Examining Social Media Use in Fashion:

The Need for Industry Standards

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ABSTRACT

Social media is an evolving platform used by the fashion industry to generate discussion, brand recognition, and improve consumer relations through interactivity and networking. The following study examines the current uses and standards of industry professionals regarding the different social media platforms to determine effective practice. The innovative new instruments in public relations strategy provide key benefits and widespread impact for users, designers, firms and publications that are transforming relationships and brands in the fashion industry.

As a means of guiding the literary research and the collection of expert opinion, Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory (1985) says, "the profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible" (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 249). The need for social networking is based on this social theory that interactivity and engagement promote social capital, or the building of networks and relationships. Consumers appreciate the transparency and trust built through social media, but the fashion industry has yet to construct standards for the uses and types of social media content and analytics.

As more fashion and public relations professionals move to online sourcing and social platforms, the increased interactivity in this digital age greatly benefits all participants, and designers and brand representatives need to embrace social networking strategies and their related improvements towards reputation, sales, and accessibility.

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Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Social media is an emerging platform that enables brand recognition and popularity for designers in the fashion industry while contributing to the interactivity of companies and consumers. Although better adopted by parallel industries, the fashion industry lacks industry-wide standards regarding the success and use of social media tools, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest. Social media is a public venue that promotes transparency and feedback. According to Lee (2009), "while fashion brands and retailers are still grappling with social media in terms of controlling brand perception and establishing metrics to measure its marketing value, they have used Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social communities to develop digital marketing strategies to drive online sales and retail store traffic" (Lee).

The fashion industry's adoption of social media has lead to exponential feedback by its users who suggest and recommend styles and collections that, in turn, make those designers and brands more popular. However, social media is not yet recognized as an effective public relations tool or emerging venue for fashion debuts and responses in the fashion industry as a whole, and the content producers who have taken to social media have yet to develop strategies equivalent to industry standards.

Background of the Problem

The current developments in social media allow consumers to anticipate and follow upcoming trends and styles before they debut. Traditionally, the fashion industry

was limited in its public relations tools to ones that restricted interaction between designers and brands, consequentially limiting consumer exposure and knowledge of upcoming collections, styles, and promotions.

There is little published data supporting the use and growth of social media as a public relations strategy in the fashion industry given its recent establishment and development as an effective measurement of public image and reputation.

As an instrument in public relations strategy, social media establishes relationships between clients and designers. Public relations practitioners and content producers must develop a standard structure for the use of different social media outlets for success and transparency purposes.

Purpose of the Study

Because of the largely undocumented connection between social media use and increased consumer reaction and brand trending, research indicates that there are no prevalent or established industry standards regarding the use of social media in the fashion industry. By comparing the impact of social media on fashion public relations strategy with parallel industries, the question arises of content control and production of such social media outlets.

The fashion industry incorporates designers, consumers, brands and media, which are interlinked by social media tools. The use of these outlets is relatively new in the fashion industry and the investigation of how they are beneficial and whom they reach exemplifies the exponential exposure social networking provides. The field of public relations emphasizes reputation and open forums for dialogue. According to Wilson

(2012), "to have power in fashion today means to have real impact, the kind that demonstrably moves an industry, as opposed to merely moving merchandise," which is achieved through the effective use of social media (Wilson).

Setting for the Study

This study is will be published as a part of the data collection process as a Senior Project at California Polytechnic State University, located in San Luis Obispo, California. Interviews will be conducted with four different industry experts: a prominent and well-followed social media director for a fashion public relations firm, a fashion publicist from a respected, nationwide public relations firm, a veteran public relations professional, and a national marketing director. Because their fields and experience are related, each will be asked one of two question sets, modified to be appropriate to their expertise and relation to the fashion field. The interview content is based on the questionnaires structured to fill in gaps in the literature and research regarding industry standards on social media. The information gathered from the literature review and questionnaires with professionals will recommend standards regarding social media use for the fashion industry.

Research Questions

Given the existing literature regarding the fashion industry and social media, this study was structured based on research questions relevant to the gaps in industry standards and research. The questions determine the validity in using social media given its measured effectiveness in promotions and brand rankings. Each question was designed

to recommend an organizational structure for the fashion industry to advance social media practices.

1. Who controls social media in the fashion industry: designers and brands or consumers?

2. What benefits do social media tools have on consumers? Designers? Publications?

3. Which social media outlets have been most effective in aiding public relations practitioners? In what ways does the fashion industry need to embrace different social media outlets? Which platforms should be abandoned?

4. Who uses social media tools to discover and explore trends and products in the fashion industry?

5. How has the development of social media platforms changed/improved the public relations profession?

Organization of the Study

This comparative social media study is based on five successive chapters. Chapter 1, *Introduction*, includes a statement of the problem, background information, the purpose and setting of the study, and presents the guiding research questions. Chapter 2, *Literature Review*, synthesizes the current literature regarding social media use in the fashion industry and other mainline industries. Chapter 3, *Methodology*, identifies the data sources and methods of collection for the study, including how data will be analyzed and presented. Chapter 4, *Data Analysis*, is a comparative analysis of the gathered data from respondent interviews versus the current literature, in the context of the research questions. Chapter 5, *Discussion and Recommendations*, is a general discussion of the

findings of the study and responses, recommendations for practice in the fashion industry, and a conclusion on the use and need of social media.

<center>**Chapter 2**</center>

<center>*Literature Review*</center>

The literature review is an evaluation of the existing published material on the social media standards in the fashion industry and their lack thereof, the different types of social networking sites, and the proven benefits and power for consumers, public relations practitioners, and designers.

Control of social media in the fashion industry:

The social media revolution in the fashion industry enables user-generated content to gear the conversations between designers and brands and their consumers. The emergence of social media has had widespread effects in the fashion industry in how it has created a constant dialogue and immediate feedback with people. According to Sinclaire (2011), consumers are active creators and monitors in social networking, and are no longer passive receivers of marketing messages. "As a result of the widespread growth of online social networking and user-generated content sites, a shift in the balance of power is occurring" (p. 293).

The fashion industry's previous "tell style" standards of communication were one-way and limiting to where public relations professionals could dictate and control their organizational methods; conversely, social media actively enforces monitoring or discussing content with consumers (Bridgen, 2012, p.66). The discussion of power in the fashion industry today is directly correlated to the impact one has on consumers and critics, as opposed to merely selling merchandise or advertising. An effective impact is one that creates brand recognition, further discussion, and consumer approval via

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comments and reposts. Wilson (2012) explains how "it was this criterion that The New York Times considered foremost when setting out to define a new power establishment: those pullers of strings who, reacting to seismic shifts in technology, communication and the economics of their industry, have reshaped the way the rest of the world sees, senses and consumes fashion" (p. 12A). Social media sites extend beyond the RSS feeds and collages previously posted by designers and brands because social networking gives consumers the power to share experiences and questions with other consumers who have experience with those brands and companies.

According to Binkley (2010), social media has a "marketing promise [that] is obvious for business: it has deep potential as a customer-service channel for retailers" (p. ?). The immediate reaction and discussion that social media allows and encourages creates a trusting relationship between consumers and designers. This online networking is granting the world an unprecedented level of access to fashion gurus (Binkley, 2010).

Benefits of social media tools on consumers, designers, and publications (Social Capital Theory):

According to Papasolomou (2012), "the Internet implementation in the marketing process is inexpensive, delivers instant international reach, offers great real time feedback, and reaches millions of people for whom the web is the center of virtually all communications" (p. 322). Social media is a means by which designers and publications can host discussions to better understand the concerns and desires of their consumers. By using social media tools as effective marketing strategies, "the fashion industry can uncover a goldmine of consumer inspiration and trend-testing" (DiMauro, 2011). Social

media sites empower designers and publications with the ability to identify and capitalize on "what's hot and catch rising trends in advance of market saturation [which] can make all the difference to a fashion brand or retailer's margin" (DiMauro, 2011).

According to Noricks (2010), the most active social media sites "have helped to generate more access between fashion brands and consumers, thus, making fashion brands appear more transparent and open." Because of popular consumer reaction in favor of company transparency, social networking sites ultimately can lead to increased consumer trust (Noricks). From a public relations standpoint, the benefits of social media use in the fashion industry stem from the improved relationship between consumers and designers. In an article in the *Public Relations Review*, DiStaso (2012) found that "public relations professionals felt that social media created a platform for open dialogue with publics that encouraged interaction and raised unexpected topics that helped strengthen the relationship" (p. 513).

The rise and popularity of social media is explained by the social capital theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1985) that says, "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (p. 248). Social capital focuses on the positives of sociability and ignores its less attractive features. "It places those positives consequences in the framework of a broader discussion of capital and calls attention to how such nonmonetary forms can be important sources of power and influence (Portes, 2000, p. 43). In terms of social media, social capital is the relationships built by networking. "The profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible" (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 249). Social networks

are not a given and must be constructed, and through social capital, "actors can gain access to economic resources, increase cultural capital through contacts with experts or individuals of refinement, and can affiliate with institutions" (Portes, 2000, p. 45). This science of influence is a social theory that analyzes social media culture: the social capital leveraged on social media outlets benefits the collective owners of those communities. According to Denny (2009), "where much of traditional advertising leans on the principles related to motivation and making choices under conditions of uncertainty, social media lives in the world of relationship building" (Denny). Reciprocity and liking are the set principles for relationship building in social networking; reciprocity is employed in that social media is a dialogue that encourages commenting and engagement, which fosters liking (Denny). Without the driving theory of social capital, social media tools would be rendered useless.

The importance of using and following social media for designers and brands is in predicting the future demand for products and collections. Predictive analytic tools compare previous trends with ongoing topic discussions to conclude fashion winners for the future. "To augment traditional analytics, some retailers and fashion designers have applied analytic techniques to social media interactions to get real-time feedback on where fashion is going and what consumers think of their upcoming designs" (Mitchell, 2011, p. 23). Social media sites have updated who dictates trends and topics in the fashion industry for a better public response, from merchandising to design transparency to promotions. According to Agathou (2011), technology and social media has revamped public interaction and input in all facets of the fashion industry, "with live streaming from the hottest runway shows, real time shopping, bloggers gaining their seats among

fashion editors and celebrities and of course tweets from the first row giving to us all a virtual seat" (Agathou).

For third-party vendors and conveyors, social media means potential applications for brand building. Magazines now employ style bloggers, have digital apps to regularly update consumers, and can disseminate information more regularly than monthly publications. With the transition to social media sites, glossy magazines are less in style given their delayed printing after fashion events and updates (Prabhakar, 2010). The impact of social media on publications is in "its potential to open up new opportunities for communication while simultaneously changing the way that organizations disseminate and receive information, respond to their stakeholders, and research audience views and motivations" (Bridgen, 2012, p. 62-63). The two-way communication between consumers and producers in the fashion industry benefits all parties considering the strengthened relationship built on trust and transparency and the potential discussion platforms for suggestions and trend setting.

Popularity and effectiveness of different social media outlets:

"When we talk about social media, the general reference is to websites or online platforms that enable the fashion industry to connect with their customers using the latest social networking technology" (Sanand, 2011). These social networking sites, including Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram, are "communities—social networks, forums, wikis and blogs—telling brands that they need to participate and create dialogues with people online" (Lee, 2009). While these social media outlets are still on the rise, others like MySpace and Tumblr appear outdated and offer less interaction and growth.

The newest site to break conventions in merchandising, advertising and trending is Twitter. "Twitter has been singled out for its ability to facilitate public conversations through its reply function, which is available for all to see," (Waters, 2011, p. 356). Despite its 140-character restriction for posts, Twitter has been recently successful in its ability to attract users by allowing reTweets, links to photos and other sites, and its ease in use and following. According to Binkley (2010), "many people find it easier to use and more informative than Facebook, LinkedIn and other social media." Twitter allows direct conversation through the @ function, where one user can "tweet" directly at another's Twitter handle, despite the public being able to follow. "Part of Twitter's power is that it feels as intimate as talking to a friend" (Binkley, 2010).

The ever-popular social networking site Facebook also allows users to post status updates, photos and albums, and connect with other users on the network. The social media site permits "crosstalk between users who follow each other and between those who do not, and the intervention of browsers in the indexing of published content (so that it can subsequently be easily located by the main browsers on the Network)" (Xifra, 2010, p. 172). These kinds of social media sites have updated traditional press venues and values, as press releases can be written and sent out to traditional media sources, then can be posted to the company Facebook page, and then a few words on the story can be tweeted on Twitter with a link back to the release wherever it was originally posted (Roach, 2012, p. 32).

But not all social media sites are word-driven; the up-and-coming Pinterest and Instagram sites are based on individual photos pinned to profiles or boards with the option to include captions and comments. According to Caro (2012), "brands are

realizing their audiences are spending more time in newer, more visually driven networks such as Pinterest and Instagram." Pinterest is a virtual pin board where users can browse pin boards and pins by other users, share photos and links of interest, and connect based on shared tastes. Instagram is a photo-sharing program that enables users to "visually catalog life's adventures" by applying filters to photos, posting them to individual profiles, and following other users with a constantly updated stream of posts (Caro). "The most popular "visual platforms" have created strength in their communities because they are visually interesting and they aggregate like-minded people" (Caro).

According to Sweetser (2011), "leadership within a profession or even within an organization may not require elite prominence in worlds of social media…but those who are more influential relative to others in the same group…are more likely to see the value of social media for themselves personally" (p. 426). The fashion industry is still relatively new to social media, and mainstream practitioners still question the credibility of these sites and outlets. The intentions of those in the fashion industry to enter the social media scene can also be uncertain; "early research on other social media applications, such as blogs and social networking sites, rarely demonstrate a strong commitment to relationship building and dialogue from the practitioners running the organizational accounts" (Waters, 2011, p. 354). Because some social media venues have already come and gone, such as MySpace and Tumblr, public relations practitioners often fear implementing social media into their marketing campaigns for fashion clients. "Stories like these provide a glimpse into the proliferation of social media and exhibit the growing interest and concern regarding the resonance of these communication platforms" (Khang, 2012, p. 279).

Who uses social media:

The social media following has grown exponentially in recent years given its newly established popularity and site improvements for easier use. According to the November 2012 update by Smith (2012), there are one billion registered Facebook users, with around 600 million of those users going mobile; Twitter has a following of 500 million total users; and newer sites such as Pinterest and Instagram have 100 million active users and over 4 million unique postings daily, respectively (Smith). The convenience and ease of social media creates a following of everyday users and consumers on the social networking sites. To keep up with trends and to voice their opinions, consumers must regularly follow brands and designers; to review consumer motivations and concerns and to maintain public interest, designers must regularly update their sites and responses. According to Bourne (2010), this relationship with consumers benefits those that use social media by "seeing upside in revenue and customer appreciation."

Despite consumers becoming content producers alongside fashion designers, "knowing how to use Twitter, update your timeline on Facebook, pin on Pinterest, check in on Foursquare and upload images on Instagram are among the digital skills that some employers expect people to have to land a job or to flourish in a current role" (Preston, 2012). To be a top hit on a social media site, one's title is irrelevant; "the designers; models; go-betweens; eyes and ears; merchants; business people; wildcards and image-makers who are ruling the game today" (Wilson, 2012). Some content producers with the highest following or most credibility are unexpected forces in the fashion industry.

"It is now possible that the junior accessories editor sitting in the third row has a

bigger voice than the editor in chief; or that the teenage blogger outweighs the

middle-aged veteran who spent decades clawing her way up, just to get to the

middle. So much competing noise, from people and devices, has skewed the

perception of who really takes precedence" (Wilson, 2012).

Because no designer or brand inherently holds power in the social media realm, some

luxury fashion brands have been resistant to joining the social media presence. However,

this refusal to prompt consumers' interests on social media sites inadvertently damages

their overall reputation. According to Morrissey (2010), "many fashion brands,

particularly those in the luxury category, remain wary of social media…[instead] you'll

find pretty much the digital equivalent of Vogue…lots of glossy photos and little in the

way of interaction" (p. 6). Interactivity and transparency drives consumer awareness and

interest, and builds relationships and trust between consumers and designers. Such trust is

crucial to business and society, despite some facets of the fashion industry being slow to

welcome it.

**The development of social media outlets and the corresponding improvements in the
public relations profession**

With the evolution of social media tools in recent years, public relations

practitioners have had to embrace the changes in how designers and consumers interact,

and how the public responds to traditional public relations materials. According to

Noricks (2010), it is the responsibility of the public relations professionals to monitor

online and social media conversations. "PR shops have played major roles in developing,

creating and executing digital and social efforts for key clients" (Bush, 2010). Part of the public relations campaign now includes social media promotions and presence, and analyzing and participating in the discussion and comments by consumers. Bush (2010) explains that marketers are "looking for both social-media and digital guidance, [so] public relations has seen increased and broader assignments from current clients, closer relationships with CMOs and a much bigger pipeline of new-business pitches" (Bush).

Social media sites disseminate traditional public relations tools quickly, to large audiences, and with minimal cost. Summed up by Lee (2009), "the fashion industry has adopted social media as a marketing platform to reach their customers online and reignite brand passion and customer loyalty," and public relations practitioners are now more involved in this process (Lee).

According to Khang (2012), "scholars have endeavored to explore social media by offering definitions, determining uses and impacts, and applying theoretical and methodological approaches regarding the topic" (Khang). This information is relevant to public relations practitioners in how they represent their clients online, encourage users to ask questions or host open forums, and in regards to the consumer-designer relationship. "As information on products and companies becomes more transparent through the use of social media, the concept of "information is power" is neutralized, as information is more readily available and shared (Sinclaire, 2011, p. 293). Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites are "tools that can be used to build relationships through open dialogue internally and externally, providing both opportunities and challenges" (DiStaso, 2012, p. 512). According to Roach (2012), the "opportunity" presented by social media does not change the practice of public relations (p. 32). "One still has to start with a newsworthy

story, turn it into a news story, and send it out or post it… [social media] just makes the

process more efficient by alerting more people to the message" (Roach, 2012, p. 32).

Social media channels have enabled the public relations practice to better communicate

with the public, and to more efficiently disseminate information on their client's

behalves.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter details the methods used for data collection for this study, including the background on data sources, the collection and presentation of data, and the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Data Sources

In this study, the primary source for data collection focused on the four interview responses from experts in the fashion industry, social media, and public relations. The interviews were conducted using questionnaires based on the presented research questions from Chapter 1. The questionnaires were tailored to allow for differing perspectives given that the respondents are experts in related fields, either formatted specific to the fashion industry or to public relations and sales strategy in general. The questions were designed as complimentary to the research questions to further enhance any conclusions made at the completion of this study regarding which social media outlets and practices are most effective and should be recommended for further exploration and use in the fashion industry.

Participants

As the Assistant Account Executive and Director of Social Media for Magenta Stripe Public Relations in New York City, Sloane Granite was selected as the expert of social media platforms because of the boutique agency's extensive client list and innovative implementation of social media. The fashion guru chosen as representative of

the fashion industry's interests and experience was Kannyn Opal, manager of the highest-rated fashion boutique Aura in San Luis Obispo. Alison Diamond, Senior Account Director at a top, fully integrated, bicoastal public relations agency, Indigo Public Relations, was interviewed with the alternative questionnaire to elaborate on the needs and successes of public relations professionals in the entertainment, fashion, and lifestyle markets. The College Special's National Sales Manager, Alex Topaz, was the second expert chosen for the public relations and marketing questionnaire for an advertising and sales perspective on social media versus social media use strictly for public relations strategy.

Interview Design

  The following tailored five questions and probes were asked to each of the four industry experts and served as significant data sources for the study. The questions are relevant to social media use as public relations strategy in the fashion industry, with the exception of the social media and marketing expert, Alex Topaz, who had an alternative third question, and the inclusion of not just fashion but related fields for public relations professional Alison Diamond:

1. How would you describe the impact that social media has on a public relations strategy for a client?

    a. Which social media outlets do you prefer to use in reaching your target audience and why do you find these effective?

    b. Which social media platform or type has been least effective in improving your public relations strategy and why?

2. In what way do you think that these online mediums have changed or improved consumer relations and brand recognition?

3. Does the fashion industry generally embrace social media as a means to promote brands and trends *and* as a platform for consumer exploration and interactivity? Why or why not?

   a. Which industry is the best example/role model in its effective use of social media tools?

4. What are the challenges in expanding the audience of social media users?

5. What's an example of a social media campaign that you have done for a client that you think has been effective?

Given his unique experience in the sales and marketing industry and indifferent perspective to the field of fashion, Topaz' third question read:

3. How is an improved interface or reskinning of a mobile application more relevant for consumers, businesses, and clients?

   a. Which industry is the best example/role model in its effective use of social media tools including Facebook, Twitter, and mobile applications?

Data Collection

The methodology of data collection for this study included the individual phone-interviews with each of the named experts, with the exceptional of the face-to-face interview with Kannyn Opal. Each interview based on the presented questionnaires was conducted during the month of November, in the year 2012, and lasted between approximately 20 and 30 minutes. The conducted qualitative interviews were recorded

and transcribed to delineate the expertise of each interviewee, to gain better understanding of their knowledge and opinion regarding the use of social media in their fields. Based on the original five research questions, the questionnaires were designed to generate differing answers and perspectives from each of the four respondents, based on their interests and experience.

Data Presentation

To ensure analytic rigor and to protect the confidentiality of the respondents, the four interviewees and their related titles and companies are identified by pseudonyms in this study. "The decision to name or not to name raises several interrelated issues which necessitate balancing the protection of internal and external confidentiality, research goals, strategies in the field and in the presentation of data, and personal comfort" (Guenther, 2009, p. 420). According to Guenther (2009), respondents vulnerable to identification and possible retribution are less likely to offer explicit, accurate information as associated with their published name in qualitative studies (p. 418).

The data and responses provided during each interview was documented through audio recordings using a standard digital voice recorder. Additional notes were taken throughout the interview for clarification and any other probes or comments were added to the questionnaire for that individual expert. The recordings were then transcribed into written verbatim responses with the occasional paraphrasing to clarify the context of some of the responses. For accuracy in meaning, the transcriptions were also sent back to the respondents for review of direct quotes and to illuminate any assumptions or miscommunications in the interview. This method of collection and presentation

guarantees the data be represented in an objective and informative manner, and ensures accuracy and validity in the responses and data sources.

Limitations

The inclusion of quantitative data in this study could have amounted to greater accuracy in the responses and conclusions of the need and use of social media in the fashion industry, but this form of data collection was limited due to monetary and time restraints based on the parameters of the project.

Delimitations

The qualitative method of interviewing of this study also restricted the number of interviews conducted for data collection and reference. Three of the interviews were conducted by phone and the local respondent was interviewed in person, and while the personal answers were candid and based on their field of work and experience, the interviewees were sent the questionnaire prior to the scheduled interview for review and brainstorming. The assumption that the responses are qualitative and provide insight into the need and use of social media in the fashion industry may also provide limitations to this study.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

The following chapter outlines the data collected from both the interviewed experts and the existing literature on the topic. The individual responses to the questionnaire will be presented in direct quotations and paraphrased ideas from the interview transcripts. In addition to their answers, a brief description of the relevant qualifications and background of each respondent will be included.

This data from the interviews will be compared to the research findings from current literature as they relate to the original four research questions presented in Chapter 1, *Introduction*. The information collected from both the interviews and literature will be sorted in this way to best compare the data on the effective need and use of social media in the fashion industry.

Description of Participating Experts

Fashion-based Social Media Director

Sloane Granite was chosen as the social media expert of the fashion industry given her experience and title as the Assistant Account Executive and Director of Social Media for Magenta Stripe Public Relations. Granite has served as the primary director of social media for two years, responsible for updates and posts on the company's Facebook and Twitter pages and Instagram profile. Magenta Stripe Public Relations is a full-service fashion and accessories firm focused on emerging designers, currently representing 35 clients showcased in top publications and style blogs, network shows and celebrities, and in New York City's Fall Fashion Week. With a Bachelor of Journalism and Mass

Communications from the University of Georgia, the Nashville native has helped with public relations for CNN, Bismark Phillips Communications Media, and Athens BLVD Events and Public Relations.

Style Guru and Boutique Owner

Kannyn Opal is the owner of the local fashion boutique, Aura, and head of their marketing and public relations. She purchased the shop in 2001 after graduating from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and supports local artists, jewelry and fashion designers, as well as big brands and names. Opal previously worked under different management at Aura, and has made significant décor and marketing changes after acquiring ownership to the store. Since 2009, the Aura San Luis Obispo Facebook page has nearly tripled in "likes" and is now up to 2,745. Opal hired a public relations and marketing professional earlier in the year to improve the store's social media strategy.

Public Relations Professional

As the Senior Account Director at a top public relations firm, Alison Diamond was interviewed as a public relations expert to asses the needs and implications of social media as a public relations tool and how, in comparison to related fields, the fashion industry lacks standards in the use of social media outlets. With previous experience as the Director of Public Relations at a prominent East Coast public relations firm, Diamond was chosen to elaborate on the needs and successes of social media campaigns in the entertainment, fashion, and lifestyle markets. At her current position at the award-winning public relations firm Indigo PR, established in 1993, Diamond is the senior communications strategist for Forbes 500 Companies.

Social Media and Marketing Professional

The College Special is the nation's leader in advertising and marketing to the 18-24 year old college demographic, and National Sales Manager Alex Topaz was selected for this study for his social media, marketing and advertising expertise. Topaz represents and recruits sales interns, coordinates and expands client markets, and manages account executive profits and exposure through The College Special mobile application and social media platforms. After receiving his degree in Communications and Public Relations from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Topaz grew within The College Special Company and has helped develop and implement the current social media platforms.

Fashion Industry-based Questionnaire

As social media professionals working in the fashion industry, Sloane Granite and Kannyn Opal were asked five questions in an interview format as part of a questionnaire tailored to reflect the impact of social media on the field of fashion. Their collective opinion represents personal and industry standards on social networking.

1. *How would you describe the impact that social media has on a public relations strategy for a client?*
   a. *Which social media outlets do you prefer to use in reaching your target audience and why do you find these effective?*
   b. *Which social media platform or type has been least effective in improving your public relations strategy and why?*

Question #1 was asked to have the respondents generate a definitive opinion regarding the different social media sites and the general platform, including their impact

on users and on designers in both negative and positive lights. Since social media sites are still relatively new to the industry, the question was designed to provide a better understanding of how the different facets of the fashion industry are responding to the exponential use of social media and how it is being used to generate marketing strategy versus open discussion between consumers and designers.

- Sloane Granite: "Social media is growing so quickly because it's an opportunity to share your own voice, on your own terms… It's hard to say which we (Magenta Stripe PR) prefer because there are three that kind of connect together that we use: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. I'm not really big on Tumblr or any other social media sites—those are my main three and the three that are the most important in our public relations strategy because they really build on each other" (Appendix A).
- Kannyn Opal: "Our social media following makes our relationships more intimate… I feel like we're able to connect for longer periods of time and we can get more out of our posts on Facebook than on other social networking sites" (Appendix B).

2. *In what way do you think that these online mediums have changed or improved consumer relations and brand recognition?*

Question #2 aims to determine how consumers have responded to social media, not in terms of purchasing power, but in their following and participation on social media sites. This question investigates the changing perception of users towards brands and designers due to relevant social media, and the value of those social media sites to professional members of the fashion industry.

- Sloane Granite: "With social media, it's like they get a behind the scenes look or an insider's point of view; they get a little more then they could find somewhere in like a magazine article, which makes people appreciate brands more because of their intimate connection" (Appendix A).

- Kannyn Opal: "Now social media is just enhancing our personalities, so our customers are really able to see who we are in the store so that it's not strictly marketing. I think it creates a stronger community" (Appendix B).

3. *Does the fashion industry generally embrace social media as a means to promote brands and trends and as a platform for consumer exploration and interactivity? Why or why not?*

   a. *Which industry is the best example/role model in its effective use of public relations tools?*

Question #3 is meant to analyze who produces content on social media sites, either designers or consumers, or both. Social media is defined by its interactivity aspects, and this question considers how the fashion industry embraces social media compared to other, more established industries on social networking platforms. The probe to this question is designed to demonstrate that the fashion industry has more variable standards for social media use than most other industries on social media, and to collect the professionals' opinions on which field is the strongest on social media.

- Sloane Granite: "Now everyone in the fashion industry has a website, a Twitter account, a Facebook page with fans, an Instagram profile that they update with trending or new information to it make it so that you can be everywhere and attract a bigger following… Before we joined, other fields

like the music industry and the technology industry were well established on

social media through social networking sites like MySpace and interactive

blogs" (Appendix A).

- Kannyn Opal: "Brands and designers follow us, follow our customers, chime

  in on our discussion boards, retweet things, are tweeted at, post questions, get

  personable… We're all about it because social media is helping the industry

  grow and prosper" (Appendix B).

4. *What are the challenges in expanding the audience of social media users that are*

   new to the fashion industry?

Question #4 evaluates who uses social media by pinpointing whom the targeted

audience is and who the current users are. This question is also aimed at building the

connection between public relations strategy/designers and their consumers, and the

challenges in increasing brand recognition and consumers relations.

- Sloane Granite: "We ideally want them to come to us instead us seeming like

  a pest" (Appendix A).

- Kannyn Opal: "You have to do it naturally for it to work. It's very slow, so

  that's probably the biggest challenge" (Appendix B).

5. *What's an example of a social media campaign that you've done that you think*

   has been effective?

Question #5, for the fashion industry-based professionals, aims to determine what

the industry considers effective social media strategy. These answers are relevant to how

the "how" and "why" the fashion industry has been targeting social media as a public

relations strategy.

- Sloane Granite: "I would say that (Magenta Stripe PR Founder) Laura did a really cool campaign on Instagram that linked up to Twitter [with Amanda Pearl]. They weren't promoting Amanda Pearl or Magenta Stripe necessarily but it was just a way to put them out there together and just show a fun approach and multiple points of view" (Appendix A).

- Kannyn Opal: "If a user liked us and then shared us with any of their friends, they would get cyber points that we would track and tally. Basically, whoever spent the most time marketing us won a $250 gift certificate towards Free People purchases" (Appendix B).

Public Relations and Marketing Questionnaire

Alison Diamond and Alex Topaz were asked to respond to the following questionnaire tailored to focus on the different uses of social media for alternative industries. Their public relations backgrounds, while threaded with representation in the fashion industry, are more relevant to the sales-approach of social media and to industries more familiar with social media.

1. *How would you describe the impact that social media has on a sales or social media campaign for a client?*

    a. *Which social media outlets do you prefer to reach your target audience and why do you find these effective?*

    b. *Which social media platform or type has been least effective in improving your strategy and why?*

Question #1 was asked to generate a collective opinion on the impact of social media in terms of generating discussion versus driving sales. Given the two alternatives for social media use in other industries, this question is meant to define the strengths and weaknesses of the different social media types.

- Alison Diamond: "I think that if you avoid social media and/or ignore it, you are off in your strategy and you're missing the 360 degree view of a client's brand and the way that you're going to go… The challenge is weighing how to talk to your consumer, and using social media depends on if you're trying to drive sales or just generate conversation" (Appendix C).

- Alex Topaz: "I think the biggest perk of Facebook is the overall connectivity between the actual groups of people that we're looking to reach out to as far as our target market is concerned" (Appendix D).

2. *In what way do you think these online mediums have changed or improved consumer relations and brand recognition?*

Question #2 considers consumer relations and brand recognition in terms of selling products or generating conversation about products and brands. Social media has facilitated both of these options, and this question aims to determine in what manner the different platforms have expanded market interest.

- Alison Diamond: "Leaps and bounds. I would imagine that there isn't a new brand out there that would tell you that social media hasn't changed the way that they've interacted with their consumers and the way that they sell there goods" (Appendix C).

- Alex Topaz: "I think they've improved consumer relations greatly because so many consumers do turn to the Internet for feedback and suggestions from their peers" (Appendix D).

3. *Does fashion industry, including high end accessories brands like those that you represent, generally embrace social media as a means to promote and explore trends and for consumer exploration and interactivity?/ How is an improved interface or reskinning of a mobile application more relevant for consumers, businesses, and clients?*

   a. *Which industry is an exemplary model for effective social media use?*

Questions #3, though phrased differently based on relevant fields, are intended to explore how the fashion industry and other fields use social media for interactivity purposes with their consumers. Mobile applications are modern social media types that can also track trends and promote products, and this question attempts to get the collective public relations opinion on whether apps and other social media have made brands more relevant for consumers.

- Alison Diamond: "Absolutely, and I think that what you can see is that over the past few years is a an increase in hire of digital agencies… Either technology or electronics has been superb in their employment of social media" (Appendix C)

- Alex Topaz: "An improved app or updated site or social networking platform makes the company, brand or person more relevant in terms of the UI [User Interface]… The restaurant business has done pretty well in recent years in

using social media to attract attention to remodels, new menu items, discounts, and specials" (Appendix D).

4. *What are the challenges in expanding the audience of social media users?*

Question #4 was designed as an interesting addition to the fourth question asked to the fashion-based professionals given that there is already an extensive online presence of social media users in other fields.

- Alison Diamond: "The biggest challenge for a public relations professional or firm is gaining and maintaining the organic connection to consumers" (Appendix C).

- Alex Topaz: "An individual user can like over one thousand pages, so what's going to get them to actually pay attention to one page or brand or promotion over the thousands on their news feeds?" (Appendix D).

5. *What is an example of a social media campaign that you've done for a client that you think was the most effective?*

Question #5 was included in the public relations and marketing questionnaire to test how large of a scale the social media campaigns are for industries, other than that of fashion, with a greater and more loyal following.

- Alison Diamond: "It was a viral video that we did that we drove to a gaming YouTube Channel and linked to our Facebook and Twitter pages. To this day, it's highest viewed video on all of their social media channels" (Appendix C).

- Alex Topaz: "Obviously it helps when you already have a client base already in tact, but we've set some pages up that have huge followings and some of

the campaigns that users have participated in include sharing those pages and

initiating further conversation on the brands and companies" (Appendix D).

Table 1

Interviewee Responses to "Who controls social media in the fashion industry: designers and brands or consumers?"

Sloane Granite	Kannyn Opal	Allison Diamond	Alex Topaz
Users generate as much content and hype about brands and products as we do by getting their voices heard by us.	Brands and designers follow us, follow our customers, chime in on our discussion boards, retweet things, are tweeted at, post questions, get personable….	The two divisions have to be treated differently because the digital media space is moving so fast that if you're not 100 percent focused in it, you've lost it. You can't do all of it at once. It's not possible for one person or one focus considering all of the voices out there.	On previous applications that have come out versus what the public has generally moved towards based on high ratings and what they like about certain technology, there has been a significant change in the interactivity of new platforms and pages.

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Table 2

Interviewee Responses to "What benefits do social media tools have on consumers? Designers? Publications?"

Sloane Granite	Kannyn Opal	Alison Diamond	Alex Topaz
With social media, it's like they get a behind the scenes look or an insider's point of view; they get a little more then they could find somewhere in like a magazine article, which makes people appreciate brands more because of their intimate connection.	I think it creates a strong sense of community, commitment, and intimacy.	I would imagine that there isn't a new brand out there that would tell you that social media hasn't changed the way that they've interacted with their consumers and the way that they sell there goods.	The recognition factor brought about by social media goes hand and hand with consumer relations in that the public and more businesses have been using social media to browse pages and apps.

Table 3

Interviewee Responses to "Which social media outlets have been most effective in aiding public relations practitioners? In what ways does the fashion industry need to embrace different social media outlets? Which platforms should be abandoned?"

Sloane Granite	Kannyn Opal	Alison Diamond	Alex Topaz
It's hard to say which we prefer because there are three that kind of connect together that we use: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Those are my main three and the three that are the most important in our public relations strategy because they really build on each other.	Facebook is our main focus and everything we post kind of trickles down to the other social media avenues.	I think it's because people are engaging more on Twitter so it's more about a conversation that we can actually engage in directly with consumers.	I think the biggest perk of Facebook is the overall connectivity between the actual groups of people that we're looking to reach out to as far as our target market is concerned.

Table 4

Interviewee Responses to "Who uses social media to discover and explore trends and products in the fashion industry?"

Sloane Granite	Kannyn Opal	Alison Diamond	Alex Topaz
I think the main challenge is that we don't want to over-stimulate users considering they're already bombarded by everyone else on their news feeds.	We post something expecting a lot of engagement and will get zero responses and then something else will get a ton of engagement that we didn't think was a big deal.	So if you're coming from a big agency or not putting your full digital attention on an individual brand, the consumer picks up on those details extremely fast.	An individual user can like over one thousand pages, so what's going to get them to actually pay attention to one page or brand or promotion over the thousands on their news feeds?

Table 5

Interviewee Responses to "How has the development of social media tools/platforms changed the public relations profession?"

Sloane Granite	Kannyn Opal	Alison Diamond	Alex Topaz
The "30-day-photo-a-day" campaign wasn't promoting Amanda Pearl or Blue Stripe necessarily but it was just a way to put them out there together and just show a fun approach and multiple points of view	Our contest was so easy for our loyal customers and for new customers to do by sharing us with their friends so it was win-win.	After we posted our viral YouTube video, we were then able to track all of the likes and comments from the YouTube video onto one place to really understand the depth and breadth of the video and to see who was talking about it.	Building pages on Facebook for our clients have been effective when we've actually been able to reach our users and coordinate them along with the user base of that demographic

Research Questions

  The following five research questions, as originally presented in Chapter 1, *Introduction*, were designed to drive the research portion of this study in both the literature review and in formatting the interview questions for the industry experts. Given the undefined and loose industry standards regarding social media use in the fashion world, the research questions were generated to determine current practices and customs in both the fashion industry and other, more experienced fields. The below findings are quotations lifted from scholarly articles and journals as they correlated with the research questions on the impact of social media for consumers and producers.

  1. *Who controls social media in the fashion industry: designers and brands or consumers?*

  The first research question was designed to determine who uses social media, who controls content production, and how professionals monitor activity and discussions on social media sites. As the primary research question, the answers to Question #1 outline the current demographic of users and producers to provide context for the extent and impact that social media has developed in the fashion industry.

- "As a result of the widespread growth of online social networking and user-generated content sites, a shift in the balance of power is occurring" (Sinclaire, 2011, p. 293).
- According to Binkley (2010), social media has a "marketing promise [that] is obvious for business: it has deep potential as a customer-service channel for retailers" (Binkley).

2. *What benefits do social media tools have on consumers? Designers?*

   Publications?

The second research question analyzes the positive impact that social media has on its different users as they relate to the fashion industry. Taking in mind consumers, designers, and public relations firms/publications, Question #2 describes how social media affects these users and producers. By acknowledging the benefits of social media platforms, this research question examines the central goals of those who use social media, as well as incorporating the literary theory that drives the study.

- "The Internet implementation in the marketing process is inexpensive, delivers instant international reach, offers great real time feedback, and reaches millions of people for whom the web is the center of virtually all communications" (Papasolomou, 2012, p. 322).

- The most active social media sites "have helped to generate more access between fashion brands and consumers, thus, making fashion brands appear more transparent and open," which ultimately leads to consumer trust (Noricks, 2010).

- According to Pierre Bourdieu's social capital theory, social networking "places those positives consequences in the framework of a broader discussion of capital and calls attention to how such nonmonetary forms can be important sources of power and influence (Portes, 2000, p. 43).

- "The fashion industry can uncover a goldmine of consumer inspiration and trend-testing" (DiMauro, 2011).

3. *Which social media outlets have been most effective in aiding public relations practitioners? In what ways does the fashion industry need to embrace different social media outlets? Which platforms should be abandoned?*

Given the variety in social media platforms, research Question #3 is meant to determine the usefulness of the different social media sites in terms of reaching target audiences, where designers and producers are tending to post, and which platforms are least effective in consumer relations and brand recognition for the fashion industry. This question establishes the lack of industry standards for the fashion industry as they pertain to social media use.

- "The most popular "visual platforms" have created strength in their communities because they are visually interesting and they aggregate like-minded people" (Caro, 2012).

- "Part of Twitter's power is that it feels as intimate as talking to a friend" (Binkley, 2010).

- The different kinds of social media sites have updated traditional press venues and values, as press releases can be written and sent out to traditional media sources, then can be posted to the company Facebook page, and then a few words on the story can be tweeted on Twitter with a link back to the release wherever it was originally posted (Roach, 2012, p. 32).

- "Brands are realizing their audiences are spending more time in newer, more visually driven networks such as Pinterest and Instagram" (Caro, 2012).

4. *Who uses social media to discover and explore trends and products in the fashion industry?*

Research Question #4 establishes the demographics of social media users. Its purpose is to synthesize the general motivation of social media users, and why the platforms have gained recent, exponential popularity in the fashion world.

- To keep up with trends and to voice their opinions, consumers must regularly follow brands and designers; to review consumer motivations and concerns and to maintain public interest, designers must regularly update their sites and responses. According to Bourne (2010), this relationship with consumers benefits those that use social media by "seeing upside in revenue and customer appreciation."

- To be a top hit on a social media site, one's title is irrelevant; "the designers; models; go-betweens; eyes and ears; merchants; business people; wildcards and image-makers who are ruling the game today" (Wilson, 2012).

5. *How has the development of social media tools/platforms changed the public relations profession?*

The purpose of the final research question is to demonstrate the benefits of social networking from a public relations and marketing perspective, and to analyze social media as an essential and effective public relations strategy.

- "The fashion industry has adopted social media as a marketing platform to reach their customers online and reignite brand passion and customer loyalty," and public relations practitioners are now more involved in this process" (Lee, 2009).

- Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites are "tools that can be used to build relationships through open dialogue internally and externally, providing both opportunities and challenges" (DiStaso, 2012, p. 512).

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Summary

Since its debut, the social media phenomenon has driven consumers online to connect with brands and designers on a more intimate level. Prior to this adoption of social media as a public relations strategy, publicists and brand representatives were confined to traditional methods for news release and marketing. The emergence of such a high interest in designers and consumer feedback is correlated to the instant, international and inexpensive reach of social media sites. Despite the shifting paradigm of fashion professionals and consumers moving to online venues, the choice of platform, kind and amount of content produced, and scale of monitoring are still vague. There currently exists no industry standards regarding the use of social media in the fashion realm. This study was conducted to illuminate the current trends in social media use and users, the benefits and effectiveness of the different social media platforms, and the importance of its implementation in digital campaigns.

Bourdieu's theory of social capital outlined the value of social media, and the literary analysis concluded that social media enhances public relations in all fields. With the included perspectives of experts in the fashion industry, public relations, and in the sales and marketing fields, the issue of developing standards for social media use was examined in terms of its impact and necessity. Two questionnaires were designed to fit the experience and professions of the respondents; one was based on the fashion industry specifically and the other was tailored to better suit more general public relations and

marketing interests. Both questionnaires were based on the original research questions, presented below:

6. *Who controls social media in the fashion industry: designers and brands or consumers?*

7. *What benefits do social media tools have on consumers? Designers? Publications?*

8. *Which social media outlets have been most effective in aiding public relations practitioners? In what ways does the fashion industry need to embrace different social media outlets? Which platforms should be abandoned?*

9. *Who uses social media tools to discover and explore trends and products in the fashion industry?*

10. *How has the development of social media platforms changed/improved the public relations profession?*

Discussion

An evaluation of the data collected from respondent interviews in Chapter 4 as compared to current literature on the topic compiled in Chapter 2 demonstrated parallel and supporting evidence in favor of social media use in the fashion industry, despite the lack of standards. The two sets of data were threaded together to generate conclusions regarding the five research questions. The inferences and results are as follows:

1. *Who controls social media in the fashion industry: designers and brands or consumers?*

As an active user and producer of social media, Granite explains the need to create a following and to analyze related content, saying, "[our] users encompass half of the development and effectiveness of social networking—they generate as much content and hype about brands and products as we do by getting their voices heard by us" (Appendix A). Despite the majority of brands and designers having social media accounts, their effectiveness as a marketing strategy is dependent on them creating a following and keeping up with relevant discussions and posts, and from those of other designers and brands. User-generated content is exactly that: posts are controlled and created by anyone on social media platforms, regardless of their title and position. Though daunting, having consumers as active creators and monitors in social networking and no longer as passive receivers of marketing messages creates a respectable neutralization of power (Sinclaire, 2011).

The abandonment of "tell-style" communication and onto networking is the establishment of a customer service channel that allows the consumer to share experiences and questions with retailers, designers, and each other. According to Opal, "brands and designers follow [each other], follow [their] customers, chime in on discussion boards, retweet things, are tweeted at, post questions, and get personable," enough to create an organic connection with followers (Appendix B). With this "seismic shift in technology, communication and the economics of their industry," social media has "reshaped the way the rest of the world sees, senses and consumes fashion" (Wilson, 2012, p. 12A). The trusting relationship between consumers and designers was built on the premise that they both are producers of social media, and that interactivity is granting

an insider view to consumers on the fashion world and fashion gurus, and for the industry to better understand their markets and followers.

2. *What benefits do social media tools have on designers? Consumers?*

   Publications?

For designers, brand representatives, and public relations professionals in the fashion industry, social media allows instantaneous feedback and far-reaching discussions with users to analyze the concerns and desires of consumers. According to Papasolomou (2012), "the Internet implementation in the marketing process is inexpensive, delivers instant international reach, offers great real time feedback, and reaches millions of people for whom the web is the center of virtually all communications" (p. 322). By including input from consumers in their designs and marketing decisions, designers can capitalize on "what's hot and catch rising trends in advance of market saturation [which] can make all the difference to a fashion brand or retailer's margin" (DiMauro, 2011). As Diamond added, "there isn't a new brand out there that would tell you that social media hasn't changed the way that they've interacted with their consumers and the way that they sell there goods" (Appendix C).

Consumers are driven by the interactivity of social media. According to Noricks (2010), the most active social media sites "have helped to generate more access between fashion brands and consumers, thus, making fashion brands appear more transparent and open" (Noricks). This platform for open dialogue has strengthened consumer relations and brand loyalty and recognition; with the use of social media, the public gets a "behind the scenes look or an insider's point of view—they get a little more then they could find somewhere in like a magazine article, which makes people appreciate brands more

because of their intimate connection" (Granite, Appendix A). Consumers can probe

designers and brand representatives with questions and concerns, build brand loyalty

through contests, discounts and prizes, and get feedback from their peers on products and

trends.

Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory supports the rise and popularity of social media

considering it focuses on social capital as a positive feature of sociability. Nonmonetary

social capital is still valuable, as in the relationships built by networking. Through social

capital, "actors can gain access to economic resources, increase cultural capital through

contacts with experts or individuals of refinement, and can affiliate with institutions"

(Portes, 2000, p. 45). The benefits of networking on social media platforms are

comparative in value for professionals in the fashion industry and for consumers/users,

considering social capital can be the improved relationships and intimacy in knowledge

for consumers *and* the economic capital and following gained by producers. Opal adds,

social media creates a "strong sense of community, commitment, and intimacy"

(Appendix B).

3. *Which social media outlets have been most effective in aiding public relations*

   practitioners? In what ways does the fashion industry need to embrace different

   social media outlets? Which platforms should be abandoned?

   From the perspective of an experienced social media director in the fashion

industry, Granite explains, "social media is growing so quickly because it's an

opportunity to share your own voice, on your own terms…and different social media sites

build off each other" (Appendix A). A central component to this study was examining the

different social media platforms and their individual effectiveness and popularity, as

compared to the collective use of social media. Based on the four interviews with experts, there is no congruent answer for the best or most valuable social media site. According to Opal and Topaz, Facebook allows connections for longer periods of time and offers the best connectivity between groups and followers; for Diamond's professional purposes, Twitter has the most impact in driving conversations because of the high engagement of users; Granite argues that both Facebook and Twitter require the picture component of Instagram and that the three are interconnected and are only parts of a larger network on social media (Appendices). As experts on social media, all four respondents suggested different social media platforms should be abandoned because of their unpopularity or lack of purpose, but there was no agreement on which was the least effective. Another concern presented regarding the acceptable standards for how to use social media. Opal elaborated, "it's a challenging process figuring out what's right and will work and what's not—almost by trial and error…we are still figuring out how much content to post, how often, and what type of content to reach users" (Appendix B).

Literary professionals have also noted this deficiency in industry standards regarding social media. Because some social media venues have already come and gone and others are near extinction or have failed to gain popularity at the rate of others, professionals in the fashion industry often fear implementing social media into their strategy. "Stories like these provide a glimpse into the proliferation of social media and exhibit the growing interest and concern regarding the resonance of these communication platforms" (Khang, 2012, p. 279). Mainstream practitioners still question the credibility to some of these sites and outlets, and while some favor one platform, other scholars offer little support for its use. While Caro (2012) argues that "the most popular "visual

platforms" have created strength in their communities because they are visually interesting and they aggregate like-minded people," it is noted that the targeted audience of more established sites like Twitter requires no relation between the target market and users. This discrepancy in popularity and use of social media in the fashion industry demonstrates the uncertainty of fashion professionals and gurus in where and how to post content.

4. *Who uses social media to discover and explore trends and products in the fashion industry?*

It has become evident through this study that the audience of social media users is ever expanding and requires attaining new users in an organic way. While building intimacy, users largely are bothered by pestering and relentless posts. As a public relations professional in the fashion industry, Granite says, "we don't want to over-stimulate users considering they're already bombarded by everyone else on their news feeds" (Appendix A). The other respondents agreed, establishing that the millions of social media users are as easily acquired as they are lost if the designers, brand representatives, and publications do not establish intimate and genuine connections with their consumers without demanding attention and participation. Diamond emphasized that "the second your presence online has become nonorganic, than users are likely to lose interest and stop following" (Appendix C). Opal added that, "an individual user can like over one thousand pages" but he constantly questions, "what's going to get them to actually pay attention to one page or brand or promotion over the thousands on their news feeds" (Appendix D).

The literature also shows that the convenience and ease of social media for consumers attracts a following of both everyday users and new followers for brands and designers. However, to be a top ranked page on a social media site, one's title is irrelevant. According to Wilson (2012), "the designers; models; go-betweens; eyes and ears; merchants; business people; wildcards and image-makers are who are ruling the game today" (Wilson). No brand or designer inherently holds power in the social media realm, regardless of sales, reputation, or name. Given the interactivity and transparency of social media, and how all users are producers, the question of who uses social media to investigate products and names in the fashion industry reverts back to how social media is "changing the way that organizations disseminate and receive information, respond to their stakeholders, and research audience views and motivations" (Bridgen, 2012, p. 62-63).

5. *How has the development of social media tools/platforms changed the public relations profession?*

This study examined the noted and published changes that social media has had on the fashion industry in terms of public relations strategy and in marketing and sales. How and why fashion professionals employ social media is exemplified by the large-scale social media campaigns that the respondents hosted on behalf of their clients and brands. According to Topaz, these campaigns have "been effective when we've actually been able to reach our users and coordinate them along with the user base of that demographic," (Appendix D). Nowadays, public relations strategy is improved when firms "have specialists in the traditional media and marketing [and] also have digital

content producers and analysis for a well-rounded public relations campaign" (Diamond, Appendix C).

An evaluation of the relevant literature suggests that social media is an essential component to public relations strategy. According to Noricks (2010), it is the responsibility of the public relations professionals to monitor online and social media conversations. Summed up by Lee (2009), "the fashion industry has adopted social media as a marketing platform to reach their customers online and reignite brand passion and customer loyalty," and public relations practitioners are now more involved in this process (Lee). The opportunities in social media include controlling the voice of a brand or designer, engaging participants in discussion, and building more intimate relationships with behind-the-scenes information available more often than monthly publications, and at lower costs than mailers or advertisements. Social media channels attract broader audiences and offer cheaper, far-reaching pitches.

Recommendations for Practice

The data gathered during this study suggests that, although social media is relatively new in its establishment and popularity, the fashion industry requires standards and improvement in its implementation to be successful as a public relations strategy. As an instrument for transparency, communication, and consumer loyalty, social media is an essential component for effective marketing by fashion professionals. The following consistencies in both respondent interviews and literature review are strong considerations for practice.

Post Regularly, Not Often

Individual consistency is important to attract new users, maintain the interest of current participants, and to exhibit an organic connection between fashion professionals and consumers on social media. Overwhelming users with too many posts too often is detrimental to social media strategy, and can hinge credibility and user concern. One expert respondent recognized that the main challenge of social media is to not over-stimulate users considering how they are already bombarded by all of the pages and posts on their news feeds, saying "it's the worst to come off as annoying or as a pest, so it's kind of a fine line, a gray area, of how much to post and when" (Granite, Appendix A). Opal added, "it's a challenging process figuring out what's right and will work and what's not—almost by trial and error" (Appendix B).

Although the resonance of social media is long lasting, the attention span of users is not. Posts should be published at regular intervals versus as often and inconsistent as they are designed. In an article in the *Public Relations Review*, DiStaso (2012) found that "public relations professionals felt that social media created a platform for open dialogue with publics that encouraged interaction and raised unexpected topics that helped strengthen the relationship" (p. 513). It is important to give users the opportunity to engage in discussion, both with producers and with their peers. According to Denny (2009), reciprocity and liking are the set principles for relationship building in social networking; reciprocity is employed in that social media is a dialogue that encourages commenting and engagement, which fosters liking (Denny). As a key concern, reciprocity implies listening and monitoring social media as much as it does provoking dialogue and interest.

Learn From Success Stories

An underlying variable apparent through the review of published literature and corroborated by experts in the fashion field is that social media is a relatively new phenomenon, and its use by professionals as a public relations or marketing strategy is even more recent. As an industry, it is essential to collaborate and feed off of each other in sharing which outlets work for which audiences, and those that did not. Analyzing the effects of social media stretch beyond monitoring conversations and growth on individual pages (although such analysis is crucial), but extends to examining the industry's use and concentration on different social media channels, and determining which are more effective than others. According to Mitchell (2011), "to augment traditional analytics, some retailers and fashion designers have applied analytic techniques to social media interactions to get real-time feedback on where fashion is going and what consumers think of theirs and others upcoming designs" (p. 23).

Without industry standards, fashion professionals must sort through success stories and errors concerning types of posts, media, and regularity. According to Granite, before the fashion industry joined the social network, "other fields like the music industry and the technology industry were well established on social media through social networking sites like MySpace and interactive blogs" (Appendix A). With newer, easier, and more respected social media sites like Facebook to replace the outdated social networks, anyone can be on social media and can flourish by reviewing how other sites and entire industries succeeded or failed.

Embrace Social Media Sites

Accepting social media as a prominent and effective public relations strategy is arguably the most important step in succeeding in the evolving fashion industry. So many users and content is online that sticking to traditional media sources and campaigns is ineffective and ignorant of the digital revolution. Argued by Diamond, an experienced public relations professional, "if you avoid social media and/or ignore it, you are off in your strategy and you're missing the 360 degree view of a client's brand and the way that you're going to go" (Appendix C). Granite agrees, saying, "[social media] has to be included because everyone is present on social media platforms, so brands and designers would be missing out if they neglect social networking" (Appendix A). The mere amount of online users and consumers has grown exponentially in recent years, with over one billion registered Facebook users, 500 million Twitter users, posting over four million daily pictures and pins on Instagram and Pinterest (Smith, 2012).

However, it is important for fashion professionals to be selective in which social media sites they render as valuable strategy. Because each site can be linked to various other channels, cross-listed postings can be bothersome and unprofessional to users, as can be irrelevant linked pages or posts. But by using social media tools as effective marketing strategies, "the fashion industry can uncover a goldmine of consumer inspiration and trend-testing" (DiMauro, 2011). Not everyone has joined the social media movement for fear of the unknown, but social media should instead be considered unhampered.

Study Conclusion

      Given the data and collected findings of this study, social media should be embraced and applied to the fashion industry as an effective and efficient means of communication and consumer loyalty. Ongoing qualitative research regarding the practicality and use of different channels and postings will generate and spread industry standards that will guide content production and analysis. Due to the evolving audience of users and consumers, and the progression and arrival of designers and brands, successes and failures in the evolution of social media as public relations strategy should be monitored and improved upon. Illuminated by this study were the parallels between current literature and experiences of fashion gurus and professionals that inferred the importance of developing a strong social media campaign, and recognizing whom the producers are on social media platforms. With extensive corroboration and recommendations for practice, this study can be used as a guide to improve or devise fashion public relations strategies. While not applicable to all fashion professionals, the documented results suggest improvement in creating universal industry standards for social media use and in expanding the audience of participants in the fashion world.

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Appendix A
Interview Transcript: Sloane Granite

       The following interview was conducted to collect the professional opinions from the perspective of a social media expert in the fashion industry. The interview and corresponding responses, transcribed below, are based on the questionnaire presented in Chapter 3, *Methodology*, on the current, most efficient, and suggested uses and outlets of social media.

Interviewer: Hillary Preece
Respondent: Assistant Account Executive at
Magenta Stripe Public Relations (Sloane Granite)
Date of Interview: 11/23/12

Interview Transcription
Hillary Preece: "How would you describe the impact that social media has on a public relations strategy for a client?"

Sloane Granite: "Social media is very important to public relations [PR] strategy. Nowadays, it's a crucial element that PR professionals can't leave out. It has to be included because everyone is present on social media platforms, so brands and designers would be missing out if they neglect social media. Social media is growing so quickly because it's an opportunity to share your own voice, on your own terms. You (PR professionals and fashion designers/brands) can control what you say on social media—it's not something that people are saying about you, they're just commenting on what you say and fostering further discussion. It's a positive way for us to put our clients out there and for the public to find their information. It is beyond imperative to put yourself out there on that platform."

HP: "Which social media outlets do you prefer to use in reaching your target audience and why do you find these effective?"

SG: "It's hard to say which we (Blue Stripe PR) prefer because there are three that kind of connect together that we use: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. I'm not really big on Tumblr or any other social media sites—those are my main three and the three that are the most important in our public relations strategy because they really build on each other. You can tease on Twitter with short 140-character tweets and then provide more information with related posts on Facebook, and then, even though Instagram is purely images, you can filter them and post staged or candid photos and link them back to Twitter and Facebook albums. I can't really pick just one social media site because I'm torn between all three and think they all correspond to each other. Twitter definitely has improved our public relations strategy the most in how you can get the most information out on Twitter because followers are more likely to read a bunch of tweets than a bunch of text on other social media sites, and we always link to the bulky text if they want to know more information. Plus it's so easy to retweet."

HP: "Which social media platform or type has been least effective in your public relations strategy and why?"

SG: "Probably the least effective, in my opinion, is the blog site Tumblr. I'm not a big Tumblr fan—we had a Tumblr, but we haven't even updated it in a while. Also, as a PR firm, Foursquare hasn't really done anything for us considering the only place to check in is at our showroom. It hasn't picked up that much so we don't really use it. Mainly we really encourage our clients to use Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, but then the other [social media site] really gaining momentum is Pinterest. It's the social media outlet that has grown the most since I've been in the industry. [Magenta Stripe PR founder] Laura controls our Pinterest account, encouraging a lot of our clients to get on there as well, especially when they link it up with their other pages."

HP: "In what way do you think that these online mediums have changed or improved consumer relations and brand recognition?"

SG: "I feel like social media makes everything more accessible to the general public because anyone can follow brands, designers and publications on Twitter or on Instagram and people can like pages on Facebook to then further view information and posts. That way they feel connected with brands and content producers, depending on who is the voice of the brand. With social media, it's like they get a behind the scenes look or an insider's point of view; they get a little more then they could find somewhere in like a magazine article, which makes people appreciate brands more because of their intimate connection. In general, social media provides a more intimate voice and point of view."

HP: "Does the fashion industry generally embrace social media as a means to promote and explore brands and trends *and* as a platform for consumer exploration and interactivity?"

SG: "I think that, as a whole, the fashion industry is definitely embracing social media and you'll find that almost all of the main books (fashion magazines) have at least have at least an Instagram account now. Lucky Magazine, for instance, has a "Lucky Closet" on Instagram to post a look of the day, or a product giveaway, or a "just in" post. Obviously it creates more work for us (PR representatives), but it's another way for us to put ourselves/our products out there in a voice that we can control. It's the same way for the magazines and other publications: they can promote their own voice and have a bigger presence, and you can focus on just one clothing brand or the new issue of a magazine or the perks of downloading an app. Now everyone in the fashion industry has a website, a Twitter account, a Facebook page with fans, an Instagram profile that they update with trending or new information to it make it so that you can be everywhere and attract a bigger following. Those users encompass half of the development and effectiveness of social networking—they generate as much content and hype about brands and products as we do by getting their voices heard by us."

HP: "Which industry is the best example/role model in its effective use of social media tools?"

SG: "The fashion industry is probably one of the newest to join social networks. Before we joined, other fields like the music industry and the technology industry were well established on social media through social networking sites like MySpace and interactive blogs. I think Facebook is the new updated MySpace, and now anyone can be only it: brands, stores, publications, anyone."

HP: "What are the challenges in expanding the audience of social media users in the fashion industry?"

SG: "I think the main challenge is that we don't want to over-stimulate users considering they're already bombarded by everyone else on their news feeds. We ideally want them to come to us instead us seeming like a pest. It's the worst to come off as annoying so it's kind of a fine line, a gray area of how much to post and when. Designers, brand reps and PR professionals want a lot of followers but to gain them through an honest approach so that they'll stay for the long run and not be annoyed. Posting regularly is important, but we (Blue Stripe PR) are definitely relaxed in how many posts we have on our different social media sites and we link them so that if you check one, you check them all."

HP: "What's an example of a social media campaign that you've done for a client that you think has been effective?"

SG: "I would say that (Blue Stripe PR Founder) Laura did a really cool campaign on Instagram that linked up to Twitter. She did it with (Blue Stripe PR client) Amanda Pearl so they both kind of did it together (from their own social media sites) where they did "30 Days of Stripes" and "30 Days of Pink." They repeated the campaign because it was fun and increased their followers. Each day for 30 days they would upload a picture coordinated with the theme. They would add each other and repost each other's pictures and hash-tag different things and tag each other or tweet at each other so they were linking up. They weren't promoting Amanda Pearl or Blue Stripe necessarily but it was just a way to put them out there together and just show a fun approach and multiple points of view. It worked pretty well."

HP: "Well thank you so much Sloane, it's been a pleasure speaking with you, as always. I'll be sending you the transcription of this interview so let me know if you'd like to edit any of your answers before publication."

SG: "Great hearing your lovely voice! Good luck stringing together my thoughts and I'll get back to you ASAP!"

The following interview was conducted to collect the professional opinions from the perspective of a fashion guru and top-rated boutique owner in the San Luis Obispo area. The interview and corresponding responses, transcribed below, are based on the questionnaire presented in Chapter 3, *Methodology*, on the current, most efficient, and suggested uses and outlets of social media.

Interviewer: Hillary Preece
Respondent: Owner, Aura Boutique (Kannyn Opal)
Date of Interview: 11/27/12

Interview Transcription
Hillary Preece: "How would you describe the impact that social media has on public relations strategy?"

Kannyn Opal: "I think it's actually made it easier for us to stay in contact with our customers and not feel like we're bombarding them with advertisements or pestering them with junk mail via mailers or email. So I actually think it's been really good in terms of our relationship with our customers. I feel like our strategy for marketing is more personable than a lot of other stores, even other boutiques in the area. They may be doing big billboard campaigns and I think that's smart, and that works for them, but you can only reach so many people who drive by that billboard when it's up… We can attract a way bigger demographic, and people can choose to notice us or not at their liking, which consumers seem to enjoy. Our social media following makes our relationships more intimate. It's tricky learning how to use it correctly but we're constantly getting better and better because we've been using it a long time."

HP: "Which social media outlets do you prefer to use in reaching your target audience and why do you find these effective?"

KO: "We use Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, although it's hard to stay on top of all of them. Facebook is our main focus and everything we post kind of trickles down to the other social media avenues. We also spend as much time on our blog as we do our Facebook because, as a store and not a brand or designer, style bloggers really pick up on our variety of fashions and large following. I wish we were more dedicated to Twitter, but we mostly reTweet about the brands that we're carrying, and just to link posts to our Facebook."

HP: "Which social media platform or type has been leave effective in improving your public relations strategy and why?"

KO: "We have Google Plus, but nobody is doing anything with Google Plus. It's good to have it though in terms of our SCO [Social Content Optimization] ranking. I also wish that we could get our girls doing Twitter more often but I feel like it's something that you

have to do regularly and constantly. You have several minutes where you're going to reach an audience and then it's no longer—it's obsolete. At least on Facebook I can post something and someone might not see it that day but they'll come back and look at it on my page the next day. I feel like we're able to connect for longer periods of time and we can get more out of our posts on Facebook than on other social networking sites."

HP: "In what way do you think that these online mediums have changed or improved consumer relations and brand recognition?"

KO: "Social media avenues are all free tools to market, minus the cost of the public relations professional we hire as our marketing strategist on these sites, but it's worth it. But in comparison to when I first started here under a different owner, we used to do mailers that were incredibly time sensitive and expensive. Now social media is just enhancing our personalities, so our customers are really able to see who we are in the store so that it's not strictly marketing. I think it creates a strong sense of community, commitment, and intimacy."

HP: "Does the fashion industry generally embrace social media as a means to promote and explore brands and trends, *and* as a platform for consumer exploration and interactivity?"

KO: "The fashion industry definitely embraces social media in every aspect of its rising. Brands and designers follow us, follow our customers, chime in on our discussion boards, retweet things, are tweeted at, post questions, get personable… We're all about it because social media is helping the industry grow and prosper. Vendors are even more likely to want to put there in stuff in here because of the time we spend marketing it and attracting customers to the store via our social networking pages."

HP: "What are the challenges in expanding the audience of social media users in the fashion industry?"

KO: "You have to do it naturally for it to work. It's very slow, so that's probably the biggest challenge. Because it's a fairly new public relations platform, I feel like I've been approached by a lot of people who say they're "experts" who suggest what we do on our social media, and then someone else, another "expert," will tell me something completely different. So it's a challenging process figuring out what's right and will work and what's not—almost by trial and error. We are still figuring out how much content to post, how often, what type of content… We post something expecting a lot of engagement and will get zero responses and then something else will get a ton of engagement that we didn't think was a big deal."

HP: "What's an example of a social media campaign that you've done for a client that you think has been effective?"

KO: "We did a Free People Clothing contest through a company called Woo Box on our Facebook and Twitter pages (it was also posted on their blog with links to their other

social media sites). If a user liked us and then shared us with any of their friends, they would get cyber points that we would track and tally. Basically, whoever spent the most time marketing us won a $250 gift certificate towards Free People purchases. It was so easy for our loyal customers and for new customers to do by sharing us with their friends. I think that sometimes with those contents, because people are really impatient, they didn't take the time to read how to do it correctly and would only share us a handful of times while the winner did way more than that. So we explained it to some of the people that tried but didn't win and after that Facebook status post that generated a huge discussion with the contest participants, we held another, similar contest and we got a way bigger response and customer participation."

HP: "Thank you so much for offering your opinion on social media, especially given the success of your store and your reputation."

KO: "I really appreciate you coming in, check us out on Facebook and feel free to shop around!"

Interview Transcript: Alison Diamond

        The following interview was conducted to collect the professional opinions from the perspective of a public relations professional with experience in the fashion, entertainment and lifestyle industries. The interview and corresponding responses, transcribed below, are based on the questionnaire presented in Chapter 3, *Methodology*, on the current, most efficient, and suggested uses and outlets of social media.

Interviewer: Hillary Preece
Respondent: Senior Account Director at Indigo PR (Alison Diamond)
Date of Interview: 11/26/12

Interview Transcription
Hillary Preece: "How would you describe the impact that social media has on a public relations strategy for a client?"

Alison Diamond: "I would say that in the last three years definitely, and perhaps even longer, it has completely changed the way that we look at public relations for a client in any industry and across the board. I think that if you avoid social media and/or ignore it, you are off in your strategy and you're missing the 360-degree view of a client's brand and the way that you're going to go. So much of our lives are happening online now that many would probably venture to say that it's the most important piece in a public relations strategy but I think it depends upon what your goals are. For certain clients, that full-page, glossy hit in Vogue is still going to be the most important thing, whereas an online piece may actually drive more traffic—not to say that that's more important than the image piece. The challenge is weighing how to talk to your consumer, and using social media depends on if you're trying to drive sales or just generate conversation. I think that all that relates back to what your strategy is but knowing that social media can do a variety of different things from fundraising to raising awareness to driving sales to just generating chatter and discussion about your product or client as well.

HP: "Which social media outlets do you prefer to use in reaching your target audience and why do you find these effective?"

AD: "I would say that still to do this day Twitter makes the most impact in terms of driving conversation. I think it's because people are engaging more on Twitter so it's more about a conversation that we can actually engage in directly with consumers. It can be done on Facebook but Facebook is a little more "look at me" and "here's my beautiful brand page with all the images I want to push." There's more direct conversation on Twitter that can come across a little more organically. Twitter's numbers are continually rising whereas Facebook is a little less in line with growth and development in comparison."

HP: "Which social media platform or type has been least effective in improving your public relations strategy and why?"

AD: "The social media platform that I find to be least successful would be Foursquare. I don't know that it has picked up as much as it could—it sort of became that check-in process on Facebook but I would rather link something relevant to Facebook than note my location. Foursquare is basically just a Facebook model where the app can't really differentiate itself from the mother brand. Foursquare is a disappointment because it has just become a mere feature of Facebook."

HP: "In what way do you think that these online mediums have changed or improved consumer relations and brand recognition?"

AD: "Leaps and bounds. I would imagine that there isn't a new brand out there that would tell you that social media hasn't changed the way that they've interacted with their consumers and the way that they sell there goods. And even for more savvy brands, like the high-end jewelry brand that I represent, we've found that Twitter is engaging a customer from lower ends all the way up. So I think it's changed across the boards from big brands to small brands, from well-established brands to brand-new."

HP: "Does the fashion industry, including accessories brands like the high end jewelry designers that you represent., generally embrace social media as a means to promote and explore trends *and* for consumer exploration and interactivity?"

AD: "Absolutely, and I think that what you can see is that over the past few years is a an increase in hire of digital agencies. I think that people expect traditional agency strategy and then on top of that, digital strategy. Some agencies, like the one that I work at, have a digital agency in house so you can hire our agency but you're getting multiple divisions to improve your public relations. We have specialists in the traditional media and marketing but we also have digital content producers and analysis for a well-rounded public relations campaign. The two divisions have to be treated differently because the digital media space is moving so fast that if you're not 100 percent focused in it, you've lost it. You can't do all of it at once. It's not possible for one person or one focus considering all of the voices out there. One post can generate a huge discussion that needs to be monitored and analyzed on a bigger scale than ever before."

HP: "Which industry is the best example/role model in its effective use of social media tools?"

AD: "Either technology or electronics has been superb in their employment of social media. I think that movement of the gaming sensation was for hardcore gamers who are spending a lot of time online. They are also talking a lot online so for that type of consumer products, social media is employed a lot more and accepted a lot more than an industry along the lines of fashion."

HP: "What are the challenges in expanding the audience of social media users?"

DB: "The biggest challenge for a public relations professional or firm is gaining and maintaining the organic connection to consumers. The second your presence online has become nonorganic, than users are likely to lose interest and stop following. So if you're coming from a big agency or not putting your full digital attention on an individual brand, the consumer picks up on those details extremely fast."

HP: "What's an example of a social media campaign that you've done for a client that you think has been effective?"

AD: "The editorial-style video I did with Joel McHale for Nintendo 3DS that came out early April (of 2012). It was a viral video that we did that we drove to the gaming YouTube Channel and linked to our Facebook and Twitter pages. To this day, it's Nintendo's highest viewed video on all of their social media channels. We did all of our work through embed codes so every media outlet that wrote about it and every person that posted about it posted the embed code. We were then able to track all of the likes and comments from the YouTube video onto one place to really understand the depth and breadth of the video and to see who was talking about it."

HP: "Well, great, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today about your experience and expertise in social media—it's much appreciated. Let me know when you decide about being identified by a pseudonym."

AD: "My pleasure and will do."

Interview Transcript: Alex Topaz

       The following interview was conducted to collect the professional opinions from the perspective of a sales manager for a nationwide company specializing in social media campaigns. The interview and corresponding responses, transcribed below, are based on the alternative questionnaire presented in Chapter 3, *Methodology*, on the current, most efficient, and suggested uses and outlets of social media.

<div align="center">

Interviewer: Hillary Preece
Respondent: National Sales Manager for
The College Special (Alex Topaz)
Date of Interview: 11/27/12

</div>

Interview Transcript

Hillary Preece: "How would you describe the impact that social media has on a [sales or public relations] strategy for a client?"

Alex Topaz: "I would describe the impact of social media as, for our company specifically, a growing process. The reason being is students—our target audience—and the public are using social media quite consistently but, they don't necessarily use it to actually make purchases from our company. So it's more about the exposure and the advertising avenue for us, less about sales directly. Sales haven't necessarily seen a large spike from social media."

HP: "Which social media outlets do you prefer to use in reaching your target audience and why do you find these effective?"

AT: "We prefer to use Facebook primarily because of the visuals that come along with the posts that we're able to actually tag and so we're able to show the students all the businesses that we work with. I think the biggest perk of Facebook is the overall connectivity between the actual groups of people that we're looking to reach out to as far as our target market is concerned."

HP: "Which social media platform or type has been least effective in improving your [sales] strategy and why?"

AT: "The least effective media platform for us, as of right now, is Twitter. Twitter has been least effective just because we focus so much energy directly into Facebook but it comes back to that connectivity of the target market. Twitter is more of an independent social media source, whereas Facebook is a bigger collective, which is probably the primary reason we haven't seen as big of a response or feedback with our Twitter page."

HP: "In what way do you think that these online mediums have changed or improved consumer relations and brand recognition?"

AT: "I think they've improved consumer relations greatly because so many consumers do turn to the Internet for feedback and suggestions from their peers. That's always been a big benefit for us because it's usually more of a positive experience that users share on social media in regards to our clients as opposed to negative messages or warnings. The recognition factor brought about by social media goes hand and hand with consumer relations in that the public and more businesses have been using social media to browse pages and apps like that of The College Special. We've been able to build our own page on Facebook and actually get our consumers to follow us, which is huge for the brand recognition."

HP: "How is an improved interface or reskinning of a mobile application more relevant for consumers, businesses, and clients?"

AT: "An improved app or updated site or social networking platform makes the company, brand or person more relevant in terms of the UI [User Interface]. The friendlier the page, the more welcoming to new users. On previous applications that have come out versus what the public has generally moved towards based on high ratings and what they like about certain technology, there has been a significant change in the interactivity of new platforms and pages. Communication is key, and when users like something, they talk about it to other users."

HP: "Which industry is the best example/role model in its effective use of social media tools including Facebook, Twitter, and mobile applications?"

AT: "The restaurant business has done pretty well in recent years in using social media to attract attention to remodels, new menu items, discounts, and specials. From getting seats on Open Table to downloading coupons, the food industry has definitely stepped up their game and social media presence to get more customers and more loyal customers very quickly."

HP: "What are the challenges in expanding the audience of social media users?"

AT: "The challenges are mainly to do with the short attention span of users. An individual user can like over one thousand pages, so what's going to get them to actually pay attention to one page or brand or promotion over the thousands on their news feeds? The bottom line is that we have to captivate the users."

HP: "What's an example of a social media campaign that you have done for a client that you think has been effective?"

AT: "We have done Facebook pages directly for clients where we built them, worked through them, and actually set them up for the future. They've been effective when we've actually been able to reach our users and coordinate them along with the user base of that demographic. Obviously it helps when you already have a client base already in tact, but we've set some pages up that have huge followings and some of the campaigns that users

have participated in include sharing those pages and initiating further conversation on the brands and companies."

HP: "Thank you so much for your time, I really appreciate it. I'll get the interview transcript to you as soon as I can for you to look it over."

AT: "Glad to help, nice talking to you!"