

MOBILE BRAND INTERACTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract:

The rapid adoption of mobile technology in Southeast Asia has provided local and international brands with new opportunities to interact with consumers. Embracing the unique aspects of mobile has enabled a region that was once lacking in consumer understanding of technology to rapidly approach parity with consumers in more developed countries. Like the United States, Southeast Asians are now constantly connected through their mobile phones and are Internet savvy. In 2012, 29 million smartphones were purchased across the region, up 78% from 2011 (FierceMobileIT, 2013). Meanwhile, an advertising industry that has been stagnant for decades with few unique media options suddenly has new technology that is being rapidly adopted and utilized by the majority of consumers. This opens up a new channel for engagement. Brands are now being challenged to better understand mobile technology and how it impacts their marketing strategy, as consumers in the region have shown that they are open to interacting with brands via mobile in the right context, with the right message and at the right time. The focus of this study is to better understand how brands in Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore can go beyond traditional advertising and deeply engage with consumers via mobile to generate brand loyalty among them. The study looks at recent mobile trends in each region, the strategies brands are using in mobile, the approach brands take toward measuring their mobile footprint and the future of mobile brand engagement across Southeast Asia.

Keywords: mobile, smartphone, branding, customer interaction, Southeast Asia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, marketing, brand engagement

INTRODUCTION

Given that most mobile phone consumers view their phone as an essential device for communication, organization, navigation and entertainment, the opportunities for brands to interact with these consumers on the mobile channel has grown significantly over the last few years. The mobile platform allows an always-on connectivity with consumers and can be highly localized and personalized, quickly making this one of the most effective channels that businesses can use to achieve brand engagement. Simply defined, brand engagement is the method by which brands connect and interact with their intended consumers with the purpose of creating and sustaining awareness of their brand. While consumers have made the transition to embracing mobile, the potential for mobile has not

been realized by many brands in the United States and the majority of brands in Southeast Asia.

This study looks at how brands in Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore can go beyond traditional advertising and engage with consumers via mobile, and reviews recent mobile trends in each country and the strategies brands are using to harness these trends. We comparatively look at the United States and further describe the issues faced by the Southeast Asian brands in using mobile for brand interactions, especially in creating metrics for measuring their mobile footprint. Our research shows that Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore have unique opportunities for mobile brand interactions that are specific to each country's users and molded by various macroeconomic and business factors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been numerous journals and articles related to the development of mobile platforms during the smartphone and tablet revolution of the last decade. Some of the current literature looks at mobile as part of a larger advertising and marketing study while other research touches on mobile-specific elements such as apps and the “third screen” as an alternative to TV and the Web. These studies have focused on specific regions, including Europe and Asia. Bellman, Potter, Treleaven-Hassard, Robinson, and Varan (2011) research the ways branded apps impact consumers’ perception of the brand and the steps brands can take to improve this perception. In their paper “Success Factors With Apps,” Chiem, Arriola, Browers, Gross, Linmman, Nguyen, Sembodo, Song, and Seal (2010) note the ways brands in Europe can refine their app strategy within mobile. Tanakinjal (2010) focuses on consumers’ preference toward various types of mobile marketing messages. Tan, Kwek, and Li (2011) highlight the benefits of advertising within the social sphere with a focus on interactive ads, moving beyond traditional banner advertising. In “The Future of Advertising,” Gupta (2013) focuses on the power of apps within the mobile space and how these apps can be customized to maximize performance.

While these studies have focused on elements of mobile in various regions, there has not been an all-encompassing analysis of mobile brand interaction in Southeast Asia that touches on all of the mobile elements that brands can utilize to interact with customers. With mobile technology rapidly changing and Southeast Asia ripe for growth, there is value in a comparative analysis on mobile brand interaction covering Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore. This study can be used as a guide for brands looking to expand their footprint in the region to better understand the opportunities for mobile brand interaction.

RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This paper focuses on four key components that paint an overall picture of the mobile environment in Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore: the mobile landscape in each country, company strategies, measurements and future trends. The objective of this paper is to explore the different factors contributing to mobile interaction and to uncover opportunities and strategies for implementing successful mobile campaigns using the United States as a key guide for best practices.

A case-based research method was used as described in Applications of Case Study Research (Yin, 2003) where primary data was collected from interview-based input provided by 27 key players across the mobile value chain. Interviews were 60-90 minutes long and digitally recorded with the interviewees’ permission. Interviews included structured and open-ended questions intended to focus on the factors identified above. Following each interview the authors used notes, digital recordings and a pre-defined debriefing template to collectively review and triangulate responses and compare them with data from other interviews. Through this iterative process additional insights and questions were discovered and integrated into subsequent interviews for further examination.

Although case-based research does not provide the same level of detail when compared to quantitative research based on statistical analysis, it still produces informative, qualitative insights with regards to the research question and subject matter of this paper.

Interview participants were selected from across the mobile value chain. Table 1 displays the list of interviews conducted across each of the countries studied, along with their position in the mobile value chain.

Table 1: Interviews conducted in Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore and the United States

Country	Total Interviews	Brands	Telecommunication Companies	Marketing Firms	Other
Unites States	11	Merkle, Johnny Rockets, NBC Universal		Mobile Marketing Association, PlacelQ, Arnold Worldwide, Giant Media, Mobile Fusion, TBWA	DataXu, Ball State University
Thailand	5			Saatchi & Saatchi, Publicis, MEC	Ghislaine Bovy, ThumbsUp
Vietnam	4	MegaStar Media Company		Lowe, Ogilvy	TechInAsia
Malaysia	2	Google	Maxis		
Singapore	5	Google, Viki		TBWA, Dentsu Mobius	inMobi

Country Landscape

With a growing population of more than 600 million, the Southeast Asian region reflects a diverse mix of economies and cultures with varying mobile technology uses. The countries studied encompass 195 million people, or about 33% of the Southeast Asian population (The World Bank, 2013).

Mobile penetration is gauged by the number of subscriptions that are active with a carrier. Southeast Asian countries already have a large percentage of active subscriptions per capita, as seen in Table 2. On average, these countries have a mobile penetration rate of 146% as compared to the 104% of the United States (NBTC, 2013; Magdirila, 2013; Forest-Interactive, n.d.).

In recent years there has been a shift in mobile device ownership from the prevalent feature phone to the more media friendly smartphone. Advances in technology have begun to drive prices down and smartphone ownership has begun to rise. Some of the large manufacturers in Southeast Asia have been able to target lower income consumers by using basic smartphone technologies instead of cutting-edge ones. Costs are significantly cheaper than that of top models and the devices still offer Internet access, Web browsing, text messaging and other basic smartphone features (M. Borelli, personal communications, May 28, 2013).

Table 2: Mobile penetration rates in Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore and the United States

Country	Population	# of Mobile Subscribers /Subscriptions	Mobile Penetration	Smartphone Users (as % of all mobile phone users)
Thailand	67 million	85 million	127%	61%
Malaysia	30 million	42 million	140%	27%
Vietnam	92 million	147 million	160%	35%
Singapore	5.5 million	7.2 million	131%	57%
United States	317 million	330 million	104%	61%

In Thailand, smartphone mobile subscriptions are currently growing 30% annually (Del Rey, 2013). Vietnam has seen its smartphone penetration rate double from 2011 to 16% (Thanh Nien News, 2012). Smartphone sales across the region were up 78% in 2012, with an average of 44% of consumers looking to buy a new smartphone in the next 12 months (FierceMobileIT, 2013).

Mobile access is also made easier by the prevalence of pre-paid SIM cards. Decentralized networks of resellers are able to distribute SIM cards with pre-paid data and minutes. Through these resellers, various providers offer discounts for the purchase of prepaid minutes or data plans. This model of decentralized distribution is cause for concern to telecommunication companies as it interferes with the direct relationship they have with their consumers, but at the same time it provides a large distributor network which helps the mobile providers gain more users (A.M. Do, personal communications, May 27, 2013).

Infrastructure, Service Providers and Government

Mobile infrastructure in Southeast Asia has been expanding to support the ever increasing smartphone data usage and help companies stay competitive. 3G network technologies have been implemented in all four countries, with Malaysia and Singapore having already completed implementation of the 4G network and Thailand officially launching its soon

(WorldTimeZone, 2013). This additional bandwidth and service coverage has allowed for the streaming of TV shows, music, games and other apps.

The governments in Southeast Asia often play an active role in policies and promotion of mobile device use. For example, in Vietnam the Ministry of Telecom and the Ministry of Defense actually compete to provide mobile services to Vietnamese consumers, enabling local business mobile providers to keep spending lean and their costs to consumers low (A.M. Do, personal communications, May 27, 2013).

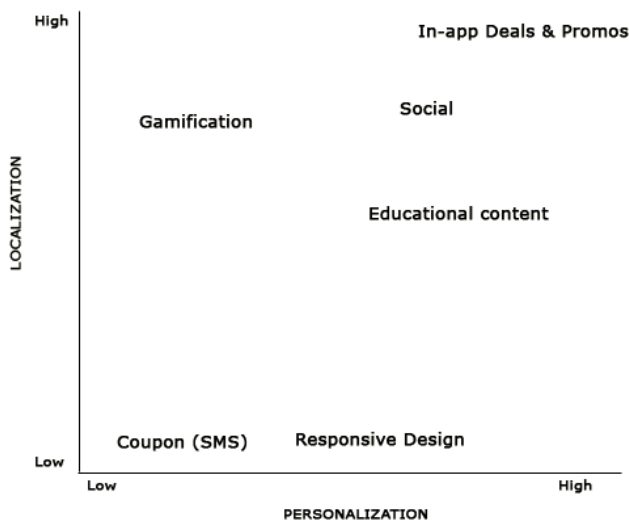
In Malaysia, the government has set a goal to reach 50% penetration of Internet services in 2013 and push toward 75% penetration by 2015. A program was launched in 2013 allowing consumers within a certain age group to receive a subsidy toward the purchase of an entry-level smartphone (N. Roy, personal communications, May 30, 2013). Income-based smartphone subsidies also exist for Malaysians that earn less than RM 3,000 per month (approximately U.S. \$934) (S. Danapalan, personal communications, May 31, 2013).

COMPANY STRATEGIES & EXAMPLES

Mobile is an interactive medium that is always connected to consumers and offers high levels of personalization and localization. Understanding and utilizing these three points is critical to success in mobile. Figure 1 illustrates how some of the tactics

discussed can be classified in terms of personalization and localization use. Companies must also grasp a key concept that mobile is an extension of existing campaigns and strategies rather than a separate entity (A. Leitao, personal communications, May 28, 2013). A unified approach will allow brands to keep their messages consistent regardless of where or how it is consumed by users. As mobile growth has steadily increased it has become more and more important for businesses to find ways to operate successfully within the space as they progress through different levels of understanding of mobile presence and strategy implementation.

Figure 1: Personalization and localization features of various engagement tactics



Social Strategy

One of the primary purposes of mobile devices has been to facilitate seamless communication between friends and colleagues. In today's environment mobile has become inherently social with consumers spending hours at a time on social sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These platforms provide a simple and effective means by which brands can interact with their users in a personalized and localized fashion. Along with simplicity comes the added advantage that their

customers are already active on these systems, and perhaps more importantly, there is virtually no cost to develop a campaign and engage with consumers.

In Vietnam, MegaStar leverages Facebook to better listen to and respond to their consumers that have questions or concerns. This direct, personalized connection and consistent interaction creates an even stronger bond between those users and the brand. Furthermore, the company provides utility and entertainment to its users by publishing show times within their Facebook page and including live feeds of special events using photos and other cinema-related content, all within the social sphere. The use of Facebook by the brands for brand communication enables users to have a consistent experience from mobile to desktop, thereby helping the brands to keep campaign elements aligned.

There are cases where social is the only approach being used by Southeast Asian brands. Some companies do not have a website, but instead manage all their external communication directly through Facebook. By building their site on Facebook, companies are able to gain access to a large group of consumers quickly and cost-effectively. Additionally, businesses are beginning to use the concept of branded hashtags on Twitter to encourage users to discuss brand-related content.

Singapore is indeed a leader in embracing mobile for creating integrated media campaigns. Its newspapers, TV channels and the Singapore Metro Rapid Transit have created many successful campaigns using QR codes, augmented reality and social media (Rao, 2012). In Singapore, there is an opportunity for brands to embrace rich media channels such as YouTube and engage with consumers looking to view mobile video. Shifting a traditional media campaign to a mobile campaign is generally a straightforward process using this platform. Meanwhile, in Vietnam, there are growing social chat applications like Line and Zalo that provide users with a fun way to engage in an

ordinarily mundane daily task through the use of stickers. These stickers then give brands the ability to send direct messages to users about their products for a specified duration.

Other Elements of Mobile Strategy

Some other key components of company strategies that either exist or are being considered in the region include responsive design, gaming/gamification, educational content generation and couponing.

Responsive design is about adjusting website elements based on the detected mobile device screen size. Such designs are prevalent in Singapore; however, it can be difficult for large corporations to implement due to their expansive websites. It affects the total cost and overall complexity, as well as increases localization challenges. Regardless, it is still a relatively inexpensive way to cover multiple platforms when compared with the development of native applications for each and functionalities within responsive designs are growing rapidly. Ad agency TBWA, for example, likes to understand the most likely user intent on specific devices to add or remove features or functionalities to improve the user experience on that specific device.

Games are hugely popular among the mobile users in Southeast Asia, particularly after the entry of smartphones into the market. With the increasing power in mobile devices, game studios have been able to create entertaining and engaging games for users. Brands looking to take small, low-cost steps into mobile can take advantage of the popularity of games by collaborating with the studios that produce them. These partnerships allow the companies to interject their brand and potentially gain consumer traction. Some companies can take a different approach and create their own game, all with the same objective of increasing consumer interaction and customer loyalty. An example of effective gamification is the iButterfly app created by Dentsu Mobius. This app was built for

a local mall in Singapore to entice customers to shop in their stores. It implements augmented reality to create digital butterflies that users can catch on their mobile device. Each butterfly contains a coupon or some other incentive to visit a store in the mall (M. Briant, personal communications, June 3, 2013).

Educational content on mobile is big across the region for both consumers and brands. Content that provides utility is used as a tactic to drive interaction by providing useful information for a certain demographic. An example is Nestlé's energy calculator app in Vietnam. The app is centered on educating moms about balancing their kids' energy needs with their nutritional needs. Using content that is based on dietary requirements for kids throughout the country, they show how consumption of a particular food equates to how much energy children should expend (A. Leita, personal communications, May 28, 2013). This utility provides access to a customer when they are in need of service or information, positioning the brand as a solution to their problem when they become in-market for goods or services.

Coupons and deal-based campaigns are also used heavily in Singapore. These can continue to be an attractive option for brands moving forward as Singaporeans tend to respond well to this and have a high propensity for shopping. Typically, these campaigns tend to be via SMS, which is not personalized and not localized. With the expansion of smartphone geo-fencing and the ability to track user behavior within an app, deals and promotions via push notifications are able to grow. Standard coupons can be part of these deals and promotions, but in this case the couponing strategy becomes a highly targeted and highly localized proposition.

In Southeast Asia, consumers are open to advertising on mobile specifically. While the acceptance rate of opt-in messages in the United States is low, Malaysians in train stations accept 30% of ad messages and nearly 60% in shopping malls

(S. Danapalan, personal communications, May 31, 2013). If consumers trust the brand, find the message contextual and are given the option to opt-in as opposed to being forced to opt-out, they are often open to messaging. However, the majority of mobile marketing is in the form of mass SMS messaging and those messages are typically viewed as spam by consumers. Brands often buy bulk message inventory from mobile carriers and provide the carrier with a message to send to consumers, which is then disseminated in bulk. There is no demographic targeting outside of the general demographics of the mobile carrier. Carriers also do little monitoring about the relevancy or content of the message. With no built-in opt-out functionality and the annoying nature of such communication, there is little favorable brand impact which can be achieved through SMS.

Educating Brands on the Power of Mobile

Before asking what unique campaigns brands have developed on mobile devices, we must first ask, "Are brands even considering mobile?" Many are not. On average only 5% of media spend is allocated for online, with mobile being a fraction of the online spend. Consider that the largest newspaper in Malaysia has one million readers (the majority are older than 45), and there are five million Malaysians online everyday (55% are between 20-29 years of age, 75% of which are located in urban areas) (S. Danapalan, personal communications, May 31, 2013). Despite this, traditional media such as TV and newspaper are continuing to sell out ad inventory and companies are still not embracing online as a principal channel. Maxis, the largest mobile carrier in Malaysia, who positions its company as a premium mobile service, launched a mobile-optimized website only in 2012. Malaysians, and specifically Gen Y Malaysians, have shifted to online, but brands have yet to catch up.

One of the reasons brands across the region have been slow to shift toward online and mobile is that

marketing teams at large organizations are too dependent on their ad agencies for decision-making, and these marketing departments have been convinced by the agencies that traditional media is a viable way to reach consumers. A traditional approach is beneficial for agencies as the brand's media spend remains high and the well-established performance formulas stay intact (spending \$X on TV ads generates \$Y increase in sales). Given the perceived discounts on large advertisement spending that agencies secure for their clients and the familiarity and comfort these clients have with traditional media campaigns, there is little reason for agencies to recommend a shift toward online and mobile. Furthermore, many agencies avoid advising clients on where consumers are actually spending their time, as it would quickly reveal the limited reach of traditional media and the ever increasing wider reach of online and mobile. Consumers spend four times more time online than with TV and 10 times more time online than with print media. In addition, one-third of all search queries are made on mobile, but many Southeast Asian brands are unaware of these current trends (S. Danapalan, personal communications, May 31, 2013).

In Singapore, digital gets 15%-19% of total marketing spend while mobile only gets 1%-4% (M. Briant, personal communications, June 3, 2013). Similarly, Malaysia is one of the leaders in smartphone penetration across Southeast Asia, yet brands have lagged behind in developing a strong presence on mobile devices. In Vietnam, some brands believe that a mobile app or social presence can replace traditional media. Mobile remains a new platform for most companies throughout Southeast Asia, but it is clear that mobile will continue to grow and the business case for mobile campaigns will become more convincing. Most brands the authors met with across the region see the value in mobile but are not shifting budgets to mobile fast enough. It is critical for agencies to continue educating brands on mobile's

value and how to better leverage mobile to create beneficial campaigns. Agencies like Lowe and Ogilvy are helping to re-educate brands on the right mix between traditional and mobile and how to truly take advantage of the mobile channel to interact with their customers.

In Thailand, companies have begun to pay attention to the number of users who are coming to their websites via smartphones and tablets. According to companies like Thumbs Up, this is the initial measurement on which brands are basing mobile spend (O. Lerdsuwankij, personal communication, May 22, 2013). Brands are finding that traffic generated from mobile devices is rising. In most cases, traffic levels of 30% or more emanating from this platform will trigger projects within the company, such as the mobile optimization of their site and/or the creation of an app. However, there is a great deal of education required for those looking to successfully promote a brand on mobile and the marketers who still rely on traditional media. These companies still do not fully understand or see the value that digital and mobile bring to a marketing campaign.

Besides understanding value, another hurdle to brands' success in mobile is the divide between their information technology (IT) and marketing departments. IT drives platform choices and marketing typically drives user experience. Mobile encompasses both areas and thus coordination is needed between these departments to generate a positive brand experience.

The perception of what digital and mobile can achieve has been skewed. Many brands look at digital and mobile as a forum for conversation and engagement with their customers to understand their brand perception. This approach generates useful insight. The benefit of wide reach across digital and mobile for brand awareness campaigns using a large budget is often not considered, despite mobile being the media where consumers are spending the majority

of their time. Additionally, while several travel companies have increased spend to focus on online and mobile transactions, the majority of brand websites are not optimized for end-to-end transactions and thus transaction-focused campaigns on these platforms are also rare.

MEASUREMENT

The complexity of measuring the value of a mobile brand presence has been one of the key roadblocks in the switch over of brands' marketing focus from traditional media to mobile, both in Southeast Asia and the United States. It is clear that consumer usage and interaction focus has shifted to mobile and that the rate of mobile adoption continues to grow exponentially. In the United States, users are spending 23% of their time on mobile compared to other forms of media. However, total mobile ad spending has significantly lagged behind consumers' shift to mobile; one of the main reasons is an inability to measure the success of brands' presence on this platform (Walsh, 2012).

The general consensus from agencies and brand teams is that without a clear method of deciphering the success of mobile campaigns the risk is simply not worth the reward. It is clear that many of the companies that authors met with were anxious for the development of an industry standard, straightforward approach to mobile measurement. Perhaps recent measurement initiatives from U.S. companies such as Adobe will make their way to Southeast Asia and provide comfort for marketing teams (Hernandez, 2013).

Types of Campaigns: Brand Awareness versus Conversion

Measuring a brand's presence on mobile differs greatly based on the goal of the campaign. Many of the risk-averse brands interviewed are stuck in a Web model where they are simply shifting measurement tools used for Web campaigns to mobile. Reports for

banner-focused campaigns often include standard metrics such as click-thru rate (CTR) and impressions, though it is clear that many brands in Thailand and Vietnam are not even using these basic CTR analytics. It is data the brands have little experience with and few benchmarks for future decision-making. There is little emphasis placed on analyzing this data, partially due to the fact that the budget for brand awareness campaigns on mobile is so small.

While mobile is often a perfect platform for conversion campaigns, many brand sites in Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore do not have functionality in place to enable consumer transactions on their site, thus it is not possible to close the loop on the cycle. Conversions or interactions that are initiated on the mobile platform then are completed on a different platform are often analyzed by U.S. companies to ensure mobile branding is not undervalued due to incorrect measurement. As a first step, it is important for brands that have a purchase option on mobile to ensure the purchase process is as easy as possible for their users. Reducing the number of steps to purchase is a good starting point. 1-800-FLOWERS in the United States determined their shopping cart was a feature customers utilized, but order tracking was less necessary and too cumbersome, thus they removed it from their mobile store (Spero, 2012). Improving the mobile purchase process makes the value of mobile branding easier to quantify because it directly links to a sale, and as Southeast Asian brands begin enabling purchase functionality on their sites, this is an important tactic for them to remember.

The Cookies Challenge

One of the key measurement challenges that face brands is a lack of cookies on most mobile platforms. iOS does not share cookie data with third parties, and while Android is slightly more open to data-sharing, accessible data differs by app and browser across mobile (M. Hanley, personal communications, April 19,

2013). Given the inconsistencies, it is almost impossible for brands to develop a targeting and retargeting strategy for a campaign that can be adequately measured. This lack of cookies forces brands to develop new strategies for targeting and determine which measurement metrics are truly applicable for their strategy.

The cookie-less mobile environment makes it challenging to identify which specific users made a purchase due to a brand message or advertisement, and thus a direct correlation between advertising spend and revenue increase cannot be ascertained. For many brands, measuring the value of any campaign ultimately comes down to a question of “does this make us money?” (J. Morrow, personal communications, April 25, 2013). With companies needing a return on their marketing investment, closing the loop is key. Direct response ads that drive traffic directly to transactional mobile apps are more straightforward with one-to-one correlation of click activity to purchase. More difficult, however, is measuring the impact of branding campaigns that are not necessarily meant to drive an immediate conversion. Without cookies to keep track of the user, and also the possibility that the user may switch devices to complete the transaction, tracking of closing-the-loop becomes a very daunting task. Many agencies expressed that significant opportunities exist for companies that can address this problem.

Interaction

Southeast Asian brand representatives seem to agree that the unique value of a mobile brand presence is generated outside of mobile ads and is centered on consumer interaction. Following the U.S.’s lead in a forward-thinking shift beyond CTR and impressions, some Singaporean brands are measuring interaction rate, average interaction and the cost-per-interaction. They have built mixed-model reports similar to Arnold Worldwide in the United States that aims to quantify the value of consumers spending time

with an ad or app and measuring their interaction with it, including how deep into the app they travel and how often they swipe the screen. Click-thru rates can be expanded to measure how long a user stays on a site after clicking an ad or what actions they take while on the site. Such interaction can be measured using pixels from third-party data verifiers that track all user activity and in some cases actual transactions, indicating the level of engagement with an ad, site or product specifically (M. Ali, personal communications, April 17, 2013).

Measurement of content consumption such as video is also important, and Ogilvy in Vietnam tracks this closely. Many brands consider the best engagements to be “high value tasks” which are defined as an action by a user that requires effort and shows interest in a brand (M. Doherty, personal communications, April 6, 2013). Creating a Facebook post or downloading a coupon are good examples of high value tasks. The goal of brand engagement analysis is to tie engagements back to sales. Generally, Southeast Asia lags behind the United States in this analysis, although most brands interviewed agreed that interaction is the key part of the mobile strategy.

Assigning value to interaction helps brands measure the value of their advertising efforts. Using historical website data and user trends, brands can diligently research the cause and effect of any specific action taken on the site and determine approximately what value such interaction could lead to. Typical interactions that can be assigned value include loyalty membership registrations, newsletter sign-ups and white paper downloads. These are all items that create a connection between the brand and a user. Using proper website analytics to attribute these actions to responses from mobile campaigns will allow brands to assign value and ROI to mobile advertising campaigns.

Additional Metrics

Surveys can be used to measure brand sentiment and brand favorability; however, one problem with surveys in a cookie-less environment is an inability to properly assess a control sample and an exposed sample. Essentially, all the surveys need to be completed immediately after exposure, which leads to unrealistically positive feedback as there is no lag between exposure and questioning recall (M. Doherty, personal communications, April 6, 2013). This is beneficial for agencies as the results of their efforts typically come back as positive, but the value to brands is low. We learned from U.S. companies that if a brand is hoping to measure brand sentiment, brand trust surveys are typically the most common way to ask the user qualitative questions about the brand. However, most of the brands that we spoke with admitted that data from these surveys is often skewed or inaccurate. Securing a participant in a survey is an interruption, and any user that chooses to participate likely has a strong feeling about the brand, either positive or negative. There is also a likelihood that consumers will overcompensate if they have little awareness of the brand, wanting to feel like they are up-to-date, resulting in an overstatement of their opinions of the brand and the sentiment they feel toward it.

Social measurement is another vital tool for Southeast Asian brands, as social campaigns are becoming an integral part of company strategy. Social media is easier for brands to measure, according to Thai brands that we interviewed. They measure likes, comments and re-tweets to identify the level of engagement with a brand. Megastar and Publicis in Vietnam are also very focused on social listening and tracking the level of engagement on their social sites, including photos uploaded. Mobile can uniquely provide brands with instantaneous feedback from customers through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Whether positive or negative,

quick and direct feedback is incredibly valuable to companies as it helps gauge the success of their strategy.

Many of the interviewees in Southeast Asia said that apps were important, but it was never really clear why. This is particularly true in Vietnam where many users do not download new apps and instead use only the apps which are pre-loaded on their phones when they make their initial purchase. U.S. data notes that most users only view five to seven apps, which means the majority of apps do not provide a benefit to consumers (Walker, 2012). Several Vietnamese brands simply measure the number of app downloads or the number of transactions that were generated from the app, if purchasing is enabled. To boost the value of measuring apps, brands should look beyond cost-per-install metrics and also focus on usage rate after installation. Ongoing engagement with apps can show the true value of an established relationship with a user.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Setting key performance indicators (KPIs) is important to track specific goals and areas of development for mobile campaigns and to set targets for the measurement tools. TBWA in Singapore builds campaigns to solve the specific needs of its clients and then develops specific KPIs around the campaign goals to measure the effectiveness of the campaign. According to a spokesperson from U.S. agency Merkle, KPIs need to be actionable and brands must be able to make decisions from the KPIs they are tracking to improve the campaign (B. Hershey, personal communications, April 25, 2013). KPIs also need to be re-evaluated every 90 days, otherwise brands are being slow to market and not staying ahead of the customer. Lack of re-evaluation typically happens because the brand often does not have a budget and thus can not review KPIs on a regular basis.

SUMMARY AND FUTURE TRENDS

In this paper we have explored a number of points relevant to Southeast Asia in regards to the mobile landscape, company strategies and measurement techniques. Table 3 is a brief summary of our findings.

The future of mobile in Southeast Asia is promising as it is at the dawn of a new digital age in which mobile is poised to be the main platform for data consumption. When comparing the future of mobile in the United States to countries in Southeast Asia, most countries are trailing the United States by several years due to economies of scale, with Singapore being the one exception. The United States is slowly reaching a plateau in terms of smartphone adoption, while there still exists massive growth opportunity for smartphones in Southeast Asia. As leaders in app and mobile development, U.S. companies are focused on the next phase of mobile engagement. The areas of interest are mobile payments, wearable devices such as smart watches and smart glasses, and lifestyle technology. Southeast Asia is at a pivotal point of smartphone growth, mirroring the documented growth and development that was experienced in the United States for the past several years. In the near future, most Southeast Asian countries will be focused primarily on delivering a more reliable mobile network infrastructure, reaching critical mass, educating consumers on mobile functionality and features, and developing mobile apps and customized mobile sites to engage users. While the mobile future of each country is unique based on the macro environment, brands in each country have one common goal: to utilize mobile to create brand interaction and effectively engage users with their brand.

A few areas in mobile technology that are gaining traction in Southeast Asia include utilization of location data, mobile rich media, community-driven platforms, and mobile payment. Across all of these various approaches by the brands to utilize mobile to

engage consumers in Southeast Asia, there is one constant: social. As the quickest and most cost-effective route into the channel, it is no wonder that brands are using social as a test ground. Facebook provides brands with a massive platform to begin engaging consumers via mobile and increase their brand awareness. Yet with the rise of social chat

platforms like Line and Zalo, and their ability to provide built-in news feeds and Internet browsers, coupled with a new generation of mobile users, Facebook will begin to see competition.

The engagement level of rich media ads is higher than standard ads due to the element of emotional interaction through various campaign forms such as

Table 3: Summary of key elements

	Landscape	Company Strategies	Measurement	Challenges and Future Opportunities
All countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology bringing down prices of smartphones • High-paced growth in smartphone demand • Pre-paid SIM cards • 3G everywhere with 4G there or coming soon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social/Social track • Mobile rich media • Responsive Design • Games • Educational content • Coupons • Celebrity endorsement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Click-through rate (CTR) • Impressions • Cookies • Interaction • Information • High-value tasks • ROI • Surveys • Social listening • KPIs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of mobile payment to close the loop • Integration of analytics with mobile engagement strategies • Attribution of completed transactions to the correct channel • Rich media engagement and community driven platforms
Country-specific observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income-based subsidies for smartphones in Malaysia • 4G already deployed and high smartphone penetration in Singapore and Malaysia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thailand is the leading market for game-based engagement • Pre-loaded apps and e-sticker through social chat in Vietnam • Most integrated media campaigns and rich media engagement in Singapore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No basis CTR analytics in Thailand and Vietnam • Singapore is going beyond the simple CTR and using interaction rate to measure engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vietnam operators want to dominate the market. More competition should be encouraged • Singapore is a small market but a great place to launch efforts for other Southeast Asian markets

videos, games, apps or information. The interactivity and ability to deliver relevant ads to consumers will help rich media ads to become much more prevalent in Southeast Asia in the next five years.

For community-driven platforms we believe the total number of branded apps in Southeast Asia will decrease in the upcoming years, leaving only high quality ones that provide real value. Such purposeful apps may be educational or knowledge-based, platforms supported by communities, or apps extending from product/brand to a meaningful service or extension of a product. Developing mobile strategies with a purpose will provide content that is engaging to consumers. Enabling platforms to be crowd-sourced empowers individuals to not only contribute and feel valuable but also connect with others in the community. Similar to the United States, Southeast Asians enjoy entertainment and are more likely to purchase a product if a celebrity has endorsed it. This community is an important platform as it is a highly effective way for agencies and brands to market to consumers.

While brands aim to promote a product to engage users into a purchase or measurable interaction, there is not an effective way to tie a mobile ad to a transactional purchase. In Singapore, much of the digital discussion is around mobile transactions. Singaporeans are accustomed to purchasing goods by a simple wave of their credit card. With the telecommunication and banking industries working together to bring mobile payments to the masses, near-field communication (NFC) transactions are likely to increase. Apple, with an end-to-end approach of design, hardware and software, will perhaps be a leader in NFC. This will help close the loop that exists when tracking mobile transactions, as brands will now be able to tie a mobile ad campaign to a physical in-store purchase. By obtaining these metrics, companies may be inclined to increase their mobile marketing

budget, as this is a less expensive and more effective strategy to engage with consumers.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

One of the biggest limitations of this research is the selection of the countries. During the discussions with the persons interviewed, the authors found that countries like Indonesia and China are playing a much larger role in influencing the trends of mobile technology and customer behavior in Southeast Asia. Including these countries in our study would have made for a more complete narrative, but was not possible in the constraints of the research methodology.

We also felt there were other areas that could have been explored in more detail. A quantitative research study on consumer attitudes in the region could provide good insights to the region. Also, with high levels of government involvement in many of these countries, a future study of the region could include more interviews with government entities. Lastly, the speed at which the mobile channel is growing in this region will likely change the landscape and company strategies rather quickly, therefore making it necessary for more studies to be conducted in the near future.

CONCLUSION

As mobile continues to become a sense of identity for consumers, brands will be well served to create a unique experience that their users can relate to and share with friends and family. Ultimately, mobile must be looked at as a long-term investment and not just a one-off option for any particular campaign. Companies looking to compete within the mobile space in Southeast Asia should develop a mobile-first approach and look to provide users with an engaging experience that provides them a utility and/or entertainment to enjoy at home or while traveling to and from work. Before that investment pays off in the form of

increased interaction and revenue, brands must be better educated as to the real value of mobile and where the opportunities lie. Brands should also take note of the social nature of the users and find a way to inject their brand into that space. At the same time they should be mindful of one of the biggest hurdles in determining successful mobile strategies and campaigns: measurement.

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