

COLUMN

Conjugating mobile: Facebook as Big Brother

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By **Gary Schwartz**

The litmus test for the success of any mobile technology is our ability to conjugate nouns and verbs around its products and services.

A loving sign is when nouns become a verb and we "Google", we "Skype", we "Facebook", we "TXT".

There seems to be a direct business correlation between becoming part of your consumer's vernacular and the stock price of the originating company.

Some companies are being proactive. They are positioning their company for success by making their products and services more verb-friendly. Perhaps product marketing teams need to spoon-feed marketing terms to the public: We "Tweet", we "Like", we "Check-in".

In September, Facebook took this spoon-feeding to an entirely new level.

Face it

At its F8 show, Facebook's expanded its one-dimensional Like vocabulary that has dominated the Web.

In an attempt to move from she Likes to he Liked to they Bought, Facebook has cranked open the commerce dictionary.

We all know that Web commerce and communication tools are very Orwellian. Words control actions. Words expand or limit our shopping behavior.

Like a well-oiled Orwell Big Brother, Facebook published new mobile commerce words and actions that it called F-commerce. It is a new grammatical system that allow the mobile shopper on Tablets and handhelds oh, and PCs and televisions to buy better.

Facebook kindly published an image of the "Social Commerce Grammar Lesson" on its blog for late-night study sessions. Here is a snapshot of its primer:

***** ACTIONS = VERBS (AKA VERBS) AND OBJECTS (AKA NOUNS) *****
***** WE LIKE TO BUY *****
***** WE LIKE TO BUY *****

There are ACTIONS and OBJECTS (AKA VERBS and NOUNS). Verbs have been expanded from LIKE to BOUGHT, WANT, OWNS, HEARTS and these verbs can now be added to nouns such as JEANS, CARS, WATCHES, SHOES.

"So CONSUMER + ACTION + OBJECT are now a social lingua franca for Web commerce. Instantly publish desire to your friends. Hannah Schwartz hearts Steve Madden pink shoes at Bloomingdale's Susan Frank wears Prada from the Gilt Groupe."

Facebook's blog writes:

"When an action is published, the activity can appear in the user's News Feed . . . So when a user is shopping, buying, or wanting in the local store a new pair of shoes, jeans, or car, she can publish this activity . . ."

First, there was TXT

The mobile technology landscape is action packed with colorful language. It seems indicative of the social nature of the channel.

Ten years ago, the 160-character constraint of the txt message birthed a generation of initialisms, acronyms and abbreviations. These coded words were strung together by whatever grammatical glue would hold the idea together.

But the goal was not to write. The goal was to send an idea, flirt, information. A generation of instant messengers sent more smiley faces than punctuation.

Sexing, Toothing, Connecting has turned the messaging channel into a global secret society generating trillions of one-line messages per day.

Until the ripe old age of 55, folk are texting more than calling. What is the adage? "A pictogram is worth a thousand words." :)

Over the years the communication and information channels have proliferated.

Nearly all our mobile consumer behavior can be conjugated through these channels in natural English.

This new instant communication code according to research done by Dr. Nanagh Kemp of the University of Tasmania has a strong grammar and phonetics structure.

However, the various channels dictate meaning. The choice of channel itself dictates much of the meaning.

Building on Ryan Copeland's oft-quoted tweet: "Twitter = I need to pee. Facebook = I peed! Foursquare = I'm peeing here. Quora = Why am I peeing?" we could extrapolate that the word SHOPPING can be conjugated across all the channels:

Twitter: I need to shop.

SMS: It's a good time to shop.

Facebook: I bought.

Foursquare: Here's where I bought.

Quora : Why did I buy?

YouTube: Watch me wear.

LinkedIn: I'm a professional shopper.

The channel also dictates rules of conduct.

For example, hash tag etiquette allows for one but not multiple hash tags in one tweet.

What we do not conjugate is as important as what we do. We do not "QR Code" or "scan me." That is not in our vernacular. We do not "App." These are not communication channels, so they do not conjugate well.

Mobile language will continue to expand as shoppers increasingly adopt and adapt these channels.

Facebook rules of engagement

However, is Facebook's Social Commerce Grammar Lesson an attempt to control social actions on the increasingly commerce-friendly Web? Is its action and object framework a brilliant evolution of the Like button allowing for consistent experience across the Web, or is it a way of controlling and targeting its user base?

What is clear is that if the solution that wins is the one that consumers adopt as their shared language.

Facebook is striding ahead of its competitors.

Facebook will win if you hear your girlfriend WANTS some GUCCI SHOES from S5A.

Facebook hopes you will not need to "Google" for presents this holiday.

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