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Social Media Interaction, Brand Engagement, Brand Awareness, and Brand Image of a Traditional Chinese Pastry Shop During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has exerted a wide range of effects on electronic (e)-commerce and technology and even forced some retail stores to cease operations. The e-commerce and online retail application use increased significantly during the pandemic. This trend prompted social media, which is an effective marketing channel, to communicate brand-related information by stimulating brand engagement and brand knowledge among consumers. In this case study, a traditional Chinese pastry shop faced the issues of low brand awareness and brand image due to limited social media interaction. Before a comprehensive social marketing plan was designed for the shop, the general factors that influenced the brand awareness and brand image of pastry shops were examined. A quantitative method was used where surveys were distributed via Google Forms. Purposive sampling was performed, and data were collected from respondents who used social media platforms to interact with others in Malaysia to buy pastry products. The total usable data for the study was 169. The findings demonstrated that there were positive significant relationships between social media interaction, customer brand engagement, brand awareness, and brand image. The marketing strategies implemented on the Facebook page of the traditional Chinese pastry shop for two months successfully and effectively increased its brand awareness and brand image, which indicated that social media interaction was the best strategy to develop brand awareness and brand image for the pastry shop. This study provided deeper insight into social media interactions for the retail industry to enhance brand awareness and brand image during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Social media interaction, brand awareness, brand engagement, brand image, traditional Chinese pastry

1. INTRODUCTION

Retailing refers to business activities involved in selling products and services to end consumers. Retail is the final step of the distribution process from multiple suppliers to eventual customers [1]. The current increase in retail digitalization allowed retailers to collect customer data across the retail value chain to improve and effectively understand customers' needs and expectations [2]. Recently, online retail developed rapidly with the rise in Internet and smartphone prevalence. For example, the Double Eleven sales of Tmall (the largest Chinese electronic [e]-commerce site) were 540.3 billion yuan in 2021 [3]. Double Eleven (11) is called Singles' Day as anything with '1' in means single in China and it falls on November 11th annually (11-11 is the date with the most '1's). New retail technology allows consumers to purchase products and services at lower prices and make purchase decisions based on online reviews. Therefore, online purchasing and shopping have become increasingly popular, easy, and cost-effective, which has led to traditional physical retail experiencing a "retail end" in many regions [4].

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a major destructive event that affected the global economy and several unresolved value networks [5]. The disease has caused many substantial psychological, social, and professional changes, such as unemployment, low savings, external fears and stress regarding an uncertain future, and physical and mental health issues [6]. The retail industry has faced significant change due to the global pandemic (COVID-19) as COVID-19 lockdowns widely impacted e-commerce, technology, and the economy, forced many retail stores to close, and led to online shopping becoming more frequent and popular [7]. During the pandemic, online retail platform and e-commerce usage increased significantly. A retail survey demonstrated that 22 million Malaysians were digital consumers and spent 80% of their time online making purchase decisions [8]. Based on this trend, many large and small retail companies adapted and converted to e-commerce and e-businesses.

The retail sector recently used a common communication channel (social media) for marketing activities. Social media refers to effective online applications, programs, platforms, or media tools to promote information-sharing and interaction among users, or corporations [9]. Social media marketing (SMM) activities are an important part of corporate brand activities [10] that involve creating and using social media platforms to implement marketing strategies, deliver brand information, and engage in relationships with customers [11, 12]. Therefore, SMM can affect consumers' perceptions of a company brand [13]. Stelzner [14] reported that 90% of companies used Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube to create marketing activities and communicate brand information to consumers. The most frequent benefit of using SMM is increased exposure where billions of users become a possible audience of the brand. Furthermore, SMM increases traffic, leads, and audience loyalty [15].

Several studies demonstrated that social media interaction (SMI) significantly influenced brand awareness (BA) and brand image (BI) [16–18]. Young consumers felt familiarity after seeing a product or brand on social media [19]. Therefore, many companies use social media to connect and interact with brand information, such as sharing and updating content, collecting feedback, and accessing consumers' preferences. The SMI aids the management of customer relationships, builds customer brand engagement (CBE), and increases BA and BI [20, 21].

Vuong [22] stated that a Gallup customer database demonstrated that 50% of customers were satisfied with a particular brand but merely 38% were engaged with the brand, which indicated that customer engagement is more important than merely satisfying customers' needs. A brand is the public-facing part of a business or organization. Therefore, it is important to consider what the customer thinks of it; nevertheless, many companies overlook this, which may have negative consequences, such as poor sales and weak growth [23].

Most previous studies investigated social media activities for increased brand engagement with luxury fashion brands [9], service brands [11], the airline industry [16], generation Y [24], cell phones [25], e-commerce [26], fast fashion [27], hotel industry [28] and skincare products [29]. Nevertheless, few studies examined the SMI, brand engagement, BA, and BI of traditional Chinese pastry shops, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The traditional Chinese pastry shop in this case study faced BA and BI issues due to an inactive social media presence and limited SMI. Before a comprehensive social marketing plan for the shop was designed, the general influencing factors of the BA and BI of pastry shops were examined. The quantitative method was used where surveys were distributed via Google Forms. Purposive sampling was used to collect data from respondents who used social media platforms to interact with others in Malaysia to buy pastry products.

1.1 Case Description and Problem Statement

The traditional Chinese pastry shop in this case study is a well-known Hokkien pastry shop that has operated in Batu Pahat, Johor, Malaysia for 80 years. The shop currently has seven workers and sells bean paste pastries (tau sar peah), wife cakes (lao po bing), and horse hoof biscuits (beh teh saw) among other pastries. The shop began operating in 1949 and was handed over to the owner' son after 10 years when he was approximately 20 years old. Currently, the shop is managed by a third-generation owner, who started as a kitchen helper when he was 20 years old. The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected the biscuit and pastry sales of the shop. The shop faced the challenge of low BA, which led to low sales on the Shopee online platform. Due to low BA and limited social media brand engagement regarding traditional Chinese pastries, the shop was not popular throughout Malaysia.

In marketing, a brand is vital to customers' purchase decisions [30] where a positive BI significantly impacts customers' purchase intentions and sales. The BA may drive customers to further evaluate the product before they consider purchasing it [31]. Therefore, businesses should communicate with the appropriate target market when promoting their brand for better awareness [32]. One means through which consumers experience brands is SMM campaigns where brands can actively engage with consumers, who interact with the brand and increase the page views and awareness of the brand [33]. Valentini et al. [31] reported that using push communication in advertising and participating in any events or sponsored events were effective means of increasing BA as it may increase the brand appearance and BA among the public. The most effective driver of BA is customer engagement as awareness is maximized during participation and interaction [34].

Firms can use social media effectively as most customers use social media as their primary platform to communicate and interact [35]. Many companies create their BI and carry out consumer-engagement activities (sharing product information and providing promotions, discounts, and advertisements) on social media [18]. The SMI helps to build brand recognition and increase customer brand engagement [16, 36, 37]. Therefore, it is recommended that companies use social media platforms to increase their customer brand engagement and strengthen their customer relationships [20], [38]. As social media marketing is effective for a company brand, the driving factors of the BA and BI of a traditional Chinese pastry shop were investigated in this study. Furthermore, social media brand engagement strategies were created for the traditional Chinese pastry shop to build its BA and BI.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions (RQs) were composed as follows:

RQ1: What factors influence the BA and BI of a traditional Chinese pastry shop?

RQ2: What social media brand engagement strategies can be used to increase the BA and BI of the traditional Chinese pastry shop?

RQ3: Are the implemented social media brand engagement strategies able to increase the BA and BI of the traditional Chinese pastry shop?

1.3 Research Objectives

The research objectives (ROs) were formulated as follows:

RO1: To identify the factors that influence the BA and BI of a traditional Chinese pastry shop.

RO2: To determine the social media brand engagement strategies that may increase the BA and BI of the traditional Chinese pastry shop.

RO3: To examine the effectiveness of the implemented social media brand engagement strategies that could increase the BA and BI of the traditional Chinese pastry shop.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The BA

The BA is linked to memory information nodes [39] and consumers' ability to recognize a brand in various situations. Brand acquaintances, people remembering information, and product ideas are important dimensions of BA [40]. The BA is the original level of brand knowledge, which involves determining the brand name or structure through detailed information [41]. Understanding a brand is a prerequisite in consumers' considerations throughout the decision-making process [13, 27]. Consumer repetition and memorable exposure to a brand can generate BA [42]. Brand elements, such as the brand name, slogan, packaging [43], and various public promotions [44], contribute to consumers' exposure to a brand. Furthermore, BA is important in influencing consumer perceptions, preferences, and behavior [45].

The BA is a vital influencing factor in consumer purchase decisions as customers who want to purchase a product will typically think of a brand name to which they are loyal [46]. Moreover, BA helps consumers choose products or services when they encounter difficulties in distinguishing the products or services due to similar quality [47]. Furthermore, BA is a tool for businesses to emphasize and define the familiarity and recognizability of a product brand to the target customer [48]. Tsimonis and Dimitriadis [10] stated that social media is a functional tool to ensure consumer familiarity with a brand.

The SMM activities have a positive and substantial impact on consumer BA [16, 49]. Yadav and Rahman [26] defined SMM as "the process that a company creates, communicates, develops and sustains stakeholder relationships by providing online marketing products through social media platforms". For example, companies can build and create interactions, share brand information, and provide customized purchase advice and word-of-mouth to enhance stakeholder relationships. Therefore, SMM campaigns are important as reminders and to remain memorable to consumers [18]. Consumers gain BA via effective marketing communication channels, such as television, smartphones, and advertising, which promise product quality assurance. This credibility aids the reduction of the risks associated with evaluation and selection when buying products [50, 51].

Sasmita and Suki [19] reported that young consumers trust a company that exists on social media. When young people browse social media using smartphones, they will notice products or brands with unique personalities that are distinct from other products or brands. Therefore, companies should place information in customers' minds naturally by advertising on social media, which is more interesting for consumers and increases BA [52]. Higher BA can increase the consumer's purchase likelihood of a product or service. High product awareness can potentially provide the company with a long-term competitive advantage [53]. Thus, companies should focus on delivering messages that attract attention and increase BA [52]. Social marketers emphasized raising awareness among the public to influence perceptions, associations, and trust in a specific organization or brand [53]. Rrustemi and Baca [54] found that social media was very important to increase BA for fashion businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, BA is important for the traditional Chinese pastry shop to gain a competitive advantage in the pastry market through the COVID-19 crisis.

2.2 The BI

A BI is the consumer's personal view of a company, which is a perception based on the customer's past experiences with the company [55]. The BI can also be defined as a consumer's judgment of the ongoing activities of a company or brand [56]. A BI is positioned by the prestige of a company when customers purchase its specific products or services [57] and is a key tool for companies to maintain customer loyalty [58].
The BI is vital in brand development and creation [59]. High BA can help increase BI, brand loyalty, and brand market share [60]. The act of designing a company product and image to occupy a unique competitive position in target customers' minds is termed BI positioning [61] where a good BI can create a good position in a customer's mind. The BI can also generate positive views among customers and build customer loyalty [62].

Fortezza and Pencarelli [17] highlighted that social media is a tool to interact with customers and build a dynamic BI. Marketers can build a strong BI by using the product, the brand name, color, logo, labelling and packaging, advertisements, retailers, other promotions, pricing, origin country, brand owner, and target market [63]. Practitioners must establish, maintain, and strengthen relationships with social media users, who are influenced by brand promises and a powerful BI [64].

Diputra and Yasa [65] demonstrated that product quality has a positive relationship with BI where a higher-quality product is accompanied by a higher customer perception of the brand. The means of building consumers' trust include establishing a powerful BI and product quality [66]. Kaur and Kaur [67] reported that the brand logo on brand personality dimension and brand familiarity exerted an additional impact on BI. Consumers develop an emotional attachment to a brand if they believe that the brand is beneficial [68]. A BI is a powerful marketing tool that can assist in distinguishing a company from its competitors [69]. Moreover, managers should strive to obtain and improve consumers' familiarity with a brand, which can be achieved by increasing consumers' exposure to brand elements, such as logos, products, and advertisements. With this strategy, managers should be able to maintain the company BI [67]. Furthermore, the company must allocate resources to maintain high-level SMI with customers to build a powerful BI and increase emotional attachment [64].

Several studies demonstrated that SMM activities had a positive effect on consumer BA and BI [9, 16, 18, 49]. ElAydi [70] reported that using social media for marketing was positively related to BI. Hence, the BI influenced the customer purchase intent [70, 71]. The SMM builds a reliable BI to drive consumer loyalty and purchase intention by creating interactive content [72]. Nurfarida and Sudarmiatin [73] stated that small- and medium-sized businesses benefited from SMM use in the form of increased customer engagement, high BA and BI, better acquisition of potential customers, low promotion costs, increased sales, and better complaint handling, such as negative feedback.

Most traditional pastry shops are time-honored brands that evoke nostalgia in consumers. Nostalgia increased the BI of traditional Chinese pastry shops that used better SMI to serve and grow their customers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Brands delivered better during the pandemic by conveying relevant information regarding health, care, safety, comfort, and reliability to gain trust and simplify their customers' lives [74].

2.3 The SMI

The SMM is defined as marketing and customer management activities that use social media platforms [75]. The SMM is a type of digital marketing to facilitate customer interactions with companies and brands via social networks [33, 76]. Social media aims to encourage consumers' interest in the brand [77] and increase customer experience [78]. Tsimonis and Dimitriadis [10] noted that social media is a core strategy for many businesses.

Chan and Guillet [79] reported that marketers provided updated information and shared interesting videos and photographs to increase customer attention while offering customized and two-way information exchange. Such interactions attracted customer attention effectively and built consumer brand loyalty, thereby increasing consumers' repurchase intentions. The benefits of SMI include facilitating and enhancing engagement, and information- and content-sharing between the business and customers [80]. Masa'deh et al. [81] stated that customer interaction significantly affected BA. Moreover, Gartner's social marketing survey 2013 [82] highlighted that the five most important benefits of investing in SMI were strengthening the customer relationship, increasing BA or brand preference, exchanging information and ideas with shareholders, establishing an active relationship with customers, and increasing profits through new products or customers.

Yadav and Rahman [26] categorized SMM activities into interaction, trendiness, information, customization, and word-of-mouth communication (EWOM). Interaction is vital and refers to the space provided by social media platforms to enable the two-way exchange of opinions and information [9, 83]. Interaction is also an incentive for consumers to create and generate content [84] and strengthen their perception and purchase intention toward the brand [85]. Using social media as two-way communication between businesses and customers creates a better understanding of customer needs, requirements, opinions, and suggestions for the product and brand [86].

The COVID-19 changed consumer behaviors and sentiments. Dubbelink et al. [87] proposed an effective marketing strategy to include clear direction for SMM activities, assess existing branding elements, plan marketing activities to meet consumers' needs, and communicate appropriate information with empathy. Mason et al. [88] reported that SMM was increasingly important after the pandemic spread. Consumers preferred to use social media to search for products, obtain product information, evaluate product choices, and make purchases. Therefore, SMI is beneficial to traditional Chinese pastry shops as the preferred communication channel during the pandemic.

2.4 The CBE

The CBE is defined as the psychological state that results from positive interactions between customers and brands [89]. The CBE is a new marketing concept that is being explored in practical and academic settings [90]. Hollebeek et al. [91] defined CBE as how customers respond cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally to brand activities through social media platforms. Kumar et al. [92] stated that CBE reveals a customer's resource investment through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activities on brand engagement.

The CBE involves three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral [38], [93]. Hollebeek et al. [91] stated that cognitive processing represents how customers interact with brand-related ideas and processes. Affection is an emotional aspect of CBE and is composed of customers' positive and convincing feelings toward a brand when they use the brand [94], such as calmness, love, and enjoyment [95]. Activation demonstrates customers' willingness to devote effort and time to interact with a brand [96] and is a behavioral aspect of CBE.

Thus, CBE is a powerful concept for increasing customer satisfaction, brand attachment and loyalty [97], advertising effectiveness, and organizational achievement [98]. Furthermore, CBE is useful in service contexts with a high degree of interactivity, such as between customers and between service personnel [99, 100] with a significant impact on purchase intention [101, 102].

The CBE also influences the brand experience [103] and helps create a powerful emotional attachment and brand loyalty [104]. The CBE is also important in marketing strategies, such as creating and enhancing consumers' brand relationships [105]. It is essential to understand how brands influence customers' behavioral intentions toward brands as it reflects actual consumption behavior [106]. Customer brand engagement can be examined through social media metrics or insight. For example, customers have interactive expressions, such as comments, Likes, ratings, and sharing the content posted by the brand. Therefore, it is recommended that businesses focus on social media content to encourage customers to interact with social media posts, which in turn reinforces customer brand engagement [107]. In the COVID-19 era, customer engagement relies on information and brand–self connection [108]. The pandemic has presented new horizons of consumer engagement. Therefore, traditional Chinese pastry shops should strategize on CBE.

2.5 Hypotheses Development

2.5.1 The SMI and CBE

Interactive brand pages motivate engagement between a brand and consumers with a positive perception of the brand [36]. Brands must create good content to attract customers to click the Like button or reply to their messages [109]. Social media engagement activities, such as posting comments and subscribing to the brand page, are important to strengthen interactions between brands and consumers [110]. For example, Facebook activity was associated with the number of posts and content posted [109]. Social media was important to boost online interaction and participation, which have changed the way people communicate with companies and brands [110–112]. Cheung et al. [37] stated that interaction was the most important SMM element for increasing brand and customer engagement. Seo and Park [16] noted that SMM activities helped to increase BA and create a powerful BI for organizations to interact with their customers. Moreover, marketers used Facebook as an important social medium to target users with a positive attitude toward a brand [113]. Santos et al. [108] highlighted that customer engagement was related to brand–self connection during COVID-19. Nonetheless, few studies have investigated the impact of COVID-19 on traditional pastry shops. Thus, the relationship between interaction and CBE for a traditional Chinese pastry shop during the COVID-19 pandemic was examined in this study. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Interaction has a positive significant relationship with the CBE for traditional Chinese pastry shops.

2.5.2 The BA and CBE

Sharing information on a brand among customers can increase the CBE level and strengthen the consumer–brand interaction and connection. Thus, brand engagement can increase BA and customers' brand recall ability [13, 43]. Content is a key dimension for influencing BA [114]. When customers with higher BA are actively involved with a brand, they are more likely to pay more attention to the company or brand and discuss, share, and engage the brand with other customers [115]. Therefore, BA and customer engagement are strongly linked. Customers who gain BA will automatically engage with the same brand until they have a bad experience [116]. Cheung et al. [37] stated that CBE is strongly connected to BA and is important in brand-building. Social media gained importance for increasing the BA of fashion businesses during the pandemic [54]. Based on the aforementioned discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: The CBE has a positive significant relationship with the BA of traditional Chinese pastry shops.

2.5.3 The BI and CBE

Brand engagements build trust and meaningful connections between customers and brands [117]. Islam et al. [118] noted that self–BI and value congruity influenced customer engagement while BI directly impacted customer engagement [97, 119]. Consumers always use a powerful and favored BI as their primary decision-making option [43]. Thus, strengthening CBE through numerous channels can enable the creation of a strong positive brand experience and BI [20]. Moreover, SMI and BI are inextricably linked [16–18]. Cheung et al. [37] reported that CBE is strongly related to BI. Brands that convey relevant information can gain consumers' trust in the BI [74]. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: The CBE has a positive significant relationship with the BI of traditional Chinese pastry shops.

2.6 Research Framework

Figure 1 was adapted from Cheung et al. [37] to investigate the effect of SMM elements, namely the effect of SMI on CBE and its impact on BA and BI.

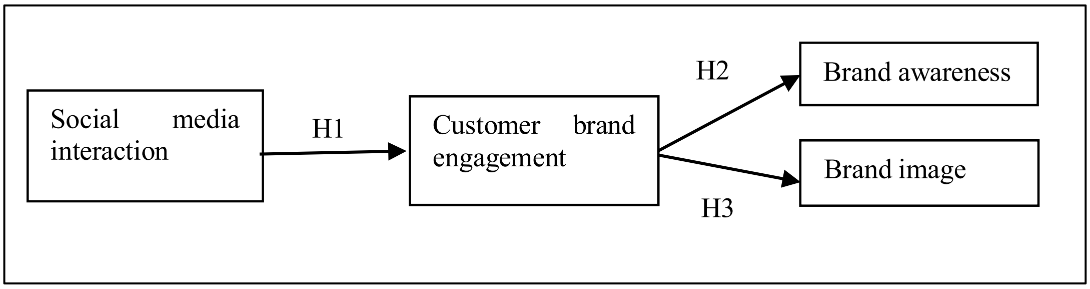


Figure 1. Research Framework

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study was designed based on a conceptual blueprint and included all sources, methods, and techniques used for data collection, measurement, and analysis to achieve the research goals [120]. Ahuja [121] stated that research design is a set of conditions to collect and analyze data in an integrated manner of economic and procedural relevance to research purposes. There are two research design types: exploratory and conclusive. Malhotra et al. [122] stated that exploratory design is used to gain insights and comprehend the nature of the marketing phenomenon. Exploratory research uses qualitative data and the research process is relatively less structured and flexible.

Conclusive design examines specific hypotheses and investigates relationships among variables using a structured and formal research process. There are two conclusive design research types: descriptive and causal. Descriptive research depicts the attributes of related groups, such as customers, salespeople, and organizations. Causal research examines the relationships between the independent and dependent variables of a phenomenon [123]. In this study, the relationship between the SMI, CBE, BA, and BI of a traditional Chinese pastry shop was investigated with a conclusive research design. The findings enabled the implementation of social media brand engagement strategies to increase the BA and BI of the pastry shop in this case study.

3.2 Population and Sampling

Krieger [124] defined a population as the total number of people or units being studied in research. Sampling refers to a list of actual cases from which samples will be taken. In this study, the target population was individuals who used social media platforms to interact with others in Malaysia to buy pastry products. Data were collected using non-probability sampling, which is a purposive sampling technique. Suhr [125] stated that the sample-to-item ratio can determine the study sample size based on the number of items and must not be < 5:1. This study consisted of 33 items (questions), which required 165 respondents.

3.3 Research Instrument

A research instrument is a tool used to collect, measure, and analyze data from research participants. The research instrument depends on the study type: quantitative, qualitative, or a combination of the two [126]. The quantitative approach was used in this study and data were collected using questionnaires. The questionnaire was divided into Section A (10 questions about the respondents' demographic profiles, such as age, gender, countries of origin, and frequency of social media platform use) and Section B (26 questions related to BA, BI, and SMI). All measurement items were adapted from Cheung et al. [37] where four items measured SMI, 10 items measured CBE, five items measured BA, and seven items measured BI. The questionnaire featured a five-point Likert scale, which allows respondents to express their level of agreement with a particular statement. The responses are assigned a numerical value that can be used to measure the attitude under investigation: one (strongly disagree), two (disagree), three (neutral), four (agree), and five (strongly agree). Subsequently, the data were screened, processed, and analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Response Rate

The quantitative method was used in this study, where surveys were distributed to respondents via Google Forms (minimum sample size = 165). A total of 225 questionnaires were distributed to the targeted respondents but 50 were returned unanswered as the respondents did not Like or follow any traditional pastry shop on social media. Therefore, only 175 questionnaires were usable (response rate = 78%).

4.2 Outliers

Outliers or anomalous observations in a dataset are discovered via outlier analysis [127]. In this study, incredibly small or incredibly large values in the dataset were detected using SPSS. If an extreme value was discovered, it may have been due to a data error and was therefore removed from the dataset [128]. In this study, outliers were detected for the CBE construct (samples 127, 173, 104, and 151), the BA construct (samples 10, 127, 173, and 74), and the BI construct (sample 74). In total, six samples were deleted and 169 datasets were used for further data analysis.

4.3 Respondents' Profiles

Table 1 depicts the respondents' profiles, such as gender, age, highest academic qualification, monthly income, employment, duration spent on social media per day, and the traditional pastry brand and social media platform they currently followed. There were 47 male respondents (27.81%) and 122 female respondents (72.19%). Up to 78% of the respondents were students. Most respondents were aged 21–30 years (86.98%) and their highest academic qualification was a Bachelor's degree (128 respondents, 75.74%). Most respondents had monthly incomes of ≤ RM2000 (80.47%) and spent 2–3 hours on social media daily (32%). The Ban Heang traditional pastry brand had the most social media followers (24.85%). Up to 58.58% of the respondents used Facebook to follow traditional pastry brands, followed by respondents on Instagram (40.83%).

Table 1. Respondents' profiles

Demographic variable		**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender	Male	47	27.81
	Female	122	72.19
Age (years)	≤ 20	13	7.69
	21–30	147	86.98
	31–40	7	4.15
	41–50	2	1.18
	> 51	0	0.00
Highest academic qualification	Bachelor's degree	128	75.74
	Diploma	17	10.06
	Master's degree	9	5.33
	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia	9	5.33
	or equivalent	1	0.59
	PhD or DBA	5	2.95
	Other		
Monthly income (RM)	≤ 2000	136	80.47
	2001–3000	19	11.24
	3001–4000	9	5.33
	4001–5000	1	0.59
	≥ 5000	4	2.37

Table 1. Respondents' profiles

Demographic variable		**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Employment	Self-employed	4	2.37
	Private sector	28	16.57
	Government sector	5	2.96
	Student	132	78.10
Duration spent on social media per day (hours)	0–1	11	6.51
	2–3	54	31.95
	4–5	53	31.36
	≥ 6	51	30.18
Traditional pastry brand followed on social media	Ghee Hiang	34	20.12
	Ban Heang	42	24.85
	Seng Heang	38	22.49
	Ng Kee Cake Shop	31	18.34
	Other	24	14.20
Social media platforms used to follow the traditional pastry brand	Facebook	99	58.58
	Instagram	69	40.83
	Twitter	0	0.00
	WeChat	0	0.00
	Other	1	0.59

4.4 Normality Test

Data normality is determined by checking skewness and kurtosis values [129]. Data are considered normal if the skewness and kurtosis are between -2 and 2 [130]. Therefore, data normality was determined and tested with SPSS before the data were analyzed. Table 2 depicts the normality test results of all variables for SMI, CBE, BA, and BI. All variables were considered normal as the skewness and kurtosis values ranged from -0.567 to -0.170 and -0.635 to -0.271, respectively, which indicated that all SMI, CBE, BA, and BI values were between -2 and 2.

Table 2. Normality test

Variable	**Skewness**	**Standard error (SE) of skewness**	**Kurtosis**	**SE of kurtosis**
SMI	-0.567	0.187	-0.271	0.371
CBE	-0.170	0.187	-0.660	0.371
BA	-0.295	0.187	-0.635	0.371
BI	-0.235	0.187	-0.631	0.371

4.5 Reliability Test

Research quality is evaluated with the concepts of validity and reliability [131]. Reliability is defined as the consistency of a measurement variable in the study. Taber [132] stated that internal consistency is acceptable when the Cronbach alpha is ≥ 0.7. The variable measurements are reliable when repeated evaluation yields the same results. In this study, the Cronbach alpha values for BA, BI, CBE and SMI were reliable and valid and ranged between 0.835 and 0.874 (values > 0.7) as depicted in Table 3. Therefore, the internal consistency in this study was acceptable for further data analysis.

Table 3. Reliability analysis

Variable	Cronbach's alpha
SMI	0.835
CBE	0.874
BA	0.841
BI	0.848

4.5 Linear Regression Analysis

In this study, the connections between SMI, CBE, BA, and BI were investigated using linear regression analysis, which determines the relationship between one independent variable and a dependent variable [133]. In linear regression analysis, a p-value < 0.05 indicates a significant relationship between the two variables and a confidence level > 95%. Significance was tested with the B column (gradient values). The line gradient (β) of zero indicates that no relationship exists [134]. As listed in Table 4, there was a positive significant relationship between SMI and CBE (p = 0.000). Table 5 demonstrates that CBE and BA had a positive significant relationship. Moreover, CBE was positively and significantly related to BI (Table 6). Therefore, all relationships between the dependent and independent variables were significant at p < 0.05 and the gradient was not zero. Therefore, all hypotheses were supported.

Table 4. The relationship between SMI and CBE

Coefficients[a]						
Model		**Unstandardized coefficients**		**Standardized coefficients**	**t**	**Significance**
		B	SE	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.540	0.269		9.438	0.000
	SMI	0.377	0.063	0.418	5.940	0.000
[a]Dependent variable: CBE						

Table 5. The relationship between CBE and BA

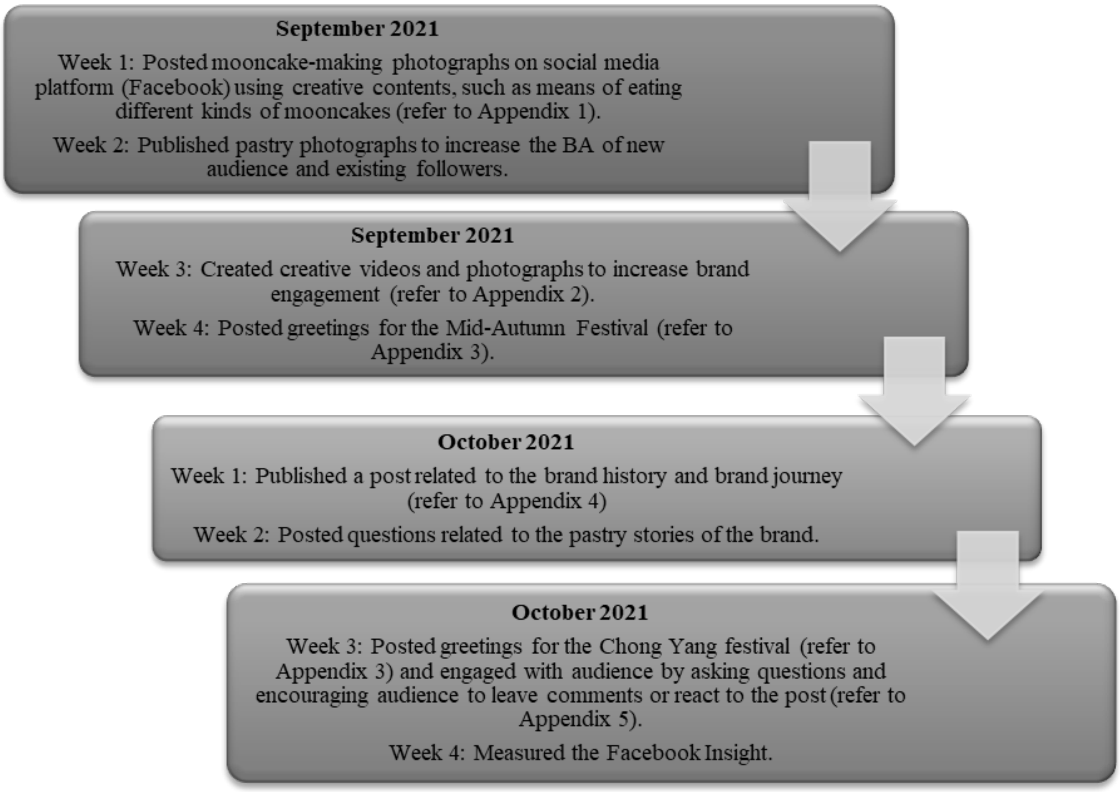
Coefficients[a]						
Model		**Unstandardized coefficients**		**Standardized coefficients**	**t**	**Significance**
		B	SE	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.855	0.288		2.966	0.003
	CBE	0.775	0.069	0.655	11.188	0.000
[a]Dependent variable: BA						

Table 6. The relationship between CBE and BI

Coefficients[a]						
Model		**Unstandardized coefficients**		**Standardized coefficients**	**t**	**Significance**
		B	SE	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.360	0.247		5.498	0.000
	CBE	0.681	0.059	0.663	11.449	0.000
[a]Dependent variable: BI						

4.7 Marketing Strategies for the Facebook Page of the Pastry Shop

Hidayanti et al. [135] stated that two-way interaction encouraged consumers to actively contribute ideas and input about new products. Figure 2 depicts the marketing strategies on the Facebook page of the traditional Chinese pastry shop from September 2021 to October 2021. The traditional Chinese pastry shop conducted two-way interactions with followers by posting and asking questions, such as which type of pastry the followers liked the most (Appendix 1–5). Subsequently, its audience and followers could comment and react to the post. Moreover, brand history can be good marketing content and a key to business success [136]. Brand history may allow the personality of a brand to shine through clearly. Thus, the pastry shop published a Facebook post on its 80-year history where the brand always focused on the traditional and original taste of its pastries, which were all handmade and contained no artificial food additives and promised quality assurance. Puro [137] mentioned that content quality may affect customers' decisions to engage with a brand. Therefore, businesses should provide content that retains customers on their websites and encourages them to engage with their social media. Based on this advice, the pastry shop created a video and posted attractive photographs to encourage engagement and strengthen consumer–brand relationships (Appendix 2).



September 2021

Week 1: Posted mooncake-making photographs on social media platform (Facebook) using creative contents, such as means of eating different kinds of mooncakes (refer to Appendix 1).

Week 2: Published pastry photographs to increase the BA of new audience and existing followers.

September 2021

Week 3: Created creative videos and photographs to increase brand engagement (refer to Appendix 2).

Week 4: Posted greetings for the Mid-Autumn Festival (refer to Appendix 3).

October 2021

Week 1: Published a post related to the brand history and brand journey (refer to Appendix 4)

Week 2: Posted questions related to the pastry stories of the brand.

October 2021

Week 3: Posted greetings for the Chong Yang festival (refer to Appendix 3) and engaged with audience by asking questions and encouraging audience to leave comments or react to the post (refer to Appendix 5).

Week 4: Measured the Facebook Insight.

Figure 2. Marketing strategies on the Facebook page of the traditional Chinese pastry shop (source: authors)

4.8 Impact of Marketing Strategies on the Pastry Shop

Figure 3 illustrates the achievement of the marketing strategies implemented on the Facebook page of the traditional Chinese pastry shop within two months, where page followers, engagement, and reach were successfully increased. For example, the audience and followers actively participated in the social media of the pastry shop by commenting on its posts as demonstrated in Appendix 5. Thus, the company page engagement increased significantly from 693 interactions in September 2021 to 802 interactions in October 2021. Moreover, videos and attractive photographs boosted the page reach of the pastry shop from 16,752 views in September 2021 to 21,282 views in October 2021. Most of the audience and followers liked the informative content and shared it with others, hence helping the brand reach a wider audience at a lower cost. In addition, the sharing helped build the BI and BA of the pastry shop by reaching more Facebook users who were unfamiliar with the brand. Furthermore, page followers increased substantially from 695 in September 2021 to 777 in October 2021.

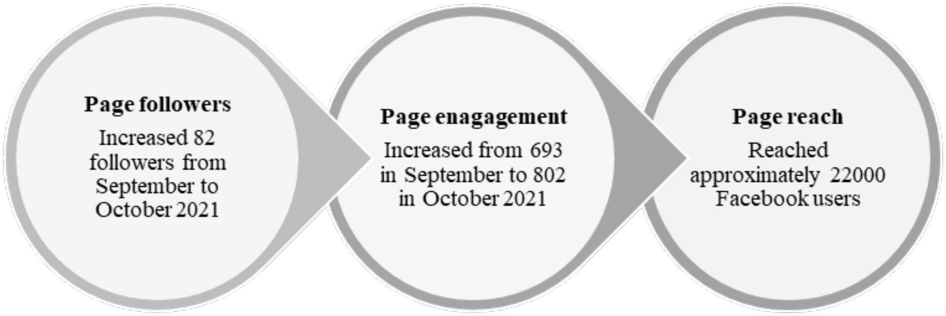

Page followers
Increased 82 followers from September to October 2021
Page enagagement
Increased from 693 in September to 802 in October 2021
Page reach
Reached approximately 22000 Facebook users

Figure 3. Impact of marketing intervention on the traditional Chinese pastry shop (source: authors)

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 What Factors Influenced the BA and BI of a Pastry Shop?

The findings indicated that SMI had a significant positive relationship with CBE and CBE was positively related to BA and BI. The three hypotheses were supported in this study as the p-value was < 0.05. The H1 was supported and agreed with previous studies [36, 37, 110]. Hanna et al. [110], Kietzmann et al. [111], and Leung et al. [112] reported that social media was essential for online interaction and engagement, which changed the communication method between brands and consumers. In this study, the pastry shop was encouraged to use Facebook as an important social medium to reach its target market by increasing interactions for brand engagement.

The findings also demonstrated that CBE was effective in increasing BA and BI. The results corresponded with those of Keller [43], Langaro et al. [13], Nurfitriana et al. [119], and Islam and Rahman [97]. In this study, it was vital for the shop to increase its brand engagement with its Facebook followers for brand-building, including BA and BI. Overall, traditional pastry shops displayed a higher degree of brand engagement by interacting with Facebook users and customers to build BA and BI during the COVID-19 crisis.

5.2 What SMM Strategies Increased the BA and BI of the Pastry Shop?

The SMM strategies of Facebook interactions and brand engagement were implemented to improve the BA and BI of the traditional Chinese pastry shop. The activities on a Facebook brand page can have a huge impact on engagement. For example, users who Like, comment, and share a brand post demonstrate two-way interaction between users and the brand. To engage customers, brands must post content that meets customers' demands so that customers click the Like button or react to the brand message. A post that receives more Likes has more page marketing value [109]. Therefore, the pastry shop engaged Facebook users, such as by posting attractive photographs and videos of various pastries. Furthermore, users or customers were engaged via creative content that included videos of different mooncakes being eaten and conveying wishes for the Mid-Autumn Festival and Chong Yang Festival.

The social media strategy of publishing a post related to the brand history and journey of the pastry shop engaged the audience by asking questions and encouraging them to leave comments or react to the post. As demonstrated in Appendixes 1–5, the pastry shop successfully used SMM strategies with attractive weekly content to engage its audience during the pandemic. The findings aligned with those of Alhaddad [138], who reported that varied content, such as links, videos, and photographs, was significant for increasing BA and BI. Briefly, a brand may become memorable via abundant content and constant and regular posting.

5.3 Were the SMM strategies effective in increasing the pastry shop BA and BI?

The SMM strategies significantly increased the Facebook followers, reach, and engagement of the pastry shop from September to October 2021. Within the two months, followers of the pastry shop increased by 82, page engagement increased from 693 to 802 interactions, and the page reached approximately 22,000 Facebook users. The pastry shop had a wider audience reach and many Facebook users knew about the brand, which enhanced page interaction and engagement. Moreover, consistently publishing posts led to higher engagement between users and the brand. The greatest form of engagement the shop received was the numerous feedback, which could be used to improve its products and business. The increased number of followers enhanced the brand popularity of the pastry shop. Consequently, customer engagement on social media was valuable for enhancing more sharing about the brand with other users and potential customers. Therefore, the implemented marketing strategies were effective in increasing the BA and BI of the traditional Chinese pastry shop during the pandemic.

6. STUDY LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

The results demonstrated that there were positive significant relationships between SMI, CBE, BA, and BI. The study provided an opportunity for further empirical investigation of the effectiveness of social media strategies in increasing BA and BI. The findings add to the existing literature by confirming the relationships in the context of traditional Chinese pastry shops. The findings were supported by Cheung et al. [37] highlighting that SMI may aid the development of strong positive brand knowledge in customers' minds.

The results demonstrated that SMI influenced CBE, which in turn increased BA and BI. The findings provided a guideline to marketers to post more attractive content to generate higher interactive relationships with consumers. Moreover, marketers may consider establishing and positioning their brand through highly interactive and active use of their social media brand pages. To improve brand page interactivity, marketers can engage with users by asking questions and encouraging them to leave comments or react to the brand post.

The implemented marketing strategies were effective of increasing the BA and BI of the pastry shop. Companies can increase their BA and BI by utilizing SMI for higher brand engagement. The SMI is significant for motivating consumers to interact for the growth of good brand engagement. Thus, social media aids the brand in reaching a larger audience at a lower cost.

This study had several limitations. First, the results had limited generalizability. Although the sample size met the minimum requirement of 165, the results were not generalized to the population as the small sample size was unable to represent all individuals who used social media platforms for interaction to buy pastry products in Malaysia. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies increase the sample size and use probability sampling approaches, such as simple random sampling, to achieve more generalized results. Second, the study was limited geographically, where data were collected from only Malaysian respondents. Hence, it is recommended that future studies collect data from several countries and compare countries as respondents from different countries might have different brand interactions and engagement.

Third, the study only focused on pastry shops, which limited the findings for other businesses. Therefore, future studies should involve several businesses, such as those in the fashion, beauty, and education industries, to investigate the relationships between SMI, CBE, BA, and BI for marketing interventions. Lastly, the survey was disseminated via Google Forms. Although it is easy to collect data via online surveys, the method has several drawbacks, such as low reliability, questions being misunderstood, and internet issues. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies use varied research methods, such as face-to-face interviews, for data collection and in-depth findings.

7. CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrated that SMI had a strong impact on CBE during the COVID-19 pandemic while CBE had a positive significant relationship with BA and BI. The results are significant where the implemented marketing strategies on the Facebook page of the traditional Chinese pastry shop increased the pastry shop BA and BI within two months. Furthermore, the findings can aid traditional Chinese pastry shops and other businesses in designing long-term social media and branding strategies to connect with their consumers for better BA and BI during the pandemic. The SMI was the best-implemented strategy for developing brand engagement, which built the BA and BI of the traditional Chinese pastry shop and other relevant businesses.

The findings support the current SMM strategies of meeting consumers' preferences for online shopping and the preferences of those who prefer physical shopping but are required to adopt online channels as the possibility of visiting physical stores is limited due to COVID-19 restrictions. This study provided appropriate guidelines for marketers to adjust and implement the best social media strategies for their company. It is recommended that marketers and businesses social media to communicate information about their brand and build a relationship with their audience. These insights are also relevant for other stakeholders, such as influencers and governmental parties, as they can assist businesses in using the possibilities of social media optimally and benefiting from it.

The results demonstrated that social media is one of the most essential platforms for delivering brand information and building customer engagement for increased BA and BI. Therefore, future researchers could plan marketing interventions by actively interacting with their audiences and posting creative and attractive content for them to Like, comment, and share with others.

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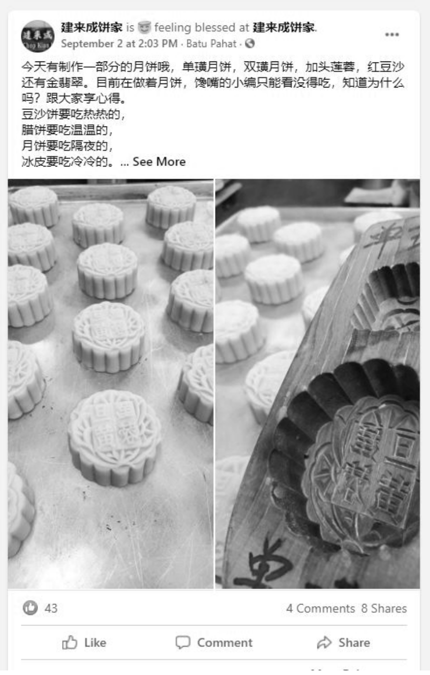
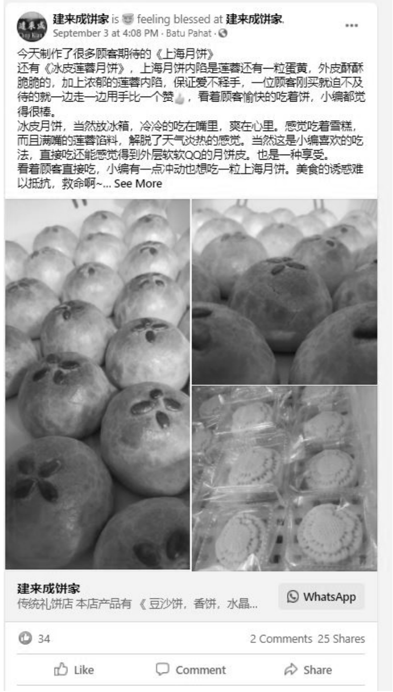
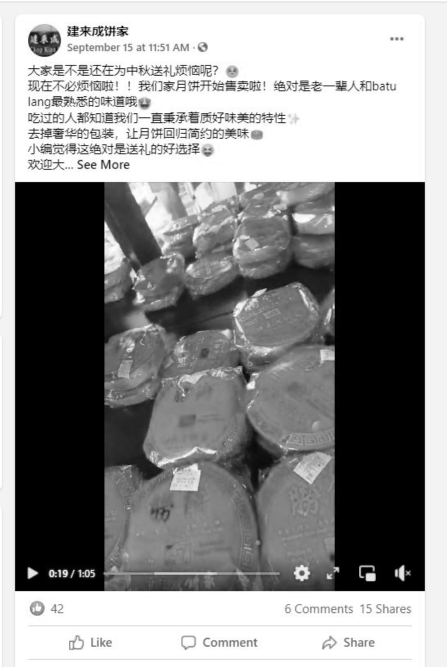
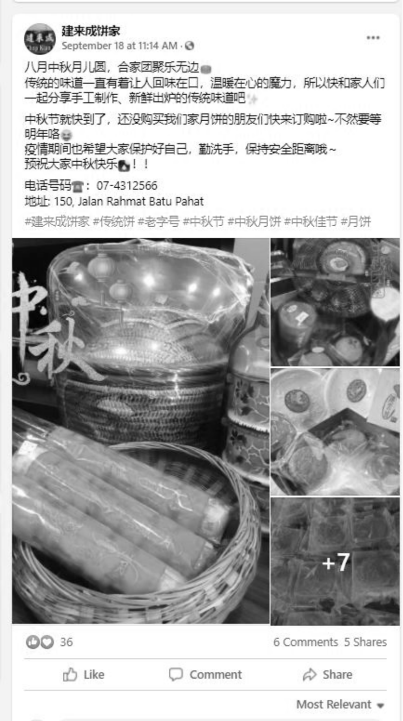
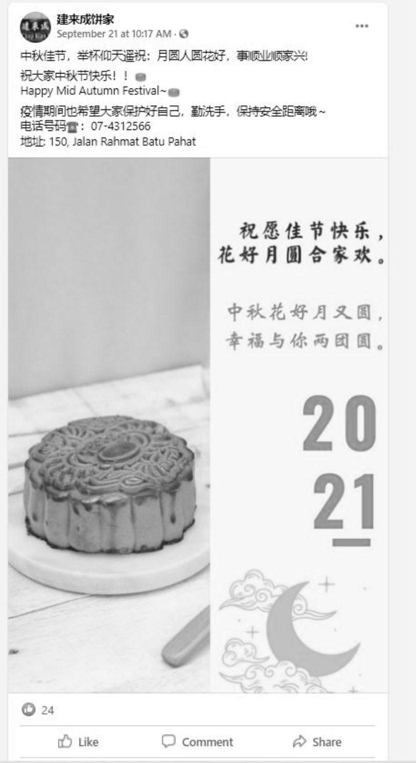
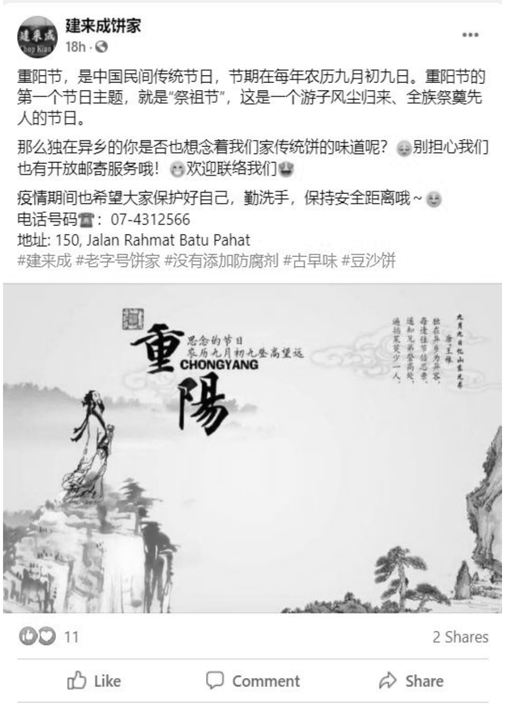
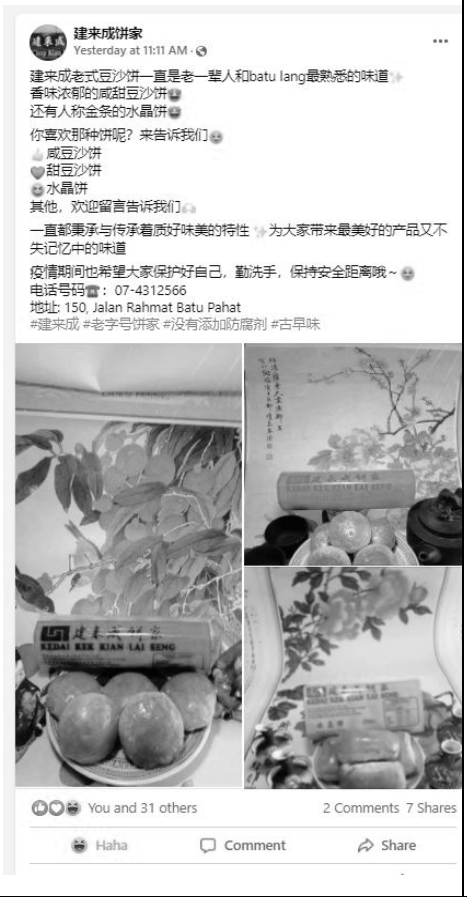
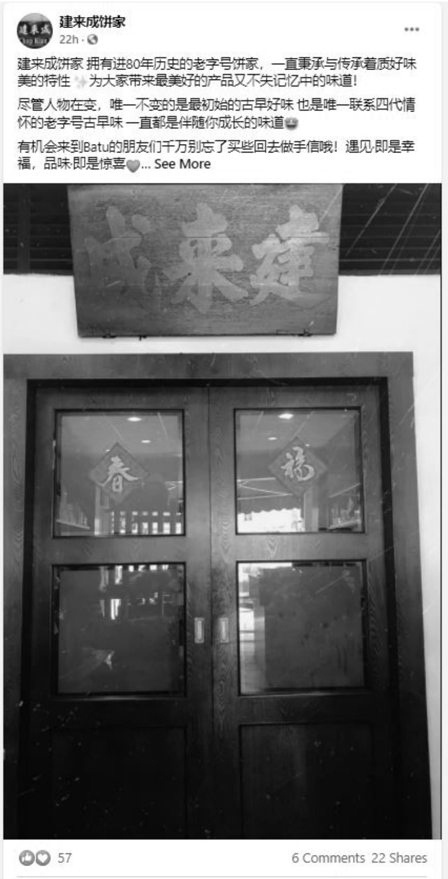
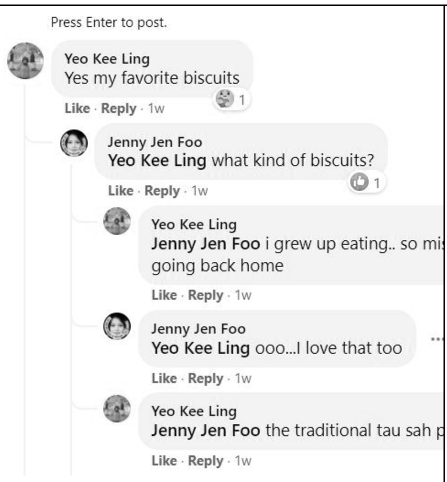
APPENDIX

Appendix 1	 **建来成饼家** is feeling blessed at **建来成饼家**. September 2 at 2:03 PM · Batu Pahat · 今天有制作一部分的月饼哦，单璜月饼，双璜月饼，加头莲蓉，红豆沙还有金翡翠。目前在做着月饼，馋嘴的小编只能看没得吃，知道为什么吗？跟大家享心得。 豆沙饼要吃热热的， 腊饼要吃温温的， 月饼要吃隔夜的， 冰皮要吃冷冷的。... See More 43 4 Comments 8 Shares 	 **建来成饼家** is feeling blessed at **建来成饼家**. September 3 at 4:08 PM · Batu Pahat · 今天制作了很多顾客期待的《上海月饼》 还有《冰皮莲蓉月饼》，上海月饼内陷是莲蓉还有一粒蛋黄，外皮酥酥脆脆的，加上浓郁的莲蓉内陷，保证爱不释手，一位顾客刚买就迫不及待的就一边走一边用手比一个赞👍，看着顾客愉快的吃着饼，小编都觉得很棒。 冰皮月饼，当然放冰箱，冷冷的吃在嘴里，爽在心里。感觉吃着雪糕，而且满嘴的莲蓉馅料，解脱了天气炎热的感觉。当然这是小编喜欢的吃法，直接吃还能感觉得到外层软软QQ的月饼皮。也是一种享受。 看着顾客直接吃，小编有一点冲动也想吃一粒上海月饼。美食的诱惑难以抵抗，救命啊~... See More **建来成饼家** 传统礼饼店 本店产品有《豆沙饼，香饼，水晶... 34 2 Comments 25 Shares
Appendix 2	 **建来成饼家** September 15 at 11:51 AM · 大家是不是还在为中秋送礼烦恼呢？ 现在不必烦恼啦！！我们家月饼开始售卖啦！绝对是老一辈人和batu lang最熟悉的味道哦 吃过的人都知道我们一直秉承着质好味美的特性✨ 去掉奢华的包装，让月饼回归简约的美味 小编觉得这绝对是送礼的好选择 欢迎大... See More 42 6 Comments 15 Shares 	 **建来成饼家** September 18 at 11:14 AM · 八月中秋月儿圆，合家团聚乐无边 传统的味道一直有着让人回味在口，温暖在心的魔力，所以快和家人们一起分享手工制作、新鲜出炉的传统味道吧✨ 中秋节就快到了，还没购买我们家月饼的朋友们快来订购啦~不然要等明年咯 疫情期间也希望大家保护好自己，勤洗手，保持安全距离哦~ 预祝大家中秋快乐！！ 电话号码☎：07-4312566 地址: 150, Jalan Rahmat Batu Pahat #建来成饼家 #传统饼 #老字号 #中秋节 #中秋月饼 #中秋佳节 #月饼 36 6 Comments 5 Shares

Appendix 3	 建来成饼家 September 21 at 10:17 AM · 中秋佳节，举杯仰天遥祝：月圆人圆花好，事顺业顺家兴! 祝大家中秋节快乐！！ Happy Mid Autumn Festival~ 疫情期间也希望大家保护好自己，勤洗手，保持安全距离哦~ 电话号码☎：07-4312566 地址: 150, Jalan Rahmat Batu Pahat 祝愿佳节快乐， 花好月圆合家欢。 中秋花好月又圆， 幸福与你两团圆。 2021 24 Like Comment Share	 建来成饼家 18h · 重阳节，是中国民间传统节日，节期在每年农历九月初九日。重阳节的第一个节日主题，就是"祭祖节"，这是一个游子风尘归来、全族祭奠先人的节日。 那么独在异乡的你是否也想念着我们家传统饼的味道呢？别担心我们也有开放邮寄服务哦！欢迎联络我们 疫情期间也希望大家保护好自己，勤洗手，保持安全距离哦~ 电话号码☎：07-4312566 地址: 150, Jalan Rahmat Batu Pahat #建来成 #老字号饼家 #没有添加防腐剂 #古早味 #豆沙饼 重陽 思念的节日 农历九月初九登高望远 CHONGYANG 九月九日忆山东兄弟 唐 王维 独在异乡为异客， 每逢佳节倍思亲。 遥知兄弟登高处， 遍插茱萸少一人。 11 2 Shares Like Comment Share
Appendix 4	 建来成饼家 Yesterday at 11:11 AM · 建来成老式豆沙饼一直是老一辈人和batu lang最熟悉的味道 香味浓郁的咸甜豆沙饼 还有人称金条的水晶饼 你喜欢那种饼呢？来告诉我们 👍咸豆沙饼 ❤甜豆沙饼 😆水晶饼 其他，欢迎留言告诉我们 一直都秉承与传承着质好味美的特性 为大家带来最美好的产品又不失记忆中的味道 疫情期间也希望大家保护好自己，勤洗手，保持安全距离哦~ 电话号码☎：07-4312566 地址: 150, Jalan Rahmat Batu Pahat #建来成 #老字号饼家 #没有添加防腐剂 #古早味 KEDAI KEK KIAN LAI SENG You and 31 others 2 Comments 7 Shares Haha Comment Share	 建来成饼家 22h · 建来成饼家 拥有进80年历史的老字号饼家，一直秉承与传承着质好味美的特性 为大家带来最美好的产品又不失记忆中的味道! 尽管人物在变，唯一不变的是最初始的古早好味 也是唯一联系四代情怀的老字号古早味 一直都是伴随你成长的味道 有机会来到Batu的朋友们千万别忘了买些回去做手信哦！遇见即是幸福，品味即是惊喜... See More 建來成 春 福 57 6 Comments 22 Shares

Appendix 5



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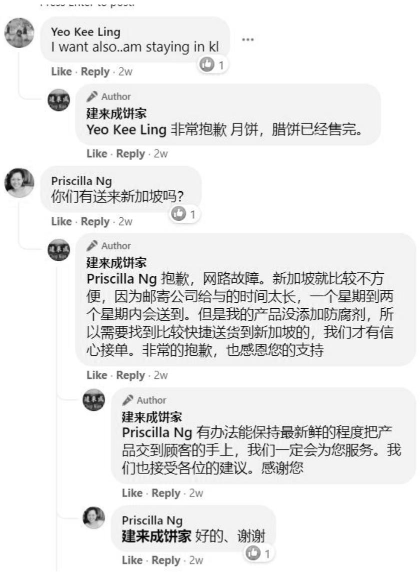
going back home
Like · Reply · 1w

Jenny Jen Foo
Yeo Kee Ling ooo...I love that too
Like · Reply · 1w

Yeo Kee Ling
Jenny Jen Foo the traditional tau sah p
Like · Reply · 1w



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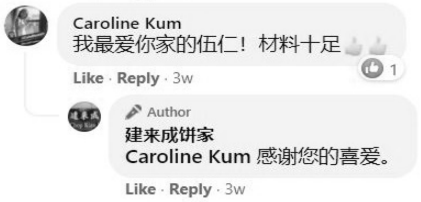

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