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WILL I FOLLOW MY IDEAL SELF EVERYWHERE?

Exploring consumer's perceptions towards fast fashion influencers on Instagram

Dr. Yupin discussing the concept of fast fashion. She explained that the fast fashion business model came about due to things like cheaper fabrics, sweatshop labor, rapid manufacturing processes, and bulk clothing producers. Examples of fast fashion include well-known outlets such as Uniqlo, Zara, H&M, Topshop, Gap, Victoria's Secret, and Shein. Next, social media was introduced in relation to marketing. Marketers need to learn how to use new social platforms, such as Instagram. Instagram has been increasingly adopted by active users for fashion consumption, where fashion brands have gained more followers than any other type of brand (Socialbakers, 2016). The image-sharing focus on Instagram content has made Instagram a popular social media platform for the fashion industry, showcasing clothing products to consumers in the most attractive ways.

Instagram appears to be the most used social media platform by influencers (Casaló, Flavián and Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020). Dr. Yupin then looked at top Instagram influencers worldwide and then the most popular 'Net Idols' in Thailand. The target group for these influencers are 20 – 30 years old.

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The reason why this is so important for marketing is that these influencers can shape trends and behaviors. For example, when a celebrity called Yaya started a craze for planting trees, the products used doubled or more in price.

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Dr. Yupin then explained how influencers were making money. This is done in a variety of ways. For example, clothes can be sponsored, or services such as hairstylists or makeup artists can be tagged in photos to publicize goods and companies.

These are essentially fashion markets, and in 2019 their value in the Asia Pacific region alone was over US\$665 billion. Instagram was identified as the most crucial social commerce platform and has become an essential source of information for making purchase decisions among the target market. Instagram fast fashion influencers, including both traditional celebrities and digital celebrities (i.e. ordinary individuals who become famous on social media), have become an essential source of information when it comes to making purchase decisions (Casaló et al., 2020)



Dr. Yupin then noted a research gap in the literature with a lack of studies looking at fashion, consumer engagement, and marketing on Instagram, even though consumers' engagement tends to be higher and tend to purchase more after viewing posts on Instagram (Locowise, 2017; Casaló et al., 2020) Moreover, studies that look into what followers desire to see from social media influencers have not been studied thoroughly in marketing (Ki et al., 2020).

Thus, this research's objective is to explore the consumers' perspectives on fast fashion consumption experience through the influence of Instagram influencers.

Next, a key literature review discussed how low-cost clothing collections are often copies of what is happening on fashion runways. This has led to consumers being encouraged to buy new fast fashion items every few weeks, driving high consumption levels. However, research on consumer aspects of fast fashion is limited (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

The niches in the market and types of influencers were explained in relation to the number of followers. For example, there are micro-influencers, macro-influencers, and celebrities. Each type has its own niches and roles in the marketplace, appealing to different demographics and product advertisers.

Recent studies have shown that social media influencers have increased social media popularity, heightened followers' need for affiliation regarding self-identity, and raised self-perception and purchase intention. Studies regarding marketing influencers on social media are limited (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Some earlier studies relating to self were looked at, with a particular focus on the work of Russel Belk, whose work on the subject began in 1988 and continued into the digital age.

The notion of self-concept or self-perception was then explored. This is the collection of thoughts, values, and attitudes people hold about themselves. Consumers tend to select products that match how they see themselves or want to be presented to others. This can represent their actual or ideal self-concepts.

Dr. Tanyatip then explained the methodology and progress. For Phase 1, they conducted 16 existential-phenomenological interviews with fast fashion consumers aged 20-45 about their shopping habits, and the effect influencers had on their purchase decisions. Purposive sampling was employed, and the criteria for choosing the participants were that they had followed at least one Instagram fast fashion influencer, in the previous 12 months. The influencers can be either traditional celebrities or micro-celebrities (i.e., ordinary individuals who become famous through the stories or photos they have posted on social media) (Casaló, Flavián and Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020). The interview transcripts were coded and contextualized using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

The findings resulted in three emergent themes. The first, fast fashion leadership and trends, looked at how consumers follow influencers to learn about the latest fashions and styles. Thai consumers follow social media influencers to update themselves on fast fashion trends. They look up to them as experts in fast fashion. They would typically buy what they had seen influencers wear on Instagram. The second, self-concept and fit, is related to how consumers follow influencers they feel match their personality or lifestyle. Consumers would choose to follow the influencers' path in fashion only if they perceived that the influencers matched their own ideal personality or lifestyle. Finally, the sponsorship effect is the idea that even though consumers are aware fast fashion brands sponsor the products, they don't care. The consumers would opt for the items regardless of the awareness of the sponsorship.



Dr. Yupin then talked briefly about what will be involved in Phase 2 of the research. The research will focus on factors affecting consumers purchase intention from the social media influencers using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The study's contributions were discussed, which is the greater understanding of the influence of fast fashion Instagram influencers from consumers' perspectives.

The findings of the Phase 1 study as been presented and disseminated to American Collegiate Retailing Association (ACRA) 2021 Conference; the research seminar on Fashion Marketing in Emerging Economies (Fashion Business Research Centre) at the London College of Fashion; and the accepted peer-review book chapter on Social Media Influencers for Fast Fashion – Thailand Study in Fashion Marketing in Emerging Economies (Palgrave Studies of Marketing in Emerging Economies) by Palgrave Macmillan.