#MarketingTrend: A Genre Analysis of Selected Promotional Facebook Posts of an International School

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Abstract: The COVID-19 caused the decline of private school enrolment as a result of the pandemic's economic shock. The upheaval demanded schools to devise a strategy that would increase or maintain their number of enrollees. Promoting in an established social media platform such as Facebook has resulted in competitive marketing. In light of all these, this interdisciplinary study examined the Facebook posts of an International School within the parameters of the three stages of the digital marketing funnel. Moreover, it also explored the linguistic features of the captions used on such online posts following the framework of Bhatia's 3 levels of linguistic analysis (2008). The results revealed that the three stages of digital marketing were evenly distributed and applied to all the Facebook posts to market the school. Furthermore, the digital marketing creators still revisited and utilized the basic grammar lessons such as types of sentences according to structure and function, types of personal pronouns, auxiliary verbs, and the like. The researchers also concluded that the simplicity of language in terms of form and meaning is imperative to entice a wide array of audiences. Moreover, persuasive techniques *(ethos, logos,* and *pathos)* and the language used by Generation Z are also apparent. The significance of the study and directions for future researchers are also discussed.

Key Words: digital marketing; social media marketing; linguistic features; marketing funnel; interdisciplinary research

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic affected all sectors in society when it hit the world back in 2020. It disrupted the educational systems globally, forcing the schools to adapt to a new mode of learning in a limited amount of time. Moreover, the decline of private school enrolment has been evident as a result of the pandemic's economic shock. According to Alam and Tiwari (2015), only 2 million out of a former 4.3 million students in private schools had re-enrolled at the beginning of the academic year 2020-2021 in the Philippines. The Department of Education (DepEd) announced that at least 440 private schools nationwide faced issues that might have led to closure, 54 of which came from 2,391 schools in Metro Manila. For one case in point, an international school in Metro Manila reported that its enrollment declined by 42% from A.Y. 2019-2020 to 2020-2021, which compelled the school to think of ways on how to cope with the crisis.

The upheaval demanded schools to devise a strategy that would increase or maintain their number of enrollees. With this, the need to promote and market were prioritized. Today's world offers social media as a convenient digital marketing tool that can be used by almost everyone. The promotion of businesses using social media is a less expensive solution than taking the risk of paying large sums to advertise in non-virtual media (Dehghani and Tumer, 2015). As of the third quarter of 2021, the DataReportal website revealed Facebook as the most used social media platform in the Philippines with 96.2% of internet users, making it an ideal platform to reach the public. In the aforementioned international school which is the focus in this study, the researchers found out that its Facebook page has more than 20,000 likes. This statistics made it a rich source of

corpora for the purpose of this study.

However, promoting in an established social media platform such as Facebook has developed crowded and overwhelming contents available to users. This resulted in competitive marketing in order to attract the attention of users and persuade them to acknowledge a product or service. The extant literature on advertising effectiveness and word-of-mouth communication indicates that certain message attributes such as message content, creative message format, level of interactivity offered, and frequency of posts should be considered in the planning and designing of posts (Aydin, Uray, and Silahtaroglu, 2020). This highlights the importance of content creation in describing the journey of a user as he/she purchases or subscribes to a specific product. This journey that a user goes through in choosing products and services is described by the sales or marketing funnel (Fig. A).
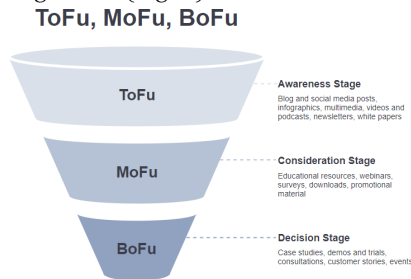
ToFu, MoFu, BoFu

Figure A. Digital Marketing Funnel from https://online.visual-paradigm.com

The content strategy of an effective promotion goes through three levels as described by the funnel: A) TOFU (Top of the Funnel) or content focused on the awareness/attraction of the public; B) MOFU (Middle of the Funnel) or content focused on giving reasons to compare several brands and choose the best option; and C) BOFU (Bottom of the Funnel) or content focused on leading users to make a decision or take action by giving extra reassurance (Sánchez-Teba, García-Mestanza, and Rodríguez-Fernández, 2020). Creative use of the language is essential in order to lead users in each level.

Carnevale, Luna, and Lerman (2015) emphasized the use of language in social media as agents to communicate the meaning of a brand and influence perception, memory, attitudes, and behavior. In a study conducted by Deng, Hine, Ji, and Wang (2020), they concluded that social media marketers need to consider the linguistic styles of their brand posts and enhance consumer engagement.

The current situation regarding private school enrollment in the country and its effect on the intensified use of social media platforms in promotion serve as important issues that need to be analyzed. While there are numerous studies that seek to evaluate the effectiveness of social media promotion

(Constantinides and Stagno, 2012; Dehghani and Tumer, 2015), and language use in social media (Deng, Hine, Ji, and Wang, 2020) limited studies have focused on describing the language used by a school for social media marketing. In light of all these, this interdisciplinary research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How many Facebook posts correspond to each of the three stages of the marketing funnel?

2. What are the common linguistic features on the promotional Facebook posts produced by the IS's marketing department?

2. METHODOLOGY
2.1 Research Design and Approach

The researchers used a qualitative design to shed light on the objectives of the present study as mentioned in the previous section. Grounded on the Genre Analysis approach, the scrutiny focused on the three levels of linguistic analysis as posited by Bhatia (2008) in Singh, Shansudin, and Zaid (2012).

The first linguistic level is the analysis of the lexico-grammatical features of the corpora. It corroborates with the first two grammar dimensions of Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) which are 'form' and 'meaning'. While the former answers the question: "How is it formed?", the latter stresses the question: "What does it mean?" In other words, these two questions are hinged upon the narrowed linguistic levels of morphology (word structure), syntax (sentence structure), and semantics (meaning in language).

The second linguistic level of examining the corpora is called 'textualization' (Widdowson, 1979 in Singh, Shansudin, and Zaid, 2012). It demonstrates the third dimension of grammar which is 'use.' It addresses the question: "When and why is it used?" Hence, it is pivoted on pragmatics (language use in context). In the parlance of GA, it explains why members of the speech community write the way they do. In this study, the speech community refers to digital marketing professionals in the fields of business and education.

The third linguistic level is termed 'structural interpretation.' Specifically, it revolves around the distinctive linguistic styles of the members of the speech community to achieve their intention or purpose in writing a text. The researchers investigated lines or captions which deviated from the conventional structure of the English language. As such, the study revealed how the marketers constructed unique structures of language to persuade the readers or target netizens to choose their educational institution.

2.2 The Corpora and Sampling Technique

A total number of 122 promotional Facebook posts from the school year 2020-2021 were selected to be part of the corpora. These online posts were aimed at reaching the school's wide array of audiences that included the parents and learners in basic education. Convenience sampling technique was applied in collecting the corpora since such posts were intended for public viewing and consumption.

2.3 Procedure and Analysis

Guided by the first research question, the following phases were followed.

Phase 1. The researchers consulted a digital data analyst who also specializes in digital marketing. The analyst advised the researchers to use the digital marketing funnel model as the framework in classifying the FB posts according to their communicative strategy[1].

Phase 2. The researchers reviewed the features of each stage of the marketing funnel. They labeled each online post based on its content. For each post, each researcher independently labeled the post whether it exhibits the hallmarks of TOFU, MOFU, or BOFU. For each disagreement, they checked the post for the second time and agreed to a unified label. Hence, this phase ensured the reliability of the present study.

Phase 3. The researchers tallied the number of posts categorized for each stage of the marketing funnel. The number of posts for each stage was divided by the total number of posts across the marketing funnel. The formula below represents the computation:

$$\frac{\text{Number of posts (in one stage)}}{\text{Total number of posts across the 3 stages}} \times 100$$

To answer the second research question, the researchers underpinned their analysis by Bhatia's three levels of linguistic analysis. To be specific, the following steps were undertaken.

First level of linguistic analysis: *Lexico-grammatical features.* The researchers created a table with two columns. The first column contains the sentences gathered from the online posts. The second column contains the corresponding linguistic features evident in each sentence. Such features included the type of sentence according to structure (simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex), type of sentence according to function (declarative, imperative, interrogative, exclamatory), pronouns (first, second, third), verb tense (past or present), voice of the sentence (active or passive), modal verbs, and the adjectives used. Subsequently, they outlined the common linguistic patterns based on the second column.

Second level of linguistic analysis: *Textualization.* The researchers analyzed and classified the common linguistic patterns on level one within the parameters of persuasive techniques: *Logos, Ethos, and Pathos.*

Third level of linguistic analysis: *Structural Interpretation.* The researchers noted the less common and unique patterns, as well as the literary items from the corpora. These patterns were considered 'outliers' as they did not conform to the common linguistic patterns.

Finally, the digital data analyst and an English teacher who holds a master's degree of Arts in Teaching English Language reviewed the results. They validated the researchers' analyses for the first and second research questions, respectively.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ 1: How many Facebook posts correspond to each of the three stages of the digital marketing funnel?

Level	Tally	%
TOFU	48	39.34%
MOFU	32	26.23%
BOFU	42	34.43%
Total	122	100.00%

Table 1. Number of Posts in Each Stage of the Digital Marketing Funnel

As shown in Table 1, most of the posts constituted TOFU, followed by BOFU, and then MOFU. Items included under TOFU (39.34%) were related to both local and national events (e.g. *"In celebration of the 157th founding anniversary of Pasay, here are some fast facts about the city."*; "*The school greets everyone a happy Chinese new year!"),* as well as admission/enrollment announcements (e.g. "*We are now accepting new students and transferees for the 2nd term, SY 2020-2021*"). It can be surmised that such linguistic items were attributed to the purposes of increasing awareness about the school and targeting potential clients or Facebook prospects.

Meanwhile, posts categorized under BOFU (34.43%) were webinars and events exclusive for the school community members who are mostly basic education students (e.g. "*Show your musicality and be a part of an array of musical performances in Virtual Battle of the bands!*"), and also testimonials coming from stakeholders (e.g. "*SHARE: Mrs. (full name of the parent), parent of a Grade 2 student shares that she was hesitant at first…But, the school proved to her that being enrolled in our institution is really worth it.*"). According to Gilfoil, Aulker, and Jobs (2015), sales conversion (from prospect to lead, then lead to customers) mostly takes place at the bottom of the marketing funnel. This explains the move to create posts

related to services and events catering to the enrolled learners which may also generate a ripple effect.

Lastly, posts regarding professional development training (e.g. "*Our Canvas Admin Training is now on Day 4.*") and community engagements (e.g. *…Here are the photos of our staff who went to our Cavite site for the intercampus-wide Tree Planting Activity.*") for teachers and staff, open house meetings (e.g. "*Get ready to experience ÉV Live!*"), and even enrollment discounts and gifts (e.g. "*Hurry and reserve your slot now. A gift awaits the first 50 registrants, and those who refer a friend.*") were what comprised MOFU (26.23%). While this level is crucial, the percentage might be lower as compared to the other two since there were few instances of training participation and community engagements among the school employees, as well as discount offers, which might be due to the pandemic.

RQ 2: What are the common linguistic features on the promotional Facebook posts produced by the IS's marketing department?

3.1 Lexico-grammatical features/ common patterns with examples from the corpus

With the posts gathered and analyzed for this study, a total number of eight common linguistic patterns were discovered. First among these common lexico-grammatical features was the use of complex and simple sentences. Here are some examples: "*As we end the first week of classes, we wish to congratulate our students and their parents for easily adjusting to the new normal.*" and "*Read the story of (name of student) who is now working as Avionics Master Inspector B at SIA Engineering Philippines.*" Along with the type of sentence based on structure, it was also found out that the recurrent functions of sentences were declarative and imperative (e.g. "*The school receives its Approved Maintenance Organization (AMO) Certificate from the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP)…*"; "*Fill out the application form here…*") related to the school's identity boosters (events, achievements, etc.), as well as admission and enrollment guidelines.

Another common linguistic feature was related to the use of first-person plural, second-person, and third-person pronouns. The examples were as follow: "*We are now accepting scholarship applicants for A.Y. 2021-2022.*" (first person-plural); "*Are you excited for the EV² Virtual Open House?*" (second person); and "*The Office of Student Development and Services and the Guidance Section present the fourth offering of MWF (Monthly Wellness Friday) with the theme "Self-care and Healthy Lifestyle" webinar.*" (third person). On the contrary, there were a limited number of sentences in

first person-singular (e.g. "*In the sanctity of my home, I, together with my family, pray, and hope…*"). The use of this pronoun was only observed among posts that included messages coming from the executive heads of the school.

The fourth linguistic pattern was related to the verbs used in the sentences which were mostly in present tense (e.g. "*The school joins the Nation in the International Women's Day Celebration.*"). In making headlines, the present form of the verb is preferred (Swan, 2005 as cited by Abdullah and Salih, 2012).

The use of active voice was also present among the analyzed linguistic items (e.g. "*The school supports Pasay City in the 157th celebration of the Pasay Day.*") This showed that the school marketers wanted to observe conciseness or brevity.

In terms of modals, the most common was "will" to show future events (e.g. "*We will open our 37th Foundation Anniversary with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.*"); "may" to use polite requests (e.g. "*You may still join the webinar via Zoom*"); "shall" to indicate politeness and futurity (e.g. "*As part of the Gender and Development Amidst the Pandemic webinar series, we shall be having the Gender Laws webinar for our students…*") and "would" to express politeness and formality (e.g. "*…we would like to get your insights on the services of our department*").

Other notable grammatical features were the following: 1) appositives for establishing credibility (e.g. "*Dr. (name of the dentist), the School Dentist, was the speaker*"); 2) parallelism or repetition for emphasis/impact (e.g. "*We are 37! We are Phoenix!*"); and 3) gradable adjectives for self (institutional)-appraisal (e.g. "*Our team is now attending the CANVAS onboarding focusing on the effective and efficient setup and management of the school's Canvas instance.*")

3.2 Textualization

Level	Logos	Pathos	Ethos
TOFU (48)	1 (2.08%)	21 (43.75%)	26 (54.17%)
MOFU (32)	0	4 (12.5%)	28 (87.5%)
BOFU (42)	0	3 (7.14%)	39 (92.86%)
Total: (122)	1 (2.08%)	28 (22.95%)	83 (68.93 %)

Table 2. Distribution of Persuasive Techniques Across the Digital Marketing Funnel

Based on Table 2, a large percentage (54.17%) of posted marketing materials under TOFU used *ethos.* This is the rhetorical strategy focusing on the establishment of one's credentials in order to get people's trust (e.g "*Congratulations to our EV students for advancing to the national competition of the Math and Science Wizards 2020 … Hats off to our faculty*

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²The researchers opted to use "EV" to initialize and protect the school's identity.

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trainers, too! Aliyah!"). This was followed by posts using *pathos* which amounted to 45.83%. Items with this rhetorical strategy were observed in posts with connections to the celebration of different events such as school anniversary, holidays, and others (e.g "*Today on Saint Valentine's Day, we wish to thank each one for being part of our family. We hope to spend the next valentine's days with you 'physically' present on the campus. Happy Valentine's day, Phoenix!"*). This showed that the school's way of raising awareness among its reach (TOFU) was usually done by highlighting its credibility in the field/ context (*ethos*) and cultivating positive feelings and affective relationships (*pathos*) at the same time.

Similarly, 87.5% of the posts identified under MOFU depicted the dimension of *ethos*. Posts under this level were usually for the consumers who evaluated a service against other competitors. These posts addressing this level were mostly connected to admission and enrollment guidelines, gifts, and offers (e.g "*EV is now accepting Scholarship Applicants for A.Y. 2021-2022. Avail of our No - Top - Up Program!"*). These posts were perceived to show the school's goodwill, competence, and reliability (*ethos*).

Meanwhile, items under BOFU that showed exclusive events for the school community, as well as testimonials from other stakeholders, commonly utilized *ethos* (68.93%). The school's rhetorical strategy to demonstrate its effectiveness and outline the perks and benefits that its stakeholders received was generally exhibited by highlighting the satisfaction of its clients. An excerpt from one of the posts states "*EV SHARE: Mrs.(full name of parent), parent of our SHS student, shares how hard it was for them at first to choose the right school for their children. She recognized the fact that students, teachers, and parents are not used to online learning … "*). This manifested how the school puts a premium on the trust given by the clients and how it has been sustained throughout the academic year.

3.3 Structural Interpretation

Some of the posts also exhibited less common linguistic patterns such as the use of capitalization (e.g *LIVE YOUR DREAM!*), deviation from normal spelling (e.g "*K3ep the 7aith" from Keep the Faith*"), and multiple exclamation marks (e.g *WE ARE NOW ONLINE!!!).* The use of hashtags (e.g *#BeAPhoenix, #OnlineEnrollment, #Aliyah*) was also observed in most of the FB posts.

Other unique features that were observed among the FB posts were the use of literary devices through figures of speech (e.g "*We are Phoenix", "We are 37"* (metaphor), and "*Fly High With Us*" (exaggeration)", coinage (e.g "*Aliyahnimus*") which was derived from

school's chant, "Aliyah!", social media expressions (e.g *Foundation Day vibe check*), and interjections (e.g *Aliyah!*).

These examples of less common and unique patterns, as well as the literary items from the corpora, tend to establish the school's identity and sense of belongingness among its stakeholders. It also creates a sort of branding for the school, setting it apart from the other schools.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the Facebook posts of an International School within the parameters of the three stages of the digital marketing funnel. Moreover, it also explored the linguistic features of the captions used on such online posts following the framework of Bhatia's 3 levels of linguistic analysis (2008).

The results revealed that the three stages of digital marketing were evenly distributed and applied to all the Facebook posts to market the school.

Furthermore, the digital marketing creators still revisited and utilized the basic grammar lessons (e.g., types of sentences according to structure and function, types of personal pronouns, auxiliary verbs, and the like). It can be concluded that the simplicity of language in terms of form and meaning is imperative for them to entice a wide array of audiences. These results are parallel to the study of Bote and Robles (2021) in which the printed and digital advertising materials of another international school also employed second-person personal pronouns, a series of adjectives, imperatives, and the like to persuade the target audiences. On a deeper level, they used simple language to appeal more to the netizens' emotions and establish credibility (*pathos* and *ethos*) and less on their logical reasoning (*logos*). Finally, it is interesting to note that some of the posts also deviated from the standard pattern of language. Specifically, the language used by Generation Z or Zoomers was also apparent.

Taking the above-mentioned results into consideration, the study might assist the following professionals in their respective endeavors. First, the digital marketers can use the digital funnel to guide the target clients in knowing the school with the suggested frequency and distribution of the three stages across all the posts. Future marketing professionals might also start scrutinizing the latest techniques and styles in digital marketing. Second, the school administrators may invest more in digital marketing using Facebook and veer away from spending too much budget on printed materials.

Lastly, linguists can look more closely at the broad range of corpora of marketing strategies from the different social media platforms. Subsequently, they can

write and publish a manual or guide for digital marketing professionals in advertising the school through the lens of linguistics.

Future researchers can address the following limitations of the study. First, they can look closely at the latest marketing strategies for A.Y. 2021-2022 and see how the landscape of digital marketing has evolved as the pandemic ensues. Second, they can determine the significant differences in which statistical treatments can be employed for testing. For instance, the number of enrollees across the academic years of using and not using the digital marketing funnel in conjunction with such linguistic features can be compared. Third, they can investigate the significant relationship between the frequency of utilizing digital marketing strategies and the number of enrollees for one school year. Fourth, they can explore other digital and social media platforms being utilized for school promotions aside from Facebook and how the use of these online marketing tools relates to the number of students enrolling in these academic institutions. Lastly, qualitative research can be administered to trace if the conventional marketing strategies of the digital creators are matched with the preferences of the digital consumers.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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