The Antecedents of Facebook Brand Page Engagement in Public Relations.

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Abstract. Social media has increased the integration of marketing and PR. Consequently, due to this transition, businesses increasingly value customer relations above transactional marketing through social media brand pages communication. However, according to recent research, a practical problem has been identified: despite the significance of social media in marketing and communication, there is a lack of understanding among PR practitioners about how to successfully and strategically communicate via social media. PR practitioners still use social media asymmetrically and as promotional or advertising tools rather than for forming relationships with the public, which creates a lack of engagement. Secondly, a recent empirical study showed that humanise interaction can create customer and brand engagement through social media brand pages. Hence, recent public relations and social media-related research did not focus on humanised interaction influencing people to engage on brands' social media Facebook pages. Thirdly, consumer brand engagement on social media was researched for several years. Furthermore, recent research conceptualised consumer engagement and brand engagement and called it social media brand engagement. Hence, social media brand engagement does not conceptualise or analyse humanised interaction and two-way symmetrical communication in computer-mediated communication in public relations related literature. Moreover, it is unclear how humanise interaction to create customer engagement through social media brand pages. This study aims to fill the research gap by providing a clear picture of how humanising interaction (as an antecedent) creates brand engagement and how to maintain a two-way communication strategy (as an antecedent) to maintain effective communication and build relationships. To answer these questions, this study conceptualises and develops a research framework where conversational human voice from relational maintenance theory and two-way symmetrical communication from excellence theory are taken as the antecedents of social media brand engagement.

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1 Introduction

It is estimated that by 2021, there will be around three billion monthly active users of social media platforms. The average time spent each day by internet users on social media has climbed to 135 minutes, reflecting the rise in the number of active user profiles [29]. Social media can change the way people receive the content of organisations and interact with them. Moreover, social media platforms enable customers to connect with numerous consumers without making physical contact [68].

Marketing and public relations have become more integrated due to social media [98]. Businesses now focus on developing positive connections with customers in order to assure customer pleasure and loyalty. Since the 1990s, marketing has changed from a transaction-based approach to one that prioritizes relationships [80, 29]. Organizations’ goals have lately shifted from relationship marketing to customer engagement, as they realized that just pleasing consumers were not enough to guarantee their loyalty and profitability [80, 29]. Businesses increasingly rely on social media platforms to interact with their consumers [92, 29].

Two-way symmetrical communication plays a huge role in public relations, relationship management, stakeholder engagement [31, 34]. However, computer-mediated communication requires interactivity [73, 95]. Furthermore, by definition, symmetrical communication is interactive communication. Additionally, social media is a kind of computer-mediated communication that has increased visibility and raised the stakes a little bit due to the unexpected nature of human interaction and the potential for conversations to become widespread [86].

Numerous organisations use two-way communication tactics on social media, according to recent studies. These groups are involved in very engaged dialogue with the wider population and draw substantial online audiences. For instance, the average response rate to inquiries on Facebook pages for international brands is 66.5%, and many businesses answer almost every question they get, usually within an hour [20]. Another example is a recent study conducted by Freberg and Kim (2020) conducted a mixed-method study that identified that to ensure stakeholder engagement, particular brands (General Motors) provided queries and other related support through social media brand pages [28]. These actions by the firm on social media platforms are often a combination of customer support, brand management, and marketing [20].

2 Literature Review-

Companies use social media channels to engage with their customers [92, 29]. Social media may affect how consumers receive and engage with organisations’ content. Moreover, marketing and public relations have become more integrated due to social media [98]. Instead of focusing on transactional approaches, PR professionals-built relationships with consumers [80, 29]. Social media has changed how businesses talk to their customers. Facebook is one of the most popular social media sites, and it has become an important tool for people who work in public relations.

Waters et al.’s (2009) study analyses how non-profit organisations use Facebook to engage stakeholders. The findings suggest that non-profit organisations that actively engage with their audience on Facebook are more successful in increasing brand awareness and participation [107]. Another study analyses the challenges and opportunities of social media. However, the authors argue that social media can be a powerful tool for public relations practitioners, as it allows them to engage with their audience in real-time [50]. Kim and Ko's (2012) study examines the impact of social media marketing activities on customer equity in the luxury fashion industry. The findings suggest that social media marketing activities
positively impact customer equity, leading to increased engagement on Facebook [57]. Kietzmann et al. (2011) presents a conceptual framework for understanding the functional building blocks of social media, including how they can be used for public relations purposes. The authors argue that social media can be used to build relationships, facilitate conversations, and enhance reputations [55].

To create a sustainable relationship, organizations' social media (Facebook) brand pages need more engagement from their customers. However, despite the significance of social networks to social communication and marketing recent research highlighted the issue as a lack of awareness regarding how to successfully and strategically interact through social media. As a result, this Facebook brand page engagement is not achievable [21, 44, 46, 76, 79, 93]. Social media practitioners frequently lack enough expertise in social media usage and communication management [21], and communication managers were not trained in using social media effectively; consequently, they could not handle responses appropriately, applying one-way communication, resulting in a lack of engagement [65]. Despite the fact that some businesses utilise social media brand sites for two-way communication, these platforms are nonetheless commonly utilized asymmetrically and as instruments for marketing or promoting rather than for building connections with the public [4, 53, 64, 104].

In order to foster engagement and two-way interaction among governments, organisations, stakeholders, and the general public, these platforms are not effectively utilised maintained. [64]. Social media in some organisations still entails one-way communication, similar to conventional media, which creates low engagement [76, 93]. Moreover, research has shown that organizations that adopt a two-way symmetrical communication model on their Facebook brand pages have higher levels of engagement [112].

There is another research gap in the academic literature. A recent study showed that it is evident that humanised interactions between organisations and primary stakeholders (customers) through organisation’s social media pages lead to greater consumer satisfaction and engagement [28]. However, recent studies on public relations literature did not provide or clearly define how humanising interactions on computer-mediated communications influences customers to engage in social media (specifically Facebook) brand pages and how Facebook brand pages can be a relationship management tool [1, 2, 8, 10, 14, 16, 19, 20, 28, 56, 58, 59, 63, 69, 71, 77, 81, 91, 99, 106, 108].

Recent public relations and social media-related research did not focus on humanised interaction influencing people to engage on brands' social media Facebook pages. Recent research, for example, has focused on CSR activities and feedback [36], CSR Communication and social media [78], social media and public relations review [13, 103], social media influencers (Smith et al., 2021), public relations and curricular offering (Christopher et al., 2021). So those are the reasons why it is important to understand how humanised interaction can create Facebook brand page engagement and how two-way symmetrical communication can help build a sustainable relationship with consumers through Facebook brand pages.

3 Conceptual Framework-

3.1 Organisation Public Relationship Maintenance Theory-

Public Relations’ fundamental objective is to develop relationships with key stakeholders [41, 61]. In the past, relationship management has played a big role in public relations research, and today's public relations work and related fields like relationship based marketing and brand involvement all concentrate on improving relationships [39, 57]. The relationship method has shown to be a reliable theory of public relations in recent years. [60, 62, 101].
A relationship is essential for effective public relations [32, 60, 88]. According to Bruning (2000), like interpersonal relationships, organisation–public relationships should meet the requirements and expectations of the public. Since Ferguson (1984) suggested that public relations academics explore connections among organisations and their consumers, theoretical work in this area has risen significantly, according to a study by Sweetser (2010), with relationship concept currently ranked as the foremost studied issue in public relations scholarship [83, 88]. Sweetser (2010) stated that, in their fundamental work on strategic communication, Center and Jackson (1995) remarked, "The right phrase for the intended results of public relations practise is "public relationships." An organisation will achieve positive public relations with effective public relations" [88]. Sweetser (2010) also added that relationships between an organisation and its public must be nurtured over time [88].

There has been an increasing corpus of research into relationship maintenance and cultivating tactics [5, 41, 51, 52, 54, 56, 62, 69, 87, 104]. Organisations employ relational methods to sustain relations with stakeholders through digital media to achieve desired relational outcomes [47, 51, 88]. Kelleher and Miller (2006) studied the effects of online communication on relationship maintenance methods and results [51]. Kelleher and Miller (2006) study used (Hon and Grunig's 1999) [41] PR Relationship Management scale to create measures of relationship maintenance strategy that could be used to evaluate public views of a company's blogs against the company's conventional public relations communication condition [41, 51, 88]. This research incorporated the relationship maintenance techniques used in Kelleher and Miller's (2006) study, which were taken from the organisational public relationship maintenance theory study by Hon and Grunig (1999) [41, 51, 62]. Earlier studies on this topic focused on face-face interactions, more recent research has looked at how these strategies can be used in virtual settings such as organizational websites, blogs, and Facebook [5, 51, 54, 69, 87, 104].

Conversation Human Voice is a key component of the organisation public relationship maintenance theory. Kelleher and Miller (2006) [51] used the PR Relationship Management scale from (Hon and Grunig's 1999) [41] study to develop measures of relationship maintenance strategy. Kelleher and Miller (2006) [51] used their expanded scale to compare public perceptions of a company's blogs to its traditional public relations communication condition [41, 51, 88, 89]. Although previous research on this topic on physical communication, more subsequent studies have looked at how the same strategies might be applied in virtual environments, including corporate blogs, websites and Facebook [5, 51, 56, 87, 104]. The typical corporate message is less appealing and meaningful to online audiences since conventional corporate communicators demonstrated little interest in the individuals who comprise the markets. On the other hand, corporate sounds seem more like revenue machinery than like real people engaging in a two-way conversation [51].

3.1.1. Conversational Human Voice-

One strategy to motivate consumers to seek a long-term connection with organisations is to demonstrate knowledge, humanity, and warmth by talking in a human manner and utilizing a conversational human voice (CHV) [20, 51, 52, 67]. Previous research found that using a conversational style for business postings on social media enhanced engagement and positive effects [97, 100]. Organisations who customised their social media communications and employed a conversational style in their messages were more willing to invest in stakeholder relationships [9], and it promotes two-way communication among the organisation and its stakeholders and helps define the organisation's corporate identity, which presents to stakeholder engagement [70].

Significant interest has been shown in webcare interactions and customer complaints for conversational human voice (CHV) [51, 76, 84]. Before social media, corporations developed
a "corporate voice" to make their messages consistent, authoritative, and captivating [20]. Customers are able to form relationships with companies more easily as a consequence of the "business tone" being replaced with CHV because it has enabled businesses seem more "human-like" [20]. It has been shown that CHV influences brand trust and involvement intentions and has a favourable relationship with a brand's legitimacy as well as customers' loyalty and satisfaction [30, 51, 84]. (Barcelos, Dantas, and Sénécal (2018) [3], show that Using CHV may considerably improve customers' desire to purchase hedonic goods when online reviews are positive, but a corporate approach is favoured when the transaction carries a high degree of risk. [3, 45]. Furthermore, social media brand pages are viewed as a critical relational function, humanising interactions between organisations and customers and engaged in a computer-mediated communication environment [28]. Thus, the first proposition is-

P1. There is a positive relationship between Conversational Human Voice and Social Media Brand Engagement.

3.2. Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Theory-

The most effective and ethical strategy for public relations has been recommended two-way symmetrical communication [31, 32, 34]. The two-way symmetrical approach, which aims to foster common agreement among an organisation and its stakeholders, states that a business must proactively and persistently pursue public comments and suggestions in order to enhance its guidelines and procedures [35, 72]. The benefits of two-way symmetry communication include the development of strong ties between a business and its stakeholders. The value of two-way symmetrical communication in creating good connections between an organisation and its stakeholders has been shown in several studies over the past few decades. Studies have demonstrated that two-way symmetrical communication, which allows organisations and their stakeholders to exchange ideas and information, is an effective way of creating strong relationships [105].

The emergence of social media has transformed communication dynamics between businesses and their stakeholders. Facebook, being the largest social media platform, has provided organizations with opportunities to engage with their audiences on a two-way symmetrical communication model. Research has shown that organizations that adopt a two-way symmetrical communication model on their Facebook brand pages have higher levels of engagement than those that adopt a one-way communication model. For instance, Kim and Lee (2011) found that organizations that use a two-way symmetrical communication model on their Facebook brand pages have higher levels of user engagement, such as likes, comments, and shares [112].

According to studies, two-way symmetrical interaction tends to improve public engagement compared to two-way asymmetrical interaction. [11, 48]. Employee engagement is the primary focus of Kang and Sung's (2017) [49] research, and they find that The business's symmetrical internal responses positively affect employees' views of their relationships with the company and their following communication patterns regarding the company [72].

In addition, Grunig (2009) argued for the utilization of social media to promote symmetrical, dialogic, and ethical communication. Aside from being attentive, two-way symmetrical interaction emphasises the value of transparent dialogues and the need to retain balance of power. [26]. Social messengers' dialogic nature and peer-to-peer connection reduce the perceived power gap between enterprises and publics, boosting the effectiveness
of two-way symmetrical communication. It is predicted that businesses' two-way symmetrical interaction on social media will connect the audiences on a more personal level since two-way symmetrical interaction has been recommended as the best method of engagement [18, 19, 72].

According to the findings of a recent research, Facebook and Twitter both had much higher levels of stakeholder participation in two-way interaction. Every year, individuals on social media constantly interact with businesses on Facebook [85]. Additionally, when two-way symmetrical interaction is utilized on non-profit institutions' Facebook pages, the public is more willing to engage with organisational communications than with publicly available information or two-way asymmetrical interaction [11], and the public seems to be more likely to engage to business message strategies based on two-way symmetrical communication strategy [11, 105]. Strategic communication requires two-way interaction since it has been shown that participating in two-way communication online (through social media) builds bonds with the general public [6, 57]. As the above discussion, there is a relationship between two-way symmetrical communication and social media brand engagement and it is expected that-

P2. There is a positive relationship between Two-way Symmetrical Communication and Social Media Brand Engagement.

Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

3.3 Social Media Brand Engagement-

Social media is a significant consumer facilitator of interaction, which varies dramatically from previous marketer-customer technology platforms [17, 22, 37, 38, 102]. However, Gómez et al. (2019) [29], recently adopted So et al., (2014) [94] study’s multidimensional method of consumer engagement and brand engagement and conceptualised it on social media brand pages and named it social media brand engagement [29, 94]. Furthermore, according to Gómez et al. (2019), “social media brand engagement” refers to “an active and engaging relationship in between consumer and the brand’s social media platform, as well as enthusiasm or and involvement in the brand’s social media platform” [29]. Moreover, identification, enthusiasm, attention, absorption, and interaction are indeed the five aspects of social media brand engagement [29, 94].
4. Data Collection-

The present study’s quantitative study approach, the structured questionnaire, will be the primary source of the research instrument. This research will be cross-sectional, meaning conclusions will be drawn based on observations made at a certain point in time. The quantitative research will be carried out in four stages. In the first step, a questionnaire will be presented to five university students from one institution’s marketing department who actively engage in or have experience with social media brand pages to collect participant feedback. The technique is known as face validation. The second step will consist of a pre-test to determine the study instrument’s content validity and follow Harrigan et al.’s (2017) study for reliability and validity testing. During the pre-test stage, four more university students from the marketing and public relations departments will be interviewed, and their comments will be included in the research instrument. The third study stage will be a pilot study with 30 university students who use social media and have some experience with social media brand pages to analyse the scale’s reliability applying Cronbach’s alpha to measure the construct’s internal consistency. The final stage will be the primary survey, which will employ a redesigned instrument (if any) to acquire the required data to examine the relationship between variables.

Bangladeshi university students, especially those located in Dhaka, who interact, communicate, engage, and post comments with different social media brand pages will be the unit of analysis. Because according to research, Facebook is the leading social networking site in Bangladesh, and Dhaka has the biggest number of active Facebook users, where marketing and purchasing through Facebook are popular (Hoque et al., 2020). According to a study, "Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital city, ranked second in terms of active Facebook users, with 22 million active users, which is 1.1 percent of the total monthly active users worldwide." The number of social media users in Bangladesh increased by 11 million in the past year, making it the eighth fastest-growing (Hoque et al., 2020).

5. Discussion-

Nowadays, particularly in the digital sphere, relationship management is a crucial part of customer support and social media brand sites [98]. Nevertheless, prior research has shown the usefulness of online engagement and how it may support the organisation of public relationships between audiences and organisations via contingent interactivity and Saffer, Sommerfeldt, & Taylor, (2013) [85] study’s findings support the theory that interactivity and humanise interaction can influence people's attitudes toward the sender of a communication [51, 82].

Two-way symmetrical communication plays a huge role in public relations, relationship management, stakeholder engagement [31, 34]. According to recent study, many organisations use two-way social media communication tactics. These organisations communicate with the public in a highly participatory way, drawing significant online audiences. For instance, the typical response time for inquiries on Facebook pages for international brands is 66.5%, and many businesses reply to practically every query they receive, usually within an hour [20].

6. Conclusion-

It is so far understood that interactivity and humanising interaction with customers on social media brand pages can increase brand engagement in social media. Still, it is unclear how or to what extent this humanising interaction on computer-mediated communication influences customers to engage in social media brand pages. Additionally, standard organisational communication through company websites does not adequately convey care
for stakeholders [50]. Contrarily, social media gives companies greater opportunities to communicate with consumers because it provides them with the opportunity to swap out the formal, professional tone of corporate websites for a more personable one that humanises the company [56, 69]. Despite the general perception that businesses using social media are better equipped to interact with the public, employ relationship maintenance techniques, and utilize the conversational human voice, Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) [66] reference very little actual data to back up this assertion [56, 66].
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