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# Facebook Marketing Strategies of Global *versus* Local Brands: Evidence from Malaysia

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## Abstract

This study examined four Facebook (FB) marketing strategies adopted by both global and local brands; post types, media types, interactivity, and service quality (SQ). 120 brands (60 brands from each group) listed in socialbakers.com were selected as a sample. A content analysis method was used to examine a total of 1,904 FB postings. The main findings include that both global and local brands used consistent FB marketing strategies in terms of entertainment, corporate ability (CA) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) type of posts and media type. While other strategies were not similar. This study is significant because it provides a benchmark case on how these two groups of brands were using FB to engage and strengthen the relationship with customers.

**Keywords:** Global brands, local brands, Facebook, social media marketing

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The current competitive globalization has led to an increase market competition between global brands and local brands in their host countries. Therefore, to winning this competition, brands should have a distinct and strong marketing strategy, including one in social media. Social media is a new marketing platform that has gained tremendous popularity among the public for socializing with their family, friends and interacting with their associated brands (Richter, Riemer & Brocke, 2011). For instance; Wearesocial (2017) reported that as January 2017, active social media users worldwide have reached to 2.8 billion users or 37% of world population. While in Malaysia, the current social media users have reached to 13.6 million users (Statista, 2017), or about 42.9% of Malaysian population. Social media is a web-based technology that allows individuals and communities to share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011), such as microblogs (eg; Twitter), photo sharing (eg; Instagram) and social network (eg; Facebook, Google+). Of many social media platform available in the market, Facebook (FB) has been regarded as the most popular platform worldwide, as well as in Malaysia (Wearesocial, 2017). Due to its popularity among the public, Statista (2017) observed that in 2016, 84 percent of Fortune 500 companies use FB, while in the case of Malaysia, Kamisah & Rohaizat (2016) reported that 100 percent of Malaysian car brands already have presence in FB to achieve their business needs. Therefore, it is evident that FB has played an important role in reaching new and existing customers. Similarly, this platform now has become a vital medium for customer to learn about the products, new offerings and communicate with brands.

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Although extensive research has been completed on FB marketing, particularly the similarities and differences of FB strategies between low involvement product versus high involvement product (Coursaris, van Osch & Balogh, 2016), B2B versus B2C/product versus services (Swani, Milne & Brown, 2013), between industries (Kim, Spiller & Hettche, 2015), within industry (Ponte, Carvajal-Trujillo & Escobar-Rodríguez, 2015), and across social media channels (Smith, Fischer & Yongjian, 2012), however, there is currently a gap in available literature on how global brands versus local brands compete in this new marketing platform. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore: first, FB marketing strategies in terms of; type of post, media type, interactivity and service quality (SQ) adopted by both global and local brands; and second, the consistency of these strategies across global brands and local brands. This study is significant because it provides a benchmark case on how these two groups of brands are using FB to engage and strengthen the relationship with the customers. It is also important to get understanding whether they are using consistent strategies in FB, or vice versa.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Global versus Local Brands**

The identity of the brands can be classified in terms of the geographical distribution and ownership (Winit, Gregory, Cleveland & Verlegh, 2014). Brands are said as a 'global brand' if they are found in multiple countries across the world, typically under the same name and similar market, whereas, brands that available in one country or limited geographical areas, although they may be owned by a local, international or global owner are considered as a 'local brand' (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004). However, this study defines global brands as brands that are originated outside the country (in the context of this study, Malaysia), found in many countries that carry the similar name and market positioning, while, local brands are brands that are originated from this country, regardless of their market distribution and ownership. Therefore, McDonald's, Toyota, and Panasonic are examples of 'global brands', while AirAsia, Maybank, and Pensonic are considered as 'local brands', even though they already penetrate into an international market. As compared to local brands, global brands are always perceived to have stronger quality (Pappu, Quester & Cooksey, 2007), high prestige (Steenkamp, Batra & Alden, 2003), and status enhancer (Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp & Ramachander, 2000). For these reasons, some consumers willing to pay a higher price to own global brands. In contrast, local brands may perceive as low status (Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp & Ramachander, 2000), even closed-mindedness (Steenkamp, Batra & Alden, 2003), a low quality that makes some local brands asking a lower price for their product. However, there are also conditions where local consumer prefers local brands, because of the closer connection to national identity and local culture (Dimofte, Johansson & Ronkainen, 2008). This situation is true, particularly for food products. In terms of marketing strategy, Roy & Chau (2011) urged that global brands typically emphasize on global positioning such as use of global theme, language, spokesperson, different kind of content, to enhance their global image, while local brands adopt a local positioning that meets the local culture. However, some global brands to consider local culture values to compete in the foreign local market (Bhardwaj, Kumar & Kim, 2010).

### **2.2 Brand Strategies in FB Marketing**

FB enables brands to participate in an online conversation with consumers. The conversation between brands and consumers serves as a basis to develop and nurture the brand-customer relationship and build a reputation (Tao & Wilson, 2015). To achieve this objective, it is critical for the brands to craft strategies that may successfully attract consumers engage with brand FB page and remains loyal. There has been growing number of research on how brands should craft their strategy to enable them to succeed in FB marketing. The most investigated strategies are the type of post and its characteristics (a type of media used to communicate the post and interactivity tools attached with the post). Type of post communicated play a fundamental role in creating, maintaining, and nurturing relationships between the company and its stakeholders (Kim & Rader, 2010). In addition, one of the main reasons of customer engagement is to seek information, clarification or assistance on certain issues related to the product or brands (Rohm, Kaltcheva & Milne, 2013). In this regard, brands through their customer service staff must provide high quality service (ie; be responsive with appropriate behavior) to satisfy the customer. Failure to do so, may cause to reputational risk (Floreddu & Cabeddu, 2016).

The right choice of post type has the potential to attract consumer engagement that will aid in accomplishing brands FB marketing goals. Adopted uses and gratification theory, past research divided the types of the post into three major categories; informational, remuneration and entertainment (DeVries, Gensler & Leeftang, 2012, Cvijijk & Michahaleas, 2013; Tafesse, 2015). It is because customer motives in online engagement with brands are to seek for information, monetary value and entertainment (Rohm, Kaltcheva & Milne, 2013; Muntinga, Moorman & Smith, 2011). Most importantly, each type of these post found to be significant to increase marketing effectiveness. In addition, brands also communicate their corporate ability (CA) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in FB (Tao & Wilson, 2015; Kim, Kim & Sung, 2014; Haigh, Brubaker & Whiteside, 2013)

to enhance reputation. Haigh, Brubaker & Whiteside (2013) found that CSR made a greater contribution than CA in improving stakeholder perceptions of organization-public relationship. Adopted type of posts used in past research, our research question is:

RQ1a: Which dominant type of post (informational, remuneration, entertainment, CA and CSR) are most frequently adopted by global brands and local brands on FB?

RQ1b: Are the most frequently adopted type of post consistent across global brands and local brands?

Video, photo, and text are the most common media used to communicate brand posts. The use of video and photo are more effective in FB marketing (Tafesse, 2015; DeVries, Gensler & Leeflang, 2012), as compared to only text. Therefore;

RQ2a: Which type of media (video, photo and only text) are most frequently used by global brands and local brands on FB?

RQ2b: Are the most frequently used media type consistent across global brands and local brands?

Interactivity is regarded as a prime factor in determining a variety of affective and behavioural outcomes such as attitude, satisfaction, decision making, and involvement (Coyle & Thorson, 2001; Fortin & Dholakia, 2005). Interactivity is also an important factor in customer decision to engage with the brand (Tafesse, 2015). Interactivity has been defined in many ways. Steuer (1992) described interactivity as the extent to which users participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time. From another perspective, interactivity is the degree to which two or more communication parties can act on each other, whether it is on the communication medium and on the message itself, and the degree to which such actions are synchronized (Liu & Shrum, 2002). Interactivity is characterized by two-way communication between companies and customers, as well as between customers themselves; put differently, it characterizes many-to-many communication (Goldfarb & Tucker, 2011). Therefore, it captures the notion of an interdependent exchange of information and the degree of influence that the communicating parties exercise over the communication process (Fortin & Dholakia, 2005). As an example, FB is more interactive than website as the former allows the two ways interactions as compared to the latter that only allows one-way interaction. The content of the brand page also differs in the degree of interactivity. For example; text supplemented with a link to a website is more interactive than with only text (Fortin & Dholakia 2005) since link can be click by the fans. Similarly, content with questions or quiz is more interactive than promotional contents because they explicitly trigger respond from the fan. Since interactivity is important to trigger consumer action, thus;

RQ3a: Which level of interactivity (high or low) mostly adopted by global brands and local brands on FB?

RQ3b: Are the level of interactivity mostly adopted consistent across global brands and local brands?

Service quality (SQ) refers to customer evaluation of the overall excellence of the brand's service (Zeithaml, 1988) which include responsiveness, and empathy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). Another perspective proposed SQ comprises two components; first; physical quality which refers to the image projected by the design, equipment, facilities and materials and secondly; staff behaviour which refers to the image projected by competence, helpfulness, friendliness and responsiveness of the employee (Hemsley-Brown & Alnawas). For this study, we refer SQ as the overall evaluation of the brand's customer service in their FB projected by their responsiveness and empathy. Providing excellence SQ is a crucial factor for brands aiming for long-term success and to remain competitive (Izogo & Ogba, 2015). In previous studies, SQ has effect on spreading positive word-of-mouth (Bujisic, Hutchinson & Parsa, 2014), increasing customer satisfaction (Ren, Qiu, Wang & Li, 2016), improving revisit intentions (Dortyol, Varinli, & Kitapci, 2014) and for overall brand image or reputation (Wepener & Boshoff, 2015). Most importantly, how SQ is delivered to the customers is more influential than what is delivered to them (Wepener & Boshoff, 2015). FB offers room for direct interaction between brands and consumers, and consumers mostly engage with brands for information seeking and timely customer service (Rohm, Kaltcheva & Milne, 2013). Due to importance of SQ to create positive perception and business performances, therefore;

RQ4a: What is the overall evaluation of SQ of global brands and local brands served on FB (whether they are strong, medium or low)?

RQ4b: Are both global and local brands received a consistent evaluation of their SQ on FB?

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

Content analysis method was selected to answer the research questions and achieve the objectives of this study. Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text (or other meaningful matter such as sounds, sign, and symbols) to the contexts of their use (Krippendorff, 2004). Using already available

data in Internet (Big Data), content analysis is more reliable than survey method because whatever information shared by brands in this channel is a reflection of brand's true behaviour. In contrast, the use of survey method lead to greater response bias as the respondent may not provide accurate and honest answers.

### **3.1 Sampling Procedure**

The sample of the study was selected from [www.socialbakers.com](http://www.socialbakers.com), which contains a total of 120 brands (60 Global brands and 60 of Local brands). 2 weeks brand FB wall messages (from 1st May, 2016 to 15th May, 2016) were conveniently selected to examine the FB marketing strategies. Through FB Graph API, wall messages for each brand that contains the message type, date, link, type of media, the number of like, share, comment were retrieved and stored in Excel. In total, this study analyzed 1904 posts, where 960 posts were from global brands and 944 posts were from local brands.

### **3.2 Variable Measured**

A coding book was designed in Excel to capture the variables under investigation. Brand's strategies in FB marketing are accessed in terms of four dimensions; type of brand post, media type, interactivity and SQ. To investigate the adoption of five type of brand post strategies (informational, remuneration, entertainment corporate ability, and CSR) on brand's FB pages, operationalisation for each strategy were adapted from previous research. Informational contained message about traditional advertisement about products or services (Cvijijk & Michahaleas, 2013). Remuneration is a message that offers fan with saving or economic value such special price promotions, loyalty programs and points (Tafesse, 2015; Cvijijk & Michahaleas, 2013; DeVries, Gensler & Leeftang, 2012). While, entertainment contained messages that are not related to brand, product or services such as asking a fan to participate in wordplay, quiz, and a teaser that are not offering any monetary value (Tafesse, 2015; Cvijijk & Michahaleas, 2013; DeVries, Gensler & Leeftang, 2012). Corporate ability is a message promoting brands/brand/product strength and achievements such as in product/service innovation, industry leadership, market orientation, financial performances (Haigh, Brubaker & Whiteside, 2013; Sora-Kim et al. 2015), while CSR is a message that promoting company's CSR events such as environmental stewardship, educational commitment, public health commitment, community/employee involvement, sponsorship of culture/sports activities and philanthropic contribution (Haigh, Brubaker & Whiteside, 2013; Sora-Kim et al. 2015). The standard procedures for dummy coding were adopted, in which values of "1" were represented for present, and "0" were assigned for "absent", respectively (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998)

For media type; it was accessed on three categories; video, photo or text only. Adopted Tafesse (2015), interactivity was operationalised by tallying the number of interactivity tools attached with the brand message that includes external links, hashtags, page/person tags, questions, call to actions and contests. SQ refers to the overall evaluation of image projected by responsiveness and empathy of brand customer service in their FB (Hemsley-Brown & Alnawas, 2016; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). If brands are both responsive and have a sense of empathy, it will be coded as strong. If one of these elements are missing, it will be coded as moderate. If both are missing, it will be coded as poor, while neutral means if there are no comments or inquiries that need to be responded by brands.

### **3.3 Training and Inter-coder Reliability**

Two undergraduate students served as coders. During each training, they were given a sample of 30 brand post in Excel, and a copy of the document which contains instructions, description, and examples of each variable under investigation. At the end of the third training, the results were compared item by item between each coders using a percentage of agreement index. Percentage of the agreement is a satisfactory index to access reliability of nominal data (Hayes & Krippendorf, 2007). The reliability for each variable was between 0.91 and 0.95. Any discrepancies in coding were examined and solved by principle researcher. Following coding, category frequencies for each variable were tabulated and statistical differences of FB marketing strategies were assessed using Chi-square tests. The results of the study will be discussed next.

## **4. RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

The first aim of this study is to examine the dominant marketing strategy of global brands versus local brands on FB; in terms of the type of post, type of media use, interactivity, and SQ. Subsequently, the study aimed to determine whether these brands used consistent marketing strategies on this platform. The descriptive and Chi-Square results of this study are depicted in Table 1. To answer RQ1a, of five types of post investigated, the informational post was the most frequently employed by both global and local brands (n=461, 48.02 % for global

brands, and  $n=323$ , 24.21% for local brands). Remuneration post was the second most frequently employed ( $n=109$ , 11.35% for global brands and  $n=323$ , 24.21 % for local brands). Next was entertainment post ( $n=108$ , 11.25 % for global brands and 85, 9.00 % for local brands), and CSR ( $n=16$ , 1.67 % for global brands, and  $n=11$ , 1.17 % for local brands). The most least frequently employed type of post was CA ( $n=5$ , 0.52 % for global brands, and  $n=9$ , 0.05 % for local brands). It is worth noticing that in terms of ranking, the most frequent type of post employed by both brands is consistent.

To examine whether the use of post type was consistent across global brands and local brands (RQ1b), a Pearson's  $\chi^2$  – test was performed, and in summation, the use of informational and remuneration posts were statistically different across these two brands ( $\chi^2 (1) = 37.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$  for informational post, and  $\chi^2 (1) = 16.85$ ,  $p < 0.001$  for remuneration post). Global brands used informational post significantly higher than local brands (percentage difference was 23.81%), while local brands use remuneration post significantly higher than global brands with 6.66 % percentage difference. Additionally, the use of entertainment, CA and CSR posts were found to be consistent across global brands and local brands ( $\chi^2 (1) = 2.64$ ,  $p = 0.105$  for entertainment post,  $\chi^2 (1) = 1.22$ ,  $p = 0.269$  for CA post, and  $\chi^2 (1) = 0.86$ ,  $p = 0.355$  for CSR post).

For RQ2a, the most frequently used type of media for global brands was photo ( $n=808$ , 84.17%), then video ( $n=139$ , 14.48%), and text only ( $n=13$ , 1.35%). Similarly, the most frequently use of media type for local brands was also photo ( $n=807$ , 85.49%), followed by video ( $n=115$ , 12.18%), and text only ( $n=22$ , 2.34%). In terms of consistency (RQ2b), result from Chi-Square shows no significant different on the type of media used across global brands and local brands ( $\chi^2 (2) = 4.45$ ,  $p = 0.108$ ).

For RQ3a, both global brands and local brands were using mostly low level of interactivity tools; either only one or no interactive tool attached in their post ( $n=697$ , 72.60% for global brands and  $n=766$ , 81.14% for local brands). In contrast, for global brands, only 263 (27.40%) of their post attached with a high level of interactivity (2 and above), while for local brands, only 178 (18.86%) of their post attached with a high level of interactivity. In terms of consistency (RQ3b), Chi-square result shows significant different exist in terms of interactivity adoption across global brands and local brands ( $\chi^2 (1) = 11.50$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). Local brands use significantly higher interactivity tools with 8.54% percentage difference over the global brand.

Regarding RQ4a, the SQ level for both global and local brands was mostly accessed in a strong position. For global brands,  $n=174$ , 18.13% of the SQ was accessed as strong,  $n=45$ , 4.69% of the SQ was accessed as moderate and  $n=80$ , 8.33% was identified as poor. The rest was neutral. In contrast, for local brands,  $n=237$ , 25.11% of their SQ was accessed as strong,  $n=61$ , 6.46% was accessed as moderate, only  $n=60$ , 6.36% was accessed as poor and the rest was neutral. The overall SQ level of local brands was accessed as stronger than global brands. In terms of consistency (RQ4b), Chi-Square test shows the significant differences exists between these groups ( $\chi^2 (2) = 19.31$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ), where SQ of local brands was 6.98% stronger than global brands and 1.77% better in moderate level. In contrast, SQ level of global brands was accessed as 1.97% poorer than local brands.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

Global brands and local brands in our sample were more likely to emphasize on the informational post when communicating with their customers on FB. However, it is important to note that almost half of posts of global brands (48.03%) were informational, as compared to only 24.21% of this type of posts used by local brands. This major difference may be due to the fact that global brands and local brands possess different motives for utilizing FB. The high usage of informational posts indicated that the prime objective for global brands in FB marketing was for advertising their product and services. Whereas, for local brands, an almost equal portion of informational and remuneration posts used depicts that product advertisement and offering special promotion such as price discount have almost equally important. However, looking at the low percentage of sales promotion usage for both brands (only in the range of 11.35 percent to 18.01 percent), the conclusion can be made that sales promotion was not the main motive of brand's engagement in FB marketing. Even though, one of the top reasons consumers followed certain brands in social media was to receive a special promotion, however, these two brands try to seek an intimate relationship with their customer without offering them with too much economic benefits. Furthermore, while entertainment post is important to attract customer interest in FB (Cvijijk & Michahaleas, 2013; Tafesse, 2015), this post rarely adopted by both global and local brands. Therefore, both brands are advised to communicate entertainment post regularly to increase the effectiveness of FB marketing.

Our study also indicated that both global brands and local brands communicated their CSR activities more often than CA. However, there was a discrepancy of this finding with the previous study where Fortune 100 companies in the USA were communicated CA more often than CSR on FB (Haigh & Brubaker, 2013; Kim, Kim & Sung,

2014). The reason for such finding was possibly due to culture differences between west and east countries. Apart of that, communicating CSR activity was found to have a strong association with customer positive perception, and purchase intent (Haigh & Brubaker, 2013), as well as strengthen brand reputation (Esen, 2015), as compared to CA. For these reasons, Malaysian brands might need to give more priority to CSR communications as compared to sharing their business achievements. Especially, it was noteworthy that there was no significant difference in the CA and CSR posts usage among global and local brands. One important conclusion regarding the use of type of posts, the total percentage of informational, remuneration, entertainment, CA and CSR used by both global and local brands very much lower than 100%, specifically in the case of local brands (72.81% for global brands and only 52.44% for local brands), which indicated that there were other motives of brands engagement in FB marketing, or other type of posts that were not examined in this study.

In terms of media type, posts with photo was the most widely adopted by both brands, and there was no significant different in media type used between them. Posts with the photo were the most effective methods for enticing fans than is a video and text only posts (Kim, Spiller & Hetteche, 2015; Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Ponte, Carvajal-Trujillo & Escobar-Rodríguez, 2016). Therefore, the wide adoption of this media type was the best decision made by both brands to ensure their FB marketing more effective. With respect to interactivity, both global and local brands used a low level of interactivity very often, however, the frequency of adoption was significantly different between these brands. Local brands had been found to use a low level of interactivity more frequently than global brands. Again, these brands made the right decision as a high level of interactive tools attached in the post generate lower fan interest (Tafesse, 2015; Chua & Banerjee, 2015).

The last strategy investigated in this study is SQ. Our result revealed that the SQ of local brands were performed significantly better than global brands. SQ is one of the important determinants of brand reputation, therefore, it is likely that local brands compete with global brands (that already perceived as reputable brands) by building a reputation through their SQ effort. However, one important finding to note is the large portion of SQ level that was measured as neutral (68.85 percent for global brands and 62.07 percent for local brands). As stated earlier, SQ level was measured as neutral if there was no respond in terms of a comment written by a fan in particular post or no comments that require responding from the brand. This result was a strong indication that seeking information or feedback from brand's customer service was not a major motive of fan engaging in brands' FB page. Therefore, we contend that major engagement motives in brand's FB might be for entertainment and socializing with other brand fans.

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Table 1: FB marketing strategies of Global brand *versus* Local brand (Chi Square analysis)

Variable	$\chi^2$ (df), p-value	Global brands		Local brands	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Type of content					
<i>Informational</i>	37.45(1), p<0.0001	461	48.02	323	24.21
<i>Remuneration</i>	16.85(1), p<0.0001	109	11.35	170	18.01
<i>Entertainment</i>	2.64(1), p=0.105	108	11.25	85	9.00
<i>CA</i>	1.22(1), p=0.269	5	0.52	9	0.05
<i>CSR</i>	0.86(1), p=0.355	16	1.67	11	1.17
Media type					
<i>Text</i>	4.45(2), p=0.108	13	1.35	22	2.34
<i>Photo</i>		808	84.17	807	85.49
<i>Video</i>		139	14.48	115	12.18
Interactivity					
<i>Low</i>	11.50(1), p<0.0001	697	72.60	766	81.14
<i>High</i>		263	27.40	178	18.86
Service quality (SQ)					
<i>Neutral</i>	19.31(2), p<0.0001	661	68.85	586	62.07
<i>Poor</i>		80	8.33	60	6.36
<i>Moderate</i>		45	4.69	61	6.46
<i>Strong</i>		174	18.13	237	25.11

Note: To allow for Chi Square analysis, interactivity were divided into two levels; high for a number of interactivity tools used is above the mean (2 and above), and low for below the mean (1 or 0). Mean for interactivity is 1.21, and SD is 1.84