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SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Marketing challenges experienced by small-to-medium enterprises over formal clothing industries in Harare, Zimbabwe

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Abstract: small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) are faced with a myriad of competitive business organisations which are broadly categorised as formal industries. These organisations exhibit varying marketing strategies to remain viable, survive and to be a going concern. This study investigated marketing strategies employed by clothing entrepreneurs in the SMEs over big formal clothing companies in Harare, Zimbabwe. The study sought to understand why customers prefer to buy from small clothing entrepreneurs over big clothing entrepreneurs. Non-probability sampling and purposive sampling techniques were adopted and a total of 75 entrepreneurs constituted the research participants. A post-positivism research philosophy was adopted, and a combination of questionnaires and open-ended interviews were the research instruments of choice. The study found that small clothing manufactures in Harare are increasingly becoming competitive in their marketing strategies as compared to rigid large formal clothing companies. The study found that, large companies need to implement creative and decisive marketing strategies and catch up with the prevailing winning marketing strategic practices suitable for the Zimbabwean economic environment. The study found that legal and illegal imported clothes (mainly from Mozambique) are threatening the viability and

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Lucia Sithole is a lecturer at Chinhoyi University of Technology in the School of Art and Design. She is a PhD student and holds a Master of Science Degree in Family and Consumer Sciences and a Bachelor of Education Degree in Home Economics. She is an experienced researcher with five publications to her credit. Members of the group are also seasoned lecturers and have done some researches in clothing fashion design. The informal sector requires government assistance to curb the importation of clothes which threatens the marketing of informal sector clothes. The importation of clothes is also threatening the livelihoods and employment of workers in the informal clothing industries. Foreign investors in clothing industry are discouraged to come to Zimbabwe due to the influx of cheap imported clothes. There is lack of political will to rescue the threat on the clothing industries.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This study explores challenges faced by small-to-medium Enterprises as they compete with formal industries to market their products. In order to remain viable, these organisations must employ a variety of marketing strategies. This study used questionnaires and open-ended interviews. Findings of the study are that small clothing manufactures in Harare are increasingly becoming competitive in their marketing strategies as compared to rigid large formal clothing companies. It was also found that large companies need to implement creative and decisive marketing strategies and catch up with the prevailing winning marketing strategic practices suitable for the Zimbabwean economic environment. Another important finding was that legal and illegal imported clothes are threatening the viability and sustainability of Harare clothing manufacturers. The findings of this study should assist the informal sector traders to improve their marketing strategies with a view to access the marketing opportunities enjoyed by the formal industries.

sustainability of Harare clothing manufacturers. It is therefore recommended that the Zimbabwean government needs to capacitate the small-scale clothing manufacturers, curb illegal smuggling of clothes from Mozambique and fight anti-competitive practices of large clothing manufacturers. Small-scale clothing manufacturers are contributing to employment creation in Harare and Zimbabwe at large.

Subjects: Materials Science; Technology; Design; Education - Social Sciences; Consumer Psychology; Art & Visual Culture; Design; Classical Studies

Keywords: marketing strategies; small-to-medium enterprises; formal clothing industries; marketing management; sustainable marketing; viable operations

1. Introduction

Harare has been characterised by monopolistic big clothing companies at the expense of small emerging clothing manufacturers. Notwithstanding, large clothing manufactures in Harare have served the city for a considerable time and they have created and sustained their marketing efforts through: quality products, account schemes, extensive promotions and discounts.

Due to their market dominance and viable operations, large corporations would then contract small clothing companies to sell the stocks of large corporations at a premium, all to the economic benefit of large clothing companies.

However, the realisation of the importance of small entrepreneurs coupled with convenience in their geographical location has propelled them to compete with large clothing manufacturers. The city of Harare has witnessed a rise of small clothing companies engaged in manufacturing clothes ranging from: corporate clothing, school uniforms, work suits, designer and customised outfits.

In countries like America and Canada, small clothing companies have long risen to the occasion and have variety of fashion designs to their names. In America, small business organisations in the clothing industry conduct a variety of workshops to enhance the viability of their operations. British small clothing businesses are known for providing specialised customer services, custom-made suits and an opportunity to try clothing before purchase—a rare find in large clothing companies.

In Africa and in particular reference to South Africa, small clothing companies conduct massive road shows, fashion weeks and even give sample outfits for free as part of their marketing efforts. In Zimbabwe, small clothing manufacturing companies adopted the use of posters and fliers as their marketing tools.

However, as the economic situation in Zimbabwe deteriorated, there was a shift whereby there was an influx of second-hand clothing from Mozambique with the eastern border city of Mutare, the gateway to and from Mozambique, being the major supplier of second-hand clothes. Combined with their existing services, SME clothing companies in Harare are supplying second-hand clothes off-setting the market position of large clothing companies. It is on the basis of this background that this study investigated the marketing challenges experienced by small clothing companies and how marketing strategies are applied to compete with large clothing manufacturing companies in Harare.

2. Problem statement

It is a business fact that, sustainable businesses are the ones that employ decisive marketing strategies. The world is increasingly adopting the consumerism concept which encourages the protection or promotion of the interests of consumers. Therefore, the success of business organisations is linked to how customer tastes and experiences are met and fulfilled. Modern-day customers prefer to buy outfits that match their needs rather than satisfy the needs for the clothing manufacturers.

According to Easey (1995), in the world of fashion, outfits and clothing, the brunt of success lays on designers to come up with products that not only meet but exceed customer expectations. Be as it may, large clothing companies have experienced highly paid clothing designers but Harare is faced with poorly operating large clothing companies. The study sought to answer the following questions:

- Are large clothing companies failing to attract customers due to marketing strategies being employed by small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs)?
- What marketing challenges are being faced by clothing companies?
- Are small clothing entrepreneurs producing products according to customer preferences which big clothing companies are failing to do?

3. Research objectives

The study sought to:

- Identify marketing strategies used by clothing manufacturing companies in Harare, Zimbabwe.
- Establish marketing challenges faced by clothing manufacturing companies in Harare, Zimbabwe.
- Identify the determining factors of product price range.
- Identify where customers are getting knowledge of clothing products on the market.
- Establish the impact of marketing strategies used by clothing manufacturing companies.

4. Literature review

Several studies on the clothing and manufacturing industries have been carried out by some researchers both in Zimbabwe and other countries internationally. For instance, Brooks, (2015) carried out a study on the hidden world of fast fashion and **second-hand clothes**. Tarisayi, (2014), explored the effects of the ebola scare on second-hand clothing Traders in Zimbabwe. Norris, (2015) studied the limits of ethicality in international markets, with special emphasis on imported second-hand clothing in India.

According to Drucker (2008), marketing is a very significant aspect in the success of any business especially the SMEs in the clothing industries and the big companies as well. In other words, without marketing, people might not know the products on the market particularly if they are from small-scale clothing businesses. Marketing is a management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying consumer's requirements profitably (Moghaddan & Foroughi, 2012). One of the most important aims of companies is to enhance market share to achieve greater scale in their operations and improve profitability (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Smith, 1994).

Marketing is the process by which firms create value for customers and build strong customer relationship in order to capture value from customers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). It is through this strong entrepreneur customer relationship that SMEs clothing entrepreneurs in Harare are becoming more popular and have more customers than big companies. Most of their garments are sewn to customer specification and satisfaction to build this strong relationship unlike clothing retailers who have ready-made items. When they succeed in this, they attract new customers by promising superior value and by keeping and increasing current customers by ensuring their satisfaction (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010).

5. Generic marketing strategies

A business strategy is a long-term plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal or set of goals or objectives and it is designed to strengthen the performance of the business entity and it

states how business should be conducted to achieve the desired goals (Mozer, 2013; Tribou, 2012). There are many alternative strategies that are available to an organisation and the organisation's choice of a strategy is a reflection of the strategic intent of the organisation and the various internal processes and practices (Lawson, 2015; Tribou, 2012). Martins (2017) cites that business leaders are faced with a range of potential business strategies to pursue and to attain competitive advantage and distinctive capabilities such as cost-leadership strategy, focus and differentiation.

Tribou (2012) argued that, cost-leadership is a concept developed by Michael Porter, utilised in business strategy. It describes a way to establish the competitive advantage and it means the lowest cost of operation in the industry. The cost-leadership is often driven by company efficiency, size, scale, scope and cumulative experience (learning curve) (Martins, 2017, p. 43; Lawson, 2015). A cost-leadership strategy aims to exploit scale of production, well-defined scope and other economies (e.g. a good purchasing approach), producing highly standardised products, using high technology (Keller & Sood, 2013). Mozer (2013) cites that the sources of the cost-advantage are: economies of scale, the learning curve, low-cost access to factors of production, technological advantages and policy choice. This strategy works well when there are price wars, products are standard and when buyers are large and have significant bargaining power (Lawson, 2015; Monaghan, 2016).

The cost-leadership strategy is always a best strategy to implement at the organisation in the sense that, it provides the organisation with economies of scale, access to capital due to low internal costs and it allows the maximisation of profits as compared to competing organisations (Tribou, 2012). However, it is not always a best strategy to implement in the sense that, economies of scale will eventually lead to diseconomies of scale resulting in the loss of profits (Tribou, 2012). Mozer (2013) argued that, if cost-leadership strategies can be implemented by numerous firms in an industry, or if no firms face a cost disadvantage in imitating a cost-leadership strategy, then being a cost leader does not generate a sustained competitive advantage for a firm. The ability of a valuable cost-leadership competitive strategy to generate a sustained competitive advantage depends on that strategy being rare and costly to imitate. Tribou (2012) added that, cost-leadership can also lead to reduction in organisational performance which in turn leads to low sales and low profits.

Another potential strategy that can be pursued by an organisation is the focus strategy. The focus strategy refers to a market focus in terms of segmentation, meaning to say that it is the provision of a product/service directed at a narrow market segment niche (Lawson, 2015; Mohamed, 2014). For example, the organisation will need to identify the various niche markets it can effectively serve and focus its products to the market niche and this can be done using the customer preferences. The greatest advantage of this strategy is that it enables the organisation to acquire mastery in the niche market (Mozer, 2013). However, the organisation can easily lose the niche market to competitors.

The third alternative strategy is the differentiation strategy which refers to a market position where customers are willing to pay a price premium for products or services offering added value from design, quality and service (Keller & Sood, 2013). This means that an organisation can offer superior quality products and services to its clients, so as to enable it to charge higher prices for quality and superior experiences (Mozer, 2013). However, this strategy will not effectively work for an organisation if it aims to increase numbers of clients rather than mere financial gains (Mohamed, 2014).

6. Importance of marketing strategies

Marketing is a very critical component for any business to survive, given the harsh economic Zimbabwe climate (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). The twofold important goals of marketing are mainly to attract new customers and to keep current customers. They continue to say that marketing strategies draw customers and when the entrepreneurs take care of their customers, market share and profits will follow.

Drucker (2008) cites that marketing has to answer to two important questions namely:

- How your enterprise will address the competitive marketplace and
- How you will implement and support day to day operations.

With marketing, selling becomes easy given that the entrepreneurs have a full understanding of customer needs, customer value and prices promote products effectively due to marketing strategies used (Drucker, 2008). Nowadays, small-scale business reaps the rewards of creating superior value and good marketing strategies (Business Resource Software, 1994). In today's very competitive market place, a strategy that ensures a consistent approach to offering your product or service in a way that will outsell the competition is very critical (Easey, 1995, p. 93).

Marketing strategies also help to research on certain objectives related to the clothing industry like how to beat competition (Drucker, 2008; Easey, 1995). According to Easey (1995), marketing helps to provide this additional knowledge and skills needed to ensure that the creative component is used to the best advantage, allowing business to succeed and grow. Easey (1995) continues to say that marketing itself is important because it helps reduce some uncertainty in the fashion industry and cut down the number of business failures.

Having good marketing strategies makes it easy to attract and keep customers (Flick, 2005). It appears that small clothing entrepreneurs have better strategies to attract customers. Flick (2005) says, customers and entrepreneurs strike some understanding and share information on what can be done and what they need. The advantage is that with small-scale clothing businesses, they do not always have ready-made clothes unlike big clothing manufacturers. They allow new designs to be brought in by customers. This is achieved through marketing that establishes a strong relationship between the small clothing entrepreneurs and the customers (Flick, 2005; Kotler & Armstrong, 2010).

7. The marketing mix

The marketing mix refers to the seven marketing variables that need to be considered to make sure that the business operates to the maximum. The elements of the marketing mix are: place, price, promotion, physical evidence, people, product and process (Flick, 2005; Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Flick (2005) cites that for products like clothing, marketers consider the four "Ps" which are: price, place, promotion and product.

7.1. Price

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2010), the price is the amount of money charged for a product or service. Easey (1995) says price is the amount of money that is exchanged for a product or service offered. It can also be the value that is placed on an item, what the item is worth given all the cost inputs. In most instances, the two are used synonymously and interchangeably. There is need for small-scale clothing entrepreneurs to seriously consider the issue of costing and pricing, so that they do not lose customers unnecessarily but at the same time remaining profitable.

Jewell (1990) cites that the determinants of price are:

- New products—consumers are often initially prepared to pay higher prices.
- Qualities of products—products are sold at a price reflecting their quality.
- Insurance premium—price is calculated from the risk involved.
- Competitors—prices charged by competitors also influence price of the product.
- Market target—the kind of group that is on target and also the culture of the group.
- Time of selling—whether it is the season for the product.

These may not be all the factors that influence prices as in Harare clothing manufacturers both SMEs and large companies. The notable ones are the prices charged by competitors and time of selling.

8. Pricing strategies

Wolonski and Coates (2009) postulate that there are pricing strategies that can be implemented and these are:

- Skimming pricing,
- Penetration pricing,
- Differential pricing.

9. The importance of price

Prices are very important to customers as they either attract or push away potential customers. Kotler and Armstrong (2010) cite that the value of price to customers is determined by:

- Customer price sensitivity,
- The level of competitive activity,
- Availability of competitor products.

10. Product

Good marketing means products that fit the market. The products on the market need to be designed correctly and then developed to keep pace with the market changes (Jewell, 1990). Market research is essential, thus it helps to understand the customer and the products (Strokes & Wendy, 2008). Market research tells the entrepreneurs who the customer is, how the customer makes the purchasing decision, what the customer wants from the product, if there are gaps in the market and what competitors are doing (Gwin, 2009). Product research concentrates on the product in order to modify existing products and to produce new products.

11. The role of new product

New products are important to small clothing entrepreneurs as they give a new look in the market and the profits may be maximised when new products are introduced (Gwin, 2009). They also give competitive advantage enabling small entrepreneurs to produce articles of better quality. Gwin (2009) postulates that with new products on the market, there is need to understand four important considerations:

- *Product messaging,*
- *Pricing strategies,*
- *Channels of communication and*
- *Promotion plans,*

Generally all products go through a product life cycle which has stages such as: launching stage, growth stage, maturity and decline.

12. Advertising media benefits and critics

Advertising is a controlled and paid non personal marketing communication (Easey, 1995). The aforementioned argued that the objective of advertising is to sell. According to Drucker (2008), advertising is meant to achieve the following: retain loyal customers, retrieve lost customers, recruit new customers and reassure old and new customers that they have made the right decision. Small entrepreneurs are coming up with more effective advertising media. Easey (1995) cites that the choice of advertising media can be influenced by six key factors namely: the type of product, type of message, budget constraints, frequency, cost effectiveness and coverage.

Wolonski and Coates (2009) cites that advertising enables:

- Consumers to receive information on new products.
- An increase in sales and makes mass production possible which may lead to lower prices, promoting competition and hence lower prices for better quality products.
- To keep down prices of newspapers, televisions and radio licences.
- Reduction of sales fluctuation.
- Consumers to make a more informed choice.
- Product identification.

Notwithstanding, Swinker and Hines (2007) cites that there are several setbacks that are associated with advertising. The aforementioned argued that advertising leads to: higher prices, realisation of monopoly power, high opportunity costs, which can be misleading and costly.

SMEs in Harare might not use newspapers since they are expensive even if they have high coverage and everyone can understand the language in the newspapers locally produced. They can use outdoor media like posters, and also has high coverage, so that many customers will be informed. It also has high readership because everyone wants to read public posters. The success of a business depends on how entrepreneurs market, price/cost and advertise their products and various authorities have said these are important.

13. Start-up steps to consider

Many individuals who launch clothing lines do so because they are artistic, yet these individuals generally are not entrepreneurs who understand how business operates. Elu, Dradley, & Moser (2003) cites that before launching an apparel line, individuals should consider the following seven start-up steps:

- Understand the commitment—The potential business owner must understand the time and money commitment necessary to make the clothing line succeed. It is wise to double their estimates about the time and capital required to start a business (Elu et al., 2003).
- Plan the business venture—Any experienced entrepreneur knows that identifying key elements of the clothing line's business strategy is crucial (Li, Gouhui, & Eppler, 2008). The business plans must include: general company description, products overview, operations overview and marketing strategies.
- Organise the business—The most overlooked aspect of creating a business is the fact that the company is an entity all of its own. It helps the business' tax structure and legal name.
- Prepare for Manufacturing—Knowing where to produce the clothing line is an extremely important decision. A small clothing business may choose to manufacture its products, but outsourcing should be considered.
- Establish a Pricing Model—Making a profit off the clothing line is necessary to the business success. Profit comes from making more revenue than fixed and variable costs combined. Fixed costs are expenses that have already been invested and cannot change (equipment purchases or buying a facility for the business). Variable costs- expenses that can vary from one period to another for example price difference between manufacturers or the cost to produce different apparel items. To ensure profit, the entrepreneur must establish wholesale and retail rates higher than the expenses.
- Market the Clothing Line—After the business essential have been developed through previous steps, entrepreneurs should start to consider the following items in their marketing strategies: selecting company logo, identifying target audience and creating online presence.

- Analysing and Adjusting—This step involves the entrepreneur identifying loopholes in the system and rectifying accordingly.

14. Social media marketing strategies

Business owners need to reach out to a bigger audience online. Establishing a presence on the internet even if there is a physical store is critical. Being active on social media sites will not only increase brand awareness but will also boost the company's rank on search engines and prove that business is in sync with the times. The generic strategies that can be employed by the organisation are: getting out of the store, sharing expertise freely, growing a network, customer relationship management and employing traditional marketing strategies (Mulu-Mukutu, Namusonge, & Odhumo, 2004; Ngoze, 2006).

15. Methodology

According to Burns and Grove (1997), the research design of a study is the end result of a series of decisions made by the researcher concerning how the study will be conducted. It is the blueprint for conducting the study that maximises control over factors that could interfere with validity of the finding (Flick, 2005).

A post positivism research strategy was adopted where questionnaires and open-ended interviews were used to collect primary data. In this study, participants from clothing companies formed the research sample.

16. Population and sampling

The targeted population for this study was made up of SMEs and big clothing companies in Harare. The accessible population comprise all the cases that conform to the designated criteria and are accessible to the researcher as a pool of participants for a study (Burns & Grove, 2003).

According to Drucker (2008), a sample is a subgroup of the target population that the researcher plans to study for the purpose of making generalisations about the target population.

A total of 75 participants who were purposively sampled from clothing industries responded to the questionnaires interviews. The sample comprised of only the small clothing entrepreneurs and big clothing manufacturers in Harare urban. This sample was chosen because of its convenience geographical location. Harare has about 75% of the clothing manufacturing companies in Zimbabwe. Fashion trends are set in Harare and other clothing manufacturing companies tend to copy from those in Harare.

17. Research instruments

In this study, questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. The researcher assumed that two instruments would enable the collection of reliable and useful data and at the same time triangulating findings.

Open-ended questionnaires were the major data collection instruments used in the study. Chilisa and Preece (2005) indicate that a questionnaire involves the gathering of data from a sampled population using set questions. The respondents managed to freely give their opinions and facts about their clothing industries in Harare. However, the questionnaires presented some problems especially with some participants who seemed not to understand English. It was therefore, necessary to translate into the vernacular language during the interviews.

Interviews are face-to-face interactions where data is collected verbally, and the researcher and the interviewee communicate in a free environment (Chilisa & Preece, 2005).

The researcher prepared an interview guide, which contained the questions to be asked. The interview technique produced qualitative data from the interview guide. Interviews managed to produce quality findings which contributed immensely to the study.

18. Findings and discussions

The following themes emerged from the collected data: marketing and its implications, marketing problems, product pricing, advertising media, preferred apparel and customer choice and influences and marketing strategy.

The demographic characteristics that were of interest in this study were: gender, age, level of education, experience and place where clothing designing skills were obtained. This helped to know the type of participants in the study and the knowledge of the area under study. From the interviews and questionnaires distributed, the study found that the participants were evenly distributed across all the gender categories.

Clothing industry has to respond to age group demands and from the questionnaire, all age groups were represented except for the 51 and above range. From the questionnaire, it seems fashion cuts across all age groups. However, there were more respondents in the 41–50 years range. It appears either they had the resources to start off their own clothing businesses or they were employed before the current harsh economic situation prevailing in Zimbabwe where a lot of youths are not employed.

All the participants who took part in the study had some form of education. Only eight respondents had “O” level, one (40) had ‘A’ level and one (25) university degree. This means that the clothing literacy level among the Harare participants was very high. This means they could understand fashion trends, marketing strategies and their importance.

From the questionnaires, most of the Harare respondents had five years and above experience in the clothing industry. It was most likely that their experience with Harare customers, with different clothing materials and pricing had kept them afloat in the clothing business.

High schools and higher and tertiary institutions have combined and played an important role in developing entrepreneurial skills that have found their way in big and SME clothing companies in Harare. Technical colleges (30) seem to have made the biggest contribution in terms of producing graduates with clothing fashion design skills. Not to be underestimated are schools (13), private colleges (15) and universities (17) who have graduates who make an impact in the clothing industry.

19. Marketing and its implications

In the clothing sector in the City of Harare, tailors and designers had different views on what marketing is. From questionnaires, they understood marketing from different viewpoints. Small clothing entrepreneurs could not define it in a more comprehensive way in English. However, when interviewed, some of them clearly explained it in (Shona) vernacular language. For the big companies, they had all-encompassing definitions that showed that they understood the concepts very well. An SME clothing entrepreneur participant defined marketing as “*Opportunity to show people what you have in different ways*” while participant from a large corporation defined the same by saying, “*It is an interesting and innovative way of advertising what you sew to potential customers*”.

20. Challenges in marketing clothing products

An appreciation of the problems faced by both big and SME clothing entrepreneurs revealed that big clothing companies have more problems. One challenge faced by big Harare clothing companies was that of changing the way they have been doing business to suit the changing times. From the questionnaires and interviews, the clients currently prefer garments that are sewn in their own specifications and individual tastes. Yet with big clothing companies, they target a big market and use a standard measure to produce some of the clothes they sell. Given this situation, big companies lose a lot of

business to SME entrepreneurs who are innovative, flexible and accommodate new designs brought in by customers. They can sew just one item for an individual customer resulting in a unique design.

However, one big challenge with SME clothing entrepreneurs is that of resources. Expenses such as rentals which are usually too high, labour costs and cost of materials always hinder the growth of these small clothing entrepreneurs. The costs are prohibitive.

At times, they do not have the mechanism to enforce payments after they have sold an item on credit to a customer. Some of the sold items would be paid for after a long period of time, yet they would have incurred some expenses.

The other problem identified by both SMEs and big clothing manufacturers was the stiff competition from cheap smuggled second-hand clothing from Mozambique and other neighbouring countries. Zimbabwe borders Mozambique and a lot of second-hand clothes find their way illegally to the market. Given the cash crunch and the harsh economic situation, customers opt for affordability rather than quality or any brand name.

According to previous studies on the consumption of second-hand undergarments in Zimbabwe, Chipambwa, Sithole, and Chisosa (2016) indicated that Zimbabwe, like any other African nation, is facing challenges ranging from obsolete equipment resulting in high operating costs thereby affecting price of the clothing products. Power shortages and high labour costs were also cited. Given that background, there is need to protect the clothing industry from unregulated imports, so that these companies become viable and return to the production levels of early 1980.

The SME clothing industries in Harare have become highly competitive and without good marketing strategies, most clothing companies were finding it difficult to survive. It becomes important for clothing companies in Harare, both big and SMEs to be innovative and be creative in marketing their clothes.

21. Pricing of clothing

From the questionnaires and interviews, both SMEs and big clothing manufacturers have similar consideration when pricing their clothing products. In both cases, they were affected by the same micro- and macro-economic environment. As they competed for the market share, prices have become important. To attract customers through pricing, big companies have sale periods where some clothing items were sold at reduced prices. According to Chipambwa, Sithole and Chisosa (2016), many clothing retail giants in Zimbabwe such as Edgars, Truworhs and Topics are facing stiff competition from the sale of second-hand clothing.

A study on clothing fashion design and shrinking customer base in Zimbabwe by Sithole, Mutungwe, Chirimuta and Muzenda (2016) revealed that in Zimbabwe, the period from 2000 to 2008 has been the most difficult for the textile and clothing sectors. This period has seen a number of clothing companies closing down and most people employed by this sector losing their jobs. The study further purported that imported second-hand clothing flooded the market at a time when wages were falling forcing the consumers to buy the cheapest clothing items available.

As for SME clothing entrepreneurs, they had negotiable payment terms and negotiable pricing regime. The price of an item was basically a negotiated affair. The idea was to keep their customers but, at the same time the price helped them recoup cost of material and with a small profit margin.

In both instances, they considered the production costs and the profit that they make in the process.

The prices charged for a clothing item should cover the cost of the fabric, electricity, labour, statutory payments like import tax, and a profit margin that kept them going especially the big companies. It emerged that big registered companies had many payment obligations. SME

clothing entrepreneurs did not have a list of statutory payments and prizes were mainly determined by cost of material, rentals and some profit margin.

22. Marketing media

While both SMEs and big clothing manufacturers agreed that in using media to advertise clothing, they use different strategies. Big companies could afford to use both the electronic and print media through advertisement on television, magazines and newspapers. SME entrepreneurs could not afford this expense. Big clothing companies engage advertising agents which costs a lot of money. They appealed to a certain class of people in society especially professionals and the affluent.

23. Apparels' entrepreneurs merchandise

According to information from interviews and questionnaires, most big companies in Harare had a wide range of apparels for all age groups and for most purposes like casual wear, uniforms and formal clothing. On the other hand, SME entrepreneurs did not specialise in particular apparels. Their range was motivated by market needs, which is what people want. Thus they did not specialise, they had apparels ranging from uniforms which they concentrated on when the demand was high, African traditional attire for men and women, children's wear, suits and costumes.

24. Customer choice, influences and marketing

What has made SME clothing entrepreneurs to continue to survive was that they construct their clothes to customer choice. While they use some designs to display their fashion, they are largely influenced by what customers desire and need. They could modify designs to suit customer specifications. In that way, they would have marketed themselves with mostly the low-income earners who could not afford to go to big designer shops.

On the other hand, big clothing companies offered very little of customer choices because their focus is on mass production. Customers who entered these big clothing shops looked at what was available whether it suited their choices. They did not adjust to individual needs and choices.

25. Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study concluded that both big and SME clothing manufacturers in Harare need to be more creative and aggressive in the way they market their merchandise. The observations were that there was a cut throat competition from cheap and illegally imported second-hands clothes from Mozambique and neighbouring countries. These imports have eroded their business competitiveness. Further, the production cost and other service costs were too high, thus making it very difficult for these manufacturers to have a big profit margin from their business.

The study also noted that the space to do clothing business in Harare was limited and crowded. This did not help especially the small clothing entrepreneurs to market their business as they were located in small dirty places. Most of the ideal spaces were occupied by big companies who can afford high rentals, labour cost, electrical bills and other statutory national payments like taxes, value added tax (VAT) and national social security authority (NSSA) for workers. The market relationship between small and big clothing manufacturing companies has been characterised with competition for customers who in turn have very little disposable income.

As they market their merchandise, SME entrepreneurs and big clothing manufacturing companies in Harare use different platforms motivated by affordability and accessibility to the customers. In terms of clothing design skills, most of the interviewees and those who responded to questionnaires had minimal qualifications. Most of the respondents had obtained the skills from technical colleges and a few had advanced to university level. Skills upgrade and update are important to compete favourably in this harsh Zimbabwean economic environment.

26. Recommendations

From the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

- Clothing manufacturers need to be creative, innovative and sensitive to customer needs and demands if they are to continue and survive in this line of business. This should lead to increased customer satisfaction and increased business for the clothing manufacturers.
- Government needs to put in strict measures to stop imports of second-hand clothing from neighbouring countries for clothing industry in Zimbabwe to survive. Police and the army are encouraged to constantly patrol the borders with these neighbouring countries. Those caught breaking the law should be given harsh punishment, so that they do not repeat the same offence. The benefits of banning imports of second-hand clothes are that clothing manufacturers will enjoy an increase in sales, thus creating opportunities for employment creation. However, Chipambwa, Sithole and Chisosa (2016) highlighted the negative effects of banning imports of second-hand clothes as the loss of employment opportunities, increase in criminal activities and rising clothing prices which becomes a disadvantage to the consumer.
- Harare City Council to avail more space for people to operate from. It should be understood that in this Zimbabwean environment where the unemployment rate is high, clothing manufacturing and selling helps in employment creation.
- Government should look at service costs of doing business with the view of lowering them to ensure affordability and viability of the business. This should benefit the majority of the consumers in the low-income bracket.
- SMEs and big clothing manufacturing enterprises to be motivated to help their employees upgrade and update their skills for competitiveness. An increase in employee skills should help the employees who wish to start their own business enterprises.
- Both SMEs and big clothing entrepreneurs need to intensify their marketing strategies to increase sales. This is supported by Kotler and Armstrong (2010) who claim marketing is a very critical component given the harsh economic environment in Zimbabwe.

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