



## Virtual Community Engagement on Facebook Brand Page

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### ABSTRACT

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The behavior of consumers in virtual community varies according to the types of the community they feel belonged to. The study may not only be conducted to understand what drives consumers to participate in the virtual brand community but may also seek to understand how members could get themselves with the community. The finding indicates that hedonic benefit is the strongest stimulus, which links to higher engagement. Though economic motive and product learning are not found to have a significant effect on sharing and commenting behavior; they are considered inherent. From theoretical contribution, the papers also provide strategic marketing directions to promote virtual community engagement.

### 1. Introduction

Social media has proven to be an effective channel which influences consumers' brand perception and consumption behavior (Munnukka, Karjaluoto, & Tikkanen, 2015). A brand can reach a large number of potential segments with low promotional costs through enhanced virtual community (Flavián & Guinalú, 2005), and subsequently produce a favorable outcome (Sotheara, Jing, & Yat, 2016). Previous studies defined brand community as non-geography with a shared identity, a sense of moral responsibility and commitment toward a brand (Flavián & Guinalú, 2005; Muniz & O'guinn, 2001; Ouwersloot & Odekerken-Schröder, 2008), and/or connected to a product.

Members of brand communities perform two particular loyalty behavior, loyalty toward the preferred brand and oppositional loyalty toward competing brand (Thompson & Sinha, 2008). People perform these behaviors when they meet and talk about the brand in a group meeting or any particular events provided by the brands or companies. However, members or fans now may participate such community activities just one click on social networking sites.

For example, a brand page or even individual page is easily created with even no cost where brands can post, like, comment and share to engage their visitors including current and potential consumers. In return, consumers respond to these efforts by

liking or commenting on the posts and status which may lead to enhancing the bond that turns them into engaged fans (Kabadayi & Price, 2014).

Laroche, Habibi, and Richard (2013) also emphasized that one of the core values of Facebook brand community is not only to bring people with similar characteristics together but also to facilitate the communication. Moreover, online brand communities are not only understood to be effective platforms for both brand owners and customers but also act like the mean to enhance customers involvement in marketing dialogue with the brands and to foster customer interaction with one another (Munnukka et al., 2015). Zaglia (2013) defined a Facebook group established by a company around its brand as a true brand community which should be distinguished from a mere fan page.

Current study suggested that customers' commitment and behavior within brand communities vary significantly among different community types such as offline and online community, fan pages, and small group brand community (Munnukka et al., 2015). However, certain particular behaviors, both active and passive participation, have been found to enhance the value of the virtual community (Shang, Chen, & Liao, 2006). For example, some members of the Facebook community get involved with more active communication, while others focus on evaluating or

watching the continuing communication around shared brand interests (Ho, 2014). Studies also suggested that common interests, values or desire among participants to discuss specific issues are also motives for community participation (Shang et al., 2006).

The consequences of brand engagement have arisen in previous discussions. Engagement enhances consumer's attitudes toward brand and purchase intention (Duffett, 2015; T. Yang (2012)). Similarly, Shang et al. (2006) suggested that promoting community participation may also increase brand loyalty. Loyal and satisfied customers are then more likely to engage in word-of-mouth (WoM) favorable to the firm (Chen, Papazafeiropoulou, Chen, Duan, & Liu, 2014).

Moreover, the significance of brand community enhances the value of the brand, but there are few papers (Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, & Pihlström, 2012; Pihlstrom, 2012; Shi, Chen, & Chow, 2016) empirically discussing the specific engagement behaviors – Like, Comment and Share feature on Facebook, which are supposed to represent user's engagement – performed by Facebook users on this communication platform. This paper reviews relevant academic marketing literature in the brand community, then develops a conceptual framework and test proposed hypotheses. Empirical finding illustrates the relationship between community participation stimuli and specific engagement behaviors performed by Facebook users.

## 2. Literature Review

### Facebook as virtual community platform

Facebook has become the world's most popular networking site with more than 1.65 billion monthly active users of 2016 ([www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org)). The study showed that users spend six days a week, 2.6 hours per day on Facebook (Lilley, Grodzinsky, & Gumbus, 2012). 82 percent of active users disclosed personal information such as date of birth, mobile phone number, home address and relationship status, etc. which help shape to catalog potential customers via specific segments or characteristics (Delerue & Hopkins, 2012; Lilley et al., 2012).

In addition, typical Facebook users regularly interact with their friends by posting messages about their personal lives, popular/unpopular trending issues and/or their opinion or experience with products/companies (Kucukemiroglu & Kara, 2015). This form of communication is considered as an important resource for many consumers and is considered more effective than advertising in influencing certain purchase decisions (Peterson & Merino, 2003).

Such platform may drive future business direction where people are encouraged to have a conversation or dialog on a product (Lilley et al., 2012). Growing numbers of business have considered Facebook as the effective communicator which creates a direct business-to-consumer information flow to a confirmed interested party (Delerue & Hopkins, 2012). This community platform is potential to promote business. For instance, a brand page is established where fans and consumers

meet and interact with companies or brands. Moreover, many small business owners see Facebook as an effective marketing and sales channels that pay high dividends and enable the companies to attract new customers, improve the effectiveness of communication with customers, and finally gain a better understanding of consumers' needs (Chen et al., 2014).

The study indicated that having a Facebook page increases sales for small business ([www.pagemodo.com](http://www.pagemodo.com)). This implication encourages the companies to create a page around their brands to engage their visitors including their fans and potential consumers. Likewise, the Facebook brand page provides consumers high possibility to interact with brands in a more direct way by liking and/or commenting on brand's posts and messages (Kabadayi & Price, 2014). When a consumer places a comment on brand's Facebook page, awareness of the brand can rise markedly (Direction). People can see who has made a comment and, more importantly, gain access to their views, thoughts, and feelings (Direction). This form of communication is likely to drive presumption blossom into a new and profitable way (Lilley et al., 2012).

### Engagement behavior discussion on Facebook

Generally speaking, Facebook users are supposed to join the community when they interact with the community elements and participate in any form of joint activity (Ho, 2014). However, some members of the Facebook community get involved with more active communication, while others focus on watching the continuous communication around shared brand interest (Ho, 2014). For example, if a customer logs in a Facebook community to become a member and comment, share experience, interact with the marketer, ask questions about the brand or product, or answers comments, that member is participating in the community activities.

On Facebook, a brand page is a good platform for community. With this platform, certain buttons are displayed to allow users to express their thoughts, feeling, and participation. Like button on Facebook has gained attraction among brands from various industries which have seen to improve the performance of the brands after implementation (Kabadayi & Price, 2014). "Likes" helps companies promote brand awareness and engagement which, in turn, contribute to return on investment, while commenting on brand pages allows consumers to share their opinions about or agreement/disagreement with the content on the pages (Kabadayi & Price, 2014).

**Like:** According to Phua and Ahn (2014), "likes" holds its functional meaning including different degrees of liking and whether people judge the value of "like" based on their relationships to others (e.g. friends, acquaintances or strangers) who like a brand. The aggregates number of Likes on a brand page is indicative that how popular the brand is or how popular the brand awareness consumer may perceive. However, the number may not translate directly to fulfilling brands' sale figures, but it remains an effective indicator by which brand can

estimate how well their Facebook pages are doing including how many members see their brand updates.

Moreover, “overall likes” and “friends’ likes” provide different explanations (Phua & Ahn, 2014). For example, when “overall Likes” is high, consumers are more likely to have more positive brand attitude, higher brand involvement, brand trust and purchase intention than when overall Likes is low. Similarly, the number of “friend’s Like” on brand pages also elicits a positive response from consumers with regards to brand-related dependent measures. When the number of “friend’s Likes” is high, consumers have significantly more positive brand attitude, brand trust, greater brand involvement and purchase intention.

**Share:** On virtual community, online users are quite easy to report product reviews and their experience online (Gvili, Gvili, Levy, & Levy, 2016). Facebook is now the largest and fastest growing photos sharing social working site, roughly two billion photos are shared daily (Malik, Hiekkänen, Dhir, & Nieminen, 2016). People who are engaged with the community or those who have the sense of belonging to the community may share product-related information with the attempt that it would benefit the public (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006).

Also, sharing on Facebook deemed to be a part of entertainment activities while browsing, the work of Malik et al. (2016) indicated that sharing (photos) could help people in fulfilling their social interaction needs, such as self-expression, self-presentation, communicating and maintaining and nurturing social relationships. On the Facebook platform, users enjoy sharing interesting content, pictures or texts with their friends or peers on their page, and they can also browse the contents shared by their friends (H.-L. Yang & Lin, 2014). While the user is browsing a Facebook community page, they are exposed to sensory stimulation through multimedia content, new ideas, and information related to their area of interest (Pöyry, Parvinen, & Malmivaara, 2013).

Sharing, on the other hand, is another form of eWoM. Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler (2004), identified four motives associated with WoM - concerns for others, helping the company, social benefit and exerting power. Moreover, the previous study showed that entertainment and informativeness are two distinct properties of eWoM that influence online consumer behavior (Gvili et al., 2016).

**Comment:** Comment on the public space are found to be more visible and much exposed to the general public because it states the users' feeling, opinion and thought, etc. (Lipsman, Mudd, Rich, & Bruich, 2012). Study suggested that page tendency could be increased if (i) the page offers on-going comments and keep customers up-to-date with the latest news, (ii) if it shows proximity to customers by asking for and giving support and advice with comment and personal experience (iii) if it offers news, information, content, photos that are fun and entertaining and rewards comments and participation (Pöyry et al., 2013). Kabadayi and Price (2014) similarly suggested that without those

who comment and like, the success and contribution of social networking sites to brands' overall performance would be limited. In addition, brand communities carry out important functions on behalf of the brand such as sharing information, perpetuating the history and culture of the brand, and providing assistance (Shang et al., 2006). A previous study suggested that events or activities are important for the emergence of a brand community (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002), yet these require high consumer cost to participate in those events or activities (Shang et al., 2006).

### 3. Theoretical development

Gummerus et al. (2012) defined economic benefit as monetary incentives such as coupon or discounts to encourage consumers to join brand page. In this regards, the economic benefit is a good reward for them. Customers may perceive that the brand does take good care of their interest; and thus, enhance their willing to behave positively with the brand. Empirical study showed that economic benefit represents functional needs of consumers (Shi et al., 2016). However, the previous study conducted on online game argued that transactional engagement behavior did not have a significant impact on economic benefit. The study further explained that those playing games frequently and already spent money on those games did not look for an economic benefit to the Facebook community (Gummerus et al., 2012). Based on the above argument, the following hypotheses are proposed.

*H1a: Economic benefit is associated with like behavior.*

*H2b: Economic benefit is associated with comment behavior.*

*H2c: Economic benefit is associated with share behavior.*

Online consumers may participate in the community if the community could provide the sense of joy and fun. Users experiencing enjoyment when engaging with a brand page are more likely to have higher continuance level (Shi et al., 2016). Gummerus et al. (2012) concluded that hedonic benefit is even more important on a brand community than on e-commerce site because users would spend more time to browse community pages.

Dholakia and Vianello (2009) suggested that entertainment is a critical aspect that intrinsically motivates users to attain fun and enjoyment while interacting with other members of the community, or after acquiring related information (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). However, it is doubted whether hedonic motive links to specific engagement behavior on Facebook. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H2a: Hedonic benefit is associated with like behavior.*

*H2b: Hedonic benefit is associated with comment behavior.*

*H2c: Hedonic benefit is associated with share behavior.*

Product information, usage, and the product-related problem could be a good reason for customers to participate in the community. The community may share product-related information with the intention to fulfill the needs of other online users (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). Similarly, Lin, Lin, and Li

(2015) concluded fan page possessed three functions, entertainment, social and information seeking to stimulate the participation. Adopting this platform, the fan not only disseminates company's product or information but also use this platform as a forum to discuss, make a brand referral and express oppositional against competing brands. Liking a brand effectively provides the firm involved with free publicity as brands' posts appear on the profile pages of the consumer responsible (Direction). From the discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H3a: Product learning is associated with like behavior.*

*H3b: Product learning is associated with comment behavior.*

*H3c: Product learning is associated with share behavior.*

#### 4. Methodology

Facebook users were invited to complete online questionnaires in the extent to which they agreed or disagreed by their personal experience with the virtual brand community. After data collection, data cleaning was applied. Of 262 responses, 25 incomplete questionnaires accounted for 9.5% were removed from the study. Items of economic benefit, hedonic benefit, and product learning were adapted from Shi et al. (2016) and Huang (2012), while specific Facebook behaviors, like, share and comment were adapted from Kabadayi and Price (2014), Malik et al. (2016) and Gummerus et al. (2012) using 5-liker scales.

Before starting the questionnaires, participants were informed to keep in mind of any virtual brand page they preferred. Confidentiality and identity of respondents were guaranteed. Finally, 237 completed questionnaires were used for data analysis. Table 1 showed high loading and high Cronbach's alpha. According to Nunnally (1978) if factor loading is greater than 0.60 and Cronbach's Alpha is greater than 0.70, good internal consistency is confirmed.

#### 5. Results

##### *Demographic profiles of respondents*

Of 237 respondents, 71.3 percent is male while 28.7 percent is female. Two age groups accounted for the largest proportion of the samples. Age group 21-30 is 65.8 percent followed by those aged 31-40, accounted for 26.6 percent. Percentage of private employees and government officials are slightly different, reported 32.1 percent and 32.5 percent respectively. Respondents are reported to have stayed long hours online. 63.3 percent of respondents is reported 1-3 hours online, while 19.3 percent spends 4-6 hours per day online.

##### **Structural model**

The structural model is estimated using SPSS 21.0. The model test includes overall explanatory  $r^2$  value, path coefficient and associated t-value of the paths. The model explains 33.9 percent on Like, 39.7 percent on comment and 42.2 percent on Share of Facebook user's behaviors.

**Table 1:** Constructs and measurement items

| Construct             | Items | Mean | Std. Deviation | Loading | Alpha |
|-----------------------|-------|------|----------------|---------|-------|
| Economic benefit (EB) | EB 1  | 2.70 | .893           | .840    | .762  |
|                       | EB 2  | 3.13 | .799           | .776    |       |
|                       | EB 3  | 2.63 | .909           | .852    |       |
| Hedonic benefit (FB)  | FB 1  | 3.30 | .743           | .838    | .796  |
|                       | FB 2  | 3.43 | .725           | .837    |       |
|                       | FB 3  | 3.19 | .710           | .855    |       |
| Product learning (PL) | PL 1  | 3.68 | .693           | .838    | .706  |
|                       | PL 2  | 3.49 | .773           | .789    |       |
|                       | PL 3  | 3.73 | .702           | .758    |       |
| Like Behavior (LB)    | LB 1  | 3.31 | .804           | .828    | .656  |
|                       | LB 2  | 3.77 | .780           | .699    |       |
|                       | LB 3  | 3.22 | .907           | .781    |       |
| Comment Behavior (CB) | CB 1  | 3.21 | .827           | .907    | .894  |
|                       | CB 2  | 3.18 | .762           | .930    |       |
|                       | CB 3  | 3.18 | .755           | .890    |       |
| Share Behavior (SB)   | SB 1  | 3.17 | .911           | .757    | .819  |
|                       | SB 2  | 3.63 | .964           | .854    |       |
|                       | SB 3  | 3.71 | .876           | .838    |       |
|                       | SB 4  | 3.19 | .887           | .770    |       |

**Table 2:** Correlation matrix

|    | Mean | Std  | EB     | HB     | PL     | LB     | CB     | SB |
|----|------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----|
| EB | 2.81 | .714 | 1      |        |        |        |        |    |
| HB | 3.30 | .612 | .347** | 1      |        |        |        |    |
| PL | 3.63 | .574 | .394** | .402** | 1      |        |        |    |
| LB | 3.43 | .640 | .385** | .564** | .500** | 1      |        |    |
| CB | 3.18 | .710 | .439** | .581** | .350** | .590** | 1      |    |
| SB | 3.42 | .732 | .327** | .531** | .433** | .691** | .612** | 1  |

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level ( $n=237$ , 2-tailed)

As shown in Table 3, seven paths in the model are supported. The Economic benefit is significantly associated with Like behavior ( $\beta=.119$ ,  $p<.05$ ), supporting H1a. Similarly, economic benefit was found to be significantly associated with Comment behavior ( $\beta=.251$ ,  $p<.05$ ), supporting H1b. However, the relationship between economic benefit and Share behavior (H1c) was not supported. As expected, hedonic benefit had a significant influence on Like behavior ( $\beta=.422$ ,  $p<.05$ ), Comment behavior ( $\beta=.544$ ,  $p<.05$ ), and Share behavior ( $\beta=.484$ ,  $p<.05$ ), supporting H2a, H2b, and H2c respectively. Product learning was found to be significantly related to Like behavior ( $\beta=.318$ ,  $p<.05$ ), and Share behavior ( $\beta=.297$ ,  $p<.05$ ), supporting H3a and H3c respectively. But the relationship between product learning and Comment behavior was not supported, rejecting H3b.

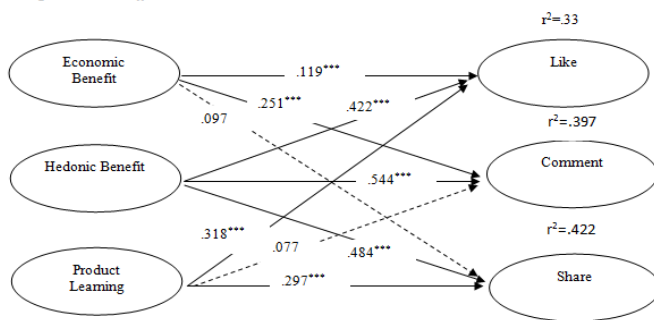
In sum, the research model was accounted for 33.9 percent, 39.7 percent and 42.2 percent of the variances in like, comment and share behavior.

**Table 3:** Path coefficient

| Hypothesized Relationship | Coefficient | t-value | p-value | Remark |
|---------------------------|-------------|---------|---------|--------|
| H1a EB → LB               | .119        | 2.390   | .018    | Sig.   |
| H1b EB → CB               | .251        | 4.468   | .000    | Sig.   |
| H1c EB → SB               | .097        | 1.609   | .109    | n.s    |
| H2a HB → LB               | .422        | 7.226   | .000    | Sig.   |
| H2b HB → CB               | .544        | 8.270   | .000    | Sig.   |
| H2c HB → SB               | .484        | 6.823   | .000    | Sig.   |
| H3a PL → LB               | .318        | 5.012   | .000    | Sig.   |
| H3b PL → CB               | .077        | 1.072   | .285    | n.s    |
| H3c PL → SB               | .297        | 3.849   | .000    | Sig.   |

Note: \*\* $p < 0.05$

Figure 1: Path coefficient model



**Figure 1:** Path Coefficient model

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

The findings provide a considerable insight on stimuli which drive Facebook users to participate in brand community and its consequences that influence common specific behaviors. Economic benefit has a positive and significant influence on Like and Comment behavior, although it is not significant with Share behavior. Furthermore, the hedonic benefit has a positive and significant influence on all Common Facebook behavior features – Like, Comment and Share. Product learning motive is also found to have a significant influence on Like and Share, yet it does not have any significant impact on Comment behavior.

The empirical findings indicate that hedonic benefit is the strongest significant stimulus. The result is consistent with Shi et al. (2016) that social media is hedonic in nature. Thus, the brand page should consider sound-entertainment characteristics when posting brand-related attributes (product photos or videos, etc.). Facebook users with higher hedonic characters are more likely to pay higher engagement with the page which, in turn, contributed to enhancing the value of the brand.

Although economic benefit and product learning do not have a significant effect on share and comment, these two motives may still be considered inherent that motivate users to participate in the community to some extent. Within this regards, certain personality trait may link to this relationship (Błachnio, Przepiorka, Senol-Durak, Durak, & Sherstyuk, 2017). However, Kabadayi and Price (2014) emphasized rewards on the virtual brand community. Those who are with frequent participation may promote such platform giving the increased likelihood engagement with brands on Facebook by both liking and commenting behaviors.

However, it is important to realize that the formation of participation of Facebook users may vary. Posting and lurking behaviors are two different behaviors, yet they are both critical indicators of active and passive participation. This finding is consistent with the previous study provided by Shang et al. (2006).

## Contribution and implication

The study provides some theoretical contributions. Most proposed hypotheses in the model are supported with significant effects on behavioral engagement. The study extends the effect of a previous study (Ho, 2014) which only emphasized the effect of participation on users' behavior, but has not mentioned specific behaviors. Kabadayi and Price (2014) supported that consumers who like the brand at least pressing Like button on the picture or video posted by brand pages.

From practical implication, the study provides marketers a strategic direction to promote consumers' engagement with their brand pages. Marketers should consider a digital marketing campaign that promotes active participation by precisely demonstrating the benefits of engaging the community. Marketers may ensure the usefulness of the page so that visitors perceive it important. Page managers should provide an acceptable feedback when visitors cite negative comment, while positive comment can promote the form of word-of-mouth. Moreover, marketers may also target those who comment and share on a Facebook page and actively engage them with brand page since they are potential for a future marketing campaign.

## Limitation and future direction

The current study poses some limitations regarding generalization of the research due to small sample size and non-scientific research method. Second, the study examined specific features on Facebook which may not represent the virtual brand community as a whole. Third, only economic, hedonic benefit and product learning were examined. Other rational variables should be considered for future study. We believe that other dimensions such as personality traits may also contribute to such specific engagement form. Future study may examine the consequences of Facebook engagement features as we believe that it would extend general understanding of Facebook brand community. Future study should also examine the consequences of virtual engagement behaviors which are not addressed in this paper.

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