Improving Social Media Response to Endorsement Marketing in an Endorser-Product Page

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Celebrity endorsers and social media are staples in modern-day marketing. In Facebook, where these two collide, Timeline posts are the main vehicles for landing endorsement marketing objectives. But how are they communicated exactly? And do they actually work? We show how to measure fan responses according to objectives and improve communication materials design for an Endorser-Product page. Qualitative content analysis via descriptive coding categorized 1:43 BSKIN Timeline posts into sell types and extracted consumption & reach scores from fan responses, where 77% of posts had low consumption and 95% had short reach. For improved response, we recommend page administrators to publish materials that create visually-appealing, 2-way conversations anchored on the endorser and offering additional material reward, using hard sell qualities for optimal reach and soft sell qualities for consumption.

Keywords: SNS Marketing, Social Media Endorsement Marketing, Facebook Data Analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is common practice to use celebrity endorsers in the marketing of new products as they lend brand equity to the 'unknown' product (Mukherjee 2009). Businesses today also have a new staple in their marketing strategy when launching products— the use of social media, with Facebook as their preferred site (McClane 2013).

Most celebrity endorsers have official and unofficial Facebook fan pages, as do new products. However, both types of pages are usually independent from each other, and endorsements usually appear just as posts in a product page's timeline or vice-versa.

Social media endorsements are not disappearing anytime soon. Facebook data scientists claim that users are 50 percent more likely to remember promotions on Facebook when visibly endorsed by someone they know (Simonite 2012).

Although this may be good news for business owners, gauging if endorser-led promotions are worth their price is still a loose science. Currently, Facebook page owners can only view trends in fans activity thru the proprietary business page analytics tool, Facebook Insights. However, the downloadable Facebook Insights Data report provides an overwhelming 90 key metrics that page administrators may not necessarily need or understand. Some claim that many of these data points are repetitive and do not help marketing at all (Hussain 2012).

There is an agreement though that the ability of the page to engage an audience and attract more fans are the more important data points, as they could lead to converting fans into customers for the business (Hussain 2012). Simply put, business owners are concerned about *consumption* (patronage of page content by fans) and *reach* (the number of people and potential people viewing the content).

Even if the terms *consumption* & *reach* both appear in the Facebook Insights Data report, they do not explain how conversion can be attained, or, at the very least, if it is at bay. Extensive online research also reveals little to how page administrators can tell if endorsers are helping at all… and since product endorsements come at a price, there is even greater pressure for business owners to ensure that their endorser-linked posts serve their objectives.

In February of 2012, a new cosmetic & skin care brand, BSKIN, contracted an up-and-coming boy band, 1:43, to endorse their flagship BB Cream product. With 1:43 having a Facebook fan base of 30,000 at the time, BSKIN created a unique Facebook page on its new product that solely targeted fans of the band— resulting in a hybrid Endorser-Product fan page: **1:43 BSKIN**.

This Endorser-Product page is a perfect environment to understand which administrator posts yield the intended response from fans, and is the subject of this study. We aim to understand the dynamics operating in an Endorser-Product fan page and how it results to high consumption & reach through the conversations of its 2 main actors, so we may later recommend communication strategies for those marketing new products using endorsers via social media.

1.1 Research Questions
To answer the general research problem: "How can Facebook posts get better response?" we must first address the following research questions:
- How are administrators communicating endorsed marketing objectives?
- What are the attributes of these communication materials?
- How are fan responses categorized?
- How are fans responding to such communication?

1.2 Scope & Limitations
The study focuses on a single Endorser-Product fan page (1:43 BSKIN) and no comparison with other pages is provided since the supporting administrator & quantitative data required for the study is only available for this page.

The study does **not** focus on the effectiveness of: (a) social media as a marketing platform, (b) endorsers for social media marketing, or the (c) BSKIN

marketing mix. Rather, it dwells on the type of communication that generate positive feedback in an Endorser-Product page.

2. METHODOLOGY

A generic approach to qualitative content analysis via descriptive coding (Lichtman, Taylor-Powell & Renner 2013) was used on the following naturally occurring data appearing on the Facebook Timeline: (a) Responses from page fans, and (b) Posts by the page administrators. These data were taken from the BSKIN 1:43 Facebook Fan Page (https://facebook.com/bskin143) during its entire page lifecycle (from February 16, 2012 – December 12, 2012). A total enumeration of administrator posts (94 items), fan posts (6 items), and fan responses (196 items) were processed.

Since the author is an administrator of the subject page, all references on the intention of the administrator, despite lack of supporting evidence, can be considered accurate albeit with some degree of subjectivity.

2.1 Categorization

2.1.1 Fan response categorization
Responses were categorized according to 2 domains of administrator interest: consumption and reach. Consumption was measured thru any of the following Facebook actions: Like, Comment, Post, Private Message, Poll tick; while Reach was measured thru Post, Share, or Tag.

Coding for these data followed the categories in **Table 1**. Response values followed a pecking order per domain value: the more it is viewed positively, the higher the value (i.e. A comment showing trial purchase intent is considered a better response than a comment showing interest in a promo/marketing).

Since the administrator represents the interest of BSKIN (or the product), actions that favored product consumption & reach were, naturally, ranked higher (as shown in the code numbers). Those that favor just the endorser or other fans were considered neutral, and those that hamper consumption & reach were rated negatively.

Table 1. Fan Response Categories

Value	Domain	Response Value	
Positive [+]	Consumption [C+]	Repeat purchase intent [C+6] Trial purchase intent [C+5] Product interest only [C+4]	Brand interest only [C+3] Marketing interest only [C+2] Like, Poll tick [C+1]
Neutral [=]	Consumption [C=]	Endorser interest only [C=0] Engagement with other fans [C=0]	
Negative [-]	Consumption [C-]	Unliking a post [C-1] Negative comment [C-2]	

Value	Domain	Response Value
Positive [+]	Reach [R+]	Product testimonial [R+3] Sharing of post [R+2] Tagging of page [R+1]
Negative [-]	Reach [R-]	Unfollow, Untag or Block *not applicable since Facebook does not supply these data*

2.1.2 Administrator post categorization

Administrator posts, which appear as a Note, Album, Photo, Poll, Event, Poster, Status Update, Message, Quiz, or Video, were categorized into 3 types of materials:

1. **Soft Sell**: product posts that have no call to action and usually share the limelight with endorsers.
2. **Mid Sell**: posts about the product/product brand yet still lack a call to action.
3. **Hard Sell**: posts with a clear call to action, which is usually a product purchase.

Coding for these data followed the categories in **Table 2**. They do not observe ranking.

Table 2. Admin Post Categories.

Sell Type	Sell Content
Soft Sell [SS] CO refers to asking fans' opinions in creating new brand experiences/ materials. EX refers to experiences with the endorser, which are unavailable outside the product brand. AUG are ancillary products which help move the actual product (BSKIN BB Cream).	Brand/Product Awareness [AW] Consultation for Co-creation [CO] Exclusive Experience Offer [EX] Establishing Rapport [RAP] Augmented Products [AUG]
Mid Sell [MS] MAD refers to advertising that sustain brand presence so customers/fans do not switch to competitors.	Product Information [PIN] Maintenance Advertising [MAD]
Hard Sell [HS]	Contest Participation [CON] Event Participation [EV] Direct Product Purchase [PUR]

All categories were initially preset, but were later modified to accommodate emergent categories.

2.1.3 Attributes Categorization
To determine the defining physical and content attributes of all Timeline posts (administrator + fan posts), they were sorted into clusters in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Attributes Clusters.

A. Content Focus
☐ Both product & endorser
☐ Product only
☐ Endorser only
☐ Neither product nor endorser

    A.1 If With Endorser
    ☐ Focused on one band member
    ☐ Focused on entire band

B. Main Content Composition
☐ Photo & text
☐ Photo only
☐ Text only
☐ No photo/text

    B.1 If With Photo
    ☐ New
    ☐ Recycled

C. Built-in Motivator
☐ Material reward
☐ Reinforced bond with endorser
☐ Product benefit
☐ None

Main Content Composition refers to the *main* content [i.e. if a short text passage introduces a photo album (the main content in this case), the material is considered to be composed as 'Photo only']. Logos and other textual design elements are also not considered as text. Motivators refer to tangible and intangible rewards that are promised or given in exchange for completing an action.

2.2 Procedure
Sell content [From **Table 2**] were identified for each administrator post. Since posts sometimes contained content across sell types, a physical count on the frequency of such content was done to determine the dominant sell type of each post. Posts, according to sell type, were also segregated according to the month they were published.

Fan responses were assigned response values [from **Table 1**]. These values were added up then grouped according to domain: For consumption, posts were ranked then sorted into ranges of +10 increments. For reach, posts were ranked according to +5 increment ranges. The increments were based on the highest-ranking post.

The ranked responses produced the following highest & lowest-valued groups per domian: (a) High Consumption, (b) Low Consumption, (c) High Reach, and (d) Short Reach. Finally, these groups were cross-referenced with their posts' attributes & sell types.

2.3 Exclusions

Private messages between administrator & fan were discarded since they do not generate reach. Responses and posts that were deleted/added before and after the analysis (Aug-Sep 2013) were also excluded.

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3. RESULTS

3.1 Administrator posts categorization

Administrator posts were mostly soft sell (68%), sometimes hard sell (18%), and rarely mid sell (9%). Multi-type materials, or those with content from two or more sell types, also emerged (5%). Soft sell materials were used heavily during initial months while others were used moderately [**Figure A**]. Note that sixty percent of multi-type materials combine soft & hard sell qualities.
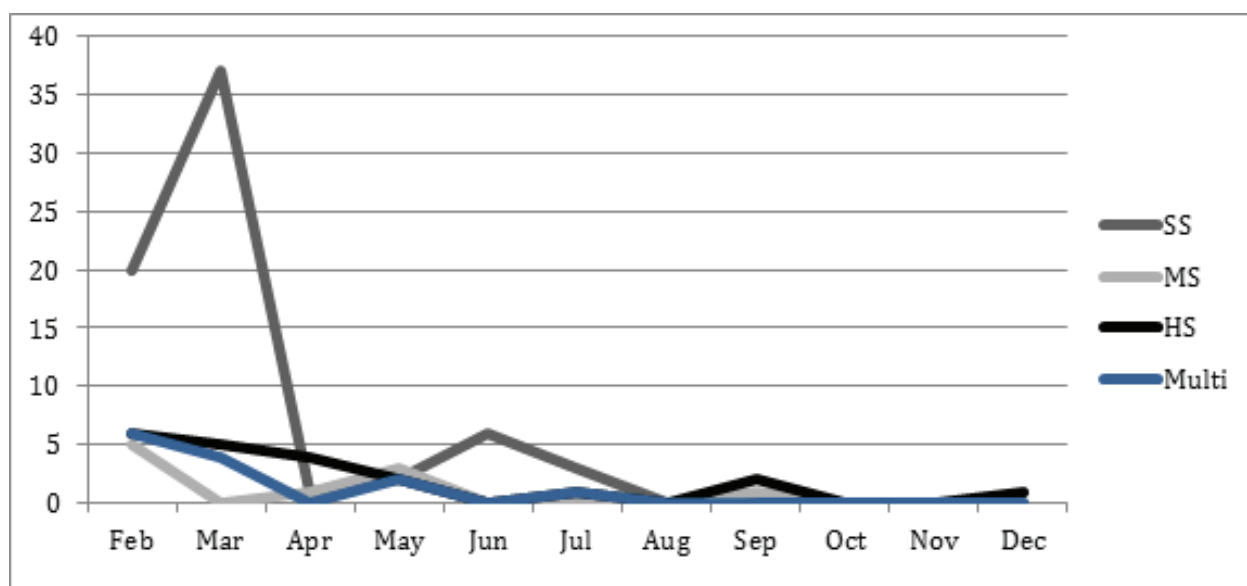

Figure A. Frequency of posts according to sell type during the entire page lifecycle.

On sell content, Exclusive Experience Offer [EX] was the dominant quality of soft sell materials (used 70% of the time), while Maintenance Advertising [MAD] was for mid sell (60%), and Direct Product Purchase [PUR] for hard sell (44%). The degrees to which these content were used varied across time [**Table 4**]. Establishing Rapport [RAP] and Event Participation [EV] were the only content absent during the 1st month of marketing.

Table 4. Frequency of content per sell type.

Month	Soft Sell					Mid Sell		Hard Sell		
	AW	CO	EX	RAP	AUG	PIN	MAD	CON	EV	PUR
Feb	16	1	18	0	3	4	1	3	0	4
Mar	2	0	37	3	1	0	0	3	3	2
Apr	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	3
May	1	0	1	0	1	0	3	0	1	2
Jun	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jul	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Aug	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sep	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Oct	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nov	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dec	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

Administrator posts comprise 84 of the total 94 posts under study; the remaining 10 are fan-generated. In the succeeding results, 'post' refers to all 94 posts appearing on the page's timeline.

3.2 Response according to Consumption

Seventy-seven percent of posts received +10 or lower consumption scores [**Figure B**] and are considered to have Low Consumption.

The top 5 posts with the highest scores (from +41 to 101+ score) are considered to have High Consumption. This classification spans 7 score ranges since we decided that at least 5 posts (which is also 10% of the total number of fans) was necessary to create a significant comparison.
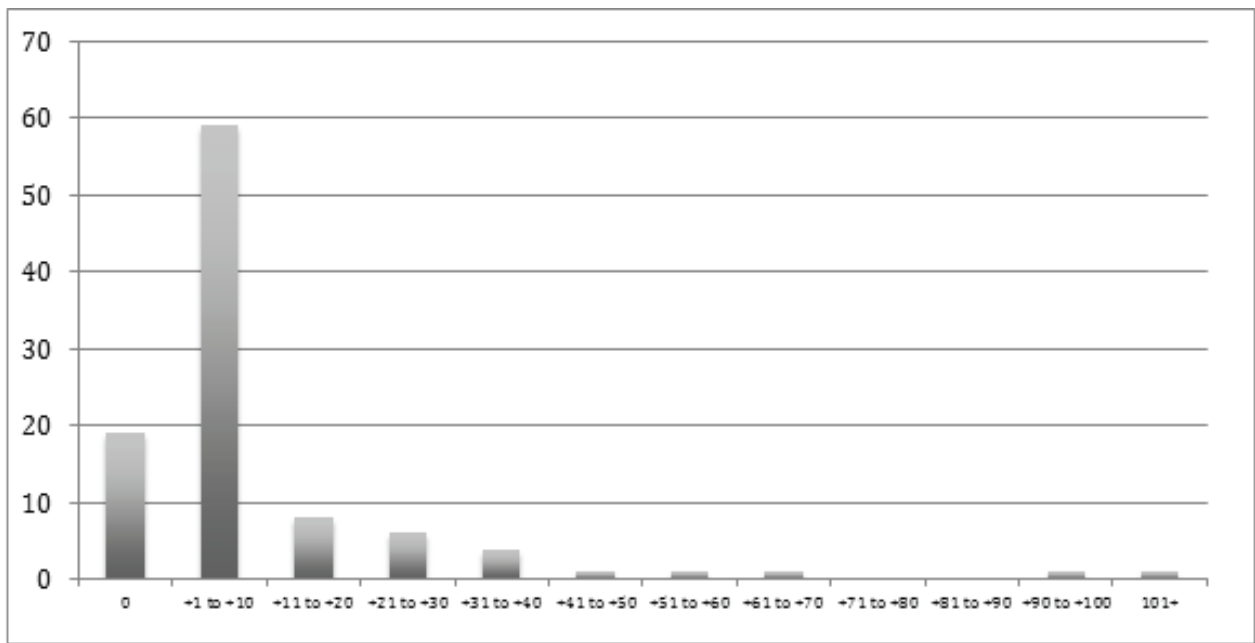

Figure B. Post consumption (in percentage).

Attributes

The following are the physical and content attributes of high and low consumption posts according to their general range [**Table 5**]:

Table 5. Attributes of High & Low Consumption Posts

Class	General Range	Dominant Sell Type	ATTRIBUTES (in percentage)															
			Content Focus				If with Endorser		Main Content Composition				If with Photo		Motivator (w/ repetition)			
			Both BSKIN & 1:43	Just BSKIN	Just 1:43	Neither	1 Member	Entire band	Photo & text	Photo Only	Text Only	None	New	Recycled	Material	1:43 Bond	Product Benefit	None
High	+41 to 101+	Soft (77%)	40	0	**60**	0	0	**100**	40	**60**	0	0	**100**	0	80	**100**	20	0
Low	+1 to +10	Soft (67%)	45	**55**	0	0	31	69	21	**36**	36	7	**84**	16	27	**42**	40	12
	zero	Soft (57%)	**29**	**29**	13	**29**	0	**100**	0	43	**57**	0	67	33	0	**43**	29	0

+41 to 101+ range: Posts were dominantly soft sell. The content was mainly focused only on the endorser (entire band) and was mainly composed of new photos of the endorser [**Figure C**]. The main motivator was having a stronger bond with the endorser, followed by material rewards. All posts contained visual images of the endorser.
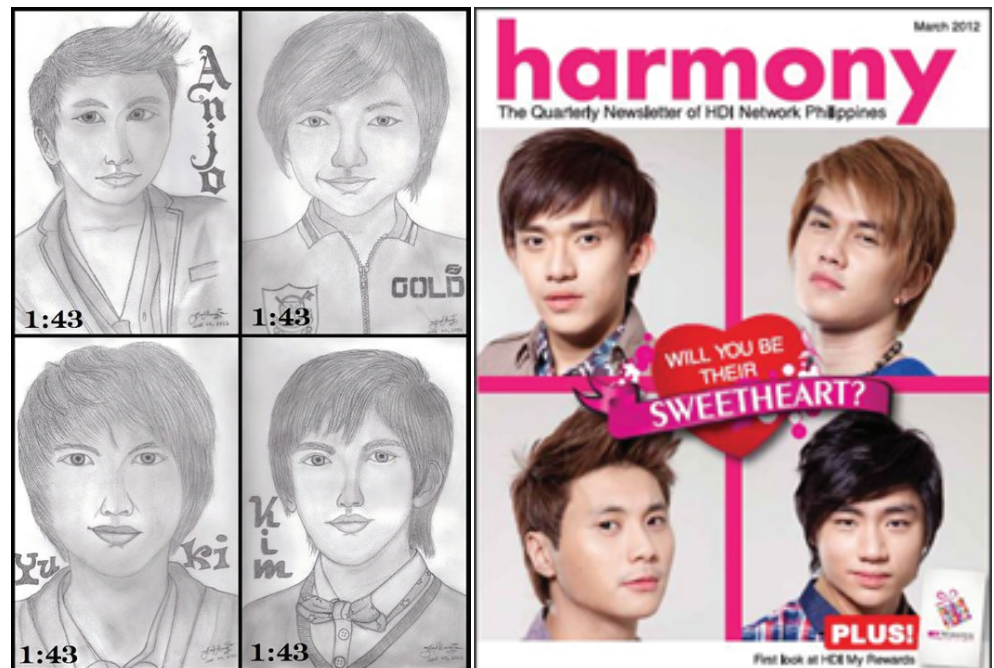

Figure C. (Left) This fan art by Jaymie earned the top consumption score with 136 likes. Similar fan art also got high consumption scores. (Right) All fan art submissions were guaranteed copies of the BSKIN-produced, 1:43-centric Harmony magazine.

This range also features hard sell posts (33%) focused on both the product & endorser [**Figure D**].

Figure D. This administrator post earned 22 likes and 45 comments.

+1 to +10 range: Posts were dominantly soft sell. The content was focused on the product and presented through just text or just (new) photo [**Figure E**]. The main motivator was a reinforced bond with the endorser, closely followed by product benefits. All posts did not have content that was solely focused on the endorser. Posts without motivators (all mid sell) were also present [**Figure F**].

Figure E. This soft sell, product-focused photo album earned 4 likes & 1 comment.

Figure F. These plain text posts without motivators earned a total of 3 likes.

Zero range: Posts were dominantly soft sell. The content was mainly composed of text [**Figures G & H**] and was focused on either (a) both product & endorser, (b) just the product, or (b) neither product nor endorser. The main motivator was a reinforced bond with the endorser, followed by product benefits. All posts did not have material motivators [**Figure I**].

Figure G. Text posts with focus on neither product nor endorser got zero response.

Figure H. Text post by fans on the endorser or other topics got zero response.

Figure I. Photos on just the product got zero response.

3.3 Response according to Reach

Ninety-five percent of posts received +5 or lower reach scores [**Figure J**] and are considered to have Short Reach. Due to this high percentage, given the diversity of material, we find a discussion of its attributes insignificant.
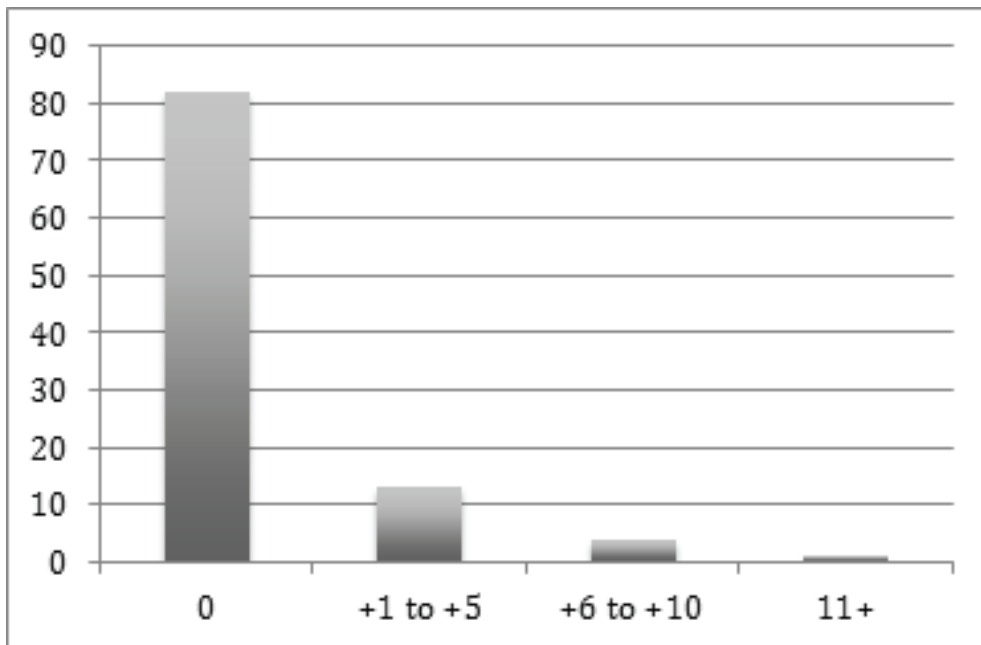

Figure J. Post Reach (in percentage)

Attributes of High Reach [Table 6]

+6 to 11+: The top 5 posts with the highest reach scores were dominantly hard sell. Their content was focused on both product & endorser (mostly entire band) and composed of both text and new photos. The main motivator was having a stronger bond with the endorser, followed by material rewards (money, pocket book). All posts did not have content that was (a) solely focused on the endorser, (b) purely text, or (c) used product benefit as motivator [**Figures K**].

Table 6. Top Reach Post Attributes

Dominant Sell Type	ATTRIBUTES (in percentage)														
	Content Focus				If with Endorser		Main Content Composition				If with Photo		Motivator (w/ repetition)		
60% - HS 20% - SS 20% - MS	Both BSKIN & 1:43	Just BSKIN	Just 1:43	Neither	1 Member	Entire band	Photo & text	Photo Only	Text Only	None	New	Recycled	Material	1:43 Bond	Product Benefit
Hard	**80**	20	0	0	25	**75**	**60**	40	0	0	**80**	20	60	**80**	0

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Figures K. Photo & text posts focused on both the product & endorser, minus the product benefit, each earned 8-13 Shares.

4. DISCUSSION

The administrators recognize that their product is new and has little brand equity, which does not lend well to an online point-of-sale. They borrow equity from endorsers and offer mostly exclusive endorser experiences to fans as springboard for brand building. They are careful not to oversell the product/product brand and promote it in stages—starting with soft & mid sell-type of communication materials in preparation for more aggressive, hard selling. These materials may vary in physical & content attributes but are almost always focused on influencing fans to try the product.

The conversation between administrator & fan, for the most part, is one-way. Administrators control the frequency and content of timeline posts. When they do require fan participation, it usually involves a product purchase or some offline cost.

Administrators are not concerned with generating or maintaining fans for the endorsers. They also continuously test how fans react to materials that do not involve the endorsers. Administrator posts, in general, are concerned with generating high product consumption.

From this, it can be said that fan responses were below administrator expectations in both quality and quantity. This can be attributed to the large focus on (a) selling the product rather than establishing rapport with the fans, and (b) consumption rather than reach. One unexpected finding was that solely a reinforced bond with the endorsers was not motivator enough to get the target response.

In designing materials, we recommend similar communication with higher-scoring posts: those that facilitate **visually-appealing**, **2-way conversations** that are **anchored on the endorser** and offer additional **material reward**, using hard sell qualities for growing an audience (reach) and soft sell qualities for retaining it (consumption). We also discourage posts that do not include the endorsers since they are, after all, under an Endorser-Product page, where fans were solicited through the endorser.

We believe that to fully understand the root cause of the unsatisfactory response of fans, the study needs to go beyond the physical and content attributes of the *promotions* on the *product*. Further research is needed on the other equally important elements of the marketing mix: *price* and *place*. Also, we invite research that can establish the direct and accumulated effects of soft & mid sell posts on hard sell posts and on each other. Finally, as there is no known similar research as of this time, future comparative studies with other Endorser-Product pages would be ideal.

5. CONCLUSION

Endorsers are commonly used in marketing new products as they lend brand equity to the 'unknown' product. Businesses today also have a new staple in their marketing strategy when launching products— the use of social media, with Facebook as their preferred site. The Endorser-Product Facebook page, 1:43 BSKIN, is a unique platform under study that is run by the product (BSKIN) administrator to convert endorser (1:43) fans into product users.

BSKIN administrators communicate their business objectives mostly thru soft sell posts, sometimes thru hard sell, and rarely thru mid sell or multi-type. Soft sell materials, using mostly Exclusive Endorser Experience content, were used heavily during the initial months of marketing while other types were used moderately. When published on the Facebook Timeline, administrator and fan posts generate negative, neutral or positive consumption & reach. Their scores reveal a page's success in attracting and engaging fans. In the 1:43 BSKIN page, 77% of posts had low consumption while 5% had high. In terms of reach, 95% were short while 5% had high reach.

For improved fan response, marketing & communication strategists are advised to publish posts which create visually-appealing, 2-way conversations that are anchored on the endorser and offers additional material reward, using hard sell qualities for reach and soft sell qualities for consumption.

However, these address only 2 elements of the marketing mix. Further studies are needed on the integration of Price & Place when duplicating the Endorser-Product page. Also, research on the cause-and-effect relationships among different sell types, and comparison with future Endorser-Product pages are recommended.

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