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What Works and What Doesn't: An Analysis of Brand Engagment on Facebook

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RUNNING HEAD: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T: AN ANALYSIS OF BRAND
ENGAGEMENT ON FACEBOOK

What works and what doesn't: An analysis of brand engagement on Facebook

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Laurie Hiebert

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Abstract

Brands and organizations utilize Facebook 'likes' and connections in order to promote brand awareness, a positive brand image, and improve purchase intention. Compared to Twitter and Instagram, Facebook remains the dominant platform for brands to sell products and engage consumers with new and upcoming merchandise and events. Consumers are dependent on their friends 'likes' and comments in order to make decisions about brands more than they are brand-made posts. This study looks at brand intention, message type, and the 'like' to determine what messages, days, and months are the most effective in generating consumer engagement.

Keywords: Social media, Facebook, Brand engagement

Introduction

Social media swiftly changed all marketing techniques. Radio clips, commercials, and newspaper ads are close to becoming obsolete in an era of Netflix, Spotify, and Facebook and Twitter. Brands have been trying to adapt to the changing platforms by moving the same ads they used on television and putting them on social media platforms, specifically Facebook. They use the same punch-lines and techniques with the assumption that the target market is expecting the same style of advertisement as they saw before social media. However, consumers marketing expectations have changed, and social media marketing is not the same as producing television commercials. Now, brands need to adopt their marketing techniques to the demands and norms of Facebook, consumer expectations of brands, and connections.

Social media is constantly changing; new platforms are being added, laws and guidelines are adjusting each year, and how people determine the trustworthiness of brands, connections, and friends is changing. By looking at previous literature, and Facebook posts from a company over a year, this study adds to this conversation by looking at what types of posts generate the most 'likes', and how that correlates to brand awareness and purchase intention. When marketing on Facebook, brands are likely to see more success when they utilize a variety of messages, (Ordenes et al., 2018), and adhere to the expectations of their target Facebook users, (Kozinets et al., 2010). The following literature review looks at brand awareness and intention, how connections influence trust and purchase intention, and the importance of 'likes' on the success of brand marketing on Facebook.

Looking at a brand on Facebook, and the influence of connections and 'likes' on consumer engagement, brand awareness, and purchase intention, this study explores posts made by one brand over the course of a year. Specifically, looking at how the day, month, and message

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type influence the number of 'likes' and comments on the brands posts. The purpose of the research, in addition to adding to previous literature, is to better understand what marketing techniques work best for the brand on Facebook.

Brand Image on Facebook

Positive and negative brand messages are received, liked, and shared by consumers in 24 hour-7 days a week-365 days cycle. Social media has shifted the brand marketing focus from solely product-centered to a balance of culture, society, and product-centered marketing. Brands no longer just sell products – they sell the culture of the brand (Kartunova, 2017). Consumers are making purchasing decisions based on the values, beliefs, and behaviors of the brands, in addition to the quality and price of the products. Brands messages on social media need focus on this culture and societal involvement in connection with the products, and less focus on developing content specifically to trigger interaction (Chwialkowska, 2019; Langaro et al., 2018) or sell a product. Only using messages that are product-focused or brand-focused deters people from the brand and reduces online interaction and purchasing. In order to increase interaction from consumers on brand posts, and to sell the brands culture and values, they need to utilize a variety of message types (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). This includes intertwining culture, products, and, when appropriate, emotional messages (Hassan et al., 2016) to reach the different needs and demands of consumers. Each of these message types influence the brand image, and in turn influences consumer attitudes about the brand.

A brands ability to connect with its consumers is vital to a brands success. Following brand-hosted events, consumers expect to see videos and picture messages that they can tag themselves in and interact with (Hassan et al., 2016). When brand events and promotions do not align with the consumers beliefs (Kartunova, 2017), or the brand does not post event follow-ups,

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consumers are less likely to engage with/in future brand messages and events, reducing consumer retention. New consumers are reliant on the feedback of friends and others to make purchasing decisions, so by losing current consumers, the brand is also losing the potential to gain new consumers. In addition, individuals with prior brand awareness are more likely to engage with messages than someone without prior brand awareness (Langaro et al., 2018), adding more stress on maintaining customer retention.

Prior brand awareness influences a consumer's chances of purchasing a product more than whether they 'like' or 'follow' a brand on Facebook (John, 2017; Langaro et al., 2018). However, 'liking' a brand on Facebook increases positive brand attitude, brand trust, and the willingness of the consumers friends to try the brand (Phua & Ahn 2016; John, 2017). Again, consumers rely on the electronic word-of-mouth before making purchasing decisions regarding an unfamiliar brand. The more social media becomes the dominant marketing platform for all brands, the more that friends and the number of 'likes' and 'comments' influence current and potential consumer's chances of following, supporting, and purchasing a brand. The closer the connection consumers have with each other on Facebook, the more likely they are to trust the information shared. Compared to brand messages, consumers are much more likely to explore the brand recommendations and warnings from their online connections.

Influence of Consumer Connections

Social influencers are individuals who have a prominent and consistent online presence with many followers, making them appear well-connected, informed, and credible. These influencers often publicly support or oppose brands, and their followers will copy their behavior because they have a greater trust in the influencer than they do advertisements that come directly from the brand (Chu & Kim, 2011). Brands need to utilize these social influencers as brand

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ambassadors to encourage positive brand awareness (Chu & Kim, 2011; Papasolomou & Melanthiow, 2012), but in doing so run the risk of receiving negative reviews from the same influencers. This consumer-influencer trust stems from consumers being able to see a real person, giving live reviews, and being able to connect through comments or likes on the influencer's posts. In addition, brands should aim to understand their target demographics as well as social influencers understand their target demographics.

Social media allows consumers to create groups based on similar interests, which gives brands an opportunity to target already established online communities with products that fit the desired group. These online communities are generally formed based on similar hobbies, employment, purchasing habits, and proximity, all factors that influence brand and purchasing behaviors. (Criswell & Canty, 2014; Micu et al., 2017). While this tactic can be beneficial in narrowing the target platform and groups, if a brand does not adhere to the norms of the platform and the group, the messages will not be well received (Kozinets et al, 2010; Criswell & Canty, 2014). Instead, the brand will be an intruder into the online community and will spark negative reviews, comments, and electronic word-of-mouth. The balance between these focused marketing techniques and adherence to online consumers norms and expectations increases brand awareness, brand trust, and in turn, an increase in consumer purchases.

In addition to social influencers, consumers rely heavily on the reviews and comments about brands from friends. The greater the connection and trust between consumers, the more likely they are to believe and respond to posts and recommendations of brands (Chu & Kim, 2011; John et al., 2017). The more frequently a consumer uses Facebook, the more weight they put on the amount of friend 'likes' and overall 'likes' of a brand to determine brand attitude, awareness, and purchasing intention (Phua & Ahn, 2016). So now, brands are trying to create

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messages that foster their culture and beliefs, attract social influencers, and generate a greater number of overall 'likes' to increase connections and brand awareness. By generating a greater number of overall 'likes', brands increase brand awareness, likeness, and purchase intention.

The Importance of 'Likes'

Consumers are more likely to follow or 'like' a brand on social media if their friends 'like' or post about a brand, which can be an effective recruiting tool for brands (Micu et al., 2017; Phua & Ahn, 2016). Consumers are also motivated to 'like' brands when the brand posts both brand-centered and consumer-centered content rather than specifically one or the other (Mochon et al., 2017; Chwialkowska, 2019). However, the more pages that a consumer likes, the more clutter their feed has, making them less likely to see brand messages that get buried by other posts (Micu et al., 2017). Consumer 'likes' do not mean much to the brand if the consumers are never seeing the posts.

By clicking 'like' consumers are demonstrating that they either agree with the post or want to know more. Consumers also 'like' and engage with posts in order to receive the same reciprocity on their posts (Carr et al., 2018). Therefore, the action of 'liking' a post means that consumers are interested in the content and want to connect with others who share the same interest. In addition, consumers feel pressure to 'like' a post when more of their friends 'like' it (Kim et al., 2015). When consumers are 'liking' posts based on what their friends 'like', brands may see a snowball effect of 'likes', which can be beneficial for a brand until it creates too much news feed clutter and consumers begin missing brands posts.

In order to break from the clutter, brands need to utilize varying message types (Ordenes, 2018) such as images, engaging, and informational posts. Varying message types allows their messages and posts to stand out, and avoids their content becoming too repetitive or blending in

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with another brands content. Once brands have consistently broke through the clutter, the focus turns to increasing 'likes' and consumer engagement. To increase 'likes', brand awareness, and purchase intention, brands must be responsive to consumer inquiries and comments (Shen & Bissell, 2013). While it may not work for all brands to respond to every comment, questions and feedback should be addressed whenever possible.

When implementing a variety of message types, brands still need to be consistent with their message intentions (Ordenes et al., 2018). When brand messages are not consistent or in line with the brands culture and values, brand 'likes' will decrease (Kartunova, 2017). A decrease in brand 'likes' also means a decrease in connections and sharing that the brands are reliant on. To summarize, consumers 'like' brands based on consistency in culture and messages, a mix of brand-centered and consumer-center messages, overall brand 'likes', number of admired social influencers that 'like' the brand, and the number of friends that 'like' the brand.

Social media has created an entire new field of communication that research has only scratched the surface of. The action of 'liking' a post on Facebook represents a support for the brand and a desire to connect with others who have similar interests. 'Likes' and connections to the brand increase brand awareness and purchase intention, so marketing to increase 'likes' on Facebook is important for brand success. The previous literature looked broadly at multiple platforms and strategies, and this research is intended to narrow the scope of Facebook marketing for brands. This research study is intended to explore the influence of brand image, consumer connection, and the 'like' on brand success on Facebook.

Methods

Data Collection

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Following IRB approval, 302 Facebook posts from one business over one year, January 1, 2018 to January 1, 2019, were recorded and coded for type, month, day of the week, image and video use, and number of reactions and comments. Even though the Facebook page is open to the public, the content of the images, videos, and comments was not recorded due to privacy concerns for the Facebook page community. Each post was categorized into one of the four categories described below: motivational, humorous, informational and engaging. To best understand which message technique was the most successful in terms of likes, each post was only assigned one type of message. The month and day of the week were recorded, but the time each post was made was not available for all posts so was not used in this study. Posts that had images and videos were recorded to study the potential effect of those varying messages on brand 'likes'. Next, the number of reactions and comments were recorded as the identifier of successful posts. Finally, all reactions on the posts were considered 'likes', and all comments, even the brands responses, were included in the number of comments.

Coding for Message Types

Messages that are more emotion-based or informative tend to generate more 'likes' and comments than messages that are transactional or directive (Chwialkowska, 2019; Hassan et al., 2016; Ordenes et al., 2018). In specific reference to coding for this study, emotion-based messages were referred to as motivational and humorous, as these posts were not directive but rather utilized emotion to intrigue the consumers about the brand. Motivational posts were intended to motivate the consumers to engage in an activity, behavior, or event (e.g., "Don't skip a Monday. #BetterThanYesterday"). Humorous posts were intended generate positive consumer engagement (e.g., "Life has ups and downs. We just prefer to call them squats"). Informative messages were informative regarding the brands upcoming events and promotions (e.g.,

"Monday's the day! Reminder, Murph will be the only workout for Monday. No regular classes will be held in honor of Memorial Day. Gym will open at 8am and workout options and scaling options will be held at 845. We will fire up at 9am with the first group. Happy hour to follow! Bring a dish and your beverage of choice! Have an awesome weekend everyone!") Engaging messages were intended to generate more consumer engagement with the post (e.g., "What's your top 3 goals for 2019? List them below!").

Results

Descriptive Results

August was the most common month for the brand to post to their Facebook page with 39 posts. These 39 posts generated total of 1,079 'likes' and 46 comments, leading the year in 'likes' by over 200 compared to the second most popular month, October. June lead the year in generating the most comments with 149, followed way behind by February with 53. The drastic differences in the top months for 'likes' and comments, August and June respectively, is due to a few outlining informative posts that generated reactions and comments way above the norm.

Table 1 documents the posts, reactions, and comments in each month.

Table 1

Number of engagements per month

Month	Posts	Likes	Avg. Likes	Comments	Avg. Comments
Jan	16	260	16.25	11	.69
Feb	17	207	12.18	53	3.12
March	15	204	13.6	15	1
April	13	152	11.69	10	.77
May	31	673	21.71	12	.39
June	32	631	19.72	149	4.66
July	24	548	22.83	14	.58
August	39	1079	27.67	46	1.18
September	28	746	26.64	16	.57
October	34	807	23.74	43	1.26
November	28	629	22.46	25	.89
December	23	652	28.35	17	.74

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With posts over a few weeks old there was no time available, but the day of the week each post was made was recorded. Table 2 documents the posts, reactions, and comments based on day of the week. Despite a lack of statistically significant differences, it appears that Monday and Wednesday were the most common days for the brand to post to the Facebook page, with 53 and 56 posts respectively. On average, Wednesday produced the most comments. The least common day for the brand to post to Facebook was Sunday, with only 24 posts. However, on average, Sunday had the most reactions. Monday generated the most 'likes' overall with 1,254. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday fell shortly behind and all had over 1,000 'likes'. Monday had the most posts and the most 'likes', while Sunday had the least amount of posts and the least amount of 'likes', showing a positive relationship between 'likes', day of the week, and number of posts.

Table 2

Number of engagements per day

Day	Posts	Likes	Avg. Likes	Comments	Avg. Comments
Monday	53	1254	23.66	50	.94
Tuesday	46	1032	22.43	27	.59
Wednesday	56	1137	20.30	180	3.21
Thursday	44	887	20.16	43	.98
Friday	48	1052	21.92	40	.83
Saturday	28	636	22.71	47	1.68
Sunday	24	607	25.29	42	1.75

In terms of categories of posts, motivational had most posts and majority of likes. Table 3 documents the number of posts, reactions, and comments based on message type. Of the 302 total posts, 184 of them were motivational. These 184 motivational posts generated 3,791 'likes'. The least common post the brand made to their Facebook page was engaging, with only 18 posts. These 18 posts only generated 278 'likes', which makes it the only category to generate under 1,000 'likes'. The 184 motivational posts also generated 82 comments, following shortly behind

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informative posts that generated 196 comments, which was more than all other categories.

Informative posts included events that often require people to sign-up for, which caused the number to comments to rise as people had questions regarding the events, the gym, or their programs.

Table 3

Number of engagements per category

Category	Posts	Likes	Ave. Likes	Comments	Ave. Comments
Motivational	184	3791	20.60	82	.45
Informational	49	1048	21.39	196	4
Humorous	50	1509	30.18	61	1.22
Engaging	18	278	15.44	59	3.28

Statistical Analysis

To further investigate differences in engagement, a series of statistical tests were performed on the data to determine which, if any, factors affected audience engagement with the posts. There were no statistically significant effects on number of reactions or number of comments based on month, day, or inclusion of photos or videos.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) determines whether there are differences in some continuous, interval or ratio-level variable based on some categorical variable with two or more levels. In other words, an ANOVA shows whether two or more groups are different on some non-categorical variable of interest. I conducted a one-way analysis of variance to explore the impact of message type on number of reactions. The ANOVA indicated there was a significant difference in number of reactions between the groups: $F(3, 298) = 4.491, p = .004$. Post-hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the humorous messages ($M = 30.18, SD = 16.323$) received significantly more reacts than motivational ($M = 20.59, SD = 14.936$) and engaging ($M = 15.28, SD = 22.400$).

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I conducted a second one-way analysis of variance to explore the impact of message type on number of comments. The ANOVA indicated there was a significant difference in number of comments between the groups: $F(3, 298) = 2.670, p = .048$. Post-hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the informative messages ($M = 4.00, SD = 20.058$) received significantly more comments than motivational ($M = .45, SD = .999$).

Discussion

The results of this study indicated humorous posts generated more 'likes' per post than the other categories. This is consistent with prior research, which found that consumers are more likely to engage with socioemotional messages, and messages that their friends have previously 'liked' than factual messages (Hassan et al, 2016, John et al., 2017, Ordenes et al., 2018). Humorous messages likely generated more 'likes' by targeting positive emotional responses as well as utilizing popular meme's and trending jokes. The brand used in this study foster's a high sense of community, support, and light-heartedness, so it is not surprising that humorous posts generated the most amount of 'likes'. Humor is a common tactic utilized by the brand to increase consumer retention and purchase intention in person, and this research study demonstrates that it translated to Facebook message success as well.

Informative posts generated more comments per post than the other categories. Informative posts shared information about upcoming events, challenges, and involvement opportunities. These posts likely generated the most comments because consumers had a variety of follow-up questions, wanted to tag friends in the posts to share the information, and wanted to express interest in the events. According to previous research, informational posts have been shown to be most effective for firm-initiated promotional communication, rather than consumers trying to learn about events from consumer-initiated communication (Mochon et al., 2017).

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Firm-initiated posts about events, challenges, and involvement reduces consumer confusion, which in turn increase consumer engagement and satisfaction.

Humorous posts generated the most 'likes', but what is defined as humorous may vary for brands. The brand used in this study utilized meme's and trending jokes that related to their brand, products, and consumers. Previous research indicates that other brands may have more success with different humor tactics and should determine humor based on the norms and expectations of their target audience (Kozinets et al., 2010). Informative posts generated the most comments, so if brands utilize this message type, they may also need to prepare to answer consumer questions. The brand utilized in this study is a small brand, and therefore was able to respond to all inquiries. Larger brands may struggle to address all consumer questions on informative posts and should consider utilizing the message type sparingly.

These results will be useful for small businesses that foster a similar brand image and post intention. Brands that promote an inclusive, connected, environment should have clear, concise informative posts that contain information pertinent to the consumers. Lengthy, vague informative posts create consumer frustration and may inhibit consumer purchase intention. In addition, brands should be cautious when withholding information on informative posts that are major influencers in a consumer purchase decision, such as pricing.

Finally, small businesses with similar target demographics may benefit from the use of photos and videos for consumer clarification, but the use of visual aids does not impact consumer online engagement. Photos and videos may help brands display their content, which can help with the post clarity mentioned previously. They do not harm consumer engagement and do not need to be avoided at all, just used in conjunction with the other recommendations from this study.

Future Research

This study assumes that all 'likes' and comments are positive. For future research, it would be beneficial for brands to know what messages types generate positive, negative, and questions from consumers. All reactions for this study were categorized as 'likes', but it would be important for brands to understand what generates a 'like', 'love', 'haha', 'wow', 'sad', and 'angry' reaction. Also, to categorize the comment types to understand if they are negative, positive, inquisitive, or indifferent. By generating a more specific reactions and comment type, brands avoid the assumption that all engagement is good engagement.

Social media is constantly changing and adapting, making it a difficult medium to research. This study looked at one platform, Facebook, to avoid generalizing results across other platforms. Each platform has different norms, expectations, and target demographics, meaning that message types that work on Facebook might not work on Instagram. Brands need to first understand where their target market is, and then determine the message types that work best for that platform, whether it is motivational, humorous, engaging, informative, or something different altogether. Finally, this study is intended to help brands understand the needs of their consumers in order to increase brand likeness, awareness, and consumer purchase intention.

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