Research Article

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Restaurant advertisement through social media: Examining followers' responses

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Abstract

The use of social networking (social media), electronic media (website) and word of mouths are among the approaches used by restaurant operators to advertise the restaurant as compared to conventional methods. Information through promotional advertisement can be spread online and customers mostly interested in social interaction and information seeking when using social media. This study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of restaurant advertising through social media in Dungun, Terengganu by examining the restaurants follower's responses. Five restaurants with their own official social media platform (Instagram) were selected for this study. Using content analysis approach, this study recorded the number of 'likes' that each of the five restaurants obtained in their promotional advertisement on Instagram. Results showed that the use of Instagram did have a positive impact on the restaurant advertising especially those with interesting food pictures and value for money promotions. It is recommended that other perspectives should also be examine in future research to seek the relationship between social media 'likes' and restaurant sales, growth and how restaurants respond to customers' feedbacks online.

Keywords:

Social media, restaurant advertising, response

1   Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

There are many ways to advertise a restaurant, such as social networking (social media), electronic media (printing) and word of mouths (Romaniuk & Hartnett, 2017). The use of printed media has been benefited restaurants in previous decade to reach larger audiences and potential customers. However, the wide use of internet technology has taken over the job. For example, internet allows the distribution and spread of advertisements very much quicker than the conventional mode. One of the most effective development of the internet technology is the birth of social media platforms. Iinternet and social media plays an important role in connecting with customers and enticing new customers in shorter period of time. The use of social media is still regarded as an alternative in promoting hospitality related businesses although the awareness of its effectiveness has increased (Anderson, 2012; Leung, van Hoof, & Buhalis 2013).

Today, restaurant operators much prefer to use social media because it is easy and quick for their product and service information to reach the customers. Information which includes promotional advertisement can be spread online at the tip of the finger. The success of advertising is depending on uniqueness, popularity and variety of menus that attract customer to come to the restaurant. Customers' responses in the forms of advertising persuasion, including attitude towards advertising and brand behavioral intentions include purchase intention and willingness to pay (Carson, Gilmore, & Maclaran, 1998). Using this social media advertising, it can change customers' minds in choosing their preferred restaurant.

1.2 Problem statement

How restaurant advertising can affect the preference of the customer to choose the best restaurant? Definitely, advertising using social media plays an importance role influencing customers' dining choice. Social media provided early information about the food and other promotional campaign to the customers through the pictures and descriptions they uploaded in the sites. In fact, if the restaurant managers want to make their customer satisfied with their services and product, they need to come out with the attractive menu, palatability and appearance of the menu and presented them in the social media such as in Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media applications. In 2010, the trend of using visuals on social media started to rise with the introduction of the Instagram application which focused on photography rather than written statuses (Cady, 2016). Currently, Instagram application is one of the most popular social media applications, with user friendly features to capture photo's, customize them and share with the followers (Middelesch, 2017).

Undeniably, the impact of user generated content by social media on a customer's decision making is well recognized in numerous market studies. DEI Worldwide (2008) stated that 70% of customers have visited social media sites to get information and 49% of them have made a purchase decision based on the information they found through the social media. In addition, on social media platforms, the customers as well as potential customer will discuss the products or services they experience. According to Ayeh, Au and Law (2012), through social media, customers are more eager to share their experiences so that marketers understand what they really expect from the services offered. At this point, marketers may involve and interact with their customers, either in formally or informally (Bergström & Bäckman, 2013; Erkan, 2015). Besides, with this platform, the restaurateurs either able to prevent negative comments or feedback before it goes viral; and able to start positive response through providing accurate content (Erkan, 2015).

On the other hand, in choosing a restaurant, the potential customers rely on information derived from social media through photos uploaded, 'share' button, 'like' button and comments (Anderson & Magruder, 2012; Tan & Loo, 2014). The users can view the location of the restaurant through the location or "check in" features as they often use social media to find restaurant locations, reviews and nutritional information (Storms, 2014). Zheng (2012) stated that the advancement in technologies, allow customers to use location data with existing online social networks in a diversity of ways. The gap between the physical world and online social networking services is accommodatingly bridged by this dimension of location. It created a platform where information can be shared easily between users, followers and potential customers.

Thus, this research was intended to examine the extend of the social media applications specifically Instagram application, that effectively could help restaurants in promoting their products and services in five selected restaurant in Dungun, Terengganu. Through the participation of customers in the social media advertisement, it could be used as a platform for restaurant to retain their customers and at the same time, attract new customers. Direct advertisement through the applications will also help in encouraging more creative advertisement as the restaurant operators can also see and monitor what their competitors are doing in an instant. Therefore, the foundation of this research was built around the following two main research objectives:

i. To investigate the effectiveness of restaurant advertising through Instagram application.
ii. To examine the Instagram followers' awareness on the restaurants' new advertisement.

This study provides information about the restaurant advertising via social media. It basically looks at the effectiveness of the advertisements created by restaurant operator in the Instagram application. The significance of the study can be

divided into academic and industrial significance. Significant for industrial use can be seen as an indicator for the restaurant to know what are the important factors in advertising, and how they would be able to come up with improvements that will enable them to serve their customers better. It also serves as the reference point for other similar hospitality operations to increase their customer awareness level. In addition, this study will also provide a guideline to those who want to gain knowledge about advertising their business in social media. Using social media to entice restaurant advertisements may change the way people do their marketing strategy in the business.

On the other hand, the academic gain for this research will enable researcher and academics to use the study as the reference and for gathering information for similar problems that comes up in the future. It can be used as the teaching materials for providing more knowledge on the impact of social media in promoting a restaurant's product and services. This study can provide evidence of how in today's technological advancement, restaurants should take advantage of its huge potential in enhancing restaurant business marketing. This research may resolve a few theoretical questions in a particular area which include the effectiveness of the restaurant advertising campaign in different demographic characteristics and the extent of the social media in providing feedback and awareness from the customers and followers.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Restaurant advertisement

The restaurant is defined as a medium that provide meal for those who are away from home. There are five major restaurant industries which is quick service restaurant or fast food, fine dining, fast casual, midscale restaurant, and a moderate restaurant (Canziani, Almanza, Frash, McKeig, & Sullivan-Reid, 2016). With the fastest growing of restaurant industry lead to the rise of dining out and take away in public. The trend of dining out are start increase due to the limited time for the meal preparation, the shift in Malaysian food expenditure patterns and urbanization arising from economic growth (Heng & Guan, 2007). Thus, all these factors create demands from potential customers and provide great business opportunities for the restaurant operators to expand their business. Due to different market demand and different restaurant location, therefore advertising may need a different approach to entice local customers and the other may be different (Al-Olayan & Karande, 2000).

In order to attract customers, promotion plays a vital in attracting and persuades customers to come as first timer or repeat customer. There are several ways to promote the restaurant business, for instance is using advertisement. Advertising that delivers message straight to the point, catchy and easy to understand will influence purchasing intention or experience the service in that restaurant. Finding a potential customer for advertising is not difficult, but getting potential customer to pay

attention was harder because the advertisement itself needs to be interested in order to attract the customer. In the conventional methods, newspaper, television and billboard advertising are the most common way of doing it (Wang, 2003). However, in today's world of information technology and gadgets, restaurant advertisement took a step forward by using social networking sites (SNS) as their marketing and promotional platform (Hanaysha, 2016). The social networking sites or better known as social media consist of hundreds of different applications that offer various modes and ease of use (Wang, 2003).

2.2 Social media

Social media is a platform to connect people in various ways, as the users can share their experience, opportunity, thought and idea in any medium such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, WeChat, and others. Through this medium, restaurant operators can take advantage by using several social media for business purposes, such as advertisement and promotions of the restaurant (Seunghyun, Yoon, Jaemin, & Seoki, 2015). In addition, almost 93% of marketers use social media for their business as it is easy to spread the information to the users or customers (Bennett, 2013). Furthermore, Needles and Thompson (2013) mentioned that social media is also shifting several aspects of restaurant operations, including marketing promotions and customer relations as it is requiring a different approach than traditional marketing. Moreover, advertising in social media also provide a great medium of quick delivering of information as well as reach numerous numbers of potential customers. The restaurant managers can search thousands of available information, allowing them to learn what customers are saying about their restaurant and to take advantage of opportunities to redeem service failures and improve performance. Well managed social media sites can create a virtual relationship with existing customers or convince a first-time customer to dine in at the restaurant (Needles & Thompson, 2013).

Even though marketers agreed that social media is one of the powerful mediums to engage with their customers, they, simultaneously, won't deny the facts that marketing thru social media also brings critical challenge to the business (Ayeh et al., 2012). Several reasons were given to this viewpoint. Since advertisement posted on the social media is no longer controlled by marketers, they described social media as difficult to monitor. For instance, It is such a marketing failure when the ads posted thru this platform causes unease to some of the customers that later translates to bad word of mouth among them; a possibility that could happen and beyond the marketers' control. Furthermore, the social media do allow users to post message without guidance and strict regulation (Kaplan & Heinlein, 2010). This further exacerbating the situation since it will create a loophole where fake social media users can leave dubious comments, testimony and feedbacks regarding the ads. This will bring unnecessary trouble to the marketers and may ultimately cost the business if not been handled thoroughly.

2.2.1 *Instagram*

In 2010, Instagram was created as a medium of an online photo-sharing and social networking service that allows users to take pictures, apply digital filters to them, associate a location with each picture and share them with a variety of social networking services, such as Facebook or Twitter. Users can upload pictures, attach their Instagram account to other social networking services, and follow other users' feeds. Currently, Instagram users can create web profiles featuring recently shared pictures, biographical information, and other personal details (Silva, Vaz de Melo, Almeida, Salles, & Loureiro, 2013). With over 200 million active monthly members, 20 billion shared photos, 1.6 billion 'likes' daily, and 60 million average photos uploaded a day, Instagram, is conceivably the most popular image-based social media for smartphones (Salleh, Hashima, & Murphy, 2015).

Instagram is one of the social media medium which works on the basis of photo sharing with reduced size as compared to other social media apps (Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015). People much prefer to use Instagram because the business advertisement will be widely spread through word of mouth (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Besides, an Instagram proved that "image speak louder than words" and how its simplicity and direct link between business and customer showed positive attributes (Lee et al., 2015). Moreover, Silva et al. (2013) stated that some of those social networks share location-related information, which it might influence other people to decide their activity preferences based on what they saw on Instagram.

2.3 Impact of social media on restaurant advertising

Kim, Koh, Cha and Lee (2015) stated that, the major impact of social media toward restaurant advertising because almost 93% of entrepreneurs is using social media for their business. According to the research, the restaurant industry is one of the frequent use social media for the purpose of their business, as it is an effective medium for advertisement and promotion. For the entrepreneurial perspective, an important research was identified at least two significant sources of competitive advantage result the restaurants successfully when implements social media strategy. Social media also can build a platform for customer to make a report or survey about their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the restaurant services or products. Reviews made by customers through social media can be categorized into three elements; the number of reviews, positive reviews and negative reviews (Kim, Li, & Brymer, 2016).

Other than that, social media also allow some business of the restaurant to have a higher predictability to win or lose for any product or services provided. Social media also a major source for marketing information on customer experiences of their product or service provided then. Jenn (2017) stated that with more than 200 million posts tagged #food and 23 million with #drinks, food and beverage photos are easily

some of the most popular types of content on Instagram. Moreover, an interactive social media communication between customers and companies, as well as among customer that provides a platform to exchange idea, information, and also opinion. At this stage, the customers are freely posting any picture of the restaurant, the foods, the décor and so on.

Social media advertising of the restaurant can actually increase the brand image of the restaurant (Hanaysha, 2016). He further explained how brand equity of the restaurant plays an important role in attracting new customers and retaining existing customers. If the restaurant is able to retain their customers, the loyalty will increase (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). Besides, this channel provides 'virtual word of mouth' as supported by Sprout Social Index (2016), which reported that 75% of people purchased a product because they saw it on social media. Of that percentage, 60.7% need to see a post 2-4 times from the company before making a purchase. The positive impact of social media advertising for restaurant proved to be a vital necessity for restaurant operators regardless of their locations. In order to compete with other restaurants, the manager should create competitive advantage and make the restaurant, especially the food visibly active on social media, as it is the medium with large customer base.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

Quantitative is used to examine an issue or providing answers through numerical data and that result can be used to support the research findings (Bryman, 2012). Quantitative research is used to understand issues in the study through the analysis of numbers and providing a sound understanding of how people behave, their attitudes, and other variables, thus can be generalized to represent the whole population (Sekaran, 2003). This research chose quantitative for several reasons. The nature of quantitative research is more structured and involved patterns of data which will be used to understand the phenomena in study (Sekaran, 2003). Quantitative data collection typically involved several forms of methods which include surveys, polls, interviews and systematic observations (Bryman, 2012).

3.2 Population and sample size

3.2.1 Population

The targeted populations in this study are the restaurants situated along the beach of Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia. The reason for doing that is because of their non-urban location which will provide new insights on how social media will affect its business growth, which is contrary to the traditional understanding of the importance

of good restaurant location. A total of 12 restaurants and food stalls was identified and further selection was done to narrow down the sample.

3.2.2   Sample size

In the end, the sample was five restaurants. This is because these five restaurants are actively using their Instagram account to promote their restaurant, menu and served as their official page for their customers in Dungun, Terengganu. The characteristic of the restaurants chosen was based on the nature of business and the size of the restaurant apart from their official Instagram page. The Instagram was chosen because of its frequent use and similarity between the five restaurants. All five restaurants chosen in this study preferred to use Instagram social media as compared to other social media platforms. Their Instagram page recorded a more active customers' and followers' participation in providing responses as compared to other social media applications.

3.3 Data collection

In this study, as content analysis was chosen as the main study approach, the primary instrument used was the Instagram social media app of the five restaurants. The Instagram pages were observed throughout the period of eight weeks starting from 01 April 2017 until 26 May 2017. Throughout this period, the researcher observed, followed, and recorded the responses given by the restaurant's followers and customers. This can be seen through the number of 'like' or 'heart symbol' (meaning their preferences on the pictures) clicked by their followers on each posting pages. They will contribute their favour on the post uploaded by the restaurant operator by giving the number of 'likes' in the official Instagram page on a daily basis throughout the fieldwork process.

3.4 Data analysis

The analysis of the data gathered and recorded throughout the fieldwork process (eight weeks of Instagram page observation) will involve a recording the frequency of the 'like'. All of the data recorded will be tabled out and analyzed based on weeks and restaurants involved. Presentation of results in a form of table, and histogram charts were used. From the data gathered, a content analysis approach was used to describe the data and transforming them to address the research objectives. The customers' response (number of 'like') represent their appreciation and preferences on the photos posted, thus, serves as an indication of restaurant's effective promotion and advertisement effort. Their presence and awareness helped to entice other Instagram followers and new followers to view the page thus have the intention to dine, follow the page or spread the news. It will eventually serve as an efficient mode of advertising as it takes less time and cost to do so.

4 Findings

Table 1 showed the frequency of responses from the restaurant customers throughout the eight weeks of the fieldwork process. It can be seen from the following table that over the eight weeks, the five restaurants' Instagram pages recorded a significant number of 'like' and its increasing patterns. It was also observed that in most occasions, followers provided positive comments and recommendations on the postings. The detail explanations of the findings are as follows.

Table 1: Overall responses - number of 'like' (or displayed as 'heart symbol' in Instagram)

Week	Restaurant HH	Restaurant MM	Restaurant PC	Restaurant TD	Restaurant CC
Week 1	167	161	43	116	86
Week 2	148	383	-	34	65
Week 3	115	308	195	51	150
Week 4	196	-	-	27	96
Week 5	127	456	241	79	183
Week 6	167	423	236	115	100
Week 7	417	75	210	172	70
week 8	267	83	-	74	14
TOTAL	1604	1889	925	668	764

Table 1 shows the number of 'like' of restaurant advertising in Instagram. For the first week, the higher number of 'like' is restaurant HH. This is because restaurant HH has made promotion and post the promotion to attract the customer to like their Instagram account. For week second and third, the higher percentage of 'like' was Restaurants MM, they come out with their new menu which is wagyu meat. They also post two or three time every day. The higher percentage for week four was Restaurant HH because at their restaurant, they often organised birthday celebrations. They posted more than one time per day. From that, people notice their postings and give 'like'.

For week fifth and week sixth, the higher percentage of 'like' was Restaurant MM, they post a variety of menu. People like them because they want to experience the menu. For week seventh, the higher percentage of number of 'like' was Restaurants HH, this because they give half price to their menu, people attract with their strategy of marketing advertising. They post an attractive picture of their dish with price. For the last week which is week eighth, the higher percentage of number of 'like' was Restaurants HH, they post attractive picture of the dish not the menu board that they usually post.

The data from Figure 1 showed that most restaurants in this study gained highest 'like'. Overall, Restaurant MM recorded a consistent high number of 'like' and the

restaurant also was found to have the highest number of 'like' in Week 2, Week 3, Week 5, and Week 6. The second highest was Restaurant HH which they recorded a steady high number of 'like'. Restaurant HH also found to have the highest number of 'like' on Week 1, Week 4, Week 7, and Week 8. The other restaurants showed a mixed response. Restaurant PC was found to be the most inconsistent in obtaining 'like'. The highest number of 'like' for Restaurant PC was week 5 and lowest was week 2. For Restaurant TD, the highest number of 'like' was 7 and the lowest was week 4 and lastly, Restaurant C, the highest 'like' was week 5 and the lowest was week 8.

4.1 Discussion

From the data obtained in the previous chapter, several interesting points can be highlighted. Firstly, the upward trend of number of 'like' in the Instagram page could be influenced by various contributing factors. One of the main factors is the visual appeal of the photos and descriptions provided in the post that directly encourages followers to click on the 'like' button (displayed as heart symbol). The other factor is the promotions itself. For some occasions, the promotions were seen to be very attractive with affordable pricing displayed on the page. Therefore, it adds to customers' intention to like the post.

In addition, frequency of promotions uploaded on the Instagram page actually determines the number of 'like' obtained from their followers. The result showed that daily posting of advertisement did not encourage more 'like'; it was more of a steady pattern of 'like'. This maybe because the followers were reluctant to show their preferences in an often manner and their reactions to frequent posts were normal as other days. However, advertisement uploaded in between several days and weeks showed the highest number of 'like' for each post. This is possibly because followers or restaurant customers were eagerly waiting for a new advertisement and promotions. After a few days of waiting, new posting of restaurant advertisement resulted in a higher number of 'like' and at certain points, positive comments from the followers and customers.
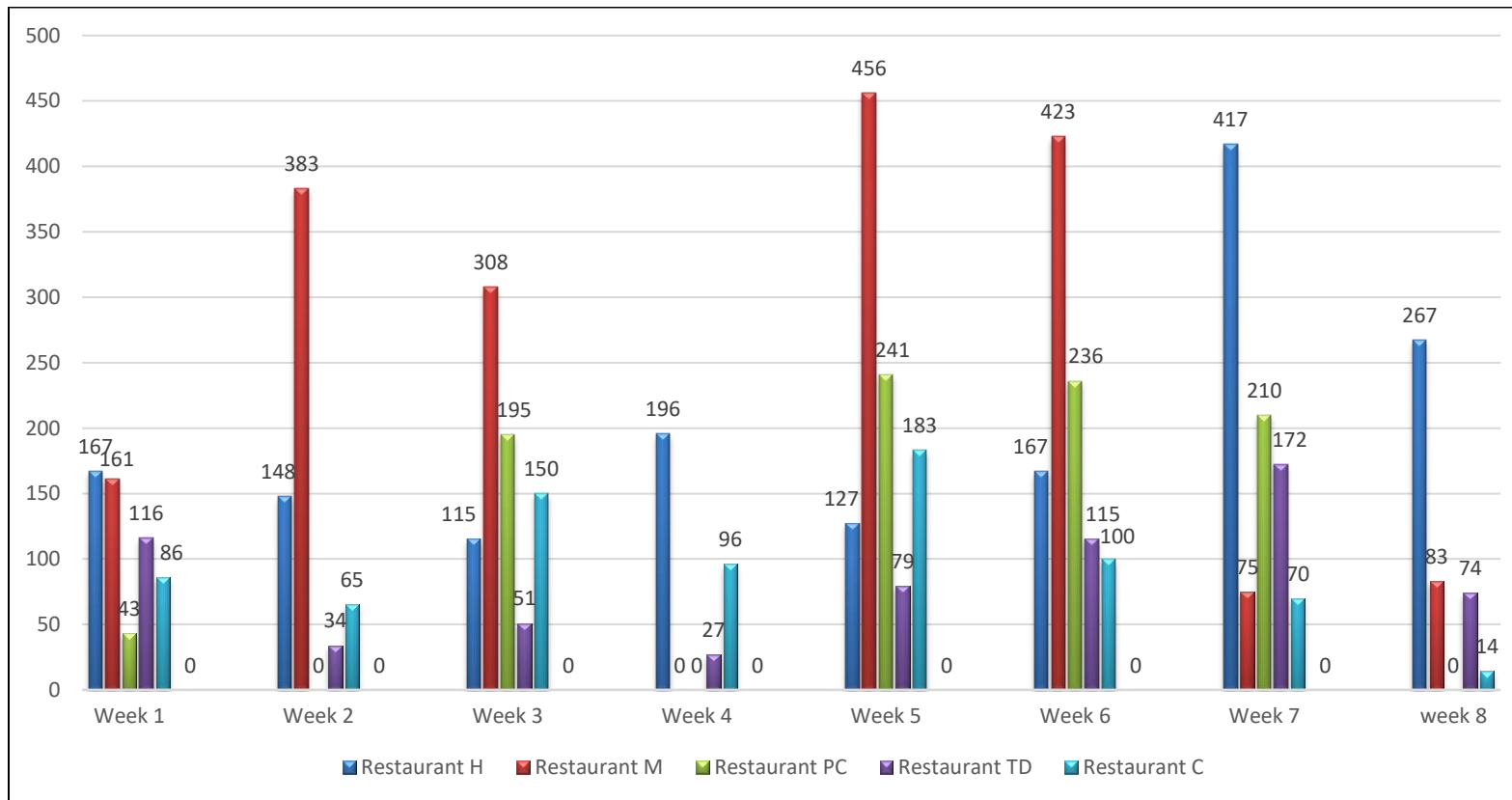
Figure 1: Comparison of 'like' for the five restaurants in Instagram

5 Conclusion

The effectiveness of restaurant advertising depends on several factors. One the factor is the method used to reach the customers. In today's business environment, it can be said that the use of internet is a vital factor that facilitate the marketing effort to create and increase restaurant brand's presence and customers' awareness of their products and services. The use of social media to promote a restaurant's product and services is seen to be increasingly accepted by the internet users and widely used by restaurant operators. This trend could alter the existing knowledge on restaurant marketing and how conventional approaches were no longer being the sole marketing tool. The increased number of 'like' can be used to measure the effectiveness of restaurant promotions and advertisements. It is recommended that further study to be done and examining the other dimensions and effects of social media such as Instagram to understand how it could affect the restaurants' sales, growth and how they respond to various types of customers' feedback online.

6 About the authors

Nurul Hamizah Salleh is currently a B.Sc. (Hons) Foodservice Management student in Universiti Teknologi MARA Terengganu. This research was initially started by her as she was interested in finding out the effectiveness of social media in promoting restaurants in remote areas or non-urban areas.

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