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A Study on the Effectiveness of Using Social Media for Organizational Reputation Management in the Telecommunications Industry in Zambia. A case of Zamtel

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to assess the effectiveness of social media usage for organizational reputation management. This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design with a population of 150 employees working at Zamtel's head office in Lusaka. A Yamane formula was used to randomly select a sample of 109 employees for data collection. The researcher designed a questionnaire for this purpose, and descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS. The study revealed that 68% of respondents believe social media is effective in managing an organization's reputation in Zambia. Zamtel has been positively impacted by social media in the past years, particularly in increasing responsiveness to customer queries and enhancing brand image, highlighting the need for the organization to continue focusing on its online presence and implement strategies to manage its reputation. The most common types of social media strategies used for reputation management by Zamtel include building brand awareness and creating engaging content, mostly through Facebook. The research also revealed challenges faced by Zamtel in using social media for organization reputation management, with a lack of resources and poor message design being the most significant challenges. The study recommends, among other things, that by establishing a social media policy, monitoring online conversations, engaging with followers, creating shareable content, utilizing influencer marketing, and responding to negative feedback, businesses can build a positive reputation online and enhance their brand image.

Keywords: social media, Organization reputation management, Telecommunications Industry

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1. Introduction

The prosperity of every business relies as much on its reputation as it does on numerous other aspects. This becomes especially vital in a competitive landscape where the customer base is limited. Bass (2018) mentions that companies are increasingly recognizing the importance of

maintaining a positive and beneficial reputation.

Vollmer and Precourt (2008) highlight that in today's digital age, shaping an organization's image positively or negatively is just a click away. This digital revolution has significantly enhanced media consciousness, including how Trust and favorability are measured and perceived by the

public sector. Social media, in particular, has introduced a novel aspect to bolstering an organization's reputation. The essence of a company's success often hinges on its reputation, which is built on the organization's recognition and the anticipations regarding its future actions (Bass 2018). Singh et al. (2008) amalgamated various academic and professional views to define reputation.

According to Schreiber, reputation can be viewed from two distinct angles: the organizations and the stakeholders. From an organization's viewpoint, reputation serves as a crucial, intangible asset that enhances its capacity to meet stakeholder expectations and distinguishes it from competitors. For stakeholders, reputation is perceived through an intellectual, emotional, and behavioral lens, reflecting their assessment of how well an organization's Communication and actions align with their interests and needs (Singh et al., 2008).

Zambia Telecommunications Company Limited (Zamtel) is officially registered under Zambia's Companies Act, Chapter 388, and is solely owned by the Government of the Republic of Zambia. It operates under the oversight of the Ministry of Transport, Works, Supply and Communications, as designated by the gazette Notice No. 183 of 2012 and the Statutory Functions Act, Chapter 4. The company's origins trace back to 1913 with the installation of a manual exchange system in Livingstone. The evolution continued, and by 1975, the Post and Telecommunication Corporation (PTC) established from the existing General Post Office (GPO).

A significant technological milestone was achieved in 1981, when Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, the then-President, inaugurated a digital microwave link between Chipata and Lusaka, marking a departure from traditional copper cables. In 1994, the PTC was divided, creating Zamtel to focus on telecommunications and Zampost for postal services. The year 1995 saw Zamtel launch the Analogue Mobile Telephone Service under Code 095 followed by the introduction of mobile GSM service in 2003. A significant change occurred in July 2010, when 75% of Zamtel's shares were sold to Lap Green of Libya. only for the Zambian government to reclaim 100% ownership in January 2012, reversing the partial privatization. Zamtel has since emerged as a competitive force in Zambia's development, offering advanced broadband internet services since 2011 (https://www.zamtel.zm/about_company.html).

1.2 Problem Statement

The problem statement discusses the effectiveness of social media usage for organizational reputation management in the telecommunications industry and presents a nuanced challenge. Social media platforms are a double-edged sword; they provide a valuable channel for telecommunications companies to engage with customers and enhance their brand image through positive interactions and content promotion. However, these

platforms also pose significant risks by enabling the rapid spread of negative feedback and criticism, which can quickly erode an organization's reputation if not managed adeptly. The study on ZAMTEL aims to assess how effectively social media has been leveraged for managing its organizational reputation, highlighting the importance of strategic social media use in maintaining competitive advantage and fostering a positive brand image in the telecommunications sector.

1.3 Aim and Significance of the Study

The study aimed at making a critical assessment of the effectiveness of social media in enhancing the reputation of an organization. The study will be of benefit in the fields of cooperation, communication, and reputation management as it will contribute to the generation of new knowledge on the topic under investigation. The study findings will also be important in helping mobile telecommunication organizations and their management teams align their services and make them more relevant to their needs. This study will provide lessons for communication and reputation experts on the effectiveness of social media use in reputation management.

2. Literature Review

The literature review highlights the concept of utilization of media in the enhancement of organizational reputation. Lachlan et al. (2016) introduced a model detailing how Consumer interactions are influenced by the relationship between a company's brand and consumer attitudes towards it, along with the effect of consumer behavior on social media. This model highlights the attributes of modern media that shift various aspects of the interaction between consumers and brands beyond the company's direct influence. It explains that the power of social networks and Their influence is determined by the value added by each new member to the network, similar to an interconnected network.

Considering Robert Metcalfe's principle, which posits that the utility or strength of a computer network escalates exponentially with the square of its nodes, can be beneficial. When examining the escalating influence of social media (Hendler & Golbeck, 2008). This suggests that as more computers (or users) join the network, the worth of the content circulated within it multiplies dramatically. Recognizing the key elements that uphold a brand's reputation and leveraging them to counteract the challenges posed by social media communication is a fundamental initial measure for ensuring a brand's integrity. Jolly (2019) suggests that a business can opt for either a dialogic or monologic mode of communication. Traditionally, firms have engaged in a one-way conversation with their audience, a method that is gradually becoming ineffective. Simply relying on company websites for self-promotion or investing in online ads is insufficient for maintaining a company's good name. These strategies are often viewed by the public as biased promotional efforts.

The literature reviewed highlights the significant role social media plays a role in shaping an organization's reputation. It outlines how customer empowerment and the

evolving marketing landscape is extensively discussed by academics. However, there's a noticeable gap in the literature concerning telecommunication companies, which are fundamental in providing the infrastructure for social media. This raises the question: Are telecommunications Companies are also vulnerable to overlooking social media's impact on their reputation? This study aims to explore this uncharted area in existing research.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach, Philosophy and Design

This research utilized a quantitative methodology, which is characterized by the employment of statistical and numerical data. According to Davis (2007), selecting research method should be guided by how well it fits the research questions and objectives, taking into account the advantages and drawbacks of each method in terms of data gathering and analysis. In this case, the quantitative method was chosen because it was aligned with the goal of quantifying customer satisfaction on a 1 to 5 scale, thus demonstrating a preference for using numerical data to assess the level of agreement with certain statements.

The study was based on the principles of positivism, applying established theories to explore the connections between variables and to identify cause-and-effect relationships between dependent and independent variables.

For the purpose of providing an exhaustive numerical analysis of how social media affects an organization's reputation management, a descriptive research design was implemented. Descriptive research is aimed at depicting findings through descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency and variability, alongside graphical representations such as pie charts and tables.

3.2 Population, Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study population comprised 150 Zamtel employees at the head office in Lusaka, Zambia.

The Yamane formula was used to establish a sample size of 109 respondents. Participants were chosen from Zamtel customers through probability sampling, guaranteeing every customer an equal opportunity to be part of the sample.

3.3 Data Collection procedures

The study gathered primary data via structured questionnaires, both online and in paper form.

The data obtained from these questionnaires were logged, encoded, and examined utilizing SPSS software, version 26.0. This analysis included computing frequencies, averages, and consistency metrics to investigate the impact of social media on how an organization manages its reputation.

To ensure the integrity of the data, all collected Responses were meticulously verified for completeness. and correctness, and any inconsistencies were rectified by conducting follow-up interviews with the participants.

Adherence to ethical standards was ensured by following the principles set by Sontaite (2015), which highlight the importance of confidentiality, informed consent, and the voluntary nature of participation, with participants being informed that their responses would be used exclusively for scholarly purposes.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 The extent of the use of social media for organization reputation management by ZAMTEL

The participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement under the extent to which Zamtel, as an organization, uses social media for organization. reputation management, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral 4= agree, and 5=strongly agree.

Table 1: Extent of the use of social media for organization reputation management by ZAMTEL

Use of social media	N	Mean	Std. deviation
The organization monitors its social media presence for reputation management	98	4.82	1.180
The organization typically respond to any negative posts or comments on social media	98	2.40	0.719
The organization uses social media analytics to measure the impact of its reputation management efforts on social media	98	4.32	0.917
The organization engages with its followers on social media in a positive and meaningful way	98	4.56	1.324
The organization places importance on maintaining a positive reputation on social media	98	4.74	1.218
The organization use social media listening tools for reputation management	98	4.20	0.952

The study reveals that participants perceive Zamtel to actively engage in reputation management through social media, demonstrating strong agreement on the organization's efforts to monitor its social media presence and emphasize a positive reputation (mean scores of 4.82 and 4.74, respectively). They acknowledge the use of social media analytics and listening tools for managing reputation (mean scores of 4.32 and 4.20), but highlight a notable deficiency in responding to negative feedback (mean of 2.40), suggesting an area for improvement. While there is a consensus on the company's positive engagement with followers (mean of 4.56), the responses show significant variability, reflecting diverse opinions on this aspect of their social media strategy.

4.2 The benefits of using social media

The participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement under the benefits of using social media for organizational reputation management where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= neutral, and

4=agree and 5=strongly agree.

Table 2: The benefits of using social media

Benefits	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Increased visibility	98	4.87	1.019
Improved customer relations	98	4.69	0.910
Better crisis management	98	4.21	1.273
Immediate response to negative feedback	98	3.98	0.819
Increased credibility	98	4.73	0.781

The results indicate that the participants largely agreed that there are benefits to using social media for organizational reputation management. Specifically, the participants strongly agreed (mean = 4.87) that using social media can increase visibility for the organization. They also agreed (mean=4.73) that using social media can increase the organization's credibility. The participants also reported agreement (mean=4.69) that using social media can improve customer relations, indicating that they believe social media can be a valuable tool for interacting with and engaging customers. In addition, the participants agreed (mean=4.21) that using social media can contribute to better crisis management. This suggests that the participants believe that social media can be used to effectively communicate with stakeholders during times of crisis.

4.3 The effect of using social media

The participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement under the effect of using social media on organizational reputation management where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral 4=agree and 5=strongly agree.

Table 3: The effect of using social media

Effects	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social media (media strategy, media platform and resource allocation) has increased the trustworthiness of the organization	98	4.57	1.145
Social media (media strategy, media platform and resource allocation) has amplified transparency of the organization	98	3.64	1.019
Social media (media strategy, media platform and resource allocation) has increased the organization's responsiveness to customer queries	98	4.81	0.198
Social media (media strategy, media platform and resource allocation) has had made the organization improve its competence level	98	4.16	1.415
Social media (media strategy, media platform and resource allocation) has enhanced the organization's brand image	98	4.78	0.136

The results of the study show that, on average, the participants agreed that the use of social media (media strategy, media platform, and resource allocation) has had a positive effect on the organization's reputation management.

4.4 The challenges faced by ZAMTEL when using social media

The respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement under the challenges faced by ZAMTEL when using social media for organization reputation management, where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral 4= agree, and 5=strongly agree. The Table below shows the results.

Table 4: Challenges faced by ZAMTEL when using social media.

Challenges	N	Mean	Std Deviation
Time management	98	2.48	1.217
Lack of resources	98	4.85	1.240
Poor connectivity	98	4.61	0.617
Difficulty in monitoring all platforms	98	3.56	0.824
Inaccurate information	98	4.72	1.146
Poor message design	98	3.17	0.918
Difficulty in responding to negative comments	98	4.39	0.506

The results in the table above show the level of agreement of the respondents with the challenges faced by ZAMTEL when using social media for organizational reputation management. The mean scores for each challenge indicate the average level of agreement among the respondents. These challenges can have a significant impact on the organization's reputation and image, and it may be necessary for ZAMTEL to address them to improve their social media strategy and reputation management.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to assess the effectiveness of social media usage for organizational reputation management. The study found that 68% of the Respondents believe that social media is effective or very effective in managing an organization's reputation in Zambia. For Zamtel, the study showed that social media has greatly impacted the overall reputation of Zamtel in the past year. This suggests that the organization should pay close attention to its online presence and consider implementing strategies to manage its reputation on social media platforms.

Furthermore, the results of the study show that, on average, the participants agreed that the use of social media (media strategy, media platform, and resource allocation) has had a positive effect on the organization's reputation management. Specifically, the participants strongly agreed

(mean = 4.81) that social media has increased the organization's responsiveness to customer queries, which suggests that the organization has been successful in using social media to engage with its customers and address their concerns in a timely manner. They also agreed (mean = 4.78) that social media has enhanced the organization's brand image, which suggests that the organization has been successful in using social media to project a positive image of itself to its stakeholders.

The results of the study further found that, on average, Zamtel, as an organization, uses social media for reputation management. Specifically, the participants strongly agreed (mean = 4.82) that the organization monitors its social media presence for reputation management and places importance on maintaining a positive reputation on social media (mean = 4.74). They also agreed (mean = 4.32) that the organization uses social media analytics to measure the

impact of its reputation management efforts on social media and uses social media listening tools for reputation management (mean=4.20). However, the participants disagreed (mean=2.40) that the organization typically responds to any negative posts or comments on social media, indicating that there may be room for improvement in this area. The standard deviation for this statement was relatively low (0.719), indicating that the responses were quite consistent. The participants also strongly agreed (mean = 4.56), that the organization engages with its followers on social media in a positive and meaningful way. However, the standard deviation for this statement was relatively high (1.324), indicating that there was more variability in the responses. The results of the study showed that Zamtel, as an organization, monitors its social media presence for reputation management on a daily basis.

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