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# The Effect of Promoting Brands through the Facebook Network

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**Abstract:** Facebook is becoming a popular tool for public relations and advertising professionals to reach mass audiences. Facebook fan pages allow brands to create an online community of brand users on the social networking site. By pressing Facebook's "like" button, a Facebook user can become a fan of the page and can interact with the brand and other consumers. This research aimed to examine whether liking and interacting with a Facebook fan page has an effect on brand loyalty and purchase intentions, and if Facebook fan pages create an online brand community. Brands use this network to improve their overall image, promote themselves much easier, much faster, access to information being very easy, in a very short time and wherever it is in the world. This article highlights the reason why users access the Facebook page of a brand. An analysis of 104 online survey responses indicates that interaction with fan pages is not a strong indicator of consumer brand loyalty or purchase intentions, suggesting that brand communities are not formed on the basis of liking a page. The study may be a useful orientation for managerial involvement in marketing practice. With over 900 million users, Facebook is currently the largest social networking site. Facebook allows users to connect and interact with others, express themselves, and maintain social relationships.

**Keywords:** Facebook fan pages, "like", online communities, brand loyalty, purchase intentions.

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## 1. Introduction

With over 845 million users, Facebook is currently the largest social networking site. Facebook allows users to connect and interact with others, express themselves, and maintain social relationships

With such a large user base, Facebook is becoming a popular tool for public relations and advertising professionals to reach mass audiences. Facebook fan pages allow brands to create an online community of brand users on the social networking site. These public profiles, which operate in a

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similar manner to individual user profiles, allow a brand to share information and post updates, photos, and more. According to Facebook fan pages, “by leveraging the real connections between friends on Facebook, a public profile lets users connect to what they care about.

To join the community, a user simply has to click the like button to subscribe to information and updates from the brand. Facebook’s like button was introduced to the public in April of 2010 (Kerpen, 2011). The like button receives over one billion clicks each day and allows Facebook users to express approval of pages, photos, statuses, articles, and more. The like button is a powerful tool because after it is pressed, Facebook shows the individual’s entire network what he or she has just liked, spreading information and affiliations in a viral manner.

A fan page may have millions of likes, but is clicking the like button a reliable measure of brand loyalty and purchase intentions? What is individuals’ intention when they like a Facebook fan page? This research tested whether or not an individual becomes a member of a brand community when he or she likes a fan page and examined how liking and interacting with a fan page affects brand loyalty and purchase intentions. Overall, the research will help determine if Facebook fan pages are an effective and useful tool in communicating with consumers.

The new trend in the marketing world is to combine different means of communication so as to exert a direct influence on the behavior of target audience. This shift in marketing is known as integrated marketing communication (Gabriela Grosbeck 2006, p.19).

## **2. Motivations behind clicking the “like” button**

An individual always has a motivation behind liking a Facebook fan page. Brand community members join a community based on either the positive or negative feelings they have towards a brand (Wilimzig, 2011). Further, individuals choose to join a Facebook brand community because they are loyal to that brand. Other motivations for joining these brand communities are economic benefits, such as discounts, competitions, and lotteries, and entertainment. Providing exclusive deals and discounts available only to members of the Facebook brand community is an incentive for individuals to join the community (Vorvoreanu, 2009). Weman (2011) found that consumers are not joining brand communities to make new friends or socialize and connect with strangers.

Hedonic motivations, related to fun or playful goals, are related to contribution behavior on a Facebook fan page. Those motivated by hedonic

notions are more likely to join a page in order to comment on or interact with the page and brand. In comparison, utilitarian motivations, driven by some sort of goal, are strongly related to browsing behavior. An individual with utilitarian motivation is more likely to look through and browse a page, rather than interact with that page. Overall, most individuals and their online behaviors are shaped by both utilitarian and hedonic motivations.

### **3. Brand loyalty and purchase intentions**

Wilimzig (2011) suggested that association with a brand community implies some sort of brand loyalty, regardless of community participation and feelings of association. Consumers turn to online brand communities as a trustworthy and reliable source for brand related information (Punjumiemi, 2009). These online brand communities are convenient, easily accessible, and enable consumers with similar brand preferences to interact with one another. Lee (2009) concluded that loyalty to a brand community predicts brand loyalty

Data collected indicated that members of brand communities are more sensitive to advertising and therefore have a greater likelihood of purchase. The more a consumer gets involved with the brand community, the more likely they are to model their purchasing behavior on other community members (Punjumiemi, 2009).

### **4. Research questions**

Previous research suggests that individuals join brand communities or like Facebook fan pages for both entertainment and fun purposes as well as goal-oriented reasons. Facebook users feel that there must be a sense of trust in the page before they like the page. In order to cultivate trust, a fan page must be authentic, transparent, and honest. A Facebook fan page is a two-way method of advertising that allows for interaction and engagement between brands and community members. Researchers have found that being a member of a brand community indicates some affiliation with that brand through brand loyalty and purchase intentions. Previous research fails to identify what implications the like button has for a brand. This research will aim to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of relationships might exist between the amount of time an individual interacts with a fan page (playing games, viewing photos, watching videos, commenting, participating in contests, etc.) and that individual's brand loyalty?

- RQ2: How does liking a page on Facebook indicate a user's affiliation with that brand?
- RQ3: Is there a relationship between the amount of time an individual interacts with a Facebook fan page and the likelihood that the individual will purchase the product or service promoted by that page?
- RQ4: How does becoming a fan of a brand on Facebook predict that individual's purchase intentions

## 5. Methodology

Data were collected through an online survey, a link to which was active for five days. Some survey questions were adapted from previous studies. The online survey was advertised to the researcher's Facebook network via three status updates on three separate days. The survey was posted over a five-day period from March 30, 2017 through April 3, 2017. Further, the researcher emailed classmates to encourage them to take the survey. The survey assumed that participants are active Facebook users because most saw the survey link through the researcher's posts on Facebook. This survey, based on a convenience sample, aimed to discover why the participants like Facebook fan pages, how often they visit and interact with the pages that they like, and for what purposes they like Facebook fan pages.

The online survey was advertised to the researcher's Facebook network via three status updates on three separate days.

Before completing the survey, participants were informed of the study purpose and the general outline of the survey. The online survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Respondents were given the opportunity to opt out of the survey any time before submitting by closing the browser window.

The online survey was advertised to the researcher's Facebook network via three status updates on three separate days.

## 6. Results

Among a total of 104 individuals who completed the online survey, 84% (87 respondents) were female, and 16% (17 respondents) were male. Also 94% of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 22.

When asked how many fan pages they like on Facebook, the largest number of 24 respondents (23%) indicated they like either 3-5 pages or 21 pages or more.

Participants were then asked about what types of Facebook fan pages they like and were given the opportunity to select all that applied. Books/movies were most liked, followed by celebrities, fashion brands and others.

When asked how often they visit the pages they like, one participant (1%) stated that they visit the pages multiple times a day, 8 participants (8%) visit a couple of times a week, 6 participants (6%) visit once a week, 16 participants (15%) visit every couple of weeks, 25 participants (24%) visit monthly, and 28 respondents (27%) never visit the pages.

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agree with three statements regarding brand loyalty, connection to fan pages they “like” and purchase intention on a scale of one to five, with one being strongly disagree and five being strongly agree. Brand loyalty was defined for participants as a preference of one brand over all others and will only purchase other alternative brands as a last resort.

When asked to rate how they feel about the statement, “I consider myself a brand loyal user to brands I ‘like’ on Facebook,” on a scale of one being strongly disagree to five being strongly agree, 26% of respondents strongly disagreed, 27% disagreed, 20% were neutral, 22% agreed, and 5% strongly agreed.

Participants were then asked to rate the level of their agreement with the statement, “I feel connected to the fan pages that I ‘like.’ ” The result was that 27% strongly disagreed, 25% disagreed, 30% remained neutral, 16% agreed, only 2% strongly agreed.

Participants were also asked to rate the level of their agreement with the statement, “Being a member of a Facebook fan page makes me more likely to purchase that brand,” on a scale of one to five, with one being strongly disagree and five being strongly agree. Among the participants, 26% said they strongly disagree, 28% disagree, 20% remained neutral, 22% agreed, 4% strongly agreed.

Eighteen (18%) respondents said they would “never” purchase the product or service promoted by a Facebook fan page that they like, followed by “not likely” by 21% of respondents; “ambivalent” by 37% “likely” by 21%, and “very likely” by 3%.

Finally, participants were asked to select all responses that indicated their motivation behind liking a brand’s Facebook fan page. The options were “sweepstakes or contest,” “monetary (coupon or free offer) games/entertainment,” “to post positive or negative comments,” “to interact with other brand users,” “just love the brand/brand loyal user,” or “other.” Just love the brand/brand loyal user was chosen by the largest

number of respondents, followed by sweepstakes or contest, monetary rewards, etc.

The findings from the study do not provide a conclusive answer to RQ1. Data do not indicate a strong relationship between the amount of time an individual interacts with a fan page and the individual's brand loyalty.

Overall, only 19% of study participants responded that they interact with fan pages somewhat often.. Of that 19%, only 45% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I consider myself a brand loyal individual to brands I like on Facebook." This small percentage of people who interact with fan pages on a somewhat often basis consider themselves brand loyal does not support a relationship between the amount of time spent interacting with a page and brand loyalty.

Among the participants, 54% responded that they rarely or very rarely interact with the fan pages that they like. Of that 54 percent, 29% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I consider myself a brand loyal individual to brands I "like" on Facebook," while another 50% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement (the rest of respondents remained neutral).

In contrast, 46% of study respondents who indicated that they never interact with the features of fan pages that they like strongly disagreed with the statement "I consider myself a brand loyal individual to brands I like on Facebook." This supports the research question that the amount of time an individual interacts with a fan page affects the individual's brand loyalty. Based upon the overall findings, it seems as though an individual's brand loyalty is not strongly affected by how often he or she interacts with the brand's Facebook fan page.

Considering also low numbers in the cells on the top left corner, which should show a big number for a strong relationship between the amount of time an individual interacts with a fan page and brand loyalty, there is no strong evidence here to support RQ1 that there is a strong relationship between the two variables.

Through RQ2, the study aimed to determine if an individual is expressing an affiliation with the brand by liking a page. This question is not supported by the findings. Over 50% of study participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "I feel connected to the fan pages that I like." Based upon these findings, it can be concluded that when an individual likes a Facebook fan page, they are not expressing a connection with the brand itself. It can be concluded that liking a Facebook fan page does not make that individual a part of a brand community.

RQ3 explored the relationship between the amount of time an individual interacts with a fan page and the likelihood that he or she is to purchase a product or service being promoted by the page. Findings do not provide conclusive evidence to suggest that the amount of time an individual interacts with a fan page predicts that individual's likelihood to purchase the product or service promote by that page.

Nineteen percent of participants indicated that they interact fan pages they like somewhat often. Of that 19%, 45% responded that they would be likely to purchase a product or service promoted by a fan page that they like. Only one-quarter responded that they would be unlikely to purchase this brand, and 5% responded that they would never purchase this brand, while the other quarter remained neutral. Similarly, of the 27% who indicated that they never interact with the fan pages that they like, 53% claimed that they would be unlikely (14%) or would never purchase the brand (39%) promoted by a page they like. This data suggests that the more time an individual interacts with a page, the more likely he or she is to purchase that brand.

In contrast, of 54% of participants indicated that they rarely or very rarely interact with Facebook fan pages, 32% claimed that they would be unlikely to (24%) or would never purchase a product or service (8%) promoted by a fan page that they like. Thirty-six percent indicated that they would be likely (32%) or very likely (4%) to purchase the product or service being promoted, while 32% remained neutral. This data suggests a positive correlation between interaction with a fan page and intent to purchase. Considering 0% for a few cells on the top left corner of the table, which should show a big number if there is a positive relationship between the amount of time an individual interacts with a Facebook fan page and the likelihood that an individual will purchase the product or service promoted by that page, it can be concluded that there is not a strong relationship between the two variables.

RQ4 looked at whether or not liking a Facebook fan page affects a consumer's purchase intentions. Study results indicate that purchase intentions are not correlated with liking page on Facebook. More than 50% of participants responded that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "being a member of a Facebook fan page makes me more likely to purchase that brand." About one quarter of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while 20% were ambiguous. Because more than half of the participants are not more likely to purchase a brand they like on Facebook, liking a Facebook fan page is not an indicator of purchase intentions.



Research findings also indicate that many individuals, especially in the 18-22 year-old age group, like celebrities and books/movies on Facebook, rather than fashion brands and nonprofits. According to the survey results, 58 respondents (56%) like some sort of celebrity (actors, politicians, sports figures, bands, musicians) and 64 respondents (62%) like books or movies. When asked to list pages an individual likes on Facebook, many respondents listed specific singers, books, and movies, although asked to exclude those categories. Based on these findings, Facebook fan pages are an effective way for celebrities, books, and movies to communicate with the public.

### **Conclusion**

According to this research, there is no evidence that Facebook fan pages create a brand community for those who like the page. There is no strong evidence that the amount of time an individual interacts with a Facebook fan page affects brand loyalty or the likelihood that an individual will purchase the product or service promoted by a fan page. The study's findings show no strong support for the relationship between interaction with fan pages and affiliation with the brand. Further there is no strong support for the likelihood of purchasing a brand just because the individual likes the brand on Facebook. Therefore, Facebook fan pages are not the most effective communications tool for brands to effectively reach their consumers. While a fan page can be used as an extension of communications techniques, using solely Facebook will not be effective.

This study is limited in scope because it is based on a convenience sample of Facebook users and the researcher's classmates. For future research on this topic, the survey should be distributed to a more diverse and random population of Facebook users. In the future it would also be beneficial to conduct focus groups or one-to-one in-depth interviews to gain a deeper and more qualitative understanding for an individual's motivation to like and interact with a brand's Facebook fan page. For a different spin on research on Facebook fan pages and the implications of the like button, researchers can explore what Facebook fan pages should be used for if a brand cannot expect brand loyalty or intent to purchase when an individual likes a page.

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