

Does a Virtual Like Cause Actual Liking? How Following a Brand's Facebook Updates Enhances Brand Evaluations and Purchase Intention



Camiel J. Beukeboom* & Peter Kerkhof & Metten de Vries

VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Available online 10 November 2015

Abstract

Studies have shown positive associations between liking a Facebook brand page and brand evaluations, but causal evidence is lacking. This online pre–post-measure experiment compared brand evaluations of ‘current followers’ of a target brand’s Facebook page, with ‘new followers’ instructed to ‘like’ the page, and ‘non-followers’ over one month. Results showed a significant positive increase for new followers on brand evaluations, whereas non-followers showed no change. Current followers were most positive in evaluations overall, but showed no change over time. This provides evidence that following a brand’s Facebook updates can *cause* positive changes in brand evaluations. The effects were explained by perceived conversational human voice, indicating the importance of brand interactivity. Implications for brands’ social media presence are discussed.

© 2015 Direct Marketing Educational Foundation, Inc., dba Marketing EDGE. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Social media; Facebook; Brand attitude; Brand equity; Purchase intention; NPS; Conversational human voice

Introduction

The advent of social media has opened up new opportunities for brands to connect with consumers. A majority of companies now include social media in their communication strategy. Yet, it remains uncertain whether these social media investments pay off by positively affecting consumer’s brand evaluations and purchase intentions (Weinberg and Pehlivan 2011).

Research into the use of social media by brands does at least suggest a beneficial effect. Several studies reveal positive correlations between social media use and variables like brand loyalty, brand evaluations, purchase intention, or net promoter score (NPS) (NPS, e.g., Dholakia and Durham 2010; Kim and Ko 2012; Naylor, Lamberton, and West 2012). However, most findings are based on correlational data and/or rely on consumers

who have chosen to follow the brand themselves. Consequently these studies do not allow for any causal conclusions since the positive brand evaluations reported by participants may very well be the cause rather than the effect of following the brand. The present online study was designed to fill this gap by using both an experimental manipulation assigning participants to follow a target brand on Facebook for a one month period, and a pre- and post-measure of brand evaluations.

Social Network Sites and Brand Evaluations

Brands have established an active presence on many social network sites. In 2013, 77% of the Fortune 500 companies were active on Twitter, 70% on Facebook, and 69% on YouTube (Barnes, Lescault, and Wright 2013). On these social network sites, brands engage in activities like customer service, offering product information, special offers and various kinds of entertainment. Through these activities, brands aim to promote their products and the brand itself and to build relationships with prospects and customers.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Communication Science, VU University Amsterdam, De Boelelaan 1081, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

E-mail address: c.j.beukeboom@vu.nl (C.J. Beukeboom).

On Facebook, brands can currently be found in generic brand communities (i.e., Facebook groups) and on brand pages (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Zaglia 2013). For Facebook brand pages, previously called fan pages, a simple like is enough to get (part of) the brand's content on one's Facebook wall, whereas in Facebook groups membership is often restricted. Facebook brand pages are more commonly used than Facebook groups and arguably the most frequently used way of brands to communicate directly with consumers. The reach of brand pages is much higher than Facebook groups, with some brands maintaining brand pages with over 40 million (Red Bull) or even 80 million (Coca Cola) followers. A 2012 industry study, showed that one third of American consumers with a profile on either Twitter or Facebook followed at least one brand, mostly on Facebook (Edison Research 2012).

While the reach of Facebook brand pages is high, the ties that may result from liking a Facebook brand page may be less strong than ties that are based on participation in a Facebook group. Facebook brand pages are described as a "social network-based online brand community" (Pöyry, Parvinen, and Malmivaara 2013, p. 226) and "a weaker form of brand community" (Zaglia 2013, p. 222), in which consumers mainly participate due to utilitarian motives (e.g., getting information or benefits; Zaglia 2013). Even though a significant proportion of Facebook users like one or more brand pages, little is known about the effects of these Facebook likes. The question remains whether Facebook pages can be used as a means to promote a brand and enhance brand evaluations.

Liking a brand on Facebook can be considered as a first step towards, or a light form of customer engagement. Customer engagement behavior has been defined by Van Doorn et al. (2010) as "a customer's behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers". Liking a Facebook fan page may constitute such a brand-focused behavioral manifestation, be it one that requires little effort and investment, and that may serve various personal and social goals. Liking a brand on Facebook exposes consumers to content created by the brand and thus constitutes an important way of distributing brand information. Consumers who like a brand page expose themselves to a stream of content that brands post on their pages. Moreover, brand pages allow for increased (informal) interactivity. In most cases, consumers are allowed to post on the brand page itself, and followers are exposed to the responses posted by the brand and other consumers.

The question our study aims to answer is whether liking a Facebook page affects brand evaluations, even when it is a rather passive form of participating in a brand community. Liking a brand page exposes consumers to brand messages and product information that they otherwise would not have encountered. Several industry studies have shown that liking a brand on Facebook is related to more positive brand attitudes and a higher incidence of purchases of the brands' products or services. For example, a study that compared Facebook fans' vs. non-fan customers' purchase behavior found that fans spend more than non-fan customers (Mulvihill 2011). Also, fans of a retailer Facebook brand page spend almost 50% more than non-fans (Renfrow 2014).

Several academic studies have also shown that engaging with a brand in social media is related to positive evaluations of the brand. Consumers that either followed or were familiar with the Facebook fan page and/or the Twitter activities of an international airline reported more positive reputation scores than consumers who did not follow the brand (Dijkmans, Kerkhof, and Beukeboom 2015). Moreover, positive evaluations of a company's social media postings were shown to relate to both positive brand attitudes and higher purchase intention (Schivinski and Dabrowski 2013). Passive usage (browsing the brand page) of a company-hosted Facebook brand page was related to a higher purchase intention in a study by Pöyry, Parvinen, and Malmivaara (2013). Labrecque (2014, Study 1) showed that the perceived interactivity of a brand was related to loyalty and willingness to share information with the brand. Several other studies revealed positive correlations between social media use and variables like brand loyalty, brand evaluations, purchase intention, and NPS (e.g., Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schäfer 2012; Dholakia and Durham 2010; Kim and Ko 2012; Naylor, Lamberton, and West 2012; Schivinski and Dakabrowski 2013; Turri, Smith, and Kemp 2013).

The studies cited above, however, are correlational and cannot exclude the possibility that a positive brand evaluation precedes social media engagement, rather than follows from engaging with the brand's social media activities. Existing positive brand evaluations may very well result in brand engagement of some kind. For example, positive word-of-mouth on Twitter (retweeting brand messages) is related to higher brand identification and brand trust (Kim, Sung, and Kang 2014). Likewise, positive brand evaluations may induce individuals to follow a brand's Facebook page. Knowing whether the reversed causal effect exists, – i.e., following a brand on Facebook causes enhanced brand evaluations – is however more crucial for companies, as it ascertains that investing in social media is worthwhile. Such a causal effect seems plausible given that a like increases exposure to, usually positive, brand related information, which may positively affect brand evaluations.

The question whether liking a brand page affects brand evaluations is also relevant given that many brands organize "like-us on Facebook" actions. Such actions may range from simple banners to promotions that require a like from consumers before they can get benefits like price reductions, lottery tickets, or WiFi access. Indeed, sales, discounts and special offerings are frequently mentioned reasons to follow a brand in social media (e.g., Edison Research 2012). And although consuming brand related information in social media appears to be mainly predicted by needs for information and entertainment, at least some consumers like a page because of the direct benefits a brand offers (Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit 2011; see also Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Wang and Fesenmaier 2003). Such invited, or more or less enforced, likes are interesting in the sense that they do not necessarily follow from consumers' personal liking or interest in the brand. Do such invited likes, that make the consumer follow the brand's Facebook updates, cause enhanced brand evaluations? Such an

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/885988>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/885988>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)