

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the current global economic downturn, many companies and organisations have had their advertising budgets tightened. However, it seems that many of them are attempting to maintain and build their reputations through other more cost-effective means. Public Relations (PR) is currently considered a cost-effective method used in order to promote products, people, place, ideas, and activities (Belch & Belch, 2009).

Public relations can have a strong impact on public awareness at a much lower cost than advertising can (Jobber, 2007; Kotler, Armstrong, Wong, & Saunders, 2008). In fact, if the organisation develops an interesting story, the media will choose it. As a result, organisations do not pay for space or time in the media. Therefore, it would seem that public relations tends to have more credibility than advertising. Some marketers mention that public relations is becoming the most dominant marketing communications tool while the power of advertising is ending (Ries & Ries, 2002).

Public relations is building good relations with the organisation's public by obtaining favourable publicity, building up a good corporate image, and handling or heading off unfavourable rumours, stories and events (Kotler et al., 2008). Indeed, public relations is the function that evaluates the attitudes of the public, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or organisation with the public interest, and executes a programme to obtain

public understanding and acceptance (Belch & Belch, 2009). From a traditional perspective, it appears that public relations is viewed as a non-marketing role, and the primary responsibility of public relations is to maintain relationships between the organisation and the public. However, there is coordination and cooperation between marketing and PR in the new perspective of public relations (Belch & Belch, 2009).

Expansion of the Internet

Public relations can be conducted through traditional media, like TV, radio and magazine, and also new media, like the internet. At the moment, it is widely accepted that the internet is an effective channel for conducting public relations activities. It has been suggested that 6,930 million people have internet access, which is around 30.2% of the world's population. Indeed, the social networking site Facebook reaches over 800 million active users at the time of writing. In fact, there is increasing usage of the internet as a PR tool (Belch & Belch, 2009). According to Ryan and Jones (2009, p. 9), "it took television 22 years to reach 50 million households-it took the internet just five to achieve the same level of penetration". Besides, the internet is a medium which allows global contact to be achieved at relatively low cost (Jobber, 2007) while also allowing information to be presented quickly (Belch & Belch, 2009). There are several sites that provide a section of their web content to be used for public relations activities, such as Facebook.

Research Objectives

1. To study the literature about the role of social networking sites and its impact on consumer behaviour in marketing.
2. To investigate and explore Thai users' attitudes towards social networking sites to understand why some people have the intention to purchase products through social networking sites.
3. To analyse the effects of social networking sites on Thai users who conduct either online or offline purchasing.
4. To arrive at conclusions and make recommendations that will help small fashion business owners to promote their businesses via social networking sites.

Research Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant difference between gender and intention to buy something from Facebook.

H2: There is a significant difference between age and intention to buy something from Facebook.

H3: There is a significant difference between income and intention to buy something from Facebook.

H4: There is a significant difference between Facebook usage and intention to buy something from Facebook.

H5: There is a significant difference between occupation and intention to buy something from Facebook.

H6: There is a significant difference between internet usage and intention to buy something from Facebook.

H7: There is a significant difference between use of social networking sites and intention to buy something from Facebook.

H8: There is a significant difference between length of time on social networking sites and intention to buy something from Facebook.

H9: There is a significant difference between gender and trust of Facebook.

H10: There is a significant difference between gender and satisfaction.

The Structure of the Research Study

This research study is divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 Introduction

The introductory chapter describes the scope of this dissertation, the purposes and hypothesis of this research. It explains how the chapters are organised with a brief description of the content of the five chapters.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter presents the literature review, which is divided into two parts: The first part addresses online PR through social networking sites, while the second looks at consumer attitudes towards online PR through social networking sites.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

The methodology is explained in chapter 3. The chapter has seven parts, namely introduction, research philosophy, research approach, research strategies, data collection, ethical concerns, and limitations of the research methodology.

Chapter 4 Research Findings, Analysis, and Discussion

This chapter shows the research findings from the questionnaire of this research, which comprises two parts: Findings from the questionnaire and discussion.

Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter concludes this research paper and contains a review of the findings and the main conclusions of this study. Then, the implications of this research are discussed. After that, recommendations and suggestions for further research are outlined.