

**EVALUATION OF USE AND IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN OFFERING
CUSTOMER CARE SERVICES IN NETWORK SERVICE PROVIDER
COMPANIES: A CASE OF SAFARICOM LIMITED.**

BY

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DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been submitted for examination to any other University.

Signed.....

Date.....

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The research project has been submitted for examination with my approval as the University Supervisor.

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My foremost gratitude goes to the Almighty God for his grace and favour in enabling me through my academic life.

To my supervisor Mr. Isaac Mutwiri for his guidance and invaluable advice in the preparation of this work. I owe a lot to my classmates, family and friends for their immense support and encouragement for this academic work.

DEDICATION

To God for His grace and favor in my life. To my mother for her support and counsel.

ABSTRACT

Use of social media in offering customer service in mobile network service provider companies is of value to customers and business owners. It helps to improve the service offered to customers. Improved service leads to improved revenues because customers are willing to spend more. In Kenya, Safaricom Limited uses social media to contact some section of its customers. This study sought to evaluate the use of social media in mobile network service provider companies using Safaricom Limited as a case study. The study had three objectives. It sought to find the benefits of using social media in customer care; the problems that use of social media in customers care encountered and various ways in which customer care was used in the call center. The research employed a case study method. Stratified random sampling was used to obtain the study subjects. A questionnaire was used to obtain data from the study subjects. Document analysis was used to obtain relevant data about customer care service. The data analyzed was from April 2012, when social media services were launched, to April 2013. Document analysis established that use of social media in Safaricom call center had helped in improvement of customer delight index, average handling time and number of customers served every month. From the questionnaires, it was established that there was no significant effect of use of social media to the reduction of number of repeat calls. Use of social media improved accessibility of customers to the call center. The major problem that the use of social media encounters is that few people have access to internet. It was similarly verified that language barrier was a problem with using social media. The languages were limited to Kiswahili and English yet some customers are not well acquainted with the written form of the two languages. Results from the questionnaires verified that social media was used to educate customers, inform them about new products and help them in troubleshooting problems related to use of Safaricom products and services. The study concluded that use of social media has had a major impact on customer service in Safaricom. It recommended that more studies needed to be done to understand the discrepancy between increased customer delight index and the non reducing repeat calls. The research also recommended inclusion of interviews as data collection tools in future. This would help to get more insights about other contributing factors that may have led to improvement of customer delight index.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Customer service, as also known as customer care, is the provision of assistance to prospective and current customers on issues related to an organization's products and services. It involves assisting customers in making cost effective and correct use of a product or service. It includes assistance in planning, installation, training, troubleshooting, maintenance, upgrading, and disposal of a product. Customer service is offered using different platforms including postal mail, e-mail, voice call services, short message services and social media. This proposal intends to study the impact of social media on telephone service operators in Kenya. The proposal is organized in three parts; the introduction, literature review and methodology.

1.1.1 Customer service

Customer service was said to have begun almost a century ago. The service dates back to January 1878 when George Willard Croy became the world's first telephone operator, working for the Boston Telephone Despatch company. Traditionally, customer service was provided at the retail outlets as either after sales service, repair services or receiving and addressing customer complaints. Customers had to visit these centers when they needed such kind of assistance. The invention of the telephone provided an alternative touch point for customer service; the call center. Call centers soon became very popular. Telephone switchboards were used where customers would make calls to telephone operators and request them to connect them to various destinations. Callers spoke to an operator at a Central Office who then connected a cord to the proper circuit in order to

complete the call. Being in complete control of the call, the operator was in a position to listen to private conversations (Harris, 2002).

Over time, call centers have evolved and have become central parts of business strategy where customers can call in and make their requests, views and questions about products and services being offered. As the telephone revolution assumed shape, call center came to be defined as a centralized office used for the purpose of receiving and transmitting a large volume of requests by telephone. Today a call center is often operated through an extensive open workspace for call center agents. The agents work in stations that include a computer for each agent, a telephone set/headset connected to a telecom switch, and one or more supervisor stations. The sizes of call center range from small ones with only a few call center agents to one with thousands of call center agents (Liljander&Strandvik, 1995).

Call center agents receive calls from customers and respond to them following an acceptable code of work and ethics and within a predetermined period of time. There are three types of call centers. These are inbound call center, outbound call center and blended call center. Inbound call centers predominantly handle calls initiated by customers. Outbound call centers make calls to customers. Blended call centers are known to handle both incoming calls from customers and calls made to customers. Blended call centers combine automatic call distribution for incoming calls with predictive dialing for outbound calls (Taylor & Bain, 2005).

There has been a shift from the call center operations where customer issues are now channeled through a variety of media, including but not necessarily limited to telephony,

email and internet chat. This has seen the transformation of call centers in contact centers. Contact centers in Kenya have become integral parts of business operations. Kenya Commercial Bank, Kenya Airways, Barclays Bank of Kenya and Safaricom Limited are some of the top business concerns that have well established contact centers. All the contact centers use different media to connect with their customers. These contact centers handle customer queries channeled via telephone conversations, E-Mail and Social Media (Gakuru, Winters &Stepman, 2009).

1.1.2 Mobile Network Operator Firms in Kenya

Mobile phones use radio spectrum to transmit signals. Registered mobile network service firms provide and manage these signals. In Kenya, privately registered mobile network firms provide these services. The government of Kenya, through a regulatory authority known as the Communication Commission of Kenya, issues license to firms in terms of bandwidth. The firms use the bandwidth to offer various types of services to customers.

In Kenya, four players, namely; Safaricom, Orange, Yu Mobile and Airtel, dominate the mobile telephone industry. Safaricom takes the biggest share of the market(Mas & Radcliffe, 2010). Mobile phone users in the country have hit 30. 7 million mark.Mobile phone network service providers offer a wide array of services to customers in Kenya. They offer data services, short message service, money transfer services, voice and other value added services. Safaricom commands 19 million of the customers who use mobile phone services. Of the number, 15 million customers use M-Pesa service, a customer-to-customer money transfer system that uses the short message service. In Kenya, as well as other African countries, the mobile phone service provider companies only give service

platforms but do not give out the mobile phones. The service companies are therefore independent of the mobile phone provider companies (Buku& Meredith, 2013).

Kenya's mobile market experienced rapid growth throughout the last decade and is forecast to grow even further over the next five years through the expansion in its mobile data services, particularly mobile banking. The price of handsets has reduced due to the duty being waived by the Government and the increase in operators has intensified competition leading to price competition in the market. Lower handset prices and service tariffs brought mobile services to the reach of a greater proportion of the population. The competition among these companies is very commendable because it has contributed to vast improvement in transformation and access quality communication for people across Kenya (Albo, Díaz& Ng, 2012).

Challenges facing network Mobile Network Operators include stiff competition for subscribers. Competition between the mobile telephone companies has resulted in a tussle between operators to capture new customers. Forgas et al (2012) did a study that indicated that although the majority of existing customers were loyal to their service providers, they required more attention so that they do not feel discriminated. Such a feeling, the study stated, would make customers to move to another company. Paying more attention to customers can be best achieved through opening channels for receiving customer feedback. Customer service is the main tool through which customers may convey their sentiments about the brand.

Customer Journey describes the series of interactions people have with a company via all available channels such as telephone, web, branch, marketing communications and

service interactions. Customer Journey concerns itself with what people do and how they feel about those interactions. It can focus on a specific task (say buying a product) or the entire customer Lifecycle. The entire customer journey influences the perception of the customer towards the brand (Nenonen et al, 2008).

Every business knows that in order to thrive it needs to differentiate itself in the mind of the consumer. Price has proved inadequate since there is a limit to how much a firm can cut back on its margins. Product differentiation is also no longer enough to attract or retain customers since technological advances have resulted in products becoming almost identical with very few tangible differences from others in the same category. Consequently, marketers have realized the importance of service differentiation as a sustainable strategy for competing for a portion of the customer's wallet (Murphy & Tan, 2003).

1.1.3 Customer service touch points

At present business times, there is a fast-growing movement among organizations interested in improving their customer-Centricity. This is done through a better understanding of customer interactions, or touch points. These interactions are called "Customer Touch point Management" (CTM). This new movement has the goal of this new movement is to improve customer experiences, and as a result, improve customer relationships. By improving customer relationships, organizations improve market share, sales, and both customer and employee loyalty and advocacy(Chen&Popovich, 2003).

A touch point is can be looked at as all of the communication, human and physical interactions the customers experience during their relationship Lifecycle with your

organization. Whether through advertisement, websites, sales persons, stores or offices, Touch points are important because customers form perceptions of your organization and brand based on their cumulative experiences. In the contemporary market, well-informed marketers and advertisers understand that customer relationships can no longer be considered to be exclusive domains concerning sales and customer service. CTM-oriented organizations understand that they can best enhance relationships with customers by improving touch points across the entire enterprise (Schneider & Bowen, 2010).

1.1.4 Customer experience & relationship management (CRM & C.E.M)

In order to overcome inherent challenges faced during cultivation and management of customers, many marketers have turned to Customer Relationship Management (CRM). CRM is a strategic approach whose goal is to get everyone in an organization to recognize the importance of customers. Under CRM the key driver for marketing success is to treat loyal customers in a way that will increase the probability they will stay loyal customers. This is accomplished in part by ensuring that a customer receives accurate information and has a consistent and satisfying experience every time he interacts with a company (Smith & Wheeler, 2002).

While CRM is generally used to manage existing customers, it also has application for other customer groups. For instance, CRM is used to help identify former customers that can become customers again. Additionally, CRM can serve an integral role in helping to locate potential customers. Computer technology plays a key part in carrying out CRM. A proper technology-based system is needed so that nearly anyone in an organization that

comes into contact with a customer has access to necessary information and is well prepared to deal with the customer. However, CRM is not only about utilizing high-tech products. It requires a strong organizational commitment that includes extensive training for all employees (Seybold, Marshak& Lewis, 2001).

While maintaining close and consistent relationships with customers through all contact points makes good business sense, accomplishing this has often been a challenge. Numerous problems, from technology failures and lack of communication between contact points as well as lack of adequate employee training or outright employee resistance, have derailed many CRM efforts. So while CRM is now widely adopted and is becoming an essential tool for most business organizations, it still has a long way to go before it is ingrained as an essential business function within most organizations. By building a relationship with a customer, the organization is able to transform a satisfied customer into a loyal one and a loyal one into an advocate of the company's products and services. This has necessitated the need for customer experience management or the CEM (Mascarenhas, Kesavan&Bernacchi, 2006).

Managing the customer relationship has been the role of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). On the contrary, CRM strategies and solutions are designed to focus on product, price and enterprise process, with minimal or no focus on customer need and desire. The result is a sharp mismatch between the organization's approach to customer expectations and what customers actually want, resulting in the failure of many CRM implementations especially concerning the Knowing Your Customer (KYC) concepts (Schouten, McAlexander& Koenig, 2007).

Whereas CRM primarily focuses on satisfying the immediate needs of the customer to manage customers for maximum efficiency, CEM focuses the operations and processes of a business around the needs of the individual customer. Successful implementation of customer experience management ensures management of multi channel interactions. Customer experience solutions address a wide array of issues. Cross-channels include contact center, Internet and self service. Cross-touch point includes telephone conversations, chat, email, Web, in-person also known as face to face. Cross-Lifecycle of the business process includes, but is not limited to ordering, fulfillment, billing, support. This culminates to the nature of the customer experience process (Gilmore & Pine II, 2002).

Through customer experience management, organizations are able to transform an unhappy customer into a happy one. Customer experience transformation or the CxT is the main tool used in this process. This is a business management strategy that enhances the customer experience from any customer touch point. Its main objective is to provide companies and their customer service organizations with the tools needed to move customers from satisfied to loyal, and then to avid brand ambassadors. This is especially useful in the use of Social Media as a customer touch point where fellow customers pass information to other customers through the diffusion process (Schouten, McAlexander & Koenig, 2007).

1.1.5 Customer experience & Customer retention

Whereas customer service from a customer point of view may be that an instance where he or she is assisted, the customer experience is a more holistic view the customer has throughout his or her engagements with the organization. According to Peppers & Rogers

(2004), customer experience is the sum of all experiences a customer has with a supplier of goods or services, over the duration of their relationship with that supplier. This is from awareness, discovery, attraction, interaction, purchase, use, cultivation and advocacy. The customer experience can also be used to mean an individual experience over one transaction (Piedade& Santos, 2010). The overall customer experience influences customer retention and loyalty.

Further , organizations have the responsibility of coming up with customer experience solutions that provide strategies, process models, and information technology to design, manage and optimize the end-to-end customer experience process. Building great consumer experience is a complex enterprise, involving strategy, integration of technology, orchestrating business models, brand management and CEO commitment. Increasing competition in the corporate world has seen the evolution of customer retention strategies where each organization strives to keep its customers (Schmitt, 2010).

Customer retention involves the process of reducing customer defections. It can be defined as an assessment of the product or service quality provided by a business that measures how loyal its customers are. This is the definition according to the business dictionary. The ubiquity and high penetration rate of mobile technology has made Kenya a center stage of dynamic and unique competition among mobile service providers. Over the years, a number of mobile network operators have emerged with attractive tariff plans with the aim of attracting and maintaining their premium customers. Attracting new subscribers is one of the biggest challenges facing mobile service providers and a key component of organizational success (Verhoef et al, 2009).

The ability of firms to successfully attract new customers is consistently rated by business owners as one of the most important factors influencing organizational success. Faced with accelerating global competition, business organizations are being forced to improve performance, reduce costs and mitigate risks which include but are not limited to loss of customers. Recently, mobile number portability was introduced in Kenya in an attempt to control dominance in the mobile telephony industry. This has posed an even greater risk to revenue generation. To combat these challenges, most organizations are looking at their customer service managers to improve organizational capability to retain existing customers by offering unmatched customer service. According to Management Centre Europe (MCE), Telecom operators in both fast-growing and mature markets are under high pressure in today's business climate. These changes create opportunities but there is also increasing competition within the industry and from other industries (Gentile, Spiller & Noci, 2007).

Customer retention embodies repeated behavior, where loyalty reflects relationship development and retention reflects relationship continuation. The emotions evoked by a customer's experience act as a chief mediator for customer retention. When combined with an organization's strong reputation and recognized expertise. The emotions of customers are the chief determinant of customer retention. Corporate organizations have to create an emotional bond with the customers in order to retain them (Verhoef et al, 2009).

1.1.6 Customer service in Kenya

Traditionally Kenyan's have always understood that for one to get customer service they either have to call the service provider or visit them at their offices. Engaging with and empowering customers as an extension of a company's marketing effort is not a new phenomenon in Kenya. Customer service in Kenyan companies is either in-house or out-sourced. In – house customer service implies that the services are offered by the company directly by its employees while outsourcing means that the service is offered by a hired company. Customer service is provided by a person, that is, a customer service representative or by automated means. Examples of automated means are Internet sites. An advantage with automated means is an increased ability to provide service 24-hours a day (Oruta, 2012).

Safaricom has been on the forefront of improving its customer service platform. With an ever increasing customer base, calls being made to the call center and visits to the retail centers are on the rise. Customers on a daily basis attempt to reach Safaricom for assistance on service related issues. Due to long call queues at the call center IVR machine or the interactive voice response, it has become a major challenge for customers' calls to get through to the call center. Customer issues therefore take longer to be resolved and some even end up unresolved due to inaccessibility to the contact center (Macharia, 2012).

Long queues and customers granting over slow service always characterize the retail centers. This is worsened by the fact that some of the customers in the queues have opted to visit the retail center after several failed attempts to reach the call center by

phone. Inaccessibility can easily lead to loss of customers to competition. Safaricom as a business therefore had to sort ways of reaching its customers and counteracting these negative impacts. This has necessitated the creation of alternative customer touch points (Oruta, 2012).

1.1.7 Social Media

The social media platform has assumed a wide array of definitions and the term has been used in different ways. Social media tools are referred to as online technology that allows people to communicate in an easy way by utilizing the internet to share and discuss information. According to the definition of Purcell et al (2010), social media can best be viewed in the context of the traditional industrial media paradigm. This media includes newspapers, radio, television and magazines. These traditional media forms were one way communication where information was dissipated to consumers without there being an immediate feedback. New web technology, where social media platform has found use, gives room for immediate feedback to providers of information.

Definition by Eyrich et al (2008) does not differ in content with that of Purcell et al (2010). The author also looks at social media tools by contrasting them with the traditional media forms. Traditional media such as television, newspapers and radio, he states, provided a one-way communication. The author looks at social media as a platform that enables everyone to contribute to the online conversations through publishing. Social media, according to the author, is “the online place where people with a common interest can gather to share thoughts, comments and opinions”. Further, he explains that social media contain social networks like Facebook, web destinations that

have been branded like ebay.com and Amzon.com. Palmer and Koenig-Lewis (2009) on the other hand define social media as online platforms and applications, which have an objective of facilitating interactions, collaborations and sharing of content.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) think that definition of social media is always bound to take a business angle rather than an academic one. The reason, they argue, is the marketing value social media garners from the users. From a business perspective, social media enable conversations to be prompted, promoted and monetized. However, the author describes social media from an academic approach where it is described as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0. Further, the social media is said to be a tool allows for the creation and exchange of User Generated Content. In an extension of the definition, the author goes on to classify the types of social media that exist today using media research and social process theories.

Social media comes in different forms. They include but not limited to micro blogs, blogs, forums, social bookmarking and voting sites, media-sharing sites, review sites and social networks. Blogs comprise of individuals and or firms online journals that are sometimes combined with podcasts. Social networks allow users to build personal websites that are accessible to other users meant for the exchange of personal content and communication. Forums are mostly sites that are used for exchanging ideas (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009).

Krotz, (2009) has done a similar classification of social media tools. According to the author, they are classified depending on the attributes and applications. They can be

classified as blogs, collaborative projects, social networking sites and content communities. These four different types of social media are unique platforms that offer different services. However, they are not entirely disconnected from one another and services often come together on the internet. These platforms are constantly and rapidly evolving to serve multiple needs of their users. Therefore, these classifications can be seen as a simplified attempt to explore a complex system of digital services that is often overlapping.

Ryan & Jones (2009) offer a detailed explanation of how social networking sites work on the internet. The purpose of the site, the authors explain, is to allow users to participate in social networking by creating their own profiles and then connecting with friends and other available contacts within the network. On the internet, a vast number of people use social network worldwide. Like-minded people meet and discuss issues that affect their lives.

Podcasts are an extension of the blogging concept on the internet. Podcasts are a series of media files distributed over the internet. Podcasts can be accessed directly through websites and downloaded to a computer or any other device to be played later. Podcasts are organized in chronological shows with new episodes that are released at regular intervals. Users usually offer feedback on particular episodes on the accompanying website or blog. Wikis are made up of online collections of web pages and are literally open for any visitor to create, edit, discuss, comment on and generally contribute to. Wikis are used as a way of encouraging constructive interaction and collaboration between people of various occupations. It helps people and organizations to harness the massive pool of talent that is always found online. It helps organizations, researchers and

experts to draw benefits from the collective intelligence of users who access the online tool (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009).

Micro blogging is a short message broadcast service that helps users to update short messages that are usually less than 160 characters. Blogging has also increased with removal of entry barriers. Users all over the world use blogs to report local news, offer opinions, share visions and experiences and generally vent frustrations about one issue or another. Bloggers read each other's posts, they comment on them and link to each other prolifically (Krotz, 2009).

1.2 Research Problem

Customer service is an integral part of growth in an organization. Organizations offer customer service through various platforms including face to face interactions, email services, phone calls and social media platforms. Revolution of internet technology has given customer service a new face. Companies are moving towards using social media to offer customer service to their clients. Telephone network service providers have also embraced the use of social media in engaging their clients. Companies have capitalized on the fact that the number of users on social media sites has been on the increase with Facebook boasting of more than 800 million users and Twitter has more than 200 million users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Mobile network service providers in Kenya have embraced customer service as one of the pillars of development in their business. Among other platforms, they have embraced the use of social media to offer customer service to their clients. Safaricom Limited runs its customer service from the call center department. The company has trained a team that

engages customers using social media platform. This helps to solve customer problems, answer their queries and receiving feedback about company products. All these efforts are geared towards improving quality of customer service offered to consumers of the company's products. As has been with other tools used to offer customer service to clients of the company, use of social media platform is hoped to have a positive impact (Macharia, 2012). .

Hennig-Thurau et al (2010) did a study whose aim was to find out the impact of new media on customer service. The study concentrated on how channels like YouTube, Twitter, Google and Facebook enabled customers to play an active role as market players. The authors observed that these new media provided opportunity for growth through adaptive strategies. In the research findings, the report pointed out that new media has helped companies to understand customer behavior in a more elaborate way than before. The new media were also found to have helped in improving management of customer interactions. As well, the report stated that new media has been useful in helping organizations do an effective measurement of customer activities and outcomes.

Sigala (2009) sought to understand the impact of e-service and use of web 2.0 by organizations on customer service provision. In the study, the author elaborated that e-service and web 2.0 helped organizations to engage customers on issues of service design, marketing and production. The study found that use of online tools in customer service provision helped to enhance customer participation and inter-customer support. Online customer service tools were said to help in developing relationships where customers support one another in getting solutions to problems associated with the use of company products and services.

The studies cited in this section have been able to capture different aspects of using the internet in the improvement of service provision for consumers. The studies have concentrated on different tools to come up with useful findings. The study by Hennig-Thurau et al (2010) focuses on new media as a whole while the study by Sigala (2009) concentrates on e-services and web 2.0 tools. There is surprisingly little research demonstrating the links between Social Media customer service and customer satisfaction. None of the studies have paid much attention to social media and its impact on customer service. This study therefore endeavored to investigate social media impact on customer service in MNOs in Kenya.

1.3 Study Objectives

1. To determine the impact of social media on customer service
2. To determine how social media is used in customer service by MNOs in Kenya
3. To determine the challenges of using social media on customer service by MNOs in Kenya.

1.4 Study Questions

1. What is the impact of social media on customer care service in Kenya?
2. What are the different ways that social media can be used in customer service by MNOs in Kenya?
3. What are the challenges of using social media in customer service?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The results to be found in this study will be useful for various stakeholders. The mobile phone companies, banks and other sectors that operate call centers and customer service centers will benefit from the results of the study. The results will be used in putting in place strategies that will help increase the quality of work output in the call centers as well as improving the ways used in offering customer service.

Safaricom Limited will be the main beneficiary of this study. The data collected will reflect the true situation on the ground. The company will use the study findings to come up with ways of improving on how they deal with customers online using social media platforms. Strategies that improve customer service using social media will be useful in improving customer commitment and loyalty to the organization. If customers are committed to the organization, productivity will be improved.

The research findings will be useful for further research. Researchers who wish to do more studies about social media platform customer service will use the information to do a literature review for future studies. Safaricom Limited has recorded success and most researchers across the world are interested in the practices that have made the company to be a success story of mobile telecommunication technology. The results found in this study will be useful to most researchers who wish to get data about Safaricom customer management practices yet they cannot access the country due to their geographical location.

1.6 Limitations

This study is limited to the fact that there is not much previous research available in this field. The use of social media is new phenomenon especially in Kenya and all who have employed its use are more or less operating on a trial and error basis. In this regard there are no specific structures or points of measurements defined. The case study methods limit the generalization of the results. The results cannot be said to experimentally independently reproducible.

1.7 Assumptions of the study

The main assumption of this study is that the use of social media actually has a significant impact on customer service. With this assumption, the study hopes to find ease in measuring the impacts as per the objectives.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses various aspects of social media, customer service and mobile phone operator services. The chapter evaluates various published works that concern the subject of discussion. The sources of works will include books, journal reports and conference papers that were done concerning the subject. This chapter is divided into sections of social media, the benefits of using social media as a communication tool, the challenges of using social media to communicate, customer service and mobile network operator services. The chapter also discusses the theoretical framework that links variables in the research.

2.1. 2 Social Media

Social media have assumed a wide array of definitions and the term has been used in different ways. Social media tools are referred to as online technology that allows people to communicate in an easy way by utilizing the internet to share and discuss information. According to the definition of Purcell et al (2010), social media can best be viewed in the context of the traditional industrial media paradigm. This media includes newspapers, radio, television and magazines. These traditional media forms were one way communication where information was dissipated to consumers without there being an immediate feedback. New web technology, where social media platform has found use, gives room for immediate feedback to providers of information.

Definition by Eyrich et al (2008) does not differ in content with that of Purcell et al (2010). The author also looks at social media tools by contrasting them with the

traditional media forms. Traditional media such as television, newspapers and radio, he states, provided a one-way communication. The author looks at social media as a platform that enables everyone to contribute to the online conversations through publishing. Social media, according to the author, is “the online place where people with a common interest can gather to share thoughts, comments and opinions”. Further, he explains that social media contain social networks like Facebook, web destinations that have been branded like ebay.com and Amzon.com. Palmer and Koenig-Lewis& West (2009) on the other hand define social media as online platforms and applications, which have an objective of facilitating interactions, collaborations and sharing of content.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) think that definition of social media is always bound to take a business angle rather than an academic one. The reason, they argue, is because of the marketing value social media garners from the users. From a business perspective, social media enable conversations to be prompted, promoted and monetized. However, the author describes social media from an academic approach where it is described as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0. Further, social media are said to be a tool that allows for the creation and exchange of User Generated Content. In an extension of the definition, the author goes on to classify the types of social media that exist today using media research and social process theories.

Social media comes in different forms. They include but not limited to micro blogs, blogs, forums, social bookmarking and voting sites, media-sharing sites, review sites and social networks. Blogs comprise of individuals and or firms online journals that are sometimes combined with podcasts. Social networks allow users to build personal

websites that are accessible to other users meant for the exchange of personal content and communication. Forums are mostly sites that are used for exchanging ideas (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009).

Krotz, (2009) has done a similar classification of social media tools. According to the author, they are classified depending on the attributes and applications. They can be classified as blogs, collaborative projects, social networking sites and content communities. These four different types of social media are unique platforms that offer different services. However, they are not entirely disconnected from one another and services often come together on the internet. These platforms are constantly and rapidly evolving to serve multiple needs of their users. Therefore, these classifications can be seen as a simplified attempt to explore a complex system of digital services that is often overlapping.

Ryan & Jones (2012) offer a detailed explanation of how social networking sites work on the internet. The purpose of the site, the authors explain, is to allow users to participate in social networking by creating their own profiles and then connecting with friends and other available contacts within the network. On the internet, a vast number of people use social network worldwide. Like-minded people meet and discuss issues that affect their lives.

Podcasts are an extension of the blogging concept on the internet. Podcasts are a series of media files distributed over the internet. Podcasts can be accessed directly through websites and downloaded to a computer or any other device to be played later. Podcasts are organized in chronological shows with new episodes that are released at regular

intervals. Users usually offer feedback on particular episodes on the accompanying website or blog. Wikis are made up of online collections of web pages and are literally open for any visitor to create, edit, discuss, comment on and generally contribute to. Wikis are used as a way of encouraging constructive interaction and collaboration between people of various occupations. It helps people and organizations to harness the massive pool of talent that is always found online. It helps organizations, researchers and experts to draw benefits from the collective intelligence of users who access the online tool (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009).

Micro blogging is a short message broadcast service that helps users to update short messages that are usually less than 160 characters. Blogging has also increased with removal of entry barriers. Users all over the world use blogs to report local news, offer opinions, share visions and experiences and generally vent frustrations about one issue or another. Bloggers read each other's posts, they comment on them and link to each other prolifically (Krotz, 2009).

Two major aspects of social media are essential in analysis of its importance. Social presence and social process are important variables used to define how effective social media communication can be. Social Presence can be referred to as the level of prominence that communication media brings between two people who are communicating. Looked at from a different frame of reference, it can be said that social presence explores how a system of communication can enable the feeling of being in an actual place or time despite the individual not being physically present. Mediums with high degree, say television, are more prominent than the text, which calls for the readers'

imagination to conceptualize situations. A communication medium that occasions high social presence results in a high social influence(Safko& Brake, 2009).

Social process is also referred to as media richness. This refers to the capacity of a medium to enable immediate feedback. Face-to-face communication is the rich media that is available.Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) states that self-presentation and self-disclosure are important elements of social processes. Self-presentation is the process where a person creates an image of himself to control the impression that others have of him or her in a social setting. This image is constructed through self-disclosure. This refers to one's personal knowledge of the image one would like to present.Kaplan and Heinlein (2010) point out that blogs and collaborative projects score the lowest in terms of social presence.This is attributed to the nature of content in communication, which is solely text based. It only allows simple discourse. Content communities and social networking sites score high above blogs and collaborative projects. The two groups enable text-based communication but theusers have provisions to share pictures, video, audio, interactive maps and other forms of media.

Social media is important in business, and its essence can be evaluated in terms of social media blocks. They include identity, sharing, conversations, sharing, presence and relationships. Various authors have dwelt on these blocks. Identity block represents the extent to which users reveal their identities in any social media setting. Disclosure of information like gender, age, location and name is an important part of identity. Identity influences the level of interaction on social media (Levinson, 2009).

The conversation block of social media framework represents the extent to which users of a given platform communicate with each other. Many social media sites are meant primarily to facilitate conversations among individuals and groups. The conversations occur for all sorts of reasons. Users on social media interact with a purpose of meeting new individuals, finding love and building self-esteem. Other people use social media as a way of making their message heard, thus positively affecting humanitarian causes, economic issues, environmental problems, or political debates(Mangold&Faulds, 2009).

Sharing can also be used as a framework to evaluate social media use. Sharing represents the degree to which users of social media exchange, distribute or receive content. Here, the term 'social' means that exchanges between the parties involved are crucial. Presence is another framework that represents the degree to which social network users know if other users are accessible. This includes knowledge of the place where other users of the media are, whether in the real or virtual world, and whether they are available for conversations. The relationship block in the social media framework represents the level to which users can be related to others. Here, 'relate' refers to the form of association that makes two or more people to converse, meet up and share objects of sociality(Levinson, 2009).

2.1.3 Benefits of Using Social Media for Communication

Social media is said to have changed lives of human beings in terms of communication to a greater degree. Social lives, relief agencies, businesses and education sectors are some of the areas that have been positively impacted by the advent of social media platforms.Social media has helped to connect social groups via the internet. Social groups

have since time immemorial been the building blocks of human societies (Thackeray et al, 2008).

Social interactions have been in the past limited by geographical boundaries. The internet has helped to turn communication into a global phenomenon. Social media has helped society to connect, share ideas, interact and be informed. Families that stay far apart are able to communicate instantaneously because social media communication is real time. Professionals of various disciplines can easily share ideas, exchange information and even arrive at solutions to problems affecting their professions. Social media is said to have led to modernization among the masses (Hawn, 2009).

O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson (2011) is of the same view that social media is of advantage to the society as a whole. The author states that social media has become an essential part of the fabric that holds society together. Social media brings together people of common interest. The author gives an example of Facebook where people can join groups that are of interest to them. This allows likeminded people to meet as friends in a virtual world. Such meeting kick starts more in-depth discussions and analysis of common topics, exchange of ideas and sharing of personal experience. Use of social media has made it easy to develop a high volume of relationships very easily. As well, social media help to increase the speed and accessibility of communication. Compared to email, social media communication is faster and enables people to communicate with real-life friends.

Use of social media for communication has been of the economic essence in the business world. Social media is influential in the current marketing practice and customer service practice. Tuten (2008) reasons that social media has impacted diverse industries in the

world, and that it will continue to be a dominating aspect in conducting businesses. According to the author, use of social media in developing professional alliances, in seeking employment and recruitment, in enhancing business to business marketing and in offering customer service is bound to occasion a quantum lead in the way that organizations carry out their activities. Businesses are able to gather and share first hand information about the market.

Social media allows for the marketing of a company's product. Social media sites like Facebook allow companies to pay adverts. Companies create profiles where they advertise their products and services. The profiles have people who religiously follow them. They help give feedback about the products and services offered. As well, the profiles help attract new customers who may not have been aware of the company's existence. Facebook, for example, has a provision where users can 'like' a page. This can be used as a measure of popularity of a company profile on social media (Hawn, 2009).

Agichtein et al (2008) contributed to the discourse on social media and marketing by listing a number of advantages that businesses can benefit from while using the platform to do marketing. The first advantage listed is that the use of social media for marketing helps in building brand value online. A strong social message, the author states, helps to create a huge impact on building a brand name for any business. Social media acts as a viral market where brand name keeps on improving on its own after initial efforts have been put in place using the correct methods. Social media marketing can also enable business to have a quick turnaround. Social media marketing, if planned well, can lead to a quick increase in website traffic. A high traffic on the website means that business is conversing with high number of customers. This increases contact with consumers and

potential consumers. Marketing via social media is cost effective. Use of social media to get in touch with customers is cost effective because it eliminates the need for intermediaries who are mostly required when conventional marketing platforms are used.

Qualman (2012) is of the same views that use of social media is instrumental in reaching out to more people in business. Through social media, the author observe, business can create a website, which can allow customers to leave comments about services. An organization can then respond to such comments or concerns. This helps to form a bond with customers. This increases the chances of gaining traffic on the website. Social media helps businesses to interact with their customers in a completely new way. When businesses give real time response to customers, asking their opinion about their services and products, it creates satisfaction. Customer satisfaction helps to improve loyalty. Loyal customers help to market business products and services. This in turn increases sales and profitability of a business concern.

Shirky (2011) prefers to evaluate the benefits of social media by looking at reputation management. Social media can help an organization maintain a positive image of itself. Managers can use social media like Twitter to clarify on anything that is in the public domain concerning the company. Maintaining a positive image of an organization is very important. Managers can use social media to clarify anything propagated about the company as a result of rumors. Social media makes it easy for an organization to respond to rumors and destructive comments that can ruin the reputation of a business. Social media can also be used in marketing research. Organizations can let businesses offer reviews about its business products and services.

2.1.4 Challenges of Using Social Media in Business

Social media has made it easy for businesses to develop global brands. Customers around the world are able to access content offered by various businesses in different countries. However, use of social media in marketing and customer service comes with different challenges. A marketer and customer service operative has to understand his audience well in order to develop business. The need to understand audience well creates a big challenge to communicating with customers via social media. Issues of managing customers who speak multiple languages comes to mind. Given that businesses can be selling products and services to a multilingual customer base, the issue of language use can become a challenge. Most businesses use standard languages to conduct their affairs. This may leave out an important section of customers who cannot understand the language used by the organization (Thackeray et al, 2008).

Use of social media for marketing and customer engagement calls for adequate preparation without which an organization can only gain so much in customer service. One challenge for social media marketing and customer service is inadequacy of digital and virtual expertise who can do proper marketing. A well informed offline customer service agent may not be the person required to do the online marketing. Organizations are charged with the responsibility of hiring an expert to deal with the social media platform interaction with customers (Gilbert et al, 2008).

Lack of personalization is another problem that can hinder proper interaction between an organization and its customers on a social media platform. Social media platforms can only magnify in popularity if they help encourage customers and business owners to

interact widely through discussion boards, comments, shout outs and blogs. If an organization treats online interaction with the exactness that it treats offline marketing, it appears cold and impersonal. Balancing personalization of interaction vis-à-vis official way of conducting business in an organization is a delicate activity. Tracking of social media effects is another challenge that organizations face. Organizations have not employed measurable methods of understanding whether their online efforts are working or not. Methods like comparing the 'likes' and number of 'shares' done have not been verified to be the most appropriate methods of measuring success (Scott, 2009).

2.1.5 Customer Service

Customer service can assume different job descriptions. Industry-wide, customer service could be in terms of after sales service provision, repair work, and call center services, banking services, insurance sector and other essential sectors of the economy. According to Hoffman & Bateson (1997), customer service is the provision of assistance to current and would be customers on issues that are related to the products and services of an organization. It involves assisting customers in making correct use of a product or service. In another definition, customer service is defined in simple terms as provision of services to customers before, during and after purchasing a product. It is looked at as a series of activities that are designed to enhance the customer satisfaction level. After customer service has been administered, there should be a feeling that a product has met the expectations of a customer in question. If looked at wholly, customer service involves assistance in planning, installation, training, troubleshooting, maintenance, upgrading, and disposal of a product. When products and service in question are of technical nature

like electronics, mechanical devices and structures, customer service is used interchangeably with technical support.

The customer service has evolved over time, as has done technological evolution. In traditional times, customer service was provided to consumers at retail outlets. These services were offered either as after sales service or repair services. As well, customer service was used for receiving and addressing customer complaints. Customers had therefore to visit these centers when they needed any such kind of assistance. A radical shift was soon realized in customer service with invention of mobile phone services. Most businesses shifted to using call centers to serve as customer service touch points. The use of call centers has occasioned in revolution of customer service in the business world (Anton & Petouhoff, 1996).

Customer service is of importance, although the degree of its essence varies from product to product, sector to sector and customer to customer. It should however be noted that whichever the level of importance, customer service is instrumental in enhancing an organization's ability to generate revenue. A customer service experience is able to change the perception of consumers towards products and services offered by a particular organization. Provision of customer services can be done by a representative or can be via automated means. Internet sites are some of the tools used in offering automated customer services. Automated services are advantageous because they are in use for 24 hours per day. In mobile phones, customer support and service is integrated in the device where customers can dial certain commands and receive instructions on how to use features provided by mobile phone service provider (Sterne, 1996).

Automated services have brought to the fore the issue of dealing with invisible online customers. Disney et al (2006) states that online customers can be short-changed emotionally because of the lack of visual and tactile presence. It is nonetheless important that service providers create a sense of personal and human-to-human connection with customers online. While implementing a customer service system in an organization, there are certain key performance indicators that should be observed. Exceeding customers' expectations is one of the indicators of good performance in customer service. Customer expectations can only be met, and indeed exceeded, if the service providers understand customer needs.

Customer service should be cost effective. Cost saving is an important element in any organization. It improves revenue and growth of an organization. Customer delight index is another measure used to understand the efficiency of a good customer service system in an organization. Customer delight index is a purely subjective data collected from customers who have had contact with an organization through customer service. Average handling time is also an important element of customer service. It not only benefits the customer but also the organization in terms of saving time. Shorter average handling time means that an organization will be able to serve many customers. The ability capture correctly feedback is of the essence of customer service in an organization. This helps to improve overall service provision for an organization (Desatnick&Detzel, 1987).

An organization can improve customer service provision in many ways. However, these can be simplified into soft and hard skills. Hard skills include product knowledge while soft skills deal with the emotional part of customer service. Hard skills call for a customer service provider to be an information expert. The provider should ensure that a customer

leaves with satisfactory answers. The language used while serving customers should be friendly. Service providers should be in a position to empathize with a customer's situation (Sterne, 1996).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework is the logical and abstract structure of meaning that is used to guide development of a study. It is used in research to present a preferred approach to a thought or idea. Conceptual frameworks are always guided by identification of key concepts and the relationship among them. They help researchers to clarify concepts and explain possible relationships between them. This study will be guided by small group communication theories, information processing theories, symbolic convergence theories and the information integration theories, respectively. Data collections tools will be formulated basing on the four theories are the guiding principles.

2.2.1 Small Group Communication Theory

Different models best elaborate this theory. Fisher's model and Poole's model have been widely used to explain this theory. For purposes of this research, Poole's model has been used to discuss this theory. According to Poole, decision-making process by various groups is achieved via application of different sequences. Various contingency variables are used to refer to decision making. The variables include group composition, conflict management approaches and task structure. According to this model, decisions are made of a cluster of different activities and communication (Hirokawa, & Poole,1996).

Four tracks are important during small group communication, according to the model postulated by Poole. These tracks are useful for interpreting communication styles that a group uses. They consist of task tracker, relation track, topic track and break points. Task track is the first stage and is the understanding period. People in the group will try to come up with the goals and try to figure out the procedure. Relation track emphasizes on interpersonal relation between the group members. Human beings are social animals and people will always find time to interact as friends. Any relations can come up via the interactions because they tend to disclose themselves to others. Such relationships are important in working as a group. Topic track relates to issues and or concerns that a group may face. This track focuses on such issues concerning the group communication. In some instances, it may be argumentative while in others, it may be a cooperative conversation. Breakpoints are points where a group shifts from one point to another. There can be either postponement or suspension (Miller, 2002).

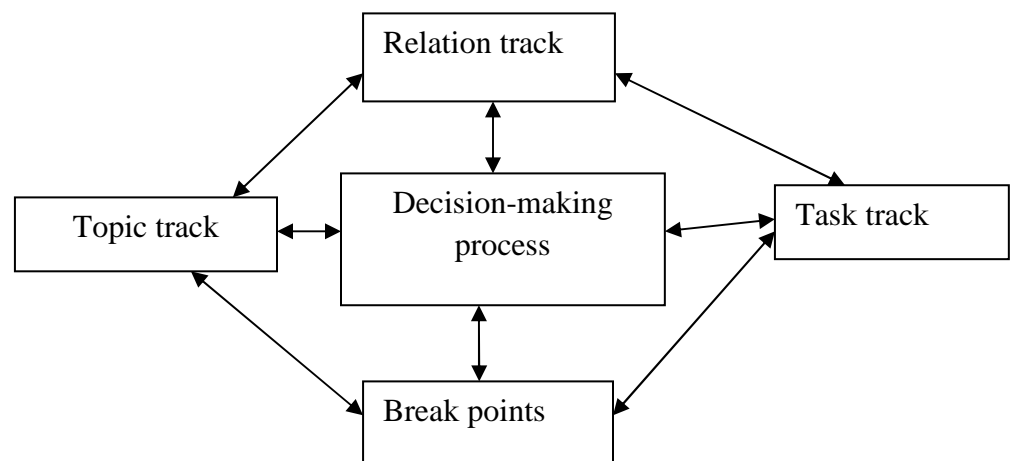


Figure 2.1: Decision Making Process

2.2.2 Information Processing Theories

Information theory experts use memory variations to explain errors in decision-making and the performance on many difficult cognitive tasks. Historical background of information theory is traced back to theories of cognitive development. Research about cognitive development is focused on the emergence of logical and analytical thought. Traditional theorists believed that reasoning shaped memory and that memory was subordinated to reasoning. Memory is necessary but not sufficient for reasoning. According to the arguments of Miller (2002), too much emphasis has been put on the way human beings process information, yet little has been put on the nature of the stimulus. Without input, no processing can take place. The author stresses the need to consider how the stimulus should be defined in the processing of information as an empirical question. This theory postulates that generalizations cannot be made from a study with only one subject. The roles of many stimuli should be investigated in order to come up with many generalizations.

It is also understood that stimuli are not equivalent. Stimuli are not all equivalent, therefore, all information cannot be processed in the same way. From the perspective of information processing, if the query posed to a respondent and the response alternatives are accurate, then all the input information will be transmitted and will be recoverable from the responses. However, should there be any inaccuracy, and then the transmitted information is bound to be considerably less than is required when making accurate inferences on the way people process information (Bormann, 1990).

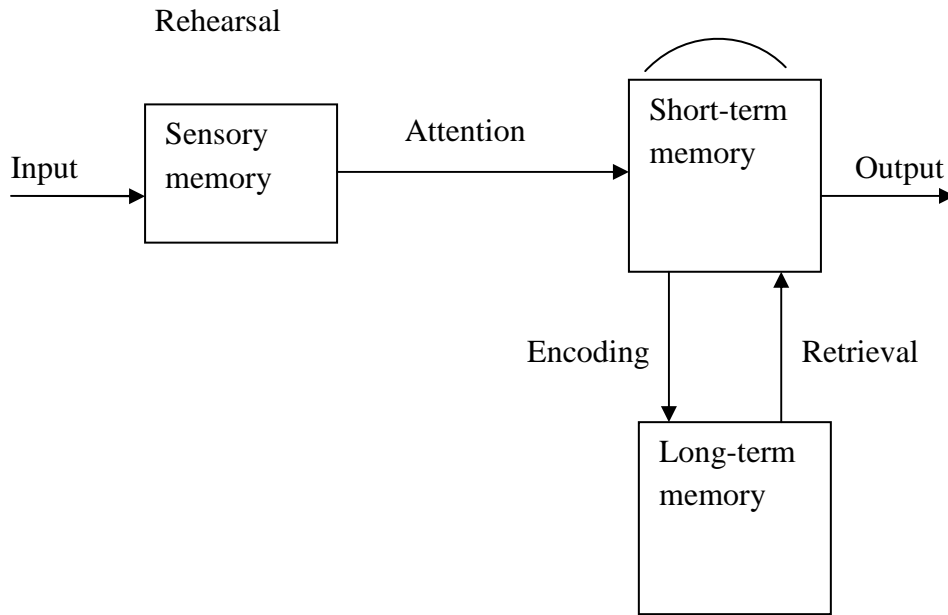


Figure 2.2: Information Processing Theories

2.2.3 Symbolic Convergence Theories

Developed by Ernest Borman and his team of graduate students at the University of Minnesota in 1972, symbolic convergence theory describes the communication process by which members of a group come to share a common social reality that is achieved through the sharing of fantasies. The theory studies the sense making function of communication. "Symbolic" refers to verbal and nonverbal messages and "convergence" refers to shared understanding and meaning. In small groups, members develop private code words and signals that only those inside the group understand. When groups achieve symbolic convergence, they have a sense of community based on common experiences and understandings (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008).

Sharing fantasies help group members create a social reality that indicates who is part of the group and who is not. Fantasy is used to describe the creative and imaginative shared interpretation of events that fulfills a group psychological or rhetorical need. The idea of

sharing fantasy themes increases group cohesiveness as members develop a common interpretation of their experiences. Fantasy themes are stories or narratives that help group members interpret group interactions and their surrounding environment. Fantasy themes develop when group members actively engage in dramatizing, elaborating on, and modifying a story. In this way, the story becomes publicly shared within the group as well as privately shared by each group member (Bormann, 1996).

Among the strengths of symbolic convergence theory is the focus on group identity and the development of group consciousness. This theory is descriptive rather than predictive. It helps people to understand how group members interact and provide gives a way of examining small group culture. We can also determine who is a group member and who is not depending on whether they are familiar with the group's fantasy themes, inside jokes, and rhetorical vision. The theory is useful for examining groups in organizations because it provides a way to compare them. This theory develops on a five-stage life cycle. It begins with the emergence or creations, then consciousness-raising, consciousness-sustaining, vision declining and finally, terminus (Miller, 2002).

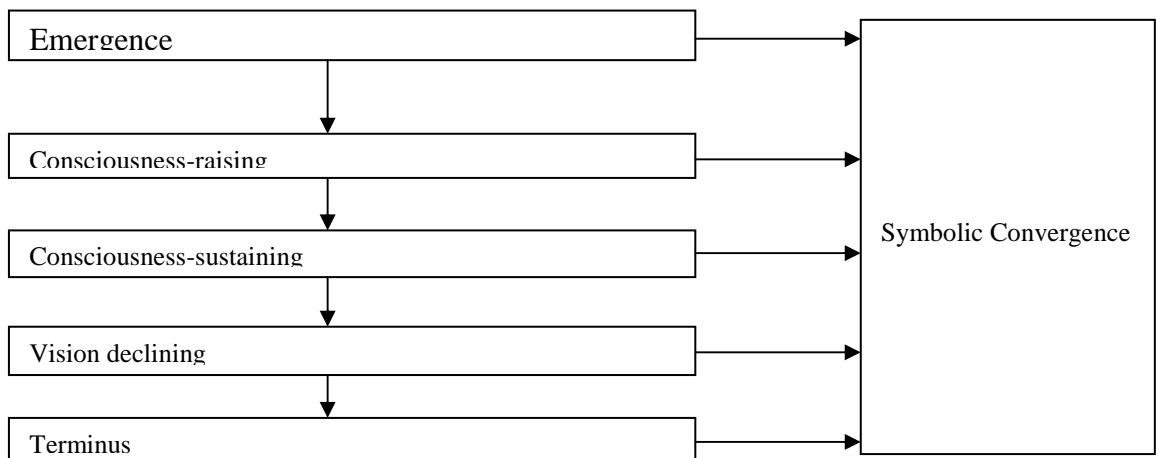


Figure 2.3:Symbolic Convergence Theories

2.2.4 Structuration Theory

This theory notes that social life is more than random individual acts and is not merely determined by social forces. Giddens, the father of this theory, suggests that human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other, and that it is the repetition of these acts which reproduces the structure. This means that there is a social structure - traditions, institutions, moral codes, and established ways of doing things. These can however still be changed when people start to ignore them, replacing them, or reproducing them differently. Social structures are not per se written as being state laws. People's everyday actions reinforce and reproduce a set of expectations. This set of other people's expectations makes up the 'social forces' and 'social structures' (Jones, & Karsten, 2008).

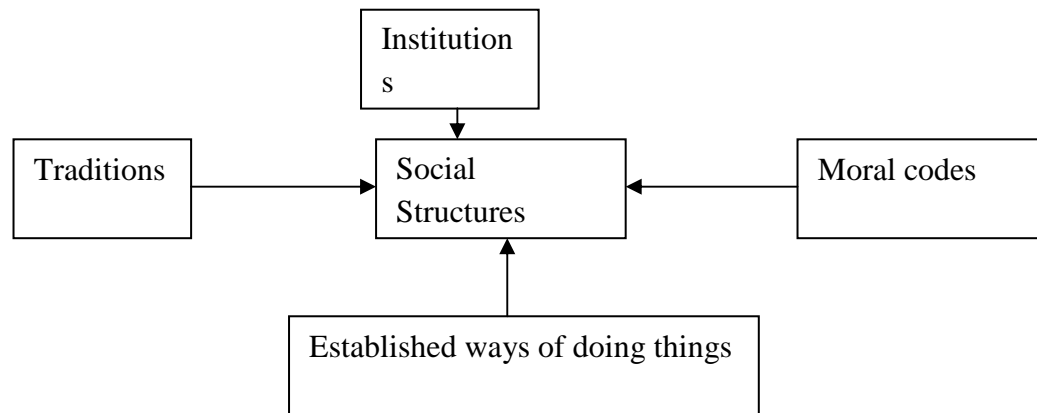


Figure 2.4 Structuration Theory

Independent Variables
Variable

Dependent

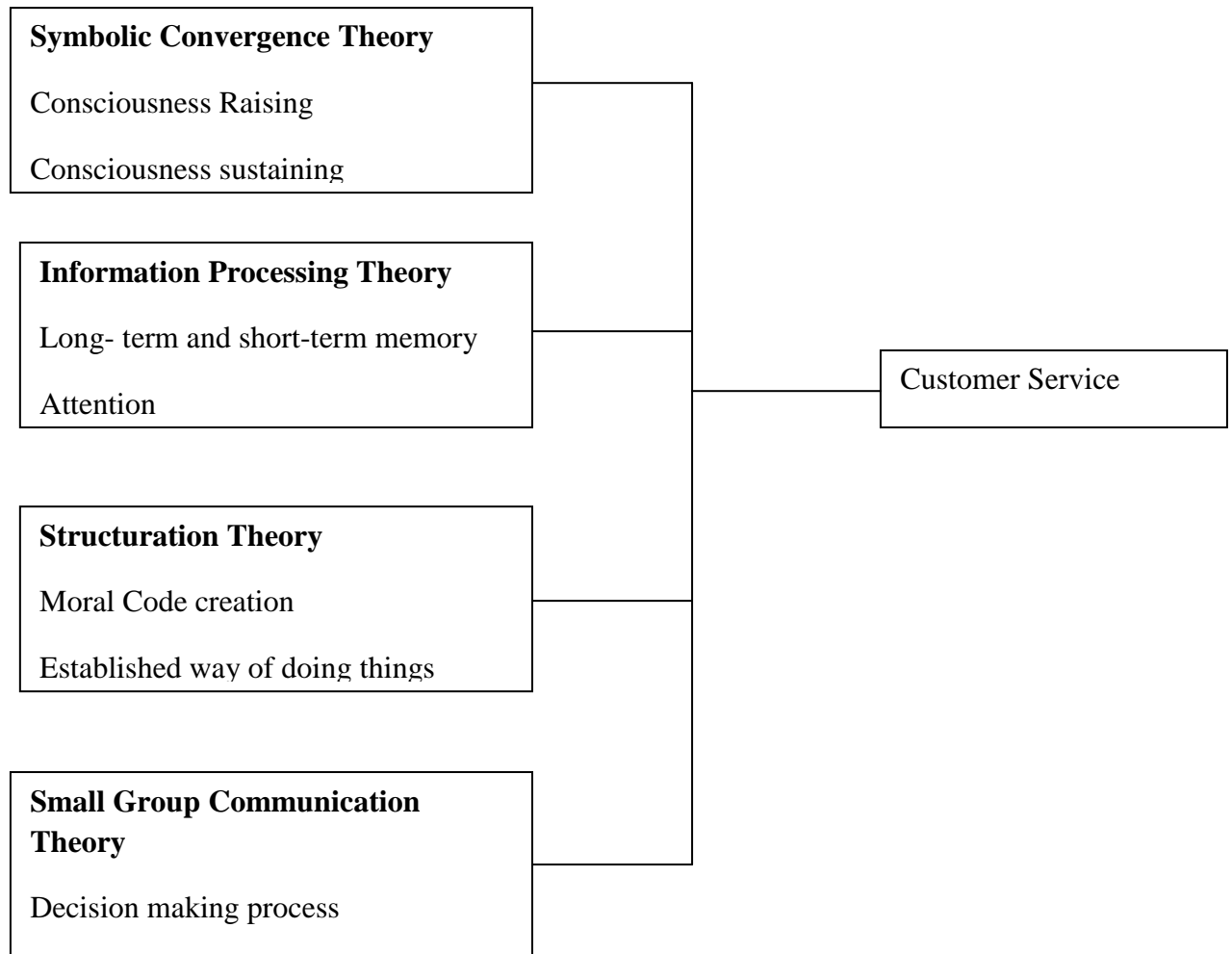


Figure 2.5: Theoretical Framework

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Under this chapter, methods that were used to get the needed information to meet the objectives of the research are explained. This chapter details the study design, study area, the target population, the sampling and size, data collection methods, research instrument and data presentation and analysis.

3.2 Study Design

The research design used a case study in one organization. The study was conducted with data collected during the period from April 2012 to April 2013. According to the definition by Yin (1994), a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined. A case study uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches in analyzing a phenomenon. Qualitative data will be obtained through content analysis while quantitative data will be obtained from the call centers.

The case study approach is useful in situations where contextual conditions of the events being studied are critical and where the researcher has no control over the events as they unfold. The case study allows an investigation into a phenomenon to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events like individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, international relations and the maturation of industries. However, results of a case study in one organization cannot be empirically independently be verified in other organizations(Yin, 1994).

3.3 Study Area

The study was done in all Safaricom call centers. The Safaricom call centers are located in Machakos County, Thika County and Nairobi County. This is the selected area of study because it is the area of interaction between the customers and the company using social media. The customer service agents and managers are located in the stations mentioned. The call center in Machakos is the major point of interaction between the company and customers. It is called Jambo Contact Centre. Thika and Nairobi County call centers hold few agents and they act more or less like redundant centers.

3.4 Population

The target population for the research was the call center customer care agents in Safaricom Limited. The study targeted a population of 1398 call center employees who work as customer care agents in various capacities. With the listed population, it was possible to get answers to the research questions. The targeted population was drawn from all the three call centers of Safaricom.

3.5 Sampling and Sample Size

The study used stratified random sampling. In this technique, a population is stratified first and then random sampling is done. Stratification is done when members of a target population are divided into homogeneous groups before sampling. After the members have been put into homogenous groups, they are randomly picked using the simple random sampling. This process is preferred because no element of the population is left out. The strata is collectively exhaustive. Sampling error is reduced if the procedure is used (Bogdan&Biklen, 1998).

The researcher stratified the call center customer care agents into different groups. The groups included the quality analysts, the support staff, the prepaid and M-Pesa agents, the postpaid agents, the directory agents, the M-Pesa agents' line customer care agents and the data customer care agents. In each stratum of the call center agents, a population list of all the top managers was drawn. Simple random sampling was then to be done to identify the subjects of study. The research used 10 % of the population as sample size (Mugenda&Mugenda, 2003). 140 subjects were studied. Quantitative analysis done in the research was drawn from the data collected from this sample.

Qualitative analysis of data was drawn from the information provided by the management in quality department of the call centre. The information included access to documents provided by the management. The documents included the quality performance trend of the call centre from April 2012 to April 2013. The quality performance trend was obtained from the customer delight index statistics. These statistics are always provided to the call centre by Synnovate Research Company. Customer handling time, number of customers handled per month and repeat calls were obtained from real time coordinators' records of trends. Access to the documents was obtained by permission from the call centre administration.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

This study used questionnaires and document analysis as the data collection method. A questionnaire is a data collection instrument that has a series of questions and other prompts whose purpose is to gather information from respondents. Questionnaires are preferred to other data collection instruments because they are cheap; they do not require

efforts on the side of the questioner and always have standardized answers. Its disadvantage is that it gives the user limited chance of expressing anything. Again, given that they are in writing form, they necessitate the user to read before giving answers (Bogdan&Biklen, 1998).Document analysis involved evaluation of customer service data in the call center of Safaricom Limited. The analysis evaluated the various elements of customer service that is offered through social media.

3.7 Research Collection Instruments

Before the questionnaire was administered, it was tested by giving it to a group of peers who pointed out discrepancies and ambiguity. The questionnaire was also be shown to the supervisor who pointed out mistakes that were in the structure and form. The questionnaires were handed personally to the respondents.

3.8 Data Analysis and Presentation

The study used quantitative and qualitative analysis to interpret the data collected.The data from the completed questionnaires was recorded. It was then entered in a computer using descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics approach was adopted for analyzing and presenting the data in this research.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter covers data analysis, findings and discussions of the research. Data was to be collected from the three call centers of Safaricom Limited. Out the 140 targeted subjects of study, 104 filled and returned their questionnaires. This represented 74 % response rate. This rate was considered satisfactory for analysis. Document analysis was done by evaluating various records at the call center between April 2012 and April 2013. Document analysis guide was used in collecting data for document analysis. The data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. The questionnaire responses were broken down into manageable categories, coded and thereafter quantitatively analyzed to get insights and make inferences. These were subsequently presented in tables.

4.1.1 Gender

The respondents were asked to indicate their gender. From the research findings, it was established that 59.17 percent were female while 40.83 percent were male as shown in Figure 4.1. This suggested that the call centre customer service job in Safaricom Limited was mainly done by the female employees.

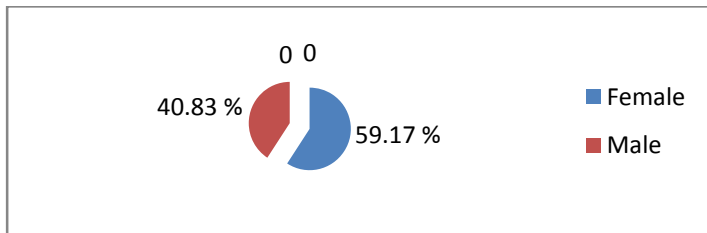


Figure 4.1 Gender of Respondents

4.1.2 Age

The study sought to establish the age of the respondents. From the research findings, it was established that 41.67 percent were between 21 to 30 years, 29.17 percent were between 31 to 40 years and 20.83 percent were between 41-50 years. It was noted that only 8.33 percent were 50 years and above of age, as shown in Figure 4.2. This implied that most of the call centre employees were of the age between 21 years to 30 years.

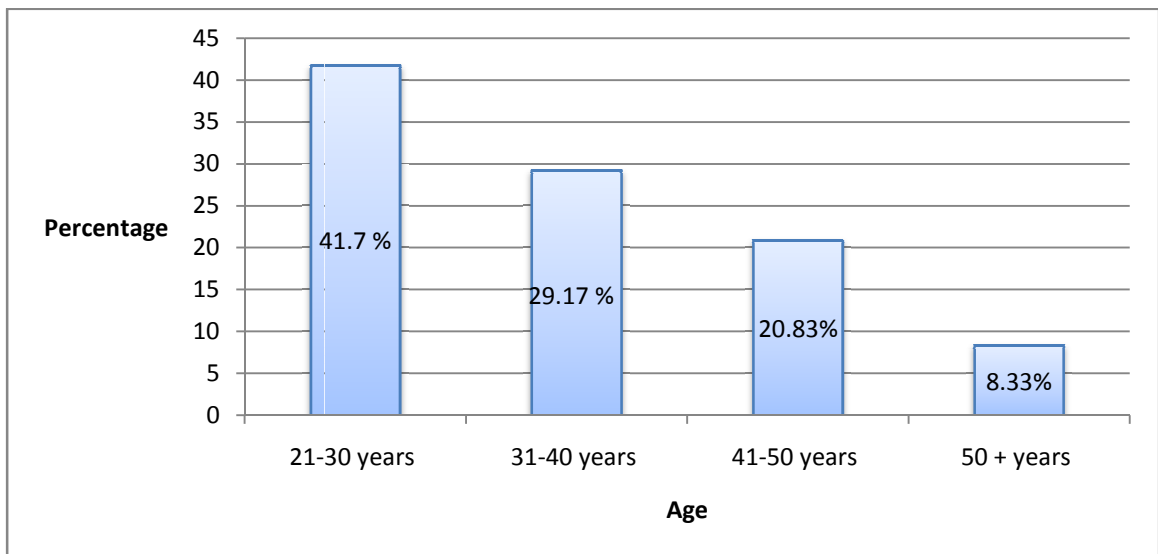


Figure 4.2 Age of the Respondents

4.1.3 Level of Reporting

The researcher sought to understand the level which the study subjects reported to in the call centre. In the results, it was ascertained 82% reported to a team leader. 15 % reported to a team manager while 3 % reported to the head of department. None of the interviewed respondents reports to the board. This means that most of the studied respondents did the tactical job in the call centre. The largest percentage of workers in the call centre does the tactical work. This is the lowest job group in the call centre. Figure 4.2 shows the percentage of respondents and the levels which they report.

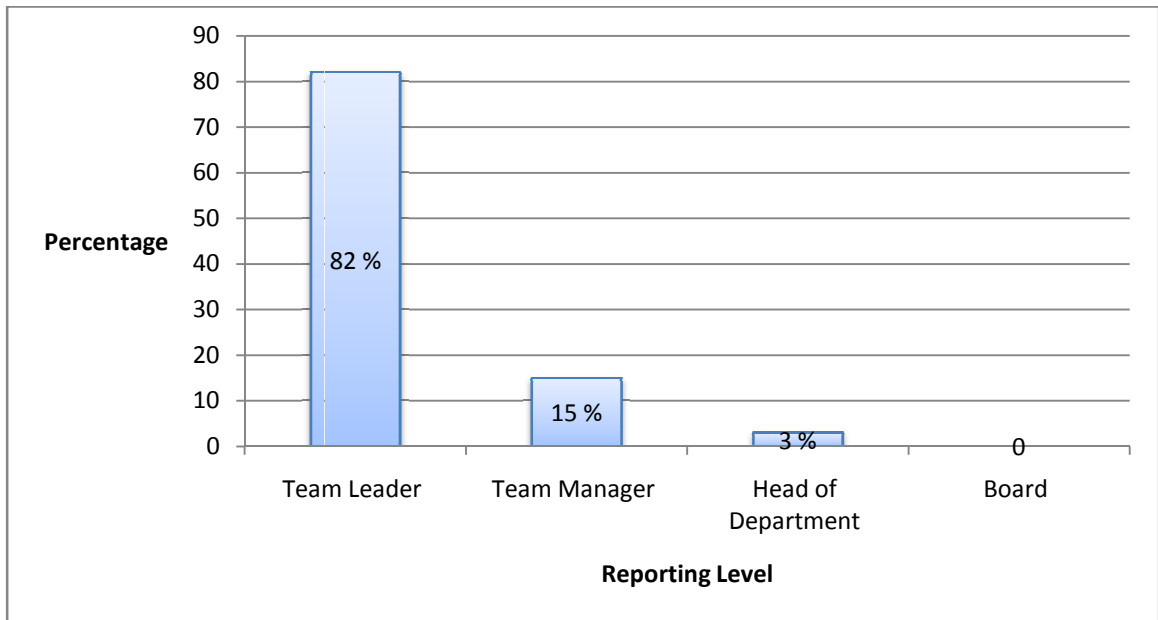


Figure 4.3: Level of Reporting

4.1.4 Time of the Shift

The study sought to find out the time of day that the respondents reported to work. Three shifts were tested, namely, the afternoon shift, the day time shift and the night shift. In the response, it was found that 56 % of the study subjects went to work during day time. 32 % of the studied subjects reported to work during the afternoon shift while 12 % worked during night time. This indicates that most customers who contact the call centre do so during daytime. Figure 4.4 shows a graphical presentation of these findings.

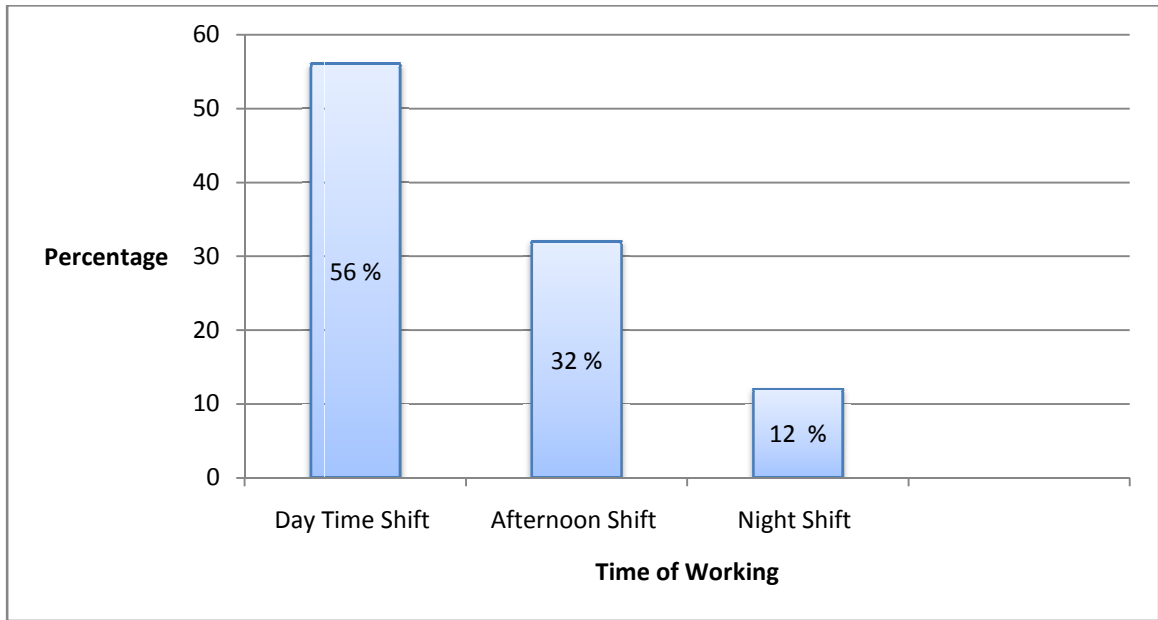


Figure 4.4: Working Shift

4.2.1 Impact of Social Media on Customer Service

The researcher wanted to establish how use of the social media platform in Safaricom Limited impacted on customer service. Results from the questionnaires and the content analysis indicate that the use of social media to contact customers had several benefits to customer service.

Results from questionnaires administered indicated that there were several benefits of using social media as a customer service platform, as summarized in table 4.1. 40 % of the studied subjects agreed that use of social media has improved ways of obtaining customer feedback. 87 % agreed that the brand value of Safaricom Limited had been improved because of the use of social media. 64 % agreed that there was an increased level of social interaction between the customer service agents and the customers, as a result of use of social media as a platform of contact. 93% of the respondents agreed that

use of social media in the call centre had helped to improve accessibility of Safaricom Customer Care to customers. Customer satisfaction had also been improved. 67 % of studied respondents agreed that social media use had improved customer satisfaction. 40 % agreed that use of social media had helped to reduce the number of repeat calls in the call centre.

Table4.1 Impact of Social Media on Customer Service

Benefits	Frequency	Percentage
Improvement in obtaining customer feedback	42	40 %
Building of the brand value	90	87 %
Increased level of social interaction between customers and call center agents	67	64 %
Increased accessibility of customer service to customers	98	93 %
Improved customer satisfaction	70	67 %
Reduced repeat calls	42	40 %

The Customer Delight Index trend obtained from the document analysis showed a steady increase in value from April 2012 to April 2013. Customer delight index is a favorable experience that the client gets from a business when he receives a good or a service. A favorable customer delight index shows that a business will get referrals from clients who have been served. In April 2012, the Customer Delight Index was 6.7. In April 2013, the index had increased to 7.8. Figure 4.5 shows the 12 month trend of Customer Delight Index as obtained from the records.

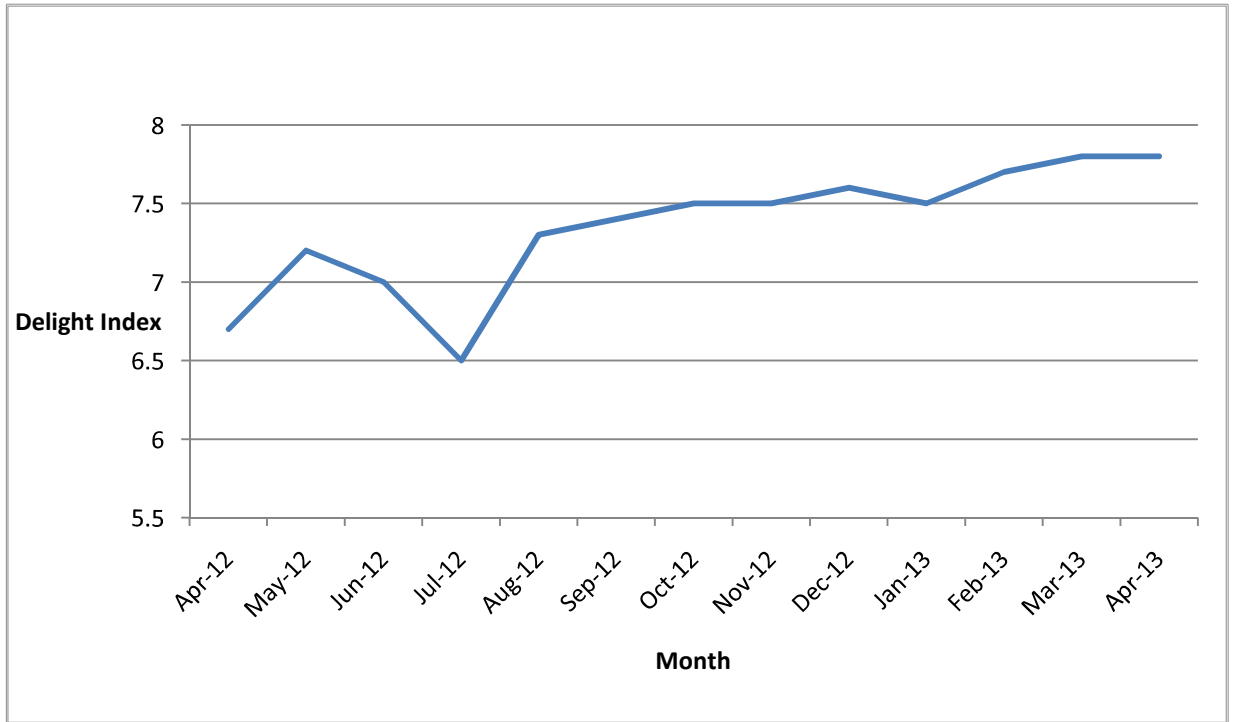


Figure 4.5: Customer Delight Index Performance

Analysis of records of the number of customers served per month from April 2012 to April 2013 was also done. Among the documents analyzed was the Call Centre Tracker feedback from Synovate that is normally sent to Safaricom every month and the Safaricom Quarterly CDI Performance document for the Financial Year 2011/2012 and 2012/2013. CDI is a measured level of acceptance of Safaricom products and services levels at all touch points and this is benchmarked against other mobile telephony companies in the industry in Kenya. The results showed an increase in the number of customers handled over the 12 months. In April 2012, the number of customers handled in all the customer care media was 3.9 million. In April 2013, the number had increased to 4.62 million. Figure 4.6 shows the trend in number of customers handled between April 2012 and April 2013.

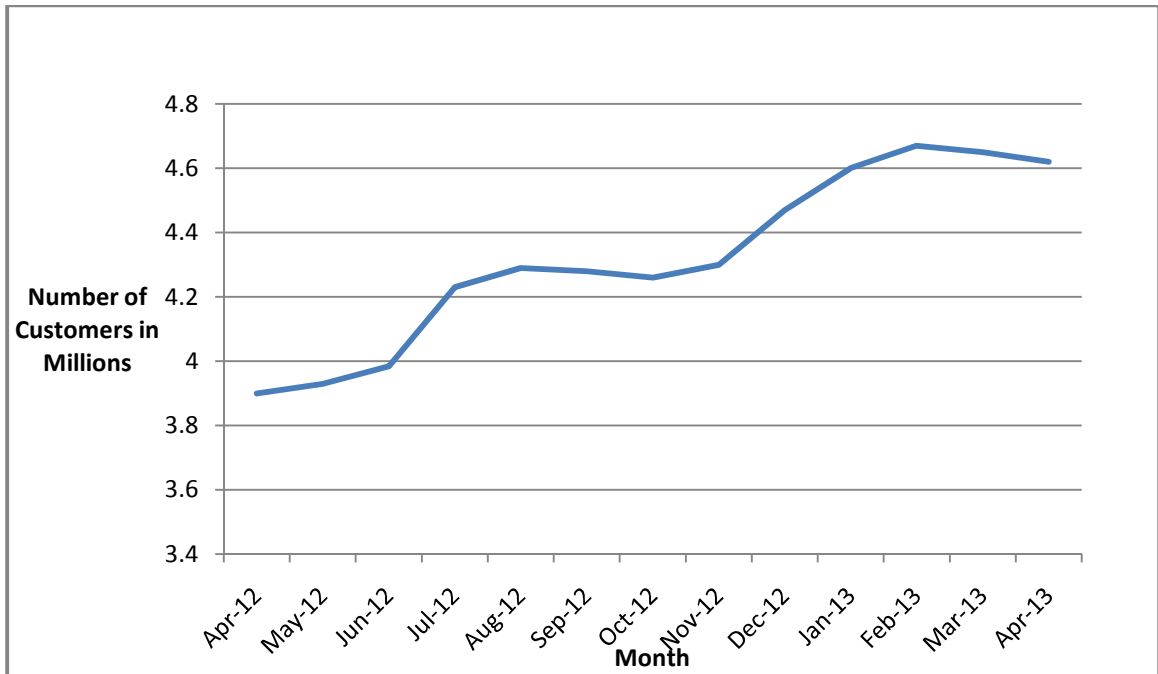


Figure 4.6: Number of Customers Handled per Month

From document analysis, it was established that the monthly customer average handling time on social media was lower than that of handling customers via voice calls. This was mainly attributed to better troubleshooting and use of the corporate website for provision of additional information e.g. attaching URL links to tweets and Facebook posts. This implies that customers are assisted faster via Social Media than via calls. Figure 4.7 shows a comparison of average handling time of customers between social media platform and voice call platform.

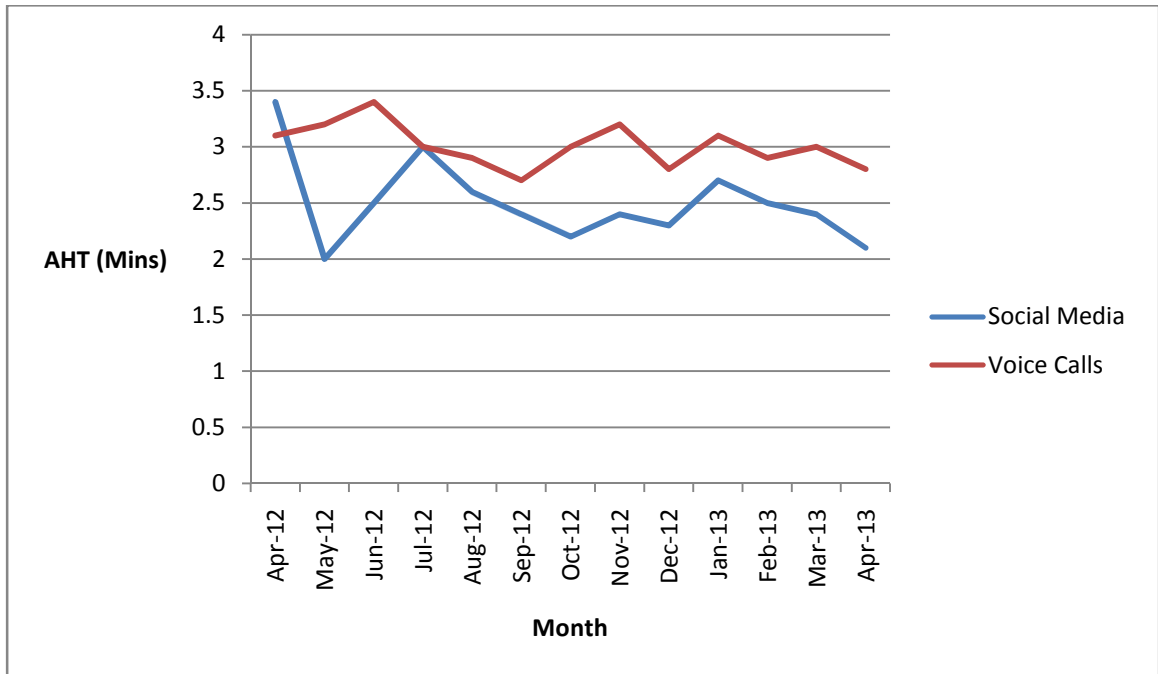


Figure 4.7: Average Handling Time (AHT) of Customers

4.2.2 Ways in which Social Media is used in Customer Service

The study sought to understand different ways in which the social media platform was used in offering customer service in the call centre. In the research, four potential uses were tested using questionnaires. 76 % of the respondents thought that use of social media was important for educating customers. 65 % stated that social media was used to inform customers about new products. 71 % agreed that use of social media as a customer care platform was useful in helping to troubleshoot problems that arose while using Safaricom products. 37 % agreed that social media was used to attract new customers. Table 4.2 gives summary of these findings.

Table 4.2 Ways in which Social Media is used in Customer Service

Use	Frequency	Percentage
Educating customers about products	79	76 %
Informing customers about new products	68	65 %
In helping to troubleshoot problems	74	71 %
Attracting of new customers	38	37 %

4.2.3 Problems of using Social Media for Customer Service

The study intended to evaluate different problems that come with using the social media platform for customer service. In the research, five potential problems were evaluated using the questionnaires. In the evaluation, 61 % of the respondents agreed that lack of enough online experts was a problem to using the social media as customer service platform. 79 % indicated that language limitation was a problem that hindered use of social media to reach out to customers via customer service. 58 % said lack of proper tools for monitoring performance was a hindrance to efficient use of social media as a customer service platform. 46 % agreed that lack of proper understanding of the nature of online customers was a problem. 87 % thought that limited access to internet by customers hindered successful use of social media for customer service. Table 4.3 gives summary of these findings.

Table4.3 Problems facing use of social media platform for customer service

Problems faced by using social media	Frequency	Percentage
Limited number of languages used on social media in a mixed language customer profile.	82	79 %
Lack of proper tools for performance monitoring	60	58 %
Lack of enough online experts	63	61 %
Lack of proper understanding of the online audience	49	47 %
Limited access to internet and social media by a large section of customers	90	87 %

4.3 Discussion

Since the new media revolution, ways of communication have improved a great deal. Use of Web 2.0 and social media platforms to reach out to customers has been embraced by different players in industrial, communication service and commercial players. Most of mobile network service providers rely on the use of customer care as the backbone of growing their business. The rate of adoption of social media as a platform for offering customer service differs across companies. It also depends on the segment of customers who are being served and the human capital of the organization.

The study found that 41.67 % of the Safaricom employees are aged between 21-30 years. This age schooled in the digital era and understands the dynamics of digital communication. This makes it easy for Safaricom to initiate social media communication to its customers. 82 % of the employees work at the tactical level of the organization. This means most of the employees in the Safaricom call center are in direct contact with the customers. Their response to questions about social media was from a point of

experience. 56 % of the employees report to work during the day time shift. Social media is used to serve customers during daytime. Most of the respondents serve customers through social media platform.

The research results, 67 % of the respondents agreed that social media use has helped to improve customer satisfaction. 64 % agreed that social media use had helped to improve social interaction between customers and call centre agents. Analysis of the records indicates that the call center customer delight index has improved from April 2012 to April 2013. In April 2012, it was 6.7. By April 2013, it had improved to 7.8. The index is used to measure customer satisfaction with the services of a company. Social media was launched in Safaricom in April 2012. From the symbolic convergence theory, it can be explained that the use of the social media platform has helped in consciousness raising and sustaining among the Safaricom customers. Social media has brought the Safaricom customer closer, enabling him to be happy about the services offered by the company.

93 % of the studied subjects agreed that social media had helped in improving accessibility of customers to Safaricom call center. The number of customers handled per month has also grown much higher. In April 2012, 3.9 million customers were handled. The monthly number of customers handled in April 2013 was 4.62 million customers. Social media platform contributed highly to this increase in the number of customers. This has been fortified by the findings in average handling time. A comparison of the average handling time of customers via voice calls and via social media shows that it takes a shorter time on social media. Short handling times mean that

more customers will be handled in a month. Structuration theory, information processing theory and small group communication theory can be used to explain the shorter average handling times for customers via social media. Attention, established ways of doing things and information processing have been influential in improvement of the average handling time of customers via social media.

87 % of the studied subjects agreed that the brand value of Safaricom was improved as a result of customer service via social media. Brand value improvement is more about improving the perception that customers hold towards a product or service. This can also be verified using the customer delight index. The Structuration theory supports this. Moral codes can be established through communication.

In the study, it was established that use of social media did not reduce repeat calls and did not help to increase the number of customers using Safaricom products and services. 40 % of the studied respondents stated that Social media had helped to improve customer feedback as well as increase the number of customers who use Safaricom services. This is an area that would be improved. Improved customer feedback and the acquisition of new customers can help to bolster marketing and research efforts.

The results found from the questionnaires showed that use of social media faced certain challenges in the call centre. 79 % of respondents stated that the language limitation was a problem. Customer care languages are English and Kiswahili. However, some of the customers served via social media may not know how to write in English or Kiswahili.

This limits the number of customers who can be served via social media. This is as opposed to via voice customer where agents are allowed to use the 42 Kenyan native languages to deal with customers.

Performance measurement is very important for the improvement of any service. 58 % stated that lack of proper monitoring tools was a challenge to successful use of social media in customer service. It was deduced that the call center did not have the proper tools for carrying out performance measurement and monitoring while using social media. The tools and key performance indicators used are those of voice call customer care service. Most of the customers served by Safaricom do not have access to internet devices. 87 % of the respondents agreed to this. Access to internet needs high end data enabled phones and airtime for the purchase of data bundles. This means that access to the call center through social media is limited to a section of Safaricom customers.

47 % of the subjects agreed that lack of understanding of online audience was a problem while using social media. This aspect scored lowly because, most of times, the customers who are served through social media are the same as those served via voice calls. Given that most of the social media platform customer care agents also serve on voice calls, the issue of understanding customers does not affect the service. 61 % agreed that lack of online experts could be a problem to successful use of social media to serve customers. Use of social media, for quicker communication, calls for understanding of how the functionalities work. Most of the agents who work in Safaricom call center were

employed as voice call customer service operatives. Training has to be done in order to have more agents who are well equipped in dealing with customers online.

From the questionnaire, it was established that Social media in the call center were put to a number of uses during the offering of customer services. Customer education was the leading. 76 % agreed that the service was used to educate customers. Information about new products was also offered via the social media. 65 % of the respondents agreed to this. 71 % agreed that the social media was used mostly for troubleshooting problems affecting Safaricom services. In the study about repeat calls, it was ascertained that social media had not been very useful in reducing the number of customers who call with the same issue. It can therefore be deduced that these functions of social media have not been executed efficiently. If education and troubleshooting was done well, it would help to reduce the number of repeat calls. 37 % of the respondents agreed that social media is used to attract new customers. This is consistent with the findings on the benefits of social media. In the call center, the social media is not put to a lot of use for marketing purposes.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Summary

This study aimed to investigate the use of social media on customer care services in Safaricom call centre. The study had three objectives. The first objective was in evaluating the benefits of use of social media for customer service in Safaricom. The second objective intended to evaluate the problems that affected use of social media in the call centre. The last objective sought to evaluate various ways in which social media is put to use in the call centre.

In the first objective, it was ascertained that social media had helped to improve various aspects of call center service. It has helped to improve customer delight index, average handling time and number of customers handled per month. However, the score on repeat calls was marginal. This means that social media use in the customer service was not helpful in reducing the number of repeat calls.

In the second objective, it was found out that little access to internet services by customers was the main problem while using social media for offering customer service. Language, lack on enough expertise in online communication and inadequate performance monitoring tools were also found to be major problems. It was deduced that lack of enough understanding of online customers was not much of a problem.

The third objective came up with a number of functions that social media in the call centre is put to. It was deduced that social media is mostly used for education purposes, troubleshooting and informing customers about new products in the company. Customers

who have problems using Safaricom products are assisted via social media. Social media is not mostly used for purposes of attracting new customers.

5.2 Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of social media in the call centre for offering of customer service. The study has found out that introduction of social media services in Safaricom has helped in improvement of customer service. The three major indicators of good service, that is, the customer delight index, the number of calls handled per month and the average handling time, have improved since the service was launched. However, repeat calls have not been reduced. The major problems facing use of social media are language, access to internet and lack of enough online communication experts. Social media is mostly used for education purposes where the agents help customers know how to use Safaricom products. It is also used for troubleshooting. Customers using Safaricom devices are always assisted via the social media.

The study achieved the intended objectives even though this can be improved further. It was observed that the number of customers served had increased since use of social media was introduced in the call center. In the research findings, this increase was attributed to the social media platform. However, there could be other dimensions that could have contributed to this improvement. This could include customers disengaging communication before it ends or agents disengaging the customer prematurely. Further studies should seek to include such variables in the research. More so, even though there was an improvement in customer delight index, repeat calls did not reduce in the same period of study. This discrepancy should be investigated in further studies. Normally, a

delighted customer should be one who has gotten a solution to his problem, without needing to call again.

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APPENDIX ONE : REFERENCE LETTER

October 22, 2013
To,
The Director – School Of Journalism
Nairobi University.
Nairobi

Dear Sir/Madam,

REF: KENNEDY KIPKEMBOI SAWE

This is to confirm that the above named is an employee of Safaricom Limited. He works in our Call Centre Operations Department as Quality Analyst, having joined us on 3rd November 2008 on permanent basis.

This is also to confirm that Kennedy was authorized on the 15th of October 2013 to issue questionnaires to randomly sampled Safaricom employees to facilitate data collection for his thesis topic "Evaluation Of Use and impact of social media In offering customer care Services in network service provider companies: A Case of Safaricom Limited."

Any assistance to him will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

For: SAFARICOM LIMITED


Carolyne Luchiri
Senior Manager- HR Information Management



APPENDIX TWO: QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A

Respondent Profile:

For Questions 1, 2, 3,4 & 5, kindly indicate your response in the “Brackets”

1.Gender: i) Male ii) Female

2. Age:

i) 18-20 years ii) 21-30 years iii) 31-40 years iv) 41-50 years

v) 50+ years

3.Education Level:

i) None ii) Primary iii) Secondary iv) Tertiary v) University

4.To which level in the organization do you report to?

i) Team Manager ii) Team Leader iii) Board iv) Others (Specify).....

5.Time of Your Shift: i) Day shift ii) Afternoon shift iii) Night shift

SECTION B

General understanding of Customer Service

6.a)Which unit or function of the organization is directly involved with customer service contact?

i) Employee level ii) Team leader level iii) Director/Business unit level

iv) Board level i.e. CEO, Executive Director

b)What is the commitment of the management to customer service?

i) Very low [ii) Low [iii) Average [iv) High [v) Very High[]

c) Kindly explain how management is committed to customer service.

.....

.....

.....

.....

SECTION C

For Qs. 7, 8 and 9 please indicate the importance using scale; 1 = Not important 2 = Less important 3 = Average importance 4 = Very important 5 = Highly important

7. How important are the following use of social media impacts on customer service?

	1	2	3	4	5
i) Improvement in obtaining customer feedback					
ii) Building of the brand value of Safaricom					
iii) Increased level of social interaction between employees and customers					
iv) Increased accessibility of customer services to the customers					
v) Proper reputation management					

8. At what level do the following challenges affect use of social media as customer service platform?

	1	2	3	4	5

i) Inadequacy of online experts					
ii) Limitation of languages used for communication					
iii) Lack of proper tools for performance monitoring					
iv) Lack of proper understanding of the online audience					

Thank you for your time

APPENDIX THREE: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS GUIDE

The data to be analyzed will be between April 2012 and April 2013. The following will be the important variables to look for:

- i. Monthly Customer Delight Index of the call centre
- ii. The volume of customers served monthly via social media
- iii. The number of repeat issues raised via phone call after customers have been served via social media
- iv. The average handling time of customers through social media, compared to the one via phone calls
- v. The number of customers handled for 12 months