

RESEARCH

Social posts impact 78pc of consumer purchases: Fashionbi

December 2, 2015



Kate Hudson for Jimmy Choo

By JEN KING

Social media has become an integral aspect of fashion marketing, with the 56 percent of consumers following branded accounts likely to spend more on purchases than those who do not, according to a new report by Fashionbi.

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A social media presence is just one aspect of an omnichannel strategy, a consumer journey that bridges online and offline interactions ripe with content, experience and high-end service to spur purchase decisions. Omnichannel has become a signifier for "exceptional" brands, but Fashionbi's "Mystery Shopping: Are the brands really able to omni-market, as they claim?" report looks to determine the actuality of the practice.

"The main purpose to carry Fashionbi's new marketing research was to check and compare the possibilities brands have across touch points to turn their social media followers into the loyal customers," said Ambika Zutshi, CEO of **Fashionbi**, Milan, Italy. "The reality was a bit different than expected.

"We checked what products the brands were asking the followers to 'check-out in-stores' on their social account and how the products were not yet available, neither online nor offline," she said. "Or how they were not available in that particular style or model that was promoted on the social media and liked by all. Or the stores ran out of sizes on those models and couldn't help customers get it in any way, or asked an additional price on shipping it in from their other stores.

"You observe all this and know that the industry is still operating with olden methodologies. Their CEOs speak about innovation and technology but forget to implement that from the very tail of the chain. The omnichannel is not yet so omni, the departments still work separately. Through this research we have brought forward the loopholes that still exist in the fashion industry and how can they be resolved."

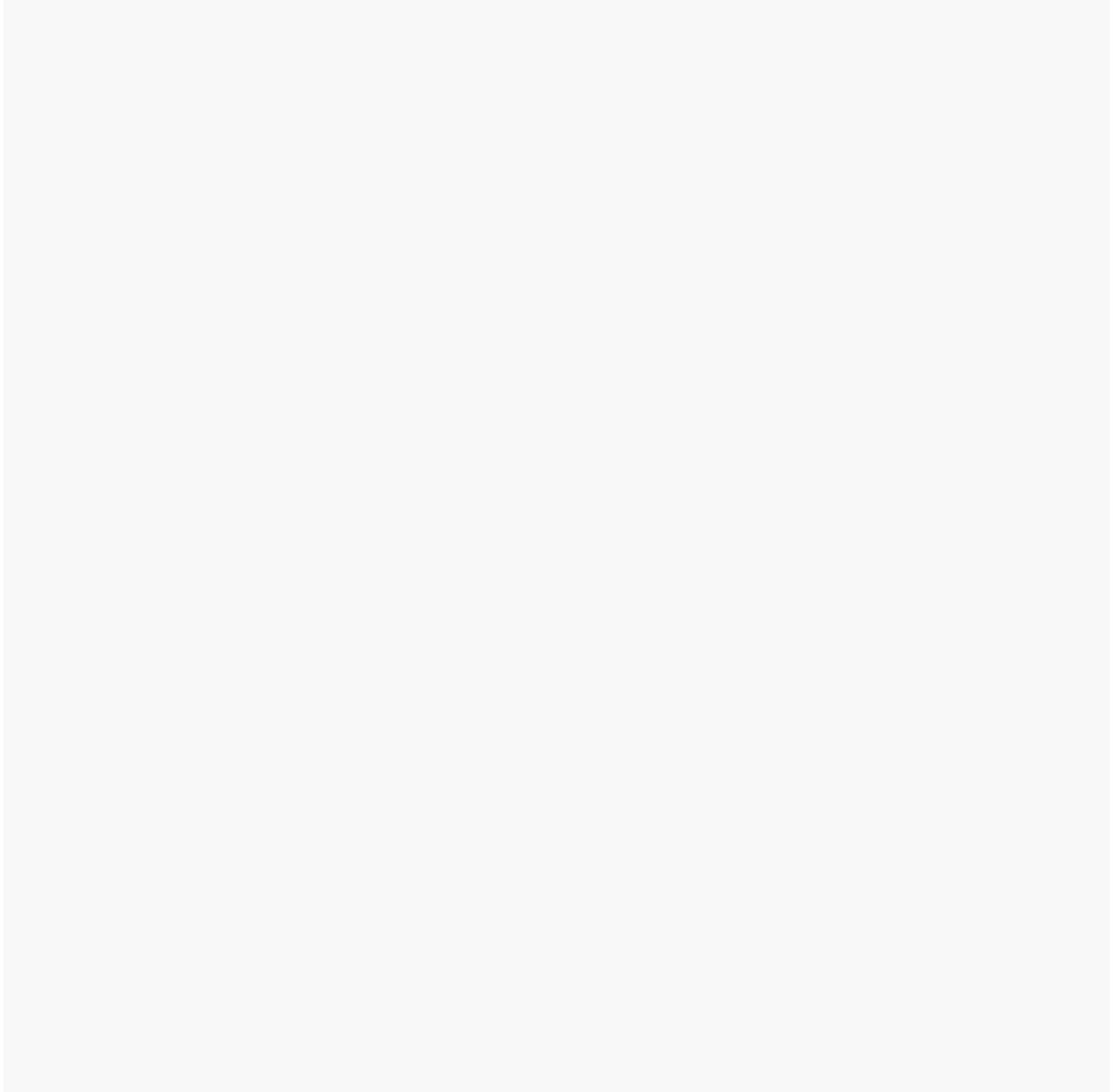
Fashionbi's report used the Instagram and Facebook accounts of mass market brands, bridge brands, pret-a-porter brands and fashion footwear brands to judge their omnichannel prowess. The objective of the report was to gauge how well the surveyed brands, selected at random from different market sectors, use omnichannel strategies across their social, online and in-store channels.

The social media data was gathered between September and November, and the bricks-and-mortar analysis was conducted in Milan Oct. 30 through Nov. 6.

Shopping across channels

During its research, Fashionbi found discrepancies in omnichannel strategies and sought to uncover the reality of omni-marketing claims.

There are opportunities being lost by brands not truly following through with omnichannel positioning. As an example of these misconnections, Fashionbi explained that if a consumer sees a pair of Jimmy Choo pumps on Instagram, but when she goes to purchase they are unavailable in-stores or not available in a particular size or color, this is a cause for discontentment and a lost sale.



A photo posted by Jimmy Choo (@jimmychoo) on Oct 27, 2015 at 10:05am PDT

Additionally, many luxury brands have an extra fee for fast deliveries on online orders, but mass market brands provide the service for free. For luxury brands, a consistent, high-touch omnichannel experience is a must, from ensuring inventory to delivery options. In terms of sharing a product image on Instagram or Facebook, fashion marketers must keep in mind that 56 percent of consumers follow their brands on social media to learn about merchandise and services. Also, 78 percent of consumers note that social media posts from brands impact their purchase decisions. The pre-a-porter brands analysed by Fashionbi include Saint Laurent, DSquared, Fendi, Marni and Miu Miu. Fashion footwear brands include Jimmy Choo, Giuseppe Zanotti, Casadei, Sergio Rossi and Pollini.

For each brand, Fashionbi looked at a number their most popular photos across Instagram and Facebook noting the image's interactions, determined by "likes," and any text that accompanied the post. Then, Fashionbi compared the ecommerce and in-store availability of the product, its price and color options when applicable. Each brand was also judged on ecommerce product visibility, ecommerce share options, social media, ecommerce shipping terms and ecommerce vs. bricks-and-mortar stores. Of the surveyed pre-a-porter brands, the images promoted on social media, for the most part, aligned with what was available on branded ecommerce and in bricks-and-mortar shops, for a consistent price. Marni and DSquared fared the best with promoted products available on and offline.

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From Marni Fall/Winter 2015 Advertising Campaign, discover the new selection of winter shoes
<http://bit.ly/MarniFWShoes>

Posted by [Marni Official](#) on [Saturday, October 31, 2015](#)

Miu Miu and Saint Laurent were not as consistent with social posts promoting new season collections that were not yet available at boutiques. Fendi also had consistency issues with the new season collection seen online, but at bricks-and-mortar only a few of promoted items were available.

While none of the five brands offer free shipping, Fendi is the only label studied to offer an in-store pick-up service.

In the fashion footwear brand category, it was concluded that online assortments trumps available color and size options found in bricks-and-mortar stores. Prices were found to be consistent online and offline.

An exception was Sergio Rossi, which has a wider range of color options offline than it does online. Pollini also was consistent in inventory assortment online and offline, and was the only brand to promote products on social media that could be purchased via ecommerce and in-stores.

Fashionbi found that of these brands, some products were available only online or were out of stock in either of the two channels. To this point, only Jimmy Choo and Sergio Rossi have a check availability function at other European stores for Milan pick-up, but this special delivery service comes with an additional cost from Jimmy Choo while it is free of charge at Sergio Rossi.

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Posted by [Sergio Rossi](#) on [Thursday, October 22, 2015](#)

Pret-a-porter and fashion footwear brands often connect product-related posts from Facebook to online stores. But, many of these posts are shared without links directing the consumer to an ecommerce page to continue the purchase path.

Not all brands surveyed include a clear product name, which also may make it challenging for the consumer to locate the item if she intends to buy.

While there are clear discrepancies across channels, brands should not assume that consumers will simply not notice.

"We should not underestimate the power of a consumer. Today's consumer is super savvy, 24/7 connected and wanting to buy anything he desires anywhere at anytime on any device at his disposal," Ms. Zutshi said. "It is not by chance that the new business model is customer-centric and not product-centric anymore.

"If a customer follows a brand on the social media, it is to get more knowledge on the brand, its products and services and creative marketing initiatives," she said. "Today, a brand needs to pull a customer and not vice-versa. Today, the followers are the brand advocates, a brand's future depends on their discussions about it.

"So if a customer would complain about how unpleasant his/her experience was with the online shopping with Brand A and how they asked him to pay an extra 50 for fast delivery, several thousand of brand's followers and his

own, would see this comments and be impacted by it on their next purchase with Brand A. The consumer knows, observes and speaks out - both on a great brand experience and on a negative one."

Don't doubt digital

Omnichannel consistency is essential for brands marketing to today's digital-savvy consumer.

Most importantly, 45 percent of luxury purchases are influenced by what the consumer has discovered digitally, according to a July report by WBR Digital.

The "Digital Advantage for Luxury Brands Director's Report: Luxury Interactive 2015" gives an overview of how digital has continued to affect and transform luxury brands, especially in terms of sales channels and revenue-driving experiences in the online space. As expectations for online experiences have changed, luxury brands have faced key challenges in the digital space from research to in-store logistics ([see story](#)).

Also, in today's retail environment, digital touchpoints serve as the "connective tissue" between Web sites, bricks-and-mortar storefronts, inventory and the consumer, according to a new report by L2.

The "L2 Intelligence Report: Omnichannel Retail 2015," developed in partnership with RichRelevance, provides insights into how digital alone does not offer marketers substantial ROI. But, an omnichannel approach, offering consumers a number of "fluid" touchpoints, leads to higher consumer spend ([see story](#)).

To ensure a consistent and worthwhile omnichannel experience for consumers, changes to strategy must be developed within departments by eliminating silos.

"It is utmost important that all the departments come together at least once a month to discuss on a cross-channel strategy," Ms. Zutshi said. "The social media manager should know what the retail manager is going to put in the retail store and what the ecommerce merchandiser is going to put online.

"They should be coherent with the products that the PR department is going to advertise with the blogger," she said. "Moreover, there should always be a plan B - what if the retail store runs out of the most requested size? How can they make the purchase process easy and seamless for an interested customer - without any extra cost.

"A customer can try a product in the store but would want to purchase it later online ([showrooming](#)). The least a brand can do is have the same price points on both the channels. Now, social media channels have started to offer buy buttons. The purpose should always be to make the purchase process as shorter and smoother for the interested customer as possible."

Final Take

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