

College-age Facebook users react negatively to site's ads: study

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Customers often “like” businesses on Facebook, but when it comes to those companies’ ads on the social networking site, “dislike” is closer to the mark, says a University of Florida study of college-age users.

The survey, conducted by advertising Professor Jon D. Morris with graduate students Qinwei “Vivi” Xie and Meng Zhang, shows that while college-age users reported positive feelings about business pages on Facebook, sponsored posts and banner [ads](#) were viewed as intrusions.

Believed to be the first of its kind, the study was chosen for presentation at Berlin’s International Conference on the Arts in Society this month, and was recognized as the top faculty paper at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Southeast Colloquium in March.

With businesses on track to spend more than \$3 billion on Facebook in 2011, up 55 percent from last year, information on how users perceive the ads could help businesses reach customers without alienating them, Morris said.

“Companies are directing a lot of money to Facebook without a clue of what’s effective,” he said. “People consider Facebook a private space, and they don’t like ads that feel intrusive.”

Xie and Morris surveyed 320 graduate and undergraduate students who were active Facebook users. The web-based questionnaire covered three

types of business presence on the site: News Feed ads, which appear as posts on a user's Facebook home page along with friends' status updates; banner ads, which appear on the right side of the page; and business profile pages. The three are collectively called Facebook Social Ads.

Business profile pages were the only type of advertisement that received positive ratings. News feed ads, which include posts from companies the user has actively "liked," garnered more attention than banner ads, but still elicited negative feelings, according to the survey responses. Despite negative feelings toward overt ads, the survey showed that users are reluctant to pay a small monthly fee to use Facebook without advertising content.

Xie said she found it surprising that News Feed ads, which are generated through preferences expressed by users and their friends, would fare as poorly as banner ads when it came to emotional response.

"News Feed ads got more attention than banner ads, but they weren't having a positive emotional impact," she said.

The study marks what Xie and Morris believe to be the first academic survey of college students about Facebook Social Ads. Most of the previous studies of college students' Internet and social network use have dealt with privacy concerns, Morris said.

Xie would like to follow the survey with an experiment that evaluates Facebook users' responses to banner ads and [News Feed](#) ads separately to determine which types of advertising reach customers best, she said. But the negative responses toward both of these ads leads her to believe that companies should focus their efforts on building interactive, highly personalized business pages on Facebook to connect with customers.

"Like any advertising, [Facebook](#) ads have to be relevant to be engaging,"

she said.

Provided by University of Florida

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