

**PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS IN MALAYSIA ADAPT TO THE DIGITAL AGE IN
THE FASHION INDUSTRY**

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1.0. Introduction to the Area of Interest

Public relations have been used throughout the whole century. Even before public relations were even a name. Just like fashion. It is human nature for us, especially women, to want nice things. Fashion has also made a lot of businesses bloom as people are always wanting to buy the latest jewellerys, clothes, and shoes. But when it comes to traditional public relations in fashion, it was all in the magazines and television. Getting any bad news on fashion business can be difficult as companies try to keep it a secret to maintain their reputation. Gossips were not easily spread.

The digital world has greatly affected the fashion industry in terms of its public relations and digital marketing. Fashion industries particularly in the retail are always keeping up with the latest trends and coming up with more designs. Going digital on social media can really increase the opportunity for fashion businesses to get more attention and potential customers from the fast travelling news. According to Udayangani Rathnayaka (2018), marketers or public relations practitioners should forecast and be prepared of the fashion trends even before they start to be trending and analyse closely on how consumers would react to it. Not only that, they will also enquire to retain these customers in long term.

Fashion industry gossip was never the consumers' forte. Now it's made available on Twitter and Instagram. (Ray A. Smith, 2018). The new media have made it essentially accessible to the latest trends and gossips. People do not grab those fashion magazines anymore whenever they want to look for inspirations. Everything is only a click away. Which is also good as it gives fashion business a bigger exposure by emerging to different types of people. Magazine companies like Vogue and Harper's Bazaar are now on YouTube and social media as they gradually evolve in the new media. According to Mike Easey (2009), social media will also help the fashion companies to identify products and designs that fits the customers' taste and this additional knowledge will also help the business to grow.

According to Jennifer Hyman (2019), designers need to understand that they are not just competing against other fashion businesses like Zara or Topshop, but they are also competing against Amazon and second-hand fashion businesses. Fashion is all about change. The trends you see now might be different next season. Therefore, fashion

businesses need to play their part in continuously coming up with ideas and inspirations in order to keep their business going. This was also supported by Mike Easey (2009) who mentioned that in order for the change which is important to fashion to take place, continuously new products should be created.

Furthermore, the upcoming rise of Tiktok has also gained the attention of the public relations practitioners in the fashion industry. Social media influencers, celebrities and fashion bloggers are now hopping on the bandwagon of hitting the views on Tiktok and making trendy statements. According to Christian Allaire from *The Vogue* (2020), there are multiple ways on how fashion industries can achieve their likes and awareness by using Tiktok. For instance, designers are more prone to sharing the process on their designs and sustainable fashion are more heavily introduced. This social media platform has become a medium where fashion businesses can market their products and gain the attention.

Not only that, the digital world has also started to introduce different types of occupations like a social media influencer or content creator. 10 years ago, these names did not even exist. We would only have to rely on celebrities and politicians as key opinion leaders. But today, public relations practitioners are now sending media drops to these people and get them to publish the PR package on their social media platforms. These social media influencers are also being heavily paid by companies depending on the number of followers they have on social media. However, it is arguable that not all social media influencers will bring promising results to a certain company. For instance, a bad review on a certain product can automatically decreased the brand's reputation and backlashed. (Karen Freberg, 2011) Therefore, public relations practitioners would have to carefully select these influencers to become brand ambassadors for their fashion business clients.

2.0. Issues Related to the Area of Interest

What makes a fashion statement trendy? These are one of the few questions that most public relations practitioners have to put in mind. When a catalogue has been released, it is up to the public relations practitioners and the marketing team to make sure these outfits sell. However, with so many fashion businesses on the internet, it is hardly impossible to come up with first-hand original ideas without copying others.

According to Dr. Saravanan (2015), she quoted how trends on fashion mirrors the physical culture and image of dressing that models the consumer identity in a specific environment. For an example, perhaps the women in Kuala Lumpur and Kelantan might have a different taste of fashion. Therefore, a public relations practitioner in the fashion industry should also identify their target markets and how the public will respond to a specific type of clothing. However, when a specific clothing caters to a majority of the public, it is only natural for other designers to use that as an inspiration for their own work. There was a time where Lily Petuna's wrapped dress was a thing in conjunction to Raya. Somehow, different designers have come up with their own version of wrapped dresses that looked identical as Lily Petuna's.

Thankfully, these trendsetters were not really an issue as no one had rightfully claimed their rights to their own designs. But some fashion businesses are very defensive with their designs and when another designer recreates the designs for their own. Back in those days of traditional media, these issues were hardly published in the magazines as people will turn a blind eye for it. But when it comes to the new media, it can turn out to be the talk of the town.

Cyberbully on social media has become fairly common these days. In fact, the word 'cyberbully' did not exist just decades ago. You don't need to be strong or powerful to cyberbully, all you need is a cellphone and a medium to post about. But when an issue strikes, people would be talking about it for days. According to Charles E. Nota (2013), people who cyberbully often do not worry in having any face-to-face confrontation as they can keep their identity anonymous. Some can be very blunt and loud, and some can just show their support by reposting what others have to say. What is more terrifying is that anyone can be a victim to cyberbully, including the fashion business owners and their respective brands.

Nonetheless, cyberbully can still be considered as publicity even if it comes out negatively. It increases the fame or credibility of a company. For fashion companies, they do not run far from publicity even during the golden age of traditional media. According to Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler (2004), research has shown that word of mouth (WOM) greatly influences customers' purchasing decisions. The existence and the development of the internet has given customers to explore an entirely different platform than they had before to voice out their opinions about brands, companies, and their products and services as well as the opportunity to find out what other customers' opinions are.

When we talk about fashion, we think of the glitz and the glam of how these fashion people mingle around and seeking for the latest trends all around the world, one fashion magazine at a time. But those were way before the new digital era had arrived. Presently, the digital age has made it easier to have access on the fresh fashion at the tip of your fingers. More so, the founders of retail companies and brand ambassadors are now more engaged with the audience than before when the chief executive officers or fashion editors were known to be uptight and untouchable.

2.1. Hatred are easily spread all over social media

With the fast technology of Web 2.0 and the power of cyberbullying, all eyes will be on these fashion icons and mistakes are bound to occur at any given time. As we are aware of, complaints are inevitable. Therefore, it is important for retail companies to consider hiring a public relations practitioner or agency to be ready in case of emergencies. There has been a bundle of cases where retail companies receive backlashes and complaints on social media as it happens all around the world. For instance, there had been a viral case of fashion plagiarism for a scarf company in 2016 named Fareeda where there had been comments circulating social media on the company had allegedly stolen the designs from a different source and doubling the price of it. The company had received backlashes and complaints all over social media on how they had people waiting in line for hours only to find out that the designs were stolen somewhere else.

Criticism on social media have become a common thing for some companies to go through. This often relates with the anonymity of the author and the free pass of "freedom of speech" that comes with it. Traditional media like magazines and newspapers are a one-way

communication streak where the readers are not given the chance to conclude any comments regarding a certain fashion campaign. However, it has become relatively easy to access in engaging with negative comments and insults.

2.2. Lack of awareness and customer care

Furthermore, one of the most common problems faced when it comes to fashion companies on social media is the lack of awareness and customer care that they have on social media. It has seemed that stolen fashion designs are a common in the fashion industry as most of companies sell their items from the same factories. Unless it's a handmade design from a fashion designer, casually bumping into different brands with the same designs are pretty common. Shoe brands like Mel&Molly, Primavera and Tomaz had reportedly having the same shoe designs but the campaigns that they launched were pretty straightforward and different from one another. This would go to show that these companies acknowledge the brands' similarities but kept it original with the campaign ideas.

However, there had been a case that struck very recently in April 2020 by The Sun Daily which had circulated all over social media, turning it into a major talk-of-the-town issue. A famous scarf company, dUCK Scarves, had also received hatred for not only printing the same scarf designs from a model-visual artiste Nia Atasha Rosli, or commonly known as Sleepyllama, but the company had also plagiarized the campaign idea from the indie company. After the allegations were made, the founder of dUCK Scarves had denied the allegations which had obvious similarities in terms of printing, material and photoshoots. The lack of awareness and customer care on dUCK Scarves' behalf had made it as one of the vital reasons why this research is made.

Speaking of lack of awareness, a fashion company that touched on any nation's sensitivity due to their lack of awareness and research will lead to backlashes and hoax. Gossips are bound to happen in the fashion industry as the spotlight shines on these companies, especially big ones like Naelofar. According to the News Straits Times (2018), the Muslim scarf company had launched their campaign in a nightclub which had videos of Muslim women dancing in hijabs. This had created such backlash from netizens and the night went by with hoax and slanders.

Another firm example of the lack in awareness can be taken from an issue being brought up by a local Muslimah company, Leeyanarahman. In March 2021, the government has set a fine of RM10,000 for anyone who has seen to be breaking the Standard Operation Procedure in the hit of the COVID-19 virus. However, the fashion company has launched a fashion show which was attended by a large number of crowds and recorded a video of the Leeyanarahman's founder, Hafiz Hamid, proudly mentioning how the event itself was not following the correct guidelines and breaching the SOP. There were also multiple pictures and videos of the guests there not wearing any face masks or social distance. Many social media users have urged the others to boycott the whole brand and have the police to further investigate on the event. Following the incident, the founder had issued a statement on how the event was carefully planned to follow the SOP and further apologised for the negligence of the protocol team in handling the event.

2.3. Lack of transparency by the retail companies

In a digital era where word of mouth can be easily spread, transparency in businesses are an important element in maintaining the company's image and reputation online. According to the Oxford Dictionary (1974), the definition of transparency is being transparent or transparent object or medium, especially in pictures or photographs on glass or other transparent substances. In this context, transparency means that the company should have nothing to hide from the audiences and clarify an issue fast before the problem becomes larger.

Apart from that, in this era of sustainability, more and more people are becoming aware on the impacts of fast fashion and its environmental damage. According to Nadiah Rosli (2018), the textile waste in Malaysia has recorded to take over four percent from the total of solid waste. Big fashion companies, or fast fashion companies, whom had been quiet on how they manufacture the clothing have sparked a negative perception from people on social media. Therefore, it has become an ongoing challenge for these public relations practitioners to create sustainable campaigns for their fashion businesses by spreading more awareness on social media.

Niall Sargent (2017) had reported that there are still fashion companies who lacks in transparency in terms of how the material is made, the impact on foreign workers and

environmental factors. Brands like Adidas and Reebok had failed to give out the information on the exploitation, poor pay and abuse of the foreign workers. Another example would be from the TAL Apparel in Penang which produce clothing brands such as Levi's, Lacoste and LL Bean in Malaysia. It is one of the known fashion producers that is found to abuse the rights of the immigrant workers in Bangladesh by wiping their pockets clean. However, when the issue was raised by the Transparenem which is a non-profit organization that focuses on human rights abuses and environmental pollutions in supply chains, TAL Apparent had failed to reimburse the immigrant workers. (Elizabeth Paton from the New York Times, 2020)

2.4. The rise of competitors online

Competitions are healthy in the business industry and the fashion companies are not immune to competitions. Whenever a drama strikes on social media, there will be competitors lining up to make the best public relations move to counter the said company and get more publicity. One of the most recent examples that can be provided is the current case of the Naelofar-Fazbulous issue. According to Khai Azfar (2021), the controversial infamous fashion entrepreneur, Noor Neelofa, which was seen breaking the Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) of the Movement Control Order (MCO) when she went to Langkawi for her honeymoon and planned a wedding that had breached the rules. The anger from the netizens had automatically gained a massive support for her competition cum fashion entrepreneur, Nur Fazura, whom had used the opportunity of reach to launch her new scarf line from Fazbulous. The instant fame that she gained from the drama had managed to make her name in the Trending List on Twitter. (Luqman Ridhwan, 2021)

Another case from Naelofar is their "Muslim-friendly" sandals and Bata. According to Kirat Kaur (2021), the company had recently come up with a pair of slippers with the promise to be wearable for Muslims. The sandals are also being marketed for RM79.90 which is ridiculously expensive for some. Unfortunately, the netizens are also scrutinizing the claim as it is commercialising religion for their own profit. To top it all off, Bata had stepped in with their slip-on sandals and emphasising that their sandals are way more "wallet friendly".

2.5. Coping with social media during a pandemic

The tragic crisis of a worldwide pandemic has caused some major adjustments to almost every department in every company. This also includes the public relations

practitioners who are working in the fashion industry too. Every year, every fashion connoisseur will be looking forward for the biggest event of the year – Kuala Lumpur Fashion Week. However, the global pandemic has now forced the event planner and public relations practitioners to adopt a different approach to host the fashion show. Positively speaking, this means that there will be more people who will be able to get the opportunity to witness the event, but Joan Kong (2020) had questioned whether this approach will still give off the same affect as seeing the clothing arts on a runway. Former Chief Editor, Suzie Adnan (2020) stated that the public relations practitioners and event planners should work hand-in-hand on how each silhouette looks like along with the camera angles and lighting. She even noted that the previous virtual fashion show was a bit short of crowd as the word of the event was not spread out evenly.

According to the Malaysian Digital Association (2020), there had been a massive decrease of interactions in the first month of the Movement Control Order (MCO) for fashion industries. Big brands like Fashion Valet and JD Sports had managed to achieve the highest interactions on social media. There had also been an increase of 14% of brands that have shifted to online operations and digital marketing. The decrease of interactions during the first month of the MCO is also supported by Benedict Leong (2021) where there had also been a percentage drop on the fashion industry's performance.

In short, social media is harsh and cruel for the fashion industry as the smallest mistakes can turn into a massive catastrophe if companies take the matter lightly. We live in a world where the society is powerful enough to boycott a certain brand until it becomes completely irrelevant to the public eye. However, big companies remain necessary although they receive the same number of backlashes over and over again.

There are also a number of issues mentioned above that are still being talked about and these fashion companies are continuously making the same mistake. Therefore, it is always up to the public relations practitioners to not only become advisors for these companies, but also help mitigate the problem before and after it occurs. This research serves as a guide to comprehend how these public relations practitioners from the fashion industry deal with crisis and if there should be a specific guidelines or ethics to address certain issues.

3.0. Objectives

3.1. Research Objectives

- To study the role of public relations practitioners' in combating a fashion crisis on social media.
- To identify the advantages in handling a fashion cover on new media than traditional media.
- To understand the impacts of new media and traditional media towards public relations' practitioners.

3.2. Research Questions

- What are the roles for public relations practitioners' in combating a fashion crisis on social media?
- What are the advantages of handling a fashion cover on new media compared to the traditional media?
- What are the impacts of new media and traditional media towards public relations' practitioners during this century?

3.3. Research Theory

Selective Exposure Theory

This independent study has used several examples of the selective exposure theory to further support the evidence of the research objectives. According to Charles Dorison (2019), the selective exposure theory refers to how the public will tend to only read what they want to believe and disregard whatever information that they assume would not be relevant to their beliefs and benefits. This psychology practice believes that people will become biased and become selective with the information that works best for them and that does not contradict their values. Furthermore, this theory also believes that the public is able to become selective with what is favourable to them due to the defence mechanism when it comes to the pre-existing ideas that they have and the new ideas clash together. (Julia Minson, 2019) This theory has been used in this study as it relates with how the public reacts to social media. They would only favour the news that are interesting or provocative instead of getting the facts checked and further broadcasting it to their friends.

Hypodermic Needle Theory

According to Chinenye Nwabueze (2018), the hypodermic needle theory, or its most common name would be the magic bullet theory, explained how the convergence of new technology such as the media has an effect on the behaviours of the public. It can also sometimes leave an immediate effect that will make the public change their perceptions and thinking too. The theory was first founded by Harold Lasswell in 1930 where during that time the media like the radio and television had started to evolve. McQuail (2005) had mentioned how the media enables itself to “inject a bullet” which is the message straight into the public’s mind. As a result, persuasive media content is thought to cause the intended attitudinal shift in the target public. The theory relates well to this independence study as we look into how the social media has vastly affected the minds of the public from their perception of beauty, cyberbullying and anonymity.

4.0. Discussion

4.1. The role of public relations practitioners' in combating a fashion crisis on social media.

According to Shahram Gilaninia (2013), public relations are mostly categorised from these three parts which is to inform, advertise or encouraging and to maintain a healthy relationship with all affairs by cooperating and integrating. Strong communication skills are the powerful key that will allow all forms of communication to work when it comes to a public relations practitioner. A public relations job is very fast forward. The practitioners have to always be aligned to the new updates and technologies so that they are able to adapt to the changes of the environment. Furthermore, Anas and Batool (2016) had also mentioned on the importance of public relations practitioners to improve the company's image, particularly in the entertainment industry like fashion.

However, the challenges that these public relations practitioners go through may also vary from their usual traditional public relations method. According to Zamani (2012), social media plays a role for having instant marketing viral schemes to sending out hate comments and jeopardising the company's image. For instance, one positive review on Twitter from an honest social media influencer will able to reach 50k likes will likely get the company a large number of customer traffic within hours or days, but a single bad review that had managed to go viral will completely tarnish the reputation of the company. Especially for fashion companies, a simple case like a material defect or a bad customer service experience will lead the consumer to go straight on social media instead of the traditional method which is via the company's customer feedback forms. Apart from this, the position of the opinion leaders arguably no longer exist as people either react to media messages independently or in line with the internet social group norms and values based on the Hypodermic Needle Theory. (Chinenye Nwabueze, 2018) Therefore, Zamani (2012) mentioned the importance for these public relations practitioners, especially in the fashion industry to always be cautious on the way they handle the social media accounts. Media and community monitoring may look like an easy task but can be extremely crucial as it acts as the first whistle blower to the company for any alarming contents that might threaten the company's image.

Companies can no longer disregard any negative comments on social media as it might cause a PR crisis to arise. Therefore, it is also the role for the public relations practitioners to constantly engage with the audiences. (Zamani, 2012) Any form of failure to

recognise a potential viral post may have a growing affect on the company as it's social media footprints will always be there even after the crisis has subside. According to Pierre-Luc Emond (2020), a review from a well-known fashion blogger can ideally influence the views for a tremendous number of readers, hence it will turn out positively or badly for the company's image. With that information, it is crucial for public relations practitioners to always be involved with social media and develop a strong relationship with the community while at the same time maintaining an empathetic but professional tone to keep the audiences engaged.

Especially in this worldwide pandemic, fashion public relations practitioners are now coming up with more interesting and fun ideas to build connections and engagements with the public on social media. This had been supported by D.Khajeheian (2015) where she too, agreed that social media is emerging to a diverse lingual in creating a strong relationship with the public. According to Chitrakorn (2020), fashion brands from everyday wear to luxury brands have come together to figure out ways on how to make their social media page as interactive as possible. However, some trends on social media can be massively spread and go viral within seconds. Now, this may be good to most companies but without proper planning and execution, the viral contents may also go haywire. For instance, Sunny Co. Clothing had promised a free swimwear for everyone that had managed to repost their content in a span of 24 hours. However, the numbers of reposted contents had gone up way higher than they imagined which led them to stop the PR campaign completely. (Maxwell Gollin, 2020) The outraged that had abrupted from the netizens is proof that public relations practitioners in the fashion industry should also be very particular and have a thoroughly planned campaign proposal before putting it live on social media.

Speaking of building connections and engagements with the public on social media, one of the public relations practitioner roles are to also identify and understand the right tone to use when conversing with the publics on social media. According to D.Khajeheian (2015), he asserted that it is very important for public relations practitioners to deeply understand the importance of having a Community Manager to develop strong responses that are interactive and engaging. Oftentimes, brands are wired to the thought of maintaining a high-profile rate where they would ignore the comments or feedbacks from the customers. This can create a tensed relationship between the brand and the customers and slowly lose more social media support. Just a few years ago, we have never known what a Community Manager is. The Community Manager acts as a representative to the company that would help the public relations practitioners to communicate with the customers on social media. (Koldo Ayerdi,

2014) In the issues that we have previously talked about previously, the lack of transparency usually occurs in any different type of businesses if not properly handled well. Therefore, having a representative to communicate with the customers are vital in order to increase more transparency in hopes that new crisis would not occur from the initial problem.

Public relations practitioners shape and bring the publicity of the brand. From fashion shows, events, corporate public relations and media, it needs to be carefully planned and discussed without the public relations department to ensure the smoothness of brand image from the company. However, with the evolution of social media, public relations practitioners have more of a bigger task which is to learn the ropes on how they can grab the audiences' attention and maintain a fine quality brand image of the company. In today's era, social media has heavily impacted the industry as it now plays a very important role for public relations practitioners. (Rachel Burgon, 2019) They have evolved from handling press conferences, maintaining relationships with journalisms for print media and planning/executing physical campaigns to approaching social media influencers, organising a PR skit on social media, coming up with relevant contents and building a steady image for the company's social media platforms.

4.2. Advantages in handling a fashion cover on new media than traditional media.

When social media had first started to be recognised, luxury brands were worried whether their brands would be tarnished as they were unable to instil the emotional feelings online. (Lee, 2009) When it comes to traditional media, any fashion crisis that would occur would be quickly swept under the rug as no one ever talks about it, and when they do, it would not reach to a certain amount of coverage that could jeopardise the whole brand. But when it comes to new media, word travels fast and it can also be dirty. However, they have soon become accustomed by the new media's influence as they realised that being interactive with the audiences online provides them to encourage the brand and clients' relationship.

According to Sanand (2011), the use of social media facilitates the fashion world to predict the fashion behaviours and study them while at the same time use it as a marketing strategy. As mentioned on the issues relating to the lack of transparency, public relations practitioners have become more aware on the importance of speaking to the public and representing the brand image not only on print media but also especially on new media. By doing so, these fashion brands are able to connect to the audiences and make them feel more connected to the brand itself.

We need to succumb the fact that everybody talks and word of the mouth spreads faster when it comes to new media. The reason being is that it gives the audiences access to write nasty comments without doing it physically and directly to the company. The idea that these people are able to remain anonymous while at the same time spurt out negativity online can instantly tarnish a brand's reputation if it isn't handled properly. The best thing about utilising social media is the ability to act fast when it comes to these backlashes. According to Teri Akahoshi (2012), new media provides the company to have access to interact with the audiences in real-time. This was something that they were unable to do when it comes to the traditional media as putting our press releases on the traditional newspaper or magazine is very much time consuming and by the time they get it posted, it might already be too late. To add, Prabhakar (2010) had also mentioned that with the conveyance of technology, traditional media needs to put on their additional creativity hats because by the time the next monthly issue has been released, people would have already known and would not even care anymore.

Speaking of the word of the mouth, new media can also be a fast and efficient medium for fashion companies to achieve brand awareness. Social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Tiktok are all different types of networks that serves different type of strategies to market a certain brand. According to Goodman (2020), public relations practitioners can study each of these mediums and curate different types of content depending on the different types of well-known social media networks that we have. For instance, Twitter is a platform that can let the audiences talk about any interesting topics and trends. If they get lucky, they will reach to thousands of audiences by getting retweets in just a matter of minutes. Instagram, on the other hand, is where most fashion companies go for. The idea that they are able to post pictures and videos on a medium that lets the viewers to share it on their pages as well makes the word-of-mouth, or we can say “word-of-the-post” highly influential when it comes to creating brand awareness. Designers can not only focus on promoting the products of their brand, but they are also allowed to share their thoughts, personal experiences and activities to create that humanly vibe that the traditional media may find it hard to do. (Teri Akahoshi, 2012)

One of the advantages of new media as compared to the traditional media is also known to the fact that it creates a medium for these fashion people like designers, stylists, influencers and everyone that is interested in fashion to talk to one another and share their creativity and ideas to the world. Public relations practitioners from famous brands like Zara have come up with a way to interact with these targeted groups by creating a website specifically for them to share their contents of them styling the company’s retail wear. (DiMauro, 2011) This strategy can serve as a chance for these influencers, bloggers and the users of the brand to become a part of the company and tell their own story. Having these people to post their pictures on social media by tagging the company’s page does not only gives the company content and testimonials, but it can also subtly promote the brand itself, thus, creating more brand awareness for the company. (Teri Akahoshi, 2012)

4.3. The impacts of new media and traditional media towards public relations' practitioners.

Back when traditional media was still taking over the fashion magazines, the term 'social media influencer' did not even exist. It is not later until social media has evolved and the public relations practitioners realised that these people who are getting thousands of engagements per content postings. Social media influencers had become the perfect opportunity for public relations practitioners in the fashion companies to subtly publicise their company's product. These social media influencers can become a tool for advertising too as they are able to not only get multiple engagements within 24 hours, but they can also attract specific type of customers that might be ideal for the company. While the traditional media usually uses celebrities to promote their brand on the magazine or newspaper, often times, these people are not even celebrities and live a normal life. So how did they become influencers in the first place?

According to Morgan Glucksman (2017), there are the types of people who influence certain types of audiences' minds and attitude through their everyday tweets, blogs, videos and pictures. They create high quality contents that could attract certain types of people to follow them, which then they will gain a vast number of followers and engagements on their social media. These people are able to shape their audiences and in return becomes one of the valuable assets to companies, especially in fashion. This can really relate well with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory where the audiences would try to model the social media influencers by the way they dress and attitude. The social media influencers will promote the company's brand for a certain amount of pay in exchange for the brand recognition. Furthermore, fashion companies can also target the right consumers by finding these social media influencers depending on their level of lifestyle and fashion sense.

On another note, while traditional media is a one-communication as its medium is only through radios, magazines, televisions and newspapers, new media is all about the two-way communication scheme. Press releases from a crisis and bad fashion trends can be lashed back by the public if it isn't done properly. Fashion designers are also placed on a microscopic glass as people are now able to watch their every move. Therefore, it is up for the public relations practitioners to excel in a certain set of skill to ensure that the problems do not arise. According to Donald Alexander (2016), one of the skills required in order to adapt from the traditional media to the digital age would be the ability to construct strong digital

communication and content creation while at the same time carefully plan on the possibilities for any backlashes to receive in the future, which is also slightly like the traditional media.

Although there are a lot of more good things about new media as compared to the traditional one, but there are still cons that makes traditional media still relevant up until today. According to Anthony Utulu (2016), he mentioned that the average attention span for consumers who users a news website would only take around 90 seconds while the time spent for them to go through the morning newspaper would be longer. With so many available accesses to information on the Internet, news coverage and stories are fighting a war between each other on getting the audiences' attention. Any news that is deemed uninteresting will not be acknowledged. This can also be adapted to the Selective Exposure Theory that has been explained by Charles Dorison (2019), people will tend to only read the things that can cater to their pre-existing mindset and views. Traditional media like the newscast television will have the audiences to sit through the whole program while the ones on the website gives them more freedom to specifically choose which website would be suitable for them. To put it in the fashion world context, it would be easier for people to learn new trends and clothing if it is being spread out on a magazine. This is because they are able to view the pictures as a whole and not just be selective on finding out the style that they are mostly familiar with.

According to Ogidi Odun (2016), the traditional media like the television or radio used to provide an alternative way for public relations practitioners to promote the company's brand in a creative way by having it done visually and in audio. This was far back when everyone had just started to be familiar with the evolvement of technology, especially for television. However, Ogidi Odun (2016) had admitted that it the traditional media does not get the audience to have access to the information about a certain brand at any time they please. This is when the new media comes along. The new media such as the social media, blogs and online news give the audiences' easy access to any information that they intend to have at anywhere around the world, just as long as they have suffice data and internet connection. The transition from the traditional media and new media has greatly impacted the public relations practitioners, even for fashion industries, to navigate their message in a much bigger global audience. They are able to disseminate information on any platforms they desire to reach the right audience that they target.

However, unlike traditional media, new media like blogs, search engines and social media are not considered credible enough as compared to the traditional media. (Teri Akahoshi (2012) In order for traditional media like the newspaper and magazines to be publicized, they must first go through some underlying procedures such as the censorship and filter check. This is due to the fact the new media allows so many bloggers and writers to write whatever they feel like and the search engines goes up to so many links at one go. Whilst for traditional media, any form of news on the newspaper can become a reliable source of information as it goes to different level of procedures when it comes to publishing from the writer, to head of department and then the head of editor in chief. Therefore, there are a lot of pros and cons when it comes to both traditional media and new media. But they are both equally as important to one another and has greatly impacted the utilization of disseminating information for public relations practitioners in the fashion industry.

5.0. Suggestions

There are numerous of ways public relations practitioners can utilise the new media while at the same time still adapting to the traditional media to gain public awareness and publicity for the fashion company. Regardless of what medium they expose themselves too, the target market and audience will still keep an eye for it. Both traditional and new media have greatly impacted the way public relations practitioners market the brand like what we have discussed and plenty of public relations practitioners have started to study on ways to make use of both of the mediums.

5.1. Combining new technologies and offline stores

With the convergence of technology, fashion companies are now up against the competitors from not only the offline physical retail stores but also online fashion like Sheins and Zalora. Therefore, they will need to come up with new ways to attract more customers into coming to their store and making it more relevant than the other competitors. Big brands like Marks and Spencer and Uniqlo have started to add in new technologies for their offline store to make the shopping experience more fun and engaging with the customers. For instance, according to Azadeh Williams (2016), Uniqlo has come up with a machine that allows the customers to take images of themselves and then virtually wear the brand's clothing line. This attempt is not only interactive and amusing, but it also gives the customers a way of trying out different clothes without having to make rounds in the fitting room. Based on the discussions above, it can be suggested that public relations practitioners can start adapting to the new technology machines like what Uniqlo did and at the same time give them the option to bring the choices home where they can take their own time in making the decision before purchasing it. By doing so, they brand itself can somehow let the customers give a sense of control and personalization. According to Kim (2021), the sense of control and power will allow the customers to reduce the uncertainty of making the decision and further increase the opportunity for them to become buyers instead of becoming avoidance.

5.2. A digital platform for fashion interactivity

When it comes to the new media, there are more ways public relations practitioners can develop their marketing strategies to gain brand awareness and engage with the audience. The options are limitless and it can be easily done or changed due to the fast-growing pace of social media. We have discussed about the importance of staying interactive

and engagement with the people on social media and it has shown many positive feedbacks from it. Just like Twitter and Facebook where people are allowed to share their thoughts and experiences online, another suggestion of making a social media platform of fashion can also be implemented. According to Lee (2009), having the audiences to a way to talk about fashion like a forum can really help these public relations practitioners and designers to receive feedback and further improve on themselves. Therefore, they should come up with a platform where not only they are able to share their thoughts online, but they can also share their outfit pictures, shop at their favourite fashion brands and customize their profile according to their aesthetics. According to Yunjeong Kim (2021), the rise of the pandemic has forced these public relations practitioners to come up with new ways to move forward to the digital world but at the same time maintaining their reputation on offline stores. They need to grasp any opportunities that they can find to market their offline stores while at the same time strive in the digital era of social media.

5.3. An opportunity to indulge in the online fashion experience

According to Fatema Kawaf (2012), one of the greatest challenges that online shoppers face today would be the inability to try, touch and physically see the product that is being displayed online. Furthermore, the presence of staffs and helpers when it comes to online shopping may differ from physical stores to online. This can again, lead the customers to have uncertainty avoidance and not make the purchase at all. Therefore, with this idea, it can be suggested that public relations practitioners should come up with a way to help the customers engage with the staffs live despite being in the comforts of their own home. Public relations practitioners can make a whole another virtual experience that would let the public to get an idea of how the product may look like on them as well as interacting with the staffs should they have any products regarding the matter. A live chat or video call can easily help these customers to navigate their way into deciding the product that they should get.

6.0. Conclusion

Overall, it may be said that fashion companies, among with everything else in general, can never truly run away from the convergence of technology. The fashion industry is a fast-growing industry that is filled with competitors all around, and public relations practitioners will need to step up their game every time in order to become different from one another. At the same time, managing conflict in social media and traditional media are far different from each other. Therefore, public relations practitioners in the fashion industry will need to fully study the behaviours and ways on how to mitigate the issue before it even arises.

As to what was discussed on the issues related, it is a known fact that the fashion industry in Malaysia is no longer alienated to the backlashes and challenges that can happen when operating things online as compared to traditional media. There are also multiple examples of these fashion companies who are forced to face eye-to-eye with the challenges and how they managed to solve the issue will give them a leverage on avoiding anything that can jeopardise the company's reputation. The most obvious issue that is usually been dealt with by these companies are mostly from the competitors, backlashes and the challenges in the global pandemic.

However, it is also crucial that their public relations practitioners are able to set up a proper role to avoid any crisis or conflicts in the future. They will need to be aligned to the new updates of technology and communicate thoroughly to the public to avoid any lack of transparency that might somehow result in another crisis. As a result, the bullet theory still holds significance in the digital age since the audience members actively decide which social media platform to use and, depending on the nature of the story, passively react to contents they are exposed to. (Chinenye Nwabueze, 2018)

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