



Identifying and Analyzing Interactive Media Contact Points in Context of Fashion Brands

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ABSTRACT

The transformation that fashion market has achieved in this period is phenomenal. Traditional marketing exists but is gradually losing the market share. Marketers and fashion brand managers are thus reconsidering the communication strategies from Digital Media perspective. The aim of this research is to develop and validate a measurement scale for understanding consumer's perception of interactive media contact points in context of fashion brands. This research involves survey responses from 378 fashion consumers. A three dimensional 40-item scale was developed based on literature review and expert opinions. The study presents the complete process of scale development and validation suggested by DeVellis, 1991 as well as implications of the main findings.

Key Words: Interactive Media, Contact Points, Fashion, Brand Communication, Digital Media, IMC, Touchpoints, Scale Development

Abbreviations

IMCP – Interactive Media Contact Point
 IMC – Integrated Marketing Communication
 AVE - Average variance extracted
 CR - Composite Reliability

INTRODUCTION

Fast moving technologies are offering pool of opportunities for marketers to look at. It is no more a traditional path that a customer will adopt to buy a product. There is no predetermined channel or way that a marketer can expect a customer to follow. It is a 360 degrees contact point revolution that has occurred as a result of digitization. Marketers are surrounded by a range of multiplying contact points where customers are directly or indirectly interacting with the brand and coherent understanding of which contact point is delivering what is debatable. The complexity of coordinating across swarm of Interactive Media contact points (IMCP) is a challenging quest.

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finer contact points as repeated interactions of the consumer that strengthen the emotional, psychological and physical connect of a brand. The broader definition of marketing communication rightly covers the various aspect of ongoing, interactive; cross functional (Duncan and Mulhern 2004) contact points (or touchpoints). Seeing the enormous popularity of the digital interactive media and its applications, it would not be wrong in saying that the contact point analysis in the marketing communication in the near future should happen through the Interactive Media Contact Points (IMCP) study. This study not being in place, new client acquisitions, brand positioning, imagery and visibility, possessing a strong hand over the competitors would be at stake. Thus, IMCP can be defined as any points or marketing activity on a digital interactive platform where you can communicate with your audience, customer, prospect or web user or "*All consumer*

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ISSN: 2231-2196 (Print)

ISSN: 0975-5241 (Online)

DOI: 10.7324/IJCRR.2017.9193

Received: 15.08.2017

Revised: 04.09.2017

Accepted: 20.09.2017

interaction platforms which cater to 2-way effective communication act as a part of Interactive Media Contact Point”.

Fashion trends and styles are ever changing and “fashion brands and retailers are struggling to find the right business model answers” (Rinnebach& Richter, 2014). A successful fashion brand must inspire its audience. New media is “drastically changing the dialogue about fashion whereby we can upon our on-demand desire for trends and gain access to them anytime, anywhere, and on any platform” (How Fashion Trends are Being Dictated by Social Media Trends. Retrieved from <https://blog.ketchum.com/how-fashion-trends-are-being-dictated-by-social-media-trends/> (2012, Oct 26)) Interactive media is changing the way fashion is presented. “The way that we shoot it, the way that we showcase it and the way that we make the clothes and design them has changed,” Wang said (Schneier, 2014). Thus the research paper focusses upon the identification and analysis of IMCP for fashion brands that have come in picture as a result of the popularity gained by the Interactive Media.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evolution of Brand Communication

The concept of Interactive Media is derived from the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). Steenkamp and Geyskens (2006) found that interactivity and brand learning is directly related to each other, greater interactivity promotes greater brand learning through better information assimilation and could help companies forge cognitive and emotional bonds with their brand users. Belch and Belch (2009) found that IMC plays a major role in developing sustainable brand identity and equity. Merriam-Webster’s dictionary redefined the classical definition of marketing as “the process or technique of promoting, selling, and distributing a product or service” by constituting communication as an interchange of thoughts, opinions and information by means of medium. The idea of Integrated Marketing Communication has been in discussions since last two decades (Schultz and Barnes 1999; Schultz 2003; Shimp 2007). The concept initiated from Integrated Marketing Communication and is now transforming towards interactive and engagement models (Swain, 2004).

Businesses cannot solely depend on one single medium when it comes to communication with its customers. Synchronous use of various forms of mediums is required due to alliance existing between them (Naik, Mantrala, and Sawyer, 1998; Naik and Raman, 2003). As rightly said, we cannot choose one of the two – Traditional or Digital. It has to be a mix of both depending upon the nature of the business. The explorative study on the simultaneous use of mediums is now the prime focus of many researchers (Nowak, Cameron, and

Krugman, 1993) (Stammerjohan, Wood, Chang, and Thorson, 2005).

Integrated marketing communication in the following years of research got retransformed by the increasing involvement of customers on digital platforms. Prior theories and literature identifies several studies related to digital contact point (Agichtein et. al, 2008; Ahlqvist et.al., 2008; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Perdue, 2010; Rumman and Alhadid, 2014). (Schivinski and Dąbrowski, 2015) studied the effect of firm created social media communication and user generated social media communication on consumer perception and brand equity. (Christodoulides and Chernatony, 2004) concentrated his study on one of the Interactive Media Contact Point apart from Social Media i.e. Website. (Bushelow, 2012) expanded the vision and concentrated the study on Facebook fan pages which were termed as Online Brand Communities. Bushelow’s research envisaged the relationship between Facebook Fan Page Interactions and Brand Loyalty. (Berger and Milkman, 2012) investigate the relationship between article characteristics and blogging. The studies only focus on few IMCP, whereas in the present scenario ‘integrated marketing paradigm focuses on the full set of contacts that affect the consumer’s brand experience’ (Calder and Malthouse, 2005) which has led to theory related gap.

Contact Points Categorization

Shopping behavior, be it physical or over the Internet is always affected by the responsiveness and the encounters. Positive word of mouth is the result of the positive perusal of offline/online buying. Contact points (or touch points) have thus been area of interest for researchers and practitioners. Several categorizations for contact points have been proposed in the past - based upon the customer experience – Pre-Purchase, During-Purchase and Post-Purchase (Dunn & Davis, 2004), based on control - controllable, influenceable and uncontrollable (Martenson, 2008), based on purchase point of view – One to One, Point of Sale, Indirect, and Mass Media (Spengler et al., 2010), based on origin – company created, intrinsic, unexpected, customer-initiated and based on operation - Functional, Social, Community, Corporate and based on media channels – paid/bought (e.g. Banners, Search Engine Advertising, Advertorials, Interactive television), owned (e.g. b2c website, b2b website, web shop, mobile web, mobile app, tablet app, e-mail, interactive point of sale, narrowcasting, desktop widgets, embedded software, campaign site, affiliates, sales content, social media) and earned (e.g. Social Media, Viral Campaigns, Blogs & News.) (Frampton, 2014).

With emerging communication channels such as online and mobile phones, marketers must constantly examine functionality in relation to consumer need, to discover new and exciting ways to engage them (Wyner, 2006). However, with fragmentation of markets and traditional communication

channels, such as mass media, it is progressively more difficult for marketers to execute meaningful and measurable communications to target groups and individuals. There are some practical difficulties in agreeing with the theory that necessarily all brand contact points must be used. For instance, the cost or the budget will clearly escalate. And as Ries&Ries (2005) explain that the brand communications arena is highly competitive and cluttered. The result is proliferation of communication messages directed at the consumers, creating communication overload. We live in an over communicated society. (Shultz & Barnes, 2002) observe too many messages, too many advertisers, too much noise, and too much stimulation to the consumer. Therefore, selection of the most appropriate contact points would be a more pragmatic approach.

METHODOLOGY

An initial qualitative study based on a review of literature and interviews of experts from fashion industry was conducted to generate list of IMCP for fashion brands. Next, the scale was refined and administered to fashion consumers.

Data Gathering

The aim of the study is to identify Interactive Media contact points for fashion brands and develop a scale to measure consumer’s perception of IMCP in context of fashion industry. Validity of the content relates to how illustrative the items of the latent construct are in defining the purposive statements. Pilot testing of the scale was carried out by Digital Media experts from fashion industry and keeping their recommendations in mind 40-item scale was formed. The scale was then tested on sample of 378 respondents to further carry out the reliability and validity tests.

Scale Description

Table 1: Description of the Measurement Scale

Component	Items	Labels
Website/Blogs	IMCP1	“Fashion Brand’s website is the prime source of information for the brand.”
	IMCP2	“Interactive fashion websites are more appealing than plain text.”
	IMCP3	“You consider content on blogs as important source of information for fashion brands.”
	IMCP4	“Content on blogs is relatable, real and consistent.”
	IMCP5	“Discussions on blog posts are worthy of a look.”

Advertisements	IMCP6	“Advertisements appearing on search engine’s (Google/Yahoo/Bing) result page for your typed fashion query are appropriate.”
	IMCP7	“Display advertisement of fashion products attracts your attention.”
	IMCP8	“Advertisement being sponsored or non-sponsored does not affect your buying process.”
Social Media	IMCP9	“Browsing through Facebook official fashion brand’s pages gives you information about the brand.”
	IMCP10	“Twitter tweets and mentions keep you updated with news from the fashion industry.”
	IMCP11	“Instagram post relates you to fashion brand’s updates and trends.”
	IMCP12	“Snapchat short stories by fashion brands are engaging.”
	IMCP13	“Websites like Pinterest and Roposso provides you valuable info related to fashion brands.”
Forums & Groups	IMCP14	“Video post by fashion brands (Youtube/Vimeo/Vine) enriches your experience with the brand.”
	IMCP15	“Videos by fashion brands give a realistic product view of the brand’s product.”
	IMCP16	“Positive word of mouth from peers elevates your likelihood towards a fashion brand.”
	IMCP17	“Online feedbacks and reviews for fashion brand are influence able.”
	IMCP18	“Celebrity endorsement by fashion brand makes it more relatable to the audience.”
Mobile	IMCP19	“Fashion Brand’s mobile apps keep you in continuous touch with the brand.”
	IMCP20	“Buying process through a mobile app is more convenient and simpler.”
	IMCP21	“Advertisements on play store or ios store catch your eyes.”
Customer Service	IMCP22	“Browsing fashion through mobile phones or tablets is convenient and comfortable.”
	IMCP23	“Contact us section/tab should be easily navigable.”
	IMCP24	“Live Chat option on fashion brand’s website makes the buying process convenient.”

Product Information	IMCP25	“You look at detailed description of the product and quality/fabric of the material while considering a fashion brand.”
	IMCP26	“Presence of appropriate size chart impacts your purchasing process.”
	IMCP27	“360 degree video of the product makes your selection stronger.”
	IMCP28	“Appropriate resolution of images and 4X Zoom features are useful in understanding the details.”
Virtual Mirror	IMCP29	“Virtual mirror on fashion website provides you the exact fit and look to great extent.”
	IMCP30	“3D Imaging & Virtual Mirror reduces the chances of returns/refunds.”
	IMCP31	“Virtual mirror reduces the evaluation time during your buying process.”
Payments	IMCP32	“You consider secured payment gateways and options for using all types of cards/e-wallets while purchasing fashion products.”
	IMCP33	“Option of cash on delivery effects your purchase decision.”
	IMCP34	“Convenient Return/Refund policies of fashion brands ease out the decision process.”
Communication	IMCP35	“Informative emails by fashion brands (Tips/Styles/Trends) create a positive brand image.”
	IMCP36	“Discounts and offers in emails attract your attention.”
	IMCP37	“Asking for feedback on the product/ rating your experience make you considerate of the fashion brand.”
Loyalty	IMCP38	“Post purchase loyalty benefits - memberships/points are welcomed by you.”
	IMCP39	“Emails create top of mind recall for the fashion brand.”
	IMCP40	“SMS/Whatsapp notification by fashion brands drives your loyalty towards the brand.”

Sample and Data Collection –

The survey was posted on the site – surveymonkey.com. The link to the survey was then constantly shared on social networking sites – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Whatsapp Groups during the span of 3 months (September’2016 to November’2016). Emails were sent to people to respond to the survey link. Respondents were regular online shoppers selected through convenience sampling. Facebook Fan Pages

were approached to share the survey. Those who filled the survey were then encouraged to circulate it further with their friends, family and colleagues. A total of 437 surveys were collected, out of which 378 were completely filled usable surveys.

DATA ANALYSIS

Validity

After developing the scale, the construct validity was assessed with the help of exploratory factor analysis. Factor analysis help in identifying the correlation between variables and test theories which otherwise seems difficult. Kaiser– Meyer– Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is another measure to validate the appropriateness of factor analysis, KMO value greater than .6 is acceptable which was achieved. Bartlett’s test of sphericity ($p = .000$) showed significant correlations amongst variables (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

In the next step convergent and discriminant validity of the construct was evaluated. Convergent validity denotes the extent of correlation of one measure of the construct to other (Malhotra and Dash, 2010). It is measured by evaluating the item-to-item correlation. Any item with correlation score above .4 was considered for analysis. On the other hand, discriminant validity denotes the distinctiveness of each measure of the construct. It is measured by checking the VARIMAX rotation in the Principal Component Extraction method of Factor Analysis. The value of factor loading depends on the size of the sample, for $n > 200$, the values above .4 are acceptable (Field, 2009). All the factor loading values above 0.5 and no cross loadings indicate decent discriminant validity. Item 2,4,10,11,14,15,18,19,20,27,31,33,37 and 38 were removed as the results of factor loading shows the loading to be less than 0.6 and some were loading on more than 1 factor (Stevens, 1992). The remaining 26 items explained a total variance of 78% which was better than 65% the result of all 40 factors. Three components were extracted. Results were supported by Eigen values and variance. Overviewing the literature and examining the factors the components were named as Pre-Purchase, During Purchase and Post-Purchase based on customer journey (Dunn & Davis, 2002)

Reliability

Cronbach alpha was tested to measure the reliability of the scale. The values obtained were above 0.7 hence suggesting high internal reliability (Guieford, 1965). AVE (Average variance extracted) and CR (Composite Reliability) was also calculated (Table 2). Composite reliability index is tested to check the internal reliability. The acceptable value of Composite Reliability is $CR > 0.7$ (Hair et al., 2009). Formula for calculating the composite reliability index is - $CR\eta^* = (\sum\gamma_i)^2 / [(\sum\gamma_i)^2 + \sum\epsilon_i]$

*Composite Reliability = (squared sum of standardized factor loadings)/{(squared sum of standardized factor loadings) + (sum of error variances)}.

The obtained results of CRη are denoted in Tables 2 which fall in the acceptable range (CRη> 0.7). AVE depicts the overall variance explained by the variables of the latent construct. The acceptable value of AVE is expected to be above

0.5 and lesser than the resultant value of CRη (Nusair&Hua, 2010). Formula for calculating AVE is –

AVE = Sum of Squared Standardized Loadings/ No. of Items corresponding to the latent variable

Discriminant validity is also achieved as all the variance extracted is more than the square of the correlation coefficients (Fornell & Larcker, 1981)(Hair et al., 2006).

Table 2: Reliability & Validity Test Results

Research Construct		Reliability			Validity	Validity & Reliability Results					
		Cronbach's α'	CR	AVE	Factor Loading						
Pre_Purchase IMCP	IMCP1	0.83	0.989	0.703	0.667	Satisfied					
	IMCP3				0.817						
	IMCP5				0.653						
	IMCP6				0.639						
	IMCP7				0.783						
	IMCP8				0.636						
	IMCP9				0.878						
	IMCP12				0.757						
	IMCP13				0.917						
	IMCP16				0.785						
	IMCP17				0.765						
	IMCP21				0.916						
IMCP22	0.837										
During_Purchase IMCP	IMCP23	0.788	0.884	.538	0.615	Satisfied					
	IMCP24				0.748						
	IMCP25				0.762						
	IMCP26				0.664						
	IMCP28				0.576						
	IMCP29				0.656						
	IMCP30				0.613						
	IMCP32				0.752						
	IMCP34				0.711						
	Post_Purchase IMCP				IMCP35		0.73	0.848	.517	0.769	Satisfied
					IMCP36					0.749	
					IMCP39					0.772	
IMCP40		0.763									

¹Obtained from SPSS Output

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

(Measurement Model to test the scale for IMCP) –

A conceptual model was created using confirmatory factor analysis to analyze the data fit. The 3 latent variables were named as – Pre-Purchase IMCP, During-Purchase IMCP, Post-Purchase IMCP. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed using AMOS software. The value of comparative fit index (CFI) > .95 is acceptable and achieved (Schreiber et.

al., 2006). The goodness of fit index (GFI) >.95 and (AGFI) > .95 was achieved (Im, Bayus& Mason, 2003). The estimated measurement model also indicates acceptable limits of RMR (>.30) and RMSEA (>.30) values. Range of CMIN/DF is acceptable within the range of 2 to 5 (Kenny, 2014). Standardized factor loadings values are acceptable between 0 and 1(Schreiber et. al., 2006). Higher value denotes better indication of the observed variable.

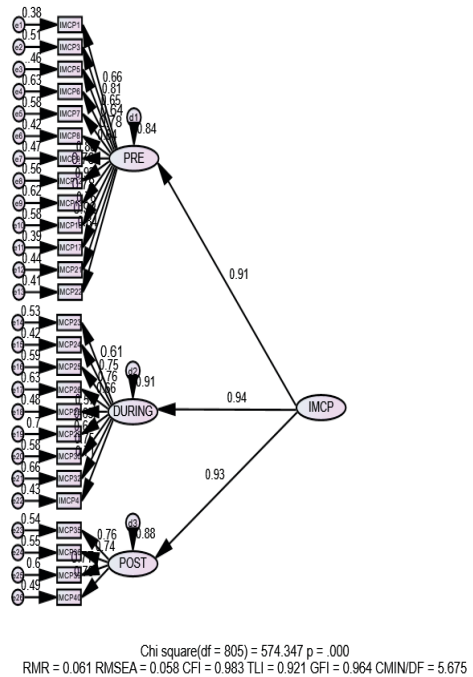


Figure 1: Measurement Model (Amos Output).

RESULTS

The above analysis has indicated that the three-factor model for IMCP of fashion brand achieves model fit and therefore is acceptable. The measures of factor loadings indicate that the selected 26 IMCPs loaded significantly on their respective factors. Thus, based on factor and content analysis the screening has reduced forty contact points to twenty six. While several items of the contact points scale had relevance to consumers perception of interactive media contact points of fashion brands, many were found to exhibit cross loadings and were thus not considered during further analysis. Despite the gaining popularity of interactive media, there are no existing scales to assess consumer's perception of IMCP. This is amongst the initial study to develop such a scale.

DISCUSSION

The three dimensions: Pre-Purchase, During- Purchase and Post-Purchase reflect the broader division of IMCP in consistent with the literature. The study also supported the literature in validating the scale which shows high correlation between the three dimensions. Through this intricate research, we extend the current body of knowledge on contact points by uncovering several distinct interactive media contact points. The results of the study offers managers an understanding of online customer journey, managers will be able to draw from these insights and conduct contact point mapping.

CONCLUSION

A rapid transformation has been observed considering brand communication and media perspective in the 20th century. The traditional marketing exists but is gradually losing the market share. The marketers and brand managers are thus re-considering the communication strategies from Digital Media perspective. At this point and time, evaluation of contact points and understanding mode of communication which influences consumer purchase decision and enhances the value of the brand is required.

Basis the results of the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis of Interactive media contact points (IMCP) of fashion brands a scale was developed to measure IMCP of fashion brands. A 35-item scale was finalized after testing on a sample of 378 respondents. The scale was initially developed by considering opinions from the experts and literature analysis. It is observed that online display and search advertisements effect the purchase of fashion brands but the influence is not very effective. Amongst the other factors, social media has a major role to play in the fashion industry and displayed the highest impact. Other important interactive media contact points which cannot be ignored includes Live Chat, Website, Mobile Apps and Virtual Mirror. The future scope of the research may propose to study the relative impact of various IMCP on brand equity and purchase decision of fashion brands.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Authors acknowledge the immense help received from the scholars whose articles are cited and included in references of this manuscript. The authors are also grateful to authors / editors / publishers of all those articles, journals and books from where the literature for this article has been reviewed and discussed.

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