



# Inter-Brand Interaction and Communication on Social Media: Strategies, Dynamics, and Impacts Related to Local Examples

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## ABSTRACT

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In today's digital landscape, social media has become a very important platform for brand communication, not only between brands and their consumers but also between brands themselves. This article explores the dynamics of inter-brand communication on social media, with a particular approach on the Romanian market. As companies increasingly engage in public dialogue with one another through platforms such as Facebook or Instagram, they are using these interactions as strategic tools to increase visibility, enhance brand reputation, and build strong connections with other brands. The study aims to analyze the communication strategies employed by Romanian brands in their interactions with other brands on social media. It explores the motivations behind these engagements, such as fostering mutual growth, capitalizing on trending topics, and creating viral moments that can boost brand recognition. The article also considers potential challenges, such as the risks of negative publicity or miscommunication, and how brands navigate these threats while engaging in public dialogue with competitors or partners. Ultimately, this paper contributes to the broader understanding of digital marketing by highlighting the growing importance of brand-to-brand communication in shaping brand identity and consumer engagement in the evolving social media environment.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, social media has transformed the way brands communicate with their audiences, offering an open platform for real-time interaction and engagement. What began as a direct line of communication between brands and consumers has evolved into a broader and more complex form of interaction, where brands now also engage among them in highly visible public spaces. This trend of inter-brand communication, particularly on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or even outdoors, has gained significant attention due to its potential to influence consumer perception, to (re)shape brand identity, and to redesign actual marketing and communication strategies.

As companies have difficulties to remain relevant and competitive in the digital marketplace, the ways in which they interact with other brands have become a new and interesting part of their social media strategies.

Rather than viewing other brands just as competitors, companies increasingly see the value in collaborating, responding to, or even playfully engaging in communicating with others in the industry. These interactions, when managed well, can create viral moments, extend brand reach, and reinforce a brand's personality and values. However, while this trend has been prominent among global brands, there is a growing interest in understanding how local brands, particularly those from smaller markets, navigate and utilize inter-brand communication on social media. By creating a unique brand identity, they can differentiate themselves from competitors and attract a lot of potential customers.

The brands present in the Romanian market provide a unique case for studying this phenomenon. This country has a dynamic economic market and a rapidly growing digital ecosystem, and also presents both opportunities and challenges for brands attempting to use social media to their advantage.

## 2. Literature review

Brand communication in social media can be defined as every message of brand-related communication „distributed via social media that enables internet users to access, share, engage with, add to,

and co-create" (Alhabash, Mundel & Hussain 2017, p. 286). Consumers actively engage with brands through digital platforms, sharing information and opinions via online comments and social networks. Social media empowers consumers to become active participants in brand communities, rather than passive recipients of marketing messages. This shift allows brands to target specific audiences with tailored content, fostering meaningful connections and enhancing customer loyalty. (Clemons, E. K. ,2009, p.156). Social media also accelerates information sharing, making it more accessible and transparent and can boost management efficiency as Yu et al. (2022) and Huang (2016) highlighted. Hameed et al. (2023, p. 2) said that brand awareness influences consumer attitudes, which in turn affects purchase intention. Celebrity endorsement can strengthen this relationship, leading to stronger purchase intentions.

As Delgado-Ballester, Navarro & Sicilia (2012, p. 32) mentioned, building brand awareness is becoming more challenging as modern marketing efforts face an environment marked by escalating media costs, a growing range of communication channels, and increasingly fragmented audiences. Brands must cultivate strong connections with their customers to foster loyalty and advocacy. By creating a sense of belonging and understanding customer needs, brands can foster strong relationships with customers that lead to repeat purchases and generate positive word-of-mouth referrals. (Enginkaya & Yilmaz, 2014, p. 220). According to Schulze et al., (2015, p. 9), consumers are more likely to engage with brands on social media when they receive relevant and valuable information. This aligns with the idea that personalized content can enhance user experience and drive repeat visits.

Voorveld (2019, p. 18) stated that brand communication frequently gains credibility when endorsed by individuals within consumers' personal networks. But how it affects the credibility and the awareness of a brand by interacting with other brands is still insufficient researched. As Uzunoglu & Kip (2014, p. 592) mentioned, recognizing the power of online influencers, companies are increasingly incorporating them into their internet-based communication strategies. It is also very important to point out that in various industries, inter-brand partnerships that prioritize product visibility and sales are becoming more common as Lee et al. (2023, p. 60) stated. Nevertheless, there are many mechanisms that really have a certain influence on these partnerships' beneficial effects, even if the partnerships are official or not.

The interaction between brands has changed a lot over the past years and we can notice a humorous touch in many brands' communication pages. Meanwhile all brands have developed various strategies to make their messages stand out, some of them decided to incorporate dark humor in their social media interactions with other brands, as Saavedra Torres et al., (2023, p. 2) revealed. Rather than maintaining a neutral tone, brands often use playful insults to engage with their peers, adding a humorous twist to their communication. As the same author discovered, brands that employ aggressive humor, such as playful teasing or light-hearted insults in their social media interactions, often experience positive reactions from their consumers. This approach can create a sense of relatability and entertainment, making the brand feel more personable and engaging. Another observation should be made about the content - if it is used frequently or if it is considered inappropriate, the excessive aggressive humor can damage brand reputation and erode consumer trust, as it may be perceived as manipulative (also indicated by Thomas & Fowler, 2021, p. 444).

This aggressive humor, particularly in the form of posts and memes on social media, has become one of the most shared types of content among users. These posts often feature bold or edgy humor that grabs attention and provokes reactions, making them highly engaging. One of the questions in brands dialogue is related to the response expected. Should the brand mirror the initial humorous tone or adopt a different approach?

Some research suggests that the effectiveness of humor in addressing online complaints depends on the brand's personality. Sincere brands are more likely to use affiliative humor to connect with customers, while exciting brands may opt for a more aggressive approach. (Béal & Grégoire, 2021, p. 8). The same authors mentioned that consumers evaluate brands more positively when their humor aligns with their personality. Sincere brands are perceived as more real when using less offensive humor, leading to increased consumer engagement. Exciting brands, often associated with youth and boldness, can use more aggressive humor without alienating their audience. Both styles can be effective if they match the brand's overall image and resonate with the target audience. (Ning et al., 2022, p. 13)

### **3. Impact of Brand Interaction on Consumer Behavior**

Trivedi (2019) defines brand experience as encounters with people, things, processes, and conditions that generate cognitive, emotional, sensory-related, and behavioral reactions. As Zhang, Cheung & Lee (2014, p. 92) also highlighted, the power of social media cannot be ignored by brand managers, who must actively engage with and support brand ambassadors to effectively navigate this digital environment. To foster positive brand sentiment and drive repeat purchases, brand managers should encourage creating interactive content that is entertaining, relevant, and trendy. By stimulating consumers' cognitive processing, emotional connection, and behavioral activation, brands can encourage active participation and co-creation. (Cheung et al., 2019, p. 531). The inclusion of positive entertainment elements in brand communications can significantly enhance their appeal and persuasiveness and they are more inclined to be part of a brand community as

Teixeira, T., Picard, R., & el Kaliouby, R. (2014, p. 5) affirmed. It is important to note that providing comprehensive information is essential for building consumer trust and encouraging engagement. (Yu et al., 2022, p. 6)

Brand presence on social media can take various forms like branded content (posts, videos, and images), influencer partnerships, user-generated content, paid ads, interactive campaigns (polls, contests), and direct engagement (responding to comments or messages). These strategies help boost visibility, consumer interaction, and loyalty. As Hameed et al., 2023, p. 4 revealed, positive experiences and favorable perceptions can increase purchase intentions. Social influence theory highlights the impact of others on individual behavior. Brand interaction represents a significant shift from traditional marketing communication, enabling real-time communication between brands through digital platforms, particularly social media, where dialogue can happen instantly. This interaction allows consumers not only to receive messages but to respond, ask questions, and even influence the conversation between brands. Consumers nowadays expect brands to understand their needs and respond accordingly, whether through chatbots, personalized email campaigns, or targeted ads. This level of engagement can drive repeat purchases, increase trust, and strengthen long-term customer relationships.

Some experts suggest that during economic downturns, companies should reduce their marketing spending to conserve resources. However, this approach may not be optimal in times of crisis, such as a pandemic, a global or local economic crisis. Consumers may appreciate brands that remain active and provide support during difficult times. Even if it is not a crisis for the whole world or country, a brand should always have a coherent presence on social media. (Nagpal & Gupta, 2020, p.260). The same author indicates that

Even though many people find online advertising intrusive or annoying, leading them to avoid it, when they are exposed in a playful manner to a dialogue between brands, there was no evidence that they fell annoyed by any brand presence (Febriyantoro, 2020, p. 5). Regarding the strategy, marketing communication can influence consumer perceptions and attitudes towards a brand through messages that can shape how consumers view and feel about the brand. (Nagpal & Gupta, 2020, p.262)

#### **4. Examples from Romanian Market**

In 2019, Starbucks installed an advertisement in Bucharest city center promoting their Monday offer—a caffè latte for 5 lei (around one euro). One day, the coffee shop 5 to Go, which employs a "fixed price" strategy (with most products costing 5 lei), took advantage of the moment and placed a smaller banner (below Starbucks') featuring their logo and the text #nudoarluni (not just Monday), highlighting their price as the same throughout the entire week.

In 2020, Burger King launched a creative Valentine's Day campaign, inviting rivals KFC and McDonald's to "be their Valentine." The post went viral, sparking responses from over 900 brands, including unexpected ones like Romania's Ministry of Internal Affairs. The humorous campaign emphasized the complexity of relationships, with Burger King celebrating non-official ones. This playful approach brought in significant engagement, earning over 100,000 reactions and gaining 11,000 new followers organically on social media.

Another example is from a recent Netflix post about a popular Romanian TV show that sparked a wave of reactions from various companies, public figures, and even politicians. The post, which has a significant public attention, became a platform for brands and institutions to engage with the audience. By commenting on the post, all these companies and institutions aimed to capitalize on the public's interest for the show. Politicians also joined the conversation, reflecting the show's cultural relevance and its potential to drive interactions. This strategic move demonstrates how timely participation in trending conversations can help brands and institutions build notoriety and deepen their connection with the audience.

In carefully chosen contexts (such as Black Friday, Valentine's Day or other commercially exploitable holidays), brands compete to create engaging comments to attract public attention and increase brand awareness. Naturally, they may respond to each other or to individual consumers using irony, sarcasm, or humor.

Many brands have seen the opportunity to incorporate this type of communication in their strategies, but they do not have the courage to do this, being afraid of many risks even though brands can create engaging and memorable social media campaigns that will increase brand awareness.

#### **5. Challenges in Brand Interaction**

Brands often find themselves in a very competitive landscape, fighting for the same attention of consumers. However, even in this competition, there are a lot of opportunities for collaboration and mutual benefit.

The most common challenges and concerns facing effective brand communication are:

- ✧ partnerships that can be bad perceived by the public
- ✧ communication and coordination challenges:
- ✧ risk of negative association:
- ✧ very different values and objectives

One common concern is that partnering with another brand might dilute their own brand identity or change the perception about their products or services. Brands may fear that consumers will associate them with the perceived weaknesses or shortcomings of their partner, even more if a partner brand experiences a negative or shameful event, it can have a negative impact on the perception of the collaborating brand. Some recent studies showed that political controversies can lead to a significant decline in consumer demand for products or even brands from the countries or regions involved if they are associated with other values or aims. (Garcia-Collart, 2023). Negative attitudes towards a brand can be shaped by consumers' personal associations with the country of origin, historical context, and other relevant factors, as Wolter et al. (2016, p. 43) showed.

It is crucial to emphasize that effective communication and coordination are indispensable for successful brand partnerships. If brands miss the opportune moment for communication, the message may be distorted and no longer enjoy the same level of receptivity among consumers. As an important challenge, it should be underscored the need to consider consumer demographics and psychographics (like age group or living place) when developing brand messages.

Another significant challenge in spontaneous brand-to-brand communication on social media platforms is the volatility of the conversational environment. Opportunities for collaboration are quite rare, and overusing them by creating such contexts can create the impression that the brand does not have enough original content and relies on other brands to build a strong social media image.

## 6. Conclusions

The findings suggest that while inter-brand communication on social media offers significant benefits, it must be carefully managed to maintain brand authenticity and prevent unintended consequences. Researchers also indicate that brands using humor in their public messages, particularly in brand-to-brand communication, are often viewed as both trendy and genuine, especially by younger consumers (Saavedra Torres et al., (2023, p. 2).

Further articles may investigate how these interactions shape consumer perceptions of the brands involved and whether they influence consumer loyalty or purchasing decisions.

It is also important to bear in mind that when brands interact, clients are exposed to new perspectives, products, and experiences that may change consumer perceptions and behaviours. As a short conclusion, the interaction between brands on social media has evolved into a dynamic space where creativity, strategy, and timely engagement play crucial roles in capturing public attention. By strategically entering public conversations and trends, brands can build stronger relationships with their audiences and they can increase their online presence.

Many brands have realized the value of partnering with unexpected brands to create fresh and exciting collaborations. It is clear that Technological advancements have transformed branding, advertising and communication into very interactive processes. Brands are increasingly engaging with their public through a variety of digital channels, leading to a change in branding and marketing strategies. By tracking customer interactions and measuring performance, businesses can gain valuable insights for optimizing their efforts. Inter-brand communication is only one piece of the puzzle created for a comprehensive digital presence.

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