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## **THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND INVOLVEMENT IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA USE-MARKETING COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS RELATIONSHIP: A CASE OF SELECTED ENTERTAINMENT SMES IN UGANDA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Brand involvement seems to be meaningful in explaining consumer decisions, despite the limited knowledge regarding the interface between social media use and brand involvement in explaining marketing communication effectiveness. It is highly likely that brand involvement plays a mediational role in the relationship between social media use and marketing communication effectiveness. To establish this, the study examined the mediating effect of brand involvement on the relationship between social media use and marketing communication effectiveness using structural equation modelling. The entertainment industry in Uganda was used as the case study. Two hypotheses were tested using a structural model because the sample size was large enough to support the stability of parameter estimates and results and the findings reveal that social media use significantly influences marketing communications effectiveness and that brand involvement is a significant mediator in this relationship. The conclusion is that relevant product information will be more effective when targeted to customers who are highly involved in the brand. The recommendation is that firms should invest in posting good and relevant product information and constantly update it on social media tools. They should also employ more selective targeting but combine this with strategies to increase brand involvement in customers.*

**Key words:** *Brand Involvement, Social Media, Marketing Communication, Entertainment SMEs, Uganda*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Brand involvement is a motivational state that drives consumer attitudes towards products or brands (Guthrie & Kim 2009). It has been recognized to enhance social interaction and has a value-generating effect in customer-supplier communication as it creates interest in the consumers' thoughts as a result of the perception that the particular brand meets important values and goals (Morris and Martin, 2000). Brand involvement influences customer's engagement with the message and purchase behaviors and thus influences the purchase decisions (Quester and Lim, 2003; Men & Tsai, 2013). It is understood to have connections with social media use (Men & Tsai, 2013), and it is likely to have an influence on marketing communication effectiveness since on social media tools

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there is timely and relevant communication which is a major precursor for customer trust, openness and intentions (Cootee et.al, 2003; Labrecque, 2014). Men & Tsai (2013) contend that brand involvement among consumers using social media leads to social media dependency that predicts consumer engagement with social media tools (Labrecque, 2014). As customers get involved with products, their interest in the brand increases and this influences their attitude towards the brand (Guthrie & Kim, 2009).

The importance of social media in creating brand evaluations and purchase intentions and sales performance has been established in literature (Andzulis et al., 2012; Naylor et al., 2012). However, there is limited knowledge regarding the interface between social media use and brand involvement in explaining marketing communication effectiveness (Cootee et al., 2003; Labrecque, 2014). Despite the importance of brand involvement, there is a dearth in studies that have examined its mediational role in the relationship between social media use and brand involvement. There is a need for such studies to be conducted so as to determine how its mediational role contributes to marketing communications effectiveness. This will not only add to the knowledge base concerning the relationship between the three constructs (social media use; brand involvement; and marketing communications effectiveness) but will also inform marketing strategists on more efficient ways to meet their objectives given the current ever- evolving communication environment.

The revolution and paradigm shift in mass communication by the new communication channels (internet and mobile communication technologies) has called for a new approach to marketing communications to reach out to customers (Kietzmann et al., 2011). According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), through social media, companies talk to and converse with their customers and more so, create the ability for firms to communicate directly with large numbers of consumers. Extant literature indicates that word of mouth communication is strong on social networks as people use their friends, family and other members of their social network as a dependable source of information (Duana et al., 2008). According to Hanna et al., (2011) consumers interact almost daily with information from companies and their peers due to the connection on social media.

Therefore, social media are emerging as a marketing communication tool that is trusted by customers on product and service information more than the traditional marketing communication media like print and television (Kietzmann et al., 2011). There is a multifaceted relationship between social media use and marketing communication which tends to underpin the way social media use by organizations is on the increase (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Studies on approaches to measuring the effectiveness of marketing communications through social media is currently a major area of interest that academicians are embarking on and various strides have been achieved in that endeavor (Culnan et al. 2010; Melissa Melancon, 2013; Alla et al., 2016 and Cheristena et al, 2016). The integration of social media in marketing communication has great influence on consumer behavior as it has been found to lead to increased awareness, improved attitudes, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation among customers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kaplan and Haenlain, 2011).

For sustainable business operations amidst challenges of a competitive market, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have to put in place strategies that will enable them to achieve effectiveness in

their marketing communications (Cohen, 2011; Garnett, 2010). They do not have huge resources to finance significant marketing communications programs via traditional media such as print or television when compared to large firms. The Internet and social media in particular, provide considerably cheaper avenues to enable them reach customers on a level-playing field. Since SMEs use social media for marketing communication purposes, the interaction of customers with brands on social media tools is likely to influence marketing communication effectiveness (Labrecque, 2014). As customers get involved with products, their interest in the brand increases and this influences their attitude towards the brand (Guthrie & Kim, 2009). Thus SMEs can provide an appropriate context for studying the inter-relationships between social media use, brand involvement and marketing communication effectiveness.

### *Research Problem and Objective*

One of the factors that have not been adequately explored is the mediating effect of brand involvement in marketing communication effectiveness when using social media (Men & Tsai, 2013; Labrecque, 2014; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Brand involvement has been recognized to enhance social interaction. It has a value-generating effect in customer-supplier communication as it creates interest in the consumers' thoughts as a result of the perception that the particular brand meets important values and goals (Morris and Martin, 2000). Brand involvement influences customer's engagement with the message and purchase behaviors and thus influences the purchase decisions (Quester and Lim, 2003; Men & Tsai, 2013). It is understood to have connections with social media use (Men & Tsai, 2013), and is likely to have an influence on marketing communication effectiveness since on social media tools there is timely and relevant communication which is a major precursor for customer trust, openness and intentions (Coote et al., 2003; Labrecque, 2014). Men & Tsai (2013) contend that brand involvement among consumers using social media leads to social media dependency that predicts consumer engagement with social media tools.

However, there is limited knowledge regarding the interface between social media use and brand involvement in explaining marketing communication effectiveness (Coote et al., 2003; Labrecque, 2014). Despite the importance of brand involvement, no study has examined its mediational role in the relationship between social media use and marketing communication effectiveness. Therefore, there is need to discover the mediating effect of brand involvement in the social media use – marketing communications effectiveness. The Media Richness theory- MRT and Social Presence theory-SPT (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Short, et al., 1976) have been used to provide the theoretical context for explaining marketing communication effectiveness. The main objective of the study was to determine the mediating role of brand involvement in the social media use – marketing communications effectiveness relationship and specifically determine the influence of social media use on marketing communications effectiveness and the mediating role of brand involvement in the social media – marketing communications relationship.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Brand Involvement*

According to Guthrie & Kim (2009), brand involvement is a motivational state that drives consumer attitudes towards products or brands. Laurent and Kapferer (1986) conceptualized brand

involvement to include: Interest; Pleasure; Sign value; Risk importance and Risk probability. Interest relates to personal interest a person has in a product and the importance the customer attaches to the product and in this study it has been formulated to reflect the respondent's perceptions on the importance of the product information accessed on social media tools. Pleasure relates to the rational benefits and value the customer attaches to the product and so reflects the respondent's perceptions on the value of information accessed on social media tools. Sign value relates to the psychosocial risk the customer attaches to the product and therefore reflects the respondent's self-expression in relation to the information on social media tools of the firm. Risk importance relates to perceived importance of the negative consequences associated with a poor choice of product or brand by the customer. In this study this it has been formulated to reflect the respondent's feeling in relation to choices made on the information social media tools of the firm. Risk probability relates to the consumers perceived probability of making a poor choice and in this study it has been formulated the respondent's perceived uncertainty in relation to the information accessed on social media tools used by the firm.

Brand involvement is the relationship among the customer and the brand and hinges on the nature of interaction or attachment to the brand that the customer has as a result of the information on the product that customers get from the company. Brands have gained unprecedented platforms through social media and this has impacted on the consumers purchase decisions. Social media tools provide a great opportunity for companies to reach many customers through targeted information that increases the chance of purchasing their products and are major sources of brand information for customers (Khan and Khan, 2012). Naylor et al. (2012), observed that brand involvement makes the consumer devote time and resources on the product or brand information leading to customers' trust and identification with the message and this increases brand knowledge. The interaction of customers with product information on social media will have varying levels of involvement depending on the psychological and emotional ties created (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). Social media tools provide an opportunity for companies to reach many customers and thus influence their purchase decisions (Khan and Khan, 2012).

### *Social Media Use*

Social Media have received growing attention from academic scholars (e.g., Paquette, 2013; Moretti and Tuan, 2013; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The term social media is used to describe an array of new Web 2.0 platforms and are internet-based built on ideological and technological foundations. Zarrella (2010) defines Social media as online technologies that facilitate the creation and distribution of content. Indeed, according to Mohammad (2017), social media use is an interactive dialogue and exchange supported by the use of Internet and mobile communication technology. This research focused on three social media tools namely; micro-blogs (Twitter), social networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, WhatsApp), and Video-sharing sites (YouTube). These were chosen because they enable the customers to play multiple roles as consumers, contributors and creators of information. Companies engage social media tools as the drivers of information to the target customers. Therefore, social media broadly describes technological systems for content creation, collaboration, connection and information sharing. In its very nature, the user-generated content creates duality that provides external stimuli for which Mangold and Faulds (2009) contend that product information is no longer solely in the hands of businesses but also other stakeholders like customers. Extant literature indicates that there are a range of social media tools that

organizations can use to engage with their publics. Social Media are collaborative in nature and have not only changed the way marketers engage in marketing communication activities but also enabled customers to play multiple roles as consumers, contributors and creators of information (Hanna et al., 2011).

#### *Marketing Communication Effectiveness*

Marketing communications can be defined as the strategies, tactics and activities involved in getting the desired marketing messages to intended target markets, regardless of the media used (Olorunleke and Akinyele, 2010; Varey 2001). Cornelissen (2009) defined marketing communications as the advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, personal selling, and marketing public relations that a company uses to communicate with its customers. Literature indicates that marketing communication effectiveness has traditionally been measured using brand awareness, recall, and recognition whereby cause-effect relationships must be established between the communication stimuli and the criterion variables (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Young and Aitken, 1999; Weinberg, 2009; Low, 2000; Naylor et al., 2012). Assessing the effectiveness of marketing communications through traditional media has been standard practice for most companies using well established methods such as surveys of customers or observation of their purchase behaviors.

Marketing communication effectiveness can be assessed from the impact it creates like awareness, trust and purchase from the customers' point of view or a company's tangible achievement of set objectives such as return on investment and sales increases. In other words, it can be analyzed from two important angles which are the company's perspective and the customer's perspective. The company approach would look at interest like return on investment, sales increases and majorly the tangible achievement of set objectives. The customer approach would look at impact it creates like awareness, trust and purchase from the customers' point of view. Of the two approaches the customer approach seems to be more objective since customers would give independent opinions compared to company employees. Marketing communications effectiveness is operationalized as a reflective construct and is measured with four items namely; Brand Awareness and Evaluations, Demand and purchasing, Customers Response, and Customers' trust and identification with the messages (Low, 2000; Naylor et al., 2012). Hence marketing communication effectiveness is seen as the positive outcomes of the marketing communication strategies, tactics and activities (Olorunleke and Akinyele, 2010). Marketing communication effectiveness should impact on the customers' level of knowledge on the company and its brand or products, and this would also impact on the consumer attitudes which in turn would influence their purchasing behaviors.

#### *Social Media Use-Marketing Communication Effectiveness Relationship*

The social media- marketing communication interface is shaped by the way marketers engage in a collaborative manner with customers (Hanna et al., 2011). According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), through social media companies talk to and converse with their customers and more so creates the ability for firms to communicate with large numbers of consumers. Extant literature indicates that word-of-mouth communication is strong on social networks as people use their friends, family and other members of their social network as a dependable source of information (Duana et al., 2008). According to Hanna et al., (2011) consumers interact with information from

companies and their peers daily due to the connection on social media. Therefore, social media is emerging as a marketing communication tool that is trusted by customers on product and service information more than the traditional marketing communication media like print media and television (Kietzmann et al., 2011). According to Mangold and Faulds (2009) there is a multifaceted relationship between social media use and marketing communication which tends to underpin the way social media is used among organizations. Social media tools facilitate communication practices in organizations that are highly differentiated from the traditional media including that mediated by computers. Social media is becoming a strategic marketing communication tool for companies (Culnan et al. 2010; Melissa Melancon, 2013). The integration of social media in marketing communication has great influence on consumer behavior as it has been found to lead to increased awareness, improved attitudes, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation among customers, and has a positive correlation with advertising and word of mouth (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011).

In their study of success factors in the use of social media by firms, Mohammadian and Mohammedreza (2012) observed that this helped in building stronger relationships with engaged customers which resulted in greater brand awareness. Other studies also observed that through awareness creation via social media use, higher customer value is obtained and stronger brand identity is created and consequently enhanced customer trust (Melissa and Melancon, 2013; Hänninen and Karjaluoto, 2017). Such effects occur because people engage in social media conversations for longer periods of time than in traditional media. There is a growing trend in which customers are turning away from traditional media for marketing communications sources (radio, television, etc.) and naturally prefer to have more control over their media consumption. Therefore, if firms become part of the conversation they are perceived to be closer to customers because the nature of application has a social context which is relational and in which the customer as a user has more control of the information (Vollmer and Precourt 2008). It is very likely that a company's image is greatly improved if it is perceived as part of that relational group. Hence most companies attempt to be part of the conversation and look for opportunities to send their marketing messages.

#### *Role of Brand Involvement in the Social Media Use-Marketing Communication Effectiveness Relationship*

Brand involvement is the relationship between the customer and the brand which hinges on the nature of interaction or attachment to the brand. Usually this attachment is created through the information about the product or brand that customers get from the company. Companies engage social media tools as the drivers of information to the target customers. Social media tools provide a great opportunity to companies to reach many customers through targeted information that increases the chance of purchasing their products and are major sources of brand information for customers (Khan and Khan, 2012). As a platform of interaction, social media tools convey product information and enable companies to directly interact with consumers and this will have an impact on their consumption choices. Therefore, brand involvement can influence brand evaluations and consumer purchase choices because consumers who are more involved with a particular brand are also more committed and would identify with the brand. Furthermore, brand involvement would influence marketing communication as consumers interact with product or brand information on social media tools and this would signal a mediation effect and thus increases brand knowledge (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Naylor et al., 2012).

The above discussion suggests that there may be a link between social media use and brand involvement on one hand and brand involvement and marketing communication effectiveness on the other hand. This nature of interaction and particularly in this study is proposed to be a mediational role played by brand involvement. In this study, social media use and marketing communication effectiveness are the independent and dependent variables respectively and brand involvement serves as the mediator variable. Thus employing Barron and Kenny's (1986) conceptualization, for a study that has a mediating variable, a three-variable system is assumed with two important causal paths feeding into the dependent variable namely: the direct impact of the independent variable and the role of the mediator.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES**

The Media Richness theory (MRT) states that different media or forms of communication have different levels of richness in the information that they provide (Short, et al., 1976). The ability to transmit information depends on whether the information will be used in times of uncertainty or equivocality (ibid). The richness of a media is assessed on the basis of its capacity to include personal focus for example when it incorporates more personal feelings and emotions, the message gets conveyed fully in better terms and social media as a medium of communication involves the personal focus of the user. The medium's richness also depends on its ability to provide immediate feedback since it allows users to quickly respond to the communication that is being received and indeed social media use for marketing communication provides a platform on which there is an opportunity of duality in communication and thus feedback. The theory proposes two other criteria for media richness which are capacity for conveyance of multiple cues which can be visual or auditory, and the varieties of language symbols used to convey the information such as graphics, numbers and natural language (ibid). Based on these criteria social media can be seen to rank very highly in media richness compared to traditional media and thus a critical aspect in the interface with marketing communication. For example, a study that used MRT to explain Facebook adoption and use in organizations revealed that it was richer in communication (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Purchase decisions most often involve situations of uncertainty or equivocality and therefore given the media richness properties discussed above, social media would be the preferred options. Even though face-to-face media (e.g. salespersons) rank the highest in media richness, they have serious limitations in terms of coverage making the overall impact of marketing communications effectiveness through social media being overwhelming.

Social presence is defined as the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships (Daft & Lengel, 1984). People perceive social presence of a medium as being either high or low and the higher the degree of social presence, the more sociable, warm, and personal the medium is and vice versa. Therefore, this theory postulates that during the interaction in any communication medium, the sense of the perceptual, psychological, and interactional accessibility will change with the levels of presence (ibid). Gunawardena (1995) defined social presence as the degree to which a person is perceived as a 'real person' in mediated communication. The theory of social presence is well placed to describe and understand how people socially interact in a social media environment and thus anchors the interface between social media use and marketing communication. Social presence has three dimensions namely: social context which are the user's characteristics and perception of the communication environment, online communication attributes of the online communication like dual/interactive nature and interactivity based on the activities and communication styles engaged by users

(Steinfeld, 1986; Garramone et al., 1986). It has also been observed that social presence in communication has a positive impact on purchase intention, therefore a high degree of social presence will create complex discussions than postings with a low degree of social presence and the nature of interactions would affect the nature of communication outcomes (Gefen and Straub, 2004). The degree of social presence will create complex discussions than postings with a low degree of social presence and the nature of interactions would affect the nature of communication outcomes and thus impacts online interaction and purchase intentions among customers because of the duality' in communication, quality of interactions between users and personal focus' of communication. Therefore, Social Presence Theory is relevant to this study because it describes presence, immediacy, social distance, and personal focus which are influencing aspects in the communication effort (Gooch and Watts, 2015).

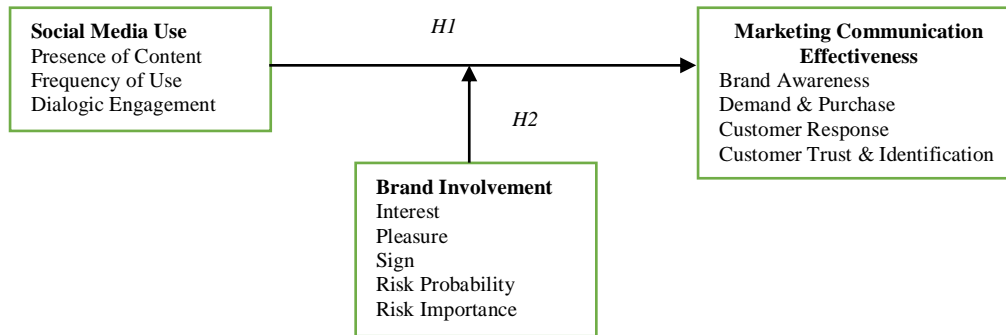
The Media Richness Theory- MRT and Social Presence theory-SPT (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Short, et al., 1976)) provide the theoretical context for explaining marketing communication effectiveness through social media use. These theories are well placed to describe and understand how people socially interact in a social media environment. The physical and technological characteristics of a medium signify information richness and social presence (through and by the existence of the firm's content), which become important dimensions in social media use (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Short et al., 1976). As discussed earlier social media score high in information richness and also score high in social presence through dialogic engagement between the customers and the marketer and other related factors (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, 2011; Hanna et al., 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

The frequency of using social media is increasing especially as a form of "word-of-mouth" that amplifies the ability for communication with large numbers of consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Abubakar (2011) contends that, there is an increased participation on social media tools because of their open and conversational nature, and in the same vein many youths spend a lot of time on social media (Ajewole and Fasola, 2012, cited in Sanusi et al, 2014). Many authors on social media identified significant relationships that have impact on marketing communication e.g., consumers use social media to search information and to make purchase decisions and positive eWOM (Kaplan and Haenlain, 2011). Seen as the number of times or the rate at which social media tools are be used, the resultant effect of frequency of use include consumer preferences and brand evaluations (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Naylor et al., 2012).

The interaction of customers with product information on social media will have varying levels of involvement depending on the psychological and emotional ties created (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985). Brand involvement can influence brand evaluations and consumer purchase choices because consumers who are more involved with a particular brand are also more committed and would identify with the brand. Furthermore, brand involvement would influence marketing communication as consumers interact with product or brand information on social media tools and this would signal a mediation effect (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Naylor et al., 2012).

Therefore, the proposed conceptual framework (figure1) integrates theoretical insights from the SPT and MRT theories in explaining marketing communication effectiveness and incorporates the mediation effects of brand involvement.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

Source: Adapted from Literature Review. Social Media Use (Pitta and Fowler, 2005; Culnan et al. 2010); Brand Involvement (Laurent and Kapferer 1986) and Marketing Communication Effectiveness (Low, 2000; Naylor et al., 2012).

Social media use is operationalized through (i) presence of content (availability of content on social media tools); (ii) frequency of use (posts and comments); and (iii) dialogic engagement (dual nature of the content). Empirical studies have revealed a significant and positive relationship between the existence of the firm's content on the social media tools and customers' knowledge of products, brand awareness, purchase decisions and consumer-brand relationships (Chu 2011; Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Zhang, et al 2011). Also, frequency of use will enhance firm-customer conversation, customer-customer conversations and co-creation and these build brand evaluations (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Naylor et al., 2012). Dialogic engagement is the intermittent exchanges between the firm/marketers and customers (Pitta and Fowler, 2005; Culnan et al. 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein 2010) which in turn create reciprocity (Kent & Taylor, 1998) that has impacts on marketing communication outcomes (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). All these three variables were hypothesized to influence marketing communications effectiveness and hence the first hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: Social Media Use positively influences Marketing Communication Effectiveness*

Marketing communications effectiveness is operationalized through (i) brand awareness; (ii) demand and purchase; (iii) customer responses, and (iv) customer trust and identification. Social media provide a lower cost avenue for communicating with customers compared to traditional media (Feng and Papatla 2012), and they have a positive correlation with advertising and word of mouth (Kaplan and Haenlain, 2011). They enable firms to market products at low cost with a wider reach, achieve increased product awareness and enhance product choice because of the inherent customer-to-customer communication. The company can connect more personally with its customers in a personalized two way dialogue and the quality of social media services positively affect customer satisfaction and trust and thus provide value to the customer which in the same vein increases the firms competitive edge (Fassnacht and Köse, 2007; Sexsmith and Angel 2012).

Brand involvement normally has the following antecedents: (i) interest; (ii) pleasure; (iii) sign value; (iv) risk importance; and (v) probability of error. Consumers will have a high involvement in products or brands that they have an interest in, and that create pleasure on their side and are likely to have a low involvement in those that do not create pleasure. Seen as the consumer's

perceived value in the product, pleasure creates enjoyment and makes consumers happy. The consumer's intrinsic satisfaction derived from the product or brand or from using a particular process mirrors the level of pleasure that will be derived (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985; 1986). Sign value is another factor that concerns the degree with which a product or brand expresses the consumer's self and thus focuses on the functional risks associated with a purchase (ibid). More so, when consumers make a product or brand choice, there is potential for associated negative outcomes which according to Mitchell (1999) create uncertainty and thus affect purchasing. Therefore, the level of uncertainty may make a consumer perceive to have made a poor choice in the product or brand, a situation that shows the consumer's emotional attachment (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985).

Social media enable consumers to interact with brands and this enables them to express opinions on the product or brand communications made by the company (Khan and Khan, 2012). Brand involvement would influence marketing communications as consumers interact with product or brand information on social media tools and this would signal a mediation effect. Brand involvement makes the consumer devote excessive time and resources on the product or brand information and this leads to customers' trust and identification with the message as well increased brand knowledge (Naylor et al., 2012). This leads to the second hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 2: Brand involvement mediates the relationship between social media use and marketing communication effectiveness*

#### *Population, Sampling Design and Tests of Reliability and Validity*

This study covered the entertainment sector in Uganda which consists of small and medium sized firms that have a significant use of social media tools especially radios, cinemas and theatres. Being mainly small or medium enterprises, these firms do not engage much in traditional marketing communication methods such as advertising, sales promotions, or personal selling due to resource limitations. The entertainment sector in a developing country like Uganda provides a rich context conducive for determining the inter-relationships between social media use, brand involvement and marketing communication effectiveness. The richness of the context is embedded in the fact that most firms in this sector provide a service closely related to communicating to their target audience and therefore marketing communication is for a better portion, part and parcel of their marketing strategies (Garnett 2010).

The study population was customers of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the entertainment sub-sector in Uganda, specifically Radio, Cinema and Theatre. Radio, theatre and cinema SMEs were chosen from this sub-sector because of their active use of social media to reach out to their customers. There are 61 radio stations in Kampala operating in a very competitive environment and in order to sustain their operations they have to employ innovative ways of doing business and connecting with their customer base. Further, the entertainment sector has seven cinemas and 6 theatres operating in Kampala. The cinemas, as opposed to the traditional video halls, include the institutions operating and showing films in organized environments using modern technology and also having a noticeable social media presence. The theatres include institutions such as theatre halls in which performances of music, dance and drama or a combination of all these are staged before a paying audience. Theatre audiences are the industry's primary market, and thus institutions have to carry targeted marketing communications that appeal to them. The population

was stratified according to the three subsectors from which were obtained list of customers and incidental sampling techniques were then applied to ensure greater randomness. A cross-sectional survey design was employed with data being collected through a self-administered highly structured questionnaire (Andersen, 2010). Prior to the survey a pilot study was conducted using a sample size of 68 customers which enabled the determination of the reliability and validity of the instruments. Using the Krejcie and Morgan’s table the maximum sample size of 365 was targeted and 280 respondents were able to provide usable data implying a 77% response rate (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970; Sekaran, 2003). All the study constructs were measured by multiple items. The sample profile is given Table 1.

**Table 1: Respondents’ characteristics**

<b>N = 280</b>		<b>Count</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
Age Group	14-21	7	2.5
	22-29	157	56.1
	30-37	96	34.3
	38-45	17	6.1
	Over 45	3	1.1
		<b>280</b>	<b>100</b>
		<b>Count</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
Gender	Male	160	57.1
	Female	120	42.9
	Total	<b>280</b>	<b>100</b>
		<b>Count</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
Level of Education	Primary	3	1.1
	Secondary	4	1.4
	Certificate	35	12.5
	Diploma	66	23.6
	Degree	166	59.3
	Postgraduate	6	2.1
		<b>280</b>	<b>100</b>

Social media use was measured by items adapted from literature, namely presence of content, frequency of use, and dialogic engagement (Pitta and Fowler, 2005; Mangold & Faulds, 2009 and Culnan et al. 2010). Brand involvement was measured using the items; interest, pleasure, sign, risk importance and risk probability adopted from, Laurent and Kapferer (1986). Marketing communication effectiveness was measured using items adapted from literature to reflect the outcomes and impact of marketing communication namely; brand awareness and evaluations, demand and purchasing, customers’ response, and customers’ trust and identification with the messages (Low, 2000; Weinberg, 2009; and Naylor et al., 2012). All the items variables were anchored on a 6-point Likert scale, in which the respondent was asked to indicate the extent of agreement with the statements that were presented on the scale, 6 representing ‘strongly agree’ and 1 representing ‘strongly disagree’.

To ensure face validity, expert reviews were conducted in which the instrument was given to two (2) marketing communication practitioners and two (2) academicians and researchers whose comments were used to re-word and re-adjust the flow of items to reflect the construct meanings in relation to their operationalization and ensure that the questions would achieve the study objectives. Reliability and validity results were all above the acceptable threshold of Cronbach’s alpha as  $\alpha \geq .70$  (Nunnally, 1978; Amin, 2005; and Yin, 2009). The reliability and validity results are indicated in table 2:

**Table 2: Reliability and Validity Results**

Construct	Pilot Study		Main Study		Validity
	Cronbach Alpha Value	Content Validity Index	Cronbach Alpha Value	Content Index	
<b>Social Media Use</b>		.778	.866	.778	
Presence of Content	.908		.748		
Frequency of Use	.767		.798		
Dialogic Engagement	.826		.725		
<b>Brand Involvement</b>	.878	.846	.795	.875	
<b>Marketing Communication Effectiveness</b>	.806	.889	.866	.778	

Data was cleaned prior to analysis by checking for missing values and outliers. We further carried out normality tests to check whether our data conformed to parametric assumptions. Data analysis was carried out using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS Version 21) and the package for structural equation modelling: Analysis of Moments Structure (AMOS) version 20. Mediation analysis was carried out using four steps as suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986).

## RESULTS

### *Measurement Model for Brand Involvement*

Brand Involvement was measured using pleasure, interest, risk management and risk propensity. The results confirm the validity of the final model with excellent model fit statistics for this construct with the AVE measure above the recommended .50 (Hair et al., 2010). Better still, the composite reliability for the eleven-item measure was .90. This was above the acceptable threshold of .70 as recommended by scholars like DeVellis (2003), McAllister (1995) and Nunnally (1978). (See figure 4)

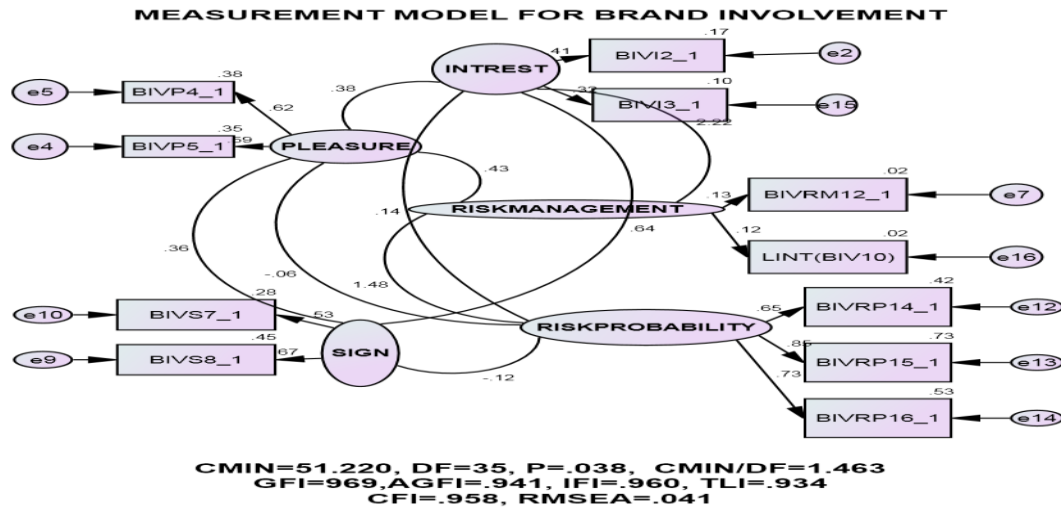
**Table 3: Validity of the Model**

Item code	Item Label	Standardised regression estimates	
CR (t)			
<b>Interest</b>			
	BIV12: The information/content on the firms' social media tools is extremely important to me	.491	
	BIV13: I am really interested in the information/content on the firms of the social media tools	.531	2
<b>Pleasure</b>			
	BIVP5: I really enjoy interacting with the product information/content on the firms social Media	.589	2.408
	BIVP6: To me, commenting on the firm's information/content on its social media tools is quite a Pleasure		
<b>Sign</b>			
	BIVS7: I clearly understand all the information/content on the firm's social media tool	.619	
	BIVS8: The information/content on social media tools is clear about the firm	.673	
<b>Risk management</b>			
	BIVRM10: It doesn't matter too much if the firm makes a mistake in the information/content on its social media tools	.891	
	BIVRM12: I would be annoyed with myself, if it turned out that i made the wrong choice based on the information/content on the firms' social media tools	1.00	
<b>Risk probability</b>			
	BIVRP14: When I access the social media tools of the firm, am not sure it is accurate and reliable	.647	
	BIVRP15: Choosing to interact with the firm through its service information/Content on its social media tools is rather difficult	.854	
	BIVRP16: Whenever I access the firm's information/content on the firm's social media tool, I can never be certain about my choice.	.728	

### Achieved Fit Indices

CMIN/DF	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	IFI	TLI	CFI
51.220 (1.463/35)	.041	.969	.941	.960	.934	.989
<b>Composite construct reliability .90; AVE = 2.4</b>						

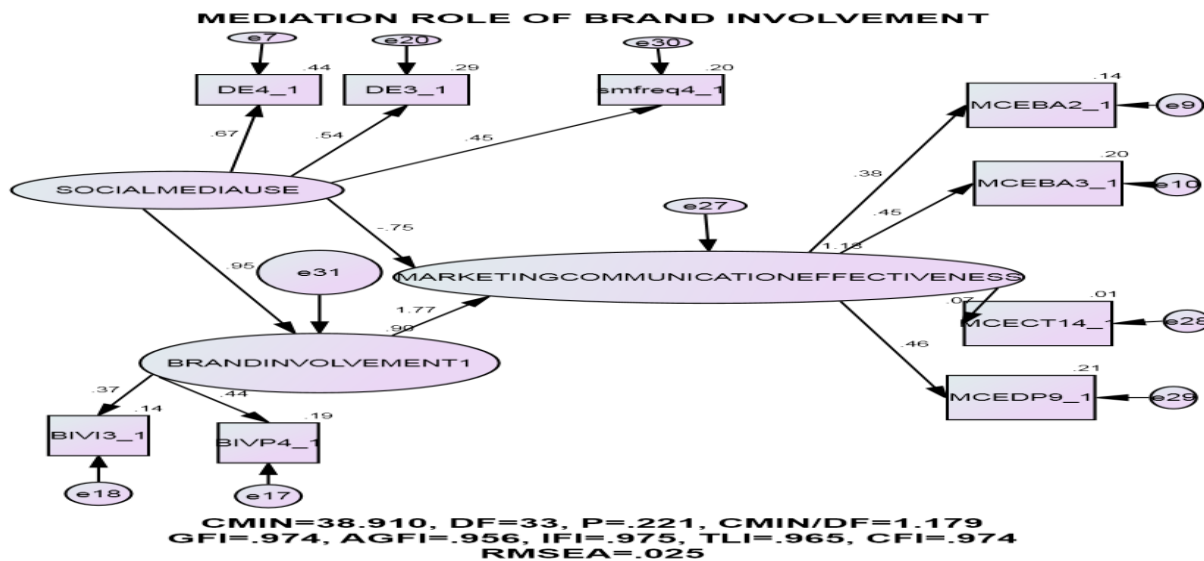
Figure 4: Measurement Model



Mediation of Brand Involvement

Figure five shows the structural model that depicts the relationships between the three variables

Figure 5: Overall Model



The results on testing the direct paths between social media use and marketing communication effectiveness reveal that all the hypothesized direct paths were found to be significant.

**Table 4: Direct Paths between Social Media Use and Marketing Communication Effectiveness**

				S.E.	B	t-Value	P	Decision
H1	MCE	<---	SMU	.118	.460	2.118	.034	Yes

Hypothesis  $H_1$  investigated the relationship between social media use and marketing communication effectiveness. The results show that the relationship is positive and statistically significant ( $\beta=.460$ ,  $t\text{-value}=2.118$ ,  $p<.05$ ), and thus the hypothesis was supported. This implies that positive changes in social media use are associated with positive changes in marketing communication effectiveness. On testing for mediation effects the bootstrap procedure by Preacher and Hayes (2008) was employed to test for mediation effects in the following hypothesis:  $H_2$ : Brand involvement mediates the relationship between social media use and marketing communication effectiveness.

**Table 5: Total, Direct and Indirect effects between social media use, brand involvement and marketing communication effectiveness**

Standardized Total Effects	Brand Involvement	Social Media Use
Brand Involvement	.530**	.000
Marketing Communication effectiveness	.546**	.267*
Standardized Direct Effects		
Brand Involvement	.530**	.000
Marketing Communication Effectiveness	.402**	.267*
Standardized Indirect Effects		
Brand Involvement	.000	.000
Marketing Communication Effectiveness	.144*	.000

**Table 6: Bootstrap Mediation Results**

Path	Point estimate	S.E	Lower Bounds	Upper Bounds	P
Marketing Communication Effectiveness ← Social Media Use	.144	.041	.058	.272	.001

**Path diagram – Social Media Use → Brand Involvement → Marketing Communication Effectiveness.** Type of mediation = Partial ( $\beta=.144$ ,  $p=.001$ ). Total effect=.546, Direct=.402, Indirect=.144

On testing Hypothesis  $H_2$ , (Brand involvement mediates the relationship between social media use and marketing communication effectiveness), the criteria for mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986) were tested first. The results showed that: There was a significant direct effect of Social Media Use on Marketing Communication Effectiveness ( $\beta=.402$ ,  $SE=.047$ ,  $t\text{-value}=4.666$ ,  $p<.05$ ). There was a significant direct effect of Social Media Use on Brand Involvement ( $\beta=.546$ ,  $S.E=.035$ ,  $t=12.773$ ,  $p<.05$ ). There was a significant direct effect of Brand Involvement on Marketing Communication Effectiveness ( $\beta=.256$ ,  $S.E=.074$ ,  $t\text{-value}=3.837$ ,  $p<.05$ ). When controlling for Brand Involvement, the direct effect of Social Media Use on Marketing Communication Effectiveness dropped from  $\beta=.402$  to  $\beta=.144$ , but remained significant. The bootstrap results indicate significant mediation effect ( $\beta=.144$ ,  $p<.05$ ) of brand involvement on the relationship between Social Media Use and Marketing Communication Effectiveness. Further, the standardized indirect effect termed as index of mediation for the indirect effect of Brand Involvement was 0.26 (95 percent CI). This implies

that Marketing Communication Effectiveness receives 26% of the indirect effect from social media use through Brand Involvement, while the remaining 74% is a direct effect. This implies that there is a significant increase in marketing communications effectiveness (about 35%) using social media when mediated by brand involvement.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results confirmed that social media use is associated with marketing communication effectiveness (hypothesis H1) which implies that positive changes in social media use of customers is associated with positive changes in marketing communication effectiveness. Meaning that the more individuals use internet to socialize and expand their circles, the easier for marketers to communicate their products by using different types of social platforms like Twitter, WhatsApp and other platforms. This then enables managers to focus more on getting better ways to communicate their products or services, since social media use stimulates positive marketing communication outcomes, a finding that is supported by previous studies such as that of Hajli (2015) and Michaelidou et al., (2011). This also supports the findings of studies that have established a link between marketing communication effectiveness through social media use and that social media use stimulates positive marketing communication outcomes (Mangold et al., 2009; Melissa and Melancon, 2013; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Schultz & Patti, 2009; Mohammadian and Mohammadreza, 2012;).

Since the study was conducted in a sector that actively uses social media in marketing communication processes it also provides support to Zhang, et al.'s (2011) findings that use of social media leading to electronic word of mouth has always improved the effectiveness of marketing communications by increasing customers' knowledge of products and brand awareness. Given that achieving communication objectives is central in any marketing communication process, use of social media as a platform for communication brings customers closer to the firm through its interactive nature.

It is also observed that brand involvement plays a mediating role in marketing communications effectiveness when using social media. It contributes about a quarter of the total effects which is slightly more than a third of the effects of the other component. What this establishes is that brand involvement can influence brand evaluations and consumer purchase choices because consumers who are more involved with a particular brand are also more committed and would identify with the brand. Furthermore, brand involvement would influence marketing communications as consumers interact with product or brand information on social media tools and this would signal a mediation effect and thus increase brand knowledge. More specifically if consumers have a high degree of interest in the brand, they express the relevance attached to the brand in their inherent needs and which would be an indication that the customers' interaction with product or brand information influences brand knowledge and hence enhancing marketing communications effectiveness (Guthrie & Kim, 2008; Kaplan and Haenlain, 2011). The pleasure derived from brand consumption creates consumer's perceived value in the product and enjoyment and affects marketing communications effectiveness because of the experiential outcomes of consistent use of social media (Naylor et al., 2012). Also, risk importance establishes a link between risks and marketing communication and thus, the risks a consumer associates with the consumption of a product will influence the perception and can only be improved by the firm creating effective marketing communication to counter the risk (Conchar et al., 2004). In addition to that, as the consumer's perceived probability of making a

poor choice increases the importance consumers attach to marketing information increases and thus has an interaction with marketing communication effectiveness (Kaplan and Haenlain, 2011).

At policy level, we recommend Governments to ensure that SMEs become part social media revolution through targeted policies. The management of SMEs needs to adopt a range of strategies to improve and sustain marketing communication effectiveness. SMEs need to increase the use of social media for marketing communication as this would enhance marketing communication effectiveness. Use of social media for marketing communications would lead to social media enabled value co-creation Garnett (2010). Despite using one sector, the findings of this research can be generalizable to some extent, and the contextual perspective this study supports existing findings most from developed country contexts but also brings on board new and insightful findings from a developing country context.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on the mediating effect of brand involvement in the relationship between social media use and marketing communication effectiveness. In line with existing literature on the mediating effect of brand involvement (Naylor et al., 2012), this study reveals that Brand Involvement plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between the Social Media Use and the Marketing Communication Effectiveness. It is therefore prudent for SMEs to strive to enhance their internal technological capacities to be able to take full advantage of communicating on social media tools. They can create various accounts and hitherto post key product information and the resultant interaction with the customers will enhance the effectiveness of marketing communications. This study also contributes to academic literature on social media use, brand involvement and marketing communication effectiveness among SMEs in a developing country context and this helps to bridge the gap in existing literature and thus provides a platform for future related research in a developing country context.

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