

Proposing a new construct to measure the effectiveness of brands operating in Social Networking Sites

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Abstract

The current study was motivated by the increasing brand adoption of Social Networking Sites, like Facebook, in companies' communication plans. Currently, the top 100 worldwide advertisers accumulate more than 1 billion users in their brand like pages. In view of this trend, it becomes important to propose a measure that captures the performance and effects of brands' efforts in brand like pages. The present study addresses this research gap, proposing the construct of brand like page participation (BPP) and validating it. For that four phases were implemented and three studies were conducted. First, the construct domain was defined based on the literature review. Then, a qualitative study based on 10 interviews with Facebook users was implemented to further investigate the construct domain. Following that, an online survey with 203 respondents was used to assess the internal consistency and unidimensionality. Finally, the construct was validated for its ability to get reproduced with a new dataset including 575 valid responses. At this phase, collected data were submitted to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), in order to check for reliability and convergence. Hence, a new construct is proposed and validated, targeted at offering managers and academics a clear tool to evaluate brands efforts in SNS and to estimate their business impact.

Keywords

Brand like page participation; Facebook; Consumer product goods



1. INTRODUCTION

Social Networking Sites have evolved into a relevant part of the internet experience, accounting for more than 2 billion users worldwide. This massive audience is mostly present in Facebook, which covers almost 50% of the total online population (Worldometers 2013; Facebook 2013), who stays connected, on average 20 minutes each time they access the platform, generating, daily 4.5 billion likes and 4.7 billion shared items (Facebook 2013). In view of this expressive audience, brands started adopting SNS in their communication plans, with more than 70 million *like pages* being launched (Facebook 2013).

Brand like pages are defined as embedded types of virtual brand communities (Sung *et al.* 2010; Zaglia 2013), consisting of a *brand profile*, containing product portfolio and information on brands' main initiatives and a *newsfeed*, where companies share their marketing content, through regular posts. For joining the brand page, users need to click the *like* button available in the brand like page, with no extra personal information being required. From the moment users join the brand like page, they start receiving branded content, targeted at captivating their participation, through the offering of tangible, emotional and social benefits (Jahn and Kunz 2012; Mangold and Faulds 2009).

As the trend has evolved, brand like pages started to represent an important share of brands digital efforts, overtaking, in many cases, email programs and brand sites. As far as brands' interests towards SNS increase, the need for measurement scales able to evaluate brands' effectiveness also increases. The few studies that address this research area focus on identifying observable measures available in brand like pages and consolidate them (Hoffman and Fodor 2010).

The current study builds on this research gap, proposing a measurement scale to evaluate the effectiveness of brands' efforts at brand like pages, in SNS. For that, the first step to be addressed consists in defining who represents the effective *audiences* in brand like pages. This is because despite brands' efforts to generate interaction with users, many of them, after joining the brand like page remain indifferent to its content. As a consequence, the brand content published gradually disappears from their newsfeeds, given Facebook's algorithm of relevance. On the other hand, other users participate, through consuming (eg. reading posts, watching videos), contributing (eg. commenting) and creating content (eg. posting pictures, videos) (Muntinga *et al.* 2011). Those who participate constitute the effective audiences that are impacted by the brand efforts, justifying the decision to focus the current study on this target, as opposed to users who *join the brand page*, but do not engage as an audience.

The positive consequences associated to users' participation are well established in the area of traditional virtual brand communities (VBC), where participation is perceived as the bounding agent that keeps brand communities alive, by means of collectively creating and consuming value through the various processes that participation implies, with positive impact on brand purchase intentions (Casaló *et al.* 2008; Madupu and Cooley 2010; Dholakia *et al.* 2004; Schau, *et al.* 2009).

Therefore, the current study builds on the argument that SNS's effectiveness is associated with the effects of users' participation in brand like pages on their intentions towards purchasing the brand. In order to validate this argument, the following two objectives were pursued: *i)* to define the construct of brand like page participation (BPP); *ii)* to propose a measurement scale for it.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

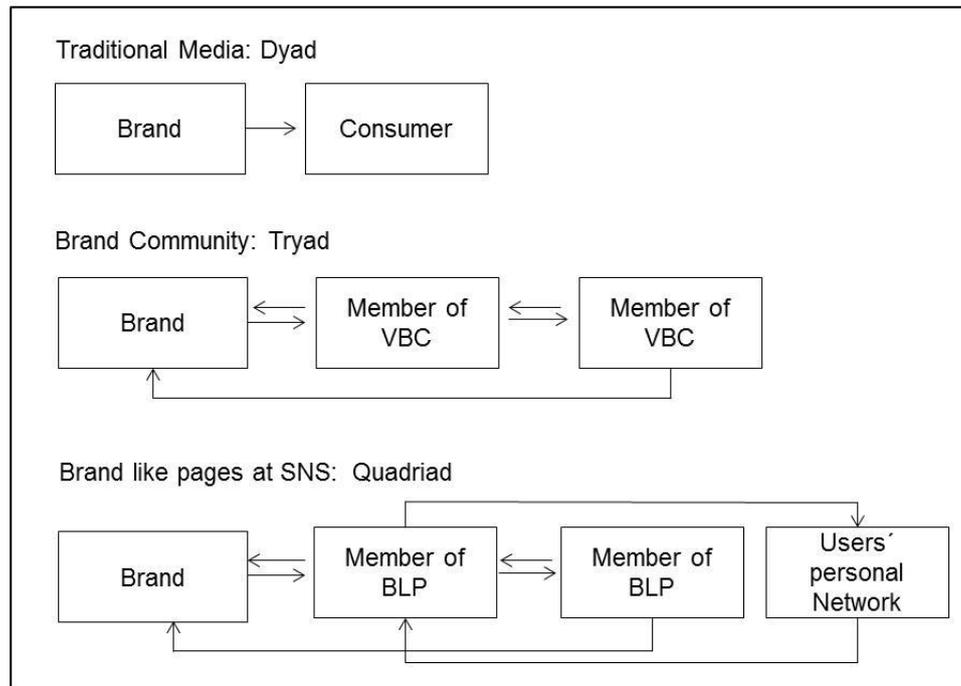
The understanding towards users' participation has evolved according to the development of media communications. In the context of traditional media, for example, participation is established within a dyad communication system (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001) with brands creating contents to share with users and users *consuming* the content through reading and watching. In these contexts, users' participation is expressed through the number of TV sets tuned in a particular program (as in the example of television audiences).

The development of VBC has challenged this traditional communication flow, with the tools for interactivity enlarging the scope of users' participation towards the *triad* consumer-brand-consumer, established among brand admirers (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). In these contexts, consumers and brands collectively create value through participation. Users are expected to participate not only consuming content (eg. reading or watching), but also contributing and creating content.

Studies in VBC are unequivocal with respect to the importance of succeeding in achieving participation, but differ on the theoretical approach adopted to measure it. Adjei *et al.* (2010) for example, have approached the participation from the perspective of its quality, defined by the relevance of comments, frequency, length and recency. Other authors approach participation either as a measure of the perceived social support that users get from the community (Woisetschläger *et al.* 2008; Casaló *et al.* 2008), or as an expression of users' intentions towards the community, measured through the future intentions to participate (Algesheimer *et al.* 2005; Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006).

Differently from VBC, where brands are at the center of the community, uniting brand admirers, SNS brand like pages are embedded in users' own social groups (Jahn and Kuntz 2012). This implies a change in focus (*the user*, instead of *the brand*) and scope of participants, as users' own social groups are also exposed to users' activities regarding brand like pages. As a result, the communication flow is expanded into a quadriad format, with users' own social groups integrating the context, as represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Three different communication flows: from traditional media to social networking sites



Furthermore, in the context of brand like pages in SNS, there is some consensus towards defining participation as an expression of *usage patterns*, established through frequency and type of interaction (Pagani *et al.* 2011; Shao, 2009; De Vries *et al.* 2012; Muntinga *et al.* 2011). The current study builds on Muntinga *et al.* (2011) typology of participation, organizing the consumer-brand related social media uses within three typologies, namely: *consuming*, *contributing* and *creating*. The authors build on the understanding that users may adopt different behaviours in social media, depending on their context and personal motivation. When presenting their argument, the authors clearly distinguish the *usage* typology from *users* typologies previously presented in online literature (Mathwick, 2002). As such, they evoke that users do not behave the same way in every social media context, arguing that the same user may create content in a certain site and not in others. Using Mathwick's (2002) users' typology for example, the authors argue that depending on users' motivations and goals, they can behave as a *lurker* (consuming content) at a given moment, and seconds later be a *socialiser* (contributing to). The theoretical approach proposed by Muntinga *et al.* (2011) seems to represent well the various communication flows present in brand like pages with users being able to adopt different behaviours regarding their participation, consuming content (eg. reading or watching), contributing to the brand like page content (eg. commenting or liking a post), or creating content (eg. sharing a post with their personal network).

3. METHODOLOGY

Envisioning the research objectives proposed, the current study has followed the phases proposed in Churchill (1979). Therefore, once brand like page participation was defined according to the literature, a sequence of three studies was implemented:

3.1. Study 1 – semi-structured interviews

Its main objective was to further investigate the construct domain in view of the embedeness of brand like pages in users' social networks and typologies of adopted participation. It consisted of a qualitative research conducted with Facebook users, by means of 10 individual interviews. The interviewees were recruited through the method of snow ball, with initial respondents referring others. The criteria for selection were that interviewees should be regular users of Facebook and fans of brand like pages. The interviews were semi-structured, being conducted in-person and through online platforms (Skype), audio-recorded and lasted 45 - 60 minutes. Each interview was transcribed and the typed transcripts were analyzed using opened coding, followed by thematic coding around categories corresponding to the research questions.

3.2 Study 2 – pre-test

It consisted of an online survey with 203 valid responses being obtained. The aim was to assess the reliability and unidimensionality of the proposed BPP construct.

Regarding sampling procedures, data were collected among Facebook users who were members of pre-selected brand like pages from consumer product goods' (CPG), which is among the most expressive segments in Facebook. Furthermore, the study has focused on brands positioned in the area of beauty and personal care. This segment was selected from the list of the existing CPGs' brand pages in Portugal (DJomba, 2013). The criteria for selection were based on: *i*) the segment size, which together with food and beverages, accounts for more than 70% of the total number of brand page users; *ii*) the segment's higher level of participation (DJomba, 2013). This measure is calculated as the ratio between the number of people that actively talk about the brand and the number of total brand page users. Both figures are available in brand pages. In the following phase, the same criteria were used to select the six brand like pages included in the study. The final brand selection favoured international brands with worldwide presences, which besides having suitable resources to conduct a successful media strategy, also operated brand like pages in Portuguese.

Respondents were recruited through a convenience sampling method, via targeted Facebook ads. A banner was positioned next to the users' newsfeed, inviting them to participate in an online research, available through a direct link to the Qualtrics Research Platform.

Concerning the research questionnaire, the items used to measure brand like page participation reflect the main functionalities available, concerning consuming, contributing or creating content. The following items were used: *E1*) Read brand posts; *E2*) Click 'like' to posts, photos or videos in the brand page (BP); *E3*) Access video and music links that are posted; *E4*) Comment the posts published in the BP and *E5*) Share with friends the content published at the BP (Muntinga *et al.* 2011; de Vries *et al.* 2012). The items were measured in a seven-point likert scale of usage frequency (1=never; 4= sometimes; 7=always).



3.3. Study 3 – main survey

It consisted of an online survey with 575 valid responses obtained. It aimed at validating the proposed construct with a new dataset and assessing its reliability and convergence.

Study 3 has followed the sampling procedures adopted in study 2, except for the adopted recruitment process. In study 3, respondents were recruited through a household panel, managed by an external research agency. An email was sent to the respondents, who accessed the questionnaire through a direct link available at the agency owned research platform.

Concerning the research questionnaire, and given the acceptable results obtained in study 2, in study 3 the same measures were used. Except for the inclusion of an additional item to measure BPP (E6: read others comments to the brand posts), which was included in order to balance the various types of B

4. RESULTS

4.1 Study 1 – semi-structured interviews

In order to further investigate the construct domain, the authors organize the findings in three major areas, which are presented and briefly illustrated with transcripts extracted from the interviews:

4.1.1. Users' networks and uses of Facebook

Aligned with the literature, the analysis of the in-depth interviews reinforces the general idea that social interaction motivations are among the main reasons why people adopt and use Facebook (Lampe *et al* 2006; Ellison *et al* 2007; Vasalou *et al.* 2010). Many interviewees associate their entry at the platform with their desire to reconnect with friends that are not physically present in their daily lives. As such, they manage to keep *friendships fresh* as Facebook fosters constant updates on mutual status and conveys *social surveillance*. The following transcripts illustrate that:

'In Facebook, you feel like a *satellite, easily beeping* to all those people that you know. I usually pamper those people that I like (but do not often meet) with affectionate messages' (woman, 32 y/o);

'I see photos. I quickly access it several times a day. It's like 'rainbow press', where you see the photos and get to know what friends are doing' (woman, 43 y/o).

Furthermore, the interviewees reveal that as uses evolved Facebook gradually developed into users' *personal and multifaceted communication platform*, through which they manage their relationships, social identity expression and increasingly address their needs for entertainment, information, self-enhancement and consumption (Papacharissi and Mendelson 2011).

The following transcript illustrates that:

'I use Facebook not only as a personal home page, but also as a network that integrates friends, shops and small businesses. In Facebook, besides being able to get information from

a friend who was on a trip and posted a photo, I can also get information from shops offering discounts, from people who sell handcrafted objects, etc.' (woman, 33 y/o).

Within this overarching framework, users acknowledge that their *private and professional, intimate and distanced* connections get somehow combined into *one* social audience, in which brand like pages are embedded as a sort of *distanced participant*, sharing users' interests and attention with friends, family, groups of interest, professional contacts and other brands.

4.1.2 Users and their entrance in brand like pages

Interviewees associate their entrance in brand like pages to brands' likability and their potential contribution to users' self-enhancement needs, as they acknowledge Facebook as a channel skilled for social exposure. This finding is supported by former studies (Wallace *et al.* 2012), with users' positioning their *entrance* in brand like pages to their efforts towards conveying their own social identities, as illustrated in the following transcripts:

'When I click *like for brands* I show who I am and what are my values. I clicked *like* for Burberry because I like clothes, TMN (telecom) and Vodafone because I like technology, Martini because I like the nightlife'. (man, 28 y/o);

'Facebook is like a window display. For example, Ariel (the washing powder) I would never click *like* to it as I do not want others to see me as someone who only thinks about the house and the children. Regarding Decathlon, I could eventually click *like* (for joining the brand like page), but would not interact, as a low-cost sports' brand is not part of my world! I *like* Coke's brand like pages because it is fun, it is positive, it is about enjoying life. I also like Super Bock (beer brand) because it is about going out, travelling, living adventures. I *liked* Corpos Danone (yogurt) because I like to be thin, I like to be beautiful' (woman, 27 y/o).

Furthermore, supporting previous studies (Sung *et al.* 2010), users also associate their entrance in brand like pages to the perceived value associated with their interactions, being predominant the idea that for users to join brand like pages they need to be able to anticipate value in their future interactions. The transcript below illustrates that:

'I keep in my Facebook the brands that give me something in return. I go to Continente (a supermarket retail chain) anyway. Therefore, I don't need to have Facebook for that, whereas at Woman Secrets (for example) I would not get to know about the promotions if not from the Facebook brand like page (...). As you can imagine, I do not want to have things that don't interest me. Brands like Compal (juice), Dove (soap) or Luso (water) have nothing to give me. I purchase Luso and enjoy it, but what news could that brand offer to me?' (woman, 39 y/o);

'I have no special interest on Vodafone. For example, I am a fan of Martha Stuart, but not of Vaqueiro (cooking brand). What could Vaqueiro say that I do not already know?' (woman, 33 y/o).

4.1.3 Users and their participation in brand like pages

After users join brand like pages, they are targeted with contents meant to evoke their participation, through consuming, contributing or creating content. During the interviews, users associate their participation, with brand like pages' performance on delivering benefits associated to socialization, self-

enhancement, entertainment, information and remuneration. This finding is supported by previous studies (Jahn and Kunz 2012) and illustrated by the following example:

‘With Lipton (Tea brand) it was different from other brands. It could also have been an ordinary conversation, but from the beginning they had a contest with hilarious video and always funny things happening. The brand made a good impression on me right from the beginning’ (woman, 31 y/o);

Moreover, the functionalities most often used for participation were further characterized by interviewees, with users’ own social network playing a major influence on their activities.

I like it: the interviewees position their *likes* as a *social sign of approval* and endorsement for contents, as illustrated in the following transcripts:

‘The *like* means that I feel proud about something and want to clap hands for it’ (man, 28 y/o);
‘What sort of posts deserves *like*? It has to be something that I like, to celebrate a victory, some product that you like because you think it is very good, also to support something cool that someone is doing’ (woman, 43 y/o).

I comment it: This functionality is somehow associated with users’ intentions to further contribute for the brand and other users in brand like pages. This activity is not often present in the transcripts, which might relate to users’ predominant lack of interest on establishing relationships with other members of brand like pages (Zaglia *et al.* 2013). Moreover, commenting is also associated with the post format, as some posts challenge users to interact and others do not.

‘I saw a post published by IKEA, in which the brand showed the image of a very white room and invited us to colour the image. In this situation they asked for my opinion and I interacted as it had to do with my area of interest’ (woman, 32 y/o).

I share it: The *share it* is presented by the interviewees as a functionality meant for recommending and creating interactions with users’ own social networks.

‘When I *share* something it needs to be great, or it needs to be related to a social cause. In these situations, I usually share with others the things that I feel that are worthwhile. Then I will be really recommending’ (man, 28 y/o).

I read it: Once that the *like*, *comment* and *share* functionalities are established, consuming content through reading posts and accessing links seems to be the way that consumers most often interact with brand like pages, enjoying the benefits of participation, without using it as means to socialize, as this implies self-exposure, which is not always appreciated.

‘I usually do not click *like* to posts because I want to keep my privacy. I find it strange that brands publish things for everyone and that anyone can get to know who I am’ (woman, 40 y/o);

‘I do not usually click *like* or comment because I do not want everyone to know what I have been reading. Facebook is like the Big Brother (TV show)! I just read. I very seldom express myself’ (woman, 27 y/o).



In conclusion, users' *likes, comments and shares* are contextualized by the interviewees as functionalities meant for getting exposure and socialize. Furthermore, users differentiate their likes and comments from their shares, as the last one represents users' efforts to create their own interactions with their networks. *Consuming* content, on the other hand seem to occur more independently from any social implications.

These findings support the quadriad type of communication flow occurring in SNS, with users' own networks influencing the type and frequency of BPP. Furthermore, the findings also endorse current study's adoption of Muntinga's *et al.* (2011) *usage* typologies, with users most often associating their activities in brand like pages (*consuming, contributing and creating*) with contents' characteristics and with their own expectations to socialize, instead of associating the activities to users' personal characteristics.

4.2. Study 2 - pre-test study

Concerning the pre-test sample characteristics (recall n=203), half of the participants were below 25 years old, 33% were between 25 and 45 and the remaining above 45 years old. The majority of the participants visit Facebook on a daily basis, 36% spend less than an hour in every visit, 21% spend between 1-2 hours and the remaining spend more than 2 hours.

At this phase, the construct BPP was assessed for unidimensionality using principal components analysis in IBM SPSS V.22. Factor extraction was based on the existence of eigenvalues larger than 1, with one component being obtained. Furthermore, it was required that all factor loadings were larger than 0.5, and that a considerable amount of total explained variance was obtained. All items have estimated standardized factor loadings above 0.70 and a total variance explained of 34% was achieved.

Additionally, reliability was accessed using Cronbach's Alpha. Brand page participation has achieved the minimum required level, with a coefficients of 0.86 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994), being validated for its reliability.

4.3. Study 3 - main survey

Among the 575 respondents, 25% were aged between 18 and 24 years old, 37% between 25 and 34 and 37% between 35 and 44. The majority visited Facebook on a daily basis, 26% spent less than ½ hour in every visit, 36% spent between ½ hour and 1 hour, 20% spent between 1-2 hours and the remaining 19% spent more than 2 hours. Regarding the brand like page, around 46% of the participants had been registered on the brand like page for more than 3 months.

The measurement model was estimated through CFA. The obtained fit measures suggest there is an acceptable model-data fit, as presented in Table 1. There is also evidence for reliability and convergence of the proposed BPP construct, with a composite reliability value of 0.87 and an average variance extracted (AVE) value of 0.54.

Table 1: Results from confirmatory factor analysis

	Standardized Factor Loading	CR	AVE
<i>Brand Like Page Participation (BPP)</i>		0.87	0.54
E1 Read brand posts.	0.60		
E2 Click 'like' to posts, photos or videos at the brand page (BP	0.70		
E3 Access video and music links that are posted	0.71		
E4 Comment the posts published at the BPP	0.87		
E5 Share with friends the content published at the BPP	0.83		
E6 Read other's comments to the brand posts	0.66		

Goodness of fit indices for measurement model: $\chi^2=61$; $df=9$; $RMSEA=0.10$; $CFI=0.98$; $NFI=0.98$; $IFI=0.98$; $GFI=0.95$

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The current study proposes a new construct to measure the effectiveness of brand like pages for brands operating in SNS. For that purpose a literature review was carried out with the *embedness* of brand like pages in users' social networks and *the typologies of participation* proposed by Muntinga *et al.* (2011) being identified as key elements to be further investigated through study 1.

The results of study 1 confirmed previous findings from the literature regarding the reasons behind users' entrance and participation in SNS. Furthermore, the findings also distinguish among the various types of participation, with contents' characteristics and users' own social networks influencing the type of participation adopted. These results support that the construct of BPP incorporates the various typologies of activities suggested in previous studies (Muntinga *et al.* 2011). As such, BPP was defined as a construct which encompasses the key activities associated to consuming, contributing and creating content.

In study 2, a measurement scale for BPP was proposed and the construct was validated for its reliability and unidimensionality. These aspects were reassessed using a new dataset, through study 3, with results being consistent with study 2.

5.1 Contributions for theory and implications for practice

The current study builds on the need to identify and propose a new construct to evaluate the efforts of brands operating brand like pages, in SNS. In this sense, its main theoretical contribution is the proposition of the BPP construct, which has its measures validated for reliability and internal consistency. Results suggest that managers incorporate BPP among their key objectives to be pursued when planning their activities in SNS and evaluating their efforts.



5.2 Limitations and future studies

The findings were obtained within a specific geography and brand segment, which reveal opportunities to be addressed in future studies. Furthermore, regarding the brand consequences investigated, future studies could enlarge the analysis, evaluating the impact of BPP on users willingness to further engage with the brand, for example through their involvement in processes related to advocacy and product innovation.

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