



## Unveiling the Most Common Social Media Platforms Used for Marketing in Higher Education Institutions in Zambia

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### ABSTRACT

Social Media Marketing has become one of the most useful and popular means of marketing Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) globally. The main aim of this research was to investigate the most common Social Media platforms used in HEIs in Zambia and then determine the best combinations of Social Media platforms for marketing HEIs. The research used a structured questionnaire designed in Google forms to collect responses from 321 respondents which were analyzed in SPSS version 20 using descriptive analysis, Bivariate tools and QQ plots. The findings revealed that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most commonly used Social Media platforms in HEIs in Zambia. Additionally, the best combination of Social Media platforms for marketing HEIs are Facebook and Twitter followed by Twitter and WhatsApp. This research also brought out the findings that there is an association between Social Media platform signed up for and age range. The research brings out the best combination of Social Media platforms that professionals managing Social Media Marketing in HEIs can use to develop an effective Social Media Marketing mix.

**KEYWORDS:** Marketing, Social Media, Higher Education Institutions, Social Media platforms, interactivity

### I. INTRODUCTION

Social Media has become a huge strategic tool for marketing of products and services across different economic sectors (Gaddam & Harinadh, 2019). Since Social Media is regarded as a strategic tool, the implication is that it must be included in strategic marketing planning for firms or organizations that have adopted its use in their overall marketing planning. Social Media allows individuals to fully interact with others and offers numerous ways in which marketers can engage with consumers (Appel *et al.*, 2019). The interactivity of Social Media makes it a suitable tool for marketing since it can enable firms to engage with customers and expand their markets beyond their geographic boundaries. The umbrella of Social Media includes platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter with empirical evidence in their use for marketing purposes (Nuseir, 2020). An interesting area of study is to establish which Social Media platforms are more effective in marketing Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in Zambia and identifying which Social Media platforms are more effective than others.

Social Media is defined as a collection of online network applications comprising of various platforms including blogs, collaborative projects and enterprise social networks (Aichner *et al.*, 2021). The definition of Social Media has a strong inclination to collaboration and this makes it highly suitable for marketing purposes.

Numerous studies have been carried out in Zambia in the area of Social Media as a teaching aid but not so much study has been done regarding Social Media Marketing in HEIs in the country. Akakandelwa and Walubita (2017) conducted a study at the University of Zambia to investigate Social Media use and its perceived impact on the social life of students at that University. The study by Akakandelwa and Walubita brought out common Social Media platforms used by students at the University of Zambia. This study perhaps becomes a huge point of reference for many studies around the subject of Social Media Marketing. This study focuses on identifying the most common Social Media platforms that are used in HIEs for marketing purposes and makes recommendations on the best Social Media platforms for marketing educational services in Zambia. The main aim of

this study is to identify the common Social Media platforms in HEIs.

**II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This study sought to establish two objectives, namely:

- i. To identify the most common Social Media platforms in higher education institutions in Zambia
- ii. To determine the best combination of Social Media platforms that enhance effectiveness of Social Media Marketing in higher education institutions in Zambia

**III. METHODOLOGY**

The study used a survey targeting a sample size of 395 respondents from a targeted population of 34,500 enrolled students in 12 HEIs that were purposively selected to suit the researchers’ needs of picking HEIs with certain characteristics. The researchers applied Yamane (1967) formula to determine a representative sample out of the total population:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where; n= Sample size, N= is the population size, e= level of precision.

$$n = \frac{34,500}{1 + 34,500(0.05)^2} = 395$$

From the targeted 395, the researchers collected 321 responses using a structured questionnaire designed in google forms and distributed using Social Media Networks in order to overcome challenges of COVID-19 in 2020 when the pandemic was at its peak. Acceptable response rate for data must be above 70%, in this instance the researchers managed to collect 74% and this is highly acceptable (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

For data analysis the researchers used SPSS version 20 using descriptive analysis, bivariate analysis and QQ plots. Since this research is based on quantitative data obtained from responses from 321 enrolled students in selected HEIs. The researchers subjected the collected data and research design on the structured questionnaire to a data validity test to ensure the integrity and consistency of the research instruments. The results of the data validity test are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Cronbach Alpha test**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.990	.990	20

According to Creswell a Cronbach Alpha test is a test for stability and consistency of the instruments used in a research (Creswell, 2010). A Cronbach Alpha test of more

than 0.6 or 60% is considered to be high and acceptable while one above .065 or 60 is very good and highly acceptable (Pallant, 2001). The reliability for the Cronbach’s Alpha in Table 1 stands at 0.99 or 99% implying a very high reliability.

**IV. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Social Media Marketing is defined as a personalized connection between brands and consumers for user centered networking and interaction (Chi, 2011). The definition of Social Media Marketing by Chi emphasizes the networking aspect and interaction, which makes platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter highly suitable for marketing applications. While Social Media Marketing in sectors such as the retail and tourism sectors has worked effectively in the Zambian business environment, fewer studies exists to determine empirical evidence for its success in the education sector.

Mutuka (2017) conducted a study at the Copperbelt University to assess how Social Media enhances enrolment at that University; this study brought out the fact that Social Media adverts influence students to enroll in various programs at the Copperbelt University. The study by Mutuka is one of the few studies that focus on Social Media Marketing. The study though did not make recommendations for combinations of the best Social Media platforms for marketing HEIs. The study also had a limitation in that it was done in one HEI and therefore, the findings may not be generalized to the use or practices of Social Media Marketing across HEIs in Zambia. The current study sampled 12 HEIs and therefore, was more representative in bringing out recommendations and findings regarding Social Media Marketing.

A study by Singhal (2020) indicated that Facebook was the most common Social Media platform for marketing and student interaction at Columbia University. Determining the most common Social Media platforms in HEIs helps greatly in the selection of the appropriate Social Media mix. According to global Statista (2022), Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram are the most popular Social Media platforms across the world with more than a million followers for each application. The global popularity of Social Media platform forms an integral part of creating sustainable competitive advantage for institutions including those operating in the education sector.

A study conducted in Kenya at University of Kabanga with a sample size of 103 students found that WhatsApp followed by Facebook were the most popular Social Media platforms for knowledge sharing among students (Maweu & Yudah, 2020). The findings in Kenya generate interest to explore how HEIs can use this information in developing Social Media Marketing strategies. It is especially a relevant study in Zambia where information on Social Media Marketing usage in the education sector is scanty. This study aims at

identifying the most popular Social Media platforms in selected HEIs in Zambia and to establish the best combination of Social Media platforms for marketing HEIs in the country. To achieve the research objectives responses from the structured questionnaire were analyzed and presented in the next section.

**V. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS**

The results presented in this section were analyzed in SPSS to arrive at conclusions and recommendations in the next section of this paper. The researchers used descriptive analysis, multivariate analysis, QQ plots and Pearson correlation as the main tools in SPSS version 20.

**1. Demographics of respondents**

The demographics in Table 2 below indicate an almost balanced participation of respondents between males and females and further show that all the 321 respondents answered the question on what their gender is on the structured questionnaire.

**Table 2: Statistics what is your gender**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	159	49.5	49.5	49.5
Valid Female	162	50.5	50.5	100.0
Total	321	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows that 49.5% of respondents were males while 50.5% were female making the sample more representative in terms of gender distribution. Gender is important in research as it increases scientific creativity and helps arrive at opinions and findings that are balanced across demographic lines (Simmons, 2021).

**2. Age range of respondents**

The age range of respondents in this research was important in order to determine the relationship between age range and Social Media platform signed up for. Table 3 above shows that participants between the age ranges of 16 to 25 years were the majority at 56.4%, followed by 25 to 34 years comprising 26.2% of total respondents with the lowest age range being between the age ranges of above 54% at 3%.

According to Omnicore 44% of Facebook users are female and 56% are males; of these two populations the largest percentage of users are between the age ranges of 18-24 years (Omnicore, 2022). The statistics by Omnicore further show that 82% of college graduates are on Facebook. The interpretation of the findings by Omnicore and the findings in Table 3 is that Facebook already is a target platform for Social Media Marketing activities for HEIs, particularly that the majority of respondents in this research were within the age ranges of Facebook populace. Table 2 shows similar

gender statistics to the ones revealed by Omnicore except that females were slightly more than the males. Further investigation was necessary to determine the Social Media platforms signed up for by enrolled students in HEIs and then show the correlation between age and Social Media platforms. Social Media platforms are known to attract a younger age group of between 16-34 and these are important in the process of online segmentation (Auxier & Anderson, 2021).

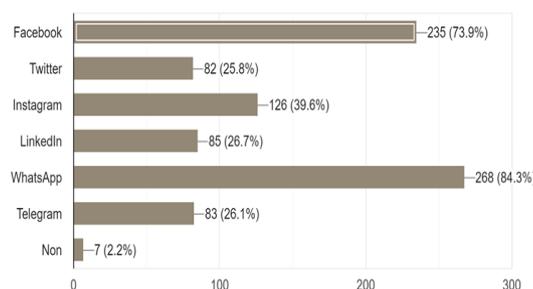
**Table 3: Statistics on what is your age range**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 16-25	181	56.4	56.4	56.4
Valid 25-34	84	26.2	26.2	82.6
Valid 35-44	42	13.1	13.1	95.6
Valid 45-54	11	3.4	3.4	99.1
Valid Above 54	3	.9	.9	100.0
Total	321	100.0	100.0	

For HEIs in Zambia to determine the best combination of Social Media platforms for marketing, age statistics and gender statistics are highly important as these are the best methods of performing online segmentation. Age and gender give good indications of segments associated with which Social Media platforms are signed up for. The implication of this is that identifying the Social Media platforms which the respondents are signed up for was relevant so that correlations could be made between age, and Social Media platform signed up for.

**3. Social Media platform signed up for**

Figure 1 shows that 84.3% of respondents are signed up for WhatsApp, while 73.9% of respondents are signed up for Facebook. The finding indicates that WhatsApp is the most signed up platform for by students in HEIs followed by Facebook and then Instagram and Twitter. Figure 1 also shows that only 7% of the 321 respondents are not signed up for any Social Media platform leading to a conclusion that the majority of enrolled students in HEIs are signed up on Social Media platforms.



**Figure 1: Social Media platforms signed up for**

A recent study in Nigeria investigated the use of Social Media among undergraduate students in the faculties of law in Universities in Osun State (Igbeneguttu *et al.*, 2021). The study design was a survey involving a sample of 527 respondents who provided outcomes similar to the ones in this research. The findings in the research by Igbeneguttu *et al* show that WhatsApp was the most popular and used Social Media application, followed by Facebook. This finding is identical to the findings in this research and also the findings discussed in the Literature review at the University of Kabianga in Kenya (Maweu & Yudah, 2020). The University of Columbia has utilized Social Media very effectively in marketing. The literature review in this study revealed that at Columbia University Facebook is the most utilized Social Media platform and this ranks the platform among the most popular in HEIs.

**4. Correlation between Social Media signed up and age**

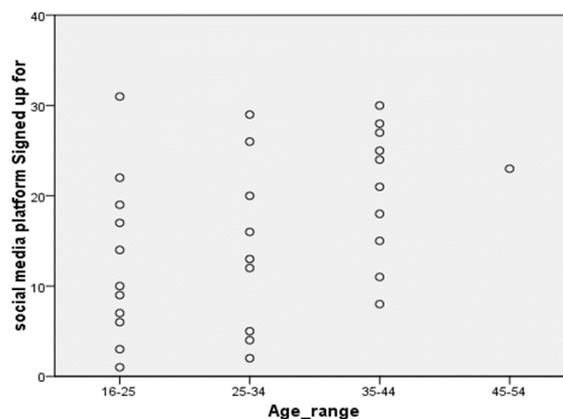
The Pearson correlation in Table 4 was done using bivariate analysis in SPSS to determine the results presented. The relationship between Social Media platform signed up for and age is important in this research as it forms a strong basis for making recommendations on the most popular Social Media platforms across different age. HEIs that want to implement SMM strategies must understand the relationship between choices of Social Media and age so that it would be easier to perform online segmentation and develop online value propositions (OVPs).

Table 4: Correlation results			
		Age range	Social Media platform Signed up for
Age range	Pearson Correlation	1	.394*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.028
	N	321	31
Social Media platform Signed up for	Pearson Correlation	.394*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.028	
	N	31	31
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

The findings after running a bivariate correlation indicated that there is a relationship between age and the Social Media platform signed up for. The spurious probability is above 0.05 with a perfect positive correlation of 1 as shown in Table 4. The relationship spurious probability between age

range and Social Media platform signed up for was significant since it is 0.28 i.e. below 0.5. Literature has shown that the majority of individuals on Social Media are between the age ranges of 18-34 (Omnicores, 2022).

The QQ plot in Figure 2 below shows that there are more plots or dots around age ranges of 16-25 than any other age range confirming the findings in Table 3.



**Figure 2: QQ plot age and Social Media and age range**

From the findings in the QQ plot the researchers went on to investigate the best combination of Social Media platforms that can be used for marketing HEIs in Zambia. Segmentation in any marketing process allows businesses to focus on their customers; in this research the online segmentation is to identify the age range of Social Media platform visitors and the Social Media platforms signed up for (Martin, 2011). Table 5 shows responses on the best combinations of Social Media platforms used in HEIs. From Table 5 below Facebook and WhatsApp had the highest commonality rate with 33% followed by Facebook and Twitter with 28% while the lowest being Instagram and WhatsApp with 11.8%.

**Table 5: Which is the most common Social Media platform combination used in your Institution**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Instagram & WhatsApp	38	11.8	11.8	11.8
Facebook & WhatsApp	106	33.0	33.0	44.9
Valid Twitter & WhatsApp	32	10.0	10.0	54.8
Facebook & Twitter	90	28.0	28.0	82.9
Facebook & Instagram	55	17.1	17.1	100.0
Total	321	100.0		

The combination of Social Media platforms in Table 5 is useful as they allow Social Media Marketers to align their marketing strategy with the correct Social Media platforms. Since Facebook and WhatsApp combinations seem highly prominent in terms of popularity, they become a huge target for digital marketing. Table 6 below shows that Facebook is the best Social Media platform for marketing HEIs followed by WhatsApp and then LinkedIn. The combinations in Table 5 show a slight difference in submission under the assumption that some respondents may have been picking one platform in the choices and not necessarily the combination. Facebook is the largest Social Media platform globally with over 2.4 billion users and this would be the reason why it is the most popular Social Media platform in HEIs (Auxier & Anderson, 2021)

**Table 6: Which is the best Social Media platform for marketing HEIs in Zambia**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Twitter	41	12.8	12.8	12.8
Facebook	98	30.5	30.5	43.3
LinkedIn	44	13.7	13.7	57.0
WhatsApp	96	29.9	29.9	86.9
Instagram	42	13.1	13.1	100.0
Total	321	100.0		

Cetinkaya at Anakara University in Turkey investigated effects of WhatsApp use on success in education process and found that WhatsApp has a large use in the education process at the University (Cetinkaya, 2017). The findings by Cetinkaya has similar findings as in Table 6 since Facebook becomes the best platform to market HEIs. WhatsApp according to findings in Figure 1 is the most used Social Media platforms in HEIs and this means that HEIs must consider the WhatsApp business edition for their advertising and communication.

**VI. CONCLUSION**

The findings in this research show that the best combinations of Social Media platforms to use for marketing HEIs are Facebook & WhatsApp and then followed by Facebook & Twitter. Individual platforms that are common are WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter which are all part of the established combinations in Table 5. The implication is that when marketing HEIs, Marketing professionals must come up with a Social Media mix that includes Facebook, WhatsApp (Business Edition) and Twitter. In terms of the most common Social Media

platforms in HEIs this research has established that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most common. WhatsApp and Facebook also form part of the best combinations for marketing HEIs according to the research results. The results from the demographic findings show that the majority of individuals on Social Media platforms are within the age range of 16-34 and since there is a significant relationship between Social Media platform signed up for and age range HEIs most take this into account when marketing their institutions.

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