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Social Media Impact on Virtual Shopping

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The following senior honors thesis project was developed to look at the connections between the topics of social media and virtual shopping. The domains of technology and e-commerce have created a fast-paced and fluctuating retail environment. Both social media and virtual shopping are increasing in popularity and use across the country and are influential in how consumers shop virtually and in real time. The research on social media and virtual shopping informs how the topics impact one another and the larger retail market. Research that looks at the connection between social media and virtual shopping can help companies prepare to accommodate consumers in the new realm of where e-commerce intersects with social media. This project aims to add to this growing body of research.

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SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT ON VIRTUAL SHOPPING

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Abstract

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Introduction

Technological advances in electronic devices, like tablets and smartphones, have made the Internet and the world available at the touch of a button. It has become commonplace to use an electronic device to conduct business, connect with friends, or shop for items with quick and easy access. Society has become so reliant on technology to stay connected to others and the larger world, research has found that on average, a person checks their phone 34 times a day (Cohen, 2011). In fact, over 1 billion people in the world use a smartphone. This means 80% of people living on earth use a mobile phone with access to the Internet (Anson, 2012). With more than half of the world using smartphones, a large portion of people have the potential to shop online and use social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Sixty-one percent of Americans use social media on a daily basis (Arno, 2012).

People ages 18-24 spend the most time social networking. Overall, individuals spend 20% of their time on a computer social networking, and 30% of their time social networking on a mobile network (device) (Jaume, 2012).

The online Webster Merriam dictionary defines social media as "forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content" (Social Media, 2013). Social media is not only a fun way to connect with old friends or post pictures; it has become a tool used for a variety of functions. Through social media, employers can find new employees, users can form and join common interest groups, support a political cause, and network with professionals from all over the world. Some of the most common social media sites are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Linked-In. Facebook is the top social network used at 17% on a computer with Twitter following with 13%. (Jaume, 2012).

Facebook is primarily a social media network to connect with colleagues, family and friends. Individuals can send messages, post links and pictures, and create groups. Twitter is a live streaming of messages, posts, or pictures by a user. Instagram is mainly for posting pictures with the ability to change some part of the picture where people can "like" or comment on the pictures. Linked-In is mainly for the business world. On this site, a user posts resume related items on a "profile" and can then connect with businesses that align with their career goals. Many companies are beginning to rely on these social media sites to boost sales, raise awareness of the company, or recruit future employees.

E-commerce plays an important role in the real and virtual retail world. E-commerce, also known as virtual or online shopping, is the characteristic of a retail store that is strictly online. E-commerce stores are retails stores that are strictly online, without any physical store. However, characteristics of this type of shopping are similar to those conducted in a physical store. They include looking at items, creating a "virtual" cart, and checking out or purchasing items. Most retail stores have an online site. Consumers turn to this kind of shopping when they do not feel like visiting a busy mall or when a product is not available through a traditional retail store. E-commerce accounts for more than $225 billion dollars in sales in the retail industry (Brohan, 2013). Rising e-commerce stores are becoming more popular as this industry grows. These stores include Gilt Groupe, Etsy, Swell, and T-Mart. Each of these stores was formed specifically for online usage.

There is little research on how social media and virtual shopping are connected. The research that has been conducted looks at the large investments retail companies are making to place their advertising on social media sites. The age demographics of social media users have particularly garnered interest for retail companies with shopping websites. The largest age

demographic of social media users is 18-25 years old. Eighty-five percent of college students use at least one social media website, and 80% use these sites on a regular basis (Cha, 2009). Companies see 18 through 30-year olds as appealing targets for sellers of goods and services. They believe that consumers within this age bracket are more likely to purchase products or services online than are older consumers as they spend more time online (Cha, 2009). By placing their advertising on social media sites they intend to gain more coverage and more consumers within this age range, thus increasing their profits with younger spenders.

The correlation between social media and virtual shopping has not been widely studied. However, both of these topics are interrelated and further research into this relationship would give great insight as to how retail companies can increase their profitability through online sales. Social media platforms give users the ability to instantly talk and virtually see one another 50 or 5,000 miles away. The technology to keep these sites running is constantly evolving to keep up with technological advances and users needs. Online shopping is also becoming increasingly convenient and easy to navigate with companies finding ways to make products more attractive and accessible to consumers. Products can now be "tried on" using avatars. Avatars are a computer-animated replication of a body or face, or an image used to represent a user's identification. (Rouse, 2005). To keep consumers engaged and interested in new products, e-commerce companies have to continually make changes to their websites with functions that accommodate advancing technology. Social media developers accommodate users by updating their sites with additional functions and tools that make site navigation easier. Virtual shopping has the ability to do the same functions while expanding online business and increasing their sales. The ways social media developers have adapted their sites to the fast-paced needs of their

users have the potential to inform the expansion and approach of how virtual shopping is currently being done.

The growing research on the correlation between social media and virtual shopping is important because of the impact of social media and e-commerce has on the world. Eventually, users will have the availability to use a virtual shopping site within or connected to a social media site. This connection has multiple benefits for retail stores. Shopping via social media spreads awareness about the company, informs the development of marketing strategies, and generates larger profits for e-commerce sales.

Literature Review

History of Virtual Shopping

In the 1980's virtual shopping became a topic of interest to Raymond Burke, University of Pennsylvania Wharton School. With limited technology, Burke started researching virtually simulated environments and selling products. His work focused on simulated environments that mimicked to scale shopping stores and its aisles. His research on virtual shopping was collected from paper surveys and interviews (Rizzo, 2012.)

Virtual shopping was looked at further when the Computer Clothing Research Group at England's Nottingham Trent University developed a program called the Virtuosi project in 1993. The Virtuosi project was created due to the growing interest in virtual shopping from designers and retailers. These groups were encountering challenges with garments not fitting consumer body shapes correctly in a retail stores. Manufacturers and designers wanted to find a way for clothes to fit consumers perfectly before arriving and placed on the store floor. The Virtuosi project created virtual mannequins. The mannequins replicated consumers and runway models, and the accompanying software enabled the designers to work with patterns and material cloth

databases in a virtual studio (Gray, 1998). The ultimate goal of this project was a virtual studio that could be used by a designer who would be able to work on a mannequin while on the phone with a retailer at the same time. This transcended fashion trends in a fast and original way (Gray). Today this is happening via satellite and Internet via social media.

With great strides in technology and software programming the millennium has brought with it the capacity for consumers to order products from stores online. Many online stores also offer a virtual aspect of the website. In this realm, "virtual" means being able to "try" products on or see the way they look on an avatar. Websites such as H&M, Ray Ban, and the online store Zugara are a few of the websites that use avatars and virtual dressing rooms. Non-retail companies such as Kraft, Pepsi-Co, Unilever, and Proctor and Gamble (P&G) have also invested in virtual technology (Rizzo, 2012). Stores have found the importance of being able to adapt to the evolving shopping habits of consumers. Creating the impression that online stores are like their physical counterparts but allow for the convenience of shopping from a smartphone may influence consumers to make more online purchases and increase e-commerce sales for stores.

Dassault System's, a leader in the business world is a company that helps people and businesses with developing virtual universes with 3-D design software, 3-D digital mock-up and product lifecycle management. In September of 2012, the company launched Perfect Shelf, a virtual mock-up display of "realistic views of retail aisles including shelves, fixtures, products, and promotional materials-allowing the shopping experience design process to take place significantly faster, with greater extent and flexibility and at lower cost" (Wong, 2012, p. 12). This system creates a real-life experience for any type of store including retail or grocery. The Perfect Shelf does not require a certain skill level to operate and was created for easy navigation. Recent research has found that the use of Perfect Shelf or other virtual shopping mechanisms has

increased sales and retail planogram optimization (Rizzo, 2012).

The future of virtual shopping is where companies will take online virtual reality shopping into retail stores. Currently, a Taiwanese clothing company has taken the virtual reality aspect of a retail website, and has put it into a dressing room of a retail store. This virtual fitting room uses the software similar to that of what retail websites use, puts it in the dressing room, and has the consumer "try" on different outfits by the touch of a button. This program eliminates the need to bring clothes into a fitting room and gives the consumer a 360-degree view of the clothing by superimposing the garments directly onto a live image of the consumer's body (Virtual Shopping, 2012). Taiwanese stores are now testing these virtual systems to see how consumers use this software and whether or not they like its functions. The United States does not currently have this technology in stores, but it is available online.

Virtual shopping has a bright future ahead. Research and trials of virtual reality systems are still being assessed, but are likely to spread quickly through the fashion, technology, and business world. These systems allow consumers to easily test products and navigate retail stores. As more virtual reality systems are created to meet the needs of stores and their unique characteristics, the virtual reality world will soon become part of the retail market.

History of Social Media

Beginning in the 1980's through the 1990's social media emerged in the form of "bulletin boards". The "Bulletin Board System" (BBS) was a place on the Internet where users could place messages on a "board" to other users. The "board" was also a central system where users could download games or files (Goble, 2012). Bulletin Board Systems and America Online (AOL) were the foundation for social media. America Online is an Internet system where a user has their own profile, and could exchange e-mails and instant messages with other users.

The social media boom emerged in the late 1990's with websites such as Classmates.com, AsianAvenue.com, BlackPlanet.com, and MiGente.com (Goble, 2012). The first social media site was a platform for high school classmates to keep in touch with one another through messaging and bulletin boards. Other early social media sites were geared toward demographic-driven markets where users of a certain demographic could find other people and keep in touch over the website. These early sites were precursors to the social media revolution in the millennium.

Early on in the millennium social media sites began popping up due to advances in Internet technology and user needs. Internet speeds were increased and different types of Internet connections became available through local telephone or cable companies. Advances in computer technology also increased user access to the Internet. The first major social media site, Friendster, connected users who knew each other and then introduced other users to one another. This site intended to help users meet new people online (Goble, 2012). The next social network site Linked-In, emerged in 2003 (Goble). This social media site was for professionals who wanted to connect with other professionals in their field or other companies. This was the first social media site to be primarily used for work and business purposes (Goble). Users create a profile with resume related information to market themselves to colleagues and potential employers. MySpace, a hipper social media site directed toward young adults consisted of a profile with pictures, the user's friends, the user's own pick of background and music, and a way to message and leave posts on other users' walls.

One of the most famous social media sites that took place in popularity over MySpace was Facebook. Facebook was founded by university students in 2003. At first, the website was only open to people affiliated with colleges or universities such as students, staff and faculty

(Goble, 2012). After two years it was open for the public use. This is a site that more focuses on posting messages to users pages, posting pictures, and being able to post a "status" of something the user would like to share for all users to see. With shy of one billion users, Facebook is the leader in the global networking platforms (Goble, 2012).

Branching off from these social networks more have developed in the past five years. Twitter, Foursquare, Instagram, Pinterest, and Vine have become popular in the online world. These social media sites are geared toward younger demographics and present a more futuristic model of community-run networks (Goble, 2012). The future of social media is hard to predict due to the constantly changing ways in which people communicate and interact. Undoubtedly, there will continue to be budding community-ran social media networks as technology becomes more advanced and the needs of users change. Currently, the world has already seen double the amount of social media networks than they did five to ten years ago.

Outcome of Social Networking/Shopping

Research has shown that engaging in social networking impacts individuals positively and results in positive mood. In one study, 76% of people reported having positive feelings after using social media sites. Some of the key words respondents used to describe their mood after social networking were "connected", "excited", "energized", and "informed" (Jaume, 2012). Similar feelings are also related to results after shopping. Studies have shown that shopping increases the feelings of self-esteem and happiness. (Mielach, 2012).

After engaging in either of these activities, individuals have reported happy or euphoric feelings (Meilach, 2012). If a social media user is networking and has a happy feeling afterward, then the social media user is likely to want to continue that happy feeling with another mood enhancing activity, like shopping. When social media users see posts or pictures of their friends

with new products, this could potentially persuade the user to buy the product or a similar one on a retail store website. This can also happen when a consumer is using a website to shop and the brand has a social media website. The consumer may be encouraged to visit the site to see if they offer deals or if they can find products on that website.

Shopping on Social Media Sites

Social media is playing a huge part in the branding, marketing, and linking of retail stores. A study done on social media and shopping revealed that 47% of consumers reported that they would shop on social media sites if the function was available (Cha, 2009). Currently, most retail stores have a link to a social media website. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are being used as tools for retail stores to open up to wider age demographics.

It has become common for companies to use social media networks for "social care". This is when companies use a social media platform to provide customer service (Redsicker 2013). One in three social media users use social media care opposed to contacting a company by the phone (Redsicker, 2013). Consumers are frequently using the Facebook, blog, and Twitter pages of various companies to concern complaints, questions, or comments about products or a service.

Social media is becoming integral in the way consumers shop and act. It has been found that social networking is changing the way consumers make purchase decisions. Users are increasingly using social networking to learn about brands, products, services, and other consumer experiences. Seventy percent of social media users hear about other consumer experiences, 65% hear about products, services, and brands, and 50% express concerns about brands and services through social media sites (Redsicker, 2013).

Companies, especially retail stores, are investing increased amounts of money into social media marketing. According to the annual Social Media Marketing Industry Report from May 2013, 61% said of social media helped their business with a 43% boost in sales. They stated that almost 90% of social media increases exposure, 75% increases traffic, 65% develops loyal fans, and 54% has grown business partnerships (Dempsey, 2013). These findings link social media and virtual shopping together and companies are finding these domains impact the way a consumer shops for products.

Social Media and Shopping Apps

There are ways to social network and shop directly from a smartphone. To do this, applications for smartphones called "Apps" are specialized programs or mobile versions of existing websites that gives smartphone users the ability to use these on their devices. Smartphone users can download Apps for a low price or for free depending on the App. Most social networking sites and stores have Apps for their users to download. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram all have free Apps to make social networking easier and more accessible. Stores such as Victoria Secret, Pet Supplies, Forever 21, American Eagle, E-Bay, CVS, and Target have Apps that make it also easier to shop and navigate online or via smartphones. This makes social networking and shopping at the same time or one after another easier and quicker for consumers.

Social media affects online shopping. There are websites with Apps that have a mixture of social media and online shopping. Pinterest is a social media site that allows users to see other users products, arts and crafts, designs, food recipes, and outfits or wardrobe pieces. The main concept is to create a board of items or ideas that you would like to create or buy. The site is using social media for an online shopping website. Another website called Wanelo, is similar to Pinterest. It is a social media site linking various online retail stores websites where you can

follow other users, and buy the items they have on their boards. Pinterest was launched in 2010, and there are already close to 50 million users for the site (Smith, 2013). Social media and online shopping are becoming almost simultaneous on some sites and are successful at being the two different types of platforms.

Methodology

Procedure

To build on the existing research on the connection between social media and virtual shopping this project distributed a consumer survey to determine whether connections exist between these two topics. The survey method was chosen due to this type of analysis best fitting with the respondents participating, reliability, and a simple way to collect data from a large number of people. Additionally, a survey was chosen to best maintain confidentiality of subjects. The purpose of this survey was to ask consumers about their social media and virtual shopping usage and to inform the research on these topics.

The website used to create and distribute the survey was Survey Monkey. This site allows users to create surveys, collect data from surveys, and analyze the results. For survey distribution, a link was created for participants to click on and follow to complete the individual survey. This link was included in an email to participants. The participants were notified of the survey through their subscription to the College of Technology listserv. The survey was automatically closed by Survey Monkey after a three-week period of time.

Participant Selection

After receiving approval from the College of Technology and Human Services Subject Committee, surveys were distributed through e-mail to 150 subjects from Eastern Michigan University's Apparel, Textile, and Merchandising Program. An electronic informed consent

form was obtained from all participants at the start of the survey on Survey Monkey.
Respondents were informed of the study's purpose and asked to digitally sign an informed
consent to participate in the survey. The consent form explained to participants that their
answers would be confidential, their participation was voluntary and how the results from the
survey would be used. Individuals were given contact information if they had any questions
about the study and informed that they were able to withdraw their participation from the study
without any repercussions.

Survey Design & Materials

The survey consisted of 25 questions. Twenty of the questions were multiple choice,
while five were open-ended questions with a comment box allowing the participant to fill in their
answer. Ten of the questions were related to virtual shopping, nine to social media usage, and
three were demographic questions. For example, one of the questions related to the social media
topic asked subjects if they used certain social media websites. The possible answers they could
choose from included: Linked-In, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or All of the above. Within the
virtual shopping topic, the survey asked participants an open-ended question; "What does online
shopping mean to you?" Respondents' were able to fill in their answer into a comment box. The
survey can be found in Appendix A.

Results

Demographic Questions

The demographic section of the survey asked respondents their age, gender, and if they
were a college or non-college student. Seventy percent of respondents were female and 30%
were male. Fifty percent of participants were ages 18-24 years old, 35% were 24-34, 10% were

35-44, and 45-54 year olds made up 5%. Eighty-three percent of respondents are currently in college, while 17% reported being out of college.

Virtual/Online Shopping Usage

For 33% of respondents shopping online is a daily activity, while 66% said it was not a daily activity. Close to 50% of participants spend $100-$175 when shopping online, while 31.2% spend $50-$100, 15.2% spend less than $50, and 3.7% spend over $175. Half of respondents said that 25% of the clothing from their wardrobe was bought online, while only 1% said that all of their clothing was bought strictly online.

Sixty-five percent of participants said they shop online 0-5 times a week, with 13% of respondents shopping online 10 or more times a week. When respondents shop online, 40% say they shop at stores that they routinely shop at, 10% visit and shop on new online websites every time, and 50% responded that they shop at a mixture of new and old stores. Participants report that 66% of the online stores they shop at are easy to navigate, while 33% are mediocre to navigate. Sixty percent of respondents use virtual dressing rooms at stores like H&M or Ray Ban use. Eighty-eight percent of subjects go to a social media site such as Facebook or Twitter after shopping online.

Under the online and virtual shopping section of the survey there were three open-ended questions. The first question was "What does online shopping mean to you?" A large percentage of subjects explained that shopping online meant that they could get on the Internet and buy things or sizes they cannot from the physical retail store. Respondents explanation of online shopping included words like "easy", "efficient", "fast", "fun", "convenient", "accessible", "addicting", and "wide-variety". The following are a few of the participants' comments about their understanding of online shopping.

- "Efficient way to buy what's not available in store(s)."

- "I can order a size in something the store doesn't have."

- "Shopping on the Internet to buy items and checking out via the through the Internet instead of physically."

The second question asked subjects, "What does virtual shopping mean to you?" Less than half of respondents did not know about virtual shopping. Comments overall indicated that subjects were not sure what it was, or that an avatar is used in virtual shopping to see what products look like in real-life. Responses from participants on virtual shopping included words like "avatars", "virtual", "reality", "video game", "innovative", "exciting", "cool" and "web-cam". Below are some statements from respondents on virtual shopping.

- "Like a video game. Not sure I have ever done that."

- "I don't have to go to a store ever."

- "Using avatars that help you see what it looks like when using an online shopping store."

The last question was "What online stores that you use have a virtual dressing room? Most of the answers were one-word answers such as "H&M", "Toms", "Ray Ban", "Coach", "Shopbop", "Zugara", and "Tobi". Listed below is an answer from one of the respondents.

- "Shopbop and Coach is the main one that comes to mind now that I understand virtual shopping. It helps to show how bags/purses will fall on the body."

Social Media Usage

In the first question respondents were asked whether they had a Linked-In, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or All of the above. Most participants had a Facebook page (91.4%), 27.9% reported that they had a Linked-In, 41% have a Twitter, 20% with a Instagram, and 49.5% had all of the social media sites listed. Forty-six percent of subjects said that they were experts when

it came to their social media skills. Thirty-six percent said they were intermediate users, while 17% said they were at a beginner level.

The next question asked what social media site do respondents use the most. The top answer from participants was the social media site Facebook, followed by Twitter, and then Instagram. Ninety-five percent of respondents believe that social media has a large impact on today's society; while 3.5% of respondents think that social media sites are a waste of time.

Ninety percent of respondents said the online stores where they shop or the brands that they like do have a social media site. Eighty-six percent also said that these stores or brands have an indirect or direct link that connects the website to the brand or store's social media site. Eighty percent of subjects think that stores should have a social media site, while 20% said they should not.

Participants were asked if social networking will be or is a part of their current or future career. Sixty-percent of respondents said that it would be, 20% said it will not, and 20% said that they did not know. A little over half of participants (54%) think that social media sites help a large amount when it comes to today's society. Six percent said it helps a small amount, 12% said it helps a mediocre amount, and 28% said an excessive amount.

The last question under the social media section was "Why do you think social media has such a large impact in today's world? Some respondents' stated that it is a fast and easy way to keep in touch and connect with people. Others explained that it is an enormous aspect of the business and career world. They believe that most employers and employees use social media to find careers, recruit, and help grow business. Words found in participants' answers to this question were "connected", "business", "in-touch", "easy", "fast", "friends", "convenient",

"function", "networking", "future", "family", and "nowadays". Listed below are responses from respondents about social media.

- "Way to expand a business by generating new customers, providing immediate and up to date information, to stand out amongst competitors, and to create awareness of company and products available."

- "Millions of people from all over the world use social media to connect to others on a daily basis. It has become a way of life in sharing news and connecting with friends and family."

- "Very large impact on the way we function today. Has everything to do with networking and the workforce. Most people get jobs via social media."

Discussion

The data collected from this survey and from previous research indicate that social media is increasingly becoming a large part of people's lives. Online and virtual shopping is also becoming more prevalent and for some consumers, a better option than shopping at a physical retail store. The survey results found that online shopping is almost a weekly activity for respondents and almost 50% of respondents belong to the following social media sites: Linked-In, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Respondents are logging on to a social media network or an online shopping website every day or every other day. This is a growing trend across the United States.

Individuals are becoming more aware of what online shopping is and how to use it. However, when asked about the virtual shopping aspect of online shopping, a little less than half of respondents did not know what this meant. Though participants may not have known exactly what virtual shopping was, their responses related it to video games and used words like

"innovative", "cool", or "future". People are interested in virtual shopping and, knowing this information, stores can better position themselves to market and expand this type of shopping on their websites. Stores such as Coach and Zugara are already ahead of the market with virtual dressing rooms. For consumers to have the option of being able to see how a product fits an avatar's body type that is similar to theirs, may help increase traffic to their stores site and their online sales. Virtual shopping is easily accessible and attractive to consumers who do not want to spend a lot of time in physical retail stores.

Forty-six percent of respondents said that they believe they are experts when it comes to social media skills, and the number one social media site used by respondents is Facebook. Individuals are becoming more tech savvy as online accessibility increases. This gives virtual shopping stores an advantage as most consumers will be able to easily navigate virtual technology across a number of platforms. The 18-24 age group will be particularly important to online retail stores. Previous research has found companies are targeting this age bracket for sales. Online stores should develop marketing strategies to become more appealing to college students, as they are willing to spend money online and are more familiar with technology. The survey indicated social media use is high among college students and stores can market to this group via social media websites and cater to the needs of college students to increase sales.

Increasingly, retail stores have a social media site and often have a direct link to their site on their retail page. The survey indicated that people think brands and stores should have some kind of social media site. Consumers see having social media site as important for retail sales. Stores can develop partnerships with social media sites to increase sales, traffic, and awareness. With expanding to social media sites, stores can also branch out to new types of target markets.

According to survey data, 60% of respondents use virtual dressing rooms that stores such as H&M or Ray Ban provide. Data showed 88% of respondents go to a social media site such as Facebook or Twitter after shopping online. Consumer's use of a social media site before or after shopping online or virtually has the potential to improve their shopping experience, which can influence them to spend more money at their favorite stores or on their favorite brands.

Over half of respondents said that social networking will be or already are a part of their current career and think that social media networking has a large impact on today's society. One respondent put emphasis on how much social media impacts the business world, increasing awareness of the company, generating new customers, and standing out against competition. A majority of employees and employers today put an emphasis on how important it is to network and to use social media sites to their advantage.

Conclusion

Researching the correlation between social media and virtual shopping will add to the research on these two topics. This information will inform how each discipline can target their audience by using the survey results to further expand both social media and e-commerce in beneficial ways. These include improving visibility in the market place, increased traffic on retail websites, and a potential for increased sales.

Social media has such a large impact on today's world and consumers. It can connect people across the world, keeping users updated with issues within their own social world and actual world. Users can find out about new products/services, see pictures of products, brands, places, locate jobs/recruit employees, and so much more. Social media has an ever-expanding list of the possibilities for consumers. The same goes with online and virtual shopping. While

online and virtual shopping is not expanding at the same pace as social media has, there will possibly come a time when its use is as common place as social media has become today.

When a consumer has access to social media sites and has access to thousands of ideas, products, or services from fellow users on social media, it has a positive impact on online and virtual shopping. Users will want to buy what they see right that second, and virtual and online shopping gives users that opportunity. Social media gives those consumers more of an incentive to spend money at the company's website if the company does a good job with social media and targeting the right consumer. A social media user will see a picture of a product, or may see a Twitter post about a service that interests them. They can go to the store or brand website, have an avatar virtually try on the shirt that they saw previously on a Facebook friend, or see how sunglasses look on them with the help of a webcam, and instantly buy it through the company's website.

The intertwining of social media and online/virtual shopping places consumers in an advantageous and hi-tech world that gives them opportunities to use their social media skills to get the best possible experience with virtual and online shopping. Using social media as a tool for virtual shopping will only increase sales for stores, raise awareness for both topics, stand out against competitors, and provide up to date information for consumers. Social media impacts the way we live, work, connect, and shop. Social media influences the way consumers are shopping, and potentially will become more significant, technical, and beneficial for consumers in the future. There are numerous consumers that are already reaping the benefits of social media and virtual shopping. The future brings vast and incredible advances for social media and virtually shopping for essentially all consumers.

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Appendix

1. Are you male or female?

Male

Female

2. What is your age?

18 to 24

25 to 34

35 to 44

45 to 54

55 to 64

65 to 74

75 or older

3. Are you currently a college student or out of college?

College Student

Out of college

*
4. What does online shopping mean to you?

*
5. What does virtual shopping mean to you?

6. Is shopping online a daily activity for you?

Yes

No

7. Approximately, how much money do you spend when shopping online?

Less than $50

$50-$100

$100-$175

$175+

8. On average, what approximate percentage of your clothing is bought online?

25%

50%

75%

100%

9. How many times a week do you shop online?

0-5

5-8

8-10

10+

10. When you shop online, is it always the same stores, or new ones each time?

Same

New

A mixture of both

11. Are the places you shop at (virtually) easy or difficult to navigate?

Easy

Mediocre

Difficult

12. When you shop online, do you use any websites that use a "virtual dressing room", such as H&M or Ray Ban?

Yes

No

13. If your answer to the previous question was yes, what are the online stores that you use that has a virtual dressing room?

14. Before, during, or after shopping online, do you go to a social media site such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, etc.?

Yes

No

15. Do you currently have a Linked-In, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram?

Linked-In

Facebook

Twitter

Instagram

All of the Above

16. What are your social media skills like?

Beginner (don't use them much)

Intermediate (use quite a bit, but could use more practice)

Expert

*
17. What social media site do you use the most?

18. Do you feel social media has a large impact in today's world?

Yes

No

*
19. If answered yes to the previous question, why do you think social media has such a large impact?

20. If answered no, do you think social media sites are a waste of time?

Yes

No

21. Do the stores/brands you shop online for have a Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram account?

Yes

No

22. If yes to the previous question, do these accounts link to the stores actual website?

Yes

No

23. Do you think stores/brands should have a social media site?

Yes

No

24. Is/will networking be a large aspect of your career/job?

Yes

No

Don't know

25. Do you think social media sites help with networking in today's world?

Small amount

Mediocre amount

Large amount

Excessively large help in today's world