

# Study examines how to get people to share a corporate post

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Communication on social media must strike a delicate balance between attracting attention and consistency with brand positioning, according to a study by Sara Valentini, Bocconi University, Milan. Credit: Weiwei Chen, Bocconi University, Milan

A brand's communication through social media posts is all the more

effective the more it is in line with the image and values the public associates with the brand. This is the subject of a recent article in the *Journal of Interactive Marketing* by Sara Valentini of the Bocconi University, Milan, co-written with Elisa Montaguti of the University of Bologna and Federica Vecchioni, data scientist at Reply.

The study investigates what can drive followers to share promotional content posted by brands on social media and sheds light on what can influence the effectiveness of communication and the likelihood that a post will go "viral".

A brand's presence on social networks is primarily intended to create "engagement," that is, interaction via posts. In particular, one aspect of engagement that brands find attractive is the spontaneous sharing of content by users themselves, in marketing parlance "rebroadcasting."

When a follower shares commercial content with his or her network of acquaintances and friends, its impact, quite predictably, is much stronger because it is conveyed by the user and not directly by the brand, which can in turn take advantage of what is known in jargon as "earned media."

Those who communicate through social channels are therefore constantly under pressure to try to achieve this result, and may resort to eye-catching content that has little or nothing to do with brand values. Companies, for example, often try to tie their content to popular online themes, such as puppies, aphorisms, facts or trendy celebrities.

However, these themes often do not match the brand's story and positioning. Thus, if using these easy elements failed to generate engagement, the end result would be doubly negative, having contributed to diluting the brand's online positioning.

The authors conducted three different empirical studies aimed at testing

to what extent the congruence of posts with brand values and the presence of promotions within the posts are important for rebroadcasting.

In the first study, they monitored and analyzed one year of [social media posts](#) by four major brands. The second study is a [field test](#) conducted in cooperation with Samsung Italy. In this case, the company allowed the authors to tweak the content of experimental posts on their own pages, precisely for the purpose of collecting relevant data for this research.

Both studies showed that consistency between online content and the values that followers associate with the brand has a positive effect on rebroadcasting frequency. Consequently, companies should be careful about using [social media](#) strategies that include elements unrelated to their image, as this may pose a risk of losing the attention of their fans.

Most interestingly, consistency with brand identity can generate a high number of shares even for posts containing price promotions. Indeed, it is not always easy for companies to persuade their fan base to share online content containing commercial cues such as discounts.

However, they are about 109% more likely to get their followers to share a high-consistency post with a promotion than a generic post. In contrast, promotions associated with content out of tune with the brand turn out to be those with the lowest probability of spontaneous spread.

The reasons for this phenomenon need to be explained. A third experiment, conducted using a panel of respondents provided by a market research firm, showed that the strongest driver for sharing a post with consistent promotional content is altruism. If people assume that a certain piece of content will be useful to their acquaintances, they will pass it around. Conversely, if a user feels manipulated, he or she will tend to do the opposite of what is desired, with an attitude known in

cognitive psychology as "reactance".

"Our results suggest that posts consistent with brand values are less likely to trigger reactance. Therefore, companies that post online content on their pages must maintain a delicate balance to attract the interest of their audience while avoiding elements that are not in line with the brand image," Sara Valentini explains.

"At the same time, posts must spur the fan base to share communication with others. Including promotional incentives, for example, can elicit altruistic motivations in the fan base. However, it can also activate reactance; for this reason, it is important to match the incentive with cues that are consistent with the brand or in line with [brand](#) values."

**More information:** Elisa Montaguti et al, Content That Engages Your Customers: The Role of Brand Congruity and Promotions in Social Media, *Journal of Interactive Marketing* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/10949968221129817](#)

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