

Advertising Strategies and Tactics Applied by the Flea Market Traders to Alleviate Poverty in Zimbabwe. Case of Mupedzanhamo (Harare) and Global Flea Market (Gweru)

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Abstract

The once city council mandated flea markets later linked to Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) by the Zimbabwean government to lobby for the sustenance of the then poor informal traders, have become booming business in Zimbabwe due to advertising strategies and tactics applied by the small scale traders in Zimbabwe's urban centres such as Harare and Gweru in particular. Despite facing challenges such as arrests and demolition of their sites by law enforcement agents and the city council police, these traders managed to pressurise local city authorities who later introduced an orderly way of trading by constructing vending bays. Instead of spreading their wares in the open to advertise them, the vendors and flea market owners resorted to advertising tactics such as posters, newspapers, bill boards, disco music, and town crying. Goods brought into Zimbabwe by cross border traders earmarked for flea markets business now fill urban centres' flea markets. Customers with different tastes for the goods on offer flood the flea markets as a result. Ironically, the once poor illegal flea market traders have become rich landlords, commuter omnibus owners and shop owners who now move around in the city driving latest vehicles. It is from this background that researchers looked for advertising tactics and strategies that enabled the once poor illegal small scale traders to woo customers who throng their flea market bays to buy all sorts of foreign goods on offer. The key research methods used include onlooker observation, surveys, interviews, critical discourse analysis and hermeneutics of interpretation. The research found out that although the once poor flea market owners now rich landlords and business people started as small scale traders, city council and government's interventions to formalize and legalize flea markets resulted in booming business as advertising strategies and tactics were applied. The research also found out that flea market business is no longer a prerogative for the poor urbanites because even the rich business people have also joined to own and even rent markets as this has become lucrative business. It was clear from the finding of this research that poverty, deprivation and vulnerability have become a thing of the past since flea markets have become sources of poverty alleviation in Zimbabwe's urban areas changing the illegal small scale traders' status from rags to riches. The researchers concluded that Zimbabwe is likely to be a flea market economy than a manufacturing economy. The researchers recommend that the Government should give full support to the flea market economy as it contributes 50% of private centre employment. The Government needs to open up to foreign investors to revive the ailing economy.

Keywords: Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs), advertising strategies, flea markets, poverty alleviation.

1.0 Introduction

The introduction of flea markets by City Council authorities later taken by Zimbabwean Government as a poverty alleviation drive to sustain the poor urban dwellers' livelihood through selling local and foreign goods, has become booming business in Zimbabwe's urban centres and peri – urban areas. This has been largely due to strategies applied by flea market owners in a bid to lure customers. Having been started as merely informal trading ventures catering for unregistered traders, the now popular flea markets have been incorporated into small to medium enterprises (SME's) to become registered formal trading enterprises.

Flea market owners are now formally registered and allocated bays and stands to conduct their businesses without the interference of law enforcement agents from city councils and the Government. These fleas markets display an assortment of goods ordered from such countries as China, Dubai, Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya, South Africa and Botswana. Besides the above, second hand clothes packed in large bales commonly known as "mabhero" are ordered direct from Mozambique and are a common sight at these flea markets. Apart from trading in clothes, the flea market vendors also sell hardware, electric gadgets from South Africa and Botswana.

Although flea markets started solely as a venture for the poverty stricken urbanities, the rich and famous have also joined in by trading the same goods sold by most flea markets owners. As a result its of no surprise to find flea markets owners owning stands, houses, properties and driving latest vehicles. The commonly used strategies to woo customers include; displaying merchandise, music, town crying, posters, billboards, flyers and newspapers. Therefore poverty, deprivation and vulnerability has become a thing of the past because the flea markets have become sources of poverty alleviation in Zimbabwe's urban areas and growth

points, drastically changing the status of the once illegal small scale traders from rags to riches.

1.2 Background

The birth of new independent Zimbabwe brought with it an array of economic challenges. The colonial era left an unbalanced economy characterized by a pathetic undeveloped rural economy based at 80% of the population. With such a huge population rural, it meant that these people relied on subsistence agriculture which could not sustain an economy affected by a devastating war. The industries in urban centres were not spared as investors left the country unsure of the new black majority Government. The country experienced an upsurge of rural to urban migration in search of employment. The estimated urbanization rate was 4,6% per annum (UN habitat, 2008). Poverty and deprivation was at its peak due to the aftermath of a 30 year war of liberation.

Faced with such a dilemma, the government embarked on a number of desperate measures to try and rescue the sinking country. The adoption of a socialist ideology at independence saw the introduction of the much popularized cooperatives as a poverty alleviation drive. The strategy was meant to create employment, self reliance and livelihood. However the programmes were short lived as the Government could not provide the inputs and training required and knowledge needs of their target audiences. In 1991 the Government introduced the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) to boost trade and production reducing spending on health, education and development. The economic policy was urban biased leaving out the majority of people in the informal sector and rural areas. ESAP that was brought as a remedy to the ailing economy did not reduce poverty and unemployment in the economic sector leading to retrenchments to thousands of formal employees.

The Zimbabwean populace became disillusioned and led to the rise of pressure groups and opposition political parties that promised food on their tables. Coincidentally political parties such as MDC emerged as stronger political contenders in 1999. To redress the economic challenges facing the Zimbabwean population, the Government initiated the formation of the Ministry of Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) which heralded current informal sectors which include flea markets, cross border traders, corner vendors, cottage tailors, backyard chicken producers and other informal sources of livelihood. This is a recognition worldwide that SMEs are an engine for economic growth (RBZ:2007). Mloyi (2013) posit that “SMEs represent 95% of enterprises that generate 50% of the private sector employment.” This mindset saw the ministry of SMEs taking the initiative to create an enabling environment that promotes entrepreneurship from micro, small and medium enterprises.

The entrepreneurship drive started in a haphazard manner mainly initiated by the poor and low income earners who wanted to supplement their incomes. Mainly in the urban centres, informal vendors were scattered everywhere in places such as railway lines, pavements, terminuses and shop verandas. However these illegal vendors suffered from the ruthless state police and municipality police officers who confiscated their wares for illegal trading. The corrupt law enforcement agents demanded heavy fines that were far beyond the reach of these poverty stricken vendors. The plight of the vendors was further aggravated by Operation Murambatsvina 2006 (Operation Clean up / Operation Restore Order) that targeted illegal structures including undesignated trading areas. More than 700 000 people were affected and these were mostly informal traders.

The hyperinflation coupled with severe drought saw the ministry of SMEs lobbying for the sustenance of informal trading. The cross border trader association led by Killer Zivhu the president pressured the Government to formalize informal trading. Local authorities were pressured to recognize them. In 2005 vending bays were constructed around Kudzanayi Bus Terminus in Gweru. The goods were mainly second hand clothes imported in bales from Mozambique, Zambia, Tanzania and Dubai. The operators were mainly the poor urbanites and the local council authorities took it as a poverty alleviation programme. However the political and economic crisis persistent continue to have a negative impact on the manufacturing sector still shedding jobs and unemployment estimated at 75 percent. Kumbirai Katsande president of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI) in a newspaper report bemoans that Zimbabwe has become a “nation of traders” (Daily News, 16 April, 2013). Killer Zivhu, president of the Zimbabwe Cross Boarder Association in the same article concurs that, Zimbabwe continue to live off the proceeds of informal trade. The Cross Border traders continue to import goods for resale from South Africa, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Britain. The common imported goods range from clothes, electric gadgets, jewellery, cosmetics, car parts, under garments and other marketable items. These imports are a common sight in designated and undesignated sites. Killer Zivhu bemoans that many of these informal traders are not recognized legally and face harassment and arrest by local authorities and the police (Daily News, April 16, 2013).

Informal trading is no longer limited to low income earners. The disposable incomes among most workers are strained hence flea markets know no class status. In a survey conducted by the Daily News reported that the Harare City Centre has its fair share of side walk sales people and flea markets. Killer Zivhu reports that up to three quarters of adult Zimbabweans were involved in some form of trade. This is evidenced by an upsurge of flea markets dotted all over the cities, growth points and all strategic parts of the country. From humble beginnings, flea market entrepreneurs have grown to an extent that they are now better positioned in

society. The rich and poor have joined the great trek to become flea market entrepreneurs. Controversial as they maybe, flea markets in Zimbabwe are a source of poverty alleviation and source of income generation. Many of these flea markets own big names such as Mupedzanhamo (Harare), Global flea market (Gweru) among others.

In view of the contributions that informal trading give to the economy the research aims to identify the advertising strategies and tactics used by these entrepreneurs to lure customers, establish customer relationships and customer loyalty. The research also aims to make a critical analysis of the challenges that flea market entrepreneurs face in their endeavour to sustain their livelihoods and economic growth.

2.0 Literature review

Rahul (2002) and Ponson (2003) quoted by Lambin et al (2012) posit that the challenge for the 21st century is to deal with the world poverty issue. Poverty and deprivation is very common in both under developed and developed nations. This global phenomenon has seen countries taking strides to alleviate this poverty bug. Entrepreneurship in particular has been used as a powerful means to reduce poverty. This creative mind has manifested itself in many small to medium enterprises that have dominated global economies. Mloyi (2011) defines SMEs to include the corner vendor, the village cobbler, cottage tailor, growth point grocer shop, backyard chicken producers, second hand clothes stall and any other business that feel small. These small ventures have created a source of poverty alleviation and livelihood.

Informal trading in the form of flea markets has engulfed most of the urban centres and rural growth points. Running flea markets has proved affordable to both the unemployed and employed. Martin (2009) states that a person might think that in today's economic recession, it is difficult to find a job, the truth is there is one business that a person can still engage in even in these times of global financial crisis. He applauds that flea market vending does not require a high educational background, if a person is good at persuading people to buy, and charisma, the flea market will be successful too. Positive engagement and involvement has seen many flea markets assuming popular names such as Mupedzanhamo (Harare) and Global Flea Market (Gweru) among other famous names. This popularity did not come overnight, but a lot of advertising and marketing strategies were used to build such names in the minds of Zimbabwean customers.

2.1 Advertising and marketing strategies

Entrepreneurship comes with a lot of innovation, imagination, experimentation and creativity. Enterprising informal traders have developed breakthrough strategies and tactics to get people's attention and influence their buying decisions. Among the marketing and advertising strategies used are flyers, town crying, posters, press, bill boards, discos and viral marketing. Traditionally advertisers in the USA spent billions of dollars per year in commercial messages. Baran (2011) notes that Babylonian merchants in Greece were hiring barkers or town criers to shout out goods and prices at passers by in 3000BC. This is very common across many of the flea markets in Zimbabwe particularly those who sell second hand clothes imported from Mozambique, Zambia, South Africa and Tanzania. Creamer (2007) quoted by Baran (2010) posits that advertising supports the economic system without which new products cannot be introduced and developments in others cannot be announced. Competitive advertising and marketing of goods new and old foster economic growth and create employment for many people. Town crying is absorbing a lot of people from the streets mainly street kids, rank marshals and school dropouts. These have found a source of livelihood thus reducing unemployment. The press also plays a major role to market and advertise flea market wares to all consumers including the elite who might shun word of mouth advertising or visiting flea market bays. Local newspapers such as Gweru Times and Harare Metro are used to market electric gadgets and imported spare parts.

Apart from using media as an important tool for advertising and marketing, flea market vendors acknowledge that the customer is at the heart of the marketing process. Without the customer, business is doomed. Baran (2010) adds that marketing and advertising must attract attention, create interest, stimulate desire and promote action. With the construction of formal structures by the local authorities and private developers, vendors continue to uplift their businesses to greater heights. Wolfe (2011) has suggested what he calls twelve (12) important tips for becoming a successful flea market vendor.

- Attractive display – colourful displays are a common site at most of the flea market shelves. Goods are no longer thrown everywhere but properly arranged. For example clothes are put on hangers under shades for weekend road show selling, other gadgets are shelved and jewellery displayed in glass displays. Eye catching merchandise clean and organized act as advertising and marketing strategies.
- Seller's personality – the person's personality can scare or lure customers. Most vendors possess people skills that create dialogue and one on one conversation. Usually discounts and better prices are offered in this customer responsive culture. This has become the most important advertising strategy.
- Be nice – being friendly and cheerful is critical. Wolfe (2011) says “engage customers in

conversations on subjects that have nothing to do with merchandise.” It is common to hear people talk about the weather and politics in general.

- Change your display – Due to the competitive nature of this business merchandisers are moved around to market and advertise goods. Usually the selling space is small and changing things up cannot be avoided.
- Knowing what your customers want – understanding the challenges affecting the economy and closure of vital industries, flea market vendors have closed in the gap to supply all items ranging from clothes, edibles, spare parts, footwear, electric gadgets, building materials, to mention a few. Vendors skillfully market and advertise their wares through posters, flyers and town crying. The once vibrant Zimbabwean economy has now been converted to a flea market economy. The agricultural production was negatively affected by the land reform, limited resources, poor weather patterns, therefore fresh vegetables, fruits are associated with flea marketing.
- Price reasonably – Due to the similarity of the goods sold at the flea market, price is a competitive strategy used. Flea market prices cater for every customer from the poor to the rich. The common slogan is “dollar for two” which means that customers can buy two items from US dollar. This then makes life affordable to many.
- Watch other successful vendors - Business growth is learning from what others have done and are doing. Successful business ideas come from watching, emulating, copying and benchmarking on other successful techniques used by fellow vendors.
- Know your staff - The best strategy to survive in the highly competitive business is to find a good product and become an expert. Having a line of business makes the vendor create customer loyalty and repeat purchase. Entrepreneurship is all about creating a brand for yourself. Sticking to what you know best (stick to the knitting) improves innovation and creativity thus growing the business. For example, if you want second hand clothes, you go to Mupedzanhamo flea market in Harare. Viral marketing becomes the tactic for advertising and marketing second hand clothes. Apart from viral marketing, town criers are employed to use persuasive advertising to create liking, preference, conviction and purchase of products. Flea markets are developing into sectors of employment.
- Flea markets are strategically positioned which is a very important marketing tactic. In the urban centres, flea markets especially those that sell edibles are located near supermarkets such as OK, TM, Spar and other shopping malls. The price mark up are so competitive that customers would then prefer to buy green vegetables outside the shop. Bus terminuses, pavements, city centres are a major attraction for vending. In rural areas, growth points, tuck shops and boarding schools are important markets for vendors.

2.2 Types of Flea Markets

Mloyi (2011) sees an entrepreneur to include corner vendor, village cobbler, growth point grocer shop, backyard chicken producer, cottage tailor and any other business that feel small. Indeed flea marketing in Zimbabwe is a mixed bag. The following activities characterize flea marketing in Zimbabwe;

- Full time salesmen - Vending has become a form of formal employment and most people wake up every morning to go to their flea market places. Their schedules start at 4:30am when they commute to the urban centres to start their day. Those who use open spaces need to unpack their wares for the day from some rented storerooms in the nearby buildings. Those who can not afford storeroom rentals have deployed night watchmen to provide security especially goods like fresh vegetables and fruits that need careful handling. The major challenge is that some items go missing in the process. With structured flea market places like global flea market (Gweru) private developers provide 24/7 security. However those manned by the local authorities like Mupedzanhamo are expected to provide own security measures. Flea market vendors default in the payment of rentals hence can not be provided with security. Full time flea markets include those who sell edibles, empty plastic buckets, bicycle spare parts, footwear, second hand clothes, fabrics, blankets, electric gadgets, jewellerys, facial creams and just to mention a few. The major challenges facing these full time vendors is that the allocated city council structures expose their goods to dust, sunlight, rain and overcrowding that leads to serious tear and wear. However those run by private people are well maintained but the rentals are far beyond many people. Global flea market rentals are pegged at US\$200 and this amount makes life impossible. Some goods are seasonal such as winter clothes and blankets and this means that they would not afford to pay rentals out of season resulting in eviction from the bays.
- Weekend road show flea markets - These markets are very popular among the working class and the affluent. Various people from all walks of life bring wares for sale over the weekend to take advantages of people who come to town for weekend shopping. Taking advantage of huge crowds is a

good marketing strategy. Local authorities are realizing substantial revenue from road vending. In the city of Gweru alone, seven hundred (700) weekend vendors provide US\$33 000 per month to the municipality. This has become big business for the local authority. However the issue of sanitation is critical. The few toilets around are overwhelmed and the litter bins are not enough. People coming from rural areas come for weekend shopping as goods are cheaply priced. Food outlets also benefit from these huge crowds, leaving everyone happy.

- Car boot vendors - These mobile vendors are very common during weekends. These vendors sell their wares on roadsides. The goods commonly sold are farm fresh vegetables, clothes, footwear, live chickens and second hand books. These vendors are usually strategically positioned as they come to where customers are due to their mobility. They park their cars close to the entrances of supermarkets and shopping malls.

These types of flea markets are further categorized into three distinct classes. One category serves the affluent income groups particularly Sam Levy flea market in Borrowdale Harare, the middle class group such as Global flea market in Gweru and the lower income group such as Mupedzanhamo in Harare Hamadziripi (2009) posits Mupedzanhamo is very popular with the poor people in the whole of Zimbabwe.

2.3 Challenges facing flea markets in Zimbabwe

The origins of flea markets in Zimbabwe is associated with a desperate attempt by the Zimbabwean Government to alleviate poverty in the face of a collapsing economy. The birth of Independent Zimbabwe brought with it a lot of economic and political challenges that saw it adopt policies that had detrimental effects. The ESAP that the Government adopted meant reduction in Government expenditure resulting in huge retrenchments of both skilled and unskilled labour through downsizing of the civil service (ibid : 2009) The private sector was not spared, restructuring and closure of industries and commercial enterprises. Therefore, massive unemployment meant increase in informal trading. Informal trading had been the domain for women, but the collapse of the formal economy saw an influx of men in the once women dominated sector. Informal trading has brought gender balance in the economic growth. Flea market owners are undercapitalized and this is evidenced by the cheap quality goods which they can afford to buy. The Government is still being haunted by the ghost of poor economic and political decisions made decades ago. For example, the hyper inflation which was a result of political results such as war veteran cash out of Z\$50 000 in 1997, involvement in the DRC civil war, and “Fast Track” Land Reform Program 2000 (Hamadziripi 2009). These setbacks saw an increase in informal cross border trade with no Government support at all. More challenges continue to affect the operations of flea market vendors. For example, poor infrastructure and services. One vendor at Mupedzanhamo Harare who wanted to remain anonymous told researchers that a lot of political interference was present regarding who should occupy the stalls. She also indicated that exploitation was not a thing of the past since some scrupulous vendors were subletting stalls and charging high rentals.

The other critical challenge comes from prohibitive import and export regulations. In an effort to protect manufacturing industries in Zimbabwe, the Government had to put restrictive measures to stop the importation of groceries such as cooking oil, packed chicken, potatoes and many more to protect its industries. Even those that are to be imported, the quantities have been reduced and duty tax so exorbitant to discourage imports. The second hand clothes have not been spared, the former Minister of Finance, Tendai Biti was on record in one of the local print media, castigating the importation of undergarments. This did not go well with women vendors who called for his head. One vendor at Mupedzanhamo disclosed that second hand clothes bales often procured illicitly prejudicing the state the much needed duty tax.

The much publicized land reforms brought chaos into the agricultural sector affecting vegetable vendors. The resettled indigenous farmers lack proper skills in farming hence find it difficult to produce all year round crops. Those attempting to do so, do not have the inputs, machinery and skills to do so hence produce at a small scale below demand and supply. The fresh vegetable vendors travel long distances in search of those commodities and the transport constraints affect both the supplier and buyer. This is a very critical challenge as roads are in a deplorable state. Electricity power cuts and water supply shortage are a common challenge. Flea market vendors engaged in tailoring, carpentry, welding and those selling electric gadgets bemoan poor supplies as a major setback. Many cannot afford electricity.

Chibisa (2008) believes that Operation Murambatsvina (Operation Clean Up) was a drawback on flea markets. The researchers concur with the above authority, since it was common practice that many people could make their own makeshift structures to sell their wares. Due to shortages of designated formal structures vendors resorted to providing vending sharks alongside formal structures. One Harare City Council official lamented that overcrowding inside and outside the vending complex at Mupedzanhamo resulted in the generation of excess refuse. Municipalities sometimes fail to collect the refuse timeously thereby creating a health time bomb. Poor sanitation coupled by vandalism of toilet fittings, perimeter walls and garbage are common sites at all vending places. Local authorities are not doing much as they are also undercapitalized. Vending places are viewed as

breeding sites for lawless practices such as illegal drug trafficking, thieving and robbery. The state police and municipality police do not offer enough security and the vendors have established own networks to offer security to their wares. Be that as it may, the researchers feel that the benefits of vending outweigh the challenges vendors experience. Mupedziswa et al (1998) had this to say, “controversial as they maybe, flea markets are a source of livelihood,” hence an economic necessity.

3.0 Research methods used

The researchers used triangulation to test the hypothesis and assumptions. Data collection and analysis methods applied included interviews, surveys, semiotics, observations, discourse and textual analysis. Priest (1996) notes that semiotics is the study of signification, communication signs and symbols. Our paper centrally used semiotics since we wanted to find out how flea market owners’ advertising and marketing communication strategies were interpreted by customers so as to enhance mutual relationships between the sellers and buyers, for customer care, satisfaction and retention. In a bid to find out how the flea market owners strategized their business activities through advertising we also used textual analysis to find out how customers for different merchandises interpreted and in turn responded to messages used for advertising the goods on offer, through town crying by the barkers themselves, billboards, disco music, newspapers and exhibitions to create customer awareness through published and verbal manifestations. Berger (1998) notes that textual analysis is a way of learning something about people by examining and scrutinizing what they write and say, with regards to how it is discoursed. As a result, in this study, textual and discourse analysis were used to scrutinize spoken and written messages with regards to how flea market owners as entrepreneurs, enticed customers to buy their merchandise and in turn retain them. On the other hand, observations were applied on participatory and on – looker basis, so as to get first hand information. Interviews were conducted at the stalls and bays where merchandise was displayed and at times loudly advertised. We asked the flea market operators and those they employed to sell and advertise their goods to find out how, when and why they advertised their merchandise the way they did under such stiff competition from fellow advertisers selling similar and different goods at Global Flea Market in the city of Gweru and Mupedzanhamo in the capital city, Harare.

4.0 Research Results and Discussion

The research findings indicate that Global Flea Market in Gweru houses one hundred stalls run by a private developer, whose rentals are pegged at US\$200 per month. Mupedzanhamo run by the city council has 1518 stands which have a potential monthly revenue of US\$96 168,00. However, non payment of monthly charges makes the local authority subsidize the vendors. In Gweru CBD, the council owns plus five hundred stands along other private owned flea markets. A council official also indicated that seven hundred weekend vendors provide US\$33 000 per month revenue to the council. The research findings indicate that flea markets are popular and provide brisk business. The common goods include edibles, clothes, fabrics, beauty chemicals, CDs, footwear, second hand clothes, blankets, DVDs, radios, spare parts, traditional medicinal herbs, trinkets such as belts, watches and leather goods. The researchers found that flea market vending has become employment for both men and women. One of the interviewee Sibusisiwe Gauche who sells empty water buckets from paint companies in South Africa, said that on a good day, she takes US\$200 home and on back to school US\$700 per day. She was quick to point out that women are creative, innovative and entrepreneurial in their own right. These buckets are displayed outside the stalls as an advertising strategy. One vendor Tafara Zimusi who sells fabrics expressed that he was making a living out of his vending. The fabrics come from Indian shops in Harare Zimbabwe and does not incur huge cost of delivery. He is a proud owner of a house and on a good day gets US\$100. He believes customers are the best marketers and advertisers (viral Marketing). He orders a lot of plain white fabric mainly for the Apostolic sects. Pricing is a very crucial strategy to lure customers. However he bemoans lack of capital as banks demand collateral security to access bank loans. The ministry of Small to Medium Enterprise through its parastatal, Small Enterprise Development Corporation (SEDCO) does not get enough vote allocation. (10 provinces with 73 districts). Storage for their wares is a major challenge as they have to pack and unpack everyday in fear of thieves and have to pay huge rentals for storage. Farai was quick to point out that he was not deterred by these challenges as they created opportunity for growth to the approval of many of the interviewees who refused to be mentioned. Many demanded to be paid for release of research information. Political instability in the country makes people to be suspicious of any interview.

Vendors associated with selling radios, and televisions can be heard from afar. Disco music is used to advertise the goods and entertainment. One of the interviewees, Mr Bazangi said that at times customers demanded to buy things they see functioning hence owns a small generator to test the electric gadgets ranging from televisions, stoves, adaptors, DVDs, plugs, irons and radios. The vendors indicated that these were imported from South Africa and Botswana. The prices of these gadgets ranged from US\$15 to US\$150 for a solar panel. On a good day, Mr Bazangi would take home US\$300. Due to the delicate nature of the electric gadgets, vendors felt that their goods were exposed to heat, dust as most of the stalls were not floored. Thieves

were also targeting their wares as the flea markets do not have tight security. A widow Alice Utete is one of the blanket vendors who took self employment after realizing that life was hard. Once a poultry owner, she saved enough money to import blankets from SA and Botswana. She revealed that she was not complaining as she could send her children to school, university, buy food and clothes for the family and extended family. On a good month end day, could take home US\$500. Most vendors were grateful to the Government of National Unity (GNU) that brought the use of US\$ that is powerful.

Second Hand Clothes are associated with barking or town crying. Most vendors of second hand clothes are skeptic of being interviewed. However, Mr Mapenzi (not his real name) imports second hand clothes from Mozambique through Mutare. He got capital from illegal diamonds sells and relocated to Gweru. He felt that selling second hand clothes was safer, no gun blasting people associated with Chiadzwa Diamonds mining areas in Manicaland. The bulk of customers are women. Town criers shout at the top of their voices, prices ranging from US\$1 for two small items. These appear to the busiest stalls as it is difficult to go empty handed as prices are very low.

One, Melody, who is a teacher by profession, sells second hand clothes imported from Canada, Australia, China and USA via shipment through Beira Mozambique. She is a weekend vendor who realizes US\$450 on a good day. She sells the goods with the help of the husband as a barker. The open space was floored with assorted items ranging from children's clothes, unborn babies, and adult clothes. Surprisingly pregnant women were buying preparation clothes from these second hand clothes. The researchers observed that among the second hand clothes sold, some items were torn and some stained, a major concern for skin diseases. The research found that a big number of vendors sell spare parts ranging from bicycles, scotch carts, motorbikes, plumbing material, building materials etc. The use of the US\$ has revived the construction industry and many people are building houses and workshops. The researchers found that market research was very critical in flea marketing. Mr Shumba, who sells bicycle parts surprised us that his decision to sell bicycle parts was a result of the transport challenges associated with the 2008 hyper inflation in Zimbabwe. Fuel shortage brought the transport industry to a stand still and Mr Shumba saw the opportunity of bicycle use. His main clients are the rural folk who can not afford cars. Mr Shumba seemed to be the busiest of them all as customers demanded various bicycle spare parts. He is a proud owner of a house, two cars and employer of four people. His main wish was to create more employment for the many young people who were unemployed.

Footwear are a common site at all flea markets. Usually these demand big open spaces for display. They come in various shapes and colours. Ladies' shoes are on high demand and better quality as compared to cheap quality shoes sold in Chinese shops. Vendors from Harare and Gweru buy them in bales from Mutare on the borders with Mozambique. One interesting vendor was Mr B. Mudziwepasi who sold five of his goats eager to get into business. He opted to be a shoe vendor as shoes are in demand all year round. On a good day he pockets US\$100. He is able to pay rent for lodging, buy food and clothes for his family. Traditional medicinal herbs are common at Mupedzanhamo. Herbs for ailments like headaches, stomachache, sexually transmitted diseases, immune boosters are common. The vendors disclosed that with the HIV pandemic and limited resources, clients are no longer shy to approach them as the herbs are priced reasonably. Pirated CDs have found place in these flea markets. The vendors are the young school leavers who cannot get employment and are trying to earn a living. None of these were interested in being interviewed as they knew that they violated the copyright act. Heaps of belts, watches, plugs, bulbs are sold on pavement and shop verandas by the unemployed youths who run battles with the police. Designated vending places are beyond reach as they survive from hand to mouth.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

From the research findings, the researchers concluded that Zimbabwe is likely to be a flea market economy than a manufacturing economy. Most products on sale are imported for buying and selling a scenario which cannot return the country to normal production capacity. It is concluded also that flea market ownership is a source of employment as respondents indicated that they are able to fend their families. Many vendors have acquired assets such as posh cars seen parked close to their vending bays. Flea markets have become a source of poverty alleviation in Zimbabwe's urban areas, changing the status from rags to riches. Government support is minimal as evidenced by lack of capital to grow into big businesses. The banks and the Ministry of Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are not forthcoming to offer any loans to vendors. The banks demand collateral security which is beyond the reach of many. The Government and local authorities are not giving full support to the flea market economy as respondents bemoan poor sanitation, lack of security and lawlessness. Proper planning and new legislations are needed to protect informal trading that is contributing to 50% of private sector employment (Mloyi 2013). Corruption and bribery at immigration border posts need to be curbed (ZIMRA). The advertising and marketing strategies are still traditional such as town crying, viral marketing, posters which do not get far too many people. Auletta (2005) quoted by Baran (2011) says that USA advertisers and marketers spend \$500 billion trying to get people's attention and influence their decisions. Without such kind of an approach

Zimbabwean flea markets would remain subsistence living from hand to mouth. The Government should put infrastructures to support the use of information technology to facilitate business to consumer (B2C), consumer to consumer (C2C) and social networks such as facebook, twitter etc. The findings reveal that flea markets are gender balanced as both men and women are empowering themselves through flea markets ownership. Sibusisiwe Gauche, a divorcee believes that flea markets have brought self – reliance to women in general. Since informal trading has become an economic necessity and poverty alleviation strategy, the Zimbabwean Government needs to be close to these vendors by making them aware that it is interested in their survival. The Government needs to open up to investors to revive the ailing economy. The Government needs to embrace a positive political drive to improve its negative political image particularly from the West. Whilst the Government policies such as the indigenization and Agrarian reforms have empowered some of its population, the poor have remained marginalized. The poor remain survivalist entrepreneurs forced into self employment. No country can be economically empowered without outside investment. Entrepreneurship should be taught from primary level to tertiary level to encourage innovation and creativity. The success of entrepreneurship can only be supported by Government systems and policies and legislation that support infrastructure development, planning, political and economic stability.

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