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Motivations to interact with brands on Facebook – Towards a typology of consumer-brand interactions

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Purpose

Social media has changed the communication landscape and online consumer behavior (Girona and Korgaonkar, 2014). With consumers spending more and more time on social media, brand-related interactions and exposure to brand communications are increasingly taking place within this sphere. Thus, Facebook and other social media become key players for branding activities (Hutter *et al*, 2013). As a result, significant power has shifted from the brands directly to consumers (Cova and Dalli, 2009). While social media has been subject to an increasing number of studies, empirical research on consumer–brand interaction on Facebook is still needed, in particular research on consumer motivations for engaging with brands on social media. Understanding these motivations would provide brand managers a better understanding of their consumers. The aim of this research is to address this gap and provide additional insights to brand managers on how to adapt their approaches to increase consumers' interaction with brands on Facebook. Therefore, this paper provides new insights about consumer–brand motivations to interact, as it distinguishes four types of consumers based on five consumer–brand motivations to interact, which we describe and discuss in relation to the intensity and the different types of interactions that consumers have with brand-related content on Facebook.

Theoretical Background

Social networks – Facebook

Social media is a “group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p 61). Different forms of social media have been studied in previous research, namely social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook (Moraes *et al.*, 2014). Facebook brand fan pages are used for explicit brand communication and as a privileged interaction channel between the brand and the users, which should be utilized to increase engagement with the brand and deepen the relationship with customers (Jahn and Kunz, 2012).

Types of consumer interactions with brand fan pages on Facebook

Consumers may have different types of interactions with brands via brand fan pages on Facebook. According to previous research, in order to measure interaction with a brand on Facebook, it is necessary to distinguish at least three levels of interaction, namely “likes”, “comments” and “shares” (Peters *et al.*, 2012). Hence, consumer engagement with the brand on Facebook is measured using indicators that are based on Facebook functionalities. Previous research also suggests that, besides “likes” and “comments”, social media metrics should also include the number of “shares” (Camarero *et al.*, 2014; Hoffman and Fodor, 2010). These items are usually combined to calculate an overall engagement metric, but a detailed view is critical for brands to understand if they have an appropriate distribution across these levels (Peters *et al.* 2012). Muntinga *et al.* (2011) introduced the behavioral construct Consumer Online Brand-Related Activity (COBRA). They point out that people can engage in multiple roles in social media, depending on their motivations and goals. They distinguished between three levels of consumer interaction: consuming, contributing and creating.

Motivations to interact with brands on Facebook

In order to understand consumer motivations to interact with brands on Facebook, we consider a user-centric functionalist perspective on social media, and apply the uses and gratification (U&G) theory proposed by Katz (1959). According to U&G theory, people use media to satisfy various needs and achieve their goals. Motivations are understood here with reference to the gratifications sought, and what activates the goal-directed behavior (Pervin, 1989). From the literature on consumer–brand relationships on social networks (Jahn and Kunz, 2012), consumer usage of social networks (Curran and Lennon, 2011), consumer engagement in online communication activities on social networks (Shu and Chuang, 2011), consumer–brand interactions on social media (Rohm *et al.*, 2013) and COBRAs (Daugherty *et al.*, 2008; Muntinga *et al.*, 2011), we identified the most important motivations associated with the use of social networks: social influence, search for information, entertainment, trust and reward.

Research Methodology

Data collection and sample

Data was collected through the administration of an online questionnaire (convenience sampling method). We obtained a convenience sample of 160 respondents (Facebook users). Our sample was heterogeneous in terms of sex, age, education level and time respondents spent on Facebook.

Principle measures

The five main motivations that could influence consumers’ interactions with brands on Facebook were all measured through multiple-item scales using a seven point scale. All the construct items, except for reward, were adapted from the work of Shu and Chuang (2011). With respect to reward, the lack of a scale that could serve as a basis for measuring this motivation made us develop a two-item scale based on previous academic (Muntinga *et al.*, 2011; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2003) and non-academic studies that have examined consumer

interaction with brands in exchange for a fee (Baird and Parasnis, 2011). Exploratory and confirmatory analyses were conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the variables used in this study. Convergent and discriminant validities for the dimensions used for our cluster analysis were supported. We had no common method bias.

Table 1: Construct measurements

	Mean	St. D.	Stand. reg. weights	Rel. analysis	CR	AVE
SOCIAL INFLUENCE (3 items)	2.64	1.37		.81	.81	.58
By interacting with brands on Facebook, I feel I am part of a community	3.16	1.69	.807			
I interact with brands on Facebook to state my interests and preferences to my friends	2.09	1.53	.666			
My interaction with brands on Facebook allows me to increase my social involvement	2.68	1.62	.804			
SEARCH FOR INFORMATION (3 items)	4.53	1.35		.80	.81	.58
My interaction with brands on Facebook allows me to better understand the brand	4.52	1.49	.822			
I like to interact with brands on Facebook because it allows me to find out the opinions of other consumers about the brand	4.28	1.74	.704			
My interaction with brands on Facebook gives me convenient access to information about brands, as the brand's posts appear directly on my news feed	4.81	1.58	.757			
ENTERTAINMENT (2 items)	3.36	1.54		.78	.81	.68
I like to interact with brands on Facebook to occupy my spare time	3.06	1.82	.682			
It is interesting to interact with brands on Facebook	3.66	1.57	.949			
TRUST (4 items)	4.09	1.28		.81	.82	.53
I believe it is safe to interact with brands on Facebook	4.83	1.50	.662			
I believe that brands respects my privacy when I interact with it on Facebook	4.08	1.61	.864			
I believe that brands will not provide the information that it has obtained about me, through Facebook, to other people or entities	3.74	1.76	.781			
I trust the information published by other consumers on the Facebook brand page	3.73	1.52	.590			
REWARD (2 items)	4.36	1.76		.84	.84	.72
I interact with brand on Facebook in order to access discounts and promotions	4.34	1.89	.853			
I like to interact with brands on Facebook as it offers contests and games from which I can access free products or other special offers	4.38	1.90	.854			

Findings and Implications

The objective of this analysis was to explore the different types of consumers who interact with brands using the five dimensions developed above. Therefore, we sorted the consumers into homogeneous clusters using cluster analysis techniques. We used hierarchical clustering methods in the exploratory approach. In order to further refine the cluster solution, we applied a non-hierarchical method to the resulting solution. Building on the five motivation factors for consumers to interact with brands on Facebook, the classification revealed four different groups of consumers with heterogeneous levels of motivation factors. Our findings

provide support for the internal and external validity of the four-cluster solution. Based on the relevant cluster means associated with the five motivational dimensions, we attributed different names to each cluster. Additionally, we used other behavioral variables and demographic variables to profile the clusters.

“Brand detached”

Our findings highlight a group of “brand detached” consumers, who have the lowest level of online interaction with the brand even when they are invited to interact with it. They spend less than one hour on Facebook per day on average, and connect to Facebook using their computers and tablets. For this group, the online presence of the brand is not important, and therefore they usually do not like, comment on or share the brand’s posts on Facebook. Thus, the “brand detached” consumers tend to assume a more “voyeuristic” behavior. Even though they do not usually like, comment on or share content, “brand detached” consumers do consume brand-related content, especially content that uses humor or that appeals to emotions.

“Brand profiteers”

These consumers spend an average of between 30 minutes and two hours on Facebook per day, using their computers and their mobile phones. Even though they consider it highly important for brands to have Facebook pages, they only have a medium level of interaction with brands on Facebook. They do not spend time commenting on the brand’s posts. Indeed, they are mainly looking for good deals. Hence, “brand profiteers” are particularly susceptible to promotions and incentives, which are their primary motivations to interact with brands on Facebook.

“Brand companions”

These consumers tend to devote a significant amount of their spare time to Facebook, spending more than two hours on Facebook per day on average. Even though they spend a significant amount of their time online, and they believe that it is highly important for a brand to have a page on Facebook, they only have a medium level of interaction with brands online. When they do interact, it is mainly due to a personal approach, since they rarely respond to brands’ calls for interaction (low level). For them, interacting with a brand is important for fun, and above all to get in contact with other users and with their friends.

“Brand companions”

Brand companions are more responsive to symbolic content that appeals to their emotions. Hence, the nature of these consumer–brand interactions on Facebook, tends to be more hedonic (e.g. sharing event-related, humorous and social-cause related posts).

“Brand reliant”

These consumers are the most enthusiastic and committed to brand fan pages on Facebook, and thus represent the highest level of online brand-related activities. They spend more than one hour on Facebook per day. Moreover, they think it is highly important for brands to have Facebook pages. They have high levels of online interaction with brands, and also a high level of response to brands’ invitations to interact. In this regard, they play the critical role of brand ambassadors.

Regarding their primary motivations to interact, “brand reliant” use the brand’s Facebook page to gather information about the brand (i.e. symbolic and functional benefits), for entertainment, and also for keeping in touch with friends.

Originality and value

Building on the five primary motivations that might influence consumers’ interactions with a brand on Facebook, a classification using clustering techniques reveals four different groups of consumers: brand detached, brand profiteers, brand companions and brand reliant. Our results provide valuable and applicable insights for brands’ social media marketing activities.

This study helps brand managers to develop strategies for effectively targeting the most desirable consumer groups.

Limitations

This study considered liking, sharing and commenting separately, whereas consumers might engage in multiple roles and thus like, share and/or comment on the same brand-related content. However, a detailed view of each of these levels of interaction is critical for brands to understand whether they have an appropriate distribution across the different interaction levels. Furthermore, the sample size and profile could also be considered a limitation, as the data were collected in Portugal only, and the sample consisted solely of young respondents. Although this population is relevant with respect to Facebook users, it is recommended that the research is replicated among older users in order to explore the generalizability of the findings.

We did not include specific brands in our study since we wanted to analyze consumer motivations to interact with brands in general. Future research could thus include specific brands, namely brands that have good results in terms of likes, but also in terms of comments and shares, in order to provide a more realistic appraisal of the content that effectively drives consumer–brand engagement on Facebook. Our research did not include potentially influential motivations that are brand specific, such as brand identity and consumer–brand relationship. Further research should explore the roles of these variables in driving consumer–brand interaction on Facebook.

Keywords: Social networking sites, Facebook, online branding, consumer behavior, cluster analysis

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