

# A Comparative Case Study in Social Network Site Usage between a Utility Sector and a Financial Sector in Malaysia

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v14-i2/20441>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v14-i2/20441

**Published Date:** 12 February 2024

## Abstract

This research aims to compare social network site usage between utility companies and financial institutions in Malaysia and to identify the challenges faced by both organisations in using social networking services. This study provides insights into the comparison of social networking services between two different services, which are utility and financial services. Both organisations utilise social network sites to convey information regarding their services. Qualitative research was employed by conducting a comparative case study to identify the

theme based on the similarities and differences between both organisations. Data were collected from the representatives of a utility company and a financial institution using structured interviews. In terms of marketing activities, the utility company is involved in marketing activities, while the marketing activities in financial institutions took place by promoting its various services. Subsequently, it was found that both organisations showed differences in terms of social media procedures and the department in charge of social media. In the case of the utility company, social media were managed by the customer service department, while social media use in the financial institution was managed by the marketing and communication department. Furthermore, the utility company preferred to use solely Facebook, while financial institution used various social media platforms. It was also found that both organisations utilised social networking services for communicating and sharing information with consumers and the public. However, challenges were encountered in their use of social media, such as the influx of negative comments, high-quality content creation, and consumer education. Thus, it is suggested that a similar study is conducted with different industries to gain further insights into other industries' methods of using social media.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Communication, Information Sharing, Utility Company, Financial Institution

### **Introduction**

Social network site denotes the collection of web-based instruments supporting the development and distribution of user-generated content (UGC) and expanding on the conceptual and technical foundations of Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Currently, social networking services are used by wider audience than sole individuals, making them a necessity in recent years due to the connection they establish among people regardless of location and time. Companies also capitalise on the possibilities of leveraging social network sites. Moreover, they are currently building social media profiles to strengthen their online presence, boost public interest, and communicate with the public online (Parveen, Jaafar, & Ainin, 2015). Thus, social network site use among companies is rapidly expanding and progressing in line with Malaysia's rapidly changing technological landscape.

Today, the majority of companies have an awareness of the significance of social network site usage. Therefore, they aim to strengthen their online presence by leveraging the benefits offered by social networking services. Statistics demonstrated the increase in the number of organisations using social media in the European Union (EU) from 37% in 2015 to 59% in 2021 (Eurostat, 2022). This was followed by the report that eight out of 10 large organisations use social networking services (Eurostat, 2022). Social network site use is also widespread in various sectors, such as airlines, telecommunication, financial, tourism, and construction among others (Gaber & Elsamadicy, 2021; Amoah & Jibril, 2021; Zandi et al., 2022; Mohamad, 2022; Noor et al., 2021).

The widespread use of social media by organisations across countries and industries implies significant benefits of it. (Schlagwein & Hu, 2016). Social network sites in organisations carry various roles that also benefit organisations in many ways. To illustrate, they function as the means of communication, sharing information, marketing approaches, hiring activities, building relationships with stakeholders, and obtaining information (Horn et al., 2015; Kapoor et al., 2018; Parveen et al., 2015; Reuter et al., 2016; Sivertzen et al., 2013; Tajudeen et al.,

2018). The active use of social network sites offers a range of potential benefits to organisations, especially in terms of understanding consumers' needs and expectations, disseminating organisations' information, and reaching potential consumers.

In recent years, social network sites have been explored by academics and practitioners (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). Notably, most research on social network sites highlighted their individual usage (Basit et al., 2020), while the research on its use by organisations gained attention due to the measures taken by organisations to leverage social media (Jani & Zakaria, 2020; Bakar & Zaini, 2022). For example, Parveen et al (2015) conducted a study on social network site use and its effect on organisational performance, which recorded a stronger effect of social network sites on companies' performance, such as improvement in customer relations and reduction of marketing costs. Another study by Becker and Lee (2019) found that large firms have higher social network site ownership compared to small firms, with response time to customers on social network sites being their priority.

The emergence of social media and other electronic platforms reduces the dependency on traditional means of communication and information sharing. In this case, a social network site is an important tool for the virtual communication and engagement of organisations with their stakeholders. However, the understanding of the method of organisations' use of social media to engage with their stakeholders remains lacking (Schlagwein & Hu, 2016). Similarly, there is limited research making comparisons of social network site usage across different sectors in Malaysia. This knowledge gap requires organisations to identify effective social media strategies that assist in their engagement with their stakeholders and the achievement of their communication goals. It also highlights the necessity for a comparative case study that could offer insights into social network site usage across different industries in Malaysia and identify the ideal practices that can be applied across organisations.

This research may broaden the insights into effective social network site usage by organisations in Malaysia. It has contributed to the best practices for social media usage in organisations. Therefore, it is important for service providers, such as utility organisations and financial institutions, to initiate active engagement on social media with consumers to improve their services. This study addresses the method through which organisations in the utility and financial sectors utilise social media, which are from the utility and financial sectors.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) What are the similarities and differences in social network site usage between utility company and financial institution in Malaysia?
- 2) What are the challenges faced by utility company and financial institution in Malaysia upon using social networking services?

### **Research Objectives**

- 1) To compare the social network site usage between the utility company and financial institution in Malaysia.
- 2) To identify the challenges faced by the utility company and financial institution in Malaysia upon using social network sites.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Overview of Social Network Site Usage in Companies***

This section presents an overview of the role of social networking services in organisations and how a utility company and financial institution make full use of social networking services in their business operation. Social network sites are computer-mediated technologies that let users communicate with one another through online groups and networks (Obar & Wildman, 2015). According to Muller (2021), approximately 55% of the organisations in the Malaysian services sector use social networking services to present their profile. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter among others allow people to connect with organisations and build online communities. Nevertheless, while social networking services offer benefits to organisations, the challenges in their use are unavoidable.

For a long period, firms have recognised the relevance of new social media communication networks (Becker & Lee, 2019). To illustrate, social networking services act as a medium for communication between organisations and stakeholders. Essentially, communication is an essential element in the organisation-stakeholders relationship, where organisations utilise social networking services to deliver important messages regarding their products or services. Two-way communication occurs when organisations respond to the stakeholders', indicating their alertness to stakeholders' inquiries. Most stakeholders prefer social networking services to share feedback and send inquiries or complaints. Thus, stakeholder engagement on social networking services is crucial to ensure effective two-way communication. Social networking services also reduce regional and demographic barriers, assisting organisations in connecting with their stakeholders and building a strong relationship with their stakeholders (Denktaş-şakar & Sürücü, 2018).

Based on information and communication technologies (ICTs), social networking services serve as new avenues to share information among stakeholders and help improve stakeholder engagement (Luca, Iaia, Mehmood, & Vrontis, 2022). Various benefits of social networking services had been examined in previous studies. To illustrate, they allow organisations to conduct marketing activities, recruitment, information sharing, and information searching (Becker & Lee, 2019; Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Kapoor et al., 2018).

### ***Social Network Site Usage in Utility Company and Financial Institution***

This section describes the existing literature on social network site usage in utility company and financial institution. Several utility organisations have been using social networking services for various objectives, including crisis communication, consumer education, and brand awareness (Echeverria, 2010, as cited in Elefant, 2011). Considering its importance, utility company's use of these networks in any situations would increase in the future (Elefant, 2011). It has been proven that in recent years, social network sites have become among the important mediums for utility company to interact with their stakeholders, mainly consumers. Utility company could also use social networking services as a communication tool to deliver information to consumers during undesired events (Baidya et al., 2019). Financial products are commonly perceived as complex and considered high-involvement items (Eren, 2021). As a result, financial services companies emphasize enhancing the integration of their products within well-established social networks. Overall, most financial institutions use social network

sites to advertise their present and prospective financial products and services, keep clients informed of any changes to financial product rules, and manage customer complaints and suggestions (Thaker et al., 2021).

### **Methodology**

A comparative case study method, which was employed in this study, is a qualitative research technique that involves comparing two or more cases that may be people, groups, organisations, or events (Given, 2008, as cited in Miri & Shahrokh, 2019). In a comparative case study, employing a variety of data-gathering techniques to gain information from each case, including interviews, observation, and document analysis is common (Goodrick, 2014). This method aims to find patterns and themes that could be utilised to draw conclusions by understanding the similarities and differences between the cases (Miri & Shahrokh, 2019). This is followed by analysis and comparison of data from each case to draw conclusions on the similarities and differences between the situations (Goodrick, 2014).

In this study, data collection was carried out through interviews with representatives from the respective organisations and supported by observation. The representative from a utility company, which was a water company, was the Head of Customer Services who was responsible for managing the water company's social network sites. Meanwhile, the financial institution was led by the Manager of Group Marketing and Communication Division. The interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis. Relevant themes of social media activities were categorised into differences, similarities, and challenges of using social network sites by both organisations. Subsequently, it was found through the interview that social network site usage benefitted organisations' communication and information sharing regardless of the challenges encountered in using social networking services such as negative comments, creative content creation, and prompt response time.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### ***Comparison of Social Networking Service Usage between Utility Company and Financial Institution***

One significant difference was found in the social network site usage between utility company and financial institution, which was marketing activities. Specifically, no marketing activity took place in a utility company, given its service-based condition where the service provision to the consumers is compulsory. Marketing activities in financial institutions involve the promotion of various types of services offered to build the public's awareness of them, especially for wealth management planning.

Another difference in this aspect was present in terms of social media procedures. In the utility company, access to social media accounts was restricted to a specific person for security purposes. Furthermore, answering the customers' inquiries involved several steps. In the case of the financial institution, the process of using social network sites took place before sharing information, in which any content must be filtered before being posted online. Social media in organisations are administered by different departments based on their necessity and the nature of business. Some organisations' social networking services are under the supervision of the corporate communication department. In this study, it was found that the customer service department manages the social networking services in a utility

company, while the services in the financial institution are managed by the marketing and communication department.

Various social networking services are available for organisations, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok among others. Notably, Facebook has been considered the “second website” for certain organisations as a medium of informing viewers regarding future events, classes, and sharing sessions at a minimum cost without making concessions to traditional news media (Figenschou & Fredheim, 2020).

In this study, the utility company had an official Facebook page, which was its most active social media platform. The financial institution owned several official social media platforms, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube channel. It is worth noting that the Facebook page was the most preferred platform by these organisations as it offered the most convenience for them. Besides, the features of Facebook where lengthy write-ups, photos, and videos among others can be posted had facilitated them in posting information. Social networking service usage is also closely related to cybersecurity. Therefore, an understanding of cybersecurity is crucial to minimise cyber threats, particularly in using social networking services. In this study, both organisations showed their respective methods of managing advanced cybersecurity issues through their information and technology (IT) department to monitor and mitigate the risks of their cybersecurity.

### ***Social Networking Services for Crisis Communication***

Both utility and financial organisations employed social networking services for communication activities with consumers and the public especially during crisis. Companies utilise social networking services to respond to consumers’ inquiries and complaints through comments and private messages among others on their respective social platforms. Utility company encourages consumers to contact them through social platforms for instant response, considering that they are instant platforms for communicating any unprecedented events known as crisis communication. For example, the utility company used social platforms to inform of sudden water interruption due to leakage, which requires time to repair. Another form of announcement includes festival greetings and operation hours. On the other hand, financial institution uses social networking services to inform of branch closures due to natural disasters (e.g., floods) and branch transfer locations. It is worth noting that these announcements are faster through social media compared to traditional mass media, such as television and radio.

### ***Social Networking Services for Information Sharing***

Another role of social networking services is information sharing. According to Wiley et al (2022), information sharing on social networking services denotes information dissemination from an organisation to the public, including news, facts, reports, highlights from events, and information relevant to stakeholders. These services promote online communication by allowing users to publish content or engage in other activities (Abbas, Jusoh, Mas’od, Alsharif, & Ali, 2022). Kümpel et al (2015) stated that social networking services contribute to more convenient and seamless information sharing between organisations and individuals with accessible and user-friendly tools for content posting.

In this study, both organisations use social networking services to disseminate information regarding products and services, consumer education, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities among others. In this study, the organisations under study offered different services; the utility company offered water-related services, such as water supply, water maintenance, and water treatment services, while the financial institution offered services including will services, trust administration, and estate administration.

In terms of consumer education, both organisations employed their respective methods of educating consumers, such as infographics, short videos, and other creative methods. For the utility company, infographics of water-saving practices and videos of water treatment were parts of the educational content provided to the consumers, which was an easier approach for consumers to understand the water-related information. Meanwhile, the financial institution shared corporate information, product information, activities, and corporate news on social media. The organisation also prepared infographics and simulation videos of actual stories to provide awareness to the public on the importance of wealth management planning.

### ***Challenges in the Use of Social Networking Services***

Despite the benefits of social networking services, organisations also encounter challenges in using them. The most common challenge is the negative comments or complaints from consumers and the public. Given that social networking services are the most convenient means of communicating, consumers and the public are able to conveniently post negative comments with harsh and inappropriate words. This situation is beyond the control of the organisation. In this study, when the utility company received negative comments on their social media, their response was to remove any abusive words in the comment section while maintaining constructive comments as guidance to improve the quality of their service. The financial institution had its respective approach to addressing undesirable comments on its social media, which was to reach out to the commenters personally through private messaging on the social platform to maintain peace and harmony while resolving the issues.

Another challenge in the use of social networking sites developing creative content that suits the audience. Given each organisation's aim to effectively reach out to its targeted audience, the content should be informative and easily understood by the audience. In this study, the utility company was making an effort towards creating educational content to spread awareness of water-related information, especially for consumers. The financial institution was progressing towards educating people on wealth management planning through educational content in the form of infographics and short videos, particularly for the youths who newly enter the working world.

Both organisations also faced challenges in terms of time of response towards inquiries and complaints by consumers and the public. The response to every inquiry and complaint received varied, required a different approach, and took time. For common issues, a structured response should be prepared, while further action for certain issues should be taken before the organisation showed its responses to inquiries and complaints.

Table 1

Statement from Key Informants based on Themes

Themes	Utility Company	Financial Institution
	<b>Differences</b>	
<b>Marketing activities</b>	<i>"In a water company, there is no marketing. Water company basically is a monopoly business, most promotional activities being done by our corporate communication. So, one of the corporate communication's tasks, such as handling seasonal greetings, then after that, if we have an event that involves Chief Minister, the corporate comms will share the upcoming event."</i>	<i>"We have done sort of campaigns featuring for a period of time. So, I think that we will highlight, in terms of the products, what kind of services we need to be featured at certain points of the event. Currently, our marketing is in charge of producing the content for TikTok. They have a unit or team to actually create the content depending on what we want to picture for that particular week or month."</i>
<b>Social media procedure</b>	<i>"When we talk about SOP, we are very alert in terms of cybersecurity issue. And our social media, we limit the access of our social media only to authorised personnel. In terms of process, we have frequently asked question template. For example, one issue, there is a template of answers. If the answer is not in the list, then the staff will revert to the executive in charge and we will help them finalise the reply to consumers."</i>	<i>"Yes, we have processes in our social media accounts. Content is something that is a big structure by the comms department, so whatever content they want to highlight is based on whatever they have made a plan for marketing. All the content is being structured and filtered by the comms department. When marketing staff create the content, it will come to us, we will filter and see whether it is reasonable, or fitting to our guideline. Then only we will approve it."</i>
<b>Department in charge of social media</b>	<i>"In customer service, I am managing a full spectrum of customer service starting from the counter operation. I have all nine customer care centres throughout this state and manage a 24-hour call centre and all other non-voice channels, including social networking services."</i>	<i>"Social networking services here are handled by the marketing and communication department."</i>
<b>Social media platform</b>	<i>"Facebook is the most convenient to us. Because in terms of posting, basically, it can post lengthy wordings, photos, and videos."</i>	<i>"In terms of platforms, we need to see what sort of content we want to post. Because Facebook is more on information sharing, Instagram is</i>



	<p><i>more on media like pictures and videos. And Tiktok can be both information and videos. But then it depends on what sort of information that we want to share.”</i></p>
<p><b>Cybersecurity</b></p>	<p><i>“We are alert in terms of cybersecurity issue. Our IT department has one team called network and security. They will alert all personnel from time to time. Another thing is when we talked about social media, we limit the access of social media only to authorised personnel. For the time being, only customer service at the executive level, corporate communication, and our outsource call centre can access social media. This is how we ensure that we don’t have much issue in terms of cyber threats.”</i></p> <p><i>“Cybersecurity as we know nowadays is a big term. Because when it comes to cybersecurity, it’s a threat that comes to all, especially organisations affiliated with financial services, banking, and so on. These are very common nowadays because you know that there are so much data from all these kind of platforms, so it will be interesting for some people especially if they want to manipulate these kind of data. So, you need to be really careful with your environment and you need to have all those security features to be implemented and actively involved in terms of identifying all those kinds of threats. So, we monitor and engage with all these security measures to be implemented in our organisation. Plus, we also work closely with Cybersecurity Malaysia and also all the regulations.”</i></p>
<p><b>Similarities</b></p>	
<p><b>Social media for crisis communication</b></p>	<p><i>“We also share all announcements through our Facebook page, and we also share press statements by Chief Executive Officer on various water supply issues and information. An example is the water supply infrastructure project we are working on.”</i></p> <p><i>“We are aligned with our communication plan, also our strategies; it’s always about us building our brand, reputation, and also our presence on social media. We also shared the information through social media in a crisis or disaster if anything happened. The public such as our staff’s family members or media want to know what is the current situation during the disaster or crisis. And also, during the pandemic, corporate comms</i></p>

	<p><i>release a notice of closure of our branches.”</i></p>
<p><b>Social media for information sharing</b></p>	<p><i>“We adopt infographics as it is easier to convey information in a simple explanation through an infographic on water saving campaign. We also share information on water supply interruption, with all the notices on social media.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s all about corporate information, product promotion, especially on our products and services, all are free to the public. Because sometimes, people do not know what kind of services are offered, so that’s how we educate them. Not just show our engagement in terms of our talks, seminars, and through this social media where we want them to know who we are. That kind of information, especially our promotion, is also going through social media. We also share our activities and corporate news or events through social media so people know who we are. Sometimes we use hashtags; when people look at the hashtag, they will know about us. When we want to reach out to them, we will ensure we not only want to reach out. We also want to spread the information about us. We need to create or spread awareness in a way that would be much more interesting such as an infographic.”</i></p>
<p><b>Challenges of using social media</b></p>	
<p><b>Negative comments</b></p>	<p><i>“Lately, we receive a lot of negative comments due to a sudden increase in water supply demand during the dry season. We also have been bombarded with negative comments during Chinese New Year because of low water pressure. And if we receive abusive comments, we will remove it.”</i></p> <p><i>“When we received negative comments, there is actually a way to respond; we don’t retaliate. Usually what we do is when there are such comments, we will answer calmly and with empathy. What we do is handle it, compartmentalise it and handle it mutually.”</i></p>
<p><b>Content creation</b></p>	<p><i>“We also share educational content on social media about our operation such as the water treatment process and water</i></p> <p><i>“We need to create more educational content and to bring more awareness to people in terms of the way we do our work, and the</i></p>

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*distribution to provide awareness to the consumers and public.”*

*way we approach people, and all this kind of risk management. People would understand better. It’s not like a myth and taboo about our business, handling a dead person’s wealth. For the younger generation, we need to educate them at an earlier stage so that they will understand the importance of having legacy management. We don’t have so-called legacy management nowadays; we are branding ourselves like wealth management. We are somehow looking forward to creating interesting content for TikTok, where we need to create or spread awareness in a way that would be much more interesting such as an infographic.”*

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**Response time** *“Response time is our top priority because response time improves our customers’ trust towards us.”*

*“Depends on the timing as well; if you delay those kinds of comments or feedback, it will backfire as well. They are waiting for a fast response.”*

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## Conclusion

Social networking services play a significant role in organisations’ virtual approach to reaching out to their consumers (Bakar & Zaini, 2022). Communication activities through social media facilitate the delivery of announcements and responses to inquiries and complaints from consumers and the public (Hanafizadeh et al., 2021). These services are also used to share information about products and services offered by organisations to a wider audience and demonstrate the activities conducted as a transparent organisation (Masele, 2022). In this study, no significant difference was found in social media usage between both organisations except in terms of marketing activities, social media procedure, department in charge of social media, social media platforms used, and cybersecurity. These organisations also shared similarities in terms of social networking services used for crisis communication and information sharing.

Aside from the benefits of social networking service use to organisations, challenges are also present. Organisations constantly face negative comments and complaints from unsatisfied consumers, to which they are required to respond politely to maintain the good reputation of the organisation. As a service provider, response time is the main concern to ensure that the consumers are served without a long wait. Overall, both organisations were

placing their effort into providing high-quality content encouraging the audience to trust their services through infographics and videos.

### **Limitation and Suggestion for Future Research**

This study has achieved its aim of comparing the social media strategies used by organisations in different sectors in Malaysia and identifying the challenges faced by Malaysian organisations in using social networking services. The results of this research would contribute to the acceptance of social networking service usage among organisations, which would ultimately benefit the organisation in future. However, several limitations were present, which may recommend further research. To illustrate, this research only compared two industries, namely a utility company and financial institution. Thus, future studies are recommended to address other industries to offer further insights into social network site usage in various industries.

### **Acknowledgement**

Authors acknowledge the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) for funding under the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) (FRGS/1/2021/SS01/UITM/02/9) with RMC File No. 600-RMC/FRGS 5/3 (050/2021).

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