

beyond Brand Interaction Study

Study Overview

The purpose of this study was to determine why fans follow brands online and what brands can do to enhance their following. This study had two parts: 1) A survey of consumers in the U.S. and U.K. (n = 3,765) on how they interact with brands both online and offline and 2) An analysis of all posts (N=14,218) appearing on the official pages of the most valuable 100 international brands.

Key Findings

- 1) People befriend brands online to learn more about them and to show appreciation for the brand and its products. People do report that they follow brands in social media to complain or post negative comments.
- 2) In our analysis of official company Facebook pages, we found that the most common type of fan post were brief posts praising the brand. Only rarely did fans use Facebook to make customer service-type requests or vandalize the page.
- 3) People tend to become fans of pages that contain numerous applications (e.g., games or other marketing material).
- 4) Images and text, rather than videos, tend to encourage fans to “like” and comment on company posts. Posing specific questions to fans tends to be a very effective way of getting them to comment on posts and, indirectly, share content with friends.

Why do people follow brands online?

In a survey we carried out of consumers in the US and UK, 41% of people follow a specific company or brand on Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, or another social network.

The top reasons that people would possibly follow a brand in social media included:

- 1) To find offers and discounts (42%)
- 2) Love of the product (33%)
- 3) To get latest news about the brand (24%)
- 4) To give them ideas on how to improve the product (12%)
- 5) To get better customer service (12%)
- 6) To complain (6%)

When people do complain about brands, they report doing so through private rather than public channels:

- 1) Email (80%)
- 2) Phone (54%)
- 3) Letter (28%)
- 4) Website Form (20%)
- 5) Facebook (5%)
- 6) Fax (4%)
- 7) Twitter (3%)
- 8) Instant Messenger (2%)
- 9) SMS (1%)
- 10) Youtube (1%)

What does fan behavior actually look like?

As people self-reported in our survey, fans rarely use Facebook as a forum to complain. Only 5% of all fan posts were negative, and only 0.7% were complaints that also requested attention from a company representative (customer service-like complaints). The majority of posts, 59%, actually praised the brands.

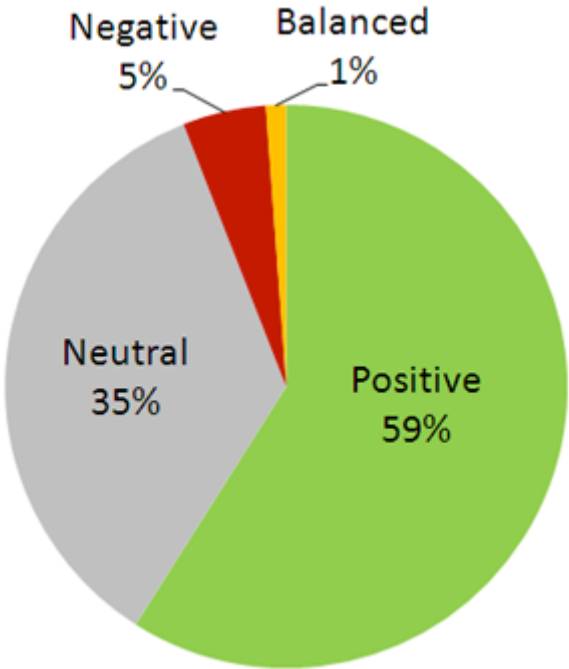


Chart 1: Facebook Fan Behavior Sentiment

Many posts (brand or fan) linked to or included embedded media, including images (15% of all posts), video (3% of all posts), news sites (3%), and polls (1%).

Irrelevant posts are somewhat common on company pages. Fifteen percent of all fan posts were self-promotional spam (e.g., “add me as your friend” or links to personal or company websites) and 6% were nonsensical comments or non-sequiturs (e.g., “my cat is like me”).

Requests for help and attention from company representatives and other fans were also common. Six percent of all posts were requests for attention or responses from the company, while 5% of posts were requests for help or responses from other fans. Interestingly, most requests for help go unanswered on Facebook. Only 0.3% of all requests for help from a company representative 2.2% of requests for help from other fans were responded to.

The following company pages had the highest number of positive and negative comments, respectively, in February 2010.

Most Positive Comments

1	Heinz	90%
2	Audi	89%
3	Tiffany & Co.	89%
4	Giorgio Armani	85%
5	Kellogg's	84%
6	BMW	83%
7	GAP	81%
8	Ferrari	77%
9	Adobe	75%
10	Honda	75%

Most Negative Comments

1	Dell	52%
2	HP	29%
3	Samsung	19%
4	Microsoft	15%
5	Pizza Hut	11%
6	Burger King	9%
7	Sony	9%
8	Pepsi	8%
9	Hyundai	7%
10	Nescafe	7%

Table1: Positive and Negative Comments on Facebook

What can companies do to increase their fan base?

We found that most brands had between 1,000 and 5,000,000 fans (now called, page “likes”) on Facebook. Brands with very high fan counts tended to highly-recognizable consumer brands, such as Coca-Cola and Starbucks.

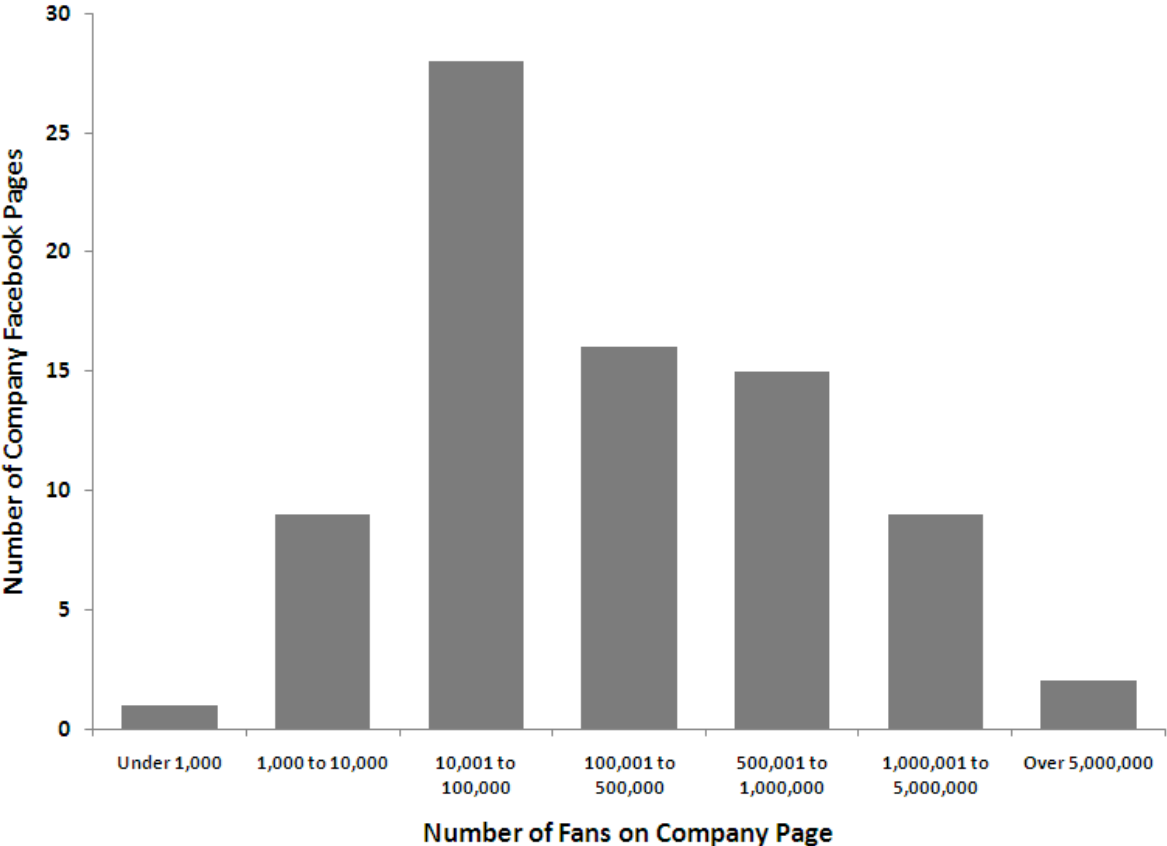


Chart 2: Facebook Pages and Number of Fans

We found that the following company pages had the highest number of fans in February 2010. (We analyzed the company's corporate page. If there was no overall corporate page, we collected data from the product page with the highest number of followers.)

Brand	Fans
Starbucks	6,506,603
Coca Cola	5,057,576
Disney	3,255,734
Adidas	2,424,489
Zara	2,037,917
McDonalds	1,787,191
H&M	1,654,126
Puma	1,423,756
MTV	1,220,436
Kellogs (Pop Tarts)	1,182,435

Table 2: Number of Facebook Fans

We identified several key factors common among sites with relatively high fan bases:

1) **Applications bring fans to the page**

Higher fan count was correlated with a greater number of tabs, including applications, on a company's page ($r = .26$).

2) **Pictures bring fans to the page**

Higher fan count was also correlated with the number of images posted on the page, both by the company and by other fans ($r = .34$).

3) **Don't try too hard**

Interestingly, companies that post frequently on their own page tend to have fewer fans. There was a negative correlation between the percentage of all posts on a page that were written by a company representative and the number of fans on the page ($r = -.28$). A deeper analysis revealed that this was, in large part, due to brands that frequently comment on fan's posts. When we statistically controlled for the percentage of fan posts that a company responded to, the correlation between the percentage of all posts written by a brand and the number of fans decreased to nonsignificance ($r = -.08$). Taken together with the other results, this suggests that fans may feel uncomfortable on pages where brands appear to be closely monitoring

conversations. While it is okay to start a conversation by posting a question to all fans, for example, it appears to be off-putting when companies respond too often to fan comments.

Sentiment Doesn't Matter

The overall tone towards the company didn't impact the number of fans on the page. Neither the proportion of positive or negative posts were correlated with the number of fans ($r = .08$, $r = -.10$, respectively).

What can companies do to get fans to share more content?

One of the best ways to build awareness about a brand, a product, or a campaign on Facebook is to have fans share the content with their friends. The most likely way that this will happen is through comments (a fan posts a comment on a brand’s Facebook page) or “likes” (a fan votes/likes another fan post or a company post). When a fan completes either of these behaviors, a notice is posted on their own Facebook page which can be seen by all of their friends.

The following findings provide insight into the type of content that encourages fans to comment and “like” posts:

1) Fans prefer images over videos

When company’s post comments on their own page, fans tend to “like” static images most often, followed by videos and text only messages. Posts that contained a mixture of media types (e.g., an image and text) tended to receive the most likes (see example). We believe that images tend to be liked most often because many Facebook users access the application from their mobile devices, which can have long loading times for rich media including videos. Further, video involves more of an investment in time on the part of the user which could inhibit engagement.

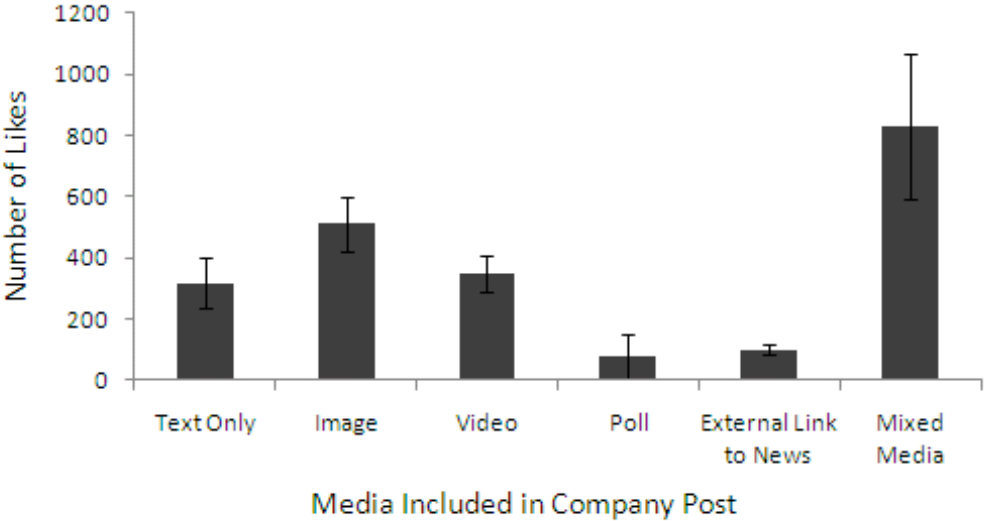


Chart 3: Media and Number of Likes

2) Text is most consistently effective at initiating commenting activity

While images and video might be most effective at generating likes, simple text-based posts, especially direct questions (see example) are the most effective at getting fans to make comments (polls produced the highest average comments, but the sample size for posts was small, $n=4$, and the data should be interpreted cautiously). As was the case for “likes”, images tended to be the most effective media for generating comments.

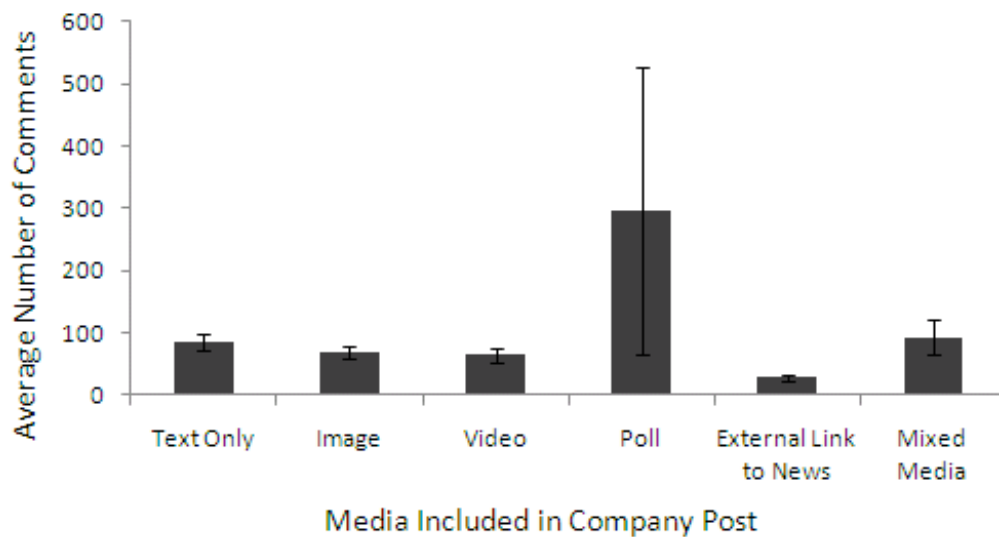


Chart 4. Media Type and Number of Comments

Top Recommendations for Brands and Their Facebook Presences:

- 1) Include applications on your page
- 2) When you add posts to your page, use text and static images to stimulate fan engagement.
- 3) Encourage fans to comment on your posts by asking questions.
- 4) Don't worry about responding to or screening negative sentiment and customer-service requests. These types of posts are rare and it doesn't appear that they influence the number of fans on your page. Furthermore, responding too frequently to fan comments appears to decrease the number of fans on Facebook pages.
- 5) Don't forget the main reasons why people become a brand fan – they want to be the first to find out new things about your product and they are there to be rewarded for their loyalty
- 6) Some brands (such as Apple) create fan pages for their products rather than employing a corporate fan page. This tends to work as people are more likely to love a product than a corporation.