Why are People Interacting with Brands on Facebook:

Unraveling Consumers' Motivations for Lurking and Posting on Facebook Brand Pages

Abstract

Facebook brand communities allow consumers to interact with brands in various ways differing in level of activeness and public visibility, ranging from rather passive and less publicly visible (or lurking) to active and highly visible (or posting) behaviors. For brands, posting behavior is particularly desirable as consumers' publicly visible interactions may strengthen the brand's online visibility and thus brand awareness. The current paper investigates individuals' motivations that may drive lurking and posting behavior on Facebook brand pages by a survey study (N = 187). Results show that while both behaviors are driven by social interaction motives, the former is also driven by a need for entertainment, and the latter is additionally driven by a need for empowerment. Since results also show that individuals engage far more in lurking than in posting behaviors, this study implies that companies should invest in strategies that appeal to consumers' empowerment motives.

Keywords: SNS brand communities, motivations, behavior

Track: online marketing and social media

1. Introduction

Social networking sites (SNS) offer companies opportunities to communicate and interact with (potential) customers. At the same time, these customers have never been more enabled to engage online with brands and share their brand evaluations with others. By creating brand communities in social networking sites (SNS brand communities), such as Facebook brand pages, companies deliver unique and interesting content to consumers and stimulate them to interact with each other and the brand (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). However, despite the widespread adoption, research on consumer participation and motivations to engage in brand-related activities in SNS brand communities is rather limited (Muntinga, Moorman and Smit, 2011; Pöyry, Parvinen and Malmivaara, 2013).

Therefore, this study will unravel consumers' motivations for lurking ('quiet membership' or non-interactive behavior, referring to people who rarely contribute to the community themselves, but mainly read posts from others as they browse the community) and posting (more interactive, publicly visible behavior or 'communicative membership') on Facebook brand pages. The next section provides a literature review, followed by our study in which the proposed distinction between lurking and posting behavior is first conceptualized in an exploratory factor analysis. Next these two types of consumer behavior are linked to six different motivations for consumer's online brand-related activities, as proposed by Muntinga et al. (2011): social interaction, information, entertainment, self-presentation, remuneration and empowerment. Moreover, the strength of the predictive power of the different motivations will be compared using structural equation modelling.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

Over time, virtual brand communities (VBC), serving as a *"specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand"* (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412) have been initiated by organizations as part of brand management strategies, or by individual consumers. Motivations for participating in these traditional VBC have been fairly well documented (e.g. Sukoco & Wu, 2010; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler, 2004, Wiertz & de Ruyter, 2007; Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, and Ilić, 2011). Although very interesting and useful, these insights might not fully apply to the nowadays frequently set up SNS brand communities, as SNS have primarily been set up for social interactions between users who share a social connection and thus not for marketing purposes. SNS brand communities are embedded in a larger network of social ties between people who usually do not share a common interest in and enthusiasm, or even love for a brand. This might be advantageous for brands as consumers' interactions are potentially visible for their entire social network and thus have much larger reach than interactions in traditional VBC. Accordingly, SNS brand communities may contribute to the spreading of brand-related content and in this way increase the brand's visibility, brand awareness and brand involvement (Jahn et al., 2012). Moreover, consumers' interactions, including their opinions may guide the brand evaluations of their friends. This word-of-mouth is highly desirable as it appears to be more effective than traditional advertising tactics due to higher credibility and lower resistance (de Vries, Gensler and Leeflang, 2012). Although very desirable for brands, previous research on VBC found that only a small fraction of members publicly posts comments. The majority prefers to passively browse the brand page or lurk and enjoy the benefits offered by others, without making any substantial contribution (Nonnecke & Preece, 2001). Moreover, the majority of the content in online communities is created by a minority of users and all users read more messages than they create (Swartz, 2006). Therefore, we expect that:

H1: Consumers engage more in lurking than in posting behavior in Facebook brand pages.

As motivations are consumers' needs which lead them to participate in the community, it is important for brands to gain understanding about them. Next to research on traditional VBC (cf. supra), a few studies have explored consumers' motivations to interact with brands on social media (e.g. Zaglia, 2013, Kwon, Kim, Sung and Yoo, 2014; Enginkaya & Yilmaz, 2014). Even though these studies provide interesting insights as well, they do not account for the multitude of activities carried out by consumers in SNS brand communities. Consumers have many opportunities to engage with brands in SNS brand communities, ranging from simply reading and viewing messages to delivering highly active and visible contributions, for example by posting a message themselves. Munginga et al. (2011) were the first to link different motivations to specific brand related activities. In a qualitative way, they linked six different motivations to activities that were divided into consuming, contributing and creating behavior, deferring in level of activeness. Similar, Pöyry et al. (2013) linked motivations to different types of behavior, however, they investigated members' hedonic and utilitarian motivations for browsing versus contributing to Facebook brand pages in a quantitative manner. Similar to Pöyry et al. (2013), this study makes a distinction between passive, less publicly visible behavior (i.e. lurking) and active, thus more visible behavior (i.e. posting). However, instead of measuring posting and lurking behavior directly, using specific scales, this study takes into consideration all possible actions one could perform on a Facebook brand page and links these actions to lurking and posting behavior using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Next, based on Muntinga et al.'s (2011) qualitative research, this study develops six categories of motivations and links these to lurking and posting in Facebook brand pages: information, entertainment, social interaction, self-presentation, remuneration and empowerment.

Consumers derive **information** from what others think and share in the brand community. Because information can be found by merely browsing a Facebook brand page and thus active participation is not a prerequisite to gain it, we expect the information motivation to have only little explanatory value for *posting* behavior in Facebook brand pages. In line with Nonnecke et al. (2001) who found that lurkers do not feel the need to participate as their informational needs are satisfied without actively having to contribute and Muntinga et al. (2011) who found that consuming brand-related content is driven by the need for information, we believe that *lurking* in a Facebook brand page is strongly motivated by this need. Previous research indicated **entertainment** to be an important motivation for both *lurking* and *posting* behavior (e.g. Muntinga et al., 2011). Therefore we expect both lurking and posting to be strongly motivated by consumers' need for entertainment. Daugherty, Eastin and Bright (2008) found **social interaction** to be a motivation for creating user-generated media in general and Muntinga et al. (2011) found it to be an important motivation for contributing to and creating brand-related content on social media, while this was not the case for mere consuming content. In line with previous studies, we expect that *posting* behavior in Facebook brand pages will be strongly motivated by consumers' need for social interaction. We also expect it to play a role in consumers' *lurking* behavior in Facebook brand pages, however to a lesser extent than the information and entertainment motivation. **Remuneration** as a motivation refers to the fact that consumers want to be rewarded for their involvement with a brand. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) for example found that online community members are more willing to participate when economic incentives are offered. Muntinga et al. (2011) however found remuneration to be a motivation for consuming brand-related content and not for contributing to or creating brand-related content. Since solely one interviewee in Muntinga et al.'s (2011) qualitative research indicated a possible reward as a motivation for consuming brand-related content and we believe that marketers offer incentives to encourage their fans to engage and actively participate in brand-related activities rather than rewarding people for merely liking their brand page without any additional efforts, we do not expect that *lurking*

behavior is motivated by the idea of a possible remuneration. Based on the previous reasoning, we do however believe that *posting* behavior can be explained by the remuneration motivation. **Self-presentation** refers to the way people present their personal identity to others and can be related to the concept of impression management which assumes that social media users present themselves through personalizing their profile and their activities on social media. In Muntinga et al.'s (2011) research, personal identity was put forward as a motivation for consumers' brand related activities, referring to people participating in these activities to gain insight into one's self, reinforce one's self-esteem and identify with and gaining recognition from peers. They found it to be an important motivation for contributing to and creating brand-related content, and not for merely consuming brand-related content. In this study, we identify the personal identity-related motivation "self-presentation" as a motivation to participate in brand-related activities in Facebook brand pages as several studies (e.g. Jahn et al., 2012; Wallace, Buil, de Chernatony and Hogan, 2014) have shown that consumers participate in brand-related activities to fulfill the need to profile themselves to their personal network. By participating in brand-related activities in Facebook brand pages, consumers reveal certain cues of their identity to others and demonstrate who they are and manage and create their self-identities. Since *lurking* a Facebook brand page does not involve activities that may show others' personal identity, we do not believe that lurking behavior is motivated by the self-presentation motivation. However, keeping the findings of Muntinga et al. (2011) in mind and following the reasoning that consumers need to actively participate in brand-related activities in order to demonstrate their identity and present themselves to peers, we do expect *posting* behavior in Facebook brand pages to be strongly motivated by the self-presentation motivation. Next to expressing their personal identity to peers, consumers may also use social media to influence other consumers or the brand itself (Muntinga et al., 2011). This idea of **empowerment** has shown to be an important motivation for creating brand-related content in Muntinga et al.'s (2011) study. Since it is difficult to influence others by rather reading or viewing brand-related content, we do not expect *lurking* behavior to be motivated by the empowerment motivation. We do however expect *posting* to be strongly motivated by the need to exert influence over others and the brand. Based on analysis of above theory, we hypothesize that:

H2: For lurking behavior, a) the information, and b) entertainment motivation have greater explanatory value than the c) the social interaction motivation. The d) remuneration e) self-presentation and f) empowerment motivations have no explanatory power.

H3: For posting behavior, the motivations a) self-presentation and b) empowerment have greater explanatory value than the c) entertainment and d) social interaction motivation, which in their turn have greater explanatory value than the e) information and f) remuneration motivation.

3. Method

To investigate consumers' motivations to engage with Facebook brand pages, the study employed an (online) survey which has been spread on Facebook. 187 participants (32.6% male; M age = between 18 and 25 years; education: 33.2 % secondary education, 66.8% higher education) were asked to select and write down one of the brand pages they 'like' on Facebook. After this, they were asked to indicate how and to which extent they interact with the brand page, using a scale from 1 (never) to 7 (always). Based on a literature review, five brand-related activities were included in the study: 1) reading and viewing messages, photos and videos of the brand, 2) liking messages, photos and videos of the brand, 3) sharing messages, photos and videos of the brand, 4) commenting on brand posts and others' contributions to the brand page, 5) posting messages, photos and videos to the brand page

(Gummerus, Liljander, Weman and Philström, 2012; Muntinga et al., 2011). Next, participants were asked about their motivations to perform these activities, namely information (Muntinga, 2013; 3 items; α = .82), social interaction (Jahn et al., 2012; 4 items; α = .88), entertainment (Gummerus et al., 2012; 3 items; α = .80), self-presentation (Jahn et al., 2012; 4 items; α = .93), remuneration (Wallace et al., 2014; 3 items; α = .92) and empowerment (Muntinga, 2013; 3 items; α = .87). The used measurement scales were all validated in previous research on (brand-related) social media user behavior. All items were assessed on a seven-point Likert-scale. Finally, the following socio-demographical characteristics were questioned: sex, education, profession and age.

4. Results

Exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation and Kaiser Normalization confirmed two types of participation in Facebook brand pages: rather passive, less-publicly visible behavior or lurking and more active, publicly visible behavior or posting. Lurking includes activities that are not or only merely visible for consumers' social network or other fans, namely reading and viewing brand posts and liking them (.78 - .90). Sharing brand posts, reacting on brand posts or others' comments and posting messages, photos or videos on the brand page are considered more visible to one's social network or other fans and are therefore labelled posting (.76 - .89; Rau, Gao and Ding, 2008). Next, a paired samples t-test revealed that participants engage far more in lurking behavior (M = 3.63, SD = 1.31) than in posting behavior (M = 1.54, SD = .78, p < .001). Therefore, hypothesis 1 stating that consumers engage more in lurking rather than posting behavior in Facebook brand pages, is supported. Next, a structural equation model analysis was conducted to test hypotheses 2 and 3. Based on the exploratory factor solution, confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS 22 was applied for testing the measurement model. After model fit modification[1], the model fitted the data: χ2/df = 1.61, GFI = .90, NFI = .91, CFI = .96, and RMSEA = .06. Moreover, the measurement model showed satisfactory reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Next, the structural model was tested and provides evidence for a significant direct positive impact of the entertainment motivation on lurking (b = .17, p = .04). As expected, lurking is predicted by the need for entertainment and H2b can be accepted. Next, results show that social interaction has a direct positive impact on lurking (b = .20, p = .04). Therefore, as expected, we can identify social interaction as a motivation for lurking in Facebook brand pages. However, we can only partly accept H2c, as the social interaction motivation has greater explanatory value than the entertainment motivation, contrary to our expectations. As expected, the remuneration (H2d), self-presentation (H2e) and empowerment (H2f) motivations do not explain lurking behavior. Contrary to our expectations, the self-presentation motivation could not be linked to posting behavior. Therefore H3a needs to be rejected. We did however found a significant direct positive impact of the empowerment motivation on posting (b = .21, p = .00). Therefore we can accept H3b. We did not find any evidence for the entertainment motivation explaining posting behavior. So, H3c needs to be rejected. Similar to lurking behavior, posting behavior is motivated by the need for social interaction (b = .18, p = .03). So, H3d can be accepted and social interaction can be identified as a general motivation for participating in Facebook brand pages. As expected, the empowerment motivation has greater explanatory value than the social interaction motivation. Posting behavior is not driven by the need for entertainment, so H3f needs to be rejected.

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[1] Covariances were allowed and the "information" motivation, one item measuring "social interaction" and one item measuring "self-presentation" were dropped in the final estimated model because of discrepancies between the proposed and estimated model (Standardized Residual Covariance matrix).

5. General Discussion

This study provides a thorough view of consumers' behavior and motivations to participate in specific brand-related activities on Facebook brand pages. First, two different types of consumer behavior can be distinguished, differing by level of activeness and public visibility: lurking and posting. In line with previous research, it was found that consumers engage far more in lurking behavior in Facebook brand pages than in posting behavior (Nonnecke et al., 2001). Next, structural equation modelling revealed that lurking and posting are driven by different motivations. Both lurking and posting are driven by the need for social interaction. Thus, we can consider social interaction as a general motivation for engaging in brand-related activities in SNS brand communities. Consequently, it is important that marketers do not put too many restrictions on consumers' possibilities to interact and let anyone have the possibility to post (not harming) content to the brand page's timeline. Next to social interaction, lurking is also (but to a lesser extent) motivated by the need for entertainment. This implies that consumers may like a brand's page for mere entertainment purposes, as they find the brand-related content amusing. This motivation has been found in earlier studies on participation in social networking sites (e.g. Sheldon, 2008, Park, Kee and Valenzuela, 2009) and Facebook brand pages (e.g. Jahn et al., 2012, Gummerus et al., 2012; Muntinga et al., 2011). As expected, the remuneration, self-presentation and empowerment motivations have no explanatory power for lurking. Similar to Muntinga et al.'s (2011) findings, and next to social interaction, this study confirms that empowerment is an important motivation for posting. Consumers actively and publicly engage in brand-related activities in Facebook brand pages to exert influence on other consumers or the brand itself (Muntinga et al., 2011). So, if posting is considered favorable, companies have to make sure they listen to their fans and respond to their questions and suggestions, thank them for their replies and sharing their opinions, while this may give them a sense of empowerment, encouraging them to further actively participate. Facebook brand pages may even be used as a source for crowdsourcing. By asking fans' opinions, fans will feel valued and appreciated and they may even provide strategic input. Despite our expectations, the self-presentation motivation could not explain why consumers engage in posting behavior on brand pages. This motivation states that people desire to control the image or impression others form of them through the way they disclose themselves amongst others on social media. By interacting with Facebook brand pages, people reveal certain personal information, that is in line with the image they want to expose to others. Perhaps this study could not specifically identify the motivation that contains the phenomenon of disclosing personal information for impression management reasons, because it might occur unconsciously and the used measurement scale for self-presentation was quite straight-forward. Because of the latter, it might have also occurred that participants responded in a socially desirable way. Further research is needed to determine the impact of this motivation on consumers' participation in brand-related activities in SNS brand communities. Also, respondents do not exhibit posting behavior for entertainment reasons. Apparently the entertainment motivation only explains lurking behavior in SNS brand communities, perhaps because lurking behavior requires less effort and people find entertainment by merely scrolling the brand page and now and then clicking the like button, without further engagement. Also, the possibility of receiving a remuneration does not explain posting behavior, although this motivation has been found marginally significant. Perhaps it might be a reason to exhibit posting behavior now and then, as some brands might ask their fans to undertake certain actions that are contained in posting behavior, such as sharing a brand post, before they get the chance to win something, get a discount and such. As motivations function as antecedents of actual behavior, our findings enable brands to anticipate desired behavior by responding to different motivations.

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