A CONTENT ANALYSIS ON THEME PARKS POST ON INSTAGRAM IN THE TIME OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Broadly, company use social media for commercial and communal purpose where it serves purpose to brand, sell and market their business also another way is to connect with and co-create with customer as well as providing platform to customer to bond together. With the shift towards visual content and fast-growing social network Instagram which photo, image and video sharing, it constitutes excellent vehicles for fostering relationships with customers. Same it goes during the crisis and risk, includes pandemics such as Covid19 crisis which hit whole world recently and collapse tourism and tour industry. The previous study show it is important to stay relevant and in a right momentum thru marketing communication. Therefore, this study adds limited literature on Instagram and Visual Content Analysis during crisis and risk. This study evaluated eight (8) Malaysia's Theme Parks official Instagram during Covid19 crisis. Observing the phase of RMCO when the country ready to recover and opening economic activity including domestic tourism. Four dimensions – visual features post, frequency of post, massage advertisement appeals and marketing communication engagement measure were examined in the visual content analysis session. Subsequently, identified sub-category like emotional and informational post appeals as well as number of 'like' and number of 'comments', studying the massage hidden and needs of the readers from the Instagram posted 'comment' been observed and analyse. This study found that the top most engaged theme park Instagram and the top recommended theme park in travel and tour website is the same where this theme park adapt frequently post their activity on Instagram as well as communicate with their customer. This study concludes by discussing on how DMO and Tourism Marketing Manager could use their Instagram to do promotion and engagement during crisis and risk like Pandemic Covid19 by strategize their post to get sufficient number of 'like' and number of 'comments' based on emotional and informational post appeals as marketing communication engagement.

ABSTRAK

Secara umumnya, syarikat menggunakan media sosial untuk tujuan komersial dan perkongsian di mana ia berfungsi untuk menjenamakan, menjual dan memasarkan perniagaan mereka dalam masa yang sama adalah untuk berhubung dan berinteraksi dengan pelanggan serta menyediakan platform kepada pelanggan untuk menjalin ikatan perhubungan dan perkongsian seasama mereka. Dengan peralihan ke arah kandungan visual, Instagram merupakan rangkaian media sosial yang berkembang pesat. Perkongsian foto, gambar dan video, menjadi sumber penghubung yang sangat efisyen untuk berkomunikasi dan seterusnya membina hubungan baik dengan pelanggan. Sama juga ketika krisis dan risiko, seperti krisis Covid19 yang melanda seluruh dunia baru-baru ini, yang turut melumpuhkan industri pelancongan. Kajian terdahulu menunjukkan bahawa penting untuk tetap relevan dan berada dalam momentum yang tepat melalui komunikasi pemasaran terutamanya ketika menghadapi krisi. Oleh itu, kajian ini menambahkan sumber kajian yang terhad melibatkan kajian Instagram dan Analisis Kandungan Visual semasa krisis dan menghadapi risiko. Kajian ini menilai lapan (8) laman Instagram rasmi Taman Tema Malaysia semasa krisis Covid19. Memerhatikan fasa RMCO ketika negara bersedia pada fasa pemulihan dan membuka aktiviti ekonomi termasuk pelancongan domestik. Empat dimensi – iaitu catatan ciri visual, kekerapan pengeposan, bentuk pesanan pengiklanan dan ukuran penglibatan komunikasi pemasaran telah disenaraikan dan dikaji dalam sesi analisis kandungan visual. Selepas itu, sub-kategori seperti pengeposan iklan berbentuk emosional mesej mahupun mesej berbentuk informasi dikaji dan dikenalpsti. Selain itu, bilangan 'suka' dan 'komen' oleh pembaca direkodkan serta rupa bentuk dan mesej dari 'komen' yang disiarkan Instagram diperhatikan dan dianalisis.
Kajian ini mendapati bahawa taman tema yang menduduki tangga teratas paling digemari di Instagram dan taman tema yang disyorkan paling popular di laman web pelancongan adalah sama di mana taman tema ini sering mengepos aktiviti dan pengiklanan mereka di Instagram, juga sering berkomunikasi dengan pelanggan mereka. Kajian ini diakhiri dengan membincangkan bagaimana DMO dan Pengurus Pemasaran Pelancongan dapat menggunakan Instagram mereka untuk melakukan promosi dan penglibatan semasa krisis dan risiko seperti Pandemic Covid19 dengan menyusun strategi pos mereka untuk mendapatkan jumlah 'suka' dan jumlah 'komen' yang mencukupi berdasarkan pos yang berbentuk mesej emosi mahupun mesej berbentuk informasi sebagai komunikasi pemasaran yang baik.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CMCO - Movement Control Order
DMO - Destination Marketing Organization
EMCO - Movement Control Order
MCO - Movement Control Order
RMCO - Recovery Movement Control Order
PATA - Pacific Asia Travel Association
UTM - Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
UNWTO - World Tourism Organization
SARS - Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
COVID-19 - Coronavirus disease
DESTCON - Destination Condition Scale
NTO - National Tourism Organization

LIST OF SYMBOLS

δ	-	Minimal error

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the background of study, problem statement, research question, research objectives, significance, scope of study and finally structure of the study.

1.1 Background of Study

The Covid-19 pandemic has upended the global travel & tourism industry, and the road to recovery will undoubtedly be a long one. Fear is still widespread, yet a readiness to return to public life is increasing. This contrast between navigating today's complex reality, while simultaneously planning for a future rebound, perfectly articulates the challenge faced by Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) and all players.

A research report by Skift, U.S. Travel Marketing During Covid-19, shows that nearly 90 percent of travel marketers have slashed their budgets. However, doing so without an optimization strategy puts brands at risk of losing marketing talent and opportunities to keep up with consumer needs and shifting behaviour.

Remaining visible throughout the pandemic has been a critical objective for our holistic engagement efforts across all key stakeholders (Kristie Goshow, n.d.) Additionally, an IPA study into advertising during a recession (Field, n.d.) found that brand that increase media communication spend in downturns grow 4.5 times faster.

As the world economy slowly reawakens, it's clear that brands need to secure the best position on the starting line once it's go-time. Leading through this crisis by successfully pivoting marketing messaging by showcasing intelligence, empathy, flexibility, and an inclusive and collaborative attitude will go a long way to not only survive, but flourish.

In this contact, social media platforms have capacity to empower consumer and tourists to engage in secondary crisis communication and even take collective action against destinations. Such online actions result in challenges for tourism destinations related to crisis management and image restoration.(Kuhzady & Ghasemi, 2019)

Social media, as platforms for content-sharing, information diffusion, and publishing thoughts and opinions, have been the subject of a wide range of studies, examining online activity within fields from politics and media to health and crisis communication. However, for various reasons, some platforms are more widely-represented in research to date than others, particularly when examining large-scale activity captured through automated processes, or datasets reflecting the wider trend towards ‘big data’.(Highfield & Leaver, 2015)

Scholars also have classified social media as either highly visual social media or low visual social media (Shuqair & Cragg, 2017b) Sites such as Instagram and Snapchat, which are primarily photo-based, are considered to be highly visual social media. Highly visual social media are almost entirely photo-based, and, therefore they may encourage more frequent engagement in appearance-related behaviours than low visual social media. They also lead to greater feelings of intimacy than text-based platforms, as they simulate a social experience that is less abstract and more similar to real (Wikipedia, 2019). Instagram, a highly visual social media platform owned by Facebook and used for photo and video sharing which allows users to post digitally edited photos that others in their social network can then “view”, “like,” and “comment” on.

In the contact of Malaysia, the covid-19 Pandemic hit the Visit Malaysia 2020 campaign too tough and it leading to cancelation of the initiative. The movement control order has been imposed stated from 18th of March 2020 with 4 phases; MCO, EMCO, CMCO and RMCO. At the state of RMCO, Malaysia have opened the economic with the new normal life style (Wikipedia, 2019).

The economic opener included the tourism sector with the domestic tourism as a start-up and then the Reciprocal Green Lane initiative. But From the destination perspective, Theme park facing one of the most challenging to fulfil the new normal SOP and also gaining the trust and confident from the visitor.

This research will investigate what did Malaysia Theme Park does in their official Instagram as platform of Social Media Marketing to communicating, engaging, and marketing themselves during MCO.

1.2 Problem Statement

Various study of Social Media marketing and visual or motion content in Integrated marketing communication tools in term of destination marketing, yet the context of the study in the specific tourism attraction like theme park who have structured organization management and special marketing team not yet been explored. The used of Instagram as picture sharing engagement and communication does influence consumer behaviour and visual representations are seen as more communicative online than text since “processing pictures requires fewer cognitive resources and they sometimes say much more than words”. Preliminary research into Instagram has offered large-scale analyses of images from specific locations, but there are many user practices, shared experiences, and approaches to content that have not yet been researched in any significant detail (Highfield & Leaver, 2015)

The study between most visited Malaysia Theme Parks social media content as marketing communication tools never been studied yet especially in the situation of crisis and risk like covid-19 where most of the destination having shock and, in a cost-cutting state.

This study does provide insights of overall destination or attraction on branding and marketing online strategy that will influence consumer engagement and trust during the crisis and risk by examine Malaysia most visited theme parks official Instagram. What did the difference and what did they do well? Then use related finding to proposed recommendation to improve.

Pandemic Covid-19 was at peak of the threat on end of February 2020 lead to Global lockdown. PATA and UNWTO announce tourism risk and crisis level Destcon 1 compared to SARS crisis which in Destcon 2 (DESTCON - Destination Condition Scale) (Amaral et al., 2015) where the tourism industry totally stops with no business activity due to 2 condition:

1. Creating a global fear of travelling
2. Movement Control Order and cross boarder lockdown

This no business and stand still phenomena also effected Theme Parks around the globe. As we know, Theme Parks is one of the tourism attraction or destination which drive tourist across region & it's a destination of many people gathering activity yet this industry has facing most challenging towards its resilience during and on the post covid-19 crisis.

As refer to *PATA Bounce Back Tourism Risk, Crisis and Recovery Management Guide on SARS and Indian Ocean earthquake/tsunami* response, one of the main recovery processes indicate was towards restoration marketing communication recovery plan (Amaral et al., 2015). No one can deny that travel and tourism is highly dependent upon Word-of-Mouth (WoM) for credibility.

The advent of online communication thru website & social media has dramatically transformed the landscape of crisis reduction, readiness, response and recovery. Responsible use of online communication channel can have a very positive effect on mitigating the negative effects of a crisis by influencing the behaviour and actions of travellers and the industry, thus minimizing impact towards the resilience.

The study also shown that visual and motion content of communication have more effective, more engage and have high impact towards influence, branding & marketing.

1.3 Research Question

To achieve the research objectives, the following research questions were formulated and examined:

i. What are the common visual features of post on Instagram by official theme parks account during Covid-19?

ii. What is the frequency of post on Instagram by official theme parks account during Covid-19?

iii. What is the common visual message style of post appeals on Instagram by official theme parks account during Covid-19?

1.4 Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to providing insights how the features, frequency and visual message style used on theme parks Instagram post in the time of pandemic Covid-19 to communicate with customer and their stakeholders. In detail, the objectives of this study are:

i. To examine the visual features of post used on Instagram official theme parks account during Covid-19.

ii. To examine the frequency of post on Instagram by official theme parks account during Covid-19.

iii. To examine message style of post appeals on Instagram by official theme parks account during Covid-19

1.5 Scope of Study

This study conducted a content analysis focuses on Malaysian Theme Parks official Instagram from 8 mega company which have all in facility including dine in and stay in facility. Reason for choosing this theme parks base on 2 category: 1 for the popularity which is based on Traveloka and Trip Advisor top 10 most popular theme parks in Malaysia

Secondly base on theme park which have most active official Instagram account. By searching their official Instagram, there are around 600 posts within time of RMCO. This research was collected during the 1st Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) phase. Almost 3 months of time period from June 10th 2020 to 31st August 2020 were identified. At this phase Malaysia government have open and allowed more economic activity including domestic tourism.

1.6 Significant of Study

Academically, this study adds limited literature on Instagram and Visual Content Analysis during crisis and risk. The marketing communication language for Instagram can be measured by number of ‘like’ and number of ‘comment’ as well as studying the massage hidden and needs of the readers from the Instagram posted ‘comment’. Performance could be also measured based on the information collected.

From an industry perspective, an understanding differences of visual post appeals in social media post (emotional & informative) could be used by industries when posting any treat on their official social media account during the crisis. For example, DMO could promote visual post shown their destination comply on Covid-19 sanitizing policy (visual informational post) in order to motivate customers to trust their brand and creating intention to purchase.

The findings of this study are also significant for organizations in choosing most engaged visual appeals for promotional or brand loyalty building during the crisis and risk in terms of gaining more ‘likes’ or ‘comment’. For example, by using visual emotional posts that portray joy, theme parks can build higher visibility and drag customers attention to beautiful memory even they cannot visit the attraction during the Covid-19 MCO. Therefore, the findings of this study on features and advertisement appeals associated with Instagram could also be helpful in better understanding marketing practices for brand and customer relationship-building, marketing and communication.

1.7 Structure of Study

This study provides five main chapters and start with the Introduction chapter which consist of background of the research problem, problem statement, and objectives of the study, research gap, research scope, and the significance of this study. The second chapter discusses and reviews relevant theories and literature on the subject of Pandemic and Tourism Industry, then social media as brand resilience and its component of efficiency, social media in tourism industry during previous pandemic and marketing appeals on Instagram. Based on the review, related hypotheses were developed at the end of Chapter 2. Chapter 3 describes the methods, data collection procedures and proposed analysis. The findings and discussions in Chapter 4 presents the results and discussion of the study based on the analyses done, finally, this thesis concludes with the academic and managerial implications, limitation and recommendation for future studies.

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