The Meaning of Social Media: Exploring the Effect of using Internet Memes as a Public Relations tool in Education Sector

Suwanjuntiwasarakij¹,²*

ABSTRACT

Social media has been one of the most important communication channels due to its adoption rate among Internet users. Many organizations in private and public sectors have undergone using it as a public relation and marketing tool. This original research aimed at exploring using meme as social media for executing public relations and promoting the presence of the Computer Service Center (CSC) of King Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Ladkrabang (KMITL). By collecting statistical information over 4 months using Facebook fan page statistical analytics, the findings showed that certain types of posts outperformed the others in attracting, especially, younger audience. Moreover, it was found that the audience was looking for attraction “wow factors” in the messages posted: short, catchy wording with a relevant image that drew attention to the meme.

Keywords: meme, social media, public relation, education, knowledge

*Corresponding author; e-mail address: kjsuwan@kmitl.ac.th

¹Department of Computer Science, Faculty of Science, King Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Bangkok, 10520
²Computer Service Center, King Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Bangkok, 10520
INTRODUCTION

Social media has been recognized as an important channel as people, especially among young adults, have encountered with a variety of connectivity such as mobile computing technologies (Iriberri & Leroy, 2009). Built on top of social media platform, "Internet memes" or "memes" were one of the most popular, proliferated viral forms of information disseminated. Increasingly, memes have gained visibility among traditional media (Pogue, 2011) and among academic interest (Bernstein et al., 2011; Thom & Millen, 2012).

Originally, memes were "distinctive cultural objects that are transmitted through communication, and spread through a population of social factors in a manner analogous to the spread of viruses through a population of organisms (Underwood & Welser, 2011, p. 304)." Internet memes were, for example, a sentence, an illustration, or a communicative symbol that were electronically diffused over the cyberspace and absorbed into our (pop) culture (Chwe, 2000) (Figure 1). Perhaps, what made memes worth spreading may be its capability of delivering shock, fresh value to audience.

![Figure 1 Sample of traditional meme on www.knowyourmeme.com](image)

Like traditional memes, certain social media innovators have re-invented traditional memes by putting interesting contents or certain information with related images (Figure 2). Altogether, these informative memes were very welcomed among social media users as the users were heavily involved in liking, commenting, and sharing. Recently, more and more social media sites have adopted this reinvention of the memes and turned into a KM tool educating people as much as a PR tool.

In this regard, Computer Service Center of King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang initiated an experimental campaign using informative memes to gain visibility, recognition, and its presence inside and outside the University, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang. The goal of this study was to experiment, explore, and observe how emerging behavior arose.
OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the performance of different post types in attracting the audience: photos, memes, statuses, videos, and links
2. To explore which type of post delivered the best performance
3. To observe information behavior (sharing) on different types of posts, and
4. To identify factors influencing the performance of different post types

METHODS

This study was conducted in an explorative manner on Facebook. Activities such as viewing, sharing, liking, and commenting on KMITL CSC fan page from July 1, 2014 to November 29, 2014 were collected. “Insights,” a collection of social analytics tool by Facebook, were employed for data analysis. With this quantitative analytics tool, basic social statistics were provided. The researcher, then identified the wow factors: factors that were capable of drawing the audience’s attention.

Each of the most rated messages posted were analyzed one by one to scrutinize what they had in common (wow factor) such wording and language use, the tone of the message, and the images used in the message.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF KMITL COMPUTER SERVICE CENTER

Located at the Electronics Building, the Faculty of Engineering, Computer Research and Service Center, officially came into being on May 9, 1981. On March 7, 2008, as announced in the Royal Gazette, KMITL has become an autonomous university. The administrative system has been patterned after government owned universities. The center therefore underwent organizational re-engineering and has become Computer Service Center (CSC) with a campus-wide scale of service including hardware maintenance, system software and application support, one-stop-service center.
internet and network infrastructure, and computer express troubleshooting. In late November 2013, CSC underwent internal modernization which resulted in four divisions: central management, computer service and technology transfer, information system and multimedia service, and network infrastructure and server service. In addition, cutting-edge technologies employed to technologically support users in a campus-wide manner. Up-to-date, there were four working divisions under the CSC.

KMITL CSC’S PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN

Increasingly, public and private sectors have realized the necessity of ICT-based management. Likewise, the CSC’s management has also envisioned enabling staff faculty, staff, and students to have quality and equality access to the technology. In doing so, CSC crafted three strategic pillars: first, enabling accessibility to central information system; second, enhancing service capacity; third, establishing self-financing scheme with outreach programs. Moreover, the information system developed for KMITL has been served as a master model with endless possibilities and application power. CSC, for instance, offer a variety of training and skill development programs, creating a foundation for sustainable society.

CSC initiated a public relation campaign years ago by setting up an official web site, www.csc.kmitl.ac.th. However, people have recently moved to social media platform, so the management of the CSC decided to do so by creating a fan page, “www.facebook.com/kmitlCSC” (Figure 3). Initially, the CSC fan page was put into use as a public relation space, advertising CSC’s activities and CSC’s public announcements. Since its debut in October 2013, the number of visitors however was not showing promising. Towards the end of June 2014, the number of the visitors subscribing the fan page was stagnantly at 189; this was considered very few. Therefore, the CSC’s management once again tried to boost up the number by forging a second initiation where CSC memes were experimentally deployed.
1. The Fan

As of November 29, 2014, the number of the fan page subscribers was 1,112, compared to 189 in June, 2014 (Figure 4). The majority of the audience was male, 61 percent, while female represented 39 percent (Figure 5). The age distribution of the audience was 65 percent (18-24), 21 percent (25-34), 8 percent (35-44), 3 percent (45-54), .90 percent (55-64), .85 percent (13-17), and .40 (65 and above).
2. Experimental Posts

In doing so, the fan page administrators have posted a variety of contents in order to attract new visitors to subscribe such as IT and health-related links and IT how-to video clips. The result, however, was mixed. According to the Average Reach and Average Engagement statistical information provided by Facebook analytics (Figure 6), photo delivered 53.39 AR percentage and 49.75 AE percentage, status delivered 26.74 AR percentage and 36.45 AE percentage, video delivered 10.65 AR percentage and 9.85 AE percentage, and link delivered 9.20 AR percentage and 9.94 AE percentage (Table 1).
Table 1 The average reach, average engagement, and their percentage accordingly to the post type (as of November 29, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post Type</th>
<th>Average Reach (AR)</th>
<th>Average Reach (AR percentage)</th>
<th>Average Engagement (AE)</th>
<th>Average Engagement (AE percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>53.39</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>49.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>26.74</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>36.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>10.65</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>9.20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1032</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. MEME Factor

The experimental posts showed that photo posts outperformed the rest in term of attracting the audience. However, there were two types of photos here: images and CSC memes. In order to pinpoint which type of photos attracted audience the most, the top 10 posts were queried, and all the photo posts were CSC memes (Figure 7, 8).

![Figure 7 Samples of CSC memes](image)
RECOMMENDATION FOR USING MEME AS A PR TOOL

According to the findings, it was found that the majority of the most reached posts had certain common characteristics. First, the message on the memes delivered a shocking value. For example, one of the CSC meme was “the psychological effects of breaking apart from a lover and breaking an addiction are alike.” Another example was “complaining is a way to longevity since it helps release stress and improve human immune system.” These two example were, at first glance, delivering a strong sense of unorthodoxy; they apparently surprised the audience. Second, the message on the memes were written so a strictly terse, minimal, and clear so that the audience could capture the message and the meaning just in a flash of second. This could be archived by painfully putting together short and catchy words. Third, a relevant image was put at the background of the memes to facilitate and help the audience to psychologically grab the whole picture (the meaning) of what the memes wanted to communicate with its message.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Social media platform has been a very important channel for PRs and marketing. Also, it was considered a playground with endless possibilities for social experiments. Internet memes were initially adopted at a social viral messaging, yet their usability was not discovered until recently. In this study, the Computer Service Center of King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang has begun
to turn the memes around and used it as a PRs tool to gain its presence. The data was collected on KMITL CSC in 4-month period and analyzed by utilizing Facebook social analytics tool. The research goal was to observe which type of posts delivered the best result in attracting the audience, and the findings showed promising as memes did engage people’s interest.

However, the challenges, more like questions, that KMITL CSC was pursuing lied in why some memes performed better than others did, what kind of messages in the memes that attracted audience the most, and what the successful meme cookbook looked like. Thus, future research was to identify wow factors that responded to the challenges and the questions stated above.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Data set from Computer Service Center, King Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Bangkok, 10520.

REFERENCES


