



How Consumers Form Attitude towards A Brand's Facebook Page from Friends' "Likes"?

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The rapid growth of Facebook users allures brand managers to create their brands' Facebook pages. This research applied social psychology theories to investigate the process by which consumers form an attitude towards a brand's Facebook page from their friends' "likes". People behave to comply with the "frame of reference" that is produced by the group to which they belong (Bearden & Etzel, 1982, p. 183). Given that a user's Facebook friends may form a reference group, if Facebook users find that many of their friends liked a brand's Facebook page, the perceived level of friends' likes may form a 'frame of reference' leading them to think that this brand's Facebook page may fit them well. Therefore, the higher the perceived level of Facebook friends' likes on the brand's Facebook page, it is expected that the higher the perceived self-fit with the brand's Facebook page (H1). According to similarity-attraction theory (Byrne et. al., 1967), people are attracted to others who are similar to them in personality and/or behavior. Brands are regarded as having human-like personalities (Aaker, 1997), and so may be the brands' Facebook pages. Thus, Facebook users may be attracted to brands' Facebook pages that they perceive to be similar to their self-image (i.e., possess a high self-fit). Sirgy's (1982) self-concept theory supports the same by postulating consumers' preference for brands and products with high self-fit. Therefore, we predict that the higher the perceived self-fit with a brand's Facebook page, the more favorable the attitude towards the brand's Facebook page (H2) and the higher the engagement with the brand's Facebook page (H3). Bem's (1972) self-perception theory argues that how a person feels is determined by how he or she acts. Therefore, the extent of behavioral engagement of users with a brand's Facebook page may be a decisive factor of forming their attitude towards it. Therefore, the higher the engagement with the brand's Facebook page, the more positive the attitude towards the brand's Facebook page (H4). Taking H2 and H4 in consideration, it is reasonable to further hypothesize that engagement with brand's Facebook page mediates the relationship between perceived self-fit with and attitude towards the brand's Facebook page (H5).

The aforementioned five hypotheses were tested using data from an online survey with a convenience sample of 197 students from a Southeastern university. All items were adapted from existing scales, except a single item scale for perceived amount of friends' like, and rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The measurement models were finalized, and the measurement validity was established through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) as well as average variance explained (AVE) and factor correlation analyses based on results from CFA. Cronbach α for all factor items were higher than .80, indicating high reliability. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted with an initial model to test H1, H3, and H4 (CFI = .94, NFI = .89, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .078), which provided support for the hypotheses (see Figure 1).

The second SEM model (CFI = .96, NFI = .93, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .088) consisted of only two latent variables, perceived self-fit and attitude, which revealed a significant relationship between the two variables ($\beta = .40, p < .001$), supporting H2.

In the final SEM model, a direct path from perceived self-fit to attitude was added to the initial SEM model in Figure 1, to test the mediation effect (H5). The regression coefficient for this added path was non-significant ($\beta = .07, p = .46$), while all the other regression coefficients remained significant. Therefore, H5 was supported.

This study was conducted based on the classic literature of social influences to delve deeper into how a consumer is influenced by private acceptance (e.g., friends' "likes"), an influence that is more integrated with his or her own values, in the context of social-media based branding. The findings of perceived amount of friend's likes as a significant predictor of consumers' engagement with and positive attitude toward a brand's Facebook page indicate the importance of viral marketing based on social ties established in virtual social networking sites. Future research that investigates how consumers' engagement in and favorable attitude toward a brand's social networking site formed through social-media based interpersonal influences lead to the consumers' attitude or loyalty toward the brand itself can shed further insight on the practical implication of the findings of this study.

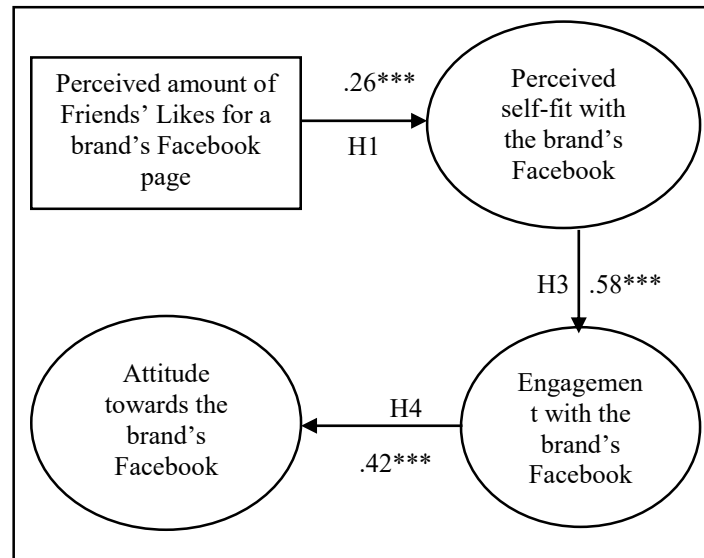


Figure 1. SEM Results. Notes: H5 is omitted from the model. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

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