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CORPORATE REBRANDING STRATEGIES EFFECT ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS ZIMBABWEAN COMPANY BRAND PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

The research aimed to assess the impact of corporate rebranding strategies on brand performance of Telecoms Company in Zimbabwe. The dependant variable of the study was brand performance while independent variable was corporate rebranding strategies. The study presents the impact and importance of corporate rebranding on brand performance, it would give guidance on future rebranding decisions. The research showed the relationship between corporate rebranding strategies with brand performance. Exploratory research design was used in shaping the philosophical orientation on carrying out the research. The target population consisted of Managing Director (1), Divisional Units Directors (7), Divisional Units Directors (8), Middle level Management (12), Supervisors (16), and employees (70), leading to a total of 114. Convenience sampling was used by the researchers because it was convenient for the researchers to visit the Head Offices because of costs and time. The research instruments used for data collection in this study were interviews and questionnaires. Results showed that there is more brand visibility of the company and rebranding strategies are crucial in building the brand performance. Recommendations from the findings are that the company should consider

upgrading their rebranding strategies in order to satisfy change in consumer taste and preferences. Again it is recommended that company improve on service provision and fault clearance turnaround times to retain clients who are switching to competitors.

Keywords: Innovation, Technology, Corporate Strategy, Brand Equity, Corporate Image

INTRODUCTION

The Zimbabwean economy is greatly agro-based whilst the telecommunications industry provides the nervous system that brings together all the other economic industries. The telecommunications industry is at the centre of all the industries in the economy, (POTRAZ, 2017). There are many licensed operators within the industry and the governing board is the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe POTRAZ. This board controls and safe guards the pricing of telecommunication services as well as giving licenses to players within the industry. According to the Potraz report (2017), telecommunications companies have been failing leading to a decline in the total number of active fixed telephone lines by 8.7% to record 305,720 from 334,828 active subscriptions as at 30 September 2016.

The fixed tele density declined from 2.5% to reach 2.4% as a result of the decline in active fixed telephone subscriptions. Corporate subscriptions made up 22.4% of total active fixed subscriptions. The Telecoms industry is operating in a challenging market dominated by a variety of firms and the market is also characterized by continuously dynamic customer likings and trends.

The deregulation of the telecommunications sector in Zimbabwe witnessed the entrance of more competitive players in the market. There has been a remarkable fluctuation of subscriber base and sales volume to the extent that customers were shifting their interests to other network service providers. Telecoms companies then embarked on rebranding strategies such as brand extension, cobranding, mixed branding and re-launching their entities so as to retain their clients. This gave the researcher the keenness to assess the effect of rebranding strategies on brand performance in the telecommunication sector. With this background, the research aimed at fulfilling the following research objectives; to analyse corporate rebranding strategies done by the selected telecoms company, to assess the effect of rebranding strategies done on brand performance of the selected telecoms company and to identify the challenges faced by the selected telecoms company in implementing the rebranding strategies. Before delving into addressing the objectives, the following section deals with brief literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Broadie and Whittme (2012) quoted in Nyagadza, Chodeva and Vingirayi (2018), defined rebranding as the change or modification of the brand in order to stimulate a change in attitudes, perceptions and behaviour of customers. Rebranding strategy can be employed or viewed in two different ways the first one being related to changes in the visual identity of an organization, that is to say changing the logo and name of the organization. Increasing global competition has led firms towards an even higher need for distinctiveness (Juntunen et al, 2010; Nyagadza et al, 2018). Among the variables that are most qualified to sustain competitive advantage, the corporate image emerges (Kay, 2006). Adopting the definition proposed by Muzellec and Lambkin (2006), rebranding concurs to the creation of a new brand element aiming to create a new image or position in the mind of stakeholders. A good and strong corporate image can have a positive impact on workers, managers, investors, and customers' evaluations. On the other hand, rebranding is a strategy involving high risks, since strong brands take years to be successfully built in order to provide higher profit margins, loyal customer bases and a continuous stream of revenue for the firm representing the brand (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2002). Balmer and Gray (1995, 1998, 2001, 2003), corporate brands are different to product brands in terms of disciplinary scope and management, and have a multi-stakeholder rather than customer orientation. They acknowledge that the terms corporate brands and corporate identities are used interchangeably, but argue that there are fundamental differences between them. According to Balmer and Gray (1995, 1998, 2001, 2003), corporate identity refers to the distinct attributes of an organization which addresses the questions, "who are we? And what are we?" and is relevant to all types of organizations. They go on to state that corporate brands on the other hand are not applicable to all organizations, and would not for example, be necessary for a monopoly (Balmer and Gray, 2003, Makasi, Govender and Munyoro, 2014). Organizations seeking to build strong corporate brands must align their internal communications activities and human resource management practices with the brand values (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Makasi, et al, 2014). Strategies of corporate branding seek to strengthen relationships with a diverse range of stakeholders including employees, shareholders and suppliers (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Makasi, et al, 2014). In the quest to achieve long-lasting relationships with internal and external stakeholders the focus advances from the product to that of the corporation (Hatch and Schultz, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010; Merrilees and Miller, 2008; Xie and Bogs, 2006; Makasi, et al, 2014). In taking centre stage, the corporation can no longer hide behind product actors; instead, as the lead actor, it must consistently deliver the brand promise to each stakeholder. Thus, as the audience for the brand reaches beyond the consumer (King, 1991; Knox and

Bickerton, 2003), top management must develop and preside over a strong strategic corporate brand perspective (Hatch and Schultz, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010; Merrilees and Miller, 2008; Makasi, et al, 2014).

Corporate rebranding decisions aim to add value to the firm, by sending a positive sign to stakeholders, the success and economic rationale of these decisions may be judged by identifying its impact on firm value, i.e., the impact on the firm's stock price. In fact, the market value of a firm's traded securities reflects an unbiased estimate of future cash flows (Simon and Sullivan, 1993). Ytreberg (2013), cited in Nyagadza, Chodeva and Vingirayi (2018), also adds on saying that rebranding constitutes the basics for the company communications with its publics and creating awareness and building a good image of the organization so as to keep the customers close to the organization. It is the only way an organization can communicate its uniqueness from other players in the same business and make the customers see, understand and believe in the differences putting the company first before the competitors, (Dally and Moloney, 2013; Nyagadza et al, 2018).

To develop a theoretically sound and practically relevant process theory of corporate rebranding, the research questions presented earlier should be answered. The following is organized around these questions. The types of corporate re-branding may occur in different levels in organizations; corporate, business unit, or product level (Muzellec and Lambkin, 2006). Product re-branding is a widely studied area in the marketing discipline, but corporate re-branding is quite a new phenomenon in an academic context. This study concentrates on corporate re-branding only. The literature gives a variety of definitions of what corporate re-branding is and what issues are included in it.

The associations to build and maintain are two of the most important issues in building brand equity (Rosenthal, 2003). Aaker (1996, 2001) explains that the goal of rebranding is to generate added sales levels and enhance firm performance. Continuous attention to the market growth is necessary once an institution decides to rebrand itself (Rosenthal, 2003). De Chernatony et al. (2010) state that "if a brand is to thrive over time it can be speculated that the values that form part of its identity would need regular subtle adjustments in order to synchronise continually with consumers' needs." Past studies suggest that name change does serve a signal of increased future profitability and investors' perception of a firm value in a positive way (Kilic and Dursun, 2006). Braun (1999) suggests that marketers could reshape consumer's experimental memories through messages. Thus, to change consumer memory, rebranding plays an important role in the reconstruction of a consumer memory. According to Harris and de Chernatony (2015), cited by Nyagadza, et al, (2018), stakeholders feel that core values of the brands have been lost after rebranding of the product or service, these

stakeholders will act or react negatively towards the brand. Using words or the visibles does not advantage a brand, (according to Teh and Salleh, 2011; Nyagadza et al, 2018), but rather using rebranding as a strategy by changing some parts of the internal organization is of utmost importance and will help the organization in getting back the lost piece of gold thus establishing a new image through satisfying the customers in the mind.

METHODOLOGY

An exploratory research design was used. The explorative research design was complimented with the use of secondary data on corporate re-branding strategies employed by telecommunication industry players. Interviews were done with all players to examine the impact of corporate re-branding on brand performance. Documentary analysis of different players' reports helped put the researcher in a picture of the extent of corporate re-branding impact on performance. The study subject also had a number of aspects that needed to be explored hence consequently making the research predominantly exploratory. Exploratory research design assisted in eliminating uncertainty and ignorance at a lower cost. It enabled the planning and designing of instruments to gather the data.

The staff at the head office of the selected telecoms company were used as the target population, and these in total were approximately 130. Descriptive research subsequently took into account the gathering of both subjective and quantitative information, in this way, some factual systems were utilized to abridge the data. This gave direction to the researcher by including more points of interest to the exploration questions. Questionnaires and unguided interviews were therefore used to gather information. The researchers used both primary and secondary data sources of information. There is a population of 744 Telecommunication staff and the sample size was 248 the researcher therefore used those stationed at Head offices. The target population consisted of Managing Director (1), Divisional Units Directors (7), Divisional Units Directors (8), Middle level Management (12), Supervisors (16), and employees (70), leading to a total of 114. Using the Krecije & Morgan Sample size determination Technique (1970), the total sample reached 91. The researchers used both primary and secondary data sources of information. Convenience sampling was used by the researchers because it was convenient for the researchers to visit the Head Offices because of costs and time.

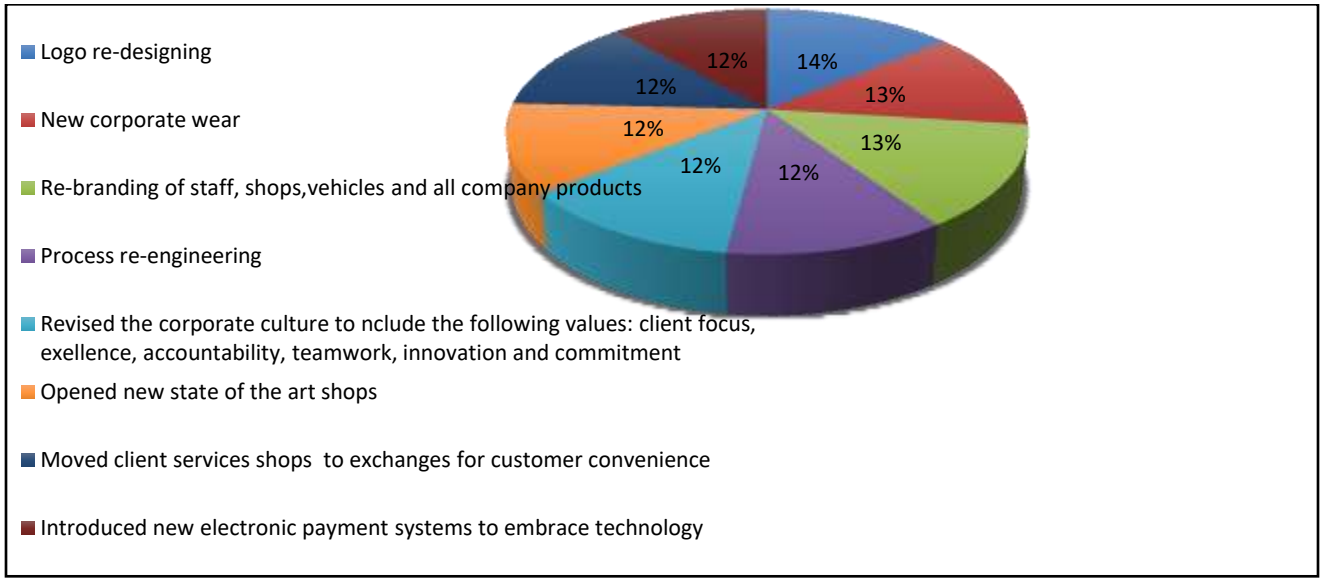
The research instruments used for data collection in this study were interviews and questionnaires. Questions were both open ended and closed ended. In order to ensure validity and reliability of data collection tools the researchers used the triangular concept (Saunders et al, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire with two sections was administered to staff, one section for the general staff and another for management, totalling 91. Out of these 91, only 84 were returned. 92.0 % is an above average response which is favourable to analysing the sampled population in order to get the best results. The response rate is high enough to warrant validity of the study findings. There were 54.0% female respondents and 46.0% male respondents. This indicates that the responses were biased towards female members of the telecom firms, revealing that posts in telecommunication sector are skewed in favour of females. The occupational status of the respondents, 59 respondents were non-managerial, 8 were in the supervisory category and 17 were in the managerial level. 58% of the respondents had their highest qualification being Degrees and above followed by 41.0% with Diplomas. With regards to the number of years the customers had spent with their respective service provider, the majority, constituting 52% had spent 9 years and above with the company. Those customers who had spent 3 years and below seconded, with a frequency of 25%. The least frequency was those who had spent more than 6 to 8 years with their service provider, who were 6%.

The management respondents were asked to identify the corporate re-branding strategies that the company was implementing to compete in the sector.

Figure 1: Corporate re-branding strategies employed by the company



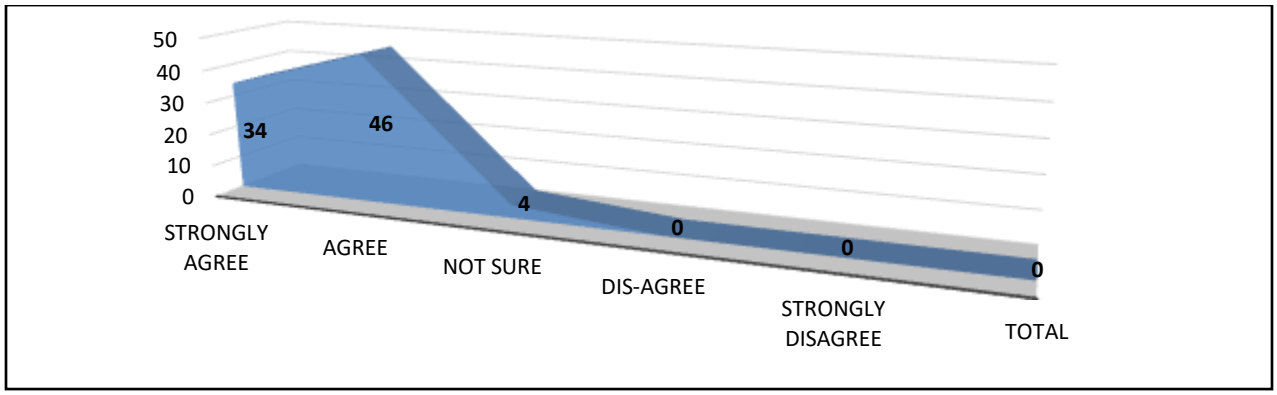
The figure above shows strategies employed by the company as stated by management respondents such as logo re-designing 12%, New corporate wear 13%, Re-branding of staff, shops, vehicles and all company products 13%, Process re-engineering 12%, Revised the

corporate culture to include the following values: client focus, excellence, accountability, teamwork, innovation and commitment 12%, opened new state of the art shops 12%, moved client services shops to exchanges for customer convenience and introduced new electronic payment systems to embrace technology 12%. The rebranding strategies employed are supported by (Schultz and Hatch, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010) who said a well-conceived, solid, strong corporate branding strategy provides management with a holistic framework to integrate the firm's activities, its vision and mission, it allows the firm to express its distinctiveness, that is, to differentiate itself in the relationship with stakeholders and represents an opportunity to increase the future incomes of the firm.

Brand familiarity: The respondents were asked to rate the statement "Most people are familiar with company's logo, colours" by agreeing or disagreeing to it. There is an indication that a combined 90% agreed and strongly agreed to the statement that most people are now familiar with the company's logo and colours. This is supported by (Aaker, 1996:10) who defined Brand awareness as the strength of a brand's presence in the consumer's mind. It is a measure of the percentage of the target market that is aware of a brand name. Marketers can create awareness among their target audience through repetitive advertising and publicity (Strydom, and Jooste, 2009). Brand awareness can provide a host of competitive advantages for the marketer. It provides the brand with a sense of familiarity.

The respondents were asked to rate the statement "Logo redesigning has changed the customer perception of the company positively" by agreeing or disagreeing to it. The highest number of respondents agreed with the statement that logo redesigning impacted positively on the customer perception which then validates and makes the statement by Einweller & Will (2002) that visual identity in the form of logos and colours has an impact on identity and customers use it as a guarantee of quality when they see that symbol on the company's products reliable.

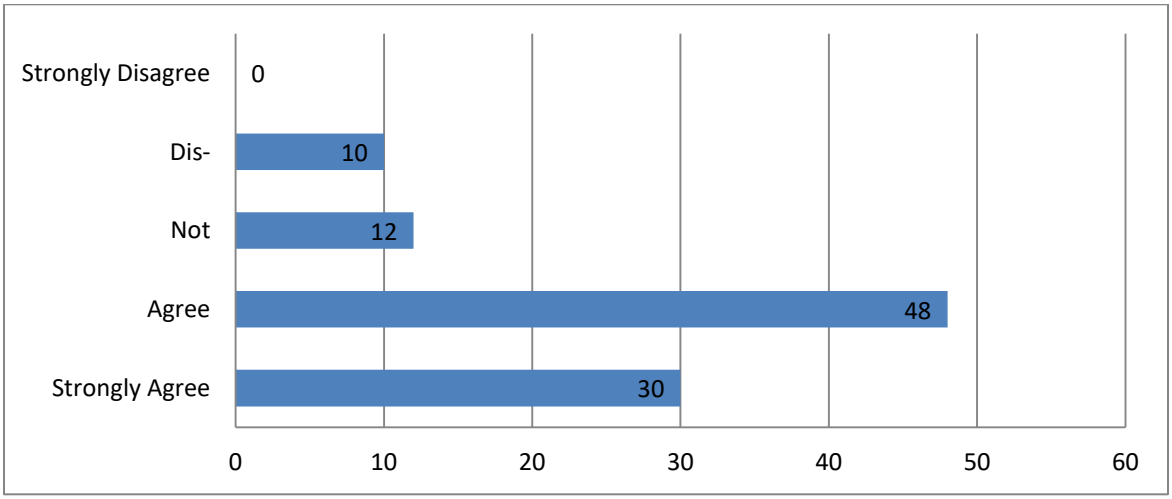
Figure 2: Response on Corporate Image Review and Brand Performance.



With a view to determine how corporate identity image positively impacts on brand performance, the respondents were asked to rate the statement "Corporate identity image review positively impacts on brand performance." From the above, it can be seen that the majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, this validates statements by authors like Aaker (1991), says image creates value in a variety of ways, helping consumers to process information, differentiating the brand, generating reasons to buy, giving positive feelings, and providing a basis for extensions. However, there is still a lack of agreement about the definition of brand image (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). Keller's (1993), cited in Hoeffler and Keller (2002) definition, although it has not, to the authors knowledge, been tested yet, seems to be a major contribution in this domain.

With a view to determine how staff retraining as a rebranding strategy impacted on the brand performance of the company, respondents were asked to rate the statement "Staff retraining impacted positively on the brand performance of the company" by either agreeing or disagreeing with it, the diagram depicts the results, one can see that 53% and 36% of the respondents respectively agreed and strongly agreed to the statement that staff retraining impacted positively on the brand performance of the company.

Figure 3: Response on Staff Rebranding and Employee Culture

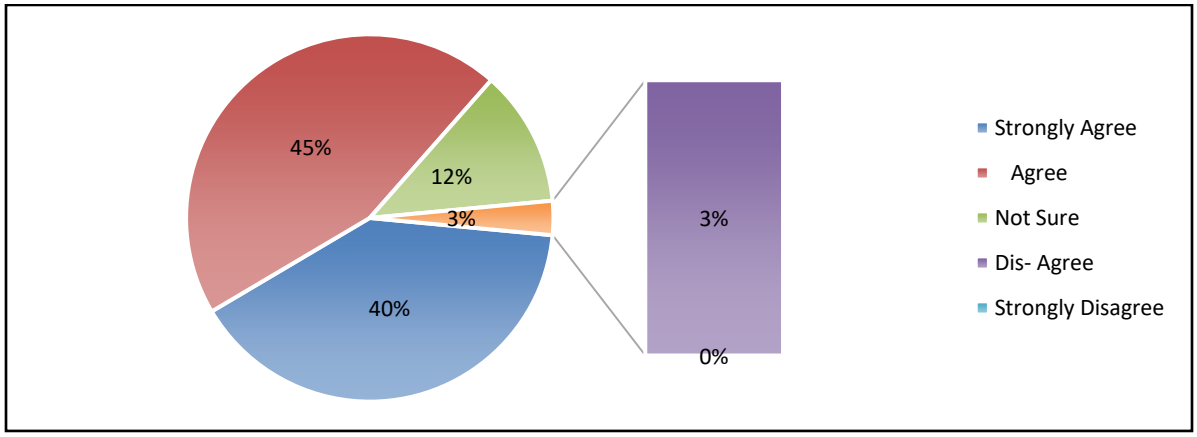


With a view to assess the effect of staff rebranding on employee culture, the respondents were asked to rate the statement "Staff rebranding affected the employee culture positively." The figure above shows the findings. 48% agreed to the statement that staff rebranding affected the employee culture positively whilst 30% strongly agreed. However an average of 30% respondents made the following comments: Staff rebranding may have evolved but protocols

and bottlenecks systems still prevail, decision making process and executions still require a major paradigm shift and staff rebranding brought credibility amongst clients and staff. The findings are in line with (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003a, 2003b, 2006, 2007) who stated that in many service organisations, much of the frontline employees' work has been routinized or dehumanized and one will find in many cases the employees are unhappy with the organisation.

Process redefining is one element done by the company as part of its corporate rebranding strategy**.** Respondents were asked to rate the strategy by agreeing or disagreeing with the statements as follows.

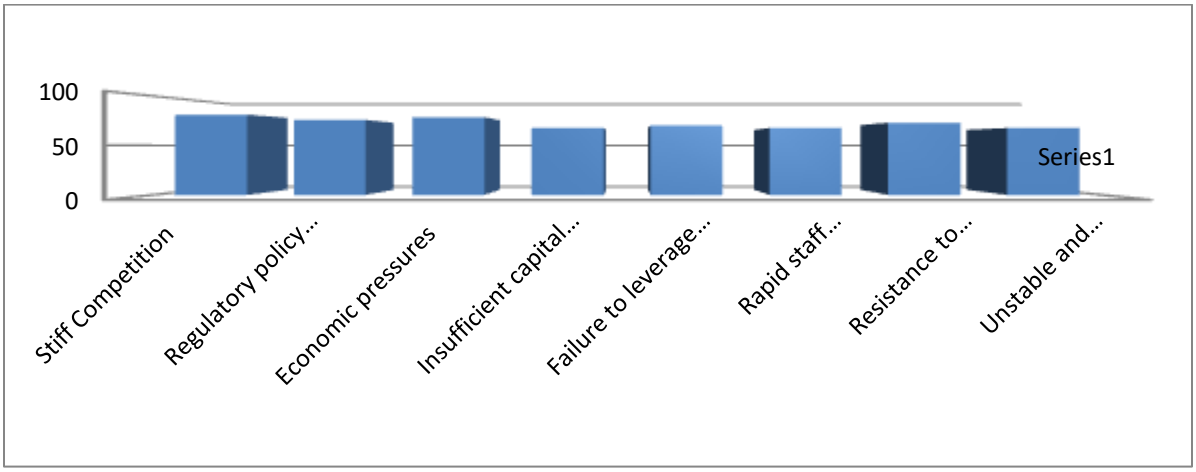
Figure 4: Process and Service Delivery



With the view to assess the impact of process redefining to service delivery system of the company, respondents were asked to rate the statement “Process redefining positively affected the service delivery system of the company by agreeing or disagreeing with it, the findings were as per figure above: 45% agreed to the statement that process re-engineering positively affected service delivery whilst 40% agreed with it. A total of 85% agreed that process redefining impacts positively on service delivery hence the strategy implemented was worth. In the early 1990’s, Michael Hammer and James Champy, in his book “Reengineering the Corporation”, that states that in some cases, radical redesign and reorganization within a company is the only way to reduce costs and improve service quality. Furthermore, information technology is the key element for allowing this to happen.

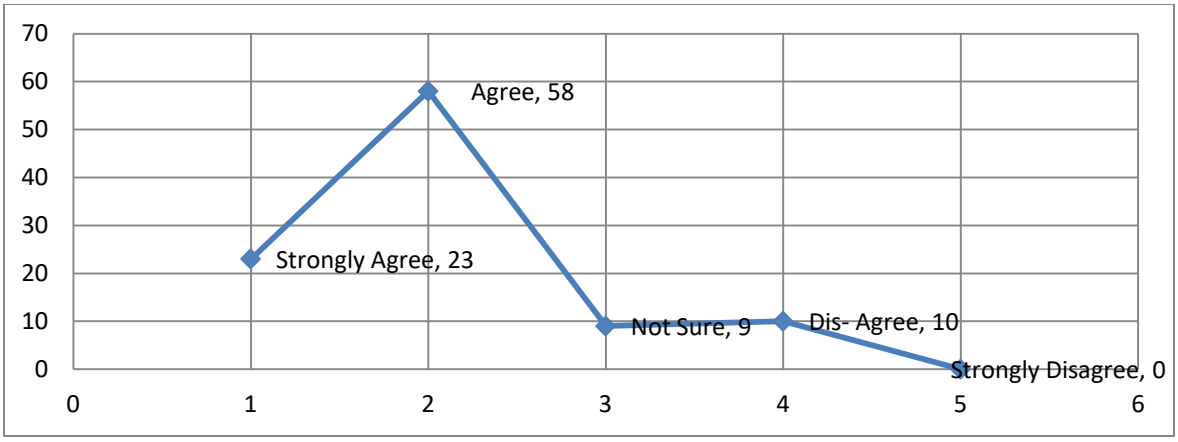
The respondents were asked to state the challenges faced by telecoms company in implementing the corporate re-branding strategies, above 70% of the respondents cited the above challenges represented on the figure below. Philips Kotler in Kellogs on Branding (2015) agreed with the respondents that corporate rebranding is not just about giving a name or attractive logo or slogan. It is one of the most challenging task manager’s face.

Figure 5: Response on Challenges Faced



These challenges are also known as "three C's of Branding". Every organisation or managers faces these challenges: Cash, Consistency and Clutter. Consumers are bombarded every day by hundreds and sometimes thousands of advertisements and promotions. Breaking through this cluttered environment is exceptionally difficult. It is hard to get anyone to pay attention to your brand, and harder still to form meaningful associations. However, to stand out a brand needs to be focused and unique; great brands means something unique in consumers' minds. Having a clear positioning is a great beginning, but not sufficient. Brands needs to create attention by creative advertising and innovative use of media.

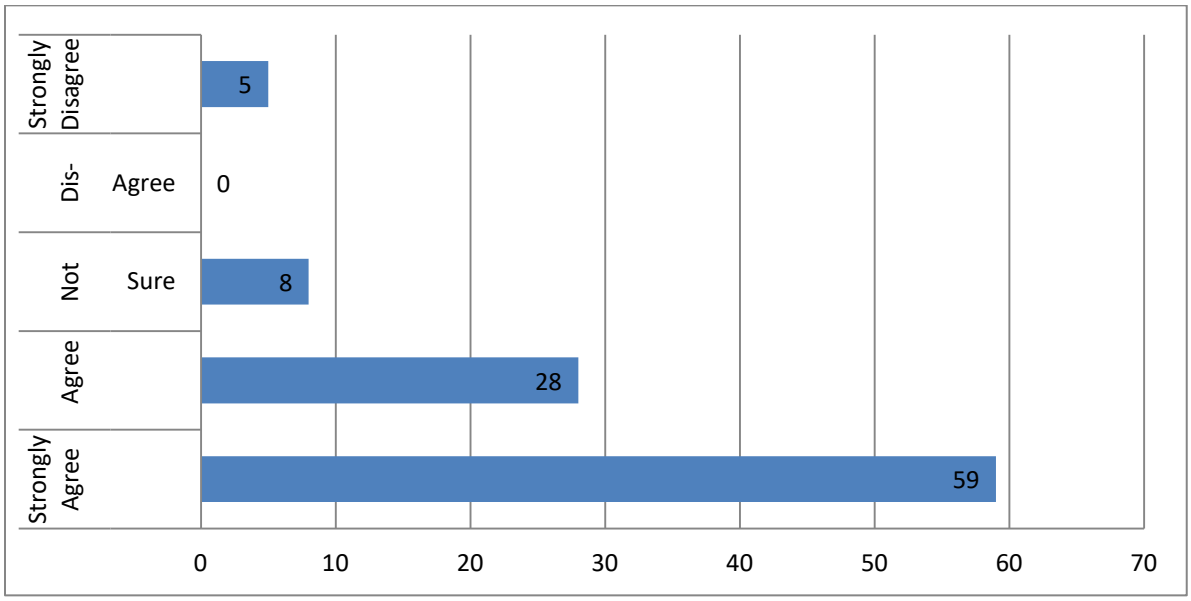
Figure 6: Response on Lean Management and Service Delivery



With a view to assess the impact of Lean management on service delivery as a rebranding strategy being implemented by the company, the respondents were asked to rate the statement "Lean management being implemented by the company positively affects the service delivery

system in the company by agreeing or disagreeing to it, the findings were as above; From figure above, the majority of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed to the statement that lean management impacted positively on the service delivery. The minority were either not sure or disagreed. Business Process Re-engineering has been formally defined by Hammer and Champy (1993) as the 'fundamental re-thinking and radical redesign of business processes to achieve dramatic improvements in critical, contemporary measures of performance, such as cost, quality, service and speed". Lean is the elimination of waste in all its forms.

Figure 7: Response on Embracing New Technology



Respondents were asked to rate the statement the company has embraced new technology in its business, with a view to assess if it had embraced new Technology as stated on its new corporate culture, the findings were as per figure above. A combined 87% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that the company has embraced new technology in its business, this supports and validates the company new corporate culture. Embracing Technology is not just about getting ahead, it is about keeping up as a business, if you want to stay up to speed or get ahead of their competitors, one needs to be clued in on the technology stakes.

CONCLUSION

With a view to ascertaining the major corporate rebranding strategies used by the company, from the major strategies commonly used, it came out from the analysis that the major rebranding strategies used were Logo re-designing, New corporate wear, Re-branding of staff,

shops, vehicles and all company products, Process re-engineering, Revised the corporate culture to include the following values: client focus, excellence, accountability, teamwork, innovation and commitment, new state of the art shops, Moved client services shops to exchanges for customer convenience and introduced new electronic payment systems to embrace technology. Adopting the definition proposed by Muzellec and Lambkin (2006), rebranding concurs to the creation of a new brand element aiming to create a new image or position in the mind of stakeholders. A good and strong corporate image can have a positive impact on workers, managers, investors, and customers' evaluations. On the other hand, rebranding is a strategy involving high risks, since strong brands take years to be successfully built in order to provide higher profit margins, loyal customer bases and a continuous stream of revenue for the firm representing the brand (Aaker, 1994, 2004, 2011; Keller, 2003, 2007). From the study, this strategy was seen to have been implemented by the telecommunications company under study. From the results, it can be concluded that a well-conceived, solid, strong corporate branding strategy provides management with a holistic framework to integrate the firm's activities, its vision and mission, it allows the firm to express its distinctiveness, that is, to differentiate itself in the relationship with stakeholders and represents an opportunity to increase the future incomes of the firm.

The second research objective sought to assess the effect of corporate rebranding strategies done on the brand performance of the company. The findings indicate that most of the corporate rebranding strategies implemented impacted positively on the brand performance of the company. This finding confirms the findings by O'Cass and Peticoch (2005) that the marketing activities and sales have significant effect on business activities, hence, the motive of profit. Seggie (2006) also suggests that marketing activities and sales force performance appears to be slightly stronger driver of rebranding and business performance in marketing activities. From the above findings, we can conclude that corporate rebranding strategies employed by the company positively affected the brand performance of the organisation as agreed with Seggie (2006) who suggested that marketing activities and sales force performance appears to be slightly stronger driver of rebranding and business performance in marketing activities.

The third research objective was to identify the challenges faced by the company in implementing the corporate rebranding strategies. The challenges stated of are also known as three C's of Branding, which are cash, consistency and clutter, every organisation or managers faces these challenges. The findings were supported by Kotler (1991), who reiterated that corporate rebranding is not just about giving a name or attractive logo or slogan. It is one of the most challenging task managers' face. It can be concluded that corporate rebranding challenges

faced by most organisations are familiar such as overcoming the past, resistance to change, lack of buy in by staff and confused messaging. Management must find ways to overcome these challenges as reiterated by Red lounge agency in their article such as maintaining crucial elements of the previous brand, communicating proactively, involving the employees in the early stages, getting the timing right and working with professionals.

There were some restrictions in this study that may decrease the credibility and generalizability of the findings. These include theoretical limitations in the area of Branding, could have restricted the generalization of the findings as reflected in the framework and definitions. Methodological limitations were influenced by the all elements that meet certain criteria for inclusion in study, which could not yield sufficient results. And also may result from an unrepresentative sample and the research design might have affected the research.

It is recommended that company should consider upgrading their rebranding strategies in order to satisfy change in consumer taste and preferences. It is recommended that company improve on service provision and fault clearance turnaround times to retain clients who are switching to competitors. The company needs to be pro-active in new areas that are developing as there is lack of speed in project execution. Wide publicity of rebranding exercise is recommended to create greater awareness among major stakeholders and targeted group of people in rebranding exercise. On its own, employees of the company should be trained and encouraged to participate in the rebranding process to facilitate the success of a particular rebranding process. This is mainly done to counter the problem of information asymmetry among the customers. Efforts towards brand building should be geared towards making the network of the company stand for something in the consumer's mind and divert money towards building quality network that offers high internet broadband with low cost so as to generate a unique selling point. Repeated study on corporate rebranding within the organization while the rebranding is taking place will also give a better view or picture of the impact. This study is only limited to the company and hence future study should advance it to the Telecommunication sector. It was difficult to explore all areas concerning corporate rebranding and to investigate the impact of rebranding on brand performance. However, researches such as this one have the benefit of updating knowledge of practice, identifying gaps between theory and practice, and thus suggesting areas for future research that might bridge those gaps,for future study, researchers have a direct topic in order to have an in depth study.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The corresponding author (Brighton Nyagadza) participated extensively in the Research Design, and drafting of the final article, save for the conception of the Study Area, Literature Review (Hilda Musingarimi) and Data Analysis, and Interpretation which was done by the other author (Ishumael Vingirayi).

COMPETING INTERESTS

One way or the other there might be some interference on how the results were presented, due to the fact that the authors had some experiences with the organisations involved in the study.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researchers conducted the research in a professional manner throughout. Statistical analysis and computations were made to avoid research bias. Apparently, the study ensured that there was no research bias through interpreting the results as presented. We assured the participants that their identities would not be revealed to the reader (Dumbu, 2014; Nyagadza, Chodeva and Vingirayi, 2018), by not allowing them to sign or write their names on the questionnaires and raw data collected would not be released to any third party. Moreso the researchers did not put participants in a situation where they were exposed to risk of harm after they have expressed their views concerning. The principle of voluntary participation was taken into consideration, thus participants were not be coerced into participating in research.

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