

## The Roles of Traditional Advertising and Branded Social Media in a Successful Marketing Communications Campaign

Advertisers are shifting increasing amounts of their advertising dollars from traditional media to various forms of online communications venues. In the early years, this shift primarily involved buying advertising space on a range of specific websites, from relatively broad-reaching sites such as Yahoo.com to more targeted and special interest sites such as candystand.com.

However, in recent years, the opportunities to showcase one's brand online have expanded to include video sites such as YouTube.com and social networking sites that include Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. These latest forms of online brand communications have created a new arena for advertisers to connect more intimately with their target audiences.

As with any changing environment, advertisers are left wondering what affects these new, more voluntary and less controlled brand interactions are having on the consumer.

In this paper, we isolate three different types of brand communications:

- a) **Traditional advertising** that runs in traditional, offline media;
- b) **'Traditional' forms of online advertising**, including banner ads that appear on a wide range of websites and commercials that consumers see within the context of TV programming that they view online;
- c) **The new branded social media networks** that are comprised of brand-related but consumer driven online interactions, including involvement with branded Facebook pages, brand sponsored online chats, branded games, etc.

Using a pre/post (longitudinal) design in which the same respondents are interviewed at two points in time, we explore how these three different types of brand communications vary on two key dimensions:

1. The **types of consumers** that engage with the specific communications venues: How do those who engage with traditional advertising for a brand differ from those who are involved with brands within the branded social media space?
2. The **outcomes** of the different types of brand interactions: What changes in consumer perceptions and behavior result from these brand engagements, and how do these outcomes differ across the three types of communications venues?

The findings detailed in this paper suggest that advertisers should establish different targets and objectives for their online advertising versus branded social media campaigns.

*The insights expressed in this paper are based on research findings for selected teen and young adult targeted brands that have particularly strong badge value and personal affinity components. While the analysis did not include brands that have a more rational selling proposition, the topics discussed bear consideration for any advertiser who is attempting to optimize communication effectiveness across traditional and non-traditional vehicles.*

### *What types of consumers engage with different online media vehicles?*

*What used to be called the new media – online banner ads and videos/commercials – actually function much like the old media. What is new is the role played by the even newer media – the branded social media.*

The task for advertising, in general terms, has always been to: 1) break through the filters that have been established by consumers to block out irrelevant and uninteresting messages, 2) convince the now-engaged consumer to think or feel differently about the brand, and 3) thus motivate behavioral change.

It is well documented (by Communicus and others) that those who are already more favorable towards a brand will tend to be more open to engagement with advertising for that brand than will those who aren't already favorably inclined; we term this phenomenon 'selective perception.'

To optimize the effectiveness of any communications campaign, it is important to understand and quantify the extent to which selective perception plays a role in the engagement choices made (often unconsciously) by consumers who may have exposure opportunities to brand messages in different communications venues. For example, knowing that a particular communications channel is most likely to attract those who are already brand fans implies a different messaging strategy than would be appropriate for a communications channel that attracts a wide array of brand fans along with those who aren't particularly involved with the brand.

*Communicus findings on selective perception clearly differentiate the types of consumers that tend to interact with 'traditional' online advertising versus branded social media.*

### **'TRADITIONAL' ONLINE ADVERTISING AUDIENCES**

'Traditional' online advertising (banner ads, commercials aired on online TV shows) is no more or less subject to selective perception than is traditional offline advertising. Specifically, while you can expect the composition of the group that engages with your online ad to have a slightly higher than average mix of brand fans versus those who aren't particularly involved with your brand, the likely ratio won't be much different than you'd see in the group who engaged with your TV commercial.

You might think that the narrower audiences of online venues, which imply better targeting, might be more likely to achieve exposure and engagement among brand fans. Or, you might hypothesize that the 'leaning forward' dynamics of online media exposure (versus the 'leaning back' dynamic of watching TV) would produce a higher composition of fans within an online ad audience.

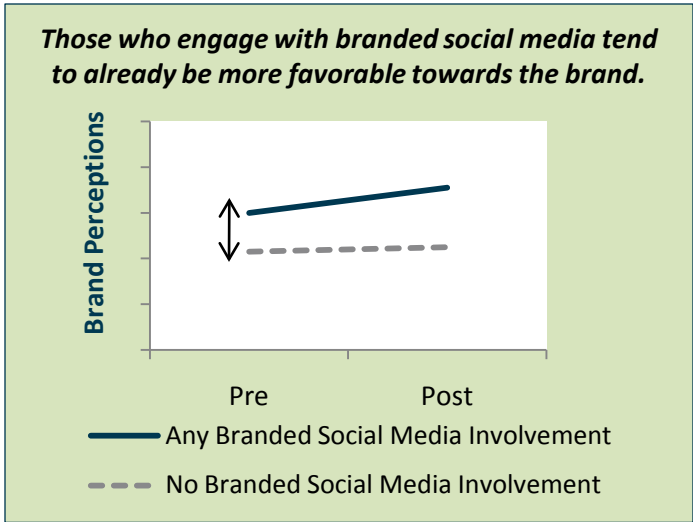
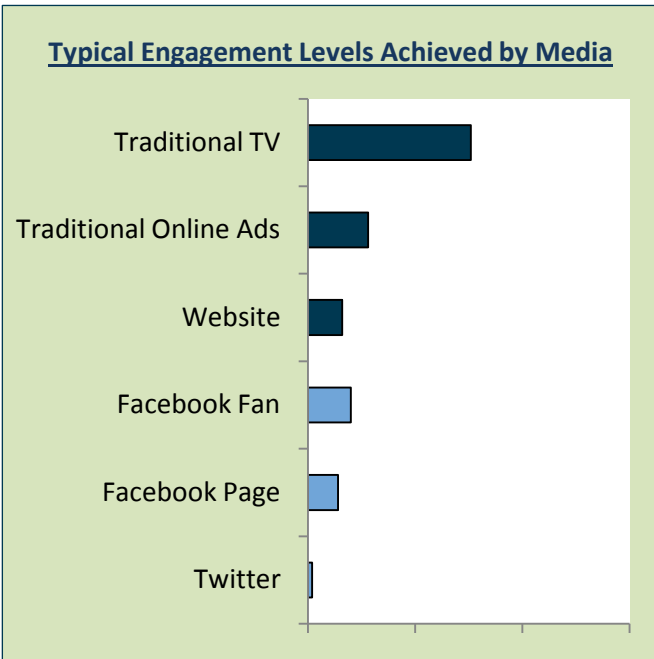
However, in actuality, the *online ad interaction is subject to about as much filtering as is the offline ad interaction.* In the online world, the barriers of inattention and disinterest have been dubbed 'banner blindness', but really these are no different than the tuning out of traditional ads that has been the bane of marketers since the early days of advertising.

### BRANDED SOCIAL MEDIA

However, branded social media activities, including involvement in membership communities such as branded Facebook pages, tend to attract a group of consumers who are already fans of your brand. Those who choose to participate in chats about your brand, put comments on your wall, and play games that involve your brand are far more likely to already be brand users and advocates than those who do not participate in these activities.

What does this mean in terms of the outcomes of these different types of brand interactions? Does traditional advertising ('traditional' in the sense that the advertiser is selecting the time, place and message content) have a harder time changing minds because of the selective perception filters? Or, conversely, are social media interactions less likely to produce changes in brand perceptions/ behavior because you're 'preaching to the choir'?

*Actually, the answer is that both types of communications work, but they work in different ways and produce different types of outcomes.*



### What are the outcomes of the different types of brand interactions?

In examining the outcomes of the different types of branded communications experiences, our findings identify several distinct patterns of result. Specifically:

#### STRENGTHS OF TRADITIONAL ADVERTISING

1. For **producing engagement among a broad swath of consumers**, traditional advertising – particularly the recently maligned traditional TV commercial – is still king. While a very successful YouTube video or a Facebook page might be viewed by two or three million, or even four or five million consumers, an 'average' commercial can generate engagement among ten times this number of consumers (see chart on the left). And, since a relatively high percentage of those

who engage with your commercial are *not* already your brand fans, an execution with high engagement potential will provide the opportunity to spread the word to those who may become future converts.

2. Because you have more control over the message with traditional advertising (both offline and online), these venues have proven to be more successful than are branded social media venues in **communicating brand attributes and benefits**. In other words, to accomplish brand positioning and repositioning objectives, you need traditional advertising.

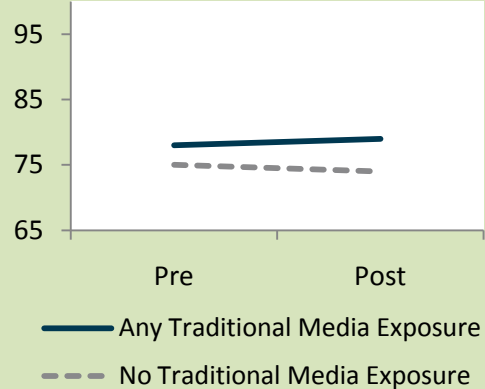
### STRENGTHS OF BRANDED SOCIAL NETWORKING VENUES

1. In contrast to traditional advertising, branded social networking experiences can be a far more powerful tool in **strengthening brand affinity** – the extent to which consumers feel connected to the brand. While traditional advertising struggles, particularly among younger targets, to build perceptions of a ‘cool brand’ and ‘for people like me’, branded social media excel at this (see charts on the right).
2. Additionally, based on their ability to ‘spread the word’, these newer media venues can, for existing products, be an excellent vehicle for **generating trial** of line extensions, new varieties and new flavors.

#### Campaign Impact on Brand Affinity Dimensions

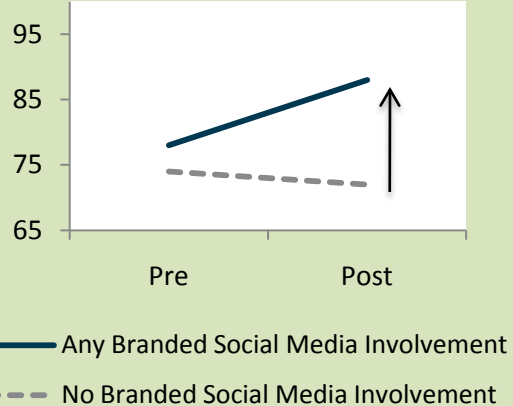
**Traditional media produce no significant impact**

Brand is “For people like me”



**Branded social media produce significant impact**

Brand is “For people like me”



Summary of Media Strengths	Traditional Media	Branded Social Media
Generating broad-based engagement	✓	
Generating engagement among those without pre-existing brand involvement	✓	
Building brand affinity		✓
Generating trial of new flavors		✓
Communicating brand attributes	✓	

How is your advertising working?

## Implications for Advertisers

A well-integrated and well-executed campaign can harness the strengths of all media to magnify the effectiveness of the entire program. Successful communications programs can:

1. Utilize traditional advertising venues to attract a broad audience, communicate brand values and drive consumers to social media venues.
2. Create and manage social media networking venues that reinforce brand affinity among fans, generate buzz and new product trial and convert newly arrived consumers (invited into the conversation both by traditional advertising messages and their friends) into fans.

Taking into consideration the distinct roles of both traditional and branded social media, advertisers should work to develop a cohesive strategic platform to execute across all media. While the attraction to newer communications vehicles is evident, traditional advertising is still more effective at attracting a broader spectrum of those who are not already strongly attached to the brand.

Beyond their customary communications roles, traditional media can be tasked with driving people to engage with branded social media, where they can interact with those who are already brand fans. To the extent that the advertiser can influence the conversation (or at least the topic!) in the branded social media space, the focus of the conversation should be consistent with the brand positioning created by the advertising run in the more traditional channels.

*For example, the advertising for Starburst candy positions the brand as a 'contradiction' – solid but juicy. On the brand's Facebook page, consumers are invited to suggest their own contradictions, and then vote on their favorites of those suggested by others.*

Through a better understanding of the pre-existing mindsets of those who engage with brands via traditional advertising (both offline and online) versus brand social media, advertisers can better connect with the audiences with whom they seek to communicate.

Likewise, by knowing what types of changes in brand perceptions and behaviors are best accomplished by different communications experiences, advertisers can be more strategic in their use of the various tools available in both the offline and online space. This research provides examples of the variations in advertising impact that can be achieved across different types of communications channels, and suggests how advertisers might tailor their communications based on these differences.

