



Brand Attributes, Online Communities and SME Brand Performance in Zimbabwe's Detergent Industry

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Article History

Received: 01.07.2025

Accepted: 21.08.2025

Published: 06.09.2025

Abstract: The study was prompted by the desire to determine the impact of social media marketing (SMM) on brand performance in small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in the detergent manufacturing industry in Harare, Zimbabwe. The problem behind this study was that SMEs in the detergent industry in Zimbabwe were lacking market-driven strategies and were not fully taking advantage of the advent of social media marketing to increase their brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty and brand performance despite the 50.8% and 109.9% internet and mobile penetration rates in Zimbabwe respectively. The objectives of the study were to assess the impact of brand attributes on brand loyalty and to determine the effect of online brand communities on brand performance. The study adopted a positivist philosophy and a quantitative research design. A survey research strategy was employed in which questionnaires were used as primary data collection research instruments. The questionnaires were administered to a sample of 370 participants. 300 questionnaires were returned and presented for analysis. The collected data was examined through SPSS Version 16. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in examining the impact of SMM on brand performance. The findings revealed positive and significant impact of brand attributes and online brand communities on brand awareness, brand recognition, brand loyalty and brand performance. The management of the SMEs in the detergent industry were recommended to advertise their brands via online shared platforms as this would improve the performance of their brands in the market. Therefore, future studies should also explore SMM impact of consumer digital interaction, electronic, word of mouth, brand attributes and online brand communities on brand performance of big organisations in different sectors.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing (SMM), Brand Performance, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Brand Loyalty, Online Brand Communities, Detergent Industry – Zimbabwe.

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1. Introduction

The detergent industry in Zimbabwe has been on the decline and the the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries - CZI, (2014) indicated that industries in the country were under threat as de-industrialisation has reached alarming levels which had a negative impact on the economy. The industrial capacity was below 10% in 2008 and increased to 36.3% in 2014 then declined to 34.3% in 2015 (Kanyenze, 2017). SMEs have been noted to have the capacity to employ 60% of the workforce and contribute over 50% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (ibid). However, SMEs in the detergent industry were facing stiff competition from well-established players in the sector. This has threatened their operational efficiencies as most of their brands are being outperformed in the market thereby causing an overall decline in industrial capacity.

Karedza & Govender (2017) noted that SMEs in the detergent industry in Zimbabwe were lacking market-driven strategies and were not fully taking advantage of the advent of social media marketing to increase their brand awareness, brand image, brand loyalty and brand performance despite the 50.8% and 109.9% internet and mobile penetration rates in Zimbabwe respectively. This study therefore seeks to examine the influence of SMM on brand performance of SMEs in the detergent manufacturing industry in Zimbabwe.

1.1. Research Objectives

- ☐ To assess the impact of brand attributes on brand loyalty.
- ☐ To determine the effect of online brand communities on brand loyalty.

Cite this article:

Mutuzu, P., (2025). Brand Attributes, Online Communities and SME Brand Performance in Zimbabwe's Detergent Industry. *ISAR Journal of Economics and Business Management*, 3(9), 17-21.

1.2. Research hypotheses

The research intended to test whether SMM has any influence on brand performance of SMEs in the detergent manufacturing industry in Zimbabwe. To do so, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- **H₁:** Brand attributes have a positive and significant impact on brand loyalty.
- **H₂:** Online brand communities have a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty.

1.3. Theory of Planned Behaviour

The performance of any brand in the market is heavily influenced by the buying behaviour of consumers in the market (Bilgin 2018). It is therefore imperative for organisations to predict the future brand buying behaviour of consumers (ibid). To examine the future behaviour of consumers, Ajzen (1991) noted that it is very critical in ascertaining different consumer intentions, attitudes and current behaviour of consumers. The TPB can be employed to project such consumer behaviour since it determines the overall brand performance in the market. Figure 1.1 depicts the TPB that the present researcher adapted from Ajzen (1991).

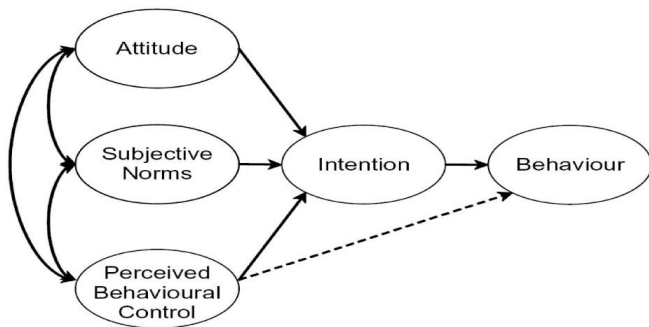


Figure 1.1: Theory of planned behaviour

Source: Ajzen (1991)

From the above TPB, consumer attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (PBC) forms the basis for examining consumer intentions regarding future brand performance. It can be seen from figure 1.1 that consumer intentions are at the centre stage of future consumer behaviour. According to Ajzen (1991), consumer brand purchase intention is strongly influenced by PBC and current consumer attitude as depicted in figure 1.1 above. According to the TPB, attitude refers to the level to which consumers might possess either positive or negative information pertaining to the behaviour which could be under consideration. Subjective norm relates to consumer's judgements of other online social media users' beliefs and norms or even sentiments which they post on online shared media platforms regarding the performance of various brands under consideration which will in turn determine their future behaviour in terms of brand purchase (Kotler 2010). PBC according to Ajzen (1991) refers to consumers' judgements regarding either the simplicity or difficulty which can be encountered while trying to perform the planned behaviour. Scholars such as Suh & Han (2003) cited that PBC can directly influence planned behaviour.

When firms come up with different brands, they predict that consumers will purchase those brands or that their brands will perform as depicted on advertisements which are shown on social

media platforms. In this regard, they predict that consumers will purchase these brands. Consumer attitudes towards brands which are communicated through social media platforms are heavily influenced by EWM which is shared by other online shared media users (Mehrabani et al. 2014; Bakopoulos et al. 2017 and Seo & Park 2017). Thus, consumers do not behave as intended or as predicted by the advertising firms. Even though the TPB postulates that as behavioural control increases so are the chances of performing the intended behaviour (Ajzen 1991). This is not always the case as other external factors come into play. Scholars such as Mehrabi et al. (2014), Bakopoulos et al. (2017) and Seo & Park (2017) noted that reviews, comments and ratings which are posted by those who have experienced the brand has the power to influence consumer behaviour towards concluding a purchase of a certain brand.

2. Literature Review

A study by Mehrabi et al. (2014) showed positive and significant influence of SMM on brand loyalty. Seo & Park (2017) revealed positive and significant link between SMM activities undertaken by businesses and brand loyalty. In another study, Bakopoulos et al. (2017) showed that SMM has a positive influence on brand loyalty. Belgin (2018) also confirmed positive and significance association between SMM and brand loyalty. Belgin (2018) conducted an empirical research that examined the effects of SMM activities on brand awareness, image and loyalty in Turkey. The findings from the study revealed that SMM activities have positive and significant effect on brand awareness, image and loyalty. Furthermore, their findings also revealed that brand awareness and brand image have significant influence on brand loyalty. The scholar proposed that future studies should look try to replicate the same study in other countries and also to explore other SMM variables affecting brand awareness, brand image and brand loyalty. The study made use of SMM activities such as trendiness, advertisement, interaction, entertainment and customisation. Variables used by Belgin (2018) were the same as those used by Seo & Park (2017) in South Korea. The findings of Seo & Park (2017) and Belgin (2018) concurred and showed that SMM activities undertaken by firms strongly influence the performance of their brands in the market. However, Bilgin (2018) just like Seo & Park (2017) did not examine how other SMM variables like brand attributes and online brand communities impact on brand awareness, recognition and brand loyalty. In this regard, the present study seeks to examine the influence of brand attributes and OBC on brand performance of SMEs in the detergent industry in Zimbabwe.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted a positivist philosophy. The positivist philosophy was used due to the quantitative nature of the study. The objectives of this study seek to establish cause and effects links between SMM variables and brand performance. Quantitative design research design allowed the collection of data that can be quantified easily. The population of this study was made up customers of Horizon Detergents, Minax Commercial, Cresschem Investments, UPROCS and Gracious Omarh Enterprise who uses social media platforms. The estimated target population was 10 000 customers who use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in Harare. A sample size of 370 participants was used from a target population of 10 000 respondents as drawn from Research Advisors (2006) in table 1.1. below.

Table 1.1: Sample size determination

Population	Margin of Error at 95% Confidence Level			
	5%	3.5%	2.5%	1%
10 000	370	727	1 332	4 899

Source: Research Advisors (2006) Sample Size Table

4. The Results of the Study Findings

4.1. Brand Attributes and Brand Loyalty (BABL)

The participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree that “there is a positive impact of brand attributes on customer brand loyalty”. Table 4.6 shows descriptive statistics pertaining to brand attributes and brand loyalty.

Table 1.2: Descriptive statistics for brand attributes and brand loyalty

Item	N	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Std. Deviation
BABL1	300	5	4	4.321	.5529
BABL2	300	5	4	4.755	.8335
BABL3	300	5	4	4.662	.7738
BABL4	300	3	1	1.337	.4333
BABL5	300	4	3	3.663	.5442
BABL6	300	5	4	4.227	.6552
Overall				4.533	

Source: Primary Data (2018)

Table 1.2 shows that for item BABL1, maximum response was 5, minimum was 4, mean was 4.321 and standard deviation was 0.5529. The mean was close to 4 implying that respondents agreed that “consumers are concerned with the attributes of SMEs’ brands that are communicated via social media”. Item BABL2 had maximum of 5, minimum of 4, mean of 4.755 which was close to 5 and this indicated that respondents strongly agreed that “social media marketing clearly depicts the attributes of a brand like brand colour and brand ingredients”. Table 1.2 shows a maximum of 5, minimum of 4 and a mean of 4.662 for item BABL3. The mean was close to 5 implying that respondents strongly agreed that “the attributes of a brand that are shown through social media marketing makes consumers want to purchase the brand again and again”. Item BABL4 had a maximum response of 5, minimum of 1 (1=strongly disagree) and a mean of 1.337. The mean was close to 1 indicating that respondents strongly disagreed that “brand prices charged by SMEs in the detergent manufacturing industry influences their customers to make repeated brand purchase”.

The maximum response for item BABL5 was 5, minimum was 3 and mean was 3.663. The mean was close to 4 and it indicated that

respondents agreed that “customers become loyal to a brand whose attributes are clearly depicted through social media marketing”. Item BABL6 recorded maximum response of 5, minimum of 4 and mean of 4.227. The mean was close to 4 indicating that respondents agreed that “there is a positive impact of brand attributes on customer brand loyalty”. The overall mean response for all the 6 items used in describing brand attributes and brand loyalty was 4.533. This was close to 5 and it indicated that respondents strongly agreed that “there is a positive impact of brand attributes on customer brand loyalty”. These findings were consistent with Bakopoulos et al. (2017), Seo & Park (2017) and Bilgin (2018) who revealed that brand attributes can result in brand loyalty.

4.2. Online Brand Communities and Brand Performance (OBCBP)

The researcher is interested in determining the effect of online brand communities on brand performance in the detergent manufacturing industry. Table 1.2 shows descriptive statistics for items that characterised OBC and brand performance.

Table 1.2: Descriptive statistics for OBC and Brand Performance

Item	N	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Std. Deviation
OBCBP1 300	5	4	4.832	.8778	
OBCBP2 300	5	4	4.556	.7320	
OBCBP3 300	5	4	4.771	.8449	
OBCBP4 300	5	4	4.822	.8828	
OBCBP5 300	5	4	4.755	.8544	
OBCBP6 300	5	4	4.722	.8122	
Overall			4.766		

Source: Primary Data (2024)

Table 1.2 shows that the maximum response for item OBCBP1 was 5, minimum was 4, and the mean was 4.832 which was close to 5 and this indicated that respondents to this study strongly agreed that “customers always share comments/ reviews/ blog posts/ related articles to peers or friends via social media concerning the performance of certain brands they experience”. The item OBCBP2 had maximum response 5, minimum 4, and mean 4.556 which was close to 5 indicating that respondents strongly agreed that “customers change their attitude towards a certain brand or product after they have read positive comments/ reviews/ online articles about the performance of a brand”. For item OBCBP3, the maximum response was 5, minimum was 4, and mean was 4.771. The mean response was close to 5 and this indicated that respondents strongly agreed that “customers feel encouraged to voice out their opinions after experiencing the performance of a brand that would have been advertised via social media platforms”. Item OBCBP4 had maximum response of 5, minimum 4 and mean of 4.822. This mean was close to 5 and it indicated that respondents strongly agreed that “customers always check other consumer reviews when exploring the performance of brand”.

It can be seen from table 1.2 that the item OBCBP5 recorded maximum response of 5, minimum of 4 and mean of 4.755. This mean response was close to 5 and this indicated that respondents to this study strongly agreed that “customers always recommend brands whose performance they have liked to their online communities”. For item OBCBP6, the maximum response was 5, minimum was 4 and mean was 4.722. The mean response for this item was close to 5 indicating that respondents strongly agreed that “online brand communities have a positive effect on brand performance”. The overall mean response for the 6 items that were used in describing the impact of OBC on brand performance was 4.766. This was close to 5 and it implied that respondents strongly agreed that “there is positive effect of online brand communities on brand performance in the detergent manufacturing industry”. Bilgin (2018) also depicted a positive effect of online brand communities on brand awareness, image and loyalty.

4.3. Hypothesis 1

H₁: *There is a positive and significant impact of brand attributes on brand loyalty*

SMM variable of brand attributes had a beta value of 0.24, p-value of 0.024 and the coefficient of determination was 0.433.

The above linear regression analysis results show that brand attributes had a positive beta. This indicated that impact of brand

attributes on brand loyalty was positive. The p-value of 0.024 showed that this positive impact was significant at 5% and 10% levels of significance. Therefore, the researcher accepted the hypothesis that “there is a positive and significant impact of brand attributes on brand loyalty” at 5% and 10% levels of significance. Linear regression analysis results also showed that brand attributes accounted for 43.3% of the variation in brand loyalty. The above findings were in line with those of Mehrabi et al. (2014), Bakopoulos et al. (2017), Seo & Park (2017) and Belgin (2018) who found positive and significant impact of SMM activities on brand loyalty in different countries.

4.4. Hypothesis 2

H₂: *There is a positive and significant effect of online brand communities on brand loyalty*

Linear regression analysis results on table 4.8 shows that online brand communities had a beta value of 0.54, probability value was 0.000 and the coefficient of determination was 0.582.

The positive beta value of 0.54 indicated that there was a positive effect of online brand communities on brand performance. The p-value of 0.000 indicated that the positive effect of online brand communities on brand performance was significant at 1%, 5% and 10% levels of significance. The researcher accepted the hypothesis that “there is a positive and significant effect of online brand communities on brand loyalty” at all levels of significance. Online brand communities accounted for 58.2% of the variation in brand performance as shown by the coefficient of determination for this variable.

The above findings were in line with findings of Mehrabi et al. (2014), Bakopoulos et al. (2017), Seo & Park (2017) and Belgin (2018) that depicted positive and significant effect of SMM activities on brand performance indifferent countries.

4.5. Inferential statistics and hypotheses testing

To determine the nature of impact of SMM variables on brand performance measures, the researcher performed some simple linear regression analysis. Regression results were also used in testing research hypotheses. Beta (β) values from the regression analysis were used to determine the nature of impact between variable, coefficients of determination (R^2) were used to show the amount of variation accounted for by a variable and the probability value (p-value) was used to test the significance of the relationship between variables. Table 4.8 shows linear regression results regarding the impact of SMM on brand performance.

Table 1.3: Regression analysis results

Variable	Beta	t-statistic	p-value	R ²	Decision
Brand attributes	0.42	3.5227	0.024**	0.433	Accepted
Online brand communities	0.54	4.3228	0.000*	0.582	Accepted

*significant at 1%, **significant at 5% Source: Primary Data (2024)

5. Conclusions of the Study

Consumers become loyal to brands with attributes that are clearly depicted through social media marketing and performs as shown

on social media platforms. When company brands perform as depicted in videos that are shared by companies via social media platforms, consumers will make repeated purchases of the same brand. Thus, showcasing brand attributes and brand performance

through shared media platforms results in customer loyalty provided the brand performs as showed in the video. Authors like Mehrabi et al. (2014) also concluded that showcasing brand attributes and its performance via shared platforms has a positive bearing on brand loyalty. Sharing of brand information by online brand communities enhances brand performance on the market. Brand online communities discuss and share brand information to other online consumers in the form of electronic word of mouth and this information improves brand awareness, brand recognition, brand loyalty which all leads to positive brand performance. Other authors like Mehrabi et al. (2014), Seo & Park (2017) and Belgin (2018) that the existence of online brand communities facilitates the exchange of brand information and this improves the performance of a brand in the market.

6. Summary of the Study

The first objective of this study was to assess the impact of brand attributes on brand loyalty. Descriptive statistics showed that the overall mean response for the six items that were employed in describing the impact of brand attributes on brand loyalty was 4.533 which was close to 5 and this indicated that respondents strongly agreed that “there is a positive impact of brand attributes on customer brand loyalty”. Results from linear regression analysis showed a positive beta value and a p-value of 0.024 for brand attributes. This depicted that there was a positive and significant impact of brand attributes on brand loyalty which lead the researcher to accept the hypothesis that “there is a positive and significant relationship between electronic word of mouth and brand recognition” at all level of significance. The second objective of this study was to establish the effect of online brand communities on brand loyalty. Descriptive statistics showed an overall mean response value of 4.766 for all the 6 items used to characterise this construct. This mean value was close to 5 implying that respondents strongly agreed that “there is positive effect of online brand communities on brand loyalty in the detergent manufacturing industry”. Linear regression analysis results showed a positive beat value and a p-value of 0.000 for online brand communities. This depicted that there was a positive and significant effect of online brand communities on brand performance and the researcher accepted the hypothesis that “there is a positive and significant effect of online brand communities on brand performance” at all levels of significance.

7. Implications of the Study/Recommendations

In line with the findings and conclusions that were drawn from those findings, the study made the following recommendations.

7.1. To the manufacturing SMEs

The management of SMEs in the detergent industry in developing countries should advertise their brand through social media platforms. It was found out that consumer digital interaction has a positive and significant influence on brand awareness. So, advertising brands through online shared platforms will increase brand awareness among their consumers. SMEs in the manufacturing industry in developing countries should design and implement platforms where consumers can rate, review or comment the experiences they would have encountered with different brands.

7.2. To Customers of SMEs in the manufacturing industry

The customers of the SMEs in the manufacturing industry should seek information pertaining to different manufacturing products concerning their attributes and how they perform on social media platforms. This helps them to be aware of brands which are trending in the manufacturing industry and also those that are performing well before they can conclude a purchase decision. Also, customers of the SMEs in the detergent industry should pressure these firms into designing online platforms where they can post, comment, rate and or review different brands of these SMEs so that others seeking brand information will have no difficulty in searching it.

7.3. Future Research Indications

Future studies should further explore the influence of Social Media Marketing on the Brand Performance of SMEs in the Manufacturing Industry in a specific developing country such as Zimbabwe. Future studies should also attempt to explore other SMM variables and examine how they impact brand performance of companies on the market.

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