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The Digital Divide: Fashion Branding In The Digital Era And Its Backlash

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

This study is about the negative impact of the scandal on brand-building efforts and the marketing of fashion brands. In the present era of the digital world, there is fierce competition amongst the top famous brands. In this difficult environment of social Media pressure, this research helps us to understand the method of navigating the brand in this environment which has become an integral part of the digital world. "Scandals related to brand identity" is the main point in this research work which goes deep into the delicate balance between getting proper visibility while maintaining honest authenticity, considering the extreme social media scrutiny. The marketing teams have to work with the objectives of high commercial success and cultural respect while avoiding cultural appropriation. This study further delves deep into the dynamic method to balance these seemingly conflicting objectives.

Keywords: Cultural appropriation, Brand building, Social Media pressure, Social Media scrutiny, Digital marketing, Digital Era, Fashion Branding, Digital Divide, Cultural appreciation, Backlash.

Introduction

Y. Liu and T. Zhang (2019), the art of having a unique identity is very important for Fashion Branding, a distinct narration for fashion labels is also essential. Creating a distinct personality that attracts the attention of the consumer is the main objective. It covers the whole strategy for the development of visual elements such as logos, typography, and imagery. The brand's heritage, ethos, and values have to be cultivated and communicated with an effective brand story. While planning a Fashion Branding, it is extremely necessary to understand the target consumers so that messaging and positioning are suited in such a way that they appeal to the desired specific demographics and psychographics. Consistency is a very important part of fashion branding, the imagery, messaging, and customer experiences have to be cohesive to reinforce the brand's identity and brand recognition which helps in creating brand loyalty. To have a constant and lasting presence in the fashion landscape, one has to create an emotional connection with the target consumers.

Torres, J. V., Clunie, C., & Aguilar, L. J. (2022, October). The fashion branding field has undergone a sea change with the entry of social media in the digital world. It has redefined the method and process of brands engaging with consumers and cultivating their brand identities. With the increasing use of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, fashion brands now have direct communication with global consumers ignoring the traditional method of using intermediaries. With the advent of digitalization, visual narration has become an important ingredient in creating compelling narratives through digital pictures and video, thereby developing emotional connections and creating a distinct perception in the minds of prospective consumers.

Agatha, J. (2022, August). Social media influencers have become part of and great strategy in global marketing allowing different brands to use the influencer's credibility to promote their brands to a niche audience with authenticity. The data information helps the brands to personalize and optimize their marketing efforts and content creation. Also, they can know the effect of their branding strategies with accuracy. Transparency and authenticity are what consumers want. That is the reason the brands use digital media to show their credibility, values, ethical practices, and sustainability efforts, thereby, building trust to develop long-lasting loyalty in this cutthroat completion. In conclusion, social media and the digital world have armed fashion brands to change their strategies in an impactful manner in the ever-changing and dynamic world of fashion branding.

Literature Review

Okonkwo, U. (2009). Fashion brands are continuously faced with complexities in the field of digital marketing, and face problems of intense competition, continuously evolving trends, and managing multiple channels in the digital world. Due to the democratization of the digital world, brands face the challenge of standing out in the middle of a saturated market, the brand also has to constantly innovate its strategies to attract and retain consumer loyalty. Due to social media, consumers are constantly updated with new trends and this has shortened the trend cycle so the brands are forced to keep themselves updated and be agile to shifting consumer preferences and emerging trends. Brands have to maintain an optimum balance and consistency between the diverse digital platforms.

Nayak, D., Gupta, R., & Bhardwaj, A. B. (2023, March). This is surely a major hurdle and problem, which requires constant attention to their messaging, imagery, and customer experiences. Compliance complexities due to data privacy regulations and algorithmic changes create further problems and complicate matters. So Brands have to consider these aspects while optimizing content performance and engagement.

Earnshaw, R. A. (2000, June). An optimum and delicate balance despite these challenges has to be maintained between paid and organic methods to have a successful marketing impact while protecting brand integrity and authenticity. These complexities have to be addressed promptly with a proper understanding of digital marketing principles and the dynamic fashion industry. One can experience the power of digital marketing to successfully drive growth, maintain brand loyalty, and thrive in the digital era.

Vänskä, A., & Gurova, O. (2022).In this globalized world today often one finds the problem of cultural appropriation whenever one is trying to adopt or use different elements from an earlier culture to a different culture with no explicit permission or without proper understanding of the deeper cultural meaning.

Pourmodheji, S. M. (2022). Cultural appropriation may include clothing, hairstyles, symbols, language, music, or traditions. "SKIMS KIMONO SCANDAL" became one of the most talked about scandals of cultural appropriation. The moment Kim Kardashian tried to trademark the word "Kimono" for her shapewear brand, she faced severe criticism and almost immediately was accused of cultural appropriation. This upset the persons with Japanese background particularly. When the criticism started to damage her image she decided to back down and planned to change the name of her shapewear brand.

Paquette, E. (2020). While taking this decision, she clarified that it never was her intention to disrespect this Japanese-origin traditional garment. In the process of naming her brand from KIMONO to SKIMS Kim Kardashian was successful in showing her genuine cultural sensitivity and respect despite huge financial losses. This positive way of responding to the controversies not only won back her credibility but was widely appreciated. This scandal brought to the forefront, the fact that there is a very thin line between appreciation and appropriation and this line can easily be breached. It seems Kim Kardashian unintentionally touched the wrong nerve in traditional sensitives which is always about respect, power dynamics, and context. But she learned her lesson very quickly to be extremely mindful and full of respect for other cultures and their tradition, and feelings while engaging with the elements of the target culture.

Maldonado, C., Lazo, S., & Carranza, A. (2008). A brand that connects with customers in a true sense must have a heritage that is strong and exudes authenticity, reliability, and emotional resonance. Heritage creates a perception for the brand of authenticity and dependability by connecting it with a rich history, tradition, or legacy. This, in turn, develops a sense of belonging and increases consumer confidence. In addition, brands are in a position to narrate an emotional story about their origin, values, and unique adventures. This helps to build an emotional bond with customers who recognize the brand's cultural roots or heritage. Also, this helps in setting the business apart in a crowded market. This narrative fosters brand loyalty by turning customers into outspoken supporters of the company and its goods with a nod to history. Furthermore, legacy enables brands to use cultural symbols and trends, increasing their relevance and significance in the lives of their customers. All things considered, the brand's legacy greatly influences its identity by creating long-lasting bonds with customers that go beyond transactional interactions.

Cruz, A. G. B., Seo, Y., & Scaraboto, D. (2024). A detailed and deliberate strategy is important to create a brand that respects and recognizes and acknowledges other cultures while avoiding cultural appropriation. It starts with in-depth investigation and comprehension of the context and cultural importance of the components going into the brand. In order to guarantee that the communities being honored have their perspectives heard and are respected during the creative process, cooperation and representation from these communities are crucial. In addition to a dedication to learning from, listening to, and making necessary adjustments based on input from impacted groups, open communication, accountability, and openness are essential. Brands should steer clear of preconceptions and misrepresentations while attempting to inform and increase knowledge about various cultures. The ultimate objective is to promote inclusivity, empathy, and respect in all brand interactions by cultivating a sincere appreciation, understanding, and connection between cultures.

Kannan, P. K. (2017). This new world of digital marketing creates an entry point into a dynamic area where

marketing principles are innovated to suit the ever-evolving digital landscape. This multidisciplinary program covers a wide range of fundamental ideas, from comprehending online customer behavior to becoming proficient with multiple digital platforms for advertising. You will study topics including search engine optimization (SEO), social media marketing, email marketing, content development, and analytics during your studies. You can learn how to effectively reach and engage target audiences, maximize the effectiveness of digital campaigns, and use data-driven insights to propel business growth by becoming proficient in these areas. Studying digital marketing also gives you transferable abilities that you may use in a variety of businesses, which makes you a great asset in today's world which is becoming more and more digitally oriented.

Rogers, R. A. (2006). Cultural appropriation is the term used to describe how people or groups adapt or utilize components of one culture to another without the owner's express consent or without fully appreciating the underlying cultural significance of the elements. These could be elements of language, music, traditions, hairstyles, clothes, or symbols. One should be mindful of the delicate and sensitive nature of cultural appropriation, since there have been instances where it has contributed to the marginalization of the cultures being appropriated, reinforced prejudices, and disregarded cultural traditions. It's crucial to remember that not every cross-cultural interaction required appropriation. When cultural exchanges are conducted with a correct understanding the sincere appreciation of the culture in question, they are frequently courteous and educational. The boundary between acknowledgment and appropriation has always been extremely thin and susceptible to blurring. Due to the constant discussion of context, power dynamics, and respect, this was an extremely delicate subject. When interacting with aspects of the target culture, one had to be exceedingly aware of and respectful of other cultures, customs, and feelings.

Rudman, L. A., Moss-Racusin, C. A., Glick, P., & Phelan, J. E. (2012) Scrutinizing the unfavorable responses, rebukes, or pushback that people, groups, or organizations could have regarding their deeds, choices, or remarks is known as backlash. A backlash can take many different forms, such as protests, boycotts, bad media coverage, social media backlash, public uproar, and reputational harm. To comprehend the origins, dynamics, and ramifications of the backlash phenomena, academics and researchers examine it in a variety of contexts, such as politics, business, entertainment, and social issues.

Laran, J., Dalton, A. N., & Andrade, E. B. (2011). Focusing and studying the drivers or triggers of backlash, such as contentious legislation, unethical actions, or insensitive comments, as well as the processes by which backlash intensifies and spreads, like media framing and social media amplification, may be important research fields. Researchers also look at the effects of backlash on people, groups, and society as a whole. These effects include how it affects an organization's performance, reputation, public perception, and policy outcomes. By examining backlash, researchers hope to clarify the workings of public opinion, social influence, and power relations while furthering our knowledge of how people and institutions deal with and adapt to social criticism and scrutiny.

Joo, S., & Ha, J. (2016). The fashion business has seen significant changes as a result of the Digital Age, including new approaches to consumer interaction, apparel design and production, and product marketing. The growth of e-commerce, which enables customers to purchase clothes online, is one important factor. This has resulted in the expansion of online merchants and direct-to-consumer businesses. With social media platforms, fashion firms can interact with their audience, present new collections, and use influencer relationships to attract a larger audience. These days, social media platforms are vital marketing tools. Virtual reality and 3D printing, for example, have completely changed the design and production process, enabling quicker prototyping and more environmentally friendly manufacturing techniques. Furthermore, consumer trends and preferences are being studied more and more using artificial intelligence and data analytics to guide marketing and product development. All things considered, the Digital Age has made fashion more accessible to all, encouraging diversity, creativity, and innovation in the field.

Ilhan, B. E., Kübler, R. V., & Pauwels, K. H. (2018). Nike has used social media campaigns, tailored marketing, and e-commerce platforms to effectively communicate with customers through digital platforms. Nike has also embraced technology in product design, as evidenced by inventions such as NikeID, which enable online customization of shoes for customers. However, Nike has come under fire for things like data privacy issues, labor practices in its supply chain disputes brought to light by online activism, and criticism for digital marketing tactics that people felt were disrespectful or tone deaf.

Hernández-Serrano, M. J., Jones, B., Renés-Arellano, P., & Campos Ortuño, R. A. (2022). With a significant online presence on digital sites like TikTok and Instagram. They have also adopted digital innovation, using live streaming and virtual reality experiences in their fashion shows. Gucci has come under fire despite their success in the digital sphere for problems including digital fatigue, which occurs when people are overloaded with stuff on the internet, and authenticity worries, which arise from the possibility that digital experiences lack the physical and sensory elements of conventional luxury purchasing.

McCombie, D. A. (1978). ASOS, an e-only company, is the perfect example of fashion branding in the internet age. They've benefited from e-commerce's accessibility and ease by providing a large selection of stylish items at affordable costs. On the other hand, ASOS has come under fire for encouraging unsustainable rapid fashion

techniques and raising questions about the environmental effects of excessive packing and online shopping returns. [19]

Zint, M., & Frederick, R. (2001) Patagonia has adopted digital media to spread awareness of its brand principles and interact with consumers through social media campaigns that highlight sustainable fashion and environmental advocacy. In spite of their online activism, Patagonia has come under fire for greenwashing since some customers don't think their sustainability initiatives are sincere and see their internet branding as a sales tactic rather than an actual dedication to environmental care. These examples highlight the various ways that the digital age has affected fashion brands, highlighting the potential for creativity and interaction alongside the difficulties and criticism that come with implementing digital branding tactics.

Choi, T. M. (2014). The deliberate process of developing and upholding a unique identity, image, and perception for a fashion brand in the marketplace is known as fashion branding. It entails developing a distinctive brand identity, set of values, and look that appeals to the intended market. Fashion branding comprises essential factors such as crafting a captivating brand narrative, creating visual components like logos, typography, and color palettes, and proficiently conveying the brand's message via diverse marketing platforms. Building brand equity in a highly competitive sector requires differentiating strategies, quality products, and consistent messaging to foster customer loyalty. Effective fashion branding fosters a feeling of community and aspiration around resonates in addition to driving customer interaction and purchasing decisions, which contributes to the long-term success and relevancy of the industry in the fashion world.

Van Gelder, A. (2006). There is a big digital division in a fashion that is highlighted by the differences in the industry's access to and use of digital technologies, erecting obstacles that affect the stakeholders. Inequalities in digital skills and knowledge among fashion professionals, disparities in resource allocation between big companies and medium and small businesses or single and independent designers, and disparities in access to advanced digital tools and infrastructure between developed and developing regions are some manifestations of this gap. Furthermore, the digital gap affects opportunities and visibility for marginalized communities in digital fashion forums, where it overlaps with diversity and inclusivity issues. To achieve a more equitable and inclusive fashion business, addressing these discrepancies calls for coordinated efforts to provide access to technology, offer training in digital skills, and support diversity and inclusivity programs.

Tran, T. M. H. (2020). Though they have different meanings, cultural appropriation, and cultural appreciation are two ideas that frequently collide in the fashion business. The term "cultural appropriation" describes how people from one culture take or utilize aspects of another, usually without giving due credit, understanding, or respect to the cultural significance of those aspects. This might show itself in the fashion industry as the trivialization or monetization of cultural heritage due to the inappropriate attribution or appropriation of traditional clothing, symbols, or aesthetics. However, cultural appreciation entails engaging with and respectfully recognizing aspects of many cultures.

Han, H. C. (2019). This is frequently achieved by cooperation, acknowledging the origins of various features, and demonstrating a sincere desire to comprehend and respect those elements' significance. Cultural sensitivity in fashion can manifest as cultural appreciation in the fashion industry can manifest itself in working with craftspeople from different origins, exhibiting traditional workmanship, or using the industry as a forum to encourage communication and understanding between cultures. To distinguish between appropriation and appreciation, one must carefully analyze the power relationships, the context, and the purpose of the usage of cultural aspects in fashion, with a focus on encouraging an ethical and respectful interaction with a variety of cultural traditions.

Le, K., & Aydin, G. (2023). Social media backlash against fashion branding has a substantial and complex effect. All the different social media platforms offer consumers a potent and prompt way to express their thoughts, share their experiences, and demand transparency from brands. Social media users may swiftly voice their concerns when fashion firms engage in problematic activities like cultural appropriation, inappropriate marketing strategies, or unethical activity. This can lead to a backlash that can become viral and harm the brand's reputation. Because of social media's rapidity and reach, it is challenging for brands to maintain narrative control because unfavorable comments can swiftly spiral out of control and cause boycotts, PR disasters, and long-term harm to a brand's reputation. On the other hand, social media also gives customers the ability to commend companies that exhibit openness, sincerity, and inclusivity, creating chances for favorable reinforcement and brand loyalty. To reduce the danger of backlash and promote a positive brand image, fashion firms must carefully manage social media, actively engage with their audience, pay attention to feedback, and connect their activities with values that resonate with customers.

Angeline, M., Chandra, S., Kinanti, F., Singgih, Y., & Safitri, Y. (2019, August). The digital divide has a complex effect on fashion branding in the digital age, posing both opportunities and difficulties for companies. Digital platforms might increase the gap between brands that can effectively use digital tools and those that cannot, even while they offer unparalleled reach and accessibility. They can worsen inequalities in access to technology and digital literacy. In addition, the swift velocity of technological progress demands perpetual adjustment, hence intensifying the pressure on brands to stay inventive and maintain their relevance. But the opposition

to digitalization in fashion branding, which is driven by worries about digital fatigue, privacy invasion, and the loss of real experiences, highlights how crucial it is to balance offline and online tactics while preserving authenticity in brand messaging.

H&M (2018) The Washington Post piece explores the controversy around the brand's 2018 ads, which included a black child with a hoodie and the slogan "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle." The commercial caused a great deal of controversy and was accused of being insensitive to racial issues. Many people attacked the company for feeding negative preconceptions by linking a black child to a historically racist image. After the incident swiftly gained broad attention on social media, requests for boycotts of H&M were made. Even though the business quickly took down the advertisement and apologized, the scandal raised more general issues around the lack of diversity and representation in the fashion industry. In addition to serving as a reminder of the serious consequences of insensitive advertising in today's globally interconnected society, it underscored the need for corporations to be more culturally sensitive and conscious in their marketing initiatives. [27] Gupta, R. (2020). Gucci received a lot of backlash in 2019 for a sweater that was part of their Fall/Winter collection and looked a lot like blackface. The sweater had a high neckline and a red-outlined cutout that resembled enormous lips. Many criticized the design, saying it was offensive and racially insensitive, drawing comparisons to the past when blackface was used as a kind of pejorative caricature. Social media users and celebrities alike expressed their shock and demanded that Gucci be held responsible for the racist imagery it had been promoting as a result of the controversy. Gucci swiftly took the sweater out of sale after apologizing in public for the negative response. In order to prevent such insensitive blunders in the future, this episode brought to light the significance of cultural sensitivity and knowledge within the fashion industry and sparked conversations on the need for greater diversity and inclusivity in design processes.

Wekwerth, Z. M. (2019). Dolce & Gabbana (2018): Due to an ad campaign that showed a Chinese model straining to eat Italian food with chopsticks, Dolce & Gabbana thus became involved in this controversy in 2018. The ad provoked claims of cultural insensitivity, and many people denounced the company for maintaining stereotypes and undermining Chinese culture. Users reacted with indignation about the Chinese model's representation and what they saw as a lack of cultural sensitivity, flooding social media channels with condemnation. Widespread criticism and calls for boycotts of Dolce & Gabbana followed the incident. After defending the effort at first, the company later apologized in reaction to the growing backlash, admitting that it had offended many and promising to take cultural sensitivity more seriously going forward. This incident brought attention to how crucial it is for marketing campaigns to respect and appreciate cultural differences. It also sparked conversations on how brands must meaningfully engage in representation and dialogue to prevent unintentionally upsetting varied communities.

Rama, Z., Han, H., & Hessels, E. (2018). Pepsi (2017) despite not being a fashion brand, Pepsi received a lot of negative press in 2017 for a commercial starring model Kendall Jenner that was deemed to be trivializing social justice movements, especially protests. In the ad, Jenner was shown participating in a demonstration and giving a police officer a can of Pepsi, which appeared to ease tensions and foster harmony. The advertisement attempted to co-opt significant social and political topics for commercial benefit, which many viewers regarded to be disrespectful and tone deaf. Critics contended that it downplayed the importance of demonstrations and the difficulties underprivileged people face. On social media, the ad drew harsh criticism, with many criticizing Pepsi for its insensitivity and ignorance of contemporary issues. Pepsi swiftly removed the advertisement in reaction to the criticism, admitting that it had been off-target and apologizing for any offence it may have caused. This episode highlighted the dangers of corporations trying to profit from social movements without actually participating with the issues at hand, underscoring the significance of authenticity and awareness in advertising.

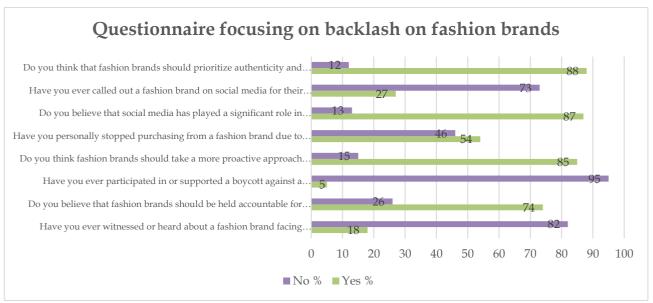
Methodology

Table: 1 Questionnaire focusing on the backlash of fashion brands

S.No.	A questionnaire focusing on the backlash of fashion brands	Yes %	No%
1.	Have you ever witnessed or heard about a fashion brand facing backlash for cultural appropriation or insensitivity in their designs or marketing campaigns?	18	82
2.	Do you believe that fashion brands should be held accountable for their actions and decisions that may offend certain communities or cultures?	74	26
3.	Have you ever participated in or supported a boycott against a fashion brand due to their controversial actions or statements?	5	95
4.	Do you think fashion brands should take a more proactive approach to ensuring diversity and inclusion in their products and campaigns to avoid backlash?	85	15
5.	Have you personally stopped purchasing from a fashion brand due to its unethical practices, such as environmental harm or labor exploitation?	54	46
6.	Do you believe that social media has played a significant role in amplifying backlash against fashion brands?	87	13
7.	Have you ever called out a fashion brand on social media for their	27	73

	controversial actions or statements?		
8.	Do you think that fashion brands should prioritize authenticity and cultural	88	12
	sensitivity over profit margins?		

Table: 1 contains eight questions designed to explore how consumers perceive brand backlash and their level of awareness regarding it. These questions were distributed as part of a survey to gather insights from consumers. The results of this survey are subsequently discussed to analyze and understand the findings in greater detail.



Graph: 1 Graph showing the responses of survey conducted on backlash of fashion brands

Result and Discussion

We sought to determine the degree of awareness on instances of backlash related to fashion brands or specific incidents through our targeted survey on fashion brands, which was given to 531 participants. Table: 1, According to our research, 18% of participants have seen or heard of a fashion company that has drawn criticism for cultural appropriation or insensitivity in its advertisements or designs. Furthermore, a sizable majority 74% think that fashion brands ought to answer for any decisions and acts they take that might offend particular communities or cultures. However, due to contentious acts or remarks, only 5% of participants acknowledged taking part in or endorsing a boycott against a fashion brand. Interestingly, in order to prevent backlash, 85% of respondents support fashion firms being more proactive in promoting diversity and inclusion in their products and promotions. Additionally, 54% of participants said they have personally stopped buying from a fashion company because of immoral actions like labor exploitation or environmental harm. Given that 87% of respondents said social media played a substantial part in increasing backlash against fashion firms, it is clear how influential it is. In spite of this, a mere 27% of respondents have criticized a fashion company on social media for their divisive remarks or acts. 88% of respondents are in favor of fashion brands putting authenticity and cultural sensitivity ahead of financial margins. We can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the backlash against fashion brands and spot areas where consumer engagement and brand communication strategies can be strengthened by using this thorough research of consumer sentiment.

Makosa, P. (2013).In this era of digital media, there are path-changing and huge advantages. Instant communication is established due to global connectivity thereby speeding up the process of collaboration and innovation across the world. There is so much information available at the click of a button that learning and solving problems and access to knowledge available for all is revolutionary. Due to the high level of automation productivity and efficiency reach the highest level. This helps considerably in streamlining the processes in all industries. This increases productivity and overall economic growth. While digitalization has unprecedented advantages one has to face new and unprecedented challenges. One of the most common problems is digital addiction to screen impacting mental health and relationship with each other. One of the major problems is that of privacy which an immediate casualty becomes. Personal data is harvested and taken advantage of by corporations and individuals having bad intentions creating legal and moral ethical behavioral issues. The compulsive dependency syndrome on technology does expose the community to dynamic cybersecurity threats, starting from data theft and facing constant cyber-attacks, forcing constant alertness to protect digital assets and digital infrastructure.

Conclusion

The Digital Era and Its Backlash" provides insightful information about the complex interactions that exist in the fashion business between digitalization, brand dynamics, and consumer empowerment. The study highlights the move to digital platforms for marketing and engagement, shedding light on the significant influence of digital transformation on fashion branding strategies. However, in the digital age, brands face more risks of backlash in addition to the advantages of enhanced connectedness and reach. This reaction highlights the significance of brand authenticity and sensitivity to consumer views. It originates from a variety of factors, including contentious campaigns and product-related concerns. [30] The report emphasizes how digital platforms have greatly empowered customers by giving them a larger voice to voice complaints and hold companies responsible. As such, fashion firms have to tread carefully when it comes to controlling the possible fallout from brand criticism while simultaneously utilizing digital platforms to increase interaction. Although there are many obstacles to overcome, the digital age also offers chances for brands to improve their relationships with customers by being responsive and open in their interactions. Future research directions suggested by the study include the function of influencer marketing, the reasons behind consumer participation in brand boycotts, and efficient methods for managing brand reputation. Overall, "The Digital Divide" underscores the evolving landscape of fashion branding in the digital era, emphasizing the imperative for brands to adapt, engage, and navigate the complexities of consumer empowerment and brand perception in an increasingly digitalized world.

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