Socially Responsible Consumption and Marketing in Practice

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1 Introduction

Marketing is a significant driver of consumption. To the extent that consumption is a catalyst for economic growth, as measured by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) the standard global indicator of economic status, marketing provides both temptation and information to foster

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consumer demand. Arguably, from this perspective, supply does effect demand, as demand is manufactured through the promotion of marketed want, projected obsolescence, and appearance of satisfying an unmet need (Nelson, 1974; Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999; Wernick, 1991). All three of these phenomena are focused on gratification but do not necessarily include an understanding of the supply chain related to a product, and responsibility for exercising the power of demand any further than self-satiation. In fact, much of the exclusion specific to supply chain responsibility is assumed by the consumer to be within the oversight of regulation (i.e., government) and the firm (Edelman, 2020).

Given the strength of consumer expenditures in developed countries' GDP, economic transformation to encompass sustainability may be catalyzed through education—economic literacy—that promotes a shift in consumption value orientation to include a responsibility for the holistic impact of a given consumption choice—a moral framework. Arguably, the inclusion of responsibility for consumption aligned to the welfare of other life in the present and future would result in justice-oriented consumption choices. The consumer, from this perspective would then be the rationale for the internalization of externalized costs of production that ensure sustainable use of environmental resources as well as labor. However, given the challenge of direct-to-consumer communication highlighted by opt-in/opt-out features and cancel culture action, education as defined is often siloed by group think limitations often leading to validation of the adage, "preaching to the choir." Though social media is not an exception to these characterizations, its intersectionality offers an opportunity to communicate and share information that may not be accessed otherwise (Côté & Darling, 2018).

In the sections that follow, we provide an overview of the history of social media and the use of the channel for advertising and promotion. We then address the potential for social media to be used for social change with the discussion of two social media campaign cases: #PayUp and #HashtagRevolt. We conclude with a discussion of limitation, concerns, and next steps.

2   The Rise of Social Media

Pew Research Center began tracking U.S. social media adoption in 2005 when the market was littered with many small social networking sites. Facebook, which started in 2003 was at its infancy and available to a

limited audience of selected colleges, Twitter, and Instagram, were yet to be deployed in 2006 and 2010, respectively. At that time, approximately 5% of American adults noted using some form of social media, only a few of those are extant today, the most well-known being LinkedIn which was online in 2003. By 2011, nearly half of all Americans reported using social media, and as of early 2021, 72% of the public are active on one or more types of social media, 69% use Facebook, 40% use Instagram, and 23% use Twitter (Pew, 2021).

Current U.S. usage rates are mimicked to some extent in aggregate global data. On a global scale as depicted in Fig. 1, as of February 2020, Facebook has the strongest penetration at 63% with Instagram and Twitter trailing at 36 and 23%, respectively.

Among the three platforms as of 2020, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are actively used by marketers with Facebook having the highest use rate at 94% followed by Instagram and Twitter, with 76% and 53%, respectively as depicted in Fig. 2.

According to Statista, in April 2021 9.5% of total active Facebook users worldwide are women between the ages of 18 and 24 years, while male users between the ages of 25 and 34 years constitute the largest group on the platform (Tankovska, 2021a). This compares with Instagram for which 15.6% of global active Instagram users are identified as women between the ages of 25 and 34 years; more than half of the global Instagram population is 34 years or younger (Tankovska, 2021b). The largest
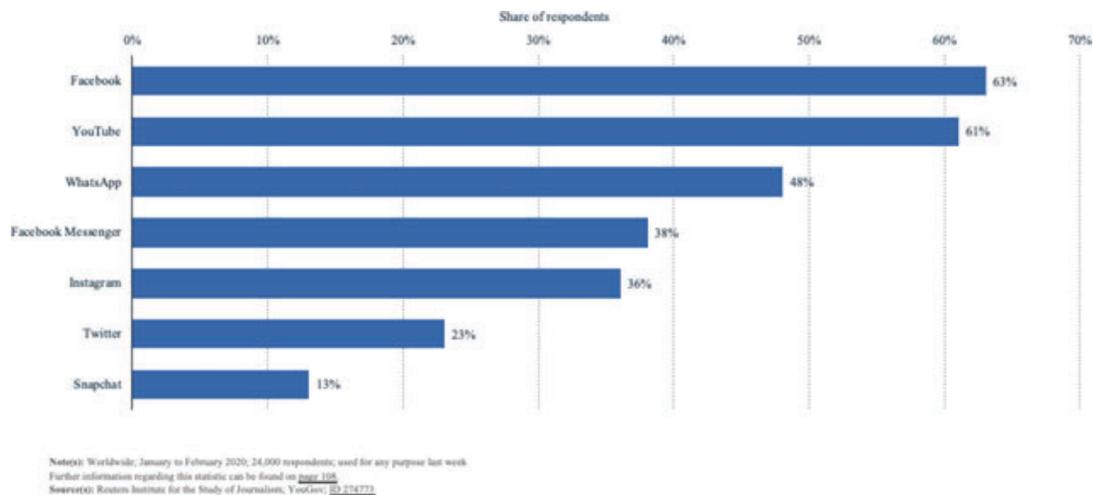

Fig. 1   Global active usage penetration of leading social networks as of February 2020 (*Source* Statista [2021a])
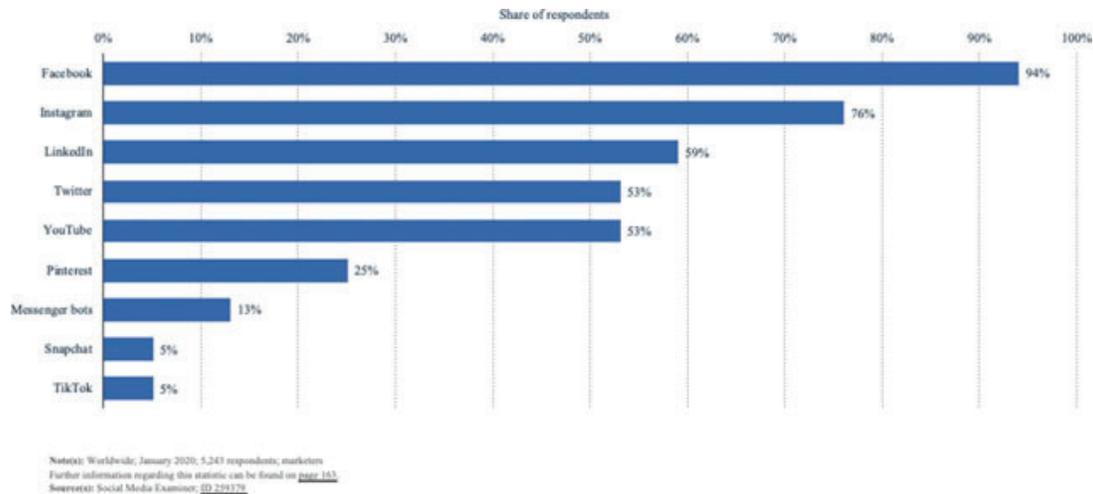
Fig. 2 Leading social media platforms used by marketers worldwide as of January 2020 (*Source* © Statista [2021b])

demographic user group of Twitter, with 38.5% of users, is between 25 and 34 years old. The second-largest age group, at 21%, is between 35 and 49 years old. Users aged less than 24 years old were approximately 24%, while users aged 50 or above accounted for roughly 17% (Tankovska, 2021c).

The rise of social media and the present statistics on its use are not necessarily attributable to strategic longitudinal planning of a particular platform's founders but rather are more reflective of deployment and the speed of user-centric adaptation of a given platform. Social media relies heavily on algorithms, which provides user content that aligns with demonstrated search and action on the platform. In other words, social media is constructed to align with user benefit. "As social media usage has become more widespread, users have become ensconced within specific, self-selected groups, which means that news and views are shared nearly exclusively with like-minded users" (Prier, 2017, 59). For this reason, social media can both limit information and provide information, both without an evaluation of quality, as defined by reliability of source and validation of statement. "Social media sites like Twitter and Facebook employ an algorithm to analyze words, phrases, or hashtags to create a list of topics sorted in order of popularity. This *trend list* is a quick way to review the most discussed topics at a given time" (Prier, 2017, 52). From this perspective, success on social media is dependent on the words used in communication, the strength of the social media presence or network

of a user, and the interest of social media users in communicating outside their immediate *friend* network. Facebook has scope limitations based on existing friends, while both Instagram and Twitter are transparent with respect to followers and are designed to promote information dissemination. These platform attributes make it easier to evaluate social media campaigns on Instagram and Twitter. Obar et al. (2012) evaluated 53 advocacy organizations specific to their use of social media and found that both Facebook and Twitter were among the most routinely used platforms, with the organizations participating noting that social media "can help facilitate civic engagement and collective action" while also strengthening "outreach efforts and enabl[ing] engaging feedback loops" (21).

Specific to corporate use of social media, marketing on social media encompasses all three channels (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) but Instagram and Twitter are the channels most widely used to influence, primarily due to the transparency and ease of information flow, which is furthered using a select group of users known as "influencers." "Social media influencers (SMIs) represent a new type of independent third-party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media" (Freberg et al., 2010, 1).

Influencers have the power to affect purchasing and perception of significant numbers of individuals based on their stated social media following. In 2021, the market power of social media influencers is expected to be $13.8 billion, a significant increase from $9.7 billion in 2020, which still represented a sizable gain from 2019 at $6.5 billion (Influencer Marketing Hub, n.d.). As of year-end 2020, 20.9% on social media users reported that they engaged with social media to follow celebrities or influencers, while finding products to purchase scored 26.5%, and seeing content from your favorite brands scored 23.4%. "Influencers aren't necessarily actors or musicians with decades of experience. Anyone can become an online personality and gather a large following if their content is interesting enough to an audience. Their followers are typically very loyal, and that's why influencers have changed the game for marketing teams. Influencers serve as trusted voices for consumers and have built lifestyles online that many people want to mimic. Brands can tap into that" (Elsbury, 2019). Influencers with large followings such as the Kardashians, each member of the family has a social

media following, can make an income from social media stated endorsements and simultaneously generate compound the sum in the form of revenue to the company retaining them (Kirst, 2015).

In 2020, Kim Kardashian ranked 11 on a listing of the most influential people on Twitter worldwide in an assessment by Statista (Tankovska, 2021d) and was listed at six on the comparable Instagram ranking, behind her sister Kylie Jenner, who was ranked four (Tankovska, 2021e). The same year, news outlets noted that Kim Kardashian received between $300,000 and $500,000 for a product endorsement post; the social media celebrity herself highlighted that her income, estimated to be more than $20 million, from social media marketing exceeded her earnings from *Keeping up with the Kardashians* her family's reality television show where she is a central figure (Isaac, 2020).

Influencers have varied spheres of influence (i.e., micro-influencers) and the monetization of their influence highlights the revenue generation capability to the sponsor company. Of importance in the present discussion, the existence of influencers highlights the significance of social media in fostering action, even if the action is related to consumption. As a result, it is not surprising that there is also a direct relationship between social media and activism. In the sections that follow, we discuss the role of social media activism and provide two case studies of social media activism in the fashion industry.

3   Social Media and Social Activism

Social media platforms by their nature, particularly Twitter and Instagram, are easily able to disseminate information through influencers and hashtags. Though the impact of the former is based on followers, the latter are searchable by users but are also used by computer algorithms to position posts to users, highlighting another aspect of social media, artificial intelligence (AI).

AI is embedded in social media platforms to disseminate information based on use of hashtags and other modes of determining common themes. Hashtag use on Twitter, for example, will place all tweets using a hashtag in one stream, increasing visibility and interaction across the platform. Hashtag use on Instagram and Facebook work similarly, except for the privacy restrictions on these platforms that allow users to limit or determine who can view their posts. Though beyond the scope of the present discussion, AI presents a potential threat to information flow

and transparency as it, on the surface, may appear objective but within its programming has a distinct probability embedded bias (Venkatesan, 2021).

Activism as a social phenomenon typically includes two or more of the following: a contentious issue, collective action, solidarity or collective identity, and an effort to solve problems using communication (Chon & Park, 2020). When combined with social media, using both influencers and hashtags, activism is transformed from physical demonstration to a click. Indeed, social media activism allows aggregation of interests on a topic and a seemingly organized advocacy to occur, albeit in relation to an individual's schedule, with the ease of simply adding an affirmation in the form of an emoji from a thumbs-up to a heart. Further, the evolution of activism on a given platform is seemingly self-determined as each user-click increases the potential distribution of a post.

Though social media may offer an opportunity for social activism, there are limitations. Perhaps most significant is if the activist campaign is on the same platform as the subject of activism. How can competing messaging be reconciled?

In the next section, we highlight two social media campaigns that actively targeted fast fashion and provide the rationale, accomplishments, and learnings related to these initiatives. The first #PayUp was an outcome of outrage related to cancellation of contracts and defaults on obligations by corporations subcontracting garment work. Following, the #HashtagRevolt campaign hijacked fast fashion brand's social media presence to increase attention and awareness of the adverse impact of fast fashion. In both cases, the social media campaigns are characterized as grassroots activism and provide insight with respect to the potential for social media as an educational and organizing tool.

4   SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Social media has been used for social change specifically targeted toward political elections, public policy, and regulatory efforts. These have included local efforts to national and global issues. The traction of any of these efforts has been determined by the pre-existing bias toward the issue or concurrent influence of the poster. Below, we address two specific social media campaigns focused on the fashion industry. The first #PayUp aligns with fast fashion from the perspective of economic equity but has

grown to encompass environmental justice as well. The second, #Hash-tagRevolt is a novel use of social media where the campaign "highjacks" the social media presence of brands being targeted to increase awareness of the adverse impact of fast fashion.

4.1   Case Study: #PayUp

The #PayUp campaign was formed in March 2020. The origin of the campaign was informal and as noted by Elizabeth Cline, one of the two significant forces behind the hashtag, the hashtag was used to increase awareness of the defaults and cancellation of major fast fashion brands on their contracts. "There was little work for a freelance journalist at the start of the pandemic, giving me time to notice firsthand what was happening," noted Cline (unpublished interview). The cancellations followed the global economic slowing resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Though opportunistic for the retailers, the consequences for workers were devastating. "Dozens of global brands refused to pay for an estimated $40 billion worth of finished goods that garment workers had spent countless hours sewing, according to research by the Worker Rights Consortium and Penn State Center for Global Workers' Rights Director Mark Anner. Millions of garment workers were laid off globally without pay as a direct result of the cancellations, sending them into the gravest economic crisis of our lifetimes without their paychecks or any savings" (Remake, n.d.a).

4.1.1   #PayUp Campaign Partners and Supporters

From its inception, #PayUp was able to build "a global coalition of garment workers, experienced labor rights groups, NGOs, and fashion activists…Strengthened by the power of social media, the #PayUp campaign went viral over the summer of 2020, with citizens all around the world using the #PayUp hashtag, resulting in over 270,000 people signing the original #PayUp petition" (Remake, n.d.b). The dissemination of #PayUp can be attributed to a variety of factors including the slowing economy, which gave opportunity for many sensitive to issues relation to economic equity to participate. However, perhaps most significant was the influence and social media dexterity of the two leaders of the campaign, Elizabeth Cline, and the non-profit Remake, both were active in worker's rights related to fast fashion before the pandemic and had networks of influence that they could tap into.

4.1.2   Campaign Accomplishments

#PayUp on Instagram and Twitter reached approximately 2.4 billion in English-speaking countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, which are also the main countries where purchases from the brands targeted take place. As of June 2021, the hashtag has been used in over 84 thousand Instagram posts and 26 thousand Twitter posts. Posts on both sites varied from individuals to NGOs and other entities, including influencers. Comments directed readers to actions and promoted the signing of the #PayUp petition.

As of December 2020, the #PayUp campaign, resulted in $15 billion in contract fulfillment obligations that had been previously canceled; estimates are that another $7 billion has been paid since the start of 2021. Though the amount appears significant, it is roughly half of the $40 billion in contract defaults and cancellations retailers executed because of anticipated pandemic-related slowdown in sales. Table 1 lists the names of the retailers based on their pay-up status.

Table 1 #PayUp targets and outcomes

PayUp Yes	PayUp No
Adidas	American Eagle Outfitters
Amazon	Arcadia
Asos	Bestseller
C&A	BooHoo
Gap	Everlane
H&M	Fashion Nova
Kering	Forever 21
Levi's	Global Brands Group
Lululemon	JCPenney
M&S	Kohl's
next	Mothercare
NIKE	Ross Dress for Less
Patagonia	Sears
Primark	The Children's Place
PVH	The Edinburgh Woolen Mill
Reformation	TJX
Target	URBN
Under Armour	Victoria's Secret
UNIQLO	Walmart
VF	
ZARA	

Source Remake (n.d.b)

4.1.3   Learnings/Implications

The #PayUp campaign that started with a simple hashtag is now associated with $22 billion dollars in committed payments from certain brands to factories and garment workers, however due to the lack of transparency with respect to payments, it is difficult to quantify the financial impact of #PayUp to the supply chain, workers, and the companies involved. When looking at the retailers' earnings statements, none explicitly referred to #PayUp. Specific to the incentive to pay-up, it might be that some companies took action to avoid negative consumer sentiment while others considered the campaign insignificant. The former may be more aligned to brand premium and the latter to the demographic of the consumer base. If this indeed is the case, it would be consistent with the results of prior research that highlighted the positive correlation between income and sustainability (Fairbrother, 2013), and age and sustainability (Ballew et al., 2019; United Nations, n.d.). However, there are potentially other reasons, including supplier dependence, where companies operating with a few suppliers may have felt more pressure to pay-up to maintain requisite relationships (LeBaron et al., 2021).

Overall, the #PayUp movement given the action it has catalyzed can be classified as successful, however, there is arguably more that can be done. For example, targeting social media with respect to a company's brand position, demographic focus, and the sustainability interests of its customers, as well as its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and commitment to sustainability, might help determine a company specific catalyst for corporate action. This is especially true when a company may have an active social media presence and is able to obscure its sustainability image.

Remake has continued the #PayUp campaign and has built on the initial success adding a seven-point action strategy to protect garment workers' rights on a global scale. The initiative includes a dedicated website, "PayUp Fashion," and an updated petition.

4.2   Case Study: #HashtagRevolt

Through advocacy, industry partnerships, events, initiatives, and education, Fashion Revolution USA's (FRUSA) mission is to bring together stakeholders across the fashion, clothing, footwear, accessories, and textiles supply chain to help create an inclusive US fashion system that conducts business ethically, regenerates the environment, and produces

responsibly, supporting all voices across the apparel network. The global organization reaches over 500 k people on its global Instagram account (Fashion Revolution [@fash_rev], 2021), the USA arm reaches nearly 26 k (Fashion Revolution USA [@fash_revusa], 2021). However, those citizens who engage with the organization are already tapped into the social and environmental issues that currently face the fashion industry. To reach new citizens outside of the sustainable fashion echo chamber and spread the messaging and mission of Fashion Revolution USA, the team had to think outside of the box. Considering FRUSA did not have funding for advertising, it used guerilla and grassroots tactics. Guerilla marketing is an unexpected brand program through alternative media (Wensen, 2008) or a means to gain maximum exposure through minimal cost to the company (Prévot, 2007).

Targeting the hashtags of many popular fast fashion brands (Table 2), Fashion Revolution USA created the #HashtagRevolt campaign to educate fast fashion consumers who follow those brands' hashtags on the issues facing the fashion industry by curating a global coordinated "hashtag hijacking" campaign during Fashion Revolution Week (FRW), April 19–25, 2021. Hashtags are a powerful source of information flow (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015), often set up by brands to generate positive PR; however, their public nature allows for manipulation. Instead of being used for a brand's original messaging, the hashtag hijacking references the use of a branded hashtag to disseminate information from another group or organization's messaging to a brand's followers. Textual hijacking is understood as a tactic played out by a less powerful actor to use, manipulate, and divert the space and resources created by a more powerful one (de Certeau, 1984).

In order to have the impact desired, Fashion Revolution USA brought many global and regional like-minded organizations and influencers together to disrupt the messaging of fast fashion brands. The goals of the campaign were to:

- raise awareness on the issues with the fashion industry
- create NEW curious and informed citizens
- drive citizens to Fashion Revolution toolkits
- encourage citizens to use their voice.

Table 2 Fast fashion brand hashtags targeted

Fast fashion brand	Brand hashtag
Pretty Little Thing	#prettylittlething
Nasty Gals	#NastyGalsDoItBetter
Miss Guided	#happilymisguided
Forever 21	#F21xe
Zara	#Zfgirl #zarawoman
Fashion Nova	#NovaBabe
Bershka	#bershkastyle
Lulus	#lovelulus
Urban Outfitters	#UOonYou
Tobi	#shoptobi
H&M	#HM
Top Shop	#TopshopStyle

Source Fashion Revolution (2021) (personal communication, April 19, 2021)

The campaign messaging focused on one social and one environmental issue through infographics posted on Instagram and encouraged citizens to get involved and "revolutionize the power of hashtags during #FashionRevolutionWeek" (personal communication, Mock, March 30, 2021). A co-branded campaign asset was created in partnership with Fair Trade USA highlighting that "98% of garment workers cannot meet their basic needs" (personal communication, Martin, March 9, 2021; Morgan, 2015).

4.2.1   #HashtagRevolt Campaign Partners and Supporters
Fashion Revolution USA and the global organization proactively sought the support of non-profits, NGOs, and influencers to amplify the messaging. Fashion Revolution USA partnered with Fair Trade USA as the organizations' missions have a similar focus and they had partnered on previous initiatives. In addition to the Fair Trade USA, key partner organizations and industry leaders included @Greenpeace, @chicksforclimate, @ecoage, @canopyplanet, @marinatestino, @amandahearst, @stand.earth, and What the Hack, a digital disruptor organization that launched a two-team hackathon to amplify these efforts.

What the Hack invited citizens across the globe to create additional Instagram campaigns utilizing the key messages and hashtags. Team 1 created a new account, @askyourbrand, and the #askyourbrand hashtag

targeting a smaller group of people who have a wider reach on the Instagram platform utilizing past Fashion Revolution messaging. "We want influencers to start questioning the brand's ethical and environmental policies/ implementation before they signed their promotional agreements. Nevertheless, we need to educate influencers on what they need to ask and how to verify the information they are given by the brand" (personal communication, Soundararajan, May 4, 2021). Team 2 created a campaign entitled "we are not clueless," which ran on Instagram from April 19, 2021, to May 3, 2021, with a campaign video that included clips from the movie *Clueless* and included further statistics about the fashion industry. "We chose Clueless, a 90's popular culture movie reference, for our campaign because the sustainability space can be frequented by intellectuals, activists, customer minimalists and supply chain professionals. This can be intimidating for the more entrepreneurially focused fashionistas and technologists who are genuinely interested in developing commercially viable solutions with innovation, circularly and ethics as a focus" (personal communication, Kilgarriff, May 4, 2021). The strategies of each hackathon team varied from FRUSA's approach. Mackenzie Mock, Director of Communications, Fashion Revolution USA, explains:

> Hashtag Revolt used an approach that flipped social media on its head by hyper-targeting popular fast fashion hashtags, bringing together the foundation of Fashion Revolution–digital campaigning and education–and the power that our collective voices must demand change. User generated content is akin to word-of-mouth advertising in the digital world, and these hashtags are the primary way brands seek this content out. It was a major success to have our educational content reach the masses at the top of these hashtag streams and hopefully catch the eye of new audiences to bring into the Fashion Revolution fold. (personal communication, Mock, June 14, 2021)

While the approach of What the Hack's teams were independent of FRUSA's, it ultimately amplified the #HashtagRevolt campaign reach and helped to infiltrate the targeted fast fashion brands' hashtags.

4.2.2   Campaign Accomplishments

Through Fashion Revolution USA's global coordinated effort to infiltrate the hashtags of many fast fashion brands, the #HashtagRevolt hijacking attracted over 1,000 posts during FRW. Fashion Revolution USA's messaging successfully disrupted the fast fashion brands' hashtag feeds

on April 19th and throughout Fashion Revolution Week sparking international curiosity among concerned citizens. General comments received on @fash_revusa posts were all positive, with several comments indicating followers would participate in the #HashtagRevolt campaign.

The #HashtagRevolt campaign was mainly activated on Instagram, however supplemental posts were published on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. On April 19, 2021, the @fash_revusa Instagram account gained 340 followers and received 36,000 Twitter impressions during the first day of activation.

4.2.3   Learnings and Implications

Preparation for launching this social media campaign started in February 2021 when key statistics were selected in partnership with the global team of Fashion Revolution. Outreach to like-minded organizations with high Instagram followers were contacted in the month leading up to FRW to secure support. Support included sending a newsletter to each organization's subscribers the week and day before the launch to build support as well as posting on Instagram with the supplied assets and copy on April 19, 2021. However, supporting organizations did not participate in sending newsletters to their subscribers. Understanding the limitations of partnering organizations' support, future campaigns of this nature will not request newsletters to be sent.

Additional learnings center on the functionality of the Instagram user face and the multiple graphics used in the campaign. The inability to copy and paste text from one account to another makes it more difficult for the platform's users to share supporting copy explaining the information given in the image. Fashion Revolution USA's decision to create two infographics and one image highlighting the #HashtagRevolt campaign (three images in total), may have hindered support as well. Perhaps one targeted statistic with one graphic may have made it easier for followers to participate. Since the campaign asked followers to include twelve brands' hashtags, it may prove easier to garner social media reposting if the campaign targeted one brand's hashtag. However, this approach goes against Fashion Revolution's standards to call out one brand or organization; this policy reflects the focus on industry change which may be clouded if one retailer is referenced.

5   Issues, Limitations, and Next Steps

Evidence suggests that firms are recognizing that environmental and social justice issues are parameters in consumer decision-making. However, just because a firm highlights performance related to the environment does not equate to their operationalizing sustainability. Current research indicates that advertising through social media can confuse or even neutralize the adverse outcomes related to a firm's production processes. Oh et al. (2017) note that firms can self-promote the appearance of sustainability through promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility activities that are not aligned and purposely obscure the environmental and social injustice impacts of their operations. These campaigns take advantage of consumer understanding of a topic such as recycling and use it to promote misinformation. An example is Fashion Nova.[1] The California based company, using micro-influencers, has been able to dominate fast fashion through social media marketing (Nguyen, 2021). However, the company's supply chain has been linked to sweatshop style production, where a largely immigrant workforce is paid by piece, and as a result, workers earn less than minimum wage and as little as $5 an hour (Kitroef, 2019). That the working conditions and compensation are based in California has resulted in media attention, but these injustice issues have been veiled by the retailer's social media blasts, which align their sensitivities with the #BlackLivesMatter movement (McGrath, 2020) and #StopAsianHate (Spencer, 2021). These social media hashtags serve to limit customer awareness of the social and environmental practices of the company—presumably the same base that would have influence over the company's business practices and accountability.

However, perhaps an even more significant issue may be the social media platform itself. Though social media has limited barriers to access a given platform, user access is not equitable with transparency. Social media is offered by public companies with both investors and profit motivations; it, in essence, is a private entity accessible by the public. This may impact how user data is used by operating system algorithms and even the freedom of participation on a platform if implicit censorship is incorporated within the platform's operations (Tierney, 2013). Social media

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[1] Fashion Nova's suppliers in a "2019 Labor Department investigation were found to owe workers $3.8 million in backpay" (Chua, 2021) and the company is listed among those that have not fulfilled the financial component of their contractual obligations.

reflects the development of technology with limited regulatory intervention whose impacts are only emerging and whose existence is affecting social action, potentially reducing it to clicktivism. There is a need for oversight and evaluation of how the platforms that constitute social media are affecting collective action and perception of community.

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