

**Thai Consumer Engagement on Facebook Fan Pages:
Marketers' Perspective**

Wasupol Tresopakol¹

The objective of this study was to reflect perspectives of Thai consumer engagement marketing people who are involved with planning social media strategy. Qualitative interview was employed to gain insight from digital marketers. Data were collected in advertising agencies and marketing department in Thai companies through guided question interviews (n = 6) from May to June 2013. The findings showed that consumer engagement is the key metric of the effectiveness of Facebook fan pages rather than the number of users pressing like, sharing contents, or posting comments. Furthermore, Thai fan page users could be segmented into 4 categories by different levels of engagement and online behavior: 1) Promotion hunters, 2) Passive users, 3) Sharing users, and 4) Brand advocacy. Additionally, the digital marketers identified problems for engaging with fan page caused by consumers' mindset with commercial fan page and the vague objectives from marketers and proposed the way to increase level of engagement amongst Thai consumers by paying attention on how consumers involve with the content and brand positioning on the fan page.

Keywords: consumer engagement, fan pages, Facebook, marketer, qualitative interview, Thai consumers

¹ Ph.D. Student, Behavioral Science Research Institute, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

Introduction

In the era of digital world, the rise of social network websites and the launch of various digital devices have raised awareness of marketers to invest in the digital media in order to gain success in marketing campaigns. High interest in digital marketing reflected from the findings that American marketers spent \$42 Billion on Internet advertising in 2011. (Harden, & Heyman, 2012).

Social network websites have been becoming a new community for Thais to connect with others through digital devices. The supporting researches revealed that more than seventy-five percent of Thais, aged above 10-year-old have at least one social media account, with 18 million on Facebook (“Bangkok Post,” 2013). In addition, forty-seven percent of Thai people used mobile phone to connect to the internet and one-third of smartphone users who owned a tablet (“The Nielsen,” 2012). Similar to the global trend, many companies and brands, therefore, used Facebook to support their business activities to build brand experience with increasing number of fan page users. The most popular fan page in Thailand, so-called Ichitan, has more than 1,800,000 users (“Social Bakers,” 2013) which reflect the usefulness of Facebook website as a powerful tool and communication platform to penetrate mass consumers.

To succeed in digital marketing, many organizations desire to quantify and understand the impact of their overall online marketing activities. In perspective of digital marketers, the amount of fan page followers has been used to show awareness of users at fundamental level. Alternatively, social media monitoring tool of Facebook fan page has also implemented to figure out the performance of each fan page. These tools include have such as the number of interaction per post, or an approximate score on post quality (Levy, 2010). Nevertheless, the indicators seemed not to illustrate the performance of fan page from marketing activities obviously.

To evaluate specific fan page, Facebook marketing largely relies on real experiences with the fan page from users. To be recognized as an important indicator, digital marketers have to understand and orchestrate consumer behavior in order to monitor fan page performance. Under this light, participation or interaction with fanpage has emerged as a key measurement to understand the impact of fanpage activities on consumers’ attitude and behaviour. Participation and interaction with fan page is an

important indicator in which online marketers used for monitoring the fan page as it showed the level of consumers participation with online marketing and the social media branding process. Engagement on the social web means customers are willing to take their time and energy and interact with brands in conversation and through processes that impact the business (Evans, 2011). Sometimes, consumer engagement is used to explain the way of consumers interacting with online activities. Clader, Malthouse & Schaedel (2009) viewed consumer engagement means personal and social interactive experiences which have significantly correlated with advertising on the internet.

Despite of the growth of interest in digital marketing, it is obvious that, in the past few years, there are few researches conducted about consumer behavior, especially in Thai context. The previous studies of social media involve with general behavior on the website such as the use of website as and social network for consumer products in Thailand (Ongkrutraksa, 2011) which demonstrate how Thai consumers interacted with new media tools.

In addition, to acquire to the need to understand consumers, the existing insights which have generally stemmed from research with customers' perspectives are insufficient for making generalizations of social media strategy. Hence, this paper aims to reveal the perceptions of digital marketers in Thailand about how to create consumer engagement in Thai society. To help the management and practitioners to orchestrate online market activities, the study further explore the nature of Thai fan page users in consumers engagement process that marketers considered as relevant and influential to their online marketing activities.

Research Objectives

The aim of this research was to develop an understanding of consumer engagement with Facebook fan page and to gain new insights regarding this important area. This exploratory study uses marketers' perspective to explain how fan pages affected consumers' perception and behaviour. Thus, the study makes a theoretical contribution in three primary ways. First, a wide-ranging finding revealed how marketers implement and measure fan page performance in relationship with Thai consumer engagement. Second, the results of the field research also illustrated the character of consumers engaging with fan page. This should extend the

segmentation model of consumer by differentiating the level of engagement which can uniquely explain Thai consumers. Third, the conceptualization of consumer engagement on Facebook is shown as theoretical framework of the consumer engagement process which served as an agenda for future research in social media study.

Method

Research Questions

The method used for this study was qualitative interview. This method was selected since this is exploratory study about consumer engagement which has not been clearly explained in academic articles under the context of Facebook fan pages. The study started from four research questions, each question being asked to acquire information to serve research objectives. Therefore, the first question was: What is the importance of consumers engagement in Facebook marketing? The second question was: What are elements which contributes to consumer engagement? The third question was What is the process of consumer engagement?. Lastly, the final question was: What is the impact of consumer engagement on Facebook? All in all, the information from these four main questions is able to answer the research objectives for this study.

Data Collection and Informants

A qualitative approach was considered as the most appropriate tool to gain the data. The interviews would allow digital marketers to express their perspectives about fan page usage in their own words. A semi-structured interview was used, which allowed the informants to influence the flow of discussion with the guidance from the interviewers. Therefore, it was also possible to develop insight further through individual probing. All answers from the informants have been transcribed the verbatim. The verbatim was then analyzed by grouping all responses for content analysis

The samples consisted of six digital marketers from five companies involving in social media marketing in Thailand between March and April 2013. All informants must have been responsible for managing social media from either advertising agency or clients' side. The reason for selecting digital marketers lies in the presumption that digital marketers are people who have plenty knowledge about new technologies and understand how to implement social media for marketing purposes. The marketers

were invited to participate in a qualitative interview to express their perception towards consumer engagement. In order to reach Thai digital marketers, snowball sampling is implemented as this is a good approach to contact online marketers with trust from references. Because the amount of digital marketing people in Thailand is limited and most marketers do not allow people to interview, the researcher initiated contact with a well-known online marketer in the seminar about social media and asked the first informant to help recruit other informants.

Main Findings

The study will discuss about consumer engagement to explain the definition of consumer engagement from marketers' view and how the marketers plan social media strategy to increase consumer engagement with their fan page. In addition, the research will introduce the four main segments of fan page users in Thailand. The segments of users in fan pages also are analyzed based on their action and perception towards fan page. Finally, the findings also showed the impact of fan page on consumer behavior in relation to brands or products.

Roles of Facebook Fan Pages on Consumer Engagement

From the marketers' point of view, the role of Facebook fan page in creating consumer engagement can be divided into two areas: 1) a channel to communicate marketing messages and 2) a tool to build relationship between brands and consumers.

Generally, a Facebook fan page is viewed as one of the marketing media that integrated marketing communication. In this perspective, a Facebook fan page was identified as a specific channel used to interact with consumers in one-way communication. Facebook fan page was created to be a central page for marketers to share information or activities related with brands or products to consumers straightforwardly. Users may press like or post comments on fan page, but ultimately as it is one-way communication; they may not feel bonded with the content or the community of the fan page. The value of Facebook fan page included quick, easy, and low cost for marketing activities. Hence, the main purpose for traditional social media strategy focused on increase the amount of followers to be the audiences of fan pages as it helped Facebook fan page to be more effective marketing communication channel for their customers.

The following interviewee's statement illustrates value of social media: *"It is different from traditional media. TVC just delivers the message in one-way communication. But social media creates the relationship between brands and audiences together. Both marketers and consumers can learn each other via social media. Also, it is quick, cheap, tangible, and effective. No cost for both marketers and consumers."*

On the other hand, Facebook fan page was perceived as a brand channel to interact with consumers intimately. Facebook fan page is beneficial for marketers to create online community because marketers can play a role of administrator to interact with consumers so as to increase brand awareness, brand preference, and/or brand equity. Most informants suggested that commitment with a fan page can reflect some sort of positive perception with brands or products, in terms of brand participation and/or brand loyalty: *"We need to shift audiences from people who just like our fan page to be representative of our brands to share information to others which is more effective to create brand loyalty."* In order to tie in the brand with consumers, lifestyle content could illustrate the personality and equity of the brand which made consumers feel like talking with people whom they can trust. Some organizations implemented Facebook as a customer relationship management channel to answer customers' enquiries.

With different two perspectives, most digital marketers acknowledged that the beginning step of digital marketing is more likely to emphasize on increasing the amount of followers and use Facebook as the central channel to distribute information amongst followers. Nevertheless, the role of social media in creating the participation with brand should be taken into account at the same time because social media is considered as the most effective tool to close the gap between brands and consumers via different platforms.

Types of Consumer Engagement on Fan Page

All informants agreed that consumer engagement was very important to measure the effectiveness of fan page. The combination between the data from social media monitoring tool and level of engagement was necessary to be the key indicator of the successful of Facebook marketing.

Fundamentally, the main objective of using fan page as marketing channel is to reach mass consumers. Therefore, marketers used the amount of fan page users to measure the performance of fan page. Nevertheless, the

number of followers is not valuable for marketers to evaluate the effectiveness of fan page. Most marketers claimed to use social monitoring tools to measure the performance of fan page such as Zocialeyes, Facebook insights, or Sentiment metric. For example, “Talking about This” was the indicator from Facebook Insight to portray the number of users who generated a “story” about a page in a seven-day period. The data from these tools included the number of people talking about brands, and the amount of consumers pressing like or posting comments on fan page.

However, increasing number of fan page followers and the data from social monitoring tools did not mirror the real picture of followers’ perception towards fan page as some users may have specific purposes to join the fan page without any interest in brands or products: *“The amount of people who join the fan page cannot say anything to me. It is obsolete. Sometimes we use talking about this to understand how consumers bond with fan page”* All marketers agreed that consumer engagement can be developed to be the indicator to reflect the effectiveness of fan page but more importantly, the effectiveness of fan page should not be illustrate from one single dimension. The combination of consumer engagement should relate with the feeling, interaction and participation. From the research findings, the characteristics of engagement can be divided into four main elements based on the features users engaged with.

Engage with content generated by other members: According to the Nielsen (2009), during shopping behaviour online people are convinced by others’ recommendations more than trusted forms of advertising. In accordance with Thai environment, comments or recommendations from other users are very crucial to make purchase decision, especially information from other members on the fan page. Marketers revealed that the content generated by others is an integral part of consumer engagement since most users intend to consume information about brands or products and perceived comments from other consumers who have similar interest or needs as trustable and reliable. Therefore, most followers mainly focus on the information from others either positive or negative sides for their purchase decision. Measuring the frequency of interaction and level of relevancy with the information from other members can indicate the level of consumer engagement.

Engage with content from administrator: Content from administrator have the impact on consumer behaviour into two main issues. 1) Informative issues. The main purpose of following fan page is to gain

specific information to support their enquiries or to solve problems. It is important for marketers to produce relevant information in line with consumers' need to increase level of interest in fan page. The successfulness of fan page seems to be considered based on how fan page can reach consumers and intention that administrator desire to communicate with. The way consumers response and react with content on fan pages can reflect level of engagement with fanpage. 2) Branding issues. Since content is able to be managed and designed by administrators or digital marketers, communication platforms on fan pages delivered to consumers influenced perception towards brand. Fan page administrator played role as brand channel to interact with consumers. Lifestyle content from reachable and intimate brand was seen to be relevant to consumers and led to more active and participation in content on fan page. Therefore, brand engagement from the fan page in term of brand preference, brand loyalty, or brand equity is considered as the essential goals of digital marketing that determine consumer engagement as well: *"People need to speak with someone who has the same lifestyle. Hence, administrators have to deliver the message to consumer in conversational way via Facebook fanpage"*

Engage with other members: Basic feature of fan page helps users to meet other people who have similar life or lifestyle which benefits to marketers who have developed brand communities through fan page. Ability for customers to share and discuss about experience for product usage or brands through fan page is very effective to create brand boding from social engagement. In other words, conspicuous display of peer-to-peer engagement amongst brand communities is a deeply ingrained feature of communities and is generally seen as a prime indicator of consumer participation with fan page. To see these benefits, marketers must cultivate relationships amongst their consumers over the long term. Further, users engaging with others may contribute to the participation with marketing activities in the real world.

Engage with offline activities: Fan page provides marketers with an opportunity to encourage consumers to participate with marketing campaign in the real world. Since social media were still considered as one of marketing channels in the integrated market, communication, consumer behaviour evolved to the reality of marketing campaigns was the sign of engagement with fan page. To understand consumer engagement, marketers should move away from a singular focus on online campaign and more towards on the engagement with offline marketing activities:

“Designing digital marketing strategy must relate with the campaign in the real world. Sometime we use fan page to encourage people to join the activities in the real world”

Segment of Fan Page Users

From the qualitative findings, it was possible to tentatively segment fan page users into four key groups according to their level of engagement.

Promotion hunters are characteristically as the lowest engaged fan page users. Members of this segment are more likely to join fan page so as to obtain prize, promotion, or discount from fan page. After the promotion campaign was terminated, this type of consumers had tendency to leave or ignored using the fan page continually. This group denied being interested in interacting with other members and the content appeared on fan page which does not relate with promotional benefits. Marketers believed that the consequence of promotional social media strategy increase this type of consumers to exist on fan page.

Passive users are more active in their use of fan page than promotion hunters but they are more quite than any groups. This group occasionally visited their interesting fan page and may feel good with some elements on fan page such as images or clip VDO. This type of groups was at the first level of consumer engagement. In order to re-visit fan pages, fan page activities from marketers are required to persuade the group to feel participated. Despite their inactivity on fan page, this group was very large amongst Thai online consumers: *“Thai people are not proactive to post or express their feeling. Most Thai like observing and consuming information only.”*

Sharing users tended to use fan page in connection with their interests, lifestyle, or experiences with products or brands. This type of group was likely to frequently visit their brand fan page and made their own content to express knowledge and participation about brands or products on the community group. Level of their engagement on the fan page is higher than passive users as measured by activities or frequency of actions on fan page such as pressing like and/or sharing comments with others. This type of group involved with any specific content and take action to show their personal identities with other members on fan page.

Brand advocacy group was built by strong bonding with fan page and brand. According to their preference with brand and fan page, this

segment played role as brand representative to be highly influential other members and build social network on fan page. Since they have plenty of knowledge and are positive with brands or products, behavioral engagement was displayed by greater amount of positive actions on fan page such as recommending products/services to others, suggesting the solution when other members having problems. This group is ultimately valuable for marketers in developing digital marketing because they refer products or brands across their communities both online and offline world. However, brand advocacy group was still very niche in Thai society: *“It is very difficult to have this group on your fanpage as they must feel extremely good with brand. But we need to have this type of people on your fan page”*

Impact of consumer engagement on purchasing intention

Engagement between consumers and fan page had a strong impact on consumer behaviour. Marketers pointed out that the outcome from digital marketing did not merely relate with purchasing behaviour. More importantly, the affiliation with brand is the achievement of digital marketing. Since fan page was seen as the channel for marketers to communicate in conversational style, the primary objective of using fan page in digital marketing emphasized on consumers bonding with brand by sharing their life or their lifestyle content with other members in order to make consumers think with fan pages like friends’ communities.

Although purchasing behaviour is an ultimate goal for marketing, it is not merely the consequence of Facebook activities. Marketers believed that consumer engagement with fan page activities was influential their mindset in making decision for their next purchase or recommendation brands or products to others.

Conclusion

From the qualitative findings, consumer engagement could be a meaningful dimension in evaluating the performance of fan page since it can judge consumer behaviour based on the feeling and action of users on fan page. It is clear that online engagement under Thai environment involved with participation on fan page which administrator plays role as a brand ambassador. In the past study, Mollen and Wilson (2010) proposed the definition of engagement in relation with the commitment as well as Thai digital marketers. Online engagement is defined as a cognitive and

affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities.

In order to clearly illustrate consumer engagement process, digital marketers proposed that new fanpage users have largely expectation from the content on the page and therefore establish expectation sets according to their perception towards fan page from different sources. In digital marketers' perspective, the starting process of engagement on fan page should initiate by users themselves rather than promotion appeared on fan pages because it encourages consumers to more involved with fan page and preferable with brands. Then, in terms of fanpage evaluation, consumers were gradually interacted with different contents both from other members and administrators.

Perception of likelihood to engage with fan page relates directly with the value that consumers think about fan pages. The approach of evaluation is considered based on value of content and relevancy of the content. High value of the content supports consumers when making decision in the real world. The focus of relevancy evaluation relies on potential of content to meet their expectation before pressing like on the fanpage whatever related with promotion, reward, or information. Satisfaction with the content from these two elements is subsequently directed at building a sense of engagement in the short period. In the long run, consumer engagement is more involved with more participation with the contents, members, or online activities which initiate a state of enduring fan page engagement.

In addition, the definition of consumer engagement should be derived from the outcome from social media marketing. Engaging with content on fan page and feeling good with the specific content is a natural part of growing up consumer engagement. Four potential outcomes from consumer engagement possibly take place from the assessment of the content, including 1) Frequency of interaction with dynamic of the content leading to induce consumers to visit the page again. Need of users to consume information related with their life and lifestyle is very important to create repeat visiting on fan page. 2) Experience during beyond their expectation in the first lead to a sense of affinity with the fan page. 3) Responding action with other members and comments either positive or negative sides reflected the commitment with the fan page, and 4) Relationship with brand from the fanpage can determine the development of more affective form of participation and consequence in intention to

purchase products or services in the real world. More refined and multidimensional measures of brand-related behaviour could also help to bolster the strength of relationship between fan page and users' behaviour as it is the consequence of social media strategy to bond between brand and users.

Specifically, consumer engagement with the fan page is the consequence of marketers to manage their relationship with small group of brand communities through the interaction between users and content. In line with the perspective from expertise in marketing, Keller (2009) believe that interactive marketing communications such as social media have a distinct advantage in their ability to encourage learning, teaching expression of commitment, and observation of brand loyalty amongst consumers. Eventually, it is not necessary for digital marketers to build purchasing behaviours amongst fan page users. The purpose of building consumer engagement with fan page mainly emphasize on creating the good relationship between brands and consumers.

Limitation and Future Research

In the analysis of consumer engagement through marketers' perspective, it can be concluded from the findings that consumer engagement for Thai people is very effective when participating with either content or brand characteristics. Marketers did not consider the effectiveness of Facebook fan page merely counted on the amount of users who join or participate with the fan page, but more importantly, the level of bonding with the brand from fan page usage is the key indicator which can reflect life and lifestyle.

Amongst all consumer groups, marketers suggest the solution to increase level of engagement with fan page in a different way. For promotion hunters, marketers should provide relevant information with rewards or prize resulted from engaging with content on fan page in order to turn this type of groups to see the value of content on fan page. Passive and sharing users who are more engaged primarily are also influenced by other members' feedback and online community. Coping mechanism to encourage these groups to be more participated focused on how consumers engage with other members and join the online groups to be a part of brand community which strengthen relationship with brand. The relationship between fan page and brand advocacy should be maintained and increase

their loyalty to brand by developing this segment to be opinion leader for online community in the long term.

Nevertheless, the research has its own limitation. This study needs to be emphasized that qualitative interviews help us to conceptualize a general picture of consumer engagement, yet they were not enough to build a theory of consumer engagement that determines Thai consumers to feel commit with brand or purchase products from Facebook fan page. Quantitative study with all fan page users to extend the model of online engagement should be explored further to complete the analysis for consumer engagement.

Reference

- Bangkok Post. (2013). *18 Million Thais Use Social Media*. Retrieved on 9 June, 2013 from <http://www.bangkokpost.com/business/telecom/349940/18-million-thais-now-on-social-media>.
- Calder, B., Malthouse, E., and Schaedel, U. (2009). An Experimental Study of the Relationship between Online Engagement and Advertising Effectiveness. *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 23(4), 321-331.
- Evans, D. (2011). *Social Media Marketing: the Next Generation of Business Engagement*. Canada: Wiley.
- Harden, L., and Heyman, B. (2012). *Digital Engagement: Internet Marketing that Capture Customers and Builds Intense Brand Loyalty*. the Unites States: AMACOM.
- Keller, K. (2009). Building Strong Brands in a Modern Marketing Communications Environment. *Journal of Marketing Communications* 15(2), 139-155.
- Levy, J.R. (2010). *Facebook Marketing Designing Your Next Marketing Campagin*. The United States, QUE.
- Mollen, A., and Wilson, H. (2010). Engagement, Telepresence and Interactivity in Online Consumer Experience: Reconciling Scholastic and Managerial Perspectives. *Journal of Business Research*, 63: 919-925.

- Ongkrutraksa, W. (2011). The Use of Websites and Social Networks for Consumer Products in Thailand. *Proceedings of the American Society of Business and Behavioral Sciences 2011*, February 22-27, 2011, Las Vegas, the United State. Retrieved on 5 June, 2013 from asbbs.org/files/2011/ASBBS2011v1/PDF/O/OngkrutraksaW.pdf.
- Socialbakers Heart of Facebook Statistics. (2013). *Thailand Facebook Statistics*. Retrieved on 5 May, 2013 from <http://www.socialbakers.com/Facebook-statistics/thailand>.
- The Nielsen Corporation. (2009). *Global Advertising Consumers Trust Real Friends and Virtual Strangers the Most*. Retrieved on 9 June, 2013 from <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/newswire/2009/global-advertising-consumers-trust-real-friends-and-virtual-strangers-the-most.html>
- The Nielsen Corporation. (2012). *Smartphone Ownership on the Rise in Asia Pacific, whilst Advertisers Struggle to Engage with Consumers via Mobile Ads*. Retrieved on 9 June, 2013 from http://jp.en.nielsen.com/site/documents/SPImr-jun12_FINAL.pdf.