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FACULTY OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SCIENCE
DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES

PROJECT TITLE:

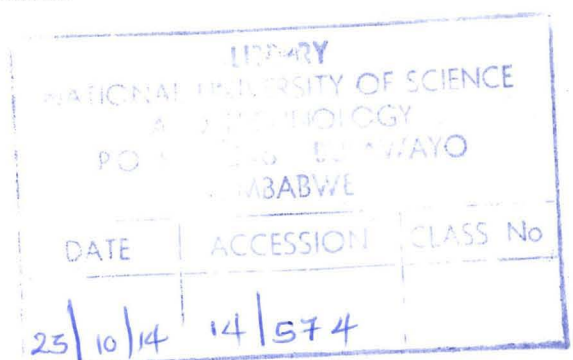
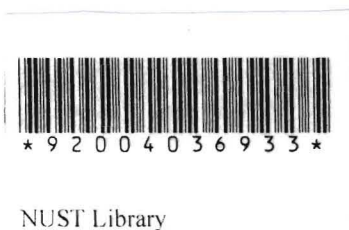
EXPLORING ORGANISATIONS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO ENGAGE
CUSTOMERS: A CASE STUDY OF ECONET WIRELESS ZIMBABWE'S PRESENCE
ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER

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ABSTRACT

This study uses Econet Wireless Zimbabwe as a case study to identify the extent to which corporate social networking contributes to relationship building between organisations and their customers. It aims to determine whether Econet knows the ‘hows’, ‘whats’ and ‘whys’ of social media application in the public relations practice. The study’s objectives are to examine how Econet Wireless Zimbabwe is using Facebook and Twitter and its reasons for using social media; to determine whether social media is facilitating dialogue between Econet and its customers; to explore how customers perceive Econet’s social media use and to investigate whether Econet’s interaction with customers on social media platforms resembles the public sphere by providing debate about service delivery, products and decision making. A literature study was conducted to discuss what social media use entails within the context of contemporary public relations. The literature review functions as a battlefield, where views from pro-social media scholars such as Gordon (2011), Grunig (2009) and Cutlip (2002) wrestle against those promulgated by scholars such as Wright and Hinson (2009) and Jo and Jung (2005) who say that the promises of social media use are exaggerated. The research was also guided by the two-way asymmetric and symmetric communication models, and the situational theory of publics. Quantitative and qualitative data was obtained from Econet’s Facebook page and Econet’s Twitter platform, as well as from questionnaires, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Analysis of the data gathered indicated that respondents were aware of the role that social media can play in promoting two-way communication between Econet and its customers. A conclusion was drawn that there is lack of sufficient dialogue and conflict transformation processes on Econet Wireless Zimbabwe’s social media platforms. Chapters within this study outline these and other issues related to how organisations can use social media to perform their communication role.