

# Abercrombie & Fitch's Social Media Transformation: From Exclusivity to Inclusivity

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## Abstract:

Abercrombie & Fitch (A&F) is on its journey of transformation from exclusivity to inclusion, diversity, and social responsibility in its social media marketing strategy. The above positions are strategic and part of how the brand answers changes in consumer attitudes taken by members of Generation Z and Millennials who ask brands to associate them with values of authenticity, representation, and corporate responsibility. This rebranding is powered through partnerships with influential persons, user-generated content, and more authentic storytelling on major platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. By rebuilding its image through that channel, and improving engagement levels, A&F has managed to re-engage a much younger and socially conscious audience. Yet, through these efforts, A&F fails to keep pace with ever-changing social media dynamics. This would be a critical analysis of A&F's social media strategy, its positioning against present industry movements, and the SWOT analysis of its positioning within the very competitive fashion industry. Also, this paper is poised to establish how issues that are beyond one's control, such as American consumer behavior and the new role of digital platforms, actually drive fashion trends.

**Keywords:** Abercrombie & Fitch, Social Media Strategy, Inclusivity, Consumer Behavior, Fashion Industry Trends.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

Indeed, this repositioning of Abercrombie & Fitch from exclusivity to inclusivity heralds a strategic turn of events with heightened scrutiny and shifting consumer values. Indeed, A&F developed a brand

identity that was driven by exclusiveness, targeting only a very small elite group: young, rich, and "perfect physically". Besides, the advertising campaign it ran during the early 2000s was particularly noted for using slim, conventionally attractive models—a marketing strategy directed toward a small group and reinforcing stereotypes of what is beautiful and desirable. This is increasingly at variance with today's

consumer, especially as views began to change in regards to diversity and inclusiveness in society.

Exclusionary practices like these so barraged A&F that sales plummeted, and accordingly, so did the company's brand image. By the time of the 2010s, the coming-of-age generations were starting to expect brands to be in lock-step with them on authenticity, social responsibility, and inclusivity, among Generation Z and Millennials. These generations no longer just buy into aspirational lifestyles but seek out companies embracing diversity in body types, ethnicities, and gender identities[1].

All these factors impose massive burdens on A&F to change its image and become relevant at least in the changed fashion scene. Along those lines, A&F reset its brand positioning with a company that embraced inclusion and social awareness-something one finds even more precisely on the brand's digital marketing strategy, which increasingly has moved to employ influencer partnerships and user-generated content as ways to foster diversity and authenticity.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have become the primary tools through which A&F communicates its transformation, allowing the brand to engage directly with consumers and rebuild its image. These platforms offer a unique opportunity for A&F to demonstrate its commitment to inclusivity through visual storytelling, influencer collaborations, and real-time interactions with its audience [2].

Certainly, even with the successful rebranding of A&F, it still faces quite a number of challenges to sustain its momentum. The algorithms of social media are in constant evolution, and consumer tastes can be notoriously fickle. Not to mention the still real factor of competition from fast-fashion brands like H&M and Zara, which have extremely effective digital marketing strategies, which could still steal A&F's market share. That begs the very crucial question of whether A&F's social media strategy is long-term sustainable.

## 1.2 Issues of Research, Methodology and Contentss

The purpose of this study is to critically explore the social media strategy of Abercrombie & Fitch and how well the brand has engaged its young consumers, especially Gen Z and Millennials. This paper attempts to explain how A&F has managed the transition from an exclusionary brand to one championing inclusivity through social media platforms, with consideration of broader industry trends. To address the purpose of this study, some of the key questions that guide this research include:

How does Abercrombie & Fitch activate influencers and

customers on Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter to engage a younger demographic?

To what degree does A&F reveal values and expectations of both Generations Z and Millennials in its social strategy?

Which external factors, changes in social media algorithms and changes in consumer behavior-create an issue for A&F to maintain a rebranded image? The following approach will inform the current study and will, therefore, focus on these questions: case studies of specific campaigns on Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter; SWOT analysis assessing brand positioning against that of the more significant fashion industry. Further analysis in this direction will be the extent to which A&F's social media strategy corresponds to the current industry trends, characterized by greater importance of sustainability, authenticity, and social responsibility for consumer purchasing decisions.

## 2. Brand Overview

In 1892, Abercrombie & Fitch was founded as an outfitter of equipment and sporting goods for the outdoors. It would later evolve to represent perhaps the archetype of American youth culture based on exclusivity by representing the "preppy" look and self-demarcating towards an elite market of young, wealthy consumers.

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, A&F became one of the most recognizable fashion brands, pretty much synonymous with its provocative ad campaigns featuring scantily clad models, highly stylized retail stores, and image of exclusivity, which eventually became the reason for the brand's downfall in the face of changing social attitudes.

In the early 2000s, A&F saw rapid growth, and during that time, this brand was known for some exclusionary practices. The "cool kids only" marketing approach promoted an unnervingly narrow definition of beauty, thus alienating many customers. Critics regularly criticized A&F for a lack of diversity, not to mention high-profile lawsuits and public outrage over discriminatory hiring and body-shaming ads.

Along with this, the changing fashion landscape finally forced the firm to change tack. Well, by the 2010s, with the rise of social media and the consumers who were moving toward inclusivity, diversity, and social responsibility, A&F became very unfavorable. Indeed, it could no longer be intransigent in insisting on its exclusionist image, especially as competitors like H&M and Zara offered more inclusive marketing and were also undercutting A&F on price. The inability of A&F to timely change precipitated a fall in sales and a perceptibly tarnished brand reputation. These issues called for a complete rebranding at Abercrombie & Fitch. The company moved to embrace diver-

sity and inclusion, featuring models of all shapes, ethnic groups, and orientations in its advertising. That transformation has been evident on social media, where A&F is positioned on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter, conveying its new brand values to appeal to the socially aware consumer [1,2].

### 3. Characteristics and Marketing Methods of American Social Media Platforms Analysis

Social media has become an inseparable tool within the fashion industry, a modern channel whereby brands are given direct contact with their target audiences. In this regard, core social networks of Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have been important for Abercrombie & Fitch in its drives toward the repositioning as an inclusive, socially responsible brand. These have indeed provided A&F with the avenue to engage its audience through influencer partnerships, user-generated content, and authentic storytelling. Each is different, with its own peculiarities that shape how A&F addresses marketing.

#### 3.1 Instagram

Instagram has been one of the main focuses of the Abercrombie & Fitch rebranding due to its highly visual nature, which works well with fashion marketing. With over 5 million followers, A&F uses Instagram not just in promoting its products but also in showing the brand's inclusivity and diversity. In turn, the highly visually dynamic focus of this platform itself is a great tool for A&F to stylistically show merchandise by using appealing pictures, creating messages that advocate body positivity and diversity.

One of the successful moves A&F has made with their Instagram strategy so far involves leveraging user-generated content. Campaigns such as #Abercrombie and #Abercrombiehaul enable customers to share their experiences with the brand, creating a sense of community and fostering authenticity. These efforts are also social proof; consumers are very likely to trust content created by fellow consumers instead of traditional advertising [1].

Another major influence that A&F has because of Instagram is in influencer marketing. For instance, it has partnered with various influencers that represent their values in terms of diversity and inclusion to raise awareness on its platforms for socially aware consumers. This allows the brand ambassadors to promote body positivity, gender inclusivity, and racial diversity to humanize the A&F brand and reach a larger audience. Indeed, such campaigns have done wonders in increasing the number of en-

gagements and changing public opinion about the brand. Apart from the static posts, A&F creates dynamic content, such as Instagram Stories and Reels, which are intended to reach an audience in a very interactive way while standing on their feet. Stories give them a chance to go behind the scenes, launch products, and do influencer takeovers more casually and authentically. Meanwhile, the Reels would add short-form video in a move with trending topics and challenges, further heightening the brand in visibility and engagement.

#### 3.2 TikTok

TikTok has become one of the most important channels in Abercrombie & Fitch's attempt to reach Gen Z, in its pursuit of authenticity, creativity, and social justice. The algorithm, favoring viral user-generated content, lets TikTok connect with consumers in an even more casual and playful style. The format is uniquely shaped for short-form videos and trends that have been instrumental in amplifying the message of inclusivity and body positivity at A&F. The #Abercrombiehaul, which encourages users to post videos of their A&F buys, is among the most successful brand campaigns to have ever existed on TikTok. It pulled in over 158 million views for the fashion brand, proving what TikTok can do to build brand awareness and engagement [3]. A&F has been using TikTok to capture a more youthful audience than before, successfully in molding an image of itself as a fashion brand embracing all kinds of bodies and backgrounds.

Another key aspect of A&F's strategy on TikTok has been influencer collaborations. It has partnered with the likes of Mik Zazon, an advocate for body positivity and inclusivity, aiming to capture content reminiscent of Generation Z's values. The influencers give A&F the ability to connect with its target consumer on a deeper level with a voice that is truly relatable to the highly socially conscious consumer[4].

Trending and challenging activities are what they are, by definition. They contain this organic, viral feeling in the real world in which A&F could participate with its user base. Such a format has also been very successful in terms of efficiency in terms of user-brand engagement within a target community. By latching onto organic trends on TikTok, the brand can position itself as an industry leader that strongly supports increasing diversity and inclusivity.

#### 3.3 Twitter

While Instagram and TikTok are highly visual platforms, Twitter offers Abercrombie & Fitch a different way to engage with its audience. Twitter's strength lies in its ability to facilitate real-time conversations and interactions. A&F

uses Twitter to respond to customer feedback, announce product launches, and participate in broader social conversations about inclusivity, sustainability, and corporate responsibility [5].

Several features ensure that Twitter is effective, including the ability to respond. A&F can respond to its consumers' queries, questions, and suggestions in real time. This will instill confidence and loyalty in its consumers, who prefer to engage with responsive and transparent brands. Twitter provides an avenue where A&F can share its sustainability work on product sustainability and updates while reducing its environmental impact. This will be important, especially in a day when buyers, especially Millennials and Generation Z, make purchase decisions based upon the ethics behind the brand.

Furthermore, Twitter gives the brand a venue to discuss issues of diversity and inclusion in far more transparent ways. By doing this, it positioned itself as a company that listened to consumers and tried to make the world better simply because the brand joined the talk of social justice and representation. Such communication enables A&F to stay closer to the audience and firm up its commitments to social responsibility [6].

## 4. Effect of the Americans Based on External Factors

Indeed, it is the cumulation of changes in consumer preference, the rise of digital media, and demands for ethical business that have pushed Abercrombie & Fitch into rebranding and social media strategies. This section aims to illustrate how these external forces, in particular, within the context of American consumer behavior, affect the current positioning and marketing efforts at A&F.

### 4.1 Localization strategy to American Consumers

One of the main drivers for the rebranding of Abercrombie & Fitch is the value change of consumers across America, more specifically for Generations Z and Millennials, where authenticity, diversity, and social responsibility are key in driving these individuals to make their purchases. These elements are deeply ingrained in their buying behavior. This has led A&F to become much more localized due to these cultural values and social issues, which are now driving American consumers' purchasing decisions [6].

To most younger US consumers, diversity and representation are everything; they would want all different body types and racial backgrounds, with different genders, showcased by their brands of allegiance and touting mes-

sages of inclusivity and equality. Abercrombie & Fitch's strategy of exclusiveness was meant for one image and likeness of wealth and beauty, something that just doesn't fit into today's new psychological makeup of its consumer.

A&F is aware of this to some extent. Due to the increasing clamor for American diversity, the company has tried to fashion its message to be more local. Thirdly, social justice and the environment have become increasingly critical for American consumers. A&F's localization drive has thus sought to capture these evolving priorities by baking social responsibility into its brand storyline. Today, the brand uses its social media platforms to express its work on diversity, body positivity, and sustainability, aiming to meet the standards of American consumers who are now increasingly more socially aware [2].

These values, showcased in their ad campaigns, have enabled A&F to connect on a personal note with American consumers and built brand loyalty among members of the modern generation, who increasingly expect more than just a pretty outfit from the brands they purchase. Thus, the brand was able to rebrand itself in the American market by presenting itself as an ally in the causes of diversity and social justice that it tries to represent.

### 4.2 How Digital Media Affects American Fashion

Trends in A&F Digital media have thrown the stakes in the fashion industry into overdrive. For the very first time, brands can speak in real time with customers, influence trends, and actually impact the way people buy. Abercrombie & Fitch harnessed online platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to surf such trends, positioning the brand as one that elicits the fashion choices of the modern American consumer [7].

Probably one of the biggest influences of digital media on fashion is the fast response to changed trends. While TikTok and Instagram managed to shorten the life cycle of fashion trends, the chance to participate in real-time conversations and viral moments was yet to be grasped by a brand like A&F.

It's this immediacy that's key to engaging with younger consumers who consider brands to be fleet of foot, responding to the fast-moving nature of digital culture. For example, challenges in TikTok and trends in Instagram turn out to be very often the heralds of a new fashion movement. Indeed, the ability of A&F to partner with influencers and the participation of the brand in viral campaigns has made it a trendsetter in casual luxury and body positivity. In this respect, A&F partnered with the influencers reflecting such values as authenticity and inclusive-

ness and thus marched in tune with the trends important for its target audience [4]. It also provides A&F with digital media through which it can effectively communicate its sustainability initiatives. Consumers are increasingly making purchasing decisions with ecological concerns in mind; hence, any brand that shows concern for sustainability stands out more easily in the crowd. Based on this idea, A&F bases its exposure on social media to show the sustainability effort, positioning itself by both ecologically sensitive customers and those for whom style goes together with environmental awareness[3].

## 5. Social Media Websites Analysis

The approach of Abercrombie & Fitch to social media is multilayered; each of these channels serves to facilitate different levels of authenticity, inclusivity, and strong consumer relationships with the brand. Because it is on Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter, the brand does a lot of varieties of engagement with its base-from strong visual storytelling to real-time, one-on-one conversations with its customers. This section provides a view of how A&F leverages these platforms against its marketing objectives.

### 5.1 Strengths

It has developed key strengths in the strong online presence on visually driven platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. All of these social media platforms give A&F an opportunity to really convey its product and brand messaging in a visually appealing way consistent with its new rebranding as an inclusive and socially responsible company.

For example, the highly visual aspect of Instagram enables A&F to advertise its products while being able to reinforce its commitment to diversity and body positivity. On the other hand, TikTok is heavy with short-form video and allows a brand to take part in trends, challenges, and influencer partnerships that help engage the younger audience[8].

All this is well complemented by the strategic use of influencer marketing by A&F. Partnering with a varied set of influencers for body positivity, A&F has very well changed its image in public and connected its brand to a larger audience. Hence, these kinds of influencers drive trustable voices in communities that further help in humanizing the brand and building deeper connections with the socially aware consumer [1].

User-generated content is another key strength of A&F's social media strategy. Campaigns such as #Abercrombiehaul encourage consumers to share their personal experiences with the brand, creating a sense of community and fostering loyalty. By allowing consumers to take part in

the brand's story, A&F enhances its authenticity and reinforces its messaging around inclusivity and diversity [8].

### 5.2 Weaknesses

Yet, despite all the strengths of its social media strategy, Abercrombie & Fitch has several weaknesses. The first is strong reliance on algorithms of social media to keep the visibility of brands and engagement high. The complex algorithms by the likes of Instagram and TikTok determine which content rises to the top of feed searches. Due to these ever-changing algorithms, organic reach can suddenly fall at any moment [9]. It makes the brand susceptible to any change in policies on the platforms that it may use to reach out to an audience[10].

Other weaknesses involve A&F's extremely weak presence on more dialogical social media platforms, like Twitter. With Twitter proving to be a gateway into real discussions in real-time between brands and their consumers, this eventual shift of theirs toward more visually oriented platforms has not allowed them to reach the full potential of deeper, more transparent engagement with the audience. This limits the brand's ability to engage in conversations around social issues, which could help it connect with older demographics who prioritize corporate responsibility and transparency [9].

### 5.3 Opportunities

A&F has several opportunities to expand its social media strategy and strengthen its market position. One such opportunity lies in the exploration of emerging platforms like Threads, Meta's Twitter competitor. As newer social media platforms continue to emerge, A&F has the chance to diversify its digital presence and engage with consumers on multiple fronts [5].

Meanwhile, scaling across platforms makes A&F less dependent on both Instagram and TikTok while hitting new audience segments. In addition, A&F can leverage the influence of micro-influencers, a rising trend. Most micro-influencers have very targeted, engaged audiences that are more apt to take their advice. Through collaborations with micro-influencers, A&F would have better access to more specific markets and could forge deeper, more personalized relationships with customers of the brand [10]. This way, the brand will be in a position to gain and retain authenticity, ultimately attracting loyal consumers who would respond better to this rather than celebrity endorsements.

Other fantastic opportunities for A&F concern sustainability. As consumers are becoming more ecologically conscious, brands that follow sustainability are found to be more likely to appeal to the ethically active customer.

A&F can utilize its social media to showcase its sustainability efforts by depicting its dedication to reducing the ecological footprint and thus appealing to the eco-conscious consumer [7].

#### 5.4 Threats

Major external threats would be amongst Abercrombie & Fitch and the fast-fashion competitors like H&M or Zara. They were more available and ran huge digital marketing campaigns, hence directly competing against this fast-moving industry of fashion clothing [11]. A high price for A&F might restrain the company's appeal within budget-conscious consumers, particularly since fast-fashion brands remain at an advantage in the market. Algorithmic changes to the social networks also seriously threaten A&F visibility. As these social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, continue to develop, their algorithms may reduce the visibility of branded content in favor of organic user-generated content. This has reduced the ability of A&F to continue at its current level of engagement and will hence force the brand to invest much more aggressively in paid advertising just to maintain visibility [12]. Another potential threat can be seen in the chance of perceived inauthenticity within influencer partnerships. For A&F, where influencer marketing has proved to be a serious strength, any misalignment between the brand and its influencers could result in accusations of inauthenticity. Many consumers, but most especially members of Generation Z, are quite attuned to inauthentic marketing, and a misstep here could damage A&F's reputation and erode consumer trust of the brand [13].

### 6. Competitive Analysis: H&M's Social Media Strategy

The main competitors of Abercrombie & Fitch include H&M, particularly within the fields of fashion and social media marketing. H&M, different from A&F which is considered to need rebranding to be inclusive and diverse, did not hesitate to take over the top spot for sustainability and affordability. The following section will compare the social media strategy approach of H&M and its competitive positioning against A&F. H&M's social media strategy encompasses sustainability, affordability, and accessibility. Probably one of the biggest campaigns that have influenced the brand is the Conscious Collection, which was very much focused on eco-friendly fashion and gained much attention on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. The company works in partnership with influencers on social media; it collaborates on earth-conscious initiatives by partnering with eco-conscious influencers who

reflect the values of the brand. This strategy has allowed H&M to differentiate itself from competitors like A&F, which have only recently embraced sustainability as part of their brand narrative [9]. Besides, H&M uses social media more diversely in its comparative usage with A&F, and it is highly oriented toward dialogue, such as Twitter. With this, H-&-M can address the consumer directly on issues such as sustainability, corporate responsibility, and ethical fashion, thus giving the brand an opportunity to win the trust of the ecologically oriented consumer. This has helped H&M sustain a prestige reputation of being an environmentally and socially responsible brand. Meanwhile, while inclusivity and body positivity are part of the central pillar in A&F's social media strategy, sustainability has excluded. While A&F indeed managed to reposition itself as one of the most diverse and inclusive brands, it has yet to seize the rising tide for sustainable fashion. This is an opportunity for A&F to expand its messaging and position itself not only as an inclusive brand but also as an eco-conscious brand, positioning itself to be able to compete better with H&M in the long run [14].

### 7. Conclusion

Social media was one avenue in which Abercrombie & Fitch could rebrand and reach out to that younger, socially conscious audience. Remarkably, A&F has managed to move away from exclusivity and controversy in the past with a strategy toward diversity, inclusivity and body positivity. Some of the strong levers that drive authenticity and community for this brand on such platforms as Instagram and TikTok are influencer marketing and user-generated content. But all this visually-driven reliance of A&F might be one of the biggest risks going forward, with constantly fluctuating algorithms and tastes. The real momentum for the brand will depend on how well it adapts to up-and-coming platforms such as Threads and cashes in on accelerating trends, including sustainability. Abercrombie & Fitch can consider ways for the future run from expanding its industry position with commitments to ethics through micro-influencers to reach target demographics. Eventually, brand longevity will depend upon an articulate ability to stay agile amidst rapid changes within the digital landscape while retaining core values on authenticity, inclusivity, and social responsibility.

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