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Social media content for business and user engagement  
*on Facebook*

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**Abstract:** Facebook is regularly used by businesses to present themselves to users and communicate with them. most users act passively by simply reading and viewing a company's official homepage. Few followers adopt a more active role, such as commenting and interacting with each other and with the company, fewer still are reactive and proactive, becoming co-creators of content. This study examines the type of content entered by businesses to stimulate user engagement, and how participation and activism is stimulated, through the creation of appropriate indexes. The results obtained uncover previously overlooked aspects of conversation and content setting, to encourage user engagement.

**Keywords:** information content, entertainment content, incentive content, socialization content, engagement indexes

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*Contenu des médias sociaux d'entreprise et engagement des utilisateurs sur  
Facebook*

**Résumé:** Facebook est régulièrement utilisé par les entreprises pour se présenter aux utilisateurs et communiquer avec eux. La plupart des utilisateurs agissent passivement en lisant et en consultant la page d'accueil officielle d'une entreprise. Peu de suiveurs adoptent un rôle plus actif, comme commenter et interagir entre eux et avec l'entreprise, moins sont encore réactifs et proactifs, devenant co-créateurs de

contenu. Cette étude examine le type de contenu introduit par les entreprises pour stimuler l'engagement des utilisateurs, et comment la participation et l'activisme sont stimulés, à travers la création d'indices appropriés. Les résultats obtenus permettent de découvrir des aspects précédemment négligés de la conversation et de la définition du contenu, afin d'encourager l'engagement des utilisateurs.

**Mots-clés :** contenu d'information, contenu de diversissement, contenu incitatif, contenu de socialisation, indices d'engagement

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### 1. Research guidelines

Facebook is now the main agora used by billions of people worldwide to communicate to each other, with a staggering number of 4.021 billion global internet users being recorded in 2017, equaling 53% penetration (Wearesocial, 2018). This would explain why most global companies (94%, Social Media Marketing Industry Report, 2017) are present on this platform, leaving the use of other social media<sup>1</sup> far behind. In particular, this platform is used for B2C by 72% of businesses, while for B2B, only 43%. So, the main goal of using Facebook is to communicate with consumers.

Given the enormity of the phenomenon, an extensive literature has concentrated on attempting to describe and understand it. How do companies behave? How do they exploit the potential of the platform? What are their main goals? And how do businesses respond to user activism and participation? Are companies able to stimulate user participation and generate engagement? Much of the literature has concentrated on business marketing strategies used on social media and follower behavior. From the consolidated research undertaken, some basic assumptions can be inferred, and represent the conceptual basis on which the present research rests.

Overall, company presence on Facebook has a twofold purpose: increasing credibility and reputation to build a trusting and loyal relationship with followers; and, gathering useful information, especially on needs and expectations of users, to gain a competitive edge in the market. Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield (2013: 7-15) have developed the concept of 'new social learning', increasingly widespread in knowledge and learning management processes. Company presence on the net, and on Facebook in particular, varies considerably from one organizations to another. Many studies<sup>2</sup> have highlighted how the behavior of companies follows a continuum that goes from a 'passive' to an 'active' presence. The passive or 'broadcasting' presence involves a 'one to many' communicative style, characteristic of self-

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<sup>1</sup> See: Twitter 68%; LinkedIn 56%, Instagram 54%, Youtube 45%, Pinterest 30%, Snapchat 7%.

<sup>2</sup> See: Parise, 2016; Treem & Leonardi, 2016; Ray, 2014; Bingahm & Conner, 2010; Underwood, Kerlin, & Farrington-Flint, 2011; Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009.

projection, where the interaction with the consumer is limited to listening to conversations and learning from the rumors. The active or "communicative" behavior requires that companies start and encourage conversations with users. Their goal is to promote their brands, create loyalty and stimulate forms of co-creation - consumers provide useful input for inventing new solutions and innovative products / services. As some authors (Oztok et al., 2015; Kabadayi & Price, 2014) claim, this latter 'communicative' mode generally, produces more regular and high-quality interactions with individuals, especially with followers and online communities.

From the users' point of view, it is well known that their willingness to engage in business dialogue is based on their identification with a brand. According to the theory of identity (Burke & Reitzes, 1991), the individual looks for a stable relationship and a dialogue with the companies and brands with which they establish a relationship of fidelity and trust. Furthermore, according to the theory of consumer socialization as reported by Ward (1974), the type of communication *used* influences user cognitive, affective and behavioral attitudes: taking part in communities that form around an enterprise, develops a sense of belonging and sharing. This justifies participation in conversations, beyond the simple search for information or for instrumental reasons. For a user to go from simply listening, to take an active and proactive role, they must feel fully involved<sup>3</sup>. In this regard, reference can be made to some classic theories, from the AIDA model to the latest BAIFDASV<sup>4</sup>, which has been applied both to advertising (such as the classic 'funnel' dynamics) and marketing (such as Purchase Marketing<sup>5</sup>). These theories would indicate that a large number of users access the social pages, but only a few would assume an active behavior. The quota of those active would tend to reduce in the funnel, as the gradient of participation and involvement increases, with only a few reactive and proactive subjects appearing as the neck thins.

The purpose of this study is to focus on company-user dynamics, to identify and understand how the active participation of consumers can be stimulated. On the one hand, the study investigates the means by which companies stimulate engagement and, on the other, verifies the effectiveness of such actions by investigating how far the proposed content effectively transforms consumer behavior from minimum engagement levels to forms of activism and reactivity (maximum level).

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<sup>3</sup> See: Vaast & Kaganer, 2013; Anderson & Li, 2014; Simula, Töllmen & Karjaluoto, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> The sequential process of Attention-Interest-Desire-Action was developed in 1898 by Elias St. Elmo Lewis (C.E. Knoeppel, A.J. Minor, & E.S.E. Lewis, 1933). Various revisions are based on the process, up to the latest Need-Attention-Interest-Trust-Desire-Action-Satisfaction-Evaluation elaborated by Christian Betancur (2014). See: Hassan, Nadzim & Shiratuddin, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Funnel Marketing or Purchase Marketing is in the same conceptual matrix as the Aida model, but focuses on online shopping dynamics. See among others: Hudson & Thal, 2013; Hoban, & Bucklin 2015.

## 2. Review of Literature

According to Mersey, Malthouse & Calder (2010), social media websites provide an opportunity for businesses to engage and interact with potential and current consumers, so encouraging long-term relationships between a company and its consumers. To generate engagement and user involvement, businesses need to make platform content as entertaining, compelling, and *credible as possible*, while considering the varying profiles of followers. With an active behavior, an enterprise aims to intercept users and cultivate relationships. To do this, companies need to act user-centric and create the conditions for a dialogic and non-monologic relationship. This means posting content not merely aimed at providing information, but primarily inciting reactions. Followers are not simply content users, but can be stimulated to start up conversations, by the use of suitable content. They can also collaborate to re-elaborate the content proposed by the companies to dialogue with them.

The set of content types published by companies are presented here in 4 macro-categories, as identified by the functionalist approach of uses and gratification (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch 1973): information<sup>6</sup>, entertainment<sup>7</sup>, incentive<sup>8</sup> and socialization<sup>9</sup>. According to this approach, the last category is the most effective way to stimulate user participation. In detail, *Information content* feeds online dialogue and respond to curiosity and cognitive needs of users on products, services, behaviors, and corporate features. When an individual is satisfied with the content offered, they express it, although it does not mean they are necessarily active or proactive, as well; *Entertainment content* serves to make the platform a fun and enjoyable environment with teaser, slogan, word games, to intensify the level of participation and interaction of users; *Incentive content* uses remuneration tools to entice users to participate and collaborate. They obtain content, gifts and/or products, the awarding of bonus points, prize draws for competitions and/or surveys; *Socialization content* serves to motivate community members to develop a sense of belonging to a company's world. Socialization content also contains information and entertainment content.

Some studies (Nelson, Keum & Yaros, 2004; Zhang, Sung & Lee, 2010) specifically analyzed the entertainment content on Facebook, and showed that 70% of the companies use this type of content, also through advergames and interactive experiences that provide sensory diving. The use of incentive content (such as competitions and discounts) was also found to be widespread. These studies also found that larger companies use a variety of competitions and discounts, as

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<sup>6</sup> See among others: de Vries et al., 2012; Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> See among others: McQuail, 1985; Whiting & Williams, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> See among others: Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Habibi, Laroche & Richard, 2014; Ashley & Tuten, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> See among others: Treem, Leonardi, 2013; Hollebeek, Conduit & Brodie, 2016.

usefulness and gratification increase the desire for entertainment and information, and thus support the active use of other content. Besides the type of content chosen, other studies<sup>10</sup> underline how it is equally essential to adopt creative and dynamic strategies, as only in this way *can content* be relevant to consumers.

According to Pisano (2016), being dynamic means: having the ability to use the knowledge of the network to continually adapt and transform the creative and organizational resources of the company; fostering stimulating conversations; integrating, building and reconciling internal and external skills, and quickly addressing the changes imposed by the network. Dynamism is multi-directional in that, in addition to affecting organizational logic, it exploits social potential for systematically solving problems. With opportunities and threats alike, all parties are encouraged to make timely and shared decisions (consumers too), to find appropriate solutions. Hence, creative content cannot be pre-packaged by a company, but has to be continuously revised, following a dialogue as active as possible, where all participants (business and consumers) are co-responsible in the process of creation.

Strategic messages selectively combine previously considered and unrelated information to create innovative connections and relationships between individuals. For example, some studies (Fosdick 2012; Morrison et al. 2011) argue that it is not enough to stimulate users to tell stories, but it is necessary to develop a broad and integrated concept of continuous remarks between corporate input and user contributions. Hence, an interactive media model capable of introducing and re-elaborating innovative elements can be redefined. Referring to theories of selective influence in the Fifties, McMillan, Hwang & Lee (2003) maintain information-based strategies are more effective with highly involved customers, while interactivity and animation are more effective for the less involved consumers.

A first objective of the research presented in this paper was to deepen the analysis of the typologies of content published by companies to involve users, and to understand what users prefer to use, and how effective the content is. The other main aim was to gain a fuller understanding of the engagement dynamics that, as anticipated, are distributed between a minimum level, where most users are located at an average level of activism, to a maximum level of reactivity and proactivity, in which the user is co-creator. By correlating the types of consumers more or less active, traced in the studies presented earlier in this paper, three levels can be identified: first, there are Networkers, Watchers and Listeners (Vinerean, Dumitrescu, & Tichindelean, 2013). They are users who only passively participate in conversations as they observe and listen, but still love to be present and have a sense of belonging to a community. At the next and middle level, there are

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10 See, among others: Peppard, & Ward, 2016; Teece, 2014; Barrales-Molina, Martínez-López e Gázquez-Abad, 2014: 409; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000.

*Informers* and *Expressers*, those who fairly frequently participate in conversations, and are willing to interact to gain information and to express their opinions, tell stories, and share ideas and emotions. Finally, at the highest level, there are the *Engagers*, those who really feel involved, and are therefore ready to dialogue, becoming proactive and readily submitting proposals, influencing other users, and co-creating when possible.

Regarding the types of engagement, many studies have examined the degree, times of permanence, and ways of fruition, but few have specifically examined how increasing engagement levels helps sustain brand success and also the credibility and reputation of a company. Notably, Facebook has launched applications that encourage users to send notifications and involve friends, so as to stimulate engagement and activism (Aral & Walker, 2012). Some scholars focusing on post content analysis have found that there are elements that further stimulate user activism, such as the use of hashtag, short questions, and visual content. Even better results are produced when human faces are present, transferring positive emotions (eg, relief, love, joy. Zheng et al., 2015; Bakhshi, Shamma & Gilbert, 2014). Overall, facilitating active and reactive behavior means encouraging consumer commitment to maximizing the benefits of social media in favor of the company (Kabadayi & Price, 2014).

According to Van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254), extending beyond mere purchase transactions, consumer commitment can be defined as a behavioral set that expresses important motivational drivers linked to a specific company. Malthouse et al. (2013) maintain users tend to share their experiences with that company, so expressing their level of loyalty and pleasure.

Communities that arise around an enterprise (or parts of it - brands, projects, events, etc.) must have their own distinctive and dynamic character. This increases a sense of belonging and a willingness to share interests, experiences, opinions, and emotions. Some authors have demonstrated a direct correlation between dynamism and increased involvement: the more specific the content, the more communities become distinctive, cohesive, and participative. According to some studies<sup>11</sup>, participation levels are unlikely to remain stable over time, but may only record some peaks.

Looking at engagement levels, Drutsa, Gusev & Serdyukov (2015) have calculated grading levels and rates using different indicators: the number of sessions to which they participate, the number of queries, the number of clicks, the number of clicks per query, time attendance, attendance/absence time per session, number of 'like', number of sessions per session, number of comments, and reviews per

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<sup>11</sup> See: Bamman, Eisenstein & Schnoebelen, 2014; Ren & Kraut, 2014; Ksiazek, Peer & Lessard, 2016.

session. Further studies<sup>12</sup> have focused on analyzing the content and feelings generated, examining keywords, tags, but also images and videos, to identify the most commonly used typologies, their relevance and levels of appreciation and sharing that come from them.

Typically, the problem of such measurements is that, though the behavioral habits of consumer platform use and presence can be noted (by quantifying the actions of companies and consumers), it is difficult to fully assess how far company action actually triggers those habits. Since consumer engagement has become a key research priority, there has been a growing interest in understanding consumer activity and engagement in social media. This helps companies increase awareness and engagement on the market and contributes positively to their return on investment (Lalmas, O'Brien & Yom-Tov, 2014; O'Brien & Cairns, 2015).

For example, through the data collected from the platform and the metrics used, a corporate post receiving thousands of comments from Facebook users can be evaluated, but not what really induced such activity. Generally, the User Engagement and Engagement Rare formulas - provided by the platform - calculate engagement, but fail to grasp the differences between participation levels and activism. The first records the percentage of users involved in posts over a week, while the second calculates the rate of engagement of a Facebook page to see how much an organization can engage users, without, however, identifying the level. Hence, through the use of experimental formulas, the study presented here attempts to measure the levels of activism and responsiveness of the most involved users in engagement.

### **3. Hypothesis and Methods**

To select the companies for study, we used their position in the world reputation rankings, as established by Interbrand and Reputation Institute. To respond to the objectives of the study, it is useful to examine the cases of excellence that are most appreciated on a reputable level by users, especially on the web. To ensure greater positioning significance, we also observed the ongoing presence of companies in each rank over a three year period (2014-2016). Comparing the first 100 positions in

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<sup>12</sup> See: Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2015; Lorenzo-Romero, Constantinides & Alarcón-del-Amo, 2011; Kim et al. 2013.



the last three years in the two rankings (Interbrand<sup>13</sup> and Reputation Institute<sup>14</sup>), we found 171 companies. Of these, only 30 held a stable position in both rankings for the entire three-year period, and only 18 of these allowed access to the pages of their headoffice worldwide, regardless of where the consultation takes place. For the sake of clarity, the top 18 preferred to maintain an official page handled by the parent company, possibly with other "local" or dedicated products / services, precisely to differentiate the times of conversation between users and businesses from those dedicated to specificity territorial or intended for niches of consumers of certain particular products. As our concern is to describe how organizations connect to their users through company identity, we decided to restrict our analysis to these 18 companies. Pages dedicated to the followers in a particular country tend to be more focused on specific products and services modeled on that country's cultural peculiarities, and so their content would fall outside the objectives of this research. The study of the selected companies was carried out by taking information from their official Facebook pages.

Based on the literature outlined above, the hypotheses underlying this study are as follows:

H1 - Custom sections and content on Facebook are used by companies to offer contents for stimulating user engagement.

H2 – Business content on Facebook stimulate active behaviors, but only a minimum share, is responsive, or proactive.

To study the 18 selected businesses (Tab.1), the information was collected from the official pages on Facebook. Weekly monitoring of corporate content posted on Facebook for three months (March-May 2017) was carried out. Based on an analysis of the trends of engagement, detected by the platform, a one-week period (between March 27 and April 3, 2017) was investigated. This specific interval was chosen after verifying that it was a standard period, where there are no public holidays and there are no special events for any of the companies in question: the performance of

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<sup>13</sup> The "Best Global Brands" classification, made by Interbrand (<http://interbrand.com/best-brands/>), uses brand strength parameters (price, brand's role in buying decisions, customer loyalty, ability to attract and motivate talents, positioning versus competing brands, analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the brand compared to attractiveness) and economic-financial data (transparent data on annual financial performance, longer-term returns, at least 30 percent of revenue coming from an area other than the site, significant presence in Asia, Europe and North America and large Geographical coverage in emerging markets; impact on stakeholder business).

<sup>14</sup> The "Global RepTrack Results" classification, made by Reputation Institute (<https://www.reputationinstitute.com/research/Global-RepTrak-100>), measures the reputation of more than 7,000 companies operating in more than 25 industrial sectors and more than 50 countries around the world, making consumer interviews to understand the emotional connection to a brand, creating trust and satisfaction with expectations. The dimensions investigated include: product / service quality, degree of innovation, conditions offered by the workplace, ethics, honesty and transparency of governance, citizenship (understood as attention to environmental issues and social responsibility), value of leadership and performance at the financial level, in terms of profitability and prospects for economic growth.

the engagement is representative of the quarterly average and the content delivered - tracked by the recognition of the keywords - fall within the themes mainly dealt with by the companies. This allowed us to make a valid comparison of the different companies under investigation, to examine their habitual behavior on Facebook.

**Table 1:** n. of 'Like' obtained in international official Facebook pages

| Companies  | N. Like    | Companies   | N. Like   |
|------------|------------|---|-----------|
| Starbucks  | 36.644.157 | Sony  | 7.559.159 |
| Intel      | 35.520.928 | Honda Motor   | 4.430.686 |
| Nike       | 27.879.642 | Robert Bosch  | 1.060.009 |
| Amazon.com | 27.191.805 | IBM   | 893.413   |
| Adidas     | 26.786.796 | Cisco Systems   | 839.684   |
| Visa       | 21.147.546 | Johnson & Johnson   | 746.618   |
| BMW Group  | 19.938.178 | Carterpillar  | 561.965   |
| Pampers    | 17.174.263 | Panasonic -<br>Formerly Matsushita<br>Electric Industrial | 346.399   |
| eBAy       | 9.527.674  | PepsiCo   | 218.576   |

To verify the first hypothesis (**H1**), the collection of information concerned some elements regarding company identity and content: recognition of identity by users, such as the presence of a blue check; the number and type of custom sections; the presence and degree of participation in predetermined sections on the part of a company; assessment of the type of material inserted, which were then organized into categories, as indicated by the literature. We proceeded with a textual analysis that recorded the most recurring keywords in the content on Facebook business pages. Keywords were then associated, by semantic assonance, and categorized according to 4 macro-groupings as identified by the literature. In particular, by recognizing the source, and the richness of sections and contents, the degree of commitment on the part of an organization in stimulating engagement can be assessed. For this purpose, recognition of the rate was carried out, and custom and added sections were examined, in addition to those already provided by the platform.

Regarding the effectiveness of business content delivered, a textual analysis that recorded the most recurring keywords in the content on Facebook business pages was carried out. Keywords were then associated, by semantic assonance, and categorized according to 4 macro-groupings (information, entertainment, incentive

and socialization), as identified by the literature. In addition to verifying the use of different content categories quantitatively, a User Themes Engagement (UTHE) index was built to detect their ability to generate responses active by users. To this end, the User Engagement formula used by the Facebook platform ( $EU = PTAT / \text{number of fans of page} * 100$ , where PTAT - *People Talking About This* - is for the sum of people who share and react) was revised by adopting a parameter that would enhance indexed themes, THI, starting from considering the content most followed by users ( $UTHE = PTAT / \text{No Follower} / THI * 100$ ). THI estimated the most relevant topics, ranging from the frequency of the most significant keywords published by companies, in relation to the user's share and the number of posts they commented on.

To test the second hypothesis (H2), the collected information was analyzed quantitatively, using indexes measuring engagement rates, automatically generated Facebook conversation rates (PTATs), and 'likes'. In detail, the Engagement Rate and percentages of active and passive users of the official pages of the companies surveyed were calculated. Engagement Rate (ER) is the indicator of the engagement rate of a Facebook page and assesses the strategies used by an organization to engage users. From the point of view of the company, it is useful to calculate this figure since it allows us to understand how effective the strategies implemented to deliver content on Facebook are, regardless of the number of fans on the page. Based on the data provided by the platform, the Rare Engagement was calculated using the following formula:  $ER = PTAT / \# FAN / \# POST * 100$ .

User Engagement was then calculated, considering the frequency of publication, the number of fans on the page, the number of posts posted during the survey period, and the PTAT. This index allowed us to determine whether the published content was successful in engagement. The value - public and visible in the 'People to the site' section - is released automatically by Facebook. The time considered in this metric is one week and the elements from it are: people who click 'I like' on the page, people who post on the page board, people who click 'I like', or comment or share one of the post posts from the page (status update, links, images), people who answer questions about an event, people who cite a page in a post, people who tag the page in a photo, people who put 'I like' or share a check-in, and people who check-in in a post. PTAT is the sum of all these elements. This metric must be related to the number of fans on the page. In this way, it was possible to get the User Engagement Index, that is, the percentage of users involved in posts over a week. The formula used to compute this index was as follows:  $UE = PTAT / \text{page number of fans} * 100$ .

Since the main objective of this research was to verify the rate of active and passive participation of users, in addition to studying the degree of involvement, the gradients of participation were also examined to understand how the involvement itself develops. To examine the levels of participation, a distinction was made based on the behavior of page users, taking the simple 'I like' to the posts of the company,

as the response of 'passive' or 'inactive' users, while sharing post, and becoming promoters of the message delivered by the company, as the response of 'active', or rather, 'reactive' users. Consequently, two indexes were created:  $ACT = \text{number} / \text{fan number} * 100$  was used to examine the degree of activism, while the  $REACT = (\text{number of shares} / \text{number Post}) / (\text{fan} / \text{post number}) * 100$ .

#### **4. Results**

All the 18 companies surveyed, except for two (Carterpillar and Panasonic), have official pages that are identified by the blue check mark. It certifies that the contents have been processed by company managers.

The organization of content in the Business Pages menu consists of several sections (Fig. 1) : all have the home page, information, posts, photos, videos, people they like (as expected given the platform), and only a few have created special sections for their users. The detailed results are as follows: nearly half (8 out of 18) deployed sections dedicated to corporate events to be shared, and an equal number provided spaces featuring faqs, information notes and surveys; over one third (7) provided links to other company social channels and one third (6) activated company webtv; more than a fifth (4) created sections for presenting job opportunities, and almost one fifth (3) created spaces dedicated to presenting places and business locations; and finally, a residual share (2) opened spaces to foster communication within communities. Some significant examples can be noted: Amazon is the only one to add the section dedicated to the Community Guidelines, and BMW provided a space dedicated to 'your TV' and a reserved event; the Cisco System menu is particularly rich in content, and gives particular attention to its customers, by providing an events section and direct support to its users, and enabling users to leave reviews; Ebay, instead, calls users directly with a polling section; career opportunities are only presented on social networks by Pepsi, Ibm, Cisco and Intel. More frequent, however, is the call to other social canals linked to the company.

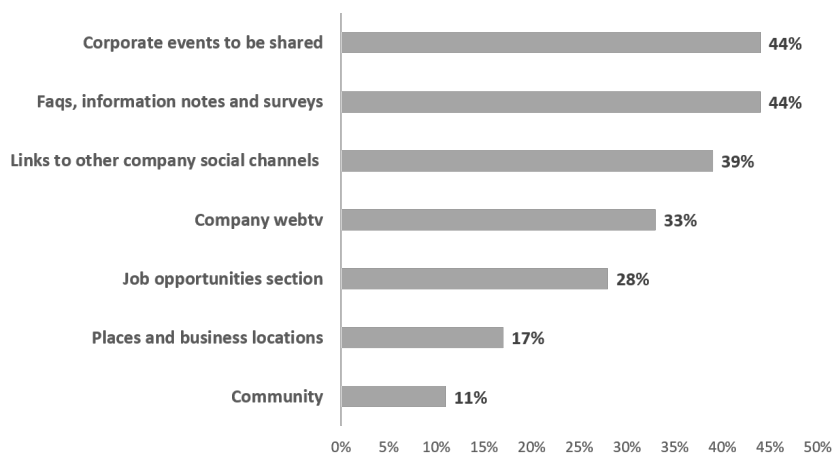


Fig. 1 – Section of Business Pages menu

The study found that almost a fifth (5) publishes little content, and in a sporadic manner, using Facebook passively, mainly for listening to rumors and getting feedback from the network. By counting the number of posts, it turned out that the companies, in the week considered, published about 8.62 posts, or just over one per day, in their weeklies. The distribution of these posts vary considerably among organizations: the most active companies post 1 to 3 or 4 messages per day, while others, not even 1 every week. In these cases, the engagement capacity (EU) is, of course, very low - below 0.1%. For the most active, the average is around 0.2%. Overall, the results are not that high, showing that while users are followers, they are not particularly involved. Businesses must therefore improve their content to have a more consistent relationship with users.

To test the first hypothesis (**H1**) and, therefore, to understand how published content, especially socialization, serves to develop a sense of community and dialogue between users, the content of the posts present in all sections was reviewed. The category analysis are presented in order of importance (Tab.2, Fig.1).

**Table 2 : The categories of content on the social network page**

| Content categories | N. Companies | N. Posts   | N. Keywords |
|--------------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Information        | 12           | 68         | 406         |
| Socialization      | 7            | 17         | 102         |
| Incentives         | 7            | 13         | 178         |
| Entertainment      | 5            | 24         | 144         |
| TOT.               | <b>18</b>    | <b>122</b> | <b>830</b>  |

Almost two-thirds of the companies (12 out of 18) surveyed use information content, mainly focused on corporate identity. Infact, most of the post content (68 out of 122) fall into the information category, confirming findings in the literature. Of the 406 keywords reviewed, 57% concern aspects of quality and innovation of product and service, consistent with core business and mission, 29% try to gain user confidence by focusing on credibility and business history, while the remaining 14% includes information that meets the needs and interests of users. Notably, Johnson & Johnson encourages reactive behaviors precisely because it offers medical information.

Over one third of the companies (7 out of 18) create posts (17 out of 122) with socialization content, to develop a sense of belonging and sharing among users and to encourage co-creation. Over two-thirds of the companies, that released this kind of content obtained positive results, as was the case of Cisco, Intel, Sony and PepsiCo. The analysis (102 keywords) shows that the objective is always mainly promotional, encouraging customers to give suggestions on how to improve products/services, to express their desires, and sometimes (in one-fourth of cases), to customize content according to their specific needs and tastes.

One third of the companies (7 out of 18) surveyed focus on incentives (13 out of 122) and nearly half create engagement, such as Johnson & Johnson, Intel and Cisco. The analysis of keywords (178) reveals the use of gifts, bonus points and surveys (50%), with a focus on combining them with the interests of their consumers (40%), and on applying irony and play (10%).

Finally, just over a quarter of the companies (5 out of 18) surveyed organize posts (24 out of 122) around entertainment content. In half the cases, they are posts aimed at encouraging product or service loyalty, and so can be considered promotional (over 144 keywords reviewed). Among posts that encourage more participation (such as Intel, Sony, and Cisco), texts are trying to involve users through amusement and content, that meets their tastes and interests, such as showing live chat or talent shows, or games.

| <b>Information<br/>(56%)</b>   | <b>Entertainment<br/>(20%)</b>   | <b>Socialization<br/>(14%)</b>   | <b>Incentive<br/>(10%)</b>   |
|--|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Features (quality and innovation) of products/services (57%)</li> <li>• History of company (29%)</li> <li>• Instructions on use of products/services (14%)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invitation to watch a match (35%),</li> <li>• to participate in live chat (33%),</li> <li>• to corporate events (25%),</li> <li>• to talent shows (7%)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage to post comments and suggestions (55%)</li> <li>• to express their desires, and sometimes (25%),</li> <li>• to express needs and interests (25%),</li> <li>• to customize products / services (15%),</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer gifts, bonus points and surveys (50%),</li> <li>• to express the interests (40%),</li> <li>• to play (10%)</li> </ul> |

**Fig. 2 - The contents posted by companies on Facebook talk about: (830 keywords)**

Although nearly two-thirds of businesses use socialization content, the number of dedicated posts is still rather small (17% of the total). The study indicates that minimum engagement levels are generated by information content (56%), and for most companies, entertainment and incentive elements are strategic for stimulating users (30%). Only the companies most geared to sharing participation, are capable of fully exploiting content focused on socialization (Tab.3).

**Table 3: The impact of the 4 categories of contents**

| Content categories   | <b>Information</b> | <b>Socialization</b> | <b>Entertainment</b> | <b>Incentive</b> |
|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| <b>% Posts</b>       | <b>56%</b>         | 14%                  | 20%                  | 10%              |
| <b>%n. Followers</b> | <b>87%</b>         | 4%                   | 6%                   | 2%               |
| <b>% n. Shares</b>   | <b>56%</b>         | 14%                  | 15%                  | 15%              |
| <b>THI Index</b>     | 0,7                | 0,8                  | 0,33                 | <b>0,52</b>      |
| <b>UTHE Index</b>    | 0,51               | <b>0,73</b>          | <b>0,73</b>          | 0,05             |

To better understand what the most effective content is for consumers, the User Themes Engagement Index was built to measure the incidence of content categories in relation to the generated engagement. In a range of 0 to 1 - where zero is minimum and 1 indicates the maximum efficiency - the incentive content generated low response levels (0.05), information rates, average levels (0.51), while those focusing on entertainment content (0.73) and socialization (0.73) got a high level response. This proves that the most effective content in stimulating active and

reactive behaviors among users is ‘socialization’, and also ‘entertainment’ content (Tab. 3).

To verify the second hypothesis (H2), an in-depth study of the degree of user activism was made. In this part of the research, it was necessary to eliminate those cases (5<sup>15</sup>) which, as emerged earlier, showed little activity, as they do not contribute to generating appropriate stimuli to engage users. Consequently, with the remaining 13<sup>16</sup> companies, we examined the degree of user activism, utilizing User Engagement and Rare Engagement, calculated on the basis of the data provided by the platform (Fig. 3). In more than half of the cases (8), the ability to engage in corporate Facebook pages (average of 0.80) was low (mean = 0.40), while in almost one quarter (3), it was average (M = 0.84), and in just two cases, it was high (M = 0.96). However, looking more closely at the content-based engagement capacity (ER, which stands at an average of 0.30), rates drop: almost nothing (M = 0.05) in two thirds of cases (8) and being low (M = 0.35) in almost one third (4). Only in one case (IBM) was it high (0.95). These results show that user behavior is tendentially passive or minimally active, being limited to clicking 'I like' page, tagging a photo, or posting a comment or sharing a check in a post. In addition, posts of companies did not, in most cases, affect active user behavior.

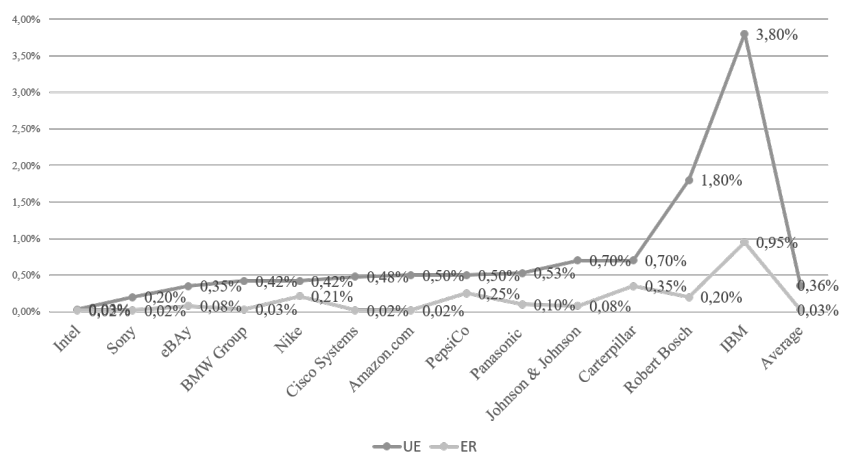


Fig. 3 – Engagement Rate and User Engagement

Finally, the study only focused on that proportion of more active users to investigate their degree of activism (Tab. 4; Fig. 4). The total number of followers (132,284,050) was 24% (316,081). Of this quota, 75% (237,061) was active, and

<sup>15</sup> Adidas, Starbucks, Honda Motor, Pampers, Visa

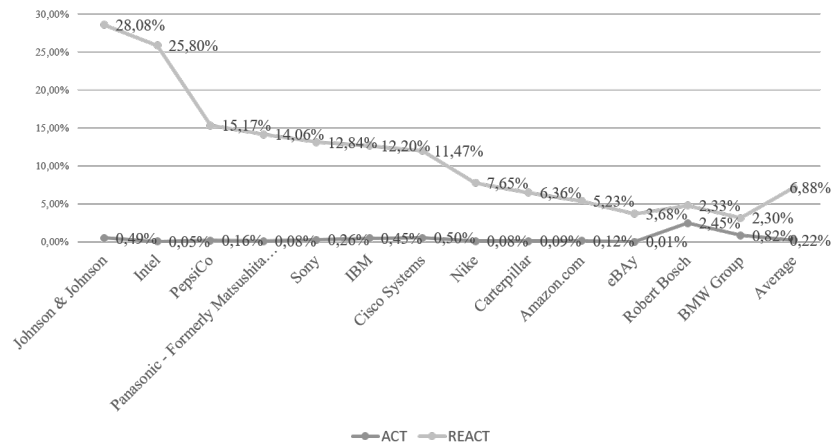
<sup>16</sup> Amazon.com, Cisco Systems, Intel, BMW Group, Sony, Robert Bosch, Johnson & Johnson, Panasonic, eBay, IBM, Nike, Carterpillar, PepsiCo.



15%, reactive (79,020). Using activation indices (ACT) and reactivity (REACT), the degree within a range of 0 to 100 could be estimated (Tab. 4).

**Table 4: User behavior: active and reactive**

|                   | High | Medium | Low |
|-------------------|------|--------|-----|
| <b>Activism</b>   | 8%   | 15%    | 77% |
| <b>Reactivity</b> | 12%  | 9%     | 69% |



**Fig. 4 – Activism Index and Reactivity Index**

The activation average was low (27.9) and is distributed as follows: 77% of active subjects (237.061), who comment and share content, reached a low level of activism (M = 16.34), 15% reached an average level (M = 53.12) and just 8%, a high level (M = 91.76).

The group of reactive subjects (15% of 7,920 users) also behaved minimally, and only on occasional. The reactivity average, calculated within a range of 0 to 100, is low and stands at 38%. Specifically, 69% of the reactive subjects reached a low level of reactivity (M = 9.23), 9% at an average level (30.97), and 12%, at a high level (89.8). These results on activism and reactivity confirm the hypothesis (H2) that only a small proportion of followers assumes an active and reactive behavior.

### **3. Discussion**

While confirming current literature that the most popular companies on Facebook are focusing on content for their followers, this study also shows that little is being done to encourage effective user engagement. The general trend of consumers is to observe and, to a lesser extent, to take an active part in conversations, with only a very limited proportion of users becoming responsive and proactive.

It emerges from the research that some product sectors, such as the more technological ones, including automotives, seem to be more able to stimulate user participation. These companies activate customized sections and publish content, in line with the expectations of their users. As indicated in the literature, the communication strategies prefigured by the companies are therefore fundamental. Not only does a company need to be present on Facebook, it must also be dynamic, capable of generating interest, posting exciting and stimulating content that can generate user engagement. Research has shown that the most effective companies are those which focus less on more 'generalized' involvement and target a niche: communities need to be stimulated by specific, distinctive, and dynamic content.

Concerning content management, most companies (16 out of 18) guarantee the authenticity of the content with the presence of the blue check on their pages. This means that the content is packaged by a corporate's executives, and so is consistent with company mission, vision, values, core business, and business communication goals. For research purposes, this is a very useful result, since it shows that companies set up a relationship with their followers presenting themselves through elements consistent with the image, principles and orientations of the enterprise. This study indicates the importance of creating familiar, adherent, and above all, interesting environments on the part of companies, in order to stimulate relationships with followers, while maintaining a coherent business identity. Indeed, an organization must be easily recognizable, and use trustworthy content that enhances their reputation in communities. They also need to be able to verify the presence of users, and their interest in participating in conversations, to identify the profile of different groups, and finally, to monitor the type of conversations that are being developed, the frequency in the exchange of messages between users, and the intensity of content sharing<sup>17</sup>.

Interestingly, most of the 13 most active companies create specific sections, customizing the content offered, according to both the interests of the company, and also those of its users. Among the sections, the most active ones are those, sharing events, linking to company pages on other social, and creating spaces for communities. This all shows the will to foster and grow relationships through engagement in common initiatives and shared interests. Further, though posts are

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<sup>17</sup> See among others: Parsons, 2013; Treem & Leonardi, 2013 and 2016; Ngai, Tao & Moon, 2015.

promotional in nature and transversal in terms of different content, those with an information focus (the majority) are organized in such a way as to foster relationships with users. To this end, organizations are aware of having to meet user expectations and gratify them as they are browsing and talking. In line with other relevant studies<sup>18</sup>, social media use needs clearly to go beyond mere passive listening to rumors and feelings from the network, and whatever can be drawn from users' comments.

As indicated by Ruehl et al. (2017), the companies active strategy involves three main approaches: first, stimulate the development of interacting communities to provide answers, support customers, moderate comments, and gather opinions, suggestions and complaints, focusing mainly on the involvement of influential users and opinion makers (for example, bloggers and early adopters), and individuals' particularly knowledgeable of company features and prevailing online positions; second, customize user experience to increase engagement and loyalty; and third, make the user a co-creator of business processes. In this latter mechanism, the company exploits the creative intelligence of the network to utilize amateur content to promote and enhance corporate products and services and, above all, to identify possible innovative solutions and foster solutions through open source crowdsourcing systems or environments for think-tanks.

According to the McKinsey report (2015), 90% of business management hopes to develop consumer co-creation, but at present the share of user involvement in these processes is just 12%. To bring users closer to shared design, companies employ such tools as games, rewards, training and peer recognition. Of those involved, 28% were curious and eager to learn, 26% wanted to have fun, participate in online games and test their skills, and 20% wanted to get awards and rewards. This indicates that many companies organize their Facebook content to involve users, but they use more incentive content than socialization content.

From the present research, it also emerges that most businesses use entertainment and incentive content, confirming the general trends identified in other researches cited in this paper. Evidently, companies need to exploit strategies to induce user involvement. Once users are involved, more advanced mechanisms for sharing and co-design can then be activated. For example, this study shows that only BMW and Bosch are cultivating the relationship in a more regular and continuous way, utilizing more creative and dynamic strategies to encourage users to co-create.

Hence, businesses need to enhance more user-centric content and be more attentive to consumer expectations and interests. However, this research has clearly revealed that a clear majority of the user sample (76%) is still predominantly behaving passively and is limited to watching and listening, only rarely actively

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<sup>18</sup> See among others: Vaast & Kaganer, 2013; Simula, Töllmen & Karjaluo, 2015.

engaging. It therefore falls into the categories of *Networkers*, *Watchers* and *Listeners*, as indicated in the literature. Among active users (77%), the majority falls into the *Informers* category at the expense of the *Expressers*. This emerges, not only from data demonstrating how the majority of users are less active, but also from the analysis of the themes that generate this type of involvement: they are mostly in the information content. Finally, the responses, which we can associate with actual *Engagement* as indicated in the literature, show proactive behavior, but in a limited and sporadic manner.

### **Conclusion**

By confirming the general trends identified in several previous studies, the present study shows that little evolution has taken place between companies and their consumers on Facebook, most companies apparently being unable to expand user engagement. In a user-centric perspective, more positive user activation data based on company-generated input could have been expected, and not just confirmation of a known situation. Moreover, Facebook has been working towards promoting activism, and has therefore improved the conditions for businesses to operate on the platform. Despite the fact that the study found greater personalization and greater care in the creation of sections, in most cases there was no such attention in the application of creative and dynamic strategy. Consequently, there is no particular input to induce co-creation, except in sporadic cases. Hence, it can be assumed that companies are not yet exploiting the maximum potential of the platform.

The construction of more refined indexes has been very useful, allowing us to deepen the study of the influence of content. Likewise, building specific indicators to quantify the degree of activism and responsiveness of followers has allowed us to see how and to what degree the quality of the content delivered varying results in user behavioral response. Consequently, this study can be a useful contribution to go towards understanding the use of social media in business communication practices in line with the principles of marketing and corporate communication.

In the future, we aim to continue to trace whether companies use more innovative forms to stimulate relationships with users. For this, some of the limitations of this present research will first need to be overcome. The use of the new indices experimented here will need further refining. This study only focused on the content already posted, but in the future, it is important to develop more systematic and organic analytical methodological tools to more precisely investigate all the elements and phases which comprise the company-consumer relationship. These indexes might be useful to link between contribution and consumption phases with shared creation phase, as they argue Schivinski, Christodoulides & Dabrowski (2015).

Next, it would be useful to make a more extensive study that also includes other social media and mobile, as more and more cross-platform references are being used. The starting point may be Facebook and input providing by its posts, but then behavior can be activated on other channels, apart from Facebook.

Then, to study the differences between levels of activism and reactive behaviors of users, it would be advisable to compare different standard weeks with particularly 'hot' weeks. based on the topics discussed. This method is useful to better understand the mechanisms that cause reactive and proactive behaviors. Finally, case studies of virtuous enterprises should be carried out, in order to study the relational dynamics between business and reactive user in detail, and to understand the consumer willingness of co-creation.

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