

# likes

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### Abstract

Marketing in Facebook has been a continuous trend on the rise in the decade, and expands daily to a range of products and services. However, little is known on the effect that it has on customers, following the immense resources often allocated to source the marketing. A question raised by Facebook marketing, is whether offline consumer behavior can be affected by Facebook likes. The answer was sought after the field experiment and results found that indeed positive consumer behavior was experienced offline after an analysis was made on Facebook page likes. Essence of likes proved effectiveness in a case where a firm used it for promotional communication. Organic consumer interaction with a firm proved to have less effect on Facebook as compared to when a firm takes paid advertisements thus usage of their platform is in the firm's page. Essence of Facebook likes is thus expansive not limited to Facebook activity but also the value it has on marketing.

### Methodology & research design

Experiments were run with a discovery vitality program, a program that utilizes similar structures with consumer loyalty programs, in aspects such as flier flights with high frequencies. Consumers of vitality gain points whereby they exercise healthy habits such as, buying healthy groceries, exercising, being vaccinated and taking preventive lifestyle measures that reduce the risk of them being sick. Points have an equivalent of higher value thus continuous accumulation leads to higher status and the consumers may be rewarded later. Data generated to earn points on consumers is not based on their personal reports rather than information obtained from real data such as grocery stores, thus the more status gained by points the higher the level of rewards one can claim. In the beginning of the research, the Facebook page of Vitality approximately had hundred thousand likes. Purposefully the page creation was for purposes of engagement and

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consumer loyalty in promotion of the reputation of the company. In two posts they had in a day, a blend of links, status updates and images were included to engage consumers, and update them on activities.

In conducting sampling, Vitality circulated invitations through e-mails for participation in the study, customers being new individuals joining between January 1<sup>st</sup> and July 30<sup>th</sup> 2013 having active email addresses. A six-month period in the sampling was to ensure intervention is done in at least six months. Focus was exclusive to new consumers due to the limited probability of them liking the firm's Facebook page, equating as a vital criterion for screening. The entire sample was later sent an email with an online survey from the firm, where the contents were to look into the relationship between a healthy behavior and Facebook. Customers who failed to respond to the emails with the survey received two reminders with each having closure dates for the survey. In commencing the survey, consent from participants was obtained for them to enter in the survey to determine the relationship between health habits and Facebook. Customers were asked questions prior to beginning the research, one being whether they had an active Facebook account, those who did not own were appreciated and opted out. Later customers who had accounts were asked if they already had liked the Vitality Facebook page, and those who had proceeded to complete the survey.

A series of question proceeded after screening and customers Facebook usage was considered, their involvement and engagement in the vitality program, and their general health. Customers who previously had not liked the page were randomly assigned to control and treatment conditions, with customers in the treatment sections being allowed to like the firms Facebook page. Customers in control condition however received no invitation to like the Facebook page, and their survey was terminated after answering the questions on their overall

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usage of Facebook and Vitality participation program. With large numbers being in the treatment section due to oversampling, the most operative method of acquiring likes was also tested by experimentally deploying the invitation's message framework with four messages. Initial messages were framed in the ways that Facebook pages are valued, one being the way that the Facebook page may lead to health improvement for half of the customers and the other half being the way that one may garner points and rewards in the vitality program.

Second message factor had a manipulation of whether liking in the page was linked to losses or gains, but the manipulations were not comprehensively central questions in the primary research of whether Facebook activity was linked to offline consumer behavior, rather than being mere presentations with A/B responses firms often utilize in determination of maximum consumer response. Customers responding with a 'yes' were auto-forwarded to like the programs page, with those who declined also thanked and took steps towards the end of the survey. After the random initial assignment to control and treatment conditions, and contact between participants and vitality ceased, for instance customers who liked the page would view the program as any liked paged whenever they logged in into their accounts. During the normal firm's operation, the data was collected for a period of six months, and that was the information set used to determine effect of acquired page likes on brand engagement offline. Due to experimental manipulation of customers to like the page, comparison among two groups which were selected provides clean casual effects from the test lacking concerns of endogeneity.

Further examinations were conducted in determination of whether the Facebook pages used by firms are a means of initiating the firm's promotional messages against a platform that consumers use in interaction and engagements for social purposes. Due to an Algorithm that Facebook uses to filter data on a user's news feed, interests of consumers on certain things were

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an important point learnt. Among the factors that the algorithm takes into consideration include, the interest the user has on the particular content in question, interest and relationship of the user with the particular content, the design and post type, and recency of postage. Due to the consequences of the filter, organic posts have been in a decline having typical reach being about two percent for posts from large pages and also being slow in reaching out to followers. In order for firms to overcome the filter that is customized by customer data, firms often pay promotional fees for post boosting. Variety of criteria is used to target boosted posts including demographics and interests. Posts can however be targeted to custom audiences using preferences and email addresses of several consumers. In distinction between the promotional techniques being firm initiated and consumer-oriented interactions limitations were put for organic interactions among customers and the official Facebook page organically in the commencing four months post intervention, and in this period no boosted posts were utilized.

However, in the studies' last two months, Vitality paid in order to boost two posts weekly specifically being targeted to custom audiences at customers who were previously in treatment condition and liked the firm's page. Social media team of the firm were in determination of posts that had been boosted and generally informative posts fell large in the segment that included information on how to earn the program's points. Predictions were made that if Firms Facebook pages provided a platform for social oriented interactions that are initiated by consumers and afterwards influence their behaviors, then an observation on offline consumer behavior would be exhibited during the period of organic interaction. This is due to the period being used exploitatively by consumers to have the platform as a direct interaction with the firm and with unlikeliness to exposure of the firm's message as a consequence of the feed filter. Expansively, the organic period majorly captures other aspects such as social effects that are potentially

caused, for instance effect of page liking and its benefit of signaling loyalty to friends. However, if the page had a behavioral influence through traditional channels of advertising, such as customer exposure to information and promotion initiated by the firm, no effect would be observable in the organic period but increased offline activity during the period of post boosting, through paid promotions by Vitality in knocking off the customer generated filter.

### Data analysis

Report data was obtained from three sources, one being customers responses to survey invitation, aggregate activity data on Vitality Facebook page recorded by the insights, and activity of points in the vitality program. Vitality logs customer points in its program each time they are earned. Each activity in the program includes completion date, subcategories and categories, household status levels, and total accrued points. For customers who finished the survey, points activity data was collected from the day of joining the program continuing in a six months span post random projection to experimental environments. Point accumulation by consumers was a dependent variable in testing effectiveness of acquired page likes on offline customer behavior. point accumulation is highly beneficial to Vitality as customers with high points are held in immense esteem as customers improve their health through engagement of healthy activities in order to have the points, which is a move lowering healthcare costs. loyalty also is observed to increase as customers rise their status levels due to receipt of numerous rewards and incurrence of switching costs that are more immense in an attempt to change to another provider, due to similarity of switching to forfeiture of benefits earned the hard way.

With results bearing managerial implications, some highlights were necessary invalidation. In testing effect of acquired page likes in Facebook, one firm was included to give the generalization due to the point generation and strategies in promotion for consumers and

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loyalty. Magnitude of the effect largely bears dependency on firm size and reputation, thus what is sold by a firm, or services provided and type of information being posted are among the considerations. Demonstration of likes having a positive effect on consumer behavior is a key finding thus measuring a firm's individual effect that the same can bear largely depends on usage (Mochon, et al., 2017). Demonstration provided by the research exhibits ease in accumulation of likes on a Facebook page and overall may cause measurable positive implications to offline consumer behaviors. Brand engagement is not guaranteed by acquisition of likes, and extensive reach may require paid or sponsored promotions. A causal effect is also in demonstration of effortful and real behavior of offline customers. Effectiveness of the pages is also based on promotional communications that are initiated by the firm and also higher effectiveness is borne to customers with low Facebook activity and low firm involvement.

A significant objective of the study is the development of a simple criteria that a firm may utilize in measurement of value that a like may have on its Facebook page. Demonstrations on how firms may randomize existing customer databases of consumers in like conditions and through the high response rate of the invitation into research, a clear exhibition is made that the method is viable. Simplicity of the procedure incapacitates endogeneity integral in page likes which significantly has been the challenge in measuring their worth. The method also additionally adapts to testing value of other social platforms in relation to promotional marketing, expanding beyond just Facebook. A firm may easily apply the same method and invite its customers to an online survey with another platform such as Instagram and Twitter, and measure offline customer behavior. Ease of application of the methodology can be further eased in practice, as the survey may be skipped and an email approach may be used by the firm in invitation of customers to like either of the selected pages. Value of Facebook page likes expands

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beyond activity within Facebook itself and climax circumstances under which their acquisition can prove the highest value.

**References**

Mochon, D., Johnson, K., Schwartz, J., & Ariely, D. (2017). What are likes worth? A Facebook page field experiment. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 54(2), 306-317.

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