



**How to Drive Social Media Engagement:  
A Study of the Most Socially Engaged Companies**

**By PhaseOne**

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## Primary Goal of the Study

The primary goal of PhaseOne's Social Media Engagement Study was to determine what drives social media engagement (as measured by earned media) across the primary consumer touch points of paid media (the brands' TV ads) and owned media (the brands' own Web and Facebook pages).



## Study Methodology

- PhaseOne's social media engagement study reviewed more than 70 brands and conducted an in-depth analysis of the paid (television advertising) and owned (the brands' own Web and Facebook pages) media for 22 big-name brands to uncover what drives social media engagement.
  - The 22 brands included for in-depth analysis are: Starbucks, Audi, McDonalds, Red Bull, American Express, Tropicana, Wendy's, Burger King, Toyota, H&R Block, Ancestry.com, The Home Depot, Motorola, Mitsubishi, Kia, Hotwire, DirecTV, Amazon, TGI Fridays, Coca Cola Zero, Netflix, and eHarmony.
- These brands represented six vertical markets: Automotive, Dining, Food/Beverage, Retail, Services, and Technology



Automotive

Retail

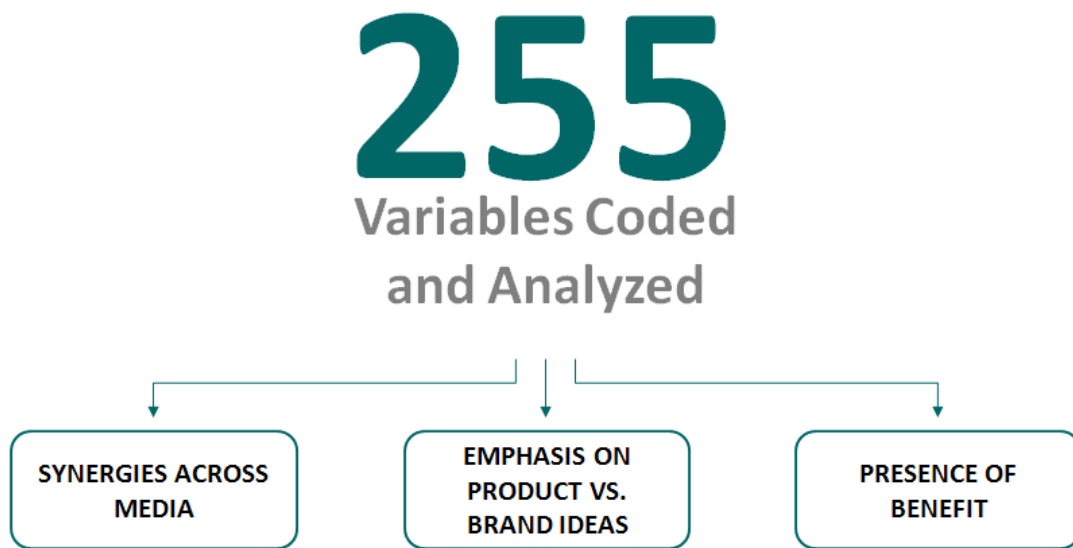
Dining

Services

Food/Beverage

Technology

- Three measures of social media engagement were used in this study:
  - Measure of ability to influence online content, or the “stickiness,” of a brand idea as assessed by Klout;
  - Measure of online consumer sentiment about a brand as assessed by Netbase; and
  - Measure of direct online consumer association with a brand as assessed by Facebook fans.
- For each of the 22 brands, PhaseOne collected and analyzed the brand’s TV ads, Web and Facebook pages.
  - Each was coded for more than 250 variables designed to systematically capture elements related to style and content, synergies across media, brand or product ideas, messaging, and consumer benefits.



- Analysis was based on publicly available data and measures.
- The study was conducted between July 2011 and January 2012.
- Note: This was an independently funded research project. Brands studied are not clients of PhaseOne.

## Primary Findings:

### The “*Me Statement*” Drives Social Engagement

In looking for the commonalities across the most socially engaged brands, PhaseOne researchers found that social media users are drawn to brands that convey a particular type of benefit that the researchers labeled as the *Me Statement*. This is a unique type of brand benefit that has an inherently social component. The *Me Statement* captures an aspect of a person’s idealized self-image that reflects how they want to be perceived by others. In the highly social world of social media, online affiliation with a brand sends a message to those in the consumers’ social networks about how they want to be seen.

One hundred percent of the most socially engaged brands delivered a *Me Statement* across media touch points. In fact, across all variables analyzed for this study, the *Me Statement* was the key differentiator between brands that scored high versus low in social media engagement.



### The “*Me Statement*” = Idealized Self Embodied by a Brand

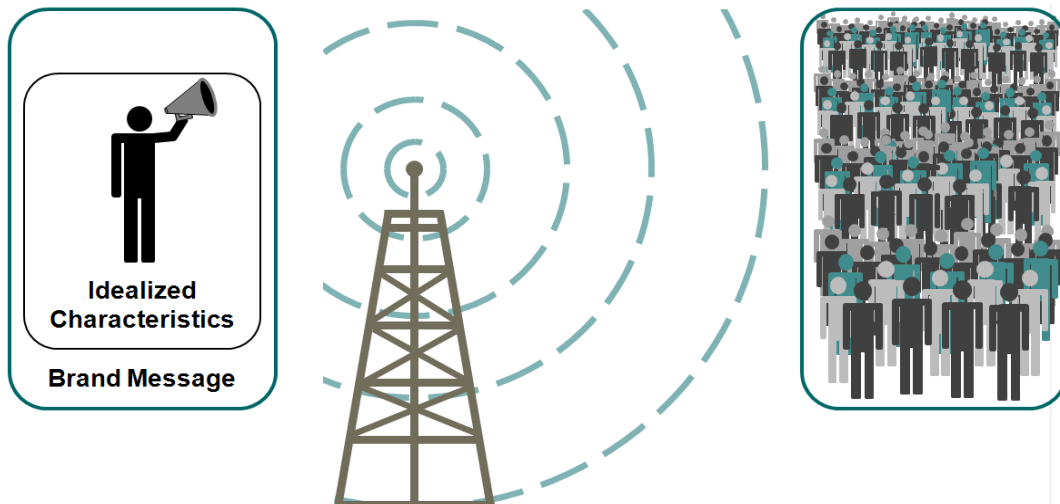
The very public nature of social media taps into consumers’ public persona — the idealized version of themselves that they want to present to others. This can be quite different from their private selves — those aspects of themselves that, while true, are not for public broadcast. Marketing messages that tap into the private self may drive sales, but they won’t necessarily drive social media engagement. The power of the *Me Statement* is that it leverages the idealized self in support of the brand. As a result, affiliating with a brand in social media has positive implications for the consumers’ public selves, which are likely the motivating factors driving engagement.

In this study, none of the brands that tapped into consumers' private selves scored in the top category of social media engagement. Rather, the study found that consumers engage with a brand via social media when a *Me Statement* is present.

As a point of contrast, for example, McDonald's and Hotwire both convey a brand message relevant to cost savings. Hotwire's message ties its brand benefit to a lack of personal funds and inability to afford desired vacations. The solution is Hotwire's ability to make travel affordable. The dominant concept of not being able to afford the lifestyle you want is not a characteristic of an idealized self that most people would want to broadcast. McDonald's, on the other hand, frames savings as indicative of a person's savvy — a person's ability to think on his or her feet and make good decisions. In this way, McDonald's brand message is more closely tied to a socially desirable idealized self.

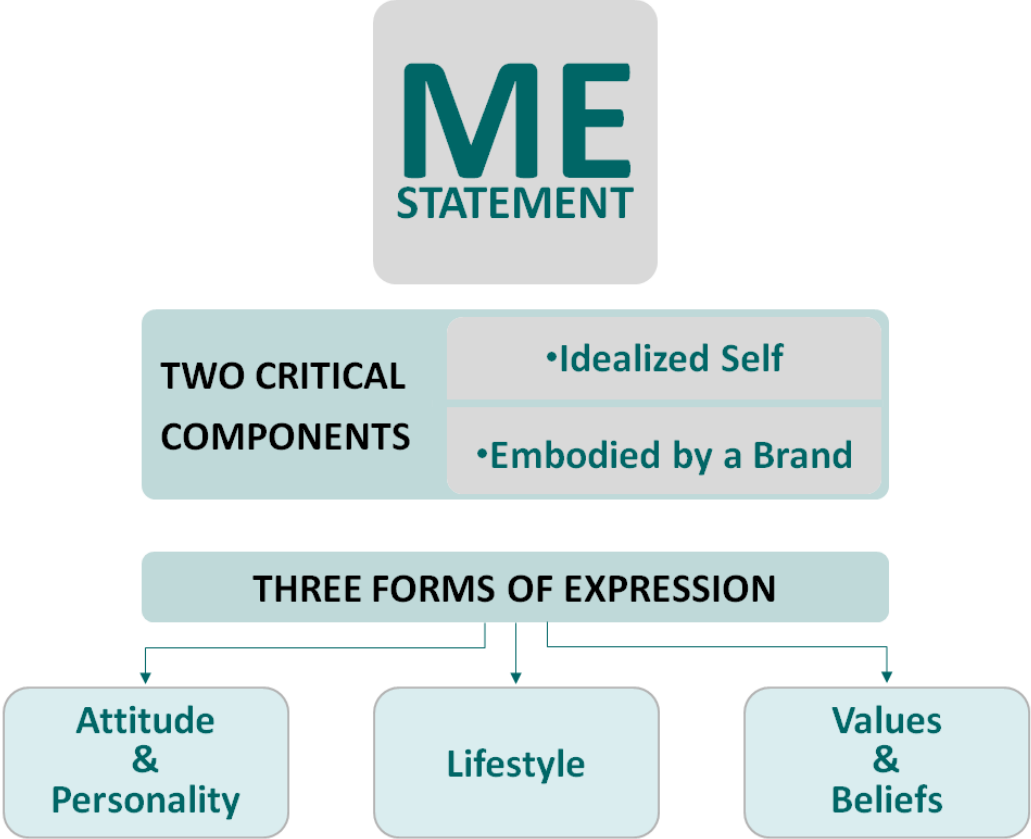
It would be an oversimplification to assume that the *Me Statement* is simply an aspirational or positive idea about the consumer. In fact, it is much more complicated. In a successful *Me Statement*, the brand is so wholly integrated into the message that the brand itself becomes the reflection of the idealized self. The Starbucks brand, for example, is the embodiment of its *Me Statement* for consumers who "pursue experiences that are uniquely me." Therefore, a *Me Statement* must incorporate two critical and highly interrelated components:

- An "Idealized Self"
- Embodied by a brand



# Me Statements Are Varied

There is no one way to express a "Me Statement." Rather, its expression can take a variety of forms that best reflect aspects of the idealized self of the brand's consumers. In this study, PhaseOne found that the most socially engaged brands had *Me Statements* that said something about their consumers in terms of their attitudes and personalities; lifestyles and behaviors; or, values and beliefs. For example, during the period of this study, Audi conveyed a message of a high-end, modern *lifestyle*; whereas Red Bull appealed to those who have a cool-under-pressure *attitude* and feel they can conquer any challenge. TOMS shoes is perhaps the strongest example of appealing to consumers *beliefs and values* by fully integrating cause marketing into the brand message through its emphasis on providing shoes to children in need.



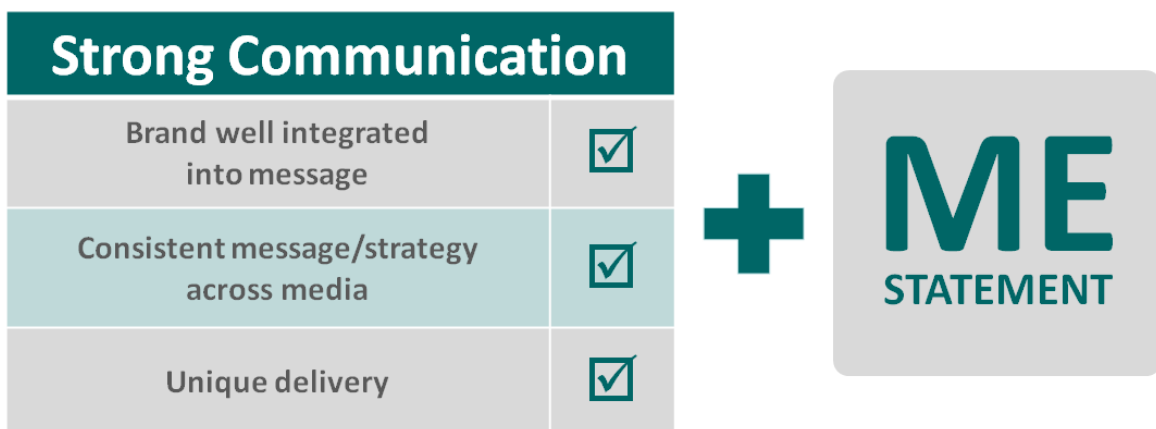
## Excellence in Communication Is Essential

To be successful in social media, you need more than just a *Me Statement*. You also need to be a strong communicator. The core fundamentals of good marketing communication that we have known for decades still apply.

All of the highly engaged brands in this study had strong communication across the media platforms analyzed. In contrast, the brands with lower levels of social engagement all exhibited one or more communication weakness. Not only is strong communication a requirement for social engagement, the study found that the following three principles are of greatest importance:

- **Brand is well integrated into the message:** The brand plays an inextricable role in the strategic message;
- **Consistent message/strategy across media:** The strategic message is reinforced across consumer touch points/media platforms;
- **Unique delivery:** The strategic message is delivered in a creative envelope that is distinctive.

Within the highly public world of social media, these basic tenets of marketing communication continue to hold true but now also include the added consideration of a *Me Statement* to drive social engagement.



## Requires a Holistic Strategic Approach

As with all brand objectives, the goal of driving social engagement requires a strategic approach that is inclusive and consistent across all consumer touch points of paid (e.g., TV advertising) and owned (e.g., Web and Facebook pages) media. This study's identification of a defined set of characteristics that help drive engagement provides a framework for this approach. A brand can maximize its engagement potential by delivering a consistent *Me Statement* across all touch points and doing so in a way that employs best practices in marketing communications. For example, consistent with its edgy *Me Statement* of "cool under pressure and can conquer any challenge," Red Bull's Web page stands out by providing current news and information about high-performing athletes, particularly related to more extreme sports, alternative music and entertainment, and Red Bull-sponsored events. As such, the site supports Red Bull's edgy brand image and messaging related to conquering a challenge.

The importance of a holistic strategic approach points to an opportunity for all brands in the study, even those that performed exceptionally well on measures of social engagement. The brands in this study tended to deliver the *Me Statement* the strongest in their paid media (e.g., TV advertising). In the best examples, the advertising wove all messaging and creative around the *Me Statement*, elevating it to the dominant take-away for the commercial. While the owned media (Web and Facebook pages) echoed the *Me Statement* for the most highly engaged brands, it was not always the dominant messaging or creative focus. This suggests a ripe area of opportunity for brands to more strongly weave the *Me Statement* into both paid and owned platforms so that the resultant strategic synergy across all touch points would further fuel a brand's engagement potential.



## **The Social Media Engagement Study Research Team**

PhaseOne's research team was headed by:

- Dr. Lisa Allard, Vice President of Special Services, PhaseOne
- Terry Villines, Senior Vice President of Analysis, PhaseOne

Special Thanks to:

- Kip Knight, Project Consultant, KnightVision

### **About PhaseOne, An SI Company**

PhaseOne is the leading analytical-based research and consultancy firm helping Fortune 500 companies improve the quality, content and success rate of their marketing communication materials. Founded in 1982, PhaseOne has developed a powerful, scientifically based, proprietary methodology that provides a rigorous, objective analysis accurately forecasting target audience responses, particularly in terms of communications impact on the target's attitudes and behaviors. PhaseOne provides some of the world's most-recognized companies with customized analytics that are used from the earliest stages of strategy development to campaign optimization prior to consumer testing or campaign launch. PhaseOne is based in Los Angeles and McLean, Va.

For more information about PhaseOne, please visit [www.phaseone.net](http://www.phaseone.net).

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