

A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON THE MALAY ONLINE NEWSPAPERS' COVERAGE TOWARDS LOCAL FOOD BUSINESSES

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Abstract: Business enterprises in Malaysia are classified as small and medium enterprises when meeting either one of the two criteria, the number of full-time employees and value of the enterprise annual sales turnover. Small and Medium Food Enterprises (SMFE), of the most popular SME in Malaysia, makes up more than 80 percent of the total number of establishments in this sector, and are mainly involved in producing processed livestock products, processed fisheries products, processed fruits, processed vegetables, cocoa products, and cereals. The study aims at understanding the role of online Malay newspapers in their coverage on the development and growth of the SMFEs. Using purposive sampling, 20 news articles from three Malay newspapers, namely the Berita Harian, Utusan Malaysia and Kosmo!, were gathered from local sections to analyse its role and coverage. The study found that although the depth of the media coverage on SMFEs may not be extensive enough, they are still favourable, showing positive tones in the reporting and indicating signs of good support for the food industry from the media. This preliminary finding serves as a foundation to more in-depth studies to have a better understanding of the content of the online news on Malaysian business, particularly the SMFEs.

Keywords: Entrepreneur, food business, media coverage, online newspaper, social media

1. Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are non-subsidary, independent firms which employ fewer than a certain limit in the number of employees. The statistical definition of a small and medium enterprise, however, differs from one country to another. In Malaysia, the National SME Development Council sets Small Medium Enterprise (SME) as an establishment that meets either one of the two criteria, which are based on the number of full-time employees and value of annual sales turnover (Chin & Ee Shiang, 2018).

SME has many categories, and the popular ones in Malaysia is the Small and Medium Food Enterprises (SMFE). In the status of small-scale food processing, this segment provides a short overview of the major categories of SMFEs, which makes up more than 80 percent of the total number of establishments in this sector. SMFEs are mainly involved in producing processed livestock products, processed fisheries products, processed vegetables, cocoa products, processed fruits, and cereals (Fatimah, Kusairi & Mohd Yusof, 2013).

Social media and traditional media are important and beneficial for small to medium enterprises (SME), especially when it comes to marketing and promotion. Both medium have their own marketing strategies, with specialty, strength, and weaknesses. A consensus emerged regarding how entrepreneurs think and make decisions with the consequences on marketing practice. According to Dew et al. (2009), there are five significant differences between the way non-entrepreneurs think, known as predictive logic and how entrepreneurs think, which is effectual logic.

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Dew et al. (2009) acknowledged that these differences are visions for the future, the basis for making decisions, attitude toward risk, attitude toward outsiders, and attitude towards unexpected contingencies. Therefore, the impact of the media strategy for SMEs towards local businesses can encourage followers to try out Malaysian products. This is when the entrepreneur making such a positive, mostly effective strategy to persuade the customers to look positively at the product's brand, leading to purchases of the products.

Mohd Irwan Dahnil et al. (2014) pointed out that the media can help build followers and future users or consumers of these Malaysian products, and what the media features will make the brands attractive for the SME's marketing purposes. According to Eagleman (2013), unique marketing strategy is the main component of social media, making it easier to communicate with the viewers. It is an application which becomes an extension which fulfil the traditional marketing in advance. Advertisements or better known as marketing through online application is the production that allows information and collaborations among users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Kietzmann et al. (2011) explained how leverage mobile and web-based help to create interactive medium that enables users and group member to share their content to co-create, discuss, and modify their posts. This makes it possible for better quality content and many other online users will be more attracted to their writing skills, thus enabling online sellers to receive more requests from any other local buyers and sometimes from another country. A finding by Siti Hasnah et al. (2019) also showed that social media too has a significant implication on marketing, customer service and sales department of SMEs, and helps to sustain business performance.

Authors of this paper argue that when SME business owners have more income and able to upgrade their businesses, this will directly help the local community especially from the B40 circle to raise their income. For example, these people can be the sales agents for the food industry, and they can advertise the products on social media such as Twitter, Facebook or Instagram.

According to Michaelidou et al. (2011), manipulating the user generated content assists businesses to accurately forecast the future purchasing behaviour of their customers and helps enhance brand post popularity. This will also attract new customers (Michaelidou et al., 2011), build awareness, increase sales and help build loyalty to the brand or the local products (Castronovo & Huang 2012). This can create a lot of opportunities to small business enterprises to grow the businesses and possibly enter the international market.

Meanwhile, Spotts et al. (2014) noted that positive publicity plays an important role and is the most important in distinguishing between firms with higher and lower sales. He noted that a firm's existing reputation becomes the key factor determining whether a negative publicity has any effect, but do not reject the fact that negative publicity could also be harmful.

By and large, stories that are positive giving an account of business results, authority and business future and showcasing rehearses are generally significant in segregating between firms with more grounded versus more fragile deals.

Centano and Hart (2012) suggested medium-sized enterprise brands need to identify the "newness" of their products when identifying the tools for publicity and promotions. The product novelty, according to the authors, has a predetermined factor which is based on the relevance perceived by clients and customers, an information crucial enough to determine its "newsworthiness" to many print magazines and newspapers.

2. Methodology

This preliminary case study will look at samples collected from the online versions of three Malay newspapers in Malaysia. Using purposive sampling, 20 news articles from three Malay newspapers, namely the *Berita Harian*, *Utusan Malaysia* and *Kosmo!* were gathered in year 2019 and 2020 from the local sections focusing on news related to food business in Malaysia. As the objective of this study is to understand the role of the media in its coverage on the development and growth of the SMFE, a content analysis on four main news elements in the samples were studied, a technique adopted from Dowling and Weeks (2011). These were the headlines, the lead, the news value, and the tone of the news. Qualitatively, all these elements were discussed and summarised to achieve this objective.

3. Discussion

Online newspapers in Malaysia are seen to be a good vehicle to publicise and create local awareness on local products, but social media is seen to have a better advantage as compared to the traditional media when it comes to marketing. According to Fatimah Mohamed Arshad et al. (2013), in the developed economies, SMEs are the major growth of economies. In terms of trade, Malaysia is a net food importer of major food items such as cereals, fruits and vegetables, beef and mutttons, dairy products, sugar, food and beverages and feedstuff for livestock. According to the Economic Planning Unit (2012), food trade deficit has widened from RM 1 billion in 1990 to RM13 billion in 2011. Thus, the government is seen to have the concern for the small and medium industries especially food industries to bring and export to other countries for example China, Singapore, Australia for better profit.

Samples chosen for this study also show that Malaysian local products can compete in the global market. In the article below (Picture 1), Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in opening ceremony at the Bworks Forum SME Route to Digital Hypermarket in Port Dickson said local products had a distinctive charm and that efforts to promote them in the international market were already well underway. Berita Harian published a news article (Picture 2) which enhance consumers' awareness of a local chocolate product named Ryverra, Estana, and Reevo released by Ryverra Chocolate and Confectionery Sdn. Bhd. Founded in 2008, the company now has 23 products all made from local chocolate with the help of government agencies. The coverage showed that media and the government are concerned of the SMFEs by giving advantages to the entrepreneurs.

News related to SMFEs in relation to the National Economic Plan too received publicity from the online newspapers. Written in a positive tone, the news (Picture 3) highlighted the importance of the electronic platform as a marketplace for the local products. In Picture 4, the Harian Metro news reported that the Gate to Global (GTG) program implemented by MARA since 2017 has proven to help the Bumiputera entrepreneurs to excel in the global market. MARA, a government agency, was established to help the various aspects of business of the local, particularly the Bumiputra entrepreneurs.

Kosmo! also plays it role to help SMFEs to stay competitive in the market. In Picture 5, the news highlighted the specialities of a *nasi kandar* restaurant in Penang, adding a more human-interest stories by inserting the history of the restaurant owner. The same newspapers too were seen to be supportive of a bigger company and the smaller SMFE when it highlighted about one of the popular brands in Malaysia, Nestle, (Picture 6) on its aid to help the local businesses, which includes cafes, *mamak* restaurants and other restaurants in form of cash aids, food supplies and masks.



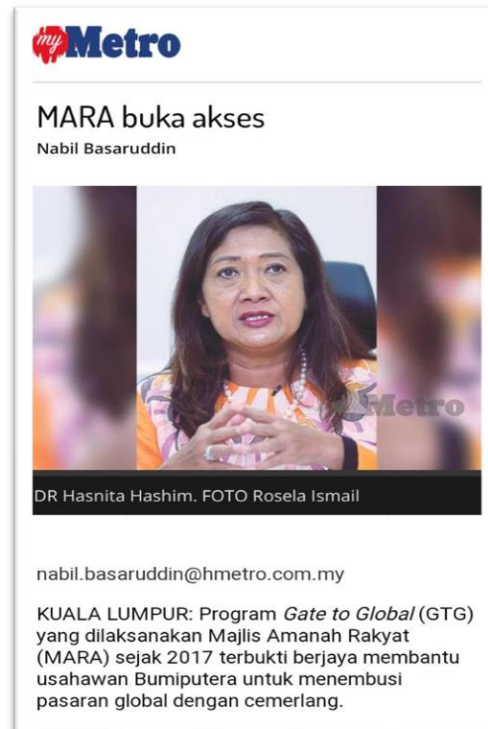
Picture 1 : Sample 1 from Berita Harian



Picture 2 : Sample 2 from Berita Harian



Picture 3 : Sample 1 from Harian Metro



Picture 4 : Sample 2 from Harian Metro



Picture 5 : Sample 5 from Kosmo!



Picture 6: Sample 6 from Kosmo!

4. Conclusion

This preliminary study shows that the three Malay online newspapers selected are supportive when it comes to promoting the local products. The case studies chosen for this study saw the headlines,

the lead, the news value and the tone of the news on the SMFE are favourable, showing positive tones in their reporting. The depth of the coverage may not be extensive, but this still shows signs of a good support for the local food industry from the media. The influence of media too can bring about a better life for the entrepreneurs by sharing about their development and their struggles which could highlight their survival in the market and create awareness from the public of the local business. News stories about hopes and opportunities take turns in the headlines, alongside with the government assistance available for the entrepreneurs. It is concluded that the online news play a very important role as a medium to promote the local products and create awareness about aids and opportunities available for the entrepreneurs which would help the local SMFEs to grow and be more competitive in the market, locally and internationally.

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