

CEOS AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN THAILAND

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to gain an insight on social media usage by organizational leaders. We conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with four well-known CEOs in Thailand who utilize social media for organizational purposes and are themselves social media icons. For manufacturing sector, we interviewed Mr. Tan Passakornnatee, CEO of Ichitan Group, and Mr. Nuttanun Puntuwong, Ichitan Group's Deputy Director of Online Marketing and Management Information System. For service sector, we interviewed Mr. Apitha Wonlopsiri, Chief Communications Officer of Enconcept English School. For non-profit organization, we interviewed U.S. Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney. For SME, we interviewed Mrs. Jongjai Gidsawang, the owner of famous fried pork shop from SME Tee-Tak television program in Thailand.

Keywords: CEOs, Social Media, Thailand

1. INTRODUCTION

The growth rate of social networks users compared to the same period a year ago (1April 2012 – 1April 2013) found that Facebook has a 24% growth, while Twitter has a growth of 53%. More impressively, YouTube has a 125% growth and Instagram has an amazing 178% growth (Zocial Rank, 2013). Interestingly, the viral diffusion of information through social media has a far greater capacity to reach the public than traditional media (Keller, 2009). Furthermore, some consumers perceive social media as a more trustworthy source of information than traditional media such as TV, radio or magazines (Foux, 2006). According to Penah (2012), 82% of consumers are more likely to trust and 77% of consumers are more likely to buy from a company whose chief executives officer (CEO) and leadership team engage on social media. Therefore, company should view social media as an essential component of their marketing mix, and integrate them in their marketing communication in order to increase brand equity and enhance organization performance. The purpose of this study is to propose the model to explore the relationship between CEO and social media in Thailand.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media Behavior

To understand how and why individual use social media networking based on uses-and-gratification framework, Thamsamisorn (2013) proposes four components of motivation: information, entertainment, social interaction and convenience.

The result indicates that different motivation will result in different use of social media. It was found that users who have high information motivation and convenience motivation will participate in user-to-content interaction. On the other hand, users who have high entertainment motivations and social interaction motivation will participate in user-to-user interaction. Moreover, it was found that user-to-content and user-to-user interactivities have significant effect on user's attitude toward social networking site, which, in turn, affects the attitude toward brand and intention to purchase (Thamsamisorn, 2013).

2.2 Social Media for Business

Social media touch nearly every facet of our personal and business lives. Qualman (2013) found that social media is an integral part of a company's overall strategy whether a business is large or small. Companies which engaged digitally with customers and clients have already seen the power and the payoff. An example is the result of Fiesta Movement campaign of Ford Company with over 7,000,000 views of YouTube videos, 750,000 views of Flickr photos, and an awareness rate of 60%.

2.3 Organizational Characteristics and Social Media

According to Jari, Hannu, and Heli (2013), there are relationships between organization characteristic and the adoption of social media. They found the current external social media use between different company sizes is similar. This is due to the fact that the cost of social media adoption ranges from minimal expenses for small firms with low budget to high expense for firms with large budget. In other word, firm size is not barrier to social media adoption.

2.4 Social Media and CEOs

Shandwick and Gaines-Ross (2013) founded that some CEOs do not participate in social media because it was not typical for their region or industry. Some CEOs perceived that there is no measurable return on investment (ROI), that social media is too risky, and that social media are only for young people.

From 2010 to 2012, CEOs sociability has increased 30% (Shandwick and Gaines-Ross, 2013). CEOs who participated on social media were more likely to be good communicators, open and accessible, and were considered good listeners.

There are many benefits of socially active CEOs. It can be an effective way of sharing news and information about the company which has positive impacts on the company's reputation. It is also a sign that the company is innovative (Shandwick and Gaines-Ross, 2013).

Anticipating social media usage will increase 256% in next 3-5 years (IBM, 2012). Moreover, a new research from Domo and CEO.com (2013) found that 68% of CEOs have no presence on any of the major social networks. The tendency in using Facebook of CEOs is decreasing 7.9% while Twitter users' rate is increasing 55.6%. There are 28 of 500 CEOs on Twitter with 19 out of 28 CEOs are active Twitter users.

A famous example of success story of using social media is Barack Obama, the 44th president of the United States. He has transformed elections campaign strategy by reaching out to voters through social media. He had more than 15 social media sites and 3 million friends on only one Facebook account (Stamford, 2009).

Mr. Patee Sarasin, the CEO of Nok Airlines, a low-cost airline in Thailand, is one of the examples of Thai CEOs who uses social media for organizational purposes. He is one of active CEOs who engages in social media. His followers could tweet problems they encounter during flights with Nok Air, which he would retweet and immediately attempt to solve the problems (Zocial Rank, 2013).

2.5 Personalities

Fang, Francis and Hasan (2012) found that age, gender, nationality, educational level, work mobility, and international experience are potential determinants of CEOs' social media behaviors. CEO characteristics are likely to affect the preference of the social media.

3. PROPOSITIONS

Based on the literature review, the propositions can be formulated as follow:

Proposition 1: The adoption of social media does not depend on company size.

Many researchers explored that personality has an influence on the social media use. For instance, an individual's personality can significantly influence their behavior when it comes to interacting with others in online worlds (Shandwick and Gaines-Ross, 2013). CEO characteristics are likely to affect the preference of the social media (Fang et al., 2009).

Since the personality can influence preference of social media use, it is argued that personality of CEO leads to the difference in CEOs' social media strategy. The general characteristics of CEOs on social media are openness to new experience and are not afraid to use new technology in order to utilize these tools for business in dynamic environment. In line with this, personality of CEO will be a significant factor that affects the social media use.

Proposition 2: Personality of CEOs affects the social media use.

4. METHODOLOGY

We conducted an in-depth, semi-structured interview with 4 CEOs. The first interviewee is Ms. Kristie Kenney, the United States Ambassador to Thailand who uses social network on a daily basis. The second interviewee is Mrs. Jongjai Gidsawang, the owner of famous fried pork shop from SME Tee-Tak television program in Thailand. The third interview was with Mr. Tan Passakornnatee, CEO of Ichitan Group and Mr. Nuttanun Puntuwong, Deputy Director of Online Marketing and Management Information System of Ichitan Group. Our last interviewee is Mr. Apitha Wonlopsiri, CEO of Enconcept English School.

This research focuses on the experience of the use of social media of CEOs and posits that understanding the experience of the use of social media of CEOs will help us understand the reasons that CEOs use social media and the strategies to engage with their customers through social media. We identified the potential interviewees by performing content analysis of CEOs who use social media in Thailand.

Ambassador Kristie Kenney uses many kinds of social media to connect with Thai people. Several video were posted on YouTube and links to the videos were posted on the Embassy's Facebook page. Moreover, she also shares her activities in personal account of

Twitter and Instagram.

Mrs. Jongjai Gidsawang, the owner of famous fried pork shop, uses Facebook fanpage to share information and create activities with customers. Those are things that other small food shops have not extensively done.

Mr. Tan Passakornnatee, CEO of Ichitan Group, has Ichitan fanpage which has the highest numbers of “LIKE” in Thailand and 3rd rank of the world. Every post in fanpage is highly popular.

Enconcept English School has many ways to connect with students and the public. They have Facebook fanpage which a large number of people click like to follow.

5. RESULT

5.1 Ambassador Kristie Kenney

Ambassador Kristie Kenney’s popularity is due in part to her unique approach of using social media to connect to Thai people.

The U.S. Embassy Bangkok’s Facebook fanpage has 152,785 likes. Its Twitter account (@USEmbassyBKK) has 50,729 followers. It also has 2920 subscribers on Youtube, and 1384 followers on Instagram. Ambassador Kenney has 758 likes on her Facebook fanpage, 41,807 followers on Twitter account (@kristiekenny), and 4309 followers on Instagram.

Ambassador Kenney uses social media for three main reasons. Firstly, she uses social media to update the activities of the U.S. government, the U.S. Embassy and the Ambassador herself. Secondly, she uses social media to get feedback from the public. Lastly, she uses social media for the personal purposes (e.g., to connect with people, to know more people, and for entertainment). She uses multiple channels of social media to gain more feedback. She focuses on social media because it is a faster way to communicate with the mass. However, the traditional media are also used. Ambassador Kenney uses social media whenever she has free times which are usually in before and after work.

She personally prefers Instagram and Twitter because Instagram is fun and Twitter is faster for news update and feedback.

The U.S. Embassy encourages the audience to comment freely on its social media accounts. If there are some negative comments, the staff will address them on a case-by-case basis.

5.2 Mrs. Jongjai Gidsawang

JehJong fried pork is a very successful SME business. This small restaurant can generate revenue of approximately 20 million baht a year. Moreover, this business becomes a famous social media case study of Thailand since Mrs. Jongjai Gidsawang, the owner, has used social media extensively. At first, she has received help from Mr. Thunyawat Chaitrakulchai who is an expert in marketing and brand management to create the brand awareness. There are four types of social media that she uses to communicate: Facebook,

Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Currently, she concentrates on Facebook because the number of users in Thailand is higher than Twitter. She has two accounts of Facebook which are her personal account and the restaurant account.

Moreover, social media provides more convenience because it is easily accessible anytime and anywhere. She pointed out that social media can promote variety of products and services such as foods, clothes, financial services and etc. In her case, she created games for the audience such as question and answer game via Facebook. Winners get free fried pork as a reward. Hence, the objective of using social media is to promote the product and increase brand awareness. Social media can affect the reputation of the restaurant. The reason why she has decided to choose herself as the brand ambassador of her restaurant was because she wanted to save cost.

She recommends improving the ease of use of social media because many of the senior citizens do not have extensive technological skills. Moreover, she mentioned that social media provide more convenience but it also incurs expenses. The social media can replace traditional media because it is a lot faster and sometimes more accurate than the traditional media.

5.3 Mr. Tan Passakornnatee, CEO of Ichitan Group

Ichitan is the number one in the organic green tea industry and result in the product available more than twenty-five countries in Asia. Ichitan brand is ranked as top of Facebook fanpage in Thailand with 1,900,337 likes. Moreover, Mr. Tan Passakornnatee also has one of the highest numbers of fans on his Facebook page with 3,729,359 likes.

Ichitan used social media for branding and obtaining loyalty. They use social media for the promotion purposes (e.g., sweepstake and giveaways). They focus more on the consumer experiences and also try to establish positive reputation by doing Corporate Social Responsibility such as Tan Pan Foundation. They concentrated on both traditional media (e.g. television ads) and social media (e.g., Facebook). Their strategy is to use social media to support the television ads campaign.

Mr. Passakornnatee is the brand ambassador of Ichitan because he can control the brand image by himself. Moreover, they can also save on advertising expenses. The vision of the executive is that everyone has to consume the media, and Ichitan must be leader among competitors in term of new strategy. An involvement of CEO in the social media will motivate employees and will result in higher utilization in the organization.

5.4 Mr. Apitha Wonlopsiri, CEO of Enconcept

Enconcept, an English language tutorial school, has 92,081 likes on Enconcept Academy' Facebook fanpage and 19,990 followers on Twitter (@Krupnan. Enconcept used social media to create two-way communication between Enconcept and learners. Enconcept

uses social media to receive feedback from consumers and support its vision and mission. Enconcept also developed mobile applications. There are eight applications, which are MyCoach, MyBooking, @Dict, MyXenTimer, MyMemolody, MyFlashcard, Xeroine, and MyTest. The strategy is to use social media to integrate the learning into a daily life. Therefore, these technologies allow students to learn anytime, anywhere and without restriction. Moreover, the use of social media enhances the content to fit the smartphone lifestyle of new generation in the digital age..

Mrs. Arisara Tanapakit or Kru P’Nan is a brand ambassador of Enconcept because she is a teacher at Enconcept. Teacher is a suitable choice for Enconcept’s brand ambassador because teacher is the person who has direct interactions with the students. Moreover, they do not need to pay for a presenter which is quite expensive.

The vision of the executive is that the marketing team must closely and constantly manage social media accounts because of their dynamic nature. Enconcept aims to constantly interact with the audience by providing interesting knowledge and information.

A latency benefit of social media is an additional channel for personalized communication that can help create and maintain long-term relationship with the customers.

Table 1: Conclusion of the result

Company	Interviewer	Position	Industry	Type of Organization	Registered Capital	Social Media Plan	Personality
US Embassy	Kristie A. Kenny	Ambassador	Government Sector	Non-Profit Organization	-	Structured	Active
JehJong Fried Pork	Mrs. Jongjai Gidsawang	Business Owner	Food	SMEs	-	Unstructured	Active
Ichitan	Mr. Tan Passakornnatee and Mr. Nuttanun Puntuwong	Chief Executive Officer Deputy Director Online Marketing and Management Information System	Beverage	Private	1.3 billion baht	Structured	Active
Enconcept	Mr. Apitha Wonglopsiri	Chief of Communications Officer	Language School	Service	4.5 million baht	Structured	Active

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Table 1 summarizes similarities and differences among the four cases of interview. The interview results seem to support our Proposition 1, because the adoption of social media by the four types of organizations interviewed does not depend on the company size. However, the type of the company seems to affect its social media strategy.

We classified the types of social media plan as structured plan and unstructured plan. Well-established organizations with large budgets, such as the U.S. Embassy and Ichitan Group, seem to have structured social media strategic plan. They have teams to monitor and use social media channel effectively, whereas SMEs do not. The common purpose in using social media of all organizations is two-way communication but addition reason in using social media depends on each organization.

All of the interviewees have active, outgoing personality. They are willing to learn and are not afraid using social media technology. This seems to provide some support to our Proposition 2 that personality of CEOs affects the social media use.

We acknowledge limitations of our study. Since this is a preliminary study, sample size is small and it lacks statistical proof to support our propositions. We plan to expand this study both in terms of depth and size. We also plan to conduct survey to further study Thai CEOs and their social media strategy.

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