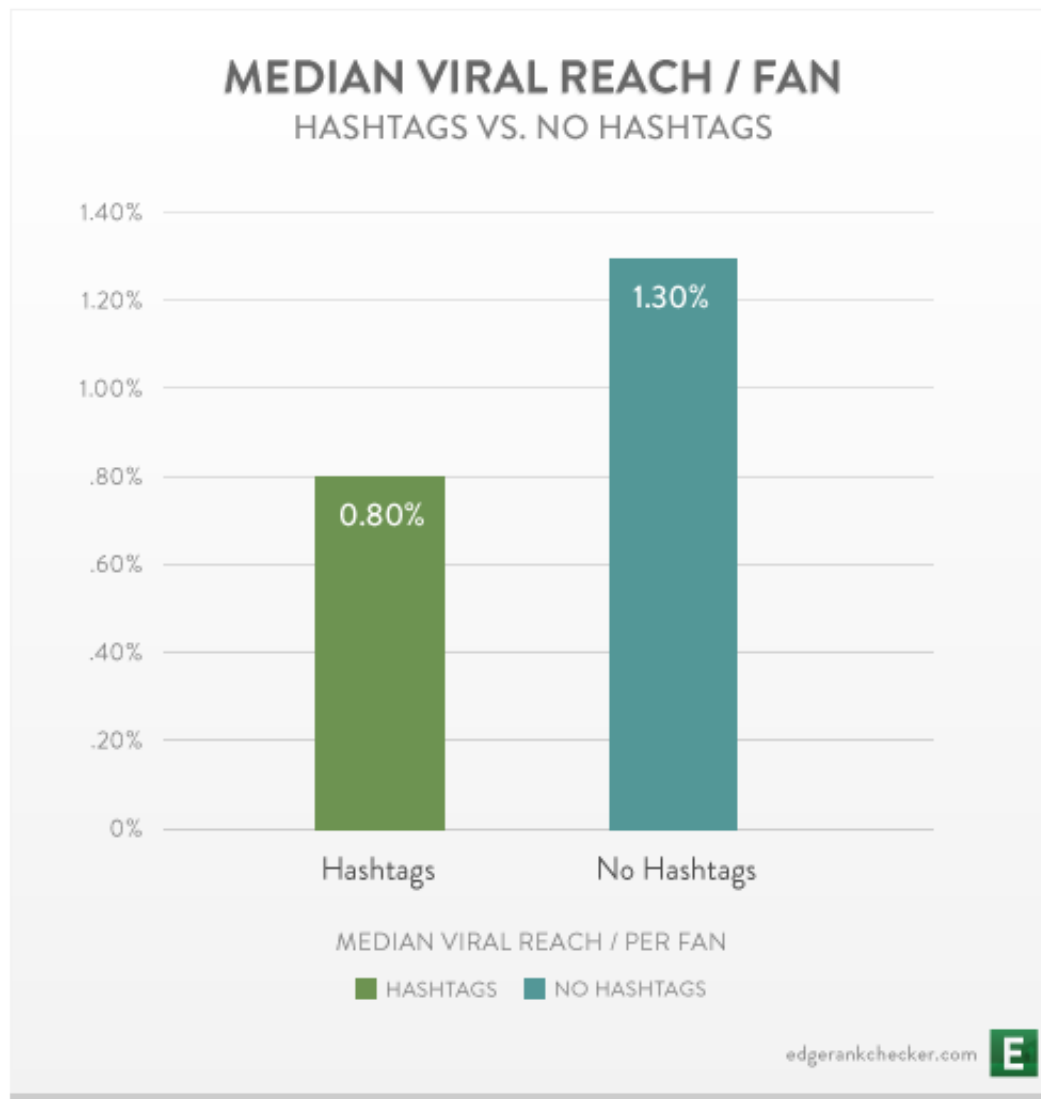


Study examines viral reach of hashtags on Facebook

September 5 2013, by Nancy Owano



Credit: <http://edgerankchecker.com/>

(Phys.org) —Facebook analysts EdgeRank Checker have performed analysis of over 35,000 posts to discover the level of viral impact of Facebook's hashtags. The discovery is, well, zero. "We decided to dig into the data to see the impact of hashtags on the news feed," blogged EdgeRank Checker earlier this week. Data released showed results from analysis of 500 Pages that posted with and without hashtags during the month of July. The Pages posted over 35,000 times. Of those 35,000-plus posts, over 6,000 had hashtags. The results: No extra exposure, no viral reach from posts with hashtags. But here is the kicker: The study found that posts without hashtags performed better than posts with hashtags.

Back in June, Facebook announced it was taking a page out of Twitter's success story and instituting hashtags into news feeds and posts. Social platform watchers were cautious about whether this was a great idea for users or for marketers. Twitter is one thing but how, they asked, could it translate over to Facebook users?

As it turns out, EdgeRank Checker findings indicate that hashtags are not having the same effect as they do on Twitter. Attempts were made to adjust for errors; after pouring over the data, they said, they wanted to account for all angles and they raised questions to help validate the findings. The questions included "Do Twitter hashtags actually increase engagement?" and "What about brands that used hashtags evenly throughout the month?"

EdgeRank Checker does not typically study Twitter data, but for this study they ran comparisons. They analyzed 50 Twitter accounts from the Fortune 500. In contrast to findings from Facebook, they found that Twitter hashtags did work. "Over 70% of the brands experienced an increase in RT's [Re-tweets, as in viral reach] when using a hashtag versus not using one," they found.

Few Facebook users, meanwhile, are clicking on hashtags, concluded EdgeRank Checker, and addressed what may be the cause. "Our [hypothesis](#) is that not many people are clicking on hashtags. If many people were clicking hashtags, we should see an increase in Viral Reach for posts with hashtags. The data is not showing that. If anything, it's showing a decrease in Viral Reach. This brought them to the question of why would hashtagged posts have a decrease in Viral Reach.

"Hashtags are often used in promotional material. For some brands, they've created campaigns around particular hashtags and use them in all posts associated with the campaign. By nature, campaigns are promotional, therefore more likely to drive less engagement, less clicks, and ultimately less Reach."

EdgeRank Checker provides tools for brands looking to boost their exposure on Facebook. EdgeRank is an algorithm ranking objects in the Facebook News Feed. Its creators developed their algorithm to help page admins understand how their Page interacts with the News Feed.

Facebook, however, expressed their view of the findings with this response: "Pages should not expect to get increased distribution simply by sticking irrelevant hashtags in their posts. The best thing for Pages (that want increased distribution) to do is focus on posting relevant, high quality-content – hashtags or not. Quality, not hashtags, is what our News Feed algorithms look for so that Pages can increase their reach."

More information: [edgerankchecker.com/blog/2013/ ... additional-exposure/](http://edgerankchecker.com/blog/2013/...additional-exposure/)

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