THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON SERVICE DELIVERY IN PARASTATALS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The use of social media network sites in organizations is wide and cannot be avoided. Social media network sites have come with the current generation and affected the way of operating in various organizations to reach and engage customers, communicate and market their products. The importance of social media in enhancing positive relationships between customers and business cannot be gainsaid. This is because they offer new and innovative ways to communicate and network via the internet. Presently, there are various platforms provided by the social media networks such as Facebook, Google plus, LinkedIn, YouTube, Skype, mysite, WhatsApp and Twitter in the strategic marketing of products and services for the parastatals. As such, social media networking has become an effective form of marketing which has raised the brand awareness, brand loyalty, customer services and has led to increase in sales and enhance service delivery to the customers. The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of social media in service delivery in parastatals. The study adopted desk based methodology. Specifically, the paper identified documentary evidence in the form of already completed studies that focused on influence of social media on service delivery, performance and the most commonly used means of social media. The findings indicated that the social media platform is designed to boost the sales of a company’s product and services. Social media is also used as part of an integrated communication tool designed for any marketing communications strategy. This means that social media is a phenomenal crisis communication strategy, this is social networking enables organizations to increase their brand awareness and facilitate direct feedback from their customers hence the company becomes aware of what satisfy their customers better. Social media can persuade the customers to fall in love with the conversations about a firm’s brand which further boosts the competitiveness of a company’s product and services. Social media is a communication function that seeks to build good relationships with the consumers and organizations thus most organizations are investing in social marketing strategy so as to gain competitive advantage.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Network Sites, Service Delivery, Parastatals
1.1. Introduction

The use of social media in organizations is wide and cannot be avoided. Social media network sites have come with the current generation and affected the way of operating in various organizations to reach and engage customers, communicate and market their products. Social networking refers to activities, practices, and behaviours among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media. Conversational media are Web-based applications that make it possible to create and easily transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos, and audios (Safko & Brake, 2009). These are changes on how people discover, read, connect, and share information. It can offer business advantages for both private companies and government agencies. Organizations can use social media networks to reach out to mass audiences efficiently at very low cost, promote brand awareness in many different markets and network with potential customers. It transforms monologues into dialogues and transforms people from content readers into content publishers (Cheryl & Heather, 2008).

Currently, parastatals and SME’s entrepreneurs leverage their business development services on the use of internet tools which include social media networks. These services include, among others, information gathering, and networking, consulting in areas like marketing, management, accounting, legal aspects, counselling as well as education and training. Other organizations such as institutions of learning and political parties are trying to keep up with this changing environment and are struggling to use Social Media to their benefit only, thus riding on the wave of Social Media but without any strategy (Robin, Jos & Theo, 2011). But Yankee (2008) argues that using social networking, as e-business format is not so much about soliciting business as it is about establishing yourself as a real, person with whom others may wish to do business. Social networking is therefore a change that has emerged in the 21st century and organizations may not have any other way but adopt this change to improve and compete in the current environment in the business world. It is common knowledge that social media networking is available to anyone with an internet connection and should therefore be a
platform that can be recommended to organizations such as parastatals. This is because social networking enables organizations to increase their brand awareness and facilitate direct feedback from their customers. In essence, a business that understands the advantage of social media is well aware that social media is fundamental in developing new business in the current competitive and online driven market place and also to ensure transparency and accountability to the citizens.

The importance of Social Media is still growing and has well become an essential mode of communication towards interacting with the customer and parastatals can take advantage of this trend and rip the benefits of customer service satisfaction and service delivery. Many organizations including the parastatals in our country today use social media as a vehicle to reach out to millions of prospective and usual customers. The parastatals are embracing social media since they have to engage in constant communication with the public to impact transparency and policy development. Its also helping in easing of congestion in the parastatals since some of the queries the clients want handled can be addressed on the social media platform.

1.2 Revolutionary Aspect of Social Media

People interpret and use the term social media in different ways. Social media is a broad term to describe all the different kinds of content that form social networks: posts on blogs or forums, photos, audio, videos, links, profiles on social networking web sites, status updates and more. Social media allows people with no knowledge of coding or web development to upload and post unique content easily and share with the world instantly. Simply put, social media is any kind of information we share with our social network, using social networking web sites and services (Eley and Tilley, 2009).

Shao (2008) more specifically addressed the core factor behind social media that is user generated content and what appeals people to go for user generated content. User Generated Content (UGC), also known as consumer-generated media (CGM) or media enabling user created content (UCC), refers to any material created and uploaded to the Internet by non-media professionals, whether it’s a comment left on Amazon.com, a professional-quality video uploaded to YouTube, or a student’s profile on Facebook. According to Shao’s analysis, content is consumed in order to fulfil the need for information, entertainment, and mood management. To begin with, the Internet has become a mass medium for consumer-sponsored communications and social media itself competes with traditional publishers about consumer
attention. Both of these reasons cause new challenges for the advertising companies (Nielsen, 2009).

The social media era was started around ten years ago. It began with LinkedIn, which was launched in 2003, followed by both My Space and Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, and Twitter in 2006. In less than a decade, its population has grown rapidly, and it has reached billions of people worldwide. Facebook has more than 500 million users worldwide; Twitter has approximately 175 million users; LinkedIn has more than 90 million users; and My Space has 57 million users (Curtis, 2011).

In the last decade there has been a major shift from traditional media. The second generation of Internet-based applications (“Web 2.0”) or what Shih (2009) calls the fourth revolution, in which users generate and control communication, holds great promise to significantly enhance marketing efforts with viral marketing campaigns (Thackeray, Neiger, Hanson, and McKenzie, 2008). This technology presents opportunities for relationship building, not only peer to peer but also between marketers and their customers. Recent studies show that the corporate adoption of social media by the fastest growing US corporations is now at record pace (Barnes and Norah, 2008). Yet, because of the novelty and potential effectiveness of Web 2.0, some marketers may be enticed to prematurely rely on social media in promotional plans. This paper discusses whether social media is able to consistently generate effective viral word-of-mouth for brands and products? During 2008 US Presidential elections, President Obama used social media effectively during campaigns and later became a brand name online. The study is therefore designed to explore the impact of social media on service delivery in parastatals and also determine whether the traditional ways of offering public services such as over the counter and at desks have died and is no longer effective as a result of social media.

The popularity of social media sites has also spread to companies and firms as part of their strategies. A study by public relation firm Burson-Marsteller shows that 86% of 100 largest companies on the Fortune 500 list use at least one of the social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or blogs, and 28% of them use all four platforms. The study also shows that 65% of these companies use Twitter, which makes it as the most popular social media site among business firms (Burson-Marsteller, 2010).

A study published on February 2010 by the Small Business Success Index (SBSI) indicates that 75% of the surveyed small businesses in the USA have already a company page on a social networking site and 57% have built a network, either their own or through a SNS like
LinkedIn. Similar findings indicating the start of a trend were reported in studies conducted earlier by McKinsey (2007) and Young (2008). This is in support of what is really happening in the parastatals since they have created websites with the services they offer with some being done online, and have also created twitter accounts, facebook page and direct email address to access the customer care person in the organizations.

According to Vaynerchuk (2011), who is the author of The Thank You Economy, social media sites allow companies to enhance the customer interaction that has already been established through Traditional media (i.e. TV ads, print ads) to a more personal level. In addition, social media sites have enabled businesses to build closer relationship with their customers, as well as to expand the market to the customers that they could not reach before (Rooney, 2011)

1.3 Service Delivery

Today businesses have appreciated the need for quality service delivery globally. Service delivery has several meanings depending on the context in which it is used. According to Zeithaml and Bitner (2000), services can be defined as deeds, processes, and or performances. But according to Ramaswamy (2006), services are business transactions that take place between a giver of service and the person who receives the service so that an outcome is produced that satisfies the receiver. According to Fox and Meyer (1995), service delivery is the provision of public activities, aids, or fulfilments to citizen. Service delivery can be either tangible which means products or intangible which refers to services. The provision of the services is a mandate of the government, to its citizens and it is provided by Acts of Parliament.

White paper (2010) increasingly, customers are using social networks as an important channel to find, receive, and communicate information about the products and services they use. This change in customer behavior creates both opportunities and challenges for customer service organizations. Social customers expect service delivered through their channel of choice, often with a personal touch. And they are certainly not afraid to express their views or displeasure. Social networks provide a rich source of unfiltered feedback and a dialogue that can be invaluable in identifying service issues and spotting opportunities for product improvement. Thus, used correctly, social networking channels can help customer service organizations be more effective and create value for the business. In addition, social networks provide an interaction channel that not only helps remove perceived barriers between customers and companies, but may also reduce the cost of service. However, when all is said and done, social networking is another communication channel and something that should not be done in a
vacuum. It needs to be embedded in the everyday processes of customer service organizations and delivered in a consistent manner for the true benefits to be realized.

Businesses have been relatively quick to adopt social media for marketing and public relations, but have been slower in realizing its role as a hub for customer support and maintaining customer relationships. While the concept of social service is not new, too few organizations have truly harnessed the power of social customer service, even though nearly a third of tweets to brands are support-related. Social media is slowly taking more of the workload historically reserved for email and telephone and is being used for everything from product evangelism to sales inquiries and support requests. Social channels are becoming more and more favored as a communication channel of choice by consumers. Twitter, Facebook and mobile technologies give consumers the easiest, most direct approach for support, but it’s the one businesses are least prepared to handle. In fact, a variety of studies have found that somewhere between 25-55% of customer service inquiries on Facebook and Twitter go completely ignored.

Social media is best used for simple customer service questions. Since many customer service questions and answers are personal in nature, identify which types of questions, issues, and concerns should be taken offline. Jamie Lynn Morgan, social media manager for Food Services of America (Spokane), advises her clients to “handle every complaint delicately, but to always respond publicly”. She encourages businesses to try and take the situation offline by asking the customer if they can call or email to resolve the issue. This allows the company to assist the upset customer in the best way possible, without filling social profiles with negative comments, while still showing other customers that the brand is responsive.

1.4 Social Media and Parastatals in Kenya
Corporations evolve just like most things in life. A corporation’s culture and traditions are the bedrock of its success and its future is pegged on a strict adherence to these principles. But that doesn’t mean that they too cannot be tweaked so as to conform to modern times. Disruptive Innovation is one of the ways where the world has been able to see tremendous advancement in product quality and superb service delivery in the last 25 years or so. Companies that refuse to advance to the new age are largely being left behind.

Kenya has come a long way, and it is very comforting that the government has been willing to allow innovations even when it means the death of older and more traditional entities being replaced by newer and modern operations. However, it has been disappointing on the other hand that the government has moved very slowly in allowing this innovation to be
accommodated in parastatal organizations. The private sector has moved with great speed in embracing this new wave of innovation, but the parastatal sector has lagged behind. Our government has a history of being last to embrace anything new; from software upgrades to strategic thinking evolutions regardless of who is running the government. This can be attributed to political red tape, bureaucracy, and the sad truth that a minor decision has to be bounced along a line of a few people who probably have nothing of value to add to the process. This obviously contributes to the passive progression process to which these parastatals miss the golden chance to increase their revenues and their efficiency.

Many state agencies are grappling with the emergence of the social media and its impact with regard to public relations. More often they try to advance their public relations with their clients and stakeholders. Employees on the other hand have embraced social media technology to advance communications between them within the state Agencies. They often feel that the management does not effectively relate well on the social media platform. Regardless of fault or blame, at some point, the two sides have to come together, resolve where the breakdown in relations is and move towards a place.

Effective public relations are a prerequisite for implementing agencies strategies as well as for managing day to day activities through people. The use of social media in parastatals has been embraced and promoted as a communication and engagement tools, sharing information with the public and, in some instances, soliciting feedback. Some of the common complaints from employees are that managers do not communicate effectively; important information is delivered through emails when in some cases face to face meetings seem more appropriate. In some cases clients complain that the Agency is not responding to their queries on twitter handles, face book pages and other modes of social media communications. If good public relations are to exist in our state agencies, social media communication must be embraced and the managers, employees and clients are going to have a positive working relationship. It is important for the Agency to know that problems exists and once learning of the problems, implement solutions to quell those issues. Gillin (2009) say that the social media has changed the rules of the game in every part of strategic communication. They also claim that over the past decade these new communication vehicles have not only turned upside down everything people knew about communication but also have dramatically changed the business of managing public relations.
Social media is being utilized on an ever increasing basis by corporations and other state agencies. This has been prompted by the fact that most people in Kenya today exhibit a certain level of dissatisfaction with public services, whether in terms of their efficiency, effectiveness or accessibility. Thus it is not surprising that recent research has indicated that public services which incorporate customer input or feedback generate higher levels of satisfaction with these services. Social media has become an important source of news. While the credibility of some sources can clearly be contested, news channels tweet or give updates on significant happenings all over the world. Their availability on social networks makes news more accessible. Additionally, news quickly gets passed around the networks in ways never experienced before. This has greatly changed the ways the customers are being handled in the parastatals since the corporate image can be quickly made or destroyed in a span of seconds thanks to the internet and different social media channels for the public to air their grievances and complaints without necessarily stepping into the organizations in person.

1.5. Review of Literature

Wairimu (2012) conducted a study on the influence of social media on the effectiveness of business operations of the youth operated small and medium enterprises in the municipal council of Nakuru. This study sought to establish the influence of the knowledge of use of social media, the attitude to the use of social media and the level of use of social media have on the effectiveness of business operation among 132 youths owning SMEs. From the findings of the study, it was evident that social media has played a very significant role in the performance of the youth operated SMEs in service delivery.

Nyawira (2012) conducted a study on the influence of social media on customer service in seed selling company a case of Segenta. The results indicated that social media has enabled the company to work more efficiently and innovative and gain more customer satisfaction when it comes to customer service. As a result it led to an increase in customer satisfaction levels and increased the number of users of the social media channels. The study concluded that social media is one of the cheapest and reliable channel when it comes to customer service. By comparing and contrasting the relatively large number of comprehensive studies on the aspects of social media, however, there is the relative lack of studies on how marketing via social media affects the company’s competitive advantage. While most studies have contributed to the
understanding of various aspects of social media, there is still a small fraction of how the marketing practices enhance a company’s competitive advantage.

Another study was done by Chebet (2012) on the use of social media as a strategic communication tool by Safaricom Ltd. The study sought to determine the factors that have influenced the adoption of social media in service delivery and also establish how the application of social media as a strategic communication tool enhances service delivery by Safaricom Limited. The study found out that social media ensured faster and instant information dissemination of information on the product and services and further ensured faster responses and feedback from customers. Social media was also employed in communication with the public on company matters; in customer relations management and managing a crisis with the company's. The study concluded that Safaricom has highly adopted social media tools on day to day activities and it has been effective in the service delivery.

Gathoni (2012) carried out a study on the adoption of social media networks as an innovative new market entry strategy by Kentucky fried chicken in Kenya. The study sought to establish the social media as an innovative new market entry strategy into Kenya using the case of Kentucky Fried Chicken. The findings revealed that KFC used social media in entering in new markets to a very great extent hence its choice for the Kenyan market. The use of social media was found to be affordable as opposed to traditional advertising methods such as television and radio commercials, banner 5 advertisements, print placements and participating in promotional events were found to be costly for their businesses besides creating monotony in a highly competitive media. Njuguna (2012) did a survey on the effects of social media on performance of Kenya Power and Lighting Company. He found that increased customer base, ROI and improved customer service are significant effect social media toward investing on social media.

Gathii (2010) conducted a study on the impact of social media on traditional mass media functions in Kenya using the case of Royal Media Services Limited, Nairobi. This study sought to find out whether social media have changed the way traditional media functions like surveillance, correlation, socialisation and entertainment are carried out in the news media firms by using Royal Media Services as a typical case. The study revealed that Royal Media Services uses some forms of social media tools like Face Book, Twitter, and 6 Really Simple Syndication (RSS) to a small extent. It thus concludes that social media impacts traditional
media functions to a small extent. Various challenges like information overload and audience segmentation were identified.

According to Constantinides & Fountain, (2008) and Bolotaeva & Cata, (2010), Social Media applications like blogs allow customers to form communities with other customers who have the same interest in products and service thus creating an easy customer segmentation for companies. This readily available customer information therefore makes target marketing easier (Sarkkinen, 2008; Ahlqvist et al., 2008). Moreover, it provides a platform for individualized markets for unsegmented consumers with customized products and services (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). This view, however, is challenged by Brown, (2002) who asserts that according to the post-modern theory, consumers have become more fragmented, confused and unpredictable. Brown, (2002) argues that segmentation is impossible and that traditional marketing introduced by Philip Kotler is “dead” and non-applicable.

According to a research conducted by Deloitte (2012), companies are increasingly employing social media strategies in order to engage more effectively with their African consumer target market. The report cites mobile telephony companies such as Safaricom from Kenya which has enhanced innovations and added value to its services with the case of M-pesa. Social media networks offer channels through which businesses can learn about their customer preference and get insights into their goods or services acceptable in the fields (Kumar & Sundaram, 2012).

**1.6 Conclusion and Recommendations**

From this paper, it has been noted that social media has enabled companies to work more efficiently and innovatively thus gaining more customer satisfaction and best service delivery. When it comes to customer service, there has been a great increase in customer satisfaction levels and also increased number of users of the social media channels. The report concludes that social media is one of the cheapest and reliable channel when it comes to ensuring fastest and efficient service delivery.

The study concludes that social media is designed to boost the sales of a company’s product and services as part of the organization promotion outlet. Social media facilitate the creation
and exchange of user generated content on the platform. Social media promotes word of mouth to ensure a fast information spread the emergence of the word of mouth using consumer user generated created media to create an organization competitive edge.

Social media connects service providers, companies and corporations with a broad audience of influencers and consumers. Social media provides numerous opportunities for strengthening and expanding relationships to customers. Social media offers a quicker and more cost-effective way to reach highly targeted markets than marketing through traditional media, such as websites, newspapers and television.

Social Media has recently changed the way people across the globe communicate with one another. However, it is worth noting that social networking has been there right from the beginning of humanity. Just like any other form of innovation, this concept has evolved and is currently becoming sophisticated with the advancement of technology. The study has revealed that parastatals have effectively embraced social media to enhance service delivery to its customers not only in the region but those in the Diaspora. On this basis i, would recommend that the parastatals should adopt several strategies to ensure effective utilization of social media. One of the strategies is to lay a solid foundation in social media and utilize it as one of the customer touch points. This will give the channel an opportunity to serve more customers.

Customers should also be sensitized on social media use to ensure that more customers are able to interact freely on the organizations social sites. This can be achieved by providing customers with information templates in the organizations, use of SMS and through advertising for example on TVs, radios and roadshow caravans.

Organizations in this era should invest more on cost as it will enable them to acquire newer technologies which will allow them to keep in touch with the changing needs of the clients as well as keep them involved hence better service delivery.
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