

THE PROCESS OF CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT ON FACEBOOK FAN PAGE IN THAILAND

กระบวนการความผูกพันระหว่างผู้บริโภคกับแฟนเพจเฟซบุ๊กในประเทศไทย

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Abstract

Facebook fan page are the new channel in the digital era that allows consumers; (1) to interact with brands through social network connection (2) to obtain news and information and (3) to feel close with brands or products. In marketer's point of view, consumer engagement is implemented as a key metric to gauge the effectiveness of social media. The objectives of this study are to understand consumer engagement process on facebook fan page under Thai context, to determine motivations and factors which impact the engagement with facebook fan page in different product categories, and to analyze the impact of engagement with facebook fan page on purchasing behavior. An analysis of data from 12 Thai informants in eight brand fan page indicated that the engagement process with fan page began with positive perception with the brands or products prior to visit fan page. Relevant and appealing contents on fan page such as information about brands or products or experience from other members are the key drivers for consumers to engage with the fan page while social bonding with other members does not influence on the process of building engagement because informants paid their attention on consuming information rather than interacting with others. However, the engagement did not have impact much on purchasing behaviour. Finally, Facebook fan page play a role on establishing relationship between consumers and brands.

Keywords : Engagement, Fan page, Facebook, Purchase Intention, Qualitative Interview

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บทคัดย่อ

แฟนเพจเฟซบุ๊กเป็นช่องทางใหม่ในโลกยุคดิจิทัลที่เอื้อให้ผู้บริโภคได้มี (1) ปฏิสัมพันธ์กับตราสินค้าผ่านการติดต่อแบบเครือข่ายสังคมออนไลน์ (2) ผู้บริโภคสามารถรับข้อมูลข่าวสาร และ (3) รู้สึกใกล้ชิดกับตราสินค้ามากขึ้น ทำให้เกิดการตลาดสมัยใหม่ได้ประยุกต์เรื่องความผูกพันของผู้บริโภค (Consumer Engagement) เป็นเครื่องชี้วัดถึงประสิทธิผลของสื่อออนไลน์ การศึกษาเรื่องความผูกพันของผู้บริโภคไทย ต่อการใช้งานแฟนเพจเฟซบุ๊กมีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อเข้าใจกระบวนการความผูกพัน และปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อความผูกพันของผู้บริโภคแฟนเพจเฟซบุ๊กภายใต้บริบทสังคมไทย ในหมวดสินค้าที่แตกต่างกัน นอกจากนี้ยังวิเคราะห์ถึงผลของความผูกพันของแฟนเพจเฟซบุ๊กที่มีต่อความตั้งใจซื้อหรือบริการ โดยผู้วิจัยได้ใช้การวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพโดยการสัมภาษณ์ (Qualitative Interview) กับผู้บริโภคที่มีการใช้แฟนเพจของสินค้าและบริการต่างๆ เป็นประจำ (Active) จำนวนทั้งสิ้น 12 ท่านที่เข้าเยี่ยมชมแฟนเพจสินค้าหรือบริการใน 8 หมวดสินค้า ผลการวิจัยพบว่า กระบวนการความผูกพันเริ่มขึ้นเมื่อผู้บริโภครู้สึกดีกับตราสินค้า หรือสินค้านั้น ก่อนการเริ่มใช้งานแฟนเพจ เนื้อหาที่ปรากฏบนแฟนเพจเป็นแรงขับให้ผู้บริโภครู้สึกผูกพันกับแฟนเพจนั้น โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งเมื่อเนื้อหาที่สามารถตอบสนองความต้องการพื้นฐานด้านข้อมูลของผู้บริโภค เช่น ข้อมูลใหม่ๆ ของสินค้าหรือบริการ นอกจากนี้ผลการวิจัยยังพบว่าความใกล้ชิดกับสมาชิกคนอื่นๆ บนแฟนเพจไม่มีอิทธิพลกับกระบวนการในการสร้างความผูกพันกับแฟนเพจต่างๆ เนื่องจากความสนใจของผู้บริโภคต่างมุ่งเน้นที่การบริโภคข่าวสารที่ปรากฏบนแฟนเพจมากกว่าการรู้จักคนอื่นๆ ในท้ายที่สุดผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยเปิดเผยว่าการสร้างความผูกพันบนแฟนเพจไม่ส่งผลต่อพฤติกรรมการซื้อสินค้ามากนัก แต่มองว่าการได้เข้าไปใช้งานแฟนเพจเฟซบุ๊ก มีส่วนสำคัญในการสร้างความสัมพันธ์ที่ดีระหว่างตราสินค้าและผู้บริโภค

คำสำคัญ : ความผูกพัน แฟนเพจ เว็บไซต์เฟซบุ๊ก ความตั้งใจซื้อสินค้า การสัมภาษณ์เชิงคุณภาพ

The Process of Consumer Engagement on Facebook fan page in Thailand

In the era of digital life, social media has been discussed as the powerful tool in the new marketing world. The social media is a better choice for marketers to deliver their intended voice to consumers' mindset (Evans, 2010) and to determine theme of communication along with human needs such as love, self-expression, fun, and etc (Treadaway, and Smith, 2010). Also, the social media makes brands or products close to their consumers and spreads marketing messages in relaxed and conversational way as well as reduce the cost per head for advertisement comparing to

traditional media such as TV, radio, or magazine (Treadaway, and Smith, 2010).

One of the most popular social network websites in Thailand is Facebook. As of February 2013, the amount of active Facebook accounts in Thailand has reached 18.5 million or around 30% of the population of the country which ranks Thailand the 13th in the world regarding number of facebook users (Socialbakers.com, 2013). Comparing to other social media, Twitter and instagram are less popular than Facebook, with only 10% of Thai social media users had Twitter accounts and 5% of social media users have accessed Instagram (Marketingoops, 2013). Therefore, marketers are willing to use facebook

as the tools to share information virally and build communities for their brands. Facebook fan page can be beneficial for marketers or entrepreneurs in three ways (Facebook, 2013). 1) Branding; Marketers can add a unique cover photo and showcase your most important news on your page timeline. 2) Highlight what matters: Marketers can pin a new post to the top of your page each week so people notice what's important. and 3) Manage everything in one place; Marketers can see and respond to your recent activities and private messages right from the top of your Page.

Since facebook is widely used and beneficial for digital marketing, the tool to measure the effectiveness of social media based on consumer behaviour is very critical. Nonetheless, the measurement of marketing activities on social media through consumer satisfaction or number of followers on the website is not efficient as it was failed to capture consumers' responses towards the activities. Consumers' engagement term was proposed to be the key metrics that marketers or entrepreneurs must consider when running their business on facebook.

Therefore, understanding the process of consumer engagement is becoming very important for companies to understand role of social media in business strategy so as to create opportunities to reach and communicate their marketing activities to their consumers effectively. This paper explores engagement process and determines the definition of the engagement on fan page. The research finding

will help marketers to identify the way to plan marketing strategy based on consumer behavior on social media which is necessary for marketers to reach ultimate goal on selling brands or products.

Literature Review

Since social media are emerged as the profound changes in communication platforms. Boyd and Ellison (2008) defined social media from its features and benefits; 1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, 2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and 3) view and traverse their list of connections and this made by others within the system. In order to measure the performance of social media, engagement is implemented to explain consumers' behavior and commitment on social media and marketing objectives. Some marketing scholars viewed that engaging customers in the online world is about the participatory power of millions of users to profit the business (Harden, and Heyman, 2009, and Evans, 2010) The use of engagement marketing tactics through applications, social ads, and so forth has opened up communication channels with consumers (Chapman, 2008). O'Brien (2009), one of the most popular gurus in social media research, viewed that engagement is clearly an important component of user experience, but like other components, it is somewhat intangible and thus difficult to measure and evaluate.

Furthermore, the term of engagement has been defined in various fields including

organizational behavior, psychology, sociology and political science. In 2010, Mollen and Wilson (2010) summarize the meaning of engagement in various aspects such as consumer behaviour online, interactivity, e-learning, advertising, and so forth.

In the field of marketing, the term “engagement” appeared in very few academic articles (Brodie et al., 2011). Specifically to explain consumer behavior in social media, Brodie (2011) defined the principle of engagement involves specific experiences between consumers and the brand, and/or other members of the community. Consumer engagement is a context-dependant, psychological state characterized by fluctuating intensity levels that occur within dynamic, iterative engagement process. Additionally, Evans (2010) proposed the process of consumer engagement can be divided into four steps in order to illustrate clear picture of behavior during engagement in social media; 1) Consumption 2) Curation 3) Creation and 4) Collaboration. Similar to study of Zailskaitė-Jastė and Kuvykaite (2012), linkage between consumer engagement with social media and brand elements can be explain into five stages which have an impacts on building brand equity differently; 1) Watching stage has a relationship with brand awareness 2) Sharing and 3) Commenting stages have a relationship with high brand awareness, favorable, and strong association, 4) Producing stage has a relationship with brand loyalty and 5) Curating stage has a relationship with brand loyalty and advocating.

While the consumer engagement literature shows the development of the concept of engagement from their psychological to action stages in different context, it is very important for this study to provide a foundation of consumer engagement with facebook fan page in Thai context. Conceptualizing its dimensions under Thai environment is the first stage for researchers to establish nature of engagement process amongst Thai consumers to be an important area for the research.

Research Objectives

The purposes of the study are 1) to understand consumer engagement process on facebook fan page under Thai context. 2) to determine motivations and factors which impact the engagement with facebook fan page in different product categories. 3) to understand the impact of consumer engagement with facebook fan page on purchasing behavior as it indicates the effectiveness of consumer engagement on social media.

Research Questions

Qualitative research was designed to see how individuals engage with facebook fan page as qualitative methods are appropriate when the research is exploratory in nature, and when the area for examination is unfamiliar to the researcher since the concept of engagement is not clear and academic articles about facebook fan page are very few for Thai consumers. This leads to the following research questions: how and to what extent do individuals engage with

fan page? What is the process of the engagement amongst Thai users? How are they using fan page to drive purchasing behaviors? What are the factors that make you feel engaged with fan page? An interview guide was developed to explore these questions. The guide focuses on the use of four categories of mobile phone, car, stationery, and non-alcohol drink.

Research Method and Design

For the study, the researcher observed fan page users from eight brand fan page and invited the users who have actively interaction on the fan page such as posting the image, playing online games, or advises other members by sending the message to their inbox with the letter of introduction about objectives of this research. Once the users accepted to join the interview, screening questionnaire about online behaviour and brand usage will be used to verify the profile of informants. Recruiting from facebook fan page directly valued the study because researchers are confident in to have participants who are indeed active and have various activities on their fan page.

The study was conducted by using semi-structure interviews with 12 fan page users as informants. The reason for choosing informants is associated with the presumption that social media targets are young people that tend to use new technologies and internet. Key informants are expected to have high frequency of visiting the fan page according to the model of active users from Forrester research (Haven, 2012). In addition, from the facebook statistics, the

result showed that the ranges of Thai people who subscribe facebook members (62%) were people aged between 18-24 years old, and 25-34 years old. (Socialbakers, 2013).

Hence, the participants were divided into four groups; 1) Young users (18-24 years old) who were active in high involvement products fan page, 2) Young users (18-24 years old) who were active in low involvement products fan page, 3) Old users (25-34 years old) who were active in high involvement products fan page, and 4) Old users (25-34 years old) who were active in low involvement products fan page.

Main Finding

In the past studies, the term ‘engagement’ was largely understood and commonly used in different contexts. In order to have a clear definition of engagement, understanding in the development of engagement is necessary to be shown in the specific context. From the qualitative findings, it was possible to tentatively segment the framework of engagement process amongst Thai consumers into three steps according to their online perception and behaviour; Entry to fan page, Evaluation, and Action stages.

Entry to fan page

In general, fan page users considered pressing like facebook fan page relied on their perception towards fan page and brands/products usage. Therefore, the research concluded three main reasons that affected their decision to press like. Firstly, majority of informants revealed

that once they have a high level of satisfaction with brands/products, they are likely to be the members of fan page. One of informants expressed that *“I have good feeling with the product and the owner of the product. I am not hesitate to click follow the fan page.”* Prior to preference with brands or products, interestingly, past usage/experience with brands or products is another factor to drive the level

of engagement. The more experience with brands and products, the more active in their fan page. Experienced users in brands or products believed that they have sufficient knowledge about brands and products to share with others: *“I have used this product before. Once I saw someone need to know how to solve technical problem, I would like to let them know about the solution. It is smart to help others.”*

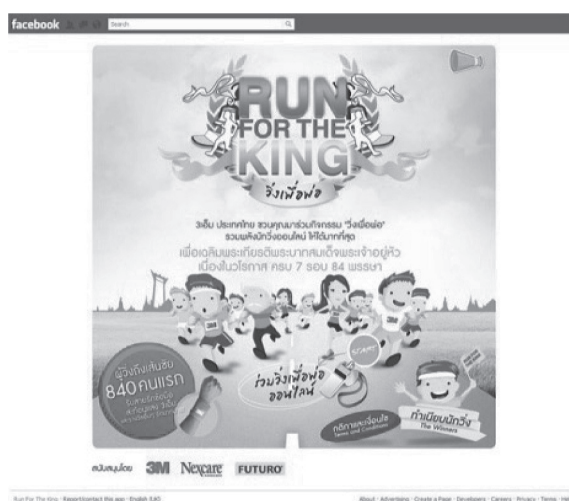


Figure 1 Example of games that convince users to engage

Secondly, some informants decided following facebook fan page because of the contents on the fan page. Information, images, or interactive games in the fan page can motivate for this type of group to use facebook fan page. Once users considered the contents are relevant or appealing to them, they will follow the fan page frequently: *“My friends invited me to play the online game with them. Actually, I do not know what the site is. After playing games, it is very fun. I am addicted to play everyday.”* Lastly, social sharing also affects informants to

join their fan page. Although consumers had no experience with the brands, but the equity of brand in the real world drove consumers to follow up the news, images or information from fan page. Some informants revealed that as facebook is the site to share feeling and interest to their peers, following fan page is the tool for them to show their interest in the specific time: *“In that time, I want to have more detail about the product to make (purchasing) decision. My friends saw it online so that they sent me a lots the detail.”*

Evaluative stage

Before joining facebook fan page, different expectation has an impact on the level of commitment. Consumers evaluated facebook fan page based on their expectation from both its features and benefits.

Fundamentally, similar to general websites, consumers perceived fan page as the channel to connect with brands and interacts with people who had the same taste, interest, and lifestyle. Hence, fan page was expected to offer basic features to the users including fast responses from administrator towards all enquiries, polite conversation amongst users, the dynamic of content and updated information.

In terms of value of fan page, Thai users became fan page users due to the purpose of gaining information. Therefore, in particular to the content on facebook fan page, type of information was important to determine the level of engagement. Ideally, the information must have three main attributes; 1) Relevancy: providing information that serves consumers' need, 2) Newness: offering the new news about brands or products, and 3) Realness: sharing information from other real experiences.

Nonetheless, another benefit of fan page associated with entertaining reasons. Users felt engaged with components such as VDO, games, or images. Emotional consequence was used to justify the level of participation with fan page. Regard with Thai character, positive feeling after playing such as relaxing, enjoyment or fun were expected as the factors that led to positive attitude towards fan page and stimulate

re-visiting fan page. Additionally, unique or new VDO, games or images were appealing users to have an interaction with fan page as it makes consumers feel exclusive to interaction with new information before their peers. *"I love visiting this fan page everyday as I can see new images of my favourite actors. I am confident no one can get this as it is only for fan page followers"*

In aspects of re-visiting again, users judged the fan page in order to decide visiting fan page again by evaluating the value of the content. The emotional participation with fan page relied on the value of fan page and annoyance from the contents on its fan page. Sometime users felt annoyed with the content of fan page that appeared on their newsfeed too frequently. Users still wanted to see the news from friends more than the contents from fan page. Besides, the ton of information in each topic would dilute overall interest of the fan page. Similar to general Thai habits, Thai people were likely to avoid reading long articles on the fan page. One or two short paragraphs were appealing for consumers to read the post.

Action Stage

Action with fan page was one of the most important indicators to measure how users engaged with fan page. The research showed that behavioral engagement with fan page related with the frequency and span of various forms of interactions. The frequency of visiting fan page led to the growth of positive perception with the brand, whereas the level and

valence of emotional engagement with fan page would not have any influence to the intention to purchase brands/products from the brand.

Interestingly, most informants confirmed that different forms of interaction such as pressing like, pressing share, or posting the comment with fan page did not affect with the level of engagement. All functions are perceived as the tools to play on the fan page which comes from the fact that most Thai users tends to be passive fan page users. *“I usually see the comments from others but do not want to comment. I seldom post the comments to others but it means nothing for me.”*

In addition, although social bonding was considered as the important factors in facebook context, but the interaction with other members on fan page was not important to build the engagement. In users’ point of view, the relationship amongst fan page users occurred through sharing their experience about brands or products usage but it is difficult to build friendship with others in the long terms. Thai users still needed privacy on facebook. Some want to only talk with friends they met in the real world. Besides, issues about bonding with others on fan page came from their negative perception towards internet usage. All informants perceived they should not be too close with people from internet world since it might lead to internet or cyber crime. *“I heard so many things about online crime. I am so scared. I need to chat only with my friends who I know in the real world”*

Impact on Purchase Intention

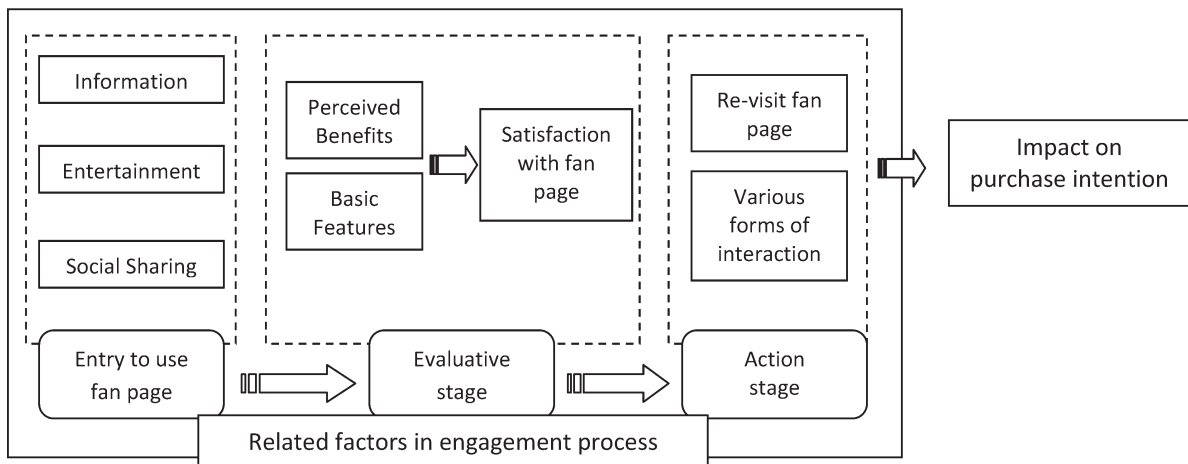
Regard with Forrester research, active users were depicted as users who have high frequency in visiting and interacting with social media (Haven, 2007). Interestingly, according to the research findings, there was no evidence that high frequency of visiting fan page stimulates purchasing behavior. Majority of fan page users primarily consumed technical information from administrator and learnt real experience from other members to support their decision making. The likelihood of purchasing brands or products was established only from the content about promotion. *“I am not saying that I will go and buy the products immediately after visiting fan page but I will use the information from others in the fan page to be the key factors when buying products”*

However, at brand level, the research findings showed supporting evidence for the relationship between interaction with fan page and commitment with the brand. Some users viewed that fan page was very effective to create brand or product awareness. When launching new products or brands, users could learn strengths and weaknesses of new products via discussion on the fan page. In addition, way of brand communication could reflect to the image and personality of its brand. *“When I used the fan page and see its update about new model of mobile phone, I think it is fantastic. The brand is new and modern.”* Besides, some users considered fan page as another touch-point for brands or products. It made users feel close to brands or products.

Discussion

According to the study of customer engagement process (Bowden, 2007), positive satisfaction with brands or products generated repeating behavior such as repeat purchasing or visiting at the shop. Then, the process engagement is the consequence of affective commitment with their products and services. In the context of

fan page in Thailand, the process of engagement took place in similar way. The findings in this study implemented the model of customer engagement process to explain consumer behaviour in the field of facebook fan page amongst Thai people as can be seen in the model 1.



Model 1 The process of consumers engagement fan page in Thai context

In the framework of study, Thai consumers had different reasons for using fan page including information, entertainment, and social sharing. These three factors are key motivations to create engagement with fan page. In users' point of view, reasons for using fan page determined the expectation from fan page to serve their needs.

Once users see features in facebook fan page, consumers started evaluating the benefit of their fanpage to ensure that offerings can serve their need to use social media. Evaluation stage was an importance of participation on fan page because this stage mainly relate with

the perception and emotion of engagement during their fan page usage.

After that, action stage is the consequence of emotional engagement with information or features appeared on the fan page. The likelihood of re-visiting fan page is largely based on their satisfaction with perceived benefits from its features rather than felt loyalty with brand. Most users wanted to follow the post from other members more than feel being group members of fan page. Different from previous studies (Zailskaite-Jaste & Kuvykaite, 2012), the engagement process with social media have a strong relationship with brand equity

Information from the users showed that different type of product categories had the impact on visiting fan page differently. In high involvement products such as smart phone, or cars, the decision to use fan page depended on the information. Users valued the content on the fan page as useful information for purchasing decision in the future. Spending time on fan page for high involvement products was not too long. Once users consumed relevant data, they tended to leave the fan page and use their own facebook account to connect with others.

On the other hand, in low involvement products, enjoyment from all entertaining components was judged as the important elements which created the participation with the fan page. Amongst all activities on fan page, playing games on the facebook was seemed to create participation with fan page. Consumers feel enjoyed with the challenge in the game such as collecting scores and interacting with their friends through instant messaging. However, notably, most users who play game were not able to take marketing information during playing game. Information about brands or products was mainly derived from the posts from administrator or other users.

At action stage, Thai consumers were not active to show their action on fan page. Level of engagement can be measured from the frequency of re-visiting and various forms of action appeared on fan page. Lastly, purchasing intention was not considered as the sign of successful digital marketing. Thai consumers

did not make final purchase decision based on purely the information from fan page. Other marketing media such as television commercial, radio advertisement, or billboard also had influence on purchase intention. In line with the perspective from marketing gurus in marketing, Keller (2009) proposed that interactive marketing communications such as social media have a distinct advantage in their ability to encourage learning, teaching expression of commitment, and observation of brand loyalty amongst consumers. Eventually, it is not necessary for digital marketers to build purchasing behaviours amongst fan page users. The purpose of building consumer engagement with fan page mainly emphasize on creating the good relationship between brands and consumers.

Conclusion and Managerial Implications

The main objective for this study is to illustrate the concept of engagement from active fan page users for practitioners and academicians to study and design digital marketing strategy. The results of this study provided several interesting insights on consumer behavior with facebook fan page. In conclusion, there are especially five notable findings of the process of engagement arose from the results. First, information or contents on fan page was still the core for users to drive engagement process with the fan page. Consumers considered re-visiting fan page from the benefits of fan page which mainly derived from the contents about brands or products. Nevertheless, it should be taken in consideration that too much information about

brands or products might lead to ignorance in visiting fan page.

Secondly, the finding seemed to offer validation to the claim that online communities had not strong instrumental value to users to engage with the process. Thai users believed that facebook was personal space for them and their friends to interact with. Fan page was just the channels for them to learn and know products or brands. The commitment with other members on the fan page was not the main priority in using fan page. Majority of informants were likely to only consume the information from other members, not interact with them.

Thirdly, the study showed the weak relationship between fan page usage and purchase intentions. Fan page usage was just the options for them to gain the information to support their purchasing decision. Users insisted to collect information from other sources. Nevertheless, the campaign of introducing new products was effective on fan page since it appeared on the newsfeed. Users feel convenient to see the information from their newsfeed.

Fourthly, brand engagement is not purely the consequence of participation with fan page. Fan page merely played role as the channel for Thai consumers to talk with brand in conversational way that led to close relationship between brand and Thai consumers. Nevertheless, to establish the equity of brand, brand engagement may derive from the content and the way the fan page talked with consumers in the long term.

Lastly, the findings revealed Thai consumers did not have engagement with fan page like social media scholars proposed in social media theory. Evans (2010) mentioned that the insight of engagement is the systematic process moving from consumption to collaboration stages. In comparison with Thai consumers, majority of informants did not create the content on fan page. The consumption of information is usual behavior of Thai consumers.

In conclusion, the concept of consumer engagement with facebook fan page was explained simply under Thai context. From the previous studies, engagement was described in various ways depended on the context of the studies. Bowden (2009) defined the customer engagement as “a psychological process comprising cognitive and emotional aspects”. This study showed that engagement with fan page was described as the frequency of visiting fan page and level of commitment in the content appeared on the fan page.

Limitation and Future Research

The research had limitation about the type of product categories. Since a limit to this study was taken out from 11 interviews amongst only 4 product categories helped us to build a general picture of engagement facebook usage, yet the findings were not enough to portray the theory of engagement process amongst all product categories. Various product categories had different digital marketing strategies to implement with users. Therefore, this might affect perception and usage with each fan page

differently. The interview should be conducted to a more diverse and random population of active facebook fan page users.

Another consideration was that there might have been fear factors about the internet usage amongst Thai people. As mentioned earlier, Thai people participated with the facebook and interacted with their acquaintances rather than building relationship with unknown people. The impact of this perception became the main obstacle to deep down understanding about social factors on fan page. The data from other communities group such as pet lover or movie star lovers was recommended to conduct since this type of groups normally opened their mind to know others and had activities on the

real world.

This study was limited in explaining the engagement process under Thai context because it was based on users' point of view which considered the fan page as the channel to connect with their brands and products. For future research on this topic, the qualitative interview should be conducted with marketing people who had responsibilities to plan social media strategy to see the gap of engagement in comparison between marketing and the real world. The interview with marketing people would also be beneficial for designing digital marketing and developing quantitative questionnaire for the future research.

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