The Power of “Like”
How Brands Reach (and Influence) Fans
Through Social-Media Marketing

INTRODUCTION
The key findings of the current research include the following:

- Facebook is the dominant social-networking site, with an audience of approximately 160 million U.S. visitors each month. It accounts for 90 percent of all time spent on social-networking sites.

- Branded content on social media can take many forms, among them content shared directly from brands, re-shared content from connections, and social-marketing tools such as Facebook’s “Sponsored Stories” advertising unit. Although there has been considerable focus on counting the incidence of these brand mentions on social networks (and, to a lesser degree, categorizing it), the authors found that the reach and frequency of social-media brand impressions are far more important than simple counting statistics.

- Facebook users spend more than a fourth of their time on the site consuming and interacting with the Facebook Newsfeed; this activity represents 4 percent of all time spent online in the United States. The Newsfeed also is the primary location where branded content is consumed. In fact, users are 40 to 150 times more likely to consume branded content in the Newsfeed than to visit the Fan Page itself.

- There typically are two potential audiences for branded content on Facebook:

  - Fans of brands on Facebook (those who have explicitly “liked” a brand) are the easiest to reach with social-media brand impressions.
  - Friends of fans typically represent a much larger set of consumers (34 times larger, on average, for the top 100 brand pages) and can receive social-media brand impressions by way of their friends. In examples from this study, the reach of branded content among friends of fans significantly exceeded the reach among fans.

  - When a brand focuses on acquiring and engaging fans, it can benefit from a significant secondary effect—exposure among friends of fans that often surpassed reach among fans.

  - For some brands, Facebook fans may have different aggregate demographic and behavioral profiles than typical brand purchasers, indicating that social media may require different approaches to marketing strategy.

  - The “value of a fan” can be assessed in three primary ways:

    - increasing the depth of engagement and loyalty among fans;
    - generating incremental purchase behavior; and
    - leveraging the ability to influence friends of fans.

Collectively, this research leads to two important conclusions:

- By focusing on measuring the reach of their branded content among various constituencies, brands can more effectively understand and optimize the way in which they leverage their presence on Facebook.

- Brands can realize significant untapped benefits by understanding and focusing on reaching the friends of their fans.
RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Over the past several years, social media have emerged to redefine the digital media landscape and, in the process, have changed the way we think about the dissemination of marketing messages.

In particular, Facebook has facilitated two unique consumer experiences of interest to brand marketers:

- The ability for consumers to identify brands of interest and connect with them has enabled sharing between brands and consumers in new ways. Brands and their consumers can now create two-way relationships and share content, news, and feedback.
- Social media also have facilitated innovative ways of sharing information about brands between friends. Whether consumers are voicing their affinity for certain brands or their experiences with products and services, Facebook not only encourages this type of sharing but can accelerate its reach and virility.

Brands increasingly are interested in establishing a social presence and engaging with their fans, helping shape their customers’ experiences, and even leveraging their voices for greater marketing impact. Underscoring the importance of this channel, 100 percent of the Advertising Age Top 100 Advertisers have established Facebook pages for their brands.

As this new marketing paradigm unfolds, there is palpable excitement about its potential to drive value for businesses but also anxiety about the difficulty of grasping the full promise of this emerging medium. According to a study conducted by the Harvard Business Review, only 12 percent of companies surveyed indicated that they were effective users of social media; just 7 percent said they were able to integrate social media into their marketing activities.

These problems are all too common for businesses attempting to succeed in today’s social-media environment.

Part of the challenge is that as social media have evolved, the research methodologies and key metrics developed to describe social activity have served to isolate—rather than integrate—into traditional marketing terms.

For example, most research on branded content on social platforms has focused on describing the incidence of these types of branded content (and, to a lesser degree, categorizing it as “positive” or “negative”) without regard to the size or composition of the audience receiving that content. Simply knowing how many brand mentions exist does little to provide insights for the potential impact of that content. In fact, it actually can lead brands to focus on suboptimal strategies because it highlights only content creators—at the cost of not understanding its distribution.

The current research indicates that an approach that is instead focused on the audience of branded content on social platforms—namely, audience reach and frequency—can unlock a much better understanding of the true impact (and, therefore, value) of those impressions. This approach is more favorable because it allows brands to focus on marketing activities that drive scale within audiences of interest. Additionally, it provides brands the opportunity to understand the profile of those audiences reached with various types of content and to begin to understand the impact of that content exposure.

Important is that an approach focused on audience reach and frequency also would serve to integrate brand activity on social platforms with other parts of the marketing mix because reach, frequency, and Gross Ratings Point (GRP) are standard units of measurement across most media channels, including television, online, radio, and print.

METHODOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

Data in this study are collected and analyzed using the comScore Social Essentials product, which is a measurement service based on comScore’s proprietary 2-million person global panel of Internet users from a home or work computer. (Note: Mobile-based Internet browsing is not included in this analysis.)

Opt-in panelists provided comScore with explicit permission to passively observe their online behavior, including site visitation, search activity, advertising exposure, and online purchases. By measuring online behavior for these opt-in panelists, comScore could observe both public and nonpublic pages within particular social networks such as Facebook.

Measurement of panelists’ exposure to social-media marketing within social networks can be linked to other behaviors in which they engage around the Web. In addition, certain select data points and illustrations in the current article are based on aggregate, nonpersonally identifiable data sourced from Facebook.

Social-Media Brand Impressions

In this article, the authors describe a unit of branded content as a “social-media brand impression.” Although these impressions occur throughout a social network and may be delivered through a variety of dissemination channels, there are four primary vehicles through which these impressions are delivered:

- **Page publishing**: These unpaid impressions appear on the fan page wall and may also appear in the Newsfeed of a fan or a friend of a fan.
- **Stories about friends**: These unpaid impressions occur when a friend actively engages with a brand (e.g., Nicole indicates she “likes” Columbia Sportswear) and become visible either on a friend’s wall or in the Newsfeed.
These stories may appear to fans and friends of fans.

- **Sponsored stories:** These paid impressions are similar to stories about friends, but they have been actively distributed more broadly and appear in the right-hand column to fans and friends of fans.

- **Advertisements with social:** These branded messages come directly from the advertisers with a social context on the unit that appears to friends of fans (e.g., “Nicole Likes Columbia Sportswear,” appearing at the bottom of the advertising unit).

Although comScore’s Social Essentials reports on all four impression types, the current research focuses specifically on unpaid—or “earned”—impressions (See Figure 1).

**Facebook Fan and Friends-of-Fans Segments**

In the current study, the authors discuss different types of user segments within Facebook. Although other analyses of Facebook fans typically have centered on counts in the total number of accrued fans, the current study instead measured audience segments within Facebook based on their exposure to brand impressions within the given reporting period (consistent with the comScore Social Essentials product).

Moreover, the authors point out, not only are fans exposed to these impressions but so are their friends. With this understanding in mind, the current research references the following audience segments:

- **Fans:** This user segment is based on users who have affirmatively stated their affinity for a particular brand by “liking” that brand. Over a given period, a subset of the total fan base has been exposed to a social-media brand impression.

- **Friends of fans:** This user segment (aka “friends”) is defined as those who are not explicitly brand fans but have been exposed to brand impressions through a friend who is a fan of a particular brand. Over a given period, a subset of the total friends of fans is likely to have been exposed to brand impressions.

- **Non-fans:** This segment encompasses all users of the social network who have neither become a fan of a particular brand nor are connected to a fan who has taken such a “like” action.

An example to illustrate the friends-of-fans multiplier (See Figure 2): Although the fan base of Microsoft Bing is approximately 1.7 million, the number of friends of fans in this network is 232 million—more than 130 times the size of the fan base.

**BRAND FANS MAKE FACEBOOK A SOCIAL MARKETING VEHICLE**

Over the past few years, Facebook has emerged as a powerful social-marketing and advertising platform. In the United States alone, Facebook has approximately 160 million visitors each month—about three of every four Internet users—with the majority of them visiting the site on a daily basis (See Figure 3).

Compared with other leading social networks, Facebook today represents the vast majority of U.S. social networking activity, accounting for 90 percent of all time spent on social networking sites in the United States.¹

---

¹ comScore Media Metrix, US, May 2011
Within Facebook, the largest portion of users’ time is spent on the individual’s homepage that features the Newsfeed. More specifically: In May 2011, 27 percent of engagement on Facebook.com occurred on the homepage and Newsfeed, followed by profile viewing (21 percent), photo viewing (17 percent) and usage of apps and tools (10 percent; See Figure 4).

Understanding the importance of the Newsfeed to the Facebook user experience helps illustrate how (and where) users are likely to see and digest information on the site. This implication especially is important for brands with a presence on Facebook, as the Newsfeed offers the greatest opportunity to reach and engage with current and potential customers.

Facebook users demonstrate their affinity for brands through use of the “like” button. By “liking” a brand (also known as “becoming a fan”), followers can express their interest affirmatively in a particular brand for reasons that may include self-expression, communicating positive associations of that brand to others, staying in communication with that brand, or receiving deals and promotions. Many iconic brands have been able to amass substantial fan followings, with Coca Cola, Starbucks, and Disney each boasting more than 20 million fans as of July 2011.

For the current study, the authors have examined the social-media impact for three very different brands—Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, and Microsoft Bing—to understand how their respective marketing messages have reached fans and friends of fans throughout the network and the resulting implications of these social-media brand exposures.

Most Branded Content Exposure Occurs in the Newsfeed

Despite an increasing willingness to identify as fans of a brand, it is important to understand that the core user experience of consuming (and engaging with) content in the Newsfeed extends to branded content.

In other words—importantly—social-media brand content is primarily consumed within the Newsfeed, as opposed to on the brand’s fan pages.

To grasp the significant difference in consumption of branded content in the Newsfeed as opposed to the brand page, the authors compared the page views on the fan page to the total number of brand exposures on Facebook, with the following results (See Figure 5):

In May 2011, Starbucks delivered 156 brand impressions throughout Facebook for every one page view on its fan page. Southwest delivered 42 brand impressions for every fan page view; Bing delivered 45. In each brand’s case, it managed to reach millions of people with brand impressions throughout the site while only attracting tens of thousands of visitors to its fan pages.

At first glance, these outsized ratios seem surprising, but the data actually are very consistent with how people use Facebook. Most of their time is spent on the Newsfeed over individual profile (or brand) pages, so it makes sense that the branded content impressions would reflect this reality.

Despite the dominance of consumption in Newsfeeds relative to brand pages, a
minority of fans see content from a brand in a given week. A Facebook analysis indicates that, on average, 16 percent of fans are reached by branded content by a brand that posts 5 of 7 days.

Why do not all fans see a particular piece of content from a brand? Some fans may miss content if they are not logged onto the site during a period when brands are active. Additionally, the Facebook Newsfeed uses an algorithm to rank content based upon the likely interest to a user. So, unlike other social-media settings, in Facebook, only the content determined to be most relevant to a user is delivered at a specific time.

Furthermore, the results of the comparison of Newsfeeds to brand pages are similar to the degree of reach between users and their friends. A given status update from a user will result in approximately 12-percent reach among their friends, according to a Facebook analysis.

How can fan pages increase the likelihood of reaching their fan base? Publishing content that is highly engaging can increase the likelihood of content appearing in the Newsfeed. Publishing more often can also increase the rate at which fans see content. A Facebook analysis suggests that each incremental day of publishing branded content from the Facebook page increases the reach among fans by approximately 2.5 percent (See Figure 6).

Of course, brands also must take care to ensure that the content and frequency of publishing aligns with the expectations of their fan base, and does not annoy or disengage fans.

**Friends of Fans: Extending the Social Influence of Fans**

Reaching fans with marketing messages certainly is of interest to brands, but the current research found that the friends of fans represent a substantial potential audience, often well beyond the scale of fans alone.

A Facebook analysis of the top 100 brand pages suggests that, for every fan, there are an additional 34 friends of fans who can be reached (with significant variance among brands; See Figure 7). This multiplier grows even larger when the analysis extends beyond the top 100 brand pages (81× on average among the top 1,000 fan pages).

Looking specifically at Starbucks, Southwest, and Bing, the ratio of fans to

---

\(^3\) Facebook, internal user analysis

---

**Figure 5** Starbucks, Southwest, & Bing: Ratio of Facebook Impressions for Fans and Friends of Fans to Page Views on Brand Fan Pages.

**Figure 6** Facebook Fan Pages: Cumulative Reach as a Function of Post Frequency (No. of Days per Week).
friends of fans varies considerably across the three brands (See Figure 8). In all three cases, however, the friends of fans represent an audience at least an order of magnitude larger than the fan base—hundreds of millions of users globally.

Friends of fans also are an intriguing audience for marketers. As these consumers have yet to identify themselves as fans of a given brand, there may be more upside in messaging to them—either for brand building or increasing consumption. Brands also can take advantage of these users’ social proximity to fans to deliver stories about those fans’ interest and engagement with their brand.

An analysis of the reach delivered via social-media brand impressions highlights this ability to extend reach through friends of fans. Across all three brands analyzed, the number of friends of fans reached by these brand impressions exceeded the reach by fans alone, and by a significant amount in the cases of Starbucks and Bing (See Figure 9).

**Reaching Consumers at Scale with Branded Content**

Social media generally are not regarded in the same way as other media channels (online display advertising, for instance) that deliver branded content at scale, such as online display advertising. The current research, however, has indicated that, in some cases, such analysis could warrant consideration, primarily because of social media’s demonstrated ability to deliver impressions comparable with that of other digital-advertising efforts.

With Southwest and Bing, social-media impressions were marginally incremental to their existing online display advertising campaigns in reaching people around the Web. In Starbucks’ case, however, unpaid

**Figure 7** Facebook Fan Pages: Friends of Fan Multiplier and Fan Base Size.

![Figure 7](image)

**Figure 8** Starbucks, Southwest, and Bing: Potential Reach of Friends of Fans Audience (000).

![Figure 8](image)
social-media impressions increased total online impression volume by an impressive 64 percent. This amplification in social-media brand impressions largely was attributable to Starbucks’ ability to leverage a larger fan base and its modest (compared to Bing and Southwest) advertising-impression volume (See Figure 10).

Most marketers would agree that, although they buy on an impression basis, their true goal is to reach people—particularly those in their target demographic. Accordingly, the authors contend that social-media research also should focus on measuring the number and composition of people reached by brand messages on Facebook and other social networks.

Social-Media Reach, Frequency, and GRPs

Facebook provides the opportunity to deliver not only brand impressions at scale but impressions with social context. This means that it has the potential to generate lift at each stage in the marketing cycle—brand awareness, favorability, purchase intent, conversion, or even long-term loyalty and lifetime value. The ability to measure the impact of these brand impressions in terms of traditional marketing metrics, in fact, can help brands realize the value of social media as an integral component of their overall marketing mix.

To achieve this cross-media comparability, social-media brand impressions must be quantified and translated into traditional media planning variables such as reach, frequency, and GRPs.

The authors calculated these metrics for Starbucks, Southwest, and Bing based on the number of social-media brand impressions delivered against fans and friends of fans. The results showed that, although fans received a higher number of impressions on average, friends of fans represented a wider reach. Due to Starbucks’ larger overall fan base, the brand delivered the highest overall number of total U.S. GRPs at 17.3 (5.7 among fans and 11.6 among friends). Southwest delivered a combined 2.0 GRPs whereas Bing delivered 2.7 GRPs (See Table 1).

---

Figure 9 Starbucks, Southwest & Bing: Total U.S. Internet Reach (%) of Social Media Brand Impressions among Fans & Friends of Fans.

Figure 10 Starbucks, Southwest, and Bing: Facebook Brand Impressions (000) versus Display Ad Impressions (000) among Fans and Friends of Fans.
SOCIAL-MEDIA AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Understanding the size of the audience reached by means of social media leads to a natural follow-on question: Who are these people?

With traditional campaigns, marketers attempt to reach particular audience segments with their messages and—in the context of social-media campaigns—these marketers want to understand how the audiences align with their marketing objectives. The analysis that follows illustrates the demographic and behavioral attributes of various Facebook fan segments.

Demographic Analysis

On the demographic side, the brand-exposed fans of the three brands studied differ by age composition (See Figure 11). Starbucks actually had a fairly young demographic profile for its fans, with more than 40 percent of the audience younger than 25, and 18- to 24-year-olds accounting for more than a fourth of all fans (26.5 percent).

Approximately 40 percent of Bing’s fans also were younger than 25, although they were more evenly balanced among the younger-than-18-year-old segment and 18- to 24-year-olds. Southwest fans, meanwhile, showed an older age profile with more than half (52.0 percent) at least 35 years old.

In the case of Starbucks, the authors observed some differences in the respective demographic profiles of its brand-exposed Facebook fans in comparison to its typical in-store customers (See Figure 12).

Specifically:

- Among people age 18 and older, 20 percent of those who had visited a Starbucks premises within the past month were between the ages of 18 and 24; 31 percent of brand-exposed Starbucks fans also were in that age segment.
- At the same time, 14 percent of in-store visitors were age 55 and older, but this same age segment accounted for just 7 percent of brand-exposed fans.

With the knowledge that fans skewed significantly younger than the typical customer, Starbucks likely would benefit by designing its social marketing strategies to bring younger customers in the door.

Understanding the demographic characteristics of a brand’s social-media following may reveal interesting audience dynamics and uncover the potential for new marketing opportunities.

| TABLE 1                                      | Exposed Impressed Total U.S. Total Internet Total U.S. |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Fans                                         | Fans (000)     | Impressions (000) | Reach (%) | Internet Reach (%) | Frequency | GRPs |
| Starbucks                                    | 6,314          | 17,098            | 2.1       | 2.9                | 2.7        | 5.7   |
| Southwest                                    | 917            | 2,924             | 0.3       | 0.4                | 3.2        | 1.0   |
| Bing                                         | 1,221          | 3,670             | 0.4       | 0.6                | 3.0        | 1.2   |

Friends

| Fans                                         | Exposed Impressed Total U.S. Total Internet Total U.S. |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Starbucks                                    | 10,630         | 35,267            | 3.5       | 4.9                | 3.3        | 11.6  |
| Southwest                                    | 1,123          | 2,994             | 0.4       | 0.5                | 2.7        | 1.0   |
| Bing                                         | 2,208          | 4,441             | 0.7       | 1.0                | 2.0        | 1.5   |

Source: comScore Social Essentials, U.S., May 2011

**Figure 11** Starbucks, Southwest, and Bing: Facebook Fan Age Demographic Profile.
What is clear in these examples is that it is difficult to generalize about a brand’s social-media audience. They may in some cases closely mirror one’s typical customer base or, in other cases, look very different. Because attracting fans can be a function of both organic brand affinity and active social-media marketing efforts, there is no obvious rule of thumb.

Nonetheless, it is important that brands understand who these fans are to utilize the strategies that will be most effective in activating these customers.

**Behavioral Analysis**

The current research demonstrates that fans have different online behavioral profiles by brand. In the analysis that follows, the authors examined the percentage of time a particular brand’s fans spent in different site categories relative to the average U.S. Internet user.

The results indicated several strong behavioral skews by brand among the top content categories (See Figure 13):

- Brand-exposed fans of all three brands significantly over-indexed for time spent in the social networking category.
- All three brands over-indexed for the entertainment category (consistent with their relative preference for leisure-oriented online content such as social networking).
- All three brands over-indexed for search/navigation.
- Bing fans exhibited a strong propensity to visit automotive pages but relatively low visitation for the financial news, newspapers and travel categories.
- Southwest fans, unsurprisingly, indexed high on the travel category and the retail category.
- Starbucks fans also indexed high on retail.

Brands can leverage the information on their fans’ online behavior to better understand what messaging might work best with customers, which products to

![Figure 12 Demographic Profile of Brand-Exposed Starbucks Fans versus Starbucks Store Visitors.](image1)

This fact should not be surprising, given that these user segments are more likely to associate with brands on Facebook.
promote via social media, and what type of promotions are most likely to gain traction.

Another way for brands to build a profile of their fans is to understand which content categories they are most likely to visit relative to the average Internet user (See Table 2).

Starbucks fans, for example, can be described as both entertainment-oriented and information seekers. Southwest fans show great interest in the weather—probably because they are heavier travelers—whereas Bing fans are more likely to be auto-intenders and consumers of teen content.

**TABLE 2**
Content Categories Most Likely to be Visited by Fans Relative to the Average Internet User

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Starbucks Fans</th>
<th>Southwest Fans</th>
<th>Bing Fans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>325</td>
<td>Social Networking</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>Social Networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>197</td>
<td>Entertainment—Multimedia</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>Gay/Lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>187</td>
<td>Search/Navigation</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>Search/Navigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>170</td>
<td>Directories—Reference</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>Gaming Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>170</td>
<td>Entertainment—Music</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>Auto Manufacturer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FACEBOOK OFFERS GLOBAL MARKETING CHANNEL FOR BRANDS**

Although most campaign measurement and evaluation occur at a local level, it also is important for many brands to take a more global perspective.

Facebook’s extensive worldwide reach makes it one of the few media channels that can be employed for global branding efforts. According to comScore, Facebook reached 714 million worldwide unique visitors in May—a performance that ranked it as the third largest worldwide Web property. It also ranks as the top social-networking site in the wide majority of countries measured by comScore.

In terms of its ability to reach fans across the world with brand impressions on Facebook (See Figure 14), the current study showed that Starbucks had a diverse base of exposed fans across all five global regions, with North America accounting for less than 30 percent of the total. Southwest had a more concentrated fan base—understandable because it is a domestic airline. Bing—a global brand—enjoyed a fairly diverse fan base, though not as diverse as Starbucks’.

Starbucks, which boasts 5,500 coffee houses in more than 50 countries, clearly is capitalizing on Facebook as a global marketing channel. In May, Starbucks’ social-media brand impressions reached more than 53 million people worldwide, with 10 individual countries delivering impressions to at least 1 million fans and friends. The United States led the way with 14.4 million exposed fans and friends, followed by Germany (4 million), Mexico (2.5 million) and Canada (2.3 million; See Figure 15).

**FAN VALUE AND SOCIAL-MEDIA RETURN ON INVESTMENT**

Perhaps the most common questions that arise in evaluating social-media efforts are
THE POWER OF “LIKE”

“What is a fan worth?” and “What is the return on my social-media investment?”

Answering such queries must begin with quantifying the value of a fan, which might be considered in the following ways:

- increasing engagement and loyalty among fans,
- generating incremental purchases among fans, and
- positively influencing friends of fans.

A retailer may want to understand how much more time fans spend at its store than non-fans. A Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) brand may be interested in knowing how much more of its product is purchased in-store by fans than non-fans. Similarly, a publisher could be curious about how much more time is spent on its Web site than a non-fan. The potential applications for understanding these differences are virtually limitless.

A good starting point for quantifying the value of social-media audiences is to analyze basic brand engagement. For Starbucks, Southwest, and Bing, the current study began by evaluating how much more likely fans and friends of fans were to visit the Web sites for those brands compared to the average visitor of those sites. Among the results (See Figure 16):

- Starbucks’ fans and friends of fans showed the highest average propensity to visit the brand Web site, with fans 418 percent more likely to visit Starbucks.com and friends of fans 230 percent more likely.
- Southwest fans were 362 percent more likely to visit Southwest.com, whereas friends of fans were 165 percent more likely to follow a comparable action.
- Bing, which showed relatively more modest lifts at 55 percent for fans and 33 percent for friends of fans, had much higher rates of visitation overall than the other two brands’ Web sites, with more than 1 of every 3 U.S. Internet users visiting Bing in May.

With these examples, the authors were able to establish that fans and friends of fans tended to exhibit significantly higher brand engagement than the typical

**Figure 15** Starbucks: Top 10 Countries by Number of Exposed Fans and Friends of Fans (000).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Fans (000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>14,417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>3,972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2,549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2,276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1,854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1,616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>1,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>1,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>1,233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: comScore Social Essentials, U.S., May 2011

**Figure 16** Starbucks, Southwest, and Bing: Website Visitation among Exposed Fans and Friends of Fans versus Average Internet User.

With these examples, the authors were able to establish that fans and friends of fans tended to exhibit significantly higher brand engagement than the typical
Internet user and also to quantify the magnitude of the difference. This evaluation, however, can often be taken to the next level of analysis:

- **Starbucks**
  
  To understand differences in purchase patterns among the fans and friends segments, comScore analyzed Starbucks customers’ in-store purchase patterns. The analysis, which examined in-store purchase behavior during May 2011, revealed that Starbucks fans and friends of fans spent 8 percent more and transacted 11 percent more frequently than the average Internet user who transacted at Starbucks (See Figure 17).

  It is important to note that differences between fans and non-fans in terms of purchase quantity or frequency are not truly reflective of the value of a “like.” At least a portion of these differences reflect the preexisting preferences of these consumers: they prefer Starbucks, make a habit of visiting Starbucks often, and also are more likely to express this brand affinity by becoming a fan of Starbucks on Facebook.

  Thus, differences in spend may reflect the strength of preexisting brand preferences. That said, it is clear that these are valuable customers for Starbucks, and social media represent a strong opportunity to engage with them.

  To understand the incremental value of the published content, this research technique can be used to identify Starbucks fans and friends of fans who have received branded content and evaluate their behavior over time. It can be used to compare this behavior not only to that of non-fans but based on the frequency and diversity of exposure to branded content and its latent impact on purchasing behavior.

- **Southwest**
  
  For Southwest, the authors conducted an analysis comparing Southwest.com site visitation patterns between fans and friends of fans and the average site visitor. The results indicated substantially higher visitation rates among fans and friends of fans. Whereas 2.7 percent of the total U.S. Internet audience visited Southwest.com in May 2011, 12.4 percent of exposed Southwest Facebook fans visited the site—nearly five times the total Internet average. Perhaps even more dramatically, 7.1 percent of exposed Southwest friends of fans visited Southwest.com—more than 2.5 times the rate among the total Internet population.

  These results suggested that exposure to socially influenced brand messages might be persuasive in driving brand engagement (See Figure 18).

  For a Web site such as Southwest.com, which sells tickets directly and therefore represents the company’s primary revenue-generation channel, differences in site visitation rates can be tied to conversion to help quantify the value of fans and friends of fans.

- **Bing**
  
  For Bing, the authors conducted a similar analysis comparing Bing.com search patterns between Bing fans and friends of fans and the average Bing.com searcher. The results, once again, indicated higher engagement across the board among the fans and friends of fans segments. Overall, Bing fans conducted 68 percent more searches on Bing than...
the average Bing searcher (40.9 versus 24.3) whereas friends of fans conducted 27 percent more searches (30.8 versus 24.3). Fans and friends also exhibited higher search engagement in terms of the number of searches per session, searches per usage day, and number of search usage days.

In each case, Bing fans demonstrated significantly higher engagement than the friends of fans segment (See Figure 19).

This dynamic illustrates the importance of the fan and friend segments to Microsoft, as their association with the Bing brand corresponds directly with Microsoft’s ability to monetize search behavior.

CONCLUSION

As marketers increasingly look to Facebook and other social-media platforms as new ways of communicating with their consumers, they seek metrics that can help them understand the value and create an effective strategy for reaching key audience segments.

Typical approaches that focus on raw fan counts, however—or the total number of engagements on a given piece of content—fail to depict the potential and realized scope of social-media brand impressions.

As illustrated through the examples in this study, a measurement approach that focuses on reach and frequency within audience types (for example, fans and friends of fans) can lead to a dramatically better understanding of how and where brand messages are reaching consumers. This same focus means that marketers also can better place their social-media strategy within the broader framework of their marketing objectives for key consumer segments.

In particular, the findings in this article may be of interest to brand marketers as they consider their realization of the “value of a fan” on Facebook.

In addition to understanding the short- and long-term reach of social-media brand impressions to fans, this approach’s ability to determine reach among the largely untapped friends of fans audiences may be important in helping brands to achieve their marketing goals on Facebook... and beyond.

Andrew Lipsman is Vice President of Marketing & Industry Analysis at comScore. Andrew specializes in several areas of research, including social media, e-commerce, online video, and online advertising and is frequently quoted by leading news organizations, such as the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, CNN, Forbes, BusinessWeek and Newsweek. Andrew is currently pursuing his MBA at Northwestern’s Kellogg School of Management and holds a BA in Public Policy Studies from Duke University.

Graham Mlod is Senior Vice President of Search and Media at comScore, based in San Francisco. He manages research projects and client relationships with a number of prominent online media companies, including Google, Facebook, Yahoo!, Hulu and Disney. He is an experienced marketer and industry analyst, having spent ten years directly and indirectly growing major technology brands. Graham holds an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University, and a BS with honors in Psychology from Santa Clara University.

Mike Rich is a Vice President in comScore’s custom media research division. In his eight years at comScore, Mike has helped pioneer new methods for measuring online video, software, hardware, and social media. Prior to comScore, Mike worked in media and technology consulting roles at Associated Press, Doceus, and Leap Wireless. Mike has a BS in Journalism from Boston University. He currently lives in Seattle with his wife and two children.

Sean Brisch leads Facebook’s measurement research group. Sean and his team are responsible for measuring how advertising and branded content impact users’ behaviors and perceptions, and for developing and standardizing methodologies for evaluating the effectiveness of marketing programs. Before joining Facebook, Sean was with Google’s Customer Labs and Quantitative Marketing groups, where he managed Google’s quantitative advertiser research and developed advertising effectiveness measurement tools for advertisers. Sean studied cognitive neuroscience at Stanford University.

**Figure 19** Bing: Brand-Exposed Fans and Friends of Fans Search Activity versus Average Bing Searcher.