

Competitive rivalry in Facebook messaging not such a bad thing

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Facebook users engaged positively with posts that were openly competitive in their messaging. Credit: University of York

Research at the University of York has shown that brands that "take on" their competitors in Facebook posts are more likely to get higher engagement rates.

Researchers, investigating the methods used by 50 high-profile brands to engage with Facebook audiences, showed that social media users engaged positively with posts that were openly competitive in their messaging, such as brands comparing themselves with other brands.

Despite this [success rate](#), only 1 percent of the 10,000 posts—200 from each of the 50 brands—investigated in the research used this tactic.

Openly competitive

Dr. Snehasish Banerjee, from the University of York's Management School, said: "It is interesting to see that some of the most successful methods of engaging with Facebook audiences, are those

that are least used by brands trying to reach social media users.

"Being openly competitive is perhaps regarded as a risky move by marketing professionals, but they can generate some of the most fun content for [social media users](#).

"Facebook is primarily a channel where people look for entertaining content, so it is not surprising that companies that retain their brand values in their posts, but can perhaps poke fun at [rival companies](#) are endearing to users."

Targeted posts

They also found that targeted marketing posts had high engagement rates; this meant posts that are pointed at a particular geographical area, for example, did better than if the post had been distributed to all Facebook users anywhere in the world. Yet only 38.6 percent of the posts in the study used this method of reaching their audiences.

The most successful and frequently used marketing posts were those that emphasised a topic or story with the brand taking centre stage. The 72 percent of posts that followed this method had high engagement, but only if the topic or story was relevant to the brand offering.

For example, if the England Cricket Team's sponsor posts a "good luck to the England Cricket Team" message, the post is likely to attract engagement. However, the same post coming from a brand that is not associated with England Cricket is unlikely to receive equal attention.

Less is more

This could also be true of seasonal messages, such as brands wishing followers a "Merry Christmas." If the seasonal message had little or no

link to the brand offering—for example a gas [company](#) compared to a [retail outlet](#) selling clothes and toys—then users would be far less likely to like, comment, or share the post.

Provided by University of York

In general, however, the research revealed that seasonal posts by companies were not well received by Facebook users. Researchers suggest that this might be due to "seasonal messaging overload," which results in users largely ignoring these posts.

The research also found that a less-is-more approach to posting resulted in more positive responses from users. Those companies that post a high volume of content frequently through the day, had less engagement than those companies that only posted once or twice a day.

Brand relevance

Dr. Banerjee said: "It is a common mistake to think that if you open a social media account that you must keep it constantly filled with content. We found that even some of the most high-profile brands make this error.

"Posting lots of content can dilute your message and result in users switching off from the brand. Those companies that posted every day, but only once or twice were more likely to get user attention than if they posted ten times a day.

"Those companies that are in the strongest position, however, are those that use a combination of all of these methods, plus images and video; the less text the better in most cases.

"If you can create messages that have photos or video; are openly competitive, but without [malicious intent](#); relevant to your [brand](#), but that speaks to what is topical in the external world; and are only posted once or twice a day, then the higher your engagement with Facebook users will be."

More information: Snehasish Banerjee et al. Identifying the antecedents of posts' popularity on Facebook Fan Pages, *Journal of Brand Management* (2019). [DOI: 10.1057/s41262-019-00157-7](#)

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