading the word of the contest on the influencers' accounts during the teaser phase, Huawei was able to generate more than 5 k contest participants, creating a total of 5264 additional content pieces for the campaign, each tagged with @huaweimobilede. The postings achieved a total reach of 24 m users, generating 2.4 m *likes* and 86 k comments. The main campaign phase that focused on the four different photography workshops and the influencers sharing their experience about working with the Huawei P10 generated 273 Instagram postings with a reach 61 m, achieving 2.5 m *likes*. For the final phase of the campaign, Social Match and Huawei focused less on generating reach and more on reinforcing the campaign's messaging as the ultimate aim was to lead the users to conversion. This campaign phase generated 14 postings with a reach of 4 m and 172 k *likes*. Lastly, the campaign attracted 11,042 new followers to the @huaweimobilede account.

By combining three different campaign phases, each with a different objective, Huawei and Social Match adopted a holistic strategy rather than focusing only on influencer advertising, influencer marketing or influencer relations (Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 Overview of campaign phases and related outcomes

Campaign phase	Outcomes
Teaser phase	Over 5 k contest participants 5264 Instagram postings Total reach of 24 m 2.4 m likes 86 k comments
Main campaign phase	273 Instagram postings Total reach of 61 m 2.5 m likes
Final campaign phase	14 Instagram postings Total reach of 4 m 172 k likes 11,042 followers for @huaweimobilede

Authors' own

With the goal of increased awareness among potential customers, Huawei's campaign generated a stronger brand awareness through the reach of their Instagram postings. By integrating influencers in their strategic marketing, they reached higher customer engagement than before. Further, the campaign's storytelling character as opposed to traditional advertising features fostered brand trust in the customers.

Discussion and Outlook

This chapter suggests that Instagram can be used effectively as a strategic marketing tool for s-commerce. The case study of Huawei's campaign #ShowWhatYouLove illustrates how companies can use social media to focus on and increase their commercial success. Influencer marketing in the context of s-commerce differs from traditional advertising in various ways. On the one hand, influencers, and not the company itself, share their experiences of using the product in question, using their very own Instagram account. In this way, the messages that influencers circulate come across as more authentic and, thus, also more credible. A thoroughly structured and sufficiently timed schedule for influencer postings was foundational to the campaign's success. On the other hand, a successful storytelling campaign such as Huawei's provides more content than mere product information in that it integrates real-life experiences with the product. Moreover, it demonstrates specific use cases for the product (or service) that are closely related to the target group's special lifestyle.

First of all, a strategic planning process is foundational to a successful influencer campaign on Instagram. While the impression prevails that everything on Instagram is 'spontaneously' shared, the campaign is in fact meticulously planned and structured in advance. This includes specification of the company's goals, the definition of parties involved (e.g. an agency, lead influencers) and time frame. Second, the fit between influencers and the brand has to be coherent in order to reach excellent results in terms of higher customer engagement. This requires a solid knowledge of current trends which relates not only to the brand image as such but also to the respective target groups. An influencer's followers and the brand's relevant target groups need to be highly coherent for a campaign to be successful. Third, while the content has to be thoroughly planned in advance (e.g. topics, images, hashtags, etc.), the relevant Instagram profiles also have to be monitored continuously throughout the campaign. Due to the fact that influencers are usually not bound to one specific brand and appear highly authentic through their profiles, they have the freedom to post and share whatever is important to them. Therefore, their collaboration needs to be recruited even if not completely controlled. Lastly, specific KPIs need to be defined beforehand in order to measure success eventually. These KPIs can include, but are not limited to, the number of followers won, the number of interactions in the form of *likes* and comments and the number of contest participants. Such performance indicators lay the foundation for future marketing activities. Only when influencer marketing is made an integral aspect of an organisation's overall marketing programme can it generate long-term results and help facilitate a significant advantage against competitors.

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10

The Influence of Electronic Word-of-Mouth on Expatriate Workers Seeking Tourist Information: The Case of Saudi Arabia

Abrar Al Sharif and Ruth Marciniak

Introduction

The purpose of the chapter is to offer an international perspective of the role electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in social commerce (s-commerce) within the context of expatriate workers preparing for and whilst working in Saudi Arabia. In particular, social networks relevant to travel and tourism activities are explored, wherein these networks support the promotion and communications of leisure opportunities in the Country. In doing so, the chapter presents a literature review and proposes a conceptual framework appropriate for the examination of human behaviour in acceptance (or rejection) of eWOM in s-commerce.

The chapter opens with a brief overview of tourism within Saudi Arabia and the unique situation of expatriate workers who reside in the Country. This is followed by an exploration of information searches for travel information and the role of eWOM in information search behav-

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_10

iour. Theoretical underpinning is provided through an examination of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Information Adoption Model (IAM) together with the need for cognitive closure (NFCC) and attitudes components. From the examination of theory and previous empirical work, a conceptual model is presented (i.e. NFCC; perceived usefulness [PU]; information adaptation; cognitive and affective attitudes and behavioural intention to use eWOM). Following this, both the theoretical contribution and managerial implications of the conceptual model are assessed.

The Context of Saudi Arabia

Over the past 20 years or so, Saudi Arabia's total population has risen faster than that of other Arab nations, with 22.6 million inhabitants in 2004 rising to over 27.1 million in 2010. Saudi Arabia's population at the end of 2016 stood at 31.7 million according to data released by the Saudi Ministry of Labor and Social Development 2016. Oil is, of course, a major source of income for the Saudi government, with most of its revenue coming from this resource. However, to promote the non-oil sector, Saudi Arabia's stability as a nation has helped it to build strong alliances with world powers, and together with its oil, it has made strong economic progress in recent years. Shaped by economic and trade agreements with external partners, the Country's foreign policy is designed to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). For example, Saudi Arabia's membership of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2005 gave impetus to the idea of "Ease of Doing Business" and stimulated greater activity among foreign investors and workers (De Bel-Air 2014). Furthermore, to promote industrial diversification, the Saudi government invested in the creation of new economic cities, for example, King Abdullah Economic City. In addition, from the mid-2000s, massive infrastructural projects have been initiated, for example, housing projects, which the Country hopes will provide alternative sources of revenue, increase employment, and encourage the overall development of the Country. The private sector of non-oil business accounted for 39.5 per cent of real GDP in 2015, and recent economic growth has led to increased expatriate numbers, particularly of highly skilled workers who often supply skills that are unavailable locally (Ministry of Labor and Social Development 2016).

In all, Saudi Arabia has now grown into a huge global job market with opportunities for skilled expatriate workers, from all over the world who currently account for 33 per cent of Saudi Arabia's population. In 2016, there were 21.1 million Saudis, 67 per cent of the population, while the number of foreign expatriates stood at 10.5 million (Ministry of Labor and Social Development 2016). In addition, according to a report by De Bel-Air, (De Bel-Air 2014, p. 9), over the period of 2005–2011, whilst up to 12.8 per cent of predominantly European and North American foreign workers in Saudi Arabia were engaged in skilled and highly skilled labour industries (e.g. oil, healthcare, finance, and retail trade), most expatriates worked in industries requiring low skilled labour (e.g. agriculture, cleaning, and domestic service). Predominantly, low skilled expatriates originate from South and Southeast Asia. The contribution that the large number of expatriate workers makes to the economy in Saudi Arabia presents opportunities for research exploring the circumstances of these workers in the Country.

An expatriate is a person who resides temporarily or permanently in a country in which they work, which is not their home country. Expatriates working in the professional industries, or those engaged in highly skilled labour industries, that is, "highly-skilled expatriate workers" (Selmer and Lauring 2010) or "professional workers", who account for 12.8 per cent (1,344,000) of the foreign expatriate workers in Saudi Arabia (De Bel-Air 2014) are the focus of this research. The rationale being, unlike unskilled expats, professional workers have a more disposable income to spend on tourism. As, in addition to them earning more money than unskilled workers, it is highly likely that a good proportion of the money earned by unskilled workers will be sent to their families back home, particularly those from South and Southeast Asia. In contrast, higher-paid workers tend to spend more of their income inside Saudi Arabia as often workers with families will bring their families with them (Reuters 2011).

Expatriate workers who seek out tourism information, either or both prior to coming to live in the Country and whilst they are residing in the Country, will engage in tourist activities which may involve substantial leisure elements or what is referred to as domestic tourism. The World

Tourism Organisation (1995, p. 35) define a domestic tourist as: “any person residing in a country who travels to a place within the country outside his/her usual environment for a period not exceeding 12 months and whose main purpose of visit is other than the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited”.

Tourism is identified as being a key motivation for someone to work in another Country as according to Selmer and Lauring (2010, p. 170), “the three main factors influencing the decision to expatriate were: desire to see more of the world; search for new experience and desire for an adventure/challenge”. For example, these experiences may consist entirely of leisure, sport, and entertainment. Even for short-stay visitors, for example, conference delegates, visitors to trade fairs, and/or individual business travellers, places of entertainment or sightseeing tours can be sought a way of relaxing at the end of the working period. Specially in the case with Saudi Arabia is that whilst the desire to see the world is a draw, it is largely due to financial incentives that highly skilled expatriate workers will come to live there (Ministry of Labor and Social Development 2016).

Challenges and the Need for EWOM Travel Information

Whilst Saudi Arabia is interested in attracting highly skilled expatriate workers to the Country, challenges exist. For example, regardless of whether an individual shares the Muslim faith, Islamic beliefs and practices will impact to some degree on the tourist experience (Cooper 2008; Battour et al. 2011). Shar’ia Law regulates leisure activities as well as other cultural practices, and many things that are considered acceptable in the West are prohibited by Shar’ia (Henderson 2011). These include public displays of affection, physical contact of any kind between people of the opposite sex, the cohabitation of unmarried couples, the consumption of alcohol or pork products, gambling, eating or drinking during fasting hours during the religious festival of Ramadan, and failing to abide by recognised standards of dress (Zamani-Farahani and Henderson 2010). More specifically, tourists, as well as investors in the tourism sector, have been put off by the strict regulations, especially those relating to certain kinds of public entertainment, alcohol consumption, and female clothing (Henderson 2011). Hence, s-commerce, defined as the use of social media to socialise and share commercially related information (Lin et al. 2017), serves an important function in supporting expatriates when visiting Muslim Countries.

An assumption of this research is that expatriate workers will use travel information to help them prepare and organise their visit to Saudi Arabia, that is, for example, learn about local and religious customs and activities they might choose to engage in while they travel around the Country. According to Showail et al. (2013, p. 3963), "the unfamiliar environment may trigger just such a learning orientation for foreign workers, whereby they may reduce role ambiguity in unfamiliar environments through information-seeking". It would be expected that first-time workers to the Country conduct some research prior to travel to ensure that they are adequately prepared. Information searches regarding visiting Saudi Arabia can be related to security concerns, while other motivations for information searches may relate to cultural sensitivity and the distance between Islamic and Western cultural practices. Those seeking to visit popular destinations or places in Saudi Arabia may rely mostly on the information presented via eWOM on a variety of social media platforms on various tourism sites, such as expedia.com and tripadvisor.com. Examples of social media platforms that specially support expatriate workers in Saudi Arabia include expat.com; aramcoexpats.com; internations.org; and forum-expat-management.com. Each of these sites relies upon consumer-generated content, thereby creating opportunities for individuals to share their experiences with others.

Whilst the existence of compounds, defined as a "home away from home", providing resident expatriates and accompanying family members with social stability and a comfortable and safe environment (Lauring and Selmer 2009), are an important element of life for Western expatriates in Saudi Arabia, highly skilled expatriate workers will still leave these compounds to spend time outside their usual environment. Despite physical word-of-mouth knowledge existing in the compounds, the assumption is that expatriates will still want to find out more for themselves, that is, via eWOM, to organise trips and activities around Saudi Arabia. Those workers planning tourist activities and seeking to visit popular destinations or places in Saudi Arabia will rely heavily on the information presented on several eWOM platforms to plan their visit. Thus, eWOM can present positive and negative information on destinations. The searches and considerations will differ from person to person (Selmer and Lauring 2010), and the level of desire and need for the information may differ when they process the information via eWOM. Gaps can occur when the eWOM posted by a reviewer is perceived as useful or not in a manner consistent with users' searches; this information can be influenced by users' individual cognitive closure, resulting in travellers' adoption of the information and intention to seek eWOM information in their future decision-making.

The Role of eWOM in S-commerce Relating to Travel and Tourism

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p. 39) defined eWOM as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet". eWOM is also called "online word of mouth" (Brown et al. 2007) or "word of mouse" (Dellarocas 2003). In the context of tourism, typically, information posted on eWOM platforms is communicated by tourists themselves, through the creation of online content. Individuals have the potential to influence the opinions of others. In 2008, Litvin et al. predicted that eWOM platforms would become major influencers of travel behaviours (Litvin et al. 2008). Now, the use of eWOM in hospitality and tourism management is well established (Litvin et al. 2018). eWOM content may include personal descriptions of individuals' own travel experiences including offerings of personal thoughts and opinions on where someone has visited or stayed. Users can update and comment on existing information as part of a continuous process of development, and they can also interact directly, engage in discussion, post questions, and respond to questions on an online community. Responses can be answered by any number of people in any number of locations around the world (Pan et al. 2007). Because of these functions, it is quite possible that travellers will predominantly rely on these information sources to offer them a useful perspective (Nieto et al. 2014).

The eWOM is distributed through various social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, wikis, personal blogs, virtual community websites owned by hospitality brands, product review sites such as epinions.com and TripAdvisor, and numerous blogs and forums, all of which have contributed in an exponential expansion of the consumer voice (Litvin et al. 2018). A blog is referred to as a website that contains chronological date stamped messages with text, audio, visuals, small games, or a combination of these elements, with the main idea being to log information and make it public (McIntosh 2005). Some travel sites consist of only one blog or a blog section on the site, while others include more blogs or are full blog sites (e.g. Google's Blogspot). Travel blogs are a special genre of text wherein travel is the central theme (Mak 2017). Defined by Pühringer and Taylor (2008), as online diaries, they allow for what Mak (2017) describes as an "emic" understanding of the travel experience. That is, a description of a cultural phenomenon from the perspective of the one who participates in the culture. In the case of a tourism blog, this being the tourist. For example, the tourist producing the blog, will post destination images and text, which only they perceive as important. Hence, combined blogs drawn from various social media platforms serve to reveal tourists' kaleidoscopic perception of a destination (Mak 2017). In turn, such s-commerce provides a very rich resource of information for the expatriate. A study by Gretzel et al. (2007) found the viewing of user opinions on review sites (e.g. TripAdvisor.com and blog sites) to be the most popular online activity amongst users of eWOM.

As with travel blogs, online travel review websites have become an important information source for online travellers (Hwang et al. 2018). Such sites offer a rich data source of travellers' experiences and evaluations of products and services (Xiang et al. 2017). Karkare and Gupta (2013, p. 307) define a review site as a "website on which reviews can be posted about people, businesses, products, or services". These sites may use both Web 2.0 techniques to gather reviews from site users or may employ professional writers to author reviews on the topic of concern for the site. People who post comments on travel blog sites are often known as travel bloggers, whereas those who post comments on travel review sites are called reviewers. Although travel review sites are part of s-commerce wherein their goal is to alleviate information asymmetry (Zhang et al. 2016) and assist consumer decision-making by providing trusted, shared social knowledge (Xiang et al. 2017), such sites vary in their business model. Commonalities of travel review sites are that all incorporate user data from a wide variety and global spread of users and all are commercially minded in terms of manipulating social knowledge through using reviewer's personal information as a means of persuasive communication in influencing travel behaviour (Zhang et al. 2016). However, differences in business models are, for example, TripAdvisor is an advertising business model; Booking.com is an Agency business model; and Expedia is a merchant business model (Innovation Tactics 2017).

Regardless of the business model, from the traveller's perspective, the most cited advantage of review websites is that they are thought of as one of the most prominent and simple to access forms of eWOM, as they remain visible for a long time after being posted, and product, company ratings, and reviews are listed next to product information on a website (Schindler and Bickart 2012). Travellers can also post reviews on other outlets, for example different eWOM platforms (e.g. blogs, microblogs, Facebook, or YouTube) (Kwok et al. 2017).

Regardless of the existing types of different eWOM information, users' willingness to use the pool of information is of the highest importance. In fact, consumers using eWOM information in making decisions are more likely to share their own opinions and experiences about products and services, in turn influencing other consumers (Mendes Filho et al. 2012; Litvin et al. 2008). According to an online report, Vlachos (2012) indicates that about 87 per cent of international travellers have used the Internet to plan trips, and around 43 per cent have read reviews by other travellers. In addition, the importance of behavioural intention to use eWOM has been identified by Parra-López et al. (2011, p. 4) as "essential" for providing guidance to website managers on how to design the information sources and the structure and the functionality of eWOM travel websites in order to enhance web traffic, usage, and competitiveness.

From the consumer perspective eWOM is understood to be a major determinant of tourist behaviour and destination choice (Mak 2017).

A Conceptual Model to Explain Behavioural Intention to Use eWOM

TAM and IAM

Davis (1989) and Davis et al. (1989) developed the TAM based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) to investigate factors involved in the acceptance or rejection of information technology. TAM has since been commonly used to predict information systems whilst the TRA's attitudinal determinants are used to determine behavioural intentions from individually held attitudes and has been used across diverse research contexts (Bagozzi et al. 1992, p. 661). Three main features were used in the TAM's development based on principles adopted from the TRA: the measurement of behaviour-relevant components of attitude, differentiating between belief and attitude, and stipulating the causal link between external stimuli (e.g. the features of an information system) and attitudes and behaviour (Davis 1993, p. 476). Davis (1989) identified the two most important perceptions that he believed could be used to predict usage outcomes as PU and perceived ease of use (EOU). PU was defined as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance" (ibid., p. 320). The definition of perceived EOU is "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort" (ibid., p. 320). According to the final model, the attitude towards using was removed, and individual behaviour intention was deemed to be directly influenced by PU and perceived EOU. TAM has more recently been used by a number of studies in different contexts, for example, e-learning, e-shopping, online retailing, Internet banking, and mobile technology (Bailey et al. 2017; Zheng et al. 2017). Recent studies have also applied the TAM in the context of eWOM to study the impact of technology acceptance factors on the adoption of different eWOM platforms (Bhandari and Rodgers 2018; Choi et al. 2018).

In attempting to extend the TAM model, a number of recent studies have appended external variables and combined the model with other theories in order to elucidate the use of technology and increase overall comprehensibility. Jackson et al. (1997), for example, argued that there should be an integration of prior usage, an argument for change, a situational involvement, and an intrinsic involvement with TAM. Researchers including Taylor and Todd (1995) have claimed considerable effects on people's intent to deploy the system through perceived behavioural control and subjective norms. Venkatesh and Davis's work (Venkatesh and Davis 2000) constituted a significant progression and extension of TAM. They created an innovative model called TAM2 to extend TAM by adding "social influence processes" and "cognitive instrumental processes" as antecedents of usage intentions and PU. PU and Perceived EOU are the principal technological determinants in TAM2, but at the same time, two other constituent groups were amalgamated: three sets of "social influence processes"—voluntariness, subjective norms, and image—and four sets of "cognitive instrumental processes"—output quality, job relevance, results demonstrability, and perceived EOU, as determinants of PU and usage intentions. TAM2 has been studied by researchers in various contexts such as teaching online, health information acceptance, mobile technology adoption, and tourists' acceptance of the information.

TAM and TAM2 are not sufficient for seeking to understand how the information obtained on eWOM platforms is accepted by consumers. Such limitations led Sussman and Siegal (2003) to propose that TAM-based predictions relating to how PU can influence intention may also be applicable to information adoption. The information-adoption-based theory of knowledge transfer by Sussman and Siegal (2003) argues that people form an intention to adopt certain ideas and behaviour in the same way as they form intentions to adopt certain behaviour or technologies. The theory also maintains that PU has been shown to be a reliable indicator of intention to adopt the information.

Therefore, Sussman and Siegal's (2003) work further extends knowledge by integrating TAM with the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) which is predicated on the view that people's elaborative processing activity governs their choice between two information processing routes. Although the IAM is a commonly used model in the context of eWOM, it is limited in terms of offering a full understanding of behavioural intentions to use the information because it focuses solely on the characteristics of information, these being quality and credibility. More complete knowledge could be obtained through the exploration of cognitive, affective, and NFCC on behavioural intention to use eWOM. Thus, the model used in the present study to investigate how eWOM information posted online and mediated by computers is absorbed and accepted by consumers is presented in Fig. 10.1. Addressing this is necessary in order to provide a sufficient explanation of individuals' information processing and user's behavioural intention to use eWOM. This study defined behavioural intention as the extent to which the user would like to use the information they find on eWOM travel review websites in their future travel planning. Individual intention to use the eWOM information in the near future means, specifically, to use it in their overall travel

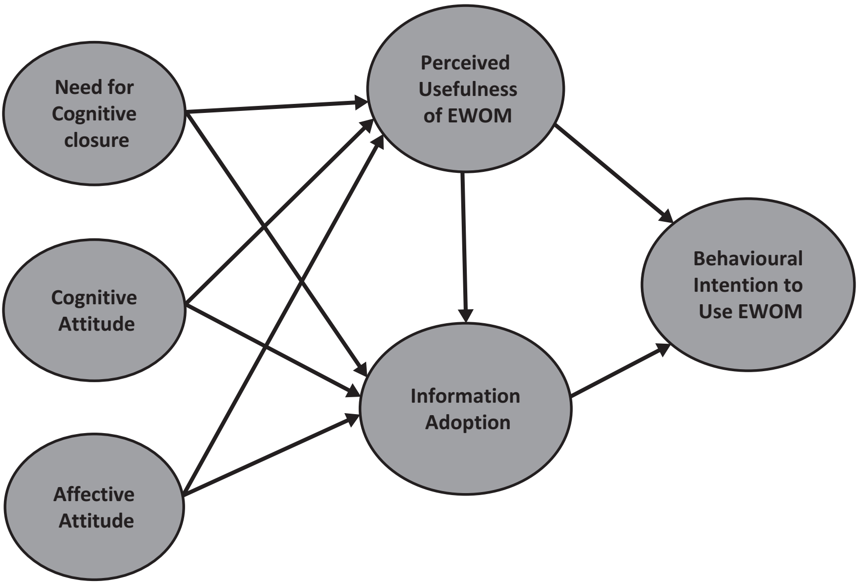

Fig. 10.1 Proposed research model

planning considerations and for comparative purposes in further information searches.

NFCC

The motivation to seek out information is driven by the perceived benefits of obtaining the information. In the information search, Andrews (2013) indicates that as the quantity of informational cues increases, a consumer's confidence in decision-making will also increase, thereby making the information sourced more useful. However, there comes a point when the individual closes the search. The NFCC, also known more simply as the need for closure, refers to a measure of "the desire for clear, definite, or unambiguous knowledge" (Kruglanski and Freund 1983, p. 448). Generally, the NFCC is made up of several sub-processes. The process of seizing and freezing is said to define the processing of information by an individual high in NFCC; the seizing process, also known as the urgency tendency, describes an individual's need to come to a rapid decision or conclusion. Freezing, or permanence tendency, refers to the individual's need to stick to their decision by shutting out any further analysis of the conclusion they have reached (Kruglanski and Webster 1996).

Previous studies have identified that when confronted with a new situation, people with a higher NFCC level utilise more information than people with lower NFCC. The high NFCC individuals look for more information in order to come to a quick decision and therefore attain closure. However, once they have made their decision, they stop looking for further information, that is, freeze, and this leads to the assumption that the information search is affected by the NFCC to varying degrees, depending on the function of the decision contexts (Webster and Kruglanski 1994). Conversely, those with low NFCC are more likely to be happy being noncommittal, and perhaps see value in a relative reluctance to form a definite opinion (Webster and Kruglanski 1994). These individuals try to stay impartial to criticism of possible decisions and to process as much information as possible in order to put off reaching a conclusion. Furthermore, Kruglanski and Freund (1983) identified that people with a high level of NFCC were more likely to use information gathered in the early stages of data searching to assist in their decision-making. As a result, these individuals base their conclusions on pre-existing schemas and are more reluctant to process new information.

However, prior research has attempted to demonstrate that traveller behaviours are influenced by eWOM, yet there is a dearth of research focusing on the role of eWOM in relation to individuals' cognitive closure. The findings of the previous research looking at the effects of NFCC on information searches on eWOM are limited. This study attempts to bridge that gap by extending the previous eWOM theories with the NFCC.

Cognitive and Affective Attitudes

Attitude construct is identified as a crucial factor influencing PU and information adoption. Breckler (1984) and Shih et al. (2013) argued that the cognitive component is deemed to be the knowledge and perceptions of an individual belief related to the information in eWOM. The affective component is seen as an individual's emotions or feelings about particular information in eWOM. These constructs are included in the TAM as a factor which mediates core beliefs and intended behaviours as Yang and Yoo (2004) suggest that, in the study of technology acceptance, it is important that the differences between the cognitive and affective dimensions of attitude are considered. Although Yang and Yoo's (2004) findings show that cognitive attitude only mediates the influences of PU and the information system used, these authors acknowledge that the exclusion of behavioural intention was a limitation in many studies. It is included in the original TAM; hence, they advise that it would be acceptable for a company's management to include this to predict a system's potential rejection or acceptance.

Following Yang and Yoo (2004), a more recent study by Shih et al. (2013) investigated the influence of cognitive and affective attitude on eWOM intention. However, although both Yang and Yoo (2004) and Shih et al. (2013) accurately implemented the theory of attitude, their studies are limited in predicting the significance of the influence of PU, information adoption, and behavioural intention to use eWOM. In all, these areas have not yet been empirically tested in the context of eWOM. Therefore, it is proposed that cognitive and affective attitude and behavioural intention are included in future empirical research (as illustrated in Fig. 10.1). Firstly, due to the importance that previous studies have placed upon them, and secondly, in order to further examine the significance of behavioural intention to use eWOM.

Theoretical Contribution of the Conceptual Model

The major contribution of this contextual study is that it develops a conceptual model that examines the determinants of behavioural intention to use eWOM. Hence, it extends the IAM to include individual NFCC and related components of attitude. The conceptual model, presented in this chapter, offers a useful contribution to theory as it extends previous information system knowledge by adopting a multiple theoretical perspective to explain this new social phenomenon, centring on behavioural intention to use eWOM. In all, application of the conceptual model serves to investigate the effects of individual NFCC on PU and information adoption in influencing behavioural intention to use the information posted on eWOM. Further, it investigates the effects on PU and information adoption resulting from two external factors: cognitive attitude and affective attitude.

This study contributes to the knowledge of information adoption and presents a novel contribution, as previous studies on information adoption have been conducted on the separate influences of individual information attributes on eWOM intentions, such as purchase intention (Cheung et al. 2008; Erkan and Evans 2016; Hussain et al. 2017; Lee and Shin 2014; Park et al. 2007; Prendergast et al. 2010), resulting in limited attention being given in the information system literature as to why consumers have positive influences to use eWOM information posted on online travel review websites. Further, this study applies the conceptual model in the novel context of highly skilled expatriate workers using information posted on eWOM travel review websites as scant research exists on cognitive and behavioural intention to use s-commerce.

Managerial Implications

The unprecedented increase in the quantity of eWOM travel information and its benefits are compelling different destination marketers and companies to develop systems that provide users with useful information, anytime and anywhere. Given the large investment in developing new information systems, an understanding of the users' PU and adoption of eWOM travel information and their behavioural intention to use this information is crucial for destination marketers so that they can prioritise their resources in an effective way. Destination marketers could facilitate the perceptions of usefulness and effectiveness of the information among individuals processing eWOM information, which would promote more persuasive and efficient reviews of places or activities, and thus, help to enhance their web traffic, usage, and competitiveness.

Conclusion

Following an examination of relevant literature, this chapter proposed a conceptual model to examine highly skilled expatriate workers in relation to their effect on the use of eWOM in Saudi Arabia, especially on the factors related to individuals' different needs for cognitive closure and cognitive and affective attitudes. In doing so, it critically reviews the theory behind the TAM and its extended successor models, which can be used to study human behaviour in acceptance (or rejection) of technology. From the preceding critique of the literature, it can be concluded that the IAM has strong foundations but lacks the comprehensive coverage of many major factors, such as individual differences in NFCC, and attitudes components. Therefore, this research serves to extend knowledge by employing modified versions of IAM, attitude theory, and individual need for closure.

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11

eWOM: The Rise of the Opinion Leaders

Shuang Zhou, Helen McCormick, Marta Blazquez, and Liz Barnes

Introduction

The growth and evolution of new media such as Web 2.0 technologies has led to the development of new forms of communication channels and platforms, transforming marketing communications from traditional face-to-face word-of-mouth to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Cheung and Thadani 2012). Further, eWOM has attracted a great deal of attention among marketers and researchers (Trusov et al. 2009). Because of consumers increasingly engaging in eWOM communication to exchange information about goods, services, brands, or companies, eWOM becomes one of the most significant communication touch points to engage consumers in their pre- and post-purchase experience (King et al. 2014). It has been documented that eWOM has significant effects on consumer purchase decision-making process (Daugherty and Hoffman 2014; Mishra and Satish 2016; King et al. 2014; Batra and Keller 2016;

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_11

Court et al. 2009), brand equity (Severi et al. 2014), new customer acquisition (Trusov et al. 2009), and sales (Chen et al. 2011; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Moe and Trusov 2011; Babić Rosario et al. 2016). Marketers have taken advantage of eWOM and incorporated it into marketing communication strategies (Kozinets et al. 2010). Traditional marketing communication tools like television and magazine advertising can be costly and they are used in many marketing communications environments; therefore, they appear to be losing their effectiveness to consumers (Smilansky 2009). One of the main benefits of eWOM marketing is its potential to overcome consumer resistance to traditional marketing communication messages with significantly low costs and fast delivery of information and to influence consumers' attitudes and behaviours towards brands or products (Chen et al. 2016; Trusov et al. 2009).

The fashion industry in particular has shown a great interest in eWOM marketing (Kulmala et al. 2013; Bendoni 2017). Before the emergence of social media, a new fashion trend or product was adopted by consumers after its designer or manufacturer released the marketing messages through a range of traditional media outlets, typically including magazines, billboards, and television advertising. The one-way flow of information made consumers recipients of up-to-date product information and fashion trends provided by industry gatekeepers, such as fashion journalists, buyers, and celebrities. The advent of social media has radically shifted this established model of fashion marketing communications by speeding up the democratisation and shifting the traditional fashion landscape (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010), through increased access to information and trends via social media feeds, enabling consumers to actively participate in online communities and engage in user-generated content practice (Bendoni 2017). Due to the variety of channels of information relating to fashion and style available to consumers, fashion opinion leaders come from all socio-economic groups and have risen in popularity in their social systems (Barnes 2013).

In recent years, opinion leaders in fashion are emerging on various social media platforms with thousands or even millions of followers (Jing Daily 2016) with their social media feeds covering a wide range of topics (Bendoni 2017). Fashion opinion leaders tend to be reference groups whose opinions, beliefs, values, and behaviours are adopted by consumers for inference so as to support or enhance self-image or self-concept (Hughes et al. 2015; Rahman et al. 2014; Park 1998). The rise of fashion opinion leaders accelerates the fashion diffusion process by legitimising the adoption of a new trend. They can introduce new fashion trends in real time, provide valued opinions and insights about fashion and brands from their perspective, and give advice on particular topics to large groups of followers (Halvorsen et al. 2013; Kretz and de Valck 2010; Kapferer and Bastien 2009).

Marketers have recognised the influential power of fashion opinion leaders and thus collaborate with them for eWOM marketing campaigns to promote products (Kozinets et al. 2010). By introducing products within a private and personal context, fashion opinion leaders' eWOM messages have become a new marketing channel for brands and could be more reliable for consumers than traditional forms of marketing (Pihl and Sandström 2013). These online fashion opinion leaders now have achieved and demonstrated the ability to influence consumers and represented a new and significant marketing communication channel in the industry. They are perceived by consumers as fashion experts who are more approachable and credible than traditional gatekeepers (Bendoni 2017) and a significant source of influence in information search and consumption of fashion (Halvorsen et al. 2013).

This chapter considers the importance and development of eWOM marketing by fashion opinion leaders, defining their characteristics and the role and challenges from both an opinion leader and brand perspective.

Definition of Opinion Leader

The concept of the opinion leader as a key influencer over consumers is well established in the marketing literature. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) described opinion leaders as the individuals who are politically interested, trustable, knowledgeable, competent, and highly motivated to influence their social networks. Subsequent authors such as Rogers and Cartano (1962) and Weimann (1994) add that opinion leaders have a wide array of personal connections and could exert impacts on the opinions and behaviours of others. They are perceived by their followers as knowledgeable experts in specific fields or on particular topics, with appropriate sources for information and recommendations, and guidance for opinions, attitudes, and behaviours (McQuail and Windahl 1993; Eliashberg and Shugan 1997). They could alert their social networks to what the significant matters around their environments are (e.g. political, social, and cultural issues or new product launch and consumer choices) through their information sharing behaviour (Nisbet and Kotcher 2009). Therefore, even if the term 'opinion leader' has been defined in many ways, its description is consistently linked with information sharing behaviour and influence on opinion followers.

Opinion leaders can be monomorphic when their domain of influence is quite limited and specific (e.g. a product or a brand) (Merton 1957), or polymorphic who could impact others in a wide scope of areas, for example, market mavens (Felick and Price 1987) who have knowledge about a various of facets of markets (Merton 1957; Weimann 1991). In this chapter, opinion leaders are defined as individuals who are knowledgeable in specific fields or on particular topics (in this chapter, the focus is on fashion opinion leaders) and are highly motivated to influence attitudes and behaviours of others through their information sharing behaviour (Nisbet and Kotcher 2009), typically as a result of their fashion credentials.

Opinion Leaders and eWOM Marketing

The significance of opinion leaders in the eWOM process has been emphasised in eWOM marketing theories (Haenlein and Libai 2013; Kozinets et al. 2010). Opinion leaders serve as significant disseminators of information regarding products, services, and brands, and heavily influence other consumers' purchase decisions (Gnambs and Batinic 2012). The development of eWOM marketing theories has experienced three evolutionary shifts: first, using traditional means like advertising and promotions to encourage naturally occurring eWOM communications among consumers; secondly, using traditional means to affect influential consumers who are viewed as potential opinion leaders and encouraging them to interpret marketing messages to other consumers through eWOM activities; thirdly, using one-to-one seeding and communication programmes to deliberately and directly target, influence, and invite opinion leaders to interpret marketing messages to consumer communities (Haenlein and Libai 2013; Kozinets et al. 2010). eWOM messages are delivered by these opinion leaders to other consumers through social media. This process is referred to a model of linear marketer influence (Kozinets et al. 2010) as shown in Fig. 11.1. By acting as friends who recommend reliable products, opinion leaders are assumed to transmit marketing messages more dependably than those salespersons, who endeavour to get rid of merchandise.

Consequently, opinion leaders play a significant role in communicating the meaning of marketing messages to other consumers. The second and third eWOM marketing theories are developed based on the attempt of harnessing the credibility of eWOM and the power of opinion leaders.

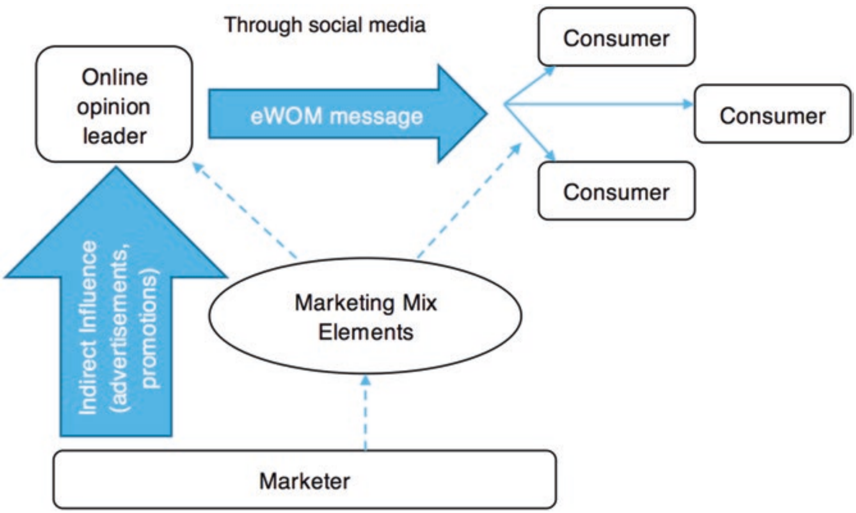

Fig. 11.1 The linear marketer influence model (Kozinets et al. 2010)

Characteristics of Fashion Opinion Leaders

According to the level of fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership involved in the diffusion and adoption process, fashion consumers can be categorised as fashion leaders or fashion followers (Hirschman and Adcock 1978). Fashion leaders possess a high level of fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership, demonstrating a combination of interest in fashion, experience, knowledge, and interpersonal influence (Myers and Robertson 1972; Goldsmith 2000). Fashion leaders can be classified in three groups (Sproles and King 1973; Baumgarten 1975). First, fashion innovators who adopt a new fashion trend earliest in the fashion life cycle. Second, fashion opinion leaders who accelerate the speed and scope of fashion diffusion process legitimising the adoption of this new trend and acting as sources of information and advice. Last, innovative communicators who combine both the roles of fashion innovators and fashion opinion leaders (Workman and Johnson 1993). Fashion followers refer to those consumers with low level of fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership and adopt a new fashion trend after fashion leaders legitimate the acceptance of this trend (Hirschman and Adcock 1978).

Fashion opinion leaders can influence their followers by sharing their knowledge about new fashion styles and by interpreting and passing over the new fashion trends with attractive implications (Workman and Freeburg 2009; Kim and Hong 2011). That way, they have a crucial role to play in the fashion diffusion and adoption process. Previous research has established the profile of fashion opinion leaders according to demographic and lifestyle characteristics, such as age (Baumgarten 1975; Hirschman and Adcock 1978), gender (Polegato and Wall 1980; Stith and Goldsmith 1989), race (Bauer et al. 1965; Stith and Goldsmith 1989), income (Summers 1970), education and social status (Rogers 1983), and marital status (Polegato and Wall 1980). It has been stated that in terms of lifestyle characteristics, the level of education, income, and social status of fashion opinion leaders is normally higher than that of fashion followers. However, demographic characteristics have more restrictions in their capacity to foresee or clarify fashion opinion leaders. For instance, some studies found that age was not a remarkable indicator of fashion opinion leaders (Polegato and Wall 1980; Chowdhary and Dickey 1988) while others found that men were more likely to be fashion opinion leaders than women (Goldsmith and Stith 1993).

Other studies have investigated behavioural characteristics of fashion opinion leaders, finding that they are more likely to participate in social activities than fashion followers (Hirschman and Adcock 1978; Baumgarten 1975). In terms of information-seeking patterns, they prefer marketer-dominated sources (e.g. fashion magazines) to consumer-dominated sources (e.g. community numbers) as the most important sources of new fashion trend information (Vernette 2004; Chowdhary and Dickey 1988; Polegato and Wall 1980). Also, consumers with high fashion leadership were found to spend more time and money on clothing compared to fashion followers (Baumgarten 1975; Gutman and Mills 1982; Phau and Lo 2004; Goldsmith and Stith 1993).

Researchers have also studied the psychological features of fashion opinion leaders and fashion followers, finding that they seem to have different sets of values and psychological characteristics. Fashion opinion leaders appear to have unique self-images and may perceive themselves as more excitable, indulgent, contemporary, formal, and colourful (Goldsmith et al. 1996). They also show a higher need for variety and uniqueness than fashion followers (Workman and Johnson 1993; Workman and Kidd 2000). Regarding social values, fashion opinion leaders place greater importance on excitement, fun, or enjoyment than fashion followers (Goldsmith et al. 1991; Goldsmith and Stith 1993).

Recently, it has been reported that fashion opinion leaders are more sensitive to 'social comparison', a tendency to be concerned about others' reactions to their own behaviours (Bertrandias and Goldsmith 2006). Due to the democratisation of fashion leadership (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010), fashion opinion leaders appear to be interpersonal transmitters of information about fashion trends and products and have relative influence in their social systems (Wiedmann et al. 2010).

Fashion Opinion Leader and Social Media

Given the importance of fashion items in constructing individual self-image and expressing self-concept (Goldsmith et al. 1996), understanding better the characteristics and role of the opinion leader in the fashion field is of key interest. Fashion opinion leaders were identified by the diffusion of innovation theory and the trickle-down theory (Rogers 1983; Sproles 1981) as the early adopters of a new fashion in adopter categories based on time dimensions and as the elite classes of consumers in the social class hierarchy. However, these statements were challenged by the trickle-across theory, which suggested that because of the simultaneous availability and accessibility of fashion-related information disseminated through multiple mass channels, fashion adoption can occur simultaneously across the time dimensions and socio-economic groups (Barnes 2013). The advent of social media has speeded up the democratisation of fashion opinion leaders (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Social media has acted as a catalyst for this democratisation, by enabling anyone to communicate with, and thus influence, huge and diverse consumer groups via the array of free to use communication channels offered via social media. Thus, the fashion opinion leaders on social media platforms appear to emerge in each socio-economic group (Crewe 2013).

Social media offers the way of blogging for exhibiting fashion opinion leadership (Kretz and de Valck 2010; Barnes 2013). Blogs are defined as the social media equivalent of personal web pages that can be presented in a multitude of different contents, from diaries about individual life to the relevant information in one specific area (Kretz and de Valck 2010). Blogs offer consumers an almost unlimited space for self-expression on the Internet (Kozinets 2006) with access to a large audience. Fashion blogging is used by fashion opinion leaders to spread eWOM to express their thoughts, ideas, and knowledge about fashion, products, and brands that are considered to be of interest or relevant to them (Kulmala et al. 2013; Lea-Greenwood 2013; Cheung and Thadani 2012). As an increasingly important tool of communication in the fashion industry, fashion blogging can offer fashion opinion leaders the possibility of interacting with large groups of followers (Kretz and de Valck 2010; Lea-Greenwood

2013). Fashion bloggers are found in possession of higher levels of enduring involvement, innovativeness, exploratory behaviour, self-perceived knowledge, and more expertise with the product category (Lyons and Henderson 2005).

eWOM Messages and Narrative Strategies

According to Statista (2018), from 2014 to 2018, the number of bloggers in the US has grew from 27.4 million to 30.6 million, and it is predicted to reach 31.7 million in 2020 which gives an idea of the relevance of the phenomenon. It is evident from statistics that consumers are actively engaging in eWOM communication through social media platforms with the number of social media users worldwide increasing 13% in 2018 to over 3 billion (Kemp 2018). Accordingly, marketers have recognised the necessity to employ eWOM as a marketing tactic in entering new markets (Wolny and Mueller 2013). That way, many brands are looking for the fashion key opinion leaders on the most popular social media, and also to utilise opinion leader endorsement strategy on social media platforms for branding and product promotion (Bendoni 2017). Brands are also developing co-created campaigns with fashion opinion leaders which have proven to be more effective and influential in terms of customers' engagement and loyalty (Thompson and Malaviya 2013). These campaigns were rated higher compared to ads generated by retailers (Hautz et al. 2014) and positively promoted interactive behaviour with the brand (Hansen et al. 2014).

The activities that fashion opinion leaders conduct online include providing product description and outfit advice for assisting in consumer's purchase decision (Kwahk and Kim 2016). Also, live streaming via videos, which is becoming more popular due to platforms such as Instagram stories where opinion leaders can discuss products in real time, having positive effects at cognitive and affective levels action (Hu et al. 2017). In terms of social interaction, it can enhance shopping entertainment and increase purchase intention (Kim et al. 2011). Thus, opinion leaders engage and attract followers through discount codes (Rapp et al. 2013).

Companies and brands work with bloggers to ensure more control over marketing messages, while for bloggers, the association with brands can improve their social status. According to Thompson and Hirschman (1995), through individuals' consumption behaviour, the products or brands as their possessions can convey the images, styles, and cultural meanings to their identities. The cyberspace allows people to present themselves and form multiple identities by using digitally presented products and brands (e.g. text, images, videos), rather than the physically presented forms in the real world (Nguyen and Alexander 1996). Opinion leaders portraying their leadership roles in relation to goods consumption on social media require strategies of manipulating the languages, signs, and symbols that stand for products and brands. Several studies have explored opinion leaders' narrative strategies for online communication, self-presentation, or storytelling about products (e.g. Gakhar and Chahal 2016; Kozinets et al. 2010; Kretz and de Valck 2010). Nevertheless, there still lacks a clear definition on narrative strategy and a fully developed theoretical perspective that illuminates the narrative strategies used by opinion leaders to create eWOM messages to persuade consumers. In this chapter, fashion opinion leaders' narrative strategies are defined as the ways they are using language, tone, practices, signs, symbols, and substance to connect brands and products in expressing eWOM messages, with the association of their physical identities, inner thoughts and feelings, ideas, cultural backgrounds, economic and social positions, and social roles.

Challenges of eWOM Marketing Campaigns Led by Opinion Leaders

Even though brands should choose the opinion leaders who are most influential and suitable to their brand identities (Bendoni 2017; Kozinets et al. 2010; Halvorsen et al. 2013; Kretz and de Valck 2010), there is still a lack of understanding about how brands collaborate with opinion leaders to develop eWOM marketing programmes. Particularly, some marketers still view employing blogging for eWOM marketing as a loss of control over the marketing message (Halvorsen et al. 2013). The content from those bloggers accepting payment for promoting products can be controlled and managed from the guidelines negotiated by bloggers and brands. However, the posts by non-paid bloggers are out of control for brands and a negative content could damage the brand image (Walden et al. 2015). In addition, Kozinets et al. (2010) suggested that brands should seek to encourage particular narrative strategies that are ideal for their products and eWOM marketing campaigns in a marketplace.

Based on previous literature this chapter proposes a model (see Fig. 11.2) about different approaches for brands collaborating with opinion leaders to cultivate eWOM marketing activities with harnessing the inherent and instrumental values of narrative strategies. Brands can engage paid opinion leaders in marketing activities (Bendoni 2017) and agree with them the use of narrative strategies as guidelines to create positive eWOM messages (Halvorsen et al. 2013). The non-paid opinion leaders can be encouraged to engage in event-based online buzz marketing activities to spread positive stories about products (Siefert et al. 2009; Niederhoffer et al. 2007; Taufique and Shahriar 2011) motivated by their interests on specific topics and the potential of increasing social capitals and blog traffics (Delisle and Parmentier 2016). In this way, the narrative strategies can be referenced and adopted as guidelines for the topic and content of stories given by participants. That way narrative strategies offer opportunities for brands to increase control over the content posted by those bloggers, who seek to maintain full independence to publish their own views or who have interest in the brands but are not influential enough for endorsement (Walden et al. 2015). For example, Tiffany & Co launched a storygiving campaign 'What makes love true' on social media to create buzz about consumers' personal love stories (Hughes et al. 2016). Burberry also launched the online community 'Art of the Trench' to encourage consumers to upload photographs of themselves wearing the iconic Burberry trench coat on social media (Catlin et al. 2015). Participants' messages in these two campaigns were similar to the 'identity construction' narrative strategy identified by Kretz and de Valck (2010) that links personal and brands' identities and meanings.

However, some relevant issues concerning eWOM marketing need to be carefully considered, for instance, breaking cultural barriers, balancing

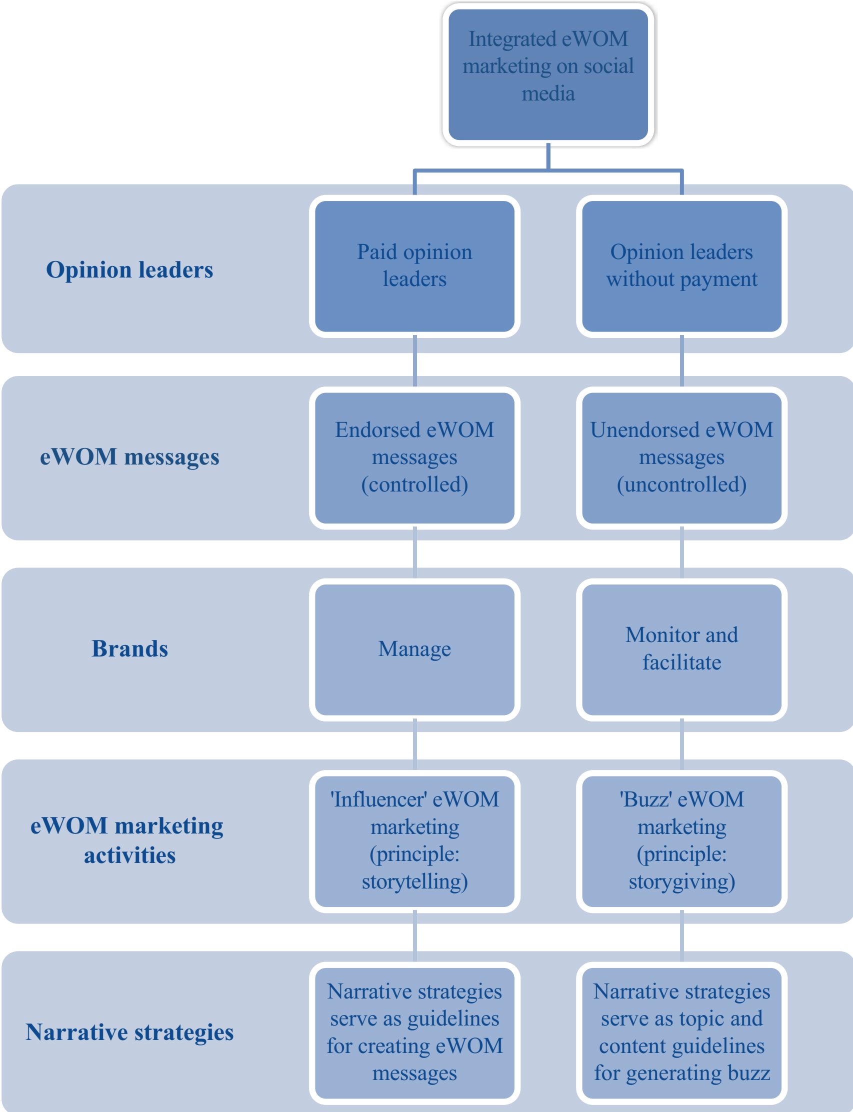

Fig. 11.2 Integrated eWOM marketing on social media

commercial and personal contents, and dealing with the effects of sponsorship disclosure in fashion opinion leaders' eWOM messages.

Breaking Cultural Barriers

Different purposes of marketing communications are to build brand image, increase brand awareness, reinforce brand values, and sell products (Dubois and Paternault 1995; Kapferer and Bastien 2009). Based on their international expansion efforts, fashion brands now need to target a global segment of consumers (Okonkwo 2007, p. 225). For that, luxury fashion retailers tend to adopt a global strategy that use standardised advertising and positioning in order to control brand image and maintain brand consistency (Alexander and Doherty 2010; Liu et al. 2016). However, due to the speedy growth of the emerging luxury market, with different characteristics and cultural contexts, it is challenging for luxury brands to adapt to local market needs and protect brand image and global position to succeed in their international expansion (Chevalier and Lu 2010; Kapferer 2014). This challenge is especially notable in East Asian's luxury markets where the consumer characteristics and cultural values are different from those of Western luxury brands' markets (Chadha and Husband 2015; Liu et al. 2016). East Asian countries like China, Japan, and South Korea show high levels of collectivism, as opposed to the Western countries. In these collective societies, luxury brands are considered as a set of symbols that can display and refine consumers' personal identities and social position (Chadha and Husband 2015). Marketing communications in these complex markets require cultural congruity and a careful adaptation of the traditional values of local luxury consumption. Meanwhile, luxury brand image must also keep international consistency to avoid over-localisation, which can result in consumer confusion as regards to brand identity and country of origin (Westjohn et al. 2012). Hence, opinion leaders are regarded as cultural intermediaries (Delisle and Parmentier 2016), which could contribute to socio-cultural transformations of marketing messages in their eWOM posts (Kozinets et al. 2010).

Balancing Commercial: Personal Tensions in eWOM Messages

The success of eWOM marketing is based on opinion leaders adapting marketing messages into more credible, useful, and desirable eWOM messages to consumers (Kozinets et al. 2010). Opinion leaders thus need to balance inherent commercial and non-commercial tensions in their messages (Boerman et al. 2017; Lueck 2015). The commercial contents of opinion leaders' eWOM messages are related to promotional contents, giveaways, discount codes, and advertising through sponsored links (Walden et al. 2015). According to Halvorsen et al. (2013), in contrast to traditional advertisements, the line between commercial content and personal attributes in the bloggers' posts can be considered vague. Even in the interviews with bloggers, they found that some bloggers managed to separate these two kinds of content. Similarly, Boerman et al. (2017) argued that it could be difficult for consumers to discern commercial content from non-commercial content when it is shared by influencers such as celebrities. They found that promotional content embedded in influencers' messages shows great resemblance in format and style with influencers' regular blog content. As bloggers' personal attributes have been shown to be one of the strongest factors influencing brand perceptions and consumptions, there is an underlying risk of bloggers' messages being too commercial, which can lead to a loss of influential effects (Pihl and Sandström 2013). An example of a resource used by Western fashion bloggers for balancing these two types of content is the 'Outfit of the day', which are pictures of bloggers' outfit with detailed descriptions, from the brand to the price of the garment (Pihl and Sandström 2013; Halvorsen et al. 2013).

Sponsorship Disclosure in eWOM Messages

As stated before, bloggers can be paid from sponsoring marketers to review and promote products on their personal blog. Some countries' regulations require to show the endorsement in the sponsored blog messages to avoid non-disclosure problems, which may lead to misleading and deceptive practices (Martin and Smith 2008) and arouse ethical concerns (Rotfeld 2008), for instance, the Federal Trade Commission in the US (Campbell et al. 2013), online endorsements regulation in the UK (CMA 2016), guidelines from the Consumers Foundation in Taiwan (Lu et al. 2014), online advertising regulations issued by the State Administration of Industry and Commerce (SAIC) in China (China Briefing 2016), and similar regulations in South Korea (Hwang and Jeong 2016).

These sponsorship disclosures can negatively affect consumers' responses to the sponsored posts in both Western and non-Western context, such as the Netherlands (Boerman et al. 2017) and Korea (Hwang and Jeong 2016). According to Boerman et al. (2017), revealing the commercial nature of an influencer's message actives generates critical and distrusting beliefs in consumers about this message, demonstrating they do not appreciate this. The recognition of commercial purpose could decrease the effectiveness of endorsement and reduce consumers' intention to engage in eWOM. Many bloggers try to moderate the negative impact of sponsorship disclosure, for instance, emphasising 'honest opinions' in sponsored posts, adding content indicating independent personal opinions into sponsored posts so as to convey an impression that the content of the posts is honest and unbiased (Hwang and Jeong 2016).

Conclusion

This chapter shows that social media has offered a democratisation of fashion opinion leaderships from traditional gatekeepers to social media influencers, who emerge in each socio-economic group and influence the adoption, diffusion, and consumption of fashion. This chapter discusses characteristics of fashion opinion leaders and their importance for eWOM marketing. By introducing products within a private and personal context, fashion opinion leaders' eWOM messages have become a useful marketing channel for brands. This chapter contributes by giving definition of narrative strategies, which are used by fashion opinion leaders to structure eWOM messages, and presents a model, which shows different approaches of narrative strategies to benefit brands' and opinion leaders' cultivation of eWOM marketing on social media. This chapter also discussed three challenges alongside conducting eWOM marketing with fashion opinion leaders, including breaking cultural barriers, balancing commercial and personal tensions in eWOM messages, and sponsorship disclosure. Future research concerning opinion leaders can explore the ways for brands and opinion leaders to deal with these challenges to conduct eWOM campaigns on social media, especially in different cultural contexts.

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12

An Exploratory Investigation into the Consumer Use of WeChat to Engage with Luxury Fashion Brands

Noreen Siddiqui, Mike Mannion, and Ruth Marciniak

Introduction

This chapter explores the behaviours and impact of millennial Chinese fashion consumers' engagement with luxury clothing brands on the WeChat social media platform. Our results suggest that consumers use WeChat extensively to engage with luxury brands and with other consumers within their friendship groups and that these interactions may influence purchasing decisions of luxury fashion brands. There is evidence

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_12

to suggest that the greatest level of consumer trust for fashion and product knowledge resides in the opinions of these WeChat friendship groups and independent fashion bloggers than directly with the brands themselves. This has implications for the tactics brands are currently employing on social media channels.

China is now the second largest economy in the world and since the introduction of economic reforms in 1978 it has experienced dramatic economic growth and managed to successfully weather the 2008 global economic crisis (EIU 2016). Consumers in China now account for approximately 30% of all global luxury consumption, and this is expected to rise to 44% by 2025 (Bu et al. 2017). There are several reasons underlying this anticipated growth. First, there is a drift towards a harmonisation of the prices of Western luxury goods so that they are no longer priced at a premium in China, causing Chinese consumers to purchase luxury goods at home rather than travel to Paris, Milan or Tokyo. Second, tighter custom controls now limit the grey market 'diagou' (Chinese nationals based overseas taking orders and sending goods into China). Finally, the purchasing growth of the millennial consumer (those born between 1980 and 2000) is also a factor. These consumers seek engagement with brands online through new social media platforms (Atsmon and Magni 2011).

Chinese millennials are identified as the new breed of "super consumer" and are big spenders for luxury brands (Simmers et al. 2014). There are around 400 million in China. Many are from the only-child generation who have grown up during China's economic reforms and benefitted considerably through its growing prosperity. They are becoming more individualistic and are using fashion clothing as a way of expressing their individualism. Kuo et al. (2017, p. 1) points out that:

> *Because they grew up socializing and having fun online, shopping to them is not just shopping. It's socializing and entertainment all merged together. They are driving China's e-commerce toward a futuristic orientation with mobile commerce, social commerce, and entertainmerce.*

Chinese millennial consumers prefer fashion clothing brands with Western origins over those with Asian origins and view these brands as symbols of success, prestige and wealth (O'Cass and Siahtiri 2013). Many prefer to interact with brands online via social media platforms than in physical settings. Word-of-mouth communication using social media is their number one influencing factor on their purchase decisions.

WeChat is a social media platform, operating in China, that provides access to a range of facilities including text messaging, voice messaging, video conferencing, sharing of photographs and videos, location sharing and mobile payments. It was launched in China in 2011 and now has 800–900 million active users making it the most popular app for consumers in China to gain fashion insight. Globally, it is the fifth-most-popular social media platform behind Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and QQ, although we recognise that some social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are banned in China (Statista 2018). There are ten million merchants with accounts on WeChat allowing consumers to shop for a wide range of products and services (Economist 2016). The attractions of using WeChat include a very large audience reach, one-to-one messaging functionality, a direct payment system and the facility to exercise a high level of brand control, that is, brands can build their own site, fulfil orders and deal with customers directly on WeChat.

The clothing sector is one of the most popular industry sectors on WeChat. However, luxury fashion brands have been slow in general to use digital channels, for example, Louis Vuitton Moet Hennessy (LVMH) only announced in 2017 that they would be launching a multi-luxury brand digital-commerce site (Williams 2017). This is partly due to a desire to protect the exclusivity of the product and a preference to focus on store presence for brand experience. They have been also less active on social media in particular than many other parts of the retail sector, but they are increasingly changing this position. They recognise that there is a generation of consumer who wish to engage online with the brand directly, and to engage with other consumers about the brand in online brand communities (OBCs). For example, Cartier, Tiffany and Bulgari all use WeChat for some aspects of sales, marketing and customer interactions. Burberry have developed a digital platform to allow consumers to instantly access runway collections from in-store and online channels (Arthur 2016). Chanel, Dior and Gucci have developed their own mobile apps and engage with consumers through a range of social media channels. Despite the huge market opportunities presented by social media in general and WeChat in particular to enable luxury fashion consumers to connect and interact with luxury brands, little is known about the detail of this engagement. Many studies focusing on consumer engagement with luxury brands have, in the main, focused on those popular within Western economies such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (e.g. Jin and Seung 2012; Dhaoui 2014).

The purpose of this chapter is to present empirical research exploring how millennial Chinese luxury fashion brand consumers engage with luxury fashion brands and other consumers through OBCs on WeChat. We have three objectives:

1. to discover their underlying motivations for using WeChat to access luxury brands;
2. to understand their perceptions of brands' direct online engagement with them; and
3. to explore how millennial consumers engage with other customers to discuss luxury fashion brands through WeChat.

This research provides two points of differentiation from previous work. First, we will explore the role of identity boundaries. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter allow OBCs to form easily and they are open to anyone. Yet, whilst members can join with ease, they can choose to reveal little of their identity, remain anonymous and maintain their privacy. On the other hand, whilst WeChat members are well known to each other, friends are admitted from the contact list on the cell phone to WeChat (Lien et al. 2017); it does provide a private space facility enabling people to communicate only with selected others allowing "Circles of Friends" to form (Zhang et al. 2016). It is not well understood quite what impact these WeChat friendship circles have upon consumer engagement. Second, whilst research is emerging on various aspects of consumer behaviour patterns on WeChat (e.g. Lien et al. 2017; Gan 2017), this work tends to focus on general consumers rather than millennial Chinese luxury fashion brand consumers. This research will add to the emerging literature on OBCs, a growing Western interest in WeChat and the use of social media within China.

Consumer Motivation for Social Media Engagement

Social media platforms like WeChat are seen as a driving force for consumer engagement due to their participatory nature and focus on relationships. The Users and Gratification Theory (U&GT) (Katz et al. 1974) is a theoretical framework that argues that people's social and psychological needs influence the media they choose, how they use that media and what gratifications it gives them. These needs can be placed into five categories:

- cognitive needs, including acquiring information, knowledge and understanding;
- affective needs, including emotion, pleasure and feelings;
- personal integrative needs, including credibility, stability and status;
- social integrative needs, including interacting with family and friends; and
- tension release needs, including escape and diversion.

Another type of categorisation is that there are utilitarian and hedonic reasons for usage. Hedonic gratification includes enjoyment, entertainment, fantasy, escapism and self-expression. An addition to this is the feeling of empowerment such as influence over other consumers or the brand and remuneration, for example, receiving some kind of economic reward such as free samples or discounts (Wang and Fesenmaier 2003). Utilitarian gratification includes achievement, mobility, immediacy and information seeking from other consumers and brands.

There are a range of other gratification models. Dunne et al. (2010) identified seven gratifications sought from social media which include communication, friending, identity creation and management, entertainment, escapism, alleviation of boredom, information search and social interaction. Muntinga et al. (2011) identified six gratifications: information, personal identity, integration and social integration, entertainment, empowerment and remunerations. Dolan et al. (2016) identified four main drivers of consumer engagement as utilitarian, entertainment, remuneration and socialisation. Obtaining social gratifications has emerged as key to motivating consumers to engage with social media platforms, to develop friendships, to find relevant information and to have fun (Ruiz-Mafe et al. 2014). Drawing on studies based upon U&GT, we focus upon hedonic, utilitarian and social gratifications on WeChat.

Online Brand Communities: Definitions and Characteristics

A brand community is defined as a "specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations amongst admirers of the brand" (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). The OBCs may be regarded as specialised brand communities that take place in a virtual setting where members interact with each other, exchange information or express their passion for the brand, and their interaction is often mediated. The OBC's core factor is the brand itself but ultimately it exists and persists due to the relationship forged between members. The social identity of the brand community is implied by three key commonalities that are always present: (1) consciousness of kind, (2) shared rituals and traditions and (3) moral responsibility.

Consciousness of kind is the most important marker. It describes the fact that members feel a solid connection to the brand but more significantly that they feel a stronger connection to one another. For a luxury brand, this suggests that members connected to the community place a high value on the brand, have knowledge to share about the brand and appreciate that other members value the brand in a similar way. Shared rituals and traditions is a process through which brand community members maintain, reinforce and diffuse the culture, values, norms, behaviours, specific language signs and symbols, history and consciousness of the community itself. For a luxury brand, this suggests members place a high value on opportunities for a shared discussion on the history of the brand, the founder, the background to certain popular products and a change in logos. Finally, moral responsibility manifests itself through the community members' attitude to retain old members and integrate new ones and to support them to enjoy a meaningful brand consumption experience. For a luxury brand this suggests members place a high value being able to support other members in the community.

Whilst there is considerable work on the effect of OBCs within a social media context (e.g. Laroche et al. 2012; Brodie et al. 2013; Brogi et al. 2013), it is largely based on OBCs created by fans enthusiastic of a specific brand. The role of the brand is passive, and the brand owner may not have knowledge regarding the existence of the community. On the other hand, an official OBC is one created and sponsored by the luxury brand itself with the aim to proactively enable members to exchange fashion opinions and receive brand information with the aim of building a collaborative community that serves both the consumers and the brand itself (Okonkwo 2009). For example, within the Facebook online brand community, consumer engagement can occur at three levels (Schultz 2016). The first level is a consumer becoming a 'fan' of the brand page by clicking 'like' on a brand page. The second level is a brand posting onto a Facebook page, for example, video which may encourage a post from a consumer. The third level is the consumer liking, commenting and sharing information within which thus extends the reach of the information.

Figure 12.1 shows the flows of social interactions within a consumer-brand-consumer triad on Facebook. Consumers can interact with other consumers and the luxury fashion brand. Luxury brands can initiate

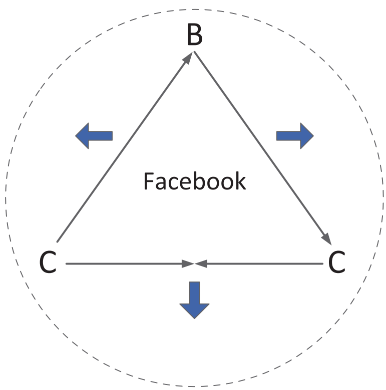

Fig. 12.1 Flows of social interactions within an OBC on Facebook

social interactions with consumers by posting content on a Facebook page. The bold arrows represent the public nature of the interactions shared within the community. There is a single external community circle represented as a dotted line showing that interactions can also extend beyond the community when sharing content with friends of fans (Lipsman et al. 2012). Key characteristics of an OBC on Facebook are (1) members are individual consumers, (2) members are anonymous and (3) social interactions are public and shared within and beyond the community.

Figure 12.2 shows the flows of social interactions within a consumer-brand-consumer triad on WeChat. The key difference in this model is that the community circle is represented as a solid line and shows interactions remaining largely within the 'circle of friends' community. Within this model, the inner solid line represents social interactions are contained within the 'circle of friends' group with the outer dotted line representing the opportunity to share social interactions when sharing with friends of fans. The key characteristics of an OBC on WeChat are as follows: (1) membership is within the 'circle of friends' groups, (2) members are known to each other and (3) social interactions take place within the Circle of Friends' Groups but can be shared beyond this community.

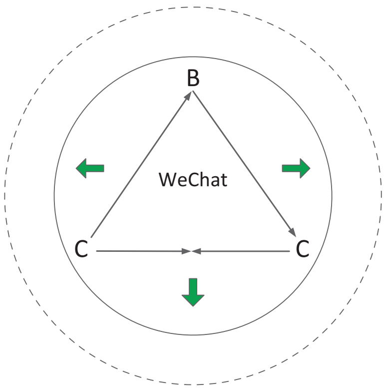

Fig. 12.2 Flows of social interactions within an OBC on WeChat

Consumers Direct Online Engagement with Brands

From a luxury brand's perspective, an important benefit of an OBC is the opportunity it presents for direct engagement with consumers. Brand-consumer engagement has several elements: creating and posting relevant and meaningful content, relinquishing some degree of control over content and allowing sharing of content amongst OBC friends. Collectively, this can encourage a sense of community among members and facilitate conversation and dialogue.

Kozinets (2014) proposed four strategies which could be adopted by brands to maximise the opportunities presented within OBCs. Brands can use OBCs to research and understand their customers by monitoring opinions, information and suggestions, to invite their community to innovate and co-create the brand offering, to demonstrate commitment to consumers by responding to service needs and finally to communicate promotions within the community. On WeChat there are two types of relationships brands that have the potential to develop with consumers: business relationships and friendships (Yang et al. 2016). Business relationships can be developed by posting product-related information or positive customer feedback on their newsfeeds. Friendships can be developed by commenting on customer updates and interacting with customer content.

In developing strategies for engagement within OBCs, however, brands must note that the consumer experience is affected by the way in which the brand administers the OBC (Payne et al. 2009). For example, the brand could affect how members establish relationships with each other and the topics, conversations and actions within the community. The inclusion of commercial actions therefore may be negatively perceived by consumers (Clemons 2009). Trust between consumers and the brand and between consumers and consumers is a pivotal driver in an OBC as a community cannot be seen to be successful if its members are unable to rely upon it (Belanger et al. 2002). Consumers expect a brand company to act as another member, providing information and sharing control but without taking commercial advantage of its position within the community (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010).

Consumer-to-Consumer Engagement

Considerable attention has been paid to the term consumer engagement. For example, Dessart et al. (2015) recognised consumer engagement as a multi-dimensional concept broadly identifying three key engagement dimensions of commitment to a brand, cognitive, affective and behavioural commitment. Much of this work has been developed with a view to giving managerial advice on the consumer-brand and brand-consumer engagement. Less attention is paid to developing an understanding of the scope and scale of managerial attention that needs to be paid to fostering commitments to the brand by enabling consumers to engage with each other.

There remains some debate as to what constitutes the scope of consumer-to-consumer (C2C) engagement. Broadly, it describes behaviours that motivates consumers to engage with each other about one or more brands. Example behaviours include word-of-mouth recommendations, helping others, blogging and writing reviews (Van Doorn et al. 2010). A desire for social engagement to satisfy hedonic needs is one driving force for C2C engagement, and a desire to take on additional pre-purchasing information from different sources to mitigate the risk of a poor purchase to satisfy utilitarian needs is another. Adjei and Noble (2012) showed that positive information shared by community members has a stronger moderating influence on purchasing behaviour than negative information, and that OBCs are effective customer retention tools for retaining both experienced and novice customers.

Brand-led online recommender systems that collate and present summaries of anonymised views of products already purchased offer one form of C2C engagement. Less data-driven informal OBCs offer another. However, there remains much more to learn about the impact that different types of community have on consumers' understanding, commitment and purchasing decisions towards a brand. Communities have different properties, for example, size, range of expertise, geographical reach, anonymity and online activity levels. They can range from large, anonymous, geographically dispersed set of generalists to a small, well-known, local specialists. Product context, for example, perceived value, price, availability also plays its part on how such C2C engagement is to be constructed. Some luxury brands, for example, offer discrete invitations to product launch events to selected consumers only.

Methodology

To address the research objectives, a number of open-ended questions were asked of a modest sample of Chinese millennial luxury fashion consumers. We adopted a phenomenological approach as it provides a firm basis for examining underlying consumer behaviour and motivations consistent with previous research in consumer engagement and social interactions within OBCs. Twelve postgraduate native Chinese millennial students studying fashion marketing at a UK university were invited to participate in this research. They all had detailed knowledge of luxury fashion brands—most had made purchases of luxury brands in the previous 12 months, and most of them had connected with luxury brands on WeChat. They were also users of Weibo and Baidu and, since they had come to the UK, had become users of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. To address the research objectives, a number of open-ended questions were asked which centred on three broad areas: social media use and motivation to use WeChat, consumer engagement with luxury brands and consumer engagement within friendships groups.

Empirical Results and Discussion

Chinese Millennials' Motivations for Using WeChat

The respondents confirmed that they checked their social media accounts very frequently, consistently with reports suggesting that on average, millennials in the UK spend more than eight hours a day connected with digital media and communications (www.digitaldayresearch.co.uk).

Chinese millennials have acquired almost 10 years' experience of using mobile phones and at least 5 years of experience on WeChat. Four main gratifications were identified:

- to remain connected with family and friends;
- ease of mobile payments;
- easy access to products and services;
- easy access to playing games and watching videos.

The respondents use WeChat to keep in touch with family and friends, gain information and have fun through liking, sharing and commenting on posts within the friendship groups.

> *keeping in touch with family and friends in friendships groups feels special as you know everyone……you can find out lots of information so if I need to find out information I just go on to my friendships groups.*

Another attraction was the facility to create new friendships through the recommendations of a friend via the exchange of electronic business cards, QR codes or the geolocation function which allows you to 'shake the phone' to locate new friendships. The respondents also acknowledged they had a wide number of different friendship groups.

Cashless mobile payments and the transfer of money to family and friends are viewed as key advantages of using WeChat. Payment services refer to transactional payments for goods and services and payments as gifts. Sending 'red letter packets' and transfer of monies to and from China is highly valued by millennials. The cashless payment facility is underpinned by the complete trust in the parent company, Tencent, to maintain privacy and security of data. The significance of the role of cashless payments has not been highlighted in previous research on social media platforms. Some major Western social media platforms have yet to seamlessly integrate a payment facility.

For Chinese millennials, utilitarian gratifications are satisfied through access to a wide range of products and services on the go regarded as 'good convenience' and 'helps to make life easier', and by providing the opportunity to access information sources and free calls with communication undertaken via text, pictures, videos, voice messages and use of QR codes. Hedonic gratifications can be satisfied in WeChat because it provides the opportunity to be entertained through access to a wide assortment of games. Doing so creates an enjoyable experience and a focal point for discussion with friendship groups.

Chinese Millennials' Direct Online Engagement with Brands

Within the sample the decision to engage directly with luxury fashion brands on WeChat varied according to their awareness of the luxury brand's presence on We Chat, from a sarcastic and incredulous 'why should I look at luxury brands on WeChat?" to 'Yes I have connected to luxury fashion brands and follow them on WeChat'. Clearly, even those luxury brands that have a presence on WeChat can do more to promote that presence or to highlight there is the opportunity to connect with the brand.

In WeChat when a member of a friendship group decides to follow a luxury fashion brand, all friends received notifications from the brand on updates and new campaigns. These push notifications are directed from the brand to the consumer and demonstrate evidence of the development of business relations with consumers. However, these are regarded as monologues which may encourage some social interactions within the friendship group but do not satisfy utilitarian gratifications related to brand information (Tsao et al. 2011).

Fashion brands can be followed on WeChat, and one can access the website of fashion brand from WeChat, for example, Valentino, Dior. The luxury fashion brand Burberry was followed by several respondents. Relevant product information was viewed with Wu Yi Tan (Chinese actress) noted in a positive manner as a model on the Burberry WeChat account. The opportunity to view fashion shows, updates on campaigns, and looking for limited edition, exclusive products only available to Chinese consumers was highly valued. This would indicate that followers are actively seeking hedonic gratifications associated with luxury fashion brands, but this is not provided on the WeChat brand community.

A number of respondents noted the use of WeChat Moments posts by brands. WeChat Moments allow luxury brands to create mini programmes, place advertising and create games to encourage engagement and provide hedonic value. The Moments Ads allow brands to place ads in feeds otherwise reserved for posts by friends. It is considered to be a useful strategy to build brand awareness, enhancing interaction with WeChat followers, and provides an opportunity to purchase through these ads. At the time of data collection, there was an awareness of Moments Ads existence but respondents were unsure of their purpose.

Luxury brand posts provide opportunities for C2C social interactions within the friendship group. However, all interactions remain within the confines of the friendship group; thus, any C2C brand and brand to consumer interactions remain within friendship group members. Whilst the opportunity exists to share such information with 'friends of friends', the respondents emphatically preferred not to share any brand interaction beyond the friendship group. On Facebook and some other social media platforms, the size of a brand community can be very large as anyone expressing an interest in the brand can become a fan and access social interactions taking place within the community. The size of the brand communities in WeChat, however, is often much more smaller and confined to friendship groups, making it more complex for brands to balance customised messages with economies of scale.

One impact of this is the Chinese millennial luxury brand fashion consumer's attitude to typical brand company responses. The first type of response is to a consumer post about one of its brands simply takes the terse form of pointing to more specific information on a website or at a nearby geographic store location. The second type of response simply informs consumers that they will receive a more detailed response within 24 hours. Both types of responses are not looked upon favourably even if they may be appropriate. In the first case the response is too short and not personalised. In the second case the timeframe is considered too long to wait ('… so I searched elsewhere and found the information quickly'). Such responses drive Chinese millennial consumers to seek utilitarian and hedonic gratifications on other channels, for example, Weibo, fashion bloggers, Baidu and Ali Baba.

Due to the nature of friendship groups, there is a preference to maintain the level of social interactions within the friendship group as this is the location of trust within a WeChat community; hence, social gratifications are satisfied by membership within a friendship group. More emphasis is, therefore, placed on the luxury fashion brand to provide utilitarian and hedonic gratifications which may influence purchase decisions taking place within the WeChat community.

The perception of the respondents was that, although luxury fashion brands do often provide relevant information, they are not sufficiently proactively developing relationships through brand communities or allowing consumers to participate with the brand. They are increasingly developing digital business relationships with consumers but not supplementing them with the social relationships which these millennials value in contributing to their purchasing decisions.

Chinese Millennials Engagement with Each Other About Luxury Fashion Brands on WeChat

The respondents confirmed that the social interactions that they experience in small-size friendship groups were a very important contributory factor in the development of their understanding of a brand, its products and for influencing their purchasing decisions. However, they also acknowledged that they also seek the opinions of other 'experts' to supplement the advice they get from their friends. Such experts might be personal shoppers, fashion bloggers, journalists or other social media platforms users.

The subject of fashion is a popular topic of conversation within the friendship groups with clothing brands, styles, fashion and inspiration frequently discussed. Methods for exchanging opinions were by 'liking', 'sharing' and commenting on posts from the brand company and other consumers. These brands are highly sought after despite consumer awareness that the purchase price of these brands is normally higher within China indicating that price harmonisation has not yet fully made an impact.

Common pre-purchase discussion themes include company and brand information and perception, product availability, product locations, purchasing options, style type and colour. Purchasing options include in store, on the website or the possibility of the purchase being made outside China, resurfacing the role of the 'daigou'. Post-purchase discussion themes include the impact of the purchase, the occasion on which the purchase was used, how it made a person feel, product quality, for example, materials, stitching, location of logo, colour, handle length and width.

The Role of Personal Shoppers

In order to make purchases, friends may set up their own online store in WeChat taking on the role of the personal shopper (daigou) and providing an alternative purchase channel for their friends or relatives regardless of whether the purchase is to be made from stores, websites or online shopping malls. Such a purchase option is valued because it is transacted by a known friend who has the trust of the friendship group. The role of the 'daigou' is new within research and has a significant role to play.

Personal shoppers often copy pictures from official websites of luxury brands and provide detailed product information to establish the authenticity of the luxury products. They identify the products that can be accessed outside China. Any friend can contact a personal shopper in private, that is, away from others within the friendship group to make arrangements for the exchange. It maintains the element of privacy as it is not a stranger who is trying to sell something but a reliable known friend.

The Role Key Opinion Leaders

Credible sources of information include following fashion bloggers who are regarded as key opinions leaders with pages on Weibo. Well-known fashion bloggers are seen as fashion 'it' girls who provide up-to-the-minute fashion and styling tips on their pages. Often, these bloggers may sell their own brand of clothing. The value of both the luxury fashion brand and the blogger is enhanced when the luxury fashion brand is namechecked within posts, pictures and videos of the fashion blogger. These pictures are often styled as fashion shoots similar to those of fashion magazines such as Vogue and attract the attention of members within a friendship group who desire detailed information on the luxury brand. The use of Chinese celebrities enhances the attraction of luxury fashion brands and creates an opportunity for social interactions with the friendship group.

Other Social Media Platforms

Other popular digital channels used by the Chinese millennials include Weibo, Baidu and Ali Baba. Weibo in particular is considered to be a fast and easy-to-use source of information. However, as it is considered to have significant Chinese government oversight, the comments left on these pages are not considered to be trustworthy. Official websites of luxury fashion brands provide useful information.

Discussion of Results

Chinese millennials utilise social media in a similar manner to many Western millennials and use WeChat extensively to engage with luxury fashion brands. They are driven by social, utilitarian (including payment services) and hedonic gratifications to use WeChat. Social interactions within OBCs on WeChat occur within friendships groups placing greater emphasis on the luxury fashion brand to leverage these groups to satisfy millennial purchasers' utilitarian and hedonic gratifications and hence influence purchasing decisions. Whilst luxury fashion brands are increasing their social media presence, they are often transaction-focused and offer limited opportunities for consumer-brand-consumer interactions. This encourages OBCs to form as independent fan-based communities in the absence of official brand-led OBC over which the brand has more influence. It also encourages the seeking of detailed brand-related information and content from a wider range of sources beyond friendship groups.

These trends point to an amended model of flows of social interactions within a consumer-brand-consumer triad for WeChat (Fig. 12.3). First, the flows of social consumer-to-consumer (C2C) interactions are strong with trust within the friendship groups represented by a bold line. The flows of social interactions between consumer-brand-consumer are weak which is reflected by the lack of an engagement strategy by luxury fashion brands on WeChat represented by the single line. The flows of interactions remain within the friendship groups with the potential to share information with friends of fans beyond the community, yet are not encouraged by friendship group members. The model includes an arrow within the C2C reaching beyond the friendship group as friends seek hedonic and utilitarian gratifications beyond the OBC. The key characteristics are (1) membership is within 'Circle of Friends' Groups, (2) members are known to each other, (3) preference for social interactions are shared only within Circle of Friends' group and (4) members seek luxury fashion brand-related information and content beyond the OBC.

Luxury fashion brands, therefore, need to consider how best to create relationships within friendship groups and develop strategies that will influence purchase decisions. This would allow the luxury fashion brands

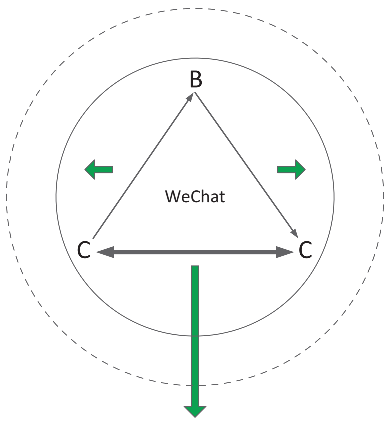

Fig. 12.3 Amended flows of social interactions within an OBC on WeChat

to satisfy hedonic and utilitarian gratifications within WeChat and therefore diminish the need for consumers to search elsewhere for such needs. For example, knowing the leverage that friends have on each other should encourage brands to win over at least one 'champion' who will then leverage their influence over their circles of friends. This might mean providing highly specific, relevant and timely brand information to fewer but very well-connected consumers and encouraging them to share this with their friends within their friendship circles to extend the reach of the brand.

Conclusions

Luxury fashion brands need to make millennial consumers aware of their presence on WeChat and consider their engagement strategy on this platform. The primary motivators for using WeChat for millennials are socialisation, payment facilities, utilitarian and hedonic gratifications. Chinese millennials value comments within their friendship groups and place great trust in this community preferring social interactions to remain within the friendship group. Social gratifications are satisfied by membership within a friendship group. This places greater emphasis on luxury fashion brands with OBCs on WeChat to satisfy hedonic and utilitarian gratifications. At present most luxury brands lack sophisticated engagement strategies on WeChat. This is encouraging the development of the 'daigou' within friendship groups and a need to satisfy hedonic and utilitarian gratification beyond the OBC. Luxury fashion brands should consider how best they can make use of each consumer-brand-consumer interaction. They should be more strategic with their use of WeChat communities by offering consumers the opportunity for increased engagement, for example, presenting the latest brand information on exclusive products with links to videos of latest campaigns on these products. They should also consider connecting with key influencers with friendship groups and the use of influential bloggers in an integrated manner.

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13

Effects of Beauty Vloggers' eWOM and Sponsored Advertising on Weibo

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Introduction

This chapter centres on the effects sponsored advertising and video bloggers (vloggers) have on consumers' perceptions of and attitudes towards beauty products on Weibo, an influential Chinese micro-blog with an average daily user rate of 154m (BBC 2017). Similarly to other social media networking sites Weibo allows sharing status updates, posting personal messages, interacting with others, and following opinion-leaders—here beauty vloggers.

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_13

Technology has enabled dialogic communication between consumers and businesses that allows real-time information sharing globally (Rapp et al. 2013). Traditionally, marketing communication was a "one-to-many" company-led approach, which has shifted towards a "many-to-many" approach that empowers the consumer to openly advocate or reject products/brands (Berthon et al. 2008). This phenomenon is known as eWOM and is perceived as a credible and trustworthy source for consumers—comparatively to company messages—as it provides personal reviews about products/services (Reichelt et al. 2013). In a digitalized age eWOM has gained momentum with approximately 84% of people accessing the internet in 2014, and of these 74% preview products online before making a purchasing decision (Ofcom 2015). eWOM and s-commerce are interlinked as s-commerce implies that users are interactive on social media (here Weibo) and engage in commercial activities (Kim 2013). Whilst past research indicates that online reviews provided by peers and beauty vloggers affect consumers when deciding on a product/service (Okazaki 2009), it lacks investigation of how the effect may change when incorporating sponsored advertising. This is further enhanced with the emergence of s-commerce, which is a multi-user-based ecommerce activity enabled through technology to enhance the shopping experience (Yamakami 2014). Thus, a question that arises is whether sponsored advertising has an influence on consumers' s-commerce activities.

Vlogging is commonplace within the beauty industry, with opinion-leaders sharing their insight into products/services through make-up tutorials and product reviews. Due to the anonymous nature of eWOM, it is up to the consumer to decide which vlogger to trust and whether this may lead into a product purchase. The level of trust usually depends on the number of followers, how many posts vloggers share, and the feedback they gain from peers (Chapple and Cownie 2017).

The Chinese beauty industry context was purposefully chosen as it is the second largest consumer market after the USA and the total retail value of beauty and personal care products in China reached RMB361 billion 2017, achieving year-on-year growth of 9.6% (Euromonitor 2015). With a growing number of Chinese internet users sharing their attitudes towards products and making purchasing decisions through eWOM, companies have recognized that vloggers pose an opportunity to promote their brands' products/services to a wider audience (Guan et al. 2014). This research seeks to

1. understand the motivations behind consumers following beauty vloggers on Weibo;
2. explore the attitudes towards and perceived quality of beauty vloggers from the perspective of subscribers with different levels of product involvement; and
3. investigate the attitudes towards beauty advertising on Weibo.

Literature Review

Chu and Kim (2011) highlight that consumers' decision-making processes to purchase beauty products are affected by vloggers, eWOM, and social status. Past research predominantly focused on the importance of advertising messages, which are moderated by variables such as involvement, motivation, and intentionality (Aitken et al. 2008). Yet, these studies fail to see the audience as part of the dialogic communication, who create meaning and relationships with products/services (ibid).

The concepts of eWOM, opinion-leadership, social status, and s-commerce are closely linked and can be examined by taking into account three aspects: opinion seeking, giving, and passing (Chu and Kim 2011). Opinion seeking implies researching the product/service prior to purchasing them. Opinion-leaders influence this information, by "giving" their insights into these products/services (Zhao et al. 2018). Opinion passing is unique to the online context, as users can disseminate messages on a global scale.

eWOM and Opinion-Leaders

eWOM originates from traditional word-of-mouth (WOM), fostered by new technologies and Web 2.0, and has the power to persuade consumers to engage in s-commerce transactions (Ali et al. 2018). The emergence of social networking sites (SNS) and micro-blogs, such as Weibo, has changed the advertising landscape. Although companies may not be able to control all digital media content, the emergence of v/blogging sees an increase in rewards (e.g. free samples, discounts) for opinion-leaders to review, promote, and even sell branded products (Kapitan and Silvera 2015). This implies that companies have the opportunity to utilize third-party blogs to stimulate dialogic communication, whilst at the same time influencing followers' attitudes and building interactive relationships. Within Western countries, cosmetic brands have established strong bonds with beauty bloggers, such as Michelle Phan or Zoella, who receive millions for product endorsement (Harvey 2013). Blog advertising in China is still underdeveloped, with sponsored relationships only recently emerging.

Past research suggests that interpersonal relationships developed through opinion seeking, giving, and passing play a vital role in influencing consumers' purchasing decisions (Chu and Kim 2011; Zhao et al. 2018). Those individuals that influence others are best known as opinion-leaders and can excerpt a significant effect on the decision-making process (Rose and Kim 2011). Opinion-leaders are seen to have specialist knowledge and expertise in a subject area that is of great value to the opinion seeker, which creates a level of trust between the individual seeking information and the individual giving their opinion (Yilmaz et al. 2011). Trust or trustworthiness implies that the audience believes that contents posted by the opinion-leader are objective and honest, whereas expertise suggests that the individual has the ability and knowledge to make accurate and reliable statements (ibid). Within an online environment, source credibility focuses on trustworthiness, expertise, and takes into account sponsor credibility, which is the perceived credibility of the blogger, and site credibility, which looks at the blog in its entirety (Hill et al. 2017). A question that emerges is whether the perceived credibility or unreliability of the vlog/vlogger transfers to a brand's product/service. This is especially important, as negative information has a greater impact on information seekers than positive information (Ahluwalia 2002).

eWOM and Blog Advertising

In order to understand the effectiveness of vlogging, it is vital to highlight the unique characteristics of vlogs. A vlog is an online medium that allows the author to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions about—here—beauty and cosmetic products. Thus, vlogs are tools that allow self-representation in an online environment that reveal a degree of the vloggers' real identities (Gilly and Schau 2003). As highlighted, credibility of these vloggers depends on their trustworthiness and expertise.

Contrary to traditional advertising, vlog advertising is carefully embedded in the posts and less obvious to the audience, which implies that it may be challenging to distinguish between editorial and advertorial content (Ho et al. 2015). Past research suggests that active product advertising on blogs decreases followers' purchase intention, as the credibility of the blogger decreases due to being seen as being sponsored by the brand (Said 2010; Sweney 2014). Whether this remains true for cosmetic vlogs is unclear, as vloggers typically highlight the brands' names and physical products when proclaiming their opinion. Yet, this may not necessarily mean that these vlogs are sponsored. To explain, *WhyEricaWhy* (vlogger) shares detailed SUQQU cosmetics make-up tutorials, whilst *Rebekah Eller* (vlogger) endorses new products, such as the Escargot Collection. Whether or not these vlogs are sponsored or simply chosen by the vloggers is not apparent from the vlog, yet (in the UK) must be declared in the notes underneath the vlog post. Whilst past research has investigated how companies can utilize vlog advertising and consumer-generated content for their advantage (Lohtia et al. 2013), research lacks to explain what effect this may have on consumers' attitudes and perceptions.

In summary, companies increasingly build relationships with opinion-leaders by providing them with rewards. Petty and Andrews (2008) suggest that followers tend to have more trust in bloggers, who receive indirect rewards rather than those that receive cash. The latter is often seen as a "fake gimmick" that was purchased by the company and thus lacks credibility (Lohtia et al. 2013).

eWOM, Consumer Product Involvement, and Motivations to Follow Vloggers

eWOM depends on creating consumer-generated content, which is often influenced by opinion-leaders. There are three different degrees of consumer involvement:

- High: enduring or situational, as it is stable and sustainable within a particular context; actively generate content (Andrews et al. 2001).
- Medium: consumers occasionally seek reviews before purchasing products; may not necessarily engage in content generation.
- Low: purchase without considering third-party feedback, yet prone to heuristics.

It is interesting to note that products recommended by an everyday audience are seen to be more powerful and effectiveness, due to their perceived similarity and proximity to the audiences' background and status (Aitken et al. 2008). Contrarily, high-involvement purchases are researched in-depth, thereby relying on reviews provided by opinion-leaders and experts. Thus, consumers interested in high-involvement products seek information through cognitive endeavours before making a purchase decision. Opinion-leaders with high expertise are perceived to have credible information and/or objective arguments that may help consumers to evaluate the product (Clark et al. 2012).

As indicated, opinion-leaders can influence consumers' purchasing decisions, and thus are of interest to companies wishing to promote their products/services through third-party blogs. Research highlights that a reason to follow vloggers and engage in content generation is that opinion-leaders are seen as product enthusiasts, who are passionate about brands and want to share their experience. Vlogs provide a platform for these individuals to talk about their passion without being judged by outsiders, those who show neither an understanding for nor an interest in beauty products and tutorials (Dasgupta 2012). This implies that the 'social' media aspect of these vlogs allows followers to comment on content and start conversations about topics that their 'real life' friends may not be interested in. Followers are also believed to be motivated by the fact that they can learn from opinion-leaders' vlogs (e.g. make-up tutorials) (Fisher 2014). Thus, opinion-leaders seem to be of importance to consumers when purchasing high-involvement products, whilst consumer-generated content is appreciated in a low-involvement scenario.

Methodology

This qualitative research investigates the effects of beauty vloggers eWOM and sponsored advertising on followers' attitudes and perceptions. Although qualitative research cannot be generalized, data collected from the semi-structured interviews provide an insight into emotional, social, and subjective feelings of followers towards advertising posted on Weibo. This research provides the initial findings of an on-going project and is, thus, exploratory in nature. Three participants were selected falling into high-, medium-, and low-involvement groups. Each of these participants is actively using Weibo (Table 13.1). The in-depth interviews were conducted in both English and Chinese and produced rich data sets. Interviews conducted in Chinese were carefully translated into English and back again, to ensure no meaning was lost.

Table 13.1 Data collection summary

Involvement	ID	Age	Key information
High	Is1	25	High interest in cosmetics
	Is2	21	Familiarity with a wide range of popular and trending cosmetic brands
	Is3	23	Follow 30 or more beauty vloggers
			Average monthly cosmetics spending: £100
Medium	Is4	22	General interest in cosmetics
	Is5	20	Familiarity popular cosmetic brands
	Is6	21	Follow up to 30 beauty vloggers
			Average monthly cosmetics spending: £50
Low	Is7	24	No interest in cosmetics
	Is8	26	Familiar with everyday cosmetic brands
	Is9	23	No vlogger subscription
			Average monthly cosmetics spending: £15

With multiple researchers coding data, the process followed Easterby-Smith et al.'s (2008) seven-step guide: familiarization, reflection, conceptualization, cataloguing concepts, re-coding, linking, and re-evaluation in order to guarantee continuity, coherence, and clarity. The researchers individually coded each interview, before in-depth discussions took place to compare and contrast emerging themes. Discrepancies that emerged throughout the coding process were carefully reviewed, discussed, and re-coded.

The limitations are first, the sample size, which focuses on nine semi-structured in-depth interviews with female participants. Although this number of interviews is low, the interviewees selected were able to best answer the research questions posed in this article. Moreover, the quality of the interviews conducted allowed for various insights to emerge, which provide the basis for future investigations. Second, the sample selected focuses on female consumers only; this can be justified as the cosmetics consumption ratio is split into 27% male and 73% female (OSEC 2012), which concurs with observations made of the Weibo beauty blog followers.

Discussion and Findings

Effects of Social Influencers and eWOM on Consumer Perceptions

Participants in Groups 1 and 2 highlighted that they classify themselves as being part of Weibo 'beauty circle' and indicate that they subscribe to vloggers and each other in order to keep up to date with the newest tutorials and posts (Is1, Is4). Beauty vloggers are idealized, as they are perceived as extremely beautiful and highly skilled. However, various interviewees pointed out that the fast pace within which information is shared has also led to a 'copycat' phenomenon and homogenization of video tutorials and vlogs. Is5 states:

> The majority of beauty vloggers are more skilful than us… some just copy ideas. On V-Day, their make-up tutorials are all the same… using pink eye shadow with glitter… I prefer vloggers who have unique and creative ideas.

Although followers build relationships with vloggers and are keen to see their newest posts (Chu and Kim 2011), they also seek unique and novel styles, which allows enhancing their own personality. Whilst being among "like-minded friends" (Is2), who share a passion for cosmetics, followers want to keep their individuality. Vloggers thus have to not only satisfy the followers needs, by posting at least "maybe twice, three times a day" (Is5), but also create unique content. With information being shared instantaneously and globally, this may not always be easy, as copycats can create similar content.

Interviewees 1 and 3 further indicate that they are inspired by the vlogger's passion and the creative way they portray these products in their vlogs: "I think they must love cosmetics and make-up, nobody would spend so much money and time on a thing they don't like" (Is3). Interviewees feel a strong connection with vlogger (Chu and Kim 2011; Zhao et al. 2018), as they are seen to be 'like minded friends', who share tips and hints and allow discussing make-up brands. "Some make-up looks are beautiful, but too dense for a day look. I think few people can appreciate them in real life. But on Weibo, the bloggers can talk about make-up skills, which is exciting for bloggers (such as myself)" (Is1). From the interviews it becomes apparent that Weibo provides followers with a sense of belonging, a platform in which they can share their feelings and emotions and talk about their passion without being "shut down" (Is6). The virtual environment creates a secure network and emotional bonds between opinion-leaders and followers. This has various implications for marketers, as they can use these emotional bonds to promote their brand's products through these opinion-leaders.

Similarly to vloggers, followers receive negative comments from "haters" (Is2), who do not understand their passion, "because this is their hobby… some vloggers get negative comments. Haters say 'you are ugly, don't post your photos any more'" (Is1). Outsiders are oblivious to the time, effort, and money spent on creating cosmetic vlogs, as they perceived them to be a waste of time, whilst followers see an opportunity to share their feelings and emotions (Is3). Yet, interviewees have also indicated that the quality of the vlog and the vloggers' appearance are vitally important. Opinion-leaders are only trusted if they are regarded as 'beautiful'. This implies that the appearance of an opinion-leader has an influence on their persuasive power to convince followers to buy into a brand. This can be explained as followers aspire to be like their opinion-leaders.

In summary, trust in opinion-leaders is associated with their level of expertise and physical appearance.

Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Beauty Vloggers

Participants indicate that beauty vloggers are talented, creative, and experienced in applying make-up. Their credibility is further enhanced though their (vloggers) background in art and/or design. "Some vloggers have arts backgrounds; one of them did a zombie look on Halloween… it scared me. Another blogger did a Lady Gaga look… they can draw anything. A day look is just a piece of cake" (Is5). This implies that the make-up skills presented in the vlogs are appealing and used as evidence for their expertise (Rose and Kim 2011). Video tutorials range from easy to advanced and provide followers with the necessary skills to copy their look at home.

"I saw a home tour video of a blogger, in which her bedroom looks like a warehouse of cosmetics" (Is3), which indicates that opinion-leaders are believed to own a lot of cosmetic products and experiment with different brands. Thus, vloggers are trusted to recommend products to the general population, who have not tried a lot of different products themselves. Yet, credibility is not associated solely by owning a lot of make-up, instead vloggers need to demonstrate that they are actively using the products by showing used packaging, and create artistic and everyday looks on vlogs (Is4). This finding concurs with literature about the 'expertise' dimension of source credibility, which is the capability of the opinion-leader to make accurate and reliable statements (e.g. Yilmaz et al. 2011). However, Interviewee 2 argues that 'expertise' is dependent on the audience. If followers are high-involvement customers, their level of knowledge may be similar to that of the vlogger; thus, these followers may not always trust vlogger recommendations: "when I started to learn about make-up and knew nothing about cosmetics, I felt that everything a blogger said was right… I followed blindly. Now I've tried many brands, I know what I need… I'll read it (vlogs) selectively" (Is1). This implies, the longer consumers follow beauty vloggers, the more they learn about different products and techniques, and the more knowledgeable they will become. Thus, whilst vloggers may be able to influence followers at the beginning, their influence weakens the more experience followers get. Contrarily, for medium-involvement consumers, beauty vloggers have more credibility, as vloggers still have more experience with products. It is noteworthy to highlight that low-involvement consumers do not trust vloggers, as they are seen as strangers; this is further discussed in the last section.

Interviewees indicate they do not solely rely on one vlogger but read multiple vlogs; thus, recommendations by a single opinion-leader are not enough to persuade high- and medium-involved consumers. "It depends if I've used this brand… if I've never used it, I tend to listen to the vloggers then go to the store and try it… if several vloggers recommend a product at the same time, I'll go buy it immediately. I bought the Clarisonic facial brush cause *I saw many recommendations*" (Is6). Group 1 interviewees insist that their trust and purchasing intent of a product recommended by a vlogger depends on how they perceived the vlogger. "If this vlogger is the one I've subscribed to for a long time… she is like a friend… so I trust what they say" (Is2), which confirms previous research (e.g. Yilmaz et al. 2011). This implies that "following time" is essential in their persuasiveness of recommending a product purchase (Petty and Andrews 2008). Contrary, medium-involved individuals also look for consumer-to-consumer recommendations before making a purchasing decision. "I will look through the comments below the micro-blog, if the majority is positive, I'll try" (Is4). This has various implications: data indicate that it may not be enough to simply sponsor one opinion-leader but may need to focus on a group of influencers, who ideally have similar follower groupings but not necessarily the same. It is noteworthy that there is a difference between high- and medium-involved consumers. Whilst high-involved individuals trust vloggers when recommending a product/service, medium-involved bloggers also consult peer recommendations.

High-involvement participants insist that they regularly follow and un-follow beauty vloggers, as some opinion-leaders change after vlogging for a long time. The more followers they gain, the more they seem to change (Is3). Whilst at the beginning it may be about simply sharing information and discussing cosmetics, their 'fame' attracts company attention and may lead to sponsorship deals. "At the start, they're regular consumers just like us, posting their feelings of cosmetics… But when they have lots of subscriber… they want attention more than pure sharing" (Is2). Interviewee 5 states "sharing makes you happy, if you're good at sharing information, you'll get more attention… you can become famous and get an oversized ego". Data suggest an attitude change in vloggers with an increased fame status towards becoming a commercialized brand and away from simply sharing feelings and emotions. This change is negatively perceived by followers and results in un-following vlogs.

Contrary to Roberts et al. (2006), we found that the attraction vloggers gain through their large following may detract from their original attitude and intention. Thus, company rewards and sponsorship deals could be seen as having a negative effect on performance, as individuals start to un-follow their former heroes. This indicates that vloggers need to be careful of their recommendations; if they are seen to blindly push a product and only praise its benefits, followers "won't buy it… if a blogger keeps pushing a product. There is no perfect product" (Is2).

In summary, dialogic communication is twofold: first, vloggers are seen as trusted sources that have the expertise and knowledge to recommend products; this however is dependent on the audiences' own understanding of beauty products. Second, followers changed their attitude towards vloggers, if they are seen to directly promote products. Although make-up brands and products can dominantly feature in vlogs and tutorials, explicit advertising is seen as unacceptable and leads to un-following vloggers.

Attitude Towards Beauty Advertising on Weibo

High-involved interviewees indicate that they utilize Weibo as a reference source that allows them to critically assess cosmetic products. High-involved interviewees are less critical, as they believe the feelings and emotions shared by the vloggers are valuable recommendations. To explain, Interviewee 2 states that "a vlogger's words are more like a reference… a product may fit you, but not me… we all have different skin types. I'll selectively read information". This suggests that consumers with high-product involvement are well informed, and critical of information received, thus, distinguishes between relevant and irrelevant information posted. "What I need is the vlogger's own feelings about the product, not an official message. If a vlogger just reproduces the company's message… I could get a leaflet" (Is3). Followers suggest that they appreciate links to the products presented. Although this could be seen as direct advertising, Group 1 interviewees feel that this is an additional service rather than explicit promotion. To explain, "sometimes a vlogger recommends cosmetics… but they're hard to find online… I'm too indoorsy to go out… a vlogger once vlogged about a brand and posted the link… I bought that eye shadow through that link" (Is2). A key finding is that in order to encourage buy-in from high-involved followers, vlog advertising needs to be practically oriented and actively integrated into the posts. Data suggest that sponsored adverts are more acceptable if the products are clearly described and tutorials produced. Furthermore, product links are not seen as sponsored ads, but rather as a convenient way to purchase products. The findings presented in this chapter contradict what has previously been found by authors such as Said (2010) and Sweney (2014), who suggest that credibility and trust decrease when brands are prompted deliberately.

Creativity is key for vlogs, which implies content needs to be interesting, unique, and the selling intention needs to be encoded. Although "I don't really care whether it's an advertisement or not… don't tell me in an 'advertising' way… Don't be too explicit" (Is6). Yet, followers want to have access to product links and detailed descriptions of the products. This finding concurs with Heider (2013), who suggests that perceived intention of communications are essential in establishing trust between vloggers and consumers.

Medium-involved interviewees indicate that negative recommendations have a greater impact on their purchasing decision than positive ones (Ahluwalia 2002). "Benefit had a new product… Some said it helps shrink pores… it used to be popular on Weibo… what impressed me was a vlogger saying it was like wax… I went to see for myself… it wasn't that bad… I still didn't buy it" (Is5). This is contrary to the behaviour of high-involved individuals, who will not try products if their opinion-leaders provide negative reviews, yet high-involved individuals seek information selectively. "I used to buy everything that was recommended now I selectively go through their posts. I even buy things if they have a negative review if I know the brand… vloggers hate Sekkisei… but I feel it brightens my skin" (Is1). This can be explained due to the fact that individuals classified as high involved also have a high level of expertise and knowledge about products.

In summary, the findings on vlog advertising are inconclusive. Although direct adverts that push products are not appreciated, it is expected to gain detailed information web links in the vlogs.

Low-Involvement Participants and Beauty Vloggers

Although low-involvement participants highlighted that they are neither following beauty vloggers on Weibo nor read reviews online, they do rely on recommendations from their friends, who engage with beauty vlogs. "I ask my friends… They know a lot… I trust them… I don't know any vloggers… I don't know if they tell the truth" (Is8). This implies that low-involvement participants see their friends as opinion-leaders and a reliable source for purchasing products. Parallels can be drawn between the findings from Groups 2 and 3 in that both rely on third-party recommendations. Group 3 highlights that their 'real life' friends are more trustworthy than a stranger that posts on Weibo (Is9). However, there seems to be an indirect influence of vloggers on low-involved participants, as their friends are actively participating in discussions on Weibo and share the recommendations they have seen online. Similarly, they also trust negative reviews given by their friends: "If they say a product is bad, I won't buy it" (Is7).

Although low-involvement participants highlighted that they do not trust beauty vloggers, they still seek information from strangers: "If I need a whitening serum, I search it online… If most comments of a product are positive, I'll buy it" (Is9). This suggests that eWOM is highly influential and persuades participants to make a purchasing decision. Participants' comments concur with past research in that the anonymous nature of eWOM can make it challenging to clearly depict messages and evaluate the reliability and quality of eWOM (Zhao et al. 2018).

Whilst sponsored advertising and vloggers do not seem to directly impact low-involvement consumers' purchasing decisions, they are indirectly persuaded through friends, who are actively part of the Weibo beauty community. A key to successfully influencing consumers is establishing an emotional bond, as friends are trusted and reliable resources for information. The more familiar individuals are with the 'source' (vlogger, friend, opinion-leader), the more likely it is that they have an influence on their purchasing decision.

Overall, it can be concluded that the higher the level of expertise is of consumers, the more they appreciate featured advertising that highlights product links and make-up tutorials. High-involved consumers trust vloggers, as they are perceived to be peers, who can be trusted.

Conclusion

Beauty vlogging is still a relatively new phenomenon that is increasingly gaining momentum, with the industry itself receiving an upward economic turn. The findings from this study highlight that beauty vlogs differ dramatically from regular blogs, in which the level of trust decreases with the amount of endorsed products shown (Sweney 2014). Followers expect to be provided with detailed product information and web links. Emotional bonds further enhance the persuasiveness of the vloggers, who receive a 'friend-like' status that moves them from being a stranger on the internet to someone you can trust and rely on.

The findings have various implications for marketers: first, sponsored advertising in general terms does not seem to have an impact on consumers' perceptions towards a brand, if the vlogger not only highlights the benefits but also provides a 'genuine' review that may shed light on aspects that are not directly communicated by the seller. Followers are very sensitive to attitude changes in vloggers, which implies that sponsorship deals should not impact on the way vloggers present themselves to their audience. Second, high- and medium-involved consumers, who spend a significant amount of money on make-up, are selective in reading and reviewing cosmetic vlogs, thereby consulting multiple sources before investing in make-up. If consumer-generated content promotion is a company's goal, sponsorship deals may have to be made with multiple vloggers rather than simply relying on one individual.

This study suggests that the motivations behind following vloggers are the sense of belonging and feeling part of a community. Relationships are created online between individuals with a similar passion for beauty products. Whilst often criticized in the 'real world', Weibo provides a platform that allows discussing and sharing feelings about cosmetics. The higher involved a consumer is with beauty and cosmetic products, the stronger the bond with vloggers. Vloggers gain a friendship status that allows them to influence these consumers, as long as they are seen to be 'real' and not sponsored. If the products do not appear to be half empty and used and no negative comments are made, followers assume that the vlog is sponsored. It is noteworthy that praising a product, sharing the link to the companies' website, and producing video tutorials are not perceived to be sponsored, as long as the make-up is used and some comments about drawbacks are made.

Although the small sample size and the qualitative nature of this research can be seen as a limitation, the in-depth study allowed to depict different themes and patterns and highlights various insights into beauty vlogging. Future research could investigate the statistical validity of the research findings. Moreover, rather than simply focusing on consumers, beauty vloggers could be interviewed in order to gain a holistic approach of beauty vlogging.

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14

The Challenges and Future Opportunities of Social Commerce

Courtney Chrimes, Rosy Boardman, and Claudia E. Henninger

Introduction

This chapter discusses how social commerce (s-commerce) is currently being used in industry and its future potential, bringing together the key themes of this book. The challenges of s-commerce as well as the opportunities that technology holds for the future are considered.

The Current Use of S-Commerce in Marketing and Sales

Interest in s-commerce has increased immensely over the last decade, in both academia and industry. This is due to further advancements in Web 2.0 features and social media sites, which have made both electronic commerce (e-commerce) platforms and social media sites more accessible

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1_14

and more sophisticated than ever. The relatively recent integration of s-commerce features into Facebook and Instagram have added an extra dimension to traditional social media marketing by making it even easier for people to purchase products through social media, inspired by the lifestyle imagery used and the convenience of it. Indeed, shopping has become ever-more social and is constantly creating further ways to entertain and engage consumers. This is particularly important for retailers in the current climate, as millennials are more focused on experiences and spending time with friends and family (BoF 2017), forcing retailers to respond and become more social spaces (both online and offline) in order to keep customers engaged and active on their sites. Hence, the purchasing power of millennials is increasing, and having grown up with the internet, their shopping behaviour is different from that of previous generations (Bilgihan 2016), so retailers of today need to innovate with this in mind in order to survive. Ted Baker's spring 2017 marketing campaign provides a prime example of s-commerce and social interaction: it features a 360-degree shoppable video, interactive windows and virtual reality experience all featured on their Instagram stories to promote the range (Drapers 2017). This highlights the vast amount of time, effort and finance spent in developing this campaign for s-commerce in order to attract consumers and its clear importance in contemporary retailers' strategies.

The chapters included in this book highlight a wide variety of industries that not only use s-commerce today but also have changed the way consumers engage. S-commerce has introduced new ways to listen to, discover and share music and has transformed the fast fashion industry by combining user-generated content (UGC) and the use of influencers through social media and e-commerce platforms, as well as the hair and beauty industries, the luxury industry and the travel industry. S-commerce has facilitated a more personal and community feel around brands and has helped consumers in their decision-making, encouraging them to purchase and share these purchases with their friends and followings.

This book further emphasises that s-commerce is not an isolated phenomenon but rather a global one, with authors providing examples from the UK, Germany, China and Saudi Arabian markets. The chapters further demonstrate that retailers need to be mindful of cultural, age and gender differences when employing s-commerce strategies; there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to s-commerce. Thus, only if done right, s-commerce has future potential to create new business opportunities for retailers (Ling and Husain 2013), an aspect discussed further in the following.

The Future of S-Commerce

Academics and practitioners are still struggling to fully understand the novel phenomenon that is s-commerce (Busalim and Hussin 2016). Consequently, it is hard to envisage its future potential. However, with almost 25% of business owners selling via Facebook and a further 30% of consumers willing to purchase through social media applications, such as Instagram, Pinterest and Twitter (Arnold 2018), it is apparent that the full potential of s-commerce has not yet been realised. S-commerce platforms are predicted to flourish in order to provide the consumer with an immersive and holistic shopping experience.

In March 2018 Instagram introduced its 'shop now feature', whereby retailers could tag up to five products in a post and provide a direct link to the retailers' website so that consumers can finalise their purchase (Arnold 2018). This is considered to be an innovative approach to shopping and social media usage, and one that is now starting to be capitalised on by influencers, bloggers and vloggers by making their outfits 'shoppable'. Thus, it is apparent that s-commerce should not be treated as an isolated channel, instead retailers must focus on creating a holistic shopping experience through complete convergence. Emerging technologies could be used to enhance this even further in the future, including augmented reality and voice recognition.

Augmented Reality

Augmented reality provides further potential for s-commerce on social media platforms. In April 2018, Snapchat introduced a 'shoppable augmented reality' feature (Mintel 2018b), which permits advertisers to make use of the sponsored Snapchat lenses, to display and sell products directly to users. For example, Kay Jewellers announced a partnership with Snapchat, whereby users were able to try on different necklaces using Snapchat's world lenses (Mintel 2018b). By allowing consumers to virtually try before they buy, retailers can now increase consumer's intention to purchase the product, as they were able to try on the product before finalising the purchase (Mintel 2018b). This indicates that augmented reality could play a vital role in the future of s-commerce. A further example of an organisation using augmented reality is L'Oreal, which created partnerships with both Facebook and Instagram. This digital innovation allows consumers to try on beauty products and click directly through to the L'Oreal website to buy the products (Vizard 2018).

Voice Recognition Within S-Commerce

Another future potential of s-commerce can be linked to the increase of virtual assistants and voice recognition technology. Virtual assistants, such as the Amazon Echo and Google Home Assistant, are becoming an essential part of the consumer's shopping journey (Sutherland 2018). Drapers (2018) found that 46% of shoppers are interested in using voice assistants to purchase clothing and a further 40% of consumers expect to use voice assistant technology instead of mobile apps or websites in the next three years. Thus, the future impact of virtual assistants is undeniable, as this digital technology is progressively advancing to include the ability to see, hear and understand (Thomson 2018). The Amazon Echo Look features an installed camera whereby users can take pictures of either themselves or of desired products and speak to the app about them directly and potentially where to find them (Thomson 2018). Consequently, it is conceivable that, in the future, social media applications may incorporate voice assistants to allow consumers to search and purchase clothing via vocal command. This idea is beginning to be realised and has been introduced by Snapchat in August 2018 through a speech recognition lens, which will test out new audio languages in order to engage its market (Damiani 2018). In the future, this may result in the one-word ordering of products directly from Snapchat (Damiani 2018).

Summary of the Future Potential of S-Commerce

To conclude, although academics and practitioners are still struggling to fully understand the definition and implementation of an s-commerce strategy, it is apparent that s-commerce will only flourish as technology advances. The future of s-commerce has many potential avenues to explore with augmented reality and voice recognition appearing to be at the forefront. Moreover, applications that in the past have failed due to being too avant-garde (e.g. MySpace and Second Life), which were discussed in one of the chapters, could see a revival, as consumers are increasingly getting used to s-commerce features and the adoption of new ways of shopping to enhance their experiences. Yet, it is key to keep in mind that if an s-commerce strategy is to be successfully implemented by retailers, it is vital that the existing challenges and barriers of s-commerce are addressed. The proceeding section will address the potential future challenges and barriers of s-commerce implementation.

Challenges of S-Commerce

Literature advocates that s-commerce has the potential to be extremely beneficial for both business and consumers. S-commerce allows retailers to integrate UGC into their storefronts (Zhou et al. 2013), which can ultimately decrease marketing costs (Chen et al. 2017) and has the ability to reach global consumers (Zhou et al. 2013). S-commerce has also been argued to have the ability to empower consumers (Ling and Husain 2013) by allowing them to search for the opinions and experiences of independent users, which is argued by Chen, Lu and Wang, (2017) to be more credible than retailer-curated information. Hence, s-commerce features, such as UGC, have been predicted to help consumers with their virtual purchasing decisions (Hajli et al. 2017). However, in order to exploit the potential capabilities and advantages of s-commerce, companies must place emphasis on overcoming the challenges and rapid growth of social media when incorporating s-commerce into their existing business (Ling and Husain 2013; Yahia et al. 2018). The following section will explore in detail the potential challenges of s-commerce.

The Role of S-Commerce on Body Dysmorphia

Although Ling and Husain (2013) found that s-commerce can empower consumers, there is a stream of research that has explored the negative impact of the 'thin ideal' online models present on retailers' product information pages on consumers' body satisfaction (Kim and Damhorst 2013; Shin and Baytar 2014; Yu and Damhorst 2015; Onge et al. 2016). Shin and Baytar (2014) found that 60% of fashion models on retailers' websites had an 'ideal' hourglass body shape. However, the presence of 'ideal' hourglass models on retailers' websites has not only led to the inaccurate appraisal of clothing fit online but also encouraged body dissatisfaction (Yu and Damhorst 2015). Kerviler, Audrezet and Suprin (2017) found that consumers' preferred to shop through Instagram, as they were able to see what the product looked like on ordinary fashion consumers with different body shapes. However, more recently, concerns have arisen about how social media applications are impacting users' mental health (BBC 2017).

Saunders and Eaton (2018) found that users of social networking sites (SNS), such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, had a greater tendency towards body surveillance and upward appearance-related comparison. Furthermore, SNS have been found to impact on people's mental health, as they encourage users to feel depressed, anxious and lonely (BBC 2017). This negative impact is further reinforced by academia. Fardouly et al. (2015) in an online shopping experiment, discovered that spending 20 minutes browsing for products on Facebook resulted in users' portraying a more negative mood when compared to when they browsed on a non SNS. Similarly, Holland and Tiggemann (2016) undertook a systematic literature review whereby they investigated the impact of SNS on users' body image. The most salient findings demonstrated that user engagement in photo-based activities on Facebook was directly related to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating. This is extremely troubling as 90% of young people use social media, which is more than any other age group, making them more susceptible to its negative effects (Mintel 2018a; BBC 2017). Both academics and practitioners have emphasised that individuals need to limit their exposure to SNS (Holland and Tiggemann 2016). Hence, if retailers are to develop an s-commerce strategy, they are urged to do so but in such a way that protects and monitors mental health issues.

In a further attempt to encourage users to cut down on their social media usages, initiatives such as 'Scroll Free September' are being pushed through the government (BBC 2018). Apple has recently revealed the innovative iPhone feature, 'Screen Time', which will provide users with insight into the amount of time spent on a social media application and will further allow users to set time limits on the usage of each app (Apple 2018). Thus, as a result of the apparent detrimental impacts of SNS, consumers are beginning to change their usage behaviour, recognising that there is a need to take a break from social media (Mintel 2018a). Indeed, almost half (47%) of users aged 18–34 claim that not engaging with social media applications would be beneficial to their overall mental health (BBC 2018). Hence, fashion brands need to develop innovative ways to overcome this challenge if they are to operate successfully on an s-commerce platform.

The Importance of Data Protection

Despite the consumer trend towards cutting down on s-commerce usage, the level of young people engaging within social media platforms and sharing personal content is rising (Mintel 2018a). However, with this comes the problematic issue of data protection, security and privacy (Salvatori and Marcantoni 2015). Retailers must seriously consider the consequences of breaking data protection laws if they are to have the opportunity to expand onto an s-commerce platform. Indeed, from the complex definition of s-commerce, it is apparent that retailers often embrace s-commerce by utilising existing social networking platforms (Ling and Husain 2013). However, it is extremely challenging for retailers to have full control over consumer data on huge systems such as Facebook (Han et al. 2018).

Furthermore, following the recent Cambridge Analytica scandal, in which the personal data of at least a million British Facebook users was exploited and improperly shared with Cambridge Analytica (Guardian 2018), there is a renewed emphasis on data security (Mintel 2018a). This renewed emphasis is especially paramount for the future of s-commerce. Indeed, s-commerce websites encourage users to contribute and collaborate in social activities, such as expressing opinions and sharing personal information with other customers (Ko 2018). However, once users sign up to SNS, it is the SNS that will own their personal profiles and demographic information (Han et al. 2018). This becomes problematic when businesses utilise this consumer data to gain strategic business advantages, such as to implement effective marketing strategies. In order to reassure and gain customers' trust, companies have a responsibility to maintain the security of users' information (Han et al. 2018). Thus, unless retailers provide full transparency and give users autonomy over their personal information, the future of s-commerce looks troubling (Mintel 2018a). The implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation in May 2018 could go someway into helping users feel more secure and trusting towards s-commerce platforms (Mintel 2018a). Thus, businesses need to be aware of the challenges surrounding data protection if they are to successfully execute an s-commerce strategy.

Challenges Concerning UGC

Within the s-commerce literature it is apparent that trust is a rising concern for consumers when shopping online. Trust is especially concerning for consumers on s-commerce platforms where, due to the lack of face-to-face communications (Yahia et al. 2018) and the salient role of UGC (Hajli et al. 2017), uncertainty is higher. Building and upholding consumer trust is, therefore, imperative for an s-commerce channel as it is predominantly built on SNS, where users' generate content and share it with others (Kim and Park 2013). Kim and Park (2013) found that trust of an s-commerce platform is the main barrier to completing a purchase and the main reason for the failure of businesses' s-commerce strategies. Similarly, Hajli et al. (2017) found that trust in an SNS was the key predictor of behavioural intentions and that the more that users trust the platform, the more likely they are to engage within the purchasing process.

Review credibility is one of the most crucial characteristics affecting review perceptions (Xu et al. 2015). In a recent study exploring user preferences of social features on s-commerce websites, Huang and Benyoucef (2015) found that the feature of inviting people to rate other people's review was the most important characteristic of Amazon, as it enhanced the credibility of the review. This suggests that, as information overload increases on SNS, consumers need to be guided towards trustworthy and accurate product reviews. There is a debate within the literature concerning the credibility and trust towards a product review. For example, Wei and Lu (2013) found that the consumer's trust towards a product review greatly depends on the person creating the review. They found that the majority of participants did not trust a review given by a celebrity, as they believed it to be a paid advertisement, yet the majority of participants trusted a fellow user's review as they believed they had no reason to lie (Hazari et al. 2017). However, despite this debate, there is a consensus within the literature that consumers trust product information from user-generated reviews more than retailer-created information (Park and Cho 2012; Wei and Lu 2013; Chen et al. 2017 Hazari et al. 2017). Subsequently, as trust becomes a more prominent concern for consumers it is an imperative that businesses make an increased effort to gain trust in s-commerce platforms (Kim and Park 2013).

Furthermore, a lack of control over UGC is also a challenge for retailers when adopting s-commerce strategies. The literature highlights that UGC, in the form of consumer's reviews, greatly influences other consumers' decision-making processes (Ling and Husain 2013; Han et al. 2018), but user-generated reviews can also have a detrimental impact on the brand's image and reputation. Indeed, within s-commerce platforms there is no, or a significant lack of, control over UGC (Ling and Husain 2013). Unlike traditional e-commerce stores in which consumer reviews are checked and have to wait for approval from the retailer before being made visible on the website, on social media platforms, companies have limited control over UGC (Ling and Husain 2013). Thus, UGC can be extremely challenging for the business and their reputation. For example, if there are positive reviews from users about a product or a brand it will help enhance the company's reputation and credibility. However, if previous consumers post negative feedback, these complaints have the potential to completely ruin the company's brand influence (Janze and Siering 2015). As a result, negative conversations on social media and product review sites can have a damaging effect on product sales (Turban et al. 2018).

Coupled with this is the challenge of intellectual property copyright (Han et al. 2018). Just as retailers have a lack of control over UGC, users who actually create the content also have limited control over their own content. As retailers begin to sell products through social media, a hub that encourages public contribution of content information, there is a huge challenge concerning the protection of intellectual property posted by users (Bertot et al. 2012). Despite social media websites providing copyright disclaimers in their terms of service (Hetcher 2008), these may not be read by users, and, a retailer may transform an idea posted by a user into a business operation in an attempt to improve business profits (Han et al. 2018). Thus, this raises the problematic question of who owns the idea and intellectual property (Han et al. 2018). S-commerce websites have led to an explosion in the production of creative content (Hetcher 2008); however, as a result copyright, issues may arise with who is the rightful owner of such content (Han et al. 2018). Consequently, users may be less prone to contribute on s-commerce if the lines of intellectual ownership copyright are blurred.

The Design of S-commerce Websites

Although s-commerce presents many opportunities for organisations, the design and implementation of this platform encompass complex issues (Turban et al. 2018). Despite the apparent benefits and abundant examples of retailers who have successfully adopted s-commerce strategies, discrepancies exist between the expected and actual performance of s-commerce (Ling and Husain 2013). In a literature review, Salvatori and Marcantoni (2015) found that, as a result of the innovativeness of s-commerce, some of the features are challenging for consumers to use. Consequently, Salvatori and Marcantoni (2015) recommend that intuitive tools and facilities may be needed to assist consumers in how to engage with s-commerce platforms.

As s-commerce is still a relatively new phenomenon, the definition and design of s-commerce has not been fully comprehended by both academics and practitioners (Huang and Benyoucef 2013). Thus, as a result there is little research that has explored the design of s-commerce platforms and user interaction with social commerce features (Huang and Benyoucef 2013). Whereas SNS are finding it challenging to bring commercial transactions to their platforms (Baghdadi 2016), the development of "newer technology-enabled business models" (Baghdadi 2016, p. 98) are proving difficult to be implemented and understood by e-commerce retailers. The current business model for e-commerce, which focuses on navigational design and Web 1.0 technologies to support online transactions (Ko 2018), does not focus on the new types of interaction that are facilitated by Web 2.0 tools (Baghdadi 2016). Hence, if e-commerce platforms are to include social features on their interfaces, it is paramount that they consider social interactions online (Baghdadi 2016) and the design s-commerce features.

Huang and Benyoucef (2017) investigated s-commerce design from a consumer's perspective. The findings acknowledged a number of design features that had considerable impacts on the consumer decision-making on an s-commerce platform. For example, in regards to usability, functionality and sociability, the most important design features on an s-commerce website included providing high-quality information, effective security and privacy design, and the ability to share experiences and knowledge with other users (Huang and Benyoucef 2017). Similarly, Shen (2012) found that user acceptance of s-commerce is largely determined by whether or not they demonstrate ease of use and trust. While these findings are extremely insightful to both academics and practitioners, there is still limited research that explores s-commerce design. Indeed, there are a number of eye-tracking studies that explore how users interact and engage with e-commerce website designs (Castagnos et al. 2010; Djamasbi et al. 2010; Chen and Pu 2014; Dospinescu and Perca-Robu 2017); however to date, there is no research that uses eye tracking to understand how consumers engage holistically with s-commerce features. Hence, as eye tracking has the potential to drive the design of websites (Djamasbi 2014), future research incorporating this methodology would prove to be extremely beneficial to the future of s-commerce design.

Although existing s-commerce literature acknowledges that s-commerce is created by various types of Web 2.0 technologies which facilitate social interactions (Ko 2018), the existing theoretical understanding of the main issues surrounding s-commerce is incomplete. Additionally, there is even less empirical evidence on how social networking can be leveraged to enhance e-commerce (Zhou et al. 2013). Furthermore, as consumers are the driving force behind social commerce (Zhou et al. 2013), a deeper understanding of how users engage with these Web 2.0 technologies and how they should be designed to encourage user interaction and trust is a challenge that retailers must face if they are to pursue an s-commerce strategy.

Further Decline of Brick-and-Mortar Stores

The decline of brick-and-mortar stores will inevitably be catalysed by the expansion of online retailing to the s-commerce platform. Retailers are expanding their online presence by pursing s-commerce strategies and, as a result, corporate communication has been democratised (Kietzmann et al. 2011). The presence of brick-and-mortar retailers are vastly declining. When brick-and-mortar stores were first introduced, they were considered to be a place solely for transactions; however, they soon evolved into a place for socialising (Skoll 1999). It is undeniable that shopping is inherently a social experience (Chen et al. 2017), in which other shoppers have the potential to enhance the shopping experience by offering support and assistance during the decision-making process (Hu and Jasper 2006). Prior to the development of Web 2.0 tools, academics and practitioners criticised online platforms for the lack of human and social interaction (Siddiqui et al. 2003). However, with the growing advancement of s-commerce facilities and the low barriers of entry into s-commerce (Han et al. 2018), social needs are vastly being fulfilled. S-commerce provides a hub for consumers to communicate and support each other during their purchase decisions (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi 2012). However, as a result of the change in consumer behaviour, driven by the emergence of technology and acceptance of s-commerce platforms, the Grimsey Review (2018) predicts that current physical stores will no longer have a purpose and will be 'consigned to the dustbin of history'. This is hugely problematic as it highlights the potential of s-commerce cannibalisation of other channels such as brick-and-mortar stores. Therefore, retailers should focus on integrating s-commerce as part of their existing business model in order to provide consumers with a holistic shopping experience, whereby their s-commerce platform and their physical stores are both equal touch points for the consumer.

Summary of Future Challenges

To conclude, despite the apparent benefits, companies must be aware of the future challenges that may impede the adoption of social commerce into their existing business models (Ling and Husain 2013). Future challenges that retailers face include body dissatisfaction, issues concerning data protection, lack of control of UGC, intellectual property copyright, s-commerce usability and design, and the potential decline of brick-and-mortar stores. This chapter has highlighted that it is indicative that the future success of s-commerce is dependent on digital innovations, holistic integration with commerce activities, and the effective design of facilities that promote social interactions and trust (Zhou et al. 2013). S-commerce is a still novel phenomenon; thus, further exploration into what facilitates and impedes users' interaction of s-commerce platforms is warranted.

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R. Boardman et al. (eds.), *Social Commerce*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03617-1