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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A NEW MARKETING WEAPON-A CASE OF THE
ZIMBABWEAN BEVERAGE SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

The main thrust of the study was to scrutinize impact of social media on brand positioning in the Zimbabwean beverage sector. Other subsequent objectives were to explore how social media influence managerial decision making especially on promotion, to establish the impact of social media on information sharing by consumers, to determine the challenges of social media use by consumers, to explore the factors that promote social media usage as well as to suggest strategic recommendations regarding social media use in order to enhance brand positioning. The target population comprised three major firms in Zimbabwe's beverage industry namely, Dairy board Zimbabwe Limited, Delta Beverages and Schweppes Zimbabwe Limited. A cross sectional survey design was used to collect data using questionnaires and interviews. Data was presented in the form of bar graphs, pie charts and analyzed using SPSS tables. The findings of the study indicated that technology breakthroughs and handset culture are the major driving factors for social media use. Utilisation of social media as a marketing strategy is still limited. Conversely, sporadic and unreliable internet connectivity especially in Zimbabwean rural areas and is the major hindrance to the use of social media this has an adverse effect on brand positioning. The major recommendation of the study is to challenge Zimbabwean firms in general and those in beverages sector in particular to exploit social media as a newly emerging marketing tool since it is less costly, effective, efficient, ubiquitous, offers real time response and above all enjoys global reach.

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INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

Adoption of multicurrency regime including dollarization of Zimbabwe's economy has resulted in the emergence of so many product brands from 2009 to date as a result of government policy of deregulation, privatisation and liberalization of several industries. The Zimbabwean beverage industry is now experiencing stiff competition as new brands are sprouting from the domestic market coupled with cheap imports from South Africa, Zambia, Dubai, China among other countries. This warrants the need for the utilization of aggressive marketing strategies that combine both traditional and modern marketing in the form of social media. According to Evans (2008), social media refers to a self-created, veritable communication between individuals concerning a particular common subject, steered by the thoughts and experiences of

those taking part. Social media refers to activities, practices, and behaviours among people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media (Safko and Brake, 2009). The digital age have brought with it the advent of new solutions in communication. The use of the internet, for example, has given rise to the new age of social media. According to Smith (2012) the last few years have been characterized by the web shifting towards user-driven technologies such as blogs, social networks and video-sharing platforms. Smith (2012) propounds that social technologies have acted as a catalyst to a revolution in user-generated content, global community and the publishing of consumer opinion, now uniformly tagged as social media. Social media is the social interaction among people in which they create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks (Ahlqvist; Bäck; Halonen; Heinonen, 2008). According to Smith (2012) the number of active users reading blogs rose from 54% to 77% globally in just two years, while those who had written a blog expanded from 28% to 45%. As Evans (2008) suggests, the influx of information through the web has formed an integral part of the

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consumer decision making process whether knowingly or unknowingly. Kietzmann *et al.* (2011) asserts that people read, watch, and use the internet to buy products and services. Increasingly, consumers are making use of platforms, such as content sharing websites, blogs, social networking, and wikis, to create, modify, share, and discuss internet content. This represents the social media phenomenon, which can now significantly impact on firm's reputation, profitability, sales growth, survival and attainment of competitive edge. The increased use of these virtual platforms has increased fears of the obsolescence and vanishing of traditional marketing tools and the rise of social media marketing. People use social media for socializing, transacting and marketing (Rawat and Divekar, 2014). The use of social media marketing had a pivotal role in enhancing and maintaining favourable brand status for global brands like Audi, coke, Pepsi, and many others (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). Through social media, important marketing intelligence can also be gathered. Even information about competitors can be collected ethically without causing friction. Strengths of social media include affordability, convenience, richness of information conveyed, easy analysis of data as well as costs savings exploiting the ubiquitous nature of social media platforms.

A large client base can be reached out using an effortless amount of resources (Fernandez, 2009). According to Miller (2011) social networks like Facebook provide an opportunity for brands to be effectively marketed to many potential clients at a very low cost. Valeecha and Reza (2013) believe that social media platforms have facilitated the rise of virtual communities that are not confined within the limits of political or geographical boundaries. Furthermore, social media platforms are easy to set up and to manage (Miller, 2011). The author further states that social media platforms encourage interaction between individuals hence multidimensional marketing can be used. Administrators can also control information shared on social media hence they are assured that the right amount and quality of information is disseminated (Miller, 2011). Social media, like all the other marketing tools is not without demerits. For example it is vulnerable to unpleasant elements like negative feedback which may then be spread to other users. The fact that anyone can post anything makes the web a dangerous place (Miller, 2011). Social media can also be hacked and this leads to compromised information as well.

Statement of the problem

Most studies have shown that brand positioning for most global brands like Microsoft and BMW was enhanced by the use of the digital media through official websites, blog posts, Facebook, Twitter and many other social media platforms. Brand positioning plays a vital role in customer loyalty levels. The opening up of the global market in terms of technology has led to the acquisition of smart phones and other internet enabled phones by most Zimbabweans. According to the Statistics International, South Africa has the highest third generation connection in Africa (32%) and Zimbabwe is pegged at 17%. This guarantees open access to social media for any one in Zimbabwe who can afford a smart phone. Zimbabwe's beverage industry, like any other industry in the

country, was adversely affected by the economic crisis pertaining to the pre-dollarization era of 2008. Currently, the Zimbabwean economy is experiencing a decline in economic growth characterised by liquidity crunch, low consumer spending due to meagre incomes and low industry capacity utilisation and this is compromising competitiveness of firms. Big brands like Coca Cola, Chibuku and Mazoe were also affected negatively in terms of brand image. More so stiff competition in the sector is almost reaching shakeout stage eroding profits, increasing operational costs and reducing market share. Social media platforms have also opened up the market for foreign companies to get involved as part of the global community. Most studies done on the impact of social media on brand positioning have been restricted in the developed world. So far, no research has been conducted to explore how this emergent digital marketing tool impacts on brands positioning in developing countries like Zimbabwe.

Objectives of the study

1. To establish the impact of social media on brand information sharing among consumers.
2. To determine the challenges of social media use among consumers.
3. To find out how social media influences consumers' decision making.
4. To ascertain the factors promoting the use of social media.

Literature Review

Social Media defined

Agreeing on a universally acceptable definition of social media may be impossible since it is a relatively a new concept (Solis, 2009). Cheung and Lee (2010) define social media as internet based platforms that enable individuals, as members, to construct public profiles in order to share their knowledge and their experiences, to post information about themselves and have contact with others who exchange and share similar interests. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe social media as a group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that facilitates the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Drury (2007) define social media as online resources that people use to share 'content': videos, photos, images, text, ideas, insight, humour, opinion, gossip, and news among other things. Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, (2011) define social media as a set of online tools that are designed for and centred on social interaction. They say that in practice, social media serves as a catchall phrase for a conglomeration of web-based technologies and services such as blogs, microblogs (Twitter), social sharing services (YouTube, Flickr, StumbleUpon, Last.fm), text messaging (WhatsApp), discussion forums, collaborative editing tools (wikis), virtual worlds (Second Life), and social networking services (Facebook, MySpace, Tagged, Google+). Social media is defined by Ahlqvist *et al.*, (2008) as the social interaction among people in which they create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Marketing weapon means that social media can be used as marketing channel or strategy.

Brand Positioning

According to Keller *et al.* (2002) brand positioning, involves establishing vital brand associations in the minds of customers and other important constituents to bring out the uniqueness of the brand and establish competitiveness. Maintaining a favourable corporate image and reputation is an important role of every business (Keller, 2005).

The role of social media in information sharing

According to Brogan (2010) information shared by consumers online can work to a brand's advantage or disadvantage. Evans (2008) postulates that besides opinion from family and friends, people have a longing to gather information first before making decisions. Heinonen (2011) describes human beings as social in today's world and that consumers are participating in a variety of activities, from consuming content to sharing knowledge, experiences, opinions, as well as getting involved in discussions with other consumers online. According to Kwon *et al.* (2014), the success of Face book's social context advertising, which utilizes social plug-in technologies, makes the power of compiled personal networks evident. Kwon and his colleagues are of the notion that social networks are the conduit for both social information and social influence. Bakshy, Eckles, Yan, and Rosenn (2012) posit that those who browse social networking sites like Face book tend to develop an addictive browsing behaviour which can translate into a continuous information sharing culture. Online social networks provide a place for consumers where they can share their product opinions either positive or negative with one another in social interaction (Hennig- Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004).

Social media and decision making

Online social networks have become an efficient major part of human communication and interaction life and influence in different ways on people's behaviour and communication (Cheung & Lee, 2010). Jaeger, Paquette, & Simmons (2010) mention that the United States President, Barak Obama, used social media during his initial presidential campaign and it helped many Americans in making their choices and decisions in the elections. Sinclair & Vogus (2011) believe that nowadays, consumers practise viral marketing spreading product and services opinions through online social networks such as Face book rather than being message receivers from marketers. Hawkins & Mothersbaugh (2010) posit that today's communities are characterized by an online environment which is effectively involved in purchase decision processes and the internet has become an important media for information search.

Traditionally, consumers made their purchase decisions based on information that they received through mass media, for example, advertising, newspapers, television advertisements and comments, among other forms but nowadays, online social networks can have power to affect consumers' purchase decision (East, Wright & Vanhuele, 2008). Senecal and Nantel (2004) are of the notion that online interactions and recommendations influence consumers' product and services choices.

The role of social media in marketing

Neti (2011) describes social media marketing as the new mantra for several brands. Neti (2011) also postulates that no one would want to be left out when it comes to participation on the social web in this digital era characterised by improvements in computer technology. The fundamentals of traditional marketing consider word of mouth as the most trusted source of information (Kotler, 2010). Smith (2012) has alluded to the utilisation of social media as becoming more profound in marketing confirming that over the last few years the web has shifted towards user driven technologies such as blogs, social networks and video sharing platforms which have proved as a convenient source of information for consumers. The online social networks provide facilities for consumers to interact with one another, accessing information, commenting, reviewing and rating content that can help them for purchasing decisions in different ways (Heinrichs, Lim & Lim, 2011). Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2004) describe social media marketing as a variety of information sources available online that are created, initiated, circulated and used by customers for educating and communicating with each other about products, brands, services, personalities among other issues. Traditionally, marketers have been enabled to gain market share by increasing awareness through media (Evans, 2010). Purchase decisions are more likely to be influenced by the degree of awareness the consumers are concerning a product (Evans, 2010). Zarella *et al.* (2010), support the idea that businesses can promote products and services, provide instant support, and or create an online community of brand enthusiasts through all forms of social media such as social networking sites, content communities, virtual worlds, blogs, micro blogging sites, online gaming sites, social bookmarking, news sites, forums and more.

Forces promoting social media use

Valeecha and Reza (2013) have attributed the rise of social media use to rapid technological advancement in recent years. Proliferation of affordable and yet advanced cell phones also contributed. Technological dynamism changed the purpose of communication and enabled the emergence of new internet based communication channels thereby facilitating the crafting of new approaches in the management of the marketing mix. According to Miller (2011), using social media in communicating brand information is less costly than using traditional marketing tools because of the ubiquitous nature of social media. With regards to this, Miller (2011) posits that consumers also use social media since it is the most affordable way of staying connected to each other. The low cost of social media marketing as well as the amount of user information that is available have contributed towards making social media marketing being a big business (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Miller (2011) views the advantage of social media in their ability to enable easy and immediate interaction between people. Meadows-Klue (2008) is of the idea that consumers prefer using social media because they trust views of other consumers more than they can trust the company. Moreover, online word-of mouth communication is considered by Dellarocas (2003) as cheaper, faster, and more effective than traditional marketing tools. Brown, *et al.* (2007) asserts online

communities are flexible, and may be based on a wide range of cultural and social interests. Within the same framework of thinking, Constantinides and Fountain (2008) are of the view that social media is popular because of its advantages like transparency, referrals power and its ability to allow contact with others. In a social network environment, the contribution of individuals to anonymous individuals may be seen as a process of acquiring a reputation which will give the contributor a feeling of power and influence when their comments are taken seriously by others, Palmer and Koenig-Lewis (2009).

Challenges of social media use

Chaffey and Chadwick (2012) noted that creating a social media strategy can be challenging since it requires a change in mindset for the company in the sense that they may have to give up some control on their messaging to enable them to communicate with customers effectively and on a one-to-one basis enabling personalisation and customisation. Valos (2009) is of the view that social media use may entail reconfiguration and reengineering of a company's internal structure in terms of communication, processes and organisational culture. This change complicates the implementation of strategies due to diversity of channels and therefore causes problems when one traditional channel is reduced or altered. To effectively utilise social media, sales people have to come up with innovative and socially encouraging ways of conveying messages (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010) and this can be a challenge for most companies that have not had the privilege of fully integrating social media into their system (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2012). Miller (2011) points out that privacy and security concerns issues have been one of the major hindrance factors to the use of social media. These are crucial cultural issues that influence people's willingness to engage in social media (Miller, 2011). Chaffey and Chadwick, 2012; Miller, 2011), confirmed that many people are reluctant to use social media due to the fear of self exposure and technophobia. For several companies, Miller (2011) maintains that the levelling of organisational hierarchy and what that implies to management in terms of loss of control over subordinates and the fear of losing competitive advantage are some attributes of social media that discourages its adoption business.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

According to Kerlinger (1973), a research design is a plan and structure of an investigation concerned with obtaining answers to the research questions.

It serves as a systematic plan, blueprint or set of instructions for conducting a study according to its objectives (Aarker, Kumar and George, 2007; 77). In this study a cross sectional survey was used. Cross sectional surveys are observational surveys involving the collection of data at a defined time.

Target Population

According to Bless and Smith (1995), target population is a set of elements that the research focuses upon and to which the results obtained by testing the sample should be generalized. The target population of this research comprises of management, employees and customers in the Zimbabwean beverage industry mainly those involved with Delta Beverages, Schweppes Zimbabwe Limited and Dairyboard Pvt Ltd Zimbabwe.

Sampling

Sampling is the selection of representation from a large group strategically and systematically that is large enough to meet the criterion of representing a particular study. Zikmund and Babin (2007) define a sample as a sub set or a portion of the targeted population. Sampling is important as it would be costly in terms of time and budgetary resources to study the whole population (Zikmund and Babin, 2007). The sample size comprised of 70 employees, 10 managers and 100 customers chosen purposively.

Research Instruments

Primary data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. Secondary data was used extensively during literature review and in questionnaire design.

Data Analysis and presentation

Social media Platforms used by respondents

The table indicates that people who use Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube and Skype comprise the largest number of the sample population as represented by the highest percentage which is 16%. On the other hand, those who use LinkedIn are represented by a percentage of 2% which is the lowest percentage value in the frequency table. These findings are in accordance with most of the reviewed literature which alludes that Face book and WhatsApp are the most widely used social media platforms (Miller, 2011).

Table 4.1. Social media platforms used (Generated using the IBM SPSS 20)

Social Media Platform(s) used		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Facebook	5	9.8	10.0	10.0	
	Other	2	3.9	4.0	14.0	
	WhatsApp	3	5.9	6.0	20.0	
	Facebook and Twitter	7	13.7	14.0	34.0	
	Facebook and LinkedIn	1	2.0	2.0	36.0	
	Facebook and YouTube	5	9.8	10.0	46.0	
	Facebook and WhatsApp	4	7.8	8.0	54.0	
	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube	7	13.7	14.0	68.0	
	Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp	8	15.7	16.0	84.0	
	Facebook, WhatsApp and Skype	8	15.7	16.0	100.0	
	Total	50	98.0	100.0		
	Missing	System	1	2.0		
	Total		51	100.0		

Impact of social media on information sharing

One of the main objectives of the study was to find out the impact of social media on information sharing under the assumption that information shared about brands through social media has an effect on brand perception among consumers. This is supported by evidence from the reviewed literature as Smith (2012) states that marketing has shifted to a new kind of word of mouth communication.

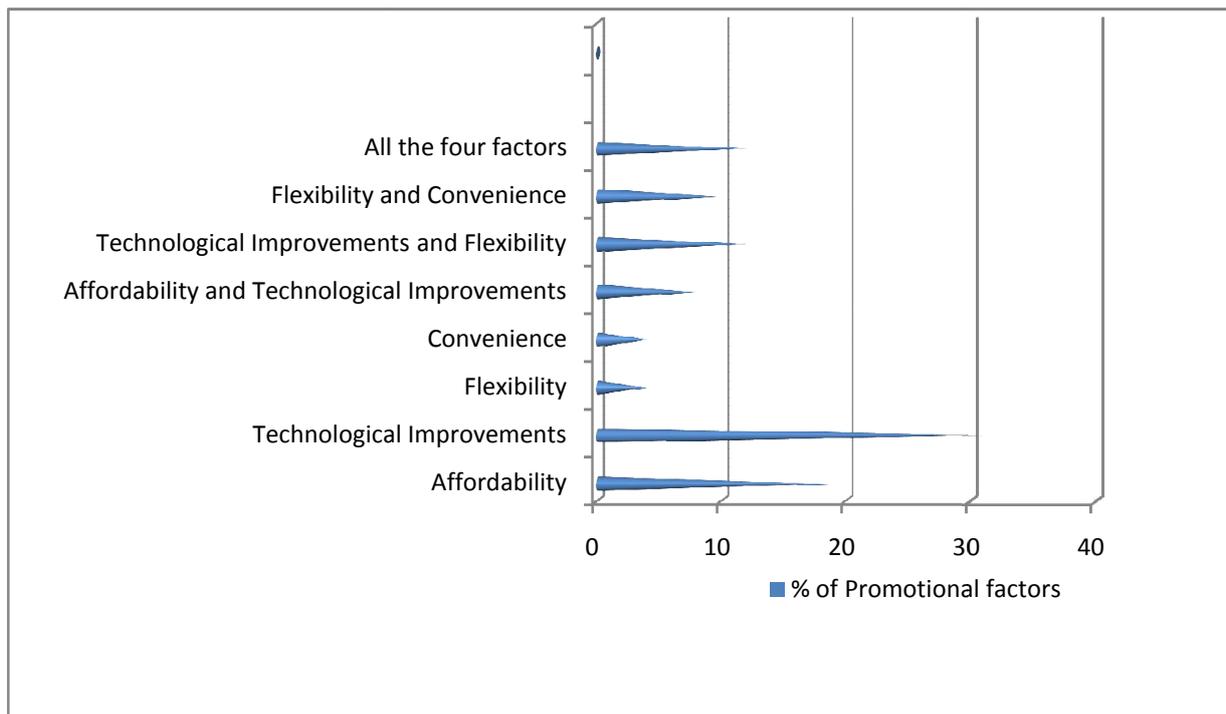
From the sample population, results in Table 4.1 show that a considerable number of people told someone after coming across information about a brand on social media. About 13% purchased a product after coming across some brand information on social media. However, the biggest number of the sample population did nothing after this encounter with brand information on social media. From this, it can be said that social media has not been very much influential on brand information sharing among Zimbabwean beverage consumers.

Table 4.2. Action taken by consumers after coming across information about a beverage brand

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Phoned to enquire	3	5.9	6.3	6.3
	Purchased a product	6	11.8	12.5	18.8
	Searched for more information	3	5.9	6.3	25.0
	Told someone	7	13.7	14.6	39.6
	None of the above	12	23.5	25.0	64.6
	Phoned and Purchased	3	5.9	6.3	70.8
	Purchased and Told someone	3	5.9	6.3	77.1
	Searched for info and Told someone	8	15.7	16.7	93.8
	10	3	5.9	6.3	100.0
	Total	48	94.1	100.0	
Missing	System	3	5.9		
Total		51	100.0		

Table 4.2. The challenges to social media use

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Difficult to use	4	7.8	8.0	8.0
	The need for internet connection	18	35.3	36.0	44.0
	Privacy risk	11	21.6	22.0	66.0
	Can be time consuming	3	5.9	6.0	72.0
	Other	2	3.9	4.0	76.0
	Difficulty and Privacy	2	3.9	4.0	80.0
	Internet and Time	7	13.7	14.0	94.0
	Difficult, Internet and Privacy Risk	3	5.9	6.0	100.0
	Total	50	98.0	100.0	
	Missing	System	1	2.0	
Total		51	100.0		



According to Table 4.2, poor internet connectivity is the formidable challenge being faced by consumers in trying to access and distribute information through social media platforms. The risk of loss privacy and insecurity discourage the usage of social media. Management of these firms feared espionage due to stiff competition in the sector.

To determine the impact of social media on brand positioning

According to the findings from the research, brand positioning for Zimbabwean beverage brands leaves a lot to be desired. Most respondents stated that the perception they have on brand image is poor in as far as social media marketing is concerned. This is demonstrated by suggestions from more than 53% of the respondents who felt that social media platforms like Face book and Whats App were not being fully utilised for the enhancement of brand image for Zimbabwean beverage brands.

Factors promoting use of social media marketing

The diagram below shows factors promoting the use of social media among Zimbabwean beverage consumers as per the sample population of this study. There are several factors motivating usage of social media. These include affordability, convenience, flexibility and technological advancements. Of the four contributing factors, technology emerged as the main factor to the increased use of social media as 31% of the responses from questionnaires supported technological advancements. Valeecha and Reza (2013) suggested that technology is the major contributing factor to the use of social media. Availability of advanced and affordable cell phones contributed in an immense way.

Challenges of Social Media as a marketing tool

Difficulties in use, illiteracy, digital divide, the risk of privacy, time and flexibility were the main challenges to the use of social media. Internet connectivity is still expensive in developing countries like Zimbabwe and therefore is considered a luxury. The need for internet connection especially in rural areas was cited as the main factor followed by privacy risk. It can be noted, according to the study, that many people would like to utilise social media but poor internet connectivity cripples its effectiveness.

Recommendations

Evidence from the study indicated that increased presence on social media can improve brand positioning for the local beverage industry. It is therefore crucial that beverage companies come up with attractive promotional social media strategies. Zimbabwean beverage producers should increase social media presence. This will help in enhancing brand image since content can be shared quickly and affordably among consumers and other stakeholders. Taking advantage of its ubiquitous nature, competitive brand positioning can be attained through social media. Customers of the beverage industry need to be more active on social media platforms since they can improve the quality they get from their preferred brands by suggestions and information shared. In that way,

beverage brands can be improved complying with tastes and preferences of consumers conveyed through comments and information shared through social media.

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