Chapter 5
Community Based Social Media Fashion Branding: Do Fashion Brands Heritage and Prestige Affect Consumers' Brand Loyalty Intention?

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Abstract This research explores whether fashion brands heritage and prestige perceived by consumers affect their brand loyalty intention. Specifically, the research aims at investigating if heritage and prestige matter in branding strategist based on engaging consumers in social media brand communities. Social media brand communities initiated by fashion brands represent the setting of this research. In fact, it has been assessed that members of brand communities usually are more informed on brands products and value than the average consumer. In order to achieve the aim of the research, a moderated structural equation modeling analysis has been developed and tested. Results show that, on the one hand, heritage has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between consumers' engagement in online communities and brand loyalty intention; and, on the other hand, prestige showed a positive moderating effect on such a relationship. Managerial implications and suggestions for future researches are discussed.

Keywords Social media marketing · Social media brand communities
Consumer engagement · Brand loyalty intention · Heritage · Prestige
Fashion brands

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5.1   Introduction

Over recent times, social media have emerged as fundamental channels for fashion marketing communications (Kim and Ko 2010, 2012). In particular, recent researches have pointed out that brand communities existing on social media—which have been defined as social media brand communities (Zaglia 2013)—are fundamental to engage consumers in online branding activities (Habibi et al. 2014a). Consequently, pertinent literature has deemed that engaging consumers in community activities may increase their brand loyalty intention, thus preventing them from switching their preferences toward products of other brands (Laroche et al. 2012; Habibi et al. 2014a).

However, scant attention has been paid to exploring whether fashion brands heritage (Napoli et al. 2014) and prestige (Kuenzel and Vaux-Halliday 2008) influence members' brand loyalty intention in social media brand communities. In order to cope with such a literature gap, the aim of this research is to explore how heritage and prestige of fashion brands as perceived by consumers may moderate the relationship between consumers' engagement in social media brand communities and brand loyalty intention—which refers to consumers' propensity for not switching their preferences toward products of another brand (Habibi et al. 2014a). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) has been selected as the methodology of this research (Bagozzi and Yi 1988). In this sense, we proposed and tested a conceptual model by analyzing 155 surveys obtained from members of several fashion brand social media brand communities.

Apart from this introduction, the research is structured as follows. The second paragraph deals with the importance of brand community for fashion branding strategies and the role of heritage and prestige as moderating factors between consumers' engagement in the community and their brand loyalty intention. Next, the third paragraph presents the proposed conceptual model and the hypotheses underlying this research. The fourth paragraph describes the sampling procedure and the SEM methodology. Finally, conclusions and managerial implications are discussed in the last paragraph.

5.2   Fashion Brands Heritage and Prestige and Social Media Brand Community Based Branding Strategies

Social media brand communities are online communities whose members are consumers that share a common passion or interest toward a specific brand (Zaglia 2013). Over recent times, marketing scholars assessed that consumers being part of such a digital form of community show higher levels of brand loyalty intention due to their participation to the community activities (Laroche et al. 2012). Therefore, consumers engaged in brand community—which are consumers actively participating to community brand-related activities and deeply involved in community inner dynamics

(Algesheimer et al. 2005)—are less prone to switch their preference toward products or services offered by a competitor (Habibi et al. 2014a). Despite this noteworthy literature, scant attention has been paid to the exploration of the potential role of heritage and prestige in affecting the relations between consumers' engagement in social media brand communities and their brand loyalty intention. Hence, in this paragraph we firstly explore the potential of social media brand communities in online branding strategies. Then, we attempt to conceptualize the importance of heritage and prestige in influencing members' brand loyalty intention in social media brand communities.

5.2.1 The Emerging Importance of Social Media Brand Communities in Online Branding

Seminally, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 412) have defined brand communities as "non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand". In this sense, pertinent literature has assessed that brand communities are frequently composed by consumers sharing similar interest, passion or love toward the brand (Zaglia 2013). Traditionally, on the one hand marketing scholars have focused on exploring the factors triggering individuals' participation to brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Specifically, according to the Social Identity Theory (SIT; Ashfort and Mael 1989), consumers tend to join brand communities in order make themselves identifiable by other members of community through symbols and values related to the brand (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). On the other hand, recent researches explored the potential of brand communities to engage consumers, foster consumers' loyalty, and collect consumers' opinion about products or services (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006).

As a consequence of the recent digitalization of humans' interactions (Tiago and Verissimo 2014), brand communities have started to transform in a digital fashion (Habibi et al. 2014a). In particular, since social media have proven to be a fertile ground for the emergence of new communities (Zaglia 2013), the majority of brand communities currently existing have assumed the form social media brand communities (Habibi et al. 2014a). Such a form of digital communities has been defined by De Valck et al. (2009, p. 185) as "a specialized, non-geographically bound, online community, based on social communications and relationships among a brand's consumers". Social media brand communities differ in at least three aspects from the traditional offline brand community. Firstly, social media brand communities are fundamental for brand strategist to constantly dialogue with consumers (Habibi et al. 2014a). In fact, since social media allow bi-directional communication it is now possible to engage consumers in interactive conversations anytime (Rialti et al. 2016a, 2017). Second, social media brand communities differ from offline brand communities in regard to the number of members, with several social media brand communities having more than one million of members (Zaglia 2013). Finally, social media brand communities are often characterized by a more structured internal

organization. Actually, at least one social media manager usually manages the community (Cova and White 2010).

Admirers and *aficionados* of every typology of brand may potentially form a social media brand community (Zaglia 2013); however, such a phenomenon tends to occur quite frequently among consumers and admirers of fashion brands. As a consequence of fashion brands iconicity and exclusiveness, indeed, the admirers of those latter are more prone to aggregate in social media brand community to be identified by other consumers through the symbols and values of fashion brands (Habibi et al. 2014b). This phenomenon is coherent with the basic assumptions of SIT (Ashfort and Mael 1989). In fact, consumers tend to aggregate in online social media brand communities started by fashion brands to obtain hedonic value—which is a form of psychological well-being deriving from participation to a community and identification within a social group (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001)—due to their membership (Zaglia 2013).

Recently, fashion marketing literature has started to explore how fashion brands could benefit from social media brand community existence in their marketing strategies (Kim and Ko 2010; Phan et al. 2011). In particular, Kim and Ko (2010) have assessed that fashion brands social media activities targeting members of online communities may improve relations between brands and customers; consequently, this may positively influence consumers' purchase intention. Moreover, Kim and Ko (2012) have also explored how social media marketing may enhance consumers based brand equity. Hence, if brand strategists are able to manage consumers' online feedbacks and to engage customers in social media marketing strategies, social media marketing may increase brand equity and increase consumers' loyalty (Phan et al. 2011; Rialti et al. 2016a). Therefore, pertinent literature has mainly focused on identifying how consumers' identification and engagement in social media brand communities may foster consumers' loyalty and the consequent potential economic benefits for the brand (Kim and Ko 2012; Godey et al. 2016).

In spite of this researches, however, scant attention has been paid to the exploration of the importance of fashion brands heritage and prestige—which are consumers' personal perceptions concerning the brand (Boccardi et al. 2016)—in fostering members' brand loyalty intention in social media brand communities.

5.2.2 Fashion Brands Heritage and Prestige in Community Based Social Media Fashion Branding

Heritage has been defined as an ensemble of "features belonging to the culture of a particular society, such as traditions, languages, or buildings, which come from the past and are still important" (Merchant and Rose 2013, p. 2620). Traditionally, the concept of heritage has been explored by two streams of marketing literature. On the one hand, researchers have focused on cultural heritage marketing, which is the marketing of cultural heritage sites (Rialti et al. 2016b, c). On the other hand,

scholars have explored the notion of brand heritage, which is the capability of the brand to transmit the sense of a brand history and related values to the customers (Napoli et al. 2014). In this perspective, the notion of heritage has frequently been explored within the fashion brands literature (Boccardi et al. 2016; Ciappei et al. 2016).

Brand heritage perceived by customers, hence, has been considered a significant element related with customer-based brand authenticity (Napoli et al. 2014). Specifically, according to Napoli et al. (2014), brand heritage is related with a brand prestige, which is the sense of exclusivity of the brand perceived by customers (Kuenzel and Vaux-Halliday 2008). Brand prestige, similarly to brand heritage, is a fundamental brand characteristics capable to influence customers' overall perceptions of the brand (Hwang and Hyun 2012).

As a result, both heritage and prestige have recently emerged as relevant strategic levers for brand strategists of fashion brand (Boccardi et al. 2016). As a proof of that, fashion brands strategist and product managers have traditionally focused on the history of the brands in order to transmit customers a feeling of exclusivity and elitism (Hudson 2011). Since it has been deemed possible to 'put ahead the fire of the past instead of the ashes' by centering brands strategies on brand heritage, it is also possible to make the customers feel involved in the glorious past and in the historical exclusivity (Balmer 2011).

In spite of this attention toward heritage, however, pertinent literature has principally focused on how to transmit to consumers' heritage and prestige of the brand (Balmer 2011). Firstly, marketing scholars have stressed the use of recurrent narrative in advertising as fundamental to communicate heritage and prestige of the brand to the consumers (Boccardi et al. 2016). Second, pertinent literature has explored how the design and internal furniture of fashion boutiques may influence consumers' perceptions related with brands heritage and prestige (Ciappei and Surchi 2011). In this perspective, the majority of scholars has focused on exploring how consumers' sensorial and emotive experience are related with perceived heritage and prestige. It emerges how marketing scholars have predominantly focused on identifying the antecedents of heritage and prestige (Kuenzel and Vaux-Halliday 2008). Moreover, the potential of heritage and prestige perceived by consumers to influence consumers' intentions in a social media mediated environment has been scarcely explored (Boccardi et al. 2016).

Moving from these considerations, this research aims to explore the importance of heritage and prestige as factors capable to influence consumers' behavioral intentions in online contexts. In fact, since heritage and prestige have been associated with consumers' intention to purchase fashion brands products, those two factors may also influence brand loyalty intention (Napoli et al. 2014). Social media brand communities have been selected as the context of this research; to our best knowledge, few studies have explored the consumers' personal perceptions affecting brand loyalty intention in a social media mediated environment (Habibi et al. 2014a, b).

Thus, the research question guiding the present research is the following one: "*Do fashion brands heritage and prestige positively influence brand loyalty intention of social media brand communities members?*".
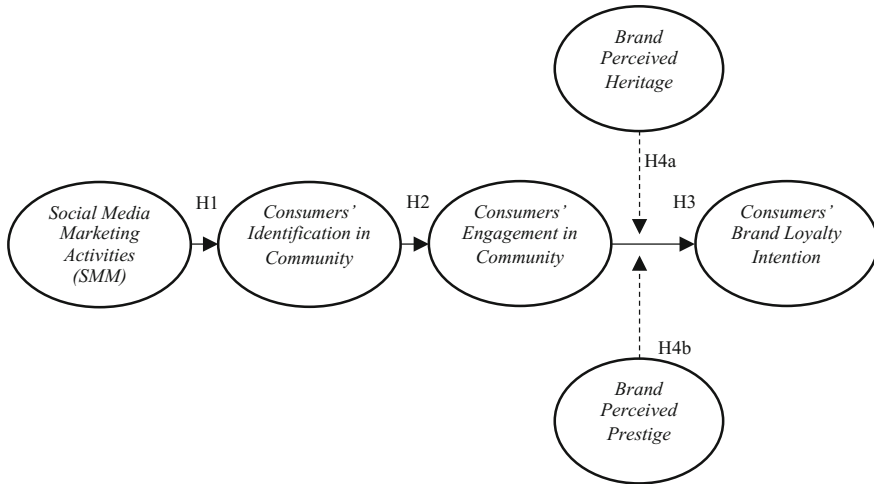
Fig. 5.1 Hypothesized model

5.3 Proposed Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

In order to answer the aforementioned research question, we have developed and tested the following conceptual model (see Fig. 5.1).

Social media marketing activities (SMMs) are a set of activities that may be undertaken by fashion brands to communicate with consumers on social media (Kim and Ko 2010, 2012). In order to be effective in reaching and influencing consumers, SMMs have to be interactive, capable to entertain consumers, customized, updated to the last news, and shareable on social media (Kim and Ko 2012).

According to Kim and Ko (2012), SMMs may improve the consumers-brand relation. Therefore, SMMs are relevant to dialogue with consumers and to transmit them information and values concerning the brand. Since consumers are more prone to identify in brands that emerge as interactive and trustworthy (Algesheimer et al. 2005), a positive relation between SMMs and consumers' degree of identification in brand community has been hypothesized. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Fashion brands social media marketing activities are positively related with consumers' identification in fashion brand related social media brand communities.

Traditionally, consumers that identify with a brand community have been deemed as the most involved in brand community related activities (Algesheimer et al. 2005). According to SIT, in order to continue to be recognized over the time by other members as *aficionados* of the brand, those consumers have to constantly participate to the community activities and, eventually, shared rituals (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). In this sense, consumers that identify with the community are more engaged in the community (Sashi 2012). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Consumers' identification in social media brand community is positively related with consumers' engagement in social media brand community activity.

Due to their participation to activities, consumers engaged in social media brand community tend to develop affective bond toward the brand. Therefore, consumers engaged in social media brand community tend to not switch their preferences and to be loyal to the brand of the community they are part of (Heere et al. 2011; Habibi et al. 2014a, b). Moving from these considerations, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Consumers' engagement in social media brand community is positively related with consumers' brand loyalty intention.

Apart from the community related factors such as identification and engagement, personal perceptions concerning the brand may affect consumers' brand loyalty intention. In particular, according to Napoli et al. (2014), perceived heritage may influence consumers' loyalty and purchase intention. Instead, Kuenzel and Vaux-Halliday (2008) assessed that the brand prestige perceived by consumers may be an antecedent of brand loyalty intention. Therefore, we have assumed that fashion brands heritage and prestige may moderate the relation between consumers' engagement in brand community and consumers' brand loyalty intention. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4a: Fashion brand prestige perceived by consumers' moderates the relation between consumers' engagement in social media community and brand loyalty intention.
H4b: Fashion brand heritage perceived by consumers' moderates the relation between consumers' engagement in social media community and brand loyalty intention.

5.4 Method

In order to answer our research question, we have collected 155 surveys among members of social media brand communities of several fashion brands (see Table 5.1). Since the number of members of social media brand community may dramatically change overnight, traditional sampling procedures over time have proven not effective in the majority of social media oriented researches. In order to cope with this problem, we adopted a sampling procedure previously used by Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) and Habibi et al. (2014a, b). Firstly, we asked respondents to enunciate the fashion brand they admire most; second, we asked respondents to name a community initiated by the fashion brand they admire most (Heere et al. 2011); finally, we asked respondents to select the social media used to follow the brand online. Building on this procedure, we were able to collect 155 usable results representing 32 worldwide social media brand community—from 11 brands—existing on 4 social media (Facebook; Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram). Gucci (20,1%), Chanel
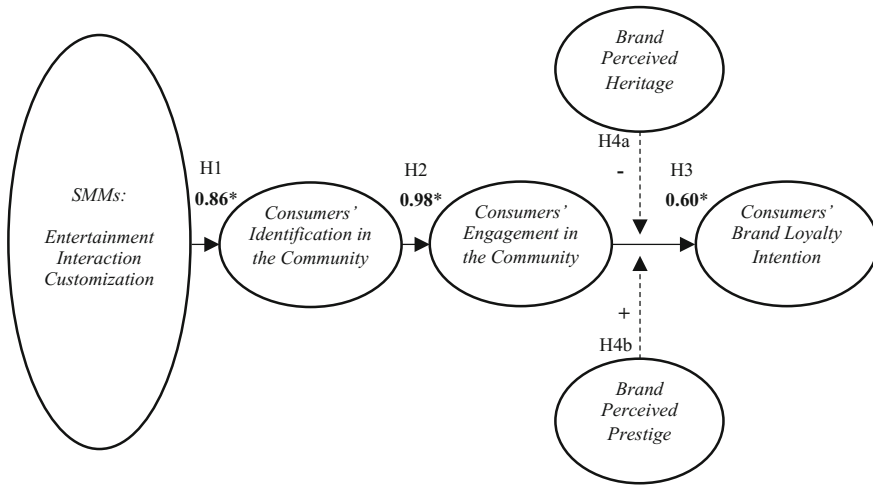
Fig. 5.2 Structural model

(17,5%) and Luis Vuitton (16,9%) have emerged as the most followed brands by respondents composing our sample.

The collected surveys have been analyzed with a two-step SEM procedure (Bagozzi and Yi 1988). A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using AMOS v. 22, an SPSS module (Arbuckle 2013) (see Table 5.2). The maximum likelihood function of AMOS was used to validate the hypotheses (Bagozzi and Yi 1988; Zollo et al. 2018). Finally, we have explored the relations among variables and the hypothesized moderation effects (See Fig. 5.2).

5.5   Results

For each of the six latent dimensions—SMM, Brand Identification, Brand Engagement, Prestige, Heritage, Brand Loyalty Intention—a CFA was implemented using AMOS (Arbuckle 2013). The first step of the procedure referred to estimating the fitting indexes of our proposed model (Bagozzi and Yi 1988). As far as concerns the absolute fitting indexes, the relative χ^2-test ($\chi^2/df = 1.925$), the Goodness of Fit

Table 5.1 Sample characteristics

Variable	Gender		Continent					Age			
	M	F	N. A.	S. A.	Europe	Asia	Oceania	19–29	30–39	40–49	>50
Freq.	29	126	23	11	112	7	2	100	32	17	6
Distr.	18.5	81.5	14.8	7	72.3	4.5	1.4	64.8	20.6	10.9	3.7

Table 5.2 Intercorrelations and reliabilities

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Entertainment	0.85							
2. Customization	0.82	0.81						
3. Interaction	0.79	0.78	0.87					
4. Identification	0.72	0.64	0.75	0.93				
5. Engagement	0.78	0.72	0.85	0.74	0.92			
6. Prestige	0.56	0.53	0.41	0.35	0.33	0.70		
7. Heritage	0.54	0.47	0.54	0.53	0.54	0.62	0.83	
8. Loyalty intention	0.58	0.46	0.51	0.59	0.67	0.47	0.54	0.79

Cronbach's alpha values are reported on the diagonal; all correlations show a p-value < 0.01

Index (GFI = 0.915), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.072) showed acceptable values. Concerning the relative indexes, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI; 0.924), the Incremental Fit Index (IFI; 0.937), the Normed Fit Index (NFI; 0.912), and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI; 0.921) were all higher than the required value of 0.9 (Bagozzi and Yi 1988).

Next, we built our proposed structural model in order to test the hypothesized relations. As shown in Fig. 5.2, all the fitting indexes of the model were acceptable. Moreover, all the hypotheses were supported ($p < 0.01$). Specifically, the interaction effects between Prestige_x_Brand Engagement ($p < 0.01$) and Heritage_x_Brand Engagement ($p < 0.01$) were significant, suggesting that moderation had occurred (Arbuckle 2013). Interestingly, the moderated SEM analysis showed a decreased effect of Brand Engagement on Brand Loyalty Intention for high levels of Heritage (the relation moved from $\beta = 0.60$, $p < 0.01$ without moderation to $\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$ with moderation). This suggests that Heritage negatively moderates the relation between consumers' engagement and brand loyalty. Instead, Prestige resulted as a positive moderating variable, given the higher influence of Brand Engagement on Brand Loyalty Intention for high levels of Prestige (the relation moved from $\beta = 0.60$, $p < 0.01$ without moderation to $\beta = +0.75$, $p < 0.01$ with moderation). Hence, perceived prestige positively moderates the relation between consumers' engagement and brand loyalty.

5.6 Conclusion, Managerial Implication and Suggestion for Future Researches

This research contributes to the literature on online fashion brand management. Indeed, our results show how heritage and prestige affect consumers brand loyalty intention. Specifically, it has emerged how prestige of fashion brand positively moderates the relation between consumers' engagement in the community and their

brand loyalty intention. This phenomenon may be well explained considering the basic assumptions of SIT concerning the reasons why consumers join brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Since consumers join brand communities to be identified by others with the brand and, moreover, the more they identify in the community the more they are loyal to brand (Algesheimer et al. 2005), prestige of the brand may be considered a fundamental factor reinforcing the engagement-loyalty relation (Kuenzel and Vaux-Halliday 2008). Interestingly, heritage negatively moderated such a relation. A possible explanation may be that in modern online contexts heritage is not fully exploited yet, due to the scarce capability of online communication to transmit a brand heritage to consumers.

Two main managerial implications emerged from our results. Firstly, brand strategists should invest in transmitting consumers the sense of prestige of the brand online. By doing so, brand strategists may reinforce brand community members' loyalty toward the brand. Second, new strategies to communicate fashion brand heritage should be developed by brand strategists. Actually, by focusing on innovative social media strategy communications such as *mythopoiesis*—which may be defined as the recurrent narrative capable to adequately transmit the sense of heritage of the brand to modern consumers and markets (Boccardi et al. 2016)—brand strategists may improve consumers' emotive attachment to the brand past tradition and values, thus positively influencing their loyalty intention.

The present research presents some limitations which highlight possible avenues for future researches. Firstly, we were able to collect only a limited number of usable responses from online consumers. Second, we did not explore in depth the causes of the negative moderation of heritage on the engagement-loyalty relation. Future researches should better analyze such a phenomenon. In particular, we suggest scholars to investigate through qualitative methodologies which kind of communications are capable to transmit a brand sense of heritage. Moreover, we suggest scholars to compare traditional form of communication with online channels in order to understand which one is more capable to influence customers' brand loyalty intention.

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