

TOURISM AND BRANDED CONTENT: A MULTISECTORIAL COMPARISON
ABOUT BRAND FAN PAGES IN FACEBOOK

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Abstract

Social network popularity has been greatly increased over the last years. Due to the high amounts of users, companies have shown interest in utilizing these networks as a means

to increment their visibility, popularity, and ultimately, sales. In the present study, brand fan pages from companies in the Facebook social network and the way users take advantage of them have been analysed. We analyse, from a comparative perspective, diverse sectors: entertainment and tourism, fashion, technology, automotive industry and beverage industry. The election of Facebook was made due to their leadership in number of profiles and in global penetration, as well as the greater quantity of followed brands compared to other social networks. We conclude the most popular brands and firms in Facebook's brand fan pages are related to entertainment and tourism.

Keywords: communication, Facebook, social network, tourism, brand fan pages.

1. Context

Due to the high popularity that social networks have gained nowadays, companies want to use them as a means to increase their visibility, popularity and sales. In this context, the huge development of social media has caused new concepts to emerge constantly, such as the term *social branding* (a new management element in companies' marketing departments).

This research focuses on the analysis of the data provided in a study about *brand fan pages* in Facebook and their utilization by users in the Broadband Society (Fondevila Gascón, 2013). This social network is the leader both in number of profiles and in global penetration, as well as in the greater quantity of followed brands compared to other social networks (Olabarri and Monge, 2013).

Brand fan pages allow companies, organizations, brands and people to keep a professional presence on Facebook, offering a large variety of tools and advantages over users' profiles (Pallares, 2012): visible information for all users, without them necessarily being "friends"; brand impact statistics; followers; page interaction; better positioning; ads with a huge capability for segmentation according to the public; direct communication with users.

Facebook *brand fan pages* emerged in 2007 (De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang, 2012), the same year as the "Like" button, an idea that didn't come into being until 2009 (Parrondo, 2012). Ever that moment, the main brands have increased their number of fans progressively above 15 million, with Coca-Cola, for instance, having reached more than 60 million (Syncapse, 2013).

Companies try to create and strengthen the emotional links between brand and consumer in order to gain their loyalty. Thus, quantitative data (number of followers) have to be complemented with qualitative data. Social networks are the ideal mean to improve this relation. The individuals who follow the brand are the ones who feel more affinity and are more willing to talk positively about it (Palazón, Sicilia, and Delgado, 2014).

Social networks have caused a change in the way that consumers and companies communicate each other (Fondevila Gascón *et altri*, 2015; Fondevila Gascón, Rom Rodríguez and Santana López, 2016). It has gone from a hierarchic and lineal scheme - with the company in the dominant position- to a bidirectional and egalitarian one with huge relevance put in the consumers. Brand management is shared with the public (Olabarri y Monge, 2013). Social networks have become a virtual environment for communication between consumers and companies where brand value is generated. This new kind of communication is more similar to a friends' talk, rather than annoying advertising (Jahn and Kunz, 2012).

Through social networks, brand communities have emerged too. They are important to increase the brands' value, and consumers' confidence and loyalty (Laroche et al., 2012). One of the most significant features of the *brand fan pages* is the community's cohesion, which generates sense of unity around the brand (Zhu, Kuo and Lee, 2012). This cohesion enables the stability and growth of the community.

Brand fan pages' fans are usually loyal consumers, committed to the company and tolerant when receiving information about the brand (De Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang, 2012). As consumers feel emotionally attached to the brand, they tend to visit stores more often and generate positive WOM (word of mouth) and it's a crucial issue for companies and how to manage their brand reputation.

The positioning of live and interactive eye-catching *posts* in the brand fan page is also essential, since those placed at the top get a higher level of popularity. Both the positive and negative comments increase the number of interactions, and so it does the brand's popularity (De Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang, 2012).

Social networks enable consumers to play a more active role in this relationship. By creating brand in these networks, the improvisation process is more important than the results obtained; the brand stays alive, and the audience is understood (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012). The importance of this bidirectional communication can be appreciated by analysing how Toyota generated positive attitudes and improved its reputation through its *brand fan page* on Facebook, showing that building and maintaining responsible social relationships with the customers enhances a brand's reputation in the long term (Byrd, 2012).

In any case, the fact that a brand has a large number of fans or "Likes" does not directly translate to an increase in conversation about it, or in its WOM. It is also necessary to create a good communication strategy with the customers (Camarero, Garrido and San José, 2014).

The loyalty, how related they feel, the WOM and the love for the brand define four different kinds of fans on Facebook: "fanatic", "utilitarian", "self-expressive", and

"authentic" (Wallace et al., 2014). It is argued that there is no direct connection between giving a "Like" and purchasing a brand.

2. Methodology

- The approach to the object of study was made under a quantitative point of view (Figure 1: study's data sheet). A survey with 33 closed questions (dichotomous, multiple answer and Likert scales) was carried out to find out the preferences, usage patterns, motivations, etc. of the Facebook brand fan pages' users.

Population	University students and professionals
Sample	Men and women, university students and professional with different nationalities.
Sample which takes the survey	441 respondents (393 university students, 48 professionals)
Refined sample	435 respondents (387 university students, 48 professionals)
Useful sample (Facebook users)	432
Fieldwork	25th-27th of March, 2014

Figure 1. Study's data sheet. Source: Self-made.

It was an attempt to explain different magnitudes' behaviour:

- What social networks are the most used.
- The preference for some social networks over other ones.
- Usage frequency.
- Most used access devices.
- Reasons for using Facebook.

- Number of followed brand fan pages in Facebook.

Brand fan pages kind, visit frequency, motivations to follow, etc. To verify the variables' relationship extent, both basic descriptive statistics and analytical statistics have been used. In the first case, survey information was tabulated and graphically represented (see section 4). Regarding analytic statistics, Mann-Whitney's U test or Wilcoxon test (non-parametric statistic test) was used. The objective of this test is to prove the heterogeneity of two ordinal or continuous samples and it requires the both samples' distributions to share a common shape (asymmetry and kurtosis).

It must be contrasted the null hypothesis that the probability that a random observation of the first population exceeds a random observation of the second population is 0.5 versus the alternative, which is that this probability is different to 0.5 (this may be approached bilaterally or unilaterally). To do this, N random values of both the first and the second population are taken and all the observations are increasingly ordered. Subsequently, statistic values U_1 and U_2 are obtained and U (the minimum between U_1 and U_2) is deduced. If U had more than 20 observations, the distribution would be quite close to a normal distribution.

The survey was conducted between the 25th and the 27th of March 2014, via online by Easy Survey, being distributed through social media and email to university students and professionals. 435 valid answers and observations were obtained.

The following hypothesis are tried to be validated:

- a) Hypothesis 1 (H1): There are differences between males and females regarding the brand fan pages they follow on Facebook.

There are no great differences between the kinds of brand that men and women follow. Men mention Nike, Coca-Cola, Adidas, Privalia, Zara, Apple, Starbucks,

Blanco, Telepizza, and Stradivarius. Women mention Privalia, Zara, Coca-Cola, Nike, Stradivarius, Adidas, Apple, Starbucks, Blanco, and Telepizza (Olabarri and Monge, 2013).

- b) Hypothesis 2 (H2). The most popular brands and firms in Facebook's brand fan pages are related to entertainment and tourism.
- c) Hypothesis 3 (H3): There are differences between professionals and students concerning the brand fan pages they follow on Facebook.

Bibliographic resources regarding this particular matter couldn't be found.

- d) Hypothesis 4 (H4): Users become brand fans on Facebook following their friends' advice.

Internet users trust 55% of their friends' comments about products and brands and 40% of unknown users' comments. For a 63% of young people, social networks play a prescriber role, and only 1 in 10 would ignore the recommendations of their contacts (Olabarri and Monge, 2013).

- e) Hypothesis 5 (H5): People follow brands on Facebook that they do not buy from.

It can be inferred from a study about *Starbucks* cafeterias and *Target* supermarkets (Ingram, 2012) that after brand exposition on Facebook (whether it's paid or not) fans and their friends are more likely to consume (Figure 2).

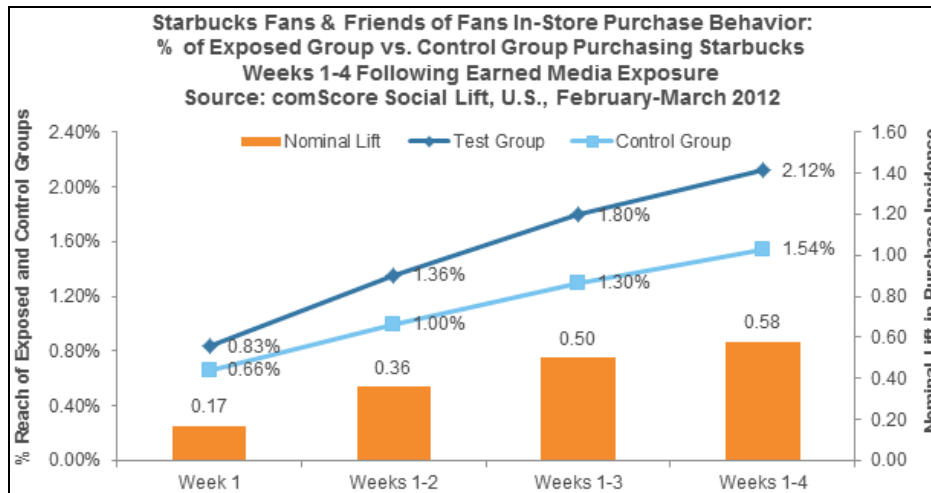


Figure 2. Starbucks Facebook behaviour with regard to the chain (Ingram, 2012).

- f) Hypothesis 6 (H6): Users "Like" but they do not really have *brand attachment*.

Brand love goes well beyond a simple "Like", since the consumer becomes more loyal and tends to speak well about the brand, being willing to pay a higher price and to obviate possible failures (giving a position of strength to the most loved brands). Social networks brand followers (like those on Facebook), by sharing contents (articles, videos, comments, etc.), generate a sense of community and higher fidelity (Palazón, Sicilia, and Delgado, 2014). Users who experience positive emotions about a brand on Facebook often tend to prefer it and recommend it (Smith, 2013).

- g) Hypothesis 7 (H7): Users add brands to their profiles to know about news and discounts.

The main reasons for the relationship between users and brands are special discounts (96%), receiving gifts or entering competitions (93%), receiving information about new products (90%) or news published by the brand (85%) (Olbarri and Monge, 2013). A similar study of The Cocktail Analysis (2013) indicates the access to promotions as the main motivation to follow a brand on Facebook.

h) Hypothesis 8 (H8): Users use brand fan pages as an element of interaction to strengthen and project their personality.

Brand fan pages are a tool to demonstrate they love the brand (26%), find people with similar tastes (19%), or share their ideas about the brands (18%) (Olabarri and Monge, 2013). The interaction with other users is the fifth most mentioned motivation (21%) to follow a brand (The Cocktail Analysis, 2013).

3. Results

100% of the respondents are users of at least one social network, being Facebook the most popular (99.31%), followed by Twitter (57.24%) and LinkedIn (38.85%). There are no statistically significant differences between girls and boys or between professional and students regarding this aspect (Figures 3 and 4).

The most common log-in frequencies between Facebook users are more than 10 times a week (74.77%) and from 4 to 7 times a week (16.67%). Within the most common frequency group, 89.47% are students and 10.53% are professionals, 77.5% are girls and 41% are boys (this difference is very close to being considered statistically significant).

The most commonly used devices to access Facebook are mobile phones (53%) and laptops (30.79%), with some statistically significant differences (Figures 3 and 4) between both genders, and also between students and professionals: whereas professionals mostly log in with their phones (75%) and laptops (25%), students distribute their use of their devices differently, with 43% of them using their phones, 32.4% using their laptop, 18% using their tabletop PC, and 4% using a tablet.

How many times per week do you use Facebook? Use: watching or interacting	General (Boys vs. Girls)	Students (Boys vs. Girls)	Professionals (Boys vs. Girls)	Girls (Students vs. Professionals)	Boys (Students vs. Professionals)
Mann-Whitney U	20752,500	16216,000	279,500	3176,000	1426,000
Wilcoxon W	57337,500	45619,000	685,500	32579,000	11722,000
Z	-1,312	-1,372	-,013	-,742	-,025
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,190	,170	,990	,458	,980
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]					
P_TAIL	0,9052	0,9149	0,5052	0,7710	0,5102

Figure 3. Nonparametric analysis of the differences related to the usage frequency. To reject the null hypothesis (homogeneity) and accept the alternative (heterogeneity), P_TAIL should be less than 0.025 or greater than 0.975. Source: Self-made.

Where do you access Facebook from? (Mark the one most frequently used)	General (Boys vs. Girls)	Students (Boys vs. Girls)	Professionals (Boys vs. Girls)	Girls (Students vs. Professionals)	Boys (Students vs. Professionals)
Mann-Whitney U	20123,500	15272,000	242,500	3068,500	957,500
Wilcoxon W	33653,500	25712,000	648,500	32471,500	11397,500
Z	-1,756	-2,225	-,943	-,912	-2,631
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,079	,026	,346	,362	,009
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]					
P_TAIL	0,9604	0,9870	0,8271	0,8191	0,9957

Figure 4. Non-parametric analysis of the differences on the access pathway to Facebook. Source: Self-made.

The most popular brands and firms in Facebook's brand fan pages (Figure 5) are related to entertainment and tourism (71.76%), fashion (59.26%), sports (38.19%), restaurants (35.19%) and food (32.41%).

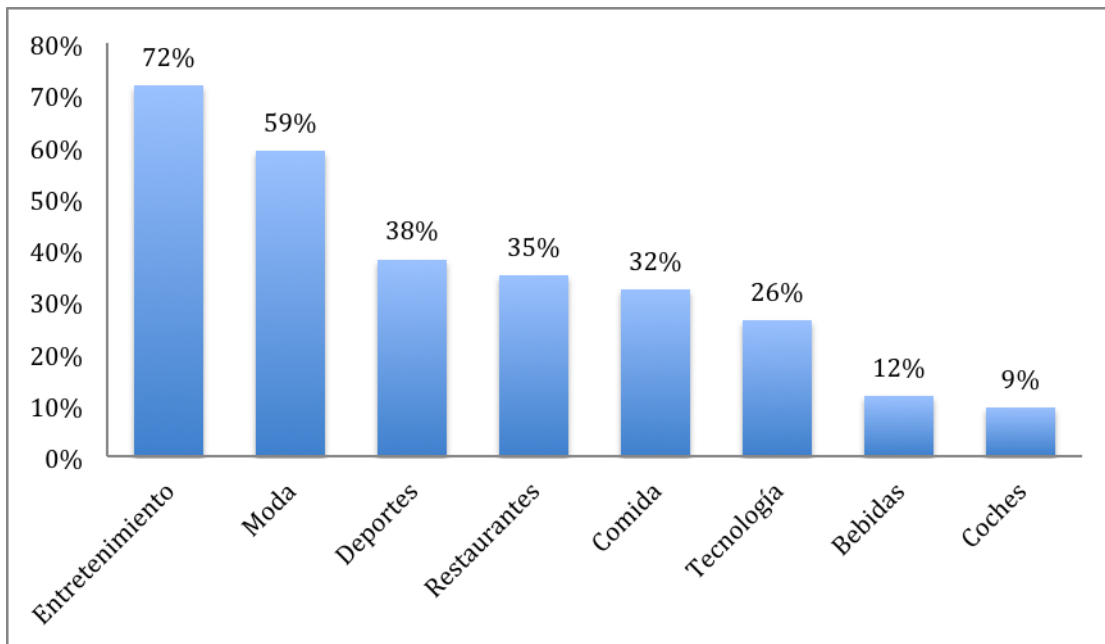


Figure 5. Most followed types of companies or brands in Facebook. Source: self-made.

The first hypothesis to be contrasted is whether there are differences between male and female followers of the brands or brand fan pages in Facebook (H1). Females tend to follow fashion brands (77%), restaurants (41%) and food chains (36%), while males prefer sports (63%) or technology (40%). Both groups converge (with barely any differences) on the most popular brands (Figure 6): entertainment (72% female and 70% male). The analysis does not determine whether there are any significant statistic differences, and the sample size is not big enough to be segmented.

We can't confirm nor deny H1. Even if there seem to be differences between genres in absolute terms concerning the followed pages in Facebook, the statistical analysis can't reveal whether those differences are truly significant or not.

We can confirm the second hypothesis (H2): the most popular brands and firms in Facebook's brand fan pages are related to entertainment and tourism.

The third hypothesis to be contrasted is determining if there are differences between professionals and students concerning followed brand pages on Facebook (H3).

Students prefer to follow brands dedicated to entertainment and tourism (73%), fashion (60%), sports (38%), restaurants (34%) and food (32%). Professionals, on the other hand follow brands concerning entertainment and tourism (58%), fashion (52%), sports (38%), restaurants (40%) and food (31%). As for brands related to sports, food, technology, drinks and cars, the differences among the groups are either too low or inexistent (Figure 6), not resulting to be statistically significant.

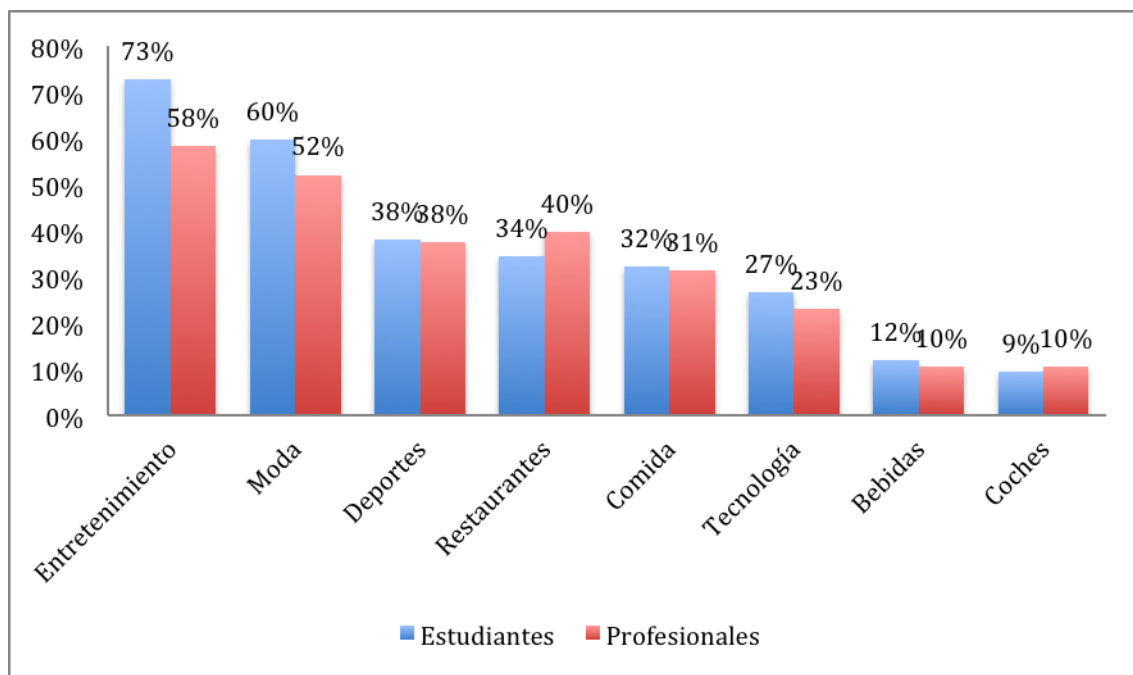


Figure 6. Most followed types of companies or brands in Facebook (students/professionals). Source: self-made.

We reject H3: There are no differences between professionals and students concerning the brand fan pages they follow on Facebook.

The most mentioned reasons to create a Facebook profile are being connected to family and friends (82.87%), entertainment and tourism purposes (31.71%), and keeping up with the latest events and news (20,14%). No significant statistical differences have been noted between genres or between students and professionals (Figure 7), although in the case of professionals, the second and third reasons swap positions. The main reason for both groups (over 70%) is to be connected to family and friends.

	What type of brands/companies do you follow?	Fashion	Food	Cars	Beverages	Restaurants	Sports	Entertainment	Technology
Girls (Professionals vs. Students)	Mann-Whitney U	1795.50	462.00	1.00	25.00	630.50	137.50	1432.00	84.00
	Wilcoxon W	1985.50	528.00	2.00	28.00	721.50	152.50	1568.00	94.00
	Z	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]			1.00 ^a	1.00 ^a		1.00 ^a		1.00 ^a
	P_TAIL	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.500
Boys (Professionals vs. Students)	Mann-Whitney U	129.00	80.00	66.00	33.00	114.00	598.00	624.00	213.50
	Wilcoxon W	150.00	90.00	76.00	39.00	135.00	689.00	702.00	241.50
	Z	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	1.00 ^a	1.00 ^a	1.00 ^a	1.00 ^a	1.00 ^a	1.00 ^a		
	P_TAIL	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.500

Figure 7. Non parametric analysis of the difference related to followed Facebook pages. Source: Self-made.

The fourth hypothesis to be contrasted is whether users follow brands on Facebook because friends or relatives ask them to (H4). Takers of the survey were asked to give a score to motivations to start following a brand fan page from 1 to 5 (being permitted not to rate one or any reason). The answers, from higher to lower score where the following:

- 1) Keeping up with news about the brand (1,154 points)
- 2) Obtain special promotions and discounts (1,121)

- 3) "I love the brand" (973)
- 4) "A friend/relative asked me to, but I'm not really interested" (882)
- 5) Show my preferences to my contacts (664)

Concerning the percentage of users that mention them, the order varies:

- 1) Keeping up with news about the brand (82.6%)
- 2) "A friend/relative asked me to, but I'm not really interested" (79.9%)
- 3) Obtain special promotions and discounts (79.9%)
- 4) "I love the brand" (77.8%)
- 5) Show my preferences to my contacts (71.1%)

The fact that a friend or relative asked them to follow a fan page is the fourth highest ranked reason in score, and the second in percentage. Furthermore, 38.4% of users give it a score of 3, 4 or 5 (it's one of the most important reason for 2 out of 5 people), with statistically significant differences existing between genres (40.8% of females, and 33.9% of males).

We accept H4: Users do start following a brand fan page because a Facebook contact asked them.

The fifth hypothesis to be contrasted is whether Facebook users have brands on their profile whose content they don't consume (H5). Survey takers were asked:

- Whether they consumed content of the brands they followed: 8.33% bought products/services from all the brands they followed, 61.11% only consumed some of the brands, and 27.55% didn't consume anyone at all (88.66% don't consume content from one or any of the brands).
- Whether they follow brands which they don't consume afterwards: Answers being yes (59.03%) and no (27.78%).

Even if there is some incoherence between both responses, it can be concluded that from 6 to 9 people out of 10 are fans of the brands they don't consume, with no statistically significant differences existing between men and women or between students and professionals. We accept H4: users do become fans in Facebook of brands whose content they do not consume.

The sixth hypothesis to be contrasted is whether Facebook users give "Likes" without any real brand attachment or loyalty to the brand they include on their profiles (H6). 23.1% of users admitted following brands they did not consume because of loyalty, attachment or other non-rational reasons.

H6 is accepted: Facebook users become fans of brands they do not feel attachment to (76.9%).

The seventh hypothesis we must verify knows whether users who add brands to their profiles do it to learn about news, events and special discount promotions (H7). According to the survey, the highest valued characteristics in a brand fan page are the following:

- 1) Relevant and usefull information (69.91%).
- 2) Discounts, special offers and coupons (53.94%).
- 3) Credibility (48.61%).
- 4) Possibility to provide feedback to firms (24.77%).
- 5) Possibility to communicate with representatives from the firm (10.06%).

The information about discounts and promotions is the second most valued characteristic by the users, also being one of the main reasons to follow fan pages. We can therefore accept H7: users add brands to their profiles in order to be informed of news and discounts.

The eighth hypothesis we must study knows whether Facebook users choose to use brand fan pages to interact with other people, and strengthen and project their personality.

Apart from these results, the study brings out new interesting ones:

- 21.53% of users didn't know the exact number of brand fan pages they follow, 16.20% followed more than 20, and a 15.05% followed a number between 5 and 10.
- The frequency of visits for these pages is low: either less than one visit per week (35.88%), or never (33.33%). Nevertheless, a 58.8% visit brand fan pages they don't follow.
- 41.9% say they don't share the information that brands publish on their profiles or with their friends, 43.52% do it sometimes, and 7.41% do it often.
- The main sites used to search information about brands are, ordered from more to less frequently used, the company's official website, Facebook, and blogs and platforms with customer opinions (Figure 8). According to their credibility, the official website would be ranked at the top of the list, followed by customer review sites, blogs, Facebook and lastly advertisement inside or outside the Internet. Facebook brand fan pages are the second most visited sources of information, but their credibility is relatively low.

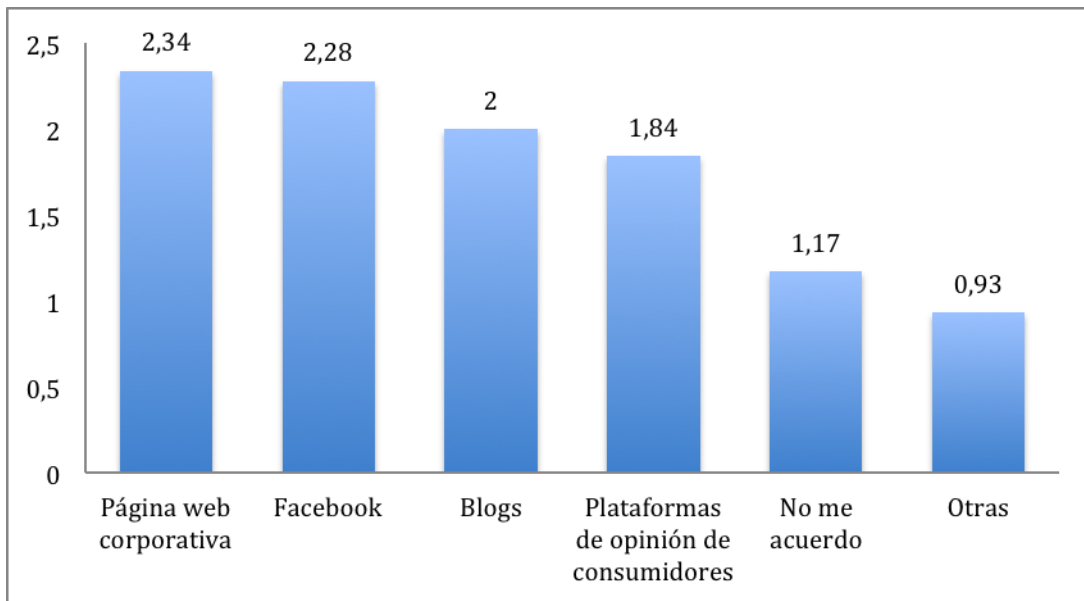


Figure 8: Most popular sites to research information concerning brands. Source: Self-made.

- It is very important to keep the content on these sites attractive; since the main reason to follow them (Figure 9) is the arousal their content induces, followed by the content itself.
- Survey respondents don't follow fan pages either because they're not interested (39.12%), they don't perceive them as useful (10.42%), they don't know the reason (14.12%), they don't want to share their preferences (7.64%), or they chose to find the information they need in official websites (6.25%).

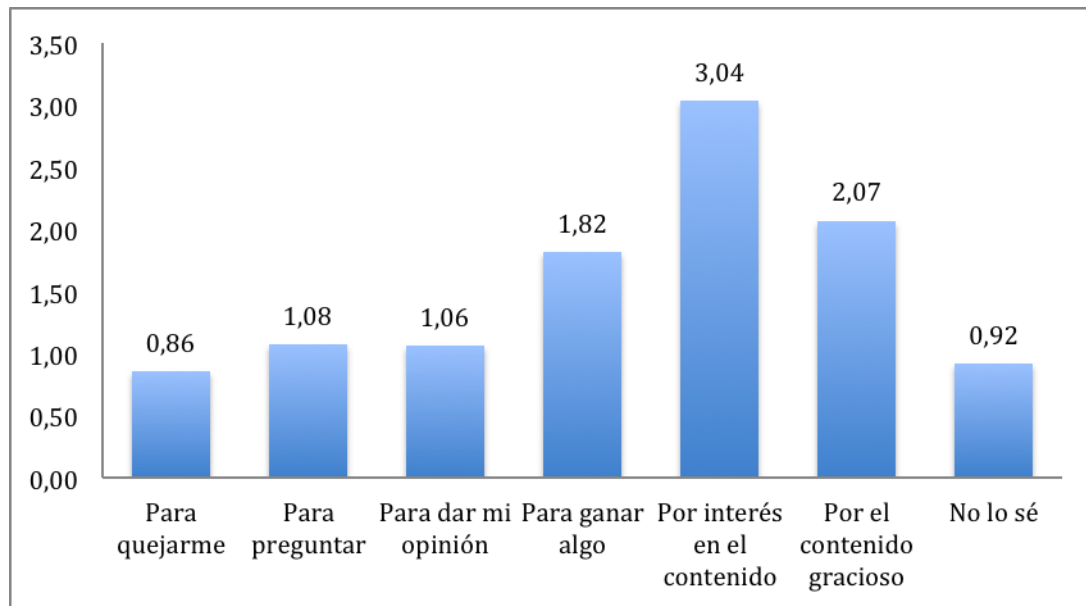


Figure 9. Reasons to follow Brand fan pages. Source: Self-made.

We can consider accepted hypothesis 8 (Users use brand fan pages as an element of interaction to strengthen and project their personality).

4. Conclusion

It has been observed the most popular brands and firms in Facebook's brand fan pages are related to entertainment and tourism and that there are no differences between men and women concerning the brand pages they follow on Facebook. That could be due to differences being actually more focused on some specific age groups than on others. However, it is not possible to carry out a statistical analysis to shed some light on differences according to age groups being significant or not because of an insufficient volume of survey respondents.

There aren't any differences in the Facebook brand pages that students and professionals follow either. However, people become fans of brands on Facebook because their contacts ask them to. What can be deduced from this is that the main

source of value that a brand provides its fans doesn't exclusively come from the impact that its contents may cause on said fans, but rather from the capacity of the content has to be recommended.

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