The Application of E-marketing Strategies in U.S. Hospitality Industry

Yu-Lun Hsu¹  Yu-San Ting²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism Nan Jeon Institute of Technology
No. 178, Chau-Chin Road, Yen-Shui District, Tainan City,737, Taiwan, ROC

²Assistant professor, Department of Hospitality Management, Nan Jeon Institute of Technology
No. 178, Chau-Chin Road, Yen-Shui District, Tainan City, 737, Taiwan, ROC
Tel./Fax: 886-6-6523111 ext. 6102 / 886-6-6527773
E-mail address: hm009@mail.njtc.edu.tw

ABSTRACT

The research intends to discover why U.S. hospitality industry takes Facebook as a direct platform to connect with potential customers and how they effectively increase sales. The presence of U.S. hospitality industry in Facebook and the way that these entrepreneurs utilize Facebook features was observed based on the literature review. The observation focused on motels, resorts, hotels, and other types of hotels in the U.S. with official pages and active on Facebook. The results showed that many hospitality industry use Facebook to reach out potential customers, and they effectively use Facebook features to increase fans, members, ads ‘likes’, and application users to increase sales indirectly by regularly posting interesting and informative updates, responding to comments and posts, and optimizing positive reviews viewed by the network. Therefore, hospitality industry worldwide should consider the experience of e-marketing strategy of U.S. to increase market growth and sales.

Keywords: e-marketing strategy, social network sites, hotel marketing, Facebook strategy, hospitality management

1. BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH

Social network sites have been widely considered the most charming system to reach people of all ages worldwide and the new trend in E-marketing is about how to use social network sites, especially Facebook, that rely on online social connections to spread information and obtain actual sales (Holzner, 2009; Albee, 2010). Using social network sites allow hospitality industry to directly communicate with potential consumers and spread information about offers via the social network. The potential breadth of the spread of information is limitless. Information influences consumer decision-making.

Since e-marketing adoption in the U.S. hospitality industry is robust but the rate of e-marketing engagement in other countries is not as dynamic and advanced. The
hospitality replaced manufacturing as a primary economic sector in The Eastern countries (Ma & Crestan, 2009). The Internet and online tools serve an important role in promoting hospitality industry to domestic and international travelers. Online social network sites, particularly Facebook, are a promising tool for The Eastern countries to promote the industry to the next level.

2. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The study investigated why hospitality industry in the United States use Facebook as an e-marketing tool and how these firms effectively used Facebook to reach out to consumers and increase sales. Since Facebook has more than 23 million users in the U.S. (Smith, 2009), and the characteristics of users cut across age, gender, demographics and geographic location. Facebook provides a broad range of features to target consumers and firms. Hospitality industry reach out to a significant segment of the market as reflected in the large number of Facebook users.

By understanding how Facebook served the e-marketing needs of hospitality industry in the U.S., the study derived best practices that the Hospitality industry in The Eastern countries can adopt to upgrade the e-marketing tools used and enforce online presence and sales.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

E-marketing emerged during the advent of the Internet as a venue and tool for marketing. E-marketing covers the traditional marketing activities but done online. Marketing in the traditional context is the aggregate of activities “that an organization must do to create and exchange value with consumers” (Silk, 2006, p. vii). Definitions of e-marketing express the functions of the Internet as a tool for obtaining and sharing information as well as connecting to the market to support sales. E-marketing is marketing in the “connected environment” of the Internet and “the use of this connectivity to market” (Stokes, 2009, p. 2). The focus is online connectivity in facilitating marketing activities. E-marketing is also a tool and venue for "companies to create online conversations, assess digital behavior, build virtual engagement, and use their Web properties to create interactive experiences that attract the extended interest of prospective and current customers" (Albee, 2010, p.4). This specifies the activities comprising e-marketing as well as the utility of e-marketing to business firms. E-marketing is of importance to the Hospitality industry that heavily relies on connectivity, communication, and related activities (Bakos, 1991; Braun, 2002).

E-marketing adoption in the Hospitality industry is diffused or fragmented but development is progressive (Schegg & Olaru, 2006). The use of e-marketing of some hospitality industry is more advanced. E-marketing across regions also varies. However, most firms progress as they develop e-marketing knowledge and capabilities, which
support the importance of deriving best practices.

Social network sites comprise an e-marketing tool. Social network sites are “web-based services that allow individuals to (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 those made by others within the system” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 1). The nature and extent of the bounded system and connections vary across social network sites.

Social network sites support the knowledge economy and the strategic use of information determines competitive advantage (Braun, 2002). Information can be used by considering patterns or trends from data shared and the sharing practices. This enables hospitality industry to identify and understand consumer needs. Analyzed information becomes a basis for marketing strategy. Hospitality industry can also share information on promotions and value offerings to address the need of consumers for information, draw consumer interests, and influence consumer preference. Social network sites bring hospitality industry and consumers together by providing the connectivity needed for information gathering and sharing.

Social network sites also support computer-mediated communication and customer relationship management, which are important marketing objectives. Social network sites enable computer-mediated communication by providing a venue for users to communicate and interact. Social network sites facilitate customer relationship management by allowing hospitality industry to establish virtual communities to support marketing design (Wang, Yu & Fesenmaier, 2002). Hospitality industry can build brands, strengthen relations with consumers, share information, manage cost, earn revenue via available applications, and learn from consumers. By supporting customer relationship management, social network sites can actualize relational equity, which is the “wealth-creating potential that resides in the firm’s relationships with its stakeholders” (Zawhney & Zabin, 2002, p. 313).

Social network sites enable viral marketing by firms (Albee, 2010). The recommendations of friends and reviews within the social circle strongly influence booking decisions (O’Connor, Hopken & Gretzel, 2008). Hospitality industry benefits from the positive recommendations and reviews of social network site users based on a satisfactory experience with the firms.

Hospitality industry has great use for social network sites. A survey (HotelMarketing, 2009) of 419 Internet users showed that more than half are members of online travelling groups or communities in social network sites. Users join groups to gain information on best deals and good travel locations based on the reviews and accounts of other members and those within their social network. Information gathering and sharing happens in an environment that provides fun and belongingness. This strengthens the influence of information gained through social network sites. By developing e-marketing skills, particularly on the various functions of social network sites (Braun & Hollick, 2006),
hospitality industry can gain more from using social media.

Facebook is one social network site offering various e-marketing features and applications. Facebook marketing emerged as a term describing marketing activities within or through this social network site (Holzner, 2009). This recognizes the popularity of the social network site and its utility in e-marketing. According to Google Trends (2010a), the search volume index and the news reference volume index of Facebook are significantly increasing to reflect on the growing popularity of Facebook as a social media. When comparing the five leading social network sites, Google Trends (2010b) reports that Facebook is leading in terms of search volume.

Hospitality industry can use Facebook in a number of ways. Holzner (2009) identified eight features that support e-marketing activities summarized in Table 1 below. Achieving e-marketing results from Facebook involves understanding the range of features, selecting from these options, measuring success, and connecting to the target market (Dunay & Krueger, 2010).

**Table 1: E-Marketing Functions of Facebook Features**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facebook Feature</th>
<th>E-Marketing Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Profile</strong></td>
<td>- establish presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- share information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- brand reinforcement (logos or profile picture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- manage connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fan Page</strong></td>
<td>- information sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- network expansion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- feedback derivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group</strong></td>
<td>- information on particular interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- reach out to niche market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Event</strong></td>
<td>- encourage participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- friend invitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advertisement</strong></td>
<td>- initial contact with users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- linked to pages and websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- linked to personal pages through ‘like’ option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marketplace</strong></td>
<td>- directory and yellow pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pages and Polls</strong></td>
<td>- draw feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Applications</strong></td>
<td>- promotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- information sharing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Facebook use by hospitality industry has been reported. Sheraton made use of Facebook Connect to link its website with Facebook and allow users to share travel experiences, which if approved and posted allows the author to tag friends (Hotel News Resource, 2009). Facebook usage by hospitality industry points to key activities for success. Posting regular updates maintains connection with followers or fans (Burgin, 2007). Responding to questions and comments are important to connect to users (Salerno, 2010). Regardless of the feature used, targeted messaging using keywords is important to address the intended audience (Hotel News Resource, 2008). Hotels can track ROI investment by using software and applications linking booking sites with Facebook to measure success (Hotel News Resource, 2010).
4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The investigation is a case study focusing on why hospitality industry use Facebook and how hospitality industry effectively use Facebook as an e-marketing tool to reach out to consumers and increase sales. In employing case study, the research collected in-depth data (Yin, 2002) on Facebook use by hospitality industry and derived best practices on how hospitality industry optimize the benefits of using Facebook to achieve marketing objectives.

The research is a qualitative study involving an in-depth inquiry of a specific phenomenon within its natural context, with the investigation addressing ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions (Creswell, 2003). Using qualitative study supported the purpose of doing an in-depth investigation on Facebook as an e-marketing tool for hospitality industry in the United States. The use of qualitative study also aligned with the thorough data gathering required by the case study method.

The qualitative data collection method is observation of the presence of U.S. hospitality industry in Facebook and the way that these hospitality marketers utilize Facebook features. The criteria used in the observation are: 1) Facebook presence; 2) features used; 3) content; 4) appearance including logo or profile picture; 5) extent and quality of network; and 6) extent and quality of interaction. The criteria based on the elements of Facebook marketing (Holzner, 2009; Dunay & Krueger, 2010). The results of the observation informed on the reasons for using Facebook based on the presence and popular use of Facebook by hospitality industry as well as on the ways that these firms use Facebook features and functions to meet marketing objectives.

The observation focused on motels, resorts, hotels, and other hotels in the U.S. with official pages on Facebook, to reflect the use of Facebook as a marketing tool. Pages exclusively featuring hotels but made by people outside of the firm are not included. The pages that will not open and those that have not posted anything or anything recent were also excluded from the study. Hospitality firm were selected for observation because these significantly use Facebook. The hospitality industry was found using the built-in search engine of Facebook that provide categorized searching of pages and groups. Observations based on the identified criteria were made in the process of searching for hospitality industry, opening and navigating the individual pages, groups or applications, and looking at the advertisements appearing on the right side pane of the Facebook page.

The observations were analyzed using thematic classification based on the observation criteria and the purpose of the study. Implications on best practices were drawn from the findings, figures presented and summarized the results.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS

1. Presence in Facebook

The search process commenced using hotel as the keyword. All hotels with
Facebook Fan and Group pages, ads and applications appear in the list of search results. Using the search engine of Facebook [See Figure 1 below] shows the widespread presence of hotels. Many of the firms present in Facebook and those that receive significant traffic are hotels and travel firms. Continuity of traffic to the hotel pages is important. This can be achieved by updating the page, widening the network, advertising, and using other Facebook features and functions.

The search engine of Facebook operates similar to the keyword system used in other search engines such as Google, Bing and Yahoo. The situation causes much easier for potential customers or Facebook users to search by using ‘hotel’ as keyword or together with a location as key phrase. It is important for hotels to use the full name or popular name of the hotel together with the particular location. Some hotel chains establish a corporate page and separate but linked pages for each hotel branch indicating the location. Small and medium hotels used the name of the establishment and the neighborhood, county of state as location, whichever is more popular.

![Figure1: Facebook Search Engine](image)

To ensure presence through the search function, hotels use the built-in search categories to classify their hotels. There are types and subtypes that hotels use in the Facebook search engine. The common classification used by hotels are ‘Place’ as the directly related search type for hotel Fan pages as well as ‘Business’ and ‘Common Interest’ specifically ‘Travel’ as the search types and subtypes for hotel Group pages. Hotels also use types and subtypes not directly related to the industry such as ‘Celebrity/Public Figure’ for Fan pages and ‘Geography’ for Group pages. Some hotels use multiple types and subtypes. Using different categorizations maximizes the market reach of hotels by enabling viewing of the hotel pages across the different search types and subtypes.

Advertisements appear on the right hand portion of the Facebook page. The
advertisements that appear on a Facebook user’s page are those related to the keywords searched. A search of hotels yields advertisements of hotels, booking firms, travel agencies and other types of related advertisements. The advertisements serve as links to the Fan or Group page of the hotel and/or to an external website as well as provide the option for viewers to ‘Like’ the ads. Hotel advertisements can lead to automatic clicks to the pages or website and/or addition to the number of fans to link the hotel to the user’s personal page and friends.

(2). Use of Facebook Features and Functions

Facebook offers a number of features for business firms. The primary features are fan page, groups, advertising, and applications. All other features and functions such as event invitations and link to personal pages are achieved by using one or more of these primary features first. The most used feature by hotels in the U.S. is the Fan page [See Figure 2 below]. Around 70 percent of hotels that use Facebook have Fan pages. The next most used Facebook function by hotels is Group page, with around 23 percent of hotels managing a group. Advertisements and applications are used sparingly by hotels. Travel agencies and booking firms use the latter features more than hotels.

![Figure 2: Facebook Features used by U.S. Hotels](image)

The preference for Fan and Group pages is the closer interaction with fans and group members. Fan pages allow hotels to interact directly with their fans through wall updates, public and private messages, and comments. The interaction can even be in real time. Many hospitality industry use Fan pages only. These include small, medium and large firms and various hotels and lodging business such as motel, resorts and casinos. There are also firms using Group pages only. An explanation for the preference is marketing strategy. Fan pages target a wide segment of the market such as Elysian Hotel in Chicago and Luxor Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. Both firms cater to a wide range of consumers including individuals, couples or families and host different functions from personal recreation to conferences. Group pages target niche groups revolving around common interests. The Eliot Hotel in Boston is marketing itself as a leisure hotel for tourists while Club Cal Neva Hotel is marketing itself as a sports and recreation hotel, particularly a great place to gamble. There are some hotels with both Fan and Group pages. Hilton
Hotel is one example. The hotel has Fan pages classified under hotel/lodging, local business and public figure. It also has Group pages categorized under business, common interests and just for fun. This optimized all available marketing channels such as by linking the hotel to the celebrity Paris Hilton and communicating the diverse services of the hotel by establishing presence in different common interest subtypes. The use of either Fan or Group pages or both depends on the marketing objectives of the hotel. As a marketing tool, the use of Fan and Group pages should be strategic to achieve objectives.

Advertisements allow limited interaction, only through the ‘Like’ option, and advertisement views are limited. The cost of posting ads on Facebook is either per click or per impression. Cost per click reflects on payment made for traffic to the page or site generated by the advertisement while cost per impression is payment for every 1,000 times that the ads were shown to Facebook users. Advertisement tracking and management shows the market characteristics of the people clicking the ads or the volume of traffic. Advertisements need regular updates to keep up with the interests of the target audience such as Spring Break offers or St. Patrick’s Day Promos. Advertising is not yet very popular with hotels because of the cost and lack of knowledge or experience over the optimization of this Facebook feature.

Applications require technical skills to create unique and interesting outputs that attract Facebook users. Not many hotels use applications because of the greater resources needed and uncertainty of the future popularity of the applications. The number of users and the positive comments or reviews made by users determine the popularity of applications. Beacon Hotel, located in Miami, is an example of a hotel that established a Facebook application, the Beacon Times. The application provides users with updates about happenings in Miami, especially South Beach. It also has a ‘gift giving’ and ‘create your entourage’ functions that encourage friends to join. There are 74 fans and 68 monthly active users. Although the number of users is small, most fans use the application at least once a month to get updates on happenings in Miami and South Beach. Updates can build the interest of users to visit South Beach. If they do, they would likely relate the travel decision to Beacon Hotel.

(3). Content of Facebook

The content or information available in the Fan or Group pages, advertisements and application of hospitality industry in the U.S. are varied. Content is important because the availability and comprehensiveness of information provided determines viewer interest and motivates consumer decision-making (Hotel News Resource, 2008).

Most of the pages of hospitality industry provide basic information including a short description of the firm, website links, telephone numbers and email, and products and services. Facebook provides a form in creating Fan and Group pages for firms to fill-up. Most of the firms actively using Facebook complete the form to provide basic information. There are some pages with incomplete information but only provide links to the website. This reflects on the use of Facebook as a marketing tool. Some firms use
Facebook as a primary marketing tool similar to television or print media as well as other online media and optimize the information delivery functions. Other firms consider Facebook only as a way of bringing traffic to their websites. With the growing popularity of Facebook, using this as a primary marketing tool optimizes the benefits to hospitality industry.

Advertisements and applications provide links to the website or page and the name and/or logo of the firm. Some advertisements feature promos and events. Information given is sufficient to connect the promo or event to the firm.

Applications provide more in-depth information on the firm and its services as well as contact details and page or website links or limited information on the firm but use the application functions to promote the hospitality firm.

(4). Fan Page, Ads and Application

The appearance of Facebook Fan or Group pages is important to draw the attention of viewers and develop a positive impression. Most hospitality industry use the standard format provided by Facebook. Firms upload their logos or pictures of the building or scenery as profile picture. This is important to reflect the identity of the firm and to develop viewer recognition (Zawhney & Zabin, 2002). A typical wall of a Fan page shows the logo, name, become a fan icon, first six fans and total number of fans, the wall updates including comments, and the info, photos, boxes, events and notes pages. A standard wall of a Group page shows the profile picture, icon to join the group, the wall posts, and pages on info, discussion and events. The profile picture is the most striking aspect of these pages. A growing number of hotels made improvements by customizing their pages. Software or applications are useful in creating HTML (hypertext markup language) or FBML (Facebook markup language) codes to add clickable pictures or other interactive content in the Fan or Group page. The result is a more attractive and engaging Fan or Group page. Examples of customized pages are New York - New York Hotel & Casino Las Vegas and Vero Beach Hotel and Spa.

Advertisements have a defined size to fit the designated space in a Facebook page. The space can contain pure text, text plus visuals, or pure visual advertisements. The ads are clickable and linked to the Fan or Group pages, applications or hotel website. The form of the advertisement depends on the marketing objective. Customization of ads can also support better achievement of marketing objectives.

Applications vary from limited to fully interactive functions. Applications created by hospitality industry still provide limited interaction. However, the knowledge and tools to develop fully interactive and unique applications are available.

(5). Extent and Quality of Network

The number of fans, group members, number of ads ‘likes’, and application users shows the extent of network of hospitality industry. The characteristics of the network determine quality or the extent that the hotels were able to reach their target market.
A look at the U.S. hospitality industry shows variance in the extent of network. The average number of fans is greater when compared to the average number of group members because Fan pages draw more people than Group pages, which involve participation. A look at the number of fans of hospitality industry indicates variance. On the average, the number of fans is around 8,000. For hotels, the number can reach as high as more than 15,000 fans while other hospitality industry was able to gain less than 500 fans. Luxor Hotel and Casino, Excalibur Hotel Casino, and New York-New York Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas have 15,919, 13,422 and 11,969 fans respectively. These are all large casino hotels. Other casino hotels in different states also have high number of fans. There are also other hotels with many fans. Vero Beach Hotel, Spa, and Nick Hotel in Florida as well as Hotel Zaza in Dallas and Houston, Texas all have more than 5,000 fans. These are medium to large hotels. Some small inns and hotels also have a significant number of fans. Beacon Hotel, Mountain Lake Hotel, and The Roger Smith Hotel have 3,883, 2,172 and 1,935 fans respectively. Historic hotels also tend to have many fans, such as Grand Hotel in Michigan with 7,469 fans. While most of the firms with high number of fans are large casino hotels or hotel chains, there are also small and medium inns, resorts and hotels with large number of fans. The number of fans is linked to the brand and marketing activities of the hotel based on an understanding of using logos or profile pictures, impact of the pages, ads and applications, communication with users, and actual experiences of customers shared in Facebook. Facebook use should be integrated into the overall marketing strategy to target objectives such as attracting the interest of many Facebook users to the firm page, capitalizing on positive consumer experiences, and bringing new customers to the firm.

Consideration of the fan base of some of the hospitality industry showed that many were able to reach out to the target market. The casino hotels were able to reach out to a wide range of Facebook users of varying socio-demographic characteristics interested in the fun and relaxing environment of casino hotels. Nick Hotel offer Nickelodeon themed rooms and activities. It was able to reach out to parents interested in providing their children with a fun vacation in Orlando, Florida. The small inns and hotels were also able to draw locals as regulars especially those with well-known restaurants catering to occasions such as weddings or birthdays as well as out-of-state visitors interested in experiencing local hospitality. The manner of marketing the firm through Facebook influences the number of fans, which translate into consumers.

Group members are usually less than 500 individuals. However, some hotel groups have members that participate in the group to receive or provide updates on the interest of the group. Group members are usually enthusiasts of the hotel and help in promoting the hotel to other members.

Application users are usually less than 100 individuals. This feature is barely used by hospitality industry. However, a run through of the wall posts and reviews of existing hotel applications indicates that the information shared and comments made, also help to
market the hotel to application users. Friends of users may also become interested in the application.

‘Likes’ for the advertisements of hospitality industry are determined through the analytics developed by Facebook. Hotels do not use advertisements frequently. However, with customized ads and ‘likes’, the reach of the ads can expand through the network of the Facebook users who liked the ads.

6. Extent and Quality of Interaction

On the average, there is activity in the Fan pages of hospitality industry made by the firm or fans. There are Fan pages with new activity every hour but there are other Fan Pages with weekly or monthly activity. A similar trend is happening for Group pages but at a smaller scale. Group updates can be hourly, daily, weekly or monthly. Advertisements are updated not as frequently as the pages, and posted only when there are new promotions. However, applications are only updated to improve features. Comments and reviews often comprise the bulk of activity for applications.

Hospitality marketers have a certain degree of control over the activity and interaction in their Fan and Group pages, ads and applications. Interaction comes in the form of questions, clarifications, suggestions, and a range of positive and negative feedback. Responding to these in a timely manner generates more interaction (Salerno, 2010). The wall of Luxor Hotel and Casino, with a high number of fans, respond to queries and comments within the hour of posting at the earliest or within the same day at the latest. The comments per post can reach nine or even twenty as the person making or commenting on the post become more interested, or other fans join the interaction. Regular information and interesting updates also draw more participation (Burgin, 2007). Mountain Lake Hotel in Pembroke, Virginia is a small hotel with a relatively significant number of fans. The hotel posts new updates weekly on its wall covering events, promos, and sponsored activities. These draw many ‘like’ reactions and comments. Interaction with existing and potential consumers can influence consumer decision-making on travel and accommodations.

6. CONCLUSION

Hospitality industry in the United States, particularly hotels, resorts and inns use Facebook for two reasons. One reason is to reach out and communicate to consumers. Facebook Fan and Group pages, ads and applications are useful in sharing information on hotel offers and updates as well as receiving feedback from consumers. Using Facebook, especially Fan and Group pages enable hospitality industry to establish relations with actual and potential consumers. Facebook supports the expansion of the market reach of hospitality industry. The other reason is for firms to be found by ensuring that their firms are present and accessible to the millions of Facebook users worldwide. Presence in Facebook allows hospitality industry to tap into users as a market, especially with the
growing popularity of online travel and the decision-making on travel influenced by reviews and testimonials from the social network.

Hospitality industry effectively use Facebook features as an e-marketing tool to reach out to consumers by building their network to gain fans, group members, ads likes, and application users. To establish a network, hospitality industry use Facebook features strategically to reach the intended market such as targeting a diverse market segment via the Fan pages, ads and applications or a niche market through Group pages. Attractive, informative, engaging and unique pages and ads as well as interactive applications also reinforce the brand, retain the interest of the existing network, and draw more users into the network. Hospitality industry also reach out to consumers by maximizing the network of fans, group members, ads ‘like’ clickers, and application users. The activity of Facebook users in the pages, ads or application of the hospitality industry is shown on their personal pages and viewable by their friends.

Hospitality marketers effectively use Facebook to increase sales indirectly. Sales are made by posting updates on events and promos to encourage travel and stay at the hospitality firm. Sales are also made through the positive reviews of existing customers that are viewable to other Facebook users in the network. Sales are made by responding to the questions and requests made on the pages of hospitality industry. These can range from prices to availability of rooms to promos and discounts. Responses to these questions and requests create interaction and influence customer decision-making.

Since Facebook is a promising e-marketing tool and venue for the Hospitality industry especially in locations with high numbers of Facebook users. A survey of Facebook users in The Eastern countries showed that the number has grown since 2009 to 6.2 million out of the 15.4 million Internet users (Su, 2010). While social gaming is the popular Facebook activity in The Eastern countries (Su, 2010), there is an existing market on Facebook for hospitality industry in the country. Integrating Facebook use into the marketing strategy of hospitality industry in The Eastern countries, by considering the experiences of hospitality industry in the U.S., can support market growth and sales.
REFERENCES


