A Study on Facebook Advertisement Strategies:
Facebook Wall Posts Promote Higher Response than Private Messages

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Introduction: Prominence of Facebook in Today’s Generation

Facebook’s information page currently states, “People spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook” (Facebook info). With a growing impact of Facebook in today’s social world, it has become a prominent tool for advertisement and exposing promotional messages such as party invitations, event listings, concerts, questionnaires, and so on. Facebook equips college students with the tools to send a survey to a large number of their Facebook friends efficiently and cost free. It provides entrepreneurs with a rich environment to spread a business idea or attract customers to their online website or offline office. It allows promoters to publicize an event or product to hundreds of people with the ease of one click.

Facebook’s other unique features include people’s ability to post or message various types of media to their friends including videos, links, photos, and so on. When sending a message or creating an event, Facebook is designed to allow the sender to pick and choose what people they’d like to send the message to. For example, when creating an event, the Facebook user can filter all of their Facebook friends by where they live or what school they attend. This is extremely useful for a college student sending a survey solely to Cal Poly students or residents of Los Osos. Overall, Facebook enables users to customize messages, select a target audience, use all forms of media, and gives the option of making these messages private or public.

Due to the “billions of minutes a month” Facebook users spend on the site, combined with more than 800 million people actively participating on the site, it is a great place to introduce, expose, or suggest a product/service/idea from a specific audience. In this new and thriving social networking atmosphere, there are multiple avenues a student, entrepreneur, or promoter can suggest their product/service/idea to an audience. These avenues include Facebook Ads, Creating an Event and Inviting Facebook friends, Wall Posting, and sending Private Messages. Out of all of these options,
private messages and wall posts are the most commonly used, cost-free, and versatile avenues of Facebook advertising. Private messages are the only unpublicized messages on Facebook not including Facebook chat. They are mainly used as a personal resource for romantic flings, personal content, and so on. Wall posts, on the other hand, are public.

To wall post, one has to go to their target profiles and post each message individually. The wall post is then published on that person’s profile so it becomes public to all their friends. At the same time, this post replicates onto that person’s and your news feed. “The News Feed — the center column of your home page — is a constantly updating list of stories from people and Pages that you follow on Facebook” (Facebook info). Additionally, wall posts allow messages to spread beyond the friends of a particular message receiver. For example, a friend of the recipient can “like” or comment on the wall post you created. This action would then replicate the message onto that new person’s news feed. Therefore, once a wall post is exposed, that particular message has the capacity to chain link to hundreds of news feeds. This can lead to exposure of one single wall post to thousands.

In this study, I will focus on whether wall posts or private messages create a higher response from an audience. I will first explain the background of this type of communication that occurs on the Internet and how certain strategies have created higher response in the past. Then, I will explain the method I plan to use in order to discover whether wall posts or private messages are more efficient in gaining response. Lastly, I will reveal my results and discuss both what I could’ve done better to create more precise results and what I learned from this experiment.

**Literature Review: Personal vs. Public Emails and Web Portals**

Email is the ancestor of all SNS (Social Network Sites) including MySpace, Twitter, Facebook, and many more. While these SNS have grown in number and popularity, they have not been around for very long. With Facebook being invented in 2004, and MySpace invented in 2003,
researchers have had little time to explore the untapped promotional resources within Facebook and other SMS (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). However, a magazine from 1997 titled Referral Web discusses the beneficial effects of social networking websites. “Part of the success of social networks can be attributed to the ‘six degrees of separation’ phenomena that mean the distance between any two individuals in terms of direct personal relationships is relatively small” (Kautz et al., 1997). This reduction in distance between two individuals promoting higher levels of personal closeness within SNS reveals how potent of an environment this is for advertising and any promotional messages.

With the knowledge of SNS being a rich environment for personal closeness, email is its oldest sister and is most closely related with the goals and aspects of SNS. Invented in 1971 by Ray Tomlinson, network email has been around for more than forty years. Many studies have tested strategies to increase customer/recipient response including the benefits of personalized content, customization, and manipulations of the audience listing within the “To” box of an email.

Researchers have discovered that individualized content within email messages create a higher response. “When messages are closely linked to an aspect of the self ‘‘me-ness’’ matching, they can exert persuasive effects” (Bizer et al., 2002). In 2002, a company called the Del Webb Corporation performed a study on how email strategies can influence different levels of response rate by online audiences. The researchers performed an experiment based on the email’s subject line, which usually includes the topic of the email. The results indicated that when a recipient’s first name was added to the subject line, the response rate doubled (Marinova et al., 2002). This study exemplifies how personal additions to a message promote higher response rates from the recipients. Another company performed a similar study in November 2004.

The Jupiter Media Corporation created an executive survey that served as the body of the email message for their study. The researchers or heads of the corporation had half of the marketers
personalize their email messages, including adding the recipient’s name and more personalized content. Another half of the marketers sent the email including only the survey and no personalized content. Their results indicated that the personalized email messages received higher “conversion rate” than the messages not personalized (Seda, 2005). Conversion rate is the ratio of the number of people who clicked on the message and those who end up following through and performing the desired action and goal of the sender. In the case of this study, there was a higher level of completed surveys with personalized messages than those without personalized content.

A group of business professors from Carnegie Mellon University looked at ten million email advertisements sent to 600,000 consumers over 9 months. They specifically investigated different levels of personalization and consumer response. Their results indicated “economic benefits of personalization” (Boatwright et al., 2005). They found that emails that mentioned the consumer’s product preference drew more favorable response than those without personalization. However, an interesting aspect in this study was that many participant consumers had a concern with privacy. Alternatively, the study found that some people didn’t like having their names in the subject line and felt the sender had too much information as a stranger. However, for the most part, results indicated personalization acquired more response than messages without any personalization.

Two distinguished college professors studied the effects of customization in a web portal. Web portals are homepages or link pages that function as an access point to the World Wide Web. Web portals include sites like Yahoo or America Online. The professors’ goal was to find whether customization in web portals creates higher psychological appeal. They concluded, “the concept of customization strikes deeper because it is aimed at an individual user” (Kalyanaraman & Sundar, 2003).
While a wall post is aimed at a particular user, if it is a mass-population aimed wall post for a survey or a promotional message, the SNS user can observe that they are not the only person being sent this message. However, a private message makes it seem like this message is customized and directed toward an individual SNS user. Other than personalization within a subject line, the message body content, and customization, another study has been done based on the “to” email audience listing.

For example, pretend a student wants to send a survey to all of their friends through email. Or, pretend an advertisement company sends a mass email to all of their interested customers. Does this large list of people reduce one’s personal feeling of closeness with the sender and cause an increased spatial relationship? Lisa Chittenden composed a study to understand how the style of an email and its audience list can influence responsiveness. This study was measured by click-through rates. “Click-through rate is the number of clicks that occur on each link in an email message” (Westlund, 2009). Chittenden’s study discovered that the specificity of the target audience affects response rate (Chittenden & Rettie, 2003). Therefore, a small amount of email addresses or an individual address listed in the “To” line will increase the amount of responses received versus having a “To” line filled with a large amount of email addresses.

Blair, Thompson, and Wuensch investigated whether the physical presence of others in an email medium can reduce the tendency to help individuals needing assistance. Their experiment included sending an email message to participants requesting assistance with an online library search task. They sent this message with a recipient list of one, four, fourteen, or forty-nine participants. Their study found that the virtual public presence significantly reduces email responsiveness (Blair et al., 2005).
Their study especially relates to the difference between wall posts and private messages. While private messages function more like an email to one individual, wall posts act more like a public and highly exposed message. The question is, which one is more effective in creating audience response? I hypothesize Facebook’s private messaging will be more efficient and attract higher participant response or conversion rate than wall posts due to the personalized aspect of a private message.

Method

I conducted research on a total of 400 Facebook users. I selected a total of 4 females and 4 males of my Facebook friends who did not have any mutual friends to participate in the study. Additionally, I made sure these 8 people shared characteristics such as age and personality to protect the results from being influenced by extraneous factors. I then divided these people into two groups called Sender Group 1 and Sender Group 2 with each group containing two males and two females. Sender Group 1 sent their messages through the private message medium while Sender Group 2 sent them through the wall post medium. After I chose the members of Sender Groups 1 and 2, I created an introductory message and survey that both Sender Groups sent to all 400 Facebook users.

I introduced the survey with the following statement: “Please take my friend Bria’s survey about Facebook. 7 easy questions, takes less than a minute! She’d truly appreciate your time and participation. It’s for her senior project at school!” The only difference between messages sent out from all 8 people was the word ‘friend’. Depending on my relationship with each member, they would state ‘brother’, ‘cousin’, etc. I wanted this message to be perceived as informal, quick, and easy by recipients so it didn’t inhibit people from responding. Next, I asked members of both groups to paste my survey link from surveymonkey.com titled “Facebook Study” underneath the introductory message.

The survey I created on surveymonkey.com includes demographic questions such as age,
gender, education, occupation, and location. However, the first and most important question is the following: “Did you receive this survey via Facebook personal message or wall post?” I used surveymonkey.com’s option to make this particular question mandatory in order for the surveyor to complete the survey. After adding the demographic questions and the study’s most critical question, I added some questions about the surveyor’s habits and experience with Facebook in order to dissipate what the study is mainly about. I asked how many times each user logs onto Facebook per day and how long he or she has been a member of Facebook. The complete survey including all questions and multiple-choice options is displayed below.

1. Did you receive this survey via Facebook personal message or wall post?

2. In a typical day, how many times do you log onto Facebook?

   0-3
   4-7
   8-16
   17-35
   36+

3. Approximately, how many months/years have you been a member of Facebook?

   0-4 months
   5-11 months
   1-2 years
   3-6 years
   7+ years

4. Which category below includes your age?

   17 or younger
18-20
21-29
30-39
40-49
50-59
60 or older

5. In what city and/or state do you live?

6. What is your occupation?

7. Are you male or female?
   Male
   Female

An example of how the survey looked to respondents in the actual study is located at Appendix A. The questions without the multiple-choice options are open-ended. These questions allowed respondents to answer in whatever way they desired. After designing the survey, I sent the link and introductory message to members of both Sender groups.

After Sender Group 1 sent a total of 200 private messages to their Facebook friends with the introductory statement and survey link, I waited one week for the recipients to acquire and chose to complete the survey. The following week, Sender Group 2 sent a total of 200 public wall posts to their friends with the same introductory statement and survey link as Sender Group 1. I waited another week for the recipients of the wall post to obtain then chose to complete the survey. I had Sender Group 1 and 2 send their messages and posts during separate weeks to prevent people receiving the message privately from being exposed to any public posts of the same message on their news feed.
Although none of the members of Group 1 and 2 have friends in common besides myself, it is very easy for public posts to spread onto numerous users’ Facebook news feeds.

**Results**

After waiting a total of two weeks, the results indicated a total of 116 out of 400 survey links sent from Sender Groups 1 and 2 completed the survey. However, 23 of the 116 completed surveys answered the most vital question with an ambiguous answer such as yes, ya, no, nope, and Facebook. Therefore, I had to eliminate these 23 completed surveys and use the surveys that provided a clear answer. From the 93 correctly completed surveys, 66 respondents received their survey by wall post and 27 received their survey by private message.

After doing a statistical analysis using a Pearson Chi-square and cross-tabulation chart, I found the number of completed surveys between Facebook users who received the survey by wall post and private message as statistically significantly different (p< .05). The following two tables support this conclusion:

**Table 1: Cross Tabulation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>No Response</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surveys Sent by Wall Post (Sender Group 1)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys Sent by Private Message (Sender Group 2)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Surveys</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Pearson Chi-Square Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21.309</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 46.50.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Therefore, the ratio of Facebook users who received the survey by wall post and the total amount of surveys sent was significantly higher than the ratio of those who received the survey by private messaging. These results do not support my original hypothesis that private messages promote higher responsiveness than wall posts. I will discuss why I believe the results differed from my original hypothesis in the discussion section of the paper. I will also mention what future studies can follow up this case and how continuing similar studies can benefit the future marketing world through social networking sites. Prior to discussing this finding, I will analyze the results of the six other questions on the survey.

**Demographic Findings**

Approximately 63%, or 59 out of the total 93 respondents, are female while 37%, or 34 out of the total 93 respondents, are male. I found this difference in percentage to be interesting since both my sender groups included an equal amount of females and males. However, after researching current demographic statistics about Facebook users, I found 55% of all United States Facebook users are female, while 45% are male (checkfacebook.com). Another factor could be that members of Sender Group 1 and 2 sent the survey links to more females than males because females tend to be more empathetic than men. Overall, my results still indicate a significant difference between male and female cooperation within this study.
Approximately 82%, 76 out of the 93 respondents are between the ages of 21-29 years old. This makes sense since my Facebook friends from Sender Group 1 and 2 are all within this age range. About 73%, 68 out of 93 responses to this question were from California (mostly Northern California) and 5 responses came from outside the U.S. (Scotland, Philippines, and Canada). This high percentage of California residents is probably due to all members of Sender Group 1 and 2 currently living somewhere in California. Lastly, in an open-ended question, I asked the respondents for their occupation. About 43% of respondents stated they were part-time or full-time students. Also, I noticed a high number of social media/marketing associated occupations.

*Facebook-Related Findings*

One of my Facebook questions asked the Facebook user around how many times they logged into Facebook per day. After collecting the results, I found 48% or 45 out of the 93 respondents log onto Facebook 4-7 times a day. Next, I asked how long the respondents have been members of Facebook. I found 56% or 52 out of 93 respondents have been members of Facebook for 3-6 years. While Facebook launched 8 years ago, it opened publically in 2006 to everyone 13 and older with an email address (Abram). Also, Facebook did not open itself internationally until 2008 (Facebook Ireland). Therefore, majority of survey respondents have been Facebook members since it first opened itself publically.

*Future Studies*

Although these percentages don’t have a large significance in this study, they can be predecessors to future studies. For example, people who have been Facebook users since it first opened to the public tend to respond and interact more than those who are new users. Also, perhaps certain demographics log onto their Facebook more times a day than other demographic groups. Another interesting study would be sending out a message or wall post with a survey link and keep the
survey open for a month or so. Then using surveymonkey.com or any other survey site that keeps track of when people complete the survey, I’d track when the majority of receivers completed the survey. Then, I would compare the turn around time between wall posts and private messages.

Additionally, I’d recommend is observing whether men or women tend to respond more often to optional tasks asked of them on social networking sites like Facebook. Also, I’d be interested to see whether there is a different habit of responding to optional requests on Facebook depending on different age groups. All of these studies could help social marketers or any business people trying to acquire customer participation develop an idea of what particular population/target audience could manifest a large amount of participation. Lastly, I’d recommend a study similar to mine that asks Sender Group 1 to send their private messages individually so each recipient thinks they are the only one receiving the message rather than receiving an impersonal, group message.

Discussion

Before performing this study, I focused my research on email studies pertaining to impersonal and personalized messages since the world of SNS is so young and there was no other research to draw from pertaining to my study. Del Webb Corporation’s study on “me-ness”, Jupiter Media Corporation’s study on personalized content, Carnegie Mellon’s study on personalization, and two college professors’ study on customization all pertain to emailing and indicate that when the recipient of an email finds personal subject matter (i.e. their name), they are more likely to open and respond to the email. However, although this makes sense for an email, I did not keep in mind what Referral Web’s magazine discovered with the ‘six degrees of separation’.

Referral Web discovered that social media websites produce a higher amount of social closeness than other online communication such as emailing. Therefore, although the Facebook wall is
public and recipients can see they were one out of many to receive my survey link, the Facebook wall is also a very social, personal close atmosphere.

While logged onto my Facebook during the time Sender Group 2 sent the public wall posts, I could see my friends’ posts flood my newsfeed. I noticed two main reactions from people receiving the survey link via wall post that did not occur with private messages. Firstly, anything posted onto a wall goes directly to that person’s entire Facebook friend population’s newsfeeds. For example, my friend Frances posted my survey link and introductory message on her friend Jen’s Facebook page. That one post out of 50 will then be exposed on all of Frances and Jen’s Facebook friends’ newsfeeds. Actually, this particular circumstance led someone to complete the survey that never directly received the survey link post, but saw the post on his news feed. I know this because when reviewing all responses to my survey, one answer to the question of how they received the survey was, “found it on another friend’s Facebook page.” This particular case was very interesting to me and could be a reason why wall posts promoted more response than private messages in my particular study.

Secondly, I also noticed when anyone posts something on a friend’s wall, people tend to respond quickly and develop conversations via commenting the post (example at Appendix B). Through observation, I now view the Facebook wall as a big venue where all your friends come to meet and socialize throughout the day. When someone yells an announcement on the microphone, most people will become aware of it. This idea correlates to any post or announcement displayed on each Facebook user’s newsfeed.

Also, another reason why wall posts acquired more completed surveys and overall response than private messages might pertain to the earlier email studies. On these large group private messages, you can see the list of people the message is being sent to. However, you aren’t allowed to do a group wall post. Wall posts have to be posted to each individual’s wall, which is more time-
consuming, but possibly more personalized. This observation could be a reason why people tend to respond more by wall post than private message. Like Chittenden’s study that revealed that less names in the “to” line of an email increases responsiveness, the Facebook wall post is sent to only one individual while the message is sent to a group of people and lists all their names. Also, any comment or response to a group private message will be shown to everyone else in that group. Therefore, all the email studies I mentioned earlier in the paper agree with the results of this study. On Facebook, a wall post is the most personalized message while the group private message is impersonal.

Since this is a new research field, yet a growing and prominent field in today’s generation, I think there should be plenty of studies testing different marketing strategies within Facebook in order to acquire the highest response from its users. I think being able to understand the average Facebook user’s habits and reactions to different mediums can help business people and marketers grasp the attention of their target audience in the most efficient way possible. Since my study mainly includes Facebook users within the age range of 21-29, residents of California, and a student majority, I believe there is plenty of room for future researchers to incorporate the same study toward a more generalized, universal audience. However, it would be interesting to see the differences between the young generation who’ve grown up with social media and the older generation that grew up with emailing. By doing a study to find the difference between these two age groups, we could find if there is a big difference in motivations to respond to a message.

**Limitations**

There were multiple limitations within this study. First of all, if I decided to redo this study, I would definitely change my most vital question (did you receive this via Facebook wall post or private message) from an open-ended formatted question to a multiple-choice question. This would prevent
respondents from answering this question ambiguously with words such as yes, no, Facebook, etc. and I’d be able to acquire more exact results.

Secondly, although the occupation of respondents isn’t very important, it would be easier to analyze the results if I created a list of different occupations or subfields of occupations in a multiple choice format instead of an open-ended question. This would prevent people from listing off multiple occupations by only being allowed to choose one. Lastly, instead of asking what city or state they live in through an open-ended formatted question, I would ask them to provide the city and state. I’d do this because I received some answers including only their state of residence and some answers with both state and city. By requiring them to respond with both the city and state they live in, I would have an easier time analyzing this data.

Besides changing most open-ended questions to multiple-choice and being more specific in how I ask a question, I also believe another limitation would be that the participant population for the study does not contain much diversity. Therefore these results only represent a majority population of ages 21-29 and most residing in the state of California. I’d recommend future studies to use a larger and more diverse population in order to find a more worldwide representation of Facebook users and their natural habits on the site. Also, in future studies I would recommend asking each member of Sender Groups 1 and 2 to send 25 links to females and 25 links to males in order to make sure the survey is going out to an equal amount of females and males. Lastly, I believe another large limitation to my study is that I didn’t specify to Sender Group 1 that their private messages should be sent individually instead of a group message.

**Conclusion**

Overall, I was shocked to find out that wall posts delivered far more responses than private messages. This study suggests that people’s habits and reactions differ between emailing and
participating in the social networking site world. Therefore, since the only scholarly articles I could find similar to this study were focused on personalized emails, I believe there should be a great deal of studies surrounded by the new generation phenomena of the social networking site world. By researching which demographics, mediums, times of day, and so on affect a person’s drive to respond or participate in a marketing activity or suggested task, we can help marketers, businessmen, students, and so on acquire the most efficient way of acquiring responses. This small study mainly focused on a twenties age range located in California is the beginning of many other interesting findings to come. It indicates a strong probability that wall posts acquire higher recipient participation than private messaging.


Marinova, A., Massey, B., Murphy, J. (2002). Permission Email Marketing as a Means of Targeted Promotion. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 43(1). Retrieved from biz.uwa.edu.au


Appendix A: Sample of Facebook Survey

**Facebook Study**

1. Did you receive this survey via Facebook personal message or wall post?

2. In a typical day, how many times do you log onto Facebook?
   - ○ 0-3
   - ○ 4-7
   - ○ 8-16
   - ○ 17-35
   - ○ 36+

3. Approximately, how many months/years have you been a member of Facebook?
   - ○ 0-4 months
   - ○ 5-11 months
   - ○ 1-2 years
   - ○ 3-6 years
   - ○ 7+ years

4. Which category below includes your age?
   - ○ 17 or younger
   - ○ 18-20
   - ○ 21-29
   - ○ 30-39
   - ○ 40-49
   - ○ 50-69
   - ○ 60 or older

5. In what city and/or state do you live?

6. What is your occupation?

7. Are you male or female?
   - ○ Male
   - ○ Female
Appendix B: Sample Wall Post

Frances Arabelle shared a link.
February 22

Please take my cousin's (Bria Park) survey about Facebook, 7 easy questions, takes less than one minute!
She'd truly appreciate your time/participation----it's for her senior project at school.
Facebook Study Survey
http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/8F55VY6

Facebook Study Survey
www.surveymonkey.com

Like · Comment · Share

Sharina Prasad-Moreno likes this.

View all 5 comments

Darryl Lopez is this a college or highschool project?
February 22 at 12:13pm · Like

Frances Arabelle Thank you soo much! It's for her college project lol. Cal Poly thing lol.
February 22 at 12:13pm · Like

Write a comment...