

ZESCO'S strategies to use social media to improve customer satisfaction surrounding residential neighbourhoods in Zambia

Mr. Piki Kayombo¹, Dr. Raj Parhik²

^{1,2} MBA General Candidate, The Copperbelt University, P.O. Box 21692, Kitwe, Zambia, Jumbo Drive, Riverside

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6905469>

Published Date: 26-July-2022

Abstract: The primary objective of this study was to strategize on how ZESCO can use social media to improve its customer satisfaction of residential customers in Zambia. In order to do this, a comprehensive literature review was carried out on topics like social media, customer satisfaction and ZESCO. The research conducted required the views, feelings and desires of residential customers for ZESCO Limited, this meant that a more analytical approach be taken. The overall methodology selected by the researcher was qualitative. The methods used to collect data were semi structured questionnaires and semi structured interviews. The semi structured questionnaires were used to collect data from residential customers of ZESCO.

Questionnaires with about 50% open ended and 50% quantitative questions were sent to about 65 people randomly picked on the 3 social media platforms used by the author. 32 responded to the questionnaires and results were analyzed using thematic analysis. The conclusions were as follows. Firstly, ZESCO residential customers are mostly not satisfied with the quality of service from the company. Secondly the top dissatisfiers are not the price nor the number of outages but poor to lack of communication attributed mostly to customer support lines and service centers. The second top dissatisfier is the slow response to faults and fault resolution cycle. The findings revealed also that customers would want ZESCO's social media to be responsive and engaging on issues like faults resolution and that ZESCO should be able to constantly share procedures and processes to make the customers life easier. Based on Customer top dissatisfiers, literature review and customer preferences, recommendations were made on the social media strategies workable for ZESCO Limited. An Interview was also conducted with ZESCO'S digital marketing team to establish current social media strategies being used by ZESCO Limited. Key recommendations included the need for ZESCO to form social media communities and also implement the use of social media mentions.

Keywords: Customer satisfaction, improve, social media, marketing, residential customers, ZESCO.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

ZESCO Limited is a parastatal located in Zambia with a vertically integrated system generating, transmitting and distributing electrical energy. The company was formed in 1970 by an act of the Zambian parliament (ZESCO, 2022). A critical look at ZESCO'S customer segments shows that, the company has 6 types of customers: residential, commercial, government, export, industrial and mining companies (ZESCO, 2014). Research conducted by Mbewe (2019) concluded that only 16% of respondents are satisfied with ZESCO's services and only 46% agreed they would recommend ZESCO to someone else.

As seen also from other literature reviewed, the customer satisfaction among ZESCO's residential customers is very low. According to a Zambian parliament (2015) report on energy and ZESCO reforms, the quality of service at ZESCO is generally poor and the service delivery is unreliable. These are among the reasons that have increased the poor customer perceptions from residential customers.

The Internet through digital marketing primarily in social media can help improve customer satisfaction of residential customers in Zambia. According to Kemp (2021), there are 5.48 million internet users in Zambia which represents a 29% internet penetration as of January 2021. Kemp also writes that Zambia has 2.6 million users of social media which represents 13.9% of the population. Social media can negatively affect any company provided that the company is misrepresented. The direct consequence of this is a reduction in customer confidence and hence customer satisfaction ratings.

This study attempts to provide methods and strategies on how social media can be used to improve customer satisfaction for ZESCO residential customers. What if ZESCO would identify, resolve or attempt to resolve customer complaints right on the social media platforms. What would this do to the efficiency and effectiveness of fault resolution? How would this improve customer sentiments and customer satisfaction?

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The problem is the poor quality of service and low customer satisfaction experienced by ZESCO Limited residential customers.

Research done by Simundi and Marvin (2020) concluded that 68% of the ZESCO customers were unhappy and unsatisfied with the quality of service from ZESCO. Vagliasindi and Jones (2013, P322) highlight the poor quality of service from ZESCO, they further highlight residential customer concerns about this poor quality of service by the company. According to the Energy Regulation Board, a Zambian energy regulatory board utility performance framework. ZESCO had very low results in 2020. In the particular year the quality of service was 0 out of 20 whilst the customer complaint resolution was 2 out of 5 (Energy Regulation Board, 2020,42-43).

This problem results in loss of brand loyalty, customers and a very bad brand reputation for the company. With the rise in social media users. Customers have taken to social media to vent their anger. According to Stat counter (2022) social media usage in Zambia is dominated by Facebook with 72.93% users, Pinterest with 11% twitter 6% and YouTube around 5%. Instagram accounts to only 2.5% users. ZESCO's poor customer feedback on social media can be seen from almost every article on the official company page on Facebook. Facebook (2022) shows a review of ZESCO limited Facebook page based on a survey of 986 people gives a rating of 1.5 out of 5. The survey is a recommendation survey asking if one would recommend the ZESCO page to anyone else. Illustrations of customer dissatisfaction can further be observed from comments given by customers on the official Facebook page.

This research seeks to address or at least understand how to address the low customer satisfaction ratings and poor quality of service that ZESCO is facing using social media strategies.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study attempts to improve and resolve customer satisfaction ratings of ZESCO Limited on social media platforms for residential customers, the study also endeavors to propose recommendations on how the corporation can use social media effectively. The research will mostly be conducted through qualitative questionnaires and the use of available.

1.4 General Objective/Specific Objectives

The Main objective of this research is to strategize on how ZESCO can use social media to improve its customer satisfaction of residential customers in Zambia. This will entail researching on general customer satisfaction data for ZESCO and specific dissatisfaction factors. Studying the effective use of social media in order to improve customer satisfaction with particular interest in the use of social media to resolve customer complaints.

Questionnaires will be designed for residential customers. After which the data will need to be analyzed. Finally, the last specific objective of the research will be to make recommendations on improvement methods which ZESCO can use in order to improve customer satisfaction.

The researcher also intends to conduct interviews with management of the following ZESCO departments, Marketing (particularly digital marketing), customer service and the national call center.

1.5 Research Questions

- I. What perceptions do residential customers on social media have about ZESCO limited?
- II. What information would residential customers find beneficial on the ZESCO social media platforms.
- III. How can social media platforms be used by ZESCO to improve the quality-of-service delivery?

- IV. What specific steps ZESCO should take to add value to their social media presence.
- V. How should ZESCO resolve customer complaints via social media platform to improve their customer satisfaction rating and establish a benchmark for other organization operating in the similar marketplace.

1.6 Significance of the Study and relevance to CBU's body of research

Recent research has begun bringing out the negatives of social media to society, but this research and many to come, provide insights on how social media can be used to resolve everyday problems and be used as a work tool rather than a device that slows down society.

The significance of this study is that it brings out the use of social media to add value to a customer, the corporation and society at large.

This study to ZESCO Limited is very significant because it looks at a very cost-effective way of adding value, making profits and improving the brand identity.

The significance of the study to the body of knowledge at CBU is that this study introduces innovations in the area of sales and marketing, particularly digital marketing.

2. THESIS LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The topic for this research is 'ZESCO's strategies to use social media to improve customer satisfaction surrounding residential neighborhoods in Zambia'. This study aims to improve and resolve customer satisfaction ratings of ZESCO Limited on social media platforms. The study also aims to propose recommendations on how the corporation can use social media effectively.

The main topics focused on in this research include customer satisfaction, social media and ZESCO Limited as a firm. Certain topics include the interaction of social media and customer satisfaction. The customer satisfaction aspect of the research seeks to discover key aspects that increase and decrease customer satisfaction. Whilst the social media aspect seeks to analyze how a business can use social media effectively in order to gain market and customer value.

The main sources of the literature include ZESCO Limited, Energy Regulation Board, Google Scholar, social media sites and academic websites.

2.2 Sources Reviewed

2.2.1 ZESCO Limited and Quality of Service

ZESCO limited is a public energy company, with the government of the republic of Zambia having 100% shares through the Industrial Development Corporation. According to ZESCO (2022) the company was formed in 1970 after the Zambia Electricity Supply Act was passed in Parliament. This Act brought together the electricity undertakings that were previously managed by the local authorities.

ZESCO further sets several strategic Key Performance Indicators in line with its vision and mission. These are both financial and non-financial, of these three are customer related. In the ZESCO Integrated Report (2019, P41) ZESCO scored 96% on customer fault resolution rate from a target of 90% and a residential customer growth rate of 90%. This data shows a company doing particularly well with its customer.

In research done by Simundi and Marvin (2020) 68% of the customers interviewed were unhappy and unsatisfied with the quality of service from ZESCO.

The Zambian energy regulator, Energy Regulation Board (ERB) also monitors all power utility companies including ZESCO. ERB set performance benchmarks for all utilities. Some parameters of interest that ERB uses to regulate ZESCO include quality of service and customer complaints resolution. According to the National Energy Report (2019) ZESCO scored 5 from a target of 5 in 2017, 2018 and 2019 in Customer Complaint Resolution. Whilst in quality-of-service ZESCO scored 10, 13 and 10 out of a scale of 20 for the years 2017, 2018 and 2019.

In 2020 the quality of service was 0 out of 20 whilst the customer complaint resolution was 2 out of 5 (Energy Regulation Board, 2020,42-43).

From the data it is important that ZESCO is monitored and important key performance indicators like fault resolution and the quality of service are measured. Whilst the data shows high scores in customer fault resolution for several years. The data is not consistent with customer sentiments about the company and the quality of services provided by the company. There is also a relationship between the quality of service and customer satisfaction. Mbewe (2019) in her study recommends that ZESCO management should concentrate on improving service quality in order to improve customer value and satisfaction. Another interesting fact from the literature is that ZESCO internal KPI shows positive customer service results as opposed to external KPI's. Social media sites also give a good indication of customer satisfaction. ZESCO's customer sentiments can be seen from Facebook (2022) that gives a rating of 1.5 out of 5 on a customer recommendation survey. This data should not be taken lightly by any marketing team.

2.2.2 Customer Satisfaction.

They are many definitions of customer satisfaction and thus making it difficult to have a standard definition to use. According to a study by Giese & Joan (2000) there are three elements that sum up most definitions of customer satisfaction or consumer satisfaction as it is called. These are: 1) consumer satisfaction is a response (emotional or cognitive); 2) the response pertains to a particular focus (expectations, product, consumption experience, etc.); and 3) the response occurs at a particular time (after consumption, after choice, based on accumulated experience, etc).

Customer Satisfaction basically occurs when a product or service meets or exceeds a customer's expectations based on specifications, product perceived value and how it makes the customer feel. Confirmation results when the perceived performance matches standards, whereas disconfirmation results from a mismatch, confirmation and disconfirmation are expected to determine consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Şensoy & Küçükosmanoğlu, 2010).

It is therefore evident that customer satisfaction is not an absolute condition, but levels of satisfaction can range from an extremely dissatisfied customer to an extremely satisfied customer. Şensoy & Küçükosmanoğlu (2010) also state that one of the many ways of measuring customer satisfaction is to compute a Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) based on customer's ratings of their satisfaction. They further state that a customer satisfaction index result at average levels around for example 70-80 out of 100 could be considered satisfactory for a business

In research conducted by Mbewe (2019, P38) quality of service was found to be the number one influence on customer satisfaction of the ZESCO Limited residential customers. Mbewe further stated on a scale of 5 only 15.9% respondents said they were satisfied with ZESCO's services out of a sample size of 107 customers. Over 50% strongly disagreed as to whether they were satisfied.

According to Khadka and Maharjan (2017) generally, price, quality, reliability, empathy and responsiveness are the main factors that influence the customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Customer satisfaction is a major business key performance indicator. Most of the research has linked it to customer loyalty, repurchases and ultimately profitability. For a firm like ZESCO Limited positive customer satisfaction is key in repairing the brand reputation of the firm. Research articles used in this review show that ZESCO has dissatisfied customers. It is important for the company to find out why these customers are dissatisfied.

According to Filipe (2013), Customers who make complaints provide an organization with the opportunity to solve certain operational malfunctions, to learn from negative situations and consequently to re-establish their satisfaction and trust. It is therefore important to note that the customer complaints by ZESCO Limited customers gives and opportunity to the company to improve. What is important is to clearly understand the complaints and device strategies that will help reduce the complaints.

2.2.3 Social media

In a survey conducted by the Zambia Telecommunication and Communication Authority ZICTA (2018), 12.8% Zambian individuals had access to the internet. The survey further revealed that 78.4 % of all internet users had a social media account with 91.8 % subscribed to Facebook. Facebook is the most popular social media outlet in the country. ZESCO Limited also runs a page on Facebook. Stat counter (2022) estimates social media usage in Zambia to be at 72.93% users for Facebook, Pinterest with 11% twitter 6% and YouTube around 5%. Instagram accounts to only 2.5% users.

According to Kemp (2021), as of January 2021 the internet usage in Zambia had grown to 29% and social media usage stood at 14%. These statistics show a steady growth of the usage of social media in Zambia and more reason for corporate firms to take it seriously.

Of interest in this research is the corporate use of social media. Samsung electronics West Africa sees the social media as a strategic business management tool, used in social listening for the purpose of understanding customers' needs/desires, gathering competitor intelligence, measuring marketing performance and garnering early warning system for looming corporate crises (Batta et al., 2015). Proper use of social media by corporate entities does a lot of good for companies. It is therefore important for corporate entities to understand the right use of social media.

In their research Batta et al state key uses of social media which include building support with potential clients, tracking public perceptions around sensitive business issues, recruiting, and enhancing customer retention. According to Niemi (2013) Companies should be present on those social media platforms their customers are using.

From research conducted by Mogaji et al (2018) social media customers use Facebook to air out their frustrations about the performance of energy companies in the United Kingdom. The research also reveals through a qualitative study that consumers are generally dissatisfied with the performance of energy companies in the UK. The study concludes that Facebook offers a platform to build and develop a consumer–brand relationship where customers can raise their concerns in a way that they could not do face-to-face or over the phone. This highlights some managerial implications regarding the staff engaging with customers online (Mogaji et al., 2018).

Some research has shown effectiveness in certain social media strategies that big firms use to improve customer satisfaction. Beard (2022) finds that establishing of customer discussion forums on social media as done by Hp is an effective strategy. Beard also mentions strategies like the monitoring of brand mentions and sentiments on social media and formulating quick responses.

According to Beard (2022) an interesting model is being implemented by some of the world's biggest companies. It exists and is practiced in the customer community's space. Let's look at a real example. Over on the HP community site, a member spends upwards of 30 unpaid hours a week responding to queries on their discussion forums. In this case, HP is using their customers to answer HP related questions. They empower their members with community management tools that encourage engagement.

All in all, as seen from the literature a company can use social media effectively by having it in the strategic plans for the Company

2.2.4 Data Analysis

Not much research has been carried out in the area of customer satisfaction, loyalty or customer feedback on ZESCO Limited. From the research carried out, what is clear is that ZESCO customers are dissatisfied generally. This is not an isolated case as data from companies dealing in energy in places like the UK and Australia show similar results. This though does not entirely agree with some the statistics provided by ZESCO Limited and the Energy Regulation Board. Most of the literature does not clearly differentiate between residential and commercial customers.

The literature on customer satisfaction generally shows how wide and complex the subject is. The literature also brings out aspects that improve customer satisfaction. Because the topic is wide the different articles do not agree on exact aspects that can improve customer satisfaction.

From the literature the percentage of Zambians using social media has been increasing. What can also be observed is that Facebook is by far the most popular social media application in Zambia.

2.3 Conclusion

Clearly ZESCO'S customer feedback is not positive and customer satisfaction as the literature has demonstrated is not high. They are several reasons given but one of the research papers reviewed points to an overall poor quality of service as the number one reason for the dissatisfaction.

The review also considered aspects of customer satisfaction from its definition and measurement. One important attribute of customer satisfaction is its ability to create customer loyalty. Another aspect is the ability to turn some customers into brand ambassadors. ZESCO Limited needs customers who will talk positively about the brand to improve the brand Image.

Social media usage by corporate entities as shown from the literature has many functions from prospecting, advertising, image building and damage control. A social media strategy is a must for any corporation in the 21st century. ZESCO Limited is no exception. The strategy can have two purposes in the case of ZESCO. Firstly, deal with customer perceptions or and understand how to use social media to resolve quality of service issues.

From the literature reviewed, it is prudent for this research to pick Facebook as a case study to represent social media sites. This is because Facebook has by far the highest number of social media users in the Country. It can also be concluded from the literature that negative feedback and complaints from customers can be seen as an opportunity to deal with the deficiencies in a company and re-establish the required trust between the firm and the customers. The complaints from ZESCO Limited's residential customers do give a platform for ZESCO to learn and provide better services to its customers and re-establish the trust and confidence from the customers.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The key purpose of the chapter is to look at the methods and methodologies used to meet the objectives of this research. The chapter contains the research Paradigm, research design, data collection and conclusion. According to Chisenga (2012), a methodology can be defined as the activity or business of choosing, reflecting upon, evaluating and justifying the methods one uses in data collection. Whilst research methods are the means one uses to collect the data.

3.2 Research Paradigm.

The research topic for this study was "ZESCO's strategies to use social media to improve customer satisfaction surrounding residential neighborhoods in Zambia". In order to gather worthwhile strategies to improve customer satisfaction. The views of customers and those of ZESCO employees needed to be collected and analyzed. Further literature which provides guidance on social media strategies to improve customer satisfaction was reviewed.

According to Dawson (2007) qualitative research explores attitudes, experiences and behaviors whilst quantitative research generates statistics through large scale surveys. Dawson further explains that one can combine both qualitative and quantitative research in a method called triangulation.

The research leans heavily on the general thoughts and views of actual customers regarding what they would want to read on ZESCO's Facebook page and other social media platforms. Findings from this would feed into the social media strategy. In order to obtain such data in detail a qualitative approach was used.

As much as the literature review highlights that generally ZESCO's residential customers are dissatisfied with the quality service offered by ZESCO, the research also endeavors to ascertain this fact. In order to obtain customer satisfaction index statistics, age and sex of customers. Quantitative methods have been used.

Ideally most of the information required to conduct this study and adequately answer the problem statement leans towards a qualitative research methodology but important quantitative data was required. Research conducted by Afande (2015) and published in an international marketing journal with the title "Factors affecting levels of customer satisfaction in government parastatals in Kenya (A case of Kenya Power)" follows a descriptive research methodology which is qualitative but both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. A lot of similarities exist between Afande's research and this research including the title. In another research by University of Oulu and Tenhunen (2016), on developing a digital marketing strategy for an energy company both qualitative and quantitative methods were used.

This research though mostly qualitative still depended on some quantitative methods therefore the overall methodology was qualitative.

3.3 Research Design

Apart from using qualitative methodologies, mixed methods were used to obtain data. What is important to note is that in order to properly address the problem statement and the objectives of the research, data was required from the literature, from different departments within ZESCO and also from the residential Customers. The research design refers to the overall strategy that you choose to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring you will effectively address the research problem; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data (*Research Guides: Organizing Your Social Sciences Research Paper: Types of Research Designs*, 2022). Data used in this research was collected in three ways. Firstly, through the literature review, secondly through questionnaires and lastly through an interview with the digital marketing specialist at ZESCO Limited.

3.4 Methods

In a study conducted by Mbale (2015), on information dissemination strategies for ZESCO Limited in densely populated areas. The following methods were used; semi structured questionnaires for customers, a focus group was conducted for other customers and finally a group of employees also received questionnaires.

Mbale's topic and usage of open-ended questionnaires is consistent with this study. Residential customers were handed questionnaires which combine quantitative and qualitative answers. The Main goal of the questionnaires was to meet the objectives of the study. This could be done by first asking questions that brought out the exact needs of residential customer from ZESCO. Then allow customers to propose solutions to meet those needs. Customers were also asked to suggest preferred social media topics from ZESCO in order to involve the voices of customers in a social media strategy. The questionnaires used were semi structured.

An interview with marketing particularly the digital marketing team was necessary in order to know what strategies are already being implemented by the company. This definitely required a qualitative approach and a semi structured interview form was created. This is in line with the problem statement which is "Poor customer satisfaction and customer feedback by ZESCO residential Customers in Zambia". Dawson (2007) describes semi structured interviews as the most common and in this type of interview the researcher wants to compare and contrast information obtained from other interviews. The interviews were meant to uncover strategies, plans and efforts already being made by ZESCO Limited on social media to improve the customer satisfaction.

Afande (2015) also used interviews and questionnaires to both employees and customers of Kenya Power in order to discover factors affecting the customer satisfaction in parastatals.

3.5 Population

The word population refers to the universe of units from which the sample is to be selected (Bryman, 2008). In the case of this research the population was all residential customers of ZESCO who use social media and all ZESCO employees.

3.6 Sampling Design

According to Afande (2015) A sample is defined as subject of a population that has been selected to reflect or represent characteristics of a population. They are mainly two sampling methods; these are Probability sampling and purposive Sampling. A targeted total number of respondents were about 40. This is because the most important responses to the researcher were qualitative and a number larger than this would not be very appropriate. Further quantitative data was required hence not a number that is too low. 32 responses were obtained from an over 65 electronic questionnaires sent out.

The researcher used purposive samples particularly convenient sampling to obtain data through questionnaires. This is firstly because of the constraints of time it is easier to send questionnaires to those who are connected to the researcher on social media. Therefore, questionnaires were sent through the Facebook news feed, Facebook story platform, all WhatsApp groups in which the researcher is a member and also through the LinkedIn platform. It was easier to do the circulation because electronic questionnaires were done using google forms.

Google forms provides good analysis tools to researchers because the data is already placed into charts as it is being collected. The other advantage to the researcher is that the raw data and questionnaires are saved on google drive and can be referenced any time.

3.7 Data collection

3.7.1 Data Collection Instruments

3.7.1.a Questionnaires

In this study questionnaires were not sent by hand. A special mobile, PC application called google forms was used. This application is primarily good for conducting online surveys, registrations among other functions. Google forms have many functions and can be used for the following to create polls, quizzes, surveys, applications, evaluations, and more within Google Drive. You can build your own form using the tools in Google Forms, or choose from a variety of templates, such as event registration, course evaluations, (Google Forms | University IT, 2022b).

The convenience, efficiency and real time monitoring of results are among the many reasons the researcher used google forms. The forms needed no extra software as analysis on the data especially the quantitative was done as and when the results are coming.

The researcher would copy a link from the created questionnaire and then share the link through the social media platforms used. On Facebook now Meta this was shared on the status update for anyone to participate. On the LinkedIn application a link was also shared on the authors status update for anyone connected to the author to respond. The author further shared

the link on the WhatsApp social media application. The difference in the WhatsApp social media application is that messages had to be sent to people picked from the phone book and also shared in groups where the author is part.

3.7.1.b Interview

The author had initially planned about three interviews with the heads of marketing, customer service and the national call center. Permission to gather information from ZESCO Limited was obtained by the author. The author then made efforts through official emails for appointments and details of the interviews to be carried out. This included a rough structure of the questions and topics.

The author managed to get a response from the marketing department at ZESCO Limited. A phone call was arranged with the contact person who is a digital marketing specialist at ZESCO Limited. A phone interview was carried out with a pre-discussed outline of topics and questions. Answers not given were sent through email to the Author.

3.7.2 Data Analysis Tools

The questionnaire had both quantitative and qualitative questions. The google form is able to make charts and graphs for all the quantitative data as the responses are sent. This meant that no extra software was needed to analyze the quantitative data from the study. Statistical data like age groups, customer expenditure, and satisfaction rates were easily analyzed.

The google form responses can also be exported into a Microsoft excel format for easier analysis. Therefore, all the open-ended responses and questions were exported into excel and a master analysis sheet was created. In the excel sheet every qualitative question was analyzed manually and independently. This resulted into the identification of key topics from answers given by the respondents.

The interview questionnaire was merely used to get policy related information regarding social media marketing in ZESCO Limited.

3.8 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter discussed the methodology and methods used in the research. The main methodology used in this research was qualitative. In order to obtain the data, the methods used included interviews and questionnaires. The Sample size for the questionnaire was a total of 35 and one for the interview. The quantitative data was presented using pie charts, bar charts and graphs. For easy interpretation percentages were used. The qualitative was broken into themes and then quantified.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Data Analysis

4.1.1 Introduction

Refer to the Data Analysis Worksheet appendix 4. which shows the rough analysis sheet used to organize the raw data from the questionnaire into logical data for presentation in the report. In describing thematic data analysis method Dawson (2002) defines it as analyzing data by themes or similar patterns, these themes are obtained from the data and are not imposed by the researcher. The open-ended questions in the questionnaire were analyzed using thematic analysis which is closely related to comparative analysis. Thematic Analysis can also be defined as a method for identifying and analysing patterns of meaning in a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

4.1.2 Quantitative data Analysis

From the Questionnaire 80% of the respondents were between 30 to 40 years, 12% between 20- 30 years, 4% between 50-60 and 4% between 40-50 years of age.

Out of the respondents 80% were male and 20% female. According to Napoleoncat.com (2022) Zambia currently has 3 048 800 Facebook users. Of these users 82.2% of these users are between the ages of 18 and 54 years. Whilst 78.7% are between 18 and 44 years. 47.4% male and 35.2 % female. Figure 1 shows the average expenditure, age group, sex and customer satisfaction of the residential customers. The researcher has a similar pattern in that 92% of the respondents were between the age of 20 and 40. This data although could have been influenced by other factors is important for ZESCO to identify the target market for its social media postings on the Facebook platform. It is clear that information and services provided on the platform must consider the age group being targeted

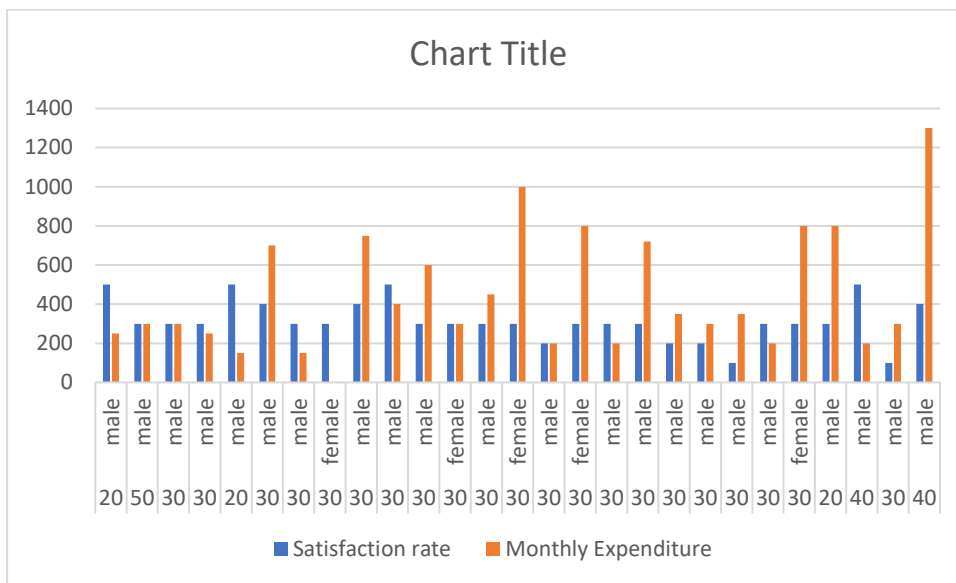


Figure 1: Satisfaction index, expenditure and sex.

On customer satisfaction index. The Likert scale was utilized. Mcleod (2008) defines a Likert scale as a five (or seven) point scale which is used to allow the individual to express how much they agree or disagree with a particular statement. A customer satisfaction index of points 1 to 5 with 1 being very dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied is an example of a Likert Scale.

16% very satisfied, 8% satisfied, 72% neutral, 12% dissatisfied and 4% very dissatisfied

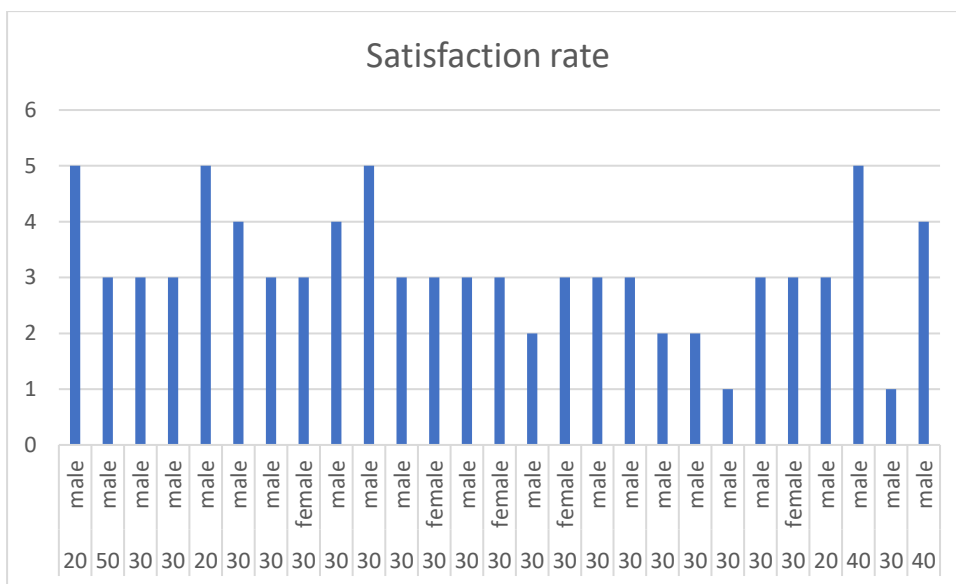


Figure 2: Table of age range, sex and Customer satisfaction index.

The average expenditure of the respondents is K315. There was a correlation in the data between the age and the expenditure but this can be ignored because the sample is large enough to produce that statistical fact. Another important fact from the respondents is that the complaints against the quality of service by ZESCO is consistent. Therefore, there is no correlation between the expenditure and the satisfaction rate from the data.

All female respondents scored 3 out of 5 in the satisfaction index. Which implies they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with ZESCO Limited. This segment of customers can also be a good target market for ZESCO Limited.

Of the respondents 36% have not liked any of the ZESCO pages whilst 44% have followed at least a ZESCO page on social media. 20% of the respondents did not answer.

4.1.3 Qualitative data Analysis

4.1.3a Qualitative data Analysis from customer questionnaire

The first analytical question was ‘‘What do you think ZESCO should be putting on their Facebook, Instagram and or LinkedIn to make it more beneficial to you as the customer?’’ From the 31 responses to the questionnaire only 26 responded to this question.

The major themes that emerged from the responses are Customer support information and. performance metrics about ZESCO. 88 % of the respondents preferred customer support information whilst the 12% preferred ZESCO performance metrics.

The performance metrics included ZESCO’s financial performance and general ZESCO performance according to the key performance indicators.

The Customer support information included faults updates 30%, new connections procedures 23%, information about electricity rates 19%, and real time interactive customer support on mobile and social media 19%. Refer to figure 3 below.

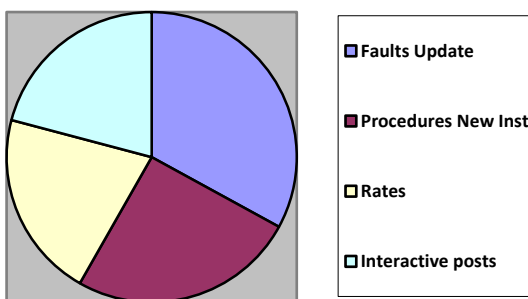


Figure 3. Customer support information required on social media

The second analytical was ‘What are your biggest challenges when dealing with ZESCO Limited?’. This question got 32 responses from a total of 35 respondents. The following themes or key topics were derived from the data. These were communication challenges, new connections, response time for faults and frequent outages

The communication challenges included poor feedback from customer support lines, unanswered phone lines, these accounted for 32 % of the residential customers biggest challenges when dealing with ZESCO.

The new connection challenges were mainly delays that a new connection takes for from application to having actual electricity which included bribes in the process, unclear procedures etc. This accounted to about 25% of the biggest challenges that customers encounter when dealing with ZESCO.

The other challenge encountered by customers when dealing with ZESCO is the response time to faults. This accounted for about 22% of customer challenges when dealing with ZESCO.

The last challenge from this question is the frequent outages experienced by customers. Figure 4 highlights the challenges.

BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACED BY ZESCO RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMERS				
	communication challenges	new connection	Poor fault response time	Frequent Outages
Responses	32 %	25%	22%	21%

Figure 4. Highlighting top challenges residential customers have with ZESCO Limited.

The question ‘‘Are they problems or services that you feel ZESCO can help you with. Without you actually visiting customer service?’’ brought out a diverse number of themes. Although 67% of the respondents gave new connections (new installation) application process as a service that can be done online. Quick response time as a service that could be offered without one visiting a service Centre. Whilst 20% of the respondents picked on quickened fault resolution time.

The question “What would you want ZESCO to change in the way they relate to the customer?” brought out about 5 main topics that residential customers need ZESCO to change in the way they deal with the way they relate with the customers. At least 41% desired quick fault resolution time, 23% primarily wanted an improved customer experience, 18% talked about improving communication especially the congested phone lines. The other 18% was concerned about the time it takes for new connections and desired for this to change.

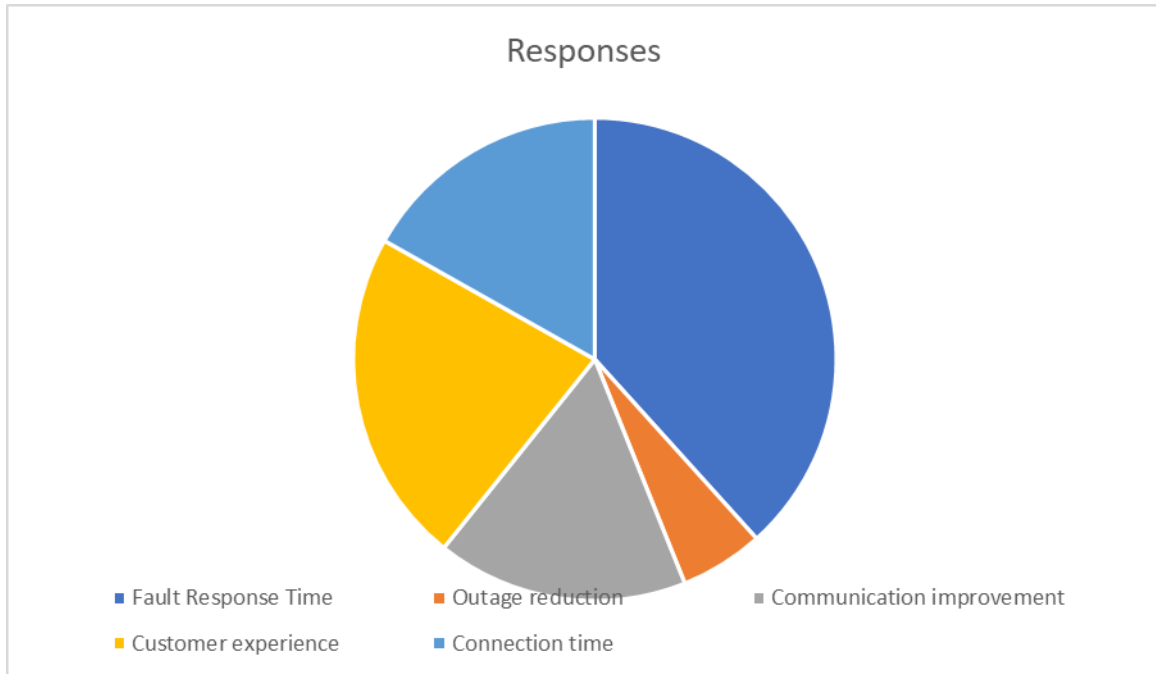


Figure 5. Response Analysis for the 3rd Analytical Question

The question “Are there problems or services that you feel ZESCO can help you with. Without you actually visiting customer service?” had a total of 30 respondents giving their views. Almost 40% of respondents thought that all services are better resolved on a face-to-face basis or had no comment. This is the group called nothing in the figure below. 25% were of the view that’s updates on faults and information surrounding faults could be resolved online whilst another 25% talked about making processes relating to new installations and connections online instead of physical services. 4% is for electronic purchase of units and 4% for alternative energy solutions being advertised online.

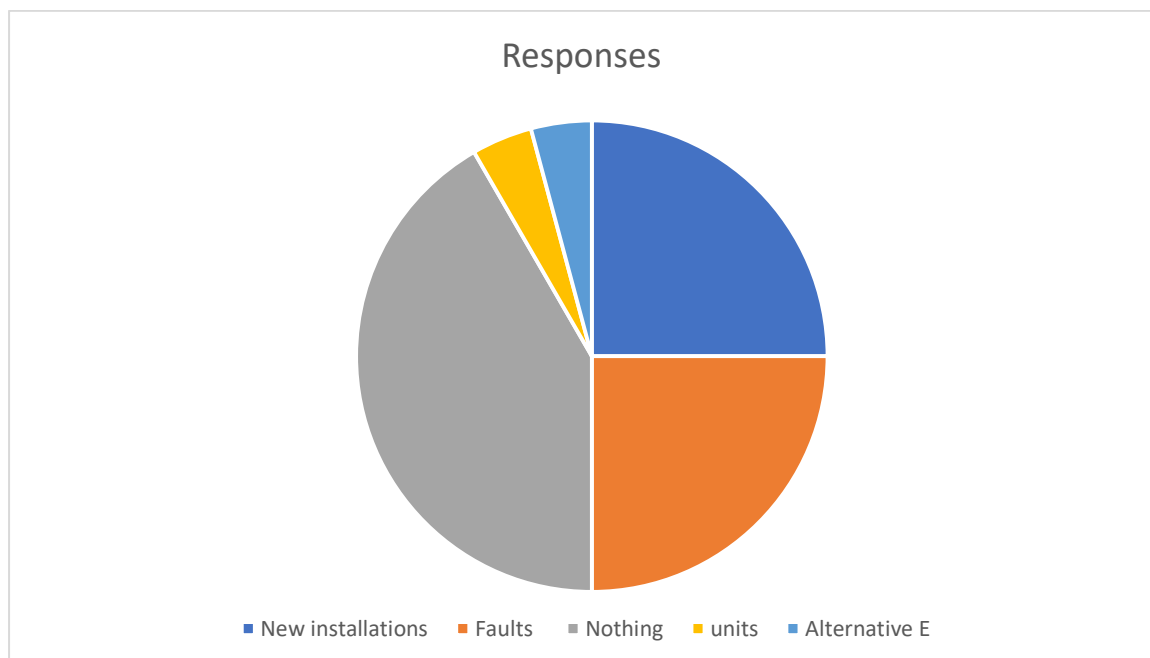


Figure 6. Responses to fourth Analytical question

4.1.3b Qualitative data Analysis from interview

Question I, in the interview was designed to understand the rationale, source and meaning behind the posts that ZESCO makes especially on social media. According to the response the messages are designed according to customer segments and message.

Question II, V and VI these three questions were designed to have an idea of the current strategies ZESCO is using on its social media platforms. According to the response ZESCO uses social media to fulfill the objectives of the marketing strategy and the company has formed a new digital marketing unit. Answers about the link among departments were not clear.

Question III, the question was to find out if ZESCO’s marketing staff have an idea of the actual performance on social media. The response was a rating of 7.5 out of 10.

Question IV, the question was formulated to discover what ZESCO does about complaints and negative sentiments on social media. According to the response the marketing team uses comments to develop better products and services.

4.2 Interpretation of quantitative data

They were 23% female respondents from the questionnaire and 77% male respondents, All the female respondents are not satisfied customers of ZESCO according to the findings. The average monthly expenditure of the respondents on ZESCO was K 476. It is no coincidence that 92% of the respondents are below 40 Years of age. These results do agree with data about Facebook usage in the country. Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram are dominated by young people. Platforms like LinkedIn have a slightly different outlook. The data is summarized by figure. Below.

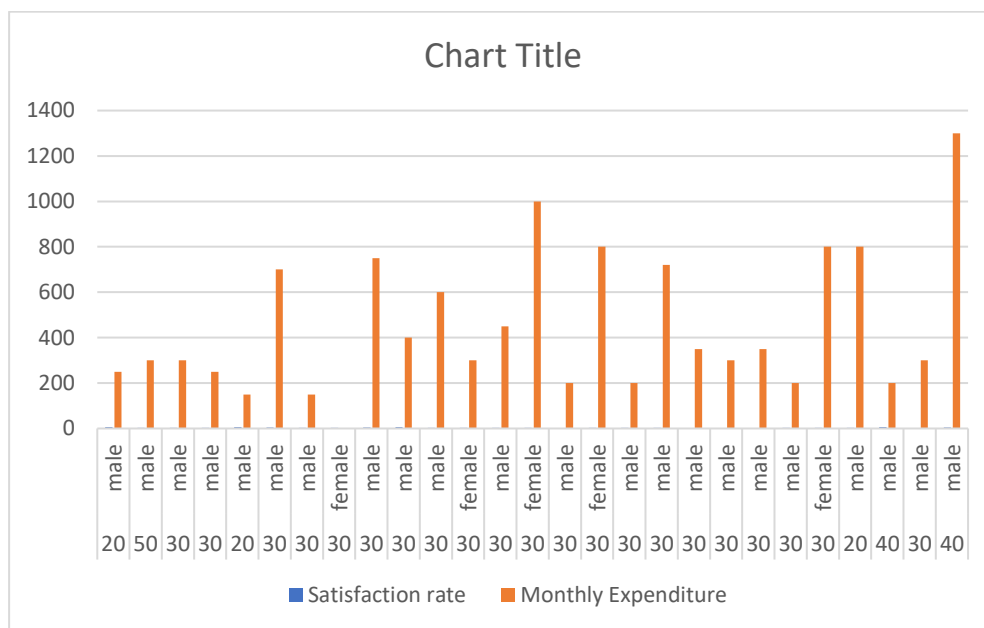


Figure 7: Sex, expenditure in kwacha and age table

4.3 Interpretation of Analytical findings from the questionnaire

4.3.1 Question 1 Interpretation

The analytical question “What are your biggest challenges when dealing with ZESCO limited?”. This question is particularly important because the topic for this research was “ZESCO's strategies to use social media to improve customer satisfaction surrounding residential neighborhoods in Zambia”. Understanding a customer’s needs is one of the most important facets of a business and marketing strategy. This question is meant to unearth the needs of ZESCO’S residential customer in order to come up with strategies that are based on solutions to meet the needs of the customer.

Kotler & Keller (2016) define marketing as meeting human and social needs and further state that the shortest definition of marketing is meeting needs profitably. Therefore, the need to understand the current problems ZESCO residential customers have with ZESCO was crucial to formulating social media strategies. The question covers research questions IV and V.

It is not strange that the majority of the residential customers complained about poor communication. In most of the responses the congested customer support line was cited as the biggest challenge. 10 out of 32 explicitly explained their challenges with the communication channel. Which is approximately 32%, 25% of the respondents bitterly complained about new connections to the electricity grid. Which are deemed to be slow. 22% about the poor fault resolution time by ZESCO and 9% complaint about frequent outages.

The findings from this question indicate the need for ZESCO to priorities the decongestion of the customer support lines, reduce the waiting time for new connections, work on reducing the fault resolution time and minimizing outages. This is the starting point for improving the quality of service and thereby the customer satisfaction.

4.3.2 Question 2. Interpretation

The analytical question “What do you think ZESCO should be putting on their Facebook, Instagram and or LinkedIn to make it more beneficial to you as the customer?”. This particular question is meant to cover the research questions II and III. It is key to the research because it allows the customer to be part of the solution through what is called voice of customer. Voice of the Customer is the process by which your customer's preferences and experiences are collected and then shared inside your organization. (Voice of the Customer: Culture for High Performance: The University of Western Australia, 2017b).

Understanding the thoughts, perceptions and opinions of the customers will ultimately have a huge impact on customer satisfaction. The responses were divided into several key topics that residential customers were interested in seeing on social media. The respondents were particularly more interested in getting useful customer support information in real time. This answer from the respondents is a clear message to the company that social media can be used to improve customer engagement.

The major one being knowledge of faults and power outages. This comes from a background where customers would experience a power outage without knowing the cause and the expected resolution time for the outage. If this information is readily available on social media and updated in real time it will help customers plan.

From the responses another customer support item that residential customers would like posted on social media is residential power rates and changes in rates. Next to this is information and procedures related to new electricity connection for residential customers. These responses clearly indicate that residential customers require certain information that will help ensure reliable supply and reduce bureaucracy.

Lastly key amongst residential customers needs is having real time and effective communication with the ZESCO Customer support staff through active phone lines publishing. Live chat boxes and comments in postings from ZESCO staff.

4.3.3 Question 3. Interpretation

The analytical question “What would you want ZESCO to change in the way they relate to the customer?”. This question had the lowest number of responses of the open-ended questions. This question was designed by the researcher like the previous one to uncover the needs of the customer. The purpose is to help design social media strategies that will appeal to the exact needs of the residential customer.

From the respondents' changes need to be effected in the fault resolution time, the customer experience at ZESCO and the communication between ZESCO and its residential customers. Improvements in new connection time is an essential part of the improvements that need to be made.

The last open-ended question was “Are there problems or services that you feel ZESCO can help you with. Without you actually visiting customer service?”. Of significance in the responses is the request from residential customers that fault and all information relating to faults should be made available to the customers without visiting any ZESCO office. The request to also have new connections procedures to be online instead of physical services.

4.3.4 Interview questions interpretation

From the interview responses it is clear that ZESCO does have a social media strategy designed to meet the objectives of the traditional marketing strategy. The company also decides when and what to post based on events and other factors. The where to post is determined by the customer segment. It is important to know that the company has a new unit specifically for digital marketing. This will give more attention to the social media side of digital marketing.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights the findings from chapter 4 based on the research objectives outlined in chapter 1.4. The conclusion also combines the findings with observations from the literature review in order to have a balanced picture of the results.

5.2 Conclusion

5.2.1 Specific Research Objective 1 was researching on general customer satisfaction data for ZESCO.

The quantitative results from the questionnaire confirms that the majority of the respondents are neither dissatisfied nor are they satisfied. Although the literature review which contains research with more focus on quantitative statistics of customer satisfaction. A study done by Tayali (2018) reveals that 51% of ZESCO customers were dissatisfied with ZESCO contact centers. Mbewe (2019) also conducted research on customer satisfaction of ZESCO'S residential customers in which only 15.9% were satisfied with the services of ZESCO Limited.

From all the findings the conclusion is that ZESCO Limited customer satisfaction ratings are not satisfactory. It can also be concluded from the interview that the internal marketing team might not be aware of the dissatisfaction of the residential customers as they rate their social media performance at 7.5 out of 10 whilst the actual rating according to Facebook (2022) is 1.5 out of 10.

5.2.2 Specific Research Objective 2 was researching on general customer dissatisfiers for ZESCO.

The findings from chapter 4 identify key items that cause dissatisfaction with ZESCO. Firstly, it is difficult for any customer to communicate with ZESCO customer service as seen from the findings. The lines are constantly busy and communication channels are very limited. The other two dissatisfaction points are the handling of new connections which take an abnormal amount of time and slow response time for faults and fault resolution. Mbewe (2019) links customer dissatisfaction to the quality of service in his research. In her study Mbale (2015) concluded that, ZESCO management needs to carry out an emergency evaluation on the existing channels of communication so that it can effectively disseminate information to its customers. Obviously, this is still a challenge.

5.2.3 Specific Research Objective 3 Studying the effective use of social media in order to improve customer satisfaction with particular interest in the use of social media to resolve customer complaints.

From the literature review the internet usage in Zambia grew from 12.8% to 29 % from 2018 to 2021. With Facebook usage being at 91 % as compared to 5% usage of youtube from internet users this is according to (ZICTA, 2018). The literature review describes two effective strategies being used by companies successfully, this is the monitoring of brand sentiments and mentions and secondly the building of customer discussion forums on social media platforms.

The findings from chapter 4 indicate that residential customers would like ZESCO to be engaging them in real time on social media on topics like faults and outages. Other customer support information like rates and changes in rates. Customer sentiments will and should form a key part of ZESCO's strategies to use social media to improve customer satisfaction.

5.2.4 The Main objective of this research was to strategize on how ZESCO can use social media to improve its customer satisfaction of residential customers in Zambia.

Since the goal of this research was to Strategize on how to use social media to improve the customer satisfaction of ZESCO'S Residential customers. Understanding the exact cause of the low customer satisfaction results was key to the research. The literature pointed to ZESCO'S quality of service as the main cause of the dissatisfaction rates. Findings from chapter 4 highlighted specific aspects of this quality of service. These included Poor communication with residential customers due to inaccessible customer support lines, slow response to faults and impossibly long new connection queues.

The Social media marketing strategy should firstly look at constantly collecting data from the customers in order to meet their needs. Secondly use social media to look at the customers biggest challenges like poor to no communication with customer support centers. This can be done by building engaging platforms for even fault reporting. Use defined social media platforms to build communities and use them as a way of reporting and resolving faults.

From the literature the social media strategy must be derived from the corporate strategy through to the marketing strategy.

5.3 Recommendations

These recommendations are derived from the findings of the research, the conclusion of the research, the literature review and the thoughts of the author. ZESCO Limited urgently needs to look at the following items in order to improve its customer satisfaction for the residential customers and thereby protect its brand.

- Improving communication with the residential customers
- Improving fault resolution cycle time. This means from the time the fault is discovered to the time the fault is resolved.
- The new connection Cycle time. That is from the time the new connection is applied for to the time it is completed.
- Ability to share clear procedures and processes to customers on social media.

In order to improve the above-mentioned items. ZESCO will need to implement the following strategies on social media

- Use Facebook as a pilot project to develop social media communities for different locations as a way of reporting faults and tracking the fault resolution times. This will ensure that customers within particular communities will know exactly what is happening in their areas and what ZESCO Limited is doing about it. These communities should encourage customer engagements with management tools provided by ZESCO.
- Commence the use of mentions and sentiment tracking on all social media platforms in order for the company to develop quick and valuable responses to customer complaints. This will help reduce the damage to the brand name.
- The biggest source of complaints on poor communication emanates from ZESCO'S call center. Customers rarely get through the call center whenever they have a challenge. Enable editing rights to trained customer support staff to attend to faults reported on the social media sites with Facebook as a pilot project. The advantage is a fault resolution process started and ended on social media will not only improve customer satisfaction for one customer but will advertise ZESCO to the larger Facebook community. The customer support staff should engage the customer right on the platform.
- The ZESCO digital marketing team should strategize on the need to periodically post procedures, processes and instructions on social media as this is one of the biggest needs highlighted by the residential customers. Procedures to include new connections, how to use the ZESCO Application, how to report faults etc. It is clear from the research that many customers are ignorant about ZESCO'S processes.

5.4 Limitations of the Study.

The limitations of this research can be summarized into three categories. The first being data related, second time and thirdly authors knowledge on the demands of a research

The data collection process was first delayed by the school and then permission from the authors work place. After the delay the initial plan of conducting face to face interviews with Managers from the National call centre of ZESCO and the ZESCO specialist for digital marketing did not take place for various work-related reasons. Email interview questionnaires were sent to the respective officers, but only one reply can through and it did not have the detailed information required by the interviewer because the digital marketing specialist did not answer it themselves.

Therefore, sentiments on customer faults needed from customer service and sentiments on social media marketing from the digital marketing team are missing from this research.

5.5 Recommendations for further research.

Missing from this research is data from fault resolution departments within ZESCO to determine what the most common faults are so as to reduce the fault clearance and response time. This is worth being an objective in future research to make the social media strategies more accurate.

The research did not focus on a particular social media site, therefore future research can narrow down to at least one social media site.

Future research can also consider looking at social media marketing as a solution rather than the traditional marketing methods'

REFERENCES

- [1] A Story about us (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.zesco.co.zm/>.
- [2] Afande, F. O. (2015). Factors affecting levels of customer satisfaction in government parastatals in Kenya (A case of Kenya Power). *Journal of Marketing and Consumer Research*, Vol.9, 2015, 57–58. <https://core.ac.uk/download/234693870.pdf>
- [3] Batta, H., Batta, W. N., & Mboho, M. (2015). Research on humanities and social sciences. mitigating corporate image crisis in the social media: Focus on some Nigerian firms, Vol.5, (No.24.), 5–6. <https://core.ac.uk/outputs/234674822>.
- [4] Beard, R. (2022). 5 ways to increase customer satisfaction using social media. <https://www.Verizon.Com/Business/Small-Business-Essentials/Resources/5-Ways-Increase-Customer-Satisfaction-Using-Social-Media-134147271/>. Retrieved February 27, 2022, from <https://www.verizon.com/business/small-business-essentials/resources/5-ways-increase-customer-satisfaction-using-social-media-134147271/>.
- [5] Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods* (3rd Edition). New York: Oxford University Press Inc.
- [6] Dawson, C. (Ed.). (2002). How to analyze your data. In *Practical research methods* (pp. 110–112). Oxford: How to Books.
- [7] Dawson, C. (Ed.). (2002). How to analyze your data. . In *Research Methods* (pp. 13–16). Oxford: How to Books.
- [8] Facebook (2022). ZESCO Page Reviews. Retrieved from https://web.facebook.com/ZESCOCORP/reviews/?ref=page_internal
- [9] Giese, Joan & Cote, Joseph. (2000). Defining Consumer Satisfaction. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*. 4. 1-24.
- [10] Giese, J. L., & Cote, J. A. (2000). Defining consumer satisfaction. *Academy of marketing science review*, 1(1), 1-22.
- [11] Grégoire, Y., Salle, A., & Tripp, T. M. (2015). Managing social media crises with your customers: The good, the bad, and the ugly. *Business Horizons*, 58(2), 173–182. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2014.11.001>
- [12] Kemp, S. (2021, February 12). Digital 2021. Retrieved from <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-zambia>
- [13] Khadka, K., & Maharjan, S. (2017). Thesis Centria University of Applied Sciences. Customer satisfaction and customer Loyalty, 9–10. https://www.academia.edu/37710540/Customer_Satisfaction_and_Customer_Loyalty
- [14] Kotler, P., & Keller, K. (2016). *Marketing management* (15th ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- [15] Manning, J. (2014). Definition and Classes of social media. A definition of social media as well as an overview of common types. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309459771_Social_Media/link/5f933d03458515
- [16] Mbale, T. (2015). Customer perceptions regarding information dissemination strategies of electricity provision by ZESCO LTD in densely populated areas of Lusaka District (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Zambia).
- [17] Mbewe, B. (2019). An Assessment of customer satisfaction at Zambia Electricity and Supply Corporation in Lusaka perspective from Retail consumers of electricity in selected ZESCO operatives in Lusaka. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309459771_Social_Media/link/5f933d03458515b7cf99.
- [18] Mcleod, S. (2008). Likert scale definition, examples and analysis | simply psychology. Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/likert-scale.html>
- [19] Mogaji, E., Ukpabi, D., & Olaleye, S. (2018). Examining consumer-brand relationships in the UK energy sector: A social media perspective. *Academy of marketing annual conference Proceedings*, 1–2. <https://core.ac.uk/download/161338005.pdf>
- [20] Niemi, T. (2013). International business thesis. utilizing social media in marketing and in strengthening the corporate image, 42–45. <https://core.ac.uk/download/38099295.pdf>
- [21] Quality resources: ‘Customer’ What is customer satisfaction. (2021). Retrieved from <https://asq.org/quality-resources/customer-satisfaction>.

- [22] *Research guides: Organizing your social sciences research paper: Types of research designs*. (2022). Libguides.Usc. Edu. <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/researchdesigns>.
- [23] Sensoy Istanbul, E. |., & Küçükosmanoğlu, A. (2010). "Customer Satisfaction, a Central Phenomenon in Marketing., 120 121. https://www.academia.edu/1977823/customer_satisfaction_a_central_phenomenon_in_marketing.
- [24] Simundi, L., & Marvin, K. (2020). The International Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Research. Assessment on Application of Total Quality Management Philosophy in Parastatals in Zambia: A Case of ZESCO Limited and Lusaka Water and Sewerage Company, (Paper ID: CFP/2204/2020), 1–2. <http://www.multiresearch.net/cms/publications/CFP22042020.pdf>.
- [25] The Energy Regulation Board. (2021). *The energy sector report 2020*, 42–43. <https://www.erb.org.zm/wp-content/uploads/files/esr2020.pdf>.
- [26] The Energy Regulation Board. (2020). *The energy sector report 2019*, 42–43. <https://www.erb.org.zm/wp-content/uploads/files/esr2019.pdf>.
- [27] The Energy Regulation Board. (2020). The Energy Sector Report 2019, 42–43. <https://www.erb.org.zm/wp-content/uploads/files/esr2019.pdf>.
- [28] The effect of social media experiential marketing towards customers' satisfaction (A Study in Chingu Korean Fan Cafe Bandung Indonesia). (2017). International journal of business and administrative studies, 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.20469/ijbas.3.10002-2>.
- [29] University of Oulu, & Tenhunen, A. (2016). *Digital marketing plan for VTT's conventional and renewable energy solutions*. <https://core.ac.uk/download/76176345.pdf>
- [30] Google forms | university IT. (2022b, February 22). <https://uit.stanford.edu>. <https://uit.stanford.edu/service/gsuite/google-forms>
- [31] Vagliasindi, M., Jones, B, J. (2013). Power Market Structure: Revisiting Policy Options Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/13115>.
- [32] Voice of the customer : Culture for high performance : The university of western Australia. (2017b, January 5). The University of Western Australia. <https://www.hr.uwa.edu.au/serviceculture/continuous-improvement-tools/voice-of-the-customer>
- [33] Zambian parliament. (2015). *Report of the committee on economic affairs, energy and labour for the fourth session of the eleventh national assembly appointed on Tuesday, 23rd September, 2014*. https://www.parliament.gov.zm/sites/default/files/documents/committee_reports/report%20of%20the%20committee%20on%20economic%20affairs%204th%20session.pdf
- [34] ZESCO. (2022). *A story about us*. Retrieved April 10, 2022, from <https://www.zesco.co.zm/about>
- [35] ZESCO Limited. (2014). Company Newsletter.
- [36] ZICTA. (2018, March 20). *2018 national survey on access and usage of information and communication technologies by households and individuals* [press release]. https://www.zamstats.gov.zm/phocadownload/Other_Institutions/ZICTA%20ICT%20Survey%20-%202018.pdf