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Analysis of fashion consumers’ motives to engage in electronic word-of-mouth communication through social media platforms

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Claudia Mueller, University of the Arts London, UK

Abstract The purpose of this paper is to analyse consumers’ interactions with fashion brands on social networking sites, focusing on consumers’ motives for engaging in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication. Existing WOM motivation frameworks are expanded to include context-specific fashion and brand variables that influence consumers to engage in eWOM on Facebook and Twitter. Subsequently, the motives are incorporated into an extended Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) model. The study demonstrates that high brand commitment and fashion involvement motivate people to engage in talking about and interacting with fashion brands. Furthermore, those who are motivated by product involvement or have a high need for social interaction engage more frequently in fashion brand-related eWOM than those that are not motivated by those factors.

Keywords electronic word of mouth; WOM; fashion; customer motivations; social media; TRA

Introduction

With ever-increasing prevalence, social networking sites are being used by consumers to connect with one another, and increasingly to connect consumers with brands and vice versa. This means that research is needed to understand consumers’ motives for engaging in social media communication by exploring why people write comments and posts on social networks. Research is also needed to examine the various opportunities brands have in order to understand and possibly influence consumers’ engagement in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication.

Much of the existing research into commercial uses of social networks has focused on understanding the impact of social media usage on brands and their ability to monetise it. (Abedniya & Mahmouei, 2010; Dellarocas, 2003; Kozinets, de Valck, 2003).

1For the purposes of this study, ‘engaging in eWOM communication’ refers to all of the following: ‘writing’, ‘liking’, ‘sharing’, ‘recommending’, ‘commenting on’, and ‘tweeting’ fashion brand-related messages on Facebook and/or Twitter. A ‘fashion brand-related message’ includes a post, link, comment, or tweet.
Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010; Moran, 2010; T. Smith, Coyle, Lightfoot, & Scott, 2007; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009; Xiaofen & Yiling, 2009). While it is undoubtedly useful for brands to know this, it should be of interest to both academics and practitioners to understand better what motivates consumers to engage with brand-related stories on social networks in the first place, and thus how brands can encourage or discourage these behaviours. This study aims to bridge this gap by reviewing existing offline and online consumer motivation research (Dichter, 1966; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998) and subsequently apply it in the context of fashion brand-related eWOM.

**Fashion, trends, and social networks**

The fashion context is deemed to be particularly revealing when studying social media usage, as fashion itself is known to spread through network effects (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010). One reason why fashion exists is that it is ‘necessarily public . . . a secret fashion is a contradiction in terms’ (Reynolds, 1968, p. 44). Not only do fashion trends follow a diffusion curve, but they are also adapted throughout their lifecycle to fit in better with the users’ norms, values, and preferences. In fact, it can be argued that trends are co-created by consumers who not only perpetuate but also adapt them along the way. Such network effects mean that when a trend is adopted successfully by a number of people, it impacts the perceived value of the product for another user, in a positive or negative way, depending on the reference point. Fashion is, therefore, a powerful social symbol used to create and communicate personal as well as group identities (Ahuvia, 2005). Kamineni (2005) posits that ‘people express themselves through consumption in a myriad of ways, and in this context, product and brands have the ability to communicate messages to others. In that product styles determine how consumers who own a particular product are perceived by others’ (p. 27). This has profound implications for peer-to-peer communications about fashion, where users can choose what, when, and with whom they decide to share information, as this in turn impacts their socially perceived identity.

Fashion has been classified as high involvement, which refers to products that are either expensive, rarely bought, linked to personal identity, or carry high risks (social or otherwise). It has been observed that high-involvement products attract a significant amount of conversations online (Gu, Park, & Konana, 2012). One reason for this high incidence of fashion chatter may lie in the complexity in evaluating its value, particularly its social value. To counteract this, social media users often share style-related information with their peers, with the expectations of receiving feedback on their stylistic choices (Lin, Lu, & Wu, 2012). The representation of the fashioned self or self-selected styles has become a critical component of the social web, and opened up a whole new channel to amplify one’s fashion preferences and engage with others/brands. The fact that the flow of new fashion or styling choices is never-ending, with the kaleidoscope of products and trends (be it recycled) constantly changing, means there is always a potential element of surprise in user-generated fashion messages. Correspondingly, surprise and newness have been cited as necessary message characteristics for maintaining the interest of a social audience (Knox, 2012).

Fashion brands, especially those in the luxury sector, have also been engaging with viral marketing content, in particular brand-sponsored videos, with the hope
of attracting the attention of visual influencers. Online pin boards, such as Pinterest, and other visual platforms have become important marketing channels for brands, as they benefit from the network effects of those influencers. Visual content has become, in some cases, its own luxury product (Kondrashova, 2012) and a powerful mode of conveying the brands’ desired image. Focusing on the motivations to engage in fashion brand-related eWOM, this research can help fashion brands to understand better how to influence peer-to-peer communications through social media without the use of traditional advertising techniques.

Marketing implications of word-of-mouth communications

Even though social media has changed the tactics of marketing, its primary goals remain the same – ultimately attracting and retaining customers (Weber, 2009). More specific marketing objectives can include raising brand awareness and improving perception of brand image. While many authors recognise the important role of social media in achieving those objectives, their contribution to the primary goals is often questioned (Dellarocas, 2003; Trusov et al., 2009). With the advent of the social web, firms now experience a new challenge, where the right balance is needed between empowering customers to spread the word about their brand through viral networks whilst still controlling the company’s own core strategic marketing goals. eWOM marketing falls under the category of viral marketing, which broadly describes ‘any strategy that encourages individuals to propagate a message, thus, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message’s exposure and influence’ (Bampo, Ewing, Mather, Stewart, & Wallace, 2008, p. 274). Strauss (2000) defines eWOM in particular as ‘the positive or negative statement made by a potential, actual or former customer about a product or a company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions on the Internet’ (p. 235).

The most prevalent social networks have been developed and are predominantly used for private non-commercial communications. However, brands are interested in exploring or using them for commercial benefit. It has been observed that although the motivations of communicators and receivers in eWOM communication may not be commercial, those activities often contain names of brands/products/venues, and therefore they are likely to affect the perception of commercial entities or their products. Because it is considered as a ‘natural, genuine and honest process’ (WOMMA, 2007), WOM has been identified as more trustworthy and as having greater impact on customers’ purchasing decisions than other communication channels (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Katz & Lazarsfield, 1995). Brands are increasingly looking to consumers’ comments for inspiration in terms of advertising campaigns and even new product development. This is often referred to as ‘crowd sourcing’ and ‘co-creation’ within the marketing toolbox (Storbacka, Frow, Nenonen, & Payne, 2012; Wolny, 2009). It is, however, worth noting that offline channels are still considered dominant in WOM. Keller (2012), in a recent study, identified that not only do more WOM conversations occur offline than online, but that face-to-face conversations are more credible, have a higher emotional content, and are linked to a natural instinct for socialisation. Brands that are able to influence customer engagement in a multichannel world, it is suggested, are more likely to gain competitive advantage and more loyal customers as a result (P. R. Smith & Zook, 2011).
The question emerging from this analysis is what motivates consumers to engage particularly in online brand-related communications. The following section will identify the most pertinent motivations based on previous research in the field of WOM and eWOM.

**eWOM motivation research**

To date, there is a dearth of frameworks specifically developed for the e-business context. Therefore, and due to the fact that the principal idea is the same, various authors refer to WOM theory to explain eWOM (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Keller & Berry, 2006; Trusov et al., 2009; Xiaofen & Yiling, 2009). The differential features in the electronic medium are related to the speed with which information travels in cyberspace, the extent of access to large volume of information, the lack of geographical limitations, and the many-to-many nature of online communications. For the purpose of this research, the definition of eWOM is expanded to include non-textual communications, which can be observed by peers such as ‘liking’ a brand on Facebook or recommending (‘retweeting’) a story on Twitter, as well as the more commonly studied product reviews and comments on social networks.

East, Vanhuele, and Wright (2008) proposed a WOM production model based on the assumption that behaviour stems from three sources of influence: motivation, opportunity, and ability (MOA). Their model attempts to explain how WOM interaction becomes more likely when people have the desire to engage in it and when they have the relevant skills and opportunity to do so. Thus it is proposed that in addition to marketing interventions and talk-worthy products, both general consumer traits (e.g. loyalty) and context-specific motivations (e.g. product satisfaction, advice seeking) influence engagement in WOM. Those two groups of consumer-related motives are the focus of our study, and will be analysed in the following sections in relation to fashion and social media contexts.

With respect to general consumer traits, one of the most long-standing motivational constructs is that of involvement, which itself is multifaceted. Dichter (1996) identified four major motivations for WOM which all centre on the construct of involvement; these are product involvement, self-involvement (or self-enhancement), other involvement (or concern for others), and message involvement. Literature differentiates between situational involvement (also termed product involvement), which occurs when evaluating the product itself or having a short-term involvement in a product of low personal relevance, and enduring involvement, sometimes called predispositional involvement, which relates to a more general attitude towards a product group or long-lasting involvement that arises out of a sense of high personal relevance (Bloch & Bruce, 1984; Wohlfeil & Whelan, 2006). Both of those constructs are analysed in our study. Enduring involvement in fashion is classified here as fashion involvement. As the primary focus of this study is on fashion and the fashion consumer, it is important to identify whether the level of general fashion involvement has an impact on consumer engagement in eWOM. *Product involvement, self-involvement, other involvement, and message involvement* are also included in the following discussion. They are hypothesised to influence consumers’ propensity to share information with others, and are included as context-specific variables.
A parallel distinction can be drawn between the construct of product satisfaction and brand commitment. The difference between customer satisfaction and commitment is conceptualised following O’Driscoll and Randall (1999) with satisfaction defined as backward-looking, whereas the commitment dimension is more forward-looking. In fact, the literature indicates that customers who commit to an organisation are more likely to generate WOM communication than those who only exhibit satisfaction with a product (Harrison-Walker, 2001). Thus the second consumer trait analysed will be that of brand commitment.

With recent research updating the WOM model within the electronic context, additional variables found to increase the likelihood of eWOM have been included in our theoretical framework on the basis of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004). In their research, which was based on pre-analysis of offline motivations (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 2005; Sundaram et al., 1998), they proposed that factors such as need for social interaction, desire for economic incentives, and advice seeking were significant motivators for consumers to engage in writing online reviews. Each of the motives identified in this section is evaluated in turn below, and applied in the context of fashion brand-related eWOM, leading to the development of a theoretical framework for this research.

**Fashion involvement**

It is important to discuss the construct of fashion involvement, as it provides a measure of enduring involvement. Specifically, with enduring involvement, personal relevance occurs because the individual relates the product to his self-image and attributes some hedonic qualities to the product (Higie & Feick, 1989). Apparel has frequently been quoted as high involvement (e.g. Bloch, 1986; Goldsmith & Emmert, 1991). Research has demonstrated that people who score high in fashion involvement are more likely to be heavy clothing buyers and have an interest in fashion (Fairhurst, Good, & Gentry, 1989). Taking into account the enduring involvement nature of the construct, a measure developed by Higie and Feick (1989) has been adapted to the fashion context to identify respondents’ level of fashion involvement, and taps into their perceptions of fashion as interesting, fun, and important. Please refer to Appendix 1 for the detail of measurement scales used.

\[ H1: \text{People with high fashion involvement are more likely to engage in fashion brand-related eWOM.} \]

**Brand involvement**

Brand involvement (sometimes termed ‘brand commitment’) is described as positive feelings of attachment to a brand (Beatty & Kahle, 1988), and is characterised by a tendency to withstand changes (Dholakia, 1997; Pritchard, Havitz, & Howard, 1999). It has been found that consumers who have high commitment to an organisation are more likely to pass on positive messages but are likely to be vehement if disappointed in a services context (Mangold, Miller, & Brockway, 1999). Hur, Ahn, and Kim (2011) identified brand commitment as predictor of members’ behaviours in an online community, such as participating in community activities.

More specifically, several current eWOM studies support the idea that affective commitment is important for fostering eWOM generation (Cheung, Lee,
Rabjohn, 2008; Harrison-Walker, 2001). Affective (or emotional) attachment to brands is particularly relevant to fashion brands, which rely strongly on emotional differentiation, as opposed to functional product differentiation. Consumers’ self-concept and values therefore should align with those of the fashion brand in order for high brand commitment to occur. Measurements of the construct have been adopted from the general brand loyalty scale by Zaichkowsky (1985) and a brand commitment scale by Beatty and Kahle (1988).

H2: People who exhibit high brand commitment to fashion brands are more likely to engage in eWOM about those brands.

Product involvement

Customer satisfaction with a product has been identified by many researchers as the most prominent determinant of WOM and eWOM engagement (e.g. Casalo, Flavin, & Guinaliu, 2008, in e-banking; Finn, Wang, & Frank, 2009, in e-services). This is particularly relevant in purchase decision-making situations, where a positive experience of a new product or a brand has a link to the desire to recommend (Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000). Correspondingly, customer dissatisfaction has been linked to negative WOM. Zeelenberg and Pieters (2004), for example, reported that WOM activities attract more dissatisfied than satisfied users. Interestingly, Doh and Hwang (2009) found in their research that a few negative comments can be helpful in generating a positive attitude and enhancing the credibility of eWOM messages, as consumers may be suspicious of credibility of comments when no negative posts appear. Product involvement specifically has been identified as a motive for WOM communication behaviour by Dichter (1966), Engel et al. (2005), and Sundaram et al. (1998). It has been defined as the level of personal relevance that a consumer sees in a product (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2006). The level of product involvement has been linked to the importance a product has in a person’s life, as well as how the product relates to the person’s self-concept (Dichter, 1966). A person’s self-concept contains a unique set of attitudes and values, and once a product is related to the individual’s attitudes and values, product involvement occurs (Warrington & Shim, 2000). This has important implications for fashion products, which have been recognised as closely linked to the wearers’ self-concept (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008; O’Cass, 2004; Phau & Lo, 2004). When a match between product and self-concept occurs, Dichter (1966) posits that it ‘produces a tension which is not eased by the use of the product alone, but must be channeled by way of talk, recommendation, and enthusiasm to restore the balance (provide relief)’ (p. 148). Feick and Price (1987) confirm this by suggesting that product involvement is the most common explanation for opinion leaders’ conversations about products. The measurement of the construct has been adopted from and Hennig-Thurau (2004) and O’Cass (2004).

H3: People with high product involvement engage in fashion brand-related eWOM more frequently.

Self-involvement

Dichter (1966) was the first to identify self-involvement as a motive for engaging in WOM behaviour, and it was applied to the electronic context by Hennig-Thurau...
et al. (2004). In later research, it was reconceptualised as self-enhancement (Abedniya & Mahmouei, 2010), and defined as ‘the need to share positive consumption experiences in an effort to enhance one’s image among others by projecting themselves as intelligent shoppers’ (Dichter, 1966, p. 148). Commenting on fashion products and brands or forwarding interesting brand messages might all contribute to the perceived status as a fashion leader and thus lead to self-enhancement within a reference group. Correspondingly, it may also lead to gaining attention and a heightened influence over others. The measurement of the construct followed the operationalisation adopted by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), who found self-involvement to be a significant predictor of eWOM.

**H4:** People who are motivated by self-involvement engage in fashion brand-related eWOM more frequently.

### Other involvement

Other involvement (or concern for others) has been identified in most extant WOM research, except in Sundaram et al. (1998), who instead identified ‘helping the company’ as a motive. Research describes other involvement as a need to help others (Price, Feick, & Guskey, 1995) or to engage in altruistic behaviour, which refers to doing something for others without expecting anything in return (Sundaram et al., 1998). In the context of social media, concern for others has been found to have a major influence on visiting online social networks (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). They refer to the concern for other consumers as ‘a genuine desire to help a friend or relative make a better purchase decision’ (ibid., p. 41). T. Smith et al. (2007) share this point of view by suggesting that one of the basic human needs is to be helpful and give advice. In addition to altruistic drives, social media users may feel compelled to reciprocate with WOM when they themselves feel indebted to a potential receiver of information (e.g. because they received valuable information from the receiver), or because they desire the opportunity to similarly obligate the receiver (Gatignon & Robertson, 1985). Fashion-styling advice and apparel-purchase advice are just some of the ways users may be helping others in social media contexts. The measurement of this construct has been adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004).

**H5:** People who are motivated by other involvement engage in fashion brand-related eWOM more frequently.

### Advice seeking

The flip side of concern for others is advice seeking, which has been isolated as a discrete motivator for WOM engagement by Sundaram et al. (1998) and applied in electronic media context by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004). Whereas the former authors referred to advice seeking as a motive for negative WOM (i.e. obtaining advice on how to resolve problems), Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) put advice seeking in the context of positive eWOM in the sense of being genuinely interested in other consumers’ opinion and advice. Particularly because ‘the credibility of formal marketing efforts often is in doubt . . . an opinion leader is likely to be chosen as an essential contact for verification or advice about a product or brand’ (Kimmel, 2010, p. 237). In the fashion contexts, advice seeking can take the form of ‘sharing’
a company-initiated product-related link or message with peers, in order to seek another person’s opinion before, for example, deciding to purchase a product. Thus it may incidentally involve forwarding brand-related messages or visuals. The measurement of this construct has been adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004).

H6: People who are motivated by receiving advice engage in fashion brand-related eWOM more frequently.

Need for social interaction
While this factor is related to the previous two, it should be recognised that sometimes consumers talk about products and services simply to make conversation. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) argue that consumers post comments to receive social benefits from being part of a virtual community, and in their study they found that social benefits have the strongest influence on users visiting these communities, as well as on the number of comments written. Burton and Khammash (2010) recognise that the reader may initially passively engage in scanning eWOM messages, but may start sharing opinions after becoming familiar with other users. The fact that consumers meet and become familiar with new people seems to have an impact on the level of activity on social media networks. The growth in fashion communities and visual pinboards may be an indication of the impact of familiarity and interaction on fashion brand-related eWOM. The measurement of this construct has been adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004).

H7: People who are motivated by the need for social interaction engage in fashion brand-related eWOM more frequently.

In addition, message involvement (‘message intrigue’ in Engel et al., 2005) and economic incentives (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) have been proposed as external motivators for eWOM engagement. As they may coincide with the personal traits and motivators analysed above, we did not include them in further analysis. They are nevertheless useful conceptual constructs, and their relevance to marketing practice warrants future research.

Theoretical framework
Based on the above discussion, an integrated model including the seven traits and motivations to engage in fashion brand-related eWOM is proposed and tested in this study, namely fashion involvement, brand involvement, product involvement, self-involvement, other involvement, need for social interaction, and advice seeking. Italicised terms have been adopted for the remainder of the study to ease comprehension. In order to understand better the link between consumer motivations, those variables were incorporated in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) model (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Here, the proposed motives are hypothesised to lead to certain attitudes, which, in turn, may prove to be decisive in forming consumers’ intention and ultimately behaviour. The TRA posits that two constructs – attitude and subjective norm – have an influence on intention to perform behaviour
and consequently on behaviour itself. The first construct, *attitude* towards behaviour, is a function of the perceived consequences associated with the behaviour and their value to the person. The second component, *subjective norm*, is a function of beliefs about the views of important others (e.g. close ties), and motivation of complying with those opinions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Accordingly, two additional hypotheses are proposed:

\[ H8: \text{People's engagement in fashion brand-related eWOM communications is influenced by their attitude towards such behaviour.} \]

\[ H9: \text{People's engagement in fashion brand-related eWOM communications is influenced by their close-ties' opinions of such behaviour} \]

This study examines both the direct and indirect relationships between motivations and behaviour to identify the model that better explains engagement in eWOM communications. Figure 1 presents the variables included in the theoretical framework.

- Dependent variable: *eWOM Engagement* (consumers’ engagement in fashion brand-related eWOM communication on Facebook and/or Twitter).
- Independent variables: *Traits and Motives* (consumers’ traits and motives for fashion brand-related eWOM engagement).
- Endogenous variables: *Attitude* and *Subjective Norm* (with regard to engagement in fashion brand-related eWOM communication).

Such conceptualisation follows from the original TRA, but amends it for the purpose of our study in several ways. First, *motives* are identified as independent variables, where in the original only *motivations to comply* and *beliefs* are identified as independent exogenous variables. Extant research has recognised that beliefs do not sufficiently capture innate needs, and TRA has in the past been criticised for not explicitly addressing the core needs that may ‘compel a specific human activity’ (Scialdone & Zhang, 2010, p. 2). Second, although the original TRA model identified that *subjective norm* and *attitude* influence intention to perform behaviour, this study included actual self-reported behaviour (*eWOM engagement*) as a more reliable measure than intention.

**Figure 1** Hypothesised model.
Methodology

Instrument development

The hypothesised predictors of engagement in fashion brand-related eWOM included seven traits and motives, as well as the interaction effects of attitude and subjective norm from the original TRA model. All of the predictors were measured using five-point Likert scales, and the dependent variable, eWOM engagement, was measured utilising a binary (yes/no) as well as ordinal (frequency) measure. The measures utilised in the questionnaire relating to the above variables were adapted from existing studies and applied within the context social media networks. For a summary of measurement scales, please refer to Appendix 1. Composite variables were created for all observed constructs using summated scales, a technique that has been used successfully in previous research (e.g. Raajpoot, Sharma, & Chebat, 2008). The reliability of key constructs was examined using conventional methods, as established scales were used. The Cronbach’s alpha of each construct is reported in Appendix 1, demonstrating adequate reliability by exceeding the suggested cut-off value of .7 for the majority of variables, with advice seeking (.62) and product involvement (.68) variables still acceptable but just falling short of the cut-off value as recommended by Nunnally (1978). Checks for multicollinearity were conducted and are presented in Appendix 2, indicating that correlations among independent variables are at acceptable levels (below .6; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Sample description and procedure

A pretest of the research instrument with seven respondents was conducted using the debriefing method, as suggested by Proctor (2005), resulting in slight amendments to question wording and questionnaire length. The resulting self-administered, Internet-based questionnaire was seeded online through various channels where respondents were likely to have had experience of engaging with fashion brands online. This method generated an Internet- and social network–literate sample of 210 users, resulting in 192 usable responses.

The sample contained a higher proportion of females (65%) than males (35%). In terms of age, the majority (51.1%) were in their twenties, 21.1% were in their thirties, 11.1% in their teens, 8.3% in their forties, and 8.3% in their fifties (N = 192). Although the sample was skewed towards females and younger consumers, this is not uncommon in samples for fashion-related surveys, and is reflective of the target population of fashion-oriented social network users.

Both groups – those who engage (53.6%) and do not engage (46.4%) in fashion brand-related eWOM – have been included in analysis of the two general characteristics, fashion involvement and brand commitment, as predictors of engagement. Subsequently, the analysis focused only on those that do engage in fashion brand-related eWOM for the purpose of analysing the propensity (frequency) of engagement based on context-specific motivators – product involvement, self-involvement, other involvement, need for social interaction, and advice seeking.

Hypothesis testing

Logistic regression was utilised to analyse the hypothesised model of engagement in fashion brand-related eWOM, followed by t-tests to identify differences based on
frequency of eWOM engagement. As the dependent variable was measured both through a binary (engagement or lack of engagement) and ordinal (frequency of engagement) scale, those tests provided the most appropriate method for the analysis of data. Traditionally, such research questions were addressed by either ordinary least squares (OLS) regression or linear discriminant function analysis (Peng & So, 2002). However, with advances in statistical software, logistic regression has gained popularity in marketing research, especially since it has less stringent data distribution assumptions, ‘it generates more appropriate and correct findings in terms of model fit and correctness of the analysis’ (Akinci, Kaynak, Atilgan, & Aksoy, 2007, p. 538).

This empirical part of the paper is divided into two parts. First, it reports on the role of fashion involvement and brand commitment in influencing eWOM engagement. This is analysed through testing two competing models – with and without the integration of attitude and subjective norm as interaction effects, model 2 and model 1 respectively. Model 2 examines whether the inclusion of subjective norms and attitudes in the model predicts behaviour better than motives on their own. Therefore hypotheses H1, H2, H8, and H9 are tested. The second part involves an analysis of context-specific motivations that influence the frequency of engagement, testing hypotheses H3–H7.

The results of logistic regression on model 1 are presented in Table 1. Overall, model 1 demonstrates a significant goodness of fit ($\chi^2 = 38.75, df = 7, p < .000$).

The results indicate that both H1 and H2 are supported with fashion involvement as well as brand involvement being a significant predictor of eWOM engagement in fashion. The model also indicates that neither attitude nor subjective norm have a direct, non-interaction effect on eWOM engagement ($p < .05$).

The second logistic regression presented in Table 2 examines model 2, which included interaction effects of attitude (H8) and subjective norm (H9) respectively.

### Table 1 Logistic regression parameters for the relationship between general traits and eWOM behaviour.

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*Overall statistics $\chi^2 = 38.75, df = 7, p < .000$.

### Table 2 Logistic regression parameters for interaction effects of attitude and subjective norm.

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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Overall statistics $\chi^2 = 34.37, df = 4, p < .000$. 

Downloaded by [James Madison University] at 10:27 18 September 2014
on the relationship between consumer traits and eWOM engagement. Overall, model 2 demonstrates a significant goodness of fit ($\chi^2 = 34.37$, df = 4, $p < .000$).

Findings from model 2 indicate that all four predictors contribute significantly ($p \leq .05$) to the predictive ability of model 2, namely Fashion Innovativeness $\times$ Attitude ($B = -.052$, df = 1, $p = .038$); Brand Involvement $\times$ Attitude ($B = .035$, df = 1, $p = .027$); Fashion Innovativeness $\times$ Social Norm ($B = .084$, df = 1, $p = .008$); and Brand Involvement $\times$ Social Norm ($B = -.038$, df = 1, $p = .05$). Hypotheses H8 and H9 are therefore supported for the two traits hypothesised. Of all those predictors of interaction, Brand Involvement $\times$ Social Norm has a borderline significance as predictor of eWOM ($p = .05$), and as such should be treated with caution in subsequent discussion.

Hypotheses H1, H2, H8, and H9 are therefore supported, as both direct motivators and significant interaction effects have been identified in our study. Both fashion involvement and brand involvement impact on eWOM engagement, directly and through attitude and social norm. Not only are these findings intuitively acceptable, they also provide support for the relationships put forward in the TRA model, regarding the interaction role of attitude and subjective norm.

The hypotheses relating to motives impacting the frequency of fashion brand-related eWOM engagement were initially tested using ordinal regression. Frequency of engagement was measured using a five-point scale, which was subsequently collapsed into ‘frequent’ and ‘infrequent’ behaviours. For either measure, the regression did not demonstrate the hypothesised motives to be predicting level of engagement ($p > .05$) nor attitude or subjective norm mediating this relationship. Tests for differences between groups, presented in Table 3, however, indicated that there are significant differences between those that engage in eWOM frequently (often and always) and infrequently (rarely and occasionally). In particular, product involvement, self-involvement, and need for social interaction differed significantly between those more or less likely to engage in eWOM generation behaviours. While this does not explicitly provide support for H3–H7, the relationships do warrant further investigation on a larger data set with active eWOM engagement to identify causalities.

### Table 3 Comparison of means between frequent and infrequent contributors of eWOM.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product involvement</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>10.65</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequent</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.86</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-involvement</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequent</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other involvement</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>10.11</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequent</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.76</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for social interaction</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>9.73</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequent</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.05</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice seeking</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequent</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion and conclusions

With peer-to-peer communication being increasingly recognised in marketing practice as a cost-effective and useful marketing tactic (Craigie, 2006; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991), understanding the motivators for eWOM engagement is of importance to both academics and practitioners. The major aim of this study was to investigate the types of motives that can predict such behaviour and its frequency, in the context of fashion brands. From a theoretical viewpoint, the study also aimed to examine the influence of established constructs of attitude and subjective norm in engaging with this type of viral marketing. Our findings not only have important marketing implications for fashion brands, but also enhance the understanding of more general e-communication behaviours.

Overall, the results show that fashion involvement and brand involvement are the key motivators for fashion brand-related eWOM engagement. In contrast to most eWOM research, which has identified customer satisfaction with the product as prime motivator to share brand-related information (Casalo et al., 2008; Finn et al., 2009), this study examined category-level interest (in our case fashion involvement) and confirmed it as a significant cause of such behaviour. Furthermore, we tested the idea that being committed to a brand has positive impact on eWOM engagement. It is evident from our results that those consumers who are brand involved are more likely to be interacting about brands online. Our findings provide support for previous research in the brand community context, where Yeh and Choi (2011) found that brand community members’ affinity for a brand predicts their positive eWOM intention, and that strong commitment to the brand mediates this relationship.

An analysis of 26 million tweets by Bazaarvoice (2012) suggests, for example, that the number of brand mentions on Twitter has been increasing steadily, by 113% from 2011 to 2012, with overall volume of tweets increasing 143% in the same time period. Their research also found that users who mention brands in their tweets have on average more followers than those that do not. This finding seems to confirm the powerful social symbol that brands have become, which makes them useful shortcuts for attracting new followers and increasing credibility in social networks.

Product involvement variable was conceptualized in keeping with the situational involvement construct (Bloch & Bruce, 1994). It occurs when a specific object catches an individual’s interest for a limited period of time, particularly when browsing or during purchase situations. Because of its temporal nature, it is distinct from the more enduring, trait-related constructs of fashion involvement and brand commitment discussed above. While our research did not explicitly test whether involvement with specific products predicts eWOM engagement, we have found that there is a significant difference in the level of product involvement between those that comment/tweet frequently and infrequently about fashion. This points to customer engagement with the product as being an important factor in increasing eWOM conversations, providing support for previous findings (Gu et al., 2012). Interestingly, and contrary to popular belief that consumers are more likely to tell others about negative than positive experiences with brands and products, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) found that users who were motivated by negative feeling visit social media platforms less often for the purpose of posting reviews on social networks. This
distinction has not been tested in our research, but would be an interesting avenue for future study.

Furthermore, *self-involvement*, linked to the importance of being perceived as opinion leader, has been found to differentiate between the frequency of fashion brand-related eWOM engagement. This motivation is linked to self-concept, and may be particularly significant when users are giving style advice to peers or commenting on fashion trends. While users are shopping online by engaging directly with brands (although social commerce may be changing this), when evaluating alternatives, they are more likely to trust other users when it comes to choices (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). By providing opportunities to enhance the fashion status of its users, it can be argued that fashion brands may be able to encourage positive eWOM behaviours.

In our study, the *need for social interaction* was found to be linked to the frequency of eWOM engagement. Perhaps this is not surprising considering the study took place in the context of social networks. However, it is apparent that users appreciate the social benefits that occur when writing comments or ‘sharing’ a brand-related post with a friend. New communities develop, and conversations are shared which lead to yet new connections. This finding is also in keeping with previous research in different contexts (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Ho & Dempsey, 2010) confirming that the frequency of eWOM engagement increases in line with the social benefit derived from being part of a network.

*Concern for others* and *advice seeking* were not found to be important factors in influencing frequency of fashion brand-related eWOM engagement, contrary to research by Ho and Dempsey (2010) on forwarding non-fashion online content, which found a positive relationship between altruism and eWOM. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) also found concern for others to be the second-highest predictor of frequency of social platform visits for eWOM after social interaction benefits. Further research, including different measurement scales and construct operationalization, may provide more explanatory results.

The major theoretical findings of our research relate to the influence of *attitude* and *subjective norm* on the resulting eWOM engagement, as we conceptualised eWOM to be part of the TRA model. Specifically, our findings confirm the role of the influence of the two constructs in the context of social media. While both *attitude* and *subjective norm* have been shown to influence the link between consumer traits and eWOM engagement, the current study does not stipulate the types on interaction effects. It does, however, demonstrate that the strength of the model is increased by the inclusion of those constructs. While some may interpret it as moderating role (Baron & Kenny, 1986), others may argue that it is in fact the attitude and subjective norm that shapes the types of motivations (Bagozzi, 1992). In either case, the findings strongly suggest that inclusions of psychological and sociological needs as drivers of behaviours may allow a better understanding of the eWOM engagement concept.

**Limitations and managerial implications**

Despite adding to a growing body of knowledge on online consumer behaviours and providing new insight on the transmission of eWOM, the results of this study should be considered in the light of the inherent fashion context. Respondents’ behaviours were studied only on two of the numerous social media networks –
Facebook and Twitter, excluding blogs, product review sites, online pin boards, and other media – and relied on self-reporting. Additionally, we decided not to measure ‘intention’ and focus instead on purely stated behaviours. Although it can be argued that it is a more reliable measure, it does deviate from the original TRA model. The actual path of interaction has not been specified, and further research on the types of influences of attitude and subjective norm in eWOM is needed. Despite its limitations, this research paves the way for future studies that can apply the extended TRA framework to other contexts within the eWOM domain. We would also like to see more extensive online consumer motivation research being conducted in the fashion context, utilising robust quantitative procedures and refined measurement scales, particularly for the constructs economic incentives and message involvement, both of which have been hypothesised to have an impact on eWOM engagement in previous literature. An analysis examining specific brand-related eWOM engagement by type of user behaviour (e.g. ‘liking’ a brand as opposed to commenting on their blog or reviewing their product), similar to one conducted by Burton and Khammash (2010) on online review reading motives, would help in this respect.

The results of this research can help fashion brands to understand better how to influence peer-to-peer communications on social media without the use of traditional advertising techniques. According to the findings, generating brand commitment and appealing to consumer with high fashion involvement can drive brand-related communications online. Marketers should strive to learn what opinions and affinities social media users have towards their brand. This is often expressed through product ratings, reviews, blogs, discussion forums, and sharing of comments or images. While some brands may try to influence these behaviours, others may not want to influence eWOM artificially but instead utilise the insight generated by users to understand their customers better. Particular attention should be paid to the co-creative capacity of consumers’ WOM to influence the brand’s image and perceived value, as consumers’ online comments may lead to changes in brands’ marketing response or may even shape marketing campaigns. Fashion, it can be argued, has been increasingly characterised by peer influence, with trends being created less by established fashion magazines or designers and more by bloggers as opinion formers who have the power to influence how a fashion brand or trend is perceived in the market. The construct of opinion leaders is not new, and the complex patterns of influence within a group have been identified in the multi-step flow of communications model (Fill, 2006). Several luxury brands have already recognised this and use blogger outreach as an important part of their marketing activities (Sepp, Liljander, & Gummerus, 2011). This is an early indication of the impact users have on brand marketing activities. In line with this trend, and building on previous research (e.g. Burton & Khammash, 2010; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Ho & Dempsey, 2010), our study highlights the importance of category-level and social drivers that lead to a stronger engagement with brand-related content in social media.

References


### Appendix 1 Summary and reliability of measures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Scales used</th>
<th>Question/statement</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>eWOM engagement</strong></td>
<td>2 alternative items used</td>
<td>• In regards to Facebook and/or Twitter, have you ever posted, 'tweeted', 'liked', 'recommended', 'shared', or commented on a fashion-related message? How often do you do this?</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Binary scale (0 = 'no'; 1 = 'yes')</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency (1 = 'always'; 5 = 'never')</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fashion involvement</strong></td>
<td>4 items</td>
<td>• I am interested in fashion • I think fashion is fun • I think fashion is fascinating • I think fashion is important</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higie and Feick (1989)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General consumer trait</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand involvement</strong></td>
<td>5 items</td>
<td>• I trust what is said by the brand • Posts and tweets by fashion brands influence my buying behaviour • I can identify with people wearing the same brands as me • It is very important to me to buy the right fashion brand/label • I invest much effort before selecting the right fashion brand/label</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zaichkowsky (1985) and Beatty and Kahle (1988)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General consumer trait</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Product involvement</strong></td>
<td>4 items used</td>
<td>• This way I can express my joy about a product • This way I can express my disappointment with a product • I feel good when I can tell others about my buying successes • I feel good when I can tell others about my buying failures</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fashion brand-related eWOM engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-involvement</strong></td>
<td>2 items used</td>
<td>• My social network contributions show that I am a clever customer • My social network contributions show that I am knowledgeable about the product</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fashion brand-related eWOM engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Scales used</td>
<td>Question/statement</td>
<td>α</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other involvement</td>
<td>4 items used (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004)</td>
<td>• I want to help others with my positive experiences with brands</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fashion brand-related eWOM engagement</td>
<td>• I want to warn others with my negative experiences with brands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• I want to give others the opportunity to buy nice products</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• I want to expose brands that behave badly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for social</td>
<td>4 items used (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004)</td>
<td>• I believe that a chat among like-minded people is a nice thing</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interaction</td>
<td>Fashion brand-related eWOM engagement</td>
<td>• It is fun to communicate this way with other people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• I meet nice people that way</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• It means I can share my style with friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice Seeking</td>
<td>2 items used (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004)</td>
<td>• I expect to receive tips or support from other people</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fashion brand-related eWOM engagement</td>
<td>• I hope to receive advice from others that help me make a fashion purchasing decision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>4 items used (Using components of Ajzen and Fishbein 1980)</td>
<td>• Writing comments and posts is a nice thing</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitude towards eWOM engagement in general</td>
<td>• Taking part in online conversations is useful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• I feel that my life is enriched by online communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• I don’t want to miss out on what is happening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective norm</td>
<td>3 items used (Using components of Ajzen and Fishbein 1980)</td>
<td>• Most people who are important to me would probably enjoy reading my comments or posts</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subjective norm related to eWOM engagement in general</td>
<td>• Most people who are important to me would probably consider my posts as useful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Posts and tweets by friends influence my buying behaviour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five-point Likert scale (1 = ‘strongly agree’; 5 = ‘strongly disagree’) unless stated otherwise.
Appendix 2  Inter-item correlation results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PI</th>
<th>FI</th>
<th>BI</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SN</th>
<th>SI</th>
<th>OI</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>AS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>.539**</td>
<td>.350**</td>
<td>.316**</td>
<td>.542**</td>
<td>.550**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion involvement</td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>.526**</td>
<td>.177*</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.257*</td>
<td>.272**</td>
<td>.241*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand involvement</td>
<td>.539**</td>
<td>.526**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.303**</td>
<td>.382**</td>
<td>.402**</td>
<td>.257*</td>
<td>.305**</td>
<td>.415**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>.350**</td>
<td>.177*</td>
<td>.303**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.649**</td>
<td>.333**</td>
<td>.406**</td>
<td>.683**</td>
<td>.363**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subjective norm</td>
<td>.316**</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.382**</td>
<td>.649**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.350**</td>
<td>.382**</td>
<td>.575**</td>
<td>.389**</td>
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<td>Self-involvement</td>
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<td>.257*</td>
<td>.402**</td>
<td>.333**</td>
<td>.350**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.259*</td>
<td>.318**</td>
<td>.210*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other involvement</td>
<td>.550**</td>
<td>.272**</td>
<td>.257*</td>
<td>.406**</td>
<td>.382**</td>
<td>.259*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.418**</td>
<td>.473**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for social interaction</td>
<td>.347**</td>
<td>.241*</td>
<td>.305**</td>
<td>.683**</td>
<td>.575**</td>
<td>.318**</td>
<td>.418**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.425**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice seeking</td>
<td>.407**</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.415**</td>
<td>.363**</td>
<td>.389**</td>
<td>.210*</td>
<td>.473**</td>
<td>.425**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message involvement</td>
<td>-.122</td>
<td>-.157</td>
<td>-.160</td>
<td>-.196</td>
<td>-.192</td>
<td>-.198</td>
<td>-.257*</td>
<td>-.266**</td>
<td>-.247*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic incentives</td>
<td>.411**</td>
<td>.251*</td>
<td>.327**</td>
<td>.441**</td>
<td>.319**</td>
<td>.368**</td>
<td>.237*</td>
<td>.398**</td>
<td>.241*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed); **Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

About the authors

Julia Wolny is a principal teaching fellow in marketing at the University of Southampton, UK. Her main research interests are related to multichannel consumer behaviour, user co-creation, digital and fashion marketing. She is the Academy of Marketing (AM) SIG chair for e-marketing and leads the related track at the AM conference. Previously she was a senior lecturer in marketing at the London College of Fashion and Director of the Fashion Business Resource Studio working with fashion brands to enhance their marketing practice and graduate employability.

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