



## Full length article

## How consumers become loyal fans on Facebook

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the values consumers want to attain from brand fan pages and how the values and opportunities for co-creation lead to engagement in a fan page, a better customer experience and greater loyalty. A conceptual model is developed to explain the whole process from a consumer becomes a fan, an engaged fan, to a loyal fan. We first use interviews with the laddering technique to discover the values that drive consumers to use a brand fan page. Then, an Internet survey is conducted to collect data and test the proposed model. This study discovers the key values (i.e., self-respect, being well respected, security, warm relationship with others, a sense of accomplishment, self-fulfillment, a sense of belonging, fun and enjoyment of life, convenience, and better service) consumers want to attain from the use of a brand fan page. Furthermore, values and co-creation positively drive consumers to engage in a fan page and further generate better experience. User experience is a determinant of satisfaction and loyalty. The findings can help companies manage their fan pages and understand how to create values for consumers and lead them to be loyal.

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## 1. Introduction

According to Facebook's Q2 2017 earnings report, there are 2.01 billion monthly active users on Facebook, and more than 65 million businesses use Pages (Facebook, 2017). A "brand fan page" is a profile used to represent the brand of a company. It also refers to a community that allows fans and interested members to gather together to chat about or get information about the brand from the company. Many businesses have started to design strategies around social network marketing and have found that fan pages on Facebook have potential value (Wallace, Buil, de Chernatony, & Hogan, 2014). Therefore, how to make Facebook users "Like" their brand fan pages and become loyal fans is an important issue. Clicking "Like" allows a Facebook user to join the fan page and become a fan. After that, the brand's information will automatically appear on that user's Facebook news feed, and the user's Facebook profile will display the fan page as an "interest." After becoming fan, a user can engage with the fan page by liking, sharing, or commenting on the page's posts. Fans can also invite their Facebook friends to join the fan page, follow the page, and rate the brand to let others know that this brand is recommended.

Little research has been done to identify the factors that drive consumers to become fans and how these factors affect their loyalty. The extant literature has focused on the intention to continue using fan pages (Lin & Lu, 2011), how consumer engagement with self-expressive brands affects brand love and word-of-mouth (Wallace, Buil, & de Chernatony, 2014), and Facebook fan typology (Wallace, Buil, de Chernatony & Hogan, 2014). Jahn and Kunz (2012) argued that consumer values lead to fan page participation, and such participation can contribute to brand loyalty. Although several types of values were examined in Jahn and Kunz's study, specific consumer values must be identified if businesses are to better manage their fan pages. Heretofore, much less has been known about which specific values brand fan pages offer to fans are able to increase Facebook members' willingness to first become fans of the brand, and then become loyal fans. In addition, Jahn and Kunz did not consider the effects of co-creation and the user experience.

Co-creation refers to the process of developing new products with customers' participation (Füller, Hutter, & Faullant, 2011), which means that customers participate in the creation of ideas during the development process of the service or product. Nysveen and Pedersen (2014) argued that the interaction and dialogue elements of co-creation improve both the company's ability to provide what consumers want and the consumers' ability to choose or adapt services to fit their needs. The brand fan page is a platform which enables fans and the company to interact and collaborate. On

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the fan page, fans may discuss their experience of using the service or product, and can also make suggestions for improvements. This joint activity can help the company develop mutual knowledge and understanding, and improve its service or products to fit consumers' needs. We posit that co-creation activities between fans and the company on the brand fan page can increase fans' engagement with the page and further enhance fan loyalty.

Customer experience refers to the customer's subjective response to interactions with the company: i.e., the communication encounter, the service encounter, and the consumption encounter (H. Kim & Choi, 2013; Meyer & Schwager, 2007). A brand fan page is a touchpoint through which the company provides service and communicates with consumers; thus, the users' participation via the page creates their experience. Prior studies have shown that loyalty is determined by the customer experience (H. Kim & Choi, 2013; Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014). The present study focuses on the experience of using and interacting with fan pages and examines how this experience mediates the relationship between user participation on a fan page and user loyalty to the fan page service.

We address the following research questions.

- (1) What particular values drive consumers to become fans?
- (2) How do values influence fans' usage of and engagement with fan pages?
- (3) To what extent does value co-creation matter in driving engagement with a fan page?
- (4) How do fans' usage of and engagement with the fan page affect their experience, and further influence their response to the brand in terms of satisfaction, trust and service loyalty?
- (5) How does fans' loyalty to the brand fan page impact their loyalty to the brand itself?

We use the laddering technique, a qualitative method, to discover the key desired values that induce Facebook members to click the "Like" button to join a brand fan page. The fan page attributes that facilitate the attainment of these values are also identified. By adopting uses and gratifications (U&G), co-creation, and loyalty theories as our theoretical basis, a conceptual model is developed to systematically explain how these values drive fans to be loyal. We then conduct an Internet survey, a quantitative method, to examine the proposed model and investigate the roles of values, co-creation, and user experience in developing loyal fans.

## 2. Literature review and hypothesis development

### 2.1. The impact of values on fan page participation

Users' participation on a fan page refers to their usage of and engagement with the fan page (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Usage intensity refers to how frequently a user reads a fan page. Fan page engagement is an interactive and integrative participation in the fan page community, which includes writing comments about the brand fan page on the page wall, rating the page, attending activities held by the page, and clicking the "Like" button for a post or sharing it.

The relationships between values and fan page participation can be explained by the U&G theory. This theory postulates that people select and use media in order to satisfy specific needs and achieve gratification. Fan pages are a form of social media that provides certain values that drive people to use it. Jahn and Kunz (2012) used U&G theory as the basis for their investigation into the relationships between values, usage intensity, and brand fan page engagement. They argued that fans will increase their usage of and engagement with the brand fan page to attain the values they

want. As such, we propose the following hypotheses.

**H1.** *The values offered by the brand fan page lead to fan page usage intensity.*

**H2.** *The values offered by the brand fan page lead to fan page engagement.*

If fans read a brand fan page more frequently, there is more contact between the fans and the page, which creates more opportunities for interactions between the fans and the page. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

**H3.** *Fan page usage intensity has a positive influence on fan page engagement.*

### 2.2. The impact of co-creation on fan page engagement

Co-creation can facilitate the accommodation of consumers' needs, and can strengthen the consumer-company relationship (Hoyer, Chandy, Dorotic, Krafft, & Singh, 2010). Consumers are now able to easily convey their ideas to the company via fan pages. To gain such favorable outcomes, value co-creation may drive fans to engage with the fan page. Since value co-creation requires interactions between consumers and the company (Grönroos, 2011), we can posit that a high level of co-creation results in a high level of interaction with the fan page. On Facebook, members who participate with the company to co-create value are going to engage with the brand fan pages by liking, making comments or sharing posts. Therefore, the level of participation in value co-creation will influence brand fan page engagement.

**H4.** *Co-creation has a positive influence on the strength of brand fan page engagement.*

### 2.3. The impact of fan page participation on the user experience

Customer experience is the response to the sum total of direct and indirect encounters with the company. The quality of the experience is determined by the outcome of the service encounter, the interaction between the customer and the service provider, and the interaction between the customer and other customers (H. Kim & Choi, 2013). We use the term "user experience" instead of "customer experience" to refer to a fan's perceptions and responses resulting from the use of and interaction with the fan page. On a fan page, user experience comes from not only the interaction between a fan and the company but also the interaction between the fan, the platform, and other fans. Therefore, the user experience on a fan page is a consequence of using and engaging with the fan page. Prior research has argued that users must engage in order to have a fruitful and joyful experience, e.g., enjoyment (Papagiannidis, Pantano, See-To, & Bourlakis, 2013). Customers' participation with a brand influences their experience with the brand (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014). Thus, we posit that if fan page users increase their use of and engagement with a fan page, they have a better user experience. We propose the following hypotheses.

**H5.** *Usage intensity has a positive influence on the user experience.*

**H6.** *Fan page engagement has a positive influence on the user experience.*

### 2.4. The impact of the user experience on service satisfaction, trust, and loyalty

User experience can be viewed as the response to service quality and interaction quality (H. Kim & Choi, 2013). Prior studies have

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