



## Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management

Apparel brands' use of Facebook: an exploratory content analysis of branded entertainment

Ben Touchette Morgan Schanski Seung-Eun Lee

### Article information:

To cite this document:

Ben Touchette Morgan Schanski Seung-Eun Lee , (2015), "Apparel brands' use of Facebook: an exploratory content analysis of branded entertainment", Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management, Vol. 19 Iss 2 pp. 107 - 119

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-04-2013-0051>

Downloaded on: 20 January 2016, At: 02:10 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 36 other documents.

To copy this document: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 1575 times since 2015\*

### Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

Sarah Giovannini, Yingjiao Xu, Jane Thomas, (2015), "Luxury fashion consumption and Generation Y consumers: Self, brand consciousness, and consumption motivations", Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal, Vol. 19 Iss 1 pp. 22-40 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-08-2013-0096>

Jessica Hill, Hyun-Hwa Lee, (2015), "Sustainable brand extensions of fast fashion retailers", Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal, Vol. 19 Iss 2 pp. 205-222 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-09-2012-0056>

Ian Phau, Min Teah, Joe Chuah, (2015), "Consumer attitudes towards luxury fashion apparel made in sweatshops", Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal, Vol. 19 Iss 2 pp. 169-187 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-01-2014-0008>

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:522623 []

### For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit [www.emeraldinsight.com/authors](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/authors) for more information.

### About Emerald [www.emeraldinsight.com](http://www.emeraldinsight.com)

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

\*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

# Apparel brands' use of Facebook: an exploratory content analysis of branded entertainment

Apparel  
brands' use of  
Facebook

107

Ben Touchette, Morgan Schanski and Seung-Eun Lee  
*Department of Human Environmental Studies, Central Michigan University,  
Mount Pleasant, Michigan, USA*

Received 1 April 2013  
Revised 11 November 2013  
Accepted 19 September 2014

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine features of branded entertainment in apparel brands' Facebook pages based on the conceptual framework of play themes (Zhang, 2010).

**Design/methodology/approach** – A content analysis was performed for 1,443 posts present on 50 apparel brands' Facebook profile pages in the time period from November 28, 2011 to December 25, 2011.

**Findings** – The findings provide meaningful insights into apparel brands' use of Facebook as a social media strategy. The most dominant branded entertainment consisted of photos and advertisements and was directed toward promoting specific products and sales without using a particular play theme. Among the play themes used, play as frivolity, which includes simple and fun activities, was predominant. Overall, apparel brands utilized limited types of branded entertainment on their Facebook pages.

**Research limitations/implications** – By integrating play themes into branded entertainment, apparel brands can optimize their branded contents on Facebook to connect with consumers and increase consumer motivation to interact with the brand. More specifically, apparel brands that adopt additional play themes other than play as frivolity for their branded entertainment will stand out and cut through the clutter of competitors' Facebook pages.

**Originality/value** – No previous research investigated apparel brands' use of Facebook pages. This study fills the void in the literature by addressing how apparel brands utilize types of branded entertainment on their Facebook profile pages.

**Keywords** Facebook, Content analysis, Apparel, Branded entertainment, Play theory, Social media strategy

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

In today's society, consumers expect companies to have an online social media presence (Parsons, 2011). Social media allows for two-way communication between users and web site publishers; social media provides a space in which information is collaborative and users can interact and participate collectively (Salkhordeh, 2010; Thrackery *et al.*, 2008). Social media applications include social networking web sites (SNWs). SNWs are sites that allow the creation of a profile with an evident list of users in which connections between users can be viewed (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Since their mainstream introduction in 2003, SNWs such as MySpace, Twitter, and Facebook have increased substantially in popularity and usage among consumers (Salkhordeh, 2010). Millions of users collectively connect to these SNWs daily (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Salkhordeh, 2010). Facebook alone has over 483 million daily active users[1] and is considered one of the most popular SNWs (Arnold, 2006; Lipsman *et al.*, 2012). With such an enormous user base, it is no surprise that many companies have incorporated Facebook into their marketing strategies (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Social media adoption is especially important for



online retailers attempting to reduce online shopping risks and increase consumer trust (Constantinides *et al.*, 2008).

Among retailers, apparel companies in particular have largely incorporated the use of SNWs into their social media strategies to stay competitive in the constantly changing environment of online retailing, or e-tailing (Constantinides *et al.*, 2008). Apparel and accessories are the fastest growing e-commerce product categories and are expected to reach sales of \$73 billion by 2016, which will account for 20 percent of all online purchases (E-marketer, 2012). According to Johnson (2011), 64 percent of consumers visit a brand's web site before making apparel purchases. If a brand can attract more consumers to its web site, it can expect to see an increase in sales. Caverly (2011) found that retailers with active Facebook profile pages can increase the number of consumers who visit their web sites. In other words, the more consumers a brand can attract to its Facebook page, the more consumers will visit the brand's web site and purchase products. Specifically, Caverly (2011) found that eight out of the top ten brands that consumers searched for online after visiting the company's Facebook page were apparel-related brands. By creating Facebook pages that have strong consumer interactions, apparel brands can take advantage of Facebook's enormous user base and gain access to its targeted consumers. For example, it was reported that 67 percent of businesses have acquired new sales through their Facebook advertising (Williamson, 2011).

Apparel brands can exploit Facebook in a variety of ways. For example, Burberry, one of the most "liked" brands on Facebook in the UK (McEleny, 2011), allowed its Facebook fans to sign up to receive a free sample of a Burberry fragrance[2]. The Facebook page for Express, a clothing brand that targets young men and women, is used as an extension of the brand's online store. Users can view and purchase any product the brand carries without ever leaving the Facebook page. Unlike the brand's web site, the Facebook page also allows users to recommend products to friends, comment on merchandise, and read comments made by other users (see footnote 2). Hanes, most commonly known for its undergarments, used its Facebook page to engage consumers with interactive forms of entertainment. For example, fans of the Hanes' Facebook page were able to create and customize virtual "comfort packages." These packages allowed fans to develop photos, videos, messages, etc. and then send them to friends and family for free. Additionally, for each comfort package sent, Hanes donated one dollar to the National Breast Cancer Foundation (PR Newswire Association LLC, 2011).

Apparel companies create Facebook profile pages to directly communicate with consumers through the use of different forms of branded entertainment. The concept of branded entertainment involves a combination of entertainment and brand information that is part of a marketing strategy designed to reach consumers (Hudson and Hudson, 2006; Lehu, 2007; Zhang, 2010). Due to its immense popularity, there has been an increased focus on the use of branded entertainment on the internet (Zhang, 2010). Various types of branded entertainment can be utilized on Facebook, including contests, sweepstakes, interactive games and word play, events, videos, audios, and downloads. Contests and sweepstakes offer rewards or prizes to participants and establish winners. Unlike sweepstakes, in which winners are chosen randomly, contests require participants to compete against each other to receive prizes. Games and word play involve direct interaction among users, which may offer them enjoyment and relaxation. These activities can be played with a partner or alone. Events, on the other hand, are intended to bring together a sizeable number of participants who share a common objective. Lastly, videos, audios, and downloads actively engage users and are

used for a variety of purposes, such as to keeping participants occupied for a long period. Based on a content analysis of the Facebook profile pages of service and product brands, Zhang (2010) found that downloads were the most commonly used form of branded entertainment.

Compared to traditional forms of marketing, branded entertainment can build a stronger relationship between the brand and consumers (Zhang, 2010). By creating a link between the brand and its consumers, this entertainment serves as an effective marketing strategy that enhances short- and long-term awareness of a brand (Lehu, 2007). While previous research has focussed on Facebook marketing in terms of its strategic importance (Constantinides *et al.*, 2008; Costa, 2010; Parsons, 2011) and consumer perception (8th Bridge Inc., 2011; Kim and Ko, 2012; Patterson, 2012), the use of branded entertainment on apparel brands' Facebook pages has yet to be analyzed. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine features of branded entertainment on apparel brands' Facebook pages based on the conceptual framework of play themes (Zhang, 2010). Play theory posits that mass communication can be considered a form of play because it provides enjoyment and pleasure (Stephenson, 1967). Zhang (2010) adopted Stephenson's (1967) play theory and suggested four different play themes (play as power, play as identity, play as fantasy, and play as frivolity) that explain consumers' motivation to participate in play. In this study, "play" refers to branded entertainment on Facebook. According to Zhang (2010), brands should utilize certain play themes in branded entertainment on Facebook to motivate the users to participate. Specifically, it is important to present play themes that are congruent to the users' profiles, such as demographics and psychographics. Thus, the current study examines how apparel brands incorporate various types of play themes into branded entertainment on their Facebook pages to appeal to their targeted users. The following research questions were identified to guide the subsequent analysis:

*RQ1.* What types of branded entertainment are utilized on apparel brands' Facebook pages?

*RQ2.* How did branded entertainment on apparel brands' Facebook pages utilize different types of play themes?

## 2. Play theory

Play theory suggests that mass communication is a form of play and that audiences will voluntarily participate in mass communication activities, which are presented by the media, to gain self-satisfaction (Stephenson, 1967). Zhang (2010) adapted Stephenson's (1967) play theory and the frameworks from Pellegrini (1995) and Sutton-Smith (1997) to examine branded entertainment used on Facebook pages. According to Zhang (2010), branded entertainment as a social media activity can be regarded as a form of play; different forms of branded entertainment trigger various consumer motivations. The four play themes that were present in branded entertainment on Facebook pages include: play as power, play as identity, play as fantasy, and play as frivolity (Zhang, 2010).

### 2.1 *Play as power*

Pleasure associated with the play as power theme stems from defeating others and from the chance to showcase certain skills used for such play (Sutton-Smith, 1997; Zhang, 2010). Within this type of play, participants' physical or intellectual skill is tested and rated through activities such as competitive games and events. Physical

skill contests, such as a soccer game, involve team cooperation; however, a team is not required for a contest to fall under the play as power theme. In physical contests, a ranking of physical skill determines clear winners and losers, with winners receiving a mental or tangible reward. Intellectual skills may be employed during play as power activities, such as chess or checkers, which showcase critical thinking skills (Pellegrini, 1995). According to Zhang (2010), the play as power theme is most commonly present in two types of branded entertainment: contests and events. Within the Facebook page context, the play as power theme can involve any contest in which users apply a skill and a clear winner is identified in a team or individual setting. Zhang (2010) also found that play as power was the most used theme; it was present on 63 percent of the Facebook profile pages maintained by the brands in question. Since play as power activities, such as contests created to showcase skills, are more attractive among males than females (Pellegrini, 1995), it could be assumed that an apparel brand targeted specifically to males, such as Nike football, could have numerous play as power activities because males are more likely than are females to participate in such entertainment.

### *2.2 Play as identity*

Play as identity activities require cooperation and bonding within a community (Sutton-Smith, 1997; Zhang, 2010). Membership within a community is vital to the play as identity theme. Participants come together during these activities to celebrate events or to work together to accomplish a shared goal. Therefore, this play theme has been most often presented within the event category of branded entertainment. This appearance results from the fact that users can express their identity by being affiliated with a group or community. Those who desire a sense of belonging are the typical participants in play as identity activities. On a brand's Facebook profile page, play as identity activities may include an event or project that requires a group effort (Zhang, 2010). For example, a brand may seek to generate a large number of "likes" on its profile page and then translate those "likes" into a dollar amount pledged to a specific charity. Accordingly, apparel brands that give consumers a sense of membership and exclusivity could employ the play as identity theme. For example, Abercrombie & Fitch's brick-and-mortar stores have a velvet rope outside to give consumers the impression of entering an exclusive club.

### *2.3 Play as fantasy*

The play as fantasy theme includes activities that entice imagery, creativity, and imagination (Pellegrini, 1995; Sutton-Smith, 1997). In the context of Facebook, play as fantasy activities include entertainment that offers surreal objects and goals (Zhang, 2010). Zhang (2010) found that play as fantasy was most often present in downloads, videos, and games. Consumers most likely to engage in play as fantasy activities tend to be romantic and artistic in nature. Young girls have been the most commonly targeted users for this theme (Pellegrini, 1995). For example, Wet Seal's Facebook page employs this theme through its virtual stylist game (Thau, 2010). The game allows users to design outfits and looks using Wet Seal apparel, an activity that encourages these users to be creative and imaginative. This highly interactive game could be one of the reasons Wet Seal has a high number of Facebook users, with more than 2.3 million people following their page.

### *2.4 Play as frivolity*

Play as frivolity refers to activities that are simple or trivial, and do not pose a complex challenge for users (Sutton-Smith, 1997; Zhang, 2010). These activities can be an

addictive, relaxing game. Play as frivolity activities could also include a poll posted by a brand asking users a simple question, such as, "What is your favorite airline company?" Zhang (2010) suggested that young children and women may be the most motivated to engage in play as frivolity activities because these groups are more likely to look for fun and relaxing activities. Branded entertainment types that most often employ the play as frivolity theme include downloads, videos, and games (Zhang, 2010). Apparel brands that target young children, such as The Children's Place, could utilize the play as frivolity theme because those consumers may be attracted to simple tasks, relaxation, and fun.

### 3. Methodology

*Apparel Magazine's* list of the top 50 apparel brands (Speer, 2011) was used to identify apparel brands and to select the study sample. According to the paper, the brands were first ranked based on annual profits of \$100 million or more and then by the number of Facebook fans. The list comprised a variety of apparel brands including manufacturers (e.g. Nike, Levi's, Hanes) and retailers (e.g. Gap, J.Crew, The Buckle). Diverse apparel brands were represented in terms of store type (e.g. specialty store: Express; department store: Nordstrom), target market (e.g. male: Men's Warehouse; young adults: Abercrombie & Fitch; baby boomer: Chico's; children: The Children's Place), and product type (intimate apparel: Victoria's Secret; sportswear: Columbia sportswear; maternity apparel: motherhood maternity).

The Facebook profile pages of each of the 50 brands were analyzed for content between November 28, 2011 and December 25, 2011. The study occurred during this particular period because online retail sales have consistently peaked between November 28 and December 25 since 2007 (Comscore, 2012). During this period when online retail sales are greatest, it is likely that there will be a large amount of activity on apparel brands' Facebook pages because many of these brands sell products directly through Facebook.

For the purpose of this study, content analysis was employed as an analytic tool because it allows a researcher to describe an initial snapshot of the phenomenon for which there is little theory or related research and to analyze the content of written, spoken, or pictorial communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner (Neuendorf, 2002; Vogt, 1999). The coding categories, which include seven branded entertainment types (online interactive, sweepstakes, video/audio, contests, festivals/events, downloads/uploads, and games/word play) and four play themes (play as power, play as identity, play as fantasy, and play as frivolity), were developed based on Zhang's (2010) research. The coding categories were expanded to include additional categories relevant to apparel brands' Facebook pages. In particular, the classification "photos and advertisements" was added as a type of branded entertainment due to the high frequency seen on apparel brands' Facebook pages. In addition, branded entertainment that did not fit into any play theme was coded as a "non-play" theme.

The unit of analysis was per post initiated by each brand. An Excel spreadsheet was used to code and manage the data. To ensure reliability and validity, two raters first coded five of the 50 Facebook pages and analyzed a total of 220 posts and then verified the analysis with a fellow rater. Then, the two raters discussed discrepancies arising from the coding of the initial five Facebook pages and reached an agreement for the coding of each item. Inter-rater reliability for the total number of coded items was 96.5 percent, exceeding the acceptable level suggested by Perreault and Leigh (1989). The coding sheets were modified to reflect the coding selections that the raters had

agreed upon. Each rater then independently coded 22 or 23 of the 45 remaining Facebook pages included in this study. After coding was completed, five brands were excluded from the analysis due to a multitude of problems such as a lack of company information and the absence of posts or interaction initiated by the brand.

4. Results

Collectively, 1,443 posts were analyzed during the time frame of the present study. Raters coded each post individually based on the elements of branded entertainment and play themes used within the post. Three Facebook posts were excluded due to insufficient information that prevented them from qualifying as any type of branded entertainment. Therefore, the sample of posts used for data analysis was 1,440:

*RQ1.* What types of branded entertainment are utilized in apparel brands' Facebook posts?

The most frequently used branded entertainment on apparel brands' Facebook pages appeared in the category of photos and advertisements, as shown in Table I. This branded entertainment most often promoted specific products and sales. Some brands posted pictures that were not directly related to the brand and thus used photos and advertisements in a blog-like format. For example, Citi Trends frequently posted pictures of celebrities, including actors Nia Long and rapper T.I. Photos and advertisements appeared on a total of 797 Facebook posts across all brands and constituted 55.4 percent of the total branded entertainment types used. Photos and advertisements appeared an average of 16 times on each brand's Facebook page. The second most used branded entertainment was online interactive posts (19.2 percent), which were used an average of six times per Facebook page. Any post in which users could provide input was considered to be online interactive. For example, Hanes made such a post by asking users to "Like this post and we'll donate 2 pairs of socks to the Salvation Army!" Sweepstakes accounted for 11 percent of branded entertainment, or an average of three appearances per brand's page. For example, The Ascena Retail Group had multiple sweepstakes posts announcing weekly gift card giveaways that users could enter to win on Facebook.

The least frequently used branded entertainment types on theses Facebook pages included download and upload functions (1 percent), such as posts by Urban Outfitters that allowed users to download a free song every Monday. Festivals and events were also among the least used (1 percent). One company that did utilize this form of branded entertainment was Lululemon. This brand had events during which designers from the brand held live discussions on Facebook via posts and comments. The last form of

**Table I.**  
Types of branded  
entertainment used  
in apparel brands'  
Facebook posts

Branded entertainment	Total frequency	Percentage	Average frequency per brand
Photos/Advertisements	797	55.4	15.9
Online interactive	276	19.2	5.5
Sweepstakes	159	11.0	3.2
Video/Audio	110	7.6	2.2
Contests	76	5.3	1.5
Festivals/events	12	0.8	0.2
Downloads/uploads	10	0.7	0.2
Games/word play	0	0	0



branded entertainment, games and word play, did not appear once in the posts analyzed for this study:

*RQ2.* How did branded entertainment on apparel brands' Facebook pages utilize different types of play themes?

Branded entertainment on apparel brands' Facebook pages was analyzed based on the way each post incorporated the use of play themes. In order to explore how play or non-play themes were utilized by different types of branded entertainment, cross-tabulations of branded entertainment types and play themes were conducted (Table II). Out of all of the posts analyzed, a total of 1,119 posts presented no specific play theme, accounting for 77.8 percent of all posts analyzed in this study. Among the play themes used, play as frivolity (7.9 percent) was most frequently present, followed by play as power (6.7 percent), play as fantasy (4.0 percent), and play as identity (3.6 percent). The play as frivolity theme was used an average of 2.26 times on each brand's Facebook page, while play as power appeared an average of 1.94 times; play as fantasy appeared an average of 1.16 times, and play as identity appeared an average of 1.04 times.

The most used branded entertainment type, photos and advertisements, incorporated a non-play theme into 91.3 percent of posts, which accounted for 728 posts. Samples of such branded entertainment were frequently used on Lululemon's Facebook page. The brand often promoted a "Product of the Day" by posting a photo to ultimately provide users with information about the brand's products. Overall, photos and advertisements utilized all play themes, but not to the extent that they incorporated the non-play theme. Play as frivolity was the most used play theme for photos and advertisements at 22 posts.

The non-play theme was utilized in 53.3 percent of all online interactive posts, more than any other play theme for this type of branded entertainment. Abercrombie & Fitch, for example, used a non-play theme within posts that informed consumers about sales and free shipping opportunities. Online interactive posts used the play as frivolity theme for 31.9 percent of the posts. Such posts asked simple questions that users could answer by commenting. For example, on Wet Seal's Facebook page, users were asked what their favorite holiday song was. Online interactive posts, along with photos and advertisements, were the only other type of branded entertainment that used all play themes at least once.

Sweepstakes and videos/audios also used the non-play theme for a majority of posts. Sweepstakes used non-play themes for 80.4 percent of posts ( $n = 127$ ) and videos/audios used non-play themes for 99.1 percent of posts ( $n = 109$ ). Under Armour served as a good example of how the non-play theme was used for both sweepstakes and videos/audios. The athletic wear brand sponsored product giveaways on its Facebook page and posted information about the sweepstakes along with information about how to enter. Additionally, Under Armour posted videos to help users learn about the brand and its products. For instance, the "Under Armour Cotton Charged Storm" video helped users learn about the properties of a fleece hoodie made by the brand.

Contests used the play as power theme most often; this theme appeared in 77.6 percent of the posts for this type of branded entertainment. Nautica posted multiple trivia contest challenges that were coded as play as power because they required users to practice a type of skill – in this case, intellectual skills. Of the posts analyzed, contest posts were never used with the play as frivolity themes.

The festivals and events category incorporated play as identity into 50.0 percent of the posts ( $n = 6$ ) and constituted the only branded entertainment type to use play as identity the most. At 33.3 percent of the posts ( $n = 4$ ), the non-play theme followed

**Table II.**  
Cross tabulation  
of branded  
entertainment types  
and play themes

Play theme		Photos/Ads.	Online interactive	Branded entertainment (BE)				Festival/Events	Download/uploads	Total
				Sweepstakes	Video/audio	Contests				
Non-play	N	728	147	127	109	0	4	4	4	1,119
	% within BE	91.3	53.3	80.4	99.1	0.0	33.3		40.0	77.8
Play as power	N	13	1	24	0	59	0	0	0	97
	% within BE	1.6	0.4	15.2	0.0	77.6	0.0		0.0	6.7
Play as fantasy	N	14	27	5	0	4	2	6	6	58
	% within BE	1.8	9.8	3.2	0.0	5.3	16.7		60.0	4.0
Play as identity	N	20	13	0	0	13	6	0	0	52
	% within BE	2.5	4.7	0.0	0.0	17.1	50.0		0.0	3
Play as frivolity	N	22	88	2	1	0	0	0	0	113
	% within BE	2.8	31.9	1.3	0.9	0.0	0.0		0.0	7.9
Total	N	797	276	158	110	76	12	10	10	1,439
	% of Total	55.4	19.2	11.0	7.6	5.3	0.8		0.7	100.0

closely within this category. Festivals and events posts that used play as identity include those from Abercrombie & Fitch. The brand hosted an in-store party and provided multiple promotional and invitational posts for fans on the Facebook page.

Downloads and uploads used play as fantasy for a majority of posts (60.0 percent), which primarily came from Urban Outfitters' free song downloads. These downloads provided users with a sense of escape. The non-play theme was used for the remaining 40.0 percent of posts for downloads and uploads, meaning play as power, play as identity, and play as frivolity were not utilized once within this form of branded entertainment.

## 5. Discussion and implications

The current study attempts to provide meaningful insights into apparel brands' use of Facebook as a social media strategy. The results of this study contribute to existing research by exploring the branded entertainment available on apparel brands' Facebook pages and analyzing them within the framework of play theory. The findings of the content analysis indicate that apparel brands use their Facebook pages in a limited capacity in terms of branded entertainment. Photos and advertisements were the predominant forms of branded entertainment ( $n = 797$ ). An overwhelming number of photos and advertisements on apparel brands' Facebook posts promoted specific products for the upcoming holiday season. For example, J. Crew's Facebook page promoted a specific product every few days and thus served as a countdown until Christmas. This result confirmed Zhang's (2010) research, which found that, during the holiday season, brands typically focus on combining branded entertainment with promotional enterprises to increase consumer interest in their products. These highly concentrated efforts and the corporate interest in product promotion could also be related to the finding that games and word play elements were never utilized on apparel brands' Facebook pages in this study. Games and word play do not typically have a high promotional effect and require skill and thought from the viewer. During the holiday season, companies cannot risk posting such entertainment, which does not focus solely on the product.

Surprisingly, most of the posts analyzed in this study failed to incorporate specific play themes into branded entertainments ( $N = 1,119$ ). Most apparel brands' efforts were limited to a simple presentation of their products and brand information. While this outcome could also be attributed to the fact that this study only analyzed Facebook pages during the holiday season, the findings of this study indicate an urgent need for apparel brands to utilize a variety of strategies on their Facebook pages to increase user engagement and to eventually increase promotional effects during the holiday season. By integrating play themes into their branded entertainment, apparel brands can more effectively optimize their branded contents on Facebook to connect with consumers and to increase consumer motivation to interact with the brand.

Among the play themes used, the relatively high use of play as frivolity ( $n = 113$ ) seems to correspond with Facebook's original purpose as a web site. Facebook, as a SNW, is meant for non-stressful or light-hearted discussion with friends, family, and companies (see footnote 1), which is relevant for the use of the play as frivolity theme. Apparel brands are using posts that reflect the easygoing nature of this particular SNW. For example, Nordstrom and Guess regularly posted relaxing or exciting questions for their viewers. Typical questions from these brands might ask readers what their weekend plans were or what their favorite holiday activity was. Use of the frivolity theme could help develop a connection between users and brands without applying any pressure for users to

purchase products. This type of bond can easily help brands foster a positive outlook in consumers' minds. However, this finding was not consistent with Zhang's (2010) results, in which play as power was cited as the most dominant theme. Zhang's research findings could diverge from ours due to the different time period of the data collection and the different types of brands analyzed.

Consistent with Zhang's (2010) research, a lack of the play as identity theme was evident on the Facebook pages of most apparel brands. Play as identity as an advertising theme has been known to help build communities and cooperative relationships among people (Zhang, 2010). Social identity has been noted as a key motivation for consumers participating in SNWs (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011). By allowing for the formation of a virtual brand community, Facebook provides a great place for companies to meet consumers' desire of being identified with others who share similar likes and interests (Zaglia, 2012). Specifically, to remedy the dearth of human connections and relationships in an online environment (Laroche *et al.*, 2012), apparel brands need to consider the use of the identity theme as a crucial part of their Facebook marketing strategy. If apparel brands utilize the identity theme, there is a potential for an increase in connections, social interactions, and word-of-mouth advertising for the brand. Brands could implement this theme simply by combining it with an existing, successful branded entertainment element. For example, Abercrombie & Fitch created a Facebook event for an in-store party. The Facebook post utilized the play as identity theme by allowing users to virtually RSVP to the event, as well as comment and "like" the event. More than 900 users interacted with the post and confirmed their attendance to the party. This event brought together consumers who shared a similar goal and simultaneously promoted the brand's store. Likewise, if there is a popular element such as a contest, event, or game in a brand's posts, that brand should bring together consumers who enjoy that particular entertainment by creating an interest group. This is a common and easy strategy that incorporates play as identity into posts on a Facebook page. By forming a brand community, apparel brands can strengthen ties among consumers, the brand, and the brand's products.

While the play as power theme would be most successful when directed at the male target market due to the competition aspect, the play as fantasy theme would be more effective in engaging female users (Zhang, 2010). Therefore, it is important for apparel brands' Facebook pages to incorporate the play theme that best fits their target users' interests. Apparel brands each have their own unique and specific target markets, so the customization of play theme usage in branded entertainment will be critical in effectively engaging with consumers on Facebook. This seems absolutely apparent for most apparel brands in this study, as they presented little significant difference in their use of play themes and branded entertainment. Companies should invest in researching what types of play themes would most effectively engage their customers. An example of a brand that successfully created this connection was The Children's Place. By utilizing the play as fantasy theme, it allowed users to create snowman figure drawings of their family members and then upload the drawings to the company's Facebook page.

Facebook profile pages provide an opportunity for apparel brands to increase consumer-brand interactions with the use of branded entertainment that incorporates various levels of consumer activeness. When a consumer can interact directly with a brand, the relationship between the two entities can be strengthened, resulting in stronger brand loyalty because the consumer is more invested in the brand and the relationship (Lehu, 2007; Muntinga *et al.*, 2011, Zhang, 2010). Apparel brands can create high levels of consumer-brand interaction by providing avenues by which consumers

can create content and share it on the corporate Facebook page (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011). In this study, few apparel brands offered such options to their consumers. However, Nautica put on several contests that encouraged its consumers to upload images of how they styled their Nautica products. These sorts of contests not only increased consumer interest by determining a winner but also greatly increased the level of consumer activeness on the Nautica Facebook page. Other apparel brands such as Gap, Express, and Nordstrom asked customers to reveal their feelings about and their experiences with the company's products in online comments. It is necessary for companies to find types of branded entertainment that will get consumers enthused about writing, publishing, and uploading their thoughts on the brand. This ultimate level of engagement will increase both brand loyalty and company sales (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011).

In conclusion, Facebook has great potential as a powerful social marketing and advertising platform for apparel brands; however, it became clear through this study that apparel brands fail to differentiate themselves beyond basic features of branded entertainment. The limited use of various types of branded entertainment and the lack of any specific utilization of theme will hinder users from engaging with a brand's Facebook content. Furthermore, consumers will not be able to differentiate among brands online. The play themes explain specific consumer motivations for interacting with a brand and the best ways to encourage consumers to visit and to stay on a brand's page. To increase the effectiveness of Facebook marketing, apparel brands must tailor their branded entertainment based on play themes. The fact that a majority of apparel brands in this study utilized play as frivolity does not mean that this is the most effective theme for branded entertainment in apparel brands' Facebook pages. A decision on which play themes will be most effective on which branded entertainment will depend on brand image, marketing objective, target market, and product. The use of multiple play themes on branded entertainment can also be considered because it can address a variety of consumer motivations and create engagement with diverse consumer groups.

## 6. Limitations and future study

Some caution should be taken in interpreting the findings of this study due to the nature of the sample and its limited generalizability. The sample was taken based upon information in *Apparel Magazine* and is therefore limited to the 50 companies listed. Future research should focus on developing a larger sample size that encompasses additional brands and posts to better represent the entire apparel industry. In addition, future research could consider splitting the brands into defined categories, such as the targeted consumer or the product price level. This differentiation would greatly increase the practicality of solutions for Facebook marketing strategies within a specific target market or product type. The time frame of this study also limits the generalizability of its findings. Thus, future research endeavors could continue the study over a longer period or focus on multiple e-commerce peaks throughout the year. While the current study addressed the types of branded entertainment and play themes utilized in apparel brands' Facebook pages, it did not consider the effect and success of each category of branded entertainment and play themes (e.g. the number of "likes" and the number of fans). Further study on how various branded entertainment forms and play themes influence the number of "likes" or fans will help brands set some priorities in the presentation of Facebook page content. Finally, with the quickly evolving nature of the internet, the findings of this study will need to be updated along with the play theories that are evaluated in terms of the Facebook posts.

## Notes

1. [www.facebook.com/press](http://www.facebook.com/press)
2. <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2344450091&Fmt=3&clientId=45540&RQT=309&VName=PQD&cfc=1>

## References

- 8th Bridge, Inc. (2011), "Social commerce IQ: fashion", available at: <http://8thbridge.com/our-blog/social-commerce-iq-fashion-infographic/> (accessed March 6, 2012).
- Arnold, T.K. (2006), "Niche competitors crowd into MySpace", available at: [www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2006-07-31-myspace-over\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2006-07-31-myspace-over_x.htm) (accessed 28 April 2012).
- Boyd, D.M. and Ellison, N. (2007), "Social network sites: definition, history, and scholarship", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 210-230.
- Caverly, D. (2011), "Fashion brands using Facebook to best effect", available at: [www.webprnews.com/fashion-brands-using-facebook-to-best-effect-2011-02](http://www.webprnews.com/fashion-brands-using-facebook-to-best-effect-2011-02) (accessed March 15, 2012).
- ComScore (2012), "Consumer brand loyalty declines", available at: [www.marketingcharts.com/topics/behavioral-marketing/consumer-brand-loyalty-declines-12818/](http://www.marketingcharts.com/topics/behavioral-marketing/consumer-brand-loyalty-declines-12818/) (accessed March 18, 2012).
- Constantinides, E., Romero, C. and Boria, M. (2008), "Social media: a new frontier for retailers?", *European Retail Research*, Vol. 22, pp. 1-28.
- Costa, M. (2010), "Community power: building a community is key to brand development", available at: <http://0-proquest.umi.com.catalog.lin.cmich.edu/pqdweb?did=2120758271&sid=2&Fmt=2&clientId=45540&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed March 19, 2012).
- E-marketer (2012), "Apparel drives US retail ecommerce sales growth", available at: [www.emarketer.com/PressRelease.aspx?R=1008956](http://www.emarketer.com/PressRelease.aspx?R=1008956) (accessed April 10, 2012).
- Hudson, S. and Hudson, D. (2006), "Branded entertainment: a new advertising technique or product placement in disguise?", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 22 Nos 5-6, pp. 489-504.
- Johnson, M.A. (2011), "The fashion industry thrives on social media", available at: [www.promotionworld.com/marketing/online/article/111117-the-fashion-industry-thrives-on-social-media](http://www.promotionworld.com/marketing/online/article/111117-the-fashion-industry-thrives-on-social-media) (accessed March 19, 2012).
- Kim, A.J. and Ko, E. (2012), "Do social media marketing activities enhance consumer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brand", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 65 No. 10, pp. 1480-1486.
- Laroche, M., Habibi, M.R., Richard, M.O. and Sankaranarayanan, R. (2012), "The effects of social media based brand communities on brand community markers, value creation practices, brand trust and brand loyalty", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 28 No. 5, pp. 1755-1767.
- Lehu, J. (2007), *Branded Entertainment: Product Placement & Brand Strategy in the Entertainment Business*, Kogan Page Publishers, Philadelphia, PA.
- Lipsman, A., Mudd, G., Rich, M. and Bruich, S. (2012), "The power of "like": how brands reach (and influence) fans through social-media marketing", *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 52 No. 1, pp. 40-52.
- McEleny, C. (2011), "Burberry is UK's most successful brand on facebook", available at: <http://0-proquest.umi.com.catalog.lib.cmich.edu/pqdweb?did=2480296571&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=45540&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed March 15, 2012).
- Muntinga, D.G., Moorman, M. and Smit, E.G. (2011), "Introducing COBRAs", *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 13-46.
- Neuendorf, K.A. (2002), *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

- PR Newswire Association LLC (2011), "Hanes ® launches comfort-sharing facebook application for breast cancer awareness", available at: <http://0-proquest.umi.com.catalog.lib.cmich.edu/pqdweb?did=2458612861&sid=2&Fmt=3&clientId=45540&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed April 10, 2012).
- Parsons, A.L. (2011), "Social media from a corporate perspective: a content analysis of official facebook pages", *Academy of Marketing Studies 2011 Proceedings of the Allied Academics International Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada*, DreamCatchers Group, LLC, Arden, NC pp. 11-15.
- Pellegrini, A.D. (1995), *The Future of Play Theory: A Multidisciplinary Inquiry into the Contributions of Brian Sutton-Smith*, SUNY Press, Albany, NY.
- Patterson, A. (2012), "Social-networkers of the world, unite and take over: a meta-introspective perspective on the facebook brand", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 65 No. 4, pp. 527-534.
- Perreault, W.D. and Leigh, L.E. (1989), "Reliability of nominal data based on qualitative judgments", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 135-148.
- Salkhordeh, P. (2010), "An exploratory content analysis of the use of Facebook in the lodging industry", Ph.D Dissertation, University of Delaware, Newark, DE.
- Speer, J.K. (2011, August), "The apparel top 50: rankings by social media popularity", available at: <http://apparel.edgl.com/reports/The-Apparel-Top-50-Rankings-by-Social-Media-Popularity74456> (accessed March 18, 2012).
- Stephenson, W. (1967), *The Play Theory of Mass Communication*, Transaction, Inc., New Brunswick, NJ.
- Sutton-Smith, B. (1997), *The Ambiguity of Play*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Thau, B. (2010), "Wet Seal of approval", *Stores*, Vol. 92 No. 10, p. 26.
- Thrackery, R., Neiger, B., Hanson, C. and McKenzie, J. (2008), "Enhancing promotional strategies within social marketing programs: use of Web 2.0 social media", *Health Promotion Practice*, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 338-343.
- Vogt, W.P. (1999), *Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Williamson, D. (2011, May), "So you like my brand on Facebook? Now what?", available at: <http://adage.com/article/digitalnext/brands-turn-likes-loyalty/227609/> (accessed November 1, 2013).
- Zaglia, M. (2012), "Brand communities embedded in social networks", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 66 No. 2, pp. 216-223.
- Zhang, J. (2010), "To play or not to play: an exploratory content analysis of branded entertainment in facebook", *American Journal of Business*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 53-64.

### Further reading

- Caillois, R. (1961), *Man, Play, and Games*, The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., Glencoe, IL.
- Indvik, L. (2011), "Burberry brings fragrance sampling campaign exclusively to Facebook", available at: <http://mashable.com/2011/08/19/burberry-body-facebook/> (accessed March 15, 2012).
- Interone (2012), "Buying habits of modern consumers", available at: [http://retail-revolution.interone.de/en/buying\\_habits\\_brand.html](http://retail-revolution.interone.de/en/buying_habits_brand.html) (accessed March 18, 2012).
- Wearden, S.T. and Harper, J.M. (2000), "Play theory revisited: dimensions of play in television and internet use", *Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication*.

### Corresponding author

Dr Seung-Eun Lee can be contacted at: [lee6s@cmich.edu](mailto:lee6s@cmich.edu)

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

[www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)

Or contact us for further details: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)