AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE USAGE OF ELECTRONIC PLATFORM FOR CONSERVATION MARKETING AMONG EDUCATION ENVIRONMENTAL CENTRES (EEC) IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

With limited funding, conservationists are far from able to assist all threatened species. Even though online marketing has been increasingly used by conservationists to raise funds and awareness on the need to reduce biodiversity loss, the major issue is reaching the target audience and influencing their behaviour, especially if the target audience is a profit-making entity. To date, a comprehensive theoretical investigation on online conservation marketing pertaining business expectation, preferences, experience and satisfaction is still in its infancy and remains unanswered. Therefore, to fulfill this gap, this qualitative study is executed, in which 19 in-depth interviews was adopted until data saturation is achieved. The participants are those who worked in relationship marketing field and have experienced online conservation marketing activities. The study explores and profiles the experiences and satisfaction of businesses based on their previous online conservation marketing and the expectation and preferences of businesses for future online conservation marketing. Based on the research findings, even before the first Covid-19 outbreak in Malaysia, many businesses in the country were involved in at least one online conservation marketing strategy with an Environmental Education Centre (EEC) and many were satisfied with the EEC online marketing strategies and services. However, most businesses have less expectations and low preferences towards the future online conservation marketing by the EEC. This study assists conservation organisations in retaining the financial support from businesses and enhancing public conservation awareness through businesses. This study is aligned with Malaysia National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) no 4, under Entry Point Project 4 (EPP 4) and also NKEA no 6, under EPP 12.

KEYWORDS: Environmental Education Centers, Electronic Platform, Conservation Marketing, Sustainable Tourism

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Inadequate funding levels are a major impediment to effective conservation and are likely associated with recent failures to meet United Nations biodiversity targets (Waldron, 2013). The importance of evaluating effectiveness is widely recognised in both marketing and conservation. However, to date, little research into the effectiveness of online conservation marketing has been published especially in regard to business expectation, preferences, experience and satisfaction.

Prior conservation research on individual expectations shows that perceived expectations were the strongest predictor the likelihood of individuals to participate in wildlife conservation programmes (Lo,
Chow, & Cheung, 2012). However, there is little in conservation research pertaining to the preferences and expectations especially for businesses. Similarly, there is limited research on the businesses experience and satisfaction towards conservation programmes.

Therefore, the objectives of this study are to explore and profile the experiences and satisfaction of businesses based on their previous online conservation marketing, and the expectations and preferences of businesses for future online conservation marketing.

METHODOLOGY

This research is different from many others in the same category as it uses a qualitative approach in which it explores the new viewpoints on a well-known research subject (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The research problems of this study were framed as open-ended interview questions to support the discovery of new findings, thereby allowing this study to update the researchers’ knowledge of the subject-matter (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000). Specifically, 19 semi-structured interviews were executed and data saturation was achieved.

The interviews were geared towards Malaysians who worked in the relationship marketing field and have experienced at least one online conservation marketing activity at their workplace. Each interview took between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Interviews in other languages other than English were then translated into English. All the interviews were then manually analysed.

FINDINGS

Even before the first outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia, many businesses in the country have had some experience with at least one online conservation marketing strategy with a local Environmental Education Centre (EEC) which includes using or viewing the EEC’s own corporate website, the EEC’s social media page (mostly via Facebook), Instant Messenger (mostly via WhatsApp with EEC representatives), or by e-mails and surveys with the EECs. Many of the businesses were satisfied with the EEC online marketing strategies and services.

The reasons for this were because these strategies have informed the businesses about current conservation activities offered by EECs, provided a means for the businesses to use their funds for corporate social responsibility purpose (which would have otherwise been used for tax purposes), and increase awareness of the current and global conservation issues.

However, most of these businesses have low expectations and preferences when it comes to online conservation marketing by the EEC in the near future. According to these businesses, they prefer to have face-to-face interactions with EEC representatives, rather than dealing with online platforms.

One of the reasons is because it is easier for them to customise the conservation activities (offered by EECs) based on the company’s needs, preferences, and what they can offer. Another reason is because most of the decision makers in the companies are not millennials, hence they have a higher preference for traditional marketing such as public relations and flyers.
CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTION

This study provides original research exploring conservation marketing for relationship marketing purposes between businesses and non-profit organisations, as well as between funder and fundee. Based on the research findings, even before the first COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia, many businesses in the country have had some experience with at least one of the online conservation marketing strategies and dealt with an EEC (i.e., Kenyir Elephant Conservation Village, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Malaysia, and Maliau Basin Conservation Area).

The research findings also illustrate that many businesses were satisfied with the EEC online marketing strategies and services. However, most businesses (prior to the enforcement of lockdown due the pandemic) had low expectations and preference for the future of online conservation marketing by the EEC.

Additionally, this study also contributes to conservation organisations ability to generate funds from businesses by understanding the standpoint of the businesses. The research findings may allow the conservation organisations (i.e., Pusat Konservasi Hidupan Liar Bota Kanan, Turtle Conservation and Information Centre Pulau Pinang, and Pusat Konservasi Hidupan Liar Segamat) to be more proactive in generating funds (i.e., adapting to business needs), rather than reactive by waiting for businesses to come to them.

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REFERENCES

