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BRAND ENGAGEMENT ON FACEBOOK BASED ON MOBILE PHONE OPERATORS' ACTIVITY WITHIN FOUR EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Introduction

In the online marketing there is currently a growing interest in digital interactivity, especially in consumer activity in social media. Information technology is empowering consumers, and their role is shifting from being passive recipients of information to becoming actively engaged with the brand.⁶⁷ One of the fastest growing and most popular social networks ever to be launched is Facebook. With nearly 800 million users who generate billions of pieces of content, the social network has a larger population than most countries.⁶⁸ According to Syncapse empirical research⁶⁹, the average value of brand Fans on Facebook in key consumer categories in 2012 was \$174.17! It means that it is no longer just a website for teenagers, who connect with friends, but a serious marketing channel.

This article highlights the concept of brand engagement on Facebook – the theoretical part describes the idea of a Page, its elements, motives that drive fans to join the community, along with the overview of strategies that rise brand engagement, awareness, loyalty and affinity. It also introduces the Post Engagement Rates, developed by the authors, which was used in the empirical part to determine the brand engagement of four, leading mobile network operators in Europe and their interactions with fans on Facebook. The analyzed countries were France, Germany, England and Poland, because they are considered to have a significant mobile network market and strong Facebook communities. Article's aim was to learn what interaction between pages' administrators and fans is and what brand engagement in four countries can be observed. The analysis was conducted in the matrix countries-operators by using brand engagement rates.

1. Brand Community on Facebook

A Facebook *Page* is a public profile specifically created for businesses, brands, celebrities, etc. Unlike personal profiles, pages do not gain friends, but fans which are people who "like" page (who pressed the *Like* button on the page). Pages work similarly to profiles, updating users with things such as posts, events, photos. When a user likes a Page, this means: a link to this Page will appear on the user's Timeline (personal profile site). What is more, a notification that he liked Page will appear on his profile (temporarily) under *Recent Activity* box and since that moment all posts published by brand Page will be appearing in his *News Feed (part of the Timeline)*. All those people, who liked Page form the Community (*fans*) of the page.

Each brand Page has the same layout that can be customized by the admin. It consists of the set of static elements, such as:

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⁶⁷ Heinonen K., *Consumer activity in social media: Managerial approaches to consumers' social media behavior*, Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 10: 338–346 (2011), p. 356

⁶⁸ Levy J., *Facebook Marketing: Leveraging Facebook Features for Your Marketing Campaigns*, Que Publishing, 2011 p. 4

⁶⁹ Kalehoff M., *Rising Value of Facebook Brand Fans Validates Social Marketing Investment*, <http://www.syncapse.com/rising-value-of-facebook-brand-fans-validates-social-marketing-investment/#.UX7q2aljpj>, 4/17/13

- *cover photo* and *profile picture* – first one is the larger image at the top of the Page and the smaller one on the left is Page's profile picture. They should be unique, presenting brand's logo, products or something associated with the brand;
- *Page information box* – an area below cover photo, providing an overview of the basic information about the Page – its name, category, Page's statistics (eg. number of fans), *applications* and *buttons*;
- *applications (apps)* - can be found on the top right, within the Page information box. Apps are designed to enhance experience on Facebook with engaging games, media resources and useful features;
- *buttons with a drop-down menu* – just above the apps there are two buttons and a drop down menu option with a set of settings. First button – *Like* enables becoming a fan of the Page and the second one – *Message* enables sending a private message to the Page's administrator.
- *posts* – updates, which appear on the main Page's area in a chronological order, published by Page admin or by fans (if the Page's settings enable it).

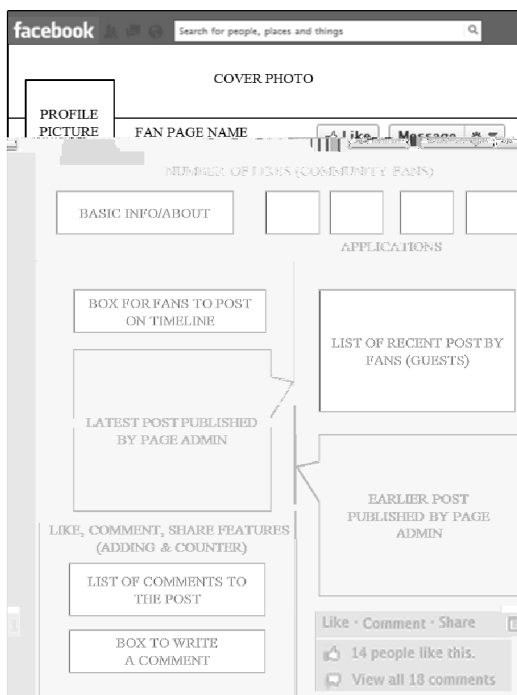


Fig. 1. Facebook Page layout

There are six types of posts to choose from on Facebook page: Video, Photo, Link, Question, Event, and Text.⁷⁰ *Videos*, usually from Youtube service can be used for product promotion and for branding, whereas *photos* along with *questions (poll)* create a lot interactions and drive engagement among fans.⁷¹ Considerable alternative for simple text-only posts are also posts with url address – preferably *link* to Facebook app or custom landing page. *Events* are mainly for those that take place at physical locations, but they are not restricted to that and they can be used for special promotions.

⁷⁰ Chaney P., *Understanding the 6 Facebook Post Types*, <http://www.practicalecommerce.com/articles/3680-Understanding-the-6-Facebook-Post-Types>, 1/8/12

⁷¹ Bullas J., *What 3 Content Types Drive the Most Interaction on Facebook?*, <http://www.jeffbullas.com/2011/10/10/what-3-content-types-drive-the-most-interaction-on-facebook/>, 10/10/11

Facebook Page enables three interaction features connected with each post, such as: *like*, *share* and *comment*. When a user *likes* a post, this means that also other users can see that he has liked it (including their friends). If enough people like it, their name will be replaced by a total count of Likes. The more likes the post gained, the higher value it has in the context of Page marketing value. *Share* feature makes it possible to publish someone's post on own profile (Timeline) or Page. This is the way content goes viral in social media – thousand fans can share one post published by Page's moderator. Sharing a post is not only a commitment to the message, but also to the brand and the more *shares*, the more chance to reach many Facebook users.

The most engaging are *comments* – a feature that enables Facebook users sharing their thoughts about the post. Comments can be both positive and negative and they can form a long conversation between users and Page moderator. This feature might be risky, if a dissatisfied customer attacks the company, criticizing its products or service. It can damage brand reputation, if there's no proper reaction from the Page moderator.

2. Motives to join brand community on Facebook

A study by Chadwick Martin Bailey reports that 33 per cent of Facebook users are fans of brands, and 60 per cent of these consumers are more likely to purchase or recommend to a friend after 'liking' a brand.⁷² Although Facebook is an example of the XXIst century new medium, it can be analyzed using the pre-Internet theories, such as *Uses and Gratifications theory*⁷³. UGT is an approach to understand why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. It can be used to understand the goals and motivations of individuals for engagement with Facebook's content. Previous applications of this theory over brand communities and social media showed that consuming *entertaining* and *informative* content is an important factor for participation in brand Communities, where entertainment was found to have a stronger effect⁷⁴. Moreover, entertainment and information were found to be among the main motivations for online engagement over brand-related content in the form of consumption, creation and contribution. In addition, Muntinga⁷⁵ report *remuneration* through sweepstakes as the third mentioned motivation for engagement.⁷⁶

R. Bodnarchuk defines the most popular reasons fans liked a Page, based on the Lab42's study. One in three surveyed users claimed that they liked brands for the *promotions and discounts* that they saved, whilst 21 per cent gave a 'like' to *get a free giveaway*. The reason is that Facebook provides an excellent venue to provide incentives to consumers, which leads to increase sales. Yet only one in ten users pointed *brand loyalty* and *trust* as their motives to join the brand community. Although this group of fans is the minority, they are important brand ambassadors - the ones who actively search for the brand on social media channels and promote it among friends.⁷⁷

⁷² Harris L., Dennis Ch, *Engaging customers on Facebook: Challenges for e-retailers*, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, J. Consumer Behav. 10: 338–346, 2011, p. 339

⁷³ Blumler J.G. & Katz, E., *The uses of mass communications: Current perspectives on gratifications research*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1974

⁷⁴ Park, N., Kee, K., & Valenzuela, S., *Being immersed in social networking environment: Facebook groups, uses and gratifications, and social outcomes*, *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 12(6), 2009, pp. 729-733

⁷⁵ Muntinga DG, Moorman M, Smit EG, *Introducing COBRA's: exploring motivations for brand-related social media use*, *Int J Advert* 30(1):13-46, 2011, p. 20

⁷⁶ Cvijikj Pletikosa I., Michahelles F., *Online engagement factors on Facebook brand pages* *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, Springer, 2013, p. 7

⁷⁷ Bodnarchuk R., *Top 4 Reasons Why Users "Like" Brands on Facebook*, <http://www.n5r.com/blog/bid/112552/Top-4-Reasons-Why-Users-Like-Brands-on-Facebook>, 1/17/13

3. Brand engagement strategy on Facebook

The strategy of posting in order to achieve the best results in getting feedback (engagement) is a combination of the several elements – these are – *the time of posting*, its *length*, *frequency* and the *type of the content*. The time seems to be a crucial success factor, as the goal is to hit the target consumer at exactly the right time - when they not only take in Page's content, but respond to it as well. As the statistics prove, **posts on the weekend perform about 16 per cent better on average and those made outside of business hours get approximately 20 per cent better response.**⁷⁸ Optimal post frequency is a separate question depending on a Page's audience, content production skills, its post lifetime, however there is an assumption based on studies, that Facebook Pages shouldn't post more than one time every three hours.⁷⁹ The best practice for text posts's length is posting between 100 and 250 characters (less than 3 lines of text), which generates about 60% more likes, comments and shares than posts greater than 250 characters.⁸⁰

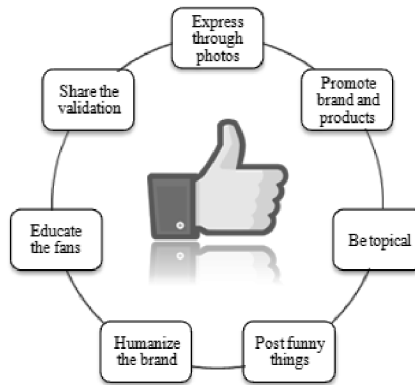


Fig. 2. Strategies to increase brand engagement on Facebook

Source: Based on Malhotra A., Malhotra-Kubowicz C., See A., *How to Create Brand Engagement on Facebook*, MIT Sloan Management Review, Volume 54, Winter 2013

According to the subject of posts, they can be *about products/service*, such as information about the new offer. They can be also *related to the brand*, containing photos from new store launch or contests with a chance of winning brand's souvenirs. The third type of posts are those *unrelated to the brand*, which are usually connected with seasonal events, like holidays, sports games, entertainment, etc. The above figure presents strategies for posting on Page regarding posts' content in a response to previously mentioned goals and motivations of Facebook users. Explaining them in the context of mobile network operators *promoting brand and products* is the strategy to directly inform about the offer, while posting *photos* might be the picture of a new smartphone available in business tariffs or for example a photo that *humanize the brand*. As it's all happening in the social media, posts that contain emotions helps fans convey their own emotions to their network of friends. Knowing that entertainment is the strong motive to join the community, there is a need to publish *funny posts*, like cartoons or something *topical*, which might be connected with holidays like the suggestion to send a text message on Valentine's day or buy a mobile phone as a gift for Christmas. By *sharing validation*, such as success stories, achievements, fans can signal

⁷⁸ Arnold M. J., *Optimizing Facebook Engagement: The Timing of Posts*, <http://socialmediatoday.com/morgan-j-arnold/597966/optimizing-facebook-engagement-timing-posts>, 7/10/12

⁷⁹ Constine J., *Study: Facebook Pages Shouldn't Post More Than 1x Every 3 hours*, <http://techcrunch.com/2012/01/17/how-often-should-facebook-pages-post/>, 01/17/12

⁸⁰ Claveria K., *Facebook study reveals optimal message length and other best practices*, <http://kccclaveria.com/2012/05/facebook-studio-study/>, 5/21/12

approval while also basking in the glory of a brand they identify with. There might be posts about the award, the brand have won or information about celebrities who decide to use the network's service. There's also a strategy to educate fans through posts, like explaining them the features of smartphones. What is important is to make posts diverse and engaging.

4. Research methodology

The research on brand engagement was conducted in two steps. Its aim was to explore four mobile brand communities on Facebook in four countries in the defined time. Mobile operators, such as Orange, T-mobile, Virgin and o2 were selected based on their significant market share in the chosen countries – Poland, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. The objective of this research was to answer the questions, what the post engagement rates for the analyzed countries are and what page fans interaction is.

First part of the web research was the analysis of ten Pages (brand communities) on Facebook between 1st – 22nd of April 2013. It covered quantity analysis of posts published by Page owners and fans' feedback to these posts through like, share and *comment* features. The comparative analysis was based on the PER_i and PER_s rates developed by the authors.

The second step was taken to determine, whether Page owners interact with fans, if they ask them a question by creating a post on their Page. The same question (translated into four languages) about the details of network's offer was posted on Pages at the same time in order to check the response time of the Page owners and usefulness of their reply. The question was asked on Monday morning (ca. 9:30 am). In two cases it was not possible to publish a post on company's Page, because the Page's administrator deactivated this feature, however in the second case it might be possible to send a private message to operator's Page.

5. Post Engagement Rate

It turns to be significant differences between the amount of fans at each community, varying from around 34 thousand fans of Orange UK to 1,5 million fans of Orange Poland. Taking it into consideration, the rate, that has been developed is a rate per thousand fans. Similarly, there are also huge variances in the amount of posts – T-mobile UK has published only 4 updates, whereas T-mobile in Poland has published 56 posts. Virtual mobile operator Virgin has the smallest community among other operators, in turn Orange is the unquestioned leader.

Table 1
The average number of Page fans and the sum of posts published
by Page's administrator between 4/1/13 – 4/22/13

Mobile Network Operators								
Country	Orange		T-Mobile		Virgin		o2	
	Fans	Posts	Fans	Posts	Fans	Posts	Fans	Posts
Poland	1 508		420		104			
	556	44	948	56	684	28		
France	691				47			
	342	23			489	12		
Germany			34 739	8			176	
			140				165	15
UK			338	4			810	
	34 013	13					872	28

Those cells filled in grey were not taken into consideration – Operators either don't provide service in these countries, or they don't have a Facebook Page. The amount of *likes* and *shares* on each Page is connected with the number of fans, but there is no linear relationship, for example o2 UK has the second highest number of fans, but only fourth place in the amount of likes and shares. On the other hand, T-mobile Germany with around 35 thousand fans had four times more likes and ten times more shares than T-mobile UK with a 140 thousand fan community.

Table 2
The sum of posts' *likes* and *shares* between 4/1/13 – 4/22/13

Mobile Network Operators								
Orange			T-Mobile		Virgin		o2	
Country	Like	Share	Like	Share	Like	Share	Like	Share
Poland	29 592	2 582	16 214	434	1 555	99		
France	20 162	2 142			242	10		
Germany			444	44			3 854	1 128
UK	159	7	95	4			6 154	829

It is clear, that this way of comparing engagement is not reliable, so there was a need to develop a more conclusive rate. The approach to determine fans' engagement is based on the relation between posts, likes/shares and the amount of Page's fans. It is measured by the following rates, developed by the authors:

$$PER_L = \frac{\Sigma(\frac{l}{p})_t}{\bar{F}_t} * 1000$$

$$PER_s = \frac{\Sigma(\frac{s}{p})_t}{\bar{F}_t} * 1000$$

PER_L – Post Engagement Rate for “likes”; l – the sum of likes at a specified period of time; PER_s – Post Engagement Rate for “share”; s – the sum of shares at a specified period of time; p – the sum of posts at a specified period of time; $\bar{F}_t$ – the average number of fans at a specified period of time.

Post Engagement Rate per thousand fans measures the share of engaged fans in the total amount of fans. This rate can be used to find out, if posts published on Page are considered to be engaging. The research proved that not every Page can be successful in its activity on Facebook. Engagement on British Pages turns to be the weakest, while German Operators have definitely the strongest one. The engagement varies less within operators, than between countries. Virgin mobile has the worst results, while the rest three networks get similar results having T-mobile Germany as a leader in likes' engagement and o2 Germany as the leader in shares' engagement.

Table 3
Post engagement rate – *likes* and *shares*

Mobile Network Operators								
Orange			T-Mobile		Virgin		o2	
Country	PER _L	PER _s	PER _L	PER _s	PER _L	PER _s	PER _L	PER _s
Poland	0,446	0,039	0,688	0,018	0,531	0,034		
France	1,268	0,135			0,425	0,014		
Germany			1,598	0,158			1,458	0,427
UK	0,360	0,016	0,169	0,007			0,271	0,037

Comments (the third post's engagement feature) were not taken into consideration due to the fact that one fan can write unlimited number of comments, the comments could be both positive or negative and what is the most important – they can be posted by Page's administrator as well as a reply to users comments.

6. Interaction on Brand Page

For brands that consider using Facebook in their marketing mix, it is thus important to realize that the content that is shared, and the interaction between the brand and its customers, is central. This interaction is often underestimated in a discussion of brand uses for social-media services. And yet it is exactly this interaction that will allow brands to benefit from social media presence.⁸¹

The second part of the research was designed to evaluate the interaction between Page's user and Page's owner. The hypothetical user might be a current or future customer of the mobile network. He might be doing a research on Facebook in order to find the best available offer based on his need to have a 1 GB data transfer included in his monthly plan.

Table 4

Interaction between fan and page based on the response to question – “

Do you have any monthly plan including 1 GB data transfer? Can you please provide me a link to this offer?” asked on the Network's Facebook Page (TL)

Country	Mobile Network Operators											
	Orange			T-Mobile			Virgin			o2		
	EP	R	RC	EP	R	RC	EP	RT	RC	EP	R	RC
Poland	Y	9	I+D L	Y	9	I+DL	Y	58	I+D L			
France	N	X	X				Y	36	I+L			
Germany				Y	6	UI				Y	32	DI+D L
UK	Y	32 0	I+D L	Y	68	DI+D L				N	X	X

EP – enable posting by fans; RT – response time in minutes; RC – response content; Y- yes; N – no; I –information; DI – detailed information; UI – unhelpful information; L – link to operator's website; DL – link to detailed offer

The table above presents the results of asking the same question on Pages of mobile network operators. 80 per cent of Pages gave a quick response to the question, the average waiting time was about an hour – the slowest turned to be Orange UK moderator, who replied after almost 5.5 hours. There might be further research needed to determine what is the acceptable time for user to get the answer. Three operators replied in less than 10 minutes – Orange Poland, T-mobile Poland and T-mobile Germany, whereas the last one didn't provide the expected answer, only suggesting to ask on their other Facebook Page. In turn, Virgin France provided the link to their whole offer, not the specified tariff. All the rest mobile brands fulfilled the objectives of this research – they have replied (vaguely or in details) and provided the link to the site, where a customer can check the details of the offer. What is important to add, apart from o2 Germany, leaders in Post Engagement Rate, failed the interaction test.

⁸¹ Beuker R., Abbing E. R., *Two Faces of Social Media: Brand Communication and Brand Research*, Issue Design Management Review Volume 21, Issue 1, pages 54–60, March 2010, p. 55

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SUMMARY

Community is a potent strategy if it is approached with the right mind-set and skills. A strong brand community increases customer loyalty, lowers marketing costs, authenticates brand meanings, and yields an influx of ideas to grow the business. Through commitment, engagement, and support, companies can cultivate brand communities that deliver powerful returns.⁸² The findings of the study conducted by the authors show that most operators have the interactive Facebook pages and users can receive answer to their question in the reasonable time. Brand Engagement rates are the highest in Germany, France and Poland take the second place with quite similar results, whereas England has definitely the lowest rates. Apart from this ranking, the overall level of engagement rate is low in comparison to the amount of fans, each fan page has. It means that brand strategies on Facebook should be improved to engage fans. Further studies might indicate reasons of this outcomes and engagement rates comparison in other sectors. What can be concluded according to this article is that although Facebook is the global platform, brand engagement rate within communities in the mobile network area is rather differentiated among countries and networks' brands. Using social media to build brand loyalty seems to be the upcoming challenge for all companies and the presence on Facebook should be taken seriously.

⁸² Fournier S., Lee L., *Getting Brand Communities Right*, Harvard Business Review, April 2009, p. 111
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