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Targeting college students on Facebook? How to stop wasting your money

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Abstract While Facebook usage has seen explosive growth, scant research has explored returns on advertising dollars marketers invest in this emerging medium. Our two-stage study of 18- to 25-year-old college students suggests that many of the advertising dollars consumer goods firms spend on Facebook are likely wasted. This study highlights that, in addition to staying in touch with friends and relatives, Facebook users are primarily motivated by three desires: (1) to voyeuristically peer into others' lives, (2) to create a distinctive identity for themselves, and (3) to act on their inner narcissistic tendencies. These motivations also make them poor prospects for advertisers, as users seem disinterested in Facebook ads and disengaged from marketers' attempts to build brands. Herein, we discuss challenges for marketers, as well as opportunities for building brands and driving sales via Facebook.

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1. Facebook: Popular, but useful for advertisers?

Marketers interested in connecting with existing and potential customers are likely to find the descriptive statistics of Facebook highly attractive: 750 million active users with 94 million from the United States alone, half of whom log on every day (Burbary, 2011). Investors also seem impressed: Facebook has raised

\$1.5 billion in capital with the help of Goldman Sachs, it generated \$2 billion in revenue for 2010, and it is reportedly worth \$50 billion (Rusli, 2011). This online behemoth has triggered societal change, and not just in the way marketers reach their customers. In 2009, *Fortune* magazine suggested that Facebook is taking over our lives (Hempel & Kowitt, 2009). By 2010, together with texting and Twitter, Facebook emerged as a principal way by which informal communication occurs among peers; even independent bloggers have begun migrating to this social network in search of interested eyeballs (Kopykoff, 2011).

The prospect of capturing a share of 770 billion page visits, half of which come from users aged 18 to 34, is understandably irresistible to many marketers

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(Burbary, 2011). However, it remains unknown whether the dollars advertisers invest in Facebook are well spent. While much is written about pages that garner a lot of 'likes' and fans, the extant literature is mostly silent regarding Facebook's effectiveness as an advertising medium and the strategic challenges of managing the complex marketer-Facebook user relationship. As such, there are very few practical implications for marketers interested in connecting with current and potential customers and building brands via Facebook.

This article presents findings from a two-stage exploratory study of Facebook usage behaviors among 18- to 25-year-old college students and aims to address this knowledge gap. Based on these students' voices, we traced individuals' motivations driving their Facebook usage and identified the key challenges for marketers interested in employing Facebook as a medium for building brands and driving sales. We also develop a propositional inventory to aid future research, and propose practical implications for harnessing Facebook's power.

While Facebook is astonishingly popular, we learned that almost no advertising works on the 18- to 25-year-old demographic, which represents 26% of all users: approximately 50 million in the United States and 188 million worldwide (Burbary, 2011). This segment accesses Facebook not just to connect with familiar people on their own terms but also to indulge in their voyeuristic, narcissistic, and exhibitionist tendencies. These users often multitask while on Facebook and are, thus, disinterested in cognitive engagement with advertisements. Furthermore, high-intensity Facebook users create their own content to promote themselves and utilize Facebook as their personal TV channel to broadcast details of their lives. As such, they compete effectively with marketers having similar intents. This strong emotional involvement is characterized by a willful suspension of disbelief whereby factual information about brands is labeled as intrusive and irrelevant.

The present challenge for marketers entails engaging Facebook users who are tone-deaf to advertising, deeply skeptical, and largely disinterested in building a relationship with marketers. Effective engagement is more likely, we propose, when marketers take the following steps. First, marketers must come to terms with individuals' motivations driving their Facebook usage and the challenges these present. Second, they must learn to work with users to jointly produce entertaining, emotion-laden content with voyeuristic, titillating value. Third, they must help users satisfy not only their need to connect with others, but also their deep-seated need to brand themselves and broadcast their online identities to social network friends.

2. How we derived our inferences about Facebook usage

In the first stage of our study, we collected data from students enrolled in three courses taught by one of the co-authors at a business school. In one class of 25 students, two focus groups were conducted. Of the two co-authors present, one primarily led the focus groups, while the other took notes. Each focus group session lasted approximately 30 minutes. The co-authors asked the following questions during the focus groups:

- Why do you use Facebook?
- What do you think about advertisements and firms' efforts to connect with you on Facebook?
- Inquiries related to their 'liking' of brands and their experience with brand pages, brand introductions, and contests.

The other two classes the co-author taught had 47 students, and they were engaged similarly. After the classes, we conducted a content analysis of the transcripts from the focus groups and class discussions, as well as from notes made by the instructors present during these activities.

In the second stage of our study, we collected data via an open-ended online survey. We posed the following question: "Tell me a little bit about why you use Facebook and the role you think Facebook plays in your life. Write as much as you want, but a minimum of five to six sentences is required." The link to the survey was emailed to 93 students registered in three separate undergraduate courses taught by another co-author. In total, 69 responses were collected: 42 from females (61%) and 27 from males (39%). We used the content analysis results from the focus groups and class discussions to identify themes of Facebook usage and underlying motivations, distill the nature of the problems posed to marketers, and conceptualize a comprehensive strategic solution. Responses from the web survey were primarily used to illustrate the themes we developed.

Participants reported an average of 534 friends, with a high of 2,000 and a low of 40. Each day, these individuals checked their Facebook page an average of 5.38 times, made 3.47 comments, and wrote 3.67 status updates. They spent an average of 1.36 hours per day on Facebook, which far exceeds currently reported estimates of 31.9 minutes (Gillette, 2011). The highest and lowest reported usage times were 5 hours and 15 minutes, respectively. Before we delve more deeply into our findings, two caveats are in order. First, the results presented relate

specifically to 18- to 25-year-old Facebook users; they do not reflect all individuals' usage behaviors. Second, because all our findings emerged from exploratory analysis, considerable testing is necessary before generalizable results can be provided.

3. Why do 18- to 25-year-olds use Facebook?

Exhibit 1 encapsulates our attempts to reduce 141 participant voices into a single narrative. As it shows, visiting Facebook pages every day—often several times a day—to snoop around and post comments and photos has become habitual behavior for 18- to 25-year-olds. Reviewing the titillating details of what others say and do is addictive, and it engages this demographic for several hours at a time. Individuals' motivations vary strongly depending on the

Exhibit 1. The narrative

"When I first log on, I always look down through my news feed to catch up on what everyone has been doing: both top news and most recent. After that, I typically check my closest friends' profiles to see if they've been online in the past couple of days. It's not unlikely for me to sit on my laptop for 1 to 2 hours at a time, just looking at different things. I've found that I waste a good amount of time doing nothing but searching Facebook."

"I think it has become a routine for people....As soon as you get on a computer with Internet, that's one of the first things you're doing. You're just checking really quick, no matter how long you're on there."

"I also use the photo application most often. It allows me to post pictures from where I may be and [about] what I have been up to recently."

"I mainly go on Facebook to check everyone's statuses and posts. Sometimes, I only go on to look at the news feed and get off. I like to know what everyone is up to, even those who I don't talk to as much in real life."

"Honestly, when I'm on Facebook, I don't pay all that much attention to advertisements. I'm only on Facebook to communicate and keep updated with friends, family, and the brands/pages I prefer to follow."

"I actually find it annoying that there are advertisements that pop up on the right-hand side of my homepage and news feed."

intensity of their Facebook usage. Low-intensity users seek low-risk interactions with others and tend to merely peep into others' lives. High-intensity users are engaged in promoting their personal brand; they employ Facebook as a sort of personal TV channel to broadcast details of their personas.

3.1. Facebook as a low-risk, high-control application

This type of low-intensity usage is motivated by the low-risk, high-control potential of Facebook as a communication vehicle in at least three important ways. First, Facebook allows users to develop a network of friends without taking the risks normally associated with building relationships via face-to-face (F2F) interactions and without making oneself vulnerable to others' responses. It is a convenient extension of the college cafeteria or dorm, where low-risk interactions can occur. The awkwardness and social risk associated with asking for friendship and getting others' commitment (e.g., "I don't know; some of us were hanging out later, maybe you want to, or whatever. . .") is reduced to a harmless friend request or an event announcement. An ignored request or announcement is less ego bruising than a rejection made F2F. Furthermore, the ability to use Facebook to participate in and/or organize social events without expending social capital and without taking social risk is especially appealing. Consider, for example, what one study participant said:

I use Facebook to keep in contact with a lot of my friends and also to see what is new around campus. Most of my friends post comments or invite me to events for the weekend.

Second, Facebook makes it easy to control and accelerate the process of getting to know people. It allows users to quickly size up people and draw inferences about them based on a convenient montage of posts and photos, and to do so more expediently than is possible via F2F communication. One study subject explained this phenomenon as follows:

It allows me to connect to them without having to have a whole conversation and keep up. . . with friends.

Third, Facebook allows users to take almost total control of their interactions with others. They can post what they want, and choose when—and if—to respond to others. Unlike F2F relationships, Facebook usage does not have many costs: conversations and agreements do not result in commitments to meet or take action. There are few obligations and little need for reciprocity, such as when answering phone calls or emails. Explaining how Facebook

allows a greater degree of control than F2F relationships, one participant noted:

We want to be friends with people, but 100% on our terms. On Facebook, I can do that. On Facebook, I have control.

3.2. Facebook for peeping

Much of the low-intensity usage is motivated by individuals' desire to satisfy their voyeuristic needs to peep into other people's lives at the implicit behest of friends. Facebook is irresistible because it offers a consequence-free platform for stalking friends and acquaintances from behind a one-way mirror. Two responses illustrate this idea:

[Why do I use Facebook?] Just to know what is going on with the people I went to school with, even though I am not hanging out with them any more.

The only thing I really do on Facebook is see what my friends are up to.

For this usage segment, Facebook serves as a personalized E! Network or TMZ: an individual's own gossip channel devoted to the lives of friends, as well as friends of friends. Other exploratory research has labeled this interest in looking at people's profiles and checking out friends of friends as 'social network surfing' (Joinson, 2008). Consider the following study responses:

I use Facebook mainly to see what my 'friends' are up to. I am not a regular Facebook checker, but I like to go on and see what a select few are doing.

I think of it as a way of 'stalking.' It's kind of creepy how much information I can find out about people through Facebook. I have deleted [my] Facebook account temporarily before, but I feel out of the loop, so I always reactivate my account. The reason I deleted it twice before [was] because I found myself spending too much time on it, and it causes a lot of social dilemmas.

I . . . use Facebook to see what some people are doing or where they are, as many people share their daily activities on their wall through posts.

I mainly go on Facebook to check everyone's statuses and posts. Sometimes, I only go on to look at the news feed and get off. I like to know what everyone is up to, even those who I don't talk to as much in real life. Facebook [plays] a pretty significant role in my life because I am constantly checking it throughout the day. It's

not that I can't survive without it; it has just become part of my routine—I go on my computer, check any emails, and proceed to check Facebook. I have gone a few days without checking it, but it seems like I miss things that way.

3.3. Facebook for self-branding

Facebook offers a forum to develop a personal brand. That is, some high-intensity users attempt to take control of what others see and come to know about them, as opposed to letting others form their own opinions. 'Branders' tell others what they are doing and frequently announce their positions on substantive issues. They aim to develop a distinctive identity (e.g., "I am an intelligent, thoughtful person imbued with desirable values and worthy of a long-term relationship"). They use Facebook to announce their special expertise, brag about their qualities and exploits, and announce their passion for activities in ways they expect will not only resonate with others, but also gain their respect. Users make statements about their personality with a mix of information, responses, posts, links, photographs, and affiliations (e.g., "I am unique, different, and special, and this is what you should make of me"). Facebook allows such users to invite others into the interesting, exciting parts of their lives.

The literature strongly validates our findings about Facebook as an identity-development, self-branding tool (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). Other scholars have noted Facebook users' interest in developing unique identities by affecting a 'living-dangerously' posture while being safely ensconced behind their handheld devices and laptops in remote locations. For instance, researchers have found that Facebook users are likely to exaggerate their alcohol and drug use (Brock, 2007) and discuss and post evidence of risqué behaviors (Cole, 2006; Epstein, 2006). Commenting on intense Facebook users, Peluchette and Karl (2009, p. 35) note that "students make a conscious attempt to portray a particular image, and those who post problematic information do so to impress a particular audience, their peers." Moreover, users' predisposition to self-promote seems to interact with features inherent in Facebook in ways that can produce identity-creating exhibitionism (Stern, 2007).

3.4. Facebook as MeTV

A notable fraction of high-intensity usage is associated with individuals acting out mild levels of narcissism. These users are considered important and

influential because there is a narcissist or two in nearly every Facebook user's network, and these characters attract significant attention from others. For 'inner narcissists,' Facebook serves as MeTV: a channel on which they get to tell others what they believe (e.g., "I am better, more exciting, and more glamorous than you") and via which they seek validation to increase their own perceptions of self worth (Ketchen & Buckley, 2010). Narcissists expect their followers to accept their special status as a celebrity—as a participant in an exciting, fun-filled lifestyle. Further, others' validation seems just as desirable if it is tinged with envy (e.g., "I want what you have") or fear/sadness (e.g., "My life is inadequate because I don't have what you have and never will"). Narcissists have little regard neither for the bandwidth/space they occupy on Facebook, nor for the attention they take from others' similar activities (Vogel, 2006). For instance, Bergman, Fearington, Davenport, and Bergman (2011, p. 709) note that "the medium appears to provide the narcissistic individual an ideal opportunity to display vanity, self-promote, manipulate his/her public-image, and gain approval and attention."

The want-to-be stars are distinctive in terms of their desire to expand their network and in terms of the large number of self-referential photographs they post (Bergman, Fearington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011). While they may have few close F2F relationships with peers, they crave attention (Buss & Chiodo, 1991) and seek others' admiration and affirmation (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002). Their connections with others are based less on notions of reciprocity or concern for the long term, and more on episodic events; that is, posting prodigious photos/comments of exciting activities in exciting places, where they are the central figure.

In sum, while peepers and creepers are watching the show, and branders are trying to shape others' thinking, narcissists are starring in their own sitcoms/dramas in search of affirmation and are using Facebook as their personal MeTV. However, narcissists are not specifically faking it or making it up: in general, they are happier and display lower levels of anxiety, depression, and sadness than other users (Vogel, 2006).

4. Why most marketers are wasting money on Facebook advertising

While the intensity of usage among Facebook patrons varies considerably, the same cannot be said of the attitudes among our sample of 18- to 25-year-old study participants. Indeed, nearly every one of the 141 respondents indicated that they find advertising

on Facebook to be annoying, intrusive, insensitive to their needs, and peripheral to their interests. Almost none recognized a benefit of connecting to brands via Facebook, and even fewer acknowledged the social medium as a conduit to building relationships with marketers. Facebook developers may have significantly erred in assuming this demographic segment is curious about brands featured on their pages, just as marketers may have mistakenly believed users are interested in what they have to say. Not one of the study participants reported buying a product or service as a result of seeing an ad or promotion on Facebook; neither did any recount using Facebook as a gateway to his/her consumption behavior. Two phenomena are worth highlighting. First, driven by a desire to save money, take advantage of an immediately attractive discount, or participate in social activities in their area, this user segment seems most likely to click on ads with strong local flavor. Second, they are likely to visit pages for brands they already use; participants mentioned Domino's Pizza and Pizza Hut most frequently. Noting that he sees ads for products he already buys, one participant said:

I was already purchasing those products to begin with. Nothing that I have done on Facebook has actually made me go out and want to buy something else. I have never been on Facebook and said, "You know what? I like this product," and then [went] out and [bought] it. I have never even received a good promotion or a coupon or a discount for liking a product. Why am I even liking it to begin with?

A great deal of caution should be exercised before extrapolating on this notion and inferring the appropriateness of Facebook for reinforcing brand messages among existing customers. While participants in our study said they visit pages for brands they already use, the frequency of such visits is notably low, making the medium unsuitable for a brand reinforcement campaign.

4.1. Dissonance, incompatibility, and competition

Table 1 serves as a guideline for this discussion. Briefly, it shows how marketing messages on Facebook are incompatible, dissonant, and often in direct competition with the motivations driving Facebook users' behaviors. For instance, users find it irresistible to connect with others in an easy, low-risk, low-commitment environment that enables voyeurism and self-promotion. As such, they harbor an equal disinterest in advertising that can be described as:

Table 1. Facebook users and marketers: Dissonance and incompatibility

Facebook users' motivations and behaviors	Dissonance and incompatibility produced by marketers' actions
<p>Motivations: Connect emotionally with other people and communities, seek relief from boredom, and find entertainment.</p> <p>Behaviors: Use Facebook as an extension of texting and instant messaging, as yellow pages, and as a dynamic yearbook of friends and relatives.</p>	<p>Problem: <i>Dissonance. Unresponsive to the new medium and lacking innovation.</i></p> <p>Motivations: Connect with the targeted segment of Facebook users that is likely to buy the product.</p> <p>Behaviors: Use Facebook as an extension of current media and messages. No usable content; only messages.</p>
<p>Motivations: Connect with people in a low-social-risk, low-commitment, high-control environment and connect with social entertainment.</p> <p>Behaviors: Use Facebook as a replacement for existing ways of connecting with people, such as F2F interactions and the telephone.</p>	<p>Problem: <i>Dissonance and lowered credibility. Working too hard to attract attention with credibility-reducing promotions.</i></p> <p>Motivations: Connect with people when they are already predisposed to participating in a social environment and gathering information.</p> <p>Behaviors: Pseudo-enticing; messages that are too good to be true and thus increase skepticism and jadedness among users. Find ways to entice users by offering products at a discount.</p>
<p>Motivations: Indulge in voyeurism.</p> <p>Behaviors: Use Facebook as if it was a one-way mirror from which to observe others' lives in the network.</p>	<p>Problem: <i>Incompatibility. Message does not possess voyeuristic value.</i></p> <p>Motivations: Tell users about the product/service.</p> <p>Behaviors: Describe the product/service (features).</p>
<p>Motivations: Build a distinctive identity on the social network.</p> <p>Behaviors: With a combination of posts and links, build a reputation and create an image of quality.</p>	<p>Problem: <i>Competition. Both users and advertisers are trying to build brand equity. Users win.</i></p> <p>Motivations: Build brand equity.</p> <p>Behaviors: Talk about the brand's quality, value, and distinctiveness.</p>
<p>Motivations: Act on levels of narcissism and gain others' affirmation.</p> <p>Behaviors: Use Facebook as MeTV and star in their own reality show.</p>	<p>Problem: <i>Competition. Marketers act like narcissists, which inner narcissists among Facebook users cannot tolerate.</i></p> <p>Motivations: Build an emotional connection between users and the brand.</p> <p>Behaviors: Talk about the brand's excitement value.</p>

- *Stale*—Namely, little more than links to current webpages and/or extensions of current ads used in broadcast or print media.
 - *Low credibility*—Tone-deaf attempts to push deals on Facebook that are too good to be true (e.g., 'Become an FBI agent in 90 days'; 'Ugg boots for \$20').
 - *Inordinately opportunistic*—Unsolicited, poorly executed ads; one participant noted that a change in her status from 'single' to 'engaged' triggered a flurry of such ads for bridal products during subsequent Facebook visits.
- Facebook users are attracted to the safe, intimate environment in which they can engage others

and peep into their lives. Here, advertising is uniformly recounted as unnecessarily intrusive. While Facebook users have a strong appetite for feeding their exhibitionist, voyeuristic, thrill-seeking impulses, they can tune out brand-related information almost immediately. What advertisers want Facebook users to do—namely, view an impersonal message with no titillating value and make a commitment—is somewhat antithetical to what Facebook users in our study said they want.

4.2. Perils of multitasking

Many of our study respondents reported their Facebook usage occurs via cell phones and handheld devices, while they are multitasking. This behavioral pattern represents a clear challenge. Recent evidence suggests that aggressive multitaskers are less likely to volitionally filter out distracting, irrelevant stimuli; perform less well on activities requiring cognitive control (Ophir, Nass, & Wagner, 2009); and are likely to favor exploratory versus exploitative information processing (Daw, O'Doherty, Dayan, Seymour, & Dolan, 2006). In other words, to the extent Facebook users multitask, they are easily distracted and pay less attention. They are also less likely to direct cognitive energy to understanding and evaluating objective information, and are less likely to use Facebook as a tool to engage in product-related searches. Inattentive, distracted Facebook users who direct low-cognitive energy toward tasks pose a special challenge to marketers interested in shaping targeted customers' consumption behaviors via Facebook.

4.3. Blurring between fake and real

During data analysis, we found participants regularly reported having a large number of friends, which seems anomalous given the current literature. How can sociologists say that American society is fragmented and disconnected (Putnam, 2000) when Facebook users report an average of over 500 friends? We searched participants' comments for answers to two questions: (1) Is this improbably long list composed entirely of real friends? (2) If the list is a mix of real and 'fake' friends, do users act as if they are all real friends?

As recent writings indicate, the blurring boundary between fake and real is a source of challenge. For instance, Lanier (2010, p. 54) suggests that social networks deliberately aim to foster fake friendships. He notes that "The real customer [for Facebook and social networks] is the advertiser of the future. . . . The whole artifice, the whole idea of fake friendship, is just bait laid by the lords of the clouds to

lure hypothetical advertisers." This faux friendliness is captured by one respondent, who said:

My real friends are not even on Facebook.

The voices we heard suggest the Facebook environment is immediate, compelling, and immersive; it likely leads users to suspend disbelief. The idea that one can have several hundred 'friends' can drive users to derive the psychological benefits of maintaining numerous contacts; that is, there is a clear theoretical basis for Facebook users' proclivity toward fake friends and their willful suspension of disbelief. Wilson, Lisle, Karft, and Wetzel's (1989) affective-expectations model suggests that if a Facebook user *thinks* he/she will enjoy the friendship of a large number of people in his/her network (affective expectation), this thinking is as important as their actual experience of interacting with others when it comes to evaluating their experience (affective reaction). In other words, if users think they have a large number of friends, it does not matter if most of them are fake because they derive the psychological benefits anyway. The suspension of disbelief about fake friendships likely lies at the core of Facebook's popularity. It may be to marketers' chagrin to discover—as we learned from participants—that most of users' fake friends are viewed as real and that verifiable brand-related information is regarded as intrusive, low credibility, and false.

5. How can scholars help?

Presently, more is known about the relationship between marketers and Facebook users from anecdotal, rather than theoretical, evidence. Aligned with our original intent to aid future theoretical development, we include a propositional inventory to stimulate new thinking and research (see Exhibit 2). Considerable testing in a variety of settings and diverse samples is necessary before generalizable insights can be produced. Anchored in these propositions and the theoretical implications of our study, we next distill practical implications and opportunities for marketers.

6. Learning to harness the power of Facebook

Facebook users' voices are clear: If it is not about them, it is not interesting. If a message does not feed their need for titillation, voyeurism, or narcissism, Facebook users view it as irrelevant, boring, low credibility, or fake. Individuals access Facebook

Exhibit 2. Propositional inventory

Marketers are more likely to engage Facebook users and reach brand-related objectives via Facebook as a medium if they outline the following:

- a. How to create entertaining content as central to their Facebook-related initiatives
- b. How to co-produce content *with* Facebook users as the main vehicle for engagement

Marketers are more likely to reach brand-related objectives via Facebook if the **entertainment content** is co-produced with target customers and includes the following attributes:

- a. Includes user-centered interactions (i.e., focuses on users' narratives versus brand benefits)
- b. Appeals to users' needs for voyeuristic and titillating values (versus information about the brands or products)
- c. Produces an emotional, visceral response from users (versus a cognitive, rational response)
- d. Centers on users' fantasies (i.e., imaginary versus real-world narratives)
- e. Helps users develop a distinct Facebook identity (Brand ME)
- f. Helps users star in their own fantasy show on Facebook as a TV channel (i.e., users are able to deploy emerging content to carve out distinct identities among their wider social networks)

to connect with the familiar; that is, they may follow a handful of brands they already purchase, but seem largely disinclined to use this interface to seek new connections with the less familiar or unknown. Their attention spans are short, their interest in cognitive engagement is limited, and their jadedness and skepticism about current Facebook advertising is formidable. Some brands may take comfort in knowing that their Facebook pages attract a large number of visits, as indicated by the number of 'fans' and 'likes.' However, our study suggests that such optimism is likely ill advised, especially because metrics showing a link between Facebook page visits and brand equity are hard to come by. While popular brands' Facebook pages yield a large number of fans and likes, the medium yields low frequency, and reach without frequency can mislead marketers because absence of the latter often leads to low levels of brand-related learning among target customers.

Facebook represents a discontinuity in the way people use media and consume entertainment. Much of what makes practical sense about branding via traditional media equates to nonsense on Facebook. Current learning about media advertising has few Facebook analogs. For instance, the notion of developing 30-second clips and magazine color spreads to embed into entertaining, informative content has no real Facebook equivalent. Now, marketers must learn to embed brand messages in

the engaging entertainment they produce and integrate brand messages into the content-generation processes via which they seek to actively engage Facebook users. The demographic we included in our study is unmoved by attempts to use Facebook as an electronic billboard for cutting and pasting current communication strategies originally designed for print and broadcast media, and by strategies that are unresponsive to their psychosocial needs. Table 2 lists examples of Facebook disappointments when brand pages and their associated apps were tone-deaf to Facebook users' psychosocial needs.

As such, Facebook advertising is not for every marketer. It is more appropriate for those who can commit to learning what it takes to function effectively in an environment of tech-savvy, self-absorbed users. First, marketers must learn to engage targeted customers in the process of jointly producing Facebook content, and to use this co-production process as a principal vehicle for building brands. Second, marketers must demonstrate the benefits of engaging and co-producing content—an outcome more likely if users believe engagement is personally beneficial and feeds their emotional needs for connection and excitement. Only a handful of marketers, including Facebook natives like Zynga—producer of popular games such as Farmville and Mafia Wars—have acquired the ability to function in this playground

Table 2. Examples of Facebook marketing disappointments

Firm	What they did	Why they failed
The Gap	Announced a change in the Gap logo. Resulted in approximately 200,000 angry comments from 30,000 users.	Insulted the brand community by failing to test the logo on Facebook. The brander and the narcissist (among others) found the announcement dissonant with their expectations.
American Airlines	Created a Facebook page with little engaging, interactive content and expected users to upload travel logs. Attracted only 625 likes.	The application held no appeal for the voyeur, the brander, or the narcissist. Failed the 'what's-in-it-for-me' test. Content was deemed useless by everyone except a very small segment of users. Anyone not currently travelling would find the content irrelevant.
Honda Crosstour	Created a Facebook page expecting to get positive feedback about the new car. The page elicited negative consumer feedback and critique.	Facebook fan page turned into a hate page. Users' criticisms went viral. The only person who posted positive comments was later identified as a product manager at Honda. The gimmick backfired: users felt their trust was violated. The page was removed after much backlash.
Motrin	Posted a video clip on Facebook and YouTube, suggesting that women wear a sling to carry small children as a fashion accessory. Expected their Twitter and Facebook community to take the video viral.	Mothers made angry comments that a baby sling is a necessity, not a fashion accessory. Slow response. Waited 2 days before removing the ad.
Molson Beer	Aimed at college students, the Facebook page encouraged users to post pictures taken while they were partying (Contest: Top party school in Canada).	Realized too late that the contest promoted underage drinking and expected photographic evidence of outrageous (and off-putting) activities in order to win.

for silliness peppered with voyeurs, exhibitionists, and narcissists.

Marketers interested in building brands and driving sales via Facebook should consider learning as a strategic endeavor. In other words, learning to operate effectively on Facebook requires clear organizational objectives and strategies; a congruent configuration of talents, technological skills, processes, and systems for effective implementation; and clear deployment of resources paralleling those devoted to other media. Because content generation is not a core skill for most marketers, attempts to identify and work with strategic partners who have developed solutions for harnessing Facebook's power are well advised. Help is also available directly from Facebook. Its marketing boot camp promises to make virtual attendees Facebook marketing experts. Table 3 provides a few examples of Facebook successes measured in terms of the positive press they received and the large number of users they attracted (even though we have no

evidence to suggest they helped build the brand or drive sales). Each case refers to marketers who developed specific applications; focused on co-creating new content for their pages; and appealed to the voyeur, the brander, and/or the narcissist in each user.

For those who remain interested in harnessing Facebook's power for building consumer brands and driving sales, we next discuss key data-derived recommendations for fostering user-centered interactions, engaging users emotionally and viscerally, and co-creating content with narcissists.

6.1. Fostering user-centered interaction

The content production process is more likely to deliver results for marketers if it is user centered; that is, if it is focused inordinately on users' motivations and emotional needs. Users are disinterested in engagement unless it is about them, rendering messages focusing entirely on a brand ineffectual.

Table 3. Examples of Facebook marketing successes

Firm	What they did	Why they succeeded
Burger King	<i>Delete 10 Friends, Get a Free Whopper.</i> Produced 230,000 broken friendships. Attracted 82,000 participants.	Titillating proposition for the narcissist and the brander, and an irresistible action for the voyeur. Understood the problem of Facebook users' short attention span. Exploited the thrill Facebook users seek (i.e., to humiliate friends and feed their narcissistic impulses).
Lupus Foundation of America	Created an informative, content-rich page and directed visitors to specific content on its website. Called visitors to take action. Within 6 months, resulted in an increase of 790% in donations and 584% in memberships.	Appealed strongly to the brander. Integrated all social media interfaces and aggregated them on its Facebook page. Multiplied the effectiveness of its blogs, forums, websites, and other outreach efforts by integrating with Facebook.
<i>Toy Story 3</i>	Created an app allowing users to turn themselves into animated toys and share these on their Facebook walls. Helped attract more than 25 million followers to the <i>Toy Story 3</i> Facebook page.	Attracted branders and narcissists; catered to the need for light and silly entertainment.
Corona Light Beer	Facebook users who 'liked' the Corona Light page entered a contest. The winner would be featured on a billboard in Times Square, New York City.	Offered the brander and the narcissist a chance for 15 seconds of fame.
Coke Zero	Facebook users could develop a Coke Zero facial profiler. Users could upload photos of people who looked like them. Attracted 152,000 new users.	Appealed to the narcissist and the brander.

Recent evidence in the literature supports this data-derived notion of user-centered interactions for reaching tone-deaf, tuned-out Facebook users. All buyers want the marketing process to be about them, versus about marketers and brands. For instance, a poll conducted by Harris Interactive indicated that 95% of respondents agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement: "[Firms should know] who I am, my buying interests, past problems or complaints, and [my] billing record" (Bulik, 2008).

How, then, can marketers create user-centered interactions and content on Facebook? While a comprehensive answer will only emerge pending further research, our study calls for marketers to shift their emphasis from defining customers as a demographic data point to defining them on the

basis of their self-perceived uniqueness and special status. Granted, the demographic descriptions of Facebook users are highly attractive, and information on the number of users and page visits is irresistible. This helps explain the rush to replicate print and broadcast strategies on Facebook with minimal adaptation. User-centered engagement often begins when individuals are invited to create an experience they seek. Users seem more likely to engage in creating content if two conditions are met. First, the engagement must allow them to accomplish what they initially aimed to do on Facebook in the first place, only faster and better than if they were to try themselves. Second, they must hear marketers say "You can do so much more on Facebook when you play with me" as opposed

to the traditional “*Look at me, buy my product because. . .*”

There is merit in considering co-created content that aligns with individuals’ motivations driving their Facebook usage. Numerous marketers have failed with brand-centered, rather than user-centered, page applications. For instance, American Airlines’ early attempts at developing a Facebook app failed largely because the company asked visitors to post travel logs they could not share easily with friends. That is, American created a platform that held no significant appeal to the voyeur, the exhibitionist, the brander, or the narcissist (O’Neill, 2008). Marketers have also been stung by underestimating the cynicism and jadedness of Facebook users, as well as their ability to spot self-indulgent solicitations for feedback. Consider Honda Motors, which actively asked for Facebook users’ opinions about its Crosstour model, likely expecting positive feedback or rave reviews that could possibly go viral. What the automaker attracted, instead, was a barrage of criticism. As these examples illustrate, testing a concept prior to large-scale implementation and rapid removal of content that produces an adverse reaction is a clear implication for managers. In contrast to Honda’s approach, *Toy Story 3* created an application that allowed visitors to develop animated versions of themselves and share their creations with others—an idea that appealed to a large segment of Facebook users (Porterfield, 2010). Similarly, Red Bull showcased the lives of sponsored athletes via its WEB TV Facebook application, and Burt’s Bees provided behind-the-scenes views: both proving irresistible to voyeurs. Finally, Uno Chicago Grill used a related marketing strategy and solicited and posted photographs patrons took while dining at the restaurant, thus appealing to branders and narcissists.

6.2. Engaging users emotionally and viscerally

Multitasking Facebook users with short attention spans, the inability to filter distracting information, and a limited capacity for cognitive engagement seem primed for co-producing content with strongly emotional, visceral (rather than rational) appeals. Facebook users do not think as much as they feed their need for emotional thrills; namely, for voyeurism, titillation, and self-promotion. Moreover, such users’ willful suspension of disbelief suggests that they are predisposed to content that is closer to fantasy than reality. Users are more likely to engage with marketers if they are invited into a fantasy experience that produces a strong emotional, visceral response. For instance, Facebook might be an appropriate platform for crowdsourcing: active

outsourcing to a user community via an open call for developing ‘what-if’ scenarios with video- and photo-posting capabilities. Consider the following, for instance:

- What if pizza was served at weddings? What would a pizza wedding cake look like?
- What if Arnold Schwarzenegger designed a breakfast cereal?
- What if your pet was going to outer space? What would you pack in her/his lunch box?
- If lawn furniture were people, what would their superhero look like?

6.3. Co-creating Facebook content with narcissists

The inner narcissist is likely to be more dominant even among the average Facebook user than our study suggests. For instance, a reported 80% of people think they are better than average (Vogel, 2006). Similarly, prodigious posting of self-referential photographs is not only evident among aggressive self-promoters; it is reported by a broad spectrum of users. Marketers are more likely to engage inner narcissists if the co-produced content helps users develop the postures and affectations they want to promote to others in their social network, and to broadcast their details to a growing audience. Inner narcissists crave reach and ratings for their personal show on MeTV. Thus, the promise of connecting to a throng and feeding their exhibitionist needs by virtue of their relationship with marketers may prove irresistible. For instance, there are opportunities to develop campaigns around emerging social trends, such as planking, owling, horse manning, and lamping. These efforts provide an outlet for self-expression, engage narcissists, connect users to a growing audience, and can include the brand in the co-produced content.

In terms of attracting narcissists, psychologists have identified a human affliction to homophily that promises to help marketers harness Facebook’s power (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). *Homophily* refers to individuals’ tendency to find individuals who share their attitudes and values more attractive than those who do not, and to seek links with people with whom they already agree and avoid those who would challenge the way they think. To the extent homophily is active in the minds of 18- to 25-year-old Facebook users, it seems likely that the narcissists among them are drawn to celebrity narcissists—people who are famous for being

Table 4. Suggestions for marketers

Motivation	Appeal to:	Suggestions for marketers
Voyeurism	Desire for titillation, peeking, and gathering <i>dirt</i> about brands	Post videos and photographs of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertisement outtakes • Casting sessions for TV ads • Discarded product/service prototypes • Ads placed in foreign markets • Videos of a typical day at the office <p><i>Examples of success: Red Bull's WEB TV and Burt's Bees.</i></p>
Branding	Desire for promoting an image of <i>uniqueness</i>	Form brand communities of only specially selected invitees who enjoy special privileges, such as the ability to do the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the marketer's logo on their Facebook pages • Download special apps (allowing them to develop professional-level content on their own pages that also feature the brand) • Access early product releases and virtual events <p><i>Examples of success: LiveScribe allows people to tweet and post about their products from their Facebook page; Travel Channel allows Facebook users to comment on how the channel helped them improve their travel experiences; Ford identifies fans and asks them to cover virtual events.</i></p>
Narcissism	Desire for saying "Look <i>only</i> at me; I am special" on Facebook pages	Engage narcissists based on the principle of homophily (i.e., people actively seek out others who are just like them), such as the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a celebrity narcissist endorse your brand on his/her page (this will attract other narcissists) • Assume that narcissists will follow celebrity narcissists (e.g., Kim Kardashian has more than 6 million followers; her recent post about "wanting to turn the phone off" garnered about 9,000 likes and about a thousand comments within 45 minutes) • Request uploads of photographs featuring the brand <p><i>Examples of success: Coca Cola's 2010 campaign (post your photo having a refreshing Coke moment).</i></p>

celebrities and little else—who they believe are just like them. One way to engage narcissists is to have noted celebrity narcissists endorse brands on their Facebook pages. For instance, Kim Kardashian's endorsement of the Zurich bag from ShoeDazzle posted on her Facebook on October 10, 2011, received 1,604 likes, 134 user comments, and 15 shares in a 24-hour period from likely voyeurs, branders, and fellow narcissists; see Table 4 for other additional suggestions.

7. Conclusions

It is unclear if advertisers flocking to new social network media are attuned to the complexities of the Facebook-user relationship or if they are aware of the significantly new technological capabilities they must develop to harness Facebook's power to brand and drive sales. Our study makes a contribution to this

field by not only highlighting some of the key challenges, but also identifying new opportunities for thinking and action. We studied a narrow demographic of 18- to 25-year-old college students and drew inferences from exploratory qualitative data. We aimed to stimulate new thinking and research, and to speak to the practical realities of marketers struggling with branding on Facebook. Caution should be exercised before implementing our inferences, as considerable testing across a wider demographic sample in multiple settings is clearly necessary before generalizable insights can emerge.

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