

AUTOMOTIVE

Automaker's Facebook "likes" paint a picture of aspirational's demographics

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Mercedes-Benz V-Class in Austria

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

Eight of the 10 automotive brands with the largest fan communities on Facebook are luxury automakers, according to research by Auto Insurance Center.

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Mercedes-Benz, BMW, and Ferrari make up the top three, with Lamborghini, Porsche, Land Rover, Audi and Jaguar taking spots five through nine. Analyzing the demographic makeup of Facebook fans can help brands see whom their product resonates with and make strategic marketing adjustments.

"We hope we have been useful both in telling brands both if their target audience is hearing their message and telling them who they can market to," said Justin Loera, senior insurance market analyst and content strategist for consumer education at [Auto Insurance Center](#).

"I think this project's insights offer brands the chance to reflect on demographics they may have overlooked, but also to gauge their success in creating buzz within communities they've specifically targeted," he said.

Social demos

As Auto Insurance Center [notes in the study](#), Facebook "likes" do not necessarily correlate with sales. Ford did not place but sold around six times as many vehicles as tenth-placed Jeep and almost quadruple what Mercedes-Benz did with barely one-sixth the likes.



Land Rover Defender

Despite these shortcomings, Facebook fans likely indicate a combination of consumer satisfaction, aspiration and engagement, all of which are important given the rapid growth of luxury vehicles.

An analysis of the makeup of Facebook communities reveals that Lexus has the most Asian-American fans, Land Rover has the most African-American followers, Jaguar the most liberal and Tesla the richest, as well as enthusiasts that tend to work in business or information technology. Lamborghini, meanwhile, tends to attract single males.

Given that likes do not necessarily indicate ownership, an automaker can use this information in its social media postings and in marketing at large.



Lamborghini Asterion

For example, that Jaguar fans skew liberal could suggest positive reaction to CSM endeavors. That Tesla has the most fans who have families, but no children at home, could help the automaker create promotions that will appeal to its fan base.

On the flip side, automakers might use this information to diversify their audience. By seeing what kind of fans competition attracts, a brand can try to one-up its competitor with promotions geared to that demographic.

It is equally important, however, not to read too much into Facebook fans. Auto Insurance Center notes that while car fans on Facebook tend to be male, women play an enormous role in car purchasing decisions. One possibility cited is that men use social media more for research while women use it for personal reasons, but that means brands have an opportunity to appeal to women on social media and get a leg up on competitors.



Tesla Model S

The findings also include a breakdown of brand popularity by career path. As expected, business professionals have a taste for luxury, but so do health care employees.

Automakers will need to invest resources to sort out whether these "chicken or the egg" situations, but doing so offers an opportunity to either be more precise with or diversify marketing and better understand a segment of consumers.

"The relationship between sales and social metrics is a complicated one, and this project was motivated by our interest in raising precisely this question," Mr. Loera said. "How does the enthusiasm evident on social translate to sales figures? Are people fans of brands they'd never be able to afford, or voicing support for the brands they've chosen in their own lives?"

Social following

Social media has opened the world up to millennials and for the first time has allowed luxury brands to directly interact with tomorrow's affluent consumers.

During Luxury Interactive 2015's panel "Millennial Marketing Tapping Into the Social-Obsessed Segment" on Oct. 15,

executives from brands not typically associated with the millennial consumer discussed the importance of reaching out to this demographic while they are young to establish a connection and cement a bond that will mature as they age. Social media has emerged as the driving force behind these connections as various platforms allow the creativity and personalities of millennial consumers to flourish as they share and embrace their interests and passions.

Lexus' national manager, digital & relationship marketer Jeanice Lee explained that while millennials are not often purchasing their own Lexus models, there is a chance that they are vocal on their preferences and interest in the automaker if a parent is considering purchasing a new vehicle. It is also safe to assume that when booking travel, the parents of millennials welcome their children's recommendations and preferences ([see story](#)).

Other studies have also found that luxury automakers are visible and effective on social media.

A month ago, German automaker BMW and U.S. electric automaker Tesla Motors emerged as the two top automotive brands on Twitter and in generating offline word of mouth momentum, according to Engagement Labs.

Chevrolet Corvette took the top spot in the two remaining categories of offline word of mouth sentiment and Facebook use but a number of luxury automakers placed in the top 10 in at least one of the four categories. Luxury brands are generally thought to be slow adopters of digital technology, but these findings prove that is not always the case ([see story](#)).

"Auto Insurance Center is all about consumer needs," Mr. Loera said. "If automakers use this data to make automobiles that reflect their fans' desires, or invite new fans into their fold, we are all for it."

Final Take

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