

Usage and Efficacy of Social Media Marketing Tools: An Investigation of College Age  
Student's Behaviors

By

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**Abstract**

This study looks at social media marketing techniques used by the world's top companies to determine their effectiveness on college age consumers. Social media use is becoming increasingly important with the advent of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. This research first defines the social media marketing strategies done on social media, and then measures the effectiveness of each strategy on college students. This research also attempts to see if there is a relationship between personality and the effectiveness of certain social media marketing strategies.

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## **Introduction**

The advent of the Internet has changed the way people communicate. As a result, more brands are looking to improve their online presence in order to better reach consumers. One way to do this is through social media. According to Parsons (2013), Social Media refers to online tools where content, opinions, perspectives, insights, and media can be shared. Social media marketing, in turn, uses social media networks to enable content sharing, information diffusion, relationship building, and fans cohesion (Chang 2015).

Companies are picking up on the trend, and in 2014, worldwide social media advertising expenditure was at 17.74 million dollars, a 56.2% increase from the year before (Kumar et al, 2016). This expenditure on social media marketing seems set to continue. A survey done by Duke University and the American Marketing Association (2018) has found that social media marketing spending has increased more over the past year than any other year (See Figure 1 below).

**Current social media spending as percent of marketing budget**

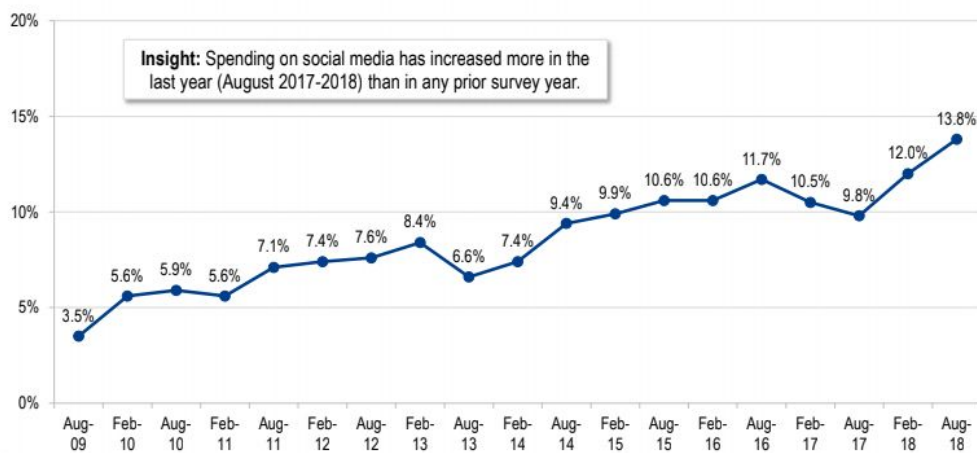


Figure 1

As can be seen, the increase in social media expenditure from August 2017 to August 2018 is the largest increase since the survey began in 2009. The same survey predicts that over the next 5 years, spending on social media marketing is set to increase by 65%, with an estimated 22.9% of a given brand's marketing budget is expected to be for social media marketing purposes (Duke University, 2018). The way

All of this money that companies are funneling into social media is more than likely spent on social networking platforms. Social networking platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter are main way people engage in social media is through. Facebook is widely assumed to be the most used social media platform and the original social networking site. According to Kaplan (2009), in 2009, Facebook registered 175 million active users, making them at the time have a population almost the size of Brazil (180 million). In addition, as of 2017, 80 percent of Fortune 500 companies have an official Facebook account (John et al, 2017). Given the fact that Facebook has a large and growing user base, it is no surprise to see successful companies making use of social media marketing on Facebook..

Although there is previous research done on the topic of social media marketing, the research done has focused on social media usage. There is little research done on social media marketing when it comes to consumer attitude towards specific social media marketing strategies. This study aims to assess consumer attitude towards social media marketing elements (SMME) used by brands on Facebook. Brands looking to be more competitive must take advantage of social media, and this research attempts to provide a better insight as to how brands may likely improve their social media marketing strategies.

## **Literary Review**

### *Social Media Marketing, A General Overview*

Social media marketing, though a relatively new form of marketing, has been researched a fair amount. A starting issue for any company is whether or not to even utilize social media marketing as a part of their business strategies. As mentioned earlier, social media marketing spending by companies is set to increase over the next several years, yet more research will be need to be done about how to effectively utilize it.

For example, a study by Kumar (2016) assessed social media marketing by focusing on 3 metrics: spending, cross-buying, and customer profitability. The key finding of the study were that social media marketing, when combined with other forms of marketing, such as television, can create a synergistic effect and that social media marketing is effective at strengthening customer firm relationships (Kumar, 2016).

Customer relationship management (CRM) is also the subject of another study done by Trainor (2014). The study examines 308 firms' social media usage and how it influences their CRM capabilities. Similarly to the study done by Kumar (2016), the study concludes that social media technologies, in order to be most effective, must be combined with existing company technologies and resources (Trainor, 2014).

Both studies emphasized the point that social media marketing yields the best results when integrated with the other resources the company already has. This suggests that when deciding if a brand should use social media marketing, the deciding factor would be how well social media technology fits in with the existing resources, at least in terms of CRM. This finding is significant, given that the survey conducted by Duke University (2018) found that

companies are still struggling with properly integrating social media marketing as a part of their marketing strategy.

In order to account for social media's reliance on the other resources within a firm's system, brands were selected from a variety of business indexes, not just ones that are focused on social media. This will be further explained in the methodologies section.

Also, both studies provided insight into potential uses companies have for social media, which in for each of these cases, firms were using social media as a form of CRM. When defining social media elements for this study, the potential for each element to build relationships with consumers and social media users was taken into account. With businesses using social media marketing as a form of CRM, it is only natural that research has also studied what factors determine the effectiveness of certain social media posts.

An example of a study looking at the factors determining effectiveness of social media posts was conducted by Chang (2015) uses the Elaboration Likelihood Model theory (Cacioppo & Petty, 1986) to explore popularity cohesion, message diffusion, and persuasive messages in social networking groups. Elaboration Likelihood Model posits that there are two distinct routes for processing information, the central route and the peripheral route. The central route is applicable when the subject has an interest and the motivation to think about the topic of discussion. In this model, the subject will be more invested in the social media post, as opposed to the peripheral route, where the subject has little interest in the matter at hand and therefore will not pay as much attention to the content of a particular social media post.

The study focused on iCook, a Taiwanese based cooking community site that focuses on collecting and sharing recipes. The study analyzed iCook's Facebook page, observing the various Facebook posts (Chang, 2015). The study concluded that the popularity of posts has the greatest effect on users perception of usefulness on the post, with popularity affecting both the central and peripheral routes. This posits that social media "fans" prefer social media posts should not only be popular, but that posts should be useful and interactive, such as including a link to the brand's website (Chang 2015).

Survey items used for our study used were designed with factors such as popularity in mind, and when creating items for the second survey, popularity measures such as "likes" and "shares" on a post were set equally to remove that bias from survey takers perceptions.

Another study looking at the effects of popularity and "likes" on Facebook was done in 2017 by John, Emrick, Gupta, and Norton. The study focused on if a user "likes" a brand on Facebook, is it simply out of fondness for the brand, or can it lead users to have a more positive view of the brand, leading to potentially more purchases. Research found that while the act of "liking" a firm's Facebook page does not directly lead to meaningful purchase decisions, there is potential for firms that promote user interaction on their Facebook pages to have an effect in consumer attitudes towards the brand (John, et. al 2017).

It is important to note that "likes" alone do not create value for consumers on social media. That is why for our study, when defining social media elements, it is taken into account how companies are trying to promote consumer interactions thus, influencing their attitudes.



In addition to studying how consumer attitudes are affected by social media activities, there is also research that looks at how social media marketing is perceived by companies. Research done by Pinheiro, Tiago, & Verissimo (2014) analyzed 170 Portuguese firms to gain insight into how social media marketing is perceived by companies. The research concluded that there are 4 categories of social media usage profiles of companies: 1. Engagement 2. Qualification 3. Discovery 4. Dead Road. The four categories are shown in figure 2.

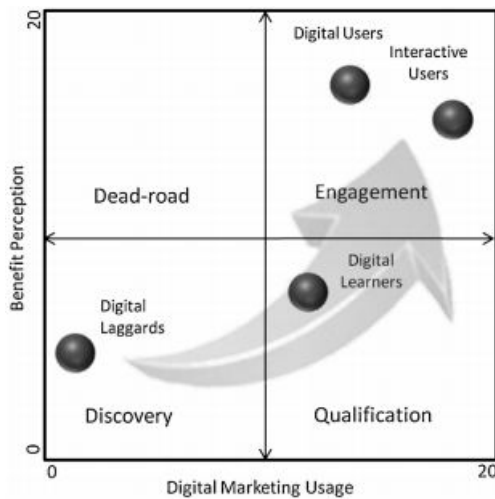


Figure 2

These four categories are based on a firm's benefit perception of social media marketing in relation to their usage. Firms in the discovery phase have a low benefit perception and low usage. Firms in the qualification stage have a high usage and are starting to see the benefits of social media marketing. Brands in the engagement phase have recognized the importance of social media marketing and thus have a high usage and understanding of the benefits. Dead road companies are companies that understand the benefits of social media but for whatever reason do not put resources into implementing

social media marketing. Traditionally, companies go from Discovery, to qualification, to engagement (Pinheiro et al, 2014).

For our study, we analyzed larger brands that are assumed to be in either the Qualification or Engagement phases were analyzed considering they were defined as successful companies by various business indexes. The process of selecting brands for this study as mentioned before, will be further elaborated on in the Methodologies section.

The benefits of social media, which are alluded to in Pinheiro's (2014) research range from CRM, which was also the subject of research mentioned earlier by Trainor (2014), to more tangible measurements such as online sales.

A study measuring the more tangible impacts of social media marketing was done by Zhang, Trusov, Stephen, and Jamal (2017). Zhang, et al, observes the correlation between social media marketing activities and online shopping. The framework of their study is based on time allocation theories, highlighting that "people allocate their time to various activities in line with the utility impact of the commodities they derive from those activities" (Zhang, et al. 2017). The theory was applied to social media usage and online e-commerce patterns. According to Zhang (2017), there is correlation between social media usage and online sales. At first, this may seem contradictory to the research done by John (2017) stating that "liking" a social media post does not directly lead to a purchase decision. That being said, Zhang (2017) was looking at overall usage, whereas John (2017) was looking strictly at the one social media activity of "liking".

Where this study aims to add onto the conversation is to look at a variety of social media strategies utilized by companies on Facebook to see if there is one in particular that which has the most positive effect on consumer attitude.

### *Personality and Social Media*

Besides social media marketing techniques and their effectiveness, the relationship between personality and social media use is a subject that researchers are looking at as well, and this study is no exception. Personality was chosen to be included in this study because personality may have an influence on how consumers are affected by social media marketing. For example, a personality trait, such as being outgoing, can possibly change how a consumer interacts with a brand on social media. Studies by Correa, Bachmann, Hinsley, and Zuñiga (2013) and Gosling, Augustine, Vazire, Holtman, and Gaddis (2013) both look at the Big 5 Personality traits and their relation to social media use.

The Big 5 Personality traits refer to extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and agreeableness. The idea of a Big 5 was first popularized by research done by Digman (1990), then was built on by Goldberg (1993). Both articles highlight the history of the Five Factor Model and Big 5 traits that are now the subject of many studies.

While both studies focused on different aspects of the Big 5, both studies concluded that in terms of social media usage, extraversion was the main personality indicator (Correa, et al. 2013) (Gosling, et al. 2013). This makes sense because, given that because people who are extraverted are more outgoing, and therefore, more likely to use social media to communicate with others. However, this may be different when looking at different social media platforms. More concrete research on how personality and social media use is split between the various networking sites will need to be done.

While there are studies observing the relationship between personality and social media use, our study attempts to see if there is correlation between Big 5 personality traits and certain social media elements. A study by Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann (2003) serves as a way of measuring the Big 5. The aim of the study was to create a way to assess the Big 5 personality traits without the use of a long measure item test, given that often these tests are time consuming. The study created both a five-item personality inventory (FIPI) and a ten-item personality inventory (TIPI), which both were short measures of the Big 5 personality traits (Gosling, 2003).

### **Study 1: Content Analysis**

#### *Purpose*

The purpose for this study is to get an idea of what is currently happening with regards to social media. By answering the “what”, further research can be used to analyze if “what” is going on is effective. This will be done through looking at the top companies and seeing what activities they have as far as social media strategies. Eventually, a list of elements will be defined.

#### *Methods*

Brands were selected using a variety of business indexes, social media indexes, and online rankings. In this way, it was assured that the brands being researched would be not just financially successful, but also effective in using social media as a form of marketing. These brands are assumed to be either in the Qualification on Engagement phases of Pinheiro’s (2014) research (mentioned earlier) given their appearance on these indexes, meaning they are not only successful companies, but companies that utilize social media.

The indexes used to select the companies were:

1. Forbes Most Successful Companies
2. Interbrand
3. Brand Watch
4. Sprinklr
5. Fortune 500 Top Companies
6. Fortune Times

Name of Index	Description of Index
Forbes	Ranks companies primarily by financial performance, as well as how good the company is to work for.
Interbrand	Ranks companies based on brand equity
Brand Watch	Ranks companies based on their social content, taking into account visibility and engagement
Sprinklr	Ranks brands strictly on how social they are, mainly looking at social engagement
Fortune 500	Ranks companies based on financial performance, particularly revenue.
Fortune Times	Ranks companies strictly on financial performance

Six indexes were chosen in order to get an accurate representation of all the available sources. Brands were selected based on their appearance and rank on each index. The list of brands was limited to those in the technology and retail industries. It was assumed that these industries were most familiar to our target research group.

We choose Wal-Mart as a hypothetical example for explaining the process of choosing the brands for this study. Wal-Mart ranked as a top 50 company in both Fortune and the Financial Times. Further, Wal-Mart also appeared on Brand Watch. Given Wal-Mart appearance on each of these indexes, it is assumed that Wal-Mart is strong both financially as well as having a strong online presence and socially. The use of multiple indexes allows for the most representative selection of companies to research. The list comprises of 66 brands

and is available in Appendix item A. For the purposes of this study, we decided to restrict the brands to the first 60.

### *Results*

Initially, an observational analysis was done on the social media profiles of these companies on three social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. This was done in order to get a general sense of what was being done across social media from a marketing standpoint. An initial list of these social media strategies was created (see Figure 3). As seen in Figure 3, the strengths and weaknesses of each strategy was taken into account, as well as which social media networking sites that each strategy was most used in. Originally, these strategies were going to be used as a base to categorize more specific strategies used within each platform.

Figure 3

<b>Name of Element</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Social Media Platform(s) most used in (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
Reposting	Company takes a consumer post about the company and shares it	To show users company is listening to what is posted about the company, and allows company to respond to post, whether post is negative or positive	Facebook, Twitter	Consumers become part of company's marketing	Possible privacy issues if consumer does not want their post shared by company

Consumer Polling	Company poses a question to consumers, can be open ended or multiple choice	To gain customer opinion about a particular aspect of the company	Facebook, Twitter	Easy way to gain customer opinion	Takes time, can be inaccurate
Online Contest	Company creates a contest that users can enter using their social media account, usually a prize involved	To generate excitement and increase consumer engagement with company	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	Is exciting, good form of crowdsourcing	Takes time
Hashtagging	Company creates a hashtag, for a example an initiative, or slogan	Allow users to lookup hashtag and see all related content to a specific company message	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	Makes it easy to see all content related to a hashtag from both company and consumer perspective, trendy	Can be annoying to users if there are a lot of related hashtags to one thing, or if hashtag is hard to remember or is bad
Event Creation	Company creates an event to announce a new product release	Generate interest in an upcoming product and announce date of upcoming event	Facebook	Good way to generate interest, keeps all material related to one product in one place, allows users to post about product	Company may lose control what i posted by consumers on the event page

Paid for Ads	Company creates an advertisement then pays for ad to be shown across social media platforms	Raise awareness about company	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	Raises awareness	Annoying for users, can be seen as spam
Multiple Accounts	Company creates an account specifically for a certain product	Organizes company's social media by product	Facebook, Twitter	Allows company to better answer questions specifically related to certain products	Too many accounts can be annoying to users

Facebook was also chosen for several reasons. Facebook is the leading platform for marketers to advertise on social media, with 94% of marketers using Facebook in some capacity, as opposed to Instagram, with 62%, and Twitter with 66% (Statista, 2018). Secondly, as mentioned earlier, Facebook has the largest user base. A large amount of users combined with a lot of marketing being done led to Facebook being chosen as the platform for study. Also, taking factors into account such as time restraints and ability to reasonably study each social media platform, led to the selection of a single platform.

This also allows this study to narrow the focus of the research, and hopefully provide better insight on how social media marketing strategies are used in what is widely viewed as the most popular social media platform. The initial strategies found in Figure 3 across Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were still used a starting point, but new, more refined elements with specific definitions and applications in regards were developed. Aspects that could be taken from each of elements in figure 3 were used to define the new elements.



For example, the social media marketing element “A company asking consumer input or opinion through a Facebook post” found in Figure 4 below, was based from “Consumer Polling” in Figure 3. The strategies found from altogether Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram were referred to when creating the new elements for just Facebook, given the features of Facebook encompass a lot of the ones done by Twitter and Instagram.

The Facebook profiles for each brand were analyzed through observation. The Facebook profile of brand was studied, and the past 20 Facebook posts were recorded and categorized. The main activities and significant actions performed by each brand on their Facebook accounts for 3 months prior to specified date were observed and taken note of.

Nine social media marketing strategies, referred to in this study as social media marketing elements, were determined. Figure 4 shows each element in detail.

Figure 4

Social Media Marketing Element	Description
1. A Photo or Video about a new product of service	The company makes a Facebook post with a photo or video featuring a product or service or new company initiative. This is the most common element used.
2. A Photo or Video about a positive experience with a customer	The company posts a photo or video with a story about how their product or service helped a customer, usually with a link to their company website to read more.
3. A company reposting from another Facebook page	The company shares a post from another Facebook page on their account.
4. A company using hashtags	The company uses a hashtag (# symbol) in a post in order to draw attention to the post, as well as a way to organize all the posts that use a particular hashtag.
5. A company using multiple Facebook accounts for multiple products or services	The company has a main Facebook account, but also has specific Facebook profiles for various products or service.
6. A company asking consumer input or opinion through a Facebook post	The company uses a Facebook post in order to solicit social media users to respond. Usually the company will ask a question on a Facebook post, with the

	intention for customers to comment their answer.
7. Companies responding to consumers comments left on a Facebook post	The company will reply to a comment left by consumer (positive or negative) under one of the company's Facebook posts
8. A company promoting events via Facebook	The company will use their profile to create an event that is being hosted by the company. The company would then invite social media users to participate and to invite their friends as well.
9. A company posting about community service they are involved in	The company posts about community service the company has recently been involved with to portray corporate responsibility.

Several factors were taken into account when defining these elements based on previous research done on social media marketing, such as how the elements could be used for CRM (Trainor, 2014) or how useful or interactive the posts are (Chang, 2015). For example, for the purpose of the social media marketing element “A company asking consumer input or opinion through a Facebook post”, it was noted that this element asks for consumer opinions, which is not only interactive, but can be seen as a form of CRM in the sense that brands can use what they learn from consumers to build a relationships and tailor social media strategies towards their customer base.

### *Discussion*

It is important to note that these elements can be used in conjunction with each other. For example, a Facebook post showing off a new product (element 1) can also be asking for consumer opinion (element 6) through the same post. Similarly, a company posting about community service (element 9) they are involved with could be doing so by reposting from another Facebook page (element 3).

While other social media marketing elements may exist, these were the 9 elements chosen for this study. These 9 were the ones observed to be used the most on Facebook, however how consumers view them and their effectiveness have not been tested yet. It was decided that these 9 elements will be furthered looked at to answer how consumers feel about these elements, and furthermore which of these elements would lead consumers to ultimately act upon.

## **Study 2: Pilot Study**

### *Purpose*

Study 2 was designed to understand the 9 social media marketing elements as shown in Figure 4 from a consumer perspective. This will be done by learning both consumer familiarity and attitude towards each of the elements found in study 1. Also, this study attempts to see if there is a link between any of the Big 5 personality traits and consumer attitude towards the elements. In accomplishing these objectives, this pilot study will serve as a basis for the main study by providing a standout “best” element, and a standout “worst” element.

### *Methodology: Survey Design*

The initial survey was taken online via Qualtrics, with 51 respondents. Survey items consisted of basic screening questions; such as does the survey taker have a Facebook account. Once the initial questions were completed to determine if the participant was eligible to participate in the survey, they were then prompted to answer questions concerning the individual social media elements.

Each questionnaire(?) reads as follows. Each respondent was given the name of one of the social media elements as well as an example of what the element would look like. For example, the question would read: A company posting on Facebook about community service they are involved in, followed by an image of Facebook post by a company posting about community service. In this way, respondents had a real life example to look at while answering questions about each element.

The participants were then asked a series of questions about their familiarity with the element, and then with their attitude towards the elements. The questions were asked using a Likert scale from 1-7, with a neutral answer choice of 4. The questions were aimed at gauging the familiarity of each element for each respondent, as well as the general attitude each respondent had towards each specific element.

For questions concerning familiarity, respondents were asked from 1 to 7 how well they knew the element, as well as how familiar they were with each element. This was done in order to see if the elements are indeed being used by social media marketers on Facebook are indeed recognizable by respondents. Responses of 1 would indicate that the respondents are unfamiliar with the elements, with responses of 7 showing extreme familiarity. For the items concerning attitude, respondents were similarly asked Likert scale style questions with 1 meaning the respondent had a negative attitude towards the element, and 7 meaning the respondent had a positive one. The full list of attitude questions can be found in Appendix item B.

The second part of the survey certainly measured personality traits. As mentioned earlier, there have been several studies linking personality and social media use. That being

said, this study attempts to see if there is a link between certain social media elements and any of the Big 5 Personality Traits. This study adapted the Ten Item Personality Inventory designed by Gosling, et al (2003). The study concluded that the TIPI, though not as thorough as a more extensive Personality inventory that could contain hundreds of items, is still a serviceable way to measure personality.

The TIPI was selected as opposed to the FIPI for two key reasons. One being that it was more extensive the Five Item Personality Inventory (FIPI) because the TIPI includes “reverse terms” for each of the Big 5 personality inventory. The other key reason being that the TIPI, though being a short measure, is still an efficient way to analyze personality.

The adopted personality inventory for this study consisted of 10 “I am” statements that the respondent would then answer how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement. For example, a statement would read “I am outgoing” and the respondent would answer how much they agree or disagree with the statement. Similarly to the questions asked in the first section concerning familiarity and attitude, a Likert scale was used with a range of 1 to 7. This way, respondents could make use of a full range of answer choices. The full personality inventory can be found in Appendix item C.

### *Results*

The results of the survey produced several outcomes. For starters, while over 93 percent of respondents said they have a Facebook account, only 48 percent of respondents said they have actually went and purchased anything based on something they have seen on

Facebook. This posits that while consumers are using Facebook, the social media strategies used by brands are only affecting about half of users in terms of purchasing decisions.

For the social media marketing elements themselves, each element was assigned a familiarity score and an attitude score, which were based off of the Likert scale questions asked in the first part of the survey. The study found that all of the elements were fairly well known, each scoring higher than the middle score of 4. However, as far as consumer attitude, element 7, companies responding to consumer comments, was by and large the social media marketing element that scored the highest, meaning it was the most favorable in the eyes of survey respondents, with companies posting about community service (element 9) a distant second. A company posting about a positive experience with a customer (element 2) scored the worst in terms of attitude. Consistently in the middle was element 1, or a photo or video promoting a product or service.

To personality inventory scores were analyzed as well, and a Pearson Correlation test was performed to see if there was a relationship between any of the Big 5 personality traits and the social media marketing elements. For both element 2 and element 7, the elements scoring the worst and best in terms of attitudes respectively, conscientiousness was found to have a significant correlation.

### *Discussion*

All of the elements being familiar to respondents supports the findings in study one, which aimed to answer what was being done by companies on Facebook from a social media marketing standpoint. Though there may be other elements being used, these 9 at least were familiar to respondents.

In terms of attitude, this study determined a best, worst, and neutral element. The “best” element being companies responding to consumer comments on a Facebook post. The “worst” being a company posting a photo or video about a positive customer experience. The “control” element being a company posting a photo or video about a product or service.

The other important finding is that both element 2 and element 7 have a statistically significant correlation with the personality trait of conscientiousness. Gosling (2003) defines conscientiousness as being dependable, organized, hard working, responsible, and thorough, while the opposites being impulsive and careless. It is possible that people exhibiting conscientiousness have a favorable attitude towards the “best” element, companies responding to consumer comments left on a Facebook post, because they perceive a company that is responding to consumer comments as a company that is responsible and organized, and as a company that cares about what their consumers have to say. For the “worst” element, or a company posting a photo or video about a positive experience with a customer, conscientious respondents may have felt negatively due to the motives behind why the company would post about a positive experience with a consumer. Perhaps consumers view the company as irresponsible and having a bad product or service, and that the company is highlighting one case where their product has positively affected someone, as opposed to the reality where their products really do not have this effect. More research will have to be done to see the reasons as to why the correlation between conscientiousness and both of these elements.

The pilot survey, having defined a “best”, “worst”, and “control” element in terms of attitude, sets the basis to further study these elements in terms of what matters most: effect on

consumers. It was concluded that the main study use the 3 elements from the pilot survey as the elements of study. Also, the main study should seek to confirm whether or not conscientiousness still plays a role in terms of how respondents feel towards the social media marketing elements.

### **Study 3: Main Study**

#### *Purpose*

This third and final study serves as the main study of this research. The goal is to determine the effectiveness of the social media marketing elements. To determine effectiveness, buyer intention and word of mouth (WOM) are the two factors being measured. The pilot study gave 3 social media marketing elements to work with, one scoring the best, one scoring the worst, and one scoring in the middle in terms of respondents' attitude towards them. This study will add on to the findings of the first 2 studies, by finding out of if what is being done by companies on Facebook actually persuades consumers to buy.

#### *Methods*

The main study was conducted using the online survey platform Qualtrics. Unlike the pilot study, the main study only focused on 3 of the social media marketing elements. Each respondent was assigned one condition. The conditions respondents were assigned were either the "best", "worst", or "control" elements. Each of the three conditions were created using one of the elements to represent Facebook posts by a fake company attempting to sell headphones. In order to eliminate any bias, all of the posts were given the same amount of likes, shares, used the same image, and were even made to have been posted at the same time



of day. This was done to make sure the only difference between each of the conditions are the elements themselves.

The three elements are in figure 5 shown below. The first image shown (top left) represent the “best” element, or companies responding to consumer comments left on Facebook post. The second image (top right) represents the “worst” element, or a company posting about a positive customer experience. The final image (bottom) represents the “control” element, or a photo or video about a product or service.

After seeing the element, each respondent was asked about their familiarity, as well as their attitude towards the condition they were presented with. The questions were similar to those asked in the first study. Personality questions concerning conscientiousness were also asked in order to see if there was any relation between conscientiousness and how respondents felt about the elements. This was based off the results found in study 1 possibly linking conscientiousness and attitude.

Figure 5



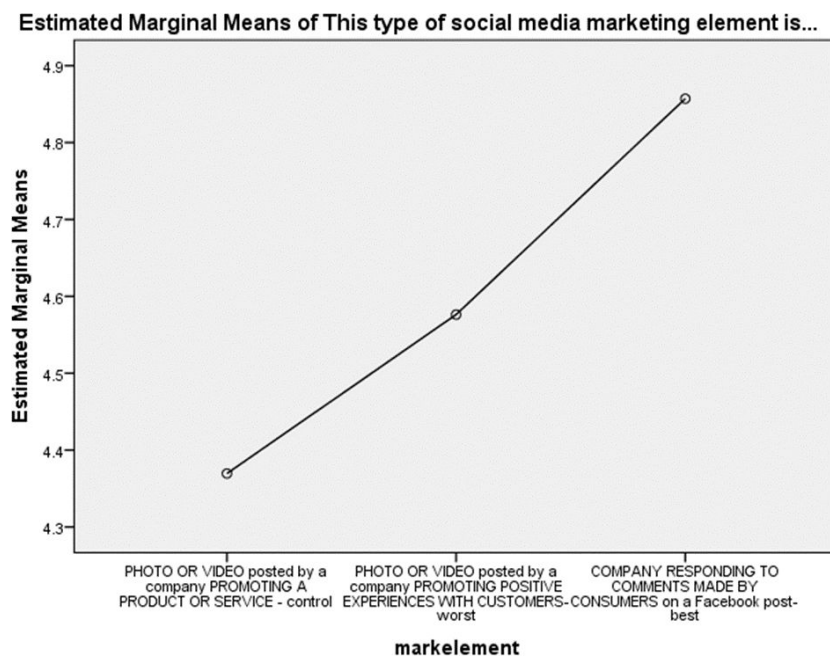
As mentioned before, the purpose of this main study was to determine effectiveness of the elements. The questions were aimed at determining purchase intentions, as well as word of mouth. Respondents were asked one, if they were in the market to buy a pair of headphones, after seeing the element how likely they would be to buy the headphones. Similarly, consumers were asked how likely they were to recommend the product to a friend after seeing the element.

### *Results*

All of the 3 elements were found to be familiar to respondents. All of the elements on a 7 point scale all scored higher than 5. Also, an univariate ANOVA on the dependent variable familiarity indicated no significant difference ( $F_{(2, 158)} = .418; p > .05$ ). An univariate ANOVA on the dependent variable of how well respondents know the element also indicated no significant difference ( $F_{(2, 158)} = 1.130; p > .05$ ). This shows that while the elements were well known and familiar to respondents, one was not significantly more familiar to respondents than the others.

In terms of attitude, it was found that the “best” element was viewed to be more positive than the other elements. A univariate ANOVA on how respondents viewed how positive or negative the elements were indicated no significant difference ( $F_{(2, 158)} = 2.226; p = .11$ ). However, the p value is marginally significant at .10 level, which likely indicates a form of directionality. The directionality probably indicates that the element we thought would have the most positive score (based on the results of the pilot survey) is indeed the one that respondents feel more positively towards. Figure 6 below illustrates this directionality.

Figure 6

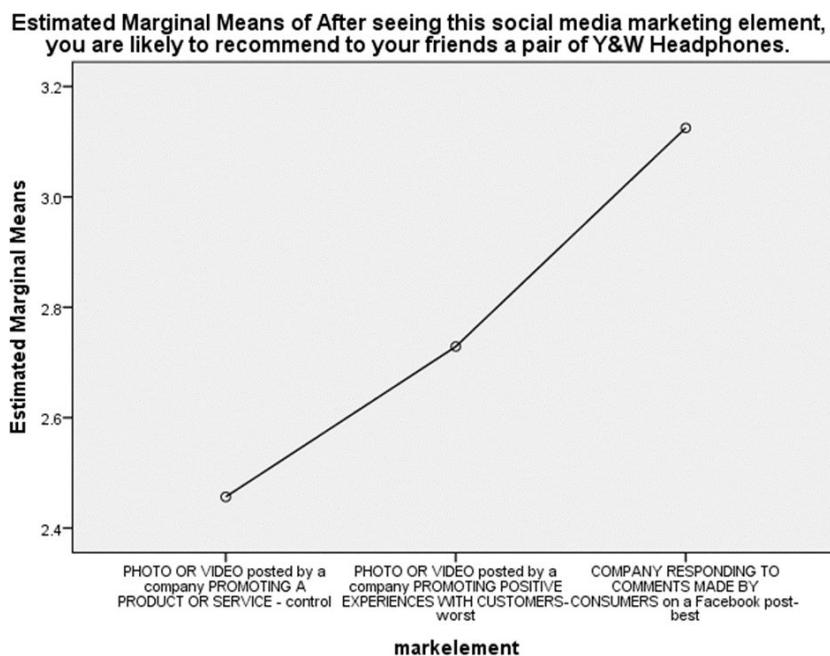


In addition to the significance tests done on familiarity and attitude, the effectiveness of the elements were also analyzed. In terms of purchase intention, it was found that that while it was found to be more likely for people to purchase a pair of headphones after seeing the “best” element, it was found to not be significant. A univariate ANOVA on how likely the respondent would themselves purchase the product after seeing one of these social media marketing elements indicated no significant difference ( $F_{(2, 158)} = .875; p > .10$ ). Though the mean score for likeliness to purchase was higher for the “best” element as opposed to the other two, that difference is not significant.

However, when looking at word of mouth, an univariate ANOVA on how likely a respondent would be to recommend to a friend to buy a pair of Y&W headphones after seeing one of these social media marketing elements indicated a significant difference ( $F_{(2, 158)} = 2.599; p < .10$ ). The p value of .078 indicates that there is significant difference at a 90

percent confidence level. This significance indicates that the element thought most likely to cause respondents to recommend the product to a friend is the element with that effect. This is seen in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7



It is to be noted that while the “best” element was found to be significantly better when it came to recommending to a friend, all of the elements scored low when looking at the 7 point scale that was used. This show that even though one element is more effective than the others, all of the elements are not very effective.

When it came to personality traits, this study looked at conscientiousness. Conscientiousness was found to have no correlation with how respondents felt towards any of the social media marketing elements.

### *Discussion*

When discussing the main study, it is important to first look at how the claims found in the content analysis and pilot study translated. For starters, This study showed the “best”, “worst”, and “control” elements as being known to respondents. This shows that the observations done in the first study identifying the original 9 elements as actually being used by companies on Facebook, are actually recognized and familiar to respondents. That being said, there are other strategies used on Facebook, and while this study only defined 9 of them, these other elements may yield different results in terms of familiarity.

When it came to personality and the elements, conscientiousness, though found to be significant in the pilot study, was not correlated with attitude in the main study. That being said, previous research linking attitude and personality may lead to more research to see if personality plays a role in other social networking platforms or with other social media marketing strategies.

Lastly, in terms of purchase intention and word of mouth, while the “best” element proved to score the best in both categories, showing to be more effective than the others, it is important to note two things. With purchase intention, while there was some directionality, respondents were not significantly more likely to purchase the headphones after seeing the element. When it came to word of mouth and recommending a friend to purchase, it was shown to be significantly better, but still relatively ineffective when considering the 7 point Likert scale that was used. This shows that overall what is being done by companies, at least on Facebook and within the findings of this study, is not leading consumers to buy or recommend the products to friends in a meaningful way.

## **Conclusion/Limitations**

This research used three studies in order to answer two questions:

1. Find out what successful companies are doing on social media
2. Find out if what companies are doing on social media is effective

Each study yielded separate findings. As you may recall, 9 elements (Figure 2) were defined by observing the social media accounts of the top companies in the tech and retail industries. A pilot study was done to define a “best”, “worst”, and “neutral” element by asking respondents their attitudes towards each of the 9 elements. Once the “best”, “worst”, and “neutral” elements were decided, the main study was done in order to determine the effectiveness of each element.

The results showed that the “best” element, which was companies responding to consumer comments on Facebook, is effective when it comes to whether or not consumers would recommend the company to their friends. So while the “best” element may not be significantly more effective than the other elements when it comes to buyer intentions, but word of mouth is still an important factor when it comes to the effectiveness of a social media marketing element.

That being said, it is important to note that while the “best” element performed better than the other elements in terms of effectiveness, the “best” element still was not effective given the 7 point scale that was used. This study started by trying to discover what companies were doing as far as a social media marketing. This study then found that while certain elements of what companies were doing proved to be more effective than others, overall, all of the social media elements were not very effective.

This posits that what companies are doing on social media is not helping the companies from a sales point, and marginally helping them when it comes to word of mouth. As mentioned earlier, companies are continually increasing their social media marketing budgets. More research must be done in order to ensure that companies are properly using their resources to generate more sales due to social media.

This research, while extensive, had several limitations. For starters, the sample was taken from college of business students at one university in western North Carolina. Perhaps asking a different demographic will yield different results. Also, this study identified 9 social media marketing elements. There very well may be others used on Facebook, and for sure there are more specific to other social media platforms. Further research into defining other types of elements can also be done. Specifically looking at this study, the main study looked at 3 elements, a “best”, a “worst”, and a “neutral” respectively. Research involving the other 6 elements in this study could show a clearer picture of effectiveness. Lastly, research looking at other personality factors (outside of the Big 5) and their relation to social media marketing may lead to other insights.

While the findings of this study did not find a definite answer to what social media marketing elements are effective when marketing to college age consumers, this study opens the door to new research opportunities. For example, studying social media elements over other social media platforms, looking at other social media marketing elements, and looking at other factors that can affect one's social media perception besides just conscientiousness and the Big 5 personality traits. Further research is required to fully understand social media marketing, and this research serves as a good starting point for more study into the topic.



**Appendix**

## Appendix Item A: List of Brands for Study

Wal-Mart	Kohls	Dell
Target	Gap	Intel
Costco	Victoria's Secret	Hewitt Packard
Lowe's	Hot Topic	Cisco
Home Depot	Dick's Sporting Goods	Oracle
Amazon	Walgreens	Qualcomm
eBay	Toys R Us	T-Mobile
Whole Foods	Aeropostale	AT&T
H&M	Pac Sun	Texas Instruments
Best Buy	Nike	Sales Force
TJX	Adidas	Netflix
Macy's	Champs Sports	YouTube
Sears	Mark's and Spencer	Accenture
Dollar General	Apple	Adobe
Sears	Samsung	Lenovo
Nordstrom	HP	Verizon
SefaMerve	Sony	Sprint
	Intel	Nintendo
JC Penny	Microsoft	Bose
Publix	Alphabet	San Disk
Hollister	IBM	Go Pro
JBL	Oculus	LG

## Appendix Item B: List of attitude questions

How familiar are you with this type of social media marketing element?

Not familiar at all							Very familiar
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

How well do you know this type of social media marketing element?

Not well at all							Very well
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

According to you, this type of social media marketing element is...

Extremely bad							Extremely good
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Extremely unfavorable							Extremely Unfavorable
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Extremely negative							Extremely Positive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

## Appendix item C: Personality Inventory Questions

I am extraverted...

(Strongly Disagree) 1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Strongly Agree)
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I am critical...

(Strongly Disagree) 1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Strongly Agree)
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I am dependable...

(Strongly Disagree) 1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Strongly Agree)
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I am anxious...

(Strongly Disagree) 1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Strongly Agree)
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I am open to new experiences...

(Strongly Disagree) 1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Strongly Agree)
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I am reserved...

(Strongly Disagree) 1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Strongly Agree)
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I am sympathetic...

(Strongly Disagree) 1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Strongly Agree)
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I am disorganized...

(Strongly Disagree) 1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Strongly Agree)
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I am calm...

(Strongly Disagree) 1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Strongly Agree)
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I am conventional...

(Strongly Disagree) 1	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Strongly Agree)
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## Appendix item D: Questions Concerning Buying Patterns in Main Study

After seeing this social media marketing element, you are likely to recommend to your friends a pair of Y&W headphones.

(Strongly Disagree) 1            2            3            4            5            6            7 (Strongly Agree)

Assume you are in the market for a pair of headphones.

After seeing this social media marketing element, you are likely to buy a pair of Y&W headphones.

(Strongly Disagree) 1            2            3            4            5            6            7 (Strongly Agree)

## Appendix Item E: Breakdown of Respondents for Main Study

180 respondents

89 females

9 sophomores, 58 juniors, 111 seniors, 2 grad students

161 had a Facebook account

Number of Respondents	180
Number of Males	91
Number of Females	89
Number of Sophomores	9
Number of Juniors	58
Number of Seniors	111
Number of Grad Students	2
Number of Respondents with a Facebook account	161

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