Chapter 81
What Social Media Marketing Content Is Best to Engage Consumers?
A Content Analysis of Facebook Brand Pages

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to investigate and empirically validate the factors contributing to consumer engagement on social media, particularly on Facebook brand pages. Using a dataset of marketing content posted on the top 100 Food and Beverage brand pages on Facebook, a qualitative study, based on an interpretive approach, has been carried out to identify the various content themes used in highly engaging posts. The results of this research demonstrate that there is a different causal impact of several content themes on consumer engagement constructs. The findings of this study permit one to better understand the determinants of consumer engagement related to the marketing content posted on Facebook brand pages and provide brand managers with valuable guidance on how to design and implement effective social media marketing strategies generating consumer engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of social media has reshaped the marketing landscape and, in its various forms, social media has become a significant marketing communication channel that allows marketers to access and take full advantage of the most unfettered consumer generated data. As of the second quarter of 2013, Facebook reported over 1.15 billion monthly active users and over 18 million business pages with 1 million new business pages added every month, indicating a dramatic growth of the business use of Facebook.

On Facebook, brand marketers create dedicated pages to foster two-way communication between the brand and its consumers. They also design and implement social media marketing strategies to ef-
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Effectively communicate with their consumers via these brand pages. A key Return On Investment (ROI) of social media marketing strategies is measured in terms of consumer engagement, an indicator of how well consumers interact with the marketing content. While ROI measurements are used to justify the efforts and expenses on social media marketing, brand marketers are seeking valuable insights into how to design social media marketing strategies that increase consumer engagement. In addition, they are also seeking insights into how to effectively measure such ROI.

Although the concept of 'online consumer engagement' has attracted abundant research interest, very few academic studies have addressed the role of the content as a driver of consumer engagement on social media platforms. Indeed, the literature discussing the effectiveness of electronic word of mouth (Davis & Khazanchi, 2008; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006) has focused on the social network structure, emphasizing on the role of the social tie strength between the communicator and the receiver as well as among members of the brand’s community in offline (Brown & Reingen, 1987) and online (Steffes & Burgee, 2009) environments. Steffes and Burgee (2009) further investigated the effect of homophily on word of mouth which is the degree to which pairs of individuals are similar in age, gender, education, and social status. Other researchers identified the communicator’s characteristics (credibility, expertise and trustworthiness) as positively associated with electronic word of mouth (Cheung et al., 2009; Hu et al., 2008; Kahle, 2001; Kiecker & Cowles, 2002; Park & Kim, 2008).

Despite the extensive research undertaken to study the effect of the communicator and receiver’s characteristics on online engagement, little has been done in academic research on the study of the effect of the marketing content itself on consumer engagement. Several researchers, however, support the idea that the viral characteristics of a marketing message are fundamentally about its content and the psychological effects content can have on a user’s desire to share it with peers (Stephen & Berger, 2009; Berger & Heath, 2005; Heath et al., 2001). To date, there are very few empirical studies which investigate the influence of marketer generate content social media on consumer engagement in the context of social media. Furthermore, the rare relevant studies (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013) examined a limited number of parameters, mostly quantitative, about the content posted by the marketers on their Facebook brand pages.

In light of such lack of research on the role of content in consumer engagement, the present work aims to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and report insightful results of a qualitative content analysis undertaken on a sample of marketing content posted on the top 100 Food and Beverage Facebook brand pages from the Fan Page List (fanpagelist.com) directory since their creation. The aim of this research is to extend existing quantitative research studies with a qualitative approach, exploratory in nature, aiming at identifying the determinants of consumer engagement related to the marketing content posted on Facebook brand pages.

The exploratory nature of this research, within the context of social media marketing, leads to adopt a qualitative study based on an interpretive approach to the inquiry as to examine why are certain content generate higher consumer engagement than others? The results discussed in this chapter provide valuable insights to brand managers into how to design and implement successful social media marketing strategies.

The rest of the chapter is structured as follows. The first section provides an overview of the related work on the conceptualization of consumer engagement. The second section tackles the issues related to the measurement of consumer engagement on social media platforms. Inspired by the levels of “traditional” consumer engagement described by Roberts and Alpert (2010) ranging from the purchase of products/services to their advocacy, a measurement model is proposed and covers a set of constructs including endorsement (“liking” of marketer’s content), feedback (commenting on marketer’s content),
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