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Hotel Social Media Marketing: A Study on Message Strategy and Its Effectiveness

Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this study is to develop a typology of social media messages in order to compare the effectiveness of different message strategies.

Design/methodology/approach - A total of 1,837 messages from 12 hotel brand Facebook pages were content analyzed. Applying both Correspondence Analysis and Multivariate Analysis of Variance, the study compared message strategy across hotel scale levels and explored the effectiveness of different message strategies.

Findings – A typology of four-type message format and six-type message content was developed. The picture message was the best message format. Product, brand, and involvement messages were shown more effective than information, reward, and promotion messages. Promotion message was the least effective message content type.

Research limitations/implications - The major limitation of this study is the generalizability due to the sample selection process. There is also limitation on exclusion of control variables, selection of the three effectiveness measures, and evolving social media technology.

Practical implications - The typology of Facebook message strategy developed in the study provided guidelines for hotel marketers to create messages on Facebook pages and track effectiveness. Hotels should also take full advantage of picture format and product, brand, and involvement contents.

Originality/value - This study created a new typology of social media message strategy consisting of two dimensions. It also provided empirical evidence to support the application of message strategy theory in the hotel social media marketing area.

Keywords: Hotel Facebook page, Marketing effectiveness, Message content, Message format, Message strategy, Social media, Word-of-Mouth

Article Classification: Research paper

1. Introduction

“Marketing is no longer about the stuff that you make, but about the stories you tell.” – Seth Godin.

As the famous marketing guru lays it out, marketing message matters, especially when employing social media as a marketing tool. The use of social media as part of the travel information search activity is becoming the norm. In business perspective, social media are perceived as effective tools and fruitful platforms for deepening customer engagement and enhancing customer-business interactions (Sigala, 2012). It comes as no surprise that the lodging industry is paying attention to the use of social media when it comes to marketing and engagement of guests. A survey showed that more than 90% of hospitality businesses were using social media for business purpose (First Merchant Services and Coyle Hospitality Group, 2012). It was also reported that social media had become a top priority for hoteliers and nearly 2/3 of all hotels used some form of social media to attract customers (TripAdvisor, 2012).

More and more hotels are establishing or enhancing their presence on social media platforms (Chan and Guillet, 2011). Given this growing trend, it behooves hoteliers to ensure that the message presented on social media outlets is indeed effective and the resources allocated to such efforts are justified. However, in a special industry report (Green and Lomanno, 2012), hoteliers are urged to be watchful when using emerging social media channels. And hoteliers are looking for possible means to measure marketing effectiveness when using social media as part

of their marketing arsenal. A review of related research literature does not offer a consensus on how to best achieve marketing effectiveness when using social media as a hotel marketing tool.

On social media platforms, messages posted by hotels are the major medium of advertising (“story telling”). Thus, to understand the marketing effectiveness of social media, it is very important to explore the messages as hotel advertisements. The literature again showed a lack of research focusing on studying social media messages. Having recognized this gap, this study applied advertising message strategy as theoretical framework to develop a typology of social media message strategies and examined the effectiveness of different message strategies. Specifically, the study intended to answer the following two research questions: (1) what types of message strategies are used currently by U.S. hotels on social media, and (2) which type of message strategy is the most effective in terms of popularity measures. By answering these two research questions, this study sought to offer useful suggestions on hotels’ future social media message strategy decisions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Message strategy and marketing effectiveness

Taylor (1999: 7) defined message strategy as “a guiding approach to a company’s promotional communication efforts for its products, its services, or itself.” The term “message strategy” deals with both “what to say” and “how to say it” in an advertising (Laskey *et al.*, 1989; Laskey *et al.*, 1995). “What to say” refers to the message content, for example, showing product price, quality, performance, availability, components, special offers, taste, packaging, guarantees or warranties, safety, or new ideas in the ads (Laskey *et al.*, 1989). “How to say it” deals with the message format or execution, for example, using of pictures, words, or both, choosing of ad media, ad timing, etc (Laskey *et al.*, 1994).

In advertising research, message strategy has been deeply investigated to develop the typology of message content. Most researchers agreed a dichotomy of message content - product attributes and brand image (Laskey *et al.*, 1995) - such as informational/rational/cognitive and image/emotional/feeling messages (Aaker and Norris, 1982), thinking and feeling messages (Vaughn, 1980), informational and transformational messages (Puto and Wells, 1984), and utilitarian and value-expressive messages (Johar and Sirgy, 1991). To expand this dichotomy, some researchers proposed multi-category message typologies, such as Simon's (1971) ten-category typology, Frazer's (1983) seven-category typology, Laskey, *et al.*'s (1989) eleven-category typology, and Taylor's (1999) six-category typology. The dichotomy of message content has also been adopted with regard to social media as new advertising platforms. de Vries *et al.* (2012) used informative and entertaining messages as two content types of posts on brand Facebook pages. Kwok and Yu (2013) categorized messages of restaurant Facebook pages into two types: sales and marketing and conversational messages. Cervellon and Galipienzo (2015) also summarized hotel Facebook page messages into two content types: emotional and informational messages.

Marketing effectiveness is always a major focus within the message strategy research. Marketing effectiveness refers to how advertising influences consumer behavior (Schreiber and Appel, 1990). Laskey *et al.* (1994, 1995) content analyzed over 1100 TV commercials and indicated that a commercial's effectiveness is influenced by message strategy and the effectiveness differs by product category. Their findings were supported by another study of print ads (Liebermann and Hint-Goor, 1996). In the hospitality field, a study of travel agency's advertising (Laskey *et al.*, 1994) also tested that different message strategies generate different advertising effectiveness. The findings revealed that informational messages elicit a more

favorable response than transformational messages and picture messages are more effective than text messages. When it comes to Facebook marketing, the numbers of likes, comments, and shares became a good popularity measure of marketing effectiveness (de Vries *et al.*, 2012; Kwok and Yu, 2013). Based on 11 brand Facebook pages, de Vries *et al.* (2012) found that video messages generate more likes while picture and web link messages are the same as text messages. They also confirmed that message strategy works differently for different product categories. However, the results also indicated that informational and entertaining messages result in the same effectiveness. Kwok and Yu (2013) analyzed 12 restaurant Facebook pages and revealed that photo and text messages receive more likes and comments than web link and video messages. They also found that conversational messages perform better than sales and marketing messages.

2.2 Social media marketing and the hotel industry

Marketing communication and advertising media have undergone an immense transformation over the past decade as new technologies made companies to contact customers more conveniently (Hongcharu and Eiamkanchanalai, 2009). The new media, such as the Internet, social media, and mobile phones are increasingly replacing traditional mass media (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012). Social media have already been recognized as new forms of word-of-mouth communication which is highly influential on consumers' decision making process (Hills and Cairncross, 2011). In the hotel industry, the literature demonstrates the favorable marketing outcomes of social media on guests' attitudes, booking intention (Leung *et al.*, 2015), and brand trust and brand loyalty (Tatar and Eren-Erdogmus, 2016). What is more, social media have also become an ideal tool for eWOM communication among hotel guests and thus exerted a significant effect on a hotel brand's image (Leung *et al.*, 2013).

Facebook is the most popular social media platform that grows interests in hotel social media research. Hsu (2012) investigated the status quo of Taiwan hotels' usage of Facebook marketing and presented Facebook as opportunities for the international eMarketing of hotels. Similarly, Phelan *et al.* (2013) examined the current status of Facebook marketing among the top 100 U.S. hotels and indicated that the use of Facebook features by U.S. hotels varies widely. Leung and Baloglu (2015) proposed and tested an integrated model of hotel Facebook marketing consisting of antecedents and consequences. They suggested that compliance, internalization, and identification are determinants of guests' attitudes toward a hotel Facebook page and hotel booking intentions and intention of spreading eWOM are two consequences of hotel Facebook marketing. Leung and Tanford (2016) developed and tested three competing antecedent models of Facebook marketing and demonstrated that Facebook marketing is a social phenomenon which is significantly impacted by three social influence factors. Choi *et al.* (2016) applied uses and gratifications theory in examining hotel Facebook marketing and identified information, convenience, and self-expression as antecedents for guest satisfaction of Facebook page and future booking intention. From message strategy perspective, Cervellon and Galipienzo (2015) conducted an experiment to test marketing effectiveness of different message strategy on a mock hotel Facebook page. They found that informational message is more effective than an emotional message in improving guests' attitudes and message content has no influence on booking intentions.

Although quite a few researches have been conducted on hotel social media marketing, how to evaluate the marketing effectiveness of social media is still lacking, specially from message strategy perspective, largely because hotels are still in the experimental stage of utilizing social media as a marketing tool (Inversini and Masiero, 2014). Besides, the typology of

Facebook messages developed in the previous literature was directly borrowed from the dichotomy of message content types without a detailed multi-category message typology. Therefore, based on advertising theory of message strategy, this empirical study on message strategy of hotel social media marketing and the related marketing effectiveness will fill a gap in existing literature and provide a foundation from which others can conduct further research with a focus on social media marketing and hospitality fields.

3. Methodology

Facebook was selected as the sample social media platform for this study because Facebook is the most popular social media platform (Greenwood *et al.*, 2016) and the most commonly used marketing platform by business (Stelzner, 2016). Similar to most advertising message strategy studies, this study used content analysis to collect and analyze messages from sample hotel brand Facebook pages (de Vries *et al.*, 2012; Kwok and Yu, 2013). Both message strategy and marketing effectiveness were examined in the study. Based on the message strategy theory, the study proposed and tested the following two hypotheses:

H₁: Different levels of hotels use different message strategy.

H_{1a}: Different levels of hotels use different message content strategy.

H_{1b}: Different levels of hotels use different message format strategy.

H₂: Different message types generate different marketing effectiveness.

H_{2a}: Different message contents generate different marketing effectiveness.

H_{2b}: Different message formats generate different marketing effectiveness.

The three popularity measures of message marketing effectiveness provided by the Facebook website were used in the study (de Vries *et al.*, 2012; Kwok and Yu, 2013), which are:

the number of likes, the number of comments, and the number of shares. Since Facebook marketing is considered as viral marketing (Golan and Zaidner, 2008), the message effectiveness is largely decided by the amount of consumers' word-of-mouth associated with a message. When people like, comment, or share a message on a hotel Facebook page, the message will also appear on their own Facebook pages and become visible to their friends. Thus, the numbers of likes, comments, and shares are viewed as measures of word-of-mouth induced by a Facebook message. Therefore, this study used these popularity measures to explore marketing effectiveness of a hotel Facebook message.

3.1 Data collection

Twelve sample hotel brand Facebook pages were selected in the study as the data collection sites (Table I). The selection of hotel brand was based on STR hotel chain scale segment report which grouped hotel brands based on the actual average room rates (Smith Travel Research, 2016). All hotel brands are grouped into six scale levels: luxury, upper upscale, upscale, upper midscale, midscale, and economy. The study chose two sample hotel brands from each hotel scale level based on the number of hotel brand Facebook page fans and the parent hotel company. Firstly, the hotel brands that had the most number of Facebook fans were selected because these hotels were more actively engaged in Facebook activities. Secondly, the hotel brands were selected from different parent companies to make the overall sample more representative. Only North American hotel brands were considered in this study due to the fact that Facebook pages of European hotel brands had a considerable amount of information posted in languages other than English.

Insert Table I About Here

All messages posted on the walls of 12 hotel brand Facebook page were collected for a five-month period. Those mini-survey questions and messages posted by hotel guests were eliminated. Only messages posted by hotels that had like, comment, and share were included in this study. The messages adding photos to the same album were grouped together since they have exactly the same numbers of likes, comments, and shares. Only one message was used to represent the message group in order to avoid duplication. For each message, the information on hotel brand, post date, the number of likes, the number of comments, and the number of shares were collected. All messages were carefully read and coded by two researchers to determine the type of message strategy. The classification coding was conducted based on a comprehensive discussion among the researchers and a review of previous studies. An inter-rater reliability check was performed and an 89% agreement was found between the two coding results, which is considered as almost perfect agreement ($> 80\%$) (Landis and Koch, 1977). The researchers then discussed any discrepancies of opinion to arrive at a final consensus.

3.2 Data analysis

A typology of message strategy of hotel Facebook messages was developed based on data coding. The typology of message strategy consisted of two dimensions: classification of message format and classification of message content. In the first dimension, a four-type classification of message format was identified as word, picture, web link, and video, which is consistent with Kwok and Yu (2013)'s classification.

In the second dimension, a six-type classification of message content was developed based on the dichotomy of message content, namely product, promotion, reward, brand, information, and involvement. Among them, product, promotion, and rewards were product attributes related or informational messages since these messages contain factual and verifiable

information about the product (hotel) important to the consumer (Puto and Wells, 1984). On the other side, brand, information, and involvement were brand image related or emotional messages since these messages display the emotional experience of using the product (hotel) in an exciting or enjoyable manner so that consumers will recall the brand with the experience (Puto and Wells, 1984).

Specifically, product messages introduced various products of hotels, including new and existing hotel properties, food and beverage, restaurants, bars, lounge, amenities, room services, spa, events/festivals, holiday products, holiday décor, mobile apps, and so on; promotion messages included those messages discussing deals, promotions, special offers, discounts, sales, packages, double/extra points, and so on; Reward messages gave Facebook fans chances to win something from the hotel without any purchase, including contests, guesses, prizes, spins, games, sweepstakes, giveaways, free stays, free points, winner announcements, and so on; brand messages focused on hotel brand, including messages taking about hotel news, hotel reviews, commercials, hotel honor and awards, hotel facts, staffing/team, charity/giveback/donation, reward programs, service recovery, brand magazines, and so on; information messages talked about information that is not directly related to the hotel, such as travel tips, destination information, trip diaries, holiday greetings, food recipes, food trends, consumer trends, and so on; and involvement messages asked for Facebook fans' replies and actions, such as questions, experience sharing, comments, picture captions, fill in the blank, humors, and so on.

The data were analyzed by SPSS software in three steps. First, descriptive statistics were presented to show the overall Facebook marketing status of 12 sample hotel brands and general message strategy of hotel Facebook marketing. Second, Correspondence Analysis (CA) and Chi-Square tests were utilized to reveal different message strategies employed by different scale

levels of hotels. CA is a statistical technique used for comparisons among both objects and attributes simultaneously based on categorical/nominal data. CA creates perceptual maps where a set of objects and attributes are displayed graphically in a joint space based directly on the association of objects and attributes (Hair *et al.*, 2010). However, in CA, the between-set distances on perceptual maps are not interpretable (Hoffman and Franke, 1986); thus, Chi-Square tests were conducted to help the interpretation of CA results. Lastly, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to compare the marketing effectiveness of different message strategies.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

A total of 1,837 messages were collected from the selected 12 hotel brand Facebook pages during the study period. In terms of hotel brands, Four Seasons posted the most number of messages (323), followed by Best Western (308), while Motel 6 posted the least number of messages (57) (see Table II). Ritz-Carlton hotels enjoyed the largest average number of likes (182.6 per message) and shares (20.5 per message), whereas Best Western hotels featured the biggest average number of comments (42.1 per message). Motel 6 had the smallest average number of likes (11.4 per message) and shares (0.2 per message), while Aloft hotels showed the lowest average number of comments (3.7 per message).

In terms of hotel scale levels (see Table II), luxury hotels posted the most number of messages (577) during the study period, followed by midscale hotels (498). The two scale levels together posted almost 60% of total messages. Economy hotels and upper upscale hotels posted the least number of messages during the study period (161 and 162, respectively). Luxury hotels

showed the biggest average number of likes (178.2 per message) and shares (16.6 per message), while upper midscale hotels enjoyed the largest average number of comments (36.2 per message). Upscale hotels had the lowest average number of likes (19.4 per message) and comments (4.1 per message), whereas upper upscale hotels received the lowest average number of shares (0.6 per message).

Insert Table II About Here

The typology of message strategy is shown in Table III. In terms of message format, web link (37.9%) was the most commonly used message format, followed by picture (30.5%) and word (28.7%). Video was the least commonly used message format (2.9%). The results suggested that hotels were familiar with posting word, picture, and web link messages on Facebook, while the use of video messages on Facebook was still limited. In terms of message content, involvement was the most popular message content type (25.4%), followed by information (19.9%) and product (19.5%). Interestingly, promotion was the least commonly used message content type (6.9%), which was different from people's common perception that Facebook is a platform for hotels to deliver promotions. Instead, Facebook is often used by hotels to interact with existing and potential customers, to share information and to announce new products.

Insert Table III About Here

4.2 Hotel message strategy

CA was conducted to examine the differences of message strategies across hotel scale levels. Before conducting CA, Chi-square tests were run to test the independence between message format/message content and hotel scale level. The results indicated that both message format and message content ($ps < 0.0001$) changed significantly across hotel scale level,

supporting H₁ (H_{1a} and H_{1b}). Thus, CA was appropriate to explore the relationships between attributes (message content and message format) and objects (hotel scale levels).

According to Hair *et al.* (2010), singular values (eigenvalues) of the dimensions should be greater than 0.20 to be included in the final solution. Thus, a two-dimensional solution was suggested by CA, which explained 83.2% of the total variances. The first dimension explained 69.8% of the total variances, while the second dimension accounted for 13.4%. The perceptual map generated by CA is shown in Figure 1. As shown in Table IV, in message strategy attributes, word (0.266) and picture (0.317) were the primary contributors to Dimension 1, while product (0.519) and involvement (0.102) contributed most to Dimension 2. Thus, Dimension 1 was named as message format dimension and Dimension 2 was labelled as message content dimension. In terms of hotel scale levels, Dimension 1 differentiated luxury hotels (0.656) from midscale hotels (0.248), whereas Dimension 2 separated upscale hotels (0.754) from upper midscale hotels (0.126).

Insert Figure 1 About Here

Insert Table IV About Here

In a perceptual map, distances between points from different sets cannot be interpreted because they do not approximate any defined quantity (Hoffman and Franke, 1986). Thus, the results of Chi-square tests were used to help with the interpretation of perceptual map. Tables V and VI show the contingency tables of the Chi-square tests. In a contingency table, adjusted standardized residual is the index showing whether the observed frequency is significantly different from the expected frequency. The cut-off value of adjusted standardized residual is ± 2 (Azen and Walker, 2011). Therefore, luxury hotels focused more on brand messages and frequently used picture format. Upper upscale hotels preferred web link format with no obvious

message content preference. Upscale hotels posted more promotion messages and preferred video format. Upper midscale hotels preferred involvement messages with no message format preference. Midscale hotels used more reward messages in word format. Economy hotels employed more word format with no message content preference.

Insert Tables V and VI About Here

4.3 Message effectiveness

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) analysis was used to examine the marketing effectiveness differences across message strategies. Both the correlation matrix ($ps < 0.0001$) and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (1696.7, $p < 0.0001$) suggested that the three dependent variables - the numbers of likes, comments, and shares - were significantly correlated. Therefore, MANOVA was an appropriate method to analyze the effects of message strategy (message format and message content) on the three correlated dependent variables because MANOVA can assess group differences across multiple metric dependent variables simultaneously (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

The first MANOVA was run using message content as the independent variable. The overall MANOVA test of Pillai's Trace and Wilks' Lambda were significant ($ps < 0.0001$), indicating that the numbers of likes, comments, and shares varied across message content, supporting H_{2a}. The Box's M test (2918.4, $p < 0.0001$) showed significant differences in variances across groups; therefore, the Tamhane T2 post hoc test was used to further analyze group differences since Tamhane T2 is the most conservative test used when the variances are unequal across groups (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

The results of MANOVA on message content (see Table VII) showed that product (M = 92.5) and brand messages (M = 89.9) generated the biggest number of likes, followed by

information (M = 65.4) and involvement messages (M = 62.6). Promotion messages (M = 30.8) induced the smallest number of likes, worse than reward messages (M = 48.9). In terms of the number of comments, involvement messages (M = 43.9) were the best, followed by reward (M = 11.4) and brand messages (M = 8.3). Promotion messages (M = 3.5) evoked the lowest number of comments, worse than product (M = 6.8) and information messages (M = 6.0). In addition, product (M = 7.8) and brand messages (M = 7.7) prompted a much bigger number of shares than information (M = 4.4) and involvement messages (M = 3.5), while reward (M = 2.0) and promotion messages (M = 1.7) were the worst message content types to induce shares.

The results indicated that product and brand messages were the best message types in terms of generating likes and shares whereas involvement messages were the best at inducing comments. These three types of messages were considered to be more effective than the other three types. Information messages were good at prompting likes and shares but were bad at generating comments. Reward messages, on the other hand, were good at evoking comments but bad at inducing likes and shares. Promotion messages had the worst marketing effectiveness in terms of the numbers of likes, comments, and shares.

Insert Table VII About Here

The second MANOVA was conducted using message format as the independent variable. The overall MANOVA test of Pillai's Trace and Wilks' Lambda were both significant ($p < 0.0001$), suggesting that the numbers of likes, comments, and shares varied across message format, supporting hypothesis H_{2b}. The Box's M test (1675.6, $p < 0.0001$) showed significant differences in variances across groups; therefore, the Tamhane T2 post hoc test was again used to further analyze group differences.

The results of MANOVA on message format (see Table VIII) showed that picture messages (M = 117.9) generated a bigger number of likes than word (M = 46.0), web link (M = 48.6), and video (M = 50.2) messages did. Word (M = 26.0) and picture messages (M = 20.9) created a bigger number of comments than web link (M = 6.1) and video messages (M = 5.7) did. In terms of the number of shares, picture (M = 10.2) and video messages (M = 7.6) were the best format, followed by web link messages (M = 3.1), while word message (M = 1.0) was the worst format.

Therefore, picture message was the most effective message format since it could generate the biggest numbers of likes, comments, and shares. Word messages were better than web link and video messages in terms of prompting comments, while web link and video messages were better than word messages in terms of evoking shares.

Insert Table VIII About Here

5. Discussion and Conclusion

While more and more hotels are embracing social media as an important marketing tool, little is known about social media message strategy and marketing effectiveness. The existing advertising literature has already demonstrated the relationships between message strategy and advertising effectiveness. Based on message strategy theoretical background, this study content analyzed over 1800 hotel Facebook messages and developed a multi-category message strategy typology. This study also revealed the message strategy preferences of different scale levels of hotels and explored the impacts of message strategy on marketing effectiveness. The two hypotheses proposed in the study were both supported by the results.

Three key findings emerged from the study. First, the typology of Facebook message strategy consisted of two dimensions, dealing with both “what to say” and “how to say it” on hotel Facebook pages. The first classification of message format contained four types: word, picture, web link, and video, in consistent with the classification of Kwok and Yu (2013)’s study. The second classification of message content included six types: product, promotion, reward, brand, information, and involvement, expanding the dichotomy of message content in the advertising literature (Aaker and Norris, 1982; Laskey *et al.*, 1995).

Second, different scale levels of hotels employed different Facebook message strategy. Luxury hotels frequently used brand messages in picture format. Upper upscale hotels preferred web link format without any message content preference. Upscale hotels posted more promotion messages in video format. Upper midscale hotels preferred involvement messages. Midscale hotels used more reward messages in word format. Economy hotels employed more word format. This is consistent with Hwang *et al.*’s (2003) finding that high-revenue companies and low-revenue companies used different message strategies in web advertising. This result indicates that hotels at different scale levels utilize Facebook in different ways as a marketing tool. For example, luxury segment hotels tend to consider Facebook as a tool for brand building; upscale hotels seem to use Facebook as a platform to promote their product and provide special offers to fans; upper midscale hotels use Facebook to get existing and potential guests involved and build customer relationships; midscale hotels prefer giving out rewards to their Facebook fans; and upper upscale hotels and economy hotels seem to utilize Facebook for a variety of purposes, and perhaps, without a clear focus.

Lastly, Facebook message strategy was found to affect Facebook marketing effectiveness. Different message contents and message formats generated different effectiveness. As for

message content, product, brand, and involvement messages were more effective than information, reward, and promotion messages. Promotion message was the least effective content type. This implies that hotel Facebook pages work best at building hotel brands, introducing new products, and interacting with customers. Facebook can also be used by hotels as tools of sharing travel information and giving out rewards. However, Facebook is not a good platform for hotels to announce promotions and deals.

As for message format, pictures was the best message format, while word, web link, and video formats had similar marketing effectiveness. The finding that picture messages have better marketing effectiveness than word messages is supported by advertising memory theory, which posits that pictures are more memorable and more easily recalled or recognized than their verbal counterparts (Lutz and Lutz, 1978). Lots of empirical evidences suggest that people process pictures differently from words and thus pictures are superior to words in terms of advertising effectiveness (Liu, 1986). In the hospitality literature, this finding was also tested by Laskey *et al.* (1994) who demonstrated that adding a picture to the comparative verbal-only travel agency ad yields large increases in ad effectiveness. However, an interesting finding was that video format was worse than picture format for Facebook messages, which confirms Kwok and Yu (2013)'s study. This result might be explained by the fact that Facebook is not a common video sharing website as Youtube.

This study made valuable contributions to both academia and industry. From a theoretical perspective, the research on hotel Facebook marketing effectiveness was limited, especially from message strategy stand point. This study was one of the first attempts to explore message strategy of hotel Facebook marketing. Applying message strategy theory in the hotel Facebook marketing context, a new multi-category typology of message strategy consisting of two

dimensions was developed. Moreover, this study also attempted to examine the different impact of message strategy on marketing effectiveness using the popularity measures on Facebook pages. Lastly, the study provided empirical evidence to support the application of message strategy theory in the hotel Facebook marketing area. Therefore, this study extends the existing literature by introducing an old theory in explaining a new phenomenon.

In a practical sense, the study had several implications for hotel marketers in general. Hoteliers can use the findings in both Facebook page development and Facebook message design activities. First, the typology of Facebook message strategy developed in the study can be used as guidelines for hotel marketers to create diverse messages on Facebook pages. Especially for those small hotels which have yet started their Facebook pages, the typology of Facebook message strategy can provide them all types of messages they can use in hotel Facebook marketing. However, the hotels should keep in mind that different types of messages could generate different marketing effectiveness. Thus, they should keep track on the effectiveness of different message types by collecting the numbers of likes, comments, and shares in order to identify and adapt the most effective Facebook message type.

Second, for those hotels that have already developed mature Facebook pages, the content analysis and correspondence analysis methods used in the study can help them to identify current Facebook marketing strategies. By creating a perceptual map of Facebook messages, hotels can find out their message content preferences and message format preferences. Only if they learn their current Facebook message strategy, can hotels improve their marketing effectiveness by adjusting their message strategy. Using this method, hotels could not only analyze its own Facebook message strategy, but also position themselves in a 'big picture' of what its competitors are doing in Facebook marketing. Thus, hotels could benchmark its Facebook

marketing efforts. For example, a hotelier of a midscale property could content analyze other midscale hotels' Facebook messages and decide to 'follow suit' with the rest of the pack or 'be different' in the approach of using Facebook as a marketing tool.

Lastly, findings on different effectiveness of message strategy can help hoteliers to leverage hotel Facebook marketing. As results of the study suggests, hotel marketer should definitely consider the use of more product, brand, and involvement messages in picture format. Since promotion message is proven to be the worst message content type, hotel marketers should not consider using Facebook to share promotions and deals. Although posting Facebook messages is free, hotels are not able to post unlimited number of messages due to time and personnel constraints. As this study shows, the number of messages posted by the sample hotel Facebook pages ranged from 0.38 to 2.13 per day. Thus, to take full advantage of the limited number of messages that could be posted on a Facebook page, hotels should use mostly picture format and product, brand, and involvement contents.

6. Limitations and Further Research

This study was not immune to limitations. The biggest limitation of this study is the generalizability. First, hotel brands on STR Chain Scales do not represent all hotel brands. Many independent hotel brands are not included in STR Chain Scales. This study only considered hotel chain brands. Second, the 12 sample hotel brands used in the study were not randomly selected from STR Chain Scales. Instead, they were selected based on two subjective criteria in order to make the sample representative of the hotel industry. Lastly, only hotel Facebook pages written in English were analyzed. Therefore, the results of the study cannot represent all hotel Facebook pages in the world; rather, they were based on North American hotels.

Besides, the study only considered message format and message content as two independent variables that influenced the numbers of likes, comments, and shares. However, there are other variables that would also influence message effectiveness, such as hotel class, size and brand, posting time and weekday, position of the post, etc. Failing to include these variables in the study may cause the study findings to be skewed. Future study should incorporate these variables as control variables to address this concern.

Furthermore, although used in the previous studies (de Vries *et al.*, 2012; Kwok and Yu, 2013), the three measures of message effectiveness used in the study are still somewhat problematic. Due to anonymity of Facebook users, the researchers were not able to identify those people who like, comment, or share a Facebook message were real hotel customer or hotel employee who did it on behalf of the hotels. Moreover, the study didn't distinguish positive comments from negative comments since both of them would generate electronic word-of-mouth on Facebook. However, these facts illustrated the study bias which need to be addressed in future studies by introducing new measures. The previous literature suggested many more accurate marketing effectiveness measures, such as recall, message comprehension, persuasion (Laskey *et al.*, 1995), attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the brand, purchase intention (Laskey *et al.*, 1994), and so on. Future research could apply these effectiveness measures in the Facebook marketing context and produce more insightful results for hotel marketers.

Lastly, as all new technology, social media are always evolving with new channels emerging and old channels obsolete. Therefore, message strategies that are effective today might not be working as well on social media in the future. The dynamic nature of social media prompts the effectiveness of social media marketing to be an on-going research interest.

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Table I.

The 12 sample hotel brand Facebook pages

Hotel Brand	Scale Level	Parent Company	No. of Fans*	Facebook Page
The Ritz-Carlton Hotels	Luxury	Marriott International	639,950	http://www.facebook.com/ritzcarlton
Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts	Luxury	Four Seasons Hotels, Inc.	487,190	http://www.facebook.com/FourSeasons
Hyatt Hotels	Upper Upscale	Hyatt Hotels Corp.	422,154	http://www.facebook.com/Hyatt
Kimpton Hotels and Restaurants	Upper Upscale	Kimpton Group Holding	85,825	http://www.facebook.com/Kimpton
Aloft Hotels	Upscale	Starwood Hotels and Resorts	169,944	http://www.facebook.com/aloft-hotels
Radisson Hotels	Upscale	Carlson	110,615	http://www.facebook.com/Radisson
Hampton Inn Hotels	Upper Midscale	Hilton Worldwide	364,330	https://www.facebook.com/hamptonbyhilton
Holiday Inn Hotels and Resorts	Upper Midscale	InterContinental Hotels Group	912,339	https://www.facebook.com/HolidayInn
Best Western	Midscale	Best Western International	1,155,026	http://www.facebook.com/BestWestern
La Quinta Inn and Suites	Midscale	LQ Management	132,457	http://www.facebook.com/laquinta
Super 8	Economy	Wyndham Hotel Group	466,250	http://www.facebook.com/Super8
Motel 6	Economy	Accor	63,399	http://www.facebook.com/motel6

*The fan number data were collected from Facebook.com on March 25, 2017.

Table II.

Descriptive statistics of hotel Facebook messages

Scale Level/ Hotel brand	No. of messages	%	Likes per message	Comments per message	Shares per message
Luxury	577	31.4	178.2	13.8	16.6
Ritz-Carlton	254		182.6	17.2	20.5
Four Seasons	323		174.7	11.2	13.5
Upper upscale	162	8.8	29.2	12.8	0.6
Hyatt	84		39.0	20.7	0.3
Kimpton	78		18.7	4.4	1.0
Upscale	202	11.0	19.4	4.1	0.7
Aloft	108		19.0	3.7	0.7
Radisson	94		19.9	4.4	0.6
Upper midscale	237	12.9	50.4	36.2	2.9
Hampton Inn	97		27.6	40.7	1.1
Holiday Inn	140		66.1	33.0	4.2
Midscale	498	27.1	68.2	34.3	1.7
Best Western	308		88.0	42.1	2.2
La Quinta	190		36.2	21.7	0.9
Economy	161	8.8	54.8	15.8	1.1
Super 8	104		78.6	20.2	1.7
Motel 6	57		11.4	7.7	0.2
Total/Average	1837	100	90.5	21.3	6.3

Table III.

Typology of hotel Facebook message strategy

Message content	No. of messages	%	Message format	No. of messages	%
Involvement	466	25.4	Web link	696	37.9
Information	365	19.9	Picture	560	30.5
Product	358	19.5	Word	527	28.7
Reward	298	16.2	Video	54	2.9
Brand	224	12.2			
Promotion	126	6.9			

Table IV.

Dimensions and their correspondence to hotel scale levels and message strategies

	Contribution to Inertia		Explained by Dimension		Total
	I	II	I	II	
Message content					
Brand	0.054	0.017	0.915	0.057	0.972
Product	0.149	0.519	0.584	0.39	0.975
Promotion	0.048	0.087	0.539	0.189	0.727
Information	0.003	0.072	0.064	0.271	0.336
Involvement	0.019	0.102	0.277	0.292	0.569
Reward	0.141	0.029	0.762	0.03	0.792
Message Format					
Word	0.266	0.028	0.832	0.017	0.849
Picture	0.317	0.105	0.915	0.058	0.973
Web link	0.003	0.009	0.062	0.034	0.096
Video	0	0.032	0	0.603	0.603
Hotel scale level					
Luxury	0.656	0.004	0.996	0.001	0.997
Upper upscale	0.017	0.007	0.259	0.019	0.279
Upscale	0.021	0.754	0.121	0.845	0.966
Upper midscale	0.020	0.126	0.181	0.22	0.401
Midscale	0.248	0.084	0.809	0.053	0.861
Economy	0.038	0.026	0.317	0.041	0.358

Table V.

Observed frequency, expected frequency (in parentheses), and adjusted standardized residual (in bold) for message content by hotel scale level

Scale level	Message content						Total
	Brand	Product	Promotion	Information	Involvement	Reward	
Luxury	115 (70.4) 6.9	200 (112.4) 11.1	8 (39.6) -6.3	134 (114.6) 2.4	103 (146.4) -5.0	17 (93.6) -10.4	577
Upper upscale	20 (19.8) 0.1	13 (31.6) -3.9	16 (11.1) 1.6	50 (32.2) 3.7	47 (41.1) 1.1	16 (26.3) -2.3	162
Upscale	12 (24.6) -2.9	77 (39.4) 7.1	32 (13.9) 5.4	12 (40.1) -5.3	33 (51.2) -3.1	36 (32.8) 0.7	202
Upper midscale	28 (28.9) -0.2	21 (46.2) -4.4	9 (16.3) -2.0	28 (47.1) -3.3	104 (60.1) 7.0	47 (38.4) 1.6	237
Midscale	34 (60.7) -4.3	11 (97.1) -11.4	56 (34.2) 4.5	106 (98.9) 0.9	130 (126.3) 0.4	161 (80.8) 11.4	498
Economy	15 (19.6) -1.2	36 (31.4) 1.0	5 (11.0) -2.0	35 (32.0) 0.6	49 (40.8) 1.5	21 (26.1) -1.1	161
Total	224	358	126	365	466	298	1837

Table VI.

Observed frequency, expected frequency (in parentheses), and adjusted standardized residual (in bold) for message format by hotel scale level

Scale level	Message format				Total
	Word	Picture	Web link	Video	
Luxury	5 (165.5) -17.8	351 (175.9) 19.1	205 (218.6) -1.4	16 (17.0) -0.3	577
Upper upscale	53 (46.5) 1.2	21 (49.4) -5.1	83 (61.4) 3.7	5 (4.8) 0.1	162
Upscale	81 (57.9) 3.8	20 (61.6) -6.7	89 (76.5) 1.9	12 (5.9) 2.7	202
Upper midscale	100 (68.0) 4.9	77 (72.2) 0.7	54 (89.8) -5.1	6 (7.0) -0.4	237
Midscale	188 (142.9) 5.2	71 (151.8) -9.2	226 (188.7) 4.0	13 (14.6) -0.5	498
Economy	100 (46.2) 9.8	20 (49.1) -5.2	39 (61.0) -3.7	2 (4.7) -1.3	161
Total	527	560	696	54	1837

Table VII.

Mean scores and standard deviations (in parentheses) for the numbers of likes, comments, and shares as a function of message content

Dependent variables		Message content						F-ratio
		Brand	Product	Promo.	Info.	Involv.	Reward	
Like	Mean	89.9 ^a	92.5 ^a	30.8 ^d	65.4 ^b	62.6 ^b	48.9 ^c	30.1 [*]
	(SD)	(72.4)	(78.0)	(37.2)	(56.0)	(62.8)	(48.9)	
Comment	Mean	8.3 ^{bc}	6.8 ^c	3.5 ^d	6.0 ^c	43.9 ^a	11.4 ^b	147.8 [*]
	(SD)	(10.1)	(6.7)	(6.5)	(6.6)	(45.7)	(17.3)	
Share	Mean	7.7 ^a	7.8 ^a	1.7 ^d	4.4 ^b	3.5 ^{bc}	2.0 ^{cd}	23.7 [*]
	(SD)	(12.1)	(11.0)	(4.0)	(7.9)	(8.1)	(6.3)	

^{a,b,c,d} The mean scores with different letters (a, b, c, d) are significantly different from each other at 0.05 or lower probability level.

^{*} $p < 0.0001$.

Table VIII.

Mean scores and standard deviations (in parentheses) for the numbers of likes, comments, and shares as a function of message format

Dependent variables	Message format				F-ratio	
	Word	Picture	Web link	Video		
Like	Mean	46.0 ^b	117.9 ^a	48.6 ^b	50.2 ^b	182.8*
	(SD)	(46.7)	(74.3)	(48.8)	(52.4)	
Comment	Mean	26.0 ^a	20.9 ^a	6.1 ^b	5.7 ^b	60.5*
	(SD)	(35.7)	(33.3)	(11.5)	(7.4)	
Share	Mean	1.0 ^c	10.2 ^a	3.1 ^b	7.6 ^{ab}	118.5*
	(SD)	(3.8)	(11.8)	(7.0)	(13.2)	

^{a,b,c} The mean scores with different letters (a, b, c) are significantly different from each other at 0.01 or lower probability level.

* $p < 0.0001$.

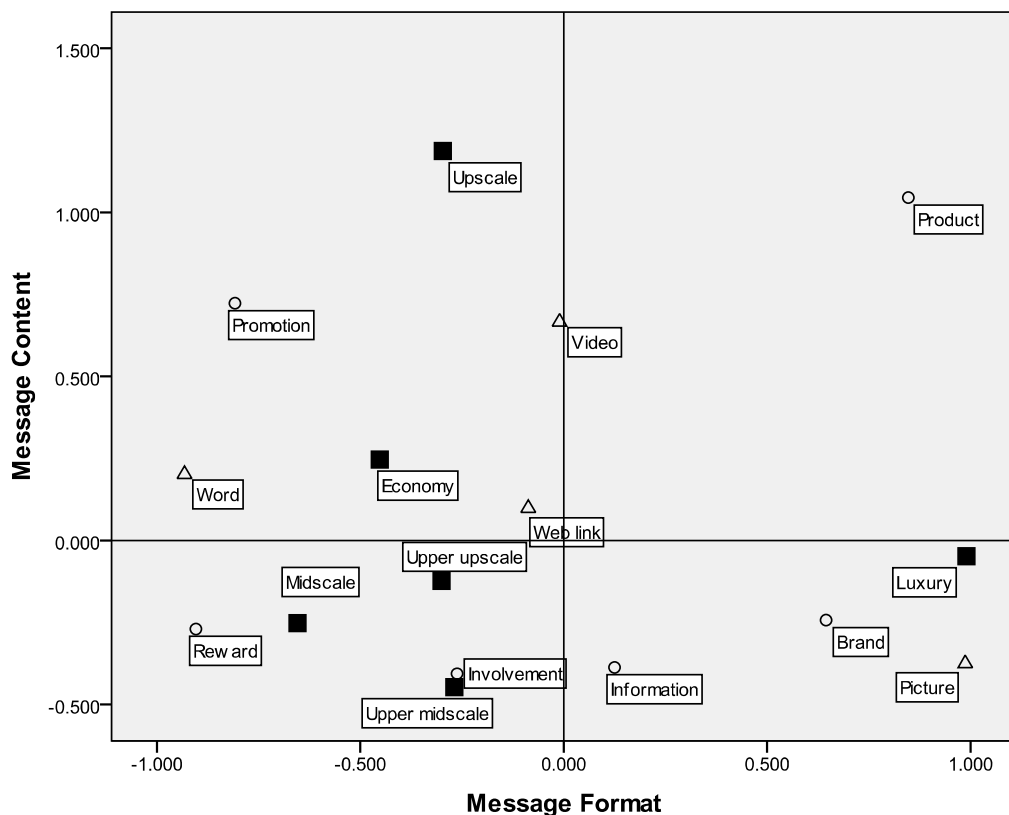


Figure 1.

Correspondence map for hotel scale levels and message strategy.

(Black squares represent hotel scale levels, circles represent message contents, and triangles represent message format.)