



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Assessing the impact of e-marketing on business performance and customer relationship in livingstone district, Zambia

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Abstract

In today's world, businesses are increasingly relying on electronic marketing to support their marketing efforts, due to the increase in online users. This research is set out to assess the impact of e-marketing on business performance of service and manufacturing enterprises and the relationship with customers in Livingstone Zambia. The main objectives of this study are to assess the effects of e-marketing on business performance, business to customer relationship and the efficiency of e-marketing in Livingstone. This study will utilize the descriptive research design as the study is intended to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The targeted groups for this study comprise of employees from the one hundred forty-seven (147) selected service and manufacturing enterprises in Zambia's Livingstone town. The study will employ convenient sampling to select the 147 companies. The study will use both SPSS and Microsoft Excel to analyze data.

Purpose: Marketing has always been about utilizing tools to connect with the business audience at the right place and time. While traditional marketing methods are still relevant in our modern age, the sheer amount of time spent relying on the internet has meant that e-marketing has boomed. Despite the growing importance of digital marketing, many businesses in Livingstone District struggle to effectively leverage e-marketing strategies to enhance their business performance, customer engagement and revenue growth. According to the Tourism Statistical Digest by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2015) Zambia failed to meet its annual target of attracting 1 million tourists and only received 1.7 % of total tourist arrivals despite having world class attractions such as the Victoria falls, diverse wildlife in the national parks and historical heritage sites. This study will assess the impact of e-marketing on business performance and customer relationship. By addressing this problem, businesses can gain insights into optimizing their e-marketing efforts to drive growth and success in their businesses.

Methodology: The research approach adopted a mixed research design using both qualitative and quantitative research design which applied an integrated E-marketing model with two hypothesis tests using the sample size of 147 business entities. This helped fulfil the aim of gathering information regarding numerical data and frequency as well as quantity, to measure the variables. The advantages of a mixed method research approach support the decision to undertake combined method research as it allows a freedom to use numerous methods to address the difficulty of the research problem. While undertaking a mixed method design for this study, a rigorous effort was made to collect both types of data in a timely way and to make certain that the data is integrated in a correct and accurate way.

Findings: The research indicated that the majority of the respondents (72%) recognized that the use of e-marketing in the form of their company's website had increased their business performance. Owning a website as a business for marketing had a significant influence on business performance and customer relationship with $p = .001$.

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This is consistent with Loda, Teichmann and Zins (2009:70) who highlight that a website is one of the most crucial tools businesses or individuals can use to nurture their digital presence. Whether they are a small firm, a large corporation, or a freelancer, making a website is a highly effective way to make the business more visible and a website design focused on visual appeal and smooth functioning can encourage visitors to explore more and visit again.

Keywords: E-marketing; Websites; Social Media; Performance

1. Introduction

E-marketing in today's business landscape cannot be overstated. E-Marketing is defined as the marketing of goods and services online using the internet. According to Khan (2012), E-marketing refers to the application of marketing principles and techniques via electronic media and more specially, the internet. E-Marketing can further be defined and referred to as the use of information technology to market and promote tourism products or any other business products and services. According to Makuni (2007), the use of the Internet for communicating and transacting with customers has been growing rapidly world over.

The impact of E-marketing on the relationship with customers is crucial in the digital age. E-marketing has revolutionized the way businesses interact with their customers, allowing for personalized marketing messages and targeted advertising. As a result, businesses can build stronger relationships with their customers by providing relevant and tailored content to meet their specific needs and preferences. The efficiency of E-marketing is influenced by various factors, such as reach, targeting, and measurement. One important factor that influences the efficiency of E-marketing is reach. Reach refers to the number of potential customers or target audience that an E-marketing campaign can reach.

According to Onyeocha and Iwuagwu (2015), E-marketing is the application of marketing principles and techniques using the internet. They argue that E-Marketing is the process of marketing a brand using the Internet. According to Banerjee (2016), E-marketing is often referred to as online marketing or internet marketing is a marketing technique where we are channelizing the marketing and promotion online with the aid of internet that further incorporates online advertising, using emails and social networking for promotion, here every aspect is been marketed and promoted online and in totality connected to distribution and sales. Since E-marketing mainly uses the internet, it therefore makes it the most effective strategy of reaching out to millions of customers and markets.

E-marketing is the ideal model of doing business. The use of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter and whatsapp has rendered E-marketing to be the most effective mode of marketing in the modern age. E-marketing plays a crucial role in the success of businesses, particularly in the context of e-commerce and digital marketing. The internet has revolutionized the way businesses operate, providing numerous opportunities for marketing and promoting products or services. In recent years, the use of the internet has shown continuous and rapid growth (Hoffman & Novak, 1995). This growth is driven by the increasing number of internet users and the recognition of its importance as a source of competitive advantage in both business-to-business and business-to-consumer marketing systems.

According to Kiriro (2015), E-marketing not only allows businesses to reach a wider audience and target specific customer segments, but it also provides cost-effective and efficient ways to communicate with customers, build brand identity and drive sales. Additionally, E-marketing enables businesses to gather and analyze data on consumer behavior, preferences and trends which can be used to tailor marketing strategies and provide products and services to suit the consumer (Wisdom, 2015).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing importance of e-marketing, many businesses in Livingstone District struggle to effectively leverage e-marketing strategies to enhance their business performance, customer engagement and revenue growth. According to the Tourism Statistical Digest by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2015) Zambia failed to meet its annual target of attracting 1 million tourists and only received 1.7 % of total tourist arrivals despite having world class attractions such as the Victoria falls, diverse wildlife in the national parks and historical heritage sites. This study will assess the impact of e-marketing on business performance and customer relationship. By addressing this problem, businesses can gain insights into optimizing their e-marketing efforts to drive growth and success in their businesses.

1.2. Objectives

- To evaluate the effects of e-marketing on business performance of service and manufacturing industries in Livingstone.
- To analyze the effects of e-marketing on business to customer relationship in Livingstone.
- To evaluate the efficiency of e-marketing in service and manufacturing industries in Livingstone.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Framework

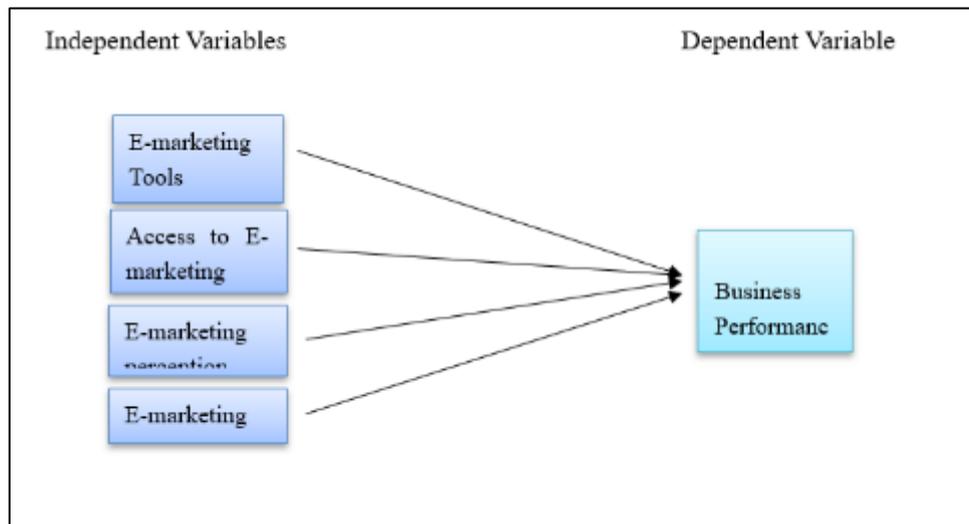


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Customer-led positioning theory holds that the customer is the one showing the marketers what they want in the product or service. The customer can offer insights to the product team by gathering data about prices, product features, product function and more. For example, when customers purchase medications, they are more inclined to know how the product interacts with their body, and how it can combine with other medications. These attributes in a customer-led theory of digital marketing are more important than price to medical drug purchasers. Choosing to do digital marketing for a small business will result in a lot of work, but it holds the promise of bringing in solid rewards for a company's brand and revenue (Gay, 2007)

A website is one of the most crucial tools businesses or individuals can use to nurture their digital presence. Whether they are a small firm, a large corporation, or a freelancer, making a website is a highly effective way to make the business more visible on the World Wide Web. According to Loda, Teichmann and Zins (2009:70) a website design focused on visual appeal and smooth functioning can encourage visitors to explore more and visit again. The trustworthiness of the sources of information on a website were found to significantly influence a person's choice and utilization of that source. The study reveals that website factors such as 'customer comments' and 'web cams' do not bring about the number of changes to the website as expected by the company.

The study found that information in respect of facilities such as tourist attractions and accommodation, affected message credibility and a customer's decision to visit a destination to a far greater extent. Loda et al. (2009:78) recommend that resources such as time and finances should be utilized and spent on the 'basic website factors' namely, dependable information regarding tourist attractions and accommodation. Moreover, instead of utilizing resources to implement new website factors such as web cams, comment facilities and e-cards, the researchers note that these may not be profitable in that they may not increase the number of bookings the website attracts. Therefore, Loda et al. (2009:78) state that, due to the diversity of websites and their capacity to persuade a visitor, companies should consider the 'basic factors' of a website as they influence an individual's decision to visit or search the website further.

E-marketing can contribute to increased customer reach and improved customer engagement. Another study highlights the importance of e-marketing in enhancing brand equity, which in turn positively influences market and financial

performance (Iddris, 2015). The adoption of e-marketing strategies can boost business performance by increasing online sales and improving brand equity, ultimately leading to positive market and financial outcomes. With e-marketing, companies have the advantage of reaching a wide audience for a fraction of the cost compared to traditional advertising budget. This is due to the relatively low cost of implementing e-marketing strategies, especially when compared to the potential benefit of reaching a global target audience (Kiriro, 2015). Apart from reach, effective targeting is another factor that contributes to the efficiency of e-marketing. Effective targeting involves understanding the needs, preferences, and behaviours of the target audience and tailoring e-marketing messages and strategies to appeal to them.

By effectively targeting the right audience, companies can maximize their chances of generating leads and conversions. In addition to reach and targeting, the measurement of e-marketing campaigns also plays a crucial role in determining efficiency. The ability to measure and track the effectiveness of e-marketing campaigns in real-time allows companies to make data-driven decisions and quickly adjust their strategies based on the feedback and results they receive.

E-marketing has a profound impact on the relationship between businesses and customers. It has led to an increase in customer satisfaction and loyalty, as well as enhanced communication between businesses and customers. In addition, e-marketing has facilitated two-way communication through social media platforms, enabling companies to engage with their customers on a more personal level (Kiriro, 2015). This has created a sense of community and trust, as customers feel valued and heard. Furthermore, e-marketing has proven to be an effective tool in influencing firms' product strategies, ultimately leading to the implementation of E-Customer Relationship Management platforms (Bader1 et al, 2022). These platforms attract consumers and enhance their purchasing intentions, thereby improving the overall customer experience.

3. Research Methodology

The research approach adopted a mixed research design using both qualitative and quantitative research design which applied an integrated E-marketing model with two hypothesis tests using the sample size of 147 business entities. This helped fulfil the aim of gathering information regarding numerical data and frequency as well as quantity, to measure the variables. The advantages of a mixed method research approach support the decision to undertake combined method research as it allows a freedom to use numerous methods to address the difficulty of the research problem. While undertaking a mixed method design for this study, a rigorous effort was made to collect both types of data in a timely way and to make certain that the data is integrated in a correct and accurate way.

4. Data Analysis

The study was anchored on two major variables namely; the independent variable E-marketing tools and dependent variable business performance. The beta (β) coefficient for each independent variable generated from the model, was subjected to a t-test, in order to test each of the hypothesis's under study. The general models however were analyzed using the F-test and significant levels will be measured at 95% confidence level with significant differences recorded at $p < .05$.

4.1. Correlation of Business Performance with Demographic Data

Table 1 Correlation of Business Performance with Demographic Data

| Variable | Partial Correlation | Significance Value |
|---|---------------------|--------------------|
| Age range | -0.1186 | 0.1709 |
| Position held in company | -0.0563 | 0.5166 |
| Type of business | 0.1718 | 0.0461 |
| Duration the business has been in operation | -0.1021 | 0.2389 |

The relationship between demographic variables and business performance was studied. It can be concluded that there was no significant relationship between the variables age range of participants, position held, type of business and duration the business has been in an operation. The variable type of business had a weak positive correlation with business performance.

4.2. 5.2 Regression of target marketing strategies utilized by the business

Log likelihood = 167.6052753

No. of obs = 138

Table 2 Regression of target marketing strategies utilized by the business

| Marketing Strategies | Coef. | Std.Err. | Z | P>z | (95% Conf.Interval) | |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|---------------------|----------|
| Undifferentiated strategy | -0.07944 | 0.0223973 | -3.55 | 0 | -0.1233 | -0.03555 |
| Multi-segment strategy | -0.00851 | 0.039845 | -0.21 | 0.831 | -0.0867 | 0.069589 |
| _cons | 1,000119 | 0.0866381 | 11.54 | 0 | 0.83033 | 1.169907 |

$$Y=1.0001 +x1-.0794+.0866$$

Target marketing strategies utilized by the business was significant with $p<.01$. This indicates that the undifferentiated strategy negatively impacted the business performance.

4.3. Regression of percentage of business with own website

Table 3 Regression of percentage of business with own website

| Business performance | Coef. | Std.Err. | Z | P>z | (95% Conf.Interval) | |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|---------------------|----------|
| Own website | -0.28927 | 0.0860476 | -3.36 | 0.001 | -0.4579 | -0.12062 |
| No website | 0.012057 | 0.0339941 | 0.35 | 0.723 | -0.0866 | 0.078684 |
| _cons | 1.15541 | 0.1056555 | 10.94 | 0.000 | 0.94833 | 1.362491 |

$$Y=1.15541 +x1-.2894+.1056$$

Owning a website as a business for marketing had a significant influence on business performance and customer relationship with $p = .001$.

4.4. Regression of percentage of business with own website

Table 4 Regression of percentage of business with own website

| Business performance | Coef. | Std.Err. | Z | P>z | (95% Conf.Interval) | |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|---------------------|----------|
| Own website | -0.28927 | 0.0860476 | -3.36 | 0.001 | -0.4579 | -0.12062 |
| No website | 0.012057 | 0.0339941 | 0.35 | 0.723 | -0.0866 | 0.078684 |
| _cons | 1.15541 | 0.1056555 | 10.94 | 0.000 | 0.94833 | 1.362491 |

$$Y=1.15541 +x1-.2894+.1056$$

94% of respondents had their own websites, while 6% did not have their own websites. Owning a website as a business for marketing had a significant influence on business performance and customer relationship with $p = .001$.

5. Discussion

The research established that the majority of the respondents (72%) recognized that the use of e-marketing in the form of their company’s website had increased their business performance, whereas over a third of the respondents were unsure whether e-marketing had increased their business performance. Additionally, the research indicated that two thirds of the respondents acknowledge the importance of e-marketing such as the company website, mobile phone and social media channels to connect and build relationships with their customers.

This is consistent with Loda, Teichmann and Zins (2009:70) who highlight that a website is one of the most crucial tools businesses or individuals can use to nurture their digital presence. Whether they are a small firm, a large

corporation, or a freelancer, making a website is a highly effective way to make the business more visible and a website design focused on visual appeal and smooth functioning can encourage visitors to explore more and visit again.

In regards to e-marketing strategies employed by businesses, respondents outlined that 83% employed a multi-segment strategy, 5% of respondents indicated that their firms undertook a concentrated strategy and 12% indicated undifferentiated strategy were the firm targeted a mass market and did not segment the market. This indicates that the respondents who utilize Facebook possibly also tend to utilize other forms of e-marketing to communicate with their customers or prospective customers.

The statistical association between these various forms of e-marketing appears to indicate that an involvement with one form of e-marketing could probably have the effect of drawing business owners into related forms of e-marketing such as Twitter, online newsletters, eWOM and WOM, Trip Advisor and other forms of social media. This is consistent with the findings of Lorenzo-Romero et al. (2011:171) that note the value of social networking sites as strategic tools to connect with customers and other businesses, whilst assisting with the development of management processes.

The current study highlights the vital link between e-marketing methods in which the company can communicate with prospective clients and visitors by using current technology. The current results are consistent with the suggestions made by Godson (2009:325), which state that relationships need to be “monitored and controlled”. Social media channels such as Facebook allow up to date relationships to be maintained between customers and the company. Even if you cannot control all aspects of the relationship, Godson suggests that you can “manage” the relationship. The results of this current investigation reinforce the importance of proactively managing, evaluating and updating each method of e-marketing which members have selected so that their business relationships with their customers or visitors are enhanced.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The following recommendations are supported by the findings and conclusions of the current study. The respondents highlighted that they strategically plan and select a number of e-marketing tools based on their own company’s goals, capabilities, time constraints and financial commitments and not withstanding experimentation with previously unused or underutilized e-marketing tools. Business enterprises should set specific objectives, stating what they intend to achieve through the use of e-marketing and the target markets they aim to reach.

It is suggested that e-marketing strategies are fully integrated into all marketing strategies which are undertaken or proposed by the firm. Moreover, the members’ websites, links to social media and the various forms of e-marketing utilized should be regularly updated. It is suggested that the owner or manager should set a timeframe wherein all the updating of the various forms of e-marketing should be performed.

Controls in the form of weekly reminders should be established to verify that the regular updating of the company website, links and social media has been completed by the nominated department or staff member. The SEO (Search Engine Optimizer) technology should be utilized within their businesses so that the number of potential customers and visitors to the websites has opportunities to increase. At the same time, the websites should continually be monitored and developed so that the benefits of SEO technology have the chance to be fully realized.

6.1. Limitations of the Study

The timeframe in which the online survey and interviews were planned and undertaken was greatly extended due to the high attrition rate originally experienced within the online survey

There was a difference in the sample sizes of the types of data collection methods which was a constraint.

6.2. Value of the Research

The current research provided valuable and up to date information on the use of e-marketing in Livingstone district. The results of the research revealed a number of benefits and problems associated with the use of e-marketing, whilst incorporating a number of recommendations to assist in these areas. The current research has created a foundation from which business owners can further build and develop their use and understanding of e-marketing, while enabling their businesses to further develop and grow.

This research has reiterated the value of listening to and communicating with customers and potential customers, in this online era. The current research has indicated a number of underutilized and innovative areas in which businesses can interact online with consumers and other businesses. The research has highlighted the potential that social media offers to businesses. It also highlighted the need for businesses to strategically incorporate various forms of e-marketing into their businesses.

Businesses need to understand the important advantages that e-marketing can provide a company with such as increased bookings or sales, increased gross profits, and increased visitor numbers. Finally, the research has revealed the perceptions which businesses hold about e-marketing, confirming the findings of other researchers "in the field of e-marketing", that e-marketing supports and improves business processes.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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