

## **Applications of Social Media for Promoting Higher Learning Institutions' Activities in Tanzania**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated applications of social media in promotion activities among Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania. Guided by a phenomenological philosophy, a multi-case study was conducted with four HLIs ranging from public to private offering institutions. The findings revealed that there is still a limited use of social media among the selected HLIs where dominance of traditional media over social media was observed. It was revealed that HLIs social media usage included posting information about college life, upcoming and past events, and publishing new programmes. The social media effectiveness included wider reach, receiving questions, feedback, increasing visibility, turnout of people during events and responses to different posts made. Challenges observed included management, infrastructure, and ability to accommodate the negative impacts. The study urges universities to actively incorporate social media platforms in the traditional marketing platforms to improve the effectiveness of their promotions. Provision of financial and managerial resources is important for ensuring that all units at the universities are active and collaborative in social media use.

**Keywords:** *Social Media; Promotion; Promotion Activities; Higher learning Institutions; Tanzania*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Tanzanian HLIs are in stiff competition following the enactment of the Education Act No. 10 of 1995. To maintain competitiveness, they need to constantly attract, engage, and retain their customers and offer programmes as per customer expectations. Luckily, the emergence of social media offers numerous capabilities for cost-effective ways to engage and gather customer information and to create competitive tailor made products/services. This study assesses the application of social media for promoting HLIs' activities in Tanzania.

### **BACKGROUND**

Social media is increasingly being used as a marketing platform in the current era (Mazurek, Korzyński, & Górska, 2019; Constantinides, & Stagno, 2011). The increased usage is partly attributed to the need for cost effective means to persuade customers amid the intense competition that various sectors in Tanzania, including HLIs, are experiencing. Social media refers to a cluster of web-based applications created from ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that enables the creation and sharing of different types of user made content over the Internet (Lankshear and Knobel, 2007; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Although social media was initially geared towards bringing individuals close, it also enhanced its organizational use (Constine, 2013). Since its inception, it has helped to transform businesses around the world and will probably bring more changes for the future (Borders, 2009; Lankshear and Knobel, 2007; Kotler and Keller, 2006). Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) thus can take advantage of this invention and strategically employ social media for promotion of their various undertakings.

It is thus argued that the use of social media platforms would enable higher learning institutions to attract and reach future students (Barnes & Lescault, 2012). Studies such as Davis et al., 2012; Lupton, 2014; Mosha et al., 2015; Kumar & Nanda, 2019 indicate that universities have also already embarked on the use of social media for enhancing a number of their business goals. Lupton (2014), for example, indicates that some academics are already using social media in several strategic ways and they have experienced many benefits for their academic works. Other authors even overemphasized and considered social media utilization to be part of everyday activities within higher learning institutions. Klamm (2011) noted that high school students and the 18-24 demographic from which college students are drawn, use social networks to stay connected. Further key groups such as parents of potential students, donors, faculty, and staff are available via the social media platforms. As a result, universities should make every effort to integrate social media platforms in their planning for marketing and communication.

Furthermore, other scholars (Davis et al., 2012 and Mosha, et al., 2015) further assert that, if used correctly, social media can help universities share information and build relationships with various audiences. From recruiting new students and faculty, to raising money, to diffusing incidents and situations—leveraging Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and other networks are powerful tools in the hands of communicators (Reuben, 2009). Moreover, engaging with social media as a higher education marketing tool is an attractive proposition, because of positive past experience in the business sector on the effects of social media marketing and the high adoption rates of social media by the younger generation (Boyd, 2008). Likewise, Constantinides and Stagno (2011) argued that the use of social media in higher learning institutions improves customer engagement, communications, and increasing brand loyalty. It is reasonable to assume that engagement with social media applications as part of university marketing could contribute to increased enrolment numbers and help prospective students make better-informed decisions regarding their study choices and university selection.

Social media presents an opportunity for additional channels through which university extension and outreach services can reach stakeholders with promotion of news, publications, programmes and other resources. In addition to disseminating information, social media offers the opportunity to engage with stakeholders and form online communities around university extension and outreach (Kumar & Nanda, 2019; Mazurek, Korzyński, & Górska, 2019). Although, social media may not be all-inclusive and needs to be part of a larger communications effort, studies (for example Klamm; 2011; Constantinides, & Stagno, 2011) acknowledge that marketers can communicate their products and services to and engage with, for greater and much wider feedback, hence enabling meeting their needs profitably. Used strategically, social media tools have great potential to help higher learning institutions to enhance and to improve the quality of their services (Davis et al., 2012 cited in Mosha, et al., 2015). Social media are especially popular among young people, including those attending universities and higher education institutions.

Despite the importance of social media as a marketing platform, little is known on the use of social media in promoting the activities of higher learning institutions. This study investigates the application of social media in the promotion activities in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. The higher learning institutions in Tanzania are in stiff competition today following the enactment of the education Act No. 10 of 1995 by the then Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology. Before the enactment, higher education in Tanzania was mainly provided by a few public institutions of higher learning in the country. The enactment was introduced to expand human capital in order to improve the socio-economic development of the country (Msolla, 2008). Higher learning education in Tanzania is under the supervision of the Higher Education Department, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. The department in collaboration with the Tanzania Commission for Universities is responsible for coordination of higher education policies and guidelines, setting standards, programmes and ensuring quality higher education. There have been

recent improvements in terms of new Higher Learning Institutions established, new programmes launched, and students' enrolment. For instance, enrolment increased from 44,715 to 63,737 while the number of HLIs increased from 61 to 101 between 2012/13 and 2017/2018 (TCU, 2018). This increase led to increased competition among HLIs in Tanzania.

As universities find the need to appeal to an ever increasing and diverse audience base, successful branding and marketing have become increasingly important activities for institutions. The Hanover Research Report (2014) asserts that successful branding to potential stakeholders, both current and prospective can help universities with many rewarding results such as increasing enrolment, expanding fundraising capabilities, and other outcomes. Social media has shown a great potential for promotion given its ubiquitous nature and ability to engage users while requiring less costly tools to connect (Kumar and Nanda, 2019). Existing reports on business use cases assert that where intensively and correctly used, social media had increased the adopting firms' exposure and indeed increased sales and other merits (Stelzner, 2014).

With increased competition, social media platforms offer an opportunity for Tanzanian universities to promote their activities, products and services with reduced costs and increased outreach. The number of Tanzanians on social media is increasing at an exponential rate especially among youth who are the main targets of these higher learning institutions. However, although most universities are reported to have taken up the use of social media tools and platforms as a regular part of their professional work, the evidence indicated that only a minority of them were seriously using social media to position themselves (Lupton (2014). Most of the existing research on social media usage by academics are from developed countries with those from developing countries including Tanzania being either scant or non-existent. There is also still some doubt whether adopting academic institutions are using social media and other emerging platforms to its full potential as there is no reliable data on how effective the use of such tools is in terms of enrollment or elevating institutional value (Barnes and Lescault, 2012). This study therefore seeks to investigate applications of social media in promotional activities in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions: To what extent is social media used for higher learning institutions' promotional activities in Tanzania? How effective is the use of social media for promotional activities in higher learning in Tanzania? What are the challenges faced in using social media in higher learning Institutions in Tanzania?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Need for Marketing of Higher Learning Institutions' Products and services**

Higher learning institutions in most countries have historically "operated in a protected, regulated market with a steady income" (Hay and van Gensen, 2008). In Tanzania for example, before the enactment of the education Act No. 10 of 1995, higher education in Tanzania was mainly provided by a few public institutions of higher learning in the country. This has meant that they have not been exposed to a truly competitive enterprise and are not accustomed to competing in an environment where survival, rather than being guaranteed, is a privilege that needs to be earned. The most prominent of players to engage in fully fledged direct marketing initiatives appear to be the private institutions, which were classified by Beneke (2011) as 'for-profit institutions' in the literature and are essentially private companies operating as a business in the higher education sector. These institutions do not benefit from government funding nor do they have the social responsibilities assigned to public universities.

Since deregulation of the education sector in 1995, higher education in Tanzania is more competitive than ever. The force behind these changes is the ever-growing expectations of students and other stakeholders. For example, students want a programme that is customized to

fit their needs (Maslowsky, 2013). Therefore, universities must now go to greater lengths to differentiate themselves from competitor institutions. The most competitive institutions frantically try to climb over one another to be the first to connect with a potential student. Despite the differing viewpoints, contemporary views suggest that the need for promotion of activities, products and services in higher education certainly exists, creating a need for institutions to become more proactive in their marketing endeavors (Wonders and Gyure, 1991; Zemsky, Shaman & Shapiro, 2001).

Underscoring this is the extent to which higher education is becoming commercialized (Beneke, 2011). This takes the view of higher education as a business, academic programmes as the product and services, and students as customers who pay to earn degrees (Stoller, 2014). According to Stoller (2014), attracting and retaining students in a university is similar to what businesses do when they try to attract, engage and retain their customers. Bay and Daniel (2001) noted that universities with many international students were referred to as 'export industries' (Gatfield, 1998), courses were termed 'educational products' (Adler, 1998), new instruction methods such as Internet courses were referred to as 'distribution methods' (Gatfield, 1998), and other institutions referred to as 'competitors' (Landrum et al, 1998). Furthermore, potential students were sometimes referred to as the 'customer base' (Browne et al, 1998; Licata and Maxham, 1998), returning students as 'repeat business' (Nichols et al, 1998), and attempts to determine to what extent the institution was meeting the students' perceived needs were related to 'customer satisfaction' (Licata and Maxham, 1998). Marketing has typically been employed in higher education for two primary reasons: (a) to attract the most desirable students and, to a somewhat lesser degree, academic and administrative staff (that is, intellectual resources); and (b) to attract government subsidies, research funding, private donations, and grants, etc. (that is, financial resources) (Beneke, 2011).

However, researchers (Hanover Research, 2014; Stoller, 2014; Allam, 2017) have argued that successful branding requires effective strategic planning and effective tools. Allam, (2017) for example noted that brand management require more than traditional advertising, marketing or identity development. Scholars (Kotler, 2003; Mboma, 2004) revealed a shift in marketing from the product-based approach to a customer/market focus approach that seeks to ensure that companies deliver products based on customers' needs and wants. University organizations that will be able to constantly engage its customers and offer as per their expectations and needs are likely to have a competitive edge. Unless academic institutions are equipped with efficient and effective marketing strategies that will constantly attract, engage, and retain learners and other stakeholders such as parents, staff, faculty, alumnae and donors, such universities will be competitively disadvantaged (Stoller, 2014; Allam, 2017). Accenture (2014) argued that from the modern business viewpoint engagement is becoming more of a necessity if companies want their customers to maintain trust and loyalty. This is where social media, a Web 2.0 internet enabled tool comes in. Social media offers numerous capabilities for customer engagement in order to gather customer information and understand them better, to create tailor made products/services, and to deliver better and competitive services/products. It is from this background that this study assesses the application of social media for promoting the activities of higher learning institutions in Tanzania

### **Social media features that support promotion activities**

Social media continues to be a major focus and growing component of the Web, with more users signing up every day for websites and applications, as new platforms are being developed (EOADV.15.00C, 2015). Online social networks are based on users as opposed to content like in other regular websites. Users are the core of the social networking sites. Without them, there would be empty forums, chat rooms and even limited use of applications. From this standpoint, users are united online based on their interests, activities and common views or goals. Users direct and provide dynamics in their networks. Interaction is another exciting characteristic of social networks

whereby connecting to one another and having fun with friends is a priority. Social networks thrive on relationships in a way that the more relationships in a network, the more profound it is and stronger it becomes.

Mtweve (2014) noted that apart from cheap advertising with huge and enhanced customer outreach, as well as the product/service choices offered by social media, marketers can involve customers in discussions about their offerings to capitalize on the shared information for product/service improvements. Strategically used, social media can support businesses to extend their customer focus to integrated marketing and relationship marketing (Zeithaml, et al., 2013). For-profit and non-profit organizations are using social media in their endeavours more and more. Similar to profit-oriented organizations, higher learning institutions across the world including in Tanzania use social media to drive their goals.

Social media platforms have tools that can generate all sorts of user data (Ellison et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2010; Reuben, 2009). Facebook, for example, is made up of six primary components: personal profiles, status updates, networks (geographic regions, schools, and companies), groups, applications, and fan pages (Wang et al., 2010). According to some authors (Ellison et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2010; Reuben, 2009.), Facebook account owners can generate reports from their page showing demographic data, page traffic in the number of likes, comments and shares, content receiving the most to least likes, age group preference for particular content, and much more. Such data are helpful in giving useful insights during product/service planning by knowing or even having a glimpse of what customers want. In addition, social media tools are useful in testing product/service response at minimal cost. Other than creating a pilot product/service and implementing it with a selected few is costly, and it is even more costly if it fails, customers can also discuss it via social media. Platforms such as YouTube are useful in providing demonstrations for customers to picture in abstract and comment on whether or not they would prefer such an offering if mass produced. According to Reuben (2009), YouTube allows people to easily upload and share video clips across the Internet through web sites, mobile devices, blogs, and e-mail.

The underlying aspect that makes social media preferable by various users is the content, with people engaged in the conversations, and dialogues being open to both negative as well as positive comments in a transparent way (Hutchins, 2015; Grabner-Krauter, 2002). This provides access to anyone to voice their opinions and comments which can lead to growth of the firms (E-Marketer, 2010; Accenture, 2011). Derojeda, et al. (2014) indicated the potential for increasing engagement over social media among people who trust one another in making purchase decisions. Despite companies having less control over the information flows, it is an advantage for building trust among consumers, and with businesses intervening only as observers, removes ambiguity and creates more engagement, as comments and feedback are used to improve services/products and ties. This also creates more trust towards social media platforms among consumers, which is a prominent factor for growth (Accenture, 2011). Universities can communicate their products and services to and engage with consumers for greater and much wider feedback, hence enabling the institutions to meet their needs.

### **Social media usage and its implications in Higher Learning Institutions**

In a number of sectors, social media has kept growing from year to year. According to Bennett (2013), there were 1.41 billion users in 2012, 1.61 billion users in 2013, 1.82 billion users in 2014, and 1.99 billion users in 2015 worldwide. It was projected that there would be 2.16 billion users in 2016 and 2.33 billion users in 2017. Usage within universities has also increased. Indeed, social media has been a game-changer throughout higher education marketing in recent years, with marketing utilizing technology and social sites to interact more with the prospective student community and to improve student recruitment (Trucker, 2014). For example, when Facebook

launched the fan pages concept in November 2007, many universities jumped at the opportunity to create an official Facebook presence for their university. As of January 2008, there were 420 universities taking advantage of this new feature (Cheater 2008). Fan pages are similar to personal profiles but can be used by businesses. They include wall posts, discussion boards, photos, videos, and many other applications from which viewers can choose to become “fans” of your organization, and this shows on their personal profile page for their friends to see. This creates a viral marketing effect – when one of their friends sees they have become a fan of another organization that interests them, they are likely to become a fan themselves. Facebook pages also offer organizations the ability to communicate with fans through direct and targeted messages (such as fans in a specific network or age group), and view “insights,” which includes detailed statistics on the usage of the organization’s page.

However, Trucker (2014) argued that social media marketing still has a long way to go before it outruns the big dogs of the higher education marketing world. In 2014, the UMD Center for Market Research reported that despite the widespread adoption of social media and other marketing tools, less than half of the undergraduate admissions officers surveyed had a written policy to manage these marketing processes and capture outcomes data (Hanover Research, 2014). In addition, 19% reported they did not know if any such media policies even existed at their institution (Hanover Research, 2014). While some of the prospective students interviewed were skeptical about social media for universities as a marketing tool, most candidates accepted that social media for universities has its uses, particularly as a channel through which to seek and share ideas and inspiration. But Trucker (2014) agreed that the popularity of social media marketing within higher education will continue to grow and overtake resources such as student forums in years to come. This is in line with the views of Parise & Guinan (2008) who posited that social media promotion is not likely to render other forms of marketing obsolete; it must be viewed for the time being as an extension of online marketing.

According to Trucker (2014), what remains important for universities using social media marketing is response time. She (ibid) argued that social media for universities if run well is by far the most efficient point of contact for students wanting quick responses for general questions. Lupton (2014) offered insights into the sophisticated and strategic ways in which some academics are using social media and the many benefits they have experienced for their academic work. These benefits included connecting and establishing networks not only with other academics but also people or groups outside universities, promoting openness and sharing of information, publicizing and development of research and giving and receiving support.

While nearly every institution of higher education uses some form of social media, it is unclear if many are realizing return of investment (ROI) on simply establishing Facebook or Twitter accounts. In Tanzania, it is also unclear to what extent social media are used in promotion activities among higher learning institutions, and it is also unclear the extent to which social media are effective in their promotion activities.

It is important, however, to maintain a critical stance on social media use and to realize the consequences and implications of their use (Lupton, 2014). Lupton (2014) added that there are benefits to social media use in academia, but survey data showed that academics were cautious even if they were enthusiastic about using social media and were skilled at use. The study also noted concerns that weighed issues regarding balancing boundaries at the personal and professional levels, content that one should post, the tools and platforms that should be used for specific purposes, and types of responses - particularly where negative responses are posted and how to reply. Career implications related to copyright and self-plagiarism were also reported.

While people can freely share their opinions, experiences, thoughts and perceptions about different issues and topics that are of great benefit to a business and other interested parties over social media, Grabner-Krauter (2002), noted that institutions need to be in touch with ongoing trends in order to immediately respond to some important emerging issues on social media. It provides users with real time updates especially when there is bad or negative information flow, counteracted by quick responses. Grewal and Levy (2014) considered this important, as sometimes a bad and false rumour can spread and badly tarnish an organisation's reputation and cause a decrease in revenue and even unnecessary encounter with legal battles. According to Grewal and Levy (2014), people were more likely to spread news of dissatisfaction more than satisfaction. While in the past, before the popularity of social media, one dissatisfied customer would tell an average of nine (9) people, resulting to loss of ten (10) customers instead of one (Cross, 2014), the consequences are massive with social media. For example, recent studies have shown that a person on Facebook has an average of 245 friends, implying business can gain but also lose a lot of customers in the modern business environment due to the outreach of social media.

It is important therefore that as universities embrace the use of social media, they are prepared and strategically position themselves to confront any negative repercussions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study is guided by a phenomenological philosophy. The framework is guided by beliefs about how things can be understood and studied (Guba, 1990). The study adopted this philosophy as it seeks to understand and explain the use of social media among higher learning institutions which is a phenomenon based around human action. The use of social media in the context of higher learning institutions is still under explored. Furthermore, the study does not aim at making inferences regarding the population as whole, but rather intends to make a theoretical generalization on the phenomenon among higher learning institutions in Tanzania. The study uses a multi-case study where marketing managers or persons responsible for social media marketing or digital marketing in the higher learning institutions are focal points as units of inquiry in the case method (Yin, 2013).

The multi-case study is conducted with four higher learning institutions ranging from public to private. Such a number is considered sufficient for qualitative data (Eisenhardt, 1989). Three of the institutions are public universities while one is a private university. Their selection is based on their usage level of social media using judgmental sampling. The criterion was reached after mapping out the use of social media among them. Initially, thirteen (13) universities were targeted but due to the saturation principle during the mapping exercise it was demonstrated that the four universities under study were active in establishing and utilizing social media accounts. The selected universities are the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), Mzumbe University and Tumaini University Dar es Salaam College (TUDARCo). In addition, a review of the social media accounts of the four selected universities indicated pertinent information related to the research questions, such that after visiting the fourth HLI, a saturation point was reached, more specifically, in relation to the types of social media, extent of use and challenges. Selection of additional cases would add little with respect to the phenomenon.

Various data collection methods were used, including in-depth interview and archival records retrieved from the social media in use. The institutions and managers/coordinators were selected as units of inquiry during the in-depth interviews based on their ability to respond to the stated questions (Merriam, 2009). Managers/coordinators with at least three years' experience dealing with the use of social media in marketing at the higher learning institutions were the focal units.

Data collected in the multi-case study included both primary and secondary whereas the former relied on in-depth interviews conducted with each manager/coordinator while secondary data were retrieved from the respective official institutional social media accounts. Using multiple cases in this manner provided strengthening of previously established concepts in subsequent cases while simultaneously allowing the development of new insights (Steenhuis and de Bruijn, 2006). The data collection exercise in each case focused on exploring insights related to the extent of use of social media over traditional media, types of social media in use, motivations behind social media use and challenges related to social media use.

An in-depth interview guide facilitated the inquiry. The questions in the interview guide were prepared in line with the research questions and theories informing this study. The interview guide was divided into two parts: One collected background information about the HLI and the other provided useful information regarding the phenomenon under study. The nature of unstructured questions enabled participants to talk freely about the phenomenon. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour and a half. All the interviews were conducted at the HLIs' premises. Two researchers were involved in the interviewing process, one questioned the participant and the other took notes. Audio taping was used in the interviews but only with the consent of the participants. Where participants declined to be audio-taped, note-taking was used instead.

Data collection and analysis often proceeded simultaneously. A constant comparison method (Eisenhardt, 1989) was used whereby each finding and interpretation was compared with existing findings as it emerged from the data. The analysis thus began from the data collection stage, as suggested by Saunders et al. (2009). Saunders et al. (2009) argued that the process of making sense of data collected starts as soon as information is available and continues as the data collection exercise proceeds. In this case, the data collected from each case was cleaned and scrutinized immediately after the interview session, before proceeding to the next case. The cleaning process involved eliminating unrelated and unnecessary details from the interview transcripts while the scrutiny focused on identifying the emerging issues/concepts related to the research questions. After the data collection exercise, the data from notebooks, audio sources, secondary data including firm and personal profiles and data on websites, and social media were compiled to develop transcripts for each case. The case data analysis was supported with descriptive statistics retrieved from the databases of the respective social media accounts. Then data were compared with the literature to establish patterns and themes.

The transcriptions were then uploaded into NVivo 12 where all files were compiled for further analysis. The NVivo software was selected because it is one of the world leaders in qualitative data analysis, and an indispensable professional tool (Bazeley & Jackson, 2014). With the aid of NVivo, the codes were generated and then condensed into themes based on similarity. Since we had data from different sources, instead of limiting the development of codes from respondents' verbatim quotes, more avenues were widened to provide room for data from other sources. The thematic analysis technique guided the analysis after uploading the files into the software.

This study used a grounded approach, whereby the analytical path commenced by going through the interview files and other data sources, developing codes, and creating themes out of the codes, and applying the cross-case technique. The formation of the codes and themes was, to a great extent, enabled by the theories used in this study. This approach used the patterns developed, leading to corroboration of the study's internal credibility. In presenting the findings, various techniques were used, such as verbal presentation, tables, and basic statistics. The findings were used to formulate a model that might be tested in the future.



## FINDINGS

### Profile of the universities in the study

In total four universities were visited including three public universities and one private university, as they were considered useful in responding to the raised research questions. The visited universities include the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), Mzumbe University and Tumaini University Dar es Salaam College (TUDARCo). The Public Relations Officers were key respondents at all the universities. However, for anonymity respondents will be referred to as A, B, C and D for presentation of findings irrespective of any order.

### Extent of Use

Assessment of use considered the degree to which social media is used for the HLI's promotional activities over the traditional, the types of social media in use, and the type of communication on social media.

### Mapping of Higher Learning Institutions on Social Media

Several universities were identified to be active in the use of social media for promoting their activities. However, the range of activities being promoted or posted differed from one university to another. The range of social media under investigation includes Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and You Tube. However, WhatsApp was dropped from the analysis as it was difficult to obtain responses to the specific research questions posed. The secondary data revealed that most of the universities use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The mapping was therefore done to survey the accounts of the universities using archival data on social media. A summary of the mapping of social media in use is shown in Table1 below.

**Table 1: Social Media in Use**

		University A	University B	University C	University D
<b>YouTube</b>	Subscription	488	28	189	219
	Video Posts	18	28	15	3
	Max viewers per post	4882	2,520	18,432	518
	Likes	49	19	89	5
	Dislikes	1	2	8	17
	Date account created	November 2017	November 2018	March 2017	October 2019
<b>Facebook</b>	Followers	8389	4574	13 489	9,800
	Likes	8232	4546	13190	9,676
	Date account created	November 2012	May 2016	2013	April 2017
	The last post	June 2020	March 2020	June, 2020	June 2020
<b>Twitter</b>	Followers	4373	70	863	93
	Following	109	-	361	0
	Date account created	April 2013	July 2015	April 2015	March 2018
	The last tweet	June 2020	November 2016	February 2020	June 2020

<b>Instagram</b>	Followers	2,410	767	4,981	2331
	Following	6	2	2	0
	Posts	122	72	666	69
	Last post	May 2020	March 2020	June 2020	Not indicated

### **University A**

As shown in Table 1, at the time of the mapping exercise the official *University A* Facebook account had 8389 followers and 8232 likes on the page. The page was created in November 2012. It can also be noted that the Twitter account, which was established in April 2013 had 4373 followers, while following 109 accounts. *University A* also has an active Instagram account and a Youtube account. When compared with the other universities, University A has the most active Youtube account with 488 subscribers and 18 posts. However, at the time of the mapping exercise it had only been active for nine (9) months. Various messages have been communicated across the posts including promotion of the organization and its products. The most attractive post had a maximum of 4882 views with 49 likes and 1 dislike.

### **University B**

The *University B* Facebook account which was established in May 2016 had 4574 followers with 4546 likes at the time of the mapping exercise. Although the Twitter account was established in July 2015 and there are 70 followers, with the last post being in 2016, there is now no following. The *University B* Instagram account on the other hand has 72 posts, 767 followers and following two (2) accounts. The last Instagram post was in March 2020. The *University B* YouTube account was launched in November 2018 and is the least active account across the four universities.

### **University C**

The *University C* Facebook account was established in June 2013 and is the most established account with 13 489 followers with 13190 Likes. The latest post was in June 2020. While the Twitter account was established in April 2015, two years after University A, it had 863 followers and following 361 accounts. The last tweet is dated back to February 2020. On the other hand, the Instagram account with 666 posts already had 4,981 followers and following two (2) accounts. The last post was in June 2020.

### **University D**

The *University D* Facebook account, which was established in April 2017, has 9,800 followers with 9,676 likes, and the last post was in June 2020. However, its Twitter account which was set up more recently in March 2018 has 93 followers, but no one was following the account at the time of the mapping. The last tweet dates to June 2020. On the other hand, its Instagram account with 69 posts enjoyed 2331 followers, with no one following at the time of the mapping. *University D* also has an official YouTube account which was established in 2019 but at the time of the mapping only had 36 subscribers. All the posts were promoting the University's products, while the most attractive post had attracted a maximum of 518 viewers, five (5) likes and 17 dislikes. The account shows all posts were made at the same time and since then there has not been any new posts.

### **Dominance of traditional media over social media**

The findings revealed that there is limited use of social media among the universities. Some of the universities seem to attach little importance to the use of social media compared to the traditional approaches to communication. This was evident during the interviews with the university representatives. *University A* noted:

*“...For publicity we use mainly print media, also calendars, diaries and little e-media...”*

Dominance of the use of websites as a publishing platform was revealed during the interviews. When asked whether they use social media, respondents stressed the use of online facilities such as websites. This implies that traditional media (non-interactive in nature) are still trusted, and little importance is provided to the social media as well. In an interview with *University C* the representative commented:

*“...Where online communications was used it was basically for internal communications and the PRO office mainly used website to do so. Websites were highly used for events, course, and programmes reporting to the outside community.....”*

*University A* added:

*“.....We also have our website where we post a number of things including anything of interest to the public especially students and staff.....We still rely on traditional and print media. if we seriously want to have public relations doing its work, we need to strengthen and empower our traditional media like Radio and TV for capturing a wider audience.....”*

### **The types of social media in use**

The number of likes and followers determined by the mapping exercise showed that, among the types of social media, Facebook is highly used followed by Twitter and Instagram. This is supported by the views of the respondents during the interviews. The representative at *University B* noted:

*“...We often use Facebook and in posting our daily collage life. We have been operating this account for about 6 months now. We general post one per week on average we reach around 500 people per post...”*

*University D* added that:

*“...We use social media. Currently, official social media are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Also, there are community accounts in WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs and e-newsletter which are operated and managed by individual staff, students or groups...”*

Further, the respondent at *University A* noted:

*“...We also have a Facebook account for the university which is managed by three administrators- 1 from the communication and marketing unit, and 2 from the ICT unit of the university. In general we use this account to gather and communicate to the public if there is anything to be communicated. We consider Facebook as an important information platform for gathering information and communicating it the public...”*

Although social media is in use at the four universities, they differ in regard to the length of time in use, ranging from 10 years to 6 months at the time of data collection. Some of the universities have also been changing accounts over time depending on the needs.

### **The Type of Communication on Social Media**

The findings reveal that various types of communication are used on the existing social media accounts. Some accounts are used for postings about college life, upcoming and past events, and publishing new programmes.

The *University C* respondent noted:

*“...Online forums like alumni bulletin, Facebook, Academic staff Assembly forums, group mails, and Whatsapps are highly used for events, course, and programmes reporting to the outside community...”*

However, some of the respondents at the universities regard social media use as mockery and being too informal for serious communication. *University A*'s respondent noted:

*“...I regard Social media more suitable for satire (mockery) communication than serious official issues. It is not informative. If it is to be used officially, it is important that be used for neat official matters than misleading. Sometimes information may go viral even before any approval for its accuracy. It is not trustworthy, not reliable, and not authentic...”*

### **Motivations behind the Use of Social media**

The study also explored various motivations embedded in the use of social media. The views of the respondents indicate that the motivations include reach, the feedback on communication that is not experienced in the traditional media, shelf-life extension, and speed and timeliness of accessing more clients, and its impact on the group of youths.

### **Effectiveness of social media in use**

A wide range of terms has been noted in exploring the effectiveness of social media. Such terms include wider reach, receiving questions, feedback, increasing visibility, turnout of people during events and responses to different posts made. The *University A* respondent noted that:

*“...With regard to effectiveness we consider wider reach, receiving questions and feedback relating the services and products we offer...”*

This was supported by the respondent at *University C*:

*“...We trace effectiveness in terms of feedbacks such as questions for clarifications, which are given by customers. A big turnout of people is in things like concerts and conferences...”*

While at *University B* the respondent indicated:

*“..... the use of Social Media increases visibility of the college and reaching the target market. We use English as the main language in all our posts.... We receive comments, whereby the number of comments depends on the post. Some receive many comments*

*and some receive very few. We as well receive questions as asked as well: The information asked is focused on asking the admission requirements, fees and location ....”*

## **Challenges**

This study revealed challenges to social media use. Management support and infrastructure were the main challenges towards effective use of social media for university activities and promotions. Other challenges included ability to accommodate the negative impact as well as challenges related to security.

### **Management Support**

The findings reveal that the sustainability of social media use depends on support from management. In one of the interviews the respondent reported that:

*“...the university structure is set in a way that it doesn’t support the size of the university. The unit is understaffed. It thus needs to be staffed in order to be able to accommodate the activities therein, e.g. uploading of adverts. Cadres like IT person are important to be incorporated to enhance the unit’s efficiency...”*

In another interview one respondent stated that:

*“...It was hard to initiate Facebook in our university... the top management is not that supportive..... Social media is regarded as the generation of the things and from that point of view, the management is not much supportive..... Although there are number of attempts to link with other units in the university, we struggle a lot to get events from other university units. Their experience is that one needs to beg a lot. Rigidity of cultural orientations with some important top management such as principals, and other related people is distinct...”*

### **Infrastructure**

The word infrastructure came up often during the interviews. In the context of this study, infrastructure ranged from Internet connectivity to the type of devices that both the universities and audience expected for access to information posted or published. Related to that, lack of devices for smooth operation of social media campaigns has been identified as another stumbling block for effective application of social media. Devices may include personal computers, or smartphones, in addition to tools for Internet connectivity such as routers, modems and Internet bundles.

### **Other challenges**

Respondents identified other challenges threatening the sustainability for use of social media at the Higher Learning Institutions. The challenges identified include the ability to accommodate the negative impact that might emerge because of unclear and inauthentic advertisements, or to repudiate and clarify what may have been spread as negative rumors. Other challenges noted were related to marketing, which fails to get the content to a large audience; resources, security and language, the latter more so as most Tanzanians are used to Swahili rather than English, which is used in most of the published communication.

## DISCUSSION

The empirical literature to some extent corresponds to the findings of the current study. For instance, Barnes and Lescault (2012) indicated that 100 percent of responding institutions were using some form of social media. In terms of the specific platforms used and highlighted, there was wider adoption of the following social media platforms: Facebook is the most common form of social networking being used, with 98% of colleges and universities reporting having a Facebook page, 84% reported having some form of an institutional Twitter account; 86% reported having an institutional YouTube channel/presence; 66% reported maintaining some kind of blog; 41% reported use of podcasting while 47% of admissions professionals reported using LinkedIn. The current findings concur that Facebook is the most used social media among the universities. This facilitates the posting of advertisements related to admission procedures, college life, scholarship opportunities, upcoming and past events such as graduation sessions, and publishing new programmes among other activities. In this way, universities have been enjoying followership, user generated content and engagement for easy clarification on important issues posed by the potential customers and other stakeholders. There is a positive attitude toward the role of social media for promotion activities.

The findings are in line with that of Accenture (2011) and Masele and Magova (2017), in which it was observed that social media was believed to have tremendous value in business due to its mass outreach, user engagement, and immediate feedback abilities in relatively efficient ways, hence fostering an efficient and effective way communication between an organization and their audiences. According to Zarella (2010), social media is an effective online tool for customer word-of-mouth communication and for building community between individuals and entities. In a particular context, social media gives customers opportunities to learn about higher learning institutions' products/services more than other available means such as broadcast media, TV and radio, print and many others to mention a few as noted by Accenture (2011); Davis et al., (2012) and Mosha, et al., (2015). In this study, the responses revealed that users could rely on information provided via social media due to perceived trustworthiness, validity and transparency of content, hence they were ready to share views and opinions concerning certain content relating to products and services provided by the firms. However, unlike the current study, existing past studies conducted in Tanzania had not investigated social media usage in promotion activities in universities.

The current study reveals that most of the universities have not made serious efforts in terms of measuring or recording the effectiveness of social media. The empirical studies reviewed indicate that there is no reliable data on how effectiveness of the use of such tools on enrollment or elevating institutional value (Barnes and Lescault, 2012). Although it was observed that the individual units in the universities in this study also had their separate social media accounts, the data collected and analysed was mainly on the official university accounts. For example, observation of *University D* indicates existence of separate social media accounts in the separate campuses. The same was noted with *University C* and *University A* where the various schools and colleges had their decentralized social media accounts. However, the investigation did not include social media use by the individual units. This may explain why although there were several attempts to link official university accounts with other units in the university, there was no support, given the rigidity influenced by cultural orientations among some important top management, such as principals, that need to be broken. This is important because unless top management is ready for the strategy, nothing can be implemented in the HLIs.

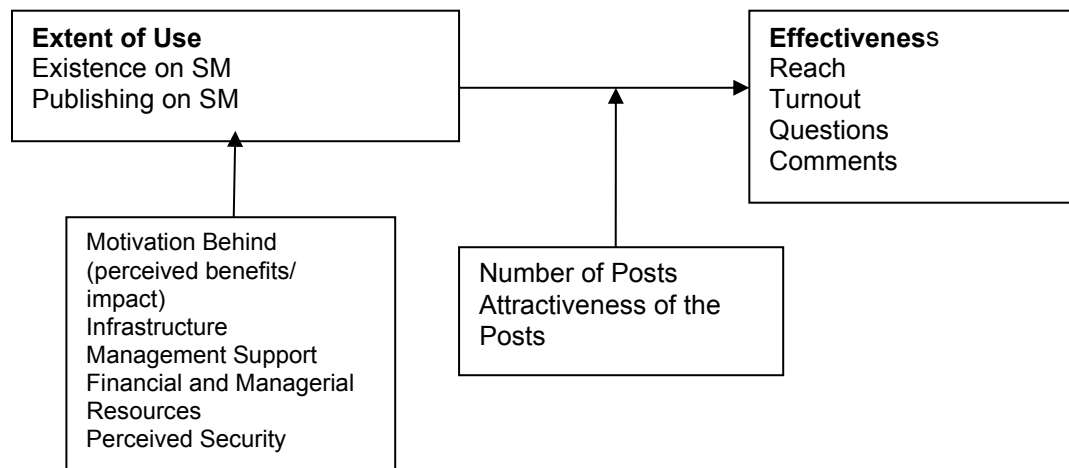
This study has however noted challenges for effective use of social media for promotion activities. The study reveals inadequate management support and infrastructure as the main challenges toward effective use of social media for promotion of university activities. The study findings

suggest that unless these challenges are addressed universities can hardly exploit the opportunities that social media provides. Available studies (Ishengoma & Kappel, 2008; Walker, Redmond, & Giles, 2010) indicate that successful implementation of systems may not be realized unless there is adequate management and organizational ICT support, a conducive environment, and wide acceptance of the benefits accrued from the system. Unlike these studies (Ishengoma & Kappel, 2008; Walker, Redmond, & Giles, 2010) whose focus were on assessment of electronic learning management systems (ELMS) continued usage intention, the current study is on use of social media usage for enhancing HLIs promotion activities. Devices including personal computers, smartphones, Internet connectivity tools such as routers or modems and Internet bundles are important.

The HLIs under study need to resolve setbacks in the field by inducing change in the top-level management. This is where corporate strategies that determine an organization's paths are formulated. It is at the top management level where long-term and expansive strategies are executed, in particular, what business activities to venture into, where and how to penetrate, what to do with the business and the scope (Coulter (2005).

## MODEL

The findings from this study indicate that the extent of use through adoption and actively publishing on social media largely influences the effectiveness of social media use. However, the challenges identified may stand as factors that influence the extent of use, which in turn impacts effectiveness. In this regard we consider extent of use to include the HLIs presence on social media. However, universities need to cultivate motivation for social media usage among its members through putting in place required infrastructure and security measures, management support including financial as well as managerial resource support. The greater the number of pages on the various social media accounts and the attractiveness of the posts and respective content published, the more attraction of viewership, and in turn the higher the extent of use. Effective social media usage will increase reach and feedback (comments, questions, and reactions) to the published communication. It could eventually lead to increased turnout of customers (students, parents and other stakeholders) with every post. Thus, the challenges act as influencing/impeding factors for the extent of use of social media. The relationship is summarized in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1:** The relationship between social media extent of use and their effectiveness

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

It is no secret that universities are perking up to the power of social media and are devoting more resources to this area. The findings have revealed that the HLIs recognize the importance for use of social media despite the existing challenges. This study recommends that universities add more efforts in terms of financial and managerial resources to make sure the universities, including their units, are active in using social media platforms. Hindering factors such as culture, inadequate budget allocations, and infrastructural related elements such as tools and equipment, all link to the top management support, which, if provided, helps to achieve positive results. It is implied that if universities are to flourish by successfully using social media for the promotion of their activities, then adoption of required infrastructure among other action is inevitable. Furthermore, competitive strategies and policies need to be formulated to reach more audiences on social media. This may be organic or paid.

Universities need to adopt an integrated marketing approach that brings together all the marketing strategies including those from the units. Without an integrated market approach, the responsible team may not succeed because even if they believe that such a strategy would increase the traffic, its implementation may face challenges from other departments. It is important that universities develop mechanisms with which they can trace the effectiveness of social media in terms of feedback such as questions for clarifications, which are asked by customers. The good news is that social media has so many options for one to get creative and experiment with a variety of marketing tactics on a budget. For example, one can use tools like analytics dashboards to monitor the success and ROI of the campaigns in a much more direct way than it could be with a traditional promotional method such as a billboard or print advertisement. Yet, complaints, negative feedback or criticism related to academic institutions can be visible to the audience through social media. Negative comments or failure to respond effectively can damage the university's reputation, unless they are properly handled including provision of clarification before negative feedback goes viral. Social media can tarnish the institution's image.

## LIMITATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study utilized a qualitative and cross-sectional methodology. Thus, it did not manage to capture the longitudinal changes over time in the use of social media. Therefore, future studies should take a longitudinal approach to capture this trend over time. Similarly, with this study being qualitative, there is a need for future studies to include a larger population for further practical and managerial implications. The quantitative approach would test new constructs and conceptualizations for better generalization. Future studies as well could use mixed methods to yield comparative results.

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