



Facebook as international eMarketing strategy of Taiwan hotels

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ABSTRACT

Taiwan hotels need to focus on international eMarketing because these cater to international travelers, especially with leisure travelers expected to increase in the coming years. Facebook offers a wide range of opportunities for the international eMarketing of hotels. Investigation of the current use of Facebook, as an international eMarketing tool, by six large hotels in Taiwan showed presence in Facebook and use of basic features. However, the use of different Facebook features varied. While the hotels were able to connect with international leisure travelers via Facebook for the communication of marketing messages, the reach is limited to Chinese-speaking users using Chinese as the primary language, even for hotel pages accessible through English accounts. Language use also limited interaction in spreading the message virally to the wider international leisure travelers. Employing options to accommodate English and even other languages by selecting from available language support options can enhance international eMarketing via Facebook of hotels.

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1. Introduction

Social networking developed into an eMarketing tool that enables business firms to access the market, learn about consumer trends, and communicate to consumers (Holzner, 2009) in a manner that could translate into market share and revenue (Albee, 2010). Facebook emerged as a leading social networking site with 350 million active users in July 2009 (Treadaway and Smith, 2010), which has grown to 500 million active users in 2010 (Facebook, 2010). This represents a staggering 42.86 percent increase in users that constitutes 7.35 percent of the world's 2010 population. The total number of Facebook users is bigger than the projected 310.2 million population of the United States in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). There are two implications for business firms. Facebook is a gathering place of a large pool of consumers. This social networking site is also a mine of consumer information and a means of spreading information to build market presence.

However, this is not to say that using Facebook ensures absolute marketing success. Similar to other online tools, implementation requires a strategic perspective to ensure the desired outcomes. Achieving results is a process involving preparation, resources, competencies, monitoring and evaluation (Silk, 2006; Stokes, 2009). It is important to keep realistic expectations about the marketing outcomes of using Facebook (Treadaway and Smith, 2010) because the results depend on how well business firms utilize the website as a marketing tool.

1.1. Background of the study

Hotels can benefit from using social networking sites. As part of an intensely competitive industry, getting help from consumers in spreading a positive experience can go a long way. The essence of the social network is the outward spread of information, which when successfully used by firms, means people within the network actually listen to the information shared (Albee, 2010). With social networking sites, the possible reach of a positive experience shared on the site could be exponential (Holzner, 2009). The information can reach foreign markets when international travelers share their positive experience of the hotel. Social networking sites become an invaluable tool for the international marketing of hotels.

In the context of Taiwan, it has a developing tourism and hospitality industry (Ma and Crestan, 2009). In 2010, the government has launched a series of campaigns, including 2010 Taipei Flora Expo and Taipei International Travel Fair, to encourage international travelers (Tourism Bureau, 2010a). Visitor arrivals from January to October 2010 showed a 21.09 percent and 46.6 percent average increase in foreign tourists and overseas Chinese visitors respectively from the previous year (Tourism Bureau, 2010b). The government has opened the gates to foreign leisure travelers. The hotels are overlooking the opportunity to steer the possible exponential growth in their international market, if they fail to connect effectively to foreign travelers, who are looking for information online via social networking.

International leisure travelers staying at hotels in Taiwan comprise the potential network of hotels. In using social networking sites, such as Facebook with the biggest number of users, hotels can create an international social network through customers as

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fans and information sharers as well as strengthen the social network through its active presence in the site by providing information, addressing questions, and responding to comments. Hotels in Taiwan wanting to create an international social network should use Facebook with an international perspective.

1.2. *The research problem and objectives*

To accommodate the huge market in Taiwan, Facebook provided traditional and simplified Chinese as primary language used in posts and other information shared on the account. To join the hype, many hotels in Taiwan are present on Facebook. An initial observation of the Facebook pages of hotels in Taiwan showed the use of Chinese as the primary language. This enabled the hotels to connect with the local market, mainland China and Hong Kong, as well as Chinese communities abroad. However, with the internationalization drive of the government to boost tourism, the use of Facebook to connect with the international leisure travel market may be a neglected area. Majority of foreign visitors to Taiwan come from the United States, Europe and Oceania (Tourism Bureau, 2010b), regions that adopt English as a common language. Using Chinese as the primary language on Facebook can limit the network reach of hotels. The objectives of the study are to investigate the current use of Facebook by hotels in Taiwan as an international eMarketing tool to identify issues and to recommend ways for hotels to use Facebook in a way that widens their reach of international leisure travelers and increases potential sales.

2. Literature review

2.1. *eMarketing*

A narrow definition considers eMarketing as using the Internet to produce sales (Stokes, 2009). In this sense, advertising and selling online constitutes eMarketing. A broader definition considers eMarketing as the strategic process of establishing online connections with customers to understand their needs as well as employing online tools to create an interactive experience for customers to draw their interest, influence purchasing behavior, and affect voluntary sharing of the experience by satisfied consumers (Albee, 2010). Underlying successful eMarketing is effective communication together with good consumer experience and positive impression of the company and its brands, products and services that emerges from responsiveness to consumer needs (Silk, 2006). Providing effective online mechanisms for interacting with consumers reinforces the positive experience to enhance their enthusiasm towards the company and its products or services to support further sales.

2.2. *eMarketing to foreign markets*

Firms need to adopt a global perspective towards foreign markets. A means of influencing foreign markets is through the co-creation process, which allows international customers to communicate and interact with the firm in developing and improving products and services (Sheth and Sharma, 2005). Language is the mechanism for connecting and interacting with international consumers. International eMarketing to foreign consumers is an opportunity created by the Internet as a tool in the business setting that enables the use of English in websites and provides language selection options in viewing website content (Madura, 2007). Linguistically appropriate online messages and interactive platforms enhance usability, influence more positive attitude, and reinforce buying intentions, better usability, more favorable attitude, and higher purchasing intentions (Krishnamurthy and Singh, 2005). Language can become a barrier to international eMarketing, when

the language selected and used does not conform to an international audience. To address language issues, language selection and use should consider the option that is able to build awareness of the firm in the international market. Moreover, techniques such as keyword use and language translation are important to mediate local dialects and languages. Although translation require a lot of time and cost, it is better to do manual translation instead of automation to ensure accurate communication. Adherence to customs in international communication also supports effectiveness (Harrison-Walker, 2002).

Applying eMarketing to the international market takes advantage of the operation of viral marketing through word-of-mouth in the virtual community. Viral marketing is the strategy of encouraging customers to share a marketing message to other people online as a means of increasing the reach and influence of the message (Wilson, 2005). The metaphor refers to the exponential spread of a marketing message online. To reach out to the international market and provide a catalyst for viral marketing, firms should use online tools that help them communicate to the international market as well as enable the spread of the message via online networking.

2.3. *eMarketing to foreign markets by hotels*

In hotels, international eMarketing is very significant because this service industry ensures sales by connecting and interacting with consumers across the globe (Braun, 2002). A report on recent developments in tourism and hospitality by the European Travel Commission (2010) highlights the urgency of engagement in eMarketing by hotels. The report showed that 64 percent of travelers for leisure purposes and 65 percent of travelers for business reasons use the Internet in planning trips, including airline reservation and hotel booking. The report also provided that online travel spending is increasing in the United States and United Kingdom while China, India and Brazil are emerging markets for online travel. TripAdvisor, a website providing a wide range of information to travelers, has increased its members to 20 million while other travel advisory websites are also becoming popular according to the same report (European Travel Commission, 2010). Online presence is vital to ensure the market share of hotels in the online travel market. Hotels can enhance their presence by establishing partnerships with online booking and travel sites, operating websites, advertising online, and participating in social networking sites that travelers frequent (Stokes, 2009).

Global trends in international eMarketing indicate fragmented adoption by hotels (Murphy et al., 2006). Internet exposure is a determinant of eMarketing adoption, with more hotels employing eMarketing in countries with higher Internet saturation (Sheth and Sharma, 2005). The priority of hotels is also a determinant, by dictating IT capability and innovation investments (Murphy et al., 2006).

An offshoot of the fragmented adoption of international eMarketing is the varying use of viral marketing. Hotels can apply viral marketing by communicating giveaways or promotional offers. Hotels can also ensure the ease in spreading the message as well as ensure the transferability of the message on a large scale through a short but catchy message that customers can copy/paste or attach to their emails, websites or forum comments. Hotels should adopt interactive networking to exploit free online resources (Wilson, 2005). Hotels can benefit from employing viral marketing because travelers are widely connected people and enthusiastic in sharing their experiences. A survey showed that almost 75 percent of respondents considered Wi-Fi connectivity as a factor in selecting accommodation with 31 percent also indicating preference of free Wi-Fi connectivity (TravelDailyNews, 2010). Internet connectivity at the site of accommodation means online communication, which likely includes sharing of information on the travel experience.

Hotels using the Internet for eMarketing and viral marketing to reach an international market need to consider language use, which is the means of communicating the marketing message and the way of spreading the message through word-of-mouth. Majority of Internet users are not English speakers but English is the accepted international language and a means of addressing linguistic differences (Harrison-Walker, 2002). Depending on the target audience, the use of English and/or translations as well as other language tools for online communication support eMarketing and viral marketing online.

2.4. Social networking websites as international eMarketing tool for hotels

A tool that supports both eMarketing and viral marketing is social networking websites, which enable the process of building connections to a network or social circle (Zarella, 2010). Social networking websites serve business firms by mapping social connections to widen relationships and spread information (Cross and Parker, 2004; Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Social networking sites enable connections with the network by bringing together people who share common interests or goals. By enabling social connections, social networking sites can enable eMarketing when business firms connect and expand to the social network of consumers.

Social networking websites accommodate business firms through interaction with global consumers in real time (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). An international social network can grow by establishing social connections with people across the globe and tapping into their social networks to reach out to more people. These websites are open to everyone. The common requirement for access is a one-time registration. These websites are also easy to use for most people. The range of functions available depends on the social networking site. There are options for different functions such as finding people, messaging, and profile viewing, among others.

Social networking websites are beneficial to hotels pursuing international eMarketing in a number of ways. With the rise of the knowledge economy, social networking sites facilitate information collection and utilization to enhance competitive positioning (Cross and Parker, 2004). Trending of consumer behavior and industry developments allows hotels to keep track of the changing or emerging demands of consumers and to adopt improvements in industry best practices. Social networking also facilitates customer relationship management in the virtual world (Zarella, 2010). Hotels can create their own network or connect to the network of travelers and travel enthusiasts in pursuit of eMarketing and viral marketing objectives. Communication in the social network is also a means of making the interactive field even, by allowing customers to establish a direct connection with the hotel and vice versa even with geographic distance. Social networking facilitates viral marketing using the network as the mode of transferring marketing message (O'Connor et al., 2008; Albee, 2010). Hotels can spread and influence the flow of information through social networking sites that enable posting of messages and reviews. Hotels need to develop skills in online social networking to experience the benefits of virtual social media (Braun and Hollick, 2006).

2.5. Facebook as international eMarketing tool for hotels

Facebook marketing is marketing via this social networking site (Holzner, 2009). Facebook has become the top social networking site by number of users and volume of access or use. An explanation for the leading position of Facebook is its diverse applications and its innovative adoption of social media (Treadaway and Smith, 2010) Facebook accommodates a wide range of users from application developers to advertisers to business and personal users. The

diversity ensures that hotels can find and create a network in the site.

It is timely for hotels to take advantage of opportunities offered by Facebook because the social networking site is not permanent (Treadaway and Smith, 2010) and rapid developments can change social networking. Hotels should take advantage of Facebook while it is nearing or at its peak. The opportunities include: (1) viral marketing, (2) business development or generation of lead, (3) outbound communication, (4) complaint management, (5) positive feedback publication, (6) fan club connection, and (7) recommendation testimonials (Treadaway and Smith, 2010).

Hotels can utilize Facebook by selecting appropriate functions or combining all functions. Facebook has features that enable eMarketing (Holzner, 2009). Descriptions of these features are contained in Table 1.

Facebook features fall under primary features and supporting technical and usage features. The primary features provide the main eMarketing and viral marketing functionality for business firms. These also comprise the modes through which hotels can use Facebook to find and understand the needs of its target market, connect and build a network within the target market, share information on the hotel including its services, communicate the marketing message, and influence people in its network to spread the message. The supporting technical and usage features provide assistance in using Facebook primary features through the option to request a speaker to train hotel managers and staff or the help center. The supporting features also offer customization options such as language options, network parameter selection, and mobile connectivity.

To use Facebook effectively, business firms need to adopt a strategic approach to understand the various features, choose the options that serve their eMarketing and viral marketing goals, establish a measure of success, and establish connections to the social network that constitutes the target market (Dunay and Krueger, 2010). The use of Facebook as an eMarketing or viral marketing by hotels ensures the achievement of specific marketing objectives.

3. Methodology

The study focused on: (1) how the hotels used Facebook to communicate and spread offers to influence sales, (2) how well have the hotels succeeded in communicating and spreading marketing offers using Facebook, (3) how do intervening factors explain international eMarketing success, and (4) how hotels can expand Facebook use as a manner of widening their international network. Exploratory case study is the method employed in the investigation. Use of the exploratory case study method enabled the collection of information (Yin, 2002) on hotels in Taiwan to support the determination of patterns on Facebook use and inform on the effect of factors, such as language and marketing message, in the relationship of Facebook use to communication and networking that translate into potential sales. Insights from the observation and analysis of Facebook use together with literature review supported recommendations on how hotels in Taiwan can improve Facebook use for international eMarketing.

The study is qualitative by focusing on 'what' and 'how' questions (Creswell, 2009; Saunders et al., 2009). In applying the qualitative approach, the data collection method is observed using a set of criteria or factors to support the collection of data on patterns of Facebook use by Taiwan hotels. The observation criteria are: (1) presence in Facebook, (2) features selected, (3) quality and volume of content, (4) aesthetics and visual quality, (5) network scope and reach, (6) interaction quality, and (7) language use (Harrison-Walker, 2002; Krishnamurthy and Singh, 2005; Holzner,

Table 1
eMarketing and viral marketing functionality of Facebook features.

Facebook features	E-marketing and viral marketing functionality
Primary features	
Profile	Establish presence in Facebook; share company, product and service information; communicate and share marketing message; establish business distinction; reinforce brand using logos as profile picture; establish network connections
Fan page	Share company, product or service information; communicate and share marketing message; expand network; get feedback updates
Group	Communicate and share marketing message; participate in discussions over common interests; identify and connect to niche markets sharing specific interests
Event	Communicate and share marketing message; influence interest and involvement in sponsored or promotional events; encourage sharing and group participation
Advertisement	Reach out to a wider pool of Facebook users; establish network connections through links and 'like' options with clicks appearing on the page of all friends
Marketplace	Establish presence and accessibility in the directory or yellow pages, which are segmented according to industry or area of business
Beacons and Polls Applications	Keep track of page activity, network growth, and feedback updates Facilitate promotions and interactive communication and sharing of marketing message
Supporting features	
Statistics	Learn trends on consumer behavior, site activity, global reach and connectivity
Press releases	Know about Facebook and Facebook community developments such as on network or business interests
Speaker requests	Request speakers to seminars or meetings in business firms or organizations to discuss Facebook and its marketing features
Help center	Obtain assistance on understanding and using Facebook features as well as troubleshooting
Network customization	Search and identify parameters of network connectivity to access target markets
Primary language options	Support connectivity to a target market through a common language and cultural characteristics
Mobile connectivity	Enable Facebook connectivity and updates via mobile Internet

2009; Dunay and Krueger, 2010). The observations occurred in November 2010 by searching the Facebook accounts of the hotels during the first week and doing a final observation during the last week.

Observation of Facebook use by hotels in Taiwan focused on the major five-diamond hotel chains catering to international visitors. The hotels observed are Evergreen Taipei, Evergreen Taichung, The Splendor Kaohsiung, The Splendor Taichung, Agora Garden, and The Westin Taipei. Search of the hotels using two Facebook accounts, one using Chinese with Taiwan as identified location of user and the other using English with location in the United States, and navigation of the pages of these hotels yielded observation data. Observation data yielded patterns of Facebook use and explanations of the role of factors, primarily language, in the relationship of Facebook use to success in making offers and networking that reflect potential sales from international travelers.

4. Results

4.1. Background of Taiwan hotels

All the six Taiwan hotels catered to local and international business travelers. There are differences in the size of the six Taiwan hotels in terms of the number of rooms available and utilization rate, as shown in Table 2. Of the six hotels, The Splendor Hotel Kaohsiung is the largest by occupying an 85-storeyed building, with hotel rooms on the 46th to the 70th floors and other facilities or amenities occupying the other floors. The other hotels also occupy entire buildings but with fewer floors. The six hotels provide 1764 rooms in total. The utilization rate of the hotels varies according to season and depending on external factors such as the tourism promotion of the government. However, on the average, the hotels in Taiwan catering to the international market have a utilization rate of 67.79 percent (Lin, 2010). Based on this average utilization rate, the hotels are able to fill less than three-quarters of their rooms, leaving 570 free rooms as the utilization gap. These unfilled rooms represent the capability of the hotels to accommodate increases in international leisure travelers. To lessen the utilization gap, the hotels can focus on their eMarketing strategies for international leisure travelers.

4.2. Pattern of Facebook use by Taiwan hotels

Facebook is an online tool commonly used by the hotels. The patterns of Facebook use by the six Taiwan hotels cover a number of areas as summarized in Table 3. Apart from availability for search in English language accounts and number of posts, the hotels share common use of Facebook functions.

4.2.1. Creation of Facebook account

Except for The Splendor Hotel Taichung, the other hotels created their Facebook accounts six months before the period of observation. The earliest to establish a Facebook account is The Splendor Hotel Kaohsiung using Facebook as early as August 2009. The Splendor Hotel Taichung was a latecomer in Facebook using only in July 2010. The period when the hotels created their Facebook accounts coincided with the rise in popularity of this social networking site in Taiwan. However, the hotels do not appear to adopt a strong strategic approach to Facebook utilization (Dunay and Krueger, 2010) Facebook adoption varies across hotel branches. Even with the same hotel, the creation of Facebook by the branches differed such as with The Splendor Hotel Kaohsiung as the early mover and The Splendor Hotel Taichung as the late mover. Facebook use appears to be an independent action of hotel branches and not as a hotel-wide eMarketing strategy.

4.2.2. Facebook presence

A search of the hotels using the two Facebook accounts (Chinese and English), indicated that three hotels (The Splendor Kaohsiung, The Splendor Taichung, Agora Garden) appeared in the search results in both accounts while the other three hotels (Evergreen Taipei, Evergreen Taichung, The Westin Taipei) did not appear in the account using English as primary language. This means that the latter three hotels were not searchable in Facebook accounts using English or other non-Chinese languages as primary language. A separate section shows search results from Bing, the search engine of Microsoft, connecting to the separate websites of the hotels or other websites featuring hospitality firms. Bing search results augment the limitations in finding the hotels not searchable in non-Chinese Facebook accounts. The downside is that international Facebook users cannot connect to the hotels without a Facebook page. This limits social networking of the hotels

Content facilitates customer relationship management by introducing the hotel to develop familiarity (Zarella, 2010). Providing concise but complete and helpful information on all areas including parking, public transportation, company overview, mission, and products makes the Facebook page a one-stop-shop source of information to familiarize fans and fan page visitors with the hotel. This establishes the social network for the viral spread of marketing offers.

Outbound communication was through wall posts and comments, photos and notes. All of the hotels communicated through wall posts, photos and notes. The wall posts were in the Chinese language and were on people, events, music, and information held or related to the hotel. The pictures were of the hotel, its staff, and customers. These describe the hotel in terms of what it is doing for consumers, the industry and the community as well as how consumers, the industry and the community regard or relate to the hotel. These establish the identity of the hotel to customers (Wilson, 2005). The notes are small articles or reports, also in Chinese, on various topics such as improvements in the hotel, activities, festivals, industry developments, and a wide assortment of information that indicates the interests of the hotel. This also reinforces the identity of the hotel. There are hotels that went further. Agora Garden provided videos to capture real life events. The Splendor Hotel Taichung has a section on “Hot Deals”, to represent a direct marketing message to fans and page visitors. The initiative of The Splendor Hotel Taichung is a stark difference to the other outbound communication of the other hotels to comprise an area of improvement for the other hotels. The outbound content is effective in attracting consumers if it is appropriate and interactive (Krishnamurthy and Singh, 2005). The topics pertained to local events, which are of interest to locals and Chinese abroad as well as of possible interest to international leisure travelers interested in experiencing Taiwan. The outbound content is appropriate. However, interactivity is limited only to Chinese-speaking users, with language use excluding non-Chinese speakers. Videos and pictures can be a way of communicating with non-Chinese speakers but only for the hotels that were searchable in non-Chinese Facebook accounts.

Inbound communication was through the “likes” and comments to wall posts. All the hotels received likes and comments on their most recent posts but only from Chinese-speaking fans located within and outside of Taiwan. The comments expressed positive experiences of hotel events or intention to visit the hotel for an event, to express the influence of the posts on consumers in providing feedback on marketing offers and spreading the message (Wilson, 2005) to their Chinese-speaking social network. However, even for domestic consumers, there was variance in the number of likes and comments received by the hotels. Evergreen Taipei and Evergreen Taichung received the most likes averaging 20 likes per post while the other hotels received an average of 10 likes. The same two hotels also received the most comments with almost all posts receiving comments. The average comments per post is 6, including feedback from fans and responses of the hotel. Many of the posts of the other hotels did not receive comments or the comments are mostly 2 or 3. Most of the posts of the Evergreen hotels were on its achievements, sponsorship or participation of events, and promotions or deals. The other hotels also posted similar contents but the pictures, topics, and contents posted by the Evergreen hotels were engaging and strongly presented the hotel as successful with interesting stuff to offer. For this hotel, the marketing message is very clear and marketing-directed (Wilson, 2005). With inbound communication in Chinese, the people who liked and commented on the posts all speak Chinese. The hotels also need to improve on the attractiveness of their wall posts to encourage more responses from Chinese-speaking customers. Interaction with international users who do not speak Chinese is a limitation and an area for improvement.

Some hotels posted on their walls more frequently than other hotels. Based on the wall posts of the hotels for November 2010, Agora Garden had only 3 posts and The Westin Taipei had 5 for November, with long gaps in between posts. The other hotels had more than 15 posts for November with short gaps, of 1–3 days, in between posts. The frequency of post determines the extent of contact (Treadaway and Smith, 2010) so the two hotels should consider posting more frequently to improve connectivity. The hotels can also consider posts in English or a mix of English and Chinese to extend offers and draw responses from international travelers.

4.2.5. *Aesthetics and visual quality*

The fan page of Evergreen Taipei, Evergreen Taichung and Agora Garden retained the color and layout template provided by Facebook. The template for a user page is blue for the Facebook banner, grey for the sections of the pages, and white as background of contents. The typical fan page has the profile picture on the upper left side. Below the profile is basic information and list of fans. Beside the profile is the list of contents and the wall. The distinction of a fan page over another fan page is the profile picture and the pictures or videos posted on the wall. The Splendor Kaohsiung, The Splendor Taichung, and The Westin Taipei utilized vibrant colors in their profile picture to create attractive contrast. The aesthetic value of the fan pages can influence the initial impression of customers (Cross and Parker, 2004), whether they speak Chinese or not. Pictures and videos of hotel facilities, as a means of visually communicating offers, can augment use of Chinese in the page. Apart from considering use of English language or mix of Chinese and English, use of expressive visual materials can help the hotels bring offers to the international travel market.

An improvement in the visual quality of the fan pages is customization. Software applications utilizing HTML (hypertext markup language) or FBML (Facebook markup language) codes enable the inclusion of bigger pictures and interactive content (Zarella, 2010). Examples of American hotels with highly customized Facebook pages are Vero Beach Hotel and Spa that included a map in its page and a changed layout and New York-New York Hotel & Casino Las Vegas with a flashy interactive page greeting visitors to its fan page. These fan pages approximate the visual presentation of the hotel websites but integrated with the social networking function. With available tools supporting customization adopted by large international hotels in other countries, hotels in Taiwan can also express their ability to level with international competitors and visually communicate with international customers by customizing their fan pages.

4.2.6. *Network scope and reach*

The scope of the network of the hotels in Taiwan is average, with a wide room for expansion as of November 2010. Evergreen Taipei has 921 fans, Evergreen Taichung has 2420 fans, The Splendor Kaohsiung has 2836 fans, The Splendor Taichung has 1263 fans, Agora Garden has 214 fans, and The Westin Taipei has 1337 fans. The situation is similar to large hotels in Hong Kong to make the situation average. However, large casino hotels in the United States, such as Luxor Hotel and Casino and New York-New York Hotel & Casino Las Vegas reached 40,960 and 36,524 fans in November 2010. There is a difference between the market reach of casino hotels in the United States and international hotels in Taiwan but the difference in the number of fans is huge given that the hotels in Taiwan are major hotel chains catering to international travelers. The fans of these casino hotels in the U.S. come from different parts of the world, even from countries that speak English as a second language. Comments from foreign fans were in varying English language proficiency. In using English as primary language, the casino hotels were still able to communicate and obtain response from fans in other countries. Hotels in Taiwan can communicate offers to international travelers,

even countries that speak English as a second language, by posting in English.

The number of fans of Taiwan hotels expressed the extent of connection to leisure travelers, who comprise potential customers. The fans obtained by the hotels were leisure travelers in Taiwan and Chinese-speaking travelers outside of Taiwan. On the average, one-third of the fans obtained by the hotels were Chinese speakers located outside of Taiwan. However, the number of fans relative to the fans of international casino hotels in the United States point to an area for expansion. The use of Chinese in the fan page limits access to Chinese speakers. The fans of the hotels and those that comment on the posts are Chinese-speaking Facebook users located in Taiwan and in other locations outside of Taiwan. The hotels have been able to attract leisure travelers from different locations outside Taiwan but the reach is limited to Chinese-speaking leisure travelers. This reflects the extent of potential customers reached by the hotels in using Facebook. Using English can expand marketing messages to international travelers. This can also encourage Chinese fans to provide feedback in English. A mix of Chinese and English can also bring together Chinese and non-Chinese speaking fans as a means of facilitating customer relationship management (Zarella, 2010) with customers and among customers.

4.2.7. Interaction quality

Interaction in the fan pages of the hotels in November 2010 is short and minimally interactive. Evergreen Taipei and Evergreen Taichung had short interactions in the items posted but the interaction is between the hotel and fans as well as between fans. The Splendor Kaohsiung has short interaction mostly between fans without the hotel joining the communication. The Splendor Taichung has short interactions between the hotel and fans as well as among fans. The Westin Taipei has short interactions between the hotel and fans but with a case of an unanswered question that pertained to sales. Agora Garden had no substantial interaction with fans by receiving “likes” but not comments. The comments and responses were all in Chinese. Minimal interaction in the pages expresses the limited connectivity to potential international customers due to language use.

An explanation of the variance is the attractiveness of the posts that may not draw that much interest from fans or visitors. Apart from interesting topics, the posts should stimulate responses that translate into comments (Burgin, 2007) that draw responses from more people to spread the message virally (Wilson, 2005) and reach international leisure travelers. Another explanation is language use. The hotels were able to connect to Chinese-speaking leisure travelers from locations outside Taiwan but interaction is poor because of the quality of posts. At the same time, posts in Chinese were unable to draw responses from foreign visitors who do not speak Chinese. In limiting posts to Chinese, the hotels exclude international travelers to hinder international eMarketing outcomes (Krishnamurthy and Singh, 2005).

4.2.8. Language use

The primary language used by the hotels in their fan pages is Chinese. All information provided and contents posted are in Chinese. Using Chinese as the primary language, the hotels were able to connect to international leisure travelers but limited to Chinese-speaking Facebook users. This means an underutilization of Facebook as an eMarketing and viral marketing tool given that the hotels in Taiwan cater to the international market, with leisure travelers as a market for expansion. Language could become a barrier to eMarketing (Harrison-Walker, 2002) and the language used in the fan pages of the hotels limits the reach of their marketing message. With this limitation, the marketing message will not be able to spread virally (Wilson, 2005) into the wider international

market of leisure travelers who do not speak Chinese. Potential international customers will not grow.

There are options within Facebook available to firms in addressing this issue. One is to create a separate but identical fan page, with similar content but with one fan page set in English. This could enable the hotels to reach out to the international market without losing existing local followers. However, this involves translation work and more effort in maintaining the fan pages. This also divides followers and limits the interaction of local and international fans. Another option is to provide Chinese and English translations in one fan page. This also involves translation work and greater time and effort while enabling interaction between locals and foreign visitors. The result could be promising with proper management of the fan page. Still another option is to use translation options through Facebook Connect, which is an added feature that enables Facebook users to connect their pages to external websites or applications. Using HTML or FBML codes, the hotels can connect their pages to translation programs or services outside of Facebook. This enables visitors to translate information and content in the fan page to their preferred language. While this offers huge potential for international eMarketing and viral marketing, there are limitations on the external programs that Facebook Connect supports. Apart from these options, the hotels should also enhance visual communication in their Facebook pages as another mode of communication. The hotels need to assess what works best given the goal to obtain international leisure visitors.

Another option outside but connected to Facebook is to use the hotel website, which comprise another venue for eMarketing. All the hotels have official websites, with hotel branches creating their respective websites, albeit connected to a global website such as for the Evergreen hotels. The official website of the hotels also provide information on services and promotions such as room rates, packages, events and other pertinent information as well as reservation service and modes of telephone and contact. The websites provide a wider range of information because of its format and design when compared to Facebook. The Evergreen Laurel Hotel Taipei and Evergreen Laurel Hotel Taichung provide online shopping service. The Agora Garden Taipei has a page featuring its bars and restaurants. The Westin Taipei has a page for meetings and weddings and wedding planner. Facebook also provides a page for information but the template limits content. The websites of the hotels have a language selection option that can translate the content of the entire website into English. Non-Chinese speaking visitors to the hotel website can view offers in English. The hotels can embed website links in its Facebook page to direct interested non-Chinese speaking visitors to the website. However, this only works for Facebook pages that appear when searched by English Facebook pages. Moreover, this still limits the ability of non-Chinese speakers to interact with the hotel and other visitors in the fan page. Use of English or mix of Chinese and English in the Facebook page appears to be a better option.

4.3. Language use in Facebook and international eMarketing outcomes

Facebook use supports international eMarketing by providing a venue for communication, interaction (Krishnamurthy and Singh, 2005; Sheth and Sharma, 2005; Wilson, 2005) and networking (Cross and Parker, 2004; Boyd and Ellison, 2007) for firms to gain and obtain market information as well as share offers to domestic and international customers. A wider network means more people viewing the offer to increase the number of potential sales. Interaction that is more dynamic also supports the likelihood of the viral spread of the marketing message through customer feedback and reports viewable to the sender’s social network and the fans of the hotel Facebook page. English is the international language that best

Table 4
Network size and reach to reflect international eMarketing outcomes of Taiwan hotels.

Size of network (fans)			
Less than 1000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Evergreen Taipei •Agora Garden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Evergreen Taipei •Agora Garden 	X
1000–2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The Westin Taipei •The Splendor Taichung 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The Westin Taipei •The Splendor Taichung 	X
2000–3000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Evergreen Taichung •The Splendor Kaohsiung Taiwan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Evergreen Taichung •The Splendor Kaohsiung 	X
	Network reach (geographic reach)	Outside Taiwan (Chinese speaker)	Outside Taiwan (non-Chinese speaker)

serves as linguistic bridge (Harrison-Walker, 2002) for marketing communication. Use of English to communicate and interact with international customers would likely lead to a wider international network that increase potential customers.

Analysis of the observed international eMarketing outcomes of Facebook use by the six hotels indicate that communication only in Chinese has hindered international eMarketing of the hotels to travelers outside of Taiwan who do not speak English. In considering network size and reach of the Facebook pages of the Taiwan hotels shown in Table 4, some hotels have bigger networks but even hotels with bigger networks have market reach limited only to customers in Taiwan and outside of Taiwan who speak Chinese. The hotels were able to establish an international network of Chinese speakers outside Taiwan. This reflects the extent of potential sales through Facebook that the hotels expect from the international market. The hotels were unable to establish an international network of non-Chinese speakers. This constitutes the untapped market that is reachable through Facebook. Size of network of casino hotels in the U.S. is three hundred times bigger than in the Taiwan hotels and network reach covers Facebook users from English speaking and non-English speaking countries. This showed that using English in Facebook by Taiwan hotels could increase network size and widen network reach to enhance potential customers and sales as international eMarketing outcomes.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The Taiwan hotels used Facebook for eMarketing. These firms have achieved success in establishing a network in the domestic market but limited success when it comes to international network, which is limited only to Chinese speakers. The hotels gained Chinese-speaking Facebook users outside of Taiwan, which constitute one-third of fans, on the average. The hotels failed to connect to the wider pool of international travelers using Chinese in their Facebook pages. Hotels in Taiwan should focus on two areas to optimize Facebook as an eMarketing tool for international leisure travelers.

Language use is the most important consideration in communicating the international eMarketing message. Facebook provided language options to encourage users speaking primary languages other than English to be involved in social networking. Selecting the local dialect works as an eMarketing tool for the domestic market. However, the six Taiwan hotels are international hotels that would benefit from attracting international leisure travelers, especially with the government campaign to bring foreign travelers into Taiwan. The use of English as primary language in the Facebook account, use of both Chinese and English in page content, having a separate but parallel Facebook account that uses English as primary language, or use of translation programs in the fan page can help users who speak and do not speak Chinese find and connect with Taiwan hotels. Hotels in other non-English speaking countries

can also optimize Facebook as an eMarketing tool by considering options in language use.

Apart from language, Taiwan hotels can draw the interest of users and translate this into potential sales by focusing on content and interaction in the fan page. Posts in the accounts of the Taiwan hotels do not always generate responses, as indication of interest. A variety of posts on games, events and promotions hosted by casino hotels in the U.S., with the content expressed in a variety of forms such as questions, dares, challenges, or promotions, generate plenty of response from consumers. There are many likes and many of the comments express excitement in visiting the hotel or satisfaction after visiting the hotel. These casino hotel fan pages are able to communicate eMarketing messages and experience the viral spread of positive feedback via the Facebook social network of fans through appropriate and interactive content that reinforce buying behavior (Krishnamurthy and Singh, 2005).

Hotels in Taiwan as well as in other countries can influence the behavior of international customers by making their wall posts more linguistically appropriate as marketing messages and more interactive for the viral spread of the message.

5.2. Recommendations

Facebook offers a wide range of opportunities for international eMarketing but the uptake of business firms is fragmented and the results differed even with similar features used. The perspective towards Facebook by hotels could explain the effort and resources employed in using this social networking site as an eMarketing tool and the manner of using Facebook to achieve eMarketing objectives. The use of Facebook by hotels depends on their perspective towards Facebook as an international eMarketing strategy. How strongly do hotels consider Facebook as an international eMarketing tool? Drawing the perspectives of a wider range of hotels is an area for expansion of the current study.

Perspectives of consumers towards the social networking site could influence the outcomes for hotels using Facebook as an eMarketing tool. It becomes important to learn if Facebook has changed the international market to the extent of influencing Facebook users to utilize the site for travel accommodation arrangements. If so, how strong is this influence? This informs on the position of Facebook as an international eMarketing tool for hotels.

In the case of hotels in Taiwan, the concerns emerging from the results of the study are language use that constitutes an encompassing factor in the effective use of Facebook as an international eMarketing strategy and perspectives towards Facebook as an eMarketing strategy that significantly limits use of this social networking site in international eMarketing. Moreover, the opportunities and outcomes may vary between large and small to medium hotels. While different hotels experience similar issues such as limited knowledge of Facebook and narrower eMarketing scope, there is need to consider the perspective not only of large international hotels but also of small and medium hotels in Taiwan

to determine common and distinct experiences and issues in the use of Facebook as an eMarketing tool.

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