

# Examining Brand Post Characteristics that Drive Facebook Consumer Engagement

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## Abstract

The development and increased use of social media by the consumers has brought new challenges for brands and marketers. Relying on the relational paradigm and being aware of social media enormous potential to reach, to foster relationships and engage and to create bonds between brand and consumer, marketers are increasingly using and considering them in their marketing strategy. In this context, social networking sites and, in particular, Facebook, are achieving an increasing relevance for marketers to communicate and engage their target.

Building on the Uses & Gratifications (U&G) theory and online consumer engagement research, our study analyzes the influence of marketing strategies related to Facebook post characteristics, such as post media and content type on fans response in terms of liking, sharing, and commenting brand posts, considered as online consumer engagement activities.

For this purpose, the authors have collected and coded approximately 2800 posts sourced from the Facebook brand pages of four top selling fashion brands (Cubanas, Paez, Havaianas and Fly London), considering the period between 1st March 2015 until 31st December 2017.

This research identifies differences across different consumer engagement activities. As such, informational, interactive and remunerational posts seem to have a positive effect on the several online consumer engagement activities examined, while vividness and entertainment yield mixed results. These findings and their implications are discussed in the context of branding and relationship marketing.

**Keywords:** Branding, online consumer engagement, relationship marketing, social networking sites.

## Introduction

Today we live in a time of change. The Luciferic rhythm to which the technologies have been following each other and metamorphized cannot but be object of reflection. The arriving of the scene of the World Wide Web and its fast pace mutation over the years underline this importance, having been the engine and, at the same time, the accelerator of the change process, impacting human beings in the most crucial aspects of their existence, as it is a privileged means of communication, interaction and social organization [1]. As the networked society [2] has been installed and social networks present themselves as the epitome of this new reality - the users, the brands and the marketing, at the same they were

being transformed, felt the need of adjusting to the constant challenges, promoting and acting according to the panorama in which they act.

In this context, users are no longer passive recipients of traditional mass communication. Empowered and with a more active voice than ever before, they produce content, and word of mouth has an increased relevance by comparison over the messages conveyed by the brands. We are facing a ubiquitous, dilettante user, who seeks both individual and group experiences, and that connects and disconnects from brands based on the interaction and depth of the dialogue they provide [3, 4]. This is one of the major challenges that marketing faces today, since the old transactional perspective gave way to a new approach grounded on relational cornerstones, where long term bonds creation, development and maintenance requires a close, sharpened, and intense process of communication between the parts. Engaging the consumers - underpinned on social networks, jumps to the forefront as a trending topic to explore, both in academic and business terms, since it is considered the driving force of postmodern consumer behavior [5], only achieved through intelligent strategies that create structures to foster emotional bonds [6, 7]. In essence, it is a question of navigating the more convenient and less intrusive social media environment, strengthening bonds and aiming for stronger relationships that result in positive responses [8].

Notwithstanding the substantial academic investment, especially in the attempt to find a consensual definition for the engagement construct, there is still a limited empirical research on its drivers in the online context [4, 9]. In order to fill this literature gap and given the strategic importance to brands to keep customers engaged, the current study focuses on validating several engagement drivers on Facebook brand pages. For this purpose, we will examine four fashion brands (Cubanas, Paez, Havaianas and Fly London), Facebook pages - the key platform where consumers interact with brands providing them with a strategic social venue that captures customers and engages with them [e.g., 10].

### **Literature review and hypothesis**

It is undeniable that the emergence of the internet and the establishment of Web 2.0 has introduced new challenges for brands and marketing, substantially altering how they should manage their tangible and intangible resources. The old transactional management approach has given rise to a new relational paradigm, based on the premise that the peculiarities of the environment and the new consumer, require a new focus whose pillars are the relationship, the interactivity between the parties and a long-term orientation [11]. In essence, it is no longer just a question of withdrawing economic dividends, it is about creating bonds and engagement, an intimate connection with and proximity to consumers, making them "owners" and brand ambassadors [12].

Although we find the roots of engagement in the approach provided by [13] - who studied its psychological preconditions, only recently the concept of engagement has gained prominence in the literature of the specialty and marketers' agendas [6, 7, 9, 14]. The achieved prominence drift beyond of the urgent need to find an indicator that recognizes that the relationship between brands and their audiences evolve according to the experience and depth dialogue [3], as emotional and rational ties are established. In essence, this is a promising concept that indicates a high predictive power and explanatory face to a valuable set of results focus of consumer behavior such as loyalty, trust or commitment to a company or brand [15].

Despite the investment made, research in engagement is still limited, being in its infancy. Many of the studies are descriptive, many of the conclusions are based on purely managerial assumptions [16, 17], with very limited studies that explain the factors related to engagement in the context of social media [4, 18].

The definition presented by [6], can be considered the most comprehensive consumer engagement (CE) in the literature. According to [6], CE represents a highly context-dependent psychological state, characterized by a specific intensity level that plays a fundamental role in the process of relational exchange. Already [7] and [19] opted, when confronted with the dissimilarity of definitions and nomenclatures for the concept and proposals present in the literature, state their main points of contact, such as: their relational nature, involving contact, experience, interaction, connection between two parties (eg, between a consumer and a brand) [20]; its strong motivational aspect [21]; the behavioral manifestations that the users develop towards a brand or company; the proactive and interactive relationship that develops between the two parties, that is, more than a merely instrumental value is a relation that is worth by experience; and, their multidimensional nature [8, 22], closing important cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions that, in the limit, should be contextually determined [23].

Although the concept of consumer engagement sounds very appealing, conceptual studies and the few empirical studies offers a partial representation of CE that neglects the analysis of its components and its drivers. We find in [9], or [24] a summary of some of its most relevant predictors. For example, [24] chose social interaction, community value, brand characteristics and reputation as the main determinants of CE. For [9] the vividness, the dynamism of the posts, the interactivity and the entertainment created around the brand increases the possibility of the posts becoming more popular with the users.

Also [25] sought to realize - through a comparative analysis - the reason why some brands could get greater engagement on Facebook. By analysing more than 1000 posts of 98 global brands concluded there are seven preferred predictors of likes, comments and shares made by fans, which are: brand communication - promoting the brand, its products and sharing the successes and achievements of the brand; providing informative value about the history and profile of the brand; using humour – posting messages and humorous images; humanization of the brand - depicting the mark as an object with life and emotion it were; request likes - asking directly and objectively likes the posts that are placed on the page; communication and promotion of related events and associated with the brand and posting images and multimedia element.

Regarding the research model of this study, it builds on diverse streams of research, such as the Uses & Gratifications (U&G) theory and consumer engagement research, to develop our hypotheses, which focus on the key drivers of consumer engagement with Facebook brand pages.

### **Brand post media type**

According to [26] media types involve both vividness and interactivity. Vividness refers to the representational richness of a mediated environment [e.g. 27, 28] while interactivity can be defined as the “degree to which two or more communication parties can act on each other, on the communication medium and on the messages, and the degree to which such actions are synchronised” [29, p.54]. Including vivid brand post characteristics,

such as images or videos, enhances the salience of brand posts [30, 31]. But so far, the extant research yields mixed results regarding its effects on consumer engagement activities with brand posts. For this research we depart from the notion that vivid brand content, with its richness in visual, auditory, and other sensory cues can generate a hedonically satisfying brand experience [e.g., 27], and develop a positive attitude toward posts compelling brand fans to interact and engage with brand posts.

Such as with vividness, within a specific interactive medium (as Facebook), different content can possess varying levels of interactivity. A brand post with only text is not interactive, whereas highly interactive brand posts comprise posing a question, using hashtags or links to external websites and stimulating discussions about the brand [32]. Insofar, research has shown inconclusive findings on the relationship between interactivity and brand post likes, shares and comments [e.g., 26, 28, 30, 32, 33]. Yet, as interactivity is known to stimulate consumer engagement in social media ranging from participation through superficial action to commitment to the co-creation of content [34], can lead to higher brand prominence for fans and favourable communication outcomes [e.g., 35], we assume that messages with a high degree of interactivity invite to more participation.

Thus, we hypothesize that:

H1: The higher the level of brand post vividness, the higher the number of a) Likes; b) Shares; c) Comments.

H2: The higher the level of brand post interactivity, the higher the number of a) Likes; b) Shares; c) Comments.

### **Brand post content type**

Drawing on the uses and gratification theory, several studies have examined the goals and motives of individuals to engage with different forms of brand content posts [26, 30, 36]. Based on previous studies, [37] propose a categorization of social media content into several main groups, relying on the level of information, entertainment, and remuneration. Informational content provides users with resourceful and helpful information [e.g., 26, 28] while entertainment refers to the relaxation, enjoyment, and emotional relief generated by temporarily escaping from daily routines [38]. Information-seeking and entertainment seem to be relevant motives to interact with brand pages since when fans are motivated, they are likely to participate and engage with the SNS brand page [e.g. 26, 30]. Additionally, previous studies have identified entertainment as the most important content factor to affect fans' behavior on a SNS brand page [e.g., 28, 39].

Remuneration refers to promotions, trials, coupons, special offers, loyalty programs and distribution points, or some kind of reward such as an economic incentive or compensation, job-related benefit or personal wants [e.g., 26, 36]. Remunerational content is expected to gratify users' needs for remuneration and rewards within social media [37] and has been studied as a driver of consumer decisions to contribute to online communities and exerts a significant effect on brand fans online engagement [e.g., 26, 30, 32, 36].

Therefore, we propose that Facebook brand page fans are likely to engage with content featuring informational, entertaining and remunerational elements. Thus:

H3: Posts which contain information content are positively associated to higher number of a) Likes; b) Shares; c) Comments

H4: Posts which contain entertainment content are positively associated to higher number of a) Likes; b) Shares; c) Comments

H5: Posts which offer remuneration positively associated to higher number of a) Likes; b) Shares; c) Comments

## Method

### Sample

The social networking site selected for collecting data was Facebook because of its unparalleled popularity, affording an opportunity to generate broadly applicable insights [40]. A sample of four brand pages from top selling fashion brand shoes was selected - Cubanas, Paez, Havaianas and Fly London. To determine the most popular brand pages and with high levels of awareness, we used the data from Socialbakers (2017) and FBRank2017, choosing the brands that ranked on the top position. The analyses covered all the four brand posts published from March 1, 2015 to December 31, 2017, with a total of 2807 brand post automatically collected comprising the final sample, a significantly greater number of publications than those analyzed in previous studies on Facebook [28, 30, 31].

### Data coding

These brand posts were content analyzed in accordance with a coding grid and coded manually, following coding strategies already developed by previous researchers.

### Operationalization of the variables

Table 1 presents the operationalization of engagement drivers and respective authors

**Table 1:** Operationalization of engagement drivers

| Drivers       | Variables           | Categories              | Authors       |
|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Media type    | Vividness           | (3) Video               | 33, 34,<br>38 |
|               |                     | (2) Link                |               |
|               | (1) Picture         |                         |               |
|               | (0) Status          |                         |               |
| Interactivity |                     | (3) Question            |               |
|               |                     | (2) Call to act         |               |
| Content type  | Information (Brand) | (1) Link                |               |
|               |                     | (0) Status and pictures |               |
|               | Entertainment       | (3) Success             |               |
|               |                     | (2) Business            |               |
| Remuneration  |                     | (1) Brand               |               |
|               |                     | (0) No information      |               |
|               |                     | (4) Emotions            |               |
|               |                     | (3) Events              |               |
|               |                     | (2) Information         |               |
|               |                     | (1) Humour/joke         |               |
|               |                     | (0) No entertainment    |               |
|               |                     | (1) Yes (Prizes)        |               |

Dependent variables used in this study, i.e. number of likes, shares and comments, represent count variables with a Poisson distribution. In addition, since the distribution

variance and mean were different for all of the dependent variables, we used a Negative Binomial estimation method which overcomes the problem of overdispersed count data [41].

## Results

Regarding the dependent variables can be concluded that the fans' most frequent reaction to brand publications on Facebook Pages are by far the likes (91%), followed by comments (5%) and sharing (4%).

By analysing the frequency of engagement drivers we conclude: 1) posts with *photos* were the most frequently used (95,4%) and presented almost no interactivity (79,4%), with “questions” (17,3%) representing the primary interactivity tool; (2) posts are undoubtedly informative (68,8%) followed by “entertainment” (27,5%) and “remuneration” (4,8%). On the other hand, based on the analysis of the publications of the brands we realize that they systematically use pictures (17 %) and rely mainly to the inclusion of links (17 %) or questions (17%) to interact with their fans even though the majority of posts are not interactive (64,5%).

In what concerns the content, brands tend to publish information about themselves (71%), mainly about shoes collections (48%) followed by other relevant business information (17%). Nevertheless, brands play an entertainment role (29%) mainly through posts with varied information mainly related to fashion and trends (11%). Rewarding fans for getting involved with the page, through contests, is also a technique used by brands even though with a minority expression (5%).

Empirical results obtained from the estimation of the theoretical model for engagement over proposed drivers are reported. Parameters are exponentiated coefficients. All results are presented in Table 2.

Except for the "entertainment" driver, the model for the number of likes is significant as a whole, although not for all categories within each driver. Only "pictures", "links", "brand information" and "contests" have a statistically significant effect on the number of likes.

Similarly, the model for the number of shares is significant as a whole, except for the “vividness” driver. Within each driver “links,” “emotion” and “remuneration” are statistically significant predictors.

The model for the number of comments is significant as a whole without exceptions. Apart from “remuneration” that has statistically significant effect on the number of comments, the other drivers are not totally predictors. “Picture”, “link”, “question”, humour and “emotion” are the only ones to have a statistically significant effect on the number of comments.

By analysing the Incidence Rate ratio (IIR) ( $\text{Exp}(\beta)$ ) with exception for “emotion” all of them are greater than one what means that the effect is bigger with the predictor than without it.

Regarding “likes” model and according to IIR’s magnitude the biggest effect is of “brand information” followed by “pictures” and “links”. Analysing the model of "shares" the variable with the greatest effect is “remuneration” followed by “link”. It should be noted, however, that emotive posts have a negative impact on the number of shares, that is, the presence of this characteristic reduces the propensity to share. As for the comments, the most

determining variable is the "remuneration" followed by "humour" and "links". As with "shares" the "emotion" has a perverse effect by reducing the number of comments.

**Table 2:** Estimation Results

| Drivers              | Likes   | Shares   | Comments   |
|----------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Vividness</b>     | <b><math>\chi^2=9,479</math>; <math>df=2</math>; <math>p=0,000</math></b> | <b><math>\chi^2=3,500</math>; <math>df=2</math>; <math>p=0,321</math></b>  | <b><math>\chi^2=2,65</math>; <math>df=2</math>; <math>p=0,048</math></b>   |
| (3) -video           | ,822  | <b>2,944</b>   | 1,297  |
| (2)- link            | <b>1,832</b>  | 1,215  | <b>2,400</b>   |
| (1) - picture        | <b>1,930</b>  | <b>3,008</b>   | <b>1,761</b>   |
|                      | <b>H1a) partially supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                   | <b>H1b) not supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                          | <b>H1c) partially supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                    |
| <b>Interactivity</b> | <b><math>\chi^2=54,76</math>; <math>df=3</math>; <math>p=0,000</math></b> | <b><math>\chi^2=161,11</math>; <math>df=3</math>; <math>p=0,000</math></b> | <b><math>\chi^2=65,60</math>; <math>df=3</math>; <math>p=0,000</math></b>  |
| (3) - question       | 1,109   | ,968   | <b>1,318</b>   |
| (2)- call to act     | 1,090   | 1,794  | 1,004  |
| (1) - link           | <b>1,663</b>  | <b>2,343</b>   | <b>1,849</b>   |
|                      | <b>H2a) partially supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                   | <b>H2b) partially supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                    | <b>H2c) partially supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                    |
| <b>Information</b>   | <b><math>\chi^2=43,34</math>; <math>df=3</math>; <math>p=0,000</math></b> | <b><math>\chi^2=35,85</math>; <math>df=3</math>; <math>p=0,000</math></b>  | <b><math>\chi^2=63,94</math>; <math>df=3</math>; <math>p=0,000</math></b>  |
| (3) - success        | 1,235   | ,589   | ,695   |
| (2)- business        | 1,636   | 1,076  | 1,257  |
| (1) - brand          | <b>2,314</b>  | 1,362  | 1,978  |
|                      | <b>H3a) partially supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                   | <b>H3b) partially supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                    | <b>H3c) partially supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                    |
| <b>Entertainment</b> | <b><math>\chi^2=38,54</math>; <math>df=4</math>; <math>p=0,000</math></b> | <b><math>\chi^2=67,81</math>; <math>df=4</math>; <math>p=0,000</math></b>  | <b><math>\chi^2=134,85</math>; <math>df=4</math>; <math>p=0,000</math></b> |
| (4) - emotions       | ,636  | ,389   | ,334   |
| (3) - events         | 1,399   | 1,278  | ,717   |
| (2)- information     | 1,114   | ,829   | ,795   |
| (1) - humour         | ,777  | 1,132  | <b>3,538</b>   |
|                      | <b>H4a) partially supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                   | <b>H4b) partially supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                    | <b>H4c) partially supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                    |
| <b>Remuneration</b>  | <b><math>\chi^2=6,03</math>; <math>df=1</math>; <math>p=0,014</math></b>  | <b><math>\chi^2=20,76</math>; <math>df=1</math>; <math>p=0,000</math></b>  | <b><math>\chi^2=106,71</math>; <math>df=1</math>; <math>p=0,000</math></b> |
| (1) - yes            | <b>1,528</b>  | <b>2,454</b>   | <b>14,634</b>  |
|                      | <b>H5a) supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                             | <b>H5b) supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                              | <b>H5c) supported <math>\alpha=5\%</math></b>                              |

Note: The statistically significant relationships are represented in bold

Our results are in line with other studies that postulate a greater propensity of the fan to click on the "like" button when confronted with a vivid, interactive and informative post. This kind of post is expected to be useful by the information contained in it and complemented by "picture" that guarantees a faster visualization, as well as an immediate access to more information through a link to the respective brand website. Furthermore, posts promising rewards through contest might suggest a positive attitude that is reflected by pressing the "like" button [e.g., 14, 25, 26, 42].

The literature on online sharing activity has proven to be more inconclusive on results [43], and that is also reflected in this study. Sharing is more demanding than simply pressing the "like" button, often a spontaneous act. In sharing, we are interacting with others and this means possibly being judged. In any case, sharing is important for brands, since it is a way of spreading "news" and in this study it seems to be evident the importance of the contests / prizes in the propensity to share, suggesting that in the presence of a possible gratification fans have a tendency to spread the "good news" [14, 36].

The negative predictive power of emotional posts can be explained by the content of these posts that are usually released during festive seasons (i.e. Christmas) in which the brand wishes "Happy Holidays" to its fans who receive them and just as they do with other friends they do not share them evoking just the "like" button in acknowledgment.

Commenting often forces us to express opinions which brings us to interacting with others; however, it is in this space that fans question the brands (i.e. prices, sizes) or that answer to quizzes and to "call to action". More interactive posts in which the brand invokes an action to their fans impel more comments. Again, and based on the same rationale, the emotive posts do not produce effects on commenting [44].

## Conclusions

This study reveals that almost all proposed drivers have an effect on engagement with Facebook brand pages. In this sense it adds insights to the fast-growing and fragmented online consumer engagement literature by developing a more comprehensive understanding on how different contents and types of posts affect consumers' engagement toward brands pages in Facebook.

The current study also provides insights for practitioners. A large number of companies use social networking sites (SNS), but still are not sure how effective they are to get their fans engaged with their pages. Attending to this, our results provide managerial guidance for the footwear industry to develop marketing strategies on SNS, particularly on Facebook, according to the consumer engagement patterns found.

As for the limitations, the results presented in this paper were based on data gathered on four brands of just one product category (Apparel/Shoes), on a limited time period and on single SNS (Facebook). This restricts the generalization of the findings to other business areas and social media formats.

Given the afore mentioned considerations, a recommendation for further studies relates to the expansion of the data set to generalize the present findings, eventually considering: 1) brands on other industry domains, to examine similarities and differences on their communication strategy on social media and the impact on engagement. Additionally, further research should aim to examine different social media formats, to expand our understanding on the antecedents of consumer engagement in the social media environment.

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