

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/social-media-experimentation>

Stanford GSB Professor Jennifer Aaker talks about corporate brand experiments, such as Terminal Man, a famed Twitterer for an airline company, and other unprecedented tests in social media communications. Her analysis is that companies that embrace and interact with individual commentary in digital media will be far ahead of those that try to quash those who freely share their opinions.



Transcript

I always think of Twitter as a wonderful way to do lots of little experiments, right? Yes.. You put things out, and you quickly conceive what things get picked up and propagated.. I'm going to guess you have the same experience.. What have you found in your experiments as you have been using Twitter and other social media over the last year? Yeah.. So we found that the brand--well, I don't do too much experimentation yet because of a lot of different reasons, but I follow brands that do like Dell or JetBlue or Starbucks.. And there's different reasons to be using it.. One is you got your discounts to Starbucks, right? And if you listen, you get cheaper Starbucks.. But then it's really interesting to see like Zappos start talking about interesting tidbits or kind of surprising insights or something that makes you laugh or something that brings happiness.. So Tony Hsieh has a very different philosophy.. 'I'm not going to just tell you you get 10% off at Zappos..

I'm going to create benefits that are not just price-focused.' And what I think you're seeing that's really fun is that companies that do allow experimentation by personal individuals, the personal brands are being built.. So people are having their own little brand following.. And then they tweet out and they have their own personality, and that kind of adds and amplifies and increases authenticity and trust.. And so I think that's so interesting is when companies allow personal individuals within the company or customers.. JetBlue let the terminal man--have you guys heard of this? JetBlue did a \$599 thing last year, and I guess again this year, "All You Can Jet".. You buy \$599, you can go anywhere.. So Terminal Man--he self-branded himself Terminal Man--bought this \$599 thing.. And he decided he was going to spend one month never leaving terminals.. So he flew all over the United States never leaving a terminal.. And he would blog and video and he became this celebrity..

Medias were following him.. Then he started commenting on JetBlue's service like, "Sitting in the first class right now.. Not too shabby." And then pilots would come talk to him.. And then JetBlue actually didn't just sort of try and silence him to some degree.. They talked to him.. Like, "You didn't like this? Why didn't you like this?" They brought him to his leadership conference, and he spoke and said, "You people are doing it all wrong.. Let me tell you what you should do." There are some companies that are hiring these types of people.. So I think that.... Honestly, it's crazy.. And so I think companies that experiment and allow personal voice to bubble up and experiment there are going to be so far ahead of companies that don't allow experimentation..