

MULTICHANNEL

Fashion marketing calls for a non-linear approach

January 30, 2015



Younger consumers check their phones a minimum of 40 times a day

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK - Consumers are becoming more digitally connected, hopping from device to device, requiring fashion brands to adapt to this growing tech adoption with cross-channel efforts that put their needs and desires first, according to speakers at the inaugural Stylus Fashion Briefing Jan. 22.

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Due to social media and the increasing array of bloggers, consumers feel more involved with the brands they love, and they crave access. Speaking directly to consumers with efforts that reach them where they are is key to breaking through the noise.

"We're seeing that shoppers are increasingly less likely to view the world in terms of channels," said Shannon Davenport, head of advisory U.S. at **Stylus Fashion**, New York. "A lot of times in the industry we think of omnichannel, or in the past we thought of multichannel, but in a way this is an outdated way of looking at things.

"We're in this wild west period of retail, where everything is being mixed up and rediscovered in a new way, which is really exciting," she said. "We know that consumers are fickle. They're more concerned with access, sharability, and fluidity than they are with

what channel they're using.

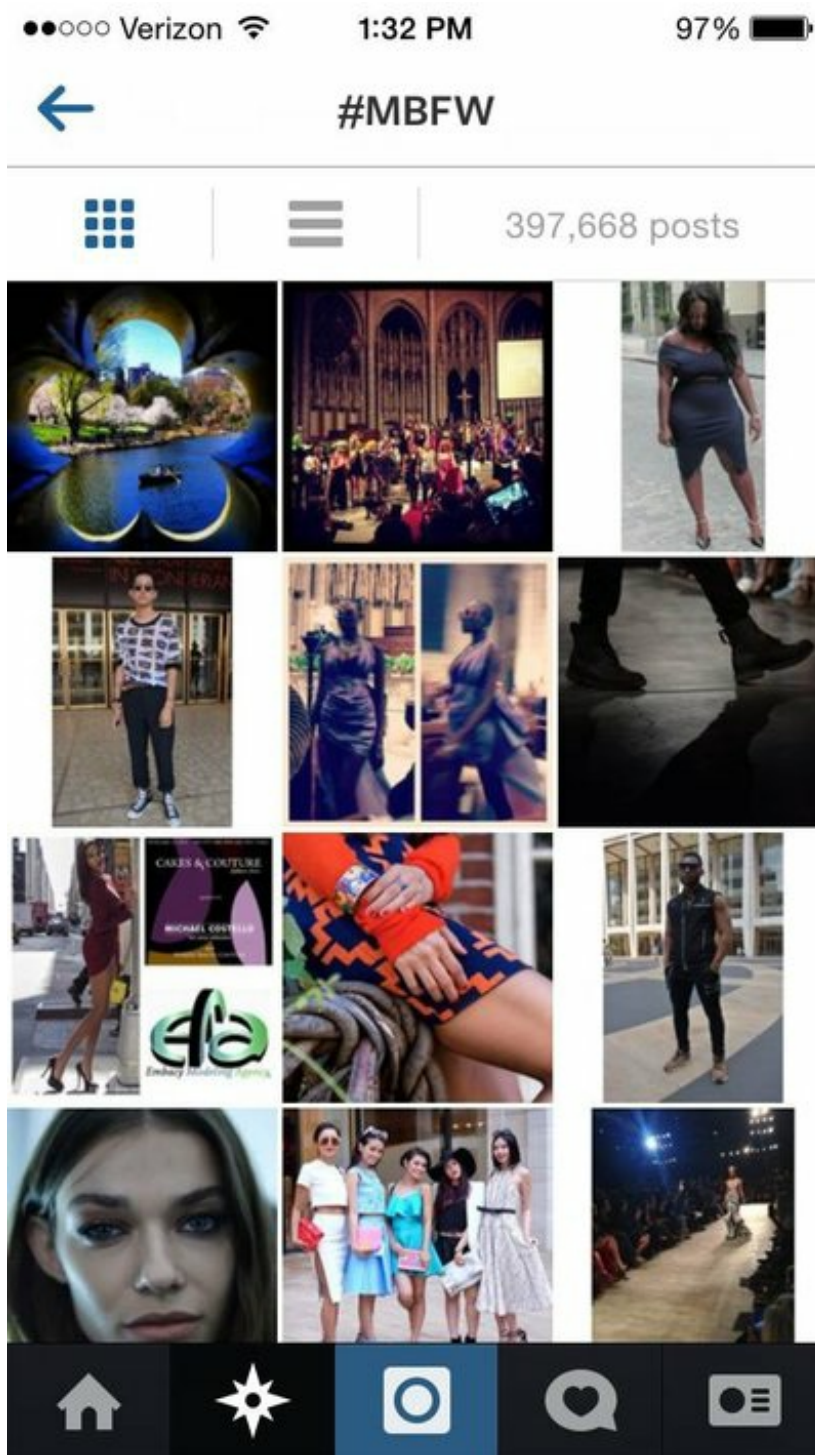
"They're also really overwhelmed and stressed. Fifty-four percent of Americans say they have too many responsibilities overall. What matters the most is creating these brand connections that let consumers stay engaged as they lead these busy, packed lives."

Getting ready

Millennials and Gen-Z individuals are going to be the consumers of the future, and brands need to prepare for them. While all consumers are becoming more digitally connected, these generations are propelling the trend and moving at a faster rate of technology adoption.

Gen-Z comprises 2 billion individuals, who do not possess their own income yet, but who affect household purchasing decisions. They have grown up with information at their fingertips and they are after instant gratification.

Millennials represent a quarter of the world's population, who are heavily embracing social media. Seventy-one percent of the group uses some form of social media on a daily basis, and 68 percent say that what they see on social platforms affects their buying decisions.



Instagram posts during Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week

Not interested in linear storytelling, these consumers only spend about 3 percent of their time on social media with words, preferring image-based platforms such as Instagram.

An L2 report with Olapic found that Instagram has a 15 percent higher engagement rate than owner Facebook ([see story](#)).

"What are the key secrets to designing these millennial-friendly interfaces?" Ms. Davenport said. "It has to be big, it has to be loud and it really has to be easy. This is all about no hassle, no fuss interactions.

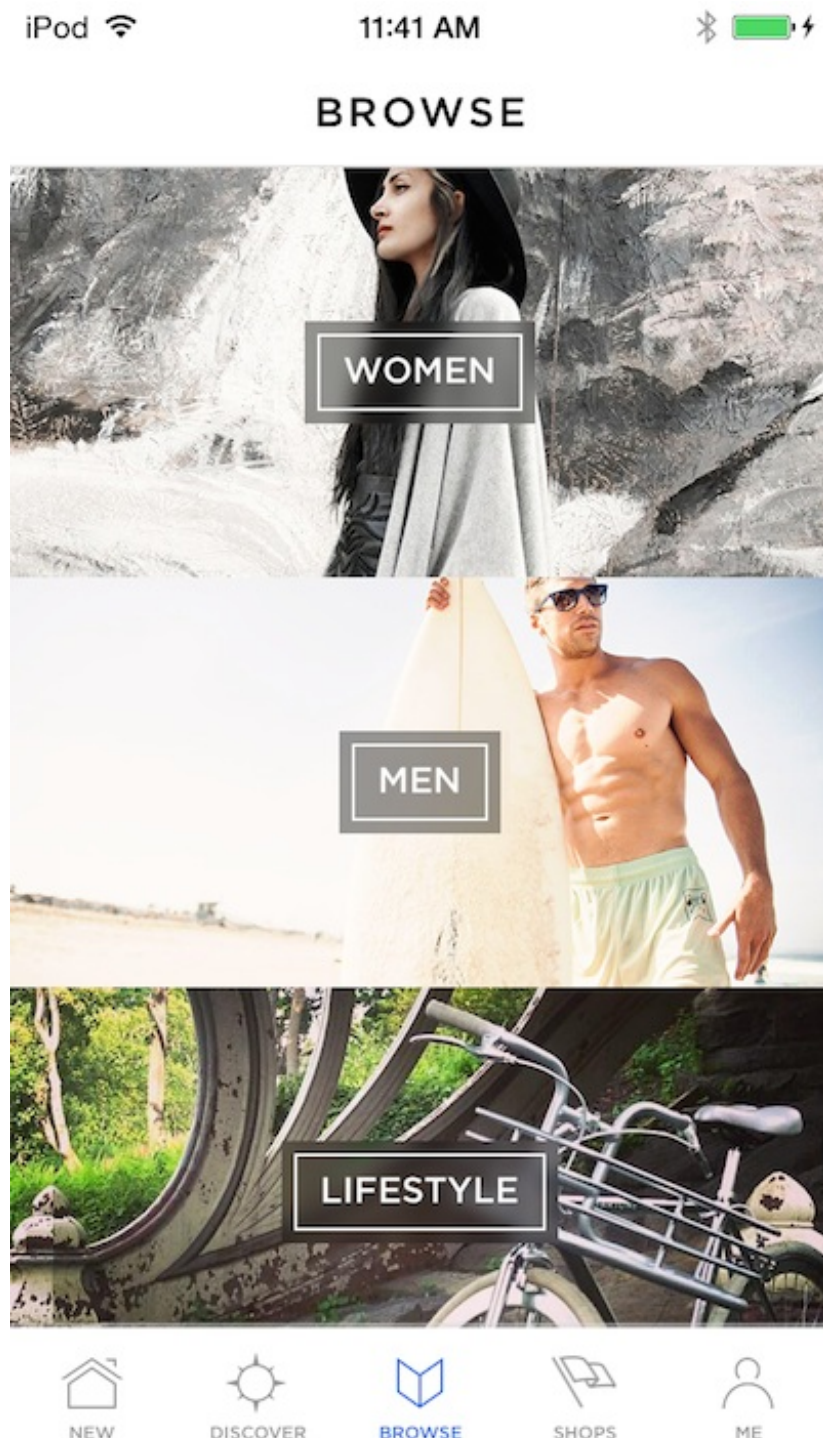
"One of the best and the most notorious version of this is actually Tinder," she said.

"Tinder is the standard bearer now as an app that does one thing and does it really well.

"These days consumers need to be able to understand your message in a matter of seconds, and they need to understand why they need to engage with you that quickly."

Brands have managed to make Instagram shoppable via platforms that email consumers, such as LiketoKnow.It.

Other retail startups take the Instagram or Tinder approach when designing their platforms, such as mobile shopping app Spring that creates a feed of new products from brands consumers follow ([see story](#)).



Screenshot of Spring app

Authenticity is also important to this audience, who trust bloggers for both fashion and beauty ideas. While it may seem that fashion bloggers are losing their luster, they still have large followings that can rival magazines, creating an opportunity for luxury brands to

reach a large, fashion-focused audience ([see story](#)).

Brands and retailers are finding ways to mix digital into the in-store experience, installing beacons that connect to a brand's app to send personalized messages based on location.

While not fashion, Ms. Davenport gave the example of Krispy Kreme, which has a "Hot Light" app, which connects to a sign to send push notifications to consumers who are nearby to a store when fresh donuts are made. Those that get to the store within 30 minutes get free pastries. This initiative has been so successful that the brand has eliminated traditional marketing.

Karl Lagerfeld's stores have fitting room iPads that enable selfies with the addition of branded filters. The designer has said that the shopping experience should be Instagram- or Twitter-worthy.

Neiman Marcus has unveiled a number of digital initiatives, including interactive tables in its shoe department ([see story](#)) and a mobile application that allows consumers to connect directly with sales associates via text message, place an item on hold or find out more about a garment via a scannable code ([see story](#)).



Neiman Marcus digital table

Also bringing extra digital experiences to a physical event is the use of Oculus Rift, which Topshop used for a runway show to enable attendees to see real-time social media and backstage content during the show.

Planning ahead

Consumers' desire for instant gratification has altered the fashion seasons, changing the strategy behind trend forecasting. With traditional forecasting in today's environment, a season is over before it has begun.

To appease consumers who want to see now, wear now, brands such as Burberry have added in immediate ecommerce to their runway shows, allowing consumers to purchase looks right after seeing them paraded on a model.

Social media provides a form of window shopping to consumers, and platforms can make or break a trend instantaneously.

For instance, the Valentino Rockstud has held on for many seasons since its premiere due to bloggers, while Kenzo's tiger sweatshirts may be oversaturated and at their tipping point.

Traditional seasons are also on the way out, since global consumers require many different seasons at the same time. For instance, a consumer in Australia will need lightweight attire when Europe is experiencing winter.

Rather, Stylus Fashion's Sue Evans suggests that brands stick to their core season or mix seasons within one collection. For example, Prada's use of leather for spring and summer materials for fall.

Harper's Bazaar editor-in-chief Glenda Bailey agreed that consumers are heavily interested in buying right when they see something, a preference that has helped make the magazine's ShopBazaar feature popular.

Larger economic and social trends are likely to make more of an impact in the future. Ms. Bailey mentioned that by 2020, 30 percent of the workforce will be freelance, creating less need for the power suit and formal business attire than before.

Consumers are also craving unique items, which will translate to how merchandise is developed and sold. Ms. Bailey also predicts a heightened level of personalization, which in her mind involves the store knowing who a consumer is as soon as they walk in the door, with an individual dressing room set up with clothing of the customer's taste.

"You go to a place, and you want it to reflect that environment," Ms. Bailey said. "If I was in charge of a global brand, I would make absolutely sure that my New York store was completely different to London, to Paris, to Shanghai, because there's so many people that want to have something that's unique."

"And I think the industry's going to be broken down into offering people something which is truly special," she said. "Think global, act artisan."

Final Take

Sarah Jones, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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