

Popularity of Brand Posts on Brand Fan Pages: An Investigation of the Effects of Social Media Marketing

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Abstract

Social media outlets constitute excellent vehicles for fostering relationships with customers. One specific way to do this is to create brand fan pages on social networking sites. Companies can place brand posts (containing videos, messages, quizzes, information, and other material) on these brand fan pages. Customers can become fans of these brand fan pages, and subsequently indicate that they like the brand post or comment on it. This liking and commenting on brand posts reflects brand post popularity. In this article, we determine possible drivers for brand post popularity. We analyze 355 brand posts from 11 international brands spread across six product categories.

Results show that positioning the brand post on top of the brand fan page enhances brand post popularity. But the findings also indicate that different drivers influence the number of likes and the number of comments. Namely, vivid and interactive brand post characteristics enhance the number of likes. Moreover, the share of positive comments on a brand post is positively related to the number of likes. The number of comments can be enhanced by the interactive brand post characteristic, a question. The shares of both positive and negative comments are positively related to the number of comments. Managers of brands that operate brand fan pages can be guided by our research with regards to deciding which characteristics or content to place at brand posts.

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Introduction

In 2011, more than 50% of social media users follow brands on social media (Van Bellegem, Eenhuizen, and Veris 2011) and companies are increasingly investing in social media, indicated by worldwide marketing spending on social networking sites of about \$4.3 billion (Williamson 2011). Managers invest in social media to foster relationships and interact with customers (SAS HBR 2010). One way to realize this aim is to create brand communities in the form of brand fan pages on social networking sites where customers can interact with a company by liking or commenting on brand posts (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Consumers who become fans of these brand fan pages tend to be loyal and committed to the company, and are more open to receiving information about the brand (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006). Moreover,

brand fans tend to visit the store more, generate more positive word-of-mouth, and are more emotionally attached to the brand than non-brand fans (Dholakia and Durham 2010).

While preliminary research has been conducted on the success of marketing activities on social media, little is known about factors that influence brand post popularity, that is, the number of likes and comments on brand posts at brand fan pages (Ryan and Zabin 2010; Shankar and Batra 2009). Management-oriented studies about brand post popularity are mainly descriptive; they provide no theoretical foundation and do not formally test which activities actually improve brand post popularity. For example, these studies suggest that companies should experiment with different brand post characteristics, such as videos, images, text, or questions (Brookes 2010; Keath et al. 2011). Current insights are thus limited, which has increased the call for research in the area of social media, as indicated by the subject of this special

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issue and the 2010–2012 Marketing Science Institute research priorities (www.msi.org).

The aim of this research is to empirically investigate what factors drive brand post popularity. We develop a conceptual model that is based upon findings from the banner and advertising literature, as well as the word-of-mouth communication literature. We consider brand post characteristics (e.g., vividness, interactivity), content of the brand post (e.g., information, entertainment), position of the brand post, and the valence of comments on the brand post written by brand fans.

We gathered data from different brand fan pages on a social networking site to test our hypotheses. The findings indicate that enhancing either the number of likes or the number of comments requires different instruments. With this research we provide insights to the social media literature, which are interesting for academics as well as for practitioners. To the best of our knowledge, we are the first to empirically investigate which factors influence the popularity of brand posts at a social networking site. Our research provides valuable and directly applicable implications for companies’ social media marketing activities.

The flow of this paper is as follows: first, we describe brand fan pages and brand post popularity, and then develop the conceptual framework and hypotheses. That initial section is followed by a description of the study design. The empirical results are then described and discussed. We conclude with implications for managers, and propose some limitations that provide opportunities for further research.

Brand Fan Pages and Brand Post Popularity

In just a few years, social networking sites have become extremely popular: Facebook, for example, claims to have attracted over 800 million active members (as of fall 2011) since starting in 2004 (www.facebook.com). Social networking sites can be described as networks of friends for social or professional interactions (Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels 2009). Members of social networking sites can become friends with other members, but they can also become fans of brands on dedicated brand fan pages. Brand fans can share their enthusiasm about the brand on these dedicated pages and be united by their common interest in the brand (Kozinets 1999). Brand fan pages reflect part of the customers’ relationship with the brand (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002), broaden the brand–customer relationship (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001), and provide a source of information and social benefits to the members (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2002; Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo 2004). On these brand fan pages, companies can create brand posts containing anecdotes, photos, videos, or other material; brand fans can then interact with these brand posts by liking or commenting on them.

In this article, we focus on the determinants of brand post popularity, i.e., the number of likes and comments. In order to find these determinants affecting brand post popularity, we use research on the effectiveness of banner advertising because similarities exist between banners and brand posts. A banner is a small advertisement on web pages that advertisers want people to click on (Drèze and Hussherr 2003). Similarly, brand posts occupy only a small part of the brand fan page, with

companies wanting brand fans to like or comment on it. Thus, the challenges for both banners and brand posts are firstly to attract people’s attention and secondly to induce people to click on and view the content. However, people voluntarily decide to visit a brand fan page, whereas they are involuntarily confronted with banners and usually pay low attention to them (Goodrich 2011; Yoo 2009). Despite these differences between banners and brand posts, factors that compel people to click on a banner may also be applicable to how people interact with brand posts. For example, banners and brand posts need special characteristics or features that make them salient from the background and capture customers’ attention (Fennis and Stroebe 2010, p. 51).

Brand posts differ from banners on another aspect as well: the likes and comments on the brand post reflect active statements of brand fans and are visible to others. By liking or commenting on a brand post, brand fans state their opinion publicly. Liking and commenting on a brand post is thus similar to WoM communication. We therefore also use literature on WoM communication when discussing the factors that influence brand post popularity.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The conceptual framework for the determinants of brand post popularity is presented in Figure 1. We argue that vividness, interactivity, the content of the brand post (information, entertainment), the top position of a brand post, and the valence of comments on a brand post are related to brand post popularity (i.e., the number of likes and the number of comments). Additionally, we do control for the day of the week the brand post is placed, message length of the brand post, and the product category (see Figure 1).

Vividness

One way of enhancing the salience of brand posts is to include vivid brand post characteristics. Vividness reflects the richness of a brand post’s formal features; in other words, it is the extent to which a brand post stimulates the different senses (Steuer 1992). Vividness can be achieved by the inclusion of dynamic animations, (contrasting) colors, or pictures (Cho 1999; Drèze and Hussherr 2003; Fortin and Dholakia 2005; Goldfarb and Tucker

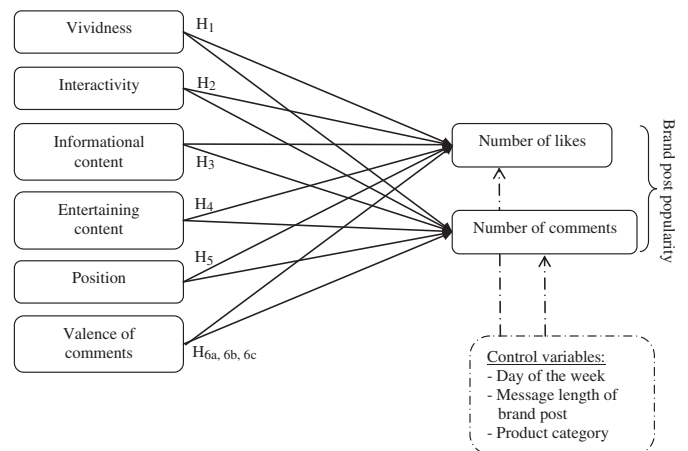


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

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