

Companies that are interactive, informative can be more influential

March 15 2016

Customers may respond better to social media campaigns and messages from companies that more frequently interact with consumers than companies seen as credible, but less interactive, according to researchers.

In a study, participants who reviewed screenshots of fictitious interactions between companies and consumers on Facebook were significantly more likely to consider content from interactive companies as more informative, said Holly Ott, a doctoral candidate in mass communications, Penn State, and currently assistant professor of communications, Shippensburg University.

She added that a link between how people perceive interactivity and informativeness may boost the influence of the content.

"We found that one of the key drivers of this effect was a mediator that we called perceived informativeness," said Ott. "Yes, more interactivity is generally seen to be advantageous for companies, but when customers find the material more informative it makes a company's communications more effective and more influential."

The perception that content is more informative may then lead customers to like the company's brand more, as well as increase their intentions to buy the company's products, according to Ott, who worked with Michael Vafeiadis, Sushma Kumble and T. Franklin Waddell, all doctoral candidates in [mass communications](#), Penn State.

"The quality of the interactivity—its perceived informativeness—makes people develop stronger attitudes toward the brand of the company and, perhaps most importantly, enhances their purchase intention," said Ott.

According to the researchers, interactivity is also more important to consumers than the perception that a company is reputable and credible—its authority.

In the study, the researchers manipulated the company representative listed on the release to test authority. In one condition, the person listed was the company's [chief executive officer](#) and in the other condition the representative was a trainee.

"We wondered if something as simple as a title would persuade the participants to think differently, in terms of how credible they thought the representative was, or how it would impact their overall perception of the product," said Ott. "Surprisingly, the participants didn't seem to be affected by the heuristics of authority."

She added that authority does play a role in persuasion, but in this study interactivity emerged as the key motivation for customer perception of the message.

The researchers, who report their findings in the *Journal of Promotion Management*, suggest that companies—even firms that already are considered authorities in their markets—should not just spread their news to customers and potential customers, but try to engage them in communication.

"One implication of the study is that companies shouldn't just disseminate information through a one-way medium. If you want to increase a person's purchase intention, or make them feel more favorable to your company and product, interact with them," Ott said. "You want

to make sure your releases are relevant and you want to make sure that your interactivity is accompanied by substantive, rich content."

The researchers recruited 131 participants for the online experiment. They were assigned to one of six different conditions. The participants reviewed a press release about a product launch that was distributed on [social media](#). In the high authority condition, the company's chief executive officer posted the press release. In the low authority condition, a junior product trainee submitted the post. There were also three interactivity conditions that represented high, medium and low numbers of communications between the company representative and customers.

After the participants reviewed the posts, they were directed to a questionnaire that measured authority, product likeability, perceived informativeness, brand likeability, company responsiveness, purchase intentions and perceived contingency.

According to Ott, future research could involve setting up experiments to study real-time social media exchanges between participants—acting as consumers—and [company](#) representatives.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Companies that are interactive, informative can be more influential (2016, March 15) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-03-companies-interactive-influential.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.