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Fashion Corporate Social Responsibility on Instagram

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Abstract

As defined by researcher and author Kate Fletcher, slow fashion is "where pleasure and fashion are linked with awareness and responsibility" in which a company emphasizes the quality of its products, working conditions, environmental impact, and societal impact (Fletcher, 2010). With the rise of slow fashion companies, this research seeks to determine the role of social media engagement, specifically on Instagram, with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) messaging. Over 120 million U.S. users are on Instagram, and companies can use these platforms to directly communicate with consumers no matter their stage in the Consumer Decision Journey of product purchasing. This paper analyzes the content of Instagram posts to determine how slow fashion companies utilize CSR messaging and practices to encourage ethical consumer behavior. To answer this question, six brands were analyzed for Instagram post content and engagement rate. The results determined that the relationship between CSR content and engagement is fairly dependent on individual brand characteristics. However, the research provides insights in regard to the fashion industry and consumer engagement on social media.

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Fashion Corporate Social Responsibility on Instagram

At the start of the decade, consumers sought out shopping malls and retail outlets for the latest fashion trends and deals. Now, ecommerce has taken over as a modern avenue for digital shoppers—people spending over $601 billion in 2019 alone (Young). The fashion ecommerce business accounted for $103.1 billion and it is expected to grow to almost $200 billion in 2024 (Duncan). Despite the increase in ecommerce business, consumer shifts in behaviors and attitudes have fashion brands scrambling to stay afloat.

Global fashion industry leaders predict rapid changes in the world of leather shoes and cotton tops in 2020. From luxury brands, like Louis Vuitton, to value markets, like Old Navy, over half of all fashion executives expect an economic slowdown in the industry. Only 12 percent of luxury leaders anticipate the fashion economy to improve—a decrease in optimism from prior years (McKinsey & Company, 12). This economic downfall prediction is due to a change in consumer behavior and attitudes. Forty-four percent of executives claim "getting woke" on sustainability issues as one of the top three themes impacting their business behind the themes of "digital landgrab" [digital landscape transition] and "caution ahead" [economic downfall] (McKinsey & Company, 13).

Sustainability is now the largest opportunity and challenge for fashion companies. According to McKinsey & Company's, *The State of Fashion 2020,* "fashion hasn't yet taken its environmental responsibilities seriously enough" (McKinsey & Company, 16). In response to the brand dismissal of the topic, consumers find it difficult to define sustainability in its most general sense in relation to brands. Per the McKinsey Apparel CPO Survey in 2019, young consumers do not understand sustainability or how to compare brands based on their sustainable aspects (*Fashion's new must-have: sustainable sourcing at scale,* 12). In order to increase understanding

of sustainable topics, fashion brands are focusing on resource efficiency, sustainable materials, transparency, and social responsibility among 18 other topics when creating content and developing initiatives (*Fashion's new must-have: sustainable sourcing at scale,* 14).

Sustainability is a vital environmental aspect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In order to generate brand loyalty and transparency, fashion brands use social media to communicate their CSR messages and stories (Adi, 166). Fashion brands are swapping traditional models of engagement, like magazine and newspaper readership, for social media likes and comments. This enthusiasm over social media has led to an overabundance of content and demand for companies to find alternative avenues to engage with consumers.

From the founding of Facebook in 2004, social media platforms have emerged as powerful sources of information about consumer behavior and attitudes. Over 2.5 billion active users log on to Facebook daily. Instagram, Facebook's photo-sharing platform, has over 1 billion users (McKinsey & Company, 33). As the platforms develop, companies must work against constantly-changing algorithms to engage with their consumers. The future of digital fashion requires brands to innovate with technology, display their CSR commitments, and uniquely engage with consumers on digital platforms—seeking new opportunities to connect and make an impression in a crowded landscape.

The content analysis determines how fashion companies utilize CSR messaging and practices on Instagram to encourage ethical consumer behavior. The analysis answers the research question, *Does the presence of CSR content in slow fashion brand Instagram posts result in higher post engagement?* The analysis provides insight into successful social media strategies utilized by fashion companies to express messages, values, and products. Success is

defined by the quantity and quality of post interaction which includes likes, comments, hashtags, and visual content.

In order to effectively evaluate slow fashion companies, the research uses The Good Trade's ranking of the top slow-fashion companies in the article, "35 Fair Trade & Ethical Clothing Brands Betting Against Fast Fashion." The Good Trade is a digital media brand that covers sustainable lifestyle. The brand's top three companies—Pact, Reformation, and Everlane—were evaluated in this research. Based on brand messaging and websites, Pact, Reformation, and Everlane appeal to middle-age audiences who are willing to spend money on modern sustainable fashion.

In order to effectively evaluate the use of CSR in slow-fashion brands, the research compared these companies to McKinsey & Company's top three "Super Winners" of fashion based on economic profit in 2019 (McKinsey, 2020). The top three companies include Nike, Inditex (Zara), and LVMH (Louis Vuitton). These three companies were praised for their "flexible business models," reinventive fashion, and product innovation (McKinsey, 2020).

In order to effectively evaluate the brands' CSR activities, a theoretical framework was used to explain the consumer decision process. The research is supported by the Consumer Decision Journey communication theory which includes five main steps: Initial Consideration Set, Active Evaluation, Moment of Purchase, Post-Purchase Experience, and Loyalty Loop (McKinsey, 2009). The Consumer Decision Journey is a modern version of the traditional funnel model that included five steps: Awareness, Familiarity, Consideration, Purchase, and Loyalty. The consumer would follow directly through the funnel to an ending purchase. The Consumer Decision Journey assumes consumers consider numerous brands during the process, make

empowering decisions, and form loyalty (McKinsey, 2009). This continuous process is pictured as a circular loop rather than a funnel.

The Initial Consideration Set is the first grouping of brands a consumer considers when purchasing or searching for a product in the Consumer Decision Journey. This is based off brand perceptions and exposure to branding at various points in a consumer's life. This research relies on the step, Active Evaluation, which is when consumers eliminate or add brands while determining what product or service to choose. This also includes "information gathering" and "shopping" (McKinsey, 2009). Moment of Purchase is when the consumer officially completes a transaction which is followed by their thoughts and opinions in the Post-Purchase Experience. This is when consumers may look to social media or rating websites to leave reviews on the purchase. Finally, the consumer decides their loyalty to a brand—whether to repurchase or consider it again in the future.

The Consumer Decision Journey is similar to the cognitive decision-making process but best aligns with fashion's inherent affective consumer response. The cognitive decision-making process assumes consumers are rational, deliberate, and sequential when solving a problem or satisfying a need (Solomon, 2015). Cognitive decision-making involves recognizing a problem, searching for information, evaluating alternatives, and choosing a product. Although this reflects the basics of the Consumer Decision Journey, the cognitive decision-making process views consumers as unemotional, rational beings. According to the American Psychological Association, fashion and the clothes people wear are often representations of emotions, self-esteem, and self-image (Mair). The Consumer Decision Journey incorporates the empowered consumer in the process, and the emotions and reactions accompanied with making a decision. This theory laid a foundation for brand and consumer research in the slow fashion industry.

Literature Review

Slow fashion is defined by Kate Fletcher, researcher and author, as "where pleasure and fashion are linked with awareness and responsibility" in which a company emphasizes the quality of its products, working conditions, environmental impact, and societal impact (Fletcher, 2010, 262). "Slow fashion" originated from the concept of "fast fashion" in which profit-driven companies focus on mass-producing and selling consumer goods for a cheaper price (Fletcher, 2010). Traditionally associated with consumer goods, the term "fast" connotates a large-scale, economically driven and standardized business model (Fletcher, 2010). Fletcher also notes in her book, *Fashion & Sustainability: Design for Change,* that companies must break from these revenue and growth-based business practices to effectively function as "slow" (Fletcher, 2012).

Based on previous literature, slow fashion is a recent concept that flourished with Fletcher's initial research into sustainable fashion practices in the textile industry. Despite slow fashion's recent introduction, the term relates to similar Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) concepts. CSR is the process of making a positive impact on various stakeholders, including the environment and consumers (Solomon, 2015). CSR, or "corporate responsibility," is a heavily debated term with various meanings—often to the discretion of each company. According to *Corporate Social Responsibility: A research handbook*, CSR is related to numerous topics, like sustainability, human rights, environmental management, animal rights, and more (Haynes, 2012, 21). There are three main dimensions of CSR—environmental, social, and economic (Dahlsrud, 2008, 6). CSR also implies a company's "license to operate" under an ethical lens with the expectation of engaging in "discretionary and philanthropic activities" relating to these three forms (Bartlett, 2011, 7).

CSR Integration and Approaches

Two common approaches to CSR are inward-looking and outward-looking. Inward-looking CSR focuses on aligning philanthropic causes with a company's core values, while outward-looking CSR concentrates on identifying consumer needs and interests—focusing primarily on stakeholders ("Shareholder value or social responsibility?", 2007). In order for a business to be successful, it must look to outward and inward influences while specifically strategizing CSR efforts from the c-suite, decision-making level.

When considering how to communicate CSR efforts, corporations already utilize marketing efforts, like social media campaigns and influencer partnerships, to form relationships with consumers. One of the key aspects of marketing is branding—the company's "product attributes, benefits or attitudes, people and relationships, credibility, and values and programs" (Bartlett, 2011). By utilizing CSR-related content and messaging, companies can share their values and attitudes with consumers. This will form a relationship between the brand, CSR, and consumers' impressions of the company.

In order to integrate CSR into companies, brands can look to three approaches to integrating CSR with marketing and branding. An integrated approach relies on an alignment with the brand and CSR, like when a brand can tell a single story across all functions of its business. The selective approach is when a company does not align its entire brand with CSR but will selectively choose specific partnerships or sub-brands to emphasize its position (Blomqvist and Posner, 2004, 35). This can also lead to brand differentiation in a crowded market. Lastly, the invisible approach allows brands to remain silent on CSR communications despite displaying CSR through its behaviors and processes. This would be used to garner trust and transparency with its stakeholders without explicitly stating its methods (Blomqvist and Posner, 2004, 36).

Slow fashion companies, like Everlane, Pact, and Reformation, utilize an integrated approach because CSR is prominent in the company's brand identity. Other companies, like Nike, use an invisible approach by not explicitly portraying CSR in its communications. Louis Vuitton and Zara use a selective approach to CSR by choosing specific partnerships to highlight its CSR commitment. When considering the various types of CSR and integration approaches, slow fashion brands choose a strongly integrated approach using inward and outward-looking processes.

Some critics argue that CSR is an "attempt to put a human face on capitalism in order to carry on with harmful practices" or that CSR is not truly effective due to a company's interest in gaining profit (Bartlett, 2011). Companies utilize various communication methods to combat this criticism, but some critics view CSR as self-serving behavior or an avenue to increase consumer skepticism (Bartlett, 2011). Other of Bartlett's criticism related CSR to greenwashing. "Greenwashing" is a term used to describe companies that spread information about being "green" but do not practice environmentally conscious behavior.

CSR and Social Media

Despite CSR criticism, corporations with a higher CSR rating for environmental, social, and economic commitments are more likely to respond to social media messages and achieve their own social media presence sooner (Bernacchi, Kesavan, and Mascarenhas, 2013). Whether the company utilizes an integrated or invisible approach to CSR, its branding forms a relationship and loyalty with the consumer. By connecting with consumers online, these corporations experienced proactive stakeholder participation following the publishing of media messages (Bernacchi et al., 2013). Participation, or engagement, on digital platforms often determines the interest in particular content or a brand. Engagement rate is an industry-wide

standard used to determine social media engagement success with consumers. According to

Rival IQ, a social media marketing analytics database, the fashion industry saw the highest

engagement rates across all industry sectors in 2019. The average engagement rate on Instagram

is .94 percent.

Even though the engagement rate is highest among industries, it is vital to notice the

overall low engagement rate present on social media. People seldom engage with content, so the

type of content and strategy supporting each brand is very influential. Engagement online can

also be described as a form of two-way communication, or the interaction between a brand and

its consumers. Two-way communication is a growing want of digital natives and Generation Z

who grew up with technology and social media (Moore, 2019). The younger generation is

expecting brands to communicate with them, form relationships, and listen to their concerns as

consumers.

With this in mind, the communication must be engaging and interactive. Currently, most

CSR-related posts are informative rather than interactive which defeats the two-way

communication purpose of a socialized media form (Cho, Furey, and Mohr, 2017). Additionally,

this develops a negative consumer perception of corporate social media marketing. Consumers

avoid the CSR messaging rather than read to become informed on the topic (Cho, Furey, and

Mohr, 2017). Brands using an integrated approach to CSR must recognize the importance of

engaging content to cater to new and old generation consumers.

Companies utilize social media as a platform for marketing while incorporating

interactivity into their posts through hashtags, videos, photos, and commenting. Instagram is a

one of many growing social media platforms in the United States. As of January 2020, over 120

million U.S. users are on the platform. This is followed by 80 million users from India and 77

million users from Brazil (Statista, 2020). Due to its fast growth since its founding in 2010, Instagram established itself as a primary platform for digital visual engagement (Wikipedia, 2020).

According to research conducted on Instagram visual content, images with faces encourage consumer purchase behavior (Valenti, 2018). Images with indirect gazes, or people not looking directly into the camera, result in greater visual digital engagement especially with a product in the foreground (Valenti, 2018). Overall, Instagram serves as a prominent social platform for visual stimulation and digital interaction to message CSR.

Current research details the types of CSR, its functions in business, and its relationship to branding and marketing. Research on CSR and its relationship with social media is slowly emerging as a popular topic in modern studies. Fletcher introduced the concept of "slow fashion" which spurred additional research on sustainable and environmental brands in one of the largest industries. Yet, little research has been completed on the interaction of CSR, social media, and slow fashion. This research serves to evaluate these concepts in relationship to one another and in the perspective of the Consumer Decision Journey.

Method

The content analysis reviewed six brands' Instagram posts during June and July of 2019 to answer the research question, *"Does the presence of CSR content in slow fashion brand Instagram posts result in higher post engagement?"* Content analysis was chosen as the method because of social media's emphasis on content, including written and visual. Other methods, such as experimental, would not align with the communication-based theory used in this research or resources available. The time frame was chosen based on the overall limitations of the research. The researcher selected two months, June and July, due to time and resource availability. Other factors were not in consideration when choosing June and July over other months in 2019.

When determining the social media platform, Instagram was chosen based on its purpose to share content, like photos, with relatively short captions. Fashion is a visual medium which aligns with a visual sharing platform, like Instagram. Instagram also has clear engagement factors, such as likes and comments, which made it efficient to analyze and create a coding scheme. The six brands analyzed in this research included Pact, Reformation, Everlane, Nike, Inditex (Zara), and LVMH (Louis Vuitton). For the purpose of this study, the brands can be separated into two groups—ethical leaders and financial leaders. The ethical leaders include the three brands from The Good Trade's list of slow fashion companies. The financial leaders include the three brands from McKinsey and Company's top fashion brands based on economic profit—these brands are also referenced as the control group.

Ethical Leaders

The three brands include Pact, Reformation, and Everlane. In addition to being recognized as the top three slow fashion companies by The Good Trade, these three brands

emphasize environmental, social, and economic aspects of CSR. The brands also have large

Instagram followings, prominent revenue streams, and expansive product bases. The brands are

committed to CSR values while building loyal consumers on social media.

Pact is a fashion brand based out of Colorado, United States, that emphasizes its use of

fair-trade, non-GMO content for its athletic and basics fashion lines. The brand sells clothing for

women, men, children, and babies. Pact also has a bed and bath line for home essentials, like

sheets. In 2016, Pact made $15 to $20 million in revenue and was anticipated to exceed $30

million in the following years (Speer). As of March 2020, Pact had 88.5 thousand followers on

Instagram with 2,146 posts.

Reformation is a fashion brand based out of California, United States, that ensures a

living wage for its employees and sells eco-friendly women's apparel. The brand sells women's

clothing specializing in denim and bridal wear. Reformation had an estimated revenue of over

$100 million in 2017 with over 80 percent of sales coming from its website (Fernandez). The

average product ranges between $30 and $300. As of March 2020, Reformation had 1.6 million

followers on Instagram with 5,079 posts.

Everlane is another fashion brand from California with a unique selling model. The

company uses a transparency model to sell its ethically sourced products. In one of its

collections, Everlane allows consumers to "Choose What You Pay" ("Choose What You Pay,"

2019). Each price includes a description of how the company stretches every dollar that goes into

the production cycle. The brand sells clothing for women and men specializing in denim and

shoes. Everlane had an estimated revenue of $100 million in 2016 (Segran). The average product

price ranges between $50 and $100. As of March 2020, Everlane had 950 thousand followers on

Instagram with 2,480 posts.

Financial Leaders

The three brands include Nike, Zara, and Louis Vuitton. In addition to being recognized as the top three brands based on economic revenue, these three brands exemplify brand loyalty and popularity in the modern world. The brands also have large Instagram followings, prominent revenue streams, and expansive product bases. Unlike the other brands, Nike, Zara, and Louis Vuitton are known to not engage in outward-facing CSR activities or openly-publicize CSR behavior on digital platforms.

Nike is a prominent sports fashion brand that produces athletic clothing, shoes, and more. The brand is known for its symbolic swoosh logo and partnership with athletes, sports teams, and celebrities. Nike has a revenue of 10.1 billion dollars with a stock value of over $85. As of March 2020, Nike had 102 million followers on Instagram with 767 posts.

Inditex is a large fashion retailer that includes eight brands with "Zara" as the most recognizable and described with the core value of sustainability (Inditex, 2020). The brand sells clothing for women, men, and children. The average product price ranges between $30 and $300. Inditex had a revenue of $28 billion in 2018 with a stock price of $12 (Inditex, 2020). As of March 2020, Zara had 38.4 million followers on Instagram with 2,901 posts.

LVMH is another fashion retailer with over 75 brands with "Louis Vuitton" as a leader in classic fashion (LVMH, 2020). Louis Vuitton sells clothing for women and men specializing in luxury pursues. The average product price ranges between $1,000 and $5,000. Louis Vuitton had a record revenue year in 2019 with over $58 billion and a stock price of $75 (LVMH, 2020). As of March 2020, Louis Vuitton had 37.4 million followers on Instagram with 4,150 posts.

Evaluative Criteria

           Each brand's Instagram posts were evaluated based on these criteria: account followers, account posts, post date, post caption content, post likes, engagement rate, hashtag use, hashtag content, product presence in the image, presence of video, and use of CSR messaging. Additionally, averages for number of post likes, post comments, and post engagement rate were determined. Appendix 1 depicts the number of followers, posts, and account handles for each brand (Appendix 1). Based on followers, the slow fashion brands had significantly less followers than Nike, Zara, and Louis Vuitton. Nike was the only brand to have less than 2,000 posts on Instagram. The slow fashion brands had anywhere from 2,000-5,000 posts which aligned with the number of posts by Zara and Louis Vuitton.

           The presence of CSR content was determined by the caption content and image content. The three forms of CSR—environmental, social, and economic—were considered when evaluating for the presence of CSR (Dahlsrud, 2008, 6). Mention of product materials, sustainability, environmental concepts, workplace conditions, social justice organizations, and socio-economic concepts among other themes were determined as containing CSR content.

Product Presence

           The presence of products in the images were evaluated to determine if there was a correlation between the presence of product and post engagement (likes or comments). The brand's hashtag use was considered as another form of engagement, and the hashtag content was evaluated for CSR-related concepts and reoccurring themes. Overall, each post from June 1, 2019 to July 31, 2019 was evaluated based on each criterion for CSR content.

Engagement Rate

Engagement rate is an industry-wide standard used to determine social media engagement success with consumers. According to Rival IQ, a social media marketing analytics database, the fashion industry saw the highest engagement rates across all industry sectors in 2019. The average engagement rate on Instagram is .94 percent. In perspective, the average engagement rate on Facebook is .04 percent, and the average engagement rate on Twitter is .03 percent (Rival IQ, 2020). This formula was also used due to the vast difference in account followers. For example, Nike had 102 million followers while Pact had 88.5 thousand followers. In order to evaluate the engagement rate of Instagram posts, the following formula was used for each post and brand:

Total Engagements Per Post (likes and comments) / Total Followers X 100

*= **Engagement Rate (%)***

The engagement rate formula was used to determine if CSR-related content correlated with greater engagement than a brand's CSR-absent content. The following comparisons were completed: individual brand between months, brands between other brands of same group, and slow fashion group brands between control group brands. After the engagement rate was determined for each post and brand, key insights were gathered regarding the highest and lowest engagement rates across brands. Then posts with high and low engagement rates were evaluated for the presence of hashtags, products in the image, and CSR content. Average engagement rates were calculated for all brands to determine if they met the industry standard of .94 percent. A coding scheme was developed to analyze the data efficiently (Appendix IV).

The sample included six brands—three slow fashion brands and three control group brands. In total, there were 418 posts, 68,641,717 likes, and 155,187 comments during the sample period. The control group brands represented 58.4 percent of the number of posts, and the slow fashion brand represented 41.6 percent of posts. The brands represented these percentages for number of posts: Pact (8.6 percent), Reformation (19.9 percent), Everlane (13.2 percent), Nike (3.8 percent), Zara (18.9 percent), and Louis Vuitton (35.6 percent). Louis Vuitton represented the percentage of most posts while Nike represented the least.

The slow fashion brands represented 2.8 percent of post likes. The control group brands represented 97.2 percent of post likes. The brands represented these percentages for number of likes: Pact (.02 percent), Reformation (2.3 percent), Everlane (.5 percent), Nike (25.7 percent), Zara (12.9 percent), and Louis Vuitton (58.6 percent). Louis Vuitton also represented the percentage of most posts while Pact represented the least.

The slow fashion brands represented 7.1 percent of post comments. The control group brands represented 92.9 percent of post comments. The brands represented these percentages for number of comments: Pact (1 percent), Reformation (4.1 percent), Everlane (1.9 percent), Nike (20.8 percent), Zara (11.8 percent), and Louis Vuitton (60.3 percent). Louis Vuitton also represented the percentage of most posts while Pact represented the last.

Overall, it is important to note the vast difference in follower size for each brand and group (Appendix I). Averages and engagement rates were used for additional analysis. Engagement rates allowed for brands to be compared regardless of follower amount. The findings outline the presence of CSR content and brand engagement while considering additional factors, like multimedia elements.

Findings

The findings of this study revealed the overall presence of CSR content in slow fashion

brand Instagram posts and the comparison with a higher post engagement is inconclusive. The

following analysis considers brands as groups, independent brands, comparison of brands, and

the relationship with multimedia elements.

Ethical Leaders

Pact, Reformation, and Everlane had a total average engagement rate of .78 percent—

Pact (.51 percent), Reformation (1.19 percent), and Everlane (.64 percent). As a group, the

brands do not meet the industry Instagram engagement rate average of .94 percent.

Independently, Reformation had the highest engagement rate of 1.19 percent that exceeded

industry standard. With CSR-specific posts, the group had an average engagement rate of .83

percent compared to posts without CSR content (.68 percent). Reformation had the highest

engagement on CSR posts while Everlane had the lowest engagement. Overall, posts with CSR

had better engagement than posts without CSR content when considering the three brands as a

group. The CSR forms used in the posts included environmental and economic—the brands did

not post content regarding social CSR.

Pact—Over 91 percent of Pact's posts included CSR content. The content specifically

pertained to the environmental form of CSR. Some of the content included discussion

surrounding the types of materials used and the company's carbon footprint. Only two of Pact's

posts exceeded the industry standard engagement rate of .94.

Reformation—Only 27.7 percent of Reformation's posts included CSR content. The

content specifically pertained to the environmental and economic forms of CSR. The content

included information about water usage, company accountability, and profits. Over 21 percent of

Reformation's posts had an above-average engagement rate.

Everlane— Only 12.7 percent of Everlane's posts included CSR content. The content

included environmental and economic forms of CSR. Some of the topics discussed included

Everlane's "Choose What You Pay" model, recycling, and plastic usage. It was the only brand to

use influencers to express CSR content. Three of Everlane's posts exceeded the industry

engagement average.

Financial Leaders

Nike, Inditex (Zara), and LVMH (Louis Vuitton) were the top three brands chosen from

McKinsey & Company and B&F's "State of Fashion 2020" based on profit. These brands served

as the control group. The brands had a total average engagement rate of .71 percent.

Independently, Nike had the highest engagement rate of 1.08 percent while Zara had the lowest

engagement rate (.29 percent). With CSR-specific posts, the group had an average engagement

of .52 percent (Note—Nike did not have any posts with CSR content, so it was not included in

the average for posts with CSR). Posts without CSR content had an average engagement rate of

.71 percent. Overall, posts without CSR content had a higher engagement rate than posts with

CSR content. These brands used environmental and social forms of CSR—no posts included

content about economic forms of CSR despite these being the financial leaders of the industry.

Nike—Nike did not have any posts with CSR content—the brand only posted 16 times

during the sample timeframe.

Zara—Only 2.5 percent of Zara's post included CSR content. The two posts mentioned

upcycling materials and recovering textile waste. These were coded as environmental forms of

CSR. Only four posts independently exceed the industry standard engagement rate—none were

CSR posts.

       Louis Vuitton—Similar to Zara, only 2 percent of posts included CSR content. The three

posts discussed social CSR issues and included a partnership with UNICEF, a large humanitarian

organization. Seven of the brands posts independently exceeded the industry standard

engagement rate—none were CSR posts.

Ethical Leaders versus Financial Leaders

       Overall, slow fashion brands experienced a higher engagement rate (.78 percent) on all

posts than the control group (.71 percent). Additionally, the slow fashion brands had a higher

engagement rate on CSR-related posts (.83 percent versus .52 percent). Reformation, within the

slow fashion group, had the highest brand engagement rate overall at 1.19 percent. The lowest

brand engagement rate was Zara, within the control group, at .29 percent. Reformation had 1.6

million followers while Zara had 38.4 million followers. The slow fashion group posted less than

the control group (174 versus 244) but included more CSR-related posts (63 versus 5).

       The slow fashion group experienced higher engagement rates on CSR-related posts while

the control group experienced higher engagement rates on non-CSR posts. The presence of CSR

content did not cause a higher engagement rate for the control group. The slow fashion group

utilized an integrated approach to CSR—developing the brand with CSR concepts. Overall, the

slow fashion brand audiences may have resonated stronger with CSR content which may assume

the higher engagement rates. The control group audience utilized an invisible or selective

approach to CSR—not directly communicating about CSR or choosing selective methods to do

so. The audiences may not associate the brand with CSR whether the brand proactively includes

CSR in its values or not. This may have resulted in an absence of increased engagement with CSR posts.

Product Presence and Engagement

All brands utilized the presence of product in the majority of Instagram posts. In two instances, Reformation did not show a product in a post. Both posts included CSR content about social and environmental concerns. Despite the inclusion of CSR content, these posts had a lower engagement rate. Ten of Everlane's posts did not include a product, and only 20 percent of the posts discussed CSR, specifically pertaining to the environment. Product presence was not significant in the analysis, and engagement rate did not increase with the absence of a product.

Video Presence and Engagement

Overall, the control group used more videos in its Instagram posts than the slow fashion brands. Thirty-three percent of the control group's posts included video while only 2.9 percent of the slow fashion brand posts included video. Reformation was the only brand from the slow fashion group to utilize video. All five posts with video had an above average engagement rate of approximately 3-4 percent per post. This surpassed the engagement rate of all other photo-only posts. The control group brands, Nike, Zara, and Louis Vuitton, utilized video the most. For example, Louis Vuitton's video posts had an average engagement rate of 1.29 percent while the posts with photos had a rate of .41 percent. Three of Louis Vuitton's video posts discussed CSR content—one of the posts had an above-average rate of 2 percent while the other videos of seemingly identical content had a rate of less than .5 percent. Video was more effective, in relation to engagement rate, for the control group brands rather than slow fashion brands.

Hashtag Use and Engagement

Hashtag use and engagement rate differed between the slow fashion group and control group. Slow fashion brands had an average post engagement rate of .46 percent with hashtags and .73 percent without hashtags. The opposite occurred for the control group—an average post engagement of 1.17 percent with hashtags and .18 percent without. The use of hashtags did not improve engagement for slow fashion brands while hashtags improved engagement for the control group. Hashtags are another form of engagement on Instagram that ties together similar topics under similar term using the "#." The control group brands used their brand name along with one or more other hashtags in each post. The slow fashion brands used one hashtag at most without tagging its individual brand name. For example, Nike used its recognizable slogan, "Just Do It" in every post while Louis Vuitton simply used its brand name. Future research is needed to determine if hashtag use relates to brand loyalty and popularity in an industry or specific hashtag content.

Industry Engagement Rate Comparison

Neither group—slow fashion or control—met or exceeded the Instagram engagement rate average of .94 percent. Despite this, individual brands, like Reformation (1.19 percent) and Nike (1.08 percent), exceeded the engagement rate. Although other brands did not meet the average, some individual brand posts exceeded the engagement rate.

Overall, the research findings provided interesting details about CSR, social media, and brand engagement. Certain factors, like the presence of products in posts, did not impact engagement while other factors, like video and hashtags, greatly impacted audience engagement. Individual brands outperformed other brands in each category. These brands can serve as strong examples of utilizing multimedia content to improve engagement. Additionally, brands tended to

include environmental CSR concepts rather than social or economic. Specifically, the slow

fashion brands utilized environmental CSR the most while the control group utilized social CSR.

Conclusion

The overall analysis of CSR content and engagement rate in slow fashion brand Instagram posts is fairly conclusive. Overall, slow fashion brands experienced a higher engagement rate (.78 percent) on all posts than the control group (.71 percent). Additionally, the slow fashion brands had a higher engagement rate on CSR-related posts (.83 percent versus .52 percent). For some brands, like Pact and Reformation, posts with CSR content had an overall higher engagement rate than non-CSR posts (Appendix II). Yet, these brands have a central focus in CSR with detailed descriptions on their websites regarding the production and sourcing of its materials. Brands without a central CSR focus, like the control group, do not experience a significant engagement rate increase when they do include CSR content—social, environmental, or economic. Despite the inconclusive correlation, there are other valuable findings from the research.

In previous research, corporations experienced proactive stakeholder participation following the publishing of informational CSR media messages (Bernacchi et al., 2013). Despite this research and the prominent engagement rate of publics in the fashion industry, consumers did not significantly engage with these messages on a modern platform. The CSR content prominent in the slow fashion brand group was primarily informational. According to a study on consumer behavior, most CSR-related posts are informative rather than interactive, which defeats the two-way communication purpose of social media (Cho, Furey, and Mohr, 2017).

Brands must find other ways to communicate CSR messaging with consumers that directs two-way communication and interaction. With more interactive content, like video, brands can increase engagement with audiences and form greater relationships with consumers. As identified in the research, brands that used video had a significantly higher engagement rate. In

order to generate brand loyalty and transparency, fashion brands must use social media to communicate their CSR messages and stories—forming trust and maintaining transparency of corporate values (Adi, 166). Further research on modern social media platforms, like Instagram, are needed to determine the impact of different multimedia elements, like video, on engagement.

The Consumer Decision Journey

In consideration of the Consumer Decision Journey, brands must create social media posts that integrate multimedia elements to improve engagement during the vital stages of the Initial Consideration Set and Active Evaluation. Unlike the cognitive decision-making model, consumers are emotional buyers with an interest in the brand's values and relationships in the industry. Using CSR content works best for brands already integrating environmental, social, and economic focuses into their communications, like Pact, Reformation, and Everlane. For larger brands using an invisible or selective approach to CSR, CSR content may not improve engagement. Overall, the consideration of the consumer decision process is vital in engaging with audiences on a modern digital platform.

Research Limitations

The research was limited due to the method and scope. Future research should include a longer timeline for data collection—specifically over an entire year or during a specific season. For example, evaluating high-end fashion brands during a fashion show may change engagement rates. The research could also focus in on a specific brand over a range over years to analyze the evolution of brands and use of various social media engagement methods.

An analysis of more brands in the fashion industry would also lead to stronger results. Due to the vast amount of fashion brands in the "green" space, the research findings were limited to the specific top three brands from two outside source lists, The Good Trade and McKinsey

and Company. The Good Trade list included more brands that could be evaluated based on CSR

and social media engagement. McKinsey's list of top financial leaders expanded beyond three,

and the additional brands would include more insight into CSR usage and multimedia

engagement. An industry-wide study may be beneficial to learning the types of fashion brands

and range of slow fashion adopters.

Additionally, the research would have benefitted from statistical analysis using data

programs. Due to time and resource restrictions, these statistical analyses tests were unable to be

completed. The analysis would provide direct correlations between specific factors and

engagement rates. With additional resources and time, the research could be expanded to include

more conclusive results.

Appendix

Appendix I: Brand Basic Instagram Statistics

Brand	Instagram Handle	# of Followers	# of Total Posts (as of March 1, 2020)
Pact	wearpact	88.5K	2,146
Reformation	reformation	1.6M	5,079
Everlane	everlane	950K	2,480
Nike	nike	102M	767
Zara	zara	38.4M	2,901
Louis Vuitton	louisvuitton	37.4M	4,150

Appendix II: Brand Average Engagement Rates (ER)

Brand	Overall (ER %)	CSR? Yes (ER %)	CSR? No (ER %)
Pact	.51	.53	.31
Reformation	1.19	1.49	1.08
Everlane	.64	.47	.67
Nike	1.08	N/A	1.08
Zara	.29	.14	.30
Louis Vuitton	.77	.89	.76

Appendix III: Brand Posts, Likes, And Comments

BRAND	# OF POSTS	# OF LIKES	# OF LIKES AVERAGE/POST	# OF COMMENTS	# OF COMMENTS AVERAGE/POST
Pact	36	14610	405.83	1609	44.69
Reformation	83	1572783	18949	6429	77.46
Everlane	55	322060	5856	3024	54.98
Nike	16	17654632	1103415	32213	2013
Zara	79	8843591	221090	18305	457625
Louis Vuitton	149	40234041	552000	93607	1248.09

Appendix IV: Coding Scheme

Variable #	Variable Title	Variable Description
1	Account Handle	This value is the label used to determine the account handle for each company on Instagram using the @ determinant
2	Account # of Followers	This value is the label used for number of followers for each company on Instagram
3	Account # of Posts	This value is the lable used for number of posts posted by each company on Instagram
4	Post Date	This value is the label used for the date in which the post was uploaded to Instagram
5	Post Caption	This value is the label used for the caption content present per post in each post on Instagram
6	Post # of Likes	This value is the label used for the number of likes or "hearts" per Instagram post
7	Post # of Comments	This value is the label used for the number of comments per Instagram post
8	Engagement Rate	This value is the label used for the engagement rate for each post using the following formula: *Total Engagements Per Post (likes and comments) / Total Followers X 100 = Engagement Rate (%)*
9	Hashtag Use	This value is the label used for the presence of a hashtag in a post. [1-YES 2-NO]
10	Hashtag Content	This value is the label used for the hashtag content present in the hashtag(s)
11	Product in Photo	This value is the label used for the presence of a product in the photo. This included any type of product sold by the company.
12	Overall use of CSR	This value is the label used for the overall use of CSR—was there CSR messaging present in the post? If yes, the various determinants labeled it by its presence in the hashtag, comment, photo, or a combination. [0-NONE 1-HASHTAG 2-CAPTION 3-PHOTO 4-HASHTAG+CAPTION 5-HASHTAG+PHOTO 6-CAPTION+PHOTO 7-CAPTION+VIDEO]
13	CSR Form	This value is the label used for the form of CSR used in the post. The three forms include Environmental, Social, and Economic. A 0 indicated no presence of CSR. [0-NONE 1-ENVIRONMENTAL 2-SOCIAL 3-ECONOMIC]
14	Presence of Video	This value is the label used for the presence of a video used in the post. The video took the place of the photo in the post. [1-YES 2-NO]
15	CSR Description	This value is the label used for the overall description of the CSR used in plain language.

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