

# HOW SOCIAL MEDIA IS REVOLUTIONIZING FASHION RETAIL

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**5W PUBLIC  
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## INTRODUCTION

Social media has, without doubt, become the driving force behind modern communication in the age of the internet. Moreover, communication via social media is no longer simply about staying in touch with family and an inner circle of friends; it is now one of the farthest reaching and effective forms of communicating, revolutionizing how people share information and make purchasing decisions.

The effect of social media on the retail industry is perhaps no more profound than in the changes rendered on the fashion world.

In the past, fashion was delivered to the consumer through the pages of a glossy magazine or brightly lit Parisian catwalks.

During this era, the fashion industry was built on the finely decorated shoulder of people, with barely a glance at technology. People would sketch designs for new fashions, people modeled those fashions, and people ran the panel that selected which new fashions would make it to department stores for the upcoming season. With the advent of social media, however, the fashion retail industry has undergone an extreme shift: technology can perform these central roles faster than ever, and fashion firms are using social media to build new relationships with consumers in a way never previously considered.

## HOW DO FASHION AND SOCIAL MEDIA INTERSECT?

Contrary to popular belief, social media does not serve only to drive e-commerce- at the very least, fashion retailers are tapping into social media

channels to perform a different role altogether. Social media links consumers to fashion retailers, and has exponentially expanded the products on offer. The effect is a two-way [high] street of information exchange.

## TRACKING FASHION TRENDS

Fashion retailers now use social media as a means to track the latest in fashion trends, with social media channels demonstrating increasing influence over what a consumer will- and won't- buy.

Facebook, for example, has a massive impact on the clothing consumers will purchase, with targeted advertising ensuring repeated reminders of each customers' dream shopping basket. Pinterest, too, has proven effective in setting trends, as does aesthetic giant Instagram.

Retailers are increasingly looking to these channels when planning their next seasonal stock intake.

## THE RISE OF THE INFLUENCER

Livestreaming on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube has allowed consumers access to a whole new realm of purchasing power, and traditional industry gatekeepers are taking note. Enter the Fashion Influencer.

The clothes worn by beloved bloggers, artists and other personalities on their respective social media platforms have a profound impact on what consumers shop for. Blogger Jacie Duprey of Damsel in Dior is one such example of this; since becoming an ambassador for Old Navy, Duprey has run a successful campaign on Old Navy's behalf by mixing the retailer's affordable options with her own style to create unique- and accessible- looks.

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Other influencers have created collections of their own. Julie Sarinana of Sincerely Jules ran her own designs from her shop Shop Sincerely Jules after it was established in 2012. Due to its growing popularity, the brand was picked up by Nordstrom in July 2016.

The demand for the fashion input of consumers themselves via social media is stronger than ever.

## REAL-TIME PURCHASING

Another impact of social media has been the radical shift toward transparency in the fashion industry: once cloaked in intrigue and cigarette smoke, consumers now have access to the innermost workings of the fashion world in a way that traditional print media was never able to deliver. With social media's all-access pass, there's no turning back for consumers.

Fashion designers have adapted to the insatiable appetites of their consumers by polishing their presence on social media, from revealing collections in real time (as opposed to the traditional six-month lag of seasons past) to adopting "see now, buy now" strategies online.

Keen to deter consumers from fast fashion outlets, retailers are pushing direct-to-consumer models via social media in a bid to keep up with consumers' changing purchasing habits. One notable leader of this shift to a new, faster-paced fashion industry is fashion designer Rebecca Minkoff. Minkoff is a pioneer of interactive boutiques, combining virtual reality experiences with social media shopping apps to replicate in-store experiences.

In 2015, Minkoff innovated virtual reality headsets for customers keen to watch streams of her original VR content from their own smartphones, including front seat passes to Minkoff fashion shows. Not to be neglected, store buyers were also allowed in the on the action, given a pass in September 2016 to instantly purchase fashions on show and put them in production.

## FORMING RELATIONSHIPS

Social media sites give retailers the opportunity to form relationships with consumers. It makes it possible to individually connect with each consumer. This is something that has not been possible until now, and it is the perfect way for brands to connect with their audience. This creates a community, encourages engagement, and can drive sales.

There are many general ways that retailers are using social media, but some companies have taken things to the next level. Here are a couple of specific examples of what major companies have done to further engage consumers:

## "POP UP" STORES

During Fashion Week in New York City, Marc Jacobs came up with an ingenious way to draw attention to a new line of products. Jacobs opened a "pop-up" store, but no money was exchanged. Consumers instead were asked to post pictures of themselves and the product on Instagram and Twitter. Rewarded with gifts from the store, participants passed on reciprocal marketing rewards to Marc Jacobs: the fashion giant received 13,500 Twitter mentions and 4,300 mentions on Instagram throughout the campaign.

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## "TOP PINNED" DISPLAYS

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## CONSUMERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Overall, the response of consumers to fashion retail on social media has been very positive. Consumers appreciate the transparency and trust that social media provides. People now expect brands to have an online presence, and they are suspicious of companies that do not maintain some sort of social media page.

Fashion retail has been one of the last industries to fully integrate social media. This is because the fashion world relies most heavily on people. But because consumers expect brands and retailers to have a social media presence, fashion retail has gotten involved in the online phenomenon. Businesses of any kind cannot afford to remain unseen on the Internet.

Consumers seem to especially appreciate and enjoy interactive opportunities that allow expression of their likes or dislikes with fashion. This makes it easier for the consumer to find exactly what they are looking for, and also makes it easier for the retailer to appeal directly to the consumer.

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

In the past, consumers had little to no input when it came to what fashion items would be sold in their local stores. Now, however, social media makes it possible and easy to collect data on fashion trends and to look for the best deals. Such information allows retailers to determine what trends are selling currently and how to best meet the needs of their customers.

## ON THE POSITIVE SIDE...

Social media makes it possible for consumers to feel directly connected to brands and retailers. It makes it possible for consumers to have an impact by sharing their opinions on a brand's social media page, or sharing items from their page with friends.



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Not only do people like to feel involved, but they also enjoy the communication that social media gives them. In the world of fashion retail, consumers appreciate being able to communicate their likes and dislikes in real time. This dynamic makes for a better experience on both sides, and also tells retailers what consumers want to see on the shelves and what they would prefer to disappear.

## ...AND THE NEGATIVE

Still, there is another side to this new era of fashion retail. Social media makes it possible for consumers to air grievances and complaints more easily, and these comments are more accessible to other consumers.

Retailers stand to lose business if there are enough bad reviews. As such, handling negative comments from consumers is essential for maintaining positive relationships and not getting a reputation for not caring what consumers think.

If a consumer communicates a problem and nothing is done about it, or they do not receive a response, they are likely to continue to post negative things that could damage the image of the retailer.

Social media has it easier to build possible to more easily build positive relationships with consumers, but it also makes it easier for negative relationships to develop. Successfully managing fashion retail on social media is a balancing act that takes some experimentation to master. No one is going to be completely free of negativity. The trick is to make sure that the positive relationships outnumber the negative.

## CONCLUSION

Social media, for its blessings as well as its flaws, is here to stay. The age of the internet has become completely integrated into our day to day lives, and social media is no exception. When it comes to the fashion retail industry, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- Fashion retail is still relatively new to the social media scene, and constant change is to be expected;
- Fashion retail has unprecedented opportunities to use social media as an interactive tool for consumers;
- Consumers expect fashion retail to have a social media presence;
- Consumers distrust companies, brands, and industries that do not have- or neglect- a social media presence; and
- Social media can be a double edged sword, allowing consumers to form both positive and negative relationships with the fashion retail industry.

The once exclusive world of fashion now sits in the pockets of every consumer with a smartphone and, while it is impossible to predict the future of the rapidly changing internet era, one thing is clear: thanks to social media, the term "fashion forward" has taken on a whole new meaning.