

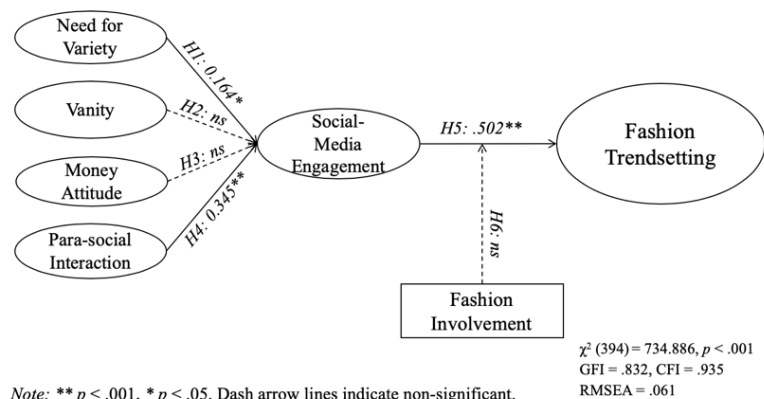
Easy to Follow a Fashion Trendsetter on Social Media but It's Hard to Become One

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Background and Purpose: Different than any previous generation, millennials were characterized as a technologically savvy generation because they have grown up with computers and the Internet (Doster, 2013). They spend around 8 hours on social media every week and they rely on social media for communicating, entertaining, and socializing with their peer groups 24/7 (Bardhi, Rohm, & Sultan, 2010; Doster, 2013). The influence of social network sites has significantly increased over the last several decades. Millennials' primary use goes beyond personal contact and extends to news consumption, and self-expression as well as brand connections (Masip et al., 2015; Wolny & Mueller, 2013). Fashion trendsetters (aka, fashion influencers, fashion bloggers) played a critical role in those behaviors. Fashion trendsetters post photos of themselves showcasing their style which influences their audiences (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2012; Rocamora, 2011). A great number of consumers reach out to them for aesthetic inspiration and exemplary taste (McQuarrie et al., 2012). From the marketing perspective, research indicated several benefits that fashion trendsetters could offer such as advertising, PR strategies, endorsing, and maintaining credibility with fans (Griffith, 2011). Therefore, previous research has mostly focused on enhancing the use of fashion trendsetters for retailing and fostering consumer-brand relationships (Labrecque, 2014). However, though there were barriers, ordinary social-media users can still aspire to become a fashion influencer. They can practice publicly displaying their taste and monitor the positive reception of (fashion) risks taken by a wannabe-influencer from an audience (Nguyen, 2018). It is reasonable to believe that social media followers may have the potential to become the next fashion trendsetters. Currently, there is lack of research addressing the characteristics of this group quantitatively. Therefore, *the purpose of this study* is to understand what factors shape millennials' social-media engagement and the extent to which social-media engagement affects an individual's fashion trendsetting behavior.

Conceptual Framework: According to the theory of Social-Media Engagement (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016), user engagement is based on two psychological components: 1) individual involvement, which has been found to increase arousal and motivation to participate and 2)



Note: ** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$. Dash arrow lines indicate non-significant.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

personal meaning, which is the degree to which a user perceives the fulfillment of his/her needs and interests. Moreover, Cheung, Lee, and Jin (2011) indicated that consumers' involvement and social interaction lead to customer engagement in an online social platform. Therefore, we developed the conceptual framework by including need for variety (Zuckerman, 2014), vanity (Netemeyer, Burton, & Lichtenstein, 1995), money attitude (Yamauchi & Templer, 1982), and para-social interaction (Kim, Ko, & Kim, 2015) as the exogenous variables while social-media engagement (Khan, 2017) and fashion trendsetting (Batinic, Wolff, & Haupt, 2008) were included as endogenous variables; and fashion involvement (O'Cass, 2004) was used as a moderation variable (Figure 1). H1: Need for variety will positively influence consumers' social-media engagement. H2: Vanity will positively influence consumers' social-media engagement. H3: Money attitude will positively influence consumers' social-media engagement. H4: Para-social interaction will positively influence consumers' social-media engagement. H5: Consumers' social-media engagement will positively influence consumers' fashion trendsetting behavior. H6: The effects of social-media engagement toward fashion trendsetting is stronger for consumers of higher fashion involvement than for consumers of lower fashion involvement.

Method: Empirical data were collected through a paper questionnaire at a major university in the US. A convenience sample 240 college students was recruited. They were granted extra credit points for completing the questionnaire, which included measures from established research of need for variety, vanity, money attitudes, para-social interaction, social-media engagement, fashion trendsetting, and fashion involvement; all items were accompanied by 7-point scales. After data cleaning, 237 valid responses were included for data analyses. The majority of respondents were male (60.8%) and 72% ranged between 19 to 22 years old (range = 18 to 35). Participants' ethnicity included 138 Caucasian, 54 African American, 12 Asian, 17 Hispanic and 16 others; they were from around 50 different majors. Participants were categorized into two fashion involvement groups (low, n=120; high, n=117).

Results: Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were conducted to ensure construct validities. Items with low communalities, low loadings or high-cross loadings were removed in the EFA. Varimax rotation resulted in 33 items that measured 6 factors, with 74.306% of total variances explained, and item loadings ranging from .660 to .891. Cronbach's alpha ranged from .786 to .959. After dropping the items of high modification indices in CFA, thirty items within six factors remained, with the reliability and validities achieved. Path analysis (Hair et al., 2010) with a good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.865, p < .001, RMSEA = .061, CFI = .935, \text{ and } GFI = .832$) was used to test hypothesized relationships (see Figure 1). A moderation test with linear regression (Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004) was conducted to examine any differences between two groups of fashion involvement. The results indicated that the p-value for the interaction term is equal to .847, which indicated that we failed to find a significant interaction and there is no moderation effect for consumers of different fashion involvement levels.

Discussion/implications: Proposed hypotheses H1, H4, and H5 were supported while H2, H3, and H6 were not supported (see Figure 1). Research findings supported the idea that millennials who need more variety and seek that variety by means of fashion are likely to be

more involved in social-media platforms, and millennials who are more connected with the trendsetter that they are following are more likely to be involved in social-media behavior. Moreover, more engagement in social-media seems likely to inspire millennials to become the next fashion trendsetters, even if they were not involved in fashion previously. Theoretically, this research helped to contribute to the understanding of millennials' trendsetting behavior, thus, the framework would be beneficial for future research for further analysis.

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