

Social media marketing; a juxtaposition of various effects on businesses in Zambia

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Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to investigate the role social media marketing plays and its effects on businesses in Zambia.*

Design/methodology/approach – *A combination of various theories to do with social media marketing, the research provides a qualitative study based on observation and phenomenology for data analysis to establish its findings.*

Findings – *This study finds that social media marketing has a vast effect on businesses in Zambia as most are finding out that not being on social media disadvantages them more than being on it. Businesses have discovered new ways of marketing products through social media that they are overwhelmed by the number of queries and business they have received through marketing on social media.*

Research limitations/implications – *This study was carried out between July 2015 and July 2016. The geographical setting limited the study to businesses operating in Zambia. However the results of the study may be applicable to other businesses advertising on social media. Some of the lessons learnt may be of use to such businesses.*

Practical implications – *Social media marketing is taken lightly by most businesses on the African continent. For example in Zambia as a country, is still lagging behind in customer service. This is applicable in the digital world as well. With businesses not knowing how to treat or react to customers on social media.*

Originality/value – *The literature discussed looks at various researches done in Western countries but very little done on the African continent and likely none published with information to do with Zambia*

Keywords: *Social media marketing, Blogging, Interactiveness, Social networks, Communication, advertising, marketing, word of mouth (WOM), Zambia*

1. Introduction

Zambian businesses like other businesses from around the world have realized the importance of using social media for marketing purposes. There are currently over 1,300,000 Facebook users in Zambia, from citation [9]. Bearing in mind that this does not include other Social Medias such as Twitter, Snap chat, Instagram and Whats app messaging which are also used by internet users.

The rise in the number of businesses advertising through social media has ballooned over the past three to four years. However, there is limited understanding of the use of social media for marketing purposes by Zambian businesses. Its effects are yet to be clarified whether negative or positive. Businesses should be made aware of the negative effects as well as the positive effects so as to mitigate the negative before they occur, and of course build on the positives.

Whats App messaging is also a tool most are using to finalize business deals, give customers quick information and feedback, and also post photos of goods for sale. These applications are reducing the cost of business in terms of customer communication, marketing and proving to be a quicker communications channel.

The best thing about using social media for marketing purposes is that it is interactive and so businesses are able to advertise and interact with their customers as cited by [7]. This makes it so much easier for them to have a two way communication with their customers without spending exorbitant amounts of money. Businesses all over the world are taking advantage of the ability to have their marketing done for them by customers sharing information online such as citation [13].

2. Background and Literature Review

2.1. Social Media Marketing in Zambia

Social media marketing is defined by citation [4] “as monitoring and facilitating customer interaction and participation throughout the web to encourage positive engagement with a company or its brands. Interactions may occur on a company site, social networks and other third party sites”. The fact that it provides an interactive [7] and participatory platform is good for businesses as they can get or give instant feedback. That’s the main difference between social media marketing and traditional marketing such as bill boards, television, radio and print media advertising.

Social media marketing can make or break a business [14]. Businesses have to be extra careful with what they post on social media as posting the wrong thing can take a long time to get it out of customers’ minds [16]. Most posts on the internet can be saved. This makes it hard to erase a bad memory completely on social media, as noted by [16].

Social media marketing has been known to enhance brand image, increase customer relationships and increase a company’s visibility in terms of adverting [3]. Unlike other countries, Zambian businesses focus more on two major platforms, Facebook and Whats App messaging. Most of them use social media platforms to market products, and advertise promotions. The advantage they have is that, a social media platform such as Facebook is giving them the advantage of boosting a page. By boosting a page a business is able to target a particular target market to view their page.

Businesses and entrepreneurs “have embraced the internet to develop “viral” marketing, in which a message can be spread quickly from one person to a handful of friends, who each in turn inform a handful of their friends”, (Ferguson, 2008) as quoted by [13]. Others opt to share interesting pages or promotions or recommend to friends online. This ensures the passing on of a message from one person to another through the click of a button. Marketers all over the world are taking advantage of the ability to have their marketing done for them by customers sharing information online [13].

2.2. Brand loyalty and Social Media

Ideally, a brand is defined as “a name, term, design, symbol, or any feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers” as cited by [1].The brand enables one particular product to stand out from other products. The product and the brand satisfy the customer differently, the product may be the tangible part of the product that physically satisfies a need, whilst the brand satisfies the emotional need of the customer, [11].

Brand loyalty “is a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred brand consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour” (Oliver, 1997:392), as quoted by [11]. Most businesses have a vast number of followers on social media especially those with reputable brands, this was also observed in a study done by [2].

3. Methodology

The study used an explorative design to collect qualitative data through observation. The study was focused on observing the activities of 30 businesses and group pages Facebook activities. The researcher used phenomenology [6], to document activities and analyze the data collected to form a discussion on the results.

4. Results

The researcher made a number of observations on social media. The findings showed that social media marketing has indeed transformed the way businesses are using social media in Zambia. Below are discussions of these findings;

4.1. In-Direct Marketing through WOM on social Media

We can conclusively say social media marketing sparks some kind of indirect marketing which organizations can use or that this may be purely accidental. If businesses used this form of marketing it can be used to launch a new product among other forms of advertising and really accelerate its sales or market a new outlet through word of mouth (WOM) on social media.

Businesses and individuals are able to indirectly market their products online through WOM. An observation on one of the blogs where a group discusses healthy lunch options for school children yielded a discovery in terms of indirect marketing. A group member posted a picture of her child's lunch box and the lunch box was quite unique. Other group members inquired where the participant bought this particular lunch box and the participant told other followers which shop and the price the lunch box was bought.

The researcher visited the shop a few weeks later and found that the shop had sold out that particular brand and type of lunch boxes. The researcher hence concluded that a business can use this method to sell a product without directly contacting individuals but create a buzz through using a review about the product on the right site. By doing so, the product may advertise itself with little effort from the business.

These discoveries lead the researcher to conclude that businesses could or do use indirect marketing to market their brands on social media.

4.2. Brand communities

Through the use of social media a number of virtual communities have been formed. The researcher grouped these into three categories; these communities serve different types of people and are comprised of active users, observers and bored members. [15] Noted the importance of segmenting online customers was vital based on behavior of online users. The Active members are usually there to learn or teach other, whilst observers may be there to learn but usually contribute nothing. Bored members are there to pass time because they have nothing better to do and so their contribution will usually make no significant difference to the group. Such groups have a high influence on brand engagement, as observed by [8].

The researcher despite discovering that indirect marketing occurs through such groups also found that these brand communities have a high influence on the reputation of certain brands. A group member will suggest how a particular brand worked well for them, another may also contribute by saying yes they also had a good experience with the brand and so other members of the group may decide to try this brand based on what they learn from other members of the group.

[8] Also found that brand communities do play a role in influencing brand loyalty whether it's somehow manipulated by the businesses themselves directly or it occurs indirectly is not known. [17] Did establish the role these brand communities play in enhancing brand loyalty on social media. It was observed that brand communities are highly influential on social media platforms based in Zambia.

4.3. Public Relations through social media

The researcher observed a number of businesses using social media particularly for public relations. For example a particular company in the country had a backlash from customers shaming their services due to very long hours of lack of service provision. This prompted them to set up a number of pages, for instance, one for alerting members of the public when they would not be providing the service and one for alerting members of the public when they are experiencing a fault in a particular area. [4] Noted that businesses will use online PR to enhance favorable comments and interactions about their brand.

The use of social media enables a business try to make amends with the general public by interacting with them and advising them about alternatives and ways in which they can make their lives easier or better depending on the product or service involved. Businesses have to be tactful in the way they use social media as a public relations platform. The researcher observed that this tool can make or break the relationship a business has with its customers. This can also be confirmed by a study done by [16].

4.4. Customers' attitudes towards social media advertising

If social media marketing was not in the least effective, businesses would not be using it. During the observation period the researcher particularly observed businesses that advertise on social media seemed to have a higher following than those that do not really advertise. Advertising through, boosting of a page as done on Facebook, increases visibility of the advertisement. This coupled with a running campaign increases awareness and customer reach. As observed by [2], social media advertising has the potential to 'build a strong brand'. [2] Cited that customers who had a positive attitude towards the brand would normally respond positively towards advertisements by liking, sharing or positive commentary. Those who reacted negatively would have a negative reaction towards the brand. The researcher found that coupled with a good reputation, customers were likely to tag or share good and rewarding advertisements with their friends and networks on social media.

4.5. Exploitation on social media through false marketing

"Hell hath no fury like a Facebook fan scorned", [5].

The researcher made a number of observations with regards to exploitation of unsuspecting buyers on some social media sites. Some business people take advantage of the fact the some potential customers do not go to the cheap parts of town. Now these areas would normally stock very cheap products sold through various shops owned mainly by foreign nationals. Some Entrepreneurs would buy goods from such shops and advertise them online sometimes for as much as 200% in profits. Some buyers have discovered after purchasing a product that the product is available at a local shop at less than half the price. This reduces the credibility of businesses advertising through social media.

Some buyers buy products they cannot afford or do not need because they are trying to keep up appearances. It is difficult for a seller to know that this potential buyer is buying something beyond their reach especially if installments are allowed. A fairly good number of buyers that buy on credit default, because they are exploited with prices too high for what the goods are worth. In most cases items sold in installments are charged at a higher price than items sold on cash basis. The study observed this has a negative effect of the use of social media marketing by businesses and Entrepreneurs.

4.6. Intellectual Property Rights Infringement and False advertising

Most entrepreneurs dealing in businesses where they have to advertise their final product for example, cakes, hair styles, décor or clothing, have found that other businesses infringe on their photo writes by downloading their photos and using them to advertise. This is causing some businesses to be jittery about advertising their products on social media. But customers want to visualize products through photos and videos. This has created a situation where some businesses are advertising falsely by using other businesses' photos and in some cases videos. This is another negative effect of marketing through social media as copy cats are busy watching and waiting to steal the next big idea invented by others. This is true for business ideas as well. As the law on copy writes infringement in Zambia is vague and mainly focused on business names and manufactured products.

5. Implications for Businesses

The results showed that social media marketing has a juxtaposition effect on various businesses in Zambia as it affects them in a good or bad way. The following are some implications for its use as observed by the researcher.

5.1. Using Social media as a Marketing Tool

Zambian businesses and entrepreneurs have to be cautious with the way they handle advertising on social media simply because it can go wrong with the click of a button. As long as it is shared the information is out there and cannot be retracted.

Big businesses have to be particularly careful how they resolve issues through social media. It is important if a customer complains publicly for the business to resolve the matter privately but announce it publicly that the issue has since been resolved.

Entrepreneurs who need to post photos of the products or services they provide should copy write their photos, so that other users do not copy their work. It can be disheartening to come up with a new product line only for someone else to replicate it and use your photo to market their business. It would be discouraging to entrepreneurs and other businesses if they stopped competitors from liking their pages because they may not get to learn from each other. As the market continues growing steadily, there will be a continuous growth of customers using social media therefore increasing the market base.

The use of social media for in-direct marketing can be used widely as long as businesses are innovative in the way it is carried out. It can drastically increase brand awareness and boost sales if it is done in the right manner.

5.2. Honesty and credibility

Businesses have to be honest on social media. The fact that it takes a long time to build trust even in person means businesses advertising virtually, have to work even harder to gain trust and build customer loyalty. Losing credibility on social media may take longer to gain because the information can be deleted by the business but saved by users. It can come back to haunt the business years later. It is important for businesses and entrepreneurs to be truthful in their dealings from the onset and maintain a trusting relationship with customers.

5.3. Cyber clutter

The use of social media for marketing purposes doesn't mean a business has a leeway of advertising using faded pictures, hard to read words or poor or bad language. Businesses have to be smart about what they post in order to avoid cyber clutter (A term the researcher is using to define junk posted on social media).

Instead of posting photos of 50 products today, why not select a few products and advertise today and then slowly advertise the other products every other day. It reduces monotony and increases excitement about your page because people will always expect something new. Business people particularly traders sometimes may post a whole lot of photos at a go forgetting that pictures and videos consume a lot more in terms of data. Because of this, customers may not see all products advertised. It is usually better to post very few photos at a time for customers to view. This also makes it easier for them to pick products to buy. If too many products are advertised at the same time a customer may get so confused about the products being advertised and lose interest.

5.4. Segmenting global customers

It has become a new trend with global businesses to segment their advertisements on social media into regional or national segments in areas where they have a good number of followers. Companies like coca cola are currently doing this; Coming up with Facebook pages, in different parts of the world based on followers. From Coca cola fan page to coca cola- Zambia fan page. Are companies realizing the importance of segmenting their followers into geographic segments on social media? This has its implications for multinational corporations. Rohm et al. (2013) identified five primary motives that drive consumers to interact with brands through social media. They include "entertainment", "brand engagement", "access to customer services and content", "product information" and "promotions" as quoted by [10].

6. Conclusion

This study initiates the probability of businesses and entrepreneurs use of social media marketing for intense interactive use of the medium to reach out to customers in ways not used before. The findings confirm that social media marketing has had a Juxtaposition effect on businesses as it has shown the good side as well as the bad side of its use. Its implications for managers clearly shows that by incorporating the highlighted implications, businesses can improve their use of social media for marketing purposes therefore improving brand image, building customer loyalty and targeting the right customers. I highly recommend that future research extend these findings and generalise the research examination by incorporating Interviews and online customer surveys and the inclusion of other social media channels.

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