

THE EFFICACY OF FACEBOOK MARKETING STRATEGIES IN CATALYSING BUSINESS GROWTH FOR EVENT MANAGEMENT ENTERPRISES IN BULAWAYO

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary business landscape, digital marketing has become a pivotal tool for fostering business growth and establishing a competitive edge. Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, have emerged as crucial channels for reaching target audiences and promoting brand visibility. In the realm of event management companies, the strategic utilisation of these digital tools holds the potential to enhance event promotion, bolster audience engagement, and elevate brand visibility, ultimately contributing to business growth. Although significant research has been done in Zimbabwe on the efficacy of digital marketing tactics in a variety of industries, there is paltry research-based knowledge on the effectiveness of Facebook marketing strategies in promoting growth in event management entities in Bulawayo. Hence, this study sought to analyse the effectiveness of Facebook marketing strategies in promoting growth for event management companies in Bulawayo. Guided by the pragmatism research philosophy and the abductive approach, the study used a mixed methods design. Quantitative data was collected from participants chosen through proportional stratified sampling while qualitative data was collected from participants chosen through purposive sampling. The study found that Facebook was an effective platform for enhancing brand visibility within the local market. It was concluded that there was a positive correlation between Facebook marketing and attraction of customers, retention of customers, brand reputation and business growth for event management enterprises in Bulawayo. It was recommended that organisations must establish robust systems for monitoring social media metrics regularly and analysing key performance indicators such as reach, engagement, and conversion rates.

Keywords: Business growth; Event management; Facebook; Facebook marketing; Social media

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In the contemporary business landscape, digital marketing has become a pivotal tool for fostering business growth and establishing a competitive edge. Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, have emerged as crucial channels for reaching target audiences and promoting brand visibility. The way consumers and businesses engage in the marketplace is changing because of digital marketing (Dash & Chakraborty, 2021). The way businesses approach their marketing initiatives has changed dramatically because of the integration of digital marketing. The diverse range of digital platforms, such as social media, search engines,

email campaigns, and content marketing, offers unprecedented opportunities for businesses to tailor their messages, interact directly with customers, and glean insights from data analytics (Donnelly et al., 2013).

In the realm of event management companies, the strategic utilisation of these digital tools holds the potential to enhance event promotion, bolster audience engagement, and elevate brand visibility, ultimately contributing to business growth. The event industry in Zimbabwe is characterised by dynamism, creativity, and innovation. In a highly competitive environment, companies in the event management industry rely heavily on effective marketing to capture the attention of diverse audiences (Dolan et al., 2017). Literature suggests that the adaptation and adoption of digital marketing strategies can amplify their reach, fortify brand recognition, and confer a competitive edge in an ever-evolving marketplace (Dash & Chakraborty, 2021). Furthermore, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) stated that for event management entities, embracing effective digital marketing strategies has become imperative to foster business growth, enhance brand visibility, and secure a competitive edge in the market.

Social media platforms, notably Facebook, have emerged as indispensable tools for businesses to reach and engage with their target audience. According to Assimakopoulos et al. (2017), Facebook stands out among the many platforms offered as a significant and powerful channel that enables businesses to communicate with potential customers in a dynamic and personalised way. Facebook is one of the largest social media platforms in the world, with billions of active users (Kavoura, 2014). This vast user base allows businesses to reach a broad and diverse audience, including potential customers who may not have been reached through traditional marketing channels. Consistent and strategic Facebook marketing can enhance brand visibility through regular posts, engaging content, and paid advertisements that ensure a brand remains in the minds of its audience (Dolan et al., 2017; Kavoura, 2014).

Bulawayo, the second-largest city in Zimbabwe, is characterised by its dynamic event landscape that caters to various audiences and a growing demand for unique experiences. Event management entities in Bulawayo are instrumental in curating and executing events that range from corporate gatherings to cultural festivals. There are numerous events that have been held in Bulawayo, some at the provincial, national, and international levels. These events include the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF), the Intwasa Arts Festival, KoBulawayo, sports events, concerts and live performances, and educational and academic events, among others. However, the convergence of digital technologies and consumer behaviour shifts has led to an era where traditional marketing approaches alone may fall short of effectively reaching and engaging target audiences. Facebook is one of the most widely used social media platforms in Zimbabwe and globally; it offers event management enterprises an opportunity to connect with their target audience in real-time, irrespective of geographical boundaries. As a result, event management companies in Bulawayo are compelled to explore and harness Facebook marketing strategies to amplify their visibility, enhance engagement, and ultimately drive business growth.

Moreover, as the world becomes increasingly connected through digital channels, these companies must adapt and capitalise on the opportunities presented by Facebook marketing strategies to extend their reach and influence (Yablonski, 2016). According to Gutu, Zimucha, and Mushayavanhu (2023), in Zimbabwe, many firms still struggle to choose the right tactics

to maximise their market success while embracing the disruptive digital marketing methods made possible by the internet. Facebook marketing is a cutting-edge marketing force that has the potential to fundamentally alter the events industry by addressing the intangibility, variability, and perishability of event management products. Gutu et al. (2023) as well as Matura (2018) concur in affirming that Facebook marketing increases client accessibility to information; creates and sustains a competitive edge.

Although significant research has been done in Zimbabwe on the efficacy of digital marketing tactics in a variety of industries, including the gasoline business (Manyumba, 2015), the telecommunications industry (Tichafa & Nyoni, 2018), and agrofood processors (Chinakidzwa & Phiri, 2020), there is paltry research-based knowledge on the effectiveness of Facebook marketing strategies in promoting growth in event management entities in Bulawayo. Understanding the dynamics between Facebook marketing and business growth is paramount, especially considering the unique challenges and opportunities that characterise the Bulawayo business landscape. Hence, this study seeks to analyse the effectiveness of Facebook marketing strategies in promoting growth for event management companies in Bulawayo.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media Marketing

According to Smith, Fischer, and Yongjian (2012), social media marketing is a type of digital marketing strategy that makes use of social media platforms to communicate with the target audience and promote goods, services, or brands. According to Chodak, et al. (2019) social media marketing is a dynamic and evolving field that leverages social media platforms for promotional activities and researchers often emphasise the global reach, cost-effectiveness, and interactive nature of social media marketing. Creating and disseminating content on social media networks to accomplish marketing and branding objectives is what Li and Leckenby (2011) defined as social media marketing. Social media marketing is a broad field with several primary goals, such as increasing website traffic, building brand awareness, and fostering customer engagement and loyalty (Smith et al., 2012). Businesses use social media marketing to interact with their audience on social media platforms by disseminating text and images.

Popular social media platforms for marketing are Facebook, which is ideal for a wide range of businesses, offering diverse ad formats and a large user base; Instagram, which is effective for visually appealing content and targeting a younger demographic audience; Twitter, which is suitable for real-time updates, customer interaction, and trends; LinkedIn, which is targeted towards professionals and YouTube which is excellent for video content and reaching a broad audience (Fiorella & Hellmann, 2019; Radzi et al., 2018; Beshears, 2017). Social media marketing is an integral part of the overall digital marketing strategy, providing businesses with a direct means of connecting with their audience, building brand identity, and driving business objectives. Successful social media marketing requires a deep understanding of the target audience, consistent engagement, and the ability to adapt to evolving trends and algorithms on various platforms (Chodak & Suchacka, 2017).

2.2 Social Media Marketing in Event Management

Social media marketing plays a crucial role in the field of event management, offering a powerful platform for promoting events, engaging with attendees, and building a community around specific occasions (Alalwan et al., 2017). Social media marketing in event management requires a strategic and cohesive approach, involving pre-event promotion, real-time engagement, and post-event follow-up (Fiorella & Hellmann, 2019). Beshears (2017) stated that in event management the goal is to create a seamless and immersive experience for attendees while maximising the event's exposure and impact, hence, the choice of social media platforms and specific strategies depends on the nature of the event, the target audience, and the overall marketing goals. Social media increases visibility and awareness as it provides a platform to reach a large audience quickly, increasing the visibility and awareness of an event (Coelho, de Oliveira & de Almeida, 2016).

According to Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) social media enables real-time interaction and engagement with the audience, fostering a sense of community and excitement around the event. Additionally, compared to traditional advertising channels, social media marketing is often more cost-effective, allowing event managers to reach a wider audience on a limited budget (Smith et al., 2012). Coelho et al. (2016) posit that platforms like Facebook and Instagram offer targeted advertising options, allowing event organisers to reach specific demographics and interests and these facilities provide instant updates and communication during the event, keeping attendees informed and engaged (Chodak & Suchacka, 2017).

However, dependence on social media may result in over-reliance on technology, potentially excluding individuals who are not active on these platforms and negative comments or criticism on social media can quickly gain traction and negatively impact the reputation of the event (Fiorella & Hellmann, 2019). Furthermore, the collection of attendee data for targeted advertising raises privacy concerns, and mishandling of this data can lead to legal and ethical issues and overly aggressive marketing on social media may lead to saturation and ad fatigue, causing users to ignore or disengage with event-related content (Chodak & Suchacka, 2017).

2.3 Facebook Marketing Strategies

According to Ellering (2022), Facebook marketing refers to the use of Facebook, one of the world's largest social media platforms, as a channel for promoting products, services, brands, or causes. It involves creating and implementing marketing strategies on the platform to reach and engage with a target audience. Facebook provides a variety of tools and features for businesses and marketers to connect with users, build relationships, and achieve their marketing objectives (Ertimur & Gilly, 2012). Businesses and organisations can create dedicated Facebook pages to represent their brand, and these pages serve as a hub for sharing information, updates, and engaging with the audience (Homburg, Ehm & Artz, 2015).

Facebook marketing entails producing and disseminating a variety of information, such as text posts, photos, videos, and links. Users can "like" and follow these pages to receive updates in their News Feeds (Ertimur & Gilly, 2012). Facebook provides a strong advertising platform that enables companies to construct highly targeted ad campaigns. The objective is to create shareable and engaging material that appeals to the target audience (Kim, Spiller & Hettche, 2015). Advertisers can target the most relevant consumers with their adverts by defining their

audience according to demographics, interests, behaviours, and other factors (Ertimur and Gilly, 2012).

Kim et al. (2015) posit that Facebook provides analytics tools that allow businesses to track the performance of their pages and ad campaigns. Insights include data on reach, engagement, and audience demographics, helping marketers refine their strategies based on performance metrics. Businesses can leverage Facebook Messenger for direct communication with customers and marketers can use Facebook Events to promote and organise online or offline events (Homburg et al., 2015). Facebook Groups provide a space for community building and fostering discussions around specific topics related to the business or industry. Running contests and give-aways on Facebook is a popular way to increase engagement and expand the reach of a brand (Akyildiz & Argan 2011). Users may be encouraged to participate by liking, sharing, or commenting on posts and Facebook allows customers to leave reviews and recommendations on business pages (Homburg et al., 2015). Positive reviews can enhance a brand's reputation, while businesses can use negative feedback as an opportunity for improvement.

2.3.1 Facebook pages

A Facebook page is a dedicated space on Facebook that represents a public profile for a business, brand, organisation, or public figure. It allows entities to share information, updates, and engage with their audience (Pamungkas, 2018). According to Nar & Iriani (2019), pages include essential information such as a profile picture, cover photo, about section, and contact details and they publish text updates, photos, videos, and links to share content with their followers. Ellering (2022) stated that users can "like" a page to become a follower and receive updates in their News Feed. Pages can accumulate followers and build a community around their brand. Users can leave reviews and recommendations on a page, providing feedback and influencing the reputation of the business (Kim et al., 2015).

2.3.2 Facebook events

According to Huertas and Marine-Roig (2015), Facebook events allow users to create, promote and manage events. Events can be anything from online webinars to in-person gatherings. When users RSVP to an event, it may appear on their profile resulting in them receiving updates about the event. Users can include information such as the event name, date, time, location, and a description (Hudson, Roth, Madden & Hudson, 2015). Users can indicate their attendance by RSVPing to an event and event creators can also invite people who can invite their friends and post updates about the event, and attendees receive notifications about important details or changes (Deng, 2016).

2.3.3 Content Marketing

To draw in and keep the interest of a target audience, content marketing is a strategic marketing method that entails producing and disseminating worthwhile, timely, and consistent information (Riyanto, 2020). It goes beyond traditional advertising by offering value to the audience through educational, entertaining, or informative content. Its main objectives are to establish brand authority, foster audience trust, and ultimately drive profitable customer action (Deng, 2016). Rowley (2016) is of the opinion that the creation of content that speaks to the

needs, interests, and pain points of the target audience requires a thorough grasp of the demographics. At the heart of content marketing is a buyer persona, which can assist in defining the traits and behaviours of the ideal audience and facilitate the creation of valuable high-quality content (Riyanto, 2020).

2.3.4 Facebook advertising

Facebook advertising is a form of online advertising that allows businesses and individuals to promote their products, services, or content on the Facebook platform (Winer, 2009). With over 2.8 billion monthly active users (as of the last available data in 2021), Facebook provides a vast and diverse audience for advertisers to target (Ellering, 2022). Facebook advertising offers various ad formats, targeting options, and analytics tools to help advertisers reach specific audiences and achieve their marketing goals (Huertas & Marine-Roig, 2015). Facebook uses an auction system to determine which ads to show to users. Advertisers bid for ad placement, and Facebook considers factors such as bid amount, ad relevance, and estimated action rates to determine ad placement. Piranda et al. (2022) asserted that Facebook advertising is a versatile and powerful tool for businesses of all sizes to reach and engage with their target audience and advertisers can tailor their campaigns based on specific objectives, whether it is brand awareness, lead generation, website traffic, or direct sales.

2.3.5 Live streaming

According to Hudson et al. (2015), live streaming refers to the broadcasting of real-time, live video content over the internet and this form of media delivery allows individuals, businesses, and organisations to share live events, performances, presentations, and other content with an online audience. Live streaming has become increasingly popular due to its immediacy, interactivity, and accessibility across various devices and platforms. Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter offer live streaming features, allowing users to connect with their followers in real-time (Pamungkas, 2018). Live streaming has become a valuable tool for communication, entertainment, and marketing. Its ability to create a sense of immediacy and connection with the audience makes it a versatile medium for a wide range of applications (Huertas & Marine-Roig, 2015). As technology continues to advance, live streaming is likely to play an even more significant role in online content consumption.

2.4 Benefits of Facebook Marketing

Facebook's advertising platform enables highly targeted ads based on demographics, interests, behaviours, and more. Facebook marketing tactics offer a number of benefits for businesses and individuals wishing to promote their products, services, or brand (Fiorella & Hellmann, 2019). This accuracy aids companies in connecting with the most appropriate market for their goods or services. Facebook provides a range of ad formats, such as pictures, videos, carousels, and more, giving companies the freedom to select the one that best fits their objectives and content (Hudson et al., 2015). According to Coelho et al. (2016), Facebook marketing raises brand awareness and exposure, and consistent posting, interesting content, and targeted advertising help consumers recognise brands. Through likes, comments, shares, and messages, Facebook allows users to interact directly with its audience, which fosters relationship-building, loyalty, and trust (Ertimur & Gilly, 2012).

Facebook provides detailed analytics tools (Facebook Insights) that offer insights into page performance, audience demographics, and post engagement (Pamungkas, 2018). This data helps businesses make informed decisions and refine their strategies. Facebook Groups provide a space for businesses to build communities around their products or services; hence, creating a community fosters a sense of belonging and encourages users to share experiences and recommendations (Ertimur & Gilly, 2012). Facebook is widely accessed on mobile devices; this mobile-friendly nature allows businesses to reach users on smart phones, where a significant portion of online activity occurs (Huertas & Marine-Roig, 2015). Using Facebook Messenger for customer communication allows businesses to provide personalised support, answer inquiries, and even implement chatbots for automated interactions.

Hudson et al. (2015), also highlighted that compared to traditional advertising channels, Facebook advertising can be cost-effective. Advertisers have control over budgets and can optimise campaigns based on performance. Facebook provides tools for lead generation, allowing businesses to capture potential customers' information directly through the platform. Ellering (2022) highlighted that while these benefits make Facebook marketing a powerful tool, it is essential for businesses to develop and adapt their strategies based on their specific goals, target audience, industry trends and regularly monitoring performance metrics. Staying informed about changes in the platforms algorithms contribute to ongoing success in Facebook marketing efforts.

2.5 Business Growth in event management

Business growth in event management involves expanding your client base, increasing revenue, and enhancing your reputation in the industry and expanding the range of services you offer (Ertimur & Gilly, 2012). Radzi et al. (2018) further highlighted that this could include organising different types of events such as corporate conferences, weddings, trade shows, or virtual events. Diversification can attract a broader clientele and identify new markets or geographic locations to target, considering regional, national, or even international expansion depending on human resources and their expertise (Ellering, 2022). According to Chodak, et al. (2019), encouraging clients to provide feedback, reviews and positive testimonials can boost your credibility, attract new clients, and address any negative feedback promptly to demonstrate your commitment to client satisfaction. Radzi et al. (2018) agree with Alalwan et al. (2017) that Facebook marketing enhances business growth.

2.6 Challenges associated with Facebook marketing strategies for event management

Facebook marketing, while effective, comes with its own set of challenges that businesses and marketers need to navigate. Fiorella and Hellmann (2019) highlighted that the decline in organic reach on Facebook has been a challenge for businesses, due to algorithm changes, organic posts may not reach as many users as before, necessitating a more strategic approach. According to Chodak, et al. (2019), ongoing concerns about data privacy and increased scrutiny on how platforms handle user information may affect ad-targeting capabilities and advertisers need to be aware of evolving privacy regulations. Some demographics may not be as active on Facebook and younger audiences may prefer other social platforms, and this might limit the effectiveness of Facebook target groups (Ertimur & Gilly, 2012). The high volume of content on Facebook can lead to saturation, making it challenging for event promotions to stand out.

Increased competition for attention requires thoughtful and creative content (Huertas & Marine-Roig, 2015). Discoverability can be a challenge, especially for smaller or niche events. Hudson et al. (2015) stated that ensuring that event details are well optimised for search and utilising targeted advertising are important strategies.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study was guided by the pragmatism research philosophy and the abductive approach. Pragmatism philosophy was chosen because it emphasises the importance of selecting research methods and approaches that are most appropriate for the research questions and objectives, rather than rigidly adhering to a single philosophical stance. It also allows for a balanced approach because it highlights the application of research findings to real-world problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Pragmatism acknowledges the value of both qualitative and quantitative data and encourages a flexible, context-sensitive research design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The abductive approach was chosen because it is used in mixed methods research (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). A mixed methods research design was employed where quantitative and qualitative data were collected respectively. Quantitative data was collected through a structured questionnaire from 116 participants who were chosen through proportional stratified sampling. The sampling technique was chosen so as to improve the representative of the sample in relation to the population (Saunders et al., 2019). Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews from 13 participants chosen through purposive sampling. The sampling technique was chosen so as to select diverse participants who were information rich. The study was conducted in line with contemporary ethics guiding research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Response rate

Out of 150 questionnaires that were distributed, 116 were returned. This gave a response rate of 77% which was considered sufficient for statistical analysis to proceed (Daikeler et al., 2022; Gordon et al., 2019). 13 semi-structured interviews were scheduled and also conducted to collect qualitative data giving a response rate of 100%.

4.2 Reliability test

The internal consistency of the research items was measured using the Cronbach alpha coefficient, and the results are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Cronbach alpha values

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach value	Status
Facebook content	6	.756	Acceptable
Frequency of posting	4	.861	Acceptable
Attraction of customers	6	.803	Acceptable
Brand reputation	5	.872	Acceptable
Retention of customers	5	.782	Acceptable
Business growth	6	.684	Acceptable

The six Cronbach alpha values were all above 0.7 which indicated a strong and solid item covariance as argued by Saunders et al. (2019) and Gerber and Hall (2017). This showed that the instrument was reliable for the study.

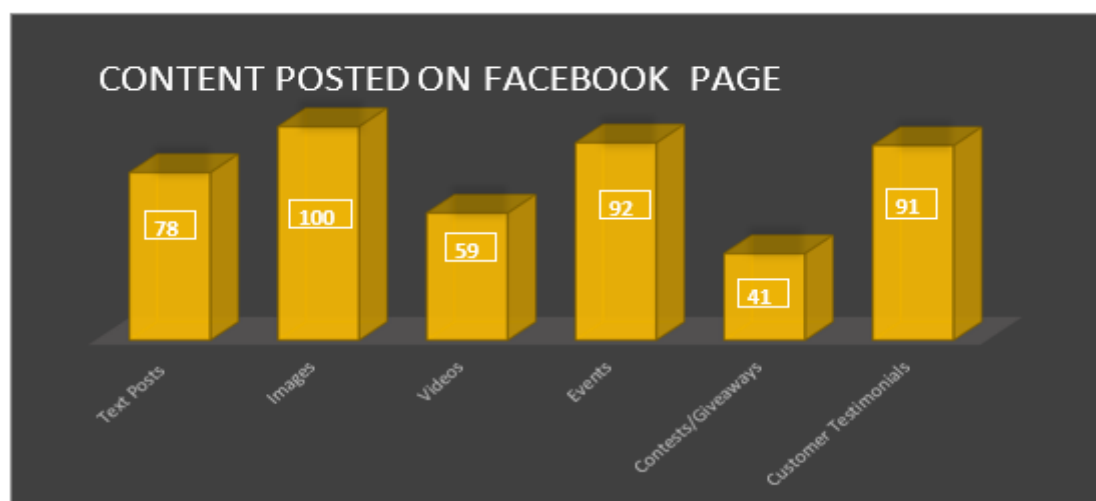
Study findings showed that 84% of the organisations were using Facebook for marketing their activities, and only 16% were not using Facebook for marketing purposes, though all the organisations indicated that they had a Facebook page. The results showed that most of the event management organisations operating in Bulawayo were using Facebook for marketing purposes. The results obtained through questionnaires concurred with the findings from semi-structured interviews. Most of the participants (84.6%) interviewed indicated that they had spent more than three years using Facebook as a marketing platform, and it was central to the overall marketing strategy of their organisations. Some of the respondents said:

“Nxangikhumbula kuhle, sesile minyaka engaba ngu four sisebensisa iFacebook for marketing purpose” (If I still remember very well, we have spent more than four years using Facebook for marketing.) [R8]

“We have been using Facebook for marketing purposes since 2020, and we realised that after COVID-19, most people are now appreciating technology”[R3]

On the frequency of posting on Facebook pages, most participants (41%) indicated that their organisations posted on a monthly basis; 34% revealed that they posted on a weekly basis; 14% posted daily; and 11% indicated that they rarely posted. 73% of the respondents interviewed said they frequently posted and advertised on Facebook. Therefore, it is fair to say that most of the respondents were at a very active stage with the use of Facebook in their organisations. On the content of what the organisations posted on their Facebook pages, the respondents revealed that the most posted were images (100%) followed by events (92%), customer testimonials (91%), text posts (78%) and videos which accounted for 59%. Contests or give-aways were the lowest at 41% as shown by figure 1 below. These findings showed that all the organisations were posting images on their Facebook pages.

Figure 1: Content posted on Facebook page



These results showed the breakdown of posting frequencies across different content types on Facebook, providing valuable insights into the digital marketing strategies employed by event management enterprises in Bulawayo. Literature suggests that by highlighting past events and positive customer experiences, businesses can leverage social proof to instill trust and confidence in their brand, thereby fostering customer engagement and loyalty (Riyanto, 2020; Deng, 2016). Text posts allowed event management enterprises to communicate information, share stories, and engage with their audience in a more personalised and conversational manner (Pamungkas, 2018; Nar & Iriani, 2019). The findings on posting frequencies across different content types highlighted the diverse approaches adopted by event management enterprises in Bulawayo to engage their audience, promote their services, and enhance brand visibility on Facebook.

4.3 Effectiveness of Facebook Marketing

In order to measure the effectiveness of Facebook marketing, a Spearman correlation test was conducted and the results are shown in table 2 below:

Table 2: Spearman correlation values

Dimension	Facebook marketing
Attraction of customers	0.643
Sig	0.001
N	116
Brand reputation	0.724
Sig	0.005
N	116
Retention of customers	0.547
Sig	0.000
N	116
Business growth	0.425
Sig	0.002
N	116

Table 2 above showed that the correlations for attraction of customers, brand reputation, retention of customers and business growth were all positive ranging from 0.425 to 0.724. The findings also showed that attraction of customers, brand reputation, retention of customers and business growth were all significant at 5% level of significance.

4.3.1 Attraction of Customers

A Spearman coefficient (ρ) of 0.643 showed that Facebook marketing was positively related to the attraction of customers. A ρ of 0.643 showed that the relationship was strong. The findings showed that an increase in the implementation of Facebook marketing resulted in a corresponding increase in the attraction of new clients. These findings indicated that effective Facebook marketing will attract more customers to the event management enterprises in Bulawayo. As such, Facebook marketing is an essential tool for attracting customers in the event management industry in Bulawayo.

4.3.2 Brand reputation

A Spearman coefficient (ρ) of 0.724 showed that Facebook marketing was positively related to brand reputation. A ρ of 0.724 showed that the relationship was strong. The findings showed that an increase in the implementation of Facebook marketing resulted in a corresponding increase in brand reputation. The findings showed that when event management companies in Bulawayo effectively used Facebook marketing their brand reputation increased significantly.

4.3.3 Retention of Customers

A Spearman coefficient (ρ) of 0.547 revealed that Facebook marketing was positively correlated to the retention of customers and was also significant at 5% level of significance. A ρ of 0.547 showed that the relationship between Facebook marketing and retention of customers was moderate. The findings showed that effective Facebook marketing resulted in organisations in the event management industry in Bulawayo retaining their customers.

4.3.4 Business growth

A Spearman coefficient (ρ) of 0.425 revealed a positive relationship between Facebook marketing and business growth. A ρ of 0.425 showed that the relationship was moderate. This indicated that increasing the implementation of Facebook marketing enhanced business growth. These findings were consistent with the findings of Radzi et al. (2018) and Alalwan et al. (2017).

4.4 Challenges encountered in Facebook marketing

Study findings indicated that, as much as Facebook is an effective tool, organisations encountered various challenges, such as encouraging audience engagement such as likes, shares, and comments, as well as maintaining a consistent and effective content strategy that aligns with the brand's message and goals. Most of the respondents were of the opinion that some demographics especially the older generation were not active on Facebook as they considered it to be for the younger generation. This ultimately limited the effectiveness of Facebook in targeting certain groups. This finding was consistent with the finding of Chodak et al. (2019).

Respondents were also of the view that negative comments or feedback on event pages negatively affected the reputation of the event and the organisation. This finding was consistent with the finding of Piranda et al. (2022). Another challenge identified was of a short attention span. One respondent had this to say

"One of the challenges is that users often have short attention spans on social media, so they might not even visit your Facebook page." [R11].

The other participant, in line with a short attention span, stated that creating content that captured attention quickly and effectively was a constant challenge as one markets using Facebook. This assertion was consistent with the thinking of Coelho et al. (2016), who had postulated that Facebook was not the only social media platform; hence, it was a challenge to

manage to capture the user's attention span, which is usually short most of the time. Challenges may impact the ability to create compelling and interactive content, and maintain meaningful interactions with customers, potentially affecting overall customer satisfaction and loyalty. Addressing challenges effectively is essential for optimising Facebook marketing efforts, fostering customer engagement, and driving business growth in Bulawayo's competitive event management industry.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The study concluded that Facebook was an effective platform for enhancing brand visibility within the local market. Businesses that actively engaged with their audience through regular posts, event updates, and interactive content experienced increased brand awareness and reputation, which is crucial for success in the competitive event management industry. The study further concluded that successful Facebook marketing strategies fostered customer engagement and contributed to the establishment of strong and lasting relationships with clients. The study concluded that there was a positive correlation between Facebook marketing and attraction of customers, retention of customers, brand reputation and business growth for event management enterprises in Bulawayo.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need to establish a robust system for monitoring social media metrics regularly and analysing key performance indicators such as reach, engagement, and conversion rates. There is also need to explore partnerships with local influencers or opinion leaders who have a significant following in Bulawayo and engage influencers to promote events and share their experiences with the business. Event management entities should invest in ongoing training for marketing teams to stay abreast of the latest trends and features on the Facebook platform. Continuous skill development ensures that marketing strategies remain innovative and effective in a dynamic online landscape.

There is a need to ensure strict adherence to Facebook's advertising policies and guidelines, regularly reviewing and updating promotional content to comply with platform rules, and avoid any potential penalties or restrictions on marketing activities. Organisations should utilise Facebook's ad targeting features to reach a more precise audience, increasing the likelihood of engagement and conversion. There is a need to develop a content strategy that resonates with the specific interests, values, and traditions of the community, ensuring a more authentic and engaging connection with potential customers. Event management companies should foster a sense of community by encouraging user-generated content, testimonials, and discussions related to events, creating a more vibrant online presence.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

More research is required to determine how marketing strategies affect the operational efficiency of SMEs across a range of industries. Future studies might consider investigating the factors influencing consumer choices, preferences, and decision-making processes when selecting event management services. Furthermore, there is a need to investigate the adoption of emerging technologies in marketing within the event management industry and explore how

technologies such as virtual reality, augmented reality, or advanced analytics are being utilised by SMEs and their impact on customer engagement and business success.

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