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Twitter Technology Trampling Fashion Designs: The Effects of Twitter on the Fashion Industry.

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Introduction

The fashion industry continuously faces the issue of fashion piracy, which means; many retailers are intentionally copying fashion designs from the runway and cheaply manufacturing them to sell at a low price. The problem is on the rise and many designers are taking hits due to the frequency and success of the culprits. While large retailers such as Forever 21, Zara, Topshop and H&M are soaring, many young designers are struggling to survive. These large companies excel at rapidly producing merchandise and putting new clothing on the racks every week. Many people in the industry, such as fashion designer Kate Brierley, worry that this sense of continuously wanting new trends and options eliminates the ability to perfect designs and explore creativity. Because the counterfeit clothing is typically produced rapidly in a factory abroad, they are poor quality, and end up in landfills.

Retailers are abusing the opportunity to take ideas from other designers and earning large profits by producing garments at a low cost. This issue has recently been on the rise most likely due to the ease of copying. With an increase in technology, retailers can more easily take designs from photographs posted online. In my thesis I will examine

how technology, in particular social media, could possibly lead to an increase in fashion

piracy, yet also serve as a useful tool for fashion designers.

Literature Review

Fashion Piracy

Unfortunately, the United States Government has no sufficient copyright laws that

protect the intellectual property of fashion designers. Many designers are struggling to

protect their designs and generate substantial business. "A Fashion Forward Approach to

Design Protection" by Laura Fanelli provides great commentary on why it is important to

address fashion and its copyright laws. She states that:

> Fashion matters. Along with being a highly significant American industry,
>
> generating approximately $350 billion in the United States annually,
>
> fashion provides a powerful means of communication, expressing the
>
> point of view of both the designer and the consumer. Nevertheless,
>
> because American intellectual property law provides virtually no
>
> protection for fashion designs, it appears as though fashion does not matter
>
> to the legislature. As a result, design piracy remains a prevalent practice
>
> and a significant threat to the growth of American fashion design. (1)

Fanelli continues her article, almost as a plea to the government to address

the fashion industry, realize its magnitude and act to stop fashion piracy. She

includes countless paragraphs explaining the types of protection the government

offers and their flaws (copyright, trademark, trade dress and design patent). Fanelli

is not alone; countless authors, designers, scholars and researchers are all standing

up against fashion piracy. The problem lies with the solution. There is no practical

and effective way to eliminate the theft of fashion designs.

In a society where news spreads rapidly, there are numerous articles providing vivid examples of companies that have been caught guilty of replicating other designers' fashions. Irene Tan provides a concrete example of a company that is frequently criticized for fashion piracy in her article "Knock It Off, Forever 21! The Fashion Industry's Battle Against Design Piracy." The article addresses the root problem of design piracy; it threatens the jobs of many in the fashion industry and costs designers millions of dollars in revenue. Tan states that both large and small companies have been culprits of design piracy, "knocking-off," or stealing fashion designs and producing them as their own. Along with Fanelli, Tan notes that this is entirely legal in the United States, the only country that does not offer protection to designers. The Council of Fashion Designers America (CFDA) as well as many fashion designers lobby for protection laws, yet the government has repeatedly declined. Congress may consider extending The Design Piracy Prohibition Act (DPPA) to cover fashion designers. If extended, designs would be protected for three years. Tan believes that it is extremely important for young emerging designers to gain protection in order to succeed. They have invested time, money, passion and skill into their design and should have the opportunity to reap the rewards.

Tan concludes by noting that factories have advanced the capabilities of their garment making machines. "Software programs develop patterns from photographs taken at the show and automated machines then cut and stitch copies of designers work from those patterns" (900). With this increase in technology, there has been an increase in piracy. A snapshot off a runway in Paris can be instantly sent to a factory in China, and the garment can be on the shelves of American stores in days. According to Tan, it took

six to 12 months and roughly $6 billion dollars for the designer to produce the design, yet he or she is not seeing the full return. This decreases the incentive for American designers to produce original designs, when companies such as Forever 21 can sell the almost-exact item for a fraction of the cost. Tan solidifies the need for fashion piracy awareness as the fashion industry is severely being affected.

The fashion industry is continuously growing and becoming a large part of the American economy. In Kevin Tu's article "Counterfeit Fashion: The Interplay Between Copyright and Trademark Law in Original Fashion Designs and Designer Knockoffs," Tu explains that this growth "has spawned an increased public awareness for fashionable designer products" (441). Many scholars, including Tu, have associated the increase in fashion awareness to the increase in the media such as tabloids and television. Now that more consumers are aware of fashion, more retailers are producing at a rapid pace to keep up with the demands of the consumer. Also a result is the increase in fashion piracy. Because many designers do not have the ability to rapidly design and produce garments, the American "fashionista" is relying on retailers that have new merchandise on the shelves every week. Tu states that United States laws extend "spotty legal protections, at best" against counterfeit and knockoff designs. This is due to the "inherently utilitarian nature of clothing items" (420). Tu, like the previously mentioned scholars, believes that legal protection is necessary to reduce fashion piracy.

Unfortunately, design stealing has become commonplace in the fashion industry and "although not exact copies, designer-inspired products also contribute to style piracy by giving the impression of relatedness to the designer product" (Tu 422). Tu gives the example of Louis Vuitton who filed separate lawsuits against Burlington Coat Factory

and Dooney & Bourke for producing similar monogrammed handbags. The result is substantial revenue loss for the original designer.

Astonishingly, the fashion industry generates more revenue in the United States than books, movies, and music combined, write authors C. Scott Hemphill and Jeannie Suk in their article "The Law, Culture, and Economics of Fashion." The fashion industry has a huge economic importance and it affects everyone. As with the other scholars studied, Hemphill and Suk favor legal protection against the copying of fashion designs. They acknowledge, "copying reduces the incentive to create." (1153) They also believe that design protection would allow designers to create and be more profitable, which in turn would benefit the United States economy. "It would also push fashion producers toward investment in design innovation and away from proliferation of brand logos by established firms making use of what legal protection is available." (1154) Like many other fashion advocates and scholars, Hemphill and Suk believe the designs produced by fashion designers are limited severely due to revenue loss, a result of fashion piracy.

Fashion piracy is no new concept; it has been around for ages. It is more prominently in today's society due to the ease of copying. Counterfeit garments can be made at a rapid pace, for little cost and shipped across the world quickly. Hemphill and Suk note:

> The most striking consequence of low-cost, high-scale, rapid copying is
> not in beating an original to market, but in the ability to wait and see
> which designs succeed, and copy only those. Copyists can choose a target
> after retailers have made their buying decisions, or even after the product

reaches stores, and customers have begun to buy. Such copyists can reach

market well before the relevant trend has ended. (Hemphill and Suk

1171)

This is precisely why retailers who copy fashion succeed and generate revenue.

Additionally, they are able to sell the copies at a much lower cost than the original.

Hemphill and Suk specifically mention the guiltiest culprit Forever 21 as well as other

retailers, such as H&M and Zara, to emphasize how common the practice of counterfeit

fashion is. Fashion piracy turns into an efficient and hard to break cycle that has a

profound impact on the economics to the fashion industry.

Many may wonder why it is important to protect designers as the see that the

fashion industry is frivolous, although "everybody inevitably expresses themselves

through the clothes they wear" (Hemphill and Suk 1161). Hemphill and Suk continue by

noting that fashion has different values for different people. For instance, it can be

viewed as an art form in which a price cannot be set on a garment. Others may find it a

product of social pressure such as buying a certain outfit to look "cool" or utilize fashion

as a means of displaying wealth or status. In terms of usefulness, fashion has the amazing

power to facilitate self-expression.

Rise of Social Networking

Social media is directly related to the changes in the fashion industry, is growing

rapidly and changing the way society interacts. danah m. boyd's "Social Networking

Sites: Definition, Networking and Scholarship" article offers interesting thought and

statistics. She begins her article defining a social networking site and stating that there are

a vast number of sites that are constantly evolving. Most important to my thesis is that social networking is almost always public, or semi-public and can be accessed from any Internet-connected device. According to boyd, at the root of social networking is the concept of connecting with other users and engaging in dialogue. Most importantly, social media has a large focus on media and most sites encourage users to upload photographs and videos. There is quite a bit of interactive technology and applications that help users easily upload from multiple devices such as directly from a mobile device, or tablet. Boyd provides examples such as Twitpic and Instagram, both photo posting platforms. Finally, social networking sites are available and accessible to everyone with Internet access. boyd illustrates that it is increasingly easy to share media online through the use of social media. Furthermore, marketing research indicates that social networking sites are growing worldwide (Smith). They give people the ability connect with one another and become part of people's everyday lives. The background research I have studied generally insists that social media is a positive addition to our lives connecting people and facilitating interaction.

Twitter

Due to the rapidly changing nature of social media, boyd's article does not address the most updated information. She failed to include information about Twitter, Foursquare and Pinterest, which are vigorously emerging as popular social networking sites in 2012. To further continue with social networking site studies, it will be imperative to narrow down my research to one form of social networking: Twitter. Delving deeper into the world of social media, many observers note the rapid expansion of Twitter. Twitter is the second most popular social networking site, behind Facebook, and ahead of

LinkedIn, writes Michelle Warren in her article "Why Should Twitter Matter to Marketers?" She also addresses the origin of Twitter quoting founder Jack Dorsey: "We came across the word 'twitter,' and it was just perfect. The definition was 'a short burst of inconsequential information,' and 'chirps from birds.' And that's exactly what the product was." Warren claims that over time Twitter has shifted and "today those 'inconsequential' bursts of information aren't so inconsequential. With 200 million users, the twittersphere constitutes a massive opportunity for marketers looking to build their brand and learn what consumers think about them" (Warren 6).

It is true; Twitter is growing and also changing how marketing and public relations professionals conduct business. There is a high opportunity for brands to increase their exposure by tweeting. More companies are hiring social media coordinators to supplement the public relations staff. Type "social media" into Monster.com, 129 available positions come up. Claire Cain Miller of the *New York Times* writes about the importance of Twitter use for small businesses. She quotes Greg Sterling, an analyst who studies the Internet's influence on shopping and local businesses, saying that Twitter is "accessible, free and simple." He also says: "Small businesses typically get more than half of their customers through word of mouth, and Twitter is the digital manifestation of that. Twitter users broadcast messages of up to 140 characters in length, and the culture of the service encourages people to spread news to friends in their own network."

Many scholars have been interested in the rise of social media. Although it is constantly evolving, there are some insightful articles on its rise. "To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter" by Alice Marwick and danah boyd is a relevant article that examines the relationship between celebrities and their Twitter accounts. Marwick and

boyd write that Twitter gives readers "backstage access" to celebrities. "Celebrity practitioners reveal what appears to be personal information to create a sense of intimacy between participant and follower" (Marwick 143). She uses the term "sense of intimacy" because the reader is still somewhat removed form the author. In fact, we do not always know who the author is. Marwick and boyd write, "While some accounts are clearly identified as written by a team… others are written by 'ghost twitterers' in the voice of the celebrity." They continue to state that "some famous people lack the time or interest to maintain an account but view it as a good marketing tool" (143). Overall, it depends on the account, but Twitter may not necessarily give followers the intimacy they believe to have. Each account varies;

> Some broadcasting information about an upcoming tour or book, others write about personal subjects, post exclusive content, or chat about their daily lives. This type of strategic revealing found on confessional talk show appearances, tell-all autobiographies, and magazine interviews has been criticized as 'second order intimacy' or the 'illusion of intimacy'… and a poor substitute for actual interaction. (143)

Thus, Twitter may not offer the information many seek.

In the business world, companies have latched on to social media as a form of public relations. More specifically, businesses have designated specific public relations professionals to handle a company's social media. In the scholarly article "Twitter as a Public Relations Tool" Evans, Twomey and Talan examine how Twitter and micro blogs have gained prominence in the business world. "Findings suggest that public relations

practitioners consider micro blogging to be a valuable asset to a campaign's social media strategy. They believe that Twitter offers a form of communication not offered by other social media application, and they believe micro blogging will continue to be an essential part of an integrated communications campaign" (Evans 1). The benefit of Twitter is derived from the easily accessible Internet, which is referred to as the "ultimate global village" (1). It provides a platform to access up to date news and information at any given time. It is a no brainer that public relations professionals would latch on and embrace the power of the Internet. Ultimately, it is changing how we conduct business.

Social media is known for its ability to connect people virtually and create dialogue. When used for business purposes, "public relations is no longer a one-way conversation, it is a constant dialogue between an organization and its audience" (Evans 3). This interaction can generate constant conversation between a consumer and a business, celebrity, or politician. The content posted reaches a constantly changing public audience. Twitter users must monitor each tweet and "produce creative, innovative and consistent digital messages that successfully represent the brand regardless of the intended audience" (3). When used successfully, Twitter is an excellent tool that can more effectively communicate information that would otherwise be posted on a company's website or in the form of a press release.

On a more personal note, Twitter allows for companies to communicate with their customers in a more casual way. They can "provide an entrée for organizations into previous private realms" (Evans 5). This valuable communication method can facilitate a relationship that may not have previously existed, but helps to foster connections between the consumer and brand. Problems can arise though if Twitter is not used with thought

and care. "If companies don't actively listen to online conversations about their audiences, then there is a huge opportunity for problems. Also, companies that use language or a tone that is too corporate come across as fake. Like in any medium, you need to adapt your content, tone and style to be relevant to your audience" (10). Twitter and other forms of social media undoubtedly help a brand grow, only if used effectively. It is merely a "tactic in an overall communications effort" (11) and cannot be relied on solely for its platform. Twitter users must also take care and thought to each tweet they post.

Now that many businesses and brands realize the importance and prominence of Twitter, they need to work on how to use it successfully. In the article "Message is clear - Social Networks Can Boost Your Business," from the Scunthorpe (England) Telegraph, Rachel Perry, a Nisa-Today employee, gives tips and testimonials on how to successfully integrate social media into a business. In fact, she states that every business must use social media, regardless of the industry. The fastest growing social media site is Twitter and there are huge benefits such as the ability to talk to people you would not normally get to. The largest mistake people make when using social media for business purposes is forgetting to be "social." She states that "it is important not to forget the social side of social media, it cannot be all promotional messages as followers you build up can get bored. It can be a lot of work too. It doesn't sound much when all you have to play with is 140 characters, but it needs a lot of planning to get it right" (Perry 1). Perry also provides various other tips such as if you are short on time, only use one social media platform well, as opposed to many platforms badly. Overall, it is clear that social media is an integral part of businesses and should not be overlooked.

Fashion and Twitter, Lack of Scholarship

I examined many scholars who have studied social media and Twitter: Bernoff,

Boyd, Marwick, Miller, Picard, Smith, and Warren. Most of these authors either study the

rise or social media, or the popularity of businesses using social media. Unfortunately,

there is little research on the connection between social media and fashion, which is why

my thesis is so relevant. I have examined many popular sources that link Twitter and

fashion, which provide useful information that may be worth examining. Twitter has

had an enormous impact on the fashion industry. It has created a platform where

the dialogues of fashion can circulate. Fashion designers can actively maintain the

public perception of their brand thorough the use of their Twitter accounts. Twitter

has the ability to bring designers and fans closer together. The connection only

continues to strengthen as fashion houses increase their Twitter activity. For example,

@OscarPRGirl, the Twitter account for iconic fashion house Oscar de la Renta, has

107,795 followers. In an interview with the famous tweeter, Michelle Halpern of

StyleCaster.com questions how her job came into existence. Director of Communications

Erika Bearman or OscarPRGirl says: "a year ago we were talking about how we could be

involved in Twitter with an authentic voice - our CEO Alex Bolen came up with the idea

for OscarPRGirl where I would write about interesting aspects of our brand." Bolen

explained, "We have beautiful product. But it needs to be talked about; it needs to be

explained. Social networking conversations are going to happen anyway and I think I'd

rather be part of the discussion" (qtd. In Holmes, 1).

The most interesting and commonly overlooked aspect of Twitter is that it is

completely free. Consumers can follow brands and feel that they are more intimately

related to the company. Brands can expand their market and can see what followers they

attract on Twitter. *Women's Wear Daily's* Rachel Strugatz reports on designer Tory

Burch and how Burch credits her brand's success to social media. Strugatz writes,

"Burch, [in a presentation] self-deprecatingly confess[ed] to the crowd that she's always

referred to as "technologically unfit" by her three children, [but] now sits at the helm of

one of the most digitally savvy brands in the fashion industry." Now that fashion brands

are certain to have a Twitter account, what they do with it is crucial. Twitter can be

extremely powerful, helping businesses and fashion labels become better known. The

downside, Twitter is public and what is posted is now in the hands of anyone with an

Internet connection. It is so crucial for designers to realize the implications of posting

their inside information. Is there a balance between sharing and over-sharing? Can the

information posted pave the way for copyright infringement?

Method

Through my research of Twitter, I want to examine tweets and study what

types of Tweets are most common in the fashion industry. I also want to determine

the motivating factors to Tweet, what kind of inside information is revealed which

may lead to fashion piracy, and the message one's Twitter feed sends. To conduct

my research, I examined the Twitter accounts of three prominent fashion designers.

If I were only to select one designer, it would be too narrow to determine any useful

information and two designers can easily turn into a compare and contrast

situation, thus three designers seemed ideal. It was also imperative to choose

designers that are American. This is because I am focusing on fashion piracy in

America, where it is significantly occurring due to lax laws and no help from the

United States government. My first designer, Diane von Furstenberg, has 371,127

Twitter followers and is most famous for her wrap dress and bold prints. With a

much more modest 12,538, my next designer is Nanette Lepore, responsible for fun

and feminine duds. Finally, I chose to study designer Tory Burch, with 139,067

followers she is known for her signature ballet flats. Each designer has created a

fashion empire based on creativity, dedication and successful business practices.

Finally, all three designers tweet frequently and share the same type of customer:

educated, sophisticated, and stylish young women.

     With the designers tweeting multiple times a day, I needed to narrow down

the amount of tweets I examined. Thus, I chose to examine tweets from February

6th through the 20th, 2012. I chose these dates because from February 9th through

the 16th New York Fashion Week is held. Each of the designers I chose presented

their clothes in fashion shows during this week. These 15 days are perfect to

examine because it would be assumed that the designers would tweet about their

fashion show and the introduction of their fall 2012 collection. I expect to see tweets

that include multimedia that relates to Fashion Week. Because new designs are

being shown to the public during this time, there may be an increased risk of

designs being stolen.

     To better grasp the meaning of the designer's tweets, I decided to separate

the tweets into five categories. The first category includes any tweet that contains a

link, such as a link to a picture, video, or outside webpage. The second category,

possibly the most simple, is the category for interesting or inspiring facts. This

category is for tweets that do not include anything but a message from the

designers' Twitter accounts, no links, no mentions, or pictures; just characters. Next, we have the retweet category. This category is specifically for all the retweets that the designers post. A retweet is when a Twitter user quotes another Twitter user fully, not adding or altering their message in any way. In the fourth category, there are tweets that interact with another Twitter user. These are tweets that mention another user, respond to another user, tweet to another user and so on. The last category, intended to be a miscellaneous category, turned into a category for the complex tweets. These tweets had a link plus a mention of another Twitter account. By separating the designers' tweets into these categories I can more easily determine what they are tweeting about and the message they are sending.

I chose to divide the tweets into these categories because it seemed that each tweet would fit into one of these five categories. They encompass every type of tweet in existence. It is much easier to analyze the Twitter accounts if the tweets can be separated into these categories. Without the categories it is harder to grasp each designer's pattern on Twitter. The patterns that are revealed help show the nature of the typical tweet and provide a representation of the Twitter account as a whole.

Analysis

When separating the tweets into five categories, the number of tweets were fairly equally divided among all three designers. This excludes the last category, where there were fewer tweets. This category, Twitter interactions plus an interaction with another Twitter user, represents the most complex kind of tweet. Because it incorporates two different aspects, it may be more time consuming to craft and thus not used as regularly.

When examining Diane von Furstenberg's Twitter feed, there were 29 tweets in the first category: links. Links most regularly used were to the DVF Facebook page and website as well as pictures using twit pic. Interestingly, the pictures tweeted were always of her product. Also tweeted were links to outside news sources such as the *New York Times* and *Vogue* with positive reviews of her fashion show. Most importantly, DVF tweeted links to watch her fashion show live. Because I intentionally chose dates that fell during New York Fashion Week, I expected that she would have tweets that promote and discuss her fashion show that took place on February 12th. She takes multimedia one-step further by encouraging her followers to check out live streaming of her fashion show. By clicking on the link, anyone can see the entire show streamed live or a re-streaming. Now, the general public gains access to what the most prestigious members of the press, heads of large retail corporations, socialites, and starlets see. Overall, this entire category was mostly comprised of tweets that related back to her brand.

The tweets seemed self-promotional in an informative way. DVF is letting her consumers have a taste of the behind the scene actions as well as first looks of her newest designs. It is almost as if her followers are her customers and by clicking on the link or reading about the latest designs, the followers are being lured into the world of DVF. Someone who may never be able to afford a signature wrap dress (most cost $365.00) can follow @DVF and still feel a sense of belonging.

Tory Burch also had many tweets with links such as links to an article about her designs, articles about fashion week, and many links to pictures. Links are important because they generally are clicked on and can take the user to another

platform. For instance, a link that directs the follower to the Tory Burch website could encourage browsing at the online clothes and even tempt the follower enough to make a purchase. The links to pictures increase on the day of her fashion show and vary from a picture of the runway, the lipstick the models use and floral embellished hairpins. @toryburch tweets pictures of the models from a distance, but no close pictures that would reveal close design information. Although, on the day before her show, @toryburch provided her users with a link to watch the entire show streamed live. It is impossible to decipher if Tory Burch intentionally tweets to limit the amount of clothing detail revealed, but she does post many pictures that certainly add to her Twitter feed making it more dynamic and interactive.

The most interesting category, and possibly the most revealing is the simple comment, interesting or inspiring fact tweet. This category is interesting because the Twitter user is not using a link or another user as the subject of her tweet. The topic, and style is completely up to the author. Similar to the first category, @DVF had 28 tweets total, each ending in "Love, Diane." Diane von Furstenberg keeps it a mystery as to who is in charge of tweeting for her well-followed Twitter feed, but with these tweets, she claims it is herself. This is doubtful based on her average of eight tweets per day. At the age of 66, Diane von Furstenberg is busier than most people. For many, Twitter would be put as a lower priority and certainly not maintained as much as @DVF. On February 8th she tweeted 30 times! Her tweets range from information regarding her fashion show and brand to tweets that are simply tidbits of inspiration. Her tweet on February 8th: "5 days to the show! Clock is ticking and so are the sewing machines! Fingers crossed. Love Diane" was

interesting and seemed extremely candid. The fact that @DVF is tweeting about crossed fingers and a ticking clock seems to indicate that she is stressed about the upcoming fashion show. This shows a very human side to Diane von Furstenberg and although maybe not the most professional, it allows her followers to get an honest look.

In a similar manner to @DVF, @toryburch tweets, "fittings, fittings and more fittings… 6 days to go!" leading up to her fashion show. This casual, yet stressful countdown builds anticipation to her upcoming show. This emphasizes the importance of the release of her fall collection as well as informs her customers that new clothes are on their way. On the day before her show @toryburch tweets, "I am feeling pretty good about our run of show. Very nervous but good." Along with @DVF, this allows her twitter followers to gain a sense of personality and humanistic quality. These tweets are important because they contradict the feeling of corporate or robotic tweets.

@toryburch engages her followers by casually asking questions such as her tweet on February 11th: "14 hours and counting at the office, fading. Fittings are going well but I definitely need something for energy. Any ideas?" By engaging her followers, Tory Burch uses social media to its fullest intention: to connect with people.

Building anticipation to her show, @nanettelepore tweeted "selecting runway music now!! I'm not giving away any hints ;)." This casual, yet informative tweet is similar to those of @DVF and @toryburch where the most prominent take away is the element of personality. On February 9th, @nanettelepore tweeted "one

week to go!! #MBFW." She is also building anticipation to her show, but strategically

uses the hash tag #MBFW. This increases her search engine optimization, meaning,

if someone were to search MBFW (which stands for Mercedes Benz Fashion Week),

Nanette Leopre's tweet would come up. The more people seeing her tweet, the more

her brand can prosper.

The @DVF tweets that make the Twitter feed stand out among another

designers are the inspirational tweets. Her tweet on February 9th says, "Don't forget

to discover yourself... you will find a lot more than you think! Love Diane." Diane's

inspirational tweets have a maternal feel possibly because the designer is 66 years

old and constantly tweets about her children and grandchildren. The inspirational

tweets are a departure from most of her other informative tweets. They add a

personal touch to her Twitter account and add interest to the 140 characters. On the

negative side, the inspirational tweets may come across as juvenile or patronizing

and may turn a more sophisticated reader away. For example, a colleague may not

be interested in reading about living life to the fullest yet is more interested in the

facts of the brand. Furthermore, it seems as if DVF is trying to communicate that

there is more to her Twitter feed than facts about her brand. It comes across as a

much needed break from the constant barrage of information, pictures, quotes and

videos that all relate back to her designs. Contrary to the personal tweets, @DVF's

Twitter feed shows numerous tweets that are less geared towards customers and

more for those inside the fashion industry. On Feburary 10th she tweeted, "an

original @DVF wrap dress on display at last night's exhibition #IMPACTCFDA: 50

Years of the @CFDA #nyfw." Diane von Furstenberg's typical customer may not

have heard of the CFDA, and could not relate to this tweet. Thus, there is evidence that @DVF makes an effort to not only tweet to her customers, but others inside the fashion industry.

Retweets, commonly known for being the laziest kind of tweet, are found 25 times on the Diane von Furstenberg Twitter feed. They can help facilitate conversation between other Twitter users easily and efficiently. Each tweet that @DVF retweets has a mention of Diane von Furstenberg somewhere in the tweet. Some, like a tweet from *W Magazine*, have links that promote Diane von Furstenberg as well as a mention of @DVF. In this case, the tweet "The latest from the runways: @DVF Fall/Winter 2012 –bit.ly/yExZag #NYFW", has a link to see pictures from the DVF fashion show. Also retweeted are mentions from extremely well-followed accounts: @Styledotcom[1], @nytimesfashion[2], @ELLEmagazine[3], and @WhoWhatWear[4] all of which post links to view pictures of the Diane von Furstenberg collection online, or an article about the collection. It seems as if every retweet that @DVF posts purposefully draws attention the brand and its product.

By retweeting, Diane von Furstenberg is creating her own publicity. She is calling into play other Twitter users to show her readers the span of the company and information that typically would be in the press section of her website. Because many of her Twitter followers are now getting their information about her brand from their Twitter feed, as opposed to their website, it seems as if the @DVF Twitter

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[1] 234,025 Twitter followers
[2] 413,336 Twitter followers
[3] 1,004,075 Twitter followers
[4] 703,124 Twitter followers

account is trying to show Twitter followers the press the brand has achieved and further inform the follower about the brand and its products.

Outside of Diane von Furstenberg's fashion week retweets, she retweets other information about where she is and what she is doing in the fashion industry. To exemplify, on February 7th, she retweeted the *Good Morning America* host @RobinRoberts: "Always love when fashion queen @DVF is here." This is DVF's way of saying that she is a guest on *Good Moring America*, and that she hopes her fans will tune in. By retweeting, DVF brings in another voice and can quickly convey a message without having to craft the tweet herself. Interaction on Twitter is one of its primary intrinsic functions and DVF is not afraid to retweet. It may be due to the ease of pushing the retweet button versus writing an original tweet, but because most of her tweets promote her brand, she can use retweeting to further encourage her followers to engage.

Nanette Lepore retweets slightly less than @DVF but seems to have the same purpose. Almost all of @nanettelepore's retweets are of a well-followed source such as @glamour_fashion[5], @Bergdorfs[6], @TeenVogue[7] and @Cosmopolitan[8]. The tweets are typically mentioning Nanette Lepore in a positive light. Clearly @nanettelepore can easily retweet other reputable accounts and further engage her followers. None of her retweets were about a topic outside her fashion line. Tory Burch retweets only when she is responding, or adding a comment. Not once, in the tweets I examined, did Tory Burch retweet another twitter user completely. She

[5] 265,464 Twitter followers
[6] 106,250 Twitter followers
[7] 1,092,739 Twitter followers
[8] 251,813 Twitter followers

does use reply and tweet "Thank u! RT @InStyle: Runway Looks We Love: @toryburch's classic love story collection & latest accessories (link)." Just like the other designers, she retweeted a reputable twitter account, Instlye[9]. Interestingly, all three designers retweet from other fashion sources. In particular, most of them are fashion publications. This is possibly a strategic public relations tactic. Friendly and frequent rapport with publications is necessary for designers to increase brand awareness. Fashion publications hold the lock and key to fashion brand exposure. When publications feature designers, designers gain customers and revenue.

Continuing to promote her brand Diane von Furstenberg has 34 tweets in the last category, tweets that converse with other Twitter users. Throughout the 15 days I examined Diane von Furstenberg's Twitter feed, she primarily conversed with Twitter user @womeninworld, a Twitter account "dedicated to advancing women and girls through stories that rarely get coverage in the news noise". @DVF participated in one of their weekly Women in the World Chats or #wiwchat, where they speak with inspirational and successful women. On February 8th @DVF tweeted to @womeninworld, using the hash tag #wiwchat 30 times. Showing her devotion to philanthropic work Diane von Furstenberg not only shares her wisdom, she once again spreads awareness of her brand. Diane von Furstenberg offers inspiration while mentioning her brand: "@womeninworld I boost women's confidence through fashion. I design to make women feel beautiful. The best version of herself! #wiwchat." Many more tweets follow that talk about Diane von Furstenberg as a person exemplifying the struggles she's overcome to cerate a

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[9] 2,116,240 Twitter followers

successful fashion brand. She also offers a great deal of inspiration and positive thinking.

These #wiwchat tweets do not come as a surprise as Diane von Furstenberg is known for her charitable work and devotion to a positive outlook on life. Her tweets are a true representation of the public image she portrays as she is known to participate in numerous charities and non-profit organizations such as Vital Voices, a non-profit group that trains women in over 150 countries to be leaders, and the Council of Fashion Designers America which supports and protects fashion designers. She also created the DVF Awards which "honor the strong, courageous women who have rallied against and overcame adversity to affect positive change within their communities and also on a global scale" (DVF.com). Recently, she also designed limited edition Coke bottles that support the Foundation for the National Institute of Health, which supports research for women's heart health. These examples of charity work, plus many more, exemplify von Furstenberg's large heart and dedication to serving others.

Tory Burch and Nanette Lepore also consciously portray themselves in a positive manner through their Twitter accounts. Not once did a designer tweet a negative comment or respond in an unfriendly manner. Nanette Lepore tweets, "@seventeenmag it's an awesome way to bounce into spring!" Cheerful and optimistic tweets represent the colorful fabrics and patterns Lepore uses in her clothing. Tory Burch tweets, "@MrJoeZee @Cindi_Leive and some of our other favorite Tastemakers on what inspires them about #NewYork (link to article)." By

speaking about New York, this tweet exudes a cosmopolitan feel. Tory Burch is representing her chic New York based brand well through her twitter account.

To continue, the Diane von Furstenberg Twitter account places a huge emphasis on inspirational positive thinking. Although tweets are 140 characters or less @DVF seems to infuse each one with motivation. Even her tweets that converse with another twitter user are motivational. @DVF's conversation with @womeninworld is a prime example, despite the various types of tweets, Diane von Furstenberg or the author behind the tweets, wants to send a positive message to its followers. Could this positive message be hinting that people should live each day by making positive choices? Diane von Furstenberg's philanthropy has certainly surpassed many other designers, and she strives to make the world a better place. This mentality completely opposes the negativity of fashion piracy. @DVF may be thinking too positively and relying too heavily on the good in others to respect her intellectual property. As a savvy businesswoman Diane von Furstenberg must be aware that the content she posts online can have negative effects, such as fashion piracy, but as a positive person, she looks on the positive side and posts the multimedia anyway.

Nanette Lepore's tweets generally have an informative feel such as "time's almost up on my 70% off coat sale!!" or "prints charming" accompanied with a picture of spring prints. Nanette Lepore also has a few inspirational tweets, although not nearly as many compared to Diane von Furstenberg. An example is her tweet on February 11th, "An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all" and her tweet on February 14th, "Moderation is a fatal thing. Nothing succeeds

like excess." Tory Burch also tweets in a similar manner; many of her tweets provide the follower with information in regards to her clothing like. On February 14th she tweeted a picture of handbags with tortoise and floral details. Also, @toryburch tweets fun facts and interesting quotes. On February 20th she tweeted "Did you know women are 50 percent of the population, but only 30 percent of owners private businesses?" This is an interesting tweet because it is inspiring for women, her customers are women, and so this makes sense. Also interesting is the choice to phrase this fact in a question form. By including "did you know" she is engaging her Twitter followers and making her tweet seem more personal.

Interestingly, when looking at all three Twitter accounts, not one of the designers had a steady number of tweets per day. Some days there was one tweet and on others eight or nine. This is noteworthy because a steady number of tweets each day sends a preprogrammed, or corporate feel. Along with the content they are tweeting, each designer does an excellent job of making their account personal, relatable and social.

By separating the tweets into these categories, it is easy to comprehend the types of content the designers are posting. While Twitter is often used to connect with other users, the designers use Twitter to promote themselves, their brand and their clothing. They give followers an inside look into newly released designs. By use of multimedia, such as pictures or video streaming, their followers are able to gain inside access to aspects of the brand not seen before. Through this, the designers have allowed their fans to more intimately connect with the brand. As recently as five years ago, these fans did not have this kind of exposure to brands; they would

have had to use magazines, Google searches or go into clothing stores to learn more about the designer and their designs. Now that the designers have increased their base of fans, they can because better known. They can undoubtedly thank Twitter for its large contribution and will most likely continue to use it at the current rate.

Clearly there is a major drawback to Twitter use and the information it provides to the public. All three of the designers I studied chose not to severely limit the design information posted online. Although, they do not post detailed or close up photos of the designs, they do post links to live streams of the fashion show. It seems that the designers would rather provide fans and consumers with up to date information about their newest designs than take steps to prohibit their designs being stolen. Needless to say, Twitter is not the only platform for fashion designs to be shared; yet it is easily accessible and constantly updated, providing fashion design thieves with the perfect bank to steal from.

Although all three designers have different brands and Twitter accounts they all tweet in a very similar manner. Each designer had tweets in all of the categories and all three of the designers tweeted on a regular basis. Because I choose to examine designers that design women's clothing only, the tweets often had a feminine feel, or a sense of empowerment for women. Finally, it seemed, due to the high volume of tweets and how each tweet was strategically crafted that the designers most likely have an employee (public relations professional) tweeting for the brand.

Conclusion

Through my analysis of these designers, it is clear that their tweets have a distinct fuel. No matter which of the five categories each tweet was initially placed into, each tweet either informs and or inspires. What better way to inform than to show; thus multimedia comes into play. For example, a designer could tweet "new bright dresses hitting Saks this Friday" or they could upload a picture of new bright dresses. The latter is much more likely to engage the consumer. It not only better represents the dress, it more specifically conveys the information. Obviously, uploading the picture comes with a price. Once the picture hits the Internet, it is available to everyone and could possibly be used to create a knock-off. Clearly it is much easier to steal a design from a picture than it would be if they had to go to the store to find the dress. The designers make no effort to limit the design images they post. They value their followers and the content they post and are willing to risk the chance of fashion piracy. Moreover, the pictures posted usually are action shots, or pictures that show only a bit of a garment. These, of course, are much harder to decipher intricate design details.

Twitter can have many negative effects. Because all three designer's accounts are public, it is impossible to track who is reading their content. Each and every post must be appropriately portraying the brand and further its public portrayal. Also important to note is that when a tweet is posted, it immediately is seen by thousands. Yes, the user can then delete tweets, but often it is not without many seeing it first. This would be a problem if there was content posted that was false, or accidentally posted. Finally, there is the large issue of fashion piracy. Often Twitter users follow designers on Twitter to gain more intimate knowledge of a brand. One

of the primary tools used is multimedia such as images and videos. All of the designers examined use images and videos of their clothing designs in their tweets, which allows any person with Internet access to easily view their designs. Because I examined the designer's feeds during New York Fashion Week, I was able to see each designer showing their newly released collection. Each designer provided users with a link to watch their fashion show. The clothes in the show have yet to hit sales floors allowing cheaper companies to produce similar designs and put them on the shelves first.

Through my research and study of Twitter and the fashion industry, it is clear that there is a direct link between fashion designers use of social media and their brand's public image. Designers use Twitter to further convey a feeling about their brand. Each tweet is strategic and not nearly as candid as many other Twitter users. However, there is no proof that designers consciously limit the content they publish to specifically prevent fashion piracy. I'm interested in determining the initial impetus to post the large amount of media, such as pictures and videos, that spans many fashion designers' Twitter accounts and if ever it occurred to them that they may be over sharing.

The involvement a consumer or fan has with the brand directly relates to the amount of content the designer posts and interaction. The designers I studied clearly consciously try and frequently use Twitter to increase their involvement and connection with their consumers. This creates a loyal following and increases the chances that their brand will sell. Consumers can look at the Diane von Furstenberg wrap dress and want it primarily for the brand. They purchase the feeling of

empowerment, sophistication, and luxury that Diane von Furstenberg implies. To a large group of consumers the knock off dress does not come with the same feeling. This "feeling" that drives customers to purchase luxury goods comes from the message that the designers send through their Twitter accounts. She lures in customers with gorgeous clothing that will not only cover your body, but will make you feel a certain way. This feeling cannot be achieved by purchasing a garment from a generic brand. I believe this is why Twitter is so important to fashion designers.

Furthermore, Twitter is a great outlet to expose designs to consumers and let them become aware of them before they hit the shelves of other retailers. They want their customers to know where the original design came from and why it is important to buy it from them. For example, designers frequently post pictures of celebrities in their clothing. This is because they want customers to feel like they have the opportunity to own the same garment as their favorite celebrity. Consumers also want to dress like celebrities and achieve the look of stylish, expensive clothing, which typically cannot be achieved by purchasing from a lower-end, mass-producing store such as Forever 21.

Although there is no proof that designers limit their content posted, never once did I find close details about the garments such as how an item was sewn or the fabric makeup of a dress. They are not spelling out how to reproduce their clothing; they use images and pictures, but never release construction details. This is certainly conscious.

It is important to continue the study of Twitter and fashion designers as there is little research done on this subject matter. I find it incredibly interesting that each designer tweets in a similar way. If I were to continue my research it would be interesting to see how foreign designers are using Twitter and if it they tweet in a similar manner to American designers. Because the European Union has more comprehensive laws against fashion piracy, and are less threatened, European designers may tweet in a more candid manner about garment production.

In the end, my research is significant because of how important the fashion industry is to the American economy. The industry produces approximately $350 billion dollars annually and has that number has the potential to grow if the government can protect designers. (Fanelli) I believe designers are using public relations tactics such as Twitter accounts to combat the loss that occurs from stolen designs. If somehow stolen fashion designs could be decreased, Twitter accounts could be less strategic. Regardless, the use of Twitter to convey the feeling of a brand will ultimately be integral to companies. Designers have significantly expanded the canvas in which they can brand themselves. Not only can they communicate their message through their clothing but also now designers have websites, blogs, Facebook pages, Pinterest accounts and most importantly Twitter accounts. Social media changes the way consumers and businesses interact.

Twitter has the powerful ability to bring the brand and the consumer closer, forming a new type of Internet-induced relationship. This is reminiscent of the past, where consumers and producers had a relationship. Now, too many people purchase from large corporations, negating any interaction between producer and consumer. Designer

Kate Brierley attributes much of her success to the relationship she has with her customers. As a couture designer producing high-end garments, she is thankful that she has her own store, which allows her to build her brand and educate clients. She is "choosing a distribution on a path that's old fashioned. There is a relationship between the consumer and the designer." She says that once someone has a connection, it is a part of his or her life, not just a product. During our interview a client entered the store to pick up a dress. After a cordial interaction, which included hugs and conversation, Brierley explained to me how she made that customer's wedding dress three years ago but the customer has been loyal ever since. Brierley feels like she is giving each customer a gift and is proud of each and every item she produces.

Now, the majority of producers never meet their consumers. Fortunately, with the advancement and popularity of social media, relationships can be formed. Luxury designers are able to speak to their customers through Twitter. More or less, my research cannot answer the question of whether or not Twitter accounts of fashion designers contribute to fashion piracy, but it lead me to discover more about the importance of Twitter in the fashion industry. Fashion piracy harms designers, costing them millions of dollars, but Twitter can help. Although this rapidly emerging social media site can show the public images and videos of designs, it has a much bigger and more important purpose. Twitter accounts allow people to connect, specifically designers and their customers, and form relationships that increase consumerism, promote loyalty, and ultimately decrease fashion piracy.

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