

Revisiting Marketing Strategies by Savanna Tobacco for Brand Image and Identity

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Abstract: *The article seeks to examine various marketing strategies used by Savanna Tobacco and how they help in the creation of the company's brand image and identity. Savanna Tobacco being the second fastest growing cigarette manufacturing company after BAT, it is of pivotal importance that it make use of marketing strategies that helps it preserve a competitive edge. The main concepts to be assessed are; to understand whether Savanna Tobacco use Marketing strategies to gain a competitive edge and to explore how these strategies help the organization in creating brand image as well as identity. The study was informed by different theories such as two-way symmetrical model, open system theory, and social cognitive theory. These were subjected to qualitative method of data analysis. Interviews, participant observation as well as questionnaires were used by the researcher in a bid to establish the desired information.*

Keywords: *Brand, Identity, Public Relations, Marketing Strategy, Image and Communication.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The study seeks to evaluate the significance of the marketing strategies employed by Savanna Tobacco in the creation of a brand image and identity. Savanna Tobacco being the second fastest growing cigarette manufacturing company after BAT, it is of pivotal importance that it make use of marketing strategies that helps it preserve a competitive edge. Furthermore, taking into consideration that the company has only existed for a decade whilst on the other hand, its greatest competition has been around for more than 100 years, the great need to employ marketing strategies that not only maintain a competitive edge, but also create a strong brand image and identity in order for it to turn its challenger brands into the preferred is inevitable. At Savanna Tobacco Marketing and Public relations are infused in one department. The main idea is to assess whether Savanna Tobacco use marketing strategies which inexorably help the organization in creating a strong memorable brand image and identity.

The article was guided by two-way symmetrical model, social cognitive theory. Questionnaires, in-depth interviews and participant observation would be used as chief tools for data collection. The study settled for these data collection methods as they could allow appropriate data to be gathered effectively and this was purely qualitative approach.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Savanna Tobacco was founded in 2002 when the company purchased a tobacco threshing plant in Harare, Zimbabwe. Savanna reconditioned the machinery and started processing and packaging cigarette stems and selling them to a number of cigarette factories around the world. Within the first two years of operation, the company had sold over three million kilograms of farm stems. By this time the directors of Savanna had already identified an opportunity to add value to Zimbabwean tobaccos by manufacturing quality cigarettes for the export market.

Savanna Tobacco's entry into the tobacco industry in Zimbabwe started with a quest for a contract growing license. Zimbabwe's historical tobacco marketing system was characterized purely by tobacco sales on the auction floors. With the commencement of the land reform program in Zimbabwe, newly resettled farmers did not have the financial capacity to grow the very expensive crop of tobacco. Hence Savanna Tobacco embarked on a process to convince Government of the merits of creating a dual system of contract farming and auctioning tobacco. This process was a resounding success.

Since then the company has never looked back. When the factory started, it was manned by six South African Technicians and about sixty Zimbabweans. To date, the expatriates have all, except for one,

been replaced by locals and the total staff complement stands at 150 permanent employees. Savanna's has two FOCKE 350 packing machines which have vastly increased the company's packing capabilities as well as the look and feel of their finished products. Savanna Tobacco's vision is to be the leading African tobacco company as well as to establish a common understanding not only for those who work for them, but for all who they interact with.

The advent of the 1950s made companies to start evolving their ways of selling and doing business this was as a result of the immense competition that had begun. Furthermore, customers had become tired of the old ways that the corporate world was using in selling. The corporations realise that, the way to the only way that they could improve was through having a deeper understanding of their consumers. Therefore, marketers realised the great need to evolve with the times as it was high time to drop ancient cliché methods of doing business and adopt effective ways that would guarantee brand preference and maximise profits. In addition, marketers have discovered that they can no longer confine their marketing effort to just attaining customers to purchase more, but rather they must work tirelessly in the enhancement of brand image and identity.

3. CORPORATE IDENTITY

Identity is a way through which an organization creates unique factors as well as aspects that makes it different from others (Fill, 2005). These aspects include where and how the organization's products as well as services are circulated, how the organizations view and communicate with both internal and external stakeholders and how it respond in relation to critical issues. This is because consumers normally respond positively to organizations that give back in any form to the society. This therefore results in the favorable response towards sponsor's image and identity. A brand is the way in which a name is given an attachment in order for it to be distinguishable among other brands (Etzel 2004, P. 260). This is done as a way to make a brand likeable and preferable among other competing brands. Corporate identity also emanates from the way in which an organization is referred to as, and the way in which it can be recognized.

A corporate identity is also defined as the overall image of a corporation, firm or business in the minds of diverse publics, such as customers, investors and employees (Birkigt and Stadler, 1986). It is a primary task of the corporate communications department to maintain and build this identity to accord with and facilitate the attainment of business objectives. It is usually visibly manifested by way of branding and the use of trademarks. Corporate identity comes into being when there is a common ownership of an organizational philosophy that is manifest in a distinct corporate culture. At its most profound, the public feel that they have ownership of the philosophy. Corporate identity helps organizations to answer questions like "who are we?" and "where are we going?" Corporate identity is often viewed as being composed of three parts, namely logos, uniforms and corporate colors. Guidelines, procedures and tools can be summarized as the structural aspects of managing the corporate visual identity. Corporate colors or company colors are one of the most instantly recognizable elements of a corporate visual identity and promote a strong non-verbal message on the company's behalf (Schultz, 2000)

4. MARKETING AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL

The umbilical code between marketing and public relations is derived from these concepts. Marketing is said to be responsible mainly for communication purposes, it is through marketing that various stakeholders can be reached out to by the organization. The marketing team engages in various activities that determines and guarantees effectiveness as well as smooth communication between the organization and its respective publics. It is as a result of these different activities that include promotions, sponsorships and interactions through consumer engagement programs that the marketing department facilitates communication with external publics. The marketing department can also facilitate internal communication through seminars, internal magazines. It is through all these activities that brand image and identity is established. The marketing department makes sure that messages that are worth to be remembered by the consumers are created. They also create catchy advertisements as well as package them in entertainment way that the message could be effectively communicated to the public. The success of the marketing department as a communicating agent is also seen in the ways in which customers act as informers of other customers about Savanna Tobacco brands. This is achieved when other satisfied well informed customers takes the role of being brand ambassadors thereby enhancing the brand image of Savanna.

When companies grow, they need to continually attract the best talent available in the market (Van Riel, 1995). Marketing communication strategies are hence used to show potential employees that the company is a good place to work. Savanna Tobacco has a large section of its websites devoted to presenting the reasons individuals should be interested in working there. Business publications have annual awards or lists of the best companies to work for. Marketing communication's role is making sure the company is under consideration for these awards hence ensuring the enhancement of brand image and identity. In addition, marketing department send news releases out about milestones reached, such as sales or profits reaching a certain threshold. They also announce major events, such as joint ventures, acquisitions or introductions of new products. Besides creating general awareness about the company, the news releases alert the investment community to what the company is accomplishing. This can result in increased interest in the company's stock, and make it easier for potential equity partners to find the company.

5. MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS ROLES

Marketing and public relations' main roles are that of building relationships, to advance, promote, and benefit the reputation of their respective departments and organization as a whole. Marketing and PR is all about communicating one's message to gain allies, advocates supporters in the community. Marketing and PR involves the cultivation of favourable relations for organizations and products with its key publics through the use of a variety of communications channels and tools. Traditionally, this meant public relations professionals would work with members of the news media to build a favourable image by publicizing the organization or product through stories in print and broadcast media.

Building product awareness when introducing a new product or re-launching an existing product, marketers can use a PR element that generates consumer attention and awareness through media placements and special events. Furthermore, marketing and PR can be used to provide customers with more in depth information about products and services. Through articles, collateral materials, newsletters and websites, PR and marketing delivers information to customers that can help them gain understanding of the product. A positive article in a newspaper, on television news show or mentioned on the Internet, often results in a discernable increase in product sales as stated by Dowling (1993). Marketing and PR function is also involved with brand reinforcement by maintaining positive relationships with key audiences, and thereby aiding in building a strong image. Today it is ever more important for companies and brands to build a good image. A strong image helps the company build its business and it can help the company in times of crisis as well. One tenet of content marketing is to be buyer centric and produce content that the public wants to consume. However, with product marketers, sales teams, and engineering teams demanding one-off content assets, sometimes efforts can be derailed. PR and marketing teams plays a pivotal role in constantly reminding content teams to focus on the public. If content marketers crafted equally powerful stories for owned media channels, consumers would eat it up (Freud, 1998).

Since marketing involves in depth communication with consumers, just like public relations, this model of two-way symmetrical is ingrained in the communication to negotiate with publics, resolve conflicts bring mutual beneficial relationships between internal and external stake holders. The role of public relations to negotiate, persuade, resolving conflicts and creating beneficial relationship between the organization and the public brings change and benefit to both the organization and the public (Grunig, 1989). The social cognitive theory is derived from constructing meaning and knowledge from social influences, (Bandura 1986). People are continually learning and constructing meaning throughout their whole life from communications within their community and now through the Internet. Open System theory as postulated by Cutlip et al (2000) gives credit to marketing role in bringing out changes in both environments and organizations through environmental inputs. Open systems actively monitors the environment to detect and predict changing conditions.

6. METHODOLOGY

The study examined the marketing strategies employed by Savanna Tobacco in Zimbabwe through their integrated Marketing and Public relations department. In this regard, qualitative and quantitative research was applied in order to tape relevant data that lead to a well refined conclusion. The study used questionnaires, interviews and participant observations to gather data and purposive and convenient sampling to deal with the targeted population. Purposive sampling is when the researcher uses personal judgment or that of some knowledgeable individual to identify who will be drawn in the

sample (Burns and Bush, 2010). The study found this approach of purposive sampling suitable for the study as the researchers gave preference to those individuals they thought were of much importance. Convenience sampling is a non-probability method of sampling in which samples are drawn at the convenience of the researcher (Shiu et al, 2009). Convenience sampling allows a large number of respondents to be interviewed within a short space of time. Convenience sampling is used to gather information quickly and inexpensive and in as much as it obtain quick information, it is relatively used to pretest a questionnaire (Aaker et al, 2001). The sampling technique was employed to the study as the researchers chose the unit according to those people who are knowledgeable about Savanna Tobacco customers and employees. The technique was also used as most managers and directors were not available for interviews therefore using those who were available at that point in time helped much in project formulation . The study interviewed 10 marketing personnel from Savanna Tobacco, 10 Savanna Tobacco sales personnel and 10 Savanna Tobacco customers. In addition, the study interviewed 30 customers for Savanna Tobacco and distributed 50 questionnaires to them. Overall, seventy five questionnaires were distributed and all were retained. The response rate was 100% and this is because respondents were given ample time to respond. Again the researchers could constantly visit the respondents to check if they understood all the questions framed. The overall individuals interviewed in the study were fifty and all of them gave their perception on the marketing strategies used by Savanna Tobacco marketing and public relations department. Qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis was explored to scrutinize the organizational documents as well as interviews responses. Content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantifiable manner for the purpose of measuring variables (Kerlinger, 1986). Discourse analysis core function is that of creating, enhancing as well as producing meaning, it is a way in which issues are talked about and attached to (Allen, 1987, P.268).

7. FINDINGS

The findings of the study show that Savanna Tobacco engages in various marketing strategies which have a positive impact on the department and Savanna Tobacco as a whole. The marketing strategies employed by Savanna Tobacco also have a bearing on enhancement of brand image and identity.

The study was conducted using interviews, participant observation and questionnaires as instruments to gather information. The content analyzed in the study was derived from documentation of reports from the marketing department at Savanna Tobacco. The study interviewed 10 marketing personnel from Savanna Tobacco, 10 Savanna Tobacco sales personnel and 10 Savanna Tobacco customers. The study carried out face to face interviews with these groups of people to establish the impact that Savanna Tobacco’s marketing department has in the augmentation of brand image and identity.

Methods	Marketing Personnel	Sales Personnel	Customers	Total
Questionnaires	15	10	50	75
Interviews	10	10	30	50

The above table shows the number of people interviewed as well as those that were given The study issued forty five questionnaires and received all of them back mainly because they allowed respondents ample time to respond.

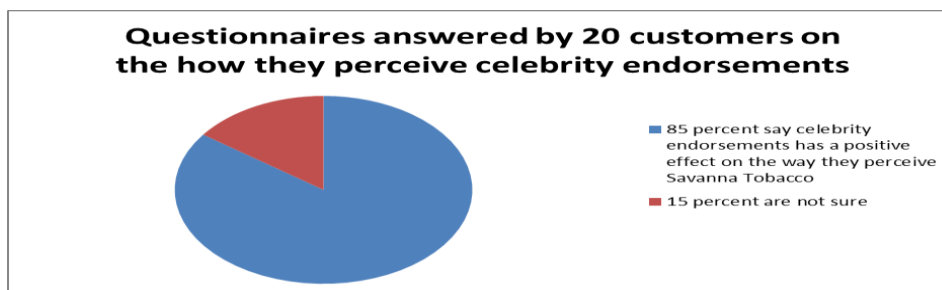
8. MARKETING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY SAVANNA TOBACCO

The study through interviews with 10 Marketing personnel from Savanna Tobacco, found out that Savanna Tobacco use celebrity endorsement as one of its core marketing strategy. The marketing department makes use of prominent musicians in a bid to establish a preferred brand image and identity hence inevitably influencing consumers' brand choice behavior. Through using celebrity endorsements as a marketing strategy, Savanna Tobacco’s marketing department try to establish a link between their brands and a desirable image or lifestyle of the endorsed celebrity as a way to gain corporate brand mileage.

Again using participant observation the study found out that using celebrity endorsements as a marketing strategy, the Marketing department of Savanna Tobacco makes use of very prominent Zimbabwean celebrities, such as, Tocky Vibes, Jah Praiser, and Sulumani Chimbetu. These celebrities provide opportunities to heighten the appeal of Savanna Tobacco’s products offered. When celebrities endorse a product, they transfer some of their own personal traits and values onto that product. So, when a celebrity endorses a brand it creates positive response about that brand. The interviews with 10 Marketing personnel established that Savanna Tobacco make use of prominent influential celebrities in all their marketing campaigns.

Out of 20 questionnaires distributed to Savanna Tobacco's customers, they were asked if they thought that celebrity endorsements affected the ways in which they view Savanna Tobacco only 3 thought it had affected nothing in the way that they viewed Savanna Tobacco and its brands.. Findings from interviews with 10 Sales Personnel indicated that celebrity endorsements had been positively affecting the Savanna Tobacco sales although it was not really drastic changes. Content derived from the 2014 last quarter marketing report showed that the consumers were positively embracing the use of celebrity endorsements by Savanna Tobacco.

Pie Chart 1



Major companies use celebrities in marketing to position their brands. Product positioning is placing a company's products in the best possible light in the minds of a target group, (Keller, 1998). The use of celebrities has become a key marketing strategy because of the power that celebrities have to influence others and to encourage others to consider using a particular brand (Kunde, 2000). When a celebrity promotes a particular brand, it is as if that brand is instantly propelled into the limelight. That brand becomes associated with that celebrity, and as long as a celebrity is seen in good light the brand is also seen in a good light.

Celebrities also offer configurations of range of personality and lifestyle meanings very thoroughly. Their persona evokes images and identity with greater clarity. This in line with Hatch and Schultz (2000) who postulates celebrities through repeated performance on public stage create their personalized meanings which can be passed into sturdy marketing, through 'meaning transfer process'. Tocky Vibes for example is perceived as a young, fun-loving, vivacious and modern ghetto Zim dancehall youth who made it through hard work and rose from rags to riches. I observed that Savanna Tobacco endorsed him as his personality can be translated into their brand image, like their local brands such as Pacific breeze which targets the free spirited, vivacious youths. Therefore, the fit between celebrity traits and brand positions and its attributes determine the success of the enhancement of brand image and identity.

9. ROLE PLAYED BY MARKETING AND PR IN ENHANCING IMAGE OF SAVANNA TOBACCO

The marketing department acts as a connection between the organization and its public. Through interviews with the 15 marketing personnel it was noted that as brand that is growing, for a profound foundation, company heavily relied on the public relations department. Through several promotions, donations and sponsorships the marketing department slowly but surely engages the public in its product awareness, thus the brand in such conditions can manage to stand out to other brands and present better offers. Thus the marketing department by promoting and coming up with such practices manages to create a name for Savanna Tobacco and hence taking the brand to better heights. It is through consumer engagement programs that the brand image and identity is enhanced. As part of the findings in response to one of the questions the marketing department personnel hinted that the brand is flourishing due to immense competitive ideas from the marketing department.

“We engage in various consumer engagement projects in order to improve visibility of the brand hence enriching both the brand image and identity.”

Therefore the marketing department as part of the study findings plays a vital role in ensuring that such outreach programs are a success. In addition, as part of the findings the Marketing department sought to clarify that the sole purpose of these promotions were to create a bond of trust with the customers who are initial the best brand ambassadors.

Through questionnaires and participatory observations, I discovered that customers hinted that they opted for Savanna Tobacco products at it locally made, affordable and of great quality. Customers

highlighted that Savanna Tobacco as brand was going out of the way to ensure that its customers received maximum satisfactory products. One of the customers highlighted that Savanna Tobacco's products are always readily available in all parts of the nation as well as that the organization has always supported its customers through thick and thin.

“The reason why I opt for Savanna Tobacco is because their products are readily available, affordable and that the company has supported us though producing legal flow wraps that are in alignment with the current health laws”.

The majority of the questionnaires and interviews that were conducted with marketing and sales department showed that the media and the marketing department work hand in glove. The marketing department in response to interviews further highlighted that the marketing department itself runs an in-house magazine/brochures to basically furnish internal staff with relevant procedures and upcoming products before they reach out to the public. The marketing department highlighted that it make use of new media like whatsapp to connect to its customers. Most articles written by *The Herald*, *H- Metro* among other papers for Savanna Tobacco shows how the Marketing department at Savanna Tobacco make use of different types of mediums in the enhancement of brand image and identity. It is through the use of different mediums that necessitate public awareness and public opinion. Savanna Tobacco also makes use of Zimbabwean television station (ZTV), radio stations and Facebook.

The study findings through interviews and questionnaires illustrate the power dominated by logos, as they create exposure and ease identification of the brand. Three quarters of the population interviewed highlighted that it was easy to note the red and green colors that are used to represent Savanna Tobacco's main brands, which are Pacific Storm and Breeze respectively. This is supported by Keillor (2007) who argues that when mere exposure happens, the liking for the brand increases. Savanna Tobacco also uses the concept of logo and colors to enhance the company's image over competitors. .

10. MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS ROLES

In interviews conducted with 15 Marketing personnel, they established that, Marketing and public relations' main roles are that of building relationships, to advance, promote, and benefit the reputation of their respective departments and organization as a whole. Marketing and PR is all about communicating one's message to gain allies, advocates supporters in the community. It aids in marketing the department for recruitment purposes and can lead to improved quality of student applicants as stated by Dowling (2001). Marketing and PR boosts an organization's credibility, as they operate through numerous trusted intermediaries. Balmer et al (2000), notes that if messages are chosen to be communicated, they inevitably gain credibility due to the intermediaries' credibility. It means cautiously aligning them with an intermediary's messages. It will mean knowing his needs and your audience's needs and where your business and its messages fit within that environment.

As a participant observer, the researcher established that, Marketing and PR involves the cultivation of favourable relations for organizations and products with its key publics through the use of a variety of communications channels and tools. Traditionally, this meant public relations professionals would work with members of the news media to build a favourable image by publicizing the organization or product through stories in print and broadcast media as noted by Van Riel (1992). Using the 15 questionnaires from the marketing personnel, it was established that, the role of Marketing and PR at Savanna Tobacco is much broader and includes: building awareness and a favourable image for a company or client within stories and articles found in relevant media outlets, closely monitoring numerous media channels for public comment about a company and its products, managing crises that threaten company or product image, building goodwill among an organization's target market through community, philanthropic and special programs and events.

Building product awareness when introducing a new product or re- launching an existing product, marketers can use a PR element that generates consumer attention and awareness through media placements and special events. This is in line with the social cognitive theory which points out that, people are continually learning and constructing meaning throughout their lives through communication. Furthermore, marketing and PR can be used to provide customers with more in depth information about products and services. Through articles, collateral materials, newsletters and websites, PR and marketing delivers information to customers that can help them gain understanding of the product. A positive article in a newspaper, on television news show or mentioned on the

Internet, often results in a discernable increase in product sales as stated by Dowling (1993). Marketing and PR function is also involved with brand reinforcement by maintaining positive relationships with key audiences, and thereby aiding in building a strong image. Today it is ever more important for companies and brands to build a good image. A strong image helps the company build its business and it can help the company in times of crisis as well.

11. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study focused on marketing strategies employed by Savanna Tobacco between the period of 2013 and 2015. The major question posed on the study emanated from the evaluation of the role played by marketing strategies in ensuring that Savanna Tobacco's brand image and identity reach greater heights. As a result of the data collected from the questionnaires, interviews and participatory observation, the study revealed that the main fundamental role of the marketing department is to devise and structure ways in which their respective organizations enrich their identity as well as image. The study established that, the marketing department uses strategies like the use of promotions, band wagon, association, sponsorships, donations among others in order to create a brand name and identity that is preferred by the consumers and various other stakeholders. This is because brand name and identity is not static but fluid, hence there is need for an organization's reputation to be won and re-won countless times as it is always under scrutiny by stakeholders, media and the government. The researchers recommend that Savanna Tobacco Marketing department should seriously consider establishing independent public relations department or corporate communication department which is entirely responsible for building a brand name, image and identity for Savanna Tobacco. This department would also ensure the flourishing of Savanna Tobacco as being the preferred in the midst of its competitors. Basing on the researcher's findings, Savanna Tobacco Company's structure has exposed major centralization of power especially at their head office in Harare. Although the organization has various branches in other cities in Zimbabwe as well as in six other countries in Africa, all the power for making important decisions that ensures the smooth flow of business are all done at the head office. Furthermore, these decisions are only made by a few people, that is the executives. It is due to this concentration of power in a few hands that decisions are not made in time therefore affecting the smooth flow of work in all branches.

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