

Strategies For Establishing A Successful Retail Chain In Zambia: A Case Study Of Zambia Bata Shoe Company PLC.

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Abstract:

The retail sector is important for Zambia's economic development since it creates employment and contributes to the country's consumer markets. However, while the Zambian retail sector offers unique potential for expansion due to a growing middle class, it also faces its own challenges, including changing consumer preferences and increase in competition from both domestic and international businesses. To remain competitive, businesses in the retail sector must use innovative strategies that encompass market penetration, brand differentiation, operational excellence, and consumer loyalty.

Zambia Bata is a major player in Zambia's footwear retail industry, having been in business for many decades and expanding across the country. However, despite Zambia Bata's long history in the country, there has been little or no research on the company's strategy and how they influence its long-term viability and success in Zambia's retail sector.

This research aims to investigate the strategies used by Zambia Bata which have contributed to its long term success in order to gain an insight into the essential success elements for retail chains in Zambia, with the goal of obtaining lessons that can be applied to the country's larger retail business. As one of the well-known and established retail chain in the Zambia, Bata provides an effective basis for researching successful retail operation and management in Zambia.

Background: *The retail sector in Zambia is critical to the country's economic growth, providing employment opportunities and meeting growing demand for a wide variety of items. However, this sector faces particular challenges such as changing customer preferences, infrastructure constraints and economic issues such as inflation and currency rate instability. These circumstances demand that those in the retail sector implement new strategies that focus not only on developing physical store networks, but also customer engagement and use of technology.*

Zambia Bata, a subsidiary of Bata Shoe Organization which has built a significant presence in the Zambian market since 1937 (About Bata Zambia - Bata Zambia, n.d.), is an excellent case study for evaluating the strategies required to build and maintain a successful retail chain. The company has evolved through Zambia's several economic phases, adapting to the ever-changing economic environment. While Zambia Bata has maintained its market dominance, knowing the strategic frameworks that have led to its success, as well as possible areas for improvement, provides useful insights for both existing and prospective Zambian retailers. This study looked into the strategies used by Zambia Bata to build and sustain a profitable retail chain in Zambia. By investigating key factors such as product sourcing, distribution network, product diversification and digital transformation, this study was able to identify best practices and challenges that are able to inform other retail businesses looking to expand in Zambia

Materials and Methods: *Qualitative method was used to conduct an in-depth analysis of the subject, while purposive sampling was employed for selecting senior management at Zambia Bata. Primary data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with senior management and retail customers. Thematic analysis was performed on the data to identify repeating themes, strategic themes, and operational issues.*

Results: *The findings indicate that effective retail strategies depend on an understanding of the economy, consumer behaviour, and market competition. Product differentiation, smart retail location, competitive pricing, and providing good customer service are all critical success elements*

Key Word: *Retail Chain, relationship marketing, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty.*

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I. Introduction

Following Zambia's political and economic liberalization in the 1990s, the country's retail business expanded significantly driven by urbanization, increased consumer spending and the entry of foreign retail chains (Ndulo & Chanda, 2016; Phiri & Ziba, 2019). Whilst some foreign retail chain stores such Zambia Bata Shoe

Company Plc, Shoprite, Pick'n'Pay and Pep Stores have managed to successfully operate, others such as clothing chains Edgars and Jets have not been successful. Zambia Bata is a major player in Zambia's footwear retail industry, having been in business for many decades and expanding across the country. However, despite Zambia Bata's long history in the country, there has been little or no research on the company's strategies and how they contribute to its long-term viability and performance in Zambia's retail market.

This research aimed to investigate the strategies used by Zambia Bata which have contributed to its long term success in order to gain an insight into the essential success elements for retail chains in Zambia, with the goal of obtaining lessons that can be applied to the country's larger retail business.

Significance: As the study focused on Zambia Bata's strategic solutions for a sustainable retail business, the insights obtained will help various stakeholders make informed choices about operating a successful retail business in Zambia.

The retail sector is an important part of Zambia's economy since it creates job opportunities as well as serving as an essential link between manufacturers and consumers, therefore, understanding the strategies that have made Zambia Bata operate a successful retail chain will allow this study to provide ideas that other organizations can implement. This insight will encourage the expansion of local enterprises, resulting in job creation, revenue generation and a stronger economy.

Scope of study: The study was geographically limited to business activities of Zambia Bata, with a focus on outlets located in Lusaka, the country's main commercial center for retail operations. Lusaka provides an important setting for analyzing retail operations in a climate with a competitive glowing consumer markets.

On a thematic basis, the study explores key components of retail chain strategy, such as marketing, customer relationship management, product availability, store placement, and human resource development. External issues like competition and Zambia's unstable economy are also taken into account.

Zambia Bata which was chosen as the case study because of its historical and ongoing involvement in the retail industry in Zambia. The long-standing operations and strategic changes made by Bata over the years provide important insights about retail chain operations in Zambia.

II. Material And Methods

This chapter discusses the research methods employed in this investigation. It examines the research design, particularly in terms of design selection. This chapter also describes the study's population, sample and sampling processes, data collection methods, as well as data processing and presentation methodologies.

Study Design: Hammond & Berman (2013) explain that research design is the plan and structure of an inquiry devised to gain answers to the research questions or to achieve the research objectives. It outlines the researcher's activities, from developing hypotheses and determining their operational implications to the final data analysis. The structure of a research problem consists of the framework, organization, and configuration of the interactions between variables in a study. This study was qualitative in approach and examined the strategies for building a successful retail chain in Zambia, with a focus on Zambia Bata. Qualitative research is particularly essential in retail operations research because it answers the "how" and "why" research questions and allows for deeper knowledge of experiences, phenomena, and context (Shakman et al., 2017). Because qualitative analysis places more of an emphasis on making sense or comprehending a phenomenon, than on forecasting or clarifying it (Bhattacherjee, 2012), a qualitative research approach allowed the researcher to evaluate the voices of participants and validated varied perspectives and experiences in retail operations. Qualitative research frequently uses small sample sizes because it is thematic and exploratory, focusing on understanding the depth of people's experiences.

Study Location: The study was carried out on Zambia Bata Shoe Company Plc head office, located in Lusaka, Mukwa Road and two retail outlets in Lusaka.

Research Approach: Due to the researcher's knowledge of their identities and the information they can reliably supply during the interview, special participants were selected through the use of purposeful sampling. Purposive sampling entails selecting participants for the interview who satisfy specific requirements.

Purposive sampling was used because it better matches the sample to the goals and objectives of the research, enhancing the study's rigor and the reliability of the data and findings. The primary purpose of purposive sampling is to concentrate on specific characteristics of a population that are of interest, allowing a researcher to best answer research questions (Rai & Thapa, 2015).

When selecting a file to serve as the source for a sample frame for a survey, the most critical factor considered was the extent to which the frame will cover the target population (Bhatia, 2008). A sampling frame is a list of the players from whom a sample is taken. The sampling frame used in this must be representative of the population (Hammond & Wellington, 2012).

Sample size: A sample of 30 respondents was interviewed and comprised of five (5) senior managers at Zambia Bata and 26 retail customers from retail outlets (13 from East Park mall store and 13 from Lumumba Road store). These were part of a total population of senior management and retail customers that visit the company's branches throughout Zambia.

Subjects & selection method: Purposive sampling was used because it better matches the sample to the goals and objectives of the research, enhancing the study's rigor and the reliability of the data and findings. The primary purpose of purposive sampling is to concentrate on specific characteristics of a population that are of interest, allowing a researcher to best answer research questions (Rai & Thapa, 2015).

Inclusion and Exclusion criteria: Not all customers were included. For the purposes of this study, the sampling frame consisted of loyalty/reward customers and regular visiting customers from two retail outlets in Lusaka only.

Data Collection Method: Data collection was done by means of semi-structured interviews that the researcher conducted with respondents to answer oral questions. The interviews were administered by the researcher to collect information that provided answers to the research questions. The researcher collected data using semi-structured interviews with respondents who answered oral questions. Interviews with each respondent lasted a minimum of 15 minutes.

Statistical analysis

Data was analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis and simple data descriptive methods. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying, analysing, and interpreting themes from a qualitative data collection (Christou, 2022). Themes were used to observe patterns and learn meanings from themes and some measures of central tendency from the variables represented in the visual data. Some of the identified themes are as listed in the table 1 below.

Table no 1

Key Themes	Findings
Product Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Focus on target market expectations, product variety, and demand forecasting
Critical Success Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Product range meeting customer preferencesStore locations with high traffic and accessibilitySkilled and trained workforceAdaptability to external challenges like COVID-19 and supply chain disruptions
Retail Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Conduct market research for good store locationsContinuous product availability based on demand
Marketing Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Effective advertising strategy (Social Media, TV, print, billboards).Strong brand image and trust vital for customer loyalty
Differentiation Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Innovative product featuresSuperior customer service and high-quality, durable productsStore renovations to enhance customer shopping experience
Human Resource Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Effective recruitment and performance managementOngoing training to keep employees updated

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are two essential quality requirements for both quantitative and qualitative research (Vu, 2021). Validity relates to how effectively a measure reflects the underlying concept that it is designed to measure, whereas reliability refers to how consistent or predictable a construct measure is (Bhattacherjee, 2012). According to Noble & Smith (2015), qualitative researchers must develop and implement methodological procedures to assure the trustworthiness of their research findings because, unlike quantitative researchers, they do not use statistical methodologies to verify the validity and reliability of study findings. Among the methodological procedures as suggested by Noble & Smith (2015) to assure the trustworthiness of the research findings, which the researcher adopted are as listed below;

- Considering personal biases that may have influenced findings.
- Recognizing sample biases and continuously evaluating approaches to ensure accurate and relevant data gathering and analysis.
- Ensuring accurate record-keeping, clear decision-making, and consistent and transparent data interpretation.
- Clear thinking during data analysis and interpretation.
- Gather participant feedback on interview transcripts to ensure the final themes and concepts accurately reflect the phenomenon under investigation.

Limitations of the Study

Due to time and budget constraints, the study was confined to a consumer survey at selected Lusaka stores. As a result, the findings may not accurately reflect the views of customers throughout the country, and the results may differ if the survey is performed in different parts of the country. As a result, additional study in other places and with different clients is needed to assess the validity and dependability of the identified attributes.

III. Result

According to the management responses, an integrated strategy that balances product availability and range, competitive pricing, customer focused marketing, and strong human resources management is essential for success in Zambia's retail industry. Zambia Bata's competitive position is further strengthened by key differentiators including innovation, outstanding customer service, and flexibility in response to market conditions. Below are the key themes and finds from management.

Table no 2

Key Themes	Findings
Product Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Focus on target market expectations, product variety, and demand forecasting
Critical Success Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Product range meeting customer preferencesStore locations with high traffic and accessibilitySkilled and trained workforceAdaptability to external challenges like COVID-19 and supply chain disruptions
Retail Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Conduct market research for good store locationsContinuous product availability based on demand
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From interviews with customers, all respondents (100%) indicated that product quality, brand and price was a major factor in deciding where to shop. Over 90% described Zambia Bata's products and services as very good. In terms of quality, pricing and variety most respondents (70%) indicated that quality and variety of Zambia Bata's products was better. However over, 50% of respondents stated Zambia Bata's prices for its products was on a higher side compared to others.

Store location with good and secure parking space or near bus stations was said to be very important. On the question of brand loyalty, over 80% respondents indicated that product quality and how long a brand has been on the market was key in deciding to be loyal to a brand.

IV. Discussion

According to the research, the retail business is very competitive. This is further complicated by customer expectations. Retailers must meet specific standards that are less significant to other businesses. Customers prioritize product variety and availability. Customers want convenience in terms of location. The store atmosphere should be appropriate and comfortable for customers.

This therefore calls for a clear business strategy for a business to successfully operate a retail chain. Strategy is defined as an organization's long-term direction and scope that maximizes its advantage through resource configuration in a changing environment, meets market demands, and satisfies stakeholder expectations (Johnson et al., 1999).

It is clear that Zambia Bata has put in place strategies aimed to meet ever changing customer expectations through an integrated strategy that balances product availability and variety, competitive pricing, customer-focused marketing, and strong human resources management.

V. Conclusion

The research concludes that effective retail strategies require a thorough understanding of Zambia's economic environment, consumer behaviour and competitive environment. Product differentiation, ideal store location, competitive pricing and enhancing customer experiences are all critical to retail success. Furthermore, innovative advertising strategies that are customized to the target market will be essential to success in Zambia's retail sector.

VI. Recommendations

1. **New Customer Loyalty Program:** The research has revealed that the company does not currently offer loyalty programs to its long-time customers who purchase footwear from it. This is a drawback because businesses

typically need loyalty programs to encourage repeat business and build lasting relationships with customers. In order to encourage them to return for additional purchases, Bata must create a loyalty program that guarantees frequent customers receive discounts for their loyalty. Having a data base of loyal customers is also key for targeted marketing which is less costly as they can be reached through mobile phones.

2. **Setting up an online store:** The research has revealed that the company does not currently have an online store for customers who wish to purchase its footwear online. In order to reach a wider customer base, provide convenience and optimize operations, Zambia Bata should embrace digital transformation, which includes e-commerce platforms and opening of an online store. Online trading will also reduce dependence on just concentration on physical location, thereby reducing on rental costs as well as other costs that come with having physical stores.
3. **Continuous Market Research:** Because retail is a challenging sector with continuously changing customer needs, Zambia Bata should conduct marketing research on a regular basis. The company must make sure that it knows what customers are thinking and not just sit back and hope that everything will work out in the long-run. In order to increase its competitiveness, effectiveness, and adaptability, Zambia Bata should place a strong emphasis on business process improvement. Bata must encourage organizational learning in order to generate information that can be applied in the future to enhance company procedures in order to achieve continuous improvement.

VII. Scope For Future Research

While this study has provided useful insights into the strategies for developing a successful retail chain in Zambia through the case study of Zambia Bata Shoe Company Plc, it also offers additional areas for future research. Future research could broaden the scope beyond a single case study to include comparative evaluation of other retail businesses operating in Zambia, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the retail sector in Zambia.

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