Northumbria Research Link

What influences people to click 'like' on posts of branded content?

Abstract

Social media is a strategic marketing tool that creates powerful brand communities. This study explores what influences people to click 'Like' on posts of branded content and whether clicking 'Like' motivates people toF search for more information on branded products. Using the stimulus-organism-response model, the study proposed a model in which the attractiveness of posts of branded content and source closeness (stimuli) influenced perceived value (organism), leading to people's clicking 'Like' behavior (response). The model was tested using responses from 509 Chinese social media users. Results showed that the attractiveness of posts of branded content directly and indirectly linked to clicking 'Like' behavior through perceived value while source closeness only exerted a direct effect on clicking 'Like' behavior. People's clicking of 'Like' behavior positively motivated them to search for more information on branded products. The study's findings advanced our understanding of the drivers, process, and outcome of clicking 'Like' behavior.

Introduction

Building brand through social media is a must for business organizations because it is an effective way of creating brand identity, generating brand loyalty, and helping managing crises (Abeza et al., 2020; Lim & Brown-Devlin, 2021; Schivinski et al., 2021). Indeed, people spend a great amount of time on social media, particularly reading news, messages, and posts of branded content from friends and other channels (Cheung & To, 2016; Vorderer, Kromer, & Schneider, 2016). The most popular social media platforms are Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, WeChat, QQ, and Snapchat. Using these platforms, people click 'Like' on posted content, comments, pictures, and videos (Dolan et al., 2016, 2019; Gan, 2017; Guo & Sun, 2020; Wang et al., 2019). Clicking a 'Like' implies an individual's endorsement of a content, comment, product, and/or service (Lee & Hong, 2016). 'Like' is also regarded as an indicator of electronic word-of-mouth (Palazon, Sicilia, & Lopez, 2015) and brand engagement (Dolan et al., 2016; Heimbach, Gottschlich, & Hinz, 2015). Research showed that an individual's Facebook profile data, including the number of 'Likes' on Facebook objects, such as brand fan pages, could be used for product recommendations (Heimbach, Gottschlich, & Hinz, 2015). Thus, clicking 'Like' and other digital activities enable marketers to develop personalized targeted marketing (Kosinski, Stillwell, & Graepel, 2013). Additionally, researchers (e.g. Jimenez & Mendoza, 2013; Lee & Hong, 2016) indicated that 'Like' influences purchase intentions and decisions. Yet, extant literature has failed to systematically examine what and how to make people click 'Like', particularly on posts of branded products (Chwialkowska, 2019; Peyton, 2013). Some researchers suggested that people are four times more likely to click 'Like' on the contents posted and liked by their friends (Egebark & Ekström, 2018) while others (e.g. Dolan et al., 2019; Moran, Muzellec, & Johnson, 2020) reported that the attractiveness of post contents, such as videos, photos, and texts with emotional and relational appeals are more effective in motivating people to click 'Like'. Unfortunately, little studies have systematically

examined whether and how source closeness and the attractiveness of posts of branded content may directly and indirectly influence people's clicking 'Like' behavior, through the role of perceived value.

In fact, researchers (Chin, Lu, & Wu, 2015; Hong, Chen, & Li, 2017) have adopted the motivational theory or impression management approach to explain why people click 'Like'. The present study, however, is grounded on a stimulus-organism-response model that predicts how people respond to stimuli (Chang, Eckman, & Yan, 2011). This study hypothesizes that the attractiveness of posts of branded content and source closeness of posts (stimuli) influence people's perceived value (organism), leading to their clicking 'Like' behavior (response). When people are continuously exposed to personalized ad messages, links, and posts of branded content from online friends (Jung, 2017), these stimuli may generate a value (organism) that people perceive to be beneficial and closely relevant to their life, and that motivates them to click 'Like' (response) (Wang et al., 2019). Clicking 'Like' in turn arouses interest of people to search for more information on understanding the branded products (Wang et al., 2019). In sum, there are under-researched areas on direct and indirect influences of source closeness and the attractiveness of posts of branded content on people's clicking 'Like' behavior through the role of perceived value.

Specifically, this study aims to answer the research questions: (1) "What is the role of post attractiveness and source closeness on leading people to click on branded posts?", (2) "What is the role of perceived value on the relationships between post attractiveness, source closeness of posts, and clicking 'Like' behavior?", and (3) "Does clicking 'Like' behavior affect people's intention to search for more information on branded products?". The study used purposeful sampling to obtain responses from 509 Chinese social media users. The data were subjected to reliability analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling analysis. Theoretically, the study contributes to the strategic marketing literature by extending the

stimulus-organism-response model to explain what and how lead to clicking 'Like' behavior. Finding of this study also enrich brand engagement literature on the different paths of how attractiveness of posts of branded content and source closeness of posts influence people's clicking 'Like' of branded posts. Practically, the study's findings provide clues to brand managers on how to enhance perceived value by clarifying the role of the attractiveness of posts of branded content and source closeness of posts that motivate people's clicking 'Like' behavior.

Literature review and hypotheses

With the advent of information and communications technology, people spend a significant amount of time online. In recent years, mobile and cloud computing have enabled people to access the Web anytime and anywhere (Vorderer, Kromer, & Schneider, 2016). Mobile devices including smart phones and tablets are the dominant modes of internet access in China (To & Lai, 2014; To, Lai, & Chung, 2013). With mobile devices, Chinese consumers frequently do online shopping, such as Taobao (To & Lai, 2014), upload and download information from the Web, and send texts, images, photos, videos, and invitations to friends, such as WeChat (Gan, 2017; To, Lai, & Chung, 2013). Indeed, social media occupies an important role of Chinese people's lives.

Given the salience of social media, it has been widely studied in the fields of psychology, sociology, internet research, brand management, and strategic marketing (Bronstein, 2013; Kende et al., 2016; Leitch & Merlot, 2018; Shang, Zhou, & Zuo, 2021; Schivinski et al., 2021). Through the ease of social media, people frequently update and exchange information, and they may place a high perceived value on the information of which they perceived to be valuable and relevant to their life and work (Shang, Zhou, & Zuo, 2021). Social media has opened opportunities for brand managers to get in touch with potential users and existing consumers

of their products (Leitch & Merlot, 2018). People may be drawn into strong attention to the posts, messages, pictures or videos that have attracted large number of 'Likes'. Nevertheless, what and how to make people click 'Like' on posts of branded content have yet to be systematically researched (Chwialkowska, 2019).

A systematic literature review on clicking 'Like' on social media

Following the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and metal-analysis (Page et al., 2021) guideline, the study conducted a literature search on 30 December 2021 in Scopus using "click", "like", "word of mouth", and "social media" in articles' "title, abstract, or keywords". Only two articles were found. Another literature search using "like", "word of mouth", and "social media" in articles' "title, abstract, or keywords" identified 108 articles. Among these 108 articles, 30 articles were non-journal articles and excluded from the selection. Abstracts of the remaining 78 articles were screened. Fifteen of them were identified as key articles about "Like (or Likes)" in social media but not about using "like" as a conjunction. Table 1 presents the topics and key findings of the selected 15 articles.

"Insert Table 1 here"

Specifically, Coulter and Roggeveen (2012) pioneered to investigate how source, relationship, and content affected consumer responses on social media. They identified source closeness and attractiveness of posts influencing consumer responses. Bunker et al. (2013) studied the influencing factors of "Like" on Facebook. They reported that brand identity explained more strongly for people clicking "Like" in the consumer situation than in the non-consumer situation while social norms explained more strongly for people clicking "Like" in the non-consumer situation than in the consumer situation. Yet, Bunker et al. (2013) did not

explore the effects of source closeness and post content on clicking "Like" behavior. Rossmann, Ranjan, and Sugathan (2016), Wallace, Buil, and de Chernatony (2017), and Dewan, Ho, and Ramaprasad (2017) showed that source closeness had an impact of clicking "Like" behavior. On the other hand, Liu et al. (2017) found that attractiveness of post such as vividness and emotional appeals had a stronger effect than interactivity does on clicking "Like". To our expectation, scant research has been done to investigate whether and how the source closeness of posts and attractiveness of posts may influence people's clicking 'Like' behavior through the mediating role of perceived value.

The stimulus-organism-response model

The stimulus-organism-response model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) argues that external environment, such as social, design, and ambient elements, provides the stimuli which affect people's cognitive state, such as internal organism, and then leading to a specific behavioral response. This model has been widely applied to retailing and marketing (Cheah et al., 2020; Mohammed & Althonayan, 2018; Pantano & Viassone, 2015; Vieira, 2013) because retailers can change the physical environment to enhance perceived value and encourage positive consumer responses. In a context of online marketing environment, researchers have adopted the stimulus-organism-response model on exploring what kind of environmental aspect (stimulus) influence internal state of people (organism) to actively engage in online brand communities (Islam & Rahman, 2017), and whether peer referent, source closeness, and perceived authority fulfilled moral obligation of which in turn influenced people's (response) clicking a 'Like' on the posts of friends (Xu, Yao, & Teo, 2020).

Attractiveness of posts and clicking 'Like' on posts of branded content

Facebook data team (2010) explored the branded content of posts and the number of comments and 'Likes' they received. This team found that posts of branded content could positively convey optimistic emotions to others when these posts received more 'Likes'. de Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang (2012) suggested that vividness and interactivity in the design of commercial posts of branded products were positively associated with the number of received 'Likes'. People may like to share attractive posts with their friends. One way to signal others is to click a 'Like' on the posts of which people believe their friends may benefit from these posts. In fact, Coulter and Roggeveen (2012) also found that certain characteristics of messages, such as interesting and catchy headlines, arouse interest of consumers to keep reading posts, thus leading to more 'Likes' of the posts. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Attractiveness of posts of branded content positively influences people's clicking 'Like' behavior.

Source closeness and people's clicking 'Like' on posts of branded content

Source closeness characterizes how people perceive the source of posts on branded product is recognized and identified by people. When people have confidence in the source of posts, they expect to get valid and credible information from the content of posts. The effectiveness of source rests on perceived level of specialty and trustworthiness of the source (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990). Ohanian (1990) highlighted that trustworthiness toward posts are stemmed from people's trust on the professionals who post the messages or figures. When people believe the source of posts is trustworthy, they are prone to share the information with others. This motivates the people to click 'Like' on the posts for gaining attentions of others on the content of these posts.

Moreover, people may favor the source of posts of branded product because these posts not only connect people to brands, but also bring intangible values to people. People may show their support to that source of posts by clicking 'Like' for conveying the value of the posts to their friends. Coulter and Roggeveen (2012) suggested that source closeness exerts a positive effect on people's attitude towards posts about branded products and messages forwarded from online "Friends". In Coulter and Roggeveen's (2012) study, they defined source closeness as the tie strength perceived by a consumer with respect to his/her social network. A source can be anyone who is a member of the consumer's "Friend" Networks that he/she interacts and/or follows (Coulter and Roggeveen, 2012). Thus, brand managers can make use of "source closeness" by disseminating a wider exposure of the posts to consumers and their networks. Thus, the following hypothesis is posited:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Source closeness positively influences people's clicking 'Like' behavior

Attractiveness of posts and perceived value

The attractiveness of posts is based on the source attractiveness theory (McGuire, 1985). This theory suggests that people are prone to be influenced by the source which they want to identify with. When people believe the posts are attractive and bring enjoyment to them, they are prone to develop affection for the source of these posts. The eye-catching messages and posts about branded products or services can leave a strong impression on social media users (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012; Vale & Fernandes, 2018). If people are exposed to interesting and attractive posts of branded content, they are emotionally affiliated with these posts. This is because these posts may bring a high perceived value on making their daily life and work better. Perceived value is characterized by consumer assessment of a product's (including information) utility based on his/her perceptions of what is received and what is given (Zeithmal, 1988).

People that are appealed to these posts will search for more brand-related information for capturing more value such as enjoyment (Vale & Fernandes, 2018).

Furthermore, Zhang and Du (2020) investigated how various social media message strategies of business-to-business (B2B) companies and business-to-consumer (B2C) companies influenced consumer perceived value. Using responses from 207 users of Sina Weibo brand pages, Zhang and Du (2020) found that emotional appeal – a construct overlapping with the attractiveness of posts in the study – was found as the most significant factor influencing consumer perceived value in the B2C context. Thus, the following hypothesis is posited:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Attractiveness of posts of branded content positively influences people's perceived value.

Source closeness and perceived value

Source closeness is rooted in the source credibility theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). This theory argues that the closeness of source depends on similarity and familiarity of the source of posts to respondents (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Similarity is characterized by the shared vision between the source of posts and people i.e. receivers who read the posts. Familiarity is characterized by how easy receivers can memorize the posts (Erdogen, Baker, & Tagg, 2001). When people share common concern and interests with the source of posts, they are prone to show a strong empathy toward the message(s) of posts. The feeling of empathy may arise from consumers' identification with posts of branded product. Such identification will attract consumers to revisit the source of postings for getting updated and valuable information about branded product, and affective attitude will drive them placing a high value on posts of branded product. People may place more value on things that they share common interests and views

with others. For example, Brown, Broderick, and Lee (2007) highlighted that the consumers use the criteria of shared interests and attitude to evaluate posts of branded product. Furthermore, Wang, Wang, and Wang (2018) reported that tie strength which is a function of the closeness of source had a significant impact on consumer perceived value and purchase intention. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Source closeness positively influences people's perceived value.

Perceived value and clicking 'Like' on posts of branded content

Perceived value is a multidimensional construct measuring consumer perceptions of what is received and what is given (Zeithmal, 1988). Sheth, Newman, and Gross (1991) suggested that perceived value includes social, emotional, and functional dimensions. When people believe that a product/service is valuable, they want to convey this message to others through clicking 'Like'. Such an action not only attracts other people's attention, but also aligns with the conformity to others on clicking a 'Like' (Egebark & Estrom, 2018). Foroudi, Marvi, and Kizgin (2020) suggested that a higher level of perceived value can lead to higher satisfaction. If people are satisfied, they will take positive actions. One of the positive actions people would take is to click 'Like' for signaling others that the product/service brings value to their work or daily life. People may also use clicking 'Like' to notify others that this product/service should not be overlooked. Wang *et al.* (2019) studied people's clicking 'Like' behavior in WeChat. They reported that perceived value enhances a person's self-concept and enjoyment, and these are considered as key antecedents of people's clicking 'Like' behavior. Thus, the following hypothesis is given:

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Perceived value positively influences people's clicking 'Like' behavior.

Clicking 'Like' and intention to search for more information on branded products

In today's competitive environment, understanding how consumers acquire product and service information is crucial for designing marketing campaigns and building consumer value (Mourali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005; Naderi, Paswan, & Guzman, 2018). Thus, information search is one of the key fields of consumer-related research (Mourali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005; Zhang et al., 2013). It is a main component of decision-making models (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2005). The extant literature showed that people are affected by actions of friends or other social network users (Erdogan, Baker, & Tagg, 2001; Lee & Hong, 2016; Na & Kang, 2018), such as celebrity. For example, people will pay attention to whether their posts are "Liked" by others and the number of 'Likes' that people have clicked. Specifically, Lee and Hong (2016) suggested that the number of positive responses such as the number of 'Likes' represents whether people show conformity to others on the important of posts of branded products. When people are attracted by the large number of 'Likes', they may be emotionally aroused to search for more information on the posts of branded product/service. In fact, Lopatovsk (2014) indicated that there is a direct and positive relationship between emotions and online information search. Karnowski et al. (2017) also suggested that social contagion may exert a positive impact on individuals to search for more information about the interesting posts. Therefore, the following hypothesis is presented:

Hypothesis 6 (H6): People's behavior of clicking 'Like' positively influences their intention to search for more information on branded products.

Figure 1 shows the theoretical model of the study.

Method

Sample

Most social media users are young adults who have a higher education level than the general population (Kamal, Chu, & Pedram, 2013; Turri, Smith, & Kemp, 2013). Therefore, university students and graduates were considered an appropriate sample of the study. The research team obtained the consent of student unions and alumni associations of a few Hong Kong universities to contact their members through emails. The electronic link of the questionnaire was randomly sent to 1,550 students of alumni who graduated in different years. The first and second reminders were sent to those who had yet to respond after one month and two months, respectively. The purpose of the survey was explained, and the anonymity and confidentiality of responses were assured in questionnaire. Additionally, potential participants were reminded that the survey was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the survey at any point. Participants were asked to recall a specific brand and why they clicked 'Like' on posts of branded content on social media platforms, such as Facebook and QQ. At the end of the first month, 274 completed questionnaires were returned, followed by 135 questionnaires at the end of the second month, and another 100 questionnaires at the end of the third month. Thus, a total of 509 completed responses were collected, yielding a response rate of 32.84 percent. Following the suggestion of Armstrong and Overton (1977), 100 sets of responses from the first batch were randomly selected and compared with those from the last batch to assess the non-response bias. There were no statistically significant differences between the two batches of data by using the criterion of $p < 0.05$ for all Likert-scale items used in the study. Accordingly, non-response bias was not a serious problem, and the sample fairly represented the responses for the target group.

Among the 509 respondents, 55.4 percent were female, 30.3 percent were younger than 20 years, 60.9 percent were single and living with parents, 46.8 percent had a bachelor's degree, 29.3 percent worked as executives or managers, 45.4 percent had a monthly salary less than HKD10,000 and 38.7 percent had been working for less than one year, as shown in Table 2.

"Insert Table 2 here"

Measures

The attractiveness of posts of branded content refers to how attractive are the messages, photos, and videos of branded products. Three items were adapted from Coulter and Roggeveen (2012). They characterize attractiveness based on the degree of catchiness, interesting, and enjoyable of the branded posts. Source closeness characterizes whether respondents have a high degree of similarity and familiarity with the source of posts. Three items were adapted from Coulter and Roggeveen (2012). Perceived value refers to how consumers evaluate the value and usefulness of branded content they obtained (Liang et al., 2012). Three items were adapted from Lee and Jun (2007) and Liang et al. (2012). They measure respondents' perception of usefulness, importance, and value of the branded posts. Clicking 'Like' behavior measures consumer actual behavior to click the 'Like' button. Three items were adapted from Peyton's (2013) study. They characterize the degree of respondents' agreement on clicking 'Like' due to the informativeness, popularity, and fun of the branded posts. The characterization of these four dimensions was in line to the stimulus-organism-response model that has been applied in online communities and retailing (Cheah et al., 2020; Xu, Yao, & Teo, 2020). Intention to search for more information on branded products measures the extent to which consumers look for more information on products and services after clicking 'Like'. Three items were adapted from Zhang et al. (2013). All measurement items are shown in Appendix I. The items were

rated using a 7-point Likert scale, with '1' representing 'very strongly disagree/not at all likely/not at all interesting (or catchy/enjoyable)' and '7' representing 'very strongly agree/very likely/very interesting (or catchy/enjoyable)'. The Cronbach's alpha values for the attractiveness of posts of branded content, source closeness of posts, perceived value, clicking 'Like' behavior, and intention to search for more information on branded products were 0.80, 0.76, 0.93, 0.80, and 0.84, respectively. Demographic information, such as gender, age group, marital status, education, job position, monthly income, and working experience were collected from respondents.

The questionnaire was developed in English. Following the back-translation method proposed by Brislin, Lonner, and Thorndike (2013), an experienced bilingual researcher was invited to translate the questionnaire from English to Chinese, and then another bilingual researcher was asked to translate the questionnaire from Chinese back to English. The purpose of this procedure was to ensure that there was no discrepancy in meaning between the original and back-translated versions. In addition, a pilot test involving 10 participants was conducted to check the clarity of questionnaire items.

Results

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Amos 26.0. Reliability analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling were used to assess the internal consistency of the collected data and the validity of the research model as shown in Figure 1.

The convergent validity of constructs was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE) values. The AVE values ranged from 0.51 to 0.81, which were greater than the acceptable level of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The discriminant validity of constructs was determined by comparing the square root of the AVE for each construct and the correlations between the construct and all other constructs. All the square roots of the AVE values were

greater than the correlation values, as shown in Table 3, indicating that sufficient discriminant validity was achieved (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

"Insert Table 3 here"

Common method variance was assessed using Harman's one-factor test. The test results showed that no single factor was apparent in the un-rotated factor structure. The first factor explained 28.6 percent of the total variance (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = 0.81, $p < 0.001$) and did not account for most of the variance. Thus, there was little common method variance to confound the results.

Means and standard deviations of constructs and correlations between constructs are shown in Table 3. Means ranged from 3.86 to 4.76, and standard deviations ranged from 1.09 to 1.71. The attractiveness of posts of branded content ($r = 0.14, p < 0.05$) and source closeness of posts ($r = 0.12, p < 0.05$) were found to be significantly associated with perceived value. The attractiveness of posts of branded content ($r = 0.19, p < 0.01$) and source closeness of posts ($r = 0.15, p < 0.01$) was each positively associated with clicking 'Like' behavior. Perceived value ($r = 0.17, p < 0.01$) was positively associated with clicking 'Like' behavior. Finally, clicking 'Like' behavior ($r = 0.25, p < 0.01$) was positively associated with people's intention to search for more information on branded products.

Results of confirmatory factor analysis showed that the fit indices of the five-factor model, which was composed of the attractiveness of posts of branded content, source closeness of posts, perceived value, clicking 'Like' behavior, and intention to search for more information on branded products ($\chi^2 = 196.80$, *d.f.* = 80, *GFI* = 0.95, *CFI* = 0.96, *NFI* = 0.93, *TLI* = 0.95 and *RMSEA* = 0.05), were better than those of the one-factor model ($\chi^2 = 1499.40$, *d.f.* = 90, *GFI* = 0.2, *CFI* = 0.82, *NFI* = 0.84, *TLI* = 0.87 and *RMSEA* = 0.09). The normed chi-square

was 2.46 and below the cut-off value of 3. In addition, change in χ^2 between the five-factor model and one-factor model confirmed that the five-factor model was better than the one-factor one ($\triangle \chi^2 = 1302.6$, *d.f.* $= 10$ and $p < 0.001$).

Owning to the fact that some demographic factors may confound the endogenous variables, five control variables were included in the structural equation modeling analysis and these variables were gender, age, marital status, educational level, and monthly salary. Results of the final structural equation model indicated that the model was good ($\lambda^2 = 356.6$, *d.f.* $= 128$, $p < 0.001$, *GFI* $= 0.92$, *CFI* $= 0.93$, *IFI* $= 0.91$, *TLI* $= 0.90$, *RMSEA* $= 0.07$). R^2 value of perceived value, people's clicking 'Like' behavior, and people's intention to search for more information on branded products was 0.04, 0.53, and 0.03, respectively. As suggested by van de Vijver and Leung (1997), the effect sizes were small and yet important for perceived value and people's intention to search for more information on branded products while the effect size was medium for clicking 'Like' behavior.

Result of the model (see Figure 2) showed that the attractiveness of posts of branded products positively influenced perceived value ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$) and clicking 'Like' behavior ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, Hypotheses 1 and 3 were supported. Sobel test was adopted to examine the z-value and confirm whether a mediator variable significantly weakened the influence of an independent variable on a dependent variable (Sobel, 1982). Result of Sobel test (see Figure 3) showed that perceived value partially and significantly mediated the effects of the attractiveness of posts of branded products on clicking 'Like' behavior (Sobel test: z = 3.19, $p < 0.01$). However, source closeness was insignificantly related to perceived value ($\beta = 0.04$, *n.s.*). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was unsupported. Source closeness exerted a positive influence on clicking 'Like' behavior ($\beta = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 2 was supported. Perceived value positively influenced clicking 'Like' behavior ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$) while clicking 'Like' behavior was positively accounted for people's intention to search for more information on

branded products ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, Hypotheses 5 and 6 were supported. Results also indicated that perceived value was insignificantly related to people's intention to search for more information on branded products ($\beta = 0.02$, *n.s.*).

"Insert Figure 2 here"

"Insert Figure 3 here"

Discussion

The study examined whether and how the attractiveness of posts of branded content and source closeness (stimuli) influenced perceived value (organism), leading to clicking 'Like' behavior (response). It also investigated the effect of clicking 'Like' behavior on people's intention to search for more information on branded products. The study's findings revealed that the attractiveness of posts of branded content exerted a direct and indirect influence on people's clicking 'Like' behavior through perceived value as a mediator. However, source closeness showed a positively direct link to people's clicking 'Like' behavior, but insignificantly linked to perceived value. Finally, clicking 'Like' behavior was found to be positively predictive of people's intention to search for more information on branded products.

With an exceptional study of Xu, Yao, and Teo (2020), they used the stimulus-organism-response model to reveal that the stimuli of interpersonal relationships were positively related to sense of moral obligation, which in turn positively accounted for people's intention to click 'Like' on friends' postings on social media. Nevertheless, this study adopted and applied the stimulus-organism-response model on explaining what and how to make people's clicking of 'Like' on branded products. Findings of the study was in line with the study of Aljukhadar, Bériault Poirier, and Senecal (2020) that stimulus becomes a key driver of social media and produces an inspiration to consumers. Drawing on the stimulus-organism-response model, the

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attractiveness of posts of branded contents was found as a key emotional stimulus which triggered a response based on the internal feeling i.e. perceived value of a consumer (an organism), leading to a behavioral response of clicking 'Like' on branded posts.

Results of the study also enriched the brand engagement literature (e.g. Naqvi, Jiang, & Naqvi, 2021) on different paths of how the attractiveness of posts of branded content and source closeness of posts lead to clicking 'Like' of branded posts. Specifically, the attractiveness of posts of branded content provided a good way of making customers to engage with the brand by clicking a 'like' through placing the amount of value on the relevant, usefulness, and importance of posts on that branded product. Nevertheless, when people have confidence in the source of posts, they may directly click a 'Like' to signal others on the branded posts.

Source closeness exerted a positive impact on people's clicking 'Like' behavior. One plausible reason is that if consumers have strong identification with the source of posts, they are more likely to share the valuable information with their friends by clicking 'Like'. The effect of source closeness on clicking 'Like' is in line with the finding of Kim and Gweon (2016). The study also addressed the neglected but salient mediating role of perceived value on the relationship between the attractiveness of branded posts and clicking 'Like'. When people are exposure to attractive videos, photos, and messages of branded products, they are stimulated to place a high value on the posts because they think these posts to be informative, enjoyable and valuable. Thus, they are motivated to click 'Like'. The mediating role of perceived value extended the results of Thai and Wang (2020) on the process of how to promote people clicking 'Like' behavior on social media.

Unexpectedly, source closeness was insignificantly linked to perceived value. One of the plausible reasons is that people use social networking sites as a means of building and maintaining weak ties with other social network users (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). Due to the weakened ties, people may not show much concern on posts of other social media users

of whom they do not know and some posts which are considered as advertisements. Moreover, when people have more experiences of using social media, the influence of social media on people becomes less (Palazon, Sicilia, & Lopez, 2015). Rather, people will place a high perceived value on the source of posts that they believe to be credible, such as source from close friends and professionals. Even if people are psychologically close to information sources, this does not necessarily mean they will value the information due to the marginal or residual impact (Simon, Brexendorf, & Fassnacht, 2016).

The insignificant link between perceived value and people's intention to search for more information on branded products implied that even if consumers perceived the posts of branded products to be valuable, useful, and important, they did not necessarily exert a direct effect on consumers' intention to search for more information on branded products The link could only be made through people's clicking 'Like' behavior. This finding highlighted the importance of driving people to click 'Like'. This result extended the studies of Kudeshia, Sikdar, and Mittal (2014, 2016) and Thai and Wang (2020) that Clicking 'Like' was a salient kind of endorsement actions which arouse people's interest to search more information on branded products before they developed a purchase intention on these products.

Practical implications

Given the salience of the attractiveness of posts of branded contents, brand managers are advised to use humors and include informative contents that may help to increase perceived value of branded products in the mind of consumers. Hollebeek and Macky (2019) reviewed the role of digital content marketing in fostering consumer engagement. They conceptualized digital content marketing as the creation and dissemination of attractive, relevant, and valuable brand-related content to consumers on digital platforms. They suggested that when digital content marketing was adopted, this could promote consumer behavioral engagement and

brand citizenship behaviors (such as clicking 'Like' in our study). Source closeness exerts a direct influence on people's clicking 'Like' behavior. In fact, source closeness refers to the tie-strength perceived by a consumer in his/her social networks (Coulter and Roggeveen, 2012). Brand managers can make use of "source closeness" by disseminating a wider exposure of the posts to consumers and their personal social networks. One plausible way is to build consumers develop confidence in the source of posts. The posts may contain data-driven posts that are quoted from experts or professionals. Brand managers may make consumers favor the source of posts by making them familiarized with searching for reliable and useful source of posts on branded product, such as quality testing of products, and that source can be promoted in the company website or different social media platforms as brand advocates (Fuggetta, 2012). As suggested by Choi, Kroff, and Kim (2021), accurate, valuable tips about branded products, and relevant facts should be posted in Facebook page or social networking sites for converting more users into brand advocates. Brand managers may need to frequently monitor the source of content for removing any source which provides inaccurate brand-related information because this may affect the relationship between a user and the brand (Davis, Piven, & Breazeale, 2014). Finally, brand managers may promote consumer perceived value by highlighting the branded products having great value for money, such as the durability of branded products in comparison to alternative brands.

Limitations and future research

The study has some limitations. Most respondents were young social media users in a collectivistic society. Future researchers may focus on different age groups and cultural settings. For example, some demographic groups especially people of aged 18-34 tend to spend more time in using social media than other groups (The Nielsen Company, 2019). The other limitation is that this study adopted a cross-sectional design, which may not be generalizable

to other settings at different times. The third limitation is that responses were collected from an online self-administered questionnaire survey. This self-reported design might be subjected to common method variance. Yet the results of Haman's one-factor test showed no single factor emerged and the first factor of the unrotated factor solution only explained 28.55 percent of the total variance, implying that common method variance was not an issue. Finally, the results showed that although clicking "Like" behavior was appropriately predicted by the attractiveness of posts, source closeness, and perceived value, perceived value and people's intention to search for more information on branded products were very weakly related to the predictor variables. Future researchers may explore additionally predictor variables to identify what factors, such as affective stimulus, will influence perceived value more significantly and what factors, such as relating the perceived benefits of branded posts to capture high quality of actual branded product performance, will arouse people's intention to search for more information on branded products effectively.

Future researchers may use experiments to examine how users will react differently in response to low compared to high degree of source closeness and high compared to low attractiveness of posts of branded content. Researchers may examine whether and how source closeness and the attractiveness of posts of branded products are related to different types of perceived value, namely social, emotional, and functional values on driving people to click 'Like'. Additionally, the effects of some specific "sources" such as celebrities and brand advocates/volunteer marketers have yet to be studied. Thus, the moderating effect of source types, such as celebrities, brand advocates, personal friends, friends-of-friends, etc. shall be examined in future research.

Conclusion

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Clicking 'Like' plays a crucial role in strategic marketing and brand engagement. Nevertheless, scant research has addressed what and how to make people clicking 'Like' on post of branded content. The study applied the stimulus-organism-response model on studying the impact of the attractiveness of posts and source closeness on clicking 'Like' behavior through perceived value. The study's findings showed that the attractiveness of posts of branded content directly and indirectly influenced clicking 'Like' behavior through perceived value, as a mediator while source closeness exerted a direct impact on people's clicking 'Like' behavior. Result of this study provided practical implications to strategic marketing and brand engagement.

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Appendix I: Questionnaire items

	Factor loadings
The attractiveness of post of branded content	
- How 'catchy' was the post you read?	0.79
- How 'interesting' was the post you read?	0.75
- How 'enjoyable' was the post you read?	0.72
Source closeness	
- How likely would you share personal confidence with the source of post?	0.79
- How likely would you perform a large favor for the source of post?	0.70
- How likely would you revisit the source' postings in the next five visits of post?	0.65
Perceived value of information	
- The post was valuable to me.	0.92
- The post was useful to me.	0.90
- The post was important to me.	0.88
Clicking 'Like' behavior	
- As the post was fun, I clicked 'Like'.	0.85
- As the post was informative, I clicked 'Like'.	0.80
- As the post was popular, I clicked 'Like'.	0.62
Intention to search for more information on branded products	
- I plan to search for more information on branded products.	0.87
- I intend to evaluate branded products.	0.85
- I will discuss with friends on features of branded products.	0.66