

**Research Article***Copyright © All rights are reserved by Jaeha Lee*

Social Media Analytics in Retail: Exploring Consumer Engagement on Facebook

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This study is to investigate the relationship between retailers' Facebook activities (e.g., type of post they use, time they upload) and the resulting consumer engagement behavior on the Facebook fan pages. A total of 2,695 postings on Facebook fan pages for Macy's, Target, Anthropologie, and Gap were collected. A three-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and series of ANOVAs were conducted to examine how content type, publisher type and timeframe affect consumer engagement on Facebook fan pages. Posting photos or videos attracted more engagement than status posts did. Results showed that marketer-generated content (MGC) was more effective in engaging users than user-generated content (UGC). This exploratory study provides retailers with effective strategies to enhance consumer engagement on their Facebook fan pages.

Keywords: Social media; Consumer engagement; Facebook; Social media analytics; Retailer; Marketing**Introduction**

Over the past two decades, marketers have experienced a major transformation of marketing with the development of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The growth of social media marketing has changed the ways that marketers and consumers behave across all type of marketing channels. Social media marketing has facilitated new ways for consumers to interact with marketers. The interactive nature of social media allows consumers not only to find information but also to share information with one another [1]. Moreover, consumers act as agents who amplify the effect of marketing actions, providing marketers with large-scale electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM). Therefore, social media has become an indispensable tool for marketers to use to enhance consumer engagement.

Among the various social media platforms, this study particularly focuses on Facebook, as the social platform that has been most widely used by consumers and marketers. On average 1.52 billion people logged onto Facebook daily in December 2018,

representing a 9% year-over-year increase [2]. Almost 80% of Americans use Facebook to share information and experiences with the second largest platform being Instagram at 32% [3]. Most of social media advertisers (93%) use Facebook ads and 24% use Instagram. Marketers have developed their own brand pages on Facebook, publishing content to engage users [4]. Almost half of the Facebook users 'like' a Facebook fan page to support a favorite brand [5].

Facebook remains one of the top social media platforms for use by retailers as 85% of consumer purchases from social media sites come from Facebook [6]. Seventy-eight percent of American consumers have discovered retail products to buy on Facebook and more and more Facebook users are clicking on e-commerce ads [7]. Facebook is also one of the leading social media networks used to manage relationships with consumers in the retail industry. Facebook supports conversations among users with a variety of features such as writing on friends' walls, commenting on links,

and participating in forum discussions [8]. Thus, retailers are increasing their involvement in the Facebook community. In 2013, 96% of Fortune 500 specialty retailers used Facebook [9].

The increased importance of social media has resulted in a substantial body of research focusing on social media marketing. Although these studies have advanced understanding of social media marketing, there is lack of empirical research on measuring marketers' performance and maximizing consumer engagement in social media. A few studies have investigated the relationship between retailer's social media marketing activities and consumer engagement. However, there has been no consistent conceptualization and operationalization of the consumer engagement on social media. Most studies used behavioral intentions instead of actual behaviors, limiting accurate understanding of the consumer engagement phenomenon.

Social media analytics are used to analyze Facebook content in this study. Social media analytics is an emerging research approach for investigating communication patterns and significant topics in social media content or big data generated from social media [10,11]. These methods have been integrated with other research methods in statistics and geographic information systems to test effects [12,13]. Big data can be a useful tool to investigate retailer-consumer interaction in social media as it shows both retailer and consumer activities [14]. Using big data, this study captures both retailers' social media activities and consumers' behavioral engagement (e.g., like, comment, share). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between retailers' Facebook activities (e.g., type of post they use, time they upload) and the resulting consumer engagement behavior on the Facebook fan pages.

This study contributes to the development of a new research direction to advance the literature of social media marketing, particularly for the retail industry by using behavioral data of retailers and consumers. Retailers may benefit from this study as it provides more accurate understanding of consumer engagement on social media, utilizing big data. The research findings will help retailers to maximize the use of social media to influence customer engagement behaviors.

The next section provides a literature review and hypotheses, followed by section 3, which describes the methodology. Section 4 presents the results, while Section 5 discusses the research findings and derives the implications. Section 6 addresses limitations and suggests future research. The whole paper is concluded with Section 7.

Literature Review

Social media marketing

Social media has evolved as an important marketing tool to promote a product, service, or brand.

Social media allows complex interactions between consumers

and marketers as marketers can share information with consumers, receive feedback, and reply to consumers via social media platforms [15]. With the aid of information and mobile technology, marketers can reach many consumers simultaneously and further build relationships with social media users [16,17]. Social media also plays a crucial role in maintaining consumer engagement. It has been found that consumers visit stores more frequently after becoming Facebook fans of a retailer and spread more positive word of mouth than nonfans [18,19]. In addition, social media empowers consumers to share their views and influence other consumers. It enables consumers to not only gather information but also share opinions. Communications between consumers via social media vastly affects decision-making since many consumers trust these communications [20]. Thus, marketers are investing significant efforts in developing social media features to increase consumer communications on their social media websites and in turn, generate the eWOM marketing [21]. eWOM has been found to have higher credibility, empathy, and relevance for customers than marketer-generated sources [22]. eWOM marketing is a form of viral marketing, described as "any strategy that encourages individuals to propagate a message, thus, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence" [22]. This means that consumer engagement is the major determinant of eWOM's success. The effect of eWOM has been found to be greater when the level of social media activities in the social media site is high. However, more than 80% of marketers are concerned about measuring the returns on investment from social media [23]. Since Facebook implemented policy changes to filter out unpaid businesses' promotional postings in users' news feeds a few years ago, effective Facebook posting activities should be of interest to marketers. According to Wozniak, et al. [24], measuring the performance qualities of consumer engagement could indicate the amount of return on investment in marketing efforts. Social media has been studied from different perspectives such as usage patterns, motivations, and characteristics of communities. For example, Cvijikj, et al. [25] examined consumers' usage patterns such as topics of conversation, intentions for posting and type of interactions on a Facebook fan page. They identified product, sales, brand, competitor, Facebook contest, company and environment as the seven major topics of the posts on the Facebook fan page. Consumers' intentions for posting were suggestions & requests, affect expression, sharing, information inquiry, complains & criticism, gratitude, competitor companions, and praise. They also found that consumers rather responded to existing posts by commenting and liking than creating their own posts. Jansen, et al. [26] argued that consumers' posts generate information dissemination processes on Twitter, which include branding comments, sentiments, and opinions. A few studies have given attention to consumers who "like" brands (e.g., [8,27]) or share brand-related content on social media (e.g., [28, 29]). However, little has been investigated regarding the marketers' performance related to consumer engagement.

Consumer engagement in social media

The act of “engaging” can be defined as interactive consumer experiences that are co-created with others [11]. Vivek, et al. [30], define “consumer engagement” as “the intensity of an individual’s participation and connection with the organization’s offerings and activities initiated by either the customer or the organization.” Specifically, in online contexts, consumers’ engagement could be described as “the cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value” [31]. Consumer engagement can result in positive consumer attitudes and experiences such as trust, satisfaction, commitment, emotional attachment, empowerment and loyalty [22,32-36]. Particularly, consumer engagement activities (i.e., likes, shares, or comments) in social media, forward content to other members of online communities. The propagation of information driven by consumer engagement is one of the most desirable outcomes of social media marketing. Further, consumer engagement does not necessarily result in actual purchases since the important role of consumers in this process is influencing potential customers and the general public [37,38].

Several researchers have attempted to classify consumer engagement behaviors. Brodie, et al. [4] distinguished between sharing, learning, co-developing, advocating, and socializing. Jaakkola, et al. [39] identified four types of consumer behaviors: co-developing, augmenting, influencing, and mobilizing. Muntinga, et al. [40] recognized three levels of consumer engagement on social media: (1) consuming (least active), (2) contributing, and (3) creating (most active). Consuming represents a minimum level on engagement, including viewing contents and following Facebook pages. Contributing signifies user-to-content and user-to-user interactions such as commenting on posts.

Creating involves producing and publishing brand-related content for others to consume and contribute. Among Muntinga’s three levels of consumer engagement on social media, this study examined the medium-level of consumer engagement, contributing such as liking, commenting and sharing.

A number of studies have addressed antecedents of consumer engagement. For example, Hennig-Thurau, et al. [41] have identified eight specific factors, which motivate consumers to engage with online communities, including (1) venting negative feelings, (2) concern for other consumers, (3) self-enhancement, (4) advice-seeking, (5) social benefits, (6) economic benefits (e.g. cost savings), (7) platform assistance, and (8) helping the company. Some studies have examined the motivations that underlie people’s decisions to contribute content to social media (e.g., [30]). In this study, the effect of specific attributes (i.e., content type, publisher type and timeframe) of social media post on consumer engagement was investigated.

Determinants enhancing consumer engagement on social media websites

Recent studies have recognized that specific attributes of social media posts could influence consumer engagement on social media websites. DeVries, et al. [42] have tested variables that enhance brand post popularity (i.e., the number of likes and the number of comments) on social media websites. They found that vividness of images, interactivity (e.g., asking a question, providing an interactive link), position of post (e.g., locating a post at the top of a social media page), and valence of content (e.g., positive, negative, or neutral) effectively increase the numbers of likes or comments. In addition, Malhotra, et al. [43] have suggested that marketers should make content shorter, more personal, and more focused on the topic to increase consumer engagement on social media websites. Kwok, et al. [44] revealed that photos or links in content were more effective in increasing the number of likes and comments.

Content type: A post can be in a variety of forms such as text message, images, videos, or links.

Social media users are motivated to find useful information in specialized communities, so the quality of content (e.g., information quality or message length) can significantly increase engagement. Photos or images in online content can have significant influence on increasing the usefulness of that content [45]. Thus, visual content like images or videos can be a powerful aid to consumer engagement. Alboqami, et al. [46] have found that pictures attached to tweets increase eWOM effects and facilitate favorable reactions on Twitter. Kwok, et al. [44] compared four content types of Facebook (link, status, video, and photo) and concluded that photo and status posts increase the number of likes and comments. In social media, users are likely to circulate content when they perceive the post interesting or fun [47,48] and content type could influence the perception. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1: Content type is associated with the number of reactions, comments, and shares.

Publisher types: On Facebook fan pages, both users and marketers can publish posts, however, publishers have different purposes in posting [46]. Ding, et al. [49] noted that previous literature generally ignored the different effects of marketer-generated content (MGC) from user-generated content (UGC). Specifically, the goal of MGC is to spread information about products, services, and brands; it is designed to facilitate conversations among users in a community. MGC helps increase awareness of a brand or product and attract more users to the community page [50]. UGC includes “the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users” [51]. Consumers find UGC more credible and trustworthy than content posted by marketers [1]. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H2: Publisher type is associate with the number of reactions, comments, and shares.

Timeframe: Ample content is generated in social media every day, ranging from simple stories about sports to posts on critical social issues [52]. Social media transmits information about

events in real time, which is its unique feature [53]. A few studies have investigated that consumers' reactions (e.g., sentiment, the number of comments and likes) to posts by timeframe (weekdays/weekends or forenoon/afternoon) when marketers post content [54,55] but their findings are inconsistent. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H3: Timeframe is associate with the number of reactions, comments, and shares.

Method

Data collection

This study was designed to examine the effect of specific attributes (i.e., content type, publisher type and timeframe) of social media posts on consumer engagement. To meet the objectives of the study, the Facebook fan pages of Macy's, Target, Anthropologie, and Gap were chosen for analysis. These four retailers were selected because they are among the top retailers based on the number of Facebook followers of each company [56]. Three different types of retail outlets were tested to reflect different uses of social media by retail type: 1) Department stores (i.e., Macy's), selling a large assortment of clothing, shoes, and housewares, 2) Discount stores (i.e., Target), selling basic merchandise including clothing, and 3) Specialty stores (i.e., Anthropologies and Gap), selling a limited assortment of clothing and accessories [57]. To collect the data, Netvizz v1.44 (<https://apps.facebook.com/netvizz/>) was used. Netvizz is a tool that can specify type of data to be collected, postings, users, etc. Posts on the Facebook fan pages from January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2017 were used for this study. The approach of examining Facebook engagement used in this study was validated by previous studies (e.g., [31]). Due to the nature of secondary data set, the researchers were not able to measure the reliability of the measurements. However, the face validity of the measurement and methodology was achieved by semi-structured interviews with five local social media managers in retail stores.

Data analysis

Two different types of data analysis were used in this study. Microsoft Excel 2016 was used for descriptive statistics and graphic

illustrations based on the results of the text mining analysis. A series of ANOVAs and t-test were then applied to evaluate significant differences in engagement levels for the proposed variables (i.e., content type, publisher type and timeframe) using SPSS 24.

Results

Descriptive analysis regarding Facebook engagement

During the study period of one year, Macy's had 961 posts (641 MGC and 320 UGC), Target had 528 posts (169 MGC and 359 UGC), Gap had 541 posts (190 MGC and 351 UGC) and Anthropologie had 664 posts (606 MGC and 58 UGC) resulting a total of 2,694 posts (Table 1). Users actively posted on the Target's and Gap's Facebook fan pages, while most of the posts on the Anthropologie's Facebook fan page were published by marketers. Target received the most comments (295 per post on average), while reactions (1,625 per post on average) were most numerous on Macy's Facebook fan page. Anthropologie's posts were shared the least (13 shares per post on average). A total of 326 videos, 2,089 photos, 170 status posts, and 109 links were posted during the one-year study period (Table 1).

Hypotheses testing

ANOVA results show that there are significant differences in the number of comments ($F = 3.766, \alpha = .01$), reactions ($F = 4.824, \alpha < .01$), and shares ($F = 8.318, \alpha < .001$) across different types of posts. Overall, photos attracted more comments, reactions, and shares than status or links, while videos attracted more reactions than the other types (Table 2). Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported. T-test results show that MGCs (1,606 posts) attracted more comments ($t = 2.995, \alpha < .01$), reactions ($t = 9.111, \alpha < .001$), and shares ($t = 2.992, \alpha < .01$) than UGCs (1,088 posts). Thus, hypothesis 2 is supported. In addition, posts published in February, March, and May received more comments ($F = 2.155, \alpha = .014$), reactions ($F = 2.292, \alpha < .01$), and shares ($F = 2.293, \alpha < .01$) than the other months. Thus, hypothesis 3 is supported. There was no statistical significance in engagement across posts published on the different days of the week, while relatively higher number of posts are published on Tuesdays and Thursdays than other days.

Table 1: Overall descriptive for stores.

Type	Brands	Number of posts	Mean score of engagement
Comments	Macy's	961	55.02
	Target	528	294.59
	Anthropologie	664	17.39
	Gap	541	73.45
	Total	2,694.00	96.4
Reactions	Macy's	961	1,624.83
	Target	528	958.05
	Anthropologie	664	918.38
	Gap	541	1,508.10
	Total	2,694.00	1,296.59

Shares	Macy's	961	127.04
	Target	528	202.13
	Anthropologie	664	12.89
	Gap	541	137.18
	Total	2,694.00	115.66

Table 2: Post-hoc test for posting type.

Engagement	Type (I)	Type (II)	Difference (I-II)	Std. Error	Sig.
Comments	Video	Photos	252.702	204.805	0.772
		Status	311.704	204.678	0.563
		Link	298.502	204.898	0.612
	Photos	Video	-252.702	204.805	0.772
		Status	59.002*	9.553	0
		Link	45.800*	13.471	0.005
	Status	Video	-311.704	204.678	0.563
		Photos	-59.002*	9.553	0
		Link	-13.202	11.375	0.819
	Link	Video	-298.502	204.898	0.612
		Photos	-45.800*	13.471	0.005
		Status	13.202	11.375	0.819
Reactions	Video	Photos	596.834	642.221	0.927
		Status	1832.447*	633.534	0.024
		Link	1876.159*	632.377	0.019
	Photos	Video	-596.834	642.221	0.927
		Status	1235.613*	126.358	0
		Link	1279.325*	120.422	0
	Status	Video	-1832.447*	633.534	0.024
		Photos	-1235.613*	126.358	0
		Link	43.712	58.476	0.974
	Link	Video	-1876.159*	632.377	0.019
		Photos	-1279.325*	120.422	0
		Status	-43.712	58.476	0.974
Shares	Video	Photos	487.44	262.335	0.328
		Status	542.73	262.207	0.214
		Link	539.773	262.239	0.219
	Photos	Video	-487.44	262.335	0.328
		Status	55.289*	9.092	0
		Link	52.333*	9.963	0
	Status	Video	-542.73	262.207	0.214
		Photos	-55.289*	9.092	0
		Link	-2.957	5.67	0.996
	Link	Video	-539.773	262.239	0.219
		Photos	-52.333*	9.963	0
		Status	2.957	5.67	0.996

*means statistically significant at $\alpha < .01$

In addition, a series of ANOVAs conducted show that the number of comments is significantly different across different retail brands ($F = 5.068, \alpha < .01$), while reactions and shares remain insignificant. Post-hoc analysis results show that posts on Macy's and Gap's Facebook fan pages attracted more comments than on Anthropologie's page (Table 2).

Discussions and Implications

Consistent with previous studies [58, 46, 44], the findings of this study suggest that visual content leads to more interactions with social media users. There are countless posts in news feeds on Facebook, so consumers are likely to skip most of them, particularly from marketers. In social media, entertainment is a key motivator for consumers to share user-generated content [59]. Retailers need to post interesting images or short videos that can grab consumers' attention within a short time frame which encourages consumers to see, react and share the post. In addition, while research shows people retain only 10 to 20% of the information they read online, retention could be increased up to 65% with the addition of visual images [6]. Providing relevant visuals that helps consumers understand the marketing information easily and effectively would also be an important consideration for retailers.

Previous studies have reported that consumers find UGCs more credible and relevant than MGCs [1,45]. However, the findings of this study show that MGCs are much more effective in creating engagement than UGCs. Although numerous users published content on Facebook pages, MGCs drew significantly more comments, reactions and shares. Retailers should aim to find effective ways to showcase UGCs. Encouraging users to post images or videos instead of texts could be a way to increase engagement with UGCs. Retailers could also share UGCs in Facebook stories to make UGCs gain more attention. Further, retailers could use Facebook as a platform for value co-creation between consumers and the retailer, or consumers and consumers by running collaborative campaigns/events. For example, social media ad contests could be an opportunity for retailers to attract more engagement with both MGCs and UGCs and co-create value with consumers. Consumers can play a central role in the process of creating an ad campaign by providing ideas and voting for winners or reacting to the posts.

Posts published in February, March, and May drew more engagement than other months. This time of year, might be when more consumers are visiting retailers' Facebook pages. Spring is the time for renewing and refreshing. Consumers are looking for inspirations to update their wardrobe, home etc. on social media. Thus, retailers should take advantage of this opportunity to highlight their new products and social media fans' engagement may maximize the exposure of the new products through eWOM.

An interesting finding is that there are different levels of engagement across different retail brands. That is, the social media's fan behavior may vary by retail brand. The difference in engagement level might be also due to the difference in retailers'

activities on social media. Findings of this study show that Target received more shares and comments than the other retailers studied. This might be due to Target's active use of Facebook apps such as "Give with Friends" and "Give with Target". These apps encourage shares since fans need to team up with Facebook friends to give a gift to their friends, family or local schools. The numbers of comments and shares are lower on Anthropologie's Facebook page. Anthropologie is known for their visual designs so their fans could be engaging more with the image-based social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest rather than Facebook [60]. Thus, retailers may want to analyze how their consumers respond to their social media marketing activities. Instead of following general tips on social media marketing, each retailer should design their own strategies that best fit their brand.

Limitations and Future Research

This study explored social media data collected from the selected retailers over a limited one-year period, which could limit any generalizations from this study. Researchers may want to consider studies of other social media platforms to further examine the effects of the various factors on consumer engagement. In addition, this research only used a quantitative analysis method (e.g., ANOVAs and t-test). Further investigation of marketers' perspectives, using in-depth interviews is recommended to better understand the current needs of retail marketers. There were differences in the average number of comments, reactions and shares per post by retailer. It would be worthwhile to investigate the differences in posting activities (e.g., content type, timeframe) by retailer and how those differences affect the average number of comments, reactions and shares per post.

Conclusion

This study examines the relationship between retailers' social media management activities and the consumer engagement behavior on the Facebook fan pages. The study findings suggest that visual postings (photos and videos) attracted more engagement than status posts did. In addition, MGC was more effective in engaging users than UGC. In this regard, this study contributes to the literature of social media marketing by confirming the effect of retailers' Facebook activities on consumer engagement behaviors. Further, big data enables the measurement of actual consumer behaviors (e.g., liking, commenting, sharing) on Facebook fan pages and accurate understanding of consumer engagement phenomenon in social media. Thus, this study suggests specific strategies for retailers to increase consumer engagement activities on their Facebook fan pages.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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