


The Role of Social Media Usage and Engagement on Purchase Intentions for Fashion Brands

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the impact of fashion brand attachment on customer purchase intention and the role of social media usage and engagement on this relationship. The data were collected through surveys distributed randomly to 404 social media users in Albania during April 2020. PLS-SEM was used to analyze the relationships between fashion brand attachment (FBA), social media usage (SMU), social brand engagement (SBE), and purchase intentions (PI). SMU integrated the social media activity during the coronavirus pandemic, motives, and frequency use of various platforms. The overall model revealed a positive impact of FBA in SBE and PI, indicating that customers with a stronger attachment to fashion brands show a higher commitment to purchase and recommend them to others. The results highlighted that SMU does not contribute directly to generate committed buyers but moderates the FBA-SBE relationship, indicating an indirect influence on the intentions to purchase fashion brands.

KEYWORDS

Fashion Brand Attachment, Purchase Intentions, Social Brand Engagement, Social Media Usage

INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry generates \$2.5 trillion globally in annual revenues and is one of the biggest industries in the world. As a result, it greatly boosts employment (McKensey, 2019).

The nature of communication in the fashion industry (Anwar, 2017) has dramatically changed in the last two decades due to the evolution of the internet and new technologies (Godey et al., 2016). The social component introduced with the development of Web 2.0 has turned customers into active participants of the business process (Chan and Astari, 2017). This new communicative setting has led to companies developing a presence on social media aiming to strengthen their relationships with customers.

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Social media has been identified as an effective mechanism for realizing firms' marketing aims; the mechanism is especially useful for facilitating communication with customers and relationship management (Alalwan et al., 2017). However, authors posit that there is a scarcity of social media research in some areas of marketing such as relationship marketing and marketing performance (Amanda et al., 2016). Furthermore, research results have been unclear regarding the impact of social media on brand loyalty building (Ahmad et al., 2020). Geissinger and Laurell's study (2016) showed that the general and diverse setting of fashion-oriented social media applications seems to exhibit few brand activists and loyalists. Instead, users of social media are seeking a variety of fashion brands rather than developing loyalty for specific brands. Fashion retail varies depending on the country due to many factors, such as shopping motivations, preferences, behaviors, and social media usage (Parker and Wenyu, 2019).

The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has caused economic recession all over the world in 2020, and it has highly affected the fashion sector. According to McKinsey survey results (2020), 75 percent of shoppers in Europe and the United States were pessimist about their financial situation in the upcoming months. As a result of uncertainty and abiding social distancing recommendations, consumer behavior has changed.

Dublin-based Digital Marketing Institute (2020) reported that the brick-and-mortar shopping revenues of more than two-thirds of firms in the fashion industry experienced a decline in revenues during the first quarter of 2020. COVID-19 has redefined the customer experience; it has led to a massive consumer shift toward online shopping as a safe and convenient alternative. As a result, it has created an environment that demands an intensification of digital efforts (Jain and Mishra, 2020).

Brand engagement in social media is broadly discussed in the literature, but the social media engagement in the relevant studies are poorly conceived (Schultz and Peltier, 2013). Understanding social media usage patterns as an antecedent of social brand engagement and its role in consumer purchasing behavior is of great importance for brand managers when designing effective social media marketing strategies. Therefore, the study conceptualized social media usage by integrating three components; the frequency of use, the motives for engagement in social media, and the social media activity level during the coronavirus pandemic.

Considering the gaps in the literature, the research objectives of this study are the following.

First, to investigate the direct effect of fashion brand attachment (FBA) on customers' purchase intentions (PI) and fashion brand engagement in social media (SBE). Second, to test whether social media usage (SMU) during the pandemic does have moderating effects on the FBA-PI and FBA-SBE relationships. Third, to examine the FBA-PI relationship in a social media setting.

The article begins with a review of the relevant literature to explore the motives that drive people to use social media and engage with fashion brands. The following section explains the theoretical framework for developing the conceptual model. Next, the methodology is explained, empirical findings from the data analysis are drawn and managerial implications are discussed. The final section is focused on the limitations of the study and directions for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Merriam-Webster vocabulary defines fashion as 'the prevailing style during a particular time'. Fashion is a popular aesthetic expression in a specific context, especially in clothing, footwear, lifestyle, accessories, makeup, hairstyle, traditionally tied to the fashion season and collections.

Customer spending in fashion brand retailing is affected mainly by hedonic motivations (Parker and Wenyu, 2019). As social human beings, individuals look for satisfying needs that support creating a positive image about themselves to look nice and trendy. Disclosing feelings of love and attachment for fashion brands is one way people choose to communicate and express themselves. In light of the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1985), individuals' self-concepts are based on their membership in social media brand communities that allow self-expression on a larger scale

(Helal, 2019). From a broad perspective, social media are described as a five-dimensional construct that enables interaction, entertainment, customization of communications, electronic word of mouth, and up-to-date information for customers (Kim and Ko, 2010; Wang et al., 2019).

The ubiquity of SM platforms presents a great opportunity for fashion companies to improve their performance in the market. The exploitation of a high volume of social data produced in real-time enables better customer analysis and effective customer relationship management (Gnizy, 2019). Fashion companies can emphasize the quality and style of fashion brands in social media at a low-cost, connecting with hundreds of people. Also, they can benefit from the generation of brand-related content from customers, interactions, and influences they have on each other. Customers have become fashion brand advocates as they engage in SM by expressing their preferences, sharing information, and referring brands to others as a trusted source of information based on their perceptions and experiences.

Understanding the extent to which social media use affects brand engagement has been the focus of many research studies in the last decade. Osei-Frimpong and McLean (2018) reported the potentiality of social presence to influence brand engagement practices. According to Martín-Consuegra et al. (2018), social media activity positively affects the direct relationship between fashion brand image and purchase intention. Meanwhile, the findings of Wang et al. (2019) revealed that social media marketing enhances consumers' brand attachment and preference but fails to generate committed and loyal buyers.

Theoretical Framework

Fashion Brand Attachment (FBA) and Purchase Intentions (PI) Relationship

Fashion brands fit with individuals' personalities. Consumers tend to create emotional bonds with fashion brands (Giri et al., 2018), leading to participating in fashion brand communities and satisfy feelings of belongingness. Customers use the love for fashion brands as an expression of themselves to create a better image and generate self-confidence about their appearance in interaction with others. Brand awareness, perceived value, organizational associations, and brand uniqueness contribute to loyalty generation towards fashion brands (Su and Chang, 2018).

PI is a future-oriented behavioral loyalty construct that refers to the possibility of purchasing a fashion brand, estimating so the future profits that a fashion brand potentially can generate (Gautam and Sharma, 2017). The more attached to a fashion brand a customer is, the greater the behavioral loyalty is expected to be shown in the future. Attachment and positive feelings towards a fashion brand can lead to repurchasing commitment in the future. Hence, the first hypothesis is formulated:

H1: FBA has a positive impact on the PI for fashion brands.

Social Brand Engagement (SBE)

SBE is a construct that reflects consumer brand engagement via social media. It is defined in the literature as involvement with a brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014), commitment to a brand through interactive experiences (Hudson et al., 2016), and consumption, contribution, and creation of brand-related content in social media (Schivinski et al., 2016). Furthermore, Osei-Frimpong and McLean (2018) defined social brand engagement as 'the connection, creation, and communication of the brand's story between a firm and consumers using brand or brand-related language, images, and meanings via the firm's social networking site' (p. 3). Customers engage in different brand-related activities in social media such as liking, reposting, commenting, sharing information, reviewing, and recommending fashion brands to friends and family members in response to marketing action stimuli and cognitive-inducing actions. However, social brand engagement goes beyond a mere behavioral response, and it affects the cognitive processing and feelings about a fashion brand (Ananda et al., 2019). The feelings of attachment are associated with a certain level of fashion brand engagement in

terms of any related positive/negative comments in the form of electronic word-of-mouth (Ahmad et al., 2020). Thus, the second hypothesis is formulated:

H2: FBA has a positive impact on SBE.

Intention to purchase a fashion brand can indicate the willingness of a consumer to perform a specific behavior. Supported by the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1975, 1987), the intentions to purchase a fashion brand can be predicted with high accuracy from the consumer's attitude towards that brand. Consequently, it is assumed that a consumer's intention to purchase a brand among other competing brands is affected by the attitude built over his/her estimations and other individuals' recommendations about that brand. Electronic words of mouth in social media are viewed as credible recommendations, as individuals are continuously expressing their fashion needs and sentiments on social media (Giri et al., 2018).

Sohaib et al. (2018) argued that argument quality, source credibility, and involvement are the main determinants of social media activities influencing purchase intentions positively. Forming a positive attitude about a fashion brand can lead to higher engagement in social media exhibited by several social media activities (liking, sharing, commenting, and posting information) that subsequently can increase the likelihood to purchase the brand in the future. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: SBE has a positive impact on the PI for fashion brands.

Social Media Usage

SM share some attributes relevant to fashion brands as fashion is a social component of presenting someone in society. Social media are easy to use and convenient to gather a lot of information about fashion brands. They help customers connect and share pieces of information with other customers and brand managers.

SMU has been the topic of many recent research studies. The presence in social media can affect the type of activities conducted in social media. Social media use depends on the degree of social presence in various platforms, which is indicated by the amount of time spent and the frequency of use (Karikari et al., 2017).

The customers' engagement with fashion brands in SM varies dependently on the needs and motives of participation, such as reinforcing the desired self-image and status in the society, entertainment, collecting information, and getting updates about favorite fashion brands (Wang et al., 2019). Customers engage in SM if the participation motives satisfy their needs. The intensity of SM activities and engagement in different social media platforms fluctuate considerably over time and are curvilinear (Geissinger and Laurell, 2016). The degree of SM engagement varies among diverse forms of social media applications, and the effect of participating in one media can be transmitted to other social media sites.

This study conceptualizes SMU as a composite of three factors, including a) the motives to be present in social media, b) the frequency of visiting various social media sites, and c) the social media activity during COVID-19. The latest recorded some effects on consumer behavior, such as increased spending on groceries and less spending on fashion goods, entertainment, and vacation due to greater insecurity about the future. Although the interest in buying fashion brands during the pandemic has diminished yet the Harris Poll (2020) conducted between late March and early May 2020 reported that between 46% and 51% of US adults were using social media more since the outbreak began. The lessened demand for fashion goods and the intensification of social media use during the pandemic can influence social brand engagement in different directions. We believe that the more individuals use social media, the greater the customers' exposure to fashion brands in social media can be, resulting in strengthened intentions to purchase fashion brands to which customers are

more attached. Those who actively participate in SM are empowered to effectively share their own experience about fashion brands to a large audience (Hudson et al., 2015). Thus, a higher SMU is associated with a greater engagement with fashion brands. As SMU exposes consumers to fashion brands and involves them in fashion-related activities in SM, it can have cognitive effects on future intentions to purchase fashion brands. If consumers recognize that the information provided in social media satisfies their needs, their purchase intentions can be positively affected (Martín-Consuegra et al., 2018). SMU can affect the relationship between FBA and PI. A higher level of SMU can be associated with increased purchase intentions to fashion brands that SM users feel more attached to. Consequently, the last hypothesis is formulated:

H4: SMU moderates the a) FBA-PI and b) FBA-SBE relationships.

The conceptual framework of the study is presented in Figure 1.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection and Sample Description

The data were collected through online surveys in Albania in April 2020. The links to surveys were distributed randomly to fashion brands' followers on social media and 404 respondents accepted the invitation to participate on a voluntary basis. The respondents were informed about the anonymity and confidentiality of the research. The sample was predominantly below 30 years of age (61%), dominated by females (89%) and 46% of the respondents fell into the \$500 - \$1000 income range. The demographic data are presented in Table 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

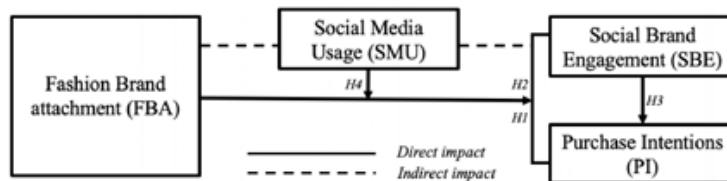


Table 1. Demographic data

	Descriptive	N	%
Age (AGE)	18-29 years	247	61%
	30-50 years	150	37%
	over 50 years	7	2%
Gender (GE)	Males	46	11%
	Females	358	89%
Incomes (INC)	Up to \$500	118	29%
	\$500-\$1000	187	46%
	\$1000-	99	25%

Measurement Instrument

A questionnaire was developed and distributed randomly to social media users following fashion brands in Albania to obtain the overall perceptions of FBA, SMU, SBE, and PI constructs. Each construct was measured by a set of questions (in total 28 items) on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree). The questionnaire was distributed in the Albanian language. The questions were translated forward and backward in English and Albanian language for maintaining the equivalence of the test questionnaire and avoid potential bias.

FBA items were adopted from Ahmad et al. (2020), PI items from Gautam and Sharma (2017), the motives for engaging in social media from Wang et al. (2019), and SBE items (SM users contribution and creation of brand-related content) from Schivinski et al. (2016).

As described in the establishment of hypotheses, the independent factors were FBA, SMU, and SBE, while PI represented the dependent variable.

The frequency of using SM was measured by answers provided to the question “How often do you use the following SM accounts (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Snapchat)?”.

SMU was calculated as the product derived from the multiplication of the mean values of the motives for engaging with fashion brands in SM, the frequency of using SM accounts, and SM activity related to fashion brands during COVID-19 (Table 2).

Control Variables

In addition to modeling relationships between latent constructs, gender, age, and income variables were included in the model to control for possible causal interference on purchase intentions. SM users have shown a distinct behavior related to age differences. Importantly, when exposed to SM communication strategy, younger consumers tend to engage more than older ones in SM content and expand the conversations about the brand/company (Perju-Mitrana and Budacia, 2017).

Furthermore, distinct social media usage patterns that originate from gender-based differences were identified in the literature. E.g., males use SM to entertain and initiate new professional or personal relationships while females utilize SM for relationship maintenance (Rousseau and Puttaraju, 2014). Also, it was expected that high-income consumers engage more with fashion brands than low-income ones, resulting so in creating higher purchase intentions.

Table 2. Social Media Usage

Social Media Usage (SMU)	Items
Motives for engaging in SM	1. I can collect a lot of information on brands on SM
	2. SM emphasizes the quality and style of fashion brands
	3. My desired self-image is reinforced when following fashion brands on SM
	4. Fashion brands contribute to my image/status on social media
	5. It's exciting and fun to follow brands on SM
Frequency of SM use	How many times do you use the following SM accounts: Facebook YouTube Instagram Twitter Snapchat
SM Activity during COVID-19	1. I am more active in SM during COVID-19
	2. I follow more fashion brands in SM during COVID-19
	3. I search for more information about fashion brands in SM

Construct Reliability and Validity

Partial least square structural equation modeling was applied in SmartPLS 3.2.7 to analyze the data. An advantage of using PLS-SEM is that smaller samples are acceptable for the data analysis (Hair et al., 2019). It is recommended that the sample size should be 5 to 10 times the maximum number of model paths. The structural model contained six independent constructs (including the control variables) and six paths. The sample size of 404 records indicated that the needed quality threshold was met, and the sample size was not a threat to the study.

Considering that the model includes reflectively measured constructs, the next step of the analysis was to check for the indicators' reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Through running a consistent PLS of 2000 samples (Sarstedt et al., 2017), all items were found to have factor loadings above .7 ($p < .05$) (Table 3). A higher level of the outer loading factors indicates a greater level of indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2013).

Cronbach's alpha measured the Composite Reliability of the constructs. All indicators scored above the .7 threshold, indicating for consistency of the constructs. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was higher than the .5 threshold, showing that the convergent validity of the constructs measures was fully established (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Henseler, 2017). As provided in Table 4, the AVEs for latent variables in the study were between 0.6 and 0.661.

Furthermore, the discriminant validity was assessed through the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlation (Henseler et al., 2015). All values scored below .72, while the threshold suggested by Henseler et al. (2015) is .9, indicating that the discriminant validity was fully established (Table 5).

Later, to identify any issue related to multi-collinearity, the collinearity statistics were checked. Multicollinearity was measured by variance inflation factors (VIF) and tolerance. No issues were

Table 3. Outer loadings

Construct	Code	Factor loadings
Fashion Brand Attachment (FBA)		
1. FB fits to my personality	FBA_1	0.740
2. I feel I belong to fashion brand community	FBA_2	0.768
3. FB helps me create an image about myself	FBA_3	0.775
4. FB contributes to my image and status in the society	FBA_4	0.774
5. FB makes me look fancy and trendy	FBA_5	0.810
6. I have emotional connection with FBs	FBA_6	0.778
Purchase Intentions (PI)		
1. I believe that SM raises my interest on FBs	PI_1	0.853
2. SM reminds me buy more often my favorite FBs	PI_2	0.769
3. I intend to buy my favorite FBs more often	PI_3	0.797
5. Although COVID-19 is threatening my budget, I believe I will continue buying FBs	PI_4	0.786
Social Brand Engagement (SBE)		
1. I tend to share with others in SM opinions and feelings about my favorite FBs	SBE_1	0.789
2. I would like to pass out information on my favorite FBs to my friends on SM	SBE_2	0.825
3. I would leave a comment when I like the information regarding my favorite FBs	SBE_3	0.822
4. I would recommend my favorite brands to other people on SM	SBE_4	0.816

Table 4. Validity and construct reliability measures

Variable	CR	AVE	AGE	FBA	GE	INC	PI	SBE	WoM
AGE			1						
FBA	0.9	0.6	0.031	0.774					
GE			0.055	-0.021	1				
INC			0.075	0.152	-0.066	1			
PI	0.878	0.643	-0.057	0.702	-0.053	0.132	0.774		
SMU			-0.051	0.654	-0.059	0.044	0.698	1	
SBE	0.886	0.661	-0.063	0.672	0.106	0.068	0.693	0.55	0.813

Table 5. Discriminant validity - Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

	AGE	FBA	GE	INC	PI	SBE
AGE						
FBA	0.039					
GE	0.055	0.052				
INC	0.075	0.151	0.066			
PI	0.06	0.719	0.08	0.131		
SMU	0.051	0.653	0.059	0.044	0.702	
SBE	0.089	0.672	0.106	0.101	0.677	0.551

found in the outer model as the VIF indicators for all variables were below threshold 3, suggested by Hair et al. (2010).

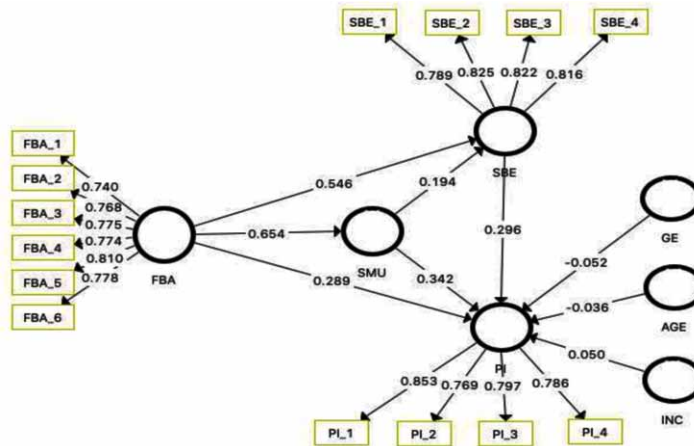
The quality of the estimated model was assessed through the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR=.047; NFI=.877), which in this study was below the .08 threshold recommended by Henseler et al. (2014). The model explained 42.6% of the variance in SMU, 47.1% in SBE, and 65.5% in PI.

In addition to the size of R², the predictive sample reuse technique (Q²) was applied as a criterion for predictive relevance (Stone 1974; Geisser 1975). Through running a blindfolding procedure, Stone-Geisser's Q² values were obtained to show how well the empirically collected data can be reconstructed with the help of the model and the PLS parameters (Fornell and Cha, 1993). The indicators showed moderate effects (.15<Q²<.35) for SBE (Q²=.276), and strong effects (Q²>.35) for PI (Q²=.385) and SMU (Q²=.373), establishing in this way satisfactory predictive relevance (Chin, 2010). Figure 2 presents the structural model.

RESULTS

After running a consistent bootstrapping procedure, empirical evidence was found in support of hypotheses 1-3. The data analysis revealed that FBA has a significant direct effect on PI (β =.289, p <.05), SBE (β =.546, p <.05), and SMU (β =.654, p <.05). SBE has a positive direct impact on PI (β =.296, p <.05), indicating that a greater engagement with brands in social media can increase the intentions for purchasing fashion brands.

Figure 2. Structural model



Additionally, a consistent bootstrapping procedure with 2000 subsamples was run to analyze the indirect effects of exogenous factors in the model. The results revealed significant specific indirect effects of SMU on the FBA-PI relationship and FBA-SBE relationship, directing for possible moderating effects of this construct. Also, SBE had a positive effect in strengthening the FBA-PI relationship ($t=.162$, $p<.05$).

Furthermore, a consistent bootstrapping procedure with added moderation effects was run to confirm the moderating effect of SMU (Hypothesis 4). The findings revealed nonsignificant moderating effects of SMU on the FBA-PI relationship ($t=.107$, $p=.915$). Oppositely, the relationship between FBA and SBE was significantly moderated by SMU ($t=2.37$, $p=.018$).

The use of social media in Albania has been increasing during the pandemic as respondents confirmed that they were more active in SM (Mean=4.3), were more exposed to the information regarding FBs in social media (Mean=3.4), and they followed more fashion brands in social media (Mean=3.5). The feeling of isolation made them more active in SM, trying to communicate and socialize virtually in absence of in-store visits. When asked about the impact of COVID-19 on their future purchase behavior, respondents stated that they feel insecure about the future (Mean=3.8), agreed that they should spend only on the necessities (Mean=3.9), and they declared to spend less on entertainment and vacations (Mean=3.5).

When checking for control variables' effects on PI, it was found out that Age ($\beta=-.036$, $p=.358$) and income variables ($\beta=-.05$, $p=.156$) do not have a significant impact on PI ($p>.05$). Although the income factor showed insignificant power to control PI, yet a positive relationship was found between the income variable and FBA ($\beta=.152$, $p=.004$). This result indicates that low-income buyers will not be motivated to purchase fashion brands unless their utilitarian needs have been satisfied. Gender was found to influence PI at a 10% significance level ($\beta=-.052$, $p=.084$), confirming previous studies (Koca and Koc, 2016) that females show a higher commitment to repurchase fashion brands than males.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research study provide insights on the role of SMU and SBE in advancing the understanding of brand relationships and commitment. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing an original framework that examines the impact of fashion brand attachment on social brand engagement and purchase intentions. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no previous

studies have explored the moderating role of social media usage and social brand engagement in the relationship between attachment and purchase intentions for fashion brands.

The results indicate a direct positive relationship between attachment to a fashion brand and commitment to purchase it in the future, denoting that customers with a strong fashion brand attachment are keen to purchase and recommend them to others. Customers are willing to invest in fashion brands that improve their self-image and image in society, help them look nice and trendy, and increase their self-esteem.

The results showed that social media contribute indirectly to forming intentions for purchasing attractive fashion brands. Developing feelings of attachment with fashion brands in social media can foster greater brand engagement that, in turn, can support customers to reinforce the willingness to purchase their favorite fashion brands. A higher engagement with fashion brands through commenting, showing preference, and recommending them to others can enhance brands' purchase intentions.

Another contribution of the study relies on the conceptualization of the SMU construct and the examination of its moderating role in the FBA-SBE relationship. The results revealed that SM users who use social media intensively are more exposed to brand communications and, as a result, may engage more with fashion brands in social media. On the other side, the insignificant moderating effect of SMU on the FBA-PI relationship can explain that companies should not expect to convert intensive users of social media into committed fashion brand buyers unless they develop and implement effective brand engagement strategies in social media.

Managerial Implications

This study brings to the attention of the fashion brand managers a few recommendations to improve their marketing activities in the following directions.

First, it is imperative to improve fashion brands image in social media to strengthen the attachment with fashion brands. Developing high quality, design, and style product mix can draw customers' attention. A company should communicate and emphasize the customers' hedonic needs. Although customers are less sensitive to traditional communication (Chan and Astari, 2017), still combining traditional media with social media can intensify brand communications to emphasize the fashion brand personality and enhance attachment with fashion brands.

Second, managers need to foster the customers' presence and engagement on social media. This recommendation encompasses the use of a motivation system to increase participation and interaction. Marketers need to find ways to convince customers to follow their favorite fashion brands in SM. One alternative can be to inform them that attractive offers/discounts would be communicated through social media accounts. They may also increase forum content and activities such as sharing positive feelings of post-purchase behavior, sharing the benefits of following a fashion brand on social media, and being an active fashion brand fan. Furthermore, they may provoke discussions among fashion brand community members highlighting the motives for purchasing a fashion brand over competing brands in the market.

In the same line with Osei-Frimpong and McLean (2018), this study emphasizes that social media usage can enhance social brand engagement. It highlights the importance of words of mouth in forming positive attitudes about fashion brands. Hence, a company should find creative ways to foster brand recommendations in social media and use incentive tools such as rewards to engage customers in this process.

Moreover, a company can improve brand communications with customers on social media by using positive emotional appeals and launching exciting posts (Testa et al., 2021). Effective decisions related to the source of information may encourage discussions among fashion brand community members. A careful selection of celebrities and self-disclosure-based influencers would absorb greater attention and increase brand engagement since the attitude toward fashion influencers positively affects brand attitude and consumer purchase intention (Chetioui et al., 2020). Although in less developed countries, companies hesitate to invest in influencers, they are still encouraged to capitalize on social

influencers that generate creative content to enhance the hedonic benefits of fashion brands, strengthen attachment, and foster social brand engagement.

Third, increasing the purchase intentions for fashion brands can improve sales for a company. Yet, the goal should be more than just about fostering sales; managers should focus on stepping up the entire online shopping experience. They need to improve their product mix by altering fashion products and shifting to online marketing mix strategies. Fashion companies need to enrich the SM users' experience by developing online alternatives to differentiate from competitors, such as creating virtual showrooms, virtual stylists, virtual dressing rooms, virtual fit, or sizing tools.

Furthermore, companies with an agile and open to change approach may recognize the coronavirus pandemic as an opportunity to grow. Small and medium-sized firms that operate in the fashion industry in less developed countries need to adapt their strategies to changing consumer preferences and behavior due to COVID-19 uncertainties. They can improve sales by utilizing social media as a digital store where customers can feel safe and enjoy the shopping experience. They can create easy and trustable ways to foster purchases on social media and e-commerce by decreasing/removing shipping payments, providing safe and diverse payment methods, and facilitating their return policy.

Lastly, a small number of local brands have been developed in the Albanian fashion market, and a few global brands operate in the country due to the low customer purchasing power.

Although Albania is perceived as a high-risk country for doing business (World Bank, 2020), global fashion companies are encouraged to pursue the internationalization process through the internet as a direct exporting entry model with the lowest risk. If that would be the case, they may benefit from the recommendations given in this study to optimize social media use in fostering brand engagement and building loyalty for fashion brands.

Limitations and Future Research

A potential limitation of this study can be that it does not focus on specific fashion brands. Generalizing overall social media feedback from favorite brands may have caused bias in responses to questions regarding purchase intentions.

The findings cannot be generalized in the entire fashion industry since differences can be recognized in fast fashion or luxury fashion segments.

Future research can be oriented in different directions. Authors may investigate other drivers that strengthen the relationship between social brand engagement and behavioral loyalty, such as the role of perceived fashion innovativeness on electronic word of mouth in social media. Another avenue can be investigating the role of social media influencers in fostering engagement and building loyalty for fashion brands.

Also, it is of great importance to explore in-depth the factors that influence online fashion brand shopping. The perceived risk of online purchase decisions in less developed countries can be a topic of interest for global brand managers.

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