

“I Hate You But I Liked You”

The Pattern of Engagement between an Electric Utility and its Facebook Fans (The Case of the Manila Electric Company)

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Abstract: With consumers increasingly converging via the social media, marketers have made it an innovative tool in achieving some of their marketing objectives. Electric utilities across the globe have also recognized the impact of social media in service delivery and communication. This research undertaking hopes to create a deeper understanding of the actual pattern of Facebook customer engagement in the case of the Manila Electric Company (Meralco) and how this online customer engagement influences satisfaction (i.e. complaints handling, customer communication and corporate image) of a brand that elicits negative sentiments.

Employing a triangulation approach, the researcher integrated the results from the online survey, content analysis and focus group discussion for its final analysis.

In terms of involvement, Meralco Facebook fans' primary objective of liking the page is to get up-to-date information. Although the presence of Meralco on Facebook was deemed risky, it was highly appreciated by the fans. Moreover, Meralco appeared more genuine with its concern for the customers.

On contents, service outage is shown to be the consistent concern across different industry context. The experience of Meralco with its Facebook fanpage showed that Facebook is a strong alternative channel during a natural disaster.

The over-all sentiment of posts by Meralco Facebook fans is neutral regardless of month or industry context. Facebook did not essentially become a venue for unreasonable, harsh and negative comments.

The statistical results of the online survey showed that females are more likely to share a post by Meralco than males. Also, there is a weak association of evaluation on complaints handling with age, sex and marital status; and a moderately negative association with income.

In general Meralco Facebook fans are satisfied with Meralco. In a scale of 1 to 5, complaints handling received 3.66 with some concerns on the promptness of the reply. On one hand, customer communication was rated 3.95 with appreciation to information given ahead of time; while on the other hand, corporate image at 3.82 with the perception that Meralco has become more open and transparent.

Although satisfaction is significantly different across varying strength of interaction, the direction of this difference is negative. An inversely weak association suggests that there is a slight potential for a strong interaction to determine less satisfaction. The propensity to share a Meralco post is different across varying strength of interaction. Statistical results show that fans with higher interaction with Meralco on Facebook have a strong inclination to share a post from Meralco.

“Liking” the Meralco Facebook fanpage is found to provide functional benefits to customers. The presence of Meralco on Facebook is valued for convenience and accessibility; and further considered a viable channel to build and grow existing customer relationships. Liking the Meralco Facebook page is the first of many possible chances for Meralco to grow its existing relationship with consumers. Facebook allows for continuous, uninterrupted communication; which is essential to create a bond with its fans. To develop this relationship, Meralco has to combine frequency, personalization and interactivity.

Key Words: Facebook Engagement; Electric Industry; Social Media; Customer Satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

With consumers increasingly converging via the social media, Marketers have also made it an innovative tool for achieving some of their marketing objectives. Recently, Marketers have taken advantage of this new Internet development to promote and create awareness about brands, gain customer insights, engage existing customers and attract new ones. In spite of social media's susceptibility to spread wrong information, Marketers still rely on it because of its: [1] broad reach [2] ability to target [3] free or low cost [4] personal [5] fast and [6] easy¹. The reputable website, Forbes.com, acknowledges the importance of social media in reinforcing company branding, facilitating word-of-mouth advertising, increasing customer loyalty and trust, and improving social signals, brand awareness, audience reach and influence².

With the advent of the Web, different brands/companies have found a new way to engage its current customers on social media (Reitz, 2012). Marketers found social media to be a more cost-efficient tool in maintaining connection and conversation with its customers. The utilization of social media in the customer engagement strategies gave rise to a new marketing term "online customer engagement." Hallahan (personal communication, March 21, 2011 as cited in Reitz, 2012) explored this new concept and proposed three elements fondly referred to as three H's – head, heart, and hands.

Most companies are convinced by the immense capacity of social media to engage the customers. In a survey conducted to 3,300 marketers, 93% reported to have incorporated social media in their marketing strategy (Idugboe, 2012 as cited in Reitz, A. R., 2012).

Facebook, being the top social media site all over the world, has increasingly become popular among brands/companies since its foundation in 2004. Facebook created a "fanpage" platform for brands/companies to better reach their customers. This "fanpage" became an instant online community for brands/companies where fans (those who "liked" the page) are allowed to post their opinions, concerns and criticisms about the brand/company.

Electric utilities across the globe also recognized the impact of social media in service delivery and communication. Ever since, electric utilities all over the world have incorporated social media in their over-all communication strategy. Electric utilities used social media to inform customers about changes to pricing and billing, to educate and inform them about new products and services; and to address questions. The social media became a channel for a "virtual" conversation with customers (Strother & Vyas, 2012).

The Manila Electric Company or Meralco is the largest electric distribution utility in the Philippines, powering more than 5 million customers. While it is a monopoly, a consumer protection mechanism was set under the Electric Power Industry Reform Act (EPIRA or Republic Act No. 9136) where a utility is rewarded or

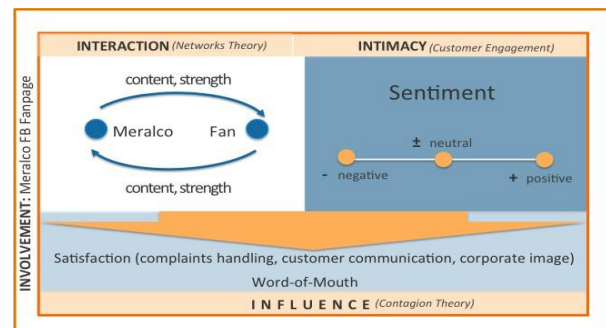
penalized based on a defined standards. Moreover, despite the high standards on service delivery under the new rates scheme, Meralco has never been penalized.

In order to increase consumer satisfaction and eventually gain favorable consumer evaluation, Meralco has implemented various consumer engagement programs and campaigns. While creating a social media account can be very risky for an electric utility, Meralco still acknowledged the potential of social media to engage consumers, improve customer awareness, knowledge, and satisfaction. In 2011, Meralco created a Facebook fanpage in order to bridge the gaps tied to consumer dissatisfaction; that includes: misinformation or lack of information on issues like the surging electric bills, power outages, illegal connections and poor service. Since its creation, the Meralco Facebook fan page experienced a significant leap from 5,000 likes in 2011 to 111,200 likes in January 2013.

1.2 Study Framework

Directly lifting from Forrester Research, Inc. consumer engagement in this study was defined based on: involvement, interaction, intimacy and influence. This research undertaking utilized the convergence communication theory as the overarching framework where Meralco's interaction with its consumers in Facebook is assumed to be two-way. This interaction was described based on strength and content as provided by networks theory. Strength pertains to the frequency of communication that takes place in a given link; while the 'content' is the type of information communicated between Meralco and its fans.

Consumer engagement was further measured based on intimacy; which was determined using consumer sentiments towards Meralco. Sentiments further refer to the attitude, thought or judgment that people have toward a particular entity as revealed by statements/comments on Facebook. These will be evaluated as negative, neutral and positive. On the other hand, influence refers to the consequence of the interaction measured in terms of satisfaction and word-of-mouth (WOM). Satisfaction will be measured adopting the three (3) attributes of Meralco's Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI): complaints handling, customer communication, and corporate image. The said CSI attributes were determined based from the current Meralco scale. The last variable under influence is word-of-mouth (WOM); which refers to the passing of information from one person to the other offline.



(Convergence Communication)

Fig. 1. Integrated Operational Framework of Meralco's Facebook Customer Engagement

¹ Retrieved From:

<http://www.business.qld.gov.au/business/running/marketing/online-marketing/social-media-business>

²<http://www.forbes.com/sites/jaysondemers/2013/09/24/the-top-7-social-media-marketing-trends-that-will-dominate-2014/>.

December 30, 2013

1.3 Statement of the Problem and Objectives/Hypotheses

This research paper examined the pattern of interaction of Meralco and its Facebook fanpage fans and to what extent this interaction actually influences consumer satisfaction and word-of-mouth behavior. Specifically, it focused on finding the following relationships:

- a. Reasons for liking the fanpage and satisfaction
- b. Reasons for liking the fanpage and word-of-mouth
- c. Strength of interaction and satisfaction
- d. Strength of interaction and word-of-mouth
- e. Socio-demographic profile and customer Handling, corporate image and customer communication satisfaction
- f. Socio-demographic and word-of-mouth
- g. Socio-demographic and strength of interaction
- h. Strength of interaction and reasons for liking the fanpage

1.4 Scope, Limitations and Assumptions of the Study

This study was limited only in understanding the interaction of the Meralco Facebook fans. Comparing the engagement of non-fans with fans would have been an interesting topic to tackle in the study; but this was not feasible given the researcher's timeline.

Second, the researcher decided to use a convenience sampling at the latter part of the data-gathering due to a very low-turn-around rate and time. The researcher's friends on Facebook were also asked to share a link asking their social network friends who liked the Meralco Facebook fanpage to answer the online survey. To preserve the integrity of the data, the researcher's Facebook friends were disqualified from answering the online survey.

Third, the respondents were asked to self-report the frequency of interaction with Meralco on Facebook in terms of how many times they liked, commented, shared the Meralco posts and/or posted on Meralco Facebook wall. The accuracy of the self-report cannot be validated nor did this research paper attempt to account for the variance in these variables.

Fourth, there were Facebook restrictions that hampered the attempt to conduct a genuinely random sampling. The researcher had to take another sampling route after Facebook disallowed adding more than five (5) friends using the researcher's pseudo account. Given this new scenario and a very low turn-around rate, the researcher opted to do snowball scheme at the latter part of the data gathering. Friends of the researcher on Facebook were asked to post the online survey request on their wall. However, it can still be argued that there was randomness in the recruitment process since direct friends of the researcher were disqualified to answer the online survey.

Fifth, possible respondents were limited to those who accepted the friend request using the researcher's pseudo account and the friends of friends of the researcher.

Finally, the researcher was only able to conduct 4 sets of mini focus group discussions due to time constraints.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Being on the forefront of the power industry, it has been Meralco's responsibility to answer questions, address concerns and clarify details on electricity prices such as increases in the rates of generation companies,

transmission companies or other regulatory imperatives in behalf of the whole industry. Such responsibility plus the communication challenges discussed above forced Meralco to actually embark into utilizing a new channel (Facebook) to intensify its attempt to engage the customers. There is a clear indication in the results of Customer Satisfaction survey, which are regularly conducted by Meralco, that dissatisfaction especially towards rates and pricing can be addressed by frequent communication on the value of electricity. By being able to engage them online, there is a hope that this will affect customer satisfaction as seen in other brands. Satisfaction is recognized as a direct or indirect contributing factor that enhances customer participation in utility programs and services, and acceptance of utility service issues. (Brit, M. & Yurkevicz, n.d.)

Understanding the actual pattern of customer engagement developed within the Facebook Fanpage of Meralco is an interesting undertaking as there has been no study conducted on the subject matter related to this, especially in the case of a electric utility company. In the previous discussion, we read about the benefits of incorporating social media in the over-all communication strategies of companies. We also read about how companies were able to meet marketing objectives by utilizing social media channels. However, these companies' products or services are non-polarizing, invoking positive sentiments. This case study provided an empirical result of online engagement in an industry that has very limited room for various marketing initiatives with the regulation of government. It becomes a worthwhile endeavor as well since the industry is not new to consumers who are indifferent about the product and the companies involved in the delivery of service.

Meralco, being the first electric company to use Facebook in the country the company was able to exemplify its actual interaction with its fans. More than the pattern of networks created, this research was able to shed light into the consequence of consumer engagement in Facebook in terms of consumers' satisfaction and word-of-mouth behavior.

1.6 Review of Related Literature

The following hypotheses were derived from previous studies:

Hypothesis 1:

"Liking" a brand's Facebook fanpage has a positive influence on brand sentiments, brand commitment and self-disclosure. (Clark, 2011 as cited in Reitz, 2012; and Burns, 2010 as cited in Reitz, A. R., 2012)

Hypothesis 2:

Consumer engagement has positive influence on interest for information and knowledge about the brand/product/company; consciousness about his interaction with the brand, experienced value, company goodwill, knowledge/awareness about the brand, and commitment/loyalty. (Vivek, 2006; Burns, 2010 as cited in Reitz, A. R., 2012; Avery, McKay & Wilson, 2007 as cited in Vivek, 2007; Higgins, 2006 as cited in Vivek, 2009; and Sirdeshmukh, Singh, and Sabol 2002; Srivastava, Shervani, and Fahey 1999; Heskett, Sasser, and Schlesinger 1997, as cited in Vivek, 2006;

Hypothesis 3:

Communication ties are strong when interaction is frequent, intense, reciprocal and personal. On one hand, strong communication ties influence cognitive judgment, trust and familiarity; while, cognitive judgment influences satisfaction. (Homburg, Koschate & Hoyer, 2006; Oliver, 1997 as cited in Reitz, 2012; and Granovetter, 1973; Krackhardt, 1992 as cited in Yuan, Fulk, Monge & Contractor, 2009)

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Content Analysis

The content analysis covered the months between April 2013 and March 2014. The researcher evaluated the months and identified which ones fell under the three different contexts: [1] September 2013 for Neutral; [2] August 2013 for Natural Disaster and [3] February 2014 for Corporate Crisis. September 2013 was a relatively peaceful period for Meralco; while in August 2013, Typhoon Maring ravaged the whole of Meralco's franchise area. Finally, it was in February 2014 when Meralco had to face a consumer communication crisis on rates and billing controversies.

The contents by Meralco were categorized as follows:

1. Service Outage (Power Interruption, Maintenance Schedule)
2. Service Issue Other Than Outages (Payment, Service Application, Meter)
3. Information About Utility Services and Programs/Campaigns (e.g. Bright Ideas/Energy Efficiency, Maliwanag ang Pasko, Typhoon Watch)
4. Corporate Social Responsibility/Corporate News (Feature Stories, Awards)
5. Public Announcement Other than Mentioned Above (e.g. Meralco Bill, Meralco Advisory, Shared Link, Pilferage)

Furthermore, contents by fans were grouped according to the following:

1. Billing/Payments/Rates
2. Energy Efficiency/Safety Tips
3. General Service
4. Meter-Related
5. Pilferage
6. Service Application
7. Service Outage
8. Others: Follow-up
9. Others: BC Location and Schedule
10. Others: Job Application, OJT, Training
11. Others (provision for other types of content in lesser frequency)

The content analysis also measured the strength per Content given the formula below:

$$\text{Strength per Content}^1 = \text{number of reached fans (0.2)} + \text{number of likes (0.4)} + \text{number of comments (0.32)} + \text{number of shares (0.62)}$$

This formula resulted to the following strength score parameters:

$$\text{Moderate strength} = \text{between } 309.91 \text{ and } 735.77$$

$$\text{Weak strength} = < 309.91$$

$$\text{Strong strength} = > 735.77$$

Finally sentiments were classified into two: [1] sentiments of the thread generated by Meralco-created posts, and [2] sentiments of fans-created posts on Meralco's Facebook timeline. Evaluation were based on the following parameters:

1. Negative Evaluation (-1)
Any content that rants/complains about Meralco services, and questioning Meralco's values as a company.
2. Neutral Evaluation (0)
Any content that inquires about power interruption or maintenance schedule; requests updates on services; and reports on power outages
3. Positive Evaluation (1)
Any content that praises or admires the service delivery of Meralco or any implementations of Meralco.
4. None
Any content that is not related to Meralco at all

2.2 Online Survey

Only fans of the Meralco Facebook fanpage and who are Meralco subscribers were considered for this study. As of February 23, 2014, the Meralco Facebook Fanpage has 112,513 fans. Initially, a total of 384 respondents were targeted for this research. However, due to a very low turn-around and time constraints, the online survey was able to generate 125 valid responses. This sample size was intended to get a ± 10 margin of error at 90% confidence level.

The strength of interaction between Meralco and its Facebook Fans was measured based on the frequency of a fan's interaction with Meralco. Respondents were asked how frequent they see/read, like, comment, and share a Meralco post. Using a 5-point Likert Scale, the respondents were asked to evaluate statements describing experiences reflective of the three (3) satisfaction attributes (complaints handling, corporate image and customer communications).

2.1 Mini Focus Group Discussion

Table 1. shows the details conducted for this study.

Table 1. Mini Group Discussion

No.	of Participants	Location	Date and Time
FGD 1	4	Coffeebean and Tea Leaf, SM Megamall Giligan Restaurant,	June 21, 2014 10 am
FGD 2	6	Alabang Town Center	June 21, 2013 5:00 pm
FGD 3	5	Café Quezon, Quezon City	June 28, 2014 1:30 pm
FGD 4	6	Shakey's Buting, Makati	June 29, 2014 3:30 pm

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Online Survey Results

3.1.1 Socio Demographic Profile of Online Survey Respondents and Focus Group Discussion Participants

There were a total of 336 Facebook users who responded to the online survey request but only 125 were qualified to the criteria of the research. The split of respondents based on sex is almost equal; which is reflective of the actual proportion of males and females in the Meralco Facebook fans.

The age range of the respondents is mostly between 18 to 34 years old (82.4%). About 26.4% of the respondents are slightly older at 35 to 54 years old; while only 12.8% belong to 45 to 54 years old. This mirrors a slightly younger fanbase who are either still studying, working or just recently settled down. This pattern somewhat deviated from the Facebook usage in the Philippines in where a large number belonged to 18 to 24 years old followed only by those from 25 to 34 years old (Revecensio, 2012). The concentration of Meralco fans at ages 25 to 34 may be attributed to the level of involvement one has with the Meralco service. Involvement is relatively high at this age since most either contribute or fully pay for the Meralco bill. The proportion of singles (52%) versus married (42%) also supported this assumption. A big majority (60.8%) belong to a household with an average monthly income of Php40,000 and below. This is an important finding as Meralco experiences more dissatisfied customers from this income group. The subscription of this group on Meralco's Facebook fanpage is an opportunity to continuously engage and perhaps, influence the mindset towards Meralco.

Males are relatively younger where only 4% belonged to 35 to 44 years old compared to females with about 44% percent. A big chunk (53.13%) of females are actually married while a big majority (65.57%) of males are still singles.

3.1.2 Reason for Liking the Meralco Facebook Fanpage

When asked why they "liked" the Meralco Facebook fanpage, the greatest number of respondents mentioned "to get up-to-date information" from Meralco. In fact, the Meralco Facebook fans expected to get electricity-related information, such as power interruption, rates and electricity tip, on Meralco's Facebook fanpage.

3.1.3 Strength of Interaction

Although a big majority of the respondents reported accessing Facebook everyday, only a small portion showed at least once a week interaction with Meralco. This interaction can be in the form of reading (20.8%), liking (27.2%), commenting (15.2%) and sharing (15.2%) a post. In totality, the average strength of interaction of the respondents was moderate (1.7736).

Furthermore, when respondents were asked if they have tried posting on Meralco's fanpage, only 27%

said yes. Among those who posted on Meralco's wall, posts include inquiry about the schedule of a power interruption, a power outage in an area, inquiry on a Meralco Christmas program/contest and a commendation of a service extended. This result shows two things that Meralco Facebook fans are less content-generators and more likely content-receivers. However, receiving less posts from fans does not equate to passive fanbase. This result is only consistent with the results presented above where getting up to date information is the primary motivation for liking the Meralco fanpage. Contrary to what most utilities fear, Meralco's Facebook account did not evolve into a basher's playing field. The results indicate that fans were more eager to receive services from Meralco than talk negatively about it.

3.1.4 Word-of-Mouth

A big majority (69%) reported that they have talked about a Meralco post. They usually share this to friends followed by relatives and direct family members. Meralco Facebook fans find it interesting to share about energy efficient tips, price-hike and power interruption schedule (if the other person will be affected).

3.1.5 Satisfaction

For complaints handling, Meralco garnered a score of 3.66. This score reflects a favorable and satisfied experience and/or perception as to the process, quality and speed of Meralco's response to any complaints. This score may have been influenced by a perception of how quick or delayed Meralco responds to customer posts. In the focus group discussion, Meralco Facebook fans seemed to have a split opinion.

Hindi pa ganun kasi sa daming nagcomment sa page marami pa ring hindi nasasagot. Feeling ko hindi pa ganun ka strong ang communications (Joy Martizon, F, 18)

They're okay nagrerespond naman. (Ken Lopez, M, 26)

In terms of customer communication, the total score was 3.95, the highest among the three satisfaction attributes. Needless to say, Meralco is found to be proactive in notifying the customers about current issues or foreseen events that may affect the services and/or rates of Meralco. Fans seemed to appreciate Facebook as a platform for customers to conveniently and directly report, complain or give suggestions to Meralco.

They (Meralco) try to reach out kapag sabihin mo tumaas yung kuryente, they try to explain. They try to reach out talaga. (Charnem Canete, F, 27)

Nagbibigay sila ng information ahead of time. (Joy Martizano, F, 18)

Meralco in terms of corporate image was rated 3.82. Although perceived more as business-oriented rather than customer-centric, Meralco Facebook fanpage was

noted to have influenced how the Meralco Facebook fans, as transparent and more accessible.

Naging mas open sila sa public. Mas nagiging laman siya ng balita. Nasasagot ang tanong ng mga tao, kung bakit nagtataas .Tsaka yung bill nila makikita mo maraming charges. So through fanpage nila pwede kang magtanong at masasagot nila kung bakit natin binabayaran yun.(Joy Martizon, F, 18)

Feeling namin nag-cacare naman siya.Kasi inuunahan niya ang mga customers. Yung

paglalagay niya ng schedule, isang thing yun na nagpapakita na nag-cacare si Meralco (John Capulcong, M, 28)

3.1.6 Hypotheses Testing

In general, there is no significant difference amongst reasons for liking on satisfaction in terms of complaints handling, customer communication and corporate image. However, results show that there is a weak association between satisfaction and reasons for liking the Meralco Facebook fanpage

Table 2. Significance Testing

Hypothesis	Significant Difference	Association/ Relationship
H1: Reasons for liking the fanpage and satisfaction		
H1a: Reasons for liking the fanpage and complaints handling	One-Way ANOVA Test F (4, 99) = .840, p>.10	Lambda of 0.02
H1b: Reasons for liking the fanpage and customer communications	ANOVA Test F (4, 112) = .617, p>.10	Lambda of 0.02
H1c: Reasons for liking the fanpage and coporate image	ANOVA Test F (4, 111) = .657, p>.10	Lambda of 0.02
H2: Reasons for liking the fanpage and word-of-mouth		
H2: Reasons for liking the fanpage and word-of-mouth	Chi-Square Test of Independence $\chi^2 (4) = 8.222, p<.10$	Phi and Cramer's V of .256
H3: Strength of interaction and satisfaction		
H3a: Strength of interaction and complaints handling	communications	Coefficient One Sample Test
H3b: Strength of interaction and customer		t(103) = 39.318, p>.10

H4: Strength of interaction and word-of-mouth

H4: Strength of interaction and word-of-mouth	Independent Samples Test t(123) = -3.373, p<.10	Phi and Cramer's V of .66
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Hypothesis	Significant Difference	Association/ Relationship
H5: Complaints handling satisfaction and socio-demographics profile		
H5a: Complaints handling and age	ANOVA Test F (6, 97) = .872, p>.10	Gamma of .125
H5b: Complaints handling and sex	Independent Samples Test t(102) = -1.198, p>0.10	Phi and Cramer's V of .439
H5c: Complaints handling and marital status	ANOVA Test F (3, 100) = 2.758, p>.10	Cramer's V of .413
H5d: Complaints handling and average monthly family income	ANOVA Test F (4, 99) = .246, p>.10	Gamma of .050

H6: Corporate image satisfaction and socio-demographics profile

H6a: Corporate image and age	ANOVA Test F (6, 109) = 1.419, p>.10	Gamma of .093
H6b: Corporate image and sex	Independent Samples Test t(114) = -.425, p>0.10	Phi and Cramer's V of .401
H6c: Corporate image and marital status	ANOVA Test F (3, 112) = 2.532, p<.10	Cramer's V of .492
H6d: Corporate image and average monthly family income	ANOVA Test F (4, 111) = 1.424, p>.10	Gamma of .240

H7: Customer communications satisfaction and socio-demographics profile

H7a: Customer communications and age	ANOVA Test F (6, 110) = 1.394, p>.10	Gamma of .063
H7b: Customer communications and sex	determinatio n, r ² , (-0.028) ²	
H7c: Customer communications and marital status	Coefficient determinatio n, r ² , (-0.107) ² or 0.01	
H7d: Customer communications and	One Sample Test t(116) = 54.586, p<.10	

Samples Test Phi and
 t(115) = -.362, Cramer's
 p>0.10 Vof
 ANOVA Test .415
 F (3, 113) =
 3.309, p>.10 Cramer's
 Vof
 ANOVA Test .492

		Coefficient	average monthly family income	F (4, 112) = .672, p>.10	Gamma of - .002
H3c: Strength of interaction and corporate image	One Sample Test	determination n, r ² , (-0.114) ² or			
	t(115) = 43.285, p<.10	0.012			
Hypothesis			Significant		Association/

	Difference	Relationship
H8: Word-of-mouth and socio-demographics profile		
Chi-Square Test of		
H8a: Word-of-mouth and age	Independence $\chi^2(6) = 1.373$, $p > .10$	Phi and Cramer's V of .105
Chi-Square Test of		
H8b: Word-of-mouth and sex	Independence $\chi^2(1) = 2.349$, $p < .10$	Phi and Cramer's V of .137
Chi-Square Test of		
H8c: Word-of-mouth and marital status	Independence $\chi^2(3) = 3.464$, $p > .10$	Phi and Cramer's V of .166
Chi-Square Test of		
H8d: Word-of-mouth and average monthly family income	Independence $\chi^2(4) = 12.874$, $p < .10$	Gamma of - .346

H9: Strength of interaction and socio-demographics profile

H9a: Strength of interaction and age	ANOVA Test $F(6, 118) = .490$, $p > .10$	Gamma of - .01
H9b: Strength of interaction and sex	Independent Samples Test $t(123) = 1.029$, $p > 0.10$	Phi and Cramer's V of .611
H9c: Strength of interaction and marital status	ANOVA Test $F(3, 121) = 2.595$, $p < .10$	Cramer's V of .570
H9d: Strength of interaction and average monthly family income	ANOVA Test $F(4, 99) = .776$, $p > .10$	Cramer's V of -.173

H10: Strength of interaction and reasons for liking

H9a: Strength of interaction and reasons for liking	ANOVA Test $F(4, 120) = .1.197$, $p > .10$	Cramer's V of .028
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3.2 Content Analysis

3.2.1 Meralco-Created Contents

The content analysis generated a result showing that the type of content frequently posted by Meralco on its Facebook fanpage is about service outage followed by public announcement. While September has the most number of Meralco posts, we find that interaction is strongest during the month with natural disaster (August). This may be attributed to the need of customers to know when electricity will be restored and to report power outages and emergency cases. Compared to the average strength of interaction. Meralco fans seemed to have low engagement at 64.45 during a month bombarded with controversial issues. (See Table 3.)

Among the different content categories, public announcements (424.95) seemed to be more relevant for

generally unsatisfied with their energy providers even for countries with quite low electricity cost. (See Table 4.)

Table 3. Month vs. Means of Reached, Likes, Comment, Share and Strength of Interaction

Month	Reached	Likes	Comment	Share	Strength
August	14,052.49	31.79	7.75	18.40	296.21
February	2,990.30	6.39	3.96	5.04	64.45
September	8,956.30	15.58	4.63	3.89	183.64
Total	10,211.94	20.78	5.76	9.70	212.93

Table 4. Content Category vs. Means of Reached, Likes, Comment, Share and Strength of Interaction

Category	Reached	Likes	Comment	Share	Strength
Corporate Social Responsibility/ Corporate News	4,237.70	49.70	5.60	5.50	91.94
Information About Utility Services and Programs/Campaigns	3,922.67	19.50	7.67	10.67	88.30
Public Announcement	18,815.50	79.94	18.37	63.81	424.95
Service Outage	9,952.72	12.86	4.40	4.34	203.67
Total	10,211.94	20.78	5.76	9.70	212.93

customers, followed by service outages. Customers were more interested to know advisories that may affect their bills. This insight is also reflective of a study conducted by OPower on Five Universal Truths about Energy Consumers (2013), indicating that although consumers are

3.2.2 Contents by Meralco Facebook Fans

On the average, the total post of Meralco Facebook fans is 356 per month. The most frequently asked concerns were related to service outages. Aside from this, the most consistently asked across various months includes: general service and billing/payments/rates. The least posted concern was about energy efficiency/safety tips.

Three content evaluators encoded all the contents and evaluated whether posts have positive, neutral or negative sentiments. Based on the evaluation, negative sentiments usually came from billing, meter-related, follow-up, pilferage, and service outage. However, most of the posts were neutral in sentiments, which means posts can really be just inquiring for Meralco's action or comments. This came as a bit of a surprise as Meralco usually gets bashed on TV or radio.

Moreover, regardless of the context Meralco is in, proportion of negative, neutral and positive sentiments did not vary. The overall sentiment is leaning towards neutral. However, the proportion of negative sentiment is slightly higher in September, during the neutral month. This is surprising as there is a greater expectation to get negative

comments during the month on which Meralco had to face billing issues.

3.3 Mini Focus Group Discussion

3.3.1 Meralco Facebook Benefits

For Meralco Facebook fans, Meralco being present on Facebook has several benefits. One is that the new communication platform allows for more interactivity. Customers, for as long as they “liked” the Meralco page, can now post their comments or complaints.

“Pwede ka ng magcomment kung may kaptibahay kang nagjumper. Kasi usually the charge goes into the other customers kaya tumataas yung bill talaga” (Ellaïne Castro, F, 26)

Two, through Facebook, Meralco has become more accessible. There is no need for customers to go the Business Center to file a concern.

“Somewhat positive siya. Kasi nga usually walan tayong direct access, kunwari may reklamo ka, kung pupunta ka naman a Meralco office, time consuming, eh katulad nga niyam, kung meron kang naisip, pwede mo agad ilagay sa status sa fanpage” (Mark Palma, M, 27)

Three, Facebook is seen as convenient compared to other communication channels. Since most Filipinos are now on Facebook, it has created a seamless experience for them to interact with the brand.

“Kapag may question ka, doon ka na lang pupunta. Unlike dati, tatawag ka pa sa office nila. Convenient kasi siya” (Jonalyn Martizon, F, 23)

Four, Meralco Facebook fans appreciated the fact that they can actually go back to a post on important announcements should they fail to take note.

“Sa television rin naman pero hindi katulad sa Facebook na mababalikan mo. Kasi yung balita kapag nasabi na hindi na mababalikan. At least sa Facebook kapag na-post na pwede mo ng balikan” (John Capungcol, M, 28)

Last benefit noted was the ability now for customers to get up-to-date information about Meralco-related matters, anytime, anywhere. During the FGD, the participants mentioned appreciation on safety and electricity efficiency tips plus the explanation on where most of the portion of the bill goes.

3.3.2 Connection with Meralco on Facebook

Although they have liked the Meralco Facebook fanpage, most of the FGD participants reported that they do not see Meralco posts as much. The fans were expecting to see more feeds from Meralco and do not mind being

bombarded with information for as long as they are relevant.

“Parang very inactive kasi sa feeds. Parang isang beses lang isang araw or kung may necessity sila, doon lang sila nagpopost. Walang buhay ‘yung Facebook nila.” (Therese Waltron, F, 23)

Still, Meralco fans emphasized the importance of having a relevant and catchy post. It is not merely about the number but whether a post is important for the fans. Finally, Meralco Facebook fans had a mix feeling towards Meralco’s urgency to reply and address each of the concerns of its customers on Facebook.

“Kung sa comment titingnan mo, hindi naman sumasagot si Meralco eh” (Dominic Reyes, M, 27)

“Matagal magresponse kapag tatawag ka sa 16211. Pero si Facebook pwede alternative channel para magcomplain” (Ellaïne Castro, F, 26)

“Pero sa Facebook after 3 miuntes may nagresponse kaagad” (Jean Torino, F, 37)

3.3.3 Perception of Meralco Facebook Fans Towards Meralco

By opening a Facebook fanpage, Meralco was seen by its fans as open, transparent and inviting. Fans recognized the effort of Meralco to make itself more accessible for the most number of customers.

“Naging mas open sila sa public. Mas nagiging confident kami kay Meralco, feeling ko mas transparent siya sa akin. Kasi di ba sa internet mas madaling magsabi, tapos yung mga netizens madaling makapag-express” (Joy Martizon, F, 18)

The Facebook Meralco account is also seen as Meralco’s brave attempt to reach out to its customers. It shows an effort to express concern for the customers. After all the notion that Meralco is just about making profit, the Facebook account has strongly spoken about Meralco’s interest to serve better its customers by hearing more from them.

“Lumalapit na si Meralco sa mga customers through social media. Mas madali ng magcomment ang mga customers, magbigay ng suggestions at komento. Feeling naming nag-kecare naman siya. Kasi inuunahan niya ang mga customers. Yung paglalagay niya ng schedule, isang thing yun na nagpapakita na nag-kecare si Meralco” (John Capungcol, M, 28)

“Tapos nagsasabi rin sila kung magtatas ng kuryente. At least nalalaman din naming at napaghahandaan” (Raiza Lubenia, F, 21)

“Yes, and we want our voice to be heard. Interesado kami doon kasi risky iyon. Pwede kami magmura. Pwede ka naming murahin doon. Kunwari ako gagawa lang ako ng account na unknown tapos magpopost ako doon ng against the company.” (Ronald Tabunan, M, 26)

“Feeling namin nag-eefort naman pala ang Meralco. Eto rin una kung naisip. Ito yung best way na ginawa ni Meralco na makipagcommunicate sila doon sa hindi masyadong nakiki-reachout sa Meralco” (Mark Palma, M, 27)

3.3.4 Building Customer Relationship Through Facebook

Liking a page is a start of a connection with any brand and fans of the Meralco Fanpage acknowledged this connection. They were positive about how this connection can actually progress from a distant relationship to a closer one. They too see the possibility for Meralco to build a mutually beneficial relationship.

“Acquaintance pa lang. Pero there is chance na ma-build ni Meralco ang relationship niya with us. Through Facebook, pwede kapag they give us regular feeds about their programs, advisory. Kapag nakikita ko parati, kapag mas nagiging visible siya, kahit na medyo negative ang perception naming sa Meralco” (Guilbert Itulid, M, 34)

Facebook is seen as a perfect platform to build this relationship because of its inherent characteristic - being interactive and accessible.

“Parang sa Facebook tuloy-tuloy lang ang pagsuyo ni Meralco sa kanyang customers” (Ellaine Castro, F, 26)

“TV kasi parang limited lang ‘yung time. Ilang seconds lang yan. Ilang minutes. Hindi naman yan yung lagging nakatingin ka sa TV. Sakto lang. Wala talagang masyadong building of relationship” (Ellaine Castro, F, 26)

To build this relationship with the Meralco fans, Meralco is suggested to frequently post relevant and appealing content; to be more personal and to maintain communication on Facebook regardless of the circumstance. Personalized messaging, through convenient communication channels, was also emphasized in a study of Opower (2013) to be very essential in changing how consumers perceived their electricity cost.

“Kulang pa sa pagre-reach out sa mga tao ‘yung Meralco. Kung paano, kunwari everyday may mga status sila na kamusta. May reklamo ba kayo? Pero walang ganon. Parang mababasa mo lang, advisories just to give information, ganon lang. Hindi siya personal na

mangangamusta sila. How’s your experience about Meralco ” (Dominic Reyes, M, 27)

“Huwag lang nila biglang ia-abandon yung Facebook nila kasu may ibang companies na ganon. Kapag marami ng problema, ila-lock down na nila ‘yung Facebook. Biglagn mawawala” (Therese Waltron, F, 23)

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This descriptive study on the pattern of engagement between Meralco Facebook fans and Meralco showcased results that may strengthen, question and perhaps explain further some of the concepts and theories pointed out earlier in the study. This study may also be helpful determining steps to improve the current Facebook strategy of Meralco. This section summarizes the results according to the operational framework of the study.

4.1 Involvement

The results showed that the primary reason for liking the Meralco fanpage was to get up-to-date information. This is very much consistent with the earlier study of Pike Research highlighting the top five (5) reasons why customers interact with utilities online. Mainly, customers want to know about billing issues, service outages and other service issues other than outage (meter installation, service application).

This study also showed that Meralco Facebook fans should not be treated according to its demographic profile. The researcher found in the study that in general level of satisfaction, strength of interaction and word-of-mouth behavior were not significantly different across different demographic profile; except however for sex vis-à-vis word-of-mouth and marital status vis-à-vis interaction. This only shows that involvement of fans is not influenced by their demographic profile. Hence in the case of Meralco, the attempt to influence Facebook fans should be. What are seemed relevant to customers are energy- efficiency tips, safety tips and rates.

Facebook link allows for reciprocity, which makes it an appropriate platform to interact and build relationship with customers. Like any online community, Facebook becomes a hub where Meralco and its customers can converge and have a more “continuous, cyclical and symmetrical relationship” (Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani & Lewis, 2012). Meralco fans acknowledged the potential of Facebook to build this relationship. Unlike the traditional communication channel, feedback may not be impossible but very limited. The experience of Meralco fans showed a fairly activated comment and post functions.

On the other hand, Facebook was also considered both as accessible and convenient. The digital divide that we used to know seems to be blurring away, at least for the more urbanized area, where Meralco customers are. Talking with customers on Facebook neither deemed inappropriate nor disturbing. In fact, the fans expected Meralco to have a Facebook account where they can access recent information and announcement. Meralco fans seemed to rely on Meralco’s Facebook page for explanations on issues affecting their electricity bill and

service. This confidence also transpired in a research conducted by Austin, Jin & Liu (May 2012).

The presence of Meralco on Facebook was a risky attempt. Although Meralco became more vulnerable to public scrutiny on Facebook, consumers highly appreciated the effort. By making itself open to possible heated conversations, Meralco was able to portray an authentic concern for its customers. The Meralco Facebook experience is an illustration of Vivek's (2009) idea that as the exchange between the brand and consumers is intensified; consumers are more inclined to reciprocate to the authenticity and start to recognize the brand's true concern for its customers.

4.2 Interaction

Interaction basically describes the exchange of contents between Meralco and its fans and how strong or frequent it is. In terms of content, Meralco content seemed to be aligned to the type of contents the fans frequently ask about. Again, across various demographic profile, except for marital status, there seems to be no significant difference in the strength of interaction. Meralco Facebook fans, regardless of demographic profile, interact with Meralco on Facebook on the needs basis.

While a previous study suggested that a person with a motivation resulting to an intrinsic value (i.e. to learn) is more engaged than a person who participates for an extrinsic value (i.e. prize) (Vivek, 2009). This was not reflected in the results of this study. There seemed to be no significant difference amongst the various reasons for liking the page on interaction. Moreover, statistical tests showed weak relationship between these two variables.

Service outage had the most consistent strength of interaction. The strength of interaction on contents related to public announcement can be a function of both content execution and context. Case in point is the public announcement on safety tips posted in August during Typhoon Maring. The post was highly relevant to the fans during that time.

The experience of Meralco with its Facebook fanpage showed that Facebook is a strong alternative channel during a natural disaster. Meralco fans tend to be more connected with Meralco on Facebook to get updates on power restoration. Instead of going through the hotline, Facebook became the "hotline" for the fans. On the other hand, when Meralco got involved in a controversial issue last February, the fans tend to be less engaged with Meralco. Perhaps, since the fanpage is fully owned by Meralco, the fans may have had the feeling that any explanations from Meralco on Facebook can be very biased towards its business interest. Hence, they opted to hear the explanation from other medium.

Meralco then has to maximize the use of Facebook during typhoon seasons. It has to keep a frequent up-to-date information about the status of both power interruption and power restoration. Finally, even during times when the company has to face controversial issues, Facebook fanpage has to maintain providing the necessary information to enlighten the fans about the issues confronted. Meralco Facebook fanpage may not be the primary source to know more about the issue; nonetheless, it remains to be a channel where fans can always go back to as reference.

4.3 Intimacy

The over-all sentiment of posts by Meralco Facebook fans is neutral. Contents were mostly to inquire about schedule of power restoration and a new service. The proportion of negative, neutral and positive comments was consistent across varying Meralco context. The content analysis results showed, regardless of month, a higher proportion of neutral compared to negative comments or posts by Meralco fans.

While for a utility, it can be very risky to be on Facebook due to potential bashers; the content analysis results indicate that there is not much to worry about. The fans did not only appreciate the presence of Meralco on Facebook, it essentially has not become a venue for bashers to bombard with their negative comments.

4.4 Socio-Demographic Profile, Satisfaction and Word-of-Mouth

The statistical results of the online survey showed that there is no significant difference in terms of how the respondents evaluated Meralco for complaints handling, customer communication and corporate image. However, test results also showed that age, sex, marital status and income can be associated with satisfaction. Age is found to have an inversely weak association with satisfaction while marital status has a positive moderate relationship with satisfaction. Sex is moderately related to satisfaction. The level of income one has may have a weak relationship to complaints handling satisfaction; and inversely weak relationship to corporate image satisfaction.

On the other hand, age, marital status and income do not show significant difference in terms of word-of-mouth behavior. This means across different age, marital status and income word-of-mouth behavior is not very varied. However, word-of-mouth behavior seems to be significantly different between male and female. Females are more likely to share a post by Meralco than males. If we look into the association of the different demographic profile, the results show a weak association with age, sex and marital status; and a moderately negative association with income.

4.5 Motivatioin, Satisfaction and Word-of-Mouth

On one hand, the statistical results show that there is no significant difference amongst the reasons for liking the Meralco Facebook fanpage on how Meralco is evaluated in terms of complaints handling, customer communication and corporate image. Regardless of the reason for liking the Meralco fanpage, Meralco will be identically evaluated. On the other hand, the satisfaction on complaints handling, customer communication and corporate image is significantly different in various reasons for liking. Finally, reasons for liking are weakly associated with satisfaction and word of mouth.

4.6 Strength of Interaction, Satisfaction and Word-of-Mouth

Tung (2012) argued that social media has the potential to increase customer contact resulting to an improved customer satisfaction. While this study would like to support this school of thought, the statistical results

of the interaction between Meralco and its Facebook fans; and satisfaction indicate otherwise. Although satisfaction is significantly different across varying strength of interaction, the direction of this difference is negative. An inversely weak association suggests that there is a slight potential for a strong interaction to determine less satisfaction.

This relationship is quite a contrary to what most literature proposed. The case of the Meralco Facebook fanpage can be viewed in different ways and may still reinforce and heighten the previous literatures. This result can be seen merely as a basis for future study to see the change of interaction and satisfaction over time. Meralco Facebook fanpage is relatively new and the quality of engagement with Meralco Facebook fans is still an exploration. The result might be an eye-opener, if the same trend shows over time, that the relationship between interaction and satisfaction can be very different for utilities or brands that do not inherently elicit positive emotion. If so, then this can be a unique pattern of Facebook engagement for brands such as Meralco, whose market is initially indifferent about the brand and that liking is solely to get relevant updates and avail services.

Finally, the propensity to share a Meralco post is different across varying strength of interaction. Statistical results show that fans with higher interaction with Meralco on Facebook have a strong inclination to share about a post from Meralco.

4.7 Over-All Facebook Experience in Building Brand Relationship

Given the above results, creating value for the presence of Meralco on Facebook can be a very long-term attempt. But this long attempt is not very far from reality. A previous study cites that customers value the presence of brand on Facebook (Lab42 as cited in Kelly, S. 2012). This finding is clearly illustrated as well in this study. Although most of the customers initially hated Meralco, "liking" the Meralco Facebook fanpage shows an existing value of the presence of Meralco on Facebook. What the researcher found in the study is similar to what literatures already cited: opportunities for consumer to view, discuss, forward and upload their own content on Facebook (Evans & McKee, 2010; Solis, 2010; Swedowsky, 2009; Wong, 2009 as cited in Reitz, 2012). More so, Meralco fans also value the presence of Meralco on Facebook for its convenience and accessibility. The experience with Meralco Facebook is a seamless transition from the habitual personal use of Facebook to getting information from Meralco and posting an inquiry to Meralco.

Furthermore, Meralco Facebook fanpage has the most potential to build and grow existing relationship with its customers, particularly those who have already liked the fanpage. Liking the Meralco Facebook is the first of many possible chances for Meralco to grow the existing relationship. Facebook allows for continuous, uninterrupted communication; which is essential to create a bond with its fans. For now, while the results of this study showed that strong interaction is negatively related to satisfaction, the relationship is still weak. This means, the direction of relationship might change over-time as proposed by various literatures. Fans, after all, did not discredit the fact that Meralco became less threatening and more open for its customers. This show of transparency

builds confidence that is attributable to satisfaction. Needless to say, interaction is not merely about the exchange but the relationship created (Sanchez-Hernandez and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2006 as cited in Vivek, 2009).

To further this relationship, Meralco has to combine frequency, personalization and interactivity (Kauppakokeakoulu, June 2008). Frequency of posts leads to frequent interaction with customers. Meralco fans reported that they do not frequently see posts by Meralco and wished to see more relevant posts not just about service outages but general information to help them save and be safe. Personalization is not just about mentioning the names of the fan but allowing for posts that makes Meralco more human by asking a personal question like – how is everyone? Or do you have other concerns?. Similar tonality of post is highly appreciated by the fans. Interactivity is the assurance that Meralco will not only reply to all of the posts but immediately reply to posts. This assurance has to be very evident to encourage sustaining interaction with Meralco on Facebook.

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