

A Model for Marketing Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Zambia

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Abstract:- The education sector in Zambia has experienced higher increase in both private and public institutions. The implication of this is that markets are shrinking causing price discovery. The increased competition and shrinking of markets cause Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), to innovate ways of maintaining or increasing their competitive advantage. The 4th Industrial revolution propounded by Klaus Schwab in 2016 predicted a shift from traditional and physical marketing strategies to technology based competitive business wars. Social media has become one of the most influential marketing tools in the 21st century with highly developed interactive platforms helping institutions to expand markets and increase revenue. The challenges that have most HEIs have faced is that they have had no means to measure investment in social media marketing and have had no well-developed model for marketing their institutions on social media.

This article is based on the findings from the author's Doctorial report based on empirical evidence from selected HEIs where data was collected to build a robust model for marketing HEIs on social media. The research found that there was a mismatch between social media platforms that HEIs were using and those popular with enrolled students. This research is a mixed research based on a post-positivism philosophy with both inductive and deductive approaches. The article is based on findings from 321 responses that were part the targeted 395 samples according to Yamane's sample calculations. The article discusses two models developed by the author as part of their doctoral dissertation at ZCAS University. Literature sources have been drawn from various journal papers and reports specifically from the Higher Education Authority. The findings show that HEIs should adopt the models developed and proposed by this author if they are to succeed in their social media marketing campaigns.

Keywords:- Education, Social media, Marketing, Platforms, Model, Facebook.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of social media marketing can be traced back to the 4th Industrial revolution in 2016 when Klaus Schwab gave a presentation at the World Economic Forum (Schwab, 2016). According to Schwab the fusion of technology and human social aspects gives birth to new ways of conducting business as the birth of neural networks takes center stage in business environments. The development of technologies such as Neural networks, Web 2.0 and the TCP/IP protocols can be strongly argued to be the foundations of social media. The birth of social media creates what has come to be known as social media marketing (SMM) and network marketing rendering the phrase "the new media" (ZIM, 2020). The new media is a phrase that has changed traditional marketing to give rise to new methods of conducting business.

SMM is a form of marketing that allows for high interaction between people and allows businesses to reach and engage customers (Gil , et al., 2020). Social media is considered to be highly flexible and allows for users to interact freely without the limitation of physical boundaries. Social media platforms such as Facebook are estimated to have more than 3.8 billion followers by the end of 2022, and this represents 40% of the world's population (Gil , et al., 2020). Does this mean that Facebook is the largest social media platform in the world? , research findings in the Education sector show that Facebook followed by WhatsApp and then Twitter are the most common social media platforms in the sector as shown in figure 1 below;

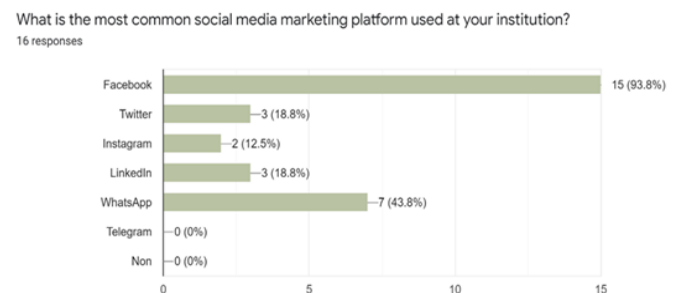


Fig 1:- The most common social media platforms for marketing in HEIs in Zambia

(Adapted from a DBA dissertation report by the author at ZCAS University 2022)

The popularity of social media platforms for marketing HEIs among social media administrators seem to show a mismatch between social media signed up for by enrolled students in HEIs and what marketers are using to market their institutions. Research findings by the author involving a sample size of 321 in twelve HEIs show that WhatsApp is the most signed up for social media platform in HEIs and creates a mismatch in the application of social media marketing mix. This implies that there is need for a model to be developed for marketing HEIs based on empirical findings from scientific research. The author proposes a model for marketing HEIs in Zambia discussed in the findings section of this paper.

➤ *Research Objectives*

- To determine the best social media mix for marketing HEIs in Zambia
- To establish usability for the social media marketing models in Higher education institutions in Zambia

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on findings from a research conducted by the author and submitted for consideration for the award of Doctor of Business Administration at ZCAS University. The paper discusses in detail the SMM model developed for marketing HEIs in Zambia according to findings from a sample of 321 respondents selected from twelve HEIs using a systematic sampling method. Yamane's formula was used to calculate the required sample size as shown below

The sample size for this quantitative research was based on the total population of enrolled students in the selected HEIs of 34,500 which is the maximum sample size and according to Hair et al. the minimum required is 50. To determine the sample size the formula below was used to get the minimum representative sample:

$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$ Where; n= Sample size, N= is the population size, e= level of precision

$$n = \frac{34,500}{1 + 34,500(0.05)^2} = 395$$

According to Creswell a sample is highly representative if it constitutes of more than 65% of the targeted sample (Creswell, 2013). In the methods used for this research the targeted sample was 395 out of a population of 34,500 and the researcher managed to collect 321 responses representing 81% of the total targeted sample. The implication of the 81% response is that the sample was highly representative.

The qualitative sample was based on professionals managing social media in 12 HEIs with a total population of 24 though the researcher was only able to conduct 67% of the targeted interview due to challenges relating to COVID-19. This is an acceptable response rate according to Guest who states that any sample above 60% to 80% is an acceptable response rate (Guest 2016).

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several studies around social media that have focused on social media platforms or opportunities and challenges that social media presents to business. One such study is the study by Imasiku, who carried out an exploratory study on the impact of social media marketing focusing on opportunities and challenges of social media for Zambian businesses (Imasiku , 2016). The study by Imasiku is highly useful as it forms a benchmark by which benefits of using social media in business can be Understood. However, the gap in many studies is that the focus is either in business in general or in the education sector but focused on the use of social media as a teaching aid rather than a marketing tool. Akakadelwa and Walubita studied the impact of social media on student life and brought out Facebook as the most common social media platform used by students at the University of Zambia (Akakandelwa & Walubita, 2012).

The limitation of the study by Akakadelwa and Walubita was that it was done in one institution and this means that the findings cannot be extrapolated across all higher education institutions. Although studies by Akakadelwa and Walubita including Imasiku's study form a strong foundation for future research on social media, their main limitations are that they former had a smaller sample size while the later was not focused on social media in the education sector. Higher education institutions must envision themselves as organizations operating in a highly competitive business environment since there has been an increase in both private and public educational institutions in Zambia. According to Higher Education Authority (HEA) there is a total of sixty higher education institutions registered by HEA (HEA, 2021). This number of HEIs is likely to increase in the next few years and thereby shrinking markets and causing price discovery among HEIs. Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter are becoming the most commonly used social media platforms according to findings by this researcher, the implication is that HEIs need to adopt these platforms for marketing purposes.

Uncertainty in business environments must cause education institutions to plan strategy and manage customer dynamics (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). The challenge that HEIs have faced in finding the correct social media marketing mix. Research conducted by this author shows that there is a mismatch between the social media platforms used by HEIs and those that are popular among students and this means that a model for social media marketing is highly necessary.

Constantinou predicted that by 2022 Facebook would have close to 3.5 billion subscribers and this has come to pass according to various social media reports online (Constantinou, 2020). The 3.5 billion is equivalent to 40% of the world's population and it places Facebook as the biggest social media platform in the world. HEIs must take advantage of the largest social media platform and also make use of Twitter as the most interactive social media platform. HEIs must build social media marketing plans in order for them to maximize the use social media for marketing purposes but however research shows that most HEIs do not develop social media plans, Figure 1 below confirms these findings

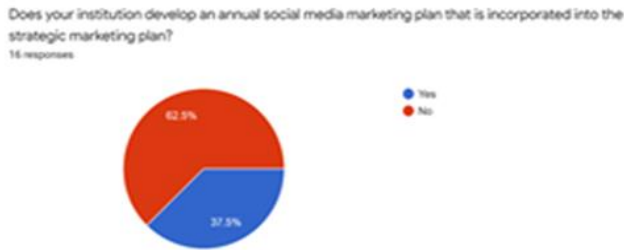


Fig 2:- Institutions developing social media plans (Adapted from the author’s research report)

In figure 2, 62.5% of respondents managing social media indicated that their institution does not develop a social media marketing plan. This means that if no planning takes place for social media marketing, HEIs are not using a scientific approach to social media marketing. The results of the cross tabulations extracted from the research findings also indicate that Facebook had the largest percentage 76.4% followed by 71.1% and then Twitter with 55.3%. The best combinations of social media platforms were Facebook and WhatsApp with 33% overall followed by Facebook and Twitter with 28%.

Which is the best social media platform for marketing HEIs * Which combinations of social media platforms are mostly used in your institution Crosstabulation

			Which combinations of social media platforms are mostly used in your institution					
			Instagram & WhatsApp	Facebook & WhatsApp	Twitter & WhatsApp	Facebook & Twitter	Facebook & Instagram	Total
Which is the best social media platform for marketing HEIs	Twitter	Count	21	20	0	0	0	41
		% within Which combinations of social media platforms are mostly used in your institution	55.3%	18.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.8%
		% of Total	6.5%	6.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.8%
	Facebook	Count	17	81	0	0	0	98
		% within Which combinations of social media platforms are mostly used in your institution	44.7%	76.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	30.5%
		% of Total	5.3%	25.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	30.5%
	Linkedin	Count	0	5	17	19	3	44
		% within Which combinations of social media platforms are mostly used in your institution	0.0%	4.7%	53.1%	21.1%	5.5%	13.7%
		% of Total	0.0%	1.6%	5.3%	5.9%	0.9%	13.7%
	WhatsApp	Count	0	0	15	64	17	96
		% within Which combinations of social media platforms are mostly used in your institution	0.0%	0.0%	46.9%	71.1%	30.9%	29.9%
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	4.7%	19.9%	5.3%	29.9%
	Instagram	Count	0	0	0	7	35	42
		% within Which combinations of social media platforms are mostly used in your institution	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.8%	63.6%	13.1%
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%	10.9%	13.1%
	Total	Count	38	106	32	90	55	321
		% within Which combinations of social media platforms are mostly used in your institution	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	11.8%	33.0%	10.0%	28.0%	17.1%	100.0%

Table 1:- Cross Tabulation Analysis

The results of the cross tabulation became the basis for developing a model with the best combination of social media platforms for marketing HEIs discussed in the next section. Determining the best combination of social media platforms is the first step in obtaining a competitive advantage (Barker, 2022). The cross tabulation in Table 4.30 above shows that Facebook overall percentage of 30.5% larger than any other media and also its combination with WhatsApp has the largest percentage of 33.0% forcing a conclusion that these are the best social media marketing platforms. The implications of the cross tabulation are that a social media marketing model must include the correct social media mx.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The importance of measuring marketing returns is that it helps companies to understand the effectiveness of their marketing activities (Callfire, 2017). Research findings show that most HEIs in Zambia do not have a means to measure returns on social media marketing investments and this is

creating problems for management to justify expenditure of social media. The result of this is that since social media is free most boards are reducing budgets for social media marketing aimed a reduction in marketing performance.



Fig 3:- The funnel model for measuring returns on social media investment

The indicators of marketing performance for HEIs are increased revenue, increased student numbers and increased market share. Once HEIs are able to track social media marketing performance and link it to a shift upwards in any of these variables then it can be deemed that social media marketing has a high impact on marketing performance for HEIs. Suppose that a HEIs has invested ZMK 350,000 in social media and the returns are ZMK 450,000, the returns therefore would be ZMK 100,000 though any other expenses maybe factored in. The model then helps management to justify their marketing spend to their boards.

Measuring marketing investments improves both market related investment decisions making and market professional accountability (Emmer & Merchant, 2020). Without justification of investment in social media marketing, marketing professionals will find it highly challenging to increase promotional budgets and particularly social media design and tool acquisitions. This is the reason why the researcher designed the “funnel model” based on the measures of marketing performance and calculations focused on determining investment minus marketing costs as below;

$$ROI = SG - MC$$

ROI= Return on Investment

SG= Sales Growth

MC = Marketing Costs

The other metrics that would help marketing professionals to measure returns on investments in marketing are analyzing sales revenue for two or more sales periods, if the movements are increasing the interpretation is that sales activities are highly efficient. However, Cost of goods sold may reduce sales revenue but this simply means that there are high investments in marketing activities and in the long run this results into a higher operating margin. A high return on capital employed (ROCE) means that the operating surplus is high and this means that marketing activities have increased. ROCE is calculated as operating surplus/Owner’s equity X 100% (Mahruzal & Khaddafi, 2020), since operating surplus is directly linked to sales activities the implication is that effectiveness of marketing strategies can be measured through this.

To maximize social media marketing performance HEIs must ensure that they are using the appropriate social media mix based on empirical scientific findings such as the ones recommended in the HEIs social media marketing model discussed in the next section.

➤ *The HEIs social media marketing model*

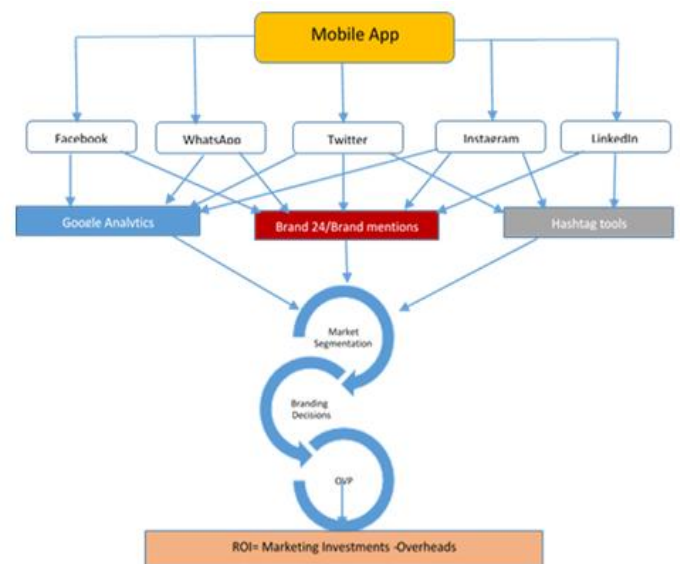


Fig 4:- Social Media Marketing model for HEIs

Findings from research show that in Zambia Facebook is the most popular social media marketing platform, followed by WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram and then LinkedIn. These findings mean that any HEI that wants to achieve a higher return on social media marketing investment must use the mix in the model above. The model suggests incorporating the social media mix for HEIs in a mobile App that has ability to integrate with social media analytical tools that can measure engagement, lead, reach and conversion on all the five social media platforms. The analytical reports produced from the social media analytical tools such as Google analytics and Brand24 allow for market segmentation to be performed on social media clickstream data, so that branding activities can be made. It also allows an Online value proposition (OVP) to be developed for maximization of social media platforms. Without a method of monitoring social media platform activities, HEIs cannot determine how effective their social media marketing strategies are.

According to Lephram, mobile Apps have the ability for higher integration of both mobile ability and web ability and by 2023 they will be producing revenues of \$935 billion (Lephram, 2021). The revenues projected by Lephram are enormous for HEIs to ignore if they want to tap into this revenue and gain huge competitive advantage in the industry. The mobile APP suggested in the model above is highly integrated with social media analytical tools and tools for calculating ROI. This makes it easier for marketing professionals to justify investment in marketing.

Branding has become highly critical for revenue growth and sustainability, this means that while HEIs generate sales through social media marketing they need to invest heavily in branding their products online. Branding has become a vexing challenge, it requires precision and careful planning (Holt, 2016), this is the reason why the social media marketing model becomes critical for HEIs. The model includes aspects of market segmentation and OVPs that allow for branding decisions to be made when placing products on social media sites such as YouTube and Facebook and Instagram.

Branding and management of social media requires effective performance monitoring, with budgets for social media page design and graphical content going high, incorporation of performance monitoring tools in social media marketing strategies becomes vital. HEIs must plan for subscription to recommended performance monitoring tools such as brand24 and Hashtag tools. Google analytics is one highly comprehensive tool that can be used but a mix of different tools gives more optimum performance.

V. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MODEL

- The model allows for HEIs to develop the best combination of social media platforms that can be used for marketing their institutions on social media. The model brings out the best mix for digital media based on empirical scientific findings related to the popularity of social media platforms in HEIs. This means that managers in HEIs are able to adopt social media platforms that will allow them to target markets in a more precise manner.
- Mobile App based on the model make it easy for student enrolment, measurement of revenue against costs of investments in social media. This will assist managers in HEIs to justify costs for social media marketing and remove the notion that since social media is free then there should be no monetary investments in its use
- Managers in HEIs will be able to monitor social media performance by generating reports for strategic decision making to give their institution a competitive advantage
- Mobile Apps incorporated in the social media model provides students in HEIs an easy, secure and effective way of making online payments

VI. CONCLUSION

The increase in HEIs has intensified competition in the education sector and provided learners with different alternatives. This has caused price and quality discovery leading to HEIs in the country implementing strategies for marketing that include online marketing and digital marketing. The battle has moved from the physical market to virtual markets, especially during and after the advent of COVID-19. HEIs need to plan their social media strategies using scientific approaches based on research. The social media marketing model is based on empirical research findings and makes recommendations on the best combination of social media platforms that HEIs can use to market effectively on social media. The model is a holistic approach to social media marketing that includes

performance measurement, OVP and branding decisions based on the value concepts of brand associations and brand equity. The use of the model in HEIs also allows managers in HEIs to easily justify their expenditure on social media marketing which in recent times has raised concerns from many boards.

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