

A Role of social media In B2B Marketing and Branding: A Case of UK Fashion Industry with Reference to Zara, UK

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Abstract

The current study focuses on the topic, **THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN B2B MARKETING AND BRANDING: A CASE OF UK FASHION INDUSTRY WITH REFERENCE TO ZARA, UK**. The study aims to analyse the role of the social media platform as funded by British small and medium fashion houses through their B2B marketing and branding activities. The researcher used the second research method in this study, in

which all important information was obtained in a second, that is, published sources. To gain valuable insight into the research topic, the researcher relied entirely on statistical data published by the Office of National Statistics (ONS). In line with that, newspaper publications and other reports are published by market research firms. In order to analyze Zara's role in B2B advertising and social media platforms, a recent annual report was used in this study. Studies have shown that in contrast to the usual marketing and promotion mode, branding activities, when done through social media, generate significant gains both in terms of business growth and sales volume.

As the UK is a world-famous fashion destination, fashion lovers from all over the world are gathering in this nation to face the latest trends. As a result, fashion retailers are taking advantage of this opportunity to grow their business. In this context, B2B marketing through popular social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube proves to be very profitable for this purpose. These forums not only help companies like Zara stay in touch with their trading partners but also engage in active partnerships with customers and partners alike. However, web-based advertising also has a few dark spots and Zara should be aware of those issues. The company can use 27 * 7 Cabot to better communicate which can be used by both clients and customers to provide feedback. In this way, the current study presented a complete account in the case of-

B2B marketing and branding as practiced by fashion brands in UK through social media channels.

Keywords: B2b Marketing, Zara, social media, Branding, Fashion

Introduction

Since the invention of the social media platform, companies and their brands have sought to raise their standards by raising people's brand awareness. In today's digital age, marketing through social media campaigns is a must, and the days when marketing required both hands-on experience and thorough work are gone. In addition, integrating big data technology into marketing has made it easier to tag

customers and create marketing strategies that meet market demand. The popularity of social media has gained momentum since Facebook was founded in 2004. Since then, the growth of social media marketing (SMM) for B2B sales has accelerated at a very high rate, recording growth of about 42% in 2016 (Businessinsider.com, 2017).

The B2B (Corporate to Business) process entails a marketing procedure involving sales representatives and other business processes. Companies have been attempting to make people aware of brands through web based communities since the introduction of widespread use of social media websites and digital marketing tactics, and recent research have indicated that user evaluations affect the majority of their purchase decisions. Among several social media sites, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have revolutionized the way of marketing. Signature features such as Facebook's "Like and share" option, Twitter's Hash tag option, and YouTube's subscribe option have made B2B marketing and brand exposure easier. According to Forbes, 38% of consumers like to read user comments on social media before purchasing any goods because individuals share their real-life experiences on web platforms, which makes people aware of and interested in a business (Forbes.com, 2017).

Review of Literature

This chapter is dedicated to a critical review and analysis of relevant bibliographic sources available in both online and offline media. Therefore, as this paper aims to examine the role of social media in the B2B market associated with the UK fashion industry, this chapter delves into published newspapers, magazine articles, books, and web publications. Dig into this industry. Over the last few decades, both the fashion industry and information and communication technology (ICT) have undergone revolutionary changes. As a result of this phenomenon, the role of social media in business expansion is gaining tremendous momentum, and traditional media channels are declining both in business and in the market. Therefore, it is essential to determine if the development of such social media is really beneficial for B2B marketing and branding in the UK fashion industry.

B2B Marketing Theory and Model B2B Marketing as a special form of social marketing involves active participation in various social media platforms and web-based advertising media. From this perspective, the following theories can be applied here:

- Agency Theory
- Rational Behavior Theory
- Direct Connection Model
- Network Model
- Hybrid Model
- Managed Model

Popular Social Media Platforms and B2B Marketing and Branding Impact After The previous section summarized key aspects of B2B marketing and branding, but it is imperative to elaborate on the role of social media platforms in this context.

- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Instagram
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn

Summary

This chapter details various theoretical concepts and models related to B2B marketing and branding, as well as the relationship between social media advertising and the UK fashion industry. increase. Besides defining important terms like B2B marketing branding, this

Research Objectives

- To investigate the effectiveness and performance of Social Media in B2B Marketing and Branding
- To identify and assess the various social media tools effectiveness and performance in B2B Marketing and Branding
- To evaluate Zara's effectiveness and performance using social media tools for B2B Marketing and Branding
- To find out suitable social media models for B2B Marketing and Branding.

Research Methodology

Research methodology can be portrayed as a set of techniques which are used by the researcher to detect results of this research and find a solution for research problem. It is associated with systemic theoretical analysis of methods as well as principles. This chapter has focused on the methods and techniques used by researcher to conduct the research work and gather reliable as well as valid results. Furthermore, justifications have been provided for considering and discarding each research method and proper links has been created with the research topic.

The primary goal of this research is to examine customer attitudes and preferences with respect to Zara, as well as to examine consumer purchasing patterns for Zara.

The supply chain encompasses a wide variety of operations. Yet, the primary issue is learning how the Zara supply chain affects customers' happiness.

There are two types of research designs: exploratory and definitive. An exploratory research design is one in which the investigator does not seek to provide a definitive answer to the research question being investigated. Nonetheless, the goal of a conclusive study design is to provide unambiguous conclusions about the topic at hand. The findings of the study may be further classified into two groups.

In addition, there are two primary ways to explore the data, a quantitative and a qualitative one. Qualitative research is a catch-all word for studies that use methods like naturalistic, ethnographic, or observational inquiry.

The researcher creates the survey with closed-ended questions using a point scale to increase the likelihood that respondents would be willing to finish the survey. In addition, this method of surveying requires less effort, resources, and time than others.

Primary and secondary sources are the two types of information gatherers.

Primary sources are information that has been gathered for the sole aim of answering a research question (or hypotheses) (s).

There are two main types of primary data gathering techniques: qualitative and quantitative. Key distinctions between qualitative and quantitative approaches to research:

Interviews, focus groups, observation, case studies, games, role acting, and other qualitative approaches are often used in business research.

Nonetheless, statistical approaches such as mean, mode, and median, as well as correlation and regression analysis, are often used to gather and analyse quantitative data.

Primary materials might range from original literary works to eyewitness reports of historical events.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

UK B2B market situation:-

As per the data revealed by Office of The National Statistics (ONS), the e-commerce market in UK accounts for 17% of entire British trade operations, out of which 9.8% is sourced from Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) while the rest, that is, 7.2% is derived from website sales (Ons.gov.uk, 2017). Here, an interesting trend is being observed in recent years. Given the social media boom all across the globe, website sales are experiencing a major growth while the share for EDI is on decline. This situation reflects changing landscape of e-commerce industry in UK. It is imperative to mention here that social media has engineered such massive transition that has entirely transformed the conventional concept of business-to-business sales. In this new scenario, British business world is experiencing a substantial potential for a holistic growth in terms of e-commerce industry as well as a massive disparity between associated industries existing hitherto. Apart from that, large organisations, irrespective of their operating industry are rapidly engaging themselves into e-commerce activities. In other words, highly contrasting features of offline versus online marketing campaigns in terms of Return-On- Investment (ROI) has propelled major companies to slowly shift their focus from conventional marketing tactics towards web-based advertising and promotional ventures.

UK fashion industry situation

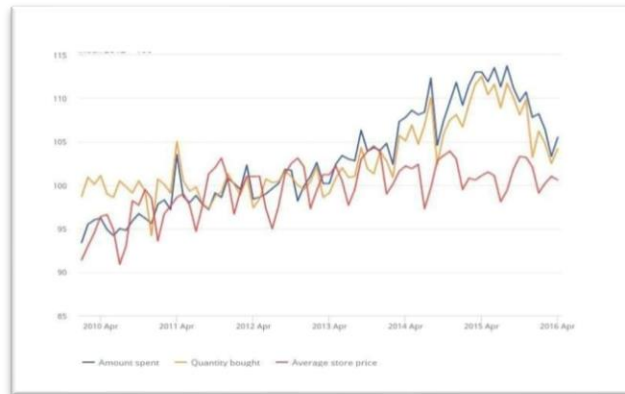
Fashion has always been an integral part of British people, used for defining themselves in society as well as understanding others. As a powerful tool for expression and influence, studies reveal that British citizen are more likely to trust and even take orders from an individual clad in suits or uniforms (McRobbie, 2013, p.122). This statement reveals the fact that human beings have a direct and integral affinity towards aesthetics, which is best expressed through fashion. Naturally, British fashion market is considered as a nucleus for fashionistas who congregate from all parts of Europe to have a gain a taste of latest fashion and learn the mechanics of soft power- radiated through fashion and attire. This unconquerable zeal as well as enthusiasm towards fashion has helped the British fashion industry to gain a net worth of £26 billion annually. In addition, the same reason has also engineered to create an employment umbrella for nearly 800,000 individuals in the country, which are engaged in diverse niches of this massive industry (Fabacus.com, 2016).

Store type	Weight in RSI	Year-on-Year Growth rate (per cent)		
		Volume	Value	Inflation in store price (intended price deflator)
Textile	0.2	-2.6	-3.0	-0.4
Clothing	11.05	-7.4	-6.7	-0.4
Footwear	1.23	2.3	0.1	-0.1
Total	12.5	-6.3	-6.0	-0.4

Summary of British retail industry, as compared between April 2016 and April 2015

This Table illustrates that clothing sector has played a predominant role in retail sales while textile and footwear segment have only minute contribution. April 2016 experienced a fall of 6.3% in both quantity

and 6% in spent amount, summing up the figures of clothing, textile and footwear industry, as compared to April 2015.



Clothing sales in UK from January 2010 to April 2016

Looking at this figure and comparing figures from April 2016 with March 2016, it is clearly visible that net bought quantity has increased by 1.7% while total spent amount has increased by 2.1%. On the other hand, the average price for store decreased by 0.4%. The last statistics is an indicator of increase in online sales compared to offline brick-and-mortar stores. This phenomenon calls for a brief discussion on retail sales.

The Retail Sales Data Index (RSI), published by Govt. of UK highlights the sales made via internet in detail. This index includes a seasonally calibrated value index as well as a year-on-year (YoY) and month-on-month (MoM) growth rates. It should be noted here that sales made via internet are estimated through measuring the total time spent in online activities associated with visiting web-stores of different fashion retailers. As per this RSI, average time spent by British internet users on a weekly basis in April 2016 created net sales of £886.6 million, which has increased by 9.3% as compared to April 2013 (Ons.gov.uk, 2017).

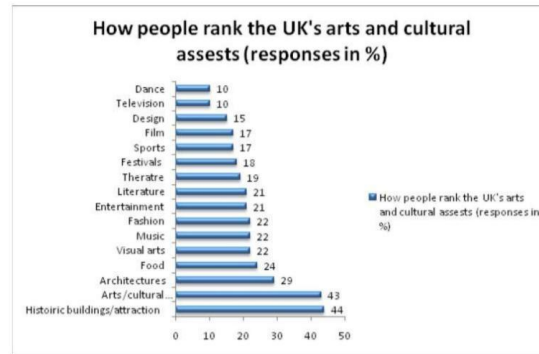
The following table illustrates the YoY growth rates for internet sales and the ratio of sales conducted via internet from different internet sector.

Category	YoY sales growth	Sales as a ratio of entire retail sale	Index categories and their respective weightage in terms of percentage
Total retail	9.3	13.4	100
Total food sector	14.3	4.5	15
Total non-food sector	10.1	10.1	36.1
Departmental stores	21.1	12.2	8.6
Clothing, textile and footwear stores	2.0	13.0	13.9
Sales from household goods	33.6	8.6	5.4
Others	-1.2	7.0	8.3
Sales from non-storereetailing	7.4	76.0	49

Summary of total sales made via internet, measured in April 2016

Now, from the abovementioned tables and statistical figures, it can be easily considered that British fashion industry generates value both for society as well as market, along with

helping the Royal Coiffers to gain foreign currency. As per a report published by British Fashion Council, the fashion industry in this country is capable of creating value through a series of ways, apart from making an appeal to international fashion community (Britishfashioncouncil.co.uk, 2016). As per a survey conducted on behalf of BFC, 22% British youth voted that fashion is the central theme that made UK attractive to them, while 15% cited design as the primary factor for the same purpose. This survey result highlights that UK has always been and is still considered as major fashion destination - thus signifying a looming opportunity for traders engaged in this industry.



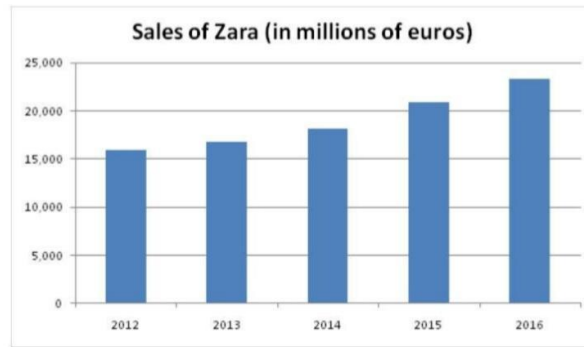
Perception towards British cultural and artistic assets

From this figure the highlights the amplitude of soft power exercised by British fashion industry over society as well as on market. Several examples could be cited here to illustrate the power of fashion in this context. The ‘New Look’ Campaign launched by fashion brand Dior instilled the concept of French chic to hundreds of thousands Britons (Ons.gov.uk, 2017). Similarly, Armani, the famous Italian fashion house reinforced elements of Italian fashion into UK. Now, it is time to move into detailed discussion on the performance of Zara in the context of online marketing and branding.

Data analysis and interpretation on Zara

Zara Espana S.A., popularly known as Zara, is a Spanish fashion retailer specialising in clothing and footwear. As the main brand of Inditex Group, Zara managed nearly 20 different clothing collections in 2016. Being one of the largest fashion company with global acclaim, this fashion house considers customers at the core of their business operations, which incorporated several different activities such as designing, manufacturing and distributing clothing and footwear material across UK market (Zara.com, 2017). Following this business philosophy, Zara has also engaged themselves into intensive web-based advertising and branding activities - for the purpose of strengthening their B2B as well as B2C marketing activities.

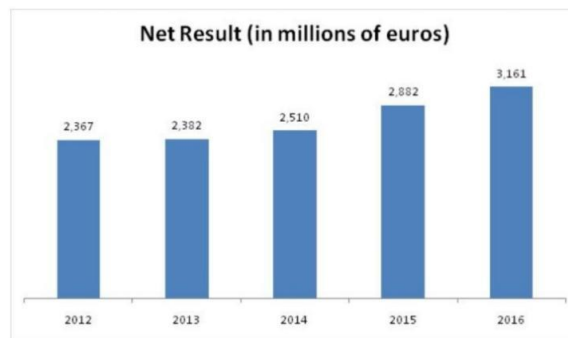
Now, in order to understand and analyse the length and breadth of B2B marketing as practiced by Zara through social media, it is imperative to critically discuss relevant elements of Zara’s business. For this purpose, majority of the discussion in this subsection has been premised on Zara annual report 2016.



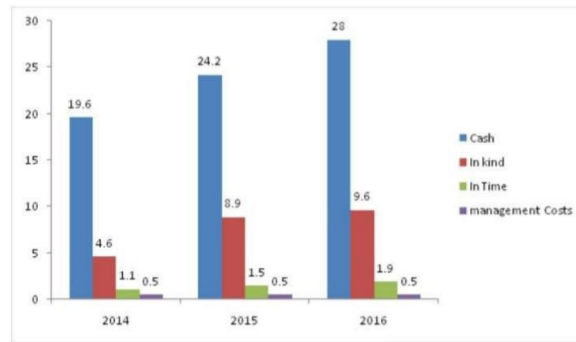
Chronological illustration of sales made by Zara (from 2012 to 2016)

Figure illustrates that Zara has experienced a steady growth over years in terms of sales. While the net sale value in 2012 was worth of €15,496 million, the amount for same context touched the ceiling of a whopping €23311 million in 2016. This monumental increase in net annual sales exhibits nearly 50% surge.

Chronological illustration of Net result gained by Zara (from 2012 to 2016)



This figure displays the net results accumulated by Zara over the past five years, that is, from 2012 to 2016. This chart also illustrates business growth of Zara as the company sought to engage in web-based marketing activities by entering B2B marketplace. The Italian fashion house mattered online retail market in 2010 by opening new online store in five countries such as Spain, Portugal, France, Italy and UK (Bbc.com, 2010). This strategic business move, apart from retaining their brick-and-mortar stores, provided a significant momentum to the company result of which is clearly visible in aforementioned chart. Now, along with stellar business growth, Zara have also engaged in active social networking activities. Apart from their online store, the company has also engraved their presence in virtual media through five major social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and YouTube (Zara.com, 2017). As of 2016, the company has 1.1 million beneficiaries.



Chronological illustration of contribution provided by Zara (in millions of Euros) (from 2014 to 2016)

This figure exhibits different types of contribution made by Zara from 2014 to 2016. It is clearly visible from this chart that their major contribution amounts in cash endowment, which has increased from €19.6 million in 2014 to €28 million in 2016. In addition, it also highlights that the company has also increased their contribution in kind over the years, as the company has experienced significant growth due to B2B marketing activities.

Data collection method

In general two types of data collection methods are used namely primary and secondary data collection methods. As commented by Silverman (2016, p.48), while primary data considers collection of first hand information from direct sources like survey, interviews and online polls, secondary data is collected from literary sources like books, journals, website and news articles.

Findings and Conclusion

The research investigating the role of social media in B2B marketing and branding exhibited the increasing importance of B2B marketing techniques in online brand promotion and marketing activities. This research emphasised on British fashion industry, with a special reference to Zara UK, the famous Italian designer clothing and footwear retailer. The researcher has performed secondary research here for understating the current state of British fashion industry and the role played social media in B2B marketing and branding activities. In due course, it has been revealed from secondary that UK, being a popular fashion destination, experiences notable fashion trends, along with possessing several world-famous fashion universities. As a result, this country has its own unique signature in fashion market, which is again reflected in the nation’s fashion market.

Now, on this context, the researcher has endeavoured to understand how social media gained a predominant role in terms of promotion and branding activities. Extensive research and analysis revealed that with the stellar growth of information and communication technologies, common public displayed a trend of performing shopping activities through web-based applications. Contrary to offline brick-and-mortar stores, these online virtual stores provided them smoother shopping experience as significant amount of time was saved. Following this trend, business entities and fashion houses also moved towards establishing online stores to keep par with changing landscape. As the conventional trading relationships were no longer valid in this new scenario, small and major players of British fashion industry sought to forge business relationships in the web.

Limitations of the research

This study faced several constraints, which restricted the natural pace of the research. Unavailability of monetary fund posed as a barrier for gathering primary data by means of survey, which would have brought more clear responses for this study. On another hand, limited monetary funds also did not allow the researcher for getting access to costly literary sources of journals and books. While collecting data about Zara, the study faced a setback as very few genuine data has been found to be available, which also have delayed completion of this study. Limited availability of statistical as well as literary data has been major limitations of this study and thus has also restricted appropriate execution of this study. Had the research work been carried out by both primary as well as secondary approach, research would have gathered more factual data. Future scope of the research

Almost every research study is aimed at grabbing a strong foothold in future aspects and this point is applicable for this study too. For current study, it may be beneficial for future researchers to carry out detailed study on Zara and this study can also play a supporting role for creating contrasting views if research is carried out on other brands from fashion industry. Statistical data gathered in this study can be helpful to find out loopholes in marketing practices and used as a lesson for future B2B practices.

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