



THE ACCOMMODATION OF LINGUISTIC STYLES ON SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND POSTINGS TOWARDS CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT DURING PANDEMIC: A CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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ABSTRACT

Business owners regularly attempt to encourage customers' engagement by posting messages on social media platforms, but the messages are often ignored. In this paper, the researcher will investigate how linguistic styles of brand posts on social media brand page influence customers' engagement. Drawing on the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) the researcher proposes that adapting to general social media linguistic styles namely emotionality, complexity and informality in brand posts could be an efficient and practical approach to enhance customers' engagement among business practitioners. The findings of this paper will improve the understanding of the role that language plays in brand communications on social media by signifying that customers' engagement could be enhanced through employing proper linguistic style in social media page postings.

Keywords: linguistic styles, consumer engagement, social media, page postings.

1. INTRODUCTION

The advent of social media as a potential tool for brands and customers' interaction is becoming an integral part of the marketing communication. Owing to the rising of COVID-19, many businesses are diversifying their sales and marketing channels through social media. Thus, it is common for brands to create social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages for them to actively network with customers via likes, shares and comments. However, enhancing customer engagement with brand postings on social media is challenging to marketers as it is unclear how they can strategically construct their linguistic styles to facilitate consumer engagement activities on social media. Consequently, it is very crucial to understand the ability of accommodating

linguistic styles in brands page postings. In this paper, the researcher will examine the linguistic style effects on brand selection and the brand selection effects on customer engagement.

Drawing on the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), the researcher proposes that tailoring brand postings to general social media linguistic styles namely emotionality, complexity and informality could be an efficient and practical approach to enhance customers' engagement. The researcher has selected Facebook page as a research context because it is the most popular social media marketing communication channel worldwide. Furthermore, data extracted from interviews is selected as a qualitative approach for this study not only due to its fertility in dyadic interactions but also because it poses new challenges to the CAT in term of robustness. The findings of this paper will improve our understanding of the role that language plays in brand-customer communications on social media as well as providing guidelines for marketers on how to strategize engaging brand postings from the linguistic standpoint for the survival, growth and sustenance of a business.

Research Objectives

- a) To examine linguistic style effect on brand selection
- b) To investigate the brand selection effect on customer engagement

Research Questions

- a) How linguistic style influences the brand selection?
- b) Is there a mediating effect of brand selection in the relationship between linguistic style and customer engagement?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Importance of Social Media

Social media has transformed the way brands and customers interact with one another and has become an essential aspect of marketing communication (R. Dolan, J. Conduit, J. Fahy, and S. Goodman, 2016). Brands are increasingly using social media accounts like Facebook brand pages, Twitter, and Instagram to communicate with customers on a regular basis by generating engaging page postings. Customers can like, share and comment on posts to follow brands and actively network with them. As the popularity of social media platforms grows, it becomes progressively necessary and crucial for researchers and practitioners to expand their knowledge of how these platforms deliver value to customers and platform providers. This is because user engagement as a key indicator of sales success is vital to a company's survival, growth, and sustainability (Cheng, X., 2020). Therefore, increasing consumer engagement with brand posts on social media is dynamic and challenging (S. Chung, A. Animesh, K. Han, and A. Pinsonneault, 2014).

In social media, language indeed does have an impact on the outcome of brand-customer communication. For instance, it has been discovered that the language used by businesses in their social media communications with customers has an impact on customers' trust in the brand (Jakic et al., 2017; Gretry et al., 2017). Given the explosive proliferation of social media, it is perplexing and cost-intensified for businesses to adjust their language to the customers' segments with regards to each of their linguistics styles. Language accommodation in computer-mediated interactions has been demonstrated to improve communicator rapport (K. Muir, A. Joinson, R. Cotterill, and N. Dewdney, 2017) and trust (L.E. Scissors, A.J. Gill, and D. Gergle, 2008). Furthermore, linguistic accommodation has been shown to have a favourable impact on communicators' involvement and behaviour in the research (R.I. Swaab, W.W. Maddux, and M. Sinaceur, 2011). As a result, it is reasonable to assume that language accommodation in brand posting will promote customer engagement.

2.2 Social Media Marketing during Pandemic

COVID-19's spread has prompted numerous countries to take severe measures. Many economic sectors, including micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, as well as startup players, have been astounded by the lockdowns and limitations on most community activities and economic activity (Kuckertz et al., 2020). For example, according to a survey done by the International Labor Organization (ILO) on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on 571 businesses, 70% of those businesses have stopped producing as a result of COVID-19. As a result of the foregoing facts, many firms are now using social media to widen their sales or marketing channels. The survey conducted by the ILO shows that only 1 in 5 companies are successful in diversifying their products.

During COVID-19, the implementation of physical or social distancing has an impact on the move from conventional to online business operations (Patma, Wardana, Wibowo, & Narmaditya, 2020). This means that firms' ability to vary their offerings, particularly in terms of social media marketing, is still restricted. It is fascinating to examine the use of social media as a marketing tool affected business performance in Malaysia during the pandemic. The importance of social media for marketing is highly significant for boosting performance, according to Chatterjee and Kumar Kar (2020), Cheung et al. (2020), and Tajvidi and Karami (2017), therefore the influence will be investigated in this study. This research is critical in understanding how firms can accommodate different linguistic styles in social media in order to deal with market changes induced by the pandemic.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWOK

3.1 Communication Accomodation Theory (CAT)

The Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) proposes that people adapt their communicative behaviours, why they do so, and how social influences emerge as a result of doing so (Giles et al., 1991; Muir et al., 2017). Convergence and divergence are two communicating strategies that are derived from CAT (Giles et al., 1991). Convergence is a communication strategy in which communicators engage in comparable communicative behaviours in order to gain social approbation, affiliation, and reduce social distance (Giles et al., 1991). Divergence, on the other hand, is a communication technique that emphasizes the distinctiveness of communication behaviours, which is commonly used to highlight diverse social identities and enhance social distance (Giles et al., 1991). Communication convergence can be achieved by modifying one's verbal, para-verbal, and non-verbal aspects, according to CAT research. CAT has been widely used and tested in a variety of CMC situations, including email (Bunz and Campbell, 2004), instant messaging (Scissors et al., 2009), online communities (Michael and Otterbacher, 2014; Welbers and de Nooy, 2014), and virtual teams (Yilmaz, 2016). As a result, utilizing a conversational language style in their social media posts that is emotional, informal, and less complex could have a good impact on consumer engagement. Based on CAT, the theoretical framework proposed is as follows:



Fig 1: Theoretical Framework

3.2 Emotionality

Emotionality refers to the emotional linguistic features, such as positive and negative emotion words, that are embedded in brand posts. Percy (2012) conducted research on marketing communication and discovered that emotions in brand communication, such as advertising and service, have an impact on the communication. Furthermore, Hancock et al., (2008) found that such effects exist in CMC in addition to face-to-face interactions. Using emotive phrases in messages has been found to increase cognitive involvement such as attention (Kissler et al., 2007), message receiver participation (Joyce and Kraut, 2006), and sharing behaviours (Joyce and Kraut, 2006). (Kim and Johnson, 2016). In a recent study, Kim and Johnson (2016) demonstrated that emotions embedded in brand-related content on Facebook influence consumers' desire to share the content and engage with the company. As a result, the researcher presents the following hypothesis:

H1: Positive emotionality of brand posts is positively related to customers' engagement whereas negative emotionality of brand posts is negatively related to customers' engagement

3.3 Emotionality

The effort required to digest and comprehend a communication is referred to as complexity. This includes post length, average sentence length, long words, hashtags, and at-mention, all of which have an impact on the message's communicative consequences (Arguello et al., 2006). Previous study has demonstrated that message complexity reduces advertising's persuasiveness (Burgers et al., 2015; Cox and Cox, 1988), implying that consumers prefer simple brand communication. Due to the obvious ubiquitous information overload on social media, consumers only devote a small amount of cognitive resources to processing social media content without paying close attention, as Jones et al. (2004) discovered, where people respond more to simple messages in overburdened mass interactions. As a result, the researcher presents the following hypothesis:

H2: Complexity of brand posts negatively impacts consumer engagement

3.4 Informality

The informality of communication is a concept that has received considerable attention in linguistic research (Baron, 2003). According to McArthur (2003), informal communication is "common, non-official, familiar, casual, and often colloquial, and contrasts in these ways with formal communication." Furthermore, past study has discovered that the communicative informality style may be utilized to soften hierarchical power connections, minimize social distance, and convey closeness, corollary, it is frequently used by communicators to strengthen relationships (Gretry et al., 2017). By using emoji, contractions, informal punctuation, and personal pronouns in accordance with the conditions of the marketing channel, brands adopting a conversational communication style can increase consumers' interactivity and improve their evaluation of the brands (Jakic et al., 2017; Kelleher, 2009). (Mohr and Nevin, 1990). As a result, the researcher comes up with the following hypothesis:

H3: Informality of brand posts positively impacts consumer engagement

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

A field study will be conducted based on Facebook brand pages to test the hypotheses. The researchers select Facebook as the research context because it is the most popular social network as well as the most popular social media marketing platform worldwide (Statista, 2020). Given its massive user community, Facebook provides a platform where brands can enhance their presence, communicate with consumers, and build consumer communities. Since Facebook brand pages provide a natural setting where researchers can unobtrusively observe brand-consumer interactions, most previous research on consumer engagement with brand posts used Facebook brand pages as their research context (Wagner et al., 2017).

4.2 Data Collection

A qualitative research will be conducted in the context of five different industries in Penang. The researcher has selected Facebook page as a research context because Facebook is the most popular social media marketing communication channel worldwide especially during pandemic where companies are gradually channeling their businesses online. Besides, it is also a good environment for the study not only because of its fertility in dyadic interactions but also because it poses new challenges to the theory of communication accommodation in terms of robustness. Therefore, the researcher will conduct an interview with each of the business owner or the person in charge of the write up to understand better regarding the language management in Facebook pages posts. The researcher will use a filing system to maintain participant's signed consent form, interview questions and interview transcriptions. There will be no participants' names associated with their interviews; as they will be pseudonymized as R1 to R5 for the business owners to keep the information and identity confidential.

5. CONCLUSION

Social media has become an important marketing communication channel. While consumer engagement is the most important and widely used evaluation metric in social media marketing, marketers are experiencing difficulties creating effective content that optimizes consumer engagement. Given the importance of language in marketing communications on social media, it is indeed surprising that little thought has gone into how firms should optimize the language in their postings to increase consumer engagement. This research takes a step forward in bridging this gap by looking into the effects of brand language styles in this scenario. The conclusions of this study teach digital marketers about the value of brand language style, demonstrating that how brands communicate is just as important as what they represent. According to the expected result of this research, digital marketers should carefully plan the linguistic style of brand posts on social media. Simply including some linguistic characteristics (positively emotional words and less complex language such as simple words and short sentences) while avoiding others (informal expressions, negatively emotional words, and personal pronouns) can help increase consumer engagement.

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