LUISS

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"The new era of fashion on Social Media: what makes you click?"

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

<u>1.1 Social media and marketing</u>

The technological development has drastically changed the communication mode in a way that affects billions of people across the globe (Gautam & Sharma, 2017). The popularity of social media dates back to the early nineties, when brands tried to eliminate all the physical boundaries existing between them and the consumers (Campbell & Anitsal 2013). According to the definition given by Nair (2011), Social media refers to "online tools where content, opinions, perspectives, insights, and media can be shared…(and) at its core social media is about relationships and connections between people and organizations." These tools include blogs, chat rooms, consumer product rating sites, discussion boards, social network sites, vlogs (video logs), widgets and wikis (Gautam & Sharma, 2017). In particular, the creation of online communities represents one of the most important innovations that has brought benefits to both brands and consumers.

With the passing of time, social media have acquired a fundamental position in consumers' daily lives, becoming almost essentials, that is why marketers have thought of making of them an important part of the marketing strategy (Zhou & Wang, 2014). In fact, due to the high growth of internet and registered social media users, marketers are highly motivated to engage in social media marketing (Carim & Warwick, 2013).

It is through social media that customers have the possibility to build profiles on the site, and consequently communicate and share information with other users of the site (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In fact, a fundamental aspect that must be taken into account, the one that has guaranteed to Social media the position they have today, in everybody's life, is the accessibility. No discrimination is made, no price to pay, everybody can enter these online communities and be whoever they want to be.

Social media instruments have resulted to be really helpful in understanding internet usage patterns of customers, searching product information patterns, customers' reviews about their experiences with products, consumer decision-making processes and much more (Wang & Chang, 2013); in fact, if in 2012 only the 40% of the companies used social media channels as their primary digital tool to reach customers (Divol, Edelman, & Sarrazin, 2012), according to Statista "it was estimated that

social media advertising spending worldwide amounted to nearly 27 billion U.S. dollars in 2018, and according to forecasted figures global expenditures on this channel will further grow to more than 37 billion by the end of 2020." (A. Guttmann, 2019). The same source affirms that today, nearly the 90% of the firms rely on social media to interact with customers.[1]

The Social media marketing strategy (SMMS) includes "a set of actions by which a company or organization expects to achieve its marketing objectives and meet the requirements of its target market through the use of social media tools and capabilities. Basically, SMMS deals with plans and decisions around the firms' target market, marketing mix, and social media mix. In this sense, social media marketing strategic actions (SMMA) comprise the marketing actions, activities, behaviors or tactics within the social media mix for a given SMMS." (Ananda et al., n.d.)

Thanks to social media, the old-fashioned one-way communication, the one that sees the consumer only as the receiver of the information given by the firm, has been transformed into an interactive two-way direct communication by removing all restrictions related to time, place, medium, etc. (Gautam & Sharma, 2017). Social media can function as meeting places where different actors, both suppliers and consumers, interact and collaborate and share information, and develop ties and relationships, or what Kieser referred to as an "arena within an arena" (Kieser, 1997). Indeed, one of the main advantages produced by social media is the new interactive and social dimension. This interaction both with the brands and with other consumers can enhance consumer confidence and trust and improve consumer service. Therefore, social media have become fundamental tools supporting existing relationships and activities in a pleasant way that can augment the users' experience (Gautam & Sharma, 2017) thanks to both richer stimuli and different tools that allow a more enjoyable and easier interaction with the website (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010; Okonkwo, 2010).

Social media belong to the category of the so-called "owned" media that allow organizations to create and distribute their own content (Laberecht, 2009). Social media is actually an umbrella term, used to refer to a series of platforms that give marketers the possibility to meet specific branding goals. In the last decade, a lot of new ones have been introduced: networking sites (e.g. Facebook), photosharing sites (e.g. Instagram), video-sharing sites (e.g. Youtube), professional networking sites (e.g. LinkedIn) and microblogging sites (e.g. Twitter) (Dawley, 2009; Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

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[1] https://www.statista.com/statistics/271406/advertising-revenue-of-social-networks-worldwide/

In particular, photosharing sites are the fastest growing social media sites, proving that the visual content is critical for a digital marketing campaign. (Lee et al., 2018)

The possibility to share different types of content like texts, audios, videos or images, makes social media a more effective tool to communicate with customers (Çukul, 2015).

Brands and consumers can communicate uninterruptedly for mutual benefits (Gautam & Sharma, 2017) engaging in a relationship that is essentially based on intimacy and trust. "Sternberg (1996) explained intimacy as feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness" (Gautam & Sharma, 2017), while Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) beautifully defined trust as "a degree of tendency to believe in a certain brand's ability to perform a promised function". Establishing a long-term relationship with customers means guaranteeing a higher transactional satisfaction to the brand, that is why marketers all around the world have been attracted by the so-called relationship marketing, that has been defined by Morgan and Hunt (1994) as "all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges". Marketers have to use Social media to be intimate with the consumers, create emotions within consumers to develop commitment and encourage consumers to be involved with the brand (Turri, et. Al. 2013). In fact, the main purpose that a Social media marketing strategy should have is to provide quality relationships with customers (Clark & Melancon, 2013).

It is all about being able to reach the customers, get them to know the brand and feel close to it.

1.2 Fashion and Social media

Even though the fashion industry has always been highly selective, giving the chance to enter that world only to those who belonged to a specific group or "élite", as Akahoshi recognizes in her work, "The fashion is cognizant to art", every artist, every designer, but also every art critic, does not need any formal education or training to emerge (Akahoshi, 2012): which means that no formal barriers should exist. Everyone should be able to express his/her opinion about the world of fashion. And that is what social media have done. "The social Web has removed the gatekeepers of an industry that was notoriously hard to penetrate and build a name in" (Lee, 2009).

With the emergence of social media, brands were scared that this could tarnish the brand's image, due to the inability to translate those feelings associated to the brand into "online traction" (Lee, 2009), but, as always more people decided to take part to these online communities, the interactivity facilitated the creation of a relationship between the firm and the client. (Akahoshi, 2012)

Social media have "an immense influence on people because of the human psychology in people's need to belong" where "they define themselves through the messages they transmit to others…through the goods and practices that they possess and display" (Phillips, 2008). Outlets like "Facebook and Twitter are now among the most valuable tools for brands to monitor consumer sentiment and provide real-time customer service in the fashion industry" (Lee, 2009). Since the world of fashion is characterized by continuous changes, also the communication tools used by brands must be adequate to this scenario. The improvement of smartphones and the iPhone, mobile applications developed by brands allow users to shop brand sales, receive style tips, and customize fashion trend news feed (Lee, 2009). All of the fashion houses "are tweeting, blogging and updating their profiles in an effort to mold their brand personalities on real-time global platforms" (Stephenson, 2009). This utilization of the social media serves as a "human voice for the brand" (Stephenson, 2009), in fact, designers not only post about their brand, but also about their personal life in order to create a more intimate relationship with customers, to show them the real life behind what they have been used to see on the runways. Thanks to this interaction, customers feel as if they are part of a family and their relationship is deepened (Stephenson, 2009).

Bourne defined social media as the "Fashion's newest Muse", an opportunity for professional growth and recognition of emerging designers, stylists and bloggers (Bourne, 2010); he believes that social media outlets are also fundamental to discover potential fashion designer. The existing technologies

are changing the traditional structures and breaking the thinking of fashion professional by providing a transparency into the fashion industry (Akahoshi, 2012).

This inclusiveness has also led to a complete changing in the role of the customer, who does not simply receive and consume the value created by the firm but participate to the cocreation of value (Grönroos, 2009). This value is represented, in our case, by the realization of new fashion items that somehow represent the customer. Indeed, this extension of the borders has given to millions of users the possibility to work with a company in order to create a new product and/or service (Billington and Davidson, 2013). The interaction with consumers and their involvement in the creation process, facilitates the acquisition of knowledge (Scuotto, Del Giudice et Al., 2017). Brands have the possibility to understand their customers' needs and give them what they want, in a cheaper, more efficient and faster way (Persaud, 2005). Social media networks offer users opportunities to voice out their ideas and consequently, customers are more active, creative and keen to develop social collaborations (Piller et al., 2012; Ariely, 2000). In this way, companies have the chance to seek new knowledge simply by interacting with their users.

Social media networks have changed our reality into a new "vibrant social dimension" in which consumers interact, recommend products/services and are involved in the firms' innovation processes. (Scuotto, Del Giudice et Al., 2017)

It is this active participation that transforms customers into brand ambassadors that not only contribute to the innovation process (Prahalad & Krishnan, 2008; Martini et al., 2013), but also to the making of important managerial and organizational changes (Kane et al., 2010). "Customers tend to be more and more involved because fashion is recognized as a form of customer expression (Godard, 2012). The fashion sector is a creative industry that 'pushes out' and 'pulls in' social changes (Santagata, 2010; Kim et al., 2007), and comes up with innovative ideas that tend to integrate or to replace existing ones (Godard, 2012)." The growing use of technological tools in the fashion industry has made it become a "juggernaut of innovation". (Scuotto, Del Giudice et Al., 2017) In fact, the fashion industry is constantly pervaded by change (Christopher et al., 2014; Agins, 2010; Burns and Bryant, 2002; Vecchiato and Roveda, 2010; Jernigan and Easterling, 1990; Kim and Ko, 2012).

However, it is fundamental for brands to be "both a reflection of a designer while remaining open to the suggestions of customers" and not lose sight of their own vision and integrity (Bourne, 2010).

Fashion is not just clothes and accessories, customers reflect their identity and emotions through what they wear, eat, and listen. Fashion embraces the aspirational identities, lifestyles and experiences

shared by social media such as Facebook and Twitter, among others. It is all about self-expression. (Scuotto, Del Giudice et Al., 2017)

1.2.1 The mediatization of Fashion

The whole concept of fashion has changed with the growing importance attached to social media. "The photogenic dimension of a dress has become more important than its tactile, material quality" (Rocamora, 2017).

If the term "mediation" is generally referred to the role of the media as "conveyors of meaning", the term "mediatization " refers, instead, to their *transformative* power (Cottle, 2006; Hepp, Hjarvard, and Lundby, 2015; Livingstone, 2009a; Lunt and Livingstone, 2015; Strömback and Dimitrova, 2011). In general, according to Cottle definition, the mediatization refers to the ability of the media to infiltrate "into the rhythms and practices of everyday life as well as systems of governance and the conduct of societies more generally" (2006). Hjarvard (2009) instead, affirms that the mediatization is the "process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic". In particular, in the case of the world of fashion, the word mediatization refers to the ways, practices of fashion, such as production, consumption, distribution and diffusion, are articulated through the media, and, more importantly, dependent on the media for their articulation. The focus here is not on the communication of fashion through social media, but on *doing* fashion through the media. It is necessary to look at the ways fashion practices have adapted to, and been transformed by, the media not by focusing on the media themselves, but on the ways people and institutions in the field of fashion have changed their practices for and with the media. (Rocamora, 2017)

When the first fashion shows were introduced, during the late nineteenth century, they were events dedicated to a social and financial élite (Evans, 2013). A decade after, these events, known as fashion weeks, became "a trade event aimed at fashion insiders and organized around a strict calendar of presentations". In recent years, instead, the development of digital media platforms has turned them into "media events - a public spectacle and entertainment addressed to a worldwide audience". A fundamental moment that represents this change can be identified in the Dolce and Gabbana fashion show that dates back to September 2009, where the whole front row was characterized by the presence of fashion bloggers and the first live streaming took place. After this event, other famous fashion brands decided to take this big step forward; for example, Burberry's collection from September 2013 was presented on 11 social networks, the show's finale was retweeted 1200 times and a video of it yielded 18,000 likes within a few hours on Instagram (Strugatz, 2013). (Rocamora, 2017)

Since then, fashion shows became something accessible to everybody, something made to bring the public in. "In September 2015 Givenchy opened their show to the public: 25,000 people registered (2000 of them within the first 2 seconds) for a chance to get access to one of the 850 tickets; 150 tickets were given to people from the local West Side area; and large screens projected the show live across the city. It is estimated that 6000 people saw the show" (Ellison, 2015). Therefore, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, have become "legitimate spaces of diffusion of the collections". (Rocamora, 2017)

Fashion shows have become mediatized events, everything is created and prepared in order to be consumed online, on a digital screen. On the *Washington Post*, Givhan about the Spring-Summer 2016 collection made by Olivier Rousteing for Balmain wrote: "these clothes look better in photographs than they do in reality. Which in these digital times is all too often the point. […] Rousteing's runway show is not about clothes or concepts. It is orchestrated to attract a million social media hits. It doesn't matter whether the clothes are judged attractive or profoundly ugly by the professionals – the gatekeepers – in the room. The ultimate audience is those people […] whose understanding of designer fashion, luxury and style has been shaped not by seeing couture craftsmanship up close but by the images of celebrities on the red carpet, the postings of celebrities on Instagram, the website advertising of luxury brands, the hyper-reality of the Kardashians […]. (Givhan, 2015) According to the designer Alexander Wang, the impact of social media today affects the designs. "The way that we shoot it, the way that we showcase it and the way that we make the clothes and design them changed" (Durmaz, 2014).

Moreover, these important changes have brought so many other changes concerning every aspect of the fashion industry, indeed also the retailing methods have changed. In 2013, Christopher Bailey, Chief Creative Officer of Burberry said: "you can't just start live-streaming show and then carry on doing everything else exactly the same as you were doing before. So we started doing this thing of 'runway to reality', where you can click to buy as you're watching the shows" (Cited in Johnston, 2013).

1.3.1 Instagram

Instagram describe themselves as "a fun and quirky way to share your life with friends through a series of pictures. Snap a photo with your mobile phone, and then choose a filter to transform the image into a memory to keep around forever. We're building Instagram to allow you to experience moments in your friends' lives through pictures as they happen. We imagine a world more connected through photos" (Wilson, 2013).

Created as a simple application made to share photos with friends, today it counts more than 1 billion of monthly active users and more than 100 million of photos and videos uploaded every day. It is the sixth most popular social network worldwide and its utilization as business tool is growing always more.[2] If it is used in a proper way, Instagram can be a "highly targeted, visual advertising channel for products and brands that can lead to a healthy stream of revenue for ecommerce business". (Çukul, 2015)

The most prominent "fast-fashion", as well as luxury, brands, they all have an Instagram account through which they try to convey the brand image, and, at the same time, build a relationship with their clients by giving them the possibility to freely express their opinions about them. After posting their contents, brands receive immediate feedbacks through the likes and shares, immediately understanding what their customers prefer and would like to have. Furthermore, Instagram give the opportunity to show the brand and the company behind-the-scenes to the customers (Lazazzera, 2015; Austin, 2013) since, normally, the account created by the brand owner is not only focused on the brand itself, but also on the designer personal life in order to evoke emotions that will make customers feel attached to the brand.

Another important functionality recently introduced by Instagram opened up the possibility to immediately buy the fashion item presented in the picture simply by tapping on it: everything is easy and within customers' reach. That is why it is the preferred platform by most of the brands existing today.

Generally, there are two distinct and common strategies that brands use: the direct product marketing (DM) and indirect product marketing (IM). The first one focuses on the product, while the other one

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[2] https://www.omnicoreagency.com/instagram-statistics/

uses attributes that are not but related to the product for marketing. For example, a bag that is photographed on a pedestal is DM, while a fashion model (person) holding the bag and the bag being vignette is IM. We often find both, but the IM is considered to be more effective, especially when used with celebrities. (Manikonda et al., 2016)

1.3.2 Facebook

Facebook is considered one of the most popular social networks throughout the world and its daily activity is very high (Correia, Medina, 2012; Pederson et al., 2017; Wallace et al., 2011). It counts over 25 billions of users, with 1.66 billions of them using it daily.[3] That is why it represents a very useful asset for the fashion industry. In fact, brands have the possibility to directly interact with their audience, but also look for and gain new clients. It is not just a unidirectional tool through which the brand shares its contents, promotions etc., in fact "it allows bidirectional communications between companies and their public" (Correia, Medina, 2014): meaning that brands also have the chance to co-create value with customers by building a strong relationship based on trust (Hajli, 2014b; Hew et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Facebook perfectly adapts to the needs of the fashion industry that is characterized by a continuous evolution, constant changes that have to be immediately shared with the public so that everyone is always up to date with the latest news and trends. This social network, indeed, has no limit of time and space for users to have access to it. Consumers just have to open their smartphones in order to be directly in touch with the brands they love.

Facebook offers multiple and unique opportunities for brands to create advertisements. There are the officially sponsored advertisements on the right column of each profile page, explicit promotional messages by companies or brands and implicit product placement or promotional posts endorsed or shared by ordinary Facebook users.

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[3] https://socialmediamarketing.it/facebook-2-5-miliardi-utenti-attivi/

1.3.3 Twitter

The numbers made by Twitter are lower than the other considered social networks, in fact it counts 139 millions of active daily users[4], but the positive aspect is that these numbers are always increasing. Although most people consider Twitter as a kind of "spin-off" of Facebook, it is actually preferred by most of its users who believe Facebook to be "too much". There are too much photos, too much words; while on Twitter, the possibility to use a maximum of 250 characters makes it easier for users to absorb a higher quantity of information in a shorter time. Moreover, you do not need to have an account in order to "tweet" or to have access to the information you need. (Pandey et al., 2020)

This social network has somehow managed to simplify, even more, the interaction between the brand and its customers by creating a minimalistic and faster way of approaching and communicating.

1.3.4 New "ad hoc" Social networks

The growing importance associated to Social media and to the digital world, in general, has led to the creation of new apps dedicated to the world of fashion. A part from all the brands app, through which it is possible to see, choose and buy all the presented items, there are also some of them like Zalando, Yoox and Rebelle, that give users the possibility to choose between a variety of brands and buy whatever they want while sitting at home.

- *21buttons*

  One of the most recent, but also very diffused, social networks about fashion is 21buttons. It was introduced in Italy at the beginning of the Summer 2017 and it had an immediate success.[5] The app is very similar to Instagram with a small but significant difference: every fashion item shown in the pictures has a "button" through which users are directly sent to the website of the store that sells it and therefore, be informed about the price, the size and the colors. After seeing the product, the user can decide whether to buy it, save it in the whishlist, or include it in the *closet,* an online wardrobe made to combine different items together. Most of the actual influencers are now part of this social community made to inspire fashion addicted when creating their outfits.

- *Chicismo*

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[4]https://www.franzrusso.it/condividere-comunicare/twitter-secondo-trimestre-2019-139-milioni-utenti-giornalieri-monetizzabili/
[5] https://compassunibo.wordpress.com/2017/12/28/e-commerce-e-fashion-in-ununica-applicazione-21-buttons/

Chicismo has been recognized as the number one app in 2014. The purpose of this app social network is to give users more ideas about what to wear in their daily lives without buying new clothes, but using those they already have in their closets, by combining them in different ways. It is possible to create so many different outfits to wear in every occasion and receive advices and feedbacks from both the other users of the community, and master fashion advisors.[6]

- *Viume*

  Viume is the app that combines human expertise and machine learning in order to find the best outfit for the occasion according to personal characteristics and the customers' lifestyle. In order to do so, the user starts by answering a series of key questions, essentially represented by images and icons. It is through these questions that the user expresses his/her characteristics, preferences and the budget. At this point, the machine learning process identifies a number of brands, items and colors that can be suitable for the user/occasion and after, this match is sent to the stylist who personally and directly interact with the user through vocal messages and pictures. In less than three hours, the customer receives a box with the proposed outfit or collection, having three days to try everything on and decide what to keep (and pay) and what to give back. [7]

  This app is made for those who are fashion addicted, but with very short time to dedicate to shopping.

- *Depop*

  Depop is an online platform and app made to buy and sell or trade fashion items. Being fashion addicted can be very expensive, that is why this app gives the opportunity to buy secondhand items at affordable prices by following the preferred accounts. A lot of influencers and celebrities use this app today, in order to sell those items they do not wear anymore or they just wore once. It is a very useful app that guarantees a more sustainable type of shopping.

- *Style.com*

  This is an app made from the original website that aims at keeping up to date its users about all the fashion trends, events, fashion shows, interviews, and everything about the world of fashion. [8]

- *Screenshop*

  This app has been defined as the "Shazam for fashion". In fact, it gives users the chance to find all the products they have seen on other social media platforms. Thanks to the very sophisticate system for image recognition, users just have to take a screenshot of the picture with the fashion item they

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[6] https://corriereinnovazione.corriere.it/cards/siete-patite-moda-queste-sono-dieci-app-che-fanno-caso-vostro/chicismo-trovare-abbinamenti.shtml

[7] https://thenexttech.startupitalia.eu/66545-20180609-viume-la-web-app-shopping-al-posto

[8] https://www.fashionsnobber.com/applicazioni-necessarie-per-appassionati-di-moda/

are looking for, to obtain the name of its designer and a series of different but similar outfits, divided according to the price range. This app was launched by Kim Kardashian at the end of 2017. [9]

But these are not the only ones that are dedicated to the world of fashion. There are so many other apps and digital platforms that aim at keeping customers up with the fashion trends and help them in choosing and buying the best outfits for every occasion they have.

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[9] https://www.corriere.it/tecnologia/cards/app-moda-simulatori-virtuali-camerino-all-ai-che-fa-shopping-posto-nostro/screenshop-shazam-moda.shtml

1.4 Influence(rs)

Social media turned out to be so powerful in spreading the news concerning fashion trends, especially thanks to the important presence of the so-called *influencers.* "Influencer marketing can be defined as a process of identifying and activating individuals who have an influence over a specific target audience or medium, in order to be part of a brand's campaign towards increased reach, sales, or engagement". It could be considered as an extension to the concept of word-of-mouth marketing, adapted to a social context and performed in a more professional way. If properly managed, this form of marketing can be very important for the brand, since it is able to build relationships with customers that are based on trust and authenticity. The influencer marketing is generally divided into two subpractices: earned influencer marketing, which is based on unpaid or pre-existing relationships with influencers or third party content that is promoted by the influencer to further their own personal growth; and paid influencer marketing, which is based on paid influencer marketing campaigns that take the form of sponsorship, pre-roll advertising or testimonial messaging that can appear at any point in the content. (Sudha & Sheena, 2017)

The influencer marketing value comes from three different sources: reach, relevance and resonance. Each influencer, apart from presenting qualities necessary to drive action, has an above-average number of followers in a specific niche or market. Therefore, they are able to reach thousands and thousands of consumers through their social channels. The relevance, instead, refers to the degree of importance that readers attach to the content, while the resonance refers to the number of activities an influencer generates through his/her content. (Sudha & Sheena, 2017)

Any person could potentially be an influencer. Pogliani (2018) identified different categories of influencers building a pyramid. At the bottom of the pyramid, the first category of influencers is that of consumers: also identified as *prosumers,* since they are not passive consumers, but they have an active role in searching for information and recommending products and services to other consumers. Even if they are not able to reach a wide range of consumers, their influence is significant since consumers tend to trust those that are similar to them.

At the second level of the pyramid there are the experts: those who are 'expert' on a specific subject or theme and use social networks to create discussions around them. They are believed to be trustworthy because of their professional qualities.

At the third level there are the gurus: a sort of evolution of the experts. Their social abilities make them able to reach a wide range of users and can consequently add value to the brand.

Finally, at the top of the pyramid, there are the VIP: those celebrities who are able to influence enormous numbers of users especially because of the emotional attachment that most of them feel towards them.

They are also defined as *trendsetter,* because of their ability to lead fashion and inspire people.

In the world of fashion, influencers tend to be divided into two main groups according to the number of followers they have on social media:

- Micro influencers: those who are able to reach a maximum of 10.000 users, they are not celebrities, but still, they are able to influence a consistent number of people because of their closeness to the customers;

- Macro influencers: those who are able to reach higher numbers of users (compared to micro influencers). They represent a powerful marketing tool because of their ability to interact with customers.

Fashion industry is entirely driven by influencer marketing compared to any other industry, it offers many ways of collaboration between bloggers and brands. It is not limited to just blog and social media posts, but it can include Instagram takeovers, event hosting, modeling or even product design. (Sudha & Sheena, 2017)

One of the main reasons why brands rely so much on influencers, is to establish credibility in the market. In fact, influencers have strong relationships, based on trust, with their audience, that is why they could function as bridges bringing customers closer to those brands that they personally trust. These relationships are essentially based on the influencers' authenticity and honesty. Users believe in what he/she says, so if he/she is saying that a brand is really fantastic and he/she does not know anything about the brand or he/she does not really like it, he/she is losing credibility and selling him/herself. It is only by being authentic that individuals can differentiate themselves on the social media. Marwick (2003) believes that "authenticity means three different things to women engaged with fashion blogs: first, a palpable sense of truthful self-expression; second, a connection with and responsiveness to the audience; and third, an honest engagement with commodity goods and brands. Thus, the authentic is not something that exists apart from commercial culture, but a set of affective relations between individuals, audiences, and commodities". (Marwick, 2003)

These influencers are living what we can call the "glam life", characterized by global travels, invitations to exclusive events, and access to luxury goods. By showing this lifestyle on their social

networks account, they engage in what Marwick (2013) called "aspirational production": everybody would like to conduct that kind of life and own those fashionable products. (Duffy & Hund, 2015)

Later on, Katz and Lazarsfeld (2006) identified three main characteristics through which it is possible to define someone's influential abilities: personal characteristics, knowledge criteria and social factors. The personal characteristics include sex, age, level of educational achievement, marital status and social class. Knowledge criteria comprise the level of knowledge that influencers may have in relation to a particular topic or area of interest (in our case, fashion); such knowledge enables individuals to become experts in the field and, as a result, an influence in the social circle that looks to them for guidance. Finally, social factors provide influencers with the strategic social situation enabling them to influence those around via their personal relationships. (SanMiguel & Sábada, 2018).

1.5 Social media impact

1.5.1 Brand Communities

A brand community is "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Brand communities play a vital role in the brand's social construction and they are characterized by three main attributes: a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility among their members. Following what Gusfield (1978) and Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) affirmed, the shared consciousness refers to the consciousness of the "intrinsic connection that members feel towards one another"; rituals and traditions represent the social processes with the main aim of reproducing and transmitting the meaning of the community, both within and beyond the borders of the community; while the moral responsibility refers to the sense of duty that the community members feel towards the community itself, it is the driving force that produces collective action and establishes the group cohesion. It is not simple to identify the borders surrounding the community; indeed, it is still discussed if only those who actively participate with comments and interactions can be considered as members or also those who just read what others write can be included. Both readers and participants feel as if they are part of the community, since they feel engaged in a relationship with the other members. What they all have in common is surely their style, even if it is the brand (or the influencer) that dictates the trend, it is the community that legitimize that kind of style, that trend. The community exists to give support to all its members, it gives them the possibility to create, discuss and reveal how they perceive that brands can be combined to create favorable expressions of style in line with current trends. (Phil, 2014)

Users, by interacting with bloggers and other users, take part to an exchange process (Chittenden, 2010): readers seek to acquire information and recommendations about products and brands, while brands obtain immediate feedbacks, suggestions, advices from their customers.

Communities have also been associated to blogospheres, because of the blurriness of their borders. Previous literature has explained the notion of the blogosphere as the aggregation of blogs (Keren, 2006) that represent the created and occupied space in the digital media landscape (Baoill, 2004). It is in these places that interactions, that lead to the creation of relations, between different actors and consumption objects take place. Each sphere is inclusive in nature, it welcomes anyone who shows the same interests of the sphere to venture in. (Laurell, 2014)

1.5.2 Impulse buying behavior effect

Generally speaking, impulse buying represents between 40 and 80 per cent of all purchases, according to the product (Amos et al., 2014; Marketingdirecto, 2012). If, on the one hand, some research show that the economic crisis and the growing use of the digital platforms have changed the way in which consumers make buying decision toward a more rational process (Experian Marketing Services, 2013; Banjo & Germano, 2014), on the other hand, there are some authors who believe that the internet favors the impulse buying behavior (Gupta, 2011; Rodríguez, 2013).

First of all, we need to make a distinction between four types of impulse buying (Stern, 1962):
1) *Pure impulse buying*, the consumer had no intention to buy the product, but his/her emotional reaction pushes him/her to buy it;
2) *Reminder impulse buying,* the consumer sees the product and remembers he/she wants to buy it because he/she needs it or because he/she saw an advertisement;
3) *Suggestion impulse buying,* the consumer sees an item for the first time, and he/she believes it can satisfy a need;
4) *Planned impulse buying,* the consumer enters the store knowing that he/she is going to make other purchases according to the special offers/promotions.

Even though the online buying behavior may seem rational, since the consumers have the possibility to search for the information they need in order to make the final purchase, the ease of choosing a product and just clicking on it in order to obtain it may be tempting and increase the likelihood of impulse buying (Greenfield, 1999). The internet development to the 2.0 Web has changed the transactional relationship between consumers and brands. In particular, social media are incorporated in every kind of activity (Xiang et al., 2016). Indeed, the 65 % of social media users declare that social networks have a fundamental influence on their purchase processes, and almost the same amount affirm that social media "inspire their online purchase" (IAB Spain, 2016; PWC, 2016). Social media can, therefore, be considered as very powerful tools to boost impulse buying. The product assortment, the possibility to buy with no limit of time or space, but also that of personalizing fashion items online, encourage customers to make online purchases (Greenfield, 1999; LaRose, 2001). Furthermore, those factors that could discourage consumers from buying online such as: the impossibility to touch the product or to try it on before buying it; are easily overcome through good

quality product presentation, realistic pictures and very detailed information about sizes. (Aragoncillo & Orús, 2018)

1.5.3 eWOM

The community participates to the creation of the so-called User-generated content, which refers to the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media (Laurell, 2014). The most relevant content created online by users is, with no doubts, the e-word-of-mouth (eWOM). This falls under the category of viral marketing, which broadly describes "any strategy that encourages individuals to propagate a message, thus, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence" (Bampo, Ewing, Mather, Stewart, & Wallace, 2008). These statements made by consumers are relevant for both the consumers themselves and the brands. Every consumer, before making a purchase, usually looks for information and advices on the web, especially on social media. Other consumers' experience can be of fundamental importance for those who would like to try the brand, but are not really sure about it since it is something they do not know anything about. Consumers are genuinely interested in other consumers' opinions and advice, particularly because the "credibility of formal marketing efforts often is in doubt…an opinion leader is likely to be chosen as an essential contact for verification or advice about a product or brand" (Kimmel, 2010). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) affirm that consumers are likely to post comments just to receive social benefits from being part of a virtual community, meaning that they only do it because of their need for social interaction. Research have shown how the eWOM is much more trustworthy and as having greater impact on customers' purchasing decisions than any other type of communication created by the brands themselves. Brands, instead, try to use them for commercial benefits. In fact, even if they are not made with the intent of being commercial, they often contain names of brands/products, and consequently are likely to affect the perception of commercial entities and their products. (Wolny & Mueller, 2013)

1.5.4 The negative impact

Apart from all the benefits generated by the growing use of social media by all the most important and advanced fashion brands, we also have to highlight some negative aspects that can be detrimental for the brand itself. First of all, through social media the brand is constantly observed by everyone

who wants to, and this is not always beneficial for the brand. There is no space for mistakes, every single thing, even the smallest one, is seen by the public and it could be the end for the brand. It is like everything is put under a microscope; everything is magnified, creating space for criticism. As we all know, social media are the perfect place to express our opinions; they voice out those who would not be listened in the real life. But sometimes it is this possibility to be heard without being forced to show who we are that creates negative vibes. People feel stronger because of this "online power" that they have, they take advantage of this position and use it to change the public opinion about the brand. Negative e-word-of-mouth, online critics, can also lead to the demolition of the brand. Moreover, everything that is generated online is stored in some kind of archive, so that it will always be remembered, even after a long time in the future. Nothing can be erased. Of course, the brand has the chance to rebuild its name even after a bad fall, but that negative step will always be somewhere on the internet.

For what concerns the social media marketing instead, the frequency and amount of messages concerning luxury consumption possess the ability to reinforce negative virtues such as greed, lust, envy, sloth, pride and anger (Pollay & Mittal, 1993), which in turn negatively impact young users' attitude toward social media advertising. (Chu et al., 2013) Users, in fact, can be bothered by this huge amount of advertisements, but also by the way in which it is presented, by the person that has been chosen to represent the brand, or by the message hidden in the adv: these, along with so many others, are all aspects that must be taken into account in order to create the right SMM strategy, otherwise users will end up perceiving it as false or deceptive.

CHAPTER 2

Literature review and Research Questions

Consumer behavior is affected by a series of internal and external factors. Before consumers can actually make a decision, "they must have some source of knowledge or information upon which to base their decisions". First of all, the consumer must have the motivation, ability and opportunity to think and plan the buying decision. Secondly, the decision is influenced by the exposure, attention and perception; the consumer will be exposed to some specific information and, considering that we cannot consider every possibility due to our "bounded rationality", this information will be later categorized and comprehended to consequently form and change our behavior. Finally, another relevant factor influencing our decision resides in what we can recall from our memory.
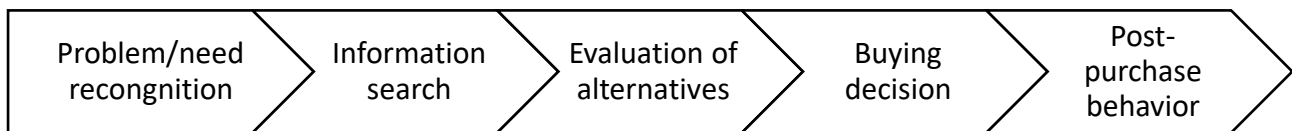
Moreover, putting these internal factors aside, we also need to take into consideration some external influences created by the culture, the diversity among people, the social class they belong to, their values and personality. Much can be understood through the decisions people make. They usually reflect something we believe in or represent who we are. (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2010)

2.1 The Consumer's decision-making process

The Consumer decision-making process is a fundamental component of the consumer behavior. Previous studies have recognized it as a rational process made of five stages: problem/need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, buying decision, and post-purchase behavior. Later on, further investigations have identified different psychological traits that have completely transformed the previous five-stage model introduced by Dewey and made it more complex (Nash, 2019). Consumers decisions can change over time, they are imprecise and adapt do different situations (Dhar, 1997). The CDMP is, in fact, influenced by internal and external factors that have been defined by Gursoy and McClary as "the motivated activation of knowledge stored in the memory and psychological traits or acquisition of information from the environment" (Gursoy &McClary, 2004). Considering that, today, the environment that has the biggest impact on the consumers' acquisition of information, necessary to make any buying decision, is the Web 2.0, and, in particular, the social media, it is essential to interpret how they influence this process in order to understand today's consumer. The online communication between consumers and brands has been identified as a key influencer for the consumer behavior, attitudes and awareness (Mangold & Faulds,

2009). The literature also shows how social media can have a different influence on the different generations, "increasing the complexity to these behaviors, furthering the need for a more comprehensive understanding" (Nash, 2019).

Consumer's decision-making process

Problem/need recongnition	Information search	Evaluation of alternatives	Buying decision	Post-purchase behavior

Img.1. The five stages of the consumer's decision-making process.

2.1.1 Information seeking

Before making any kind of purchase decision, consumers look for the information they need through a variety of sources. In today's society, the increasing presence of new technologies, the Web 2.0 and the Social media, is completely changing the environment in which consumers operate (Nash, 2019). "Social media websites now receive the highest web traffic worldwide (Alexa, 2018) and one third of online time is spent on social media (GlobalWebIndex, 2018)". (Kawaf & Istanbulluoglu, 2019) In our case, the consumer normally uses these platforms in order to search for the information about the product she wants/needs and consequently identify choices and evaluate alternatives. The advent of digital fashion media has, on one side, reduced the brands' autonomy and control over the

information released about them, and, on the other, guaranteed a "privileged" access to any kind of information to consumers.

In the case of fashion, magazines were the most used source in the past, especially because of the visual aesthetic elements that are fundamental to convey the right message to customers (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010). But the situation changed in the last decades. In fact, the primary source of information is fashion blogs, these have "broken down the historical monopoly of the fashion magazines in disseminating fashion" (Engholm & Hansen-Hansen, 2013). Furthermore, the millennials generation is relying, everyday more, on consumer-dominated media for their information search (American Press Institute, 2015). In fact, consumers rely on social media pages as a source of information even though this could come from strangers and anonymous users (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Schindler & Bickart, 2005; Sen & Lerman, 2007).

2.2 Consumers' exposure to social media marketing strategies

"Marketing stimuli are messages and information about products or brands and other offerings communicated by either the marketer or by nonmarketing sources". Consumers are continuously exposed to a huge amount of marketing stimuli during their journey, in fact, lately, they are able to control the stimuli they are exposed to, so that they "can actively seek certain stimuli and avoid others". (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2010)

Social media are, always more, considered as the perfect tool to conduct promotional activities and to effectively communicate with customers (Popp and Woratschek, 2016; Harrigan et al., 2017; Gao and Feng, 2016; Kohli et al., 2015). "As reported by Facebook (2014) itself, Facebook was able in 2014 to generate more than 5.4$ billion from advertising with growing percent up to 58%. Furthermore, Facebook revenue from advertising has grown by 59 per cent during the past year to over $5.4 billion in 2014 (Facebook, 2014), which is testament to the shift from traditional media advertising to digital interactive media advertising by organisations" (Alalwan et al., 2017). According to a more recent research conducted by Smith (2016), more than 2.5 million businesses pay to use Facebook advertising, and 75% of brands pay to promote posts.

The effectiveness of this kind of communications largely depends on how customers perceive and formulate their attitudes toward such activities (Duffett, 2015). It is common knowledge that the familiarity with a stimulus is fundamental for it to be recalled from memory (Becknell et al., 1963), because the frequency of exposure has a positive effect on the customer's perception process (Solomon, 2009). Consequently, consumers prefer those stimuli to which they are exposed more

frequently. The higher they get to know with that stimulus, the more positive will be their reaction to it. This is because of the "mere exposure" effect, the condition that makes the stimulus accessible to the consumer's perception. (Harrison, 1977)

All marketers today seek to increase the number of advertisements on social media, so that consumers become familiar with them and generate a positive attitude (Bialkova & van Trijp, 2010).

2.3 The five dimensions of the social media marketing

Consumers are no longer primarily interested in products specifics and satisfaction, they do not just look for the most convenient price and the best quality on the market, what they really want is a pleasurable experience with the brand they like. "They want to gain emotional rewards from enticing store atmosphere, superb customer service, and entertaining experiences" (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). The brand experience is the result of the subjective sensations, feelings, and evaluations that are internally processed and generated from the brand-related stimuli like brand design, visual identity, packaging, communications, and other environmental cues (Brakus et al., 2009). Hence, the brand experience can occur through the product, the service, the store, or the marketing campaign.

For what concerns the marketing campaign, prior studies have identified five different dimensions of social media marketing activities: entertainment, interaction, customization, trendiness, and word-of-mouth (Gautam & Sharma, 2017; Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012; Mohammadpour et al., 2014). The entertainment refers to the pleasure and fun that comes from the usage of social media, in other words, to the hedonic sphere. The interaction, instead, refers to the users' contribution on the brands pages on social media, while the trendiness is the degree to which the information that users can find on these pages is new and up to date. The customization represents the ability of the brand to respond to customers' individual needs and tastes (Seo & Park, 2018). Finally, the word-of-mouth refers to the online opinions exchange and recommendations among users (Sano, 2014).

2.4 Co-creation and Crowdsourcing

Traditionally, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, consumers did not participate to the creation of value, they used to passively absorb information about the brand, buy and receive the product to consequently consume it. In post-modernity, social media has become essential for the establishment of the brand value (Arvidsson, 2005) and the firms are not the only responsible of the

brand message. Digital marketers today, not only aspire to the creation of the right brand message, but also to the creation of relevant and compelling content, possibly through value co-creation, defined by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) as "joint creation of value by the company and the customer". This common practice gives to customers the possibility to actively participate to the creation of the brand message.

Before: Now:

| Brand | | Brand |

| Consumer | | Consumer |
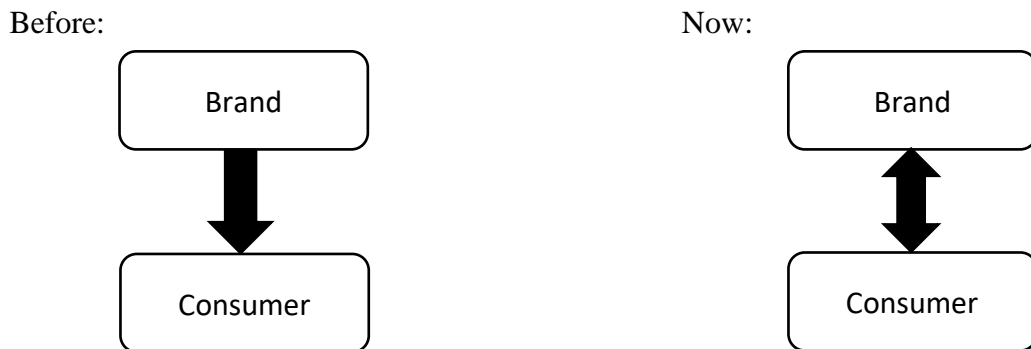
Img.2. The evolution of the relationship between the brand and the consumer.

Apart from this co-creation of value, the firms can also decide to externalize part of their activities, by giving to customers the chance to participate to creation and development of a project, an object or an idea.[10] This practice is called *crowdsourcing* and social media represent the perfect environments where firms can develop it. It generates benefits to both the firm and the consumer: the consumer will feel as if she is part of something, part of a group, so she will become more confident about her individual abilities and perceive her needs, especially the social ones, as satisfied; while the firm will benefit from the costs reduction, but also the improvement of quality and flexibility (Palacios et al., 2016). The participation of some external actors to those actions that were internally done before, shows how social media have brought firms closer to customers, and blurred that fixed distinction.

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[10] https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crowdsourcing

2.5 Representation and engagement-centered marketing actions

Marketers make a distinction between the "representation" and the "engagement" type of actions. The first one aims at presenting and getting consumers to know the brand, while the second one aims at creating a bond, a relationship, with the customers by giving them the possibility to directly get in touch with the brand and with the other users. This latter encourages customers to co-create and share contents about the brand, consequently creating what we defined before as *brand communities.* A recent research made by Ananda et al. (2017) showed how the number of representation-centered actions was higher than the engagement-centered actions. Proving that brands still relied on a traditional transaction-centered marketing approach, which is entirely focused on presenting the brand's products and promotions and how to access to the online shop or catalog. But what makes social media different from the other marketing communication channels used by the brands is, indeed, their "bidirectionality": users can respond and react to all the posted contents (Ananda et al., 2019). This new access to the contents is of fundamental importance to get the brands closer to customers and generate engagement, which is a central concept for brand communities. As defined by Hollebeek et al., (2014) consumer–brand engagement goes beyond a mere behavioral response, and also comprises cognitive processing and affection; as such, consumer–brand engagement is "a consumer's positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to consumer–brand interactions" (Ananda et al., 2019). Consumers can express how they feel about a post through the multiple tools given by social media. For instance, Facebook's "Like", Pinterest's "Pin" or Instagram's "Heart" buttons manifests users' appreciation, positive affection or the emotional relationship they have with the brand. These are fast and immediate ways to express their engagement with the brand and, furthermore, they do not require so much effort, that is why consumers find them easy and pleasurable ways to get in touch with the brands and let them know what they think.

Examples of a representation-centered (Img.3) and engagement-centered (Img.4) marketing actions by Gucci on Instagram.[11]

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[11] https://www.instagram.com/gucci/

Img.3. A Gucci representation post on the Instagram page.

Img.4. A Gucci engagement post on the Instagram page.

2.6 Social media marketing and brand loyalty

"Brand loyalty occurs when consumers make a conscious evaluation that a brand or service satisfies their needs to a greater extent than others do and decide to buy the same brand repeatedly for that reason" (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2010). It is not just a simple habit, it represents a deep connection between the brand and the consumer, which is based on commitment. Schembri, Merrilees, and Kristiansen (2010) believe that consumers find it aspirational to be identified with brand signs and symbols. In this case, the brand represents for consumers part of their own personality. Establishing a brand loyalty relationship with customers means generating a win-win situation for both the brand and the client: the client has better prices and superior product quality, while the brand obtains higher incomes, but, especially, positive eWOM from satisfied consumers, free publicity for the brand that can attract a very high number of consumers, also coming from different contexts.

Social media marketing includes strategies of both direct and indirect marketing that seek to generate consumer awareness, recognition, recall and consciousness for a product, or for the brand in general, being executed through web tools of social networking, content dissemination and microblogging (Chaffey & Smith, 2013). "Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) examined more than five hundred Facebook users and found out that the user-generated marketing on social media exerted a positive impact on brand equity and brand attitude" (Ahmed et al., n.d.). The study conducted by Ahmed et al., revealed how the social media marketing strategies play a key role in building brand loyalty. The numerous fans of the social media pages tend to be committed to the pages they follow and like (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006).

Social media marketing is different than traditional methods of marketing: consequently, it requires special attention and strategy building to achieve brand loyalty. Social media marketing is related to relationship marketing; therefore, the firms need to shift their main goal from "trying to sell" to "making connections with consumers" (Gordhamer, 2009). According to Coon (2010), brands should focus on the "small acts", those that will give them the chance to reach lots of people and accomplish the objectives in a shorter period of time compared to the "big campaigns". Being based on the relationship with the client, the social media marketing is also more sincere, because it aims at showing what the brand really is, in order to create an emotional attachment, rather than trying to control its image. (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012)

Several studies have been conducted in order to analyze the different drivers and consequences of brand loyalty in the online context (e.g., Khadim et al., 2018; Srinivasan et al., 2002; Tatar & Eren-Erdogmus, 2016). The loyalty drivers in the online context are not the same as the offline one, brands are asked to focus on some specific factors related to the online context such as the connectivity, interactivity, customization, convenience or ease of use, cultivation or relevance of online information and community (Srinivasan et al., 2002). The relevance of the proposed content is fundamental, that is why "companies have to keep themselves updated about what customers are interested in, their activities and current perspectives in life" (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012). In fact, in order to maintain their customers' loyalty, marketers have utilized various means that combined the classical marketing mix variables, but also new methods of marketing such as events, sponsorships, one-to-one marketing activities, Internet marketing and social media marketing (Keller, 2008; Kotler and Keller, 2007).

2.7 Social media marketing and brand preference

The brand preference analysis is an important topic in marketing. In fact, in order to induce a specific brand choice, marketers must be able to understand which are the main factors that influence and determine the consumers' preference for a brand. These factors can be divided into two main categories: the consumers' personality traits and the brands properties. (Yang et al., 2015) Today, thanks to the increasing use of social media as a marketing tool, all the brands with active profiles and pages have the power to generate strong and direct relationships with their customers, make them understand how valuable they are for them.

This growing use of social media has also given a new opportunity to the small and medium-sized enterprises. In fact, considering the smaller budget they have to invest on the communication that aims at retaining their existing customers, but also on that kind of publicity made to attract new possible customers, social media represent an efficient use of marketing costs (Krasnova et al., 2010). Ryan and Jones (2009) affirmed that marketing products and services on social media are cheap and, at the same time, are able to generate a higher rate of return. Furthermore, these social media marketing strategies are also preferred by the consumer.

Customers choose and buy according to what they encounter on their social media pages (Ogilvie et al., 2018). Consequently, these social media developments have changed the traditional marketing practices and strategies, and introduced new ones (Itani et al., 2017).

2.8 Social media marketing and brand attachment

The emotional attachment was first studied in the context of the parent-child connection. In 1988, Bowlby defined it as "a disposition to seek proximity and contact with another individual who is the object of attachment" (Dwivedi et al., 2019). The interpersonal attachment is associated with feelings of dependency, closeness, love, affection and passion (Aron and Westbay, 1996; Collins and Read, 1990).
In general, in consumer behavior, consumers develop emotional attachments to different marketable entities, such as products (Kleine & Baker, 2004), places (Williams et al., 1992), celebrities (Thomson, 2006), and brands (Percy et al., 2004; Slater, 2000). Consumers normally develop these attachments so that their experiential, symbolic and emotional needs are fulfilled (Park et al., 2006), and the increasing presence of social media in people's lives is the reason behind the strong emotional connections with the preferred social media brands (Harrigan et al., 2017; Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013).

This means that the main reason why consumers decide to buy products or, in our case, fashion items, from a specific brand, resides in the emotional connection that the brand is able to create (He et al., 2016). According to Berry (2000), "great brands always make an emotional connection with the intended audience". The long-term relationships built by brands have, at their bases, this emotional brand attachment. For this reason, marketers always have to introduce new initiatives that can maintain these relationships with their customers and make them stronger. (Perera et al., 2019) A fundamental aspect of user attachment is *enjoyment*, which reflects the role of social media in helping consumers to enjoy and relax (VanMeter et al., 2015).

This affection refers to consumers' feelings of peace, love and friendliness towards a brand. In particular, a connection denotes feelings of being attached and bonded with a brand, while passion refers to feelings such as consumer delight and captivation with a brand. (Thomson et al., 2005). More recent researches have shown how "consumers are attached to particular brands because they are materialistic and anxious with their existence needing symbolic security" (Japutra et al., 2019). The brand is the representation of the self, a "place" where consumers can feel as if they were at home. In fact, those individuals that are attached to a brand, show the tendency to spend more resources, such as time and money, for the brand (Park et al., 2010).

2.9 Social media consumer engagement and WOM

In order to understand if consumers are really engaged with the brand, it is necessary to see and analyze how they respond to the content posted on the different platforms. The most common ones, such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, give to their users the possibility to express how they feel about the content they see through specific click-based buttons. "Users can then share their interest or convey their attitude about content posted by anyone using these buttons" (Swani et al., 2013). Despite the difference between these plugins, they all have common underlying motivations and cognitive processes.

Dhaoui (2014) identified four types of consumer engagement, four different types of consumers' reactions to the online strategies used by the brands:

1) The pass-on, which is the most relevant eWOM for the brands, since it consists of consumers *passing on* to other users the online contents they found interesting (Dahl, 2015). Consequently, the brand has on one side, the possibility to understand which is the most effective strategy to use, those contents

which are considered the most by consumers, those that draw their attention; and, on the other, to take advantage of this free publicity made by the customers themselves;

2) The "liking" of the content itself, which shows the endorsement of the brand and the values expressed in the content. This makes the brand understand the consumers' favorite contents and also increases its online visibility;

3) The feedbacks and comments to the contents published by the brand, which gives to the brand the chance to understand the brand equity level;

4) The conversations among users, which are really representative of consumers' general sentiment about the posted content.

Users that see a content they like, something they can relate with, immediately share it with each other, so, naturally, the pass-on reaction generates eWOM. But, actually, also the "liking" at the post can generate it: that is because other users that see the post can see that another user liked it before, or it could even appear on their home page (as it is in the case of Facebook). In fact, according to Henning-Thurau et al. (2014), "by liking a post, consumers declare their endorsing statement without leaving a comment". This type of reaction does not require the same effort as commenting or replying (Swani et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2017).

Pass-on behaviors, instead, refer to recommendation behaviors such as: sharing a post on Facebook, reposting a photo on Instagram, retweeting a tweet on Twitter. (Ananda et al., 2019)

The content posted by brands on social media, today, is of fundamental importance to build a strong relationship with the client and generate brand loyalty. Nevertheless, few studies analyze which types of marketing actions, messages or contents posted by brands on social media consumers prefer. In other words, which is the content that makes them "click". That is why, this study aims at answering the two following questions:

RQ1: What type of SMM actions by fashion brands drive higher pass-on, endorsement and aggregate intention to engage in eWoM behaviors?

RQ2: What is the relationship between fashion consumers' perceived exposure toward fashion brands' SMM actions and their intention to engage in eWoM behaviors?

(Ananda et al., 2019)

Research design and methods

3.1 Measurement instrument

In order to find answers to the two questions introduced before, a survey has been formulated. This was adapted from the research conducted by Ananda et al. (2019), which provides empirical basis for the measurement of social media marketing actions in the context of fashion brands. The main idea of this instrument relies on investigating on the frequency with which fashion brands perform different SMM actions and also consumers' exposure to these actions. The questionnaire included 13 blocks of questions each referring to a different measurement item for fashion brands' SMM actions from Ananda et al. (2019), then identified with a code so that they would be easily recognized in the dataset, as shown in the Table I. The 13 SMM actions belong to two main categories: the *representation-centered* and *engagement-centered* actions; in particular, 10 SMM actions refer to the first category and 3 to the second one. For each block of questions, there is a real example of social media content in order to illustrate the SMM action, so that respondents had the possibility to visually experience and understand the difference between the SMM actions.

The survey consists of an online self-administered questionnaire that has been distributed via mobile device using different social media platforms in order to reach a fair number of respondents. For the same reason, the whole survey was formulated in Italian.

Furthermore, the questionnaire presents social media contents published by four brands belonging to two different categories. In particular, the brands chosen were Zara and H&M for the fast-fashion category, while Gucci and Dior for the luxury brands. This decision was made to compare the social media strategies, used by these two categories of brands, and see if they have a different impact on consumers.

For each SMM action illustrated through real examples taken from the above mentioned brands' social media pages, the respondents were asked about the perceived frequency of their exposure to each type of action, through the question "How frequently do you perceive that the fashion brands you follow post this kind of content?". The responses to the perceived exposure were measured through a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "never" (=1) to "always" (=5).

TYPE OF ACTION	ACTION	CODE
REPRESENTATION	Providing access to the brands' e-shop/e-commerce site	**SMMAO1**
	Providing product promotion content (e.g. pictures or videos about products)	**SMMA02**
	Providing upcoming product sneak-peeks	**SMMA03**
	Providing exclusive campaign previews	**SMMA04**
	Reporting or sharing posts of product launch, offline stores or other offline promotional events (e.g. live-streaming of fashion weeks)	**SMMA05**
	Providing content about the brand's expertise, values and culture	**SMMA06**
	Publishing casual socialization content (e.g. greetings)	**SMMA07**
	Publishing promoted posts or ad-banners	**SMMA08**
	Showcasing brand achievements, results, innovation, news or success stories	**SMMA09**
	Customer's appreciation (e.g. thanking customers for the purchases)	**SMMA10**
ENGAGEMENT	Posting content about personalities (e.g. celebrities) or influencers	**SMMA11**
	Sharing personalities' or influencers' posts and endorsements of the brand and its products	**SMMA12**
	Encouraging customers to share their brand experiences	**SMMA13**

Source: *Adapted from Ananda et al., 2019*

Table I.

Items of fashion brands' SMM actions

For what concerns, instead, the measurement of the eWOM engagement or, in other words, the consumers' behavioral intention to engage in eWOM, this aims at understanding consumers' likeliness to positively respond to the indicated SMM action using one-click social plug-ins. The questions were: "Would you share this type of content?" and "Would you 'like' this content?"; while the provided answers were "Yes/No". The first question is designed to measure the intention to engage in pass-on eWOM behaviors, while the second one aims at measuring the intention to engage in endorsement/aggregate eWOM behaviors (Ananda et al., 2019).

For the data analysis, first of all, the average of the perceived exposure for each SMM action has been calculated as well as the level of intention to engage in eWOM behaviors generated by each SMM action. If the latter aims at answering to the RQ1, the former can help answering the RQ2 along with the use of the point-biserial correlation to analyze the relation between perceived frequency of SMM actions and intention to engage in eWoM behaviors.

3.2 Data collection

As said before, the questionnaire has been distributed through mobile device and the use of different social media in order to reach a discreet number of respondents. The overall number of responses was 138, but only 121 were complete at 100%, so that is the number considered for the analysis. The whole sample of respondents is aged between 20-30, they are all Italian with the 33.61 percent of males and the 66.39 percent of females. The chosen sample includes part of what is called Generation Y, or Millennials, and part of the Generation Z. This choice relies on the knowledge that, by definition, these are two generations that are born in the age of the Internet and are used to connect with others through social media. Consequently, they are, for sure, those more exposed to the different social media marketing stimuli used by fashion brands.

3.3 Results

In order to understand the respondents' perceived exposure, the average for each social media marketing action has been calculated. The overall average perceived exposure to the SMM actions is 3.37, a bit lower than the result of Ananda et al., 2019. All the results are summarized in the Table II. The top five SMM actions (those with highest average) are "publishing promoted posts or ad-banners" (SMMA08), "sharing personalities' or influencers' posts and endorsements of the brand and its products" (SMMA12), "providing access to the brands' e-shop/e-commerce site" (SMMA01), "providing product promotion content (e.g. pictures or videos about products)" (SMMA02), "posting content about personalities (e.g. celebrities) or influencers" (SMMA11). The SMM action that reported the lowest level of perceived exposure is, instead, "providing content about the brand's expertise, values and culture" (SMMA06).

SMM ACTION	FREQUENCY SCALE (AVERAGE)
SMMAO1	4,09
SMMA02	3,99
SMMA03	3,30
SMMA04	3,49
SMMA05	3,86
SMMA06	2,78
SMMA07	2,90
SMMA08	4,45
SMMA09	2,93
SMMA10	3,76
SMMA11	3,87
SMMA12	4,41
SMMA13	3,29
MEAN	**3,37**

Table II.
Perceived exposure average to the SMM actions.

Curiously, two (SMMA11 and SMMA12) out of three *engagement-centered* actions are among the top five perceived exposure SMM actions.

3.4 Social media marketing actions and eWOM engagement

The social media marketing actions considered for this analysis, generate an average of 34.9 percent intention to engage in pass-on eWOM behaviors. Of the thirteen SMM actions, only four of them present a higher level of intention to engage in eWOM behaviors with an average that is higher than 40 percent. These are: "reporting or sharing posts of product launch, offline stores or other offline promotional events (e.g. live-streaming of fashion weeks)" (SMMA05), "providing product promotion content (e.g. pictures or videos about products)" (SMMA02), "sharing personalities' or influencers' posts and endorsements of the brand and its products" (SMMA12), "posting content about personalities (e.g. celebrities) or influencers" (SMMA11). All the others show an average below, in particular, the SMMA08 that refers to "publishing promoted posts or ad-banners" has the lowest level compared to all the others SMM actions.

| | | Type of eWOM engagement | | | |
| | | Pass-on | | Endorsement/Aggregate | |
SMM ACTION	_Frequency scale (average)_	_%_	_r$_{pb}$_	_%_	_r$_{pb}$_
SMMA01	4,09	22,3	0,080	80,8	-0,290**
SMMA02	3,99	52,1	-0,430**	75,2	-0,302**
SMMA03	3,30	30,6	-0,199*	80,2	-0,290**
SMMA04	3,49	35,5	-0,166	74,4	-0,346**
SMMA05	3,86	59,5	-0,382**	81,0	-0,260**
SMMA06	2,78	24,0	-0,161	73,6	-0,211*
SMMA07	2,90	19,8	-0,366**	57,9	-0,401**
SMMA08	4,45	19,0	-0,033	45,8	-0,021
SMMA09	2,93	33,1	0,086	70,2	-0,023
SMMA10	3,76	33,9	-0,250**	82,6	-0,420**
SMMA11	3,87	43,0	-0,197*	87,6	-0,259**
SMMA12	4,41	47,1	-0,199*	86,8	-0,382**
SMMA13	3,29	33,9	-0,209*	69,4	-0,078
Mean	3,37	34,9		74,27	

Significant at *p<0,05; **p<0,01

Table III.

Perceived exposure and intention to engage

in eWOM behaviors for each SMM action.

According to the results, the levels of intention to engage in endorsement and aggregate eWOM are higher than the others. In fact, the overall average is of 74.27 percent, more than a half. Of all the SMM actions, the only one that shows an average below the 50 percent, corresponds to "publishing promoted posts or ad-banners" (SMMA08), while the top five SMM actions are "providing access to the brands' e-shop/e-commerce site" (SMMA11), "reporting or sharing posts of product launch, offline stores or other offline promotional events (e.g. live-streaming of fashion weeks)" (SMMA12), "customer's appreciation (e.g. thanking customers for the purchases)" (SMMA10), "posting content about personalities (e.g. celebrities) or influencers" (SMMA05) and "sharing personalities' or influencers' posts and endorsements of the brand and its products" (SMMA01).

After having identified the SMM actions that generate the highest levels of intention to engage in pass-on and endorsement/aggregate eWOM, the point-biserial correlation has been calculated for each SMM action. Since the dataset presents a metric (frequency of exposure) and a non-metric

variable (intention to engage in pass-on and endorsement/aggregate eWOM), in order to calculate the correlation between these two variables, we use the point-biserial correlation, a special case of the Pearson's correlation. This correlation shows the relationship between the fashion consumers' perceived exposure toward fashion brands' SMM actions and their intention to engage in eWoM behaviors.

As shown in the Table III, this relationship is, in most of the cases, negative, meaning that the higher the level of exposure to the SMM action is, the lower will be intention to engage in pass-on and endorsement/aggregate eWOM. In other words, fashion consumers show a positive attitude towards those social media marketing contents that they do not see so often. The only two positive values corresponds to the relationship between "providing access to the brands' e-shop/e-commerce site" (SMMA01) and the intention to engage in pass-on eWOM behaviors, and the "showcasing brand achievements, results, innovation, news or success stories" with the intention to engage in pass-on eWOM behaviors. This positive relationship shows, instead, how fashion consumers' likeliness to engage in pass-on behaviors is higher as their exposure to these types of social media marketing actions grows.

This negative correlation clearly indicates that an overexposure to specific social media marketing contents can create an unintended effect: consumers feel overwhelmed by that type of information and develop a refusal against it. Consumers do not want to receive that kind of information anymore and they just ignore it.

Furthermore, as already mentioned before, in order to see if there is a different perception according to the type of brand that generates the social media marketing action, all the questions from the survey have been randomized, so that respondents have randomly answered to questions picturing a fast-fashion or a luxury brand.

In this case, "encouraging customers to share their brand experiences" has not been considered since, from the social media pages, it has been found that brands belonging to the luxury category do not use this type of social media marketing action at all.

As you can see from the Table IV, the average of respondents that would more likely engage in pass-on and endorsement/aggregate eWOM is higher in the case of the luxury brands (pass-on eWOM: 29.71 for the fast-fashion brands and 37.68 for the luxury brands; endorsement/aggregate eWOM: 67.32 for the fast-fashion brands and 75.38 for the luxury brands). In particular, in the case of pass-on behaviors the highest differences can be found in correspondence of the social media marketing

actions that refer to: "providing product promotion content (e.g. pictures or videos about products)" (SMMA02), "reporting or sharing posts of product launch, offline stores or other offline promotional events (e.g. live-streaming of fashion weeks)" (SMMA05), "showcasing brand achievements, results, innovation, news or success stories" (SMMA09), "customer's appreciation (e.g. thanking customers for the purchases)" (SMMA10).

Type of eWOM behaviors

	Pass-on		*Endorsement/Aggregate*	
SMM ACTION	**FAST-FASHION BRANDS %**	**LUXURY BRANDS %**	**FAST-FASHION BRANDS %**	**LUXURY BRANDS %**
SMMA01	22,4	22,2	82,8	79
SMMAO2	47	58,2	77,3	74,5
SMMA03	32,8	28,1	81,3	80,7
SMMA04	34,8	36,4	77,3	70,9
SMMA05	50	68,3	82,8	79,4
SMMA06	20	29,5	68,3	78,7
SMMA07	22,6	16,9	56,5	59,3
SMMA08	17,5	20,7	36,5	56,9
SMMA09	28,3	37,7	75	66,7
SMMA10	27,4	40,7	85,5	81,4
SMMA11	41	45	86,9	88,3
SMMA12	47,5	48,4	84,5	88,7
MEAN	**29,71**	**37,68**	**67,32**	**75,38**

Table VI.

Consumers' likeliness to engage in pass-on and endorsement/aggregate WOM behaviors according to the brand type.

While in the case of the endorsement and aggregate type of eWOM behaviors, the highest differences correspond to: "providing content about the brand's expertise, values and culture" (SMMA06),

"publishing promoted posts or ad-banners" (SMMA08) and "showcasing brand achievements, results, innovation, news or success stories" (SMMA09).

From the results, it is evident how consumers are more likely to engage in positive eWOM behaviors with those brands that are characterized by a higher quality, an authentic value and that convey a prestigious image.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusions

4.1 Research limitations and managerial implications

This research aims at replicating a study that has already been conducted by Ananda et al. (2019), on an Indonesian sample of fashion consumers comprising people of different ages. In this study, the focus has been on a sample that is only made of young people aged between 20 and 30 and they are all Italian. But, in addition to the already made research, a distinction between fast-fashion and luxury brands has been analyzed as well. The major limitation for this research resides, for sure, in the limited sample taken into account, fashion covers a highly diverse range of brands and customers, people with different motivations. That is why, future research should analyze a wider sample, comprising people of different ages and coming from different countries, in order to understand if there are some traits and characteristics that must be taken into account when choosing which is the most appropriate social media marketing strategy to implement for each brand.

Furthermore, the kind of measure used for this research that links intention and behavior is not exempt from criticism (e.g. Bagozzi, 2007). Even though the questionnaire presents contents taken from existing social media brands pages, we cannot affirm that those same consumers that answers positively, will actually engage in positive behaviors. This is because there are more aspects that should be taken into account, such as, for example, the fact that "sharing" or "liking" a specific content may be visible to others (for example the person's name may appear in the list of people who have liked the content) and this can affect the self-presentation of the individual, that may consequently generate a discrepancy between the intention to engage in positive eWOM behaviors and the actual behavior.

According to DataReportal, the number of internet users increased by 1.2 million between 2019 and 2020 and, in particular, the number of social media users in Italy increased by 2.1 million between April 2019 and January 2020 (+6.4%), while the social media penetration stood at 58 percent in January 2020[12].

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[12] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-italy

Numbers are clear, there is no better communication channel than social media, today. Consequently, it is fundamental for each fashion brand to have a valid social media marketing strategy.

The effectiveness of these strategies is normally measured in terms of eWOM engagement metrics as indicators of the SMM strategy performance (Wong, 2014). However, particularly in the case of the fashion industry, researches concerning the relation between the generation of eWOM engagement and the effectiveness of the SMM strategy are still a few (Ananda et al., 2019). Furthermore, even though we are talking about data that can be easily retrieved from the brands' social media pages, it actually means collecting and analyzing a huge amount of historical data in order to understand which are the SMM actions that created the highest levels of engagement in eWOM behaviors. This could lead to the implementation of time and resources in order to try to understand those data, without really knowing if the brand is actually implementing the right SMM strategy. In fact, this study will provide the right information to create the right SMM strategy from the start, by analyzing consumers' possible reactions to specific SMM actions focusing on different eWOM engagement behaviors.

As a result of the consumer-brand interaction, this study provides empirical data of intention to engage in eWOM behaviors and identifies two types of eWOM behaviors, specifically *pass-on* and *endorsement*. The first one, the pass-on engagement, refers to recommendation behaviors, whereas the second one, the endorsement type of engagement, refers to positive attitudes toward the content shared by the brand, such as preference and liking (Ananda et al, 2019).

Moreover, in contrast with the previous studies, this shows how the excessive exposure to marketing stimuli can generate the opposite of the result marketers wanted. Consumers always want to have access to new types of information, what they are looking for is fun and entertainment, consequently the presence of advertisements and banners, which frequency of exposure is believed to be the highest (4.45 on 5), even though it can give visibility to the brand, does not generate positive attitudes towards the brands. Consumers are more likely to engage in positive pass-on eWOM behaviors when seeing those social media marketing actions, such as the promotion of those events to which they can participate through their social media platforms (59.5%), or those that clearly picture the brands' fashion items (52.1%). Whereas, in the case of the endorsement eWOM behaviors, consumers are more prone to engage in positive behaviors towards those actions that involve the participation of fashion influencers (86.8%) or celebrities (87.6%) that decide to stand with the brand.

The aim of this research is to provide marketers with an additional tool that will give them the possibility to understand how to create the best social media marketing strategy, by planning their

social media content and messages. The results of this study could help brands to reduce the time and effort spent to determine and implement their eWOM engagement strategies in social media.

4.2 Conclusions

The always growing use of social media in our daily lives has opened up new opportunities for both consumers and brands, especially in the world of fashion. New platforms have been created while the old ones have been improved and adapted to the innovative world we live in and the consumers' exacting demands in order to satisfy their expectations. The greater involvement of consumers has changed the ways through which the brands communicate with them, it is not just a one-way communication, but it is more of an interaction. The whole relationship has changed, consumers are now considered as part of the brands' families and just as if they were talking with their family members, consumers communicate with brands through social media. Consequently, every brand should be able to create the right social media marketing strategy. Brands must choose carefully the type of message they want to convey and how to transmit it to the public, the different contents they want to include, but also the people that can represent their brand.

This study aims at giving marketers empirical data about possible consumers' responses to different social media marketing actions. Knowing in advance, which could be the content that could generate positive eWOM engagement behaviors, can make the firm save money and effort before dedicated to the analysis of huge amount of historical data coming from the metrics of eWOM engagement (number of reposts/shares, number of likes and number of reblogs) that can be retrieved from the different platforms (Ananda et al., 2019). In this case, two types of eWOM engagement have been considered, the "pass-on" and the "endorsement/aggregate", as well as the frequency of exposure to each marketing stimuli in order to verify the effect that this can have. The results have shown how consumers would be more prone to engage in endorsement/aggregate eWOM, rather than the pass-on and that they prefer to have access to always new types of information. The overexposure to specific contents does not generate consumers' positive attitudes, they are more interested in understanding more about the brand, participating to the online events along with all those contents that make them feel close to the brand itself. Also, the identification of the brand with a person they consider as a popular idol, represents something that would take the brand out of the sole fashion industry to become something bigger, something that can involve the whole consumers' life.

Future studies should be addressed to a wider public, including people from different countries and different ages, in order to understand if different traits and characteristics can generate different outputs. People with different cultures and different ages can, in fact, have a different type of approach to social media, consequently marketers must be able to develop specific social media marketing strategies.

Appendix

Survey

- Providing access to the brands' e-shop/e-commerce site

<u>Fast-fashion brand</u>

1) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (access to e-shop)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5 → sempre

2) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

3) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

4) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (access to e-shop)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

5) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

6) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

- Providing product promotion content (e.g. picture or videos about products)

Fast-fashion brand

7) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (product promotion)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

8) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

9) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

<u>Luxury brand</u>

10) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (product promotion)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

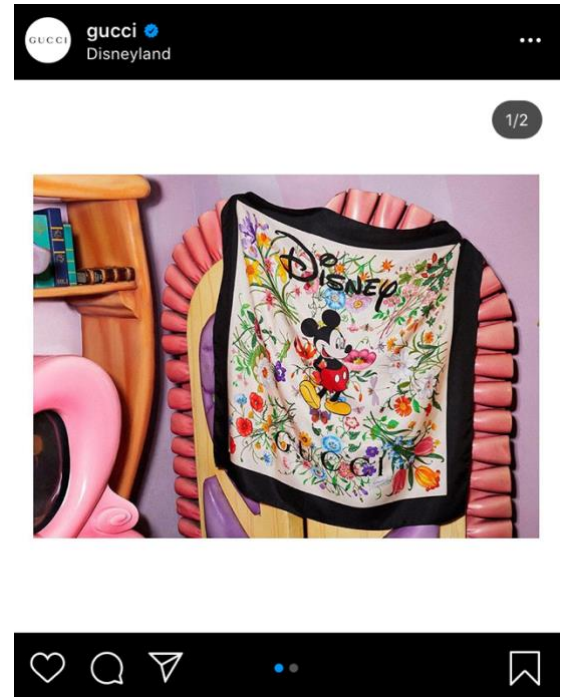11) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

12) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

- Providing upcoming product sneak-peeks

<u>Fast-fashion brand</u>

13) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (upcoming products sneak-peeks)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

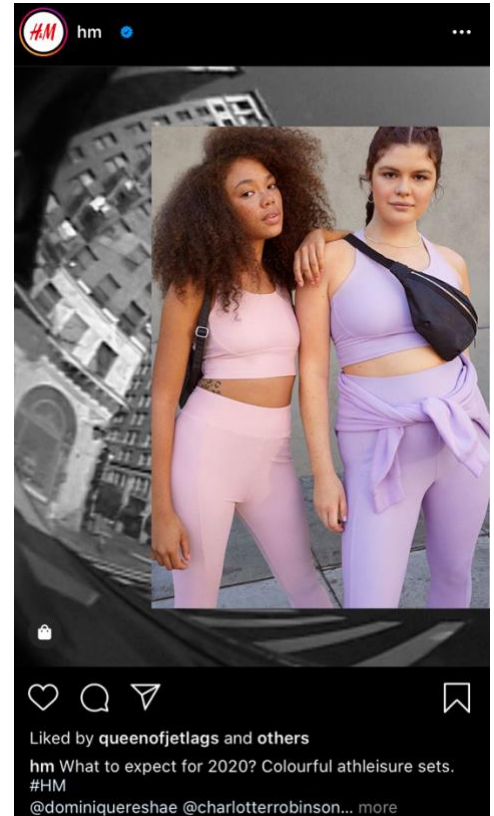14) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

15) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

<u>Luxury brand</u>

16) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (upcoming products sneak-peeks)

1 → mai

2

3
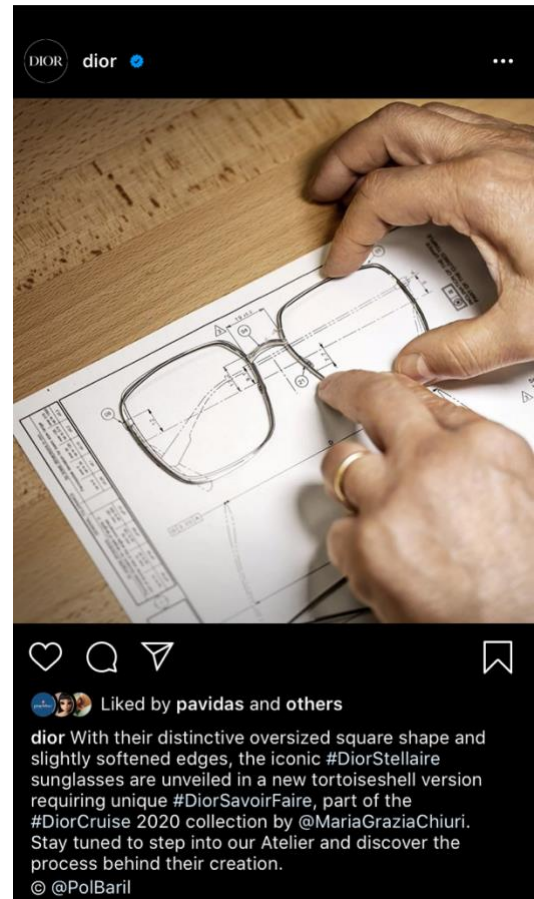
4

5→ sempre

17) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

18) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

dior With their distinctive oversized square shape and slightly softened edges, the iconic #DiorStellaire sunglasses are unveiled in a new tortoiseshell version requiring unique #DiorSavoirFaire, part of the #DiorCruise 2020 collection by @MariaGraziaChiuri. Stay tuned to step into our Atelier and discover the process behind their creation.
© @PolBaril

- Providing exclusive campaign previews

<u>Fast-fashion brand</u>

19) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (campaign previews)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

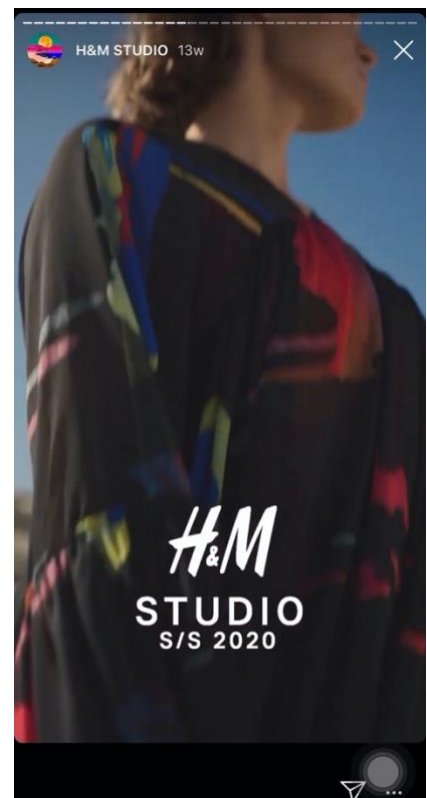20) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

21) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

Luxury brand

22) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (campaign previews)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

23) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

24) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

- Reporting or sharing posts of product launch, offline stores or other offline promotional events (e.g. live-streaming of fashion weeks)

Fast-fashion brand

25) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (promotional events)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

26) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

27) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

<u>Luxury brand</u>

28) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (promotional events)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

29) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

30) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

- Providing content about the brand's expertise, values and culture

<u>Fast-fashion brand</u>

31) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (brand value)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

32) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

33) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

34) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (brand value)

1 → mai

2

3

4
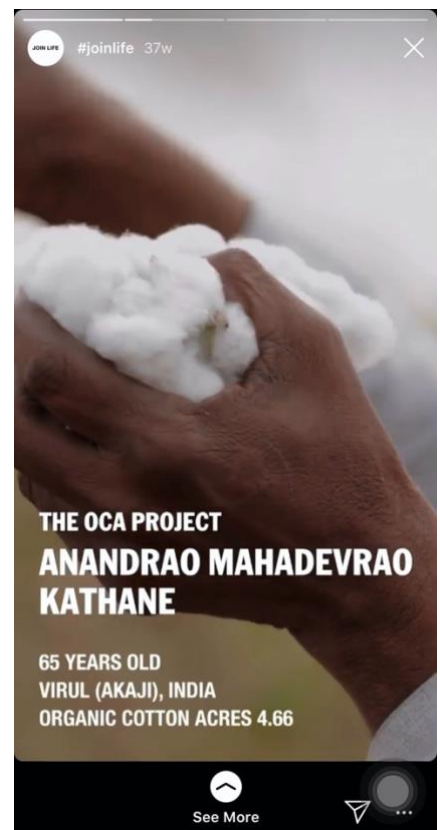
5→ sempre

35) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

36) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

- Publishing casual socialization content (e.g. greetings)

37) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (access to e-shop)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

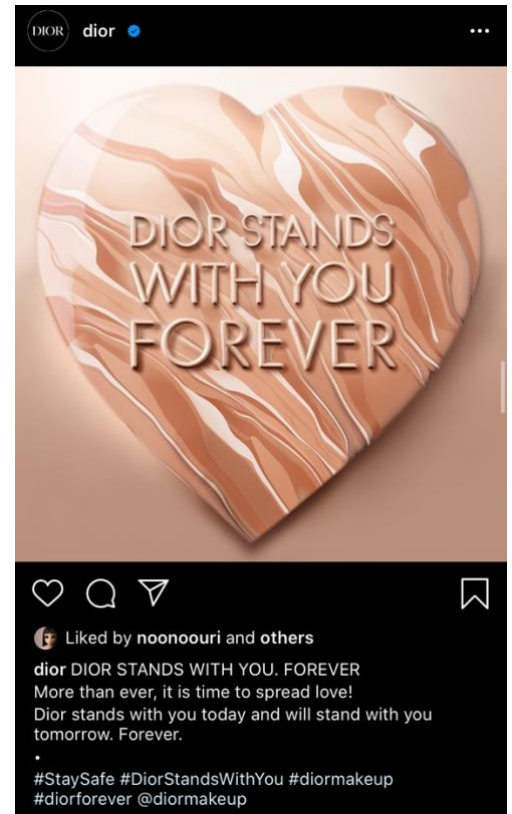38) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

39) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

<u>Luxury brand</u>

40) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (access to e-shop)

1 → mai

2

3
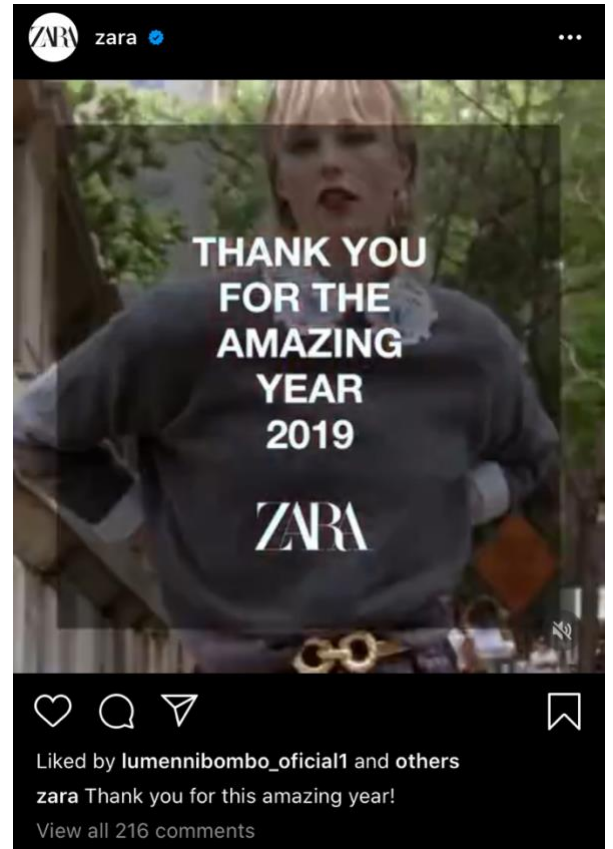
4

5→ sempre

41) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

42) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

- Publishing promoted posts or ad-banners

43) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (advertising)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

44) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

45) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

<u>Luxury brand</u>

46) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (advertising)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5 → sempre

47) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

48) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

- Showcasing brand achievements, results, innovation, news or success stories

<u>Fast-fashion brand</u>

49) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (brand news)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

50) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

51) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

<u>Luxury brand</u>

52) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (brand news)

1 → mai

2

3
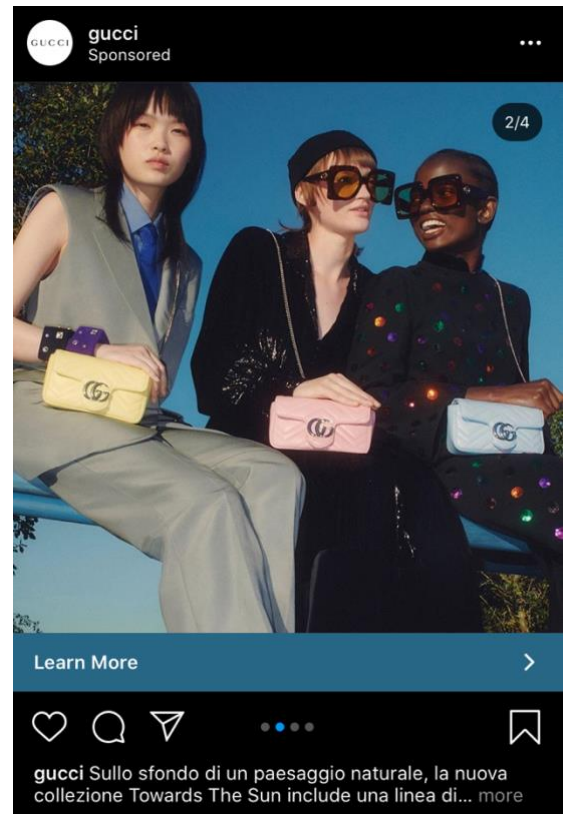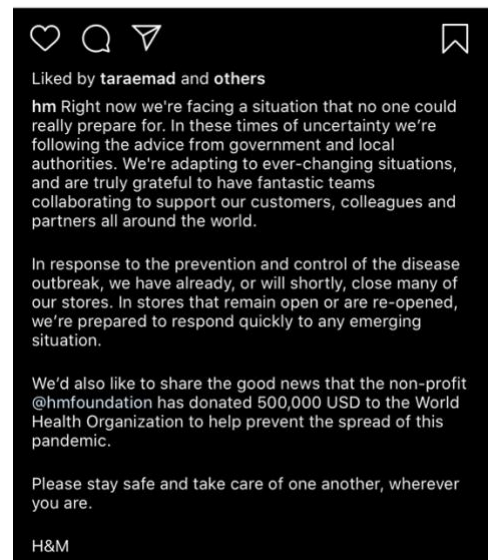
4

5→ sempre

53) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

54) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

- Customer appreciation (e.g. thanking customers for the purchases)

<u>Fast-fashion brand</u>

55) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (customer's appreciation)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5 → sempre

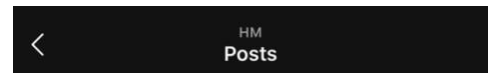56) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

57) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

<u>Luxury brand</u>

58) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (customer's appreciation)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

59) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

60) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

- Posting content about personalities (e.g. celebrities) or influencers

Fast-fashion brand

61) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (content about celebrities)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5 → sempre

62) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

63) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

<u>Luxury brand</u>

64) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (content about celebrities)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

65) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

66) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

- Sharing personalities' or influencers' posts and endorsements of the brand and its products

Fast-fashion brand

67) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (influencers' endorsement)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

68) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

69) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

<u>Luxury brand</u>

70) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (influencers' enndorsement)

1 → mai

2

3

4

5→ sempre

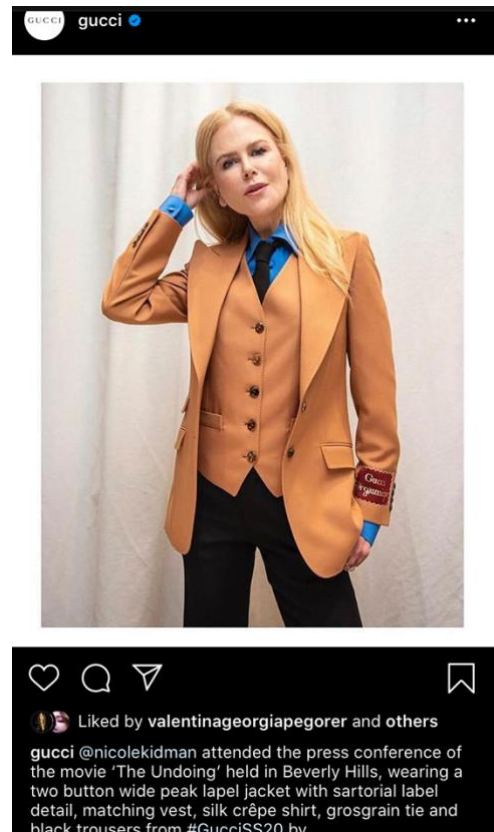71) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

72) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

- Encouraging customers to share their brand experiences

<u>Fast-fashion brand</u>

73) Quanto spesso percepisci che i brand di moda che segui postano questo tipo di contenuti? (sharing brand experiences)

1 → mai

2

3
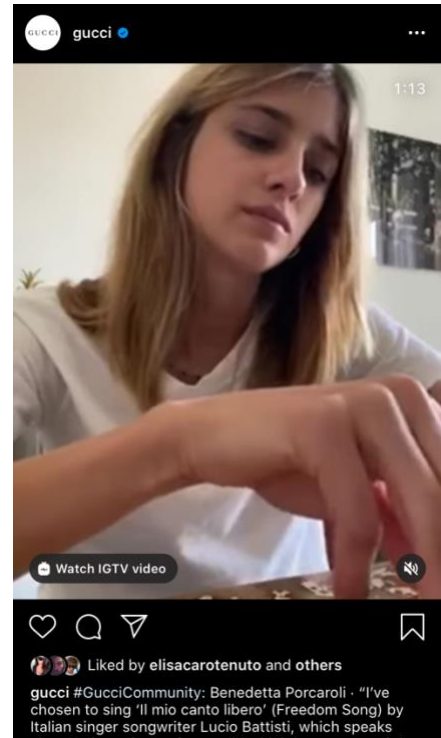
4

5→ sempre

74) Condivideresti questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

75) Metteresti un like a questo tipo di contenuto?

Sì

No

- Demographics

76) Genere

Maschio

Femmina

77) Età

…

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LUISS

Department of Impresa e Management

Chair of Web Analytics & Marketing

**"The new era of fashion on Social Media:
what makes you click?"**

SUMMARY

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1. Introduction

1.1 Social media and marketing

The technological development has drastically changed the communication mode in a way that affects billions of people across the globe (Gautam & Sharma, 2017). The popularity of social media dates back to the early nineties, when brands tried to eliminate all the physical boundaries existing between them and the consumers (Campbell & Anitsal 2013). According to the definition given by Nair (2011), Social media refers to "online tools where content, opinions, perspectives, insights, and media can be shared…(and) at its core social media is about relationships and connections between people and organizations." These tools include blogs, chat rooms, consumer product rating sites, discussion boards, social network sites, vlogs (video logs), widgets and wikis (Gautam & Sharma, 2017).

With the passing of time, social media have acquired a fundamental position in consumers' daily lives, becoming almost essentials, that is why marketers have thought of making of them an important part of the marketing strategy (Zhou & Wang, 2014). In fact, due to the high growth of internet and registered social media users, marketers are highly motivated to engage in social media marketing (Carim & Warwick, 2013).

Social media instruments have resulted to be really helpful in understanding internet usage patterns of customers, searching product information patterns, customers' reviews about their experiences with products, consumer decision-making processes and much more (Wang & Chang, 2013); in fact, if in 2012 only the 40% of the companies used social media channels as their primary digital tool to reach customers (Divol, Edelman, & Sarrazin, 2012), according to Statista "it was estimated that social media advertising spending worldwide amounted to nearly 27 billion U.S. dollars in 2018, and according to forecasted figures global expenditures on this channel will further grow to more than 37 billion by the end of 2020." (A. Guttmann, 2019). The same source affirms that today, nearly the 90% of the firms rely on social media to interact with customers.[13]

The Social media marketing strategy (SMMS) includes "a set of actions by which a company or organization expects to achieve its marketing objectives and meet the requirements of its target market through the use of social media tools and capabilities. Basically, SMMS deals with plans and decisions around the firms' target market, marketing mix, and social media mix. In this sense, social

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[13] https://www.statista.com/statistics/271406/advertising-revenue-of-social-networks-worldwide/

media marketing strategic actions (SMMA) comprise the marketing actions, activities, behaviors or tactics within the social media mix for a given SMMS." (Ananda et al., n.d.)

Thanks to social media, the old-fashioned one-way communication, the one that sees the consumer only as the receiver of the information given by the firm, has been transformed into an interactive two-way direct communication by removing all restrictions related to time, place, medium, etc. (Gautam & Sharma, 2017). They actually belong to the category of the so-called "owned" media that allow organizations to create and distribute their own content (Laberecht, 2009). Social media is actually an umbrella term, used to refer to a series of platforms that give marketers the possibility to meet specific branding goals. Furthermore, the possibility to share different types of content like texts, audios, videos or images, makes social media a more effective tool to communicate with customers (Çukul, 2015).

1.2 Fashion and Social media

Even though the fashion industry has always been highly selective, giving the chance to enter that world only to those who belonged to a specific group or "élite", as Akahoshi recognizes in her work, "The fashion is cognizant to art", every artist, every designer, but also every art critic, does not need any formal education or training to emerge (Akahoshi, 2012): which means that no formal barriers should exist. Everyone should be able to express his/her opinion about the world of fashion. And that is what social media have done. "The social Web has removed the gatekeepers of an industry that was notoriously hard to penetrate and build a name in" (Lee, 2009).

The continuous changes of the fashion industry and the introduction of new communication channels have forced brands to adapt to consumers' newest requests and needs. All of the fashion houses "are tweeting, blogging and updating their profiles in an effort to mold their brand personalities on real-time global platforms". This utilization of the social media serves as a "human voice for the brand". Thanks to this interaction, customers feel as if they are part of a family and their relationship is deepened. (Stephenson, 2009) This inclusiveness has also led to a complete changing in the role of the customer, who does not simply receive and consume the value created by the firm but participate to the cocreation of value (Grönroos, 2009). Brands have the possibility to understand their customers' needs and give them what they want, in a cheaper, more efficient and faster way (Persaud, 2005). Social media networks offer users opportunities to voice out their ideas and consequently, customers are more active, creative and keen to develop social collaborations (Piller et al., 2012; Ariely, 2000). In this way, companies have the chance to seek new knowledge simply by interacting with their users.

The whole concept of fashion has changed with the growing importance attached to social media. We are not just talking about communicating about fashion through media, but of *doing* fashion through the media. In fact, the word "mediatization", in this case, refers to the ways, practices of fashion, such as production, consumption, distribution and diffusion, are articulated through the media, and, more importantly, dependent on the media for their articulation. (Rocamora, 2017)

When the first fashion shows were introduced, during the late nineteenth century, they were events dedicated to a social and financial élite (Evans, 2013). A decade after, these events, known as fashion weeks, became "a trade event aimed at fashion insiders and organized around a strict calendar of presentations". In recent years, instead, the development of digital media platforms has turned them into "media events - a public spectacle and entertainment addressed to a worldwide audience". Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, have become "legitimate spaces of diffusion of the collections". (Rocamora, 2017)

1.4 Influence(rs)

Social media turned out to be so powerful in spreading the news concerning fashion trends, especially thanks to the important presence of the so-called *influencers.* "Influencer marketing can be defined as a process of identifying and activating individuals who have an influence over a specific target audience or medium, in order to be part of a brand's campaign towards increased reach, sales, or engagement". It could be considered as an extension to the concept of word-of-mouth marketing, adapted to a social context and performed in a more professional way. If properly managed, this form of marketing can be very important for the brand, since it is able to build relationships with customers that are based on trust and authenticity. The influencer marketing is generally divided into two subpractices: earned influencer marketing, which is based on unpaid or pre-existing relationships with influencers or third party content that is promoted by the influencer to further their own personal growth; and paid influencer marketing, which is based on paid influencer marketing campaigns that take the form of sponsorship, pre-roll advertising or testimonial messaging that can appear at any point in the content. The influencer marketing value comes from three different sources: reach, relevance and resonance. Each influencer, apart from presenting qualities necessary to drive action, has an above-average number of followers in a specific niche or market. Therefore, they are able to reach thousands and thousands of consumers through their social channels. The relevance, instead, refers to the degree of importance that readers attach to the content, while the resonance refers to the number of activities an influencer generates through his/her content. (Sudha & Sheena, 2017)

In the world of fashion, influencers tend to be divided into two main groups according to the number of followers they have on social media:

- Micro influencers: those who are able to reach a maximum of 10.000 users, they are not celebrities, but still, they are able to influence a consistent number of people because of their closeness to the customers;

- Macro influencers: those who are able to reach higher numbers of users (compared to micro influencers). They represent a powerful marketing tool because of their ability to interact with customers.

The fashion industry is entirely driven by influencer marketing compared to any other industry, it offers many ways of collaboration between bloggers and brands. It is not limited to just blog and social media posts, but it can include Instagram takeovers, event hosting, modeling or even product design. (Sudha & Sheena, 2017)

1.5 Social media impact

1.5.1 Brand Communities

A brand community is "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Brand communities play a vital role in the brand's social construction and they are characterized by three main attributes: a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility among their members.

Users, by interacting with bloggers and other users, take part to an exchange process (Chittenden, 2010): readers seek to acquire information and recommendations about products and brands, while brands obtain immediate feedbacks, suggestions, advices from their customers.

1.5.2 Impulse buying behavior effect

Generally speaking, impulse buying represents between 40 and 80 percent of all purchases, according to the product (Amos et al., 2014; Marketingdirecto, 2012). If, on the one hand, some research show that the economic crisis and the growing use of the digital platforms have changed the way in which consumers make buying decision toward a more rational process (Experian Marketing Services, 2013; Banjo & Germano, 2014), on the other hand, there are some authors who believe that the internet favors the impulse buying behavior (Gupta, 2011; Rodríguez, 2013).

Even though the online buying behavior may seem rational, since the consumers have the possibility to search for the information they need in order to make the final purchase, the ease of choosing a product and just clicking on it in order to obtain it may be tempting and increase the likelihood of impulse buying (Greenfield, 1999). The 65 % of social media users declare that social networks have a fundamental influence on their purchase processes, and almost the same amount affirm that social media "inspire their online purchase" (IAB Spain, 2016; PWC, 2016). Social media can, therefore, be considered as very powerful tools to boost impulse buying. The product assortment, the possibility to buy with no limit of time or space, but also that of personalizing fashion items online, encourage customers to make online purchases (Greenfield, 1999; LaRose, 2001).

1.5.3 eWOM

The community participates to the creation of the so-called User-generated content, which refers to the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media (Laurell, 2014). The most relevant content created online by users is, with no doubts, the e-word-of-mouth (eWOM). This falls under the category of viral marketing, which broadly describes "any strategy that encourages individuals to propagate a message, thus, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence" (Bampo, Ewing, Mather, Stewart, & Wallace, 2008).

2. Literature review and Research Questions

2.1 The Consumer's decision-making process

The Consumer decision-making process is a fundamental component of the consumer behavior. Previous studies have recognized it as a rational process made of five stages: problem/need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, buying decision, and post-purchase behavior. Later on, further investigations have identified different psychological traits that have completely transformed the previous five-stage model introduced by Dewey and made it more complex (Nash, 2019). Consumers decisions can change over time, they are imprecise and adapt do different situations (Dhar, 1997). The CDMP is, in fact, influenced by internal and external factors that have been defined by Gursoy and McClary as "the motivated activation of knowledge stored in the memory and psychological traits or acquisition of information from the environment" (Gursoy &McClary, 2004). Considering that, today, the environment that has the biggest impact on the consumers' acquisition of information, necessary to make any buying decision, is the Web 2.0, and, in particular, the social media, it is essential to interpret how they influence this process in order to understand today's consumer.

2.1.1 Information seeking

Before making any kind of purchase decision, consumers look for the information they need through a variety of sources. In today's society, the increasing presence of new technologies, the Web 2.0 and the social media, is completely changing the environment in which consumers operate (Nash, 2019). In our case, the consumer normally uses these platforms in order to search for the information about the product she wants/needs and consequently identify choices and evaluate alternatives. The advent of digital fashion media has, on one side, reduced the brands' autonomy and control over the information released about them, and, on the other, guaranteed a "privileged" access to any kind of information to consumers.

2.2 Consumers' exposure to social media marketing strategies

"Marketing stimuli are messages and information about products or brands and other offerings communicated by either the marketer or by nonmarketing sources". Consumers are continuously exposed to a huge amount of marketing stimuli during their journey, in fact, lately, they are able to control the stimuli they are exposed to, so that they "can actively seek certain stimuli and avoid others". (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2010)

Social media are, always more, considered as the perfect tool to conduct promotional activities and to effectively communicate with customers (Popp and Woratschek, 2016; Harrigan et al., 2017; Gao and Feng, 2016; Kohli et al., 2015).

The effectiveness of this kind of communications largely depends on how customers perceive and formulate their attitudes toward such activities (Duffett, 2015). It is common knowledge that the familiarity with a stimulus is fundamental for it to be recalled from memory (Becknell et al., 1963), because the frequency of exposure has a positive effect on the customer's perception process (Solomon, 2009). Consequently, consumers prefer those stimuli to which they are exposed more frequently. The higher they get to know with that stimulus, the more positive will be their reaction to it. This is because of the "mere exposure" effect, the condition that makes the stimulus accessible to the consumer's perception. (Harrison, 1977)

All marketers today seek to increase the number of advertisements on social media, so that consumers become familiar with them and generate a positive attitude (Bialkova & van Trijp, 2010).

2.3 The five dimensions of the social media marketing

Consumers are no longer primarily interested in products specifics and satisfaction, "they want to gain emotional rewards from enticing store atmosphere, superb customer service, and entertaining

experiences" (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). The brand experience is the result of the subjective sensations, feelings, and evaluations that are internally processed and generated from the brand-related stimuli like brand design, visual identity, packaging, communications, and other environmental cues (Brakus et al., 2009). Hence, the brand experience can occur through the product, the service, the store, or the marketing campaign.

For what concerns the marketing campaign, prior studies have identified five different dimensions of social media marketing activities: entertainment, interaction, customization, trendiness, and word-of-mouth (Gautam & Sharma, 2017; Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012; Mohammadpour et al., 2014). The entertainment refers to the pleasure and fun that comes from the usage of social media, in other words, to the hedonic sphere. The interaction, instead, refers to the users' contribution on the brands pages on social media, while the trendiness is the degree to which the information that users can find on these pages is new and up to date. The customization represents the ability of the brand to respond to customers' individual needs and tastes (Seo & Park, 2018). Finally, the word-of-mouth refers to the online opinions exchange and recommendations among users (Sano, 2014).

2.3 Co-creation and Crowdsourcing

Today, firms are not the only responsible of the creation of the brand message. Consumers are involved into a process called "co-creation of value" , which has been defined by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) as "joint creation of value by the company and the customer". Apart from this co-creation of value, the firms can also decide to externalize part of their activities, by giving to customers the chance to participate to creation and development of a project, an object or an idea.[14] This practice is called *crowdsourcing* and social media represent the perfect environments where firms can develop it.

2.5 *Representation and engagement-centered marketing actions*

Marketers make a distinction between the "representation" and the "engagement" type of actions. The first one aims at presenting and getting consumers to know the brand, while the second one aims at creating a bond, a relationship, with the customers by giving them the possibility to directly get in touch with the brand and with the other users. A recent research made by Ananda et al. (2017) showed how the number of representation-centered actions was higher than the engagement-centered actions. Proving that brands still relied on a traditional transaction-centered marketing approach, which is

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[14] https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crowdsourcing

entirely focused on presenting the brand's products and promotions and how to access to the online shop or catalog. But what makes social media different from the other marketing communication channels used by the brands is, indeed, their "bidirectionality": users can respond and react to all the posted contents (Ananda et al., 2019). This new access to the contents is of fundamental importance to get the brands closer to customers and generate engagement, which is a central concept for brand communities.

2.9 Social media consumer engagement and WOM

In order to understand if consumers are really engaged with the brand, it is necessary to see and analyze how they respond to the content posted on the different platforms. The most common ones, such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, give to their users the possibility to express how they feel about the content they see through specific click-based buttons. "Users can then share their interest or convey their attitude about content posted by anyone using these buttons" (Swani et al., 2013).

Dhaoui (2014) identified four types of consumer engagement, four different types of consumers' reactions to the online strategies used by the brands:

5) The pass-on, which is the most relevant eWOM for the brands, since it consists of consumers *passing on* to other users the online contents they found interesting (Dahl, 2015). Consequently, the brand has on one side, the possibility to understand which is the most effective strategy to use, those contents which are considered the most by consumers, those that draw their attention; and, on the other, to take advantage of this free publicity made by the customers themselves;

6) The "liking" of the content itself, which shows the endorsement of the brand and the values expressed in the content. This makes the brand understand the consumers' favorite contents and also increases its online visibility;

7) The feedbacks and comments to the contents published by the brand, which gives to the brand the chance to understand the brand equity level;

8) The conversations among users, which are really representative of consumers' general sentiment about the posted content.

The content posted by brands on social media, today, is of fundamental importance to build a strong relationship with the client and generate brand loyalty. Nevertheless, few studies analyze which types of marketing actions, messages or contents posted by brands on social media consumers prefer. In

other words, which is the content that makes them "click". That is why, this study aims at answering the two following questions:

RQ1: What type of SMM actions by fashion brands drive higher pass-on, endorsement and aggregate intention to engage in eWoM behaviors?

RQ2: What is the relationship between fashion consumers' perceived exposure toward fashion brands' SMM actions and their intention to engage in eWoM behaviors?

(Ananda et al., 2019)

3. Research design and methods

3.1 Measurement instrument

In order to find answers to the two questions introduced before, a survey has been formulated. This was adapted from the research conducted by Ananda et al. (2019), which provides empirical basis for the measurement of social media marketing actions in the context of fashion brands. The main idea of this instrument relies on investigating on the frequency with which fashion brands perform different SMM actions and also consumers' exposure to these actions. The questionnaire included 13 blocks of questions each referring to a different measurement item for fashion brands' SMM actions from Ananda et al. (2019), then identified with a code so that they would be easily recognized in the dataset, as shown in the Table I. The 13 SMM actions belong to two main categories: the *representation-centered* and *engagement-centered* actions; in particular, 10 SMM actions refer to the first category and 3 to the second one. For each block of questions, there is a real example of social media content in order to illustrate the SMM action, so that respondents had the possibility to visually experience and understand the difference between the SMM actions.

The questionnaire presents social media contents published by four brands belonging to two different categories. In particular, the brands chosen were Zara and H&M for the fast-fashion category, while Gucci and Dior for the luxury brands. This decision was made to compare the social media strategies, used by these two categories of brands, and see if they have a different impact on consumers.

For each SMM action illustrated through real examples taken from the above mentioned brands' social media pages, the respondents were asked about the perceived frequency of their exposure to each type of action, through the question "How frequently do you perceive that the fashion brands you follow post this kind of content?". The responses to the perceived exposure were measured through a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "never" (=1) to "always" (=5).

TYPE OF ACTION	ACTION	CODE
REPRESENTATION	Providing access to the brands' e-shop/e-commerce site	**SMMAO1**
	Providing product promotion content (e.g. pictures or videos about products)	**SMMA02**
	Providing upcoming product sneak-peeks	**SMMA03**
	Providing exclusive campaign previews	**SMMA04**
	Reporting or sharing posts of product launch, offline stores or other offline promotional events (e.g. live-streaming of fashion weeks)	**SMMA05**
	Providing content about the brand's expertise, values and culture	**SMMA06**
	Publishing casual socialization content (e.g. greetings)	**SMMA07**
	Publishing promoted posts or ad-banners	**SMMA08**
	Showcasing brand achievements, results, innovation, news or success stories	**SMMA09**
	Customer's appreciation (e.g. thanking customers for the purchases)	**SMMA10**
ENGAGEMENT	Posting content about personalities (e.g. celebrities) or influencers	**SMMA11**
	Sharing personalities' or influencers' posts and endorsements of the brand and its products	**SMMA12**
	Encouraging customers to share their brand experiences	**SMMA13**

Source: *Adapted from Ananda et al., 2019*

Table I.

Items of fashion brands' SMM actions

For what concerns, instead, the measurement of the eWOM engagement or, in other words, the consumers' behavioral intention to engage in eWOM, aims at understanding consumers' likeliness to positively respond to the indicated SMM action using one-click social plug-ins. The questions were: "Would you share this type of content?" and "Would you 'like' this content?"; while the provided answers were "Yes/No". The first question is designed to measure the intention to engage in pass-on eWOM behaviors, while the second one aims at measuring the intention to engage in endorsement/aggregate eWOM behaviors (Ananda et al., 2019).

For the data analysis, first of all, the average of the perceived exposure for each SMM action has been calculated as well as the level of intention to engage in eWOM behaviors generated by each SMM action. If the latter aims at answering to the RQ1, the former can help answering the RQ2 along with the use of the point-biserial correlation to analyze the relation between perceived frequency of SMM actions and intention to engage in eWoM behaviors.

3.3 Results

In order to understand the respondents' perceived exposure, the average for each social media marketing action has been calculated. The overall average perceived exposure to the SMM actions is 3.37, a bit lower than the result of Ananda et al., 2019. All the results are summarized in the Table III.

The social media marketing actions considered for this analysis, generate an average of 34.9 percent intention to engage in pass-on eWOM behaviors. Of the thirteen SMM actions, only four of them present a higher level of intention to engage in eWOM behaviors with an average that is higher than 40 percent.

| | | | *Type of eWOM engagement* | | |
| | | *Pass-on* | | *Endorsement/Aggregate* | |
SMM ACTION	*Frequency scale (average)*	*%*	r_{pb}	*%*	r_{pb}
SMMA01	4,09	22,3	0,080	80,8	-0,290**
SMMA02	3,99	52,1	-0,430**	75,2	-0,302**
SMMA03	3,30	30,6	-0,199*	80,2	-0,290**
SMMA04	3,49	35,5	-0,166	74,4	-0,346**
SMMA05	3,86	59,5	-0,382**	81,0	-0,260**
SMMA06	2,78	24,0	-0,161	73,6	-0,211*
SMMA07	2,90	19,8	-0,366**	57,9	-0,401**
SMMA08	4,45	19,0	-0,033	45,8	-0,021
SMMA09	2,93	33,1	0,086	70,2	-0,023
SMMA10	3,76	33,9	-0,250**	82,6	-0,420**
SMMA11	3,87	43,0	-0,197*	87,6	-0,259**
SMMA12	4,41	47,1	-0,199*	86,8	-0,382**
SMMA13	3,29	33,9	-0,209*	69,4	-0,078
Mean	3,37	34,9		74,27	

*Significant at *p<0,05; **p<0,01*

Table III.

Perceived exposure and intention to engage

in eWOM behaviors for each SMM action.

After having identified the SMM actions that generate the highest levels of intention to engage in pass-on and endorsement/aggregate eWOM, the point-biserial correlation has been calculated for each SMM action. As shown in the Table III, this relationship is, in most of the cases, negative, meaning that the higher the level of exposure to the SMM action is, the lower will be intention to engage in pass-on and endorsement/aggregate eWOM. In other words, fashion consumers show a positive attitude towards those social media marketing contents that they do not see so often. The only two positive values corresponds to the relationship between "providing access to the brands' e-shop/e-commerce site" (SMMA01) and the intention to engage in pass-on eWOM behaviors, and the "showcasing brand achievements, results, innovation, news or success stories" with the intention to engage in pass-on eWOM behaviors. This positive relationship shows, instead, how fashion consumers' likeliness to engage in pass-on behaviors is higher as their exposure to these types of social media marketing actions grows.

Furthermore, as already mentioned before, in order to see if there is a different perception according to the type of brand that generates the social media marketing action, all the questions from the survey have been randomized, so that respondents have randomly answered to questions picturing a fast-fashion or a luxury brand.

In this case, "encouraging customers to share their brand experiences" has not been considered since, from the social media pages, it has been found that brands belonging to the luxury category do not use this type of social media marketing action at all.

As you can see from the Table IV, the average of respondents that would more likely engage in pass-on and endorsement/aggregate eWOM is higher in the case of the luxury brands (pass-on: 29.71 for the fast-fashion brands and 37.68 for the luxury brands; endorsement/aggregate: 67.32 for the fast-fashion brands and 75.38 for the luxury brands).

| | Type of eWOM behaviors | | | |
| | Pass-on | | Endorsement/Aggregate | |
SMM ACTION	**FAST-FASHION BRANDS %**	**LUXURY BRANDS %**	**FAST-FASHION BRANDS %**	**LUXURY BRANDS %**
SMMA01	22,4	22,2	82,8	79
SMMAO2	47	58,2	77,3	74,5
SMMA03	32,8	28,1	81,3	80,7
SMMA04	34,8	36,4	77,3	70,9
SMMA05	50	68,3	82,8	79,4
SMMA06	20	29,5	68,3	78,7
SMMA07	22,6	16,9	56,5	59,3
SMMA08	17,5	20,7	36,5	56,9
SMMA09	28,3	37,7	75	66,7
SMMA10	27,4	40,7	85,5	81,4
SMMA11	41	45	86,9	88,3
SMMA12	47,5	48,4	84,5	88,7
MEAN	**29,71**	**37,68**	**67,32**	**75,38**

Table VI.

Consumers' likeliness to engage in pass-on and endorsement/aggregate
WOM behaviors according to the brand type.

From the results, it is evident how consumers are more likely to engage in positive eWOM behaviors with those brands that are characterized by a higher quality, an authentic value and that convey a prestigious image.

4. Conclusions

4.1 Research limitations and managerial implications

The major limitation for this research resides, for sure, in the limited sample taken into account, fashion covers a highly diverse range of brands and customers, people with different motivations. That is why, future research should analyze a wider sample, comprising people of different ages and coming from different countries, in order to understand if there are some traits and characteristics that

must be taken into account when choosing which is the most appropriate social media marketing strategy to implement for each brand.

The number of internet users increased by 1.2 million between 2019 and 2020 and, in particular, the number of social media users in Italy increased by 2.1 million between April 2019 and January 2020 (+6.4%), while the social media penetration stood at 58 percent in January 2020[15].

Numbers are clear, there is no better communication channel than social media, today. Consequently, it is fundamental for each fashion brand to have a valid social media marketing strategy.

The effectiveness of these strategies is normally measured in terms of eWOM engagement metrics as indicators of the SMM strategy performance (Wong, 2014). However, particularly in the case of the fashion industry, researches concerning the relation between the generation of eWOM engagement and the effectiveness of the SMM strategy are still a few (Ananda et al., 2019). Furthermore, even though we are talking about data that can be easily retrieved from the brands' social media pages, it actually means collecting and analyzing a huge amount of historical data in order to understand which are the SMM actions that created the highest levels of engagement in eWOM behaviors. This could lead to the implementation of time and resources to try to understand those data without really knowing if the brand is actually implementing the right SMM strategy. In fact, this study will provide the right information to create the right SMM strategy from the start by analyzing consumers' possible reactions to specific SMM actions focusing on different eWOM engagement behaviors.

Moreover, in contrast with the previous studies, this shows how the excessive exposure to marketing stimuli can generate the opposite of the result marketers wanted. Consumers always want to have access to new types of information, what they are looking for is fun and entertainment, consequently the presence of advertisements and banners, which frequency of exposure is believed to be the highest (4.45 on 5), even though it can give visibility to the brand, does not generate positive attitudes towards the brands. Consumers are more likely to engage in positive pass-on eWOM behaviors when seeing those social media marketing actions, such as the promotion of those events to which they can participate through their social media platforms (59.5%), or those that clearly picture the brands' fashion items (52.1%). Whereas, in the case of the endorsement eWOM behaviors, consumers are more prone to engage in positive behaviors towards those actions that involve the participation of fashion influencers (86.8%) or celebrities (87.6%) that decide to stand with the brand.

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[15] https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-italy

The aim of this research is to provide marketers with an additional tool that will give them the possibility to understand how to create the best social media marketing strategy, by planning their social media content and messages. The results of this study could help brands to reduce the time and effort spent to determine and implement their eWOM engagement strategies in social media.

4.2 Conclusions

The always growing use of social media in our daily lives has opened up new opportunities for both consumers and brands, especially in the world of fashion. New platforms have been created while the old ones have been improved and adapted to the innovative world we live in and the consumers' exacting demands in order to satisfy their expectations. The greater involvement of consumers has changed the ways through which the brands communicate with them, it is not just a one-way communication, but it is more of an interaction. The whole relationship has changed, consumers are now considered as part of the brands' families and just as if they were talking with their family members, consumers communicate with brands through social media. Consequently, every brand should be able to create the right social media marketing strategy. Brands must choose carefully the type of message they want to convey and how to transmit it to the public, the different contents they want to include, but also the people that can represent their brand.

This study aims at giving marketers empirical data about possible consumers' responses to different social media marketing actions. Knowing in advance, which could be the content that could generate positive eWOM engagement behaviors, can make the firm save money and effort before dedicated to the analysis of huge amount of historical data coming from the metrics of eWOM engagement (number of reposts/shares, number of likes and number of reblogs) that can be retrieved from the different platforms (Ananda et al., 2019). In this case, two types of eWOM engagement have been considered, the "pass-on" and the "endorsement/aggregate", as well as the frequency of exposure to each marketing stimuli in order to verify the effect that this can have. The results have shown how consumers would be more prone to engage in endorsement/aggregate eWOM, rather than the pass-on and that they prefer to have access to always new types of information. The overexposure to specific contents does not generate consumers' positive attitudes, they are more interested in understanding more about the brand, participating to the online events along with all those contents that make them feel close to the brand itself. Also the identification of the brand with a person they consider as a popular idol, represents something that would take the brand out of the sole fashion industry to become something bigger, something that can involve the whole consumers' life.