

**Brand Fans and Followers:  
Exploring the Motives and Gratifications for Engaging with  
Brands on Facebook and Twitter**

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*Paper presented at the 2010 Popular Culture Association Conference*

*Internet Culture Division, St. Louis, Missouri*

# **Brand Fans and Followers: Exploring the Motives and Gratifications for Engaging with Brands on Facebook and Twitter**

## **ABSTRACT**

When Facebook allowed companies to join the ranks of its members in November 2007, more than 100,000 corporate users created a free profile page during the first 24 hours (Zukowski 2008). Some Facebook members have opted to become a fan of a company or brand and engage with that brand online. Similarly, Twitter users can follow brands that have Twitter accounts.

The extensive use of Facebook and Twitter as tools for advertising and relationship-building purposes has created a need for more research about fans and their engagement with brands online. This study involves interviews with 17 social media users to explore the motives and gratifications related to following and engaging with brands. Some of the themes explored include brand and social identity; self-disclosure and online display; brand trust, satisfaction, and attachment; brand consciousness; and reciprocal action.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of using Web sites to promote brands surfaced during the spring of 1995 when marketers launched sites for Maytag, United Airlines, and Ragu. In response, researchers explored how advertisers used the Internet for advertising and branding purposes during this “Web 1.0” era (see Ind and Riondino 2001; see Stuart and Jones 2004). In recent years, the social media sites of “Web 2.0” have created new challenges and opportunities for the industry. Social

media allow the marketer to engage with the consumer at a more intimate level than that allowed by traditional advertising. In addition, social media provide a way for consumers to share brand experiences with friends, a process that possibly exerts more influence on behavior than an advertising message could achieve. Marketers are now exploring how to best use social media tools, such as blogs, podcasts, social networking sites, and microblogging services, while at the same time, social media companies are developing products to entice marketers.

Social media present a way for companies to build the ultimate relationship with a consumer, which is where the consumer is a company champion, advocate, or evangelist. Some brands, including Harley-Davidson, The Body Shop, and Southwest Airlines, have successfully achieved this status with their consumers prior to the arrival of social media (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Through social media, evangelists have a pulpit for proclaiming their brand love. As Kozinets (1999) suggested, “The organization must foster and nurture a mutually beneficial continuing relationship with customers, and online communities provide a mechanism to establish such long term relationships.” Social media can also be used to create online brand communities of enthusiasts that benefit firms by fostering brand loyalty, increasing market share and sales, driving product interest, and creating positive word-of-mouth advertising, as suggested by anecdotal evidence (Armstrong and Hagel 1996; Hagel and Armstrong 1997).

One social networking site that has been expanding its advertising offerings is Facebook. Traditionally, Facebook has offered sponsored ad space. In November 2007, Facebook introduced a new advertising platform called Facebook Pages, which provides a profile free of charge to companies (Zukowski 2008). According to the Facebook Pages help page, “Facebook created Pages when we noticed that people were trying to connect with brands and famous artists in ways that didn’t quite work on Facebook. Not only can you connect with your favorite artists

and businesses, but now you also can show your friends what you care about and give them recommendations by adding Pages to your personal profile” (as cited in Greenstein 2009). Among the 100,000 early adopters who created pages within the first 24 hours of this initiative were brands, musicians, organizations, and local businesses. Some of the first corporations to launch a Facebook page were Coca-Cola, Sony, Verizon, CBS, and Blockbuster (Zukowski 2008). By 2010, more than 3 million companies, organizations, and public figures have created Facebook profiles, which attract more than 20 million fans a day (Walsh 2010). Facebook offers free pages to gain access to useful targeting data about the users interacting with brands and transforms consumer interactions into social ads that can be auctioned to buyers willing to pay for impressions (Klaassen 2007).

Facebook Pages are very similar to traditional user profiles, but offer more advanced options for “friends or “fans” to interact with the profile. One of the unique features of two walls; one wall is used for the Page owner’s personal communications to fans while the other is used for fans to write their own messages (Greenstein 2009). Although Pages are a form of advertising, they provide a much more interactive experience for users. Page owners can also interact with fans through “updates” that appear on the fans’ news feeds (Greenstein 2009). Companies also tap information from their fans’ profile pages to use in further product developments or company initiatives (Bowley 2006).

A strong relationship between a brand and a Facebook fan can translate into increasing awareness among unaware consumers, who become exposed to the brand through a friend who is already a fan. The feature not only makes the consumer feel as though they are part of a brand community, but also helps the brand reach its target audience more efficiently. Pages also give

Facebook users another method of self-expression on their profiles. Users can display their own favorite brands or view their friends' favorite brands, offering a glimpse into their preferences.

In 2008, Facebook launched a new kind of advertising format (Klaassen 2008).

Engagement ads, which appear on the right side of a user's profile page, allow the user to engage directly with the advertised products or services without moving to a new Web page. One type of engagement advertisement invites a user to comment on the ad, one offers gift-giving, and another provides a way for a user to become a fan of a brand. Any activity will appear in the user's news feed. The user can give a thumbs up or thumbs down to an ad posted and is able to comment on the status of the Page owner. This feature offers a way for brands to receive direct feedback from consumers in a way that is convenient for consumers (McCarthy 2008).

A newer addition to Facebook is a social media platform by Vitruve that provides brands with mini applications that can be inserted into the news feeds of Facebook fans (Walsh 2010). The platform allows for customizable coupons, polls and quizzes, slideshows, and events-related applications. Having the applications on a user's wall and news feed provides 100 times greater reach than other parts of the Facebook page, according to research by Vitruve (Walsh 2010). Other companies have released similar concepts. Fan Appz's Professional platform allows fans to share brand-specific polls, quizzes, and promotions with friends by publishing the results to the fans' news feeds (Sullivan 2010).

On March 30, 2010, Facebook announced that instead the option of "becoming a fan" of a brand, Facebook users will now click that they "like" a brand (Ortutay 2010). Facebook users are familiar with the "like" function, with research demonstrating that users are much more likely to click they "like" content than they are to click "become a fan." The company also indicated that "liking" is a more natural action than "becoming a fan."

Microblogging site Twitter is comparable to Facebook in that it allows for a user to have friends, or “followers” in Twitter terminology. The site is limited in terms of content that can be placed by a user, limiting content to 140 characters of text. Despite the content restrictions, Twitter has similarly attracted marketers.

The extensive use of Facebook and Twitter as tool for advertising and relationship-building purposes has created a need for more research about fans and their engagement with brands online. The purpose of this study is to 1) to explore the relationship between a consumer and a specific brand, 2) to determine why consumers friend brands on Facebook or follow them on Twitter, 3) to explore how brands use social media to engage consumers, and 4) to explore how consumers engage with brands on social media.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Marketers have long used branding to build relationships with consumers with the goal of encouraging brand loyalty and generating enthusiasm for the brand (Schultz 2007). The Internet provides a valuable platform for building these relationships and creating brand communities, and several research studies have explored branding on Web sites, in online advertising, and in online communities. Dou and Krishnamurthy (2007) examined how product and service providers use Web sites to build brands. Hollis (2005) advocated the brand building impact of online advertising. Van Dijk (2006) described the potential for online communities to be accepting of persuasive messages. Social networks provide an opportunity for brands to forge an intimate relationship with consumers, a topic that has not yet been specifically explored in the literature.

## **Engagement**

A goal of many social media campaigns is to stimulate the consumer to engage with the brand. Social networking engagement might be an outcome of a previous relationship with a brand or it might lead to a more favorable relationship with a brand. Plummer offered this definition of engagement at the annual ARF conference in 2006: “Engagement is turning on a prospect to a brand idea enhanced by the surrounding context” (Burns 2006). Paine (2008) advocated for engagement in a brand relationship to be measured using not only online metrics, such as time spent on a Web site and the number of unique visits, but also elements from the relationship scale developed by Hon and Grunig (1999).

## **Facebook Engagement**

A study by The e-tailing group found that 50% of brands and retailers have adopted five out of ten social media tools, with Facebook Pages being used by 86% of respondents (Megna 2009). Another 10% of respondents plan to adopt Facebook Pages in the next year. This *Community and Social Media Study* also found that the primary reason for adopting social media tools, as indicated by 39% of respondents, was customer engagement. The study described Facebook as being the “single most effective tactic in mobilizing brand advocates and influencers to spread the word about products/services” (Megna 2009).

Studies have shown that social networking members, particularly young people, are willing to interact with advertisers on these sites. A study by Li (2007) found that 37% of 18-26 year-olds and 31% of 27-40 year-olds are interested in viewing advertiser profiles. Daily users expressed more interest than weekly or monthly users with about half of adult daily users and about one-third of youth daily users expressing interest. Social networking members are also more likely to tell friends about products than non-members (50% of adult users and 67% of

youth users), and those who are interested in viewing advertiser profiles are even more likely to mention products to friends (61% of adult users and 77% of youth users). A separate study by MySpace and Isobar found that 40% of the social networkers surveyed use the social networking sites to learn about brands or products that they like and 28% have had a friend recommend a brand or product to them (Fox Interactive Media 2007).

A Razorfish study of 1,000 consumers found that although 62% said they do not actively seek brand opinions using social media, 71% have shared product or service recommendations on social media sites at least once every few months (Razorfish 2009). The study also found that those in the consideration stage of a purchase decision were more likely than those in the awareness or action phase to be persuaded by the “social influencers” who are active in social media platforms. With respect to brand interactions, respondents were more likely to interact with music and entertainment brands than automotive, retail and apparel, travel, home and garden, or financial services companies. According to the report, “Our data suggest that brands need to do a much better job engaging consumers on social platforms, as witnessed by the lukewarm reception and high level of indifference consumers have about brands in social media.” About 29% of respondents are fans of a brand on a social networking site, and of these respondents, 57% visited the brand’s fan page in the past few weeks or months. In this report, Razorfish also introduced the Social Influence Marketing (SIM) Score to measure a brand’s reach and likeability based on the nature of online conversations and offline word-of-mouth against other competitors.

For each of top 100 global brands for 2008 according to *Business Week/Interbrand*, Wetpaint/Altimeter Group assigned an engagement score based on the level of engagement and participation in social media channels (Wetpaint/Altimeter Group 2009). Using this method, the

top five brands in terms of engagement were Starbucks, Dell, eBay, Google, and Microsoft. Nike, Pepsi, Blackberry, and Adidas are other consumer brands in the top 20.

### **Twitter Engagement**

Research has also demonstrated the marketing power of Twitter. A study by Interpret found that Twitter users were twice as likely to engage with brands on Twitter as Facebook users are on Facebook (Kee 2009). In addition, Twitter users engage in multiple ways with brands. The survey of 9,200 Twitter users found that 24% of those who used Twitter had reviewed or rated products online as compared to those who do not use Twitter. Twitter users were also more likely to visit company profiles than non-Twitter users (20% vs. 11%) and click on ads or sponsored links (20% vs. 9%). Twitter users also mention products in 20% of their updates.

Performics and ROI Research's survey of 3,000 consumers found that of active Twitter users, 48% had used search after seeing an ad on Twitter (Maher 2009). Additionally, 44% had recommended a product on Twitter, 44% said they are receptive to promotions and offers on Twitter, and 39% said they have discussed a product on Twitter.

A 2010 study by Chadwick Martin Bailey in partnership with iModerate Research Technologies found that 79% of Twitter users who follow a brand are likely to recommend the brand to friends as opposed to 60% of Facebook users (Sass 2010). Furthermore, 67% of Twitter followers and 51% of Facebook fans are more likely to purchase the brand since becoming a follower or fan.

### **Reciprocal Action Theory**

The reciprocal action theory describes how the actions of one party in a relationship will be reciprocated by the other party to avoid feelings of guilt for violating the norm of reciprocity (Li and Dant 1997). In a marketing context, when a brand attempts to engage a consumer in a

relationship, the consumer will feel obligated to reciprocate by forming positive attitudes and showing positive behaviors (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schroder and Iacobucci 2001).

### **Relationship Dimensions**

A brand can offer two different aspects of a relationship: exchange and communal (Clark and Mills 1979; Mills and Clark 1982; Hon and Grunig 1999). In an exchange relationship, a consumer is seeking a reward for brand loyalty with the outcome of this relationship being satisfaction (Esch et al. 2006). In a communal relationship, a consumer participates out of concern for the other's welfare with the outcome being trust (Esch et al. 2006). Hon and Grunig (1999) view satisfaction and trust as two distinct variables from exchange and communal relationships in their relationship model.

Research has demonstrated future purchase intention to be impacted by brand knowledge through a brand relationship path that includes brand satisfaction, brand trust, and attachment to the brand, highlighting the importance of a brand relationship (Esch et al. 2006). The concept of brand attachment refers to the interdependence between the brand and the consumer (Thomson, MacInnis and Park 2005). In Esch et al. (2006), brand attachment is conceptualized as "a longer-lasting, commitment-inducing bond between the brand and the consumer" (p. 100). Brand attachment, also dubbed brand love, is distinct from satisfaction, but is a mode of satisfaction, according to Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). Satisfaction is a cognitive judgment often made on the basis of a transaction, while attachment is an affective response that results from a long-term relationship (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006). Additionally, attachment is integrated into the consumer's identity, a process that does not happen with satisfaction. In the Esch et al. study (2006), brand attachment was found to be a significant driver of current purchase behavior and future purchase intentions. The study also explored brand trust and satisfaction and found the

paths in the model between these two variables and brand attachment to be significant (Esch et al. 2006).

Commitment is another component of the brand-consumer relationship. Organizational commitment describes the loyalty an employee feels toward an organization, a concept that is manifested in the attitude toward the organization based on a strong belief in the organization's goals (Mowday, Steers and Porter 1979). In this relationship, the consumer can pressure the organization to maintain its goals and exhibits a strong interest in retaining membership in the organization (Mowday, Steers and Porter 1979). Commitment has also been described as the "enduring desire to maintain a valued relation" (Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande 1992). A similar concept is brand commitment, which results from an emotional attachment to a brand (Fournier 1998). A higher level of brand commitment can be found among those are invested in an online brand community (Kim et al. 2008). Increased commitment leads to repeat purchase behaviors, positive word of mouth, greater customer involvement, and increased customer participation (Kim et al. 2008).

### **Brand Identification**

A precursor to commitment or loyalty is brand identification. This concept relies on social identification, which is a perception of association with a certain group. Tajfel (1982) described social identity theory as being focused on "the part of the individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership in a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership." Ashford and Mael (1989) first claimed the potential for an organization to be part of a social identity, calling this concept organizational identification. In a marketing context, this identification can be with a brand or the consumers of a particular brand, a process called brand identification. Bhattacharya and Sen

(2003) demonstrated the link between social identity and brands by demonstrating how people will associate themselves with brands that reflect their self-concepts. Precursors of brand identification include prestige, satisfaction, and corporate communication, and brand identification results in positive word-of-mouth communication and repurchase behaviors (Kuenzel and Halliday 2008). Brand identification can also be considered in terms of a self-expressive brand, where the consumer perceives the brand to enhance the social self or reflect the inner self. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) found self-expressive brands to have a positive direct impact on brand love and that consumers will engage in more positive word-of-mouth behaviors with self-expressive brands.

On the Web, people will develop and exhibit a social identity that goes beyond their personal identity. In their study of personal Web site creators, Schau and Gilly (2003) explored digital association, a concept similar to identification that may also be applicable to the relationship between brands and consumers on a social networking site. As they described, “[C]onsumers add depth to their digital selves by using brands and their logos as shorthand for more complex meanings” (p. 397). The desire to define oneself using brands may reflect a public self-consciousness, which is the awareness of how one appears to another person (Feningstein, Scheier and Buss 1975).

Brand consciousness may also play a role in a consumer’s interest in becoming a fan of a brand. This concept is defined as “the notion that brands play an important role in the psychological process that precedes the buying act” (LaChange, Beaudoin and Robitaille 2003). Nelson and McLeod (2005) found brand consciousness to influence awareness and liking of product placements.

## **Self-Disclosure**

Some members will use and enjoy the many community features of Facebook. They will share personal experiences, thoughts, favorites, photos, or videos or comment on the experiences, thoughts, favorites, photos, or videos of their friends. These members who exhibit a natural willingness to connect and share with others are exhibiting self-disclosure behaviors. Self-disclosure has been defined in the literature as a message about the self that one individual communicates to another (Wheless and Grotz 1976). People use self-disclosure to make themselves known to others, leading to a closer relationship with a person who reciprocates (Taylor and Altman 1987). This tendency toward self-disclosure online may be related to an interest in becoming a fan of brands because users can share those brands and brand interactions with their Facebook friends.

## **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between these variables and becoming a fan of a brand on Facebook and engaging online with that brand. The following four research questions are proposed.

RQ1: What is the relationship between a consumer and a specific brand on Facebook and Twitter?

RQ2: Why do consumers friend brands on Facebook or follow them on Twitter?

RQ3: How do brands use social media to engage consumers?

RQ4: How do consumers engage with brands on social media?

## **METHOD**

The sample consisted of 17 Facebook users who would be considered brand evangelists. All participants were screened to ensure they were fans of a certain brand and that they were

following that brand on Facebook. The sample consisted of four men and 13 women ranging in age from 16-40. Fourteen of the 17 participants were young adults in the age range of 19-24. A variety of brands were identified by participants, with multiple participants for each of the following brands: Starbucks (3), Chick-fil-A (2), and Victoria's Secret (2). The participants, their ages, and their brands are listed below:

Alex, age 24, fan of Starbucks  
Ashley, age 21, fan of Chick-fil-A  
Barb, age 38, fan of Chick-fil-A  
Debra, age 40, fan of Attitudes Dancewear  
Emily, age 22, fan of Starbucks  
Jenny, age 16, fan of McDonald's  
Kristin, age 22, fan of World of Beers  
Laura, age 24, fan of Tokidoki  
Lindsay, age 24, fan of Victoria's Secret

Ly, age 22, fan of Guy Harvey  
Matt, age 21, fan of Papa Gino's Pizzeria  
Mike, age 22, fan of Ralph Lauren  
Nicole, age 21, fan of Victoria's Secret  
Rebekah, age 19, fan of MAC makeup  
Sarah, age 19, fan of Lily Pulitzer  
Shannon, age 24, fan of American Apparel  
Shelby, age 22, fan of Starbucks

A team of four college students taking an independent study course at the University of South Florida located the participants through convenience sampling. Interviews were then conducted in person during February and March of 2010.

Although all participants were fans of a particular brand on Facebook, very few were using Twitter and therefore, were not following the brand on Twitter. Consequently, the results emphasize the relationship with a brand on Facebook with the occasional mention of Twitter.

## **RESULTS**

RQ1: What is the relationship between a consumer and a specific brand on Facebook?

Facebook users who are friends of certain brands have strong favorable opinions about those brands. Participants noted good customer service and quality, affordability, distinctiveness, and consistency of the products as reasons for being consumers of certain brands. Hometown

businesses are also among favorite brands for sentimental reasons, particularly for participants who are far from home. Others are attracted to the personality of the brand.

- “Exceptional customer service, chicken and consistency throughout the chain... I am very satisfied with this brand because I know when I enter a Chick-fil-A I will receive the same service no matter where I am.”—Ashley, fan of Chick-fil-A
- “They may be expensive, but they have a lot of deals that make it affordable for everyone’s budget. Always good quality and pretty products. The customer service is also very reliable.”—Nicole, fan of Victoria’s Secret
- “It’s a great pizza. Has a good family atmosphere. The staff is kind. I grew up in Massachusetts. When my family got pizza for dinner, it was always Papa Gino’s. I moved from Massachusetts to Florida about eight years ago. The move ended that close relationship. Every time we go back to visit we get Papa Gino’s at least once.”—Matt, fan of Papa Gino’s
- “I think of high quality, delicious, high price beverages, clean stores, and well-educated and trendy associates.”—Alex, fan of Starbucks
- “It is a very colorful, bold, fun, and stand out brand.”—Laura, fan of Tokidoki
- “It’s a very happy brand. I feel like it’s just a very classic and conservative style. All really classy.”—Sarah, fan of Lily Pulitzer
- “It’s comfortable, sometimes reasonably priced, and the clothes are so basic that I can wear the same thing for years.”—Shannon, fan of America Apparel
- “Whenever I think of Guy Harvey, I think of the great outdoors, mainly offshore fishing. It reminds me of all the great relaxing times I’ve had with my friends just hanging out on the boat fishing all day. Also, the paintings on the back of the t-shirts with all the different kinds of fish are really appealing to me.”—Ly, fan of Guy Harvey
- “I associate MAC with bright colors, reliability. I know my makeup’s going to stay on all day. Having fun because it’s bright.”—Rebekah, fan of MAC
- “I think they have the best fast food and they have great customer service.”—Barb, fan of Chick-fil-A

The favorable opinions of the brands are linked to outcomes such as trust, passion, and satisfaction. Many participants expressed their commitment to their brand and indicated that the company had not done anything to disappoint them. Just as found by Kim et al. (2008), a higher level of brand commitment can be found among those are invested in an online brand

community. This commitment leads to positive outcomes such as repeat purchase behaviors, positive word of mouth, greater customer involvement, and increased customer participation (Kim et al. 2008).

- “I trust it and am satisfied with it. I’ve never had a problem with it. I consider myself a loyal customer, but that doesn’t mean I wouldn’t shop anywhere else.”—Nicole, fan of Victoria’s Secret
- “I’m probably one of their favorite customers. They’re one of those stores I can’t go into without buying something. I definitely trust them and have never had any issues with them, which is also why I’m satisfied with them. At least half of my clothes are from there.”—Mike, fan of Ralph Lauren
- “I’m satisfied with this company. I trust this brand. A lot of people have heard about the brand and have not had any bad experiences.”—Kristin, fan of World of Beer
- “I am passionate about this brand because I know they take care of their employees, which in the end provides better service to consumers.”—Ashley, fan of Chick fil A
- “Oh yes, really passionate. It’s all the makeup I use. All brushes, all makeup, everything. I am committed to this brand. I plan to use it pretty much all my life. I couldn’t think of using anything else.”—Rebekah, fan of MAC
- “I absolutely love Tokodoki, especially because here in this area, few people know this brand. I love this brand so much I actually got a tattoo of the logo. Thank God it is a cute heart and crossbone logo.”—Laura, fan of Tokidoki
- “I’ve been wearing products from this brand since high school so it’s been about six dedicated years with no complaints. Guy Harvey continues to create great looking shirts with new designs each year.”—Ly, fan of Guy Harvey
- “I am passionate about this brand. Season after season, they come up with better and better prints and they never fail to satisfy their customers. I trust this brand because they always have consecutively good items. Yes, I tell people about the brand and encourage them to go buy them off eBay.”—Sarah, fan of Lily Pulitzer
- “I trust and am satisfied with the brand because I have only had one wardrobe malfunction. For the most part, every piece of clothing is dependable, comfortable, and wearable. I am committed to buying more of my basic staples from this brand.”—Shannon, fan of America Apparel
- “I am very satisfied with this brand, and they haven’t let me down yet. I would say that I am committed to this brand. I trust them.”—Jenny, fan of McDonald’s

- “I’m satisfied and fairly committed. I get Starbucks more often than I get Dunkin’ Donuts. Dunkin’ Donuts has a drive-through by my house, but I still go to Starbucks. They are similar in price, but I prefer Starbucks.”—Emily, fan of Starbucks
- “We have a very long and good relationship. I am very satisfied with the brand because they have never done me wrong, but if I can get the items cheaper online, I will do so.”—Debra, fan of Attitudes Dancewear

Some participants described how the brand is an expression of the person they consider themselves to be. Others, like fan of Papa Gino’s Matt, just like the brand, but don’t see that it reflects anything about him. Brand identification is prevalent among fans of self-expressive brands, where consumers perceive the brand to enhance the social self or reflect the inner self (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006). Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) found that consumers will engage in more positive word-of-mouth behaviors with self-expressive brands.

- “I have always been passionate and interested in coffee because it was a real important part of my culture and family. Up to my father, all male members on my father's side worked picking coffee. So the amount of money Starbucks spends to make sure their brand stands out the way it does fairly represents who I am. Hard working, humble, educated and passionate.”—Alex, fan of Starbucks
- “I believe it is an expression of me because when you see Lily Pulitzer, you think of bright and happy and I would say I am a bright and happy person.”—Sarah, fan of Lily Pulitzer
- “I think all clothes are an expression of who we are in some way. It’s the little choices like what to wear in the morning that make us who we are.”—Mike, fan of Ralph Lauren
- “I also like to fish and many of the great products Guy Harvey offers are for most fishermen. Not to say only people who fish can wear it though.”—Ly, fan of Guy Harvey
- “Tokidoki means *sometimes* in Japan and the designer is an Italian artist who would draw these cute little characters and he was actually discovered by a makeup artist and they loved the character so much they collaborated and made this brand come to life. That is why I would like to say it is an expression of who I am and all my friends know Tokidoki from me.”—Laura, fan of Tokidoki

Several participants described themselves as brand conscious. They tend to value quality products and perceive a link between higher quality and brand names. Some participants spend money on expensive brands only for special occasions or look for deals.

- “I would say that brands are extremely important to me. When I find a brand that’s high quality I tend to pay extra so they get my business.”—Mike, fan of Ralph Lauren
- “I like certain brands and tend to buy accordingly. I don’t like generic or off-brands and I would like to think that I know a lot about trendy brands. I will almost always pay the extra money for brands that I like and trust brands that I have heard of over ones I haven’t.”—Kristin, fan of World of Beers
- “I am a very brand conscious person. I do like them. I think that things that are name brand are better quality. So I do look for brand things over non-brand product.”—Shelby, fan of Starbucks
- “I pay extra for certain brands because I’m going to pay for my MAC makeup because I know it’s going to look good and it’s going to last, instead of paying for the cheap stuff at like Target or Wal-Mart. I learn about trendy brands from being in a sorority and reading magazines, so I would say I’m pretty into the trends.”—Rebekah, fan of MAC
- “I usually stick to brand that I know that provide comfort and breathability. I’ll always pay extra for a brand that I like because of the familiarity I have with the quality of the clothing.”—Ly, fan of Guy Harvey
- “I would consider myself someone who likes certain brands. If I am going to purchase something nice and pay a decent amount of money for it. I will make sure it is a brand I like.”—Ashley, fan of Chick-fil-A
- “I actually buy all of my fancy brands on eBay. I find that it’s much cheaper and is the same quality. I am brand conscious, but I do it in a monetarily friendly way.”—Sarah, fan of Lily Pulitzer
- “I know a lot of brands, but I try to have my own style and stick to my own brand. I do not try to get a brand because everyone else has it like purses, for example. I do not understand how people could pay so much money, like \$800 for just a purse, but I would be a hypocrite if I said I would not spend extra. If it is a brand I love then I would...or at least get it when it’s on sale.”—Laura, fan of Tokidoki
- “I would say I know a fair amount about trendy brands. I really only follow American Apparel and Urban Outfitters. I don’t normally pay extra for trendy brands unless it’s for a special occasion, like a wedding or graduation. Other than that, I normally go to a thrift or consignment shop.”—Shannon, fan of America Apparel
- “I do like certain brands and know about the brands I like. I save money once in a while to purchase a brand that could be expensive. I have lived in America, France, Lebanon, and Africa so I know a lot about trendy brands in all ranges. My weakness is Roberto Cavalli, when I can afford it, which is not very often.” —Lindsay, fan of Victoria’s Secret

- “I would definitely pay extra for a brand if a product’s quality is better than its alternative.”—Wes, fan of Starbucks
- “Having children from the ages of 11-16 makes me very aware of brands, but it is about quality, not popularity for me. I will pay more for certain brands if they have proven themselves to me. Otherwise, I don’t really care about brand names.”—Debra, fan of Attitudes Dancewear
- “Starbucks is expensive, but it’s worth it.”—Emily, fan of Starbucks

Some participants are aware of the value of brands, even if they would not describe themselves as brand conscious. When it comes to clothing, Victoria’s Secret fan Nicole doesn’t see herself as someone who is entirely brand conscious. She said she likes things that are comfortable and would last a long period of time. She would pay extra for a brand of higher quality, but she doesn’t purchase items necessarily because they are a particular brand. “I like what I like,” she said. Others are not as influenced by branding.

- “I don’t go out of my way to pay extra for a name. If I like something that is from a ‘no name’ place then great. If I like something from a branded company then great. In this economy though, saving money is very important.”—Matt, fan of Papa Gino’s
- “I consider myself someone who is happy with what they have. I don’t go out of my way to buy from a certain brand, or pay extra for a certain brand. I’m not picky when it comes to brands.”—Jenny, fan of McDonald’s
- “I’m brand conscious to an extent, but I’ll still buy clothes at Target. It really just depends on the product I’m purchasing.”—Emily, fan of Starbucks

RQ2: Why do consumers friend brands on Facebook?

Reasons for initially friending brands on Facebook are varied, but many participants emphasized the ability to receive information or special offers from the company. In an exchange relationship, a consumer is seeking a reward for brand loyalty (Esch et al. 2006). This reward may be manifested in the form of product updates, coupons, or special offers. Others were encouraged by particular online initiatives by the company, such as Victoria’s Secret’s Pink

competition for college students. Nicole, for example, initially became a fan of Victoria's Secret on Facebook when the company was having a collegiate competition for their Pink line. The school that got the most fans on Facebook would receive a part of the proceeds from the Pink products bearing the school's name and logo. However, Nicole says she probably would have added the brand had there not been a contest. Some participants were motivated to become a fan of a brand when they noticed a friend also became a fan, saw the brand among their suggested friends, or responded to Facebook advertising.

- “I initially added this brand because it was new. I became a fan to learn more about the location and to receive specials.”—Kristin, fan of World of Beer
- “I added MAC as a friend because one, I like to hear about the new things coming out and two, because they tell you about special offers.”—Rebekah, fan of MAC
- “To find out about upcoming events and specials.”—Barb, fan of Chick-fil-A
- “To see updates about new seasons of clothes and to see if there are any deals going on.”—Sarah, fan of Lily Pulitzer
- “I’ve shopped at this store for many years now, so I added this brand to receive updates on merchandise and get coupons.”—Debra, fan of Attitudes Dancewear
- “Because I want to know more about it and what is new with their products. I constantly check my Facebook, so when I do, I can also get a quick fashion tip too.”—Lindsay, fan of Victoria's Secret
- “So I can see updates on upcoming clothing or designs.”—Laura, fan of Tokidoki
- “Initially, I did it so I could see news and updates about the company.”—Mike, fan of Ralph Lauren
- “Someone else added them and I saw they were on there and so I added them.”—Nicole, fan of Victoria's Secret
- “It was initially suggested by one of my friends on Facebook.”—Ly, fan of Guy Harvey
- “Because it popped up as a fan suggestion on my Facebook and I was like, ‘Ooohhh, I like that.’ “—Emily, fan of Starbucks

- “A friend invited me to. She is an employee of American Apparel.”—Shannon, fan of American Apparel

Many participants acknowledged that friending brands communicates something about themselves to their friends. Young adults often consider what friends or family will think about associations with companies such as World of Beer or Victoria’s Secret. Additionally, some Facebook users often friend brands that are also popular with their friends, a process which may be used to demonstrate their similarity with friends.

- “[Papa Gino’s is] only in New England and not many people in Florida have heard of it before. I friended the brand on Facebook so that my Facebook friends would know what foods back home I like and what a great pizzeria Papa Gino’s is. Papa Gino’s is very popular in Massachusetts and all my Facebook friends from Massachusetts agree with me on how great Papa Gino’s is.”—Matt, fan of Papa Gino’s
- “I think that being a fan of Chick-fil-A sends a positive message to others. It shows others what type of food you like and what you possibly look for in a restaurant. It is popular with my friends because it is inexpensive and most of my friends are college students. It is also popular with my friends because of the beliefs the founder of Chick-fil-A has.”—Ashley, fan of Chick-fil-A
- “I was hesitant about friending World of Beer on Facebook for fear of looking unprofessional to prospective, future employers or family members. The fact that this brand is popular among my Tampa friends played a role when I was deciding to friend this brand and when I did, I was happy to see that two of my friends ‘liked’ my action.”—Kristin, fan of World of Beers
- “I think it just means that by being a fan of Guy Harvey on Facebook, people will know you like to wear their products and enjoy that kind of lifestyle, which is fishing and outdoor activities. This brand is quite popular with my fraternity, Sigma Chi, as many of my brothers also own many t-shirts.”—Ly, fan of Guy Harvey

Some participants believe friending a favorite brand may prompt friends to also become a fan. They also viewed friending a brand as a way to show support for the brand.

- “I think it’s good because it lets other people know that they’re on there and they can friend them. I don’t see Victoria’s Secret as a scandalous brand anymore. I wouldn’t matter if none of my friends were a fan, but I might not have them if they weren’t.”—Nicole, fan of Victoria’s Secret

- “A lot of my friends are friends of the brand, but this did not make me want to friend them. I did so because I like the brand and have worn it for years now. If anything, I would say my friends saw them on my Facebook and started to friend the brand too.”—Lindsay, fan of Victoria’s Secret
- “I only know a few people that are friends with this brand since it is really not known in our area. If anything, a lot of my friends started following Tokidoki because I introduced them to the brand.”—Laura, fan of Tokidoki
- “I just figured because I am loyal to Starbucks over other competitors, I felt like I could give Starbucks that kind of support by being a fan.”—Emily, fan of Starbucks

Others consider their relationship with a company to be a purely transactional one, and are not interested in using the relationship to express something about themselves to others. In a way, these users do not feel defined by a brand. In some cases, their Facebook friends were not fans of the brand.

- “When I became a fan the first thing I did was delete the message about it from my page so it didn’t clutter things up too much. Most of my friends don’t see the point in paying so much for clothes, no matter how comfortable they are.”—Mike, fan of Ralph Lauren
- “I just wanted to become a fan because I really like it and I’m spending so much money on my makeup.”—Rebekah, fan of MAC
- “I’m not really interested in pushing this into others or letting it form full dimensions to who I am.”—Alex, fan of Starbucks
- “It doesn’t really say anything to others. I just saw it and wanted to become a fan. It is popular with my high school friends, but it doesn’t seem very popular among my college friends.”—Sarah, fan of Lily Pulitzer
- “The brand is popular with my friends. Most of them shop there regularly. I normally don’t like to be friends of brands, but I accepted because a friend of mine invited me. I wouldn’t normally seek this brand out and friend them.”—Shannon, fan of American Apparel

Many participants are open to having a relationship with a company and value the product or company information provided through Facebook. Some users also like to get ideas about how to wear the products, particularly with cosmetics and clothing. Additionally, Facebook users seek promotional offers including discounts and free products from companies.

- “If you friend specific locations, they often have Facebook promotions or rewards. They offer free meals, sandwiches, etc.”—Ashley, fan of Chick-fil-A
- “[Benefits include] information on the brand, learning about their products and types of beer, learning about what specials were on what nights, and possibly receiving free stuff or discounts and promotions.”—Kristin, fan of World of Beer
- “I received some emails and messages on Facebook about promotions and coupons that I could use. Living in Florida does not give me much benefit from the promotions.”—Matt, fan of Papa Gino’s
- “They keep their page updated with the latest releases and information about promotions and even places to get some of their things they have sold out on their Web site.”—Mike, fan of Ralph Lauren
- “Sometimes they could put up a ‘we’re having a free coffee day’ or coupons or stuff. And that’s always a plus.”—Shelby, fan of Starbucks
- “I found out about online promotions that they have and also, people post pictures of their family all dressed up in their brand and it gives me different ideas of ways to wear it.”—Sarah, fan of Lily Pulitzer
- “I think it’s a benefit for the company so they can see the loyal customers they have, and I can also see if they are running any deals or specials if they write about it.”—Emily, fan of Starbucks
- “I like the special offers and also, you can see on there how people use their makeup. You can get tips on unique ways to use MAC makeup.”—Rebekah, fan of MAC
- “When they come out with new products, they tell me so I don’t have to go into the store. They also tell me about promotions and sales.”—Nicole, fan of Victoris’a Secret
- “I believe in the brand and most of all, the product. It is fun to be involved.”—Alex, fan of Starbucks
- “We get special offers and coupons for being friends with Attitudes.”—Debra, fan of Attitudes Dancewear
- “The benefits are just expanding knowledge about the brand and being on track with what’s new. The semi-annual and annual sales are very important and I like to be notified.”—Lindsay, fan of Victoria’s Secret
- “It is like having a backstage pass to your favorite band. I get to see what the designer is creating, so if you follow them on Facebook, you get ahead of most fans on Tokidoki.”—Laura, fan of Tokidoki

- “I feel like the benefits of becoming a fan of Guy Harvey on Facebook are that sometimes the company posts upcoming products that I may or may not be interested in and shows pictures of the product for me to browse through at the comfort of my own home when I have some downtime.”—Ly, fan of Guy Harvey

RQ3: How do brands use Facebook to engage consumers?

Some of the ways companies are engaging with consumers is through status updates or posts that show up on the news feed of the Facebook user. Others are directly messaging consumers, either through Facebook or through e-mail. Others, such as McDonald’s, may not be using Facebook effectively to engage consumers.

- “I have received numerous e-mails and messages about new promotions, foods, and coupons.”—Matt, fan of Papa Gino’s pizza
- “They send out mailings, e-mails, and post status updates on Facebook.”—Mike, fan of Ralph Lauren
- “I get the offers on the news feed.”—Rebekah, fan of MAC
- “They put out notifications when they come out with a new product.”—Nicole, fan of Victoria’s Secret
- “At this point, they are using Facebook as a one-way communications platform. They have more fun with Twitter.”—Alex, fan of Starbucks
- “They post updates and send out emails on Facebook about new designs in the works and new products that are coming out.”—Laura, fan of Tokidoki
- “I get announcements on my wall about upcoming sales and new product releases. Every once in a while, they post a coupon that only Facebook friends of the brand can get. This makes you feel special and you save money, which is always the goal.”—Lindsay, fan of Victoria’s Secret
- “Besides e-mail, they send out alerts to those who are a friend of the brand letting them know about upcoming sales, new merchandise, and coupons.”—Debra, fan of Attitudes Dancewear
- “They have commercials all over the TV and radio commercials and Internet ads, but I never notice McDonald’s reaching out drastically on Facebook.”—Jenny, fan of McDonald’s

For the most part, status updates are being read by consumers. Participants described how they use the updates to gather information about the company. One participant commented that updates are too business-like and are not written with a personal voice.

- “I read status updates. They tell me what kind of events they have going on like getting ready to launch a new sandwich.”—Ashley, fan of Chick-fil-A
- “I do read status updates. They tell about different sales and promotions that are going on throughout the story and they also mention significant people in the company. They have competitions. They tag people in their status to thank them for a big purchase.”—Sarah, fan of Lily Pulitzer
- “They tell what’s going on at that time at the bar.”—Kristin, fan of World of Beer
- “I read the status updates on the news feed. Any deals they are running or new products or flavors of coffee they are coming out with.”—Emily, fan of Starbucks
- “They talk about upcoming events, show video clips from fashion shows, and mention various giveaways and promotions.”—Mike, fan of Ralph Lauren
- “I absolutely read the status updates. They just usually show new things and updates on what is going on with all of their products.”—Laura, fan of Tokidoki
- “I don’t go out of my way to look at updates, but since I check my Facebook a lot, I’ll see their updates in the mix with others. From their posts, you get a feel that they are all about business, but still throw you a bone every now and again.”—Lindsay, fan of Victoria’s Secret
- “Really all I hear is if new stuff is coming out.”—Rebekah, fan of MAC
- “Although I don’t read the updates as much as I intend to, when I do, the brand is telling me they care about their customers and want to keep them informed.”—Debra, fan of Attitudes Dancewear

Customers appreciate the special offers and discounts on Facebook, however they also mentioned e-mail as another method to communicate this same information. Companies may be using e-mail more extensively and effectively than Facebook for promotional messages. While a Facebook wall post can be easily missed, customers will be less likely to overlook an e-mail.

- “I received a free sandwich for being their friend. I thought that it was great Chick-fil-A was using present day technology to connect with its customers.”—Ashley, Chick-fil-A

- “I have received e-mails/messages with promotions. I think it is a great idea. Pretty much everyone is on Facebook nowadays. It is one of the best free ways to advertising and market your brand. Especially if you send out messages with promotions.”—Matt, fan of Papa Gino’s pizza
- “On Facebook, I mainly pull updates from this brand. This helps me prepare for a big shopping trip because I know when the big sale is coming up or when a new product is being released. I have gotten a few free panties here and there thanks to Facebook.”—Lindsay, fan of Victoria’s Secret
- “By getting this offer, I made me want to go to the shop even if I did not need something right away. I use the discounts every chance I get.”—Debra, fan of Attitudes Dancewear
- “They have posted special discounts on the site, but I have not used any yet. Usually the offers they have emailed me are better. I still thought it was good that they offer rewards for showing your support.”—Mike, fan of Ralph Lauren
- “I haven’t yet, but I plan to use the coupons or vouchers in the store.”—Rebekah, fan of MAC
- “They sent it to my e-mail, but probably because I was a shopper not a fan.”—Nicole, fan of Victoria’s Secret
- “I’ve only received promotional discounts through e-mail from the company Web site.”—Ly, fan of Guy Harvey

Participants had a variety of suggestions for companies who wish to engage consumers in social media. Some suggested motivating Facebook users to friend the brand by offering a free product, as some companies have previously done. Others suggested more engagement, including more posts, more messages, more giveaways, and more personable communications.

Purchase information should also be available on the profile.

- “I would encourage them to sent up account or fan pages for each individual stores because the promotions differ from store to store.”—Ashley, fan of Chick-fil-A
- “They could maybe send specific things to fans’ message boxes on Facebook to let them know about things. Maybe if messaged me and said, ‘If you like caramel macchiato, you should try this new drink!’ They can just be sure to keep it updated and have new and interesting things to keep having people come back.”—Emily, fan of Starbucks
- “Maybe making their page cute, having more tips. Because all you read are comments. So maybe if they incorporated like a cuter Facebook page. They haven’t personally messaged

me, but it would be helpful if they sent you a message so it could get to your inbox and you wouldn't have to search the page just to get updates. On their profile, you can't see all the locations and history or interesting facts. The official Twitter does not have a lot of tweets or promotions.”—Rebekah, fan of MAC

- “They need to have more links and ways to show customers how they can buy Lily Pulitzer products. Looking at the page, I can just see the product, but I don't know how to go about purchasing it.”—Sarah, fan of Lily Pulitzer
- “Put more pictures up! Promote some specials or sales.”—Shannon, fan of American Apparel
- “Offer one free beer to first time Facebook fans.”—Kristin, fan of World of Beers
- “Post offers more often and do more giveaways, like random drawings for gift cards amongst their fans.”—Mike, fan of Ralph Lauren
- “Make it more personal rather than an ad page. Like how certain TV shows put up new episode on this day. Make it more personal for consumers, but I'm not sure how. Make status updates seem like it's a real person not just an ad.”—Nicole, fan of Victoria's Secret
- “I would suggest that they put up more pictures of events like the Help Haiti Run. They made shirts and all proceeds go to Haiti, but this brand never posted pictures. So I would have to log out of Facebook and go to the brand Web site.”—Laura, fan of Tokidoki
- “Possibly offer discounts or other promotional offers.”—Jenny, fan of McDonald's
- “More is always better, so I would have to say more special offers for Facebook users.”—Debra, fan of Attitudes Dancewear

RQ4: How are consumers engaging with brands on Facebook?

Many participants in this study are engaging with brands on Facebook to learn more about the products and the company. Users are mostly reading wall posts, although some are completing surveys, clicking the “like” button, or looking at images and other site content. For the most part, users perceive Facebook profiles to be a one-way communication vehicle serving as a source of information. One participant, however, expressed that the medium seems friendlier than corporate Web sites. Others, however, find that corporate Web sites are easier to navigate

when viewing products. In contrast, some Facebook users have not felt the need to engage with the brand's profile and would prefer to interact with store employees in person.

- “I read through all the wall postings to see things that I’ve missed.”—Mike, fan of Ralph Lauren
- “I use the profile to learn about it, not really engage, because I don’t think they talk back, but to learn about it, yes. I’ve looked at their information and read their updates. I’ve never written on their wall. But, I’ve definitely looked up their info and seen what they’ve written.”—Shelby, fan of Starbucks
- “Yes, to find out more information on their grand opening and location. I have read wall postings and looked at site content.”—Kristin, fan of World of Beer
- “I read wall posting and look at photos because that is how they run their promotions.”—Ashley, fan of Chick-fil-A
- “I’ve gone on there to look at new products and see if there is anything I might be interested in.”—Nicole, fan of Victoria’s Secret
- “I’ve interacted by reading posts, doing surveys, and checking images. I usually do not like to do surveys, but I like the brand, so I didn’t mind too much.”—Lindsay, fan of Victoria’s Secret
- “I have hit the ‘like’ button, but surprisingly, that is about it. They need to add more to their Facebook because I would definitely be willing to take a survey.”—Laura, fan of Tokidoki
- “I do all the time. They have very interactive Web sites as well. I participate on those, too.”—Alex, fan of Starbucks
- “If I see something that sparks my attention, then I’ll click on it. I don’t really go to their profile page every day. I look for deals that pop up on my news feed.”—Emily, fan of Starbucks
- “I have used Facebook to learn more about this brand and other brands. I read the Papa Gino’s wall postings from time to time. I feel like a Facebook page for a brand is a lot friendlier. Corporate/brand Web sites aren’t as friendly. I can friend the brand on Facebook and show my friends what brands I like.”—Matt, fan of Papa Gino’s
- “If I want to learn more, I go straight to the retail site to browse pictures. I have not ever interacted with this brand on Facebook.”—Shannon, fan of American Apparel
- “I use more of their Web site because I feel it’s easier to click dresses or shirts and you don’t have to click all the way through Facebook to get through it. It’s not as easy to navigate through stuff on Facebook. If there is anything new, they usually make it their status. Like

‘check out the Lily Web site for new patterns or designs or items.’ ”—Sarah, fan of Lily Pulitzer

- “I read about it in magazines and see it online. I go to their site a lot. I don’t really go to their Facebook much, only to see their status updates. I go to their site mostly. I have looked at their photos on Facebook, but that’s about it. I do read their wall posts, though.”—Rebekah, fan of MAC
- “I do not comment or send messages to Attitudes’s Facebook. The most interaction that I get online is just looking for special offers. I prefer to talk to the people in person.”—Debra, fan of Attitudes Dancewear

Posting brand-related content can be a way to promote that a user is a fan of a particular brand. Some Facebook users enjoy sharing in social media and part of this phenomenon includes sharing brand information. Previous studies have determined that brand identification results in positive word-of-mouth communication (Kuenzel and Halliday 2008) and that consumers will engage in more positive word-of-mouth behaviors with self-expressive brands (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006). For some users, the promotion of brands provides a way to bond with friends over favorite brands or products. The concept of self-disclosure may also be relevant here, leading to a closer relationship with the person who returns the disclosure (Taylor and Altman 1987).

Most participants who promote specific brands do so with the occasional status update or photo featuring the product. Several remarked that friends will often respond with a comment or a “like.” Others do not choose to communicate brand information on Facebook.

- “I will put up pictures if I got anything new from Tokidoki. Since there is not a local store and I have to order stuff, I get very excited when it comes in.”—Laura, fan of Tokidoki
- “Once I set my Facebook status saying that I want to take a road trip back to Massachusetts just to get the food. I was missing home that day and all the foods that are only found in Massachusetts. I was also curious to see who else was thinking the same thing.”—Matt, fan of Papa Gino’s
- “I’ve probably posted a joke or two, like about my bright yellow bikini that I bought. I did post pictures like with my bathing suit on and stuff and when a friend asked where I got it, I said from Victoria’s Secret.”—Nicole, fan of Victoria’s Secret

- “I like to let people know what I like and plus a lot of people will comment too and have the same interests in the brands. I’ve probably said like ‘gone shopping at MAC’ or ‘blew all my money on MAC,’ letting people know I bought MAC.”—Rebekah, fan of MAC
- “Maybe if I’m in the library, I’ve posted ‘Thank God for Starbucks’ or ‘Going to Starbucks with my girls.’ The fact that I really like it motivated me to do it.”—Emily, fan of Starbucks
- “I share on Facebook all the time. I think it is real. Human beings like sharing. Social media has allowed us to share things all the time every time. Why? It is our culture. It is reality. Sometimes you just roll with things. I like the brand, and I like sharing it with people.”—Alex, fan of Starbucks
- “I don’t mind sharing what brands I like.”—Matt, fan of Papa Gino’s
- “I once posted on my status update an experience I had at the drive-through.”—Barb, fan of Chick-fil-A
- “I don’t like to broadcast what companies I’ve become fans of. I mostly become fans for informational reasons.”—Kristin, World of Beer
- “Although I enjoy sharing information about myself using social media, sharing information about favorite brands is not something I usually do. I just share information about my everyday life and what is going on.”—Ashley, fan of Chick-fil-A
- “I don’t share about my favorite brands because I don’t shop often and don’t want to promote already trendy brands.”—Shannon, fan of American Apparel
- “I really like this brand, but I have no reason to post anything on my wall. The closest I came was posting how I just went on a big shopping spree there, but I decided for some, that might be too much information.”—Lindsay, fan of Victoria’s Secret
- “I’m reserved about what I put up and don’t really feel the need to talk about my favorite brands. I don’t feel like I’m defined by the brands that I wear.”—Sarah, fan of Lily Pulitzer

Although some participants have encouraged friends to become fans of a particular brand for the promotional offers, others have recommended brands to friends, but not encouraged them to necessarily become Facebook fans.

- “I tell my friends back home to friend Papa Gino’s because of the promotions and coupons. I’m trying to help them save money.”—Mike, fan of Papa Gino’s
- “Yes, in order to extend this brand, to get more people to know about it, and to all share something we like in common.”—Lindsay, fan of Victoria’s Secret

- “Yes, because you can get special offers. Also, you get really good tips you can use every single day. I think it is a good product that others might like too. I would recommend it to all my friends.”—Rebekah, fan of MAC
- “Yes, because of the promotions and rewards you can receive.”—Ashley, fan of Chick-fil-A
- “Yes, if I feel like they would also appreciate the opportunity to view their fan page on Facebook.”—Ly, fan of Guy Harvey
- “I have not because I don’t think it’s necessary, but I have encouraged them to shop there.”—Nicole, fan of Victoria’s Secret
- “I’ve recommended brands to people but never pushed them to become fans.”—Mike, fan of Ralph Lauren
- “I just share the information if I really like the product and think that my friends could use the information or the special offer or coupon.”—Debra, fan of Attitudes Dancewear
- “Starbucks just posted a Facebook status update about free pastry Tuesday, and I forwarded to my friends. I post and tag Starbucks all the time on Twitter. However, I would never try to push a brand into a friend’s throat. You really do not have to since it is so much credible coming from a friend. They can take it or leave it.”—Alex, fan of Starbucks

## **DISCUSSION**

This study draws on brand relationship literature to explore the online consumer-brand relationship. Concepts such as brand attachment, self-expression, trust, satisfaction, and self-disclosure, among others, are all studied here in the context of brand friending and level of online engagement. While the sample size is small, this study provides a framework for future studies in this area.

While some marketers have been successful in engaging consumers, much more understanding about consumers needs to occur to fully realize the potential of social media. Consumers have strong relationships with brands, and express passion, satisfaction, commitment, and identification with a certain brand. Some identify with a certain brand, believing that it is a representation of the person they either are or perceive themselves to be. Many are brand

conscious consumers who value the quality that often comes with a name brand. More research is necessary to understand whether these brand relationship indicators are predictors or outcomes of engaging with that brand on a social media site.

Becoming a fan of a brand on Facebook may be a way for consumers to express their commitment to a brand, or commitment may be an outcome of a long-time online relationship with a brand, as predicted by the reciprocal action theory. Many however, are looking for a transactional relationship with a brand and value the company information and special offers afforded them through Facebook. Some Facebook fans enjoy the opportunity to showcase favorite brands for friends, which may demonstrate their similarity to friends or encourage friends to also become a fan of the brand.

Companies are attempting to engage fans primarily through status updates that appear on fans' news feeds and direct messages to fans' Facebook inboxes. Consumers are, for the most part, reading these updates to get information about their favorite brands. Facebook does appear to compete with e-mail as a distribution method, and if Facebook is only used as a one-way communication method, e-mail will remain the preferred method of information delivery. Consumers would like to see companies offering more ways to engage them through Facebook.

Facebook fans are engaging to some extent with these brands online to learn more about the company and its products or to receive special offers. They are reading wall posts, clicking that they "like" something, and looking at content. The medium may be preferred to corporate Web sites in some cases, but has limitations in other ways. Fans like to also post information about brands in their status reports or photos on their Facebook profile, although some hesitate to share so much personal information about their spending habits. In addition, the desire to display

favorite things and connect with others on Facebook may lead to an inclination to broadcast a preference for a brand as well.

Many respondents in this survey, and likely many fans of brands on Facebook, have not had a lengthy relationship with brands on Facebook. Additional research could explore a specific brand community on Facebook where the participants have had more interactions with the brand. Quantitative research could determine the variables that explain why consumers choose to become a fan of a brand on Facebook and how they interact with that brand online.

In the end, getting a consumer to become a fan of a brand on Facebook is a first step toward providing opportunities to engage with that consumer. As consumers are found increasingly on social networking sites, the advertising industry is seeking ways to interact with consumers on these sites, exploring how to strengthen consumer-brand relationships, and learning how to measure engagement to demonstrate a return on investment.

*The author would like to thank Kelsey Marineau, Shereen Sarthou, Amy Dreyer, and Whitney Vance for conducting the interviews used in this study.*

## APPENDIX

### **Objective 1: To explore the relationship between a consumer and a specific brand**

How would you describe yourself in terms of brand consciousness? (Prompts: Are you someone who likes certain brands, someone who knows a lot about trendy brands, someone who pays extra for certain brands?)

Let's talk about the particular brand you mentioned when we set up this interview. That brand was \_\_\_\_\_. When you think about this brand, what comes to mind?

Why are you a customer of this brand?

How would you describe your relationship with this brand? (Prompts: Are you passionate about this brand? Do you trust this brand? Are you satisfied with this brand? Would you say you are committed to this brand?) (Prompt them to explain.)

Do you think this brand is an expression of who you are? Why do you say that?

### **Objective 2: To determine why consumers friend brands on Facebook or follow them on Twitter**

Why did you initially add this brand as a friend or follow this brand on Twitter?

Do you think about what being a fan of this brand says to others? Did that play a role in you deciding to friend this brand?

Is this a brand that is popular with your friends? Did that play a role in you deciding to friend this brand?

What do you see as the benefit of friending or following this brand? (What are the rewards?)

### **Objective 3: To explore how brands use social media to engage consumers**

What are some ways this brand has attempted to reach you through social media?

Do you read status updates by this brand? What do they tell you about the brand?

Have you ever received some sort of promotion or special discount from this brand either on Facebook or Twitter? If so, what did you think of this brand after receiving this offer? If so, did you use the promotion or special discount to purchase a product or get a free product?

What advice would you give this brand's social media manager so that they could have a better relationship with you?

#### **Objective 4: To explore how consumers engage with brands on social media**

Have you used social media to learn more about this brand or to engage with a brand? Why did you do this?

Have you ever interacted with this brand on Facebook? How? (read wall postings, posted on the brand's wall, looking at content on site, taking a survey/poll, playing games on the site, etc.)

Have you ever posted about this brand on your own status updates on Facebook or Twitter? Did you generate this content yourself or was it a message provided by the company? If you created content, what motivated you to do this? If it was a message by the company, what did you think about having this message on your wall?

Do you like to share information about yourself in social media? If so, is part of sharing information about yourself sharing your favorite brands too? Why?

Have you ever encouraged your friends to become a fan of a certain brand? Why?

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