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### Online Social Communities Through the Lens of Polyvore

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The Rochester Institute of Technology

Department of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

Online Social Communities Through the Lens of Polyvore

by

Maansi Aurora

*A thesis* submitted

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree

in Communication and Media Technologies

Degree Awarded:

June 17, 2014

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Literature Review.....	6
Changing Aspects of the Internet.....	6
Online Social Shopping Communities and Polyvore .....	7
Critical Visual Analysis and Social Identity.....	18
Hedonic Shopping Motivations .....	30
Polyvore and Its Users .....	32
Discussion.....	44
Conclusion .....	45
References.....	48

## ONLINE SOCIAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE LENS OF POLYVORE

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Department: Communication

College: Liberal Arts

Degree: Master of Science in Communication & Media Technologies

Term Degree Awarded: Summer Semester 2014 (2138)

Abstract

Traditionally, people used the Internet for simple interaction within the communication sphere. With the introduction of social media platforms the online world has become more interesting as consumers are using them to create, share, and discuss over the Internet. The growing popularity of the social online communities is bridging the gap between consumers and brands by providing them with a platform to communicate with each other. This study visually analyzes Polyvore, a social shopping online community. It sheds light upon how members use Polyvore in different ways, the hedonic motivations associated with shopping online, and the way in which an online community with a growing aspect of offline meetups is used by its members to make social connections.

*Keywords:* Internet, Polyvore, social online community, communication

### Online Social Communities Through the Lens of Polyvore

Polyvore is a social online community that has about 1.4 million users on their website. It is based on the concept on using visual elements and helping users to create collages by putting together different items called Polyvore “sets.” The visual platform also gives its users an opportunity to interact with each other via text-based communication. The users can comment, share, shop online, and perform different social media functions on Polyvore. Many studies have been conducted on Pinterest, which is based on the similar concept of visual communication. Polyvore, even though not as well known, is the upcoming website for people who love fashion and social media. Being a fashion aficionado and brand lover Polyvore is like a visual playground for me. It gives me a different platform to express my style through creating sets, to interact with other users, and to be a part of the online community. Since its emergence social media has been evolving and represents individual identity online. Polyvore, with its features and elements, sets the stage for the current scenario of not only social media but also fashion over the Internet.

While there have been some studies on social media and online shopping using Polyvore as an example, most of the research has been done on the functional use of the website. By studying activities of the Polyvore users I hope to shed some new light upon the process in which users utilize tools and customize the sets they create over the website. The first section will focus on talking about the way in which fashion is using social media to increase its online presence. The second section will use concepts such as critical visual analysis, social identity, and hedonic shopping motivations and link them to Polyvore. The last part of the thesis will study three Polyvore users (Niki, Amy, and Amber), who are unique set creators in their own way. The thesis will not be a detailed analysis about Polyvore and its website but instead it will study three

users to give a broader idea about fashion communities online. Polyvore is not just a fashion website; it ties together concepts of social media and online shopping that lead its users to gain a social identity over the Internet.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review will serve as a background for the further sections and the study. It will explore the structure of change in the communication sphere as a whole, specifically communication over the Internet. The emergence of social media and similar platforms has added the element of interactivity to online communication. Different brands are recognizing the rising potential of social media and using it in their favor to reach out and develop relationships with their consumers. The section will also shed light upon social shopping online communities and the way Polyvore fits into that category.

### **Changing Aspects of the Internet**

Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011) define social media as “employ[ing] mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content” (p. 241). People in the online world use a mix of technology and software to connect with others around the world. Social networking in the Web 2.0 is not limited by space or time and allows its users to customize profiles to communicate with individuals on a large scale. The Web 2.0 platform is based on the experience of interaction and sharing of knowledge with others (Gunawardena et al., 2009).

Traditional one-sided communication has evolved over time into interactive communication to develop and maintain relationships among brands and its consumers. Originally, social media was thought to negatively affect the image of the brand in the eyes of

the consumers and fashion brands were hesitant to adopt it (Kim & Ko, 2012). Eventually, fashion brands realized the potential and power of using social media to network and involve consumers in the development of the brand's online community. Online communities can be in the form of blogs or forums that help users store and share content such as photos, videos, podcasts, and other media among each other. The potential of social media is vast because this online platform is not limited by geography and is based on the special relation between brands and its users (Kim & Ko, 2012). Fashion brands can set up their network on a social networking site to facilitate communication. The communication in online brand communities is not limited between brands and consumers but gives consumers an opportunity to communicate among themselves. Burberry was the first luxury fashion brand before Gucci and Louis Vuitton to harvest the potential of the social media and establish itself over the online platform. Designer labels such as Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Donna Karan, and many others are using social media such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and iPhone apps to interact with the consumers over the web (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Drummond (2010) found that there has been a shift in the trendsetters of the fashion industry from the fashion designers to the consumers of fashion. People have gained knowledge and experience by operating within the online fashion community. The fashion brands are deriving their inspiration for future fashion trends by using these consumer bases. Due to technological advances user engagement via social media is becoming an important platform for brands to communicate with their consumers (Drummond, 2010).

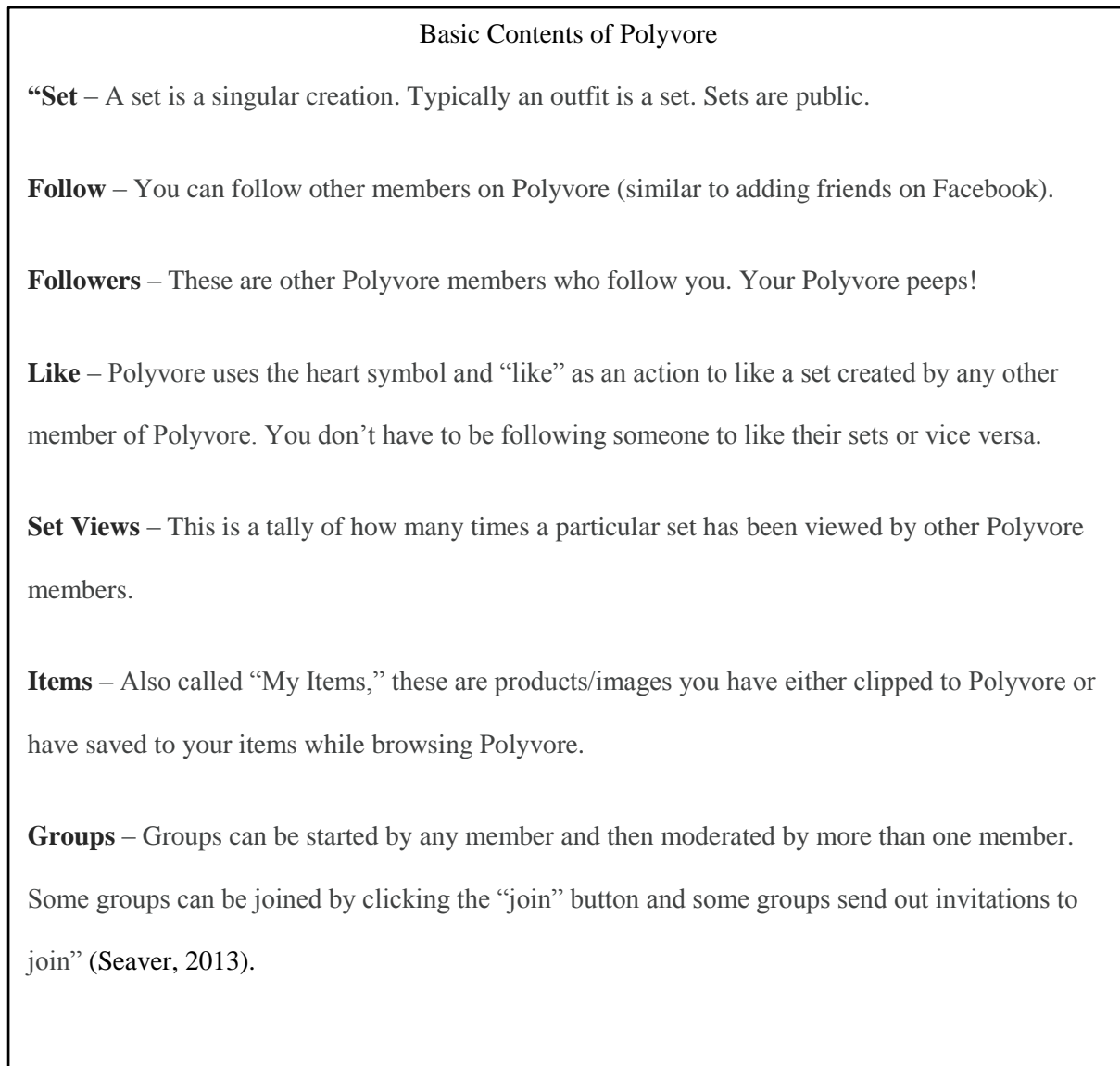
### **Online Social Shopping Communities and Polyvore**

In a *New York Times* article journalist Claire Miller (2010) describes Polyvore as being a “user generated fashion magazine full of user generated ads.” There are approximately 30,000



sets a day created by the members of Polyvore. A set is a compilation of different items such as clothing, shoes and accessories, and others created as a collage over Polyvore by its users. The new era of shopping online is based on the engagement model. Its sole purpose is to interact with the consumer directly and get them involved. Various brands such as Coach and Burberry use Polyvore to advertise their products. They engage consumers to create sets using their products in contests to add the fun and social element and enhance the experience of online shopping (Miller, 2010).

Registered users have the opportunity to make use of user-generated features such as ratings, styles, and others on social shopping websites. The members of Polyvore, a social shopping channel (SSC), create personal collages known as sets on the website (Olbrich & Holsing, 2011). These styles are used by various brands to run contests over the website. The contests help the brands and members to connect and communicate with each other, and also add to the brand awareness. The main focus of social shopping websites is to develop a relationship between its members and promote shopping with each other in an online community. In their study Olbrich and Holsing (2011) define a SSC as a “virtual community of consumption,” which is a community that centers consumption-related interests. Thus, the existence of a community could be regarded as a core element of social shopping” (p. 9). The basic motivation for people to join and be part of online communities such as Polyvore lies in the satisfaction derived by a need for shopping (Olbrich & Holsing, 2011). Bill Seaver (2013) over Micro Explosion Media defined the basic contents of Polyvore (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1:* Basic contents of Polyvore as defined by Bill Seaver, Micro Explosion Media, 2013.

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) in their study have defined communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). The three basic elements that form a part of the communities of practice are domain, community, and practice, which are applicable to social websites. Polyvore, being an online social shopping community, works well within the principle of communities of practice.

Polyvore is a platform (domain) for its members to interact and discuss fashion while creating community built around shared interests. This in turn promotes learning (practice element) by members imparting their knowledge within the online community.

Purdy, Robinson, and Wei (2012) found that Polyvore forms a part of the demand forum. The new dimension of business operating as per innovative technologies backed by social media and open communication gives way to the open-firm concept of the study. Consumers actively participating in the production process are narrowing the gap between the brands, its producers, and the consumers. Three models of the open firm are proposed within the study based on their functionality. A demand forum is an exchange prototype between sellers and buyers based on mutual benefit. The website allows its users to create digital collages of clothes and accessories and actively engage with the all the different brands using Polyvore. This gives the brands a chance to communicate with fashion consumers and get ideas about their intentions (Purdy, Robinson, & Wei, 2012).

The tagline "Discover, shop and express your style" is appropriate for the website based on its functionality. The two options for sign up consist of email or Facebook. Explore leads the user to choose from everything, fashion, beauty, home, or top sets which is also available below. The following button is to view your followers. You can shop on the website by choosing categories that are given by shop. To make a set of Polyvore the create option can be used and it takes you to another page on which tools for designing are available. The search box can be used to search anything over Polyvore or narrow the search using categories. If a user clicks on any icons such as the shirt, shorts, or bag that are displayed in blue, or in that area, they are directed to sign up using Facebook (see Figure 2).

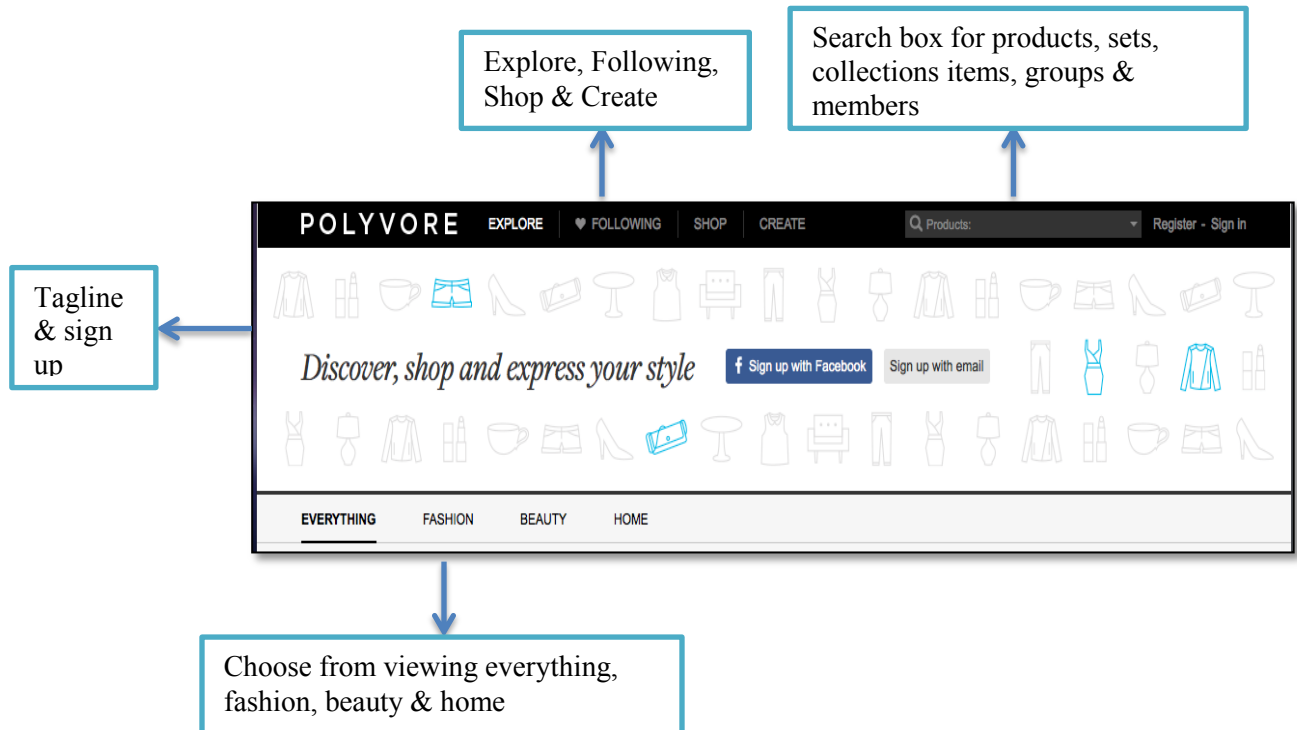


Figure 2: Polyvore homepage.

Blogs and blogging are the new dimensions of the computer-mediated communication that is growing with increasing popularity over the Internet. Pham (2011) finds that there are differences between fashion and style blogs but they do overlap. Style blogs are more textual whereas fashion blogs are based more on images, making them visual. The study of fashion themed blogs has shown that now fashion is accessible to ordinary people via the online platform. Bloggers provide for marketing and publicity of fashion brands by using items over the blog. The new trend of citizen journalism has given many bloggers a platform of fame where they have received invites for fashion shows, job offers in magazines, and merchandise from brands (Pham, 2011). Polyvore falls into the category of being a fashion blog since it is more visual than textual. Users of Polyvore are clipping and linking images of branded items from different websites and using them in sets.

Olbrich and Holsing (2011) study the business model of social shopping communities and use Polyvore as an example. Social shopping communities are a mix of both worlds: online shopping and social networking. Users of Polyvore can share, comment, tag, and purchase products online with links that are used on the collage sets. Social shopping is a development of an online community that plays the role of both connecting consumers by communication and shopping. The users of Polyvore can benefit from various features such as recommendation lists, ratings, tags, and interaction with other users within the community (Olbrich and Holsing, 2011).

Fred Cavazza (see Figure 3) has classified the different websites and created a social media landscape based on their role in the online community (Arca, 2012). In this landscape Polyvore belongs under the commerce category, which is based on purchase and sharing among its members. Different brands can use different social media outlets to advertise their products and communicate with their customers to fulfill their needs in a better way (Arca, 2012).

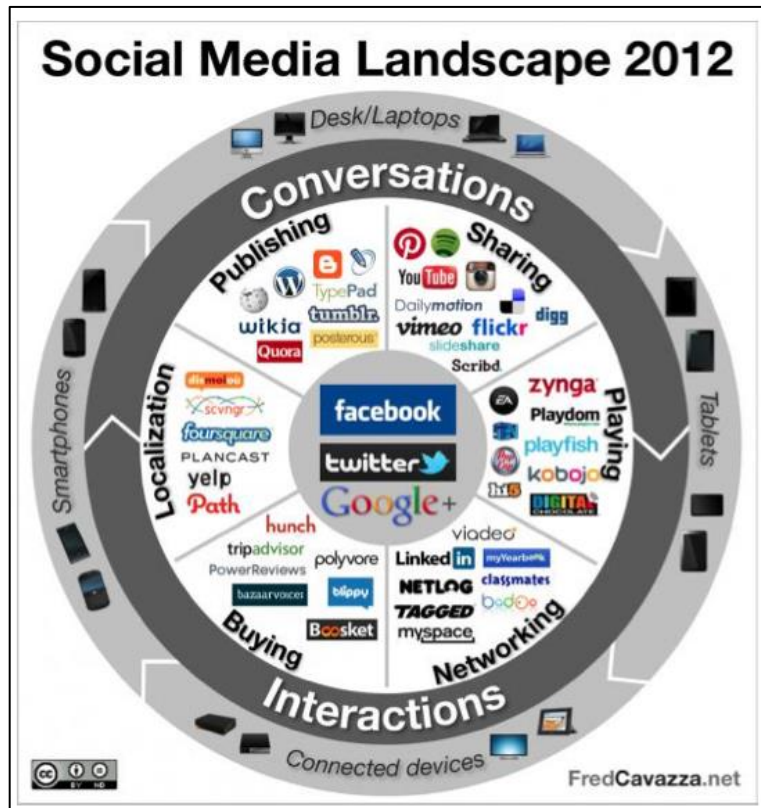


Figure 3: Social media landscape classification model by Fred Cavazza, 2012.

Polyvore Intelligence Report (2012) states that 72% of the users of the website are women out of which the majority (49%) fall under the group of 19-34 years of age and the rest (15%) of the users are between 35 to 44 years of age. The major social distribution through the website is directed towards Pinterest which shares similar characteristics with Polyvore in terms of visual creativity and use of social media.

Table 1

*Comparison of the Top Five Social Media Websites*

Social Media Website by rank	Advantages	Disadvantages	Managerial Implications
1. Facebook (Social networking)	Communication Sharing	Privacy & Security	The advertisements and campaigns are for the sole purpose of communication and sharing, no shopping motives
2. Twitter (Micro blogging)	Mass audience reach Direct connection with all followers	Busy website More text based than visual Limit to character space	Its main focus is on developing conversation along with sharing news and views on worldwide topics
3. Pinterest (Bookmarking)	More visual than text based Access to items in the collage with website links for purchase	Potential privacy concerns Images used on the website Copyright issues	Creation of digital boards to participate/ collaborate user thoughts and ideas, added benefit of shopping the items on the digital boards
4. Instagram (Photo sharing)	Visual since it's based solely on pictures and videos, text is limited to photo caption and comments Communication and sharing Cross media links	Privacy issues Overuse of hash tags	Sharing experiences through pictures, in its developing stage to be used as an application for shopping
5. Polyvore (Online social community/ shopping)	Communication with people of similar interest Set creation, sharing, liking, recommendation lists Direct link to websites of items posted in sets, drives site traffic	Main topics of sets revolve around the themes of fashion, beauty, and home	Creation of digital scrapbooks that facilitate sharing and shopping. Based on the goal of you can buy what you create

The top five social media websites, each dominating the online social world in their own way, have their own pros and cons (see Table 1). Facebook, ranked number one on the list, is being used by billions of people for communicating and sharing pictures, videos, stories, statuses, and much more. Even though there have been certain privacy and security concerns with using Facebook people still continue to use the website. The various features of Facebook help it in defining the role of social networking over the Internet. Twitter, the second largest social website, is mainly used by people for micro blogging. It has a wide audience reach and establishes direct connection between followers. This helps establish a social relationship in an online community and gain information from the mass. News, food, fashion, community, celebrities, world current affairs, and many other topics are discussed on this forum which helps the users gain knowledge about various areas from just one website. Twitter is more text based than visual and limits its tweets to 140 character spaces. There are around 200 million tweets per day making it a very busy social micro blogging website. Instagram, used for photo and video sharing, is another one of the top ranking websites over the Internet. It is more visual than text based and helps connect people with similar tastes in different areas of life to follow and comment on each other's posts. Instagram has led to the over usage of hash tags. A hash tag, written as "#," is used with an image/video by writing words or phrases that define it. When a user clicks on a certain hash tag he can see similar items or photos uploaded by people all around the world; that leads to privacy concerns over Instagram.

Pinterest and Polyvore are similar and different from each other at the same time. The similarity between the two is based on set creation, which makes the websites more visual with a lesser emphasis on text. Users of both websites can access items pinned or used in a set as direct links are provided on the items. This adds to the social shopping dimension for Pinterest and



Polyvore. Pinterest users can pin items from all around the Internet across various genres.

Polyvore is like a subset of Pinterest that allows its users to create sets in the categories of fashion, beauty, and home only. This feature makes Polyvore a niche community helping users of similar interests to establish a relationship. Pinterest faces issue with image copyright since users can take any image from the Internet to pin it to their board.

The most attractive feature that makes these websites the top five ranking websites across the Internet is cross media links. Facebook is the only platform among the top five social websites that does not provide its users with cross media links. Users of Facebook can only share a video, image, or story with another user of Facebook but not on any other website. People can share images, news, stories, and videos over Facebook through other online websites. The cross media links feature on Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and Polyvore allows its users to share their posts across all media including Facebook. People can like and comment on shared posts that establish a connection between users.

The fashion landscape has transformed from being a magazine driven structure to an online one with the virtual presence of brands. According to a Blackbook (2010) article, Polyvore has gained popularity among brands and designers because of the amount of users and traffic it generates towards other websites. Brands such as Coach have conducted contests on Polyvore and have received a great response from its users in the form of style sets. It has become a platform for designers and brands to communicate directly with their consumers and gain knowledge about their likes and preferences. Polyvore also helps people in the fashion world to get information about popular items and predict future trends (Blackbook, 2010).

In their study, McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips (2013) found fashion bloggers appeal to their audiences by using their posts as a “megaphone” of sorts to establish their influencer status.

The online world has made it easy to disseminate information and interact over the Internet with people across the world. Blogs form an important part of that category of online media and consumption. The difference between other blogs and fashion blogs is that blogs about fashion are based more on visual material than text (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2013). Blogs created by ordinary consumers are reaching out to a mass audience standing true to the megaphone effect. The authors of this study have used Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and applied it to fashion bloggers. The success of a fashion blogger is to create a community online, gain an audience, and maintain it. Fashion bloggers take risks and make an effort to get out of their comfort zone while posting things over their blog. This quality and leadership in fashion taste helps them develop cultural capital overtime. They create a social platform defined by interactivity and achieve a position within that online community (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2013).

The authors found that Polyvore overcomes the issue of ordinary people who cannot afford vintage and expensive clothing. Polyvore has links attached to the items displayed in sets that users can easily access and purchase over the Internet (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2013). The bloggers on Polyvore link various items from different brands and create sets over the website. This makes it a visual fashion medium with limited text that is in the form of set titles or comments from other users. People post personal things on other social media websites by creating sets and interacting through contests and comments. Polyvore gives itself an edge of differentiation over other social websites (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2013). Polyvore as a website shares the functionality of a blog. Users of Polyvore create and share sets with the audience, which is in the form of followers. Creativity and interaction with other users is an important aspect to develop a strong base for themselves over Polyvore. The online community

serves as a means to meet the needs of fashion consumers by providing them with an outlet to receive feedback from like-minded consumers about their set creations.

### **Critical Visual Analysis and Social Identity**

Schroeder (2006) states:

Marketing often relies on strong visual identity. Products and services are promoted via images, corporate image commands increasing attention, and images of identity pulse through marketing communication, consumer households, and mass media. Many battles of the brands take place in the visual domain. Furthermore, the Web mandates visualizing almost every aspect of corporate strategy, operations, and communication, bringing visual issues into the mainstream of strategic thinking, and spurring research and thinking about perception and preference of visual displays. (p. 303)

Visual elements form a very important part of a brand's communication model over the web. All brands use images to establish an identity and attract consumers. A study of these visual elements used over the web provides for an explanation about consumer preferences and perceptions. Analysis in terms of description about the sets made by users of Polyvore will help understand the website's functionality.

Visuals are a crucial component of the fashion world; Polyvore is the best example of utilizing visuals to communicate with people over the Internet. The items used in sets created by its users promote fashion brands and its products. The mix and match of different brands in one set with various items gives Polyvore its cutting edge of differentiation when compared to other websites. The links people use of other items help users to shop online and also form a social community based on sharing, liking, and commenting on other sets.

The social media platform has transformed the society into a digital one in which people

are creating and maintaining online identities. Social media has given the society an opportunity to connect with people around the globe by sharing pictures, videos, information, and much more. Online communities with shared interests are another aspect of social media communication (Davila, 2013). These communities help people create more than just a personal identity and develop relationships among other members of the group. Like Polyvore, Pinterest is another social media website mainly based on a visual medium. The basic functionality of the website is for its users to share pictures and comment on other users' activities. The difference between Pinterest and others is that social media websites help people communicate with text and develop relationships with each other (Davila, 2013).

Polyvore is an online social community performing the three basic functions of creating, exploring, and shopping (see Figure 4). Members of Polyvore can explore the entire website for new trends, clothes, designs, and much more. All the items used over the site are linked to its source and this helps members to find clothes, accessories, and other things that they like and would like to purchase over the web (Feldstein & Wilson, 2010). The creation part of Polyvore gives its members an opportunity to create collages with different items available on the site and calls them "sets." The website is a pure visual medium but users title their sets, interact with other set creators, comment, and share sets, and this adds to the verbal aspect of Polyvore (Feldstein & Wilson, 2010).

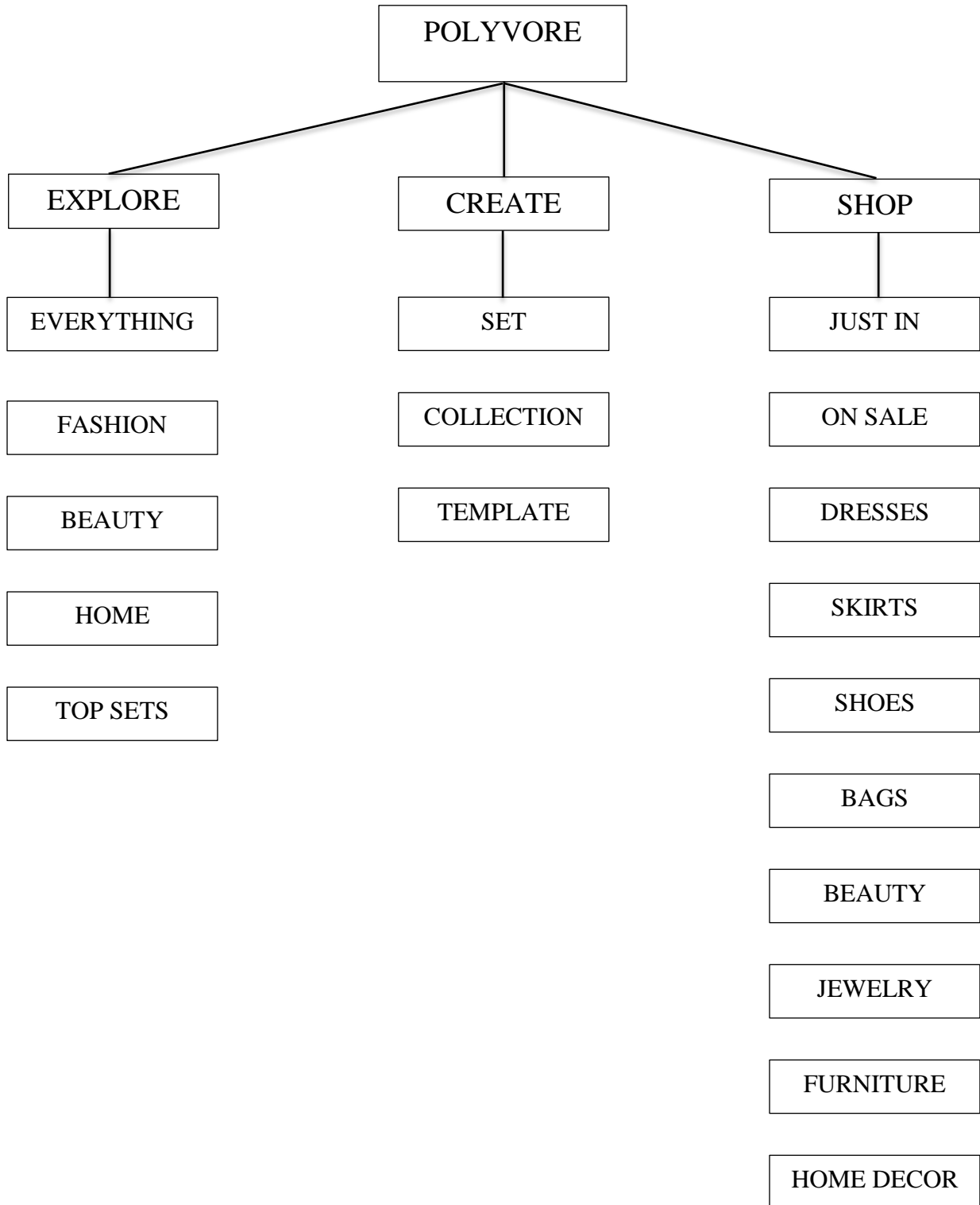


Figure 4: Flowchart of Polyvore showing three basic functions with its options.

Polyvore has 1.4 million registered users consisting of both fashion set creators and amateur stylists that share their collages over other social networking sites. Co-founder Pasha Sadri said “When you put on clothes, you are making that sort of assembly from pieces that you have—this is the Lego analogy—and it’s highly integrated with your identity” (Jacob, 2010). His inspiration for Polyvore was derived from his former years of playing Lego as a child. The website lets you design a virtual wardrobe by putting different pieces together and these clothes form a part of your online identity as a user. Polyvore is based on the use of visual elements since the human brain processes images faster than text (Jacob, 2010).

Papacharissi (2002), in his study of personal home pages, found that people reveal limited details about themselves in the form of text and make more use of non-verbal cues. People attach links of other websites onto their homepage that can be looked upon as social association. These website links portray the person’s individual interests. The text, color, font, and space used online present some aspect associated with an individual’s identity. Feedback, which is a crucial part of the online forum, displays the need for interpersonal communication and approval by society (Papacharissi, 2002). Polyvore shares some characteristics similar to a personal homepage of an individual in the online world. Users such as Amber have their personal blog links attached to their profile on Polyvore. Amber and Amy have groups that they have created on the website and maintain communication with its members through various contests. Amy, Amber, and Niki display unique identity characteristics with creating different sets by using elements on Polyvore.

Many individuals use the Internet to express themselves and create an identity in online communities that coincides with their personal interests. Santilli (2010), who studies fan behavior of an individual on a particular fan page, found that “Identity is a complex social

construction produced and maintained by a subject's position within their culture and society. Individuals therefore possess the capacity for multiple identities" (p. 40). Young women are constantly looking for different outlets to form and maintain online identities. The new age of the Internet has given them a platform to communicate and network with the use of their online alternative identities.

Young women, especially bloggers, use the online platform to express and share their personal identity. People use the virtual forum as a scrapbook or their personal diary, which is available not only to the known people but reaches out to a wider audience (Stefanic, 2010). The digital creation of sets on Polyvore feeds the users' desires to become fashion stylists. The users on Polyvore have a limitation only of the number of items that can be used in a set, but are free to create anything else to express themselves over the website. The sets display their fashion sense with no boundaries of budget. The greater the number of likes, comments, and shares on a set determines the value of an individual's profile and fame on Polyvore. Many users can use this online community bound by fashion to satisfy the identity and consumption needs (Stefanic, 2010).

Polyvore's Vice-President of product management, Jess Lee, considers the users' preferences over the website as its prized possession. The way in which people use sets and match items is the data that can be valuable not only to the company but also to brands being published on Polyvore (Jacobs, 2010). Lee says "Our mission is to democratize fashion, to empower people on the street to think about their sense of style and share it with the world" (p. 3).

The current state of fashion magazines is in chaos, but Polyvore on the other hand is a community defined by mutual liking and sharing of users' sets. To study the process of set

making, Polyvore invited a user of the website, Gail Helmer, whose profile name is MyChanel (see Figure 5), to Polyvore (Jacobs, 2010). She was chosen because she is famous for her sets, has many followers, and also is a part of the top members list.

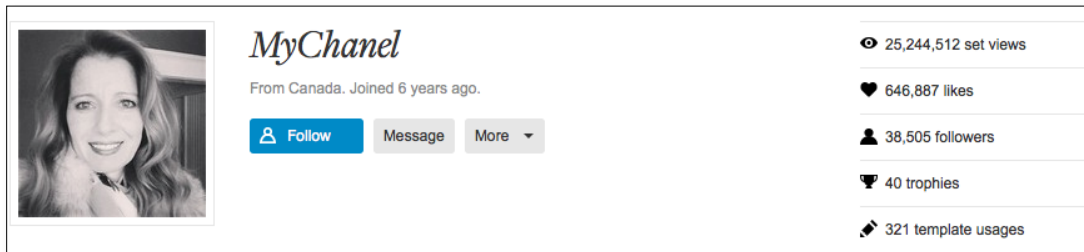


Figure 5: MyChanel (Gail Helmer) profile on Polyvore.

Different users on Polyvore use various ways to place items in a set such as an overlap or a mosaic. This particular user uses a magazine layout (see Figure 6) to create all her sets (Jacobs, 2010).

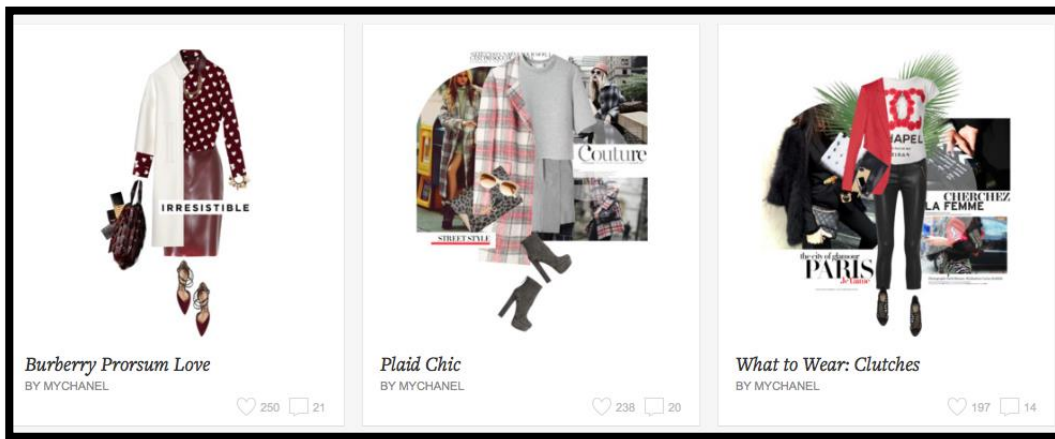


Figure 6: MyChanel (Gail Helmer) sets using magazine layout format.

The section later in the study will focus on reviewing sets of three users of Polyvore (Niki, Amy, and Amber), and will display the different styles used to place items within a set. Polyvore as a website is placing the power of fashion and style creation into the hands of ordinary people. This experience of using Polyvore will enhance interactivity over online



platforms, help consumers explore items and brands, and also represent themselves over this platform through set creation.

Knott and Molesworth (2010) in their study of digital virtual consumption (DVC) refer to the digital platform as a liminal zone based on imagination and material things. They study many digital platforms that offer the virtual experiences of consumption to its users. Users of these websites browse through items for free similar to window-shopping and derive the feeling of consumption without making an actual purchase (Knott & Molesworth, 2010). The digital world in some way increases the consumers' desire to purchase material goods to fulfill their needs. The virtual world offers the consumers an opportunity to fulfill their material desires without actual consumption. People create a virtual profile online which reflects their imagination and personal ideals (Knott & Molesworth, 2010). Polyvore offers this platform to its users in the form of an online social shopping website. People can create sets and looks that they may or may not buy in real life but derive the satisfaction of consumption through creation. It's like an online catalogue of fashion brands with various trends, styles, and other things that require consumer involvement.

The team at Polyvore has a column over the website dedicated towards displaying the latest trends in fashion (see Figure 7). The column is a daily update on new trends in the fashion world and appears on the homepage of Polyvore. Members and visitors of the website can view various items by selecting a particular top trend from the column. Polyvore displays all the products available to shop in relation to the trend and the search can be refined on the basis of search by price, color, brand, and store.

<i>Sunday 16 February 2014</i>	<i>Monday 17 February 2014</i>	<i>Tuesday 18 February 2014</i>	<i>Wednesday 19 February 2014</i>
<p><b>Trends</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breton Shirts</li> <li>Pointed-Toe Pumps</li> <li>Neoprene Skirts</li> <li>Collarless Jackets</li> <li>Color Block Handbags</li> <li>Cropped Shirts</li> <li>Navy Lace Dresses</li> <li>Neon Green Shoes</li> <li>Multi-Strand Necklaces</li> <li>Cat Eye Glasses</li> </ul>	<p><b>Trends</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Turtleneck Crop Tops</li> <li>Laser-Cut Handbags</li> <li>Quilted Pants</li> <li>Logo Earrings</li> <li>Card Holder Wallets</li> <li>Beret Hats</li> <li>Strapless Dresses</li> <li>Pointed-Toe Flats</li> <li>Red Handbags</li> <li>Hooded Leather Jackets</li> </ul>	<p><b>Trends</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ombre Dresses</li> <li>Orange Heels</li> <li>Palazzo Pants</li> <li>Bib Necklaces</li> <li>Khaki Parkas</li> <li>Spike Bracelets</li> <li>Suede Backpacks</li> <li>Cable Knit Dresses</li> <li>Metal-Frame Sunglasses</li> <li>Tassel Bags</li> </ul>	<p><b>Trends</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pastel Dresses</li> <li>Clover Earrings</li> <li>Shimmer Blush</li> <li>Leopard Print Jeans</li> <li>Blue Lace Dresses</li> <li>Neon Jewelry</li> <li><a href="#">Block-Heel Pumps</a></li> <li>Quilted Skirts</li> <li>Heart Rings</li> <li>Studded Loafers</li> </ul>
<i>Thursday 20 February 2014</i>	<i>Friday 21 February 2014</i>	<i>Saturday 22 February 2014</i>	<i>Sunday 23 February 2014</i>
<p><b>Trends</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sweetheart Neckline Dresses</li> <li>Spike Bracelets</li> <li>Anchor Shirts</li> <li>Quilted Leather Jackets</li> <li>Diamond Flower Earrings</li> <li>Red Clutches</li> <li>White Biker Jackets</li> <li>Baroque Pearl Jewelry</li> <li><b>18 Colorful Sports Bras</b></li> <li>Skater Dresses</li> </ul>	<p><b>Trends</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Neon Tops</li> <li>Laser-Cut Dresses</li> <li>Punk Jewelry</li> <li>Yellow Heels</li> <li>Black Tutu Skirts</li> <li>Unisex Watches</li> <li>Midi Bodycon Dresses</li> <li>Peep-Toe Booties</li> <li>Rose Gold Necklaces</li> <li>Bow Hair Accessories</li> </ul> <p><b>Contests »</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blooming Brilliance</li> </ul>	<p><b>Trends</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Midi Bodycon Dresses</li> <li>Dragonfly Jewelry</li> <li>Black and White Shoes</li> <li>High-Waisted Jeans</li> <li>Spike Bracelets</li> <li>Flared Skirts</li> <li>Leopard Print Cardigans</li> <li>Neon Jewelry</li> <li>Silk Shirt Dresses</li> <li>Suede Pumps</li> </ul> <p><b>Contests »</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blooming Brilliance</li> </ul>	<p><b>Trends</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sparkly Dresses</li> <li>Green Blazers</li> <li>Studded Loafers</li> <li>Box-Pleat Skirts</li> <li>Graphic Tees</li> <li>Retro Swimwear</li> <li>Heart Rings</li> <li>Mary Jane Pumps</li> <li>Floral Shirts</li> <li>Tortoise Shell Necklaces</li> </ul> <p><b>Contests »</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blooming Brilliance</li> </ul>

Figure 7: Polyvore trend chart 02/16/2014- 02/23/2014.

In addition to the trends column, Polyvore hosts a tab for all the contests it runs over the website. The contests displayed on the homepage are the ones run by the Polyvore team or the brands that sponsor their products. The members can create their own contests, too, to remain active and engage other members over the website. The users can publicize these member specific contests as a description along with their sets or over their profile. Other brands having contests for Polyvore members can be written about or shared over profiles by members. Amber is the best example of publicizing her own and other brand contests over her Polyvore profile. This helps other members to participate in the contest and to develop a connection with the

brand. The contest activity creates engagement among members and adds to the social sharing dimension of Polyvore.

Polyvore introduced the new Clipper update for its iPhone and iPad application users on Friday 21 February 2014 (see Figure 8). The announcement of the update was featured on the website's homepage. Members of Polyvore showed immense appreciation in the form of comments and likes for this new update. The desktop version of the Clipper allows the users to collect and save items they wish to use in their sets from the Internet. This concept is similar to Pinterest in which users can bookmark items, stories, and more, and pin it to their boards. The iPhone application limited the users' access to the Polyvore library and items already clipped in sets through the desktop. The new Clipper update solved this user problem and allows them to access all items over the web to use in creating sets on Polyvore. Polyvore works over the desktop and has an application for the iPhone and iPad but an Android version of it is yet unavailable. Many of the user comments to this Clipper update revolved around requesting the Polyvore team to create an Android version of the website for easy access over their phones.

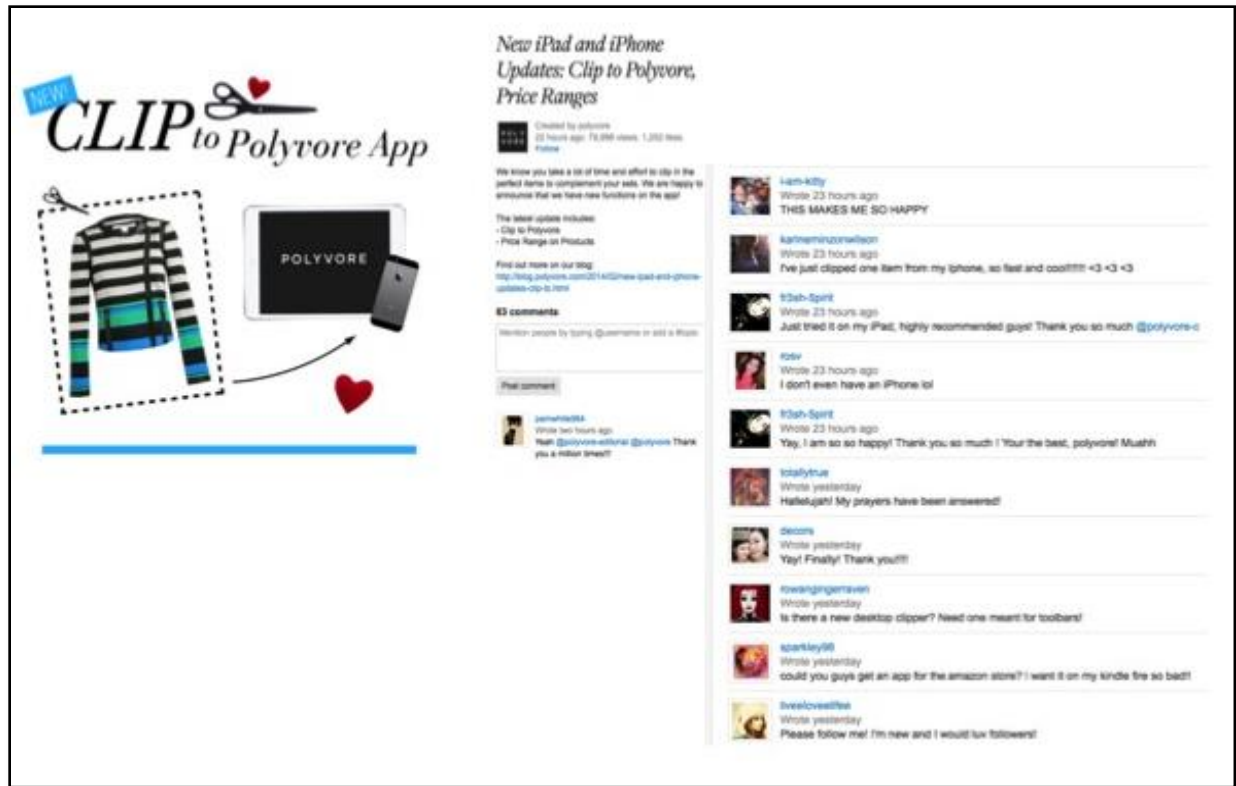


Figure 8: Polyvore announcement of new Clipper updates for its iPhone and iPad application users.

The goal of the study conducted by Sessions (2010) is to display a relationship between offline social gatherings and its effect on the users of online communities that attend such meetups. There were four hypotheses that were used in the study based on meetup attendees' participation and level of activity towards the website. People meeting face-to-face that are a part of the virtual world adds to their social capital. There was a direct correlation between attendees being more active and posting more over the website than non-attendees (Sessions, 2010). It was also found that people attending meetups are more connected to the website and develop better, stronger relationships with other members. The people attending the meetup were less likely to leave the website but the level of activity after the offline gathering was not affected by it (Sessions, 2010). Polyvore offers its users the opportunity to organize an offline gathering that will help them strengthen their online relationships with other users.

Piper (2012) finds that,

Following the popularity of online social-networking sites (SNS) like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, in recent years a hybrid online/offline community model has emerged.

Previously identified by the term electronic-to-face (e2f) communities, they are online communities developed with the purpose of facilitating offline interaction. (p. 1)

Piper created a prototype website called “Mix it Up” with an environment that facilitates member participation in offline gatherings through interaction online (Piper, 2012). The goal of Mix it Up was to fulfill the needs of its members and provide social benefits which are the two important characteristics of an online-offline community. The members build a strong sense of community over time by constant interaction with other users over common topics of interest (Piper, 2012). Polyvore is aiming to create the same sense of community among its members by giving them a platform to facilitate offline gatherings. The users of Polyvore can meet in offline environments to discuss shared interests and have discussions over fashion, beauty, and home.

Polyvore Meetups is a concept that was established by Polyvore in August 2013 (see Figure 9). It is based on the idea of expanding online relationships and converting them into real life experiences. People over the website share their love for fashion, beauty, and home through set creations. Polyvore gives these members an opportunity to meet other users outside the online platform. Users that wish to organize a meetup can decide upon the time, date, and location and email the Polyvore team for a confirmation. Polyvore not only helps the users to promote their meetup but also sponsors a meetup package for the event. Users are encouraged to email pictures of the meetup to Polyvore by using a “#Polyvoremeetup” hashtag. Polyvore uploads these meetup pictures to different social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. This feature helps users to develop a real world relationship and create a community to discuss shared

interests.



*Figure 9: Polyvore Meetups description/invitation.*

Meyers (2013) in her book views gossip blogs as an outlet for people to participate in conversations that revolve around the lives of celebrities over the Internet. The comments section of the blog is vital to develop a connection between users. It helps users interact and creates a base for future community development. Blog readers have developed offline communities/meetups in addition to online interaction (Meyers, 2013). The comments section on Polyvore works along similar lines as the gossip blog with the main aim to promote interactivity between members. Offline interactions not only strengthen ties between people but Meyers added a new dimension to it. The knowledge and information that participants gained from online blogs can be used as conversations between people in an offline environment (Meyers, 2013).

Shen and Cage (2013) studied the meetups and its relationship to community participation and social capital. They studied a website involving users of an online community

sharing the common interest of science fiction. Summing up their research they found out that people join online communities which they find interesting and share common interests. The online community gives them the opportunity to search for friends and strengthen their relationship with them (Shen & Cage, 2013). Meetups or face-to-face gatherings perform the work of a catalyst in this process. They help people to connect and develop ties with each other and transform it from the online to the offline world. The downside of offline gatherings was found to be in developing smaller social groups of the meetup attendees, which would make it difficult for new members to join the community (Shen & Cage, 2013).

### **Hedonic Shopping Motivations**

Even before the Internet came into existence and the Web 2.0 developed technologies to create online social communities such as Polyvore, Tauber (1972) identified social motives of shopping related to the structure of traditional marketplace. Tauber (1972), in his study of motivations for people to shop, hypothesized shopping motivations that are easily applicable to the online world. The first social motivation to shop is related with gaining new experiences outside the comfort zone of one's own household. Shopping in the outside environment can provide people with an opportunity to interact and meet new people. The online world is based on a similar structure even though shopping can be done from one's own house. The people using social shopping communities such as Polyvore can meet new people over the web and develop relationships (Tauber, 1972).

The second motivation lies in communicating with other people sharing the same interest. Stores in the traditional marketplace are the central point of people sharing the same hobbies to interact and form associations with each other (Tauber, 1972). Polyvore's base model

runs on similar lines by providing a platform to its users for interaction via comments, likes, and creating sets that are related to shared interests.

Lastly, the social motivation to shop is to create an association and derive the sense of belonging to a reference group. People interested in the fashion, beauty, or home genre can become a part of Polyvore (Tauber, 1972). The website helps its users to create sets displaying personal style, follow other users whose styles they admire, and discover the latest trends. Polyvore is therefore like a reference group for some people that they look up to. The interaction among members helps them develop a sense of community towards Polyvore (Tauber, 1972).

Arnold and Reynolds's (2003) social shopping category of hedonic motivations is developed on Tauber's (1972) social motivations of shopping along with other prior research. In their study social shopping is a category in which people experience the feeling of enjoyment along with interaction and creating associations with other people (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003).

Babin, Dardin, and Griffin (1994) divide shopping into two categories on the basis of value into utilitarian and hedonic shopping. In their study hedonic shopping is "related more to spontaneous hedonic responses that capture a basic duality of rewards for much human behavior" (p. 645). The study distinguishes "shopping with a goal" from "shopping as a goal" based on the entertainment value involved in the process. The shopping experience in itself can be an assessment of fun and entertainment since the goal intended does not lie in product purchase. At the same time some utilitarian value might be involved as the person shopping could satisfy the task of uplifting his mood via the process (Babin, Dardin, & Griffin, 1994). Polyvore feeds the hedonic shopping values of its members. The users of the website mainly use Polyvore as a means to create sets and browse fashion which converts into an online community bound by social shopping. Polyvore serves as a platform for instant gratification to its users by



providing them with links to products that lead to immediate purchases. The end goal reflected lies in enjoyment and fun that is fulfilled by the process of shopping online.

Wolfenbarger and Gilly (2001) find that the amount of money spent while shopping online can help distinguish it between “goal-oriented”/utilitarian and/or experiential shopping. The experiential shopping is basically directed towards people that possess a hobby in a certain product/service or brand. The shopping experience is not just bound by the possession of an item but instead in the excitement of the process of procurement. The motivation to shop and more time availability increases the desire to shop. As compared to utilitarian shopping the pleasure associated with experiential shopping results in more satisfaction and instant purchasing (Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2001). Polyvore is more aimed towards experiential shopping than goal oriented purchases. Polyvore users do not browse the website with an intention to shop for a specific product. Instead the browsing activity of created sets with various items leads and motivates them to experience an urge to shop online. The members of Polyvore share a hobby to create and publish sets that are motivated by their love for fashion. Shopping for an item on Polyvore is like a fun-filled adventure in which users can compare, select, and choose what they wish to buy without the constraints of time.

### **Polyvore and Its Users**

In this section, three Polyvore users (Niki, Amy, and Amber) will be profiled in detail in order to reveal how the website works for its users. Each user profile will be reviewed on the basis of their Polyvore profile featuring set created, number of followers, top sets, and a detailed analysis of their one week activity over the website. Polyvore is similar to a digital magazine enabled by ease of use as it provides direct links to the displayed items for users to shop. The layout is simple with a lot of white space that gives the background an uncluttered look. The line

“Discover, shop and express your style” written on the top left corner of the site sums up the entire experience of Polyvore in three adjectives. The logo of the website is simple, just using the name “Polyvore” in a unique font. The white logo stands out against the black strip used as the background. The three major categories home, beauty, and fashion entail all the sets created on Polyvore. The little icons of shoes, bags, clothes, and other elements on the top of the homepage of Polyvore signify fashion, beauty, and home items. Some of the famous sets and Polyvore editorials/daily posts are displayed on the homepage. Users and visitors both can browse the current trends and contests that are taking place on it.

In some way the information value of the left and right can be applied to the way in which Polyvore is structured. The sets created and editorial posts, even though new, are featured on the left side of the page signifying given information. The new information that is available to users about current trends and contests is placed on the right side of the page since it’s a trending topic over the website. Every set on Polyvore is presented as a separate unit of information that signifies a higher frame value. Even though Polyvore has a lot to offer the web page is simple to navigate through. It takes some time and usage for an individual to get accustomed to making use of Polyvore efficiently and effectively.

Niki is a student from Slovak Republic and joined Polyvore about a year ago (see Figure 10). When she started off all her sets were titled “outfit” with sometimes a word describing what kind of outfit it was. After eight months she began titling her sets with quotes or lines. The words in her title correspond to some element that she used in her collage. For example, the title of one of her sets is “Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass, it's about learning to dance in the rain,” and this set has an umbrella and the words “April showers” within the collage. Niki has over 5000 followers and has transformed from using simple designs when she first started off to

adding more detail by using various elements in her sets.

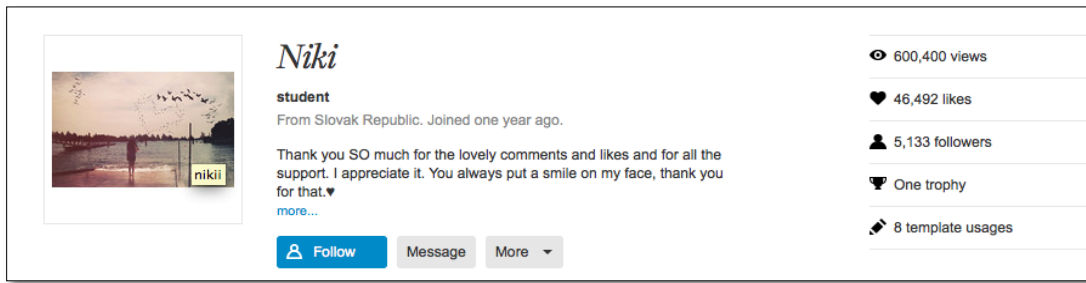


Figure 10: Niki's Polyvore profile.

Niki has created 119 sets out of which 21 are awarded top sets. In comparison to Amy who receives numerous comments only on top sets, Niki receives comments on some of her daily creations as well. The number of likes per set with set views and followers has increased consecutively even though frequency of set creation is not that high (see Figure 11). For the purpose of the study any set having more than 10 comments was studied.

Sunday 16 February 2014	Monday 17 February 2014	Tuesday 18 February 2014	Wednesday 19 February 2014
704,061 set views	706,337 set views	707,598 set views	708,324 set views
50,443 likes	50,447 likes	50,451 likes	50,471 likes
5,767 followers	5,795 followers	5,799 followers	5,803 followers
One trophy	One trophy	One trophy	One trophy
7 template usages	7 template usages	7 template usages	7 template usages
Thursday 20 February 2014	Friday 21 February 2014	Saturday 22 February 2014	Sunday 23 February 2014
708,814 set views	709,577 set views	710,427 set views	710,947 set views
50,477 likes	50,490 likes	50,490 likes	50,524 likes
5,813 followers	5,822 followers	5,827 followers	5,832 followers
One trophy	One trophy	One trophy	One trophy
7 template usages	7 template usages	7 template usages	7 template usages

Figure 11: Changes in Niki's profile between 02/16/2014 - 02/23/2014.

The color tones of clothes and accessories used by Niki in her sets go well with the architectural buildings she uses in them. The overall theme of her Polyvore profile, after studying her sets, can fit into the genre of a travel theme. Even though the website has the social media element Niki does not hash tag any users or post any description along with her sets. Her sets are solely based on the innovative quotes she uses as titles for her sets.

The background of all her sets is filled with some image from an article and pictures of different destinations (see Figure 12). The sets Niki creates feature many photographs of different architectural buildings. The use of architectural elements could denote that she loves architecture as a subject or has some connection with it in particular. The other denotation could be that she loves to travel and these are the destinations she wants to visit. Sometimes the elements in the set background overpower the clothes and accessories she wants to feature in her collage. The clothes she uses are just in the form of one outfit placed in the center of the set covered by images all around it. According to Kress and Leeuwen (1996), Niki is using the concept of center element in her Polyvore sets where all the elements surrounding the main outfit are margins. The center element, in this case the outfit of the set, is the most important aspect and the other items around it are passive. Nikki has developed this style of design over a period of time, as her sets in the starting period were not designed this way. The consistent things in her sets are the clothes, a handbag, and shoes that are found in all of them. Most of the collages even feature a model's face that goes well with the composition of the portrait. She does not have many collections but has used many articles from other brands that are linked under the items category in her profile.

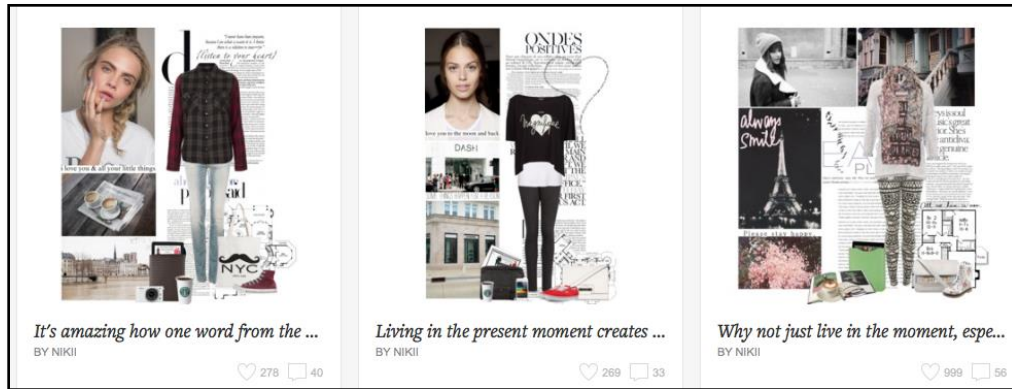


Figure 12: Niki's sets.

The templates used by Niki define the basic outline of the items she utilizes in her sets created over Polyvore. Most of her sets fit into the two templates that she has posted on Polyvore (see Figure 13).

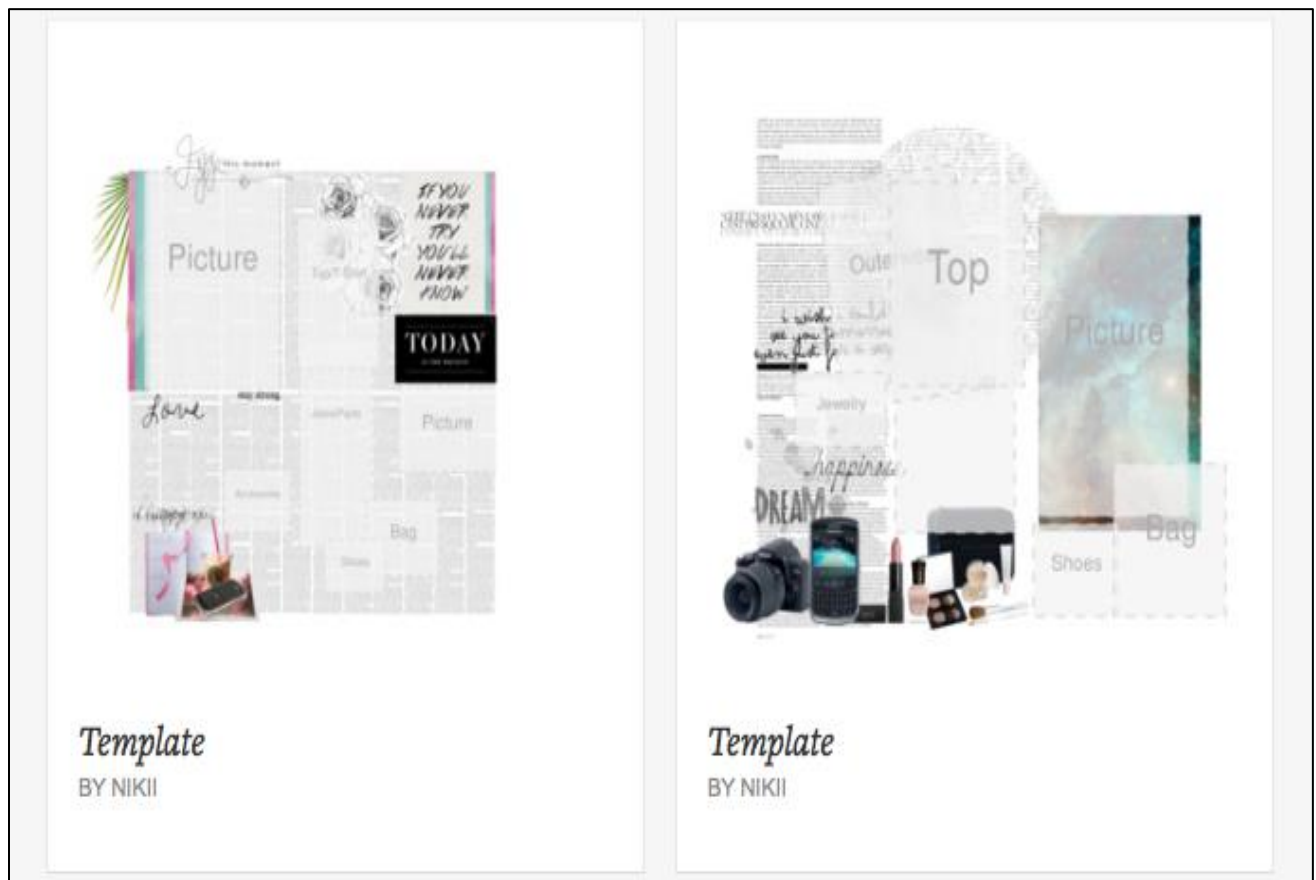


Figure 13: Templates used by Niki over Polyvore for set creation.

Niki has received many sets as gifts from other users of Polyvore. These gifts symbolize the token of love and appreciation that is developed between users over an online community such as Polyvore. The online platform works on the principle of give and take, and in a social website like Polyvore, this principle transforms into liking and sharing of sets. The members express their gratitude towards other users for following and liking their creations by specially creating sets as a gift for them (see Figure 14).

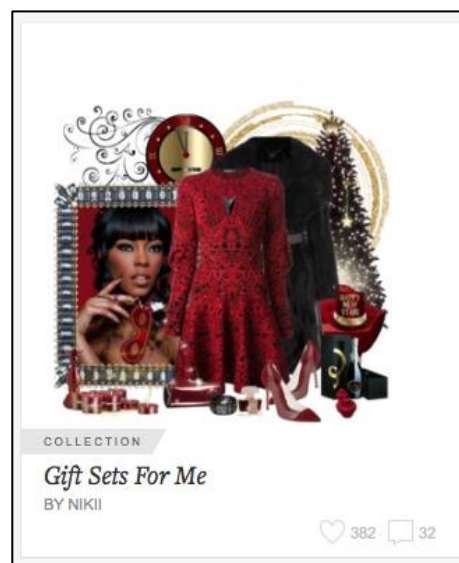


Figure 14: Gift sets for Niki.

Amy on the other hand is a different user of Polyvore and has elements that are unique to her collages. She has her own group on Polyvore named “To be Yourself.” Amy is from Argentina and she joined the website four years ago (see Figure 15).

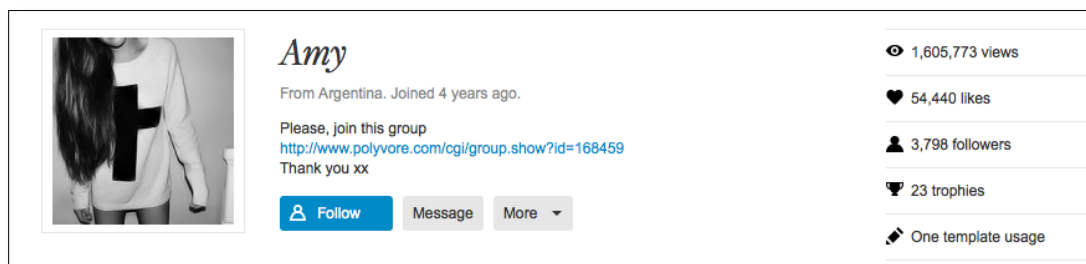


Figure 15: Amy's Polyvore profile.

To keep her group active and creative Amy runs contests within the group for its members. A few weeks back Amy did not have a blog linked to her profile but now has attached her Tumblr onto Polyvore. She has 224 sets in total and all of them are titled as “Untitled” with a number attached to it. Amy uses no images and keeps the background decontextualized which helps maintain focus on the elements of her collages. Glasses, in the form of spectacles or shades, and shoes are a part of all the sets in addition to clothes and various other elements. The other item that Amy constantly uses in her sets is some form of a plant, which could denote her love for nature. This user keeps her sets close to real world and does not use any model/celebrity picture in them on Polyvore (see Figure 16).

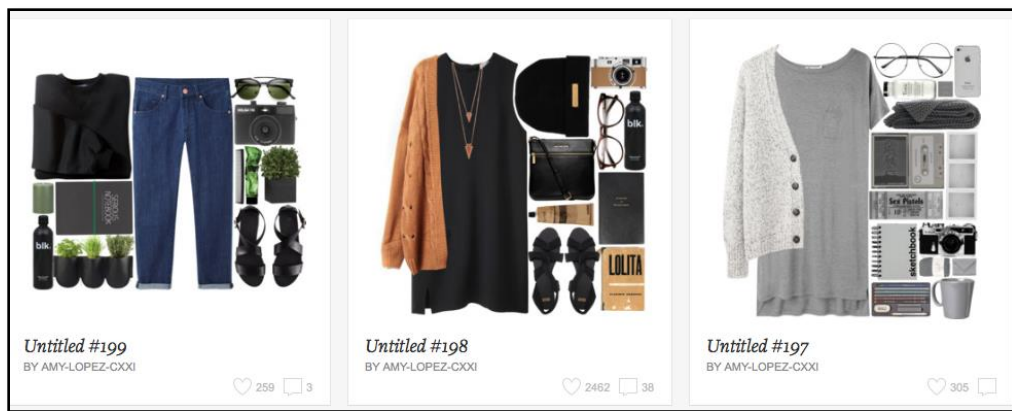


Figure 16: Amy's sets.

Most of her work on Polyvore follows a constant theme of using earthy tones and pastel shades for her collages. There are very few sets in which Amy has experimented with using a brighter shade or color for her work. Her sets are more like columns in which each item fits perfectly within a spot of the column (see Figure 17). Amy's columnar use could denote that she is very organized in her personal life and likes to see things placed in a certain way. Amy has remained consistent over time and has not introduced any new backgrounds or elements that others use in their collages. Even though she joined Polyvore three years before Niki, Amy has less than 4000 followers. She has many collections that she has created and items that have been

used from other sources under her profile. In addition to her group Amy is a part of other groups and participates in their contests to win trophies that will add to her Polyvore profile.

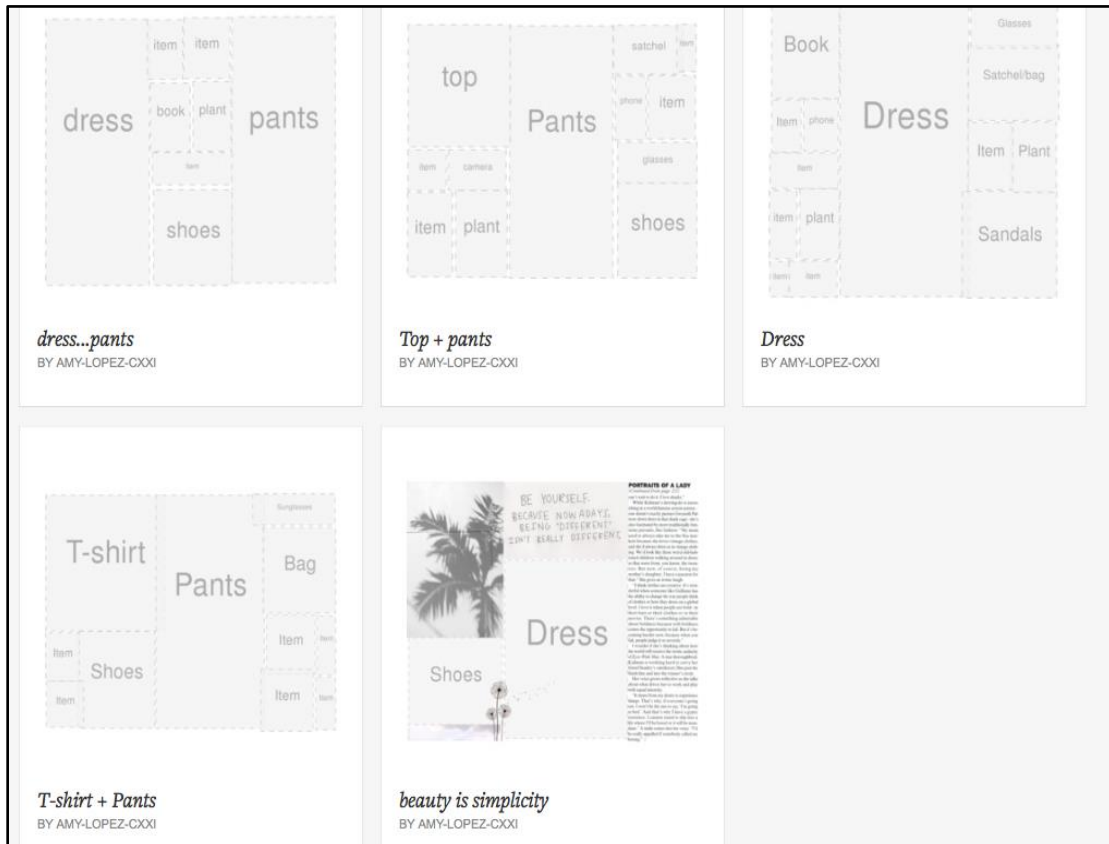


Figure 17: Templates used by Amy over Polyvore for set creation.

In the one week of analysis Amy had 290 sets in her collection on Polyvore and did not create any new sets (see Figure 18). Out of the total 290 sets, 10 have been published as top sets of the day on the Polyvore homepage. The number of comments was directly related to the top sets created by Amy. The top sets received the most comments in the form of praise and congratulating her. All of her sets are accompanied by the common description to join her group on Polyvore.



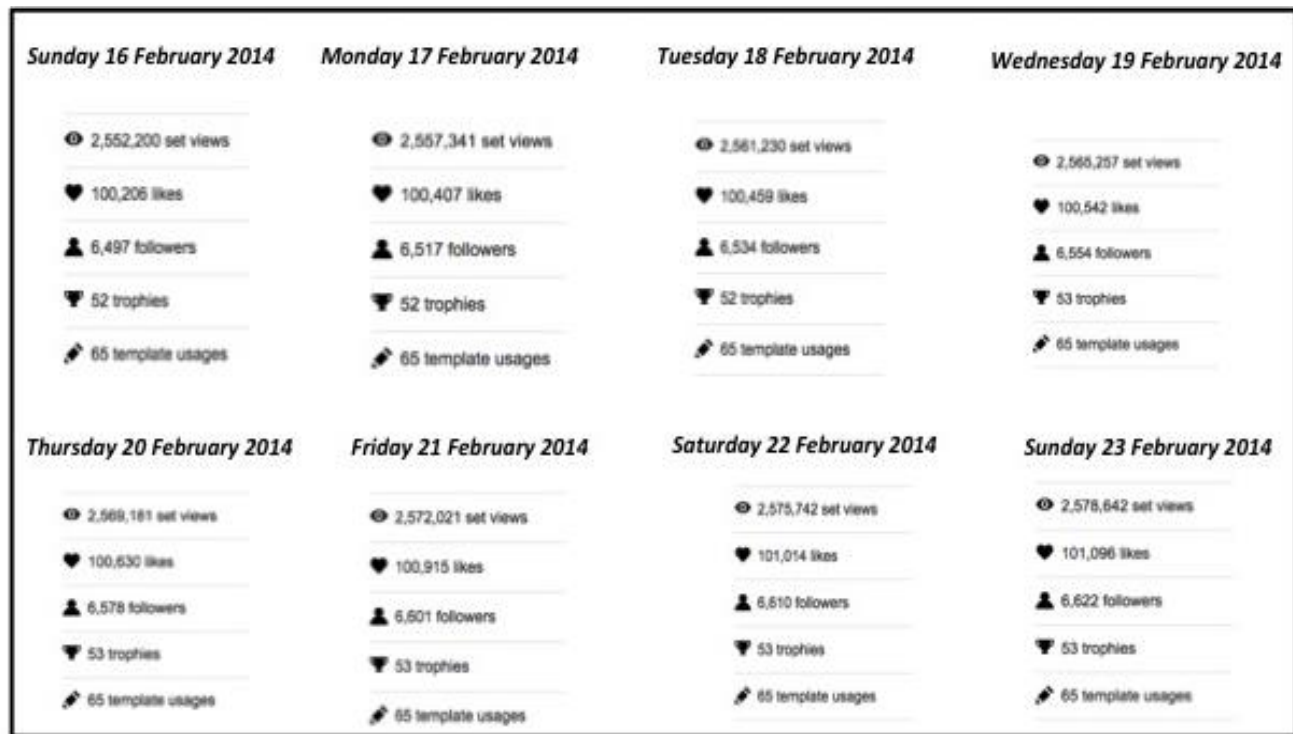


Figure 18: Changes in Amy's profile between 02/16/2014 – 02/23/2014.

Venkatesh, Joy, Sherry, and Deschenes (2010) find that the aesthetics of certain fashion related products can help define the outlook of a woman's body as a whole. An example that the authors give is of high-heeled shoes that empower woman with confidence and add to their social position. Social identity is a material process consisting of constant changes that rely on a combination of clothes, shoes, jewelry, and other elements of aesthetic fashion used by woman as a means to fulfill their desires (Venkatesh, Joy, Sherry, & Deschenes, 2010). In reference to this is Amy who creates sets over Polyvore that reflect her personal style. High heels shoes are one category of fashion items that is not present in Amy's sets. All her sets have flats, sandals, or shoes to match with clothes and other accessories. Amy is using the Polyvore platform to express her own unique sense of style and create an identity for herself in the online world. High heels portray confidence and glamour in the fashion world, yet Amy keeps her sets simple with the use of flats signifying her individuality (Venkatesh, Joy, Sherry, & Deschenes, 2010).

For further research on members' experience and usage of Polyvore the three users were contacted by message over the website. Only Amy out of the three users chose to respond for this analysis. The questions asked pertained to Polyvore user experience, motivation that drives members to create sets, and details about their creations. Amy has been a Polyvore user over the past four years. She is a fashion lover and that was the primary reason for her discovery of Polyvore. Amy states that Polyvore is a platform that allows you to express yourself and your personal style, and then share that with other people. According to Amy, the motivation for her to create sets is to "just be yourself when you use something. I always have in my mind the phrase 'Fashion is temporary. Style is permanent.'" This statement by Amy is consistent with Polyvore's tagline which states, "Discover, shop and express your style." over its homepage. Fashion and its trends with regards to clothes, shoes, and accessories change over time with seasons and other factors. People can learn fashion tricks and tips from the outside world but style is an inborn trait of an individual. An individual can better his/her sense of style with time and that is what stays permanent which reflects on the outside.

Amy started off by exploring several styles in the creation of sets. Her oldest sets which she calls "grunge" are the principal style that represents her personal style. She has created over 300 sets and that experience with Polyvore has given her an opportunity to experiment with different styles. Amy's new style of set creation has added an element of newness and vigor not only for her followers but for herself as well. The new sets display clear "organic" colors and soft tones, which characterize Amy's identity and personal self.

Amber Nicki Rose calls herself a fashion lover from France and joined Polyvore four years ago (see Figure 19).

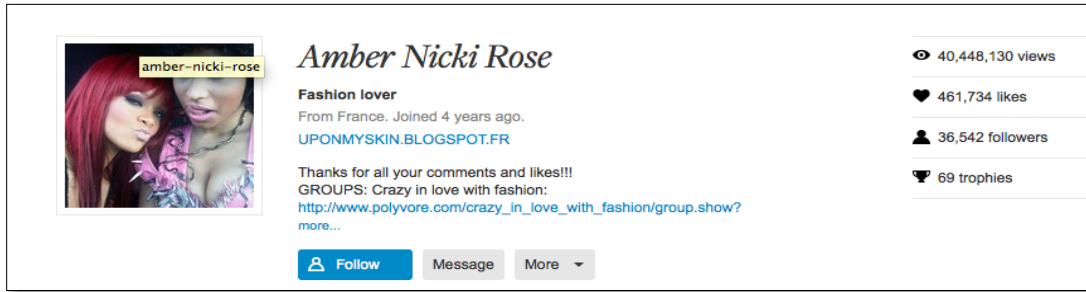


Figure 19: Amber's Polyvore profile.

She has her own group “In love with fashion” and has created 1169 sets in total. In addition to the group, Amber has her own blog that she has linked to her Polyvore profile. Her entire collections of sets are either titled as Blogger, Street, or Celebrity style. The celebrity style sets feature a particular celebrity look and the elements consist of details on how people can copy that very same look. The other two categories that she uses always feature a model that has worn the same type of clothes and accessories and this adds to the composition of the image. The various clothes and accessories that she uses overlap each other displaying no white space whatsoever (see Figure 20).

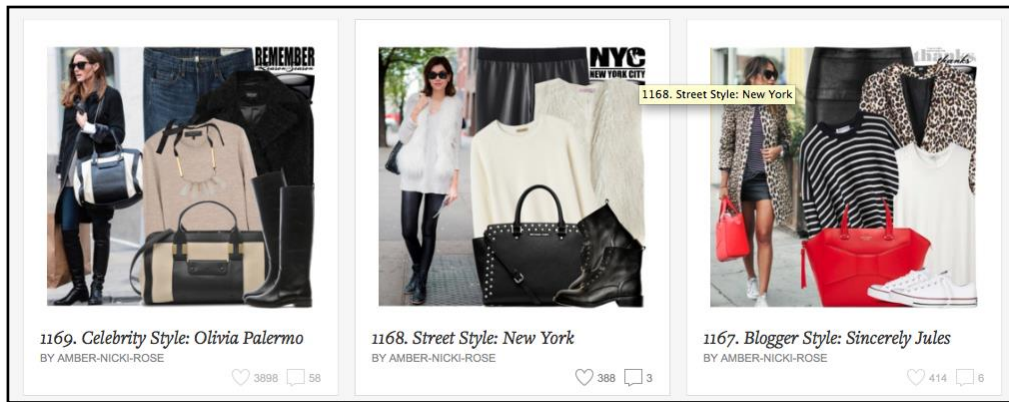


Figure 20: Amber's sets.

Amber is the most active member among the three studied for the purpose of this study. She created a total of 13 sets during the analysis week, which is an average of two sets per day barring Saturday on which no new sets were created. The analysis of studying top sets was based

on examining sets that have received more than 20 comments on each. Of the 1263 sets that were studied, 102 have been selected as top sets. Amber has won many contests and receives a lot of appreciation from her followers with regards to her creations. More disorganized when she started, the sets were not following a particular pattern, but with the lapse of time the technique of overlapping is used throughout. The study of her sets reveals that she has created a theme for her sets revolving around street, blogger, and celebrity style.

The consistent elements of her sets are shoes and a bag, which are always placed on the bottom right corner of the set. Amber follows a similar theme all throughout her collages in reference to the way she places her items in them. The extreme top right corner of her sets is always placed with some article that displays a few words and the rest is overlapped with other items. The concept of salience can be applied to the technique Amber uses in creating her sets on Polyvore. The foreground objects such as the clothes, bags, and shoes are more salient than the background elements such as the article and celebrity/model pictures. The pictures of celebrity/models are just as a reference for users to identify the elements and match it with the outfit she puts together in the set. The items that overlap other elements in the set are more important than the items being overlapped. Her use of different prints and color components adds to the overall composition of her collages. Since she draws her inspirations from celebrities and other well-known models the originality of creation is not seen in her sets. Amber is an active and well-known user of Polyvore having above 30,000 followers and winning over 65 trophies for her creations (see Figure 21). Polyvore, in addition to its own contests, runs sponsored brand and member contests over the website. The contests present the users with a challenge to create theme specific sets. Each contest can have numerous numbers of entries into the contest but trophies only show for first, second, and third place winners.

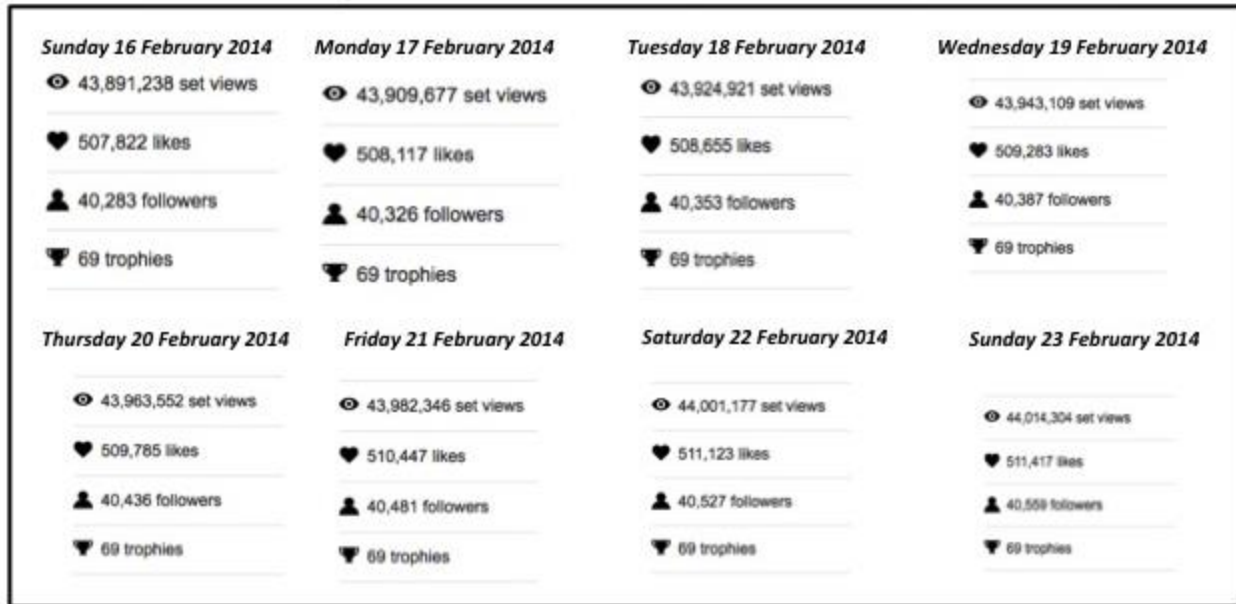


Figure 21: Changes in Amber's profile between 02/16/2014 – 02/23/2014.

The users utilize different techniques such as merging, overlapping, and columns to create sets. Niki merges her outfit within the background images, Amy places her items in particular columns, and Amber overlaps all items and backgrounds to create the set. Niki and Amy display their style or what they think is stylish. At the same time Amber, copying styles of celebrities and models, creates sets that are very up to date in the fashion world. Polyvore has given fashion a different meaning and opened its doors to ordinary people to express themselves.

### Discussion

Polyvore, the interactive fashion website, is an example of the ever changing social media domain over the Internet. It is helpful to its users and fashion brands using new media for marketing. The users' benefit lies in being a part of an online community which keeps them updated about fashion, trends, share, like, and comment about different sets made by each other on Polyvore. Fashion brands run contests and their merchandise, which forms a part of sets, is publicized. Polyvore has changed the face of online shopping by adding the social media dimension and communicating over a broader platform to a wider audience.

Polyvore is a great model for a social media package as it's used for sharing, commenting, liking, and interacting among users. Other social media websites and blogs help people develop personal relationships with each other by being more textual and providing more information. The relationship between Polyvore users is based more on the sets created and less personal in nature as there is less information available about the user. The analysis of visual elements used in sets by Polyvore users helps others form associations and denote characteristics of their personalities that may not hold true every time. The creation of an online profile is based on the sole aim to create a social identity over the Internet. This identity may or may not involve all character traits of an individual. The personal blog links that people provide on the Polyvore profile fulfill the dimensions of social media and give them more visibility over the Internet. The reasons for people attaching links to their blog could vary from person to person but the aim mainly is to provide more details about themselves over the website.

The study helped me understand Polyvore and its tools in a better way. Out of the many users of Polyvore, the three chosen for this study use Polyvore differently to create various sets. Each of them opted for different titles, and each used different backgrounds and items to create sets that are unique. The different uses of color, tones, and styles in each set denote something about the creator. There are some items that Niki, Amber, and Amy use constantly throughout their sets, which represent certain characteristics, related to their social identities on Polyvore. Each visual element on Polyvore is coded; the process of decoding with the help of critical visual analysis has helped me delve deeper and look more into detail about the users of Polyvore.

### **Conclusion**

The Internet domain has evolved rapidly over the past few years to include social media and online communities. Online communities serve as a platform for its users to facilitate

communication, share experiences, and develop social connections. Interaction in online communities such as Polyvore is a two-way street between users of the website, based on many factors such as participation, social identity, and shopping motivations to name a few. Polyvore provides a space where its users can exchange and share ideas with others, and gain feedback about their own work in terms of created sets. It is like a playground for its members in which they can create sets, interact with other members, share experiences, and shop what is created. The style makers around the world of the Polyvore community can represent their sense of style through creation of sets. Like-minded shoppers and fashion lovers use Polyvore to explore new brands, products, styles, and looks. Utilizing Polyvore as a social shopping online community in this study proved to be very useful to learn about its users, the visual aspects of the website, and online communication in general.

Limitations of the research provide a base for future study to delve deeper into the working of Polyvore. First, for the purpose of this study the category of fashion from the website was abstracted to be reviewed. The other categories of Polyvore, which include beauty and home, did not form a part of the study. This resulted in loss of substantial information and visual details that could have been studied for understanding the website as a whole. Secondly, the three users analyzed for the study are a very small number in comparison to the number of members over Polyvore. This gives an unfair representational value to the website as a whole. For future study, more users of Polyvore can be analyzed to get a summary about the different styles members use for set creation. Furthermore, the study mainly focuses on exploring Polyvore through the social media lens.

The gap between social media and online communities is becoming smaller with time. At the same time offline meetups arising due to online social connections are growing at a rapid speed. This is one area that the future research could focus upon.



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