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Fashion Brands' Use of Emojis on Twitter: An Exploratory Study

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Social presence is the feeling that others are involved in the communication process or the sense of being present in a social encounter with another person. The ultimate goal for creating social presence is to create a level of comfort where people feel at ease around the mediator (business) and the other participants (consumers). Participants see an environment that lacks social presence as impersonal, and the amount of information shared with others decreases. The rise in computer-mediated communication (CMC), such as Twitter, has produced a demand for creating social presence in online environments. The use of emojis in CMC demonstrates a great potential for increasing social presence and a way to encourage conversation between the mediator and participants. Emoji is a Japanese neologism that means "picture word." There are many types of emojis and they can be used to convey voice inflections, facial expressions, and bodily gestures. Businesses that utilize emojis on their social media platforms might see an increase in interactions from their consumers and ultimately sell more products. The purpose of this study is to explore the use of emojis by fashion brands on their Twitter accounts. This study attempts to contribute knowledge that is helpful in the development and implementation of effective Twitter strategies for fashion brands. The following research questions were addressed:

- To what extent do fashion brands use emojis on Twitter?
- What types of emojis do fashion brands use frequently on Twitter?
- How does the use of emojis differ by tweet type?
- What is the relationship between the use of emojis to the number of replies, retweets, and likes?

A content analysis was conducted on tweets created by the top 10 fashion brands for the month of December 2016. These top fashion brands consisted of five mass fashion brands (Nike, Adidas, Victoria's Secret, Zara, and H&M) and five luxury brands (Chanel, Dior, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and Prada). Brands were ranked based on the number of followers on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest in 2016. The unit of analysis was a tweet initiated by each brand. After training, the two coders analyzed the predetermined categories from the coding scheme in each brand's tweet, including (a) the presence of an emoji in the tweet, (b) the type of emoji used, (c) the content and context of the tweet, (d) the number of replies, (e) the number and content of the replies that contained emojis, (f) the number of retweets, and (g) the number of likes given to the tweet. The overall reliability of the coders, based on their analysis of 182 tweets, was good in terms of Cronbach's alpha; it reached .97 on average and ranged from .89 to 1. The two coders continued coding independently and analyzed the brands. Collectively, they analyzed a total of 438 tweets.

The 10 brands had an average of 6,128,533 followers. Chanel was the top brand with 12,753,084 followers, followed by Victoria's Secret (10,600,121) and Dior (7,352, 332). We

found an average of 44 tweets per brand (*SD*=40.5). Victoria's Secret registered 120 tweets, and had the highest number, while Nike was the lowest with only 3. There was an average of 12 replies per tweet (*SD*=40.78). Chanel had the highest average number of replies per tweet (*M*=41.89, *SD*=48.69) and Nike was a very close second (*M*=41.00, *SD*=39.85). Zara had the lowest average number of replies per tweet (*M*=2.58, *SD*=2.84). Each tweet was retweeted 498 times on average (*SD*=2,039.53). Chanel had the highest average number of retweets per tweet (*M*= 2,380.56, *SD*=3,571.08) while Zara had the lowest average number of retweets per tweet (*M* = 47.89, *SD*=17.86). In terms of the total number of likes per tweet, we found an average of 1,254 likes per tweet (*SD*= 3732.92), with Chanel being the highest (*M*=5,524.83, *SD*=7,902.57) and Prada being the lowest (*M*=194.59, *SD*=113.44).

Only 11.2% of the total tweets included emojis in their messages. The use of emojis varied among the brands (χ^2 = 73.50, *p* < .001). Of the 10 brands, only 3 utilized emojis in their tweets. Victoria's Secret was the top user of emojis with 29.2% of their tweets containing emojis. H&M used emojis in 19.1% of their tweets, and Adidas utilized emojis in 9.1%. All three brands were mass fashion brands. None of the luxury brands in our sample used emojis in their tweets (χ^2 = 54.17, *p* < .001). Among the emojis that were included in the tweets, 67.3% (*F*=34) were classified as objects. Emojis classified as objects are simply related to the contents of the tweet and do not add emotion or personality. For example, Victoria's Secret often included objects in their promotional tweets by using flags to demonstrate which countries offer their current products and sales. Emojis that dipict emotion were minimally used (*F*=15, 28.6%). Emojis classified as depicting emotion convey personality in the message with facial expressions, hearts, hand gestures, and so on. For example, Victoria's Secret included a "winky face" in a few of their tweets to enhance the playfulness of their brand image. The use of emojis was not significantly different based on the types of messages (*p* = .32). Regardless of the use of emojis, the most dominant type of tweet was related to the promotion of sales or products (58.4%), followed by messages related to branding that do not focus on specific products (15.8%); messages referring to a specific event (13.0%); a pass along such as endorsement of other brands or celebrities (8.7%); and a conversation starter such a question, a reference to a specific user, or a greeting (4.1%). Our results also revealed that the use of emojis was more prevalent in replies from consumers. 91.8% of the tweets in our sample had replies that contained emojis. Of these replies, 80.4% were positive replies from consumers. In examining the effectiveness of using emojis on Twitter, we found that the use of emojis was positively related to the number of replies (*r*=.14, *p* < .01), retweets (*r*=.13, *p* < .01), and likes (*r*=.15, *p* < .01).

In conclusion, consumers are increasing their use of emojis to communicate with fashion brands on Twitter; however, the use of emojis by fashion brands is minimal and tends to be limited to simple objects as opposed to conveying emotion or brand personality. Because emojis are becoming a more popular form of communication on social media, there is a significant opportunity for fashion brands to increase engagement with their consumers by humanizing themselves through use of emojis. The findings of this study show that the tweets of fashion brands using emojis were positively related to the number of replies, retweets, and likes. Therefore, fashion brands should explore a wide array of emojis and develop creative ways to implement them into their Twitter messages.