

How Apparel Companies Use Social Media: The Case of Facebook

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Abstract

This study focused on how the U.S. apparel companies use social media as a new marketing channel. On Facebook Wall the contents of messages in English initiated by companies and consumers were investigated and categorized by using content analysis. Chi-square analysis and *t*-test were utilized to compare the use of social media by companies with higher and lower business performance. The majority of messages initiated by apparel companies gave their consumers useful information about new products, promotions, and recruiting. On the other hand, messages initiated by consumers contained a variety of content related to companies, users, and products. Apparel companies with lower business performance were more actively engaged in posting messages and responding to consumers. The results will be helpful in employing social media to build new marketing strategies through direct communications with consumers.

Keywords: social media, social networking, Facebook

I . Introduction

Social media or consumer-generated media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) has been growing rapidly through the diffusion of high speed Internet (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010). People can access social media everywhere and the spend time on social networking sites is different according to geographies and sex (Comscore Data Mine (CDM)^{A, B}, 2011). Israel is the number one ranked country with 10.7 hours per month, on average. It is followed by Russia (10.7 hours), Argentina (8.4 hours), Philippines (7.9 hours), Spain (5.7 hours), U.S. (5.2 hours), and Norway (4.5 hours). CDM^B (2011) showed that females (6.5 hours) spend more time on social networking sites than males (5 hours).

Originally, social media was developed for the

connection and communication between users and their friends. As the popularity of social media expanded, marketers acknowledged an important marketing channel to connect their current customers and potential customers. The best advantage of social media is two-way communication between companies and customers because marketers can connect directly to their customers.

Apparel (2010) emphasized that now is the right time to use social media to take an opportunity to increase business performance. Using social media is not an option but a necessity. In 2010, the U.S. marketers spent approximately \$ 1.7 billion on social media, and used Facebook (53%), Myspace (17%), and Twitter (3%) (Shah, 2011). Apparel companies have usually used social media to publish information about sales or promotions and to upload fashion shoots and runway videos. Some companies

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have presented photos of real women wearing their brands, conducted polls for new products, and posted new and fun videos per hour to increase brand reputation and brand loyalty. In addition, 89% of consumers rely on peer reviews about products and companies in social media (Apparel, 2010). It appears that social media can be used in a variety of ways to promote fashion brands.

Currently, apparel companies are highly interested in social media, but the existing empirical research on social media for apparel companies was very limited. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to investigate the use of social media by apparel companies. Three objectives guided the work: 1) to describe the features of social media used by the apparel company, 2) to identify available information on social media of the apparel company, and 3) to analyze the relationship between the use of social media and the business performance of the apparel company. In addition, the findings would contribute to fashion marketers who are considering a new marketing strategy with social media.

II. Background & Conceptual Framework

1. Definition of social networking site

The terms social media, social network sites, and social networking sites, and social network services have been used interchangeably in practice. There is very limited research on how the terms are different conceptually and the terms are used distinctively. Therefore, the definitions for social media, social network sites, and social networking sites, and social network services are reviewed for this research.

Kaplan and Haenlin (2010) adopted the term “social media”. They defined the social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0. and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p. 61). They classified social

media by the degrees of self presentation/disclosure and social presence/media richness as follows: “Collaborative Projects” (e.g., Wikipedia), “Blogs” (e.g., YouTube), “Social Networking Sites” (e.g., Facebook), “Virtual Game Worlds” (e.g., World of Warcraft), and “Virtual Social Worlds” (e.g., Second Life).” Therefore, in the research social networking sites are considered a type of social media.

Boyd and Ellison (2008) used the term “social network sites”. The term was defined as follows: “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 211). Boyd and Ellison (2008) considered that social network site is a more appropriate term than social networking site. The term “networking” emphasizes building new relationships among users who don’t know each other. The term “network” is related to keep the relationships among people who already know each other. As contrasted to Boyd and Ellison (2008), social networking sites may be a more appropriate term in this research because companies may primarily be interested in building relationships with new consumers.

Ahn, Han, Kwak, Moon, and Jeong (2007) defined the term “social networking services” as providing online private spaces to share private information, photo, and events with others through the use of the internet. Cyworld, MySpace, and Orkut are mentioned as the examples for social networking services. It seems the social networking services are used as the synonym of social networking sites. However, the term “services” is also used to refer to new features provided by social networking sites, such as Facebook Platform, Google Friend Connect, and MySpaceID (KO, Cheek, & Shehab, 2010). In the previous literature it is not clear how social networking services are differentiated from social networking sites, but it appears that service is used as a subordinate concept in social

networking sites.

Therefore, this research uses both social media and social networking sites defined by Kaplan and Haenlin (2010). In this research, social media means a phenomenon which communicates through all applications on virtual space. Social networking sites indicate a type of social media.

2. History of social media

Social media started in the late 1990s, and has boomed since the mid 2000s. The beginning point of social media was interpreted by slightly different views of scholars. According to Kaplan and Haenlin (2010), "Usenet" launched in 1979 might be considered as the beginning point because public news were posted, readied, and commented on Usenet. But "Open Diary" founded in 1998 used a more appropriate format to admit a starting point of social media. The users posted and shared private stories with their friends. Boyd and Ellison (2008) considered that the beginning of social networking sites was SixDegrees.com launched in 1997 because users made their profiles, connected with their friends, and sent messages to their friends.

During this time, social networking sites appeared in the world. LiveJournal, BlackPlanet, Ryze.com, MySpace, and Facebook were launched in the U.S. Skyrock was founded in France, Cyworld was in South Korea, and QQ was in China. In 2005, Facebook, started by Harvard University students, expanded to high school students, and everyone in the world. Today, Facebook has become one of the most popular social networking sites in the world (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Joinson, 2008).

3. Use of social media

Social media was utilized for various purposes. College students utilized social media as a tool to keep in touch with old friends and current friends. But they never communicated with their parents on Facebook and they very rarely connected with strangers.

Some students as they responded that they can not live without Facebook. It means that the students might be addicted to Facebook (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). Forster, Francescucci, and West (2010) investigated why young consumers participate in social media, and then they found five different motivations such as 'community membership', 'information value', 'friendship connection', 'participation confidence', and 'participation concerns'. The motivation of community membership is related to get involved a community. Information value is explained in terms of reciprocity and trust. It indicates the importance of the information quality and credibility in social media. Friendship connection is to keep friendship or acquaintances. The final two motivations are related to potential barriers to participation. Participation confidence is about concerns of the potential issues occurring as information spread out. Lastly, participation concerns are about fears and harms which occurred by strangers' access to privacy information.

In the research regarding diabetes, it was found that patients, family members, and their friends used social media to share personal clinical experiences, to request information about disease, and to get emotional support (Greene, Choudhry, Kilabuk, and Shrank, 2010). Overall, Greene et al. (2010) rarely found incorrect information in the discussions even though medical professionals do not show up. However, if wrong information is created, it would be very dangerous because it can be very rapidly distributed in social media.

Park and Lee (2009) showed the influence of online reviews on purchase decisions between the U.S. and the Korean consumers. The U.S. consumers had online shopping experience more than the Korean consumers, but the Korean consumers more frequently used online reviews. The online reviews had influence more on the Korean consumers' purchase decisions than the U.S. consumers. Specifically, the Korean consumers' perceived usefulness of online reviews (attitude) affected more strongly their purchase decisions. Usage frequency of online reviews (behavior)

is an important influence factor on the U.S. consumers' purchase decisions. However, regardless of the different cultural background the perceived usefulness of online reviews can raise the usage frequency of online reviews.

Currently, marketers utilize social media as a new marketing channel for promotion and communication. Social networking sites provided new services to companies using for the commercial purposes. For example, Fan pages in Facebook for products, brands, and companies directly connect companies to their target markets. Companies can have an opportunity to build better relationships with consumers through virtual communication in Fan pages (Forster et al., 2010). Social networking sites are continually evolving and developing to meet users' needs.

4. Conceptual framework

1) The types of messages

To develop an efficient social media strategy, companies first should know what information is talked about (Falls, 2009). In social media, companies are interested in browsing and collecting information, hosting or sponsoring communities, creating relationships, and sharing ideas, music, video, photos, entertainment, dislikes and likes with consumers (Hensel & Deis, 2010; Miller et al., 2009).

Consumers share personal history, diary, photos, and interesting news on social networking sites. Information sharing is a key for participation of social media. Users rapidly shared useful information with their friends or other users who have same interest topics. The information obtained via the virtual communication affects consumer's buying decision (Greene et al., 2010; Park & Lee, 2009; Pempek et al., 2009). In social media, there are various in the contents of messages posted by companies and consumers in social media. Therefore, companies need to know what contents are available in social media. The following hypotheses are generated:

- H1. Companies would vary in the types of messages they create.
- H2. Consumers would vary in the types of messages they create.

2) Social media and business performance

Social media help companies to improve brand awareness, customer relations, and sales. Companies can get valuable insights from consumer's comments and explore competition companies through using social media (Petrecca, 2012). In addition, companies make efforts to build brand awareness regardless of the business size. However, in practice larger companies manage social media differently from smaller companies (Ball, 2011). Larger companies tend to control the use of social media under formalized policies. On the other hand, the majority of small size companies employ social media without the formalized policies. Due to the restrictions, messages in more various contents may be posted on the social media of companies having smaller performance than companies having higher performance. Thus, we hypothesized:

- H3. Messages initiated by companies would be different according to the performance of companies.
- H4. Messages initiated by consumers would be different according to the performance of companies.

Small companies need to commit to social media management to improve the business performance via social media. Companies need to manage regularly and consistently social media. Small businesses at start up stage can obtain more benefits by using social media because they build their business systems through direct communication with consumers (Ball, 2011; Hensel & Deis, 2010; LaunchHouse, 2012; Petrecca, 2012). Therefore, we expect that companies with low performance will frequently engaged in social media.

- H5. For messages initiated by companies, the reaction of consumers with low performance

would be higher than the reaction of consumers with high performance.

- H6. For messages initiated by consumers, the reaction of consumers with low performance would be higher than the reaction of consumers with high performance.
- H7. For messages initiated by consumers, the reaction of companies with low performance would be higher than the reaction of companies with high performance.

III. Method

To meet the objectives of the study, the current

research used content analysis to investigate the use of social media by apparel companies.

1. Sample

For this research, the top U.S. 20 apparel companies were selected from “2010’s Apparel Top 50 Companies” ranked by profit margins. Two companies were removed because they were integrated with several brands. Finally, 18 apparel companies were re-ranked by annual sales for this research (see Table 1).

The sample consisted of apparel companies that focused on men (5%), women (11%), children (11%), men and women (33.3%), men, women, and children (38.8%). The annual sales of 18 apparel companies

<Table 1> The top 18 U.S. apparel companies

Rank	Company name	Web site	Facebook site	Target	Employee	Store	2010 Sales
1	Nike	http://www.nikebiz.com	http://www.Facebook.com/nike	Total	34,400	n/a	19,176.0
2	Gap	http://www.gap.com	http://www.Facebook.com/gap	Total	135,000	3,095	14,197.0
3	Polo Ralph Lauren	http://www.ralphlauren.com	http://www.Facebook.com/RalphLauren	Total	19,000	265	4,978.5
4	Cintas	http://www.cintas.com	http://www.Facebook.com/Cintas	M & W	30,000	n/a	3,774.7
5	Aeropostale	http://www.aeropostale.com	http://www.Facebook.com/aeropostale	M & W	14,460	952	2,230.1
6	Guess?	http://www.guess.com	http://www.Facebook.com/GUESS	Total	12,700	432	2,128.5
7	Urban Outfitters	http://www.urbanoutfittersinc.com	http://www.Facebook.com/urbanoutfitters	M & W	14,000	326	1,937.8
8	Carter’s	http://www.carters.com	http://www.Facebook.com/carters	Children	7,622	446	1,589.7
9	J. Crew	http://www.jcrew.com	http://www.Facebook.com/Jcrew	Total	12,000	321	1,578.0
10	Gymboree	http://www.gymboree.com	http://www.Facebook.com/Gymboree	Children	12,400	898	1,014.9
11	Unifirst	http://www.unifirst.com	Not available	M & W	10,000	n/a	1,013.4
12	The Buckle	http://www.buckle.com	http://www.Facebook.com/bucklestore	M & W	7,000	407	898.3
13	JoS. A. Bank	http://www.josbank.com	http://www.Facebook.com/Jos.A.Bank.Clottiers.Inc	Men	4,318	473	770.3
14	The Wet Seal	http://www.limitedbrands.com	http://www.Facebook.com/wetseal	Women	6,148	504	560.9
15	Maidenform Brands	http://www.maidenform.com	http://www.Facebook.com/MaidenformBrands	Women	1,175	n/a.	466.3
16	lululemon athletica	http://www.lululemon.com	http://www.Facebook.com/bucklestore	M & W	3,219	124	452.9
17	True Religion Apparel	http://www.truereligionbrandjeans.com	http://www.Facebook.com/truereligionbrandjeans	Total	1,238	101	311.0
18	Volcom	http://www.volcom.com	http://www.Facebook.com/Volcom	Total	492	20	280.6

Note: Rank is by the annual sales in the most recent fiscal years for the companies picked from “The Apparel Top 50 for 2010”
\$: millions

Target: M & W =Men and Women; Total: Man, Woman, and Children.

ranged between \$ 19 billion and \$ 280 million. The average sales amount was \$ 3.186 billion. The number of employees ranged from 492 and 135,000; with an average of 18,065 employees. All companies had own online websites, and only one company did not use Facebook.

2. Instrument development

A coding sheet was developed with five sections to investigate the targeted apparel companies' websites and Facebook. The coding instrument was pre-tested on the Facebook pages of three companies to check appropriateness for the developed coding instrument. After testing the initial coding sheet, it was revised and completed as follows. The first section was to collect the companies' background information such as target market, 2010's sales, the number of employee and stores, and website's existence. The second section was designed to check that companies are using social media. The third section reported the categories and the number of linkers on Facebook. In the fourth section, meaningful words in the messages started by companies were coded along with the posting time. It also included the posting times for the first comments and the last comments, and counted the total number of comments for each message. This same information was coded for the messages initiated by consumers. Additionally, for the messages initiated by consumers, the companies' reactions were counted. Finally, it was investigated on Facebook Wall messages posted for two weeks from January 1, 2011 to January 14, 2011.

IV. Results

1. Data description

The results for the practice use of social media by the apparel companies showed that 13 companies' websites (72%) displayed the connection icons for easy access into social networking sites of the companies. Most connection icons were placed on the

bottom sides of websites. 44% of the connection icons were located on the bottom-right of the websites. Only one company placed connection icons on the top-right. All the companies investigated used Facebook (100%), and also preferred to and Twitter (61%), YouTube (28%), and MySpace (6%). Some of the samples were using other social networking sites (e.g. Blog, Bukle, and Filckr) (see Table 2).

The apparel companies had from 2,266 and 3,888,397 linkers on Facebook. On average 953,375 consumers liked the apparel companies' Facebook. The companies displayed 3-17 categories on Facebook. Most companies were consisted not only with the basic categories such as 'Info' (100%), 'Wall' (94.1%), 'Photo' (88.2%), and 'Video' (82.4%). In addition, most companies designed differently Facebook with

<Table 2> Frequency distribution of using social media
n=18

Descriptive		F	%
Icon location to connect SNS on the company website	Top-Right	1	5.6
	Bottom-Left	3	16.7
	Bottom-Center	1	5.6
	Bottom-Right	8	44.4
	Not available	5	27.8
Number of SNS	1	7	38.9
	2	3	16.7
	3	3	16.7
	4	4	22.2
	Not available	1	5.6
Facebook	Available	17	94.4
	Not available	1	5.6
Twitter	Available	11	61.1
	Not available	7	38.9
YouTube	Available	5	27.8
	Not available	13	72.2
MySpace	Available	1	5.6
	Not available	17	94.4
Others	Available	14	77.8
	Not available	4	22.2

<Table 3> Frequency distribution of using Facebook
n=17

Descriptive		F	%
Number of likes on Facebook	Less than 5,000	4	23.5
	5,001-50,000	1	5.9
	50,001-100,000	4	23.5
	100,001-1,000,000	2	11.8
	More than 1,000,000	6	35.3
	Total	17	100.0
Using category on Facebook	Less than 6	2	11.8
	6-10	7	41.2
	11-15	6	35.3
	More than 15	3	5.9
	Not available	1	5.9
Wall	Available	16	94.1
	Not available	1	5.9
Info	Available	17	100.0
	Not available	0	0.0
Photo	Available	15	88.2
	Not available	2	11.8
Video	Available	14	82.4
	Not available	3	17.6
Event	Available	8	46.1
	Not available	9	52.9
Note	Available	1	5.9
	Not available	16	94.1
Others	Available	15	88.2
	Not available	2	11.8

various categories such as ‘Poll’, ‘Job Career’, ‘Coupon Details’, ‘Sizes’, ‘Discussions’, and ‘Photo Contests’ (see Table 3).

For the period of data collection, 141 messages were initiated by the companies and 1,776 messages were initiated by the consumers (see Table 4). Even though one company was using Facebook, the category of Wall was not displayed. Two companies did not allow consumers to create a new message. One company did not show their own messages, but consumers communicated on the Facebook Wall.

<Table 4> Frequency distribution of messages initiated by companies vs. consumers

Rank	Company	Company		Consumer	
		F	%	F	%
1	Nike	1	.7	163	9.2
2	Gap	8	5.7	125	7.0
3	Polo Ralph Lauren	4	2.8	190	10.7
4	Aeropostale	9	6.4	0	.0
5	Guess?	15	10.6	0	.0
6	Urban Outfitters	18	12.8	99	5.6
7	Carter’s	13	9.2	203	11.4
8	J. Crew	0	.0	0	.0
9	Gymboree	0	.0	211	11.9
11	The Buckle	4	2.8	38	2.1
12	JoS. A. Bank	2	1.4	5	.3
13	The Wet Seal	24	17.0	56	3.2
14	Maidenform Brands	3	2.1	1	.1
15	lululemon athletica	18	12.8	567	31.9
16	True Religion Apparel	4	2.8	35	2.0
17	Volcom	11	7.8	79	4.4
18	Cintas	7	5.0	4	.2
Total		141	100.0	1,776	100.0

Finally, only messages written in English were analyzed. 68 messages were not posted in English, so the subjects were not included in the final analysis because translation was impossible.

Once a message was posted by a company, the first consumer comment, under the 141 messages initiated by the companies, appeared within 16 minutes, on average, of the initial posting. 56 comments were threaded and lasted on average of 8 days 17 hours. On the other hand, 1708 messages initiated by consumers, the first comments were posted, on average, in 19 minutes. The series of messages averaged continued 1.5 days and included 1.5 comments. Among messages initiated by consumers, the response message rate of company was 12%.

2. Hypothesis testing

Content analysis was conducted to test H1. 141 messages initiated by companies were reviewed and categorized into “Asking”, “Giving Information”, “Greeting”, “Recommending”, and “Others” (See Table 5). The asking category include contents asking 1) opinion about interesting topics such as new year’s resolutions or expected super bowl champions, 2) opinion before new products come out or after, 3) consumers’ outfit photos. In the information category, companies gave consumers variety information about companies, employee, complementary products, events,

interesting news, magazines, catalogs, TV channels, products, technology, services, recruiting, and promotion. Greeting category included messages for Happy New Year, sorry message for not managing Facebook for a while, and thank you messages to express customers’ participation. Recommendation category included messages to recommend customers new styles and products. In addition, videos, photos, and advertisements were linked or uploaded. 66% of the messages included in giving information category.

<Table 5> Content analysis for messages initiated by apparel companies $n=141$

Categories	F	%
Asking about	20	14.2
thinking for interesting topic	15	10.6
opinion for new, pre, or favorite product	3	2.1
outfit photo	2	1.4
Giving information about	93	66.0
company or employee	5	3.5
complementary product	1	.7
event	16	11.3
interesting news	6	4.3
magazine, catalog, or other channels	10	7.1
new product	28	19.9
new technical and services	4	2.8
recruiting	1	.7
promotion	22	15.6
Greeting	7	5.0
happy new year	5	3.5
sorry message	1	.7
thank you message	1	.7
Recommending	12	8.5
new style	1	.7
product	11	7.8
Others	9	6.4
upload AD	1	.7
link or upload photo	2	1.4
link or upload video	6	4.3

Content analysis was conducted to test H2. In the same period, messages initiated by consumers were investigated and categorized (see Table 6). 1,708 messages initiated by consumers were additionally added three categories (e.g., evaluating, presenting, suggesting). Consumers were asking companies or other users about companies (e.g., recruiting plans, events), social media (e.g., no working online website, usage of social networking sites), shopping experiences (e.g., online orders, stores, customer services), post-purchase (e.g., return, repair, cleaning), products (e.g., plans for new products’ coming out, product characteristics, product development processes, complementary products), sales (e.g., promotions, stock availability, store locations), and exchanging the used products among other users. Consumers positively or negatively evaluated brands, products, employees, on-off line shopping experiences, and services. Consumers informed about companies or stores, events, online or off line shopping experiences, product arrival or coming soon, raised price, sale, or promotions. Consumers greeted other users with Happy New Year, introducing messages, hello, thank you, or hoping to be friends. In addition, consumers just wrote brand names, brand’s slogan, competition brand names, or simple statements such as “I need something”, “will buy pants tonight”, “bought something”, and “I visited a store”. Only three messages were about the product recommendations. Consumers suggested companies these issues: promotions for other products, extent of items or lines, online websites, social networking sites, opening

<Table 6> Content analysis for initial messages by consumers
n=1708

Categories	F	%
Asking about	523	30.6
company or recruiting	31	1.8
complementary product	3	.2
event	6	.4
issues regarding online website, SNS, catalogs, or mobile	20	1.2
issues regarding online order, store, or customer service	46	2.7
new products' coming out	11	.6
post-purchase issue	26	1.5
product characteristic	128	7.5
product development process	2	.1
sale or promotion	71	4.2
stock availability	148	8.7
store location	11	.6
exchange the used product	20	1.2
Evaluating about	446	26.1
brand or product	385	22.5
employee or on-off line shopping experience, or service	61	3.6
Giving information	46	2.7
company or store	10	.6
event	16	.9
online or off line shopping	5	.3
product arrival or coming soon	10	.6
raised price	1	.1
sale or promotion	4	.2
Greeting	56	3.3
happy new year	14	.8
introduce myself	6	.4
just say hello	23	1.3
thank you message	3	.2
to be friends	10	.6
Presenting about	84	4.9
brand name or slogan	35	2.0
competition brand	5	.3
needed product	2	.1
plan to buy product	9	.5
purchased product or visited store	33	1.9

<Table 6> Continued

Categories	F	%
Recommending	3	.2
product	3	.2
Suggesting	96	5.6
promotions for other products	1	.1
extend items or lines	8	.5
online website or SNS	3	.2
opening a new store in a specific area	14	.8
replacement for out-of stock or old lines	33	1.9
variety designs, sizes, colors, or fabrics	37	2.2
Others	454	26.6
link websites	94	5.5
link or upload outfit photo or purchased product photo	339	19.8
link or upload photo and video	21	1.2

a new store in a specific area, replacement for out-of stock or old lines, products such as designs, sizes, colors, and fabrics. Consumers linked other websites and uploaded photos (e.g., outfit photos, photos for purchased products) and videos. 30.6% of the messages were involved in the asking category and 26.1% of the messages were regarding evaluations of brands, products, employees, and shopping experiences.

To analyze the relationship between the use of social media and the companies' business performance, the companies were divided into two groups based on median split of the sales amount: high business performance group ($n=8$) and low business performance group ($n=9$). Chi-square analysis was used to analyze significant differences on the categories of messages initiated by companies according to companies' business performance (see Table 7). The five categories (e.g., asking, giving information, greeting, recommending, others) were not significant different between high business performance companies and low business performance companies. Therefore, H3 was not supported.

For eight categories (e.g., asking, evaluating, greeting,

<Table 7> Chi-square analysis results for messages initiated by companies $n=141$

Category	High performance company	Low performance company	Total
Asking	8	12	20
	0.4	0.6	1
Giving information	56	37	93
	0.6	0.4	1
Greeting	4	3	7
	0.61	0.4	1
Recommending	4	8	12
	0.3	0.7	1
Others	3	6	9
	0.3	0.7	1
Total	75	66	141
	0.5	0.5	1

$\chi^2(4)=6.61 \quad p > .05$

giving information, presenting, recommending, suggesting, others) of messages initiated by consumers, chi-square analysis was conducted to find significant differences according to companies' business performance (see Table 8). The results showed strongly significant difference between the two groups, $\chi^2(7)=244.16, p < .001$. Thus, H4 was supported.

t-test was used to know the reaction (threaded comments) for messages according to company business performance (see Table 9). The reaction for the messages posted by companies was not significant differences between high and low business performance groups. H5 was not supported. However, for

<Table 8> Chi-square analysis results for messages initiated by consumers $n=1708$

Category	High performance company	Low performance company	Total
Asking	111	412	523
	.2	.8	1.0
Evaluating	226	220	446
	.5	.5	1.0
Greeting	9	37	46
	.2	.8	1.0
Giving information	42	14	56
	.8	.3	1.0
Presenting	65	19	84
	.8	.2	1.0
Recommending	0	3	3
	.0	1.0	1.0
Suggesting	19	77	96
	.2	.8	1.0
Others	257	197	454
	.6	.4	1.0
Total	729	979	1,708
	.4	.6	1.0

$\chi^2(7)=244.16^{***} \quad p < .001$

the messages initiated by consumers the reaction was significant different between high ($M=.44, S.D=1.42$) and low business performance companies ($M=2.37, S.D=3.57$), $t(1706)=-13.77, p < .001$. H6 was accepted. In addition, low performance companies ($M=.30, S.D=.537$) posted feedback messages more often than high performance companies ($M=.04, S.D=.209$),

<Table 9> *t*-test results of reaction for messages according to company's performance

	Reaction	Performance	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Initiated by company	Reaction	High	43.3	67.7	139	3.735	.055
		Low	64.1	131.1			
Initiated by consumer	Reaction	High	.44	1.424	1,706	- 13.77	.000
		Low	2.37	3.567			
	Company's reaction	High	.04	.209	1,706	- 12.22	.000
		Low	.30	.537			

$t(1706) = -12.22, p < .001$. This finding supported H7.

V. Conclusion

1. Discussion and implications

This study provided an initial exploration of social media used by apparel companies. It was identified how apparel companies utilized social media and what they communicated with consumers on Facebook Wall. This research showed that most apparel companies used social media and preferred Facebook more than other social networking sites. The websites of companies displayed connection icons of social media for easy access. Apparel companies were differently designed on Facebook as using various categories reflecting brands' features. It was impressive that some companies showed various and creative ways on Facebook to communicate with their current and potential consumers. On the other hand, some companies' actions were inactive on Facebook. For example, some companies never responded to consumers' questions or never allowed messages created by consumers.

The messages initiated by both companies and consumers included various content. Companies posted messages to ask customers' opinion, to greet users, and to recommend their products. Over half of the messages were to give useful information related to event, sale, promotion, new services, and recruiting. The messages initiated by consumers included more varied content: consumers asking stores' locations, products' colors, sizes, stocks, and prices before and after buying. On Facebook, consumers evaluated the companies and the purchased products. A few messages were related to shopping experience, and compliments to employees. Consumers also shared information regarding their hands on shopping experiences and useful shopping tips. Interestingly, consumers gave companies new suggestions for color, sizes, and details in specific items, possible locations for opening of new stores, replacement of

products in previous lines or out of stock items, and line extensions. The suggestions would be a basis for building new business strategy of apparel companies.

According to the companies' business performances, the reaction of companies was significantly different. In the messages initiated by the consumers, companies with low business performance responded more progressively and actively than companies with high business performance. In this point, companies with lower business performance realized social media as a more important marketing tool to strengthen a brand loyalty. Companies with higher business performance showed apathetic attitudes for consumers' opinion on Facebook. To seek sustainable growth, however, the companies need to communicate with consumers on social media.

In conclusion, our findings suggest that social media can be a useful channel to make successful brands in a rapidly changing fashion industry. Companies can garner customers' reactions to products and get a variety of opinions in a short time through communicating directly with their customers. Furthermore, customers' useful opinions can be reflected into their new strategy. This research would be a guideline about how apparel companies use and manage social media when apparel companies jump into social media.

2. Limitation and future research

This research had several limitations. The first limitation was the issue about terms. This research used interchangeably social media and social networking sites. Even though each term was defined from the literature reviews, readers might be still confused by the two terms. Therefore, in following research the terms should be redefined by specific standards. Using consistent terms would improve and enlarge the discipline area of social media.

Second, the messages posted during two weeks were collected. The specific period for messages was a standard to compare consistent use of social media

by apparel companies. Due to the standard of limited time, some companies represented no messages on Facebook Wall although the companies actually had the messages posted by companies or consumers beyond the specific period. Therefore, messages posted for longer periods would be required to investigate for future research.

Lastly, this study included 17 U.S apparel companies for the content analysis. In the U.S. there are over 50,000 apparel companies. Therefore, the sample was not enough to represent the use of social media in the U.S. apparel industry. More apparel companies would be included in future research.

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