EIGHTH EDITION

marketing

grewal·levy

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Dear Professor,

We are delighted to inform you that Marketing 8e has published. This exciting new edition provides the power of Connect with **SmartBook** 2.0, which continually adapts to individual students' needs, creating a personalized and productive learning experience. This helps students come to class better prepared and ready to learn, allowing you to transform your classroom experience. The $7^{\text{th,}}$ edition will feature 8 **new Video Cases**, assignable Marketing Analytics exercises, assignable Marketing Mini Sims and much more, all within Connect. In addition, McGraw-Hill has recently introduced a new Marketing Insights Podcast series as well as a new Marketing Video Library, both updated monthly!

We are thrilled to provide the Grewal/Levy newsletter to empower you to provide current, cutting-edge examples of marketing in the classroom.

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Sincerely,

This newsletter summarizes article abstracts for the following topics:

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Videos:

Ford vs. GM: Old Rivals Battle for Share of the EV Truck Market

- Ford and GM recently introduced their first electric pickup trucks. WSJ auto reporter Mike Colias breaks down the different strategies the two legacy auto manufacturers are pursuing to bring their EVs to market.
- 7:08 min
- **Video Link**

NFT Art Is Transforming the Market and Setting New Records

- Non-fungible tokens, or NFTs, have gone in the last year from a relatively obscure blockchain technology to a market valued at around $44 billion. WSJ explores how NFTs are transforming the art market and tells the story of who is behind the buzz.
- 7:36 min
- **Video Link**

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Supply Chain Responsibilities in the Opioid Crisis

Sarah Maslin Nir, Jan Hoffman, and Lola Fadula, “Pharmaceutical Company Is Found Liable in Landmark Opioid Trial,” The New York Times, December 30, 2021; Jan Hoffman, “Judge Overturns Purdue Pharma’s Opioid Settlement,” The New York Times, December 17, 2021; Jan Hoffman, “CVS, Walgreens, and Walmart Fueled Opioid Crisis, Jury Finds,” The New York Times, November 23, 2021

Use with Chapter 16, “Supply Chain Management”

The ramifications and damages due to the opioid crisis continue to be cataloged and measured. At the same time, questions about who should be held responsible for its vast spread and persistence also remain to be settled. Whereas Purdue Pharma and some of its executives already have been accused and found guilty of conspiring to push the terribly addictive and dreadfully damaging drug OxyContin, other less well-known opioids also have been (and continue to be) sold to patients, by less familiar pharmaceutical firms and retail pharmacies. The responsibilities held by each of these members of the supply chain in turn are being addressed by state- and federal-level courts.

Some recent rulings are instructive. In particular, a massive lawsuit in New York State, initially involving hundreds of defendants, assigned part of the responsibility for the crisis and its effects to the U.S. arm of Teva Pharmaceuticals, an Israeli firm. A jury agreed with prosecutors’ assertions that the pharmaceutical firm created a “public nuisance” by misrepresenting the risk of addiction and overstating the appropriate uses of the various opioids that it produced. However, in naming this single firm, the outcome of the case does not reflect the reality: Hundreds of other pharmaceutical manufacturers also were charged with similar damages, but they chose to settle before the case reached a jury.

Another case in Ohio focused instead on retail pharmacy chains. Here too, the jury assigned responsibility to these supply chain actors, for failing to take reasonable measures when it was clear that opioid abuse was occurring. The Ohio lawsuit assigned blame to both individual locations of the national chains and the corporate headquarters of three major retailers: Walgreens, Walmart, and CVS.

Beyond the companies themselves, another case involves executives at the very top of the corporation. A judge recently rejected a bankruptcy plan for Perdue Pharma, because it protected the family owners of the firm, the Sacklers, from being held liable. But such protections arguably are unfair, considering the evidence that the family that sat at the top of the board of directors actively sought to profit from continued, risky sales of the drug, even as evidence of the damages of OxyContin became obvious and unmistakable.

Finally, several cases have alleged that regulatory authorities, as indirect members of the supply chain, also should be held accountable. These allegations suggest that it is up to legal and governmental agencies to keep watch of what corporations and supply chains are doing, and the ways in which they are skirting existing laws, to serve and protect the public.

In all these cases, the losing side has vowed to appeal, such that the outcomes remain uncertain. But the larger questions are relevant for supply chain management in any sector, though perhaps particularly so for sensitive, high-risk industries such as pharmaceuticals. When products are being sold that cause direct harm to consumers and society at large, which members of the supply chain are responsible to ensure protections are in place? The ideal answer would be, “All of them.” But when none of them act in responsible ways, how should courts apportion the blame?

Discussion Questions

1. If you were a judge or member of the jury in one of these trials, how would you assign blame across the supply chain? In detail, how responsible are (a) manufacturers, (b) retailers, (c) regulatory authorities, (d) physicians, or (e) consumers for the risks associated with the sale, distribution, and use of opioids?

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As More Carmakers Open Experience-Based Showrooms, What Goals Are They Really Seeking?

Brett Burk, “Selling Cars, Plus Coffee, Tea, or a Fancy Dinner,” The New York Times, December 30, 2021

Use with Chapter 2, “Developing Marketing Strategies”

For car shoppers wandering around New York City, an expanding array of experience options offers them some novel propositions. They could make reservations for a traditional Korean tea ceremony at Genesis House, grab a drink at the bar inside Intersect by Lexus, or test drive a new Lincoln along the Seaport. The luxurious, service-centric spaces have little in common with traditional dealerships. But is their ultimate purpose the same?

At Genesis House, the main stated goal is to introduce drivers to Hyundai’s new upscale line of cars. Visitors need to make reservations at the restaurant, but passersby, attracted by the hint of a car outline behind metal beaded curtains in the window, also can stop in for a show in the lightbox theater or a visit to the library contained in the space. Rather than a new brand, Mercedes uses its New York display space to introduce consumers to its line of electric vehicles. In this tech-oriented space, interactive displays help people gain in-depth information about charging capacities, the vehicles’ range, and the benefits of owning an electric car. Lexus is more esoteric in its goals: Its three-story, 16,500-square-foot showroom is dedicated to showcasing core brand values, such as omotenashi, or commitment to hospitality, and takumi, defined roughly as artisanship.

In encouraging test drives from the Seaport, Lincoln appears more determined to ensure potential buyers include the brand in their consideration set. It wants younger drivers to have the experience of actually driving the cars, not just seeing them in a showroom. Such interactions will, it hopes, update its brand image, which continues to suffer from an outdated reputation. The Lamborghini lounge may be incredibly luxurious and richly appointed, but it also serves a clearly practical purpose. Allowed in only by invitation, visitors to the lounge can spend time with a sales representative to personalize the vehicles they plan to order. This appealing direct link with brand representatives encourages many consumers to select added features, which then increase per-car profits by approximately 80 percent. Later, they return to the lounge to take delivery of their previously ordered cars.

In this sense, the directly owned and managed showrooms, experience centers, lounges—whatever name they take—exist for disparate purposes. But ultimately, the goal is the same: The carmakers want to reach buyers directly to establish their brand image and make clear the value that they offer. And these efforts in turn are inevitably directed toward increasing sales.

Discussion Questions

1. The car brands mentioned in this abstract are all high-end or luxury brands. Can similar showrooms benefit economy or midrange car brands too? What about trucks or utility vehicles? Why or why not?
2. Why are these types of showrooms mainly located in New York City? What makes that location particularly appealing for such branded outposts?

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Lining Up College Influencers, for Emotional and Business Support

Gina Cherelus, “Want to be an Influencer? Here’s One Place to Start,” The New York Times, December 29, 2021; Kaley Roshitsh, “College Influencer Program, 28 Row, to Start this March,” WWD, March 19, 2019

Use with Chapter 3, “Social and Mobile Marketing,” and Chapter 9, “Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning”

For many college students, becoming an influencer sounds like a perfect gig. Take something they love already, like fashion, sports, or travel, and dive deep into it; post entertaining content about it that gets people to respond positively, which feels good; set your own schedule for creating and posting content; and then, perhaps best of all, get paid. It sounds amazing!

But how do they go about it?

For many would-be influencers, making the transition from uploading cute tidbits that their friends and family appreciate to attracting the thousands of followers that will lead marketers to pay to work with them is unknown, unfamiliar territory. In the gap, influencer marketing platforms have arisen, promising to link potential influencers with interested brands. But even these platforms tend to have minimum follower requirements, and the cutthroat competition can be overwhelming.

With a different approach, the 28 Row platform therefore specifically targets college-age women who want to make contacts with businesses but also seek supportive connections with other members of this cohort. Initially, the founders of the 28 Row application thought they could simply create a space for college-aged women to share common interests. But soon they realized that influencer marketing was a primary interest for many of the first participants, leading them to prioritize options that might help members build their influencer businesses.

To join the app, users must have an “.edu” email address, and they are strongly encouraged to engage in productive, supportive interactions with one another. Thus some more experienced influencers share tips and hints; others just getting started can ask questions specific to their needs. The platform managers also vet all applicants, to ensure their existing social media feeds offer compelling, high-quality content, rather than being overwhelmed with inauthentic or only sponsored posts.

The presence of this appealing demographic, all in one place, has brought various brands to the platform as well, including H&M, E.l.f. Cosmetics, and Monday Haircare. In addition, 28 Row promises to link the brands to the influencers that appear best suited to their specific campaign goals, such greater reach versus increased purchasing.

But the business goals are inseparable from the other elements that sets 28 Row apart. Noting evidence that social media can be particularly detrimental for the self-esteem and self-images of young women, the platform offers a determined commitment to creating a safe space. Influencers can learn, without judgment, and pursue their goals, to the benefit of themselves, their followers, and the brands that work with them.

Discussion Questions:

1. What forms of help do influencers need to get started?
2. If you decided to become an influencer professionally, what would your first steps be? How would you grow your followers, for example, and how would you find brands with which to partner?

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Consolidation Instead of Competition: The Threat to Cattle Ranchers, as well as Consumers

Peter S. Goodman, "Record Beef Prices, But Ranchers Aren't Cashing In," The New York Times, December 27, 2021

Use with Chapter 16, "Supply Chain Management"

In a capitalist market, competition is healthy. The negative, well-known result of insufficient competition is higher prices for consumers. A (near) monopolist can charge nearly any price it wants, because consumers don't have any other options for obtaining the products it sells. The developments in the beef industry in the past few decades suggest that consumer prices are not the only concern linked to weak competition though. Consolidation in the middle of the supply chain—that is, among meatpackers—also creates serious threats upstream, among the ranchers who supply the cows that represent the start of the chain.

Due to massive consolidation efforts by several big meatpacking companies, just four firms (Tyson Foods, JBS, Cargill, and National Beef Packing Company) control 85 percent of the meatpacking market. Their ability to acquire most of their competitors and restrict the market this way has grown in recent decades, as enforcement of antitrust legislation has diminished. The threats to both consumers and suppliers thus have been emerging over time, but the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic made the implications even more evident.

In particular, consolidation and related cost-cutting strategies led the conglomerates to close many meatpacking plants. This move also effectively limited supply, so the prices that consumers paid for beef already had been rising. Then, when the coronavirus largely halted production, shortages were rampant, and prices skyrocketed even further.

But the purposefully limited capacities of the meatpacking plants also reduced the demand for beef supplied by ranchers. Because they had few alternative buyers for their stock, which is by definition perishable, ranchers were forced to take below-cost prices for their herds. In addition, the powerful meatpacking firms embraced the addition of another actor in the supply chain, in the form of feedlots that exhibit similar levels of consolidation. The large feedlots and massive meatpackers enter into confidential contracts that set quantities and prices, without making any of that information public. The small ranchers, excluded from the negotiations and unable to learn what prices are being paid, have little recourse than to accept whatever price the feedlots offer them to take and begin processing the cattle.

The result has been the widespread loss of independent family ranches. The small firms simply cannot afford to continue their operations. In addition to the losses these closures imply for families and ranching communities, they also suggest harms to the environment. Cattle ranching is a prominent contributor to greenhouse gasses, but small, closely run ranches tend to be more protective of the lands that have been in their families for generations and that constitute the bedrock of their labor. In contrast, industrial ranching operations tend to prioritize efficiency over conservancy.

The system, when considered from a basic economic and market perspective, thus seems broken: Prices are at an all time high, but the profits are not being shared sufficiently with all the stages of the supply chain to enable it to persist. In the past, when beef prices rose, meatpackers and ranchers benefitted about equally. Today, the meatpackers take approximately two-thirds of the profits; for example, JBS earned $18 billion in revenues (an annual increase of 32 percent) in just a single quarter in 2021. A rancher that sells to the conglomerate reported, for the same quarter, that his credit card debt load had surpassed $55,000, and with prices where they stood, he expected to lose even more on the sale of his next herd.

Discussion Questions:

1. If a supply chain does not work for all its members, what solutions are there? Should small ranchers be driven out, if they cannot operate efficiently enough, or should more powerful members of the chain be required to share profits more equitably?

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Why Warhammer?

Shane O'Neill, "Who's Up for a Round of Warhammer?" The New York Times, December 25, 2021

Use with Chapter 5, "Analyzing the Marketing Environment"

Imagine being tasked with marketing Warhammer 40,000. The game, with its odd name, is played on a tabletop, not online. Some of its main characters include the human-sacrifice–demanding emperor of the Imperium of Man, a bunch of Orks, the Forces of Chaos, and murderous women known as Adepta Sororitas. To play, players must build their own models and boards, then perform complex mapping and mathematical operations to determine how their characters may advance and move. The game's laser, to confirm clear sightlines, is officially optional, but the costs of a good set-up run around $400 or so.

Not one of these features supports a conventional marketing approach. The brand name is odd; its image is mostly nerd-centric and proudly outside mainstream pop culture. Because it requires in-person interactions, getting to tournaments can be costly and difficult, not to mention the costs of the models and related tools to play.

And yet, Warhammer 40,000 (colloquially known as Warhammer 40K), decades after its introduction in 1987, is enjoying a remarkable resurgence. Famous fans discuss their set-ups on talk shows, including one in which Superman (Henry Cavill) and Spiderman (Tom Holland) hijacked the interview by engaging in an enthusiastic exchange about their shared hobby. Rather than remaining solely a niche, nerd pastime, Warhammer 40,000 has spread, including to the WWE, where the game inspires the costumes of the wrestler Shayna Baszler.

Along with these famous adopters, the regular fan bases have grown substantially as well, including vastly increased registrations for tournaments. The game's parent company Games Workshop acknowledges its dedicated marketing efforts to appeal to, encourage, and expand this fan base. For example, it has introduced new offerings, such as a subscription service that allows Warhammer players to access videos, animation, and other related content through an app. In turn, the company's stock price, within just two years, has increased by around 60 percent.

These marketing efforts have played a part, though the game also might be benefitting from external trends too. Nerd culture is more broadly accepted in general. In a more specific cultural development, political events and trends often appear to be encouraging consumers to embrace dystopian entertainment content, as if to acknowledge while also escaping their seemingly dystopian reality. But such considerations also might go too far, as when a tournament player embraced the hate-motivated philosophy of the Imperium of Man and arrived wearing a swastika-emblazoned sweatshirt. In an official response to that incident, Games Workshop issued a reminder: "The Imperium is Driven by Hate. Warhammer Is Not."

Discussion Questions:

1. What other marketing tactics would you recommend for Games Workshop, to build on and expand its fan base?
2. What other environmental trends might be encouraging the current popularity of Warhammer 40,000?

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When Is a Plus Sign Additive, and When Is It Redundant? A Branding Trend

Neil Vigdor, “Many Pluses, Zero Minuses, Some Division,” The New York Times, December 23, 2021

Use with Chapter 19, “Advertising, Public Relations, and Sales Promotions”

The humble plus sign, usually the first mathematical operator children learn in math class, has taken on new and expanded meaning when applied in rebranding and marketing initiatives. Virtually every new content platform being streamed or broadcast, by famous names such as CNN, Disney, Apple, and BET, features a “+” at the end of the platform’s logo. Beyond these digital examples, existing brands are embracing the trend too; for example, Bausch & Lomb swapped out its long-standing ampersand for a plus sign, rebranding as Bausch + Lomb (still spoken the same way). Even some law firms have adopted this standard.

The rationale seems to reflect a desire to promise more, without being too specific about what that “more” entails. Rather than claiming to be a “premium” or “deluxe” version—which might raise consumer expectations of actual added benefits—these brands and the associated logos can offer a vague sense that there is more to be gained. The digital providers seem to want to signal a sort of unending, limitless amount of content. Sports fans might appreciate what ESPN offers, but the promise of ESPN+ seems to be that there is some infinite amount of games and sports reporting available for them.

Still, there are limits. The widespread use of the short, descriptive symbol can quickly become overuse, such that the plus adds nothing and becomes meaningless. A parallel, relatively recent example is likely familiar: For a few years, it seemed like every technology product stuck a lowercase i in front of its brand name. Ultimately, the affectation lost much meaning though.

Yet the symbolic form also might have more resonance today, reflecting the communication norms that predominate in a short messaging world. People typing out conversations on their mobile devices often seek easy shortcuts (“LOL,” “OMG,” emojis) that are clear and easy to understand. The plus sign effectively reflects such preferences, such that consumers know generally what it implies from the first glance. It communicates a clear message that requires little cognitive effort to understand and signals benefits, even if in a general sense. So maybe the plus is a plus, of benefit for more and more brands.

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you interpret the plus sign added to a brand with which you’re familiar?
2. Should brands consider their existing images before adding a plus sign? For example, is this addition more or less appropriate for a law firm versus an entertainment channel? Why?

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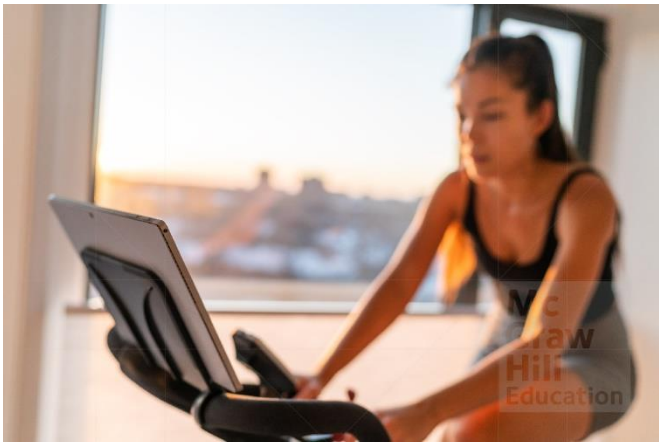
Peloton in the City: A Harmful Product Placement that also Reflects the Times

Steven Kurutz, "'Sex in the City' Reboot Is Not the Only Problem for Peloton," The New York Times, December 15, 2021; Lauren Thomas, "Peloton Is Slashing the Price of its Bike by Hundreds of Dollars to $1,495," CNBC, August 26, 2021

Use with Chapter 6, "Consumer Behavior," and Chapter 19, "Advertising, Public Relations, and Sales Promotions"



Reportedly, when the producers of the Sex in the City reboot And Just Like That… approached Peloton, to request the right to use its exercise bike in the show, they did not explain the role it would play (do we still need to issue a spoiler alert?)—that is, a role as the apparent cause of the heart attack and death of the character Mr. Big. Had the company known, it might have refused permission: Following the airing of the first episode, in which the untimely death occurs, its stock immediately fell by 11 points.

As influential as Carrie Bradshaw and her adventures might be in pop culture though, it is difficult to pin all of Peloton's troubles on the show. Just like Mr. Big and his underlying heart condition, some underlying issues and diagnoses have set the scene for the company's risky health.

Those issues largely revolve around consumers' and service providers' behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic. When gyms around the world closed to patrons, there were a lot of people who sought out and purchased at-home exercise equipment. Peloton benefitted substantially from this trend, and the company sought to build on it by introducing expanded options and additional features. For example, a more expensive model of the traditional bike, with a rotating screen, allowed subscribers to its service to engage in yoga and strength training, along with the regular spin classes that the base model provided. In addition to expanded exercise class options, Peloton introduced its own line of stationary bike shoes, ear buds, heart monitors, and weights, along with a treadmill.

During 2020 and early 2021, many users snapped up these machines and related gadgets happily, convinced that they would continue relying on the technologically advanced machines for years. But similar to many other exercise trends before it (e.g., NordicTrack, the Ab Roller), the Peloton seemingly has become a glorified clothes hanger in many homes. On online marketplaces, it is easy to find sellers hoping that others will want their "barely used" equipment. The consistency of the claims that the machines have rarely been used signals people's actual behaviors: They firmly believed they would work out at home, and they invested in tools to enable them to do so. But then their motivation waned, and today, the bikes mostly just take up space in their homes.

By late 2021, consumer purchases from Peloton fell 17 percent. If people really wanted a bike, they could get a much less expensive, lightly used version from neighbors. In response, Peloton cut its own retail prices drastically, by around 20 percent. But market analysts appear to sense that its peak popularity has passed. More and more gyms are open, and consumers appear more comfortable visiting them. They also have learned that, even if the machines are cool, it's hard to stay motivated to work out at home. For most consumers, even if the machines are not painful reminders of their late spouses—the role the Peloton ultimately adopted in Sex in the City—they offer an unpleasant reminder of people's good intentions to work out and failure to follow through on those goals.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why might people invest in expensive exercise equipment and never use it? Is there anything that companies that sell such equipment do to avoid that seemingly all-too-human tendency?

2. Should brands demand information about how their products will be used, before agreeing to product placements in entertainment content?

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A Cinematic Cycle: Women In and At the Movies

John Jurgenson, "Do Women Still Want to Go to the Movies?" The Wall Street Journal, November 11, 2021

Use with Chapter 6, "Consumer Behavior," and Chapter 9 "Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning"

Movie theaters are open again, and big name, blockbuster, superhero movies are bringing in the crowds. But those crowds have a particular profile: young and male. Middle-aged and older women have not returned to the same extent as their counterparts, and the reasons why remain a topic for debate.

According to some assessments, women tend to be more cautious, so returning to theaters, despite COVID-19 vaccinations and enhanced protections, still is not a risk they are willing to take. But interviews with previous moviegoers do not really support that claim. Rather, female consumers express a common, collective sense of disinterest. Visiting the theater represents an effortful, expensive undertaking—and a ready substitute is available.

Streaming services have made it easier for most consumers to access entertainment content, soon after and sometimes even simultaneous with its big-screen release. For middle-aged women, the prospect of staying at home, in comfortable surroundings, with the snacks and drinks they have on hand, while paying less or nothing to see the same movie, appears to shift the balance of value notably toward at-home viewing.

This value equation in turn implies that, for some reason, young and male viewers find more value in going to the movies. What could that reason be? Some critics note that movie studios continue to churn out content that appeals to young men—loud, adventurous, violent fare—while ignoring the preferences of older and female audiences. Perhaps then, there are simply not enough titles that appeal to women to convince them to go back to the theater.

But perhaps the reasoning is less discriminatory in character. Older women tend to prefer character- and dialogue-driven films, which may not require the sort of big-screen presentations that strongly benefit the viewing of a blockbuster adventure movie. Thor might look a lot bigger on the big screen, and special effects can become a really awesome spectacle in high resolution formats. The romantic lead in a quiet drama instead probably can be appreciated just as much on the television screen at home.

Across these various possible reasons, the implications are similar. Women, especially those older than their mid-30s, used to account for nearly one-quarter of movie theater patrons. Today, that percentage is down below 15 percent. Movie studios and theaters thus need to determine the key factors driving these behaviors and try to resolve them, in their ongoing attempts to stay afloat in the COVID-19, digital streaming era.

Discussion Questions:

1. Which of the listed reasons seem most convincing to you, regarding why older women have not returned to theaters? Can you think of any others?
2. What kinds of promotional strategies could movie studios adopt to convince this cohort of consumers to come back? What about movie theaters?

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Tidbits

Updated Twitter Policies: No More Personal Pictures without Permission

Allison Prang and Deepa Seetharaman, "Twitter Bans Sharing of Private People's Photos, Videos without Consent," The Wall Street Journal, November 30, 2021

When it came to privacy, Twitter had what one privacy scholar called a "semi-truck–sized hole" in its standards: In most countries, users could post pictures of other individuals, without asking permission first. But that hole is being filled in, at least partially, by a new rule that forbids such posts. If a user wants to post a picture of someone, they need to get permission first, and if they fail to do so, the depicted person can report the post and have it removed. For some people, this protection offers a general sense of security and privacy; for others, including victims of harassment or doxxing attacks, it might offer a life-saving protection that keeps them from being harmed. But the new policy also is notably broad, leading some observers to suggest it is nearly impossible to enforce. Furthermore, it places the burden on the person whose privacy is violated to report the issue. It does not apply to large public events, such as if someone is videoed attending a rally. Nor do these rules apply to public figures or to posts that are in the public interest. Thus the new rule seems like a necessary minimum standard. But does it do enough to protect users' privacy?

Removing Intermediaries: Factory-to-Consumer Shipping Options

Matthew Stern, "Can a Factory-to-Consumer Experience Be a Quality One?" Retail Wire, December 30, 2021

There are many reasons to rely on intermediaries to get products from factories to consumers. But for a few innovative providers, today's marketplaces provide an ideal setting for eliminating those intermediaries and streamlining the process. In particular, companies such as Browze and Quinze claim that they can get products to consumers faster, cheaper, and more consistently than conventional supply chains. A key factor leading to this promise is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has complicated and stymied many supply chains. The new generation of factory-to-consumer providers rely on airmail shipping, with its relative speed and consistent costs, rather than sea freight, which tends to be slower and has been subjected to massively increasing costs. The direct shipping also reduces the amount of inventory in the supply chain. But along with these efficiency and cost considerations, the companies are determined to offer better customer service than traditionally has been available from manufacturers. For example, Browze applies stringent quality control reviews and allows for free returns. It also hosts a 24/7 customer support chat line and a self-service experience platform online. Even as these companies display the promise of the streamlined product distribution plan though, some others struggle, with consumers complaining that when they receive shipments directly from the factory, they often contain poorly constructed or incorrect merchandise, with few options for returning the items. Thus, even if a supply chain consists of fewer actors, it appears that consumers still demand the same value and services they would from an extended, multiparty chain.

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