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Facebook wall posts: what sort achieves the most interaction?

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Introduction/Background

While the potential of social media has empowered consumers, giving rise to ever greater abilities to interact and create conversations among very large audiences, the marketing adoption of social media is more difficult. For example, meaningful understanding of consumer motivations for information exchanges is lacking (e.g. Schmitt, Skiera, & van den Bulte, 2011; Van der Lans & Van Bruggen, 2011). From a practitioner perspective implementing a digital media viral marketing campaign ‘can be tricky for advertisers to tap into’ (Leskovec, Adamic and Huberman, 2007, p. 2). Failed viral campaigns remain the norm (Mills, 2012; Van der Lans & Van Bruggen, 2011) and ‘success in this area remains elusive to most firms’ (Ferguson, 2008, p. 68; Kalyanam, McIntyre, & Masonis, 2007). Building on calls for further research into viral marketing (e.g. Gupta & Harris, 2010; Zhang, Craciun, & Shin, 2010), and in particular, what contributes the key success factors of viral campaigns (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & van Wijk, 2007; Wallsten, 2010), we explore a month of activity in the Australian Red Cross Blood Service (Blood Service) Facebook page for the purpose of identifying the levels of interaction with wall posts for the better calculation of ROI.

Method

Social media is ubiquitous and fundamentally different from traditional or other online media because of its ‘social network structure and egalitarian nature’ (Peters, Chen, Kaplan, Ognibeni, & Pauwels, 2013, p. 281). However, the difficulty lies in both harnessing such power and in measuring the results because some returns ‘will not always be measured in dollars, but ... in customer behaviors’ (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010, p. 42). While evidence of online social consumer interactions with brands, products or services can be shown in the number of active users and brand awareness can be shown in the number of fans (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010), there is a push towards measuring more quantifiable results such as income generated from social media interactions (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011); but proving a link between social media campaigns, any other marketing activities and revenue can be challenging. Exploration of interaction across several levels is needed to enhance understanding, with a view to more effectively measuring ROI. The context of this study is the Red Cross Blood Service, a non-profit organization that seeks to change behavior of Australians to increase blood donations. They are turning to social media as a way to achieve this aim. Interactions from initial wall posts are measured across three criteria: a like, share or comment. Liking a wall post is a relatively simple interaction, a click of the mouse. Sharing and commenting can show evidence of higher level interactions as community members can include personalized messages. Commenting can be the simple showing of support, or a reply to a specific question, wall post status or another comment.

Results

The most successful wall post, ranked by shares, asked donors to watch a video and then share it with others, with the name “You’re a giver, be a liker” and the tagline *‘Donate*

Like Share'. This campaign ran from November 6 to December 2 and was designed to encourage every donor to become a fan of the Blood Service Facebook site. During this month other social media activities, forming part of an overall marketing strategy, were also run. The campaign comprised a video, donor centre elements, an email to all donors and Facebook advertising. The campaign was a call to action which communicates to people 'what to do, rather than what to think' (Smith, 2006, p. 38). The message concluded that donors were givers, so be likers too. The original wall post generated 1,578 shares, the highest number of shares for any wall post for the month under investigation. This post also generated the highest number of comments, 115 (though the second most commented post was close at 113). The other measure considered in this analysis was likes, and the wall post with the most number of likes, 1,438, asked donors to provide the Blood Service with their best overheard stories. This campaign was co-creation based by inviting community members to 'co-create unique experiences' with the Blood Service community (Prahallad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 7). A summary of all three measures for both posts is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of rankings for the most successful wall posts

<i>Interaction Measure</i>	<i>Measurement criteria</i>		
<i>Wall Post</i>	<i>Shared Rank</i>	<i>Liked Rank</i>	<i>Commented Rank</i>
Call to Action: Watch this video to see how your shared story makes your donation even more powerful.	1 st : 1578	3 rd : 1229 (574 male, 1981 female, 10 unknown, 17 page)	1 st : 115 (37 male, 72 female, 0 unknown, 6 page)
Co-creation: Give us your best stories, donors!	10 th : 86	1 st : 1438 (346 male, 1070 female, 12 unknown, 10 page)	5 th : 101 (39 male, 62 female)

Discussion and conclusion

This study makes an important addition to the theoretical discussions of social media interactions by considering the outward ripples generated from the original wall post, rather than simply totaling active users or membership. Further research could consider the interactions in light of consumer culture theory (CCT) (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) by framing the consumer as an active co-creator of meaning and look at the evidence of co-created messages. Such research could also consider clarifying how the actions of share, like and comment metrics relate to authoritative performances and authenticating acts. Second, the study showcases a practical measure for analysis marketing communication effectiveness for marketing departments. Overall, the official National marketing wall posts were successful, suggesting the messages were well received by community members; although the impact on donor activity (bookings and donating) is unknown. Further research could consider a longer time period and focus on exploring identity goals to illuminate the interactions between the brand and community members and help to develop an understanding of why community members participate in the calls to action and co-creation, by commenting, forwarding the video or liking the posts. Finally, future research could consider the top ten wall posts for each level of interaction to determine themes for these more successful wall posts and explore and compare the longevity of individual wall posts.

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