



Developing a Framework to Understand the Roles of Fashion Leaders and Followers in a Process of Fashion Viral Marketing Campaigns

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Keywords: Campaign, Media, Leader, Follower

The development of technology in the recent years has impacted many companies' operations and profitability. Advancing technology comes with new rules for firms to carry out business with their customers and partners. The enormous growth of social media (Twitter®, Facebook®, LinkedIn®, MySpace®, Google+®, Pinterest®, blogs, and virtual worlds) and plethora participation of consumers in these platforms make it imperative for companies to reexamine their business strategies. In these online communities, consumers share and write openly about values, meanings, and feelings of various products and services. Consumers deem the postings from other consumers to be more trustworthy than those from the marketing professionals (Keller & Fay, 2012). Marketing professionals have therefore recognized the need to encourage consumer-to-consumer (C2C) referrals through viral marketing campaigns in social media.

The fashion industry has changed tremendously with adoption and diffusion of information technologies and the change continues as new types of online business models are needed to reach ever more demanding and digitalized consumers (Kulmala, Mesiranta, & Tuominen, 2013). In the fashion cycle, great emphasis is placed on fashion leaders and their role played in influencing the followers (Beaudoin, Moore, & Goldsmith, 2000; Hirschman & Adcock, 1978). However, in the social media environment, marketers could reach and influence a large body of audience at same time rather than following traditional adoption and diffusion cycle where the leaders adopt the idea first and then influence the followers. Namely, it might be equally important for marketers to target both fashion leaders and followers to spread out marketing message with speed and scope. It is imperative for marketers to understand the different but equally important roles played by fashion leaders and followers in the process of a viral campaign.

The objective of current study is to propose a conceptual framework to illustrate how fashion leaders and followers may respond and react differently to a viral market campaign in terms of receiving message/content, interpreting and assessing message/content, and reaction to the campaign in social media (i.e., attitude & transmission/forwarding intention). The elaboration likelihood theory/model (ELM), a persuasion model which attempts to explain how the attitude of a receiver can be changed by a persuasive message, is used to build a conceptual framework (Figure 1). ELM states that there are two routes through which persuasive messages are processed, the central and the peripheral. The producer of a message could use either one of the routes to better target a message to an audience. ELM posits that individuals will process the

message differently depending on the level of involvement. Hence, it is important for the message content to meet the needs of various audiences. Viral marketing campaigns content is the key in ensuring effectiveness that generates awareness and interest to necessitate product adoption or message forwarding. Therefore, we propose to focus on both fashion leaders and followers to gain a deeper understanding of how fashion viral marketing campaigns content is received, interpreted, passed to others, and finally influence receivers' attitude and behavior in social media.

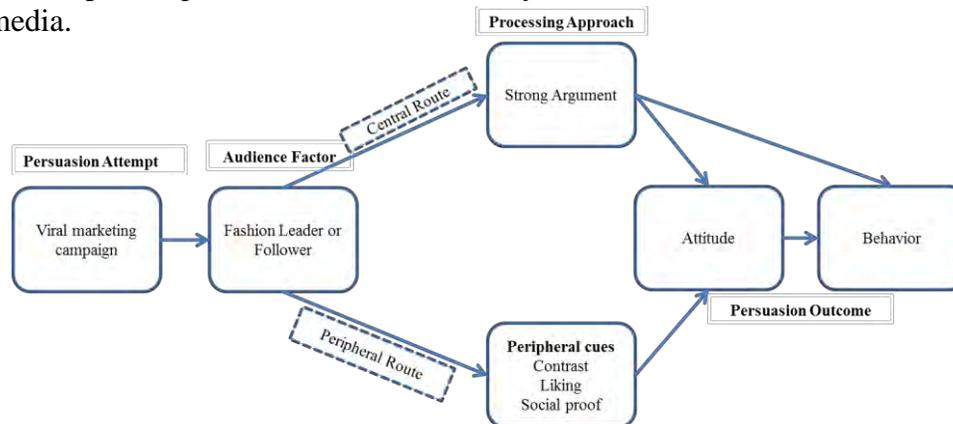


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Understanding Fashion Leaders' and followers' roles in a viral marketing campaign

Individuals are involved with messages at different levels. Individuals following the central route to process information use cognition. In this case, the ideas and content of the messages must be very thoughtful in that the receiver is highly involved with the product and will therefore dissect and scrutinize the message. ELM peripheral route seeks to use different cues to target those who are unable or unwilling to process centrally routed messages. Authority, commitment, contrast, liking, reciprocity, scarcity, and social proof are seven cues that signal the use of a peripheral message. The proposed framework suggests that marketers need to generate content that fits fashion leaders and followers' needs and information processing styles respectively to increase audiences' acceptance of a social media marketing campaign with speed and scope to make it viral.

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