

Effects of Social Media Marketing on Brand Awareness Based on the Stimulus Organism Response Model in Developing Countries

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess how social media marketing (SMM), which includes trendiness, eWOM, interactivity, and informativeness, affected brand awareness in the education services industry in Lusaka, Zambia, with a focus on the University of Zambia. The study's theoretical foundations were the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) and Customer Bonding theories. A structured survey questionnaire was used in data collection, and Pearson's R was used to analyze the effect of SMM on brand awareness. The University of Zambia's 277 students were the study's target population. The method of simple random sampling was applied. The study found that SMM significantly increased brand awareness in the education services industry in trendiness, eWOM, interaction, and informativeness. The study also found that poor scheduling for SMM and problems with internet access affect how effective SMM is at raising brand awareness in the Lusaka, Zambia, education services industry. The SMM framework for increasing brand awareness was designed based on the findings. According to the study's findings, social media marketing (SMM) is an essential instrument for market communication in the Lusaka, Zambia, education services industry, helping to raise brand awareness. Accordingly, the study suggested that Zambian educational institutions consistently invest in social media marketing (SMM) to build and enhance brand recognition.

Keywords

Social Media Marketing, Brand Awareness, Education Services Sector, Interactivity, Informativeness, Word of Mouth, Trendiness

1. Introduction

The utilization of social media marketing (SMM) has brought about a significant transformation in the manner in which firms engage in brand promotion and establish connections with their intended consumer base. The emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter now X have provided firms with a potent weapon to augment their brand recognition. Given the increasing globalization, stiff competition and rapidly changing consumer demands, SMM has been considered a tool for promoting brand awareness of business corporations (Cheung, Pires, & Rosenberger, 2019). The need to understand the link between SMM and brand awareness has sparked research interests among researchers and scholars. However, there is scant of empirical studies on the impact of SMM in the context of the education sector where social media is increasingly being employed (Raj, 2022). As supported by Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti (2016), despite its increasing and ubiquitous use by organisations, scholar research on SMM is scant and organisations deploy SMM guided by intuition or trial and error.

In the context of Zambia, as observed by Mukosa, Mbewe and Kayombo (2022), although SMM has been employed the education sector in Zambia as part of their integrated marketing strategies, there is lack of empirical evidence on social media as a marketing tool as most of the existing literature focused use of social media as a teaching aid. This represents a significant empirical gap which is the primary motivation for this present study. Given the need to fill the existing empirical gap, this study aimed to examine the effects of SMM on brand awareness in the education service sector in Lusaka, Zambia using a case study of higher educational institutions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Media Marketing

The concept of “social media marketing” has been variably defined in scholarly literature, often referring to the practise of establishing and nurturing connections with existing and prospective clients in order to cultivate relationships with them (Sohaib, Safeer, & Majeed, 2022). Yadav and Rahman (2018b) argue that there is a lack of consensus in the existing literature about the definition of SMM, despite its increasing popularity in both industry and academia. Li, Larimo, and Leonidou (2021) define SMM as the strategic utilisation of social media platforms within marketing activities to enhance stakeholder value. Mukosa et al. (2022) define SMM as a contemporary kind of media within the marketing domain, which has become an integral component of marketing communication strategies. Moyo (2018) define SMM as “the use of social media websites and social networks to market a company’s products and services”. Shareef et al. (2019) also describe SMM as a complementary strategy to the old marketing way, which is applied on social media sites.

Furthermore, as stated by [Monica and Balaay \(2015\)](#), SMM encompasses a range of strategies aimed at engaging social networks and their users with the objective of enhancing brand recognition or promoting specific products. According to [Mukosa et al. \(2022\)](#), SMM can be more precisely characterised as the use of internet technologies rooted in Web 2.0 to establish connections and interactions between commercial enterprises and their clientele. However, despite the various definitions, there is consensus among scholars regarding the meaning of SMM. In this study, the working definition is drawn from [Yadav and Rahman \(2018b\)](#) who defined SMM as:

“A process by which companies create, communicate, and deliver online marketing offerings via social media platforms to build and maintain stakeholder relationships that enhance stakeholders’ value by facilitating interaction, information sharing, offering personalized purchase recommendations, and word of mouth creation among stakeholders about existing and trending products and services”.

Moreover, there exist other activities that encompass the scope of SMM. The primary activities associated with SMM encompass interaction, personalization, informativeness, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), and trendiness. According to [Sohaib et al. \(2022\)](#), SMM activities encompass the systematic approach employed by organisations to originate, convey, and distribute online marketing offers, including products and services, across various social media platforms. The primary objective of these activities is to establish and sustain connections that yield value for stakeholders. According to [Yadav and Rahman \(2018a\)](#), interactivity refers to the extent to which consumers think that social media platforms in e-commerce facilitate the exchange of content and ideas between the business and other consumers. In contrast, informativeness can be defined as the degree to which individuals regard social media platforms as offering precise, beneficial, and reliable information pertaining to e-commerce enterprises ([Khoa & Huynh, 2023](#)).

Another primary activity in SMM is customization, which refers to the degree to which consumers perceive an e-commerce website’s social media platforms as providing tailored services that cater to their individual requirements and preferences ([Sohaib et al., 2022](#)). In addition to personalization, there exists a concept known as eWOM, which refers to the perceptions held by consumers regarding the degree to which they recommend and share their experiences with e-commerce enterprises through social media platforms ([Yadav & Rahman, 2018b](#)). Finally, the term “trendiness” pertains to the extent to which a consumer perceives an e-commerce website’s social media platforms as showcasing fashionable and up-to-date information ([Khoa & Huynh, 2023](#); [Sohaib et al., 2022](#)).

2.2. Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is widely recognized as an essential factor in the development

of brand equity, which pertains to the extent of a brand's recognition and recall among consumers as well as their capacity to correctly associate the brand with various circumstances (Alexandra & Cerchia, 2018). The level of brand awareness is associated with the probability of its recall and the level of cognitive effort required for such recall (Bernarto et al., 2020). Brand awareness, as defined by Bilgin (2018), refers to the capacity of customers to recognize and recall a brand as belonging to a specific product category, and to do so consistently across various contexts. According to the findings of Alexandra and Cerchia (2018), brand awareness holds significant importance in the process of consumer decision-making. This is primarily because it serves as an initial stage in which a brand is included in the consideration set, either through recognition or recollection of the brand (Alexandra & Cerchia, 2018).

The concept of brand awareness according to Aaker (2020) encompasses two key components: brand recognition and brand recall. Brand recognition refers to consumers' capacity to identify a brand based on prior exposure, particularly when the brand is presented as a cue (Khurram, Qadeer, & Sheeraz, 2018). On the other hand, brand recall pertains to consumers' ability to retrieve a brand when provided with cues such as the product category, the needs fulfilled by the category, or similar prompts (Kotler & Keller, 2021). In cooperation, both brand recognition and brand recall play a crucial role in maintaining brand awareness, the primary goal of which is to build a powerful brand image with enduring connections that demonstrate brand resonance (Latif, Islam, & Noor, 2015).

According to Yusoff and Azmel (2022), brand awareness refers to the extent to which a product or service is readily recalled and considered by consumers. Tritama and Tarigan (2016) argue that the establishment of brand awareness necessitates a continuum that encompasses the first state of doubt regarding a brand's familiarity, up to the consumer's conviction that the product is the sole representative within a specific category. Brand awareness may be described as the capacity of attributes like as the brand's name, symbol, and emblem to be established inside the cognitive framework of customers, enabling them to identify and retain knowledge about the brand (Kotler & Keller, 2021). According to Kotler and Keller (2021), brand awareness can be defined as the ability of a brand to be chosen by consumers within a set of product categories, with the intention of being remembered by them. According to Osman (2021), brand awareness encompasses the process of establishing and cultivating the level of familiarity and recognition that a specific brand holds among its intended audience.

According to Kotler and Keller (2021), the establishment of brand awareness is a crucial factor in the process of consumer decision-making. This is primarily attributed to its ability to initiate the inclusion of a brand in the consideration set, which is facilitated by the consumer's recognition or recollection of the brand (Khurram et al., 2018).

From the aforementioned review of related literature, a significant number of

researches has been conducted on SMM and brand awareness. Majority of previous studies have found a positive relationship between SMM and brand awareness. Regardless of this, majority of these studies have been conducted in other sectors such as banking, manufacturing, retail, real estate, airline and telecommunication sectors whilst little attention has been paid to the education service sector. Additionally, majority of the studies has been done outside the African continent as most of the prior studies have been done in European and Asian countries. Furthermore, most of the studies on social media in the education sector have focused on its role as teaching aid and not necessarily as a marketing tool. In particular, no research has examined the effects of SMM on brand awareness in the education services sector of Zambia. Hence, little is known about the impact of SMM on brand awareness in the Zambia's education services sector. Therefore, this research sought to fill the noted gaps in literature by examining the effects of SMM on brand awareness in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia with special reference to the higher educational institutions in Lusaka, Zambia. The difference of this present study compared to previous studies is that it analyzes the impacts of SMM on brand awareness in the context of the education services sector in Zambia.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design to help in answering the research questions and achieve the objectives. Descriptive research designs are meant to provide answers to who, what, where, when and how questions (Creswell, 2017).

A deductive approach was used in this study given the quantitative nature of the research, aim and objectives. One crucial attribute of the deductive research approach is the utilization of quantitative data collection and analysis to address research questions that have the potential to validate or disprove established theories or hypotheses (Saunders et al., 2020). More so, the deductive research approach was found suitable to test the hypotheses of the study.

The target population for the study consisted of students at the University of Zambia. According to recent statistics, the student population at the University of Zambia was approximately 21,812 as at the year ending 2022 (UNZA, 2023). Hence, 21,812 represented the population size for the study.

The researcher employed the simple random sampling technique. This random sampling technique was preferred as it ensured that every enrolled student at the university had an equal chance of being selected thereby enhancing validity of the findings.

The following Slovin's (1960) formula was employed to estimate the representative sample size for the study:

$$n = N/1 + N(e)^2 \text{ with 5\% error of margin,}$$

where n , N and e represent the sample size, population size, and error margin re-

spectively. Therefore, given the finite population of 21,812 and the sampling error margin of 5%, the representative sample size for the study was found to be 393.

The study collected quantitative primary data using structured questionnaires which were self-administered by the researcher. Questionnaires were preferred as they allowed collection of large amounts of data in the shortest time possible. The structured questionnaires had close-ended questions under the five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The measurement scale for SMM was adapted from the SMM scales developed by [Khan and Jan \(2019\)](#), [Alalwan \(2018\)](#) and [Yadav and Rahman \(2018b\)](#). On the other hand, brand awareness was measured by adapting the brand awareness measurement scale by [Dabbous and Barakat \(2020\)](#) and [Munyau \(2017\)](#). The questionnaire had four sections where the first section captured demographic information of the respondents whilst the remaining three sections collected information pertaining to the research objectives. The questionnaire method was deemed the most appropriate method to collect primary quantitative data for the study.

The questionnaires were administered to 393 respondents at the university, of which 277 correctly completed questionnaires were returned which represented a 70.4% response rate.

To ensure content validity, the researcher pilot tested the questionnaires to randomly selected 40 students from the ZCAS university in Zambia to check whether the questionnaire was correct, easy to understand and had contextual relevance. The pilot study also helped to improve validity as the respondents to the pilot study picked up some errors, ambiguities or any limitations that were in the questionnaires including wording and structure of the questions. For face validity, the researcher shared the questionnaire with marketing experts where the main aim was to get the opinions of the experts on the content and relevance of the questionnaire. For construct and content validity, the questionnaire was developed making use of existing literature.

The reliability of the study was ensured by carrying out a pilot study where data from the pilot study was used to estimate the Cronbach's alpha statistic which measures internal consistency of a research instrument. The 0.7 threshold was employed to check for reliability.

3.1. Data Analysis and Presentation

The research study employed both quantitative data analysis techniques. The analysis procedure included data cleaning, editing, sorting and coding. Quantitative data from survey questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive analysis (means, frequencies, percentages and standard deviations) and inferential analysis (correlations). The correlation analysis was mainly conducted to test the hypotheses stated in Chapter One. The researcher used Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 27 to analyze the data. The results were presented in form of tables, pie charts, histograms and bar charts. The mean (M) statistics were interpreted using the framework proposed by [Pimentel and Pimentel \(2019\)](#)

shown in **Table 1**.

On the other hand, the correlation coefficients for this study are interpreted using the proposed rule of thumb by **Schober, Boer and Schwarte (2018)** shown in **Table 2**.

3.2. Conceptual Framework

Through review of the Stimulus Organism Response model alongside other relevant literature and models the study identified factors affecting Social Media Marketing and developed the hypotheses. Descriptive and correlation analysis was used in the study.

Based on the study the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Interactivity in SMM positively influences brand awareness in the education services sector.

H2: Informativeness in SMM positively influences brand awareness in the education services sector.

H3: Electronic word of mouth in SMM positively influences brand awareness in the education services sector.

H4: Brand awareness in the education services sector is positively impacted by trendiness in SMM.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings, analysis, and discussion of the results. Tables and graphs are used to present the data obtained from the questionnaire, while

Table 1. Interpretations of mean statistics from 5-point Likert scales.

| Mean Statistic | Interpretation |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| $0 \leq M < 1.5$ | Disagree Strongly |
| $1.5 \leq M < 2.5$ | Disagree |
| $2.5 \leq M < 3.5$ | Neutral |
| $3.5 \leq M < 4.5$ | Agree |
| $4.5 \leq M < 5.0$ | Strongly Agree |

Adapted from **Pimentel and Pimentel (2019)**.

Table 2. Rule of thumb for interpreting correlation coefficients.

| Value of Correlation Coefficient | Relationship Interpretation |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 0.000 - 0.199 | Very Weak |
| 0.200 - 0.399 | Weak |
| 0.400 - 0.599 | Moderate |
| 0.600 - 0.799 | Strong |
| 0.800 - 1.000 | Very Strong |

Source: **Schober et al. (2018)**.

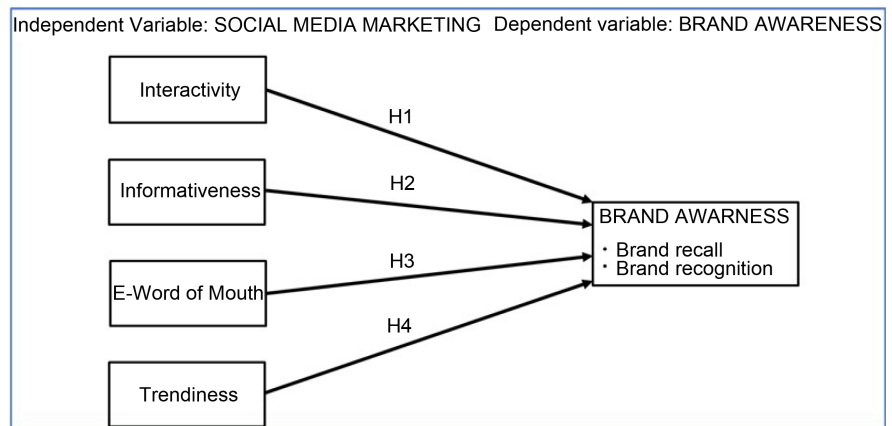


Figure 1. Proposed model of the study.

the findings are discussed in light of the reviewed literature. Firstly, the chapter presents the response rate for the survey, then the results of the reliability test and then the demographics of the participants. Lastly, results pertaining to the research objectives are presented in this chapter (Figure 1).

As shown in Figure 2, the majority of participants (52.3%) were males while 47.3% were females. This reflects that the majority of the students at the University of Zambia are males.

As shown in Figure 3, the highest proportion of the survey participants (73.3%) indicated that they were between 18 and 30 years old, followed by 18.4% who were between 31 and 40 years old. Additionally, 8.3 percent were between 41 and 50 years. These findings indicate that the majority of the students at the University of Zambia are aged between 18 and 30 years.

As shown in Figure 4, the largest percentage of the survey participants (33.6%) indicated that they were from the Faculty of Education whilst the minority (3.6%) were from the Law faculty. The rest were from the Agricultural Sciences (13.0%), Humanities and Social Sciences (13.0%), Health Sciences (10.1%), Graduate School of Business (9.4%), Engineering (5.4%) and Natural Sciences (5.1%). Additionally, 6.9 percent were from other faculties at the University of Zambia. These findings indicate that the participants were fairly distributed across several faculties at the university implying lack of sampling bias and ultimately improved validity of findings.

Factors that affect Social Media Marketing on Brand Awareness in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia.

This section presents and analyses the descriptive results pertaining to the study.

The results in Table 3 show mean statistics ranging between 3.5 and 4.5 for all the statements pertaining to the informativeness activity of SMM. The results mean that majority of the participants were in agreement to each of the statements. These results showed that based on informativeness, the university practice SMM.

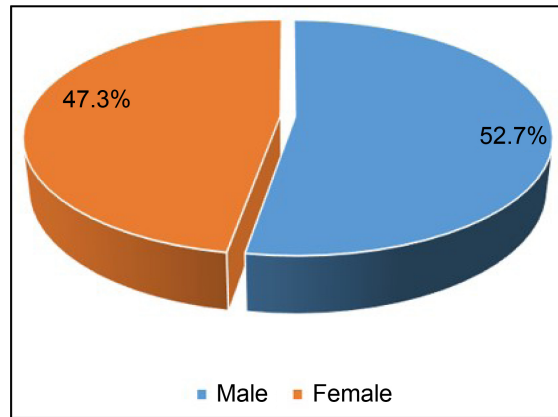


Figure 2. Gender disposition.

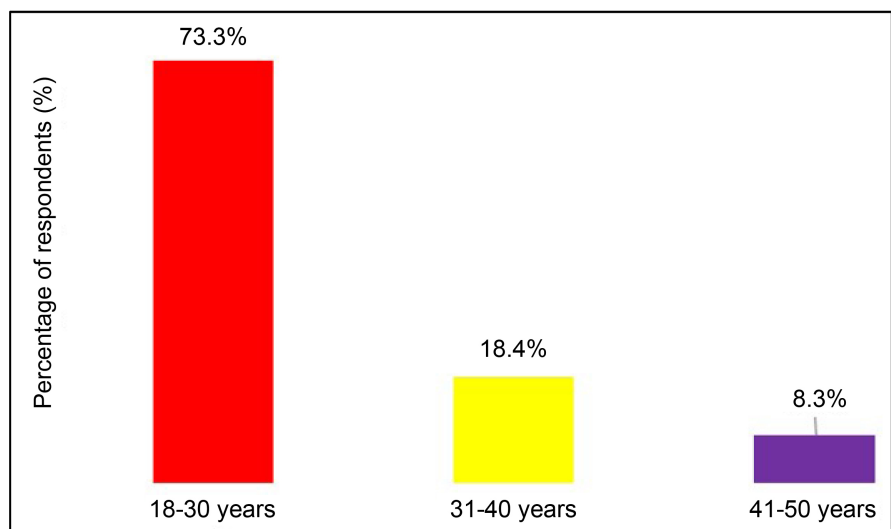


Figure 3. Age.

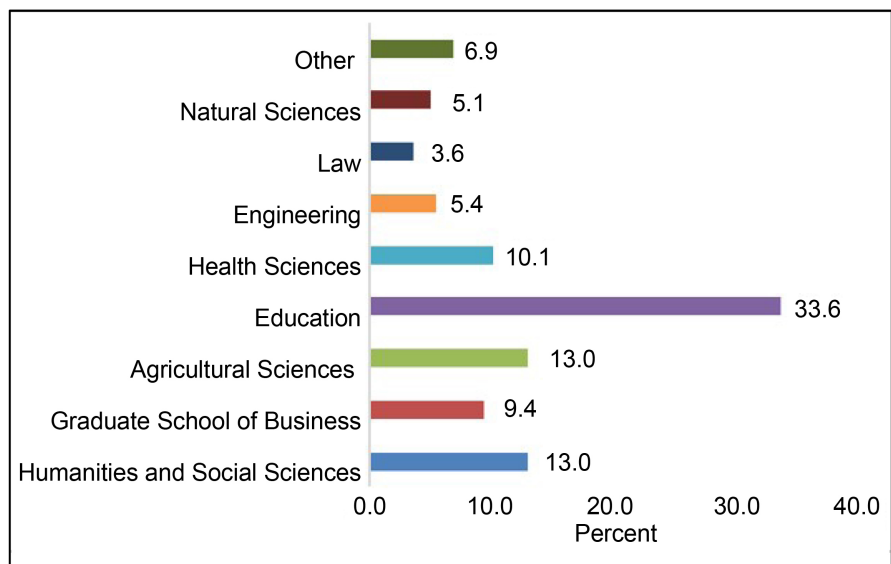


Figure 4. Faculty.

Table 3. Informativeness.

| Code | Statement | M | SD |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|
| INF1 | SMM is a good source of information and supplies relevant information regarding educational services | 3.99 | 0.634 |
| INF2 | SMM provides timely information to target audience | 4.03 | 0.767 |
| INF3 | The university shares informative caption on its social media platforms | 3.79 | 0.745 |
| INF4 | SMM is a good source of up-to-date information regarding educational services | 4.05 | 0.775 |
| INF5 | The university share informative information of the services on social media platforms | 3.82 | 0.880 |

The results presented in **Table 4** show that all the statements pertaining to the interactivity activity of SMM had mean statistics ranging between 3.5 and 4.5 implying that on average majority of the participants agreed. These results showed that in terms of interactivity, the University of Zambia practice SMM.

The descriptive results signposted in **Table 5** show that all the three statements pertaining to eWOM in SMM had mean statistics of 3.79, 3.88 and 3.80 respectively. These mean statistics were between 3.5 and 4.5 implying that on average majority of the participants agreed to the statements pertaining to eWOM. Hence, the results revealed increased utilization of SMM by the University of Zambia in terms of eWOM.

The results in **Table 6** show mean statistics ranging between 3.5 and 4.5 to all the statements pertaining to trendiness in SMM. The results mean that majority of the survey participants agreed to each of the statements pertaining to trendiness activity. In overall, these results showed that based on trendiness, the University of Zambia practice SMM.

4.1. Hypothesis Analysis

This section presents the results of the correlation analyses carried out for hypothesis testing. The main aim of the study was to evaluate the effects of SMM on brand awareness in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia. In line with this aim, the study aimed to evaluate the effects of the SMM activities (interactivity, informativeness, e-word of mouth and trendiness) on brand awareness in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia. The results of the correlation test are presented in **Table 4**.

As shown in **Table 7**, the results of the Pearson Correlation test estimated a positive correlation coefficient of 0.589 for informativeness which is statistically significant at 5% level ($p = 0.000$). These results indicate that Informativeness has a significant moderate correlation with brand awareness in the education

Table 4. Interactivity in SMM.

| Code | Statement | M | SD |
|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|
| INTER1 | SMM is effective in gathering customers' feedback | 3.92 | 0.794 |
| INTER2 | The social media sites of the university are interactive | 3.82 | 0.684 |
| INTER3 | SMM encourages customers to offer feedback | 4.04 | 0.734 |
| INTER4 | It is possible to exchange opinions or conversation with other users through the university's social media | 3.75 | 0.801 |
| INTER5 | SMM facilitates two-way communication between the university and customers | 4.02 | 0.840 |

Table 5. Electronic WOM in SMM.

| Code | Statement | M | SD |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|
| eWOM1 | I would like to pass along information on brand or services from the university's social media platforms to my friends | 3.79 | 0.995 |
| eWOM2 | I would like to share opinions on brands, items, or services acquired from the university's social media platforms with my acquaintances | 3.88 | 0.840 |
| eWOM3 | I would like to upload contents from the university's social media platforms on my blog or micro blog | 3.80 | 0.763 |

Table 6. Trendiness in SMM.

| Code | Statement | M | SD |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|
| TRE1 | Contents shown in the university's social media platforms is the newest information | 3.75 | 0.789 |
| TRE2 | The university has large number of social media followers compared to the other universities in Zambia | 3.94 | 0.713 |
| TRE3 | Presence of the University brand is very high on social media platforms | 3.95 | 0.665 |
| TRE4 | Using the university's social media is very trendy | 4.02 | 0.601 |
| TRE5 | The frequency of updates from the university's social media is very high | 4.04 | 0.765 |

services sector in Lusaka, Zambia. In short, the results imply that informativeness of SMM can significantly promote brand awareness in the sector. Based on the results, the research failed to reject the hypothesis stated in Chapter 1 concluding that SMM through informativeness has a significant positive influence on brand awareness in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia. The results are also in consonance with those of [Parastati \(2022\)](#) who showed significant positive relationships between informativeness in SMM and brand awareness in

Table 7. Pearson correlation results.

| | Variables | Brand Awareness |
|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Informativeness | Pearson Correlation | 0.589*** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 |
| | N | 277 |
| Interactivity | Pearson Correlation | 0.526*** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 |
| | N | 277 |
| eWOM | Pearson Correlation | 0.509*** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 |
| | N | 277 |
| Trendiness | Pearson Correlation | 0.757*** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 |
| | N | 277 |

NB: ***means significant at 5%.

the Indonesia's real estate sector.

More so, the results in **Table 7** show that the study revealed a statistically significant but moderate correlation between Interactivity and brand awareness ($r = 0.526$; $p = 0.000$). These results mean that interactivity in SMM can significantly increase brand awareness in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia. These results therefore resulted in the researcher failing to reject the hypothesis leading to the conclusion that interactivity in SMM positively influences brand awareness in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia. The results are in agreement with the study by [Thuy and Long \(2023\)](#) which found that SMM activities such as interaction positively impact customers' brand awareness in Vietnam. Similarly, [Barua and Zaman \(2019\)](#) examined the role of SMM on brand awareness in private universities in Bangladesh and found significant positive effects of interactivity on brand awareness. [Elaydi \(2018\)](#) examined the effects of SMM on brand awareness in the mobile services sector in Egypt and found a positive link between interactivity as a dimension of SMM and brand awareness.

The correlation results shown in **Table 7** show a positive significant correlation coefficient of 0.509 for eWOM which is statistically significant at 5% level ($p = 0.000$). These results indicate a significant moderate correlation between eWOM and brand awareness in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia. The researcher therefore failed to reject the hypothesis concluding that SMM through eWOM has a significant positive influence on brand awareness in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia. The results corroborate with the study by [Faisal and Ekawanto \(2021\)](#) which showed that SMM activities in terms of WOM have a positive impact on brand awareness. More so, [Thuy and Long](#)

(2023) also found that eWOM through SMM positively impact customers' brand awareness. Yusoff and Azmel (2022) also cited that SMM enables organisations to effectively engage with consumers and achieve WOM communication thereby aiding in building brand awareness.

Lastly, the correlation results presented in **Table 7** show that the study revealed a statistically significant strong correlation between SMM's trendiness and brand awareness ($r = 0.757$; $p = 0.000$). These results imply that trendiness in SMM can significantly boost brand awareness in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia. These results therefore led to the failure to reject the hypothesis leading to the conclusion that brand awareness in the education services sector is positively impacted by trendiness in SMM. The results agree with Bilgin (2018) who studied the effects of SMM on brand awareness in Turkey and established that the SMM activity of trendiness has significant positive effects on brand awareness. Barua and Zaman (2019) also found significant positive effects of trendiness on brand awareness. However, the results contradict the findings by Thuy and Long (2023) trendiness has the little impact on brand awareness.

In overall, the correlation results presented in **Table 7** have shown that SMM activities namely interactivity, informativeness, eWOM and trendiness have significant positive effects on brand awareness in the education services sector. The results have resulted in the support of the research hypotheses stated earlier as summarised in **Table 8**.

In conclusion, all the hypotheses were supported implying a significant positive relationship between SMM and brand awareness in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia. The results mean that SMM represents an effective

Table 8. Summary of hypothesis results.

| Hypothesis | Correlation coefficient | P-value | Decision |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------|----------------------|
| H1: Interactivity in SMM positively influences brand awareness in the education services sector | 0.526 | 0.000 | Hypothesis supported |
| H2: Informativeness in SMM positively influences brand awareness in the education services sector repeated | 0.589 | 0.000 | Hypothesis supported |
| H3: Electronic word of mouth in SMM positively influences brand awareness in the education services sector | 0.509 | 0.000 | Hypothesis supported |
| H4: Brand awareness in the education services sector is positively impacted by trendiness in SMM | 0.757 | 0.000 | Hypothesis supported |

tool for creating and increasing brand awareness in the education services sector in Zambia. The significant positive relationship between SMM and brand awareness support existing literature and theories. For instance, the results concur with the Customer Bonding Theory which predicts that social bonds are derived from customer-firm interactions. In the same vein, the results are consistent with the SOR theory.

On the other hand, the results support the findings of previous empirical studies. For instance, Bilgin (2018) found that SMM plays a crucial role in enhancing brand recall and recognition by creating brand awareness. Further, Chierici et al. (2019) and Maria et al. (2019) reported that SMM provide firms with effective ways to boost brand awareness. The results also support the empirical findings from the studies by Ahmad (2020), Barua and Zaman (2019), Elaydi (2018), Malanda (2020), Mehdi and Kalim (2023) and Saydan and Dülek (2019) which revealed that SMM has significant positive influence on brand awareness.

4.2. SMM Framework for Building Branding Awareness

The study aimed to formulate a SMM framework for building branding awareness in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia. The framework presented in Figure 5 was developed based on the results presented and analysed in this chapter as well as the SOR theory.

As shown in Figure 5, the proposed framework may be employed in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia. From the framework, the institutions in the education services sector may enhance effectiveness of SMM through several interventions such as proper timing of social media posting, creating trust and positive attitudes in SMM, training of social media marketers, ensuring supportive organisational culture, ensuring quality and relevant content as well as

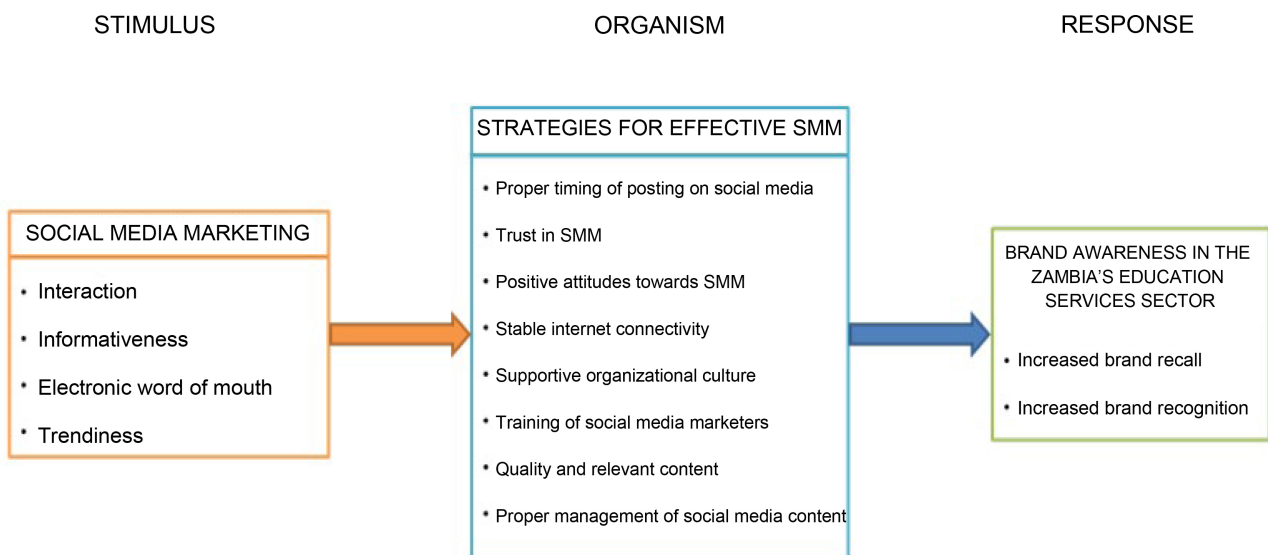


Figure 5. Proposed SMM framework

proper management of social media content. Through these, the institutions in the education services sector may realize increased brand awareness through increased brand recall and brand recognition. The proposed framework is also similar to that one developed by [Cheung et al. \(2019\)](#) for examining SMM effects on brand awareness.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the results, the main conclusion drawn SMM represents a significant market communication tool for promoting brand awareness in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia. More so, the research concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between SMM and brand awareness in the education services sector in Zambia. Thus, to increase brand awareness, institutions in the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia may market and promote their service offerings via social media.

Contributions of the Study

The study made significant contributions to the body of empirical knowledge, policy and practice. In other words, the results of the study have indicated to have significant contributions to theory, practice and policy. The theoretical implications are that the study has made significant contributions to the existing knowledge on SMM and brand awareness given dearth of literature in the context of the education services sector in developing African countries such as Zambia. In this regard, the findings of the study provide additional information to the existing body of literature regarding SMM and brand awareness in the education sector. The research also represents an important source of empirical literature on SMM and brand awareness to future scholars and researchers.

Besides theoretical implications, the study also has significant practical and policy implications. Precisely, the research findings help in guiding effective utilization of SMM in the education services sector in Zambia towards building brand awareness. The findings of the study would be of value to marketing managers in the education services sector as they offer insights for sound evidence-based decision making towards increasing brand awareness in the education services sector.

6. Limitations of Study

Firstly, the study was limited to the education services sector in Lusaka, Zambia focusing on the University of Zambia as the single case study. Hence, the results of the study may not be generalized to the entire education services sector in Zambia such that there is need for further research to be conducted making use of several educational institutions to improve on generalisability and validity of results. In addition, the research was purely quantitative in nature such that some important qualitative information could have been left out. Hence, further re-

search needs to be undertaking employing qualitative or mixed-method research methods. In this regard, future researchers may make use of research methods such as interviews and observations to gather in-depth information to address the research topic. Other research studies may be conducted in other sectors such as the telecommunication, banking, retail and manufacturing sectors in Zambia for improved generalisability. The study was more focused in the higher education sector thereby limiting generalisability of results. Hence, the need for a replica of the study focusing on primary and secondary educational institutions.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations for policy and practice were made:

- 1) The study recommends the educational institutions including the University of Zambia to continuously invest in SMM as it was found to have significant positive effects on brand awareness.
- 2) The institutions in the education services sector such as the University of Zambia are also recommended to integrate SSM into their integrated marketing communication plans.
- 3) There is also need for the institutions to undertake training and capacity development programmes for marketers for effective SMM.
- 4) The study also recommends the Government of Zambia to invest in Internet connectivity infrastructure through private-public partnerships with internet service providers to ensure uninterrupted internet connectivity towards effective SMM.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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