ABSTRACT

Mission statements are an important component of marketing audits and marketing plans. Campbell and Yeung’s Ashridge mission model is one of the methodologies suggested in academic literature for use in the analysis and design of mission statements. This paper measures marketing managers’ perceptions of the usefulness of the Ashridge mission model as a tool for assessing the quality of organisational mission statements in Zimbabwe. To fulfill this objective, the perceptions of a convenience sample of 25 marketing managers enrolled on a postgraduate marketing programme at a leading Zimbabwean university are gathered and content-analysed. The Ashridge mission model prescribes that an ideal mission statement should have four elements — i.e. purpose, strategy, behaviour standards and values. The study finds that nearly all the mission statements in the sample reflect the purpose and strategy elements. More than half of them are in conformity with the values component. Less than half are in compliance with the behaviour standards aspect. Although the study is exploratory in nature, considering the convenient nature of the sample, the practical implication of this paper is that marketing managers in Zimbabwe can draw on the Ashridge mission model to analyse existing mission statements and design new ones.

Key words: Mission statement, marketing plan, Zimbabwe, values, behaviour standards, strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

There are many views concerning the suitable content of a business mission statement (Kemp and Dwyer, 2003). Campbell and Yeung’s (1991) Ashridge mission model is one of the several models in existing academic literature. It suggests the ideal components of a corporate mission statement—that is purpose, strategy, behaviour standards and values. However, there is a paucity of literature on the practical relevance of the model especially to developing countries in Africa, Zimbabwe included.

Mission statements are highly value-laden and their constituent elements like ‘strategy’ are too illusive to be defined (de Wit and Meyer, 1998). Consequently, it would be reasonable if empirical studies on the relevance of mission analysis frameworks like the Ashridge mission model, using content analysis as a research strategy, are designed in such a manner that key informants and/or employees and managers of the organisation(s) concerned analyse the content of a mission statement(s). A major weakness of the study is that the researchers themselves, instead of the respondents, content analysed the 54 sample mission statements for compliance with the Ashridge mission model. Considering the subjective meanings of some of the model’s constituent elements such as ‘strategy’, perhaps Muzondo et al’s findings would have been different if they had asked key informants and staff of the organisation(s) concerned to content-analyse and interpret their mission statements using the model. There are radically different opinions on most of the key issues within the field [of strategic management and organisational mission] and the disagreements run so deep that even a common definition of the term ‘strategy’ is illusive (de Wit and Meyer, 1998).

The objective of this study is to measure the perceptions of marketing managers on the applicability of the Ashridge mission model as a management apparatus for assessing the quality of corporate mission statements in Zimbabwe. Marketing authorities such as Kotler et al. (2009), McDonald (2008), Gilligan and Wilson (2003), to name but a few, indicate that mission analysis is one of the critical components of marketing
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audits\(^1\) and marketing plans\(^2\). Despite the critical role played by mission statements in corporate strategy, many textbooks on strategic management and marketing only dedicate about half a page to a few pages to mission statement analysis (Muzondo, 2012). Hence there is a paucity of published literature on the practical relevance of the Ashridge mission model to organisations in developing countries especially those in Africa (Muzondo et al., 2013).

This paper contributes to the body of knowledge on mission statement analysis from an African strategic marketing standpoint. Diversity in management practices around the world has been recognised in management literature in the United States of America for more than 30 years but it has taken much longer for American academics to accept that not only practices but the validity of theories may stop at national borders (Hofstede, 1993). The usefulness of management frameworks developed in one country may not be applicable to other countries. The Ashridge mission model was developed in the United Kingdom and its usefulness in Zimbabwe cannot be assumed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
The Ashridge mission model suggests four elements of mission—purpose, strategy, behaviour standards and values. A strong mission exists when the four elements of mission link tightly, resonating and reinforcing each other (Campbell and Yeung, 1991).

A number of authors such as Wheelen and Hunger (2002) and Johnson and Scholes (2002) agree that purpose is one of the fundamental components of a good mission statement. Some strategic management gurus, in fact, admit that the definition of mission is hinged on the purpose element. For example, Johnson and Scholes (2002) state that a mission is a general expression of the overall purpose of the organisation, which ideally, is in line with the values and expectations of major stakeholders and is concerned with the scope and boundaries of the organisation. Purpose answers the critical question why the company exists (Campbell and Yeung, 1991; de Wit and Meyer, 1998). For instance, "[a]n organisation exists to accomplish something: to make cars, lend money, provide a night’s lodgings, and so on" (Kotler et al., 2009:42). To achieve purpose in competition with other organisations, there is need for strategy.

Strategy provides the commercial logic for the company (Campbell and Yeung, 1991). Strategy describes how an organisation sets out to achieve its purpose and/or goals in competition with other organisations. The strategy component of mission is also acknowledged in a number of other mission statement analysis frameworks (e.g. Piercy and Morgan, 1994; Sidhu, 2003; Abell, 1980; Wheelen and Hunger, 2002).

Nonetheless, purpose and strategy are only empty intellectual thoughts unless they can be converted into action, policy and behaviour standards or guidelines that help people to decide what to do on a day-to-day basis (Campbell and Yeung, 1991). Behaviour standards are the policies and behaviour patterns that underpin the distinctive competence and the value system (ibid). The importance of behaviour to organisations is also acknowledged in corporate identity and corporate image literature (Check-Teck and Lowe, 1999; Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Stuart, 1999; Abratt, 1989). This brings us to the last element of the Ashridge mission model—values.

Values are beliefs and moral principles that lie behind the company’s culture (Campbell and Yeung, 1991). Values give meaning to the norms and behaviour standards in the company that act as the ‘right brain’ of the organisation (ibid).

While all four components of mission prescribed by the Ashridge mission model are important, Muzondo (2012) believes that purpose and strategy are more important than values and behaviour standards. He

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\(^1\) A marketing audit is a comprehensive, systematic, independent, and periodic examination of a company’s or business unit’s marketing environment, objectives, strategies, and activities, with a view to determining problem areas and opportunities and recommending a plan of action to improve the company’s marketing performance (Armstrong and Kotler, 2009).

\(^2\) A marketing plan is a written document that summarises what the marketer has learned about the market place and indicates how the firm plans to reach its marketing objectives (Kotler et al., 2009).

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regards purpose and strategy as the *hardware elements* of mission and he gives them symbolically more weight in guiding mission analysis and design than values and behaviour standards, which he terms *software elements*. In his conceptual paper, Muzondo (2012) developed and suggested five propositions on the quality of mission statements which were informed by his hardware and software constructs of mission elements. The propositions were based on a five-point scale ranging from *Excellent* to *Very poor*. This means that a mission statement is: (1) *Excellent* if it complies with all four components of mission as propounded by the Ashridge mission model. (2) *Good* if it is consistent with all two hardware elements only or the hardware components plus any one software element, (3) *Average* if it is compliant with one hardware element only or a hardware component plus any one or all two software elements, (4) *Poor* if it conforms to all two software elements only, and (5) *Very poor* if it is compliant with none of the four components of the model.

In a follow up empirical paper, Muzondo *et al.* (2013) refined and tested the five propositions using content analysis data from a systematic random sample of 54 mission statements drawn from organisations that had provided one-year internships to business studies students in a leading Zimbabwean university. Their study found that only seven of the 54 corporate mission statements in the sample were *excellent*, 51 were *good*, 53 were *average* and none was *poor* or *very poor* because there was no mission statement which conformed to one or all two software elements only without being compliant to at least one hardware element. However, the weakness in Muzondo *et al.*'s paper is that it is the researchers themselves instead of respondents, who content analysed the sample mission statements. Given the qualitative and value laden nature of mission statements, perhaps the results may have varied if key informants and staff of the concerned organisations had instead content analysed the mission statements.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Population and sample

The population for this study was marketing managers who are students in taught postgraduate marketing degree programmes offered in Zimbabwean universities. There are at least four universities in Zimbabwe offering postgraduate marketing programmes. Marketing managers review corporate mission statements when carrying out marketing audits and designing marketing plans. Primary data to fulfill the study's objective were gathered from a convenience sample of 25 marketing managers enrolled on a postgraduate marketing degree offered by one of the four universities. The unit of analysis was an assignment on the application of the Ashridge mission model to organisational mission statements in Zimbabwe. This assignment was given to students of a postgraduate programme in one of the stated universities as part of their continuous assessment on a core course called strategic marketing which was taught by one of the authors. In fact, there were 32 students enrolled on the programme at the time the assignment was given out but six of them dropped out before submitting the assignment. Of the remaining 26 managers (meaning there were 26 assignments in all) the researchers withdrew one assignment from the unit of analysis because of some technicalities. This left the study with a total 25 assignments that were based on 23 corporate mission statements because two organisations in the sample had two marketing managers who were enrolled on the programme.

3.2 Data gathering procedure and analysis

The data were gathered from a secondary source, that is, copies of a written assignment in response to a question given by one of the authors to his strategic marketing students to gauge their appreciation of Campbell and Yeung's (1991) Ashridge mission model and its practical relevance to their respective organisational mission statements. Before giving out the assignment, the first researcher or author delivered a lecture on marketing planning to the students. The lecture explored how marketing managers can apply the Ashridge mission model as a methodology for analysing an existing corporate mission statement and guiding the crafting of a new one. Mission statement analysis is a fundamental step in the marketing audit and the marketing planning processes. At the conclusion of the lecture, one of the authors referred the students to de Wit and Meyer's (1998) textbook - *Strategy: Process, Content, Context* - which has the full text of the original article on the Ashridge mission model, originally published in *Longrange Planning*.
The students were given a three-week deadline to write and submit the assignment. After marking and giving feedback on the assignment, one of the authors requested and was granted permission by the students to retain copies of their assignment so that together with his colleague researchers, they could draw on them to write this scientific article. The researchers content analysed the assignments to determine the extent to which the students agreed or disagreed that their corporate mission statements complied with the Ashridge mission model.

Content analysis is an attempt to quantify qualitative data by noting, for example, frequencies of events, words, and actions and others (Lancaster, 2005). It entails analysing the contents of documentary materials such as books, magazines, newspapers and of all other verbal materials which can be either spoken or printed (Kothari, 2004). The purpose of content analysis is to describe the content of your respondents' comments systematically and classifying the various meanings expressed in the material you have recorded (Adams et al., 2007). However, it is not the only way in which you could analyse the data you have obtained. You may find yourself presenting information in the form of a connected narrative (in a study following the case study method, for example), or in a series of verbatim quotations taken from the interviews (ibid).

The researchers adopted the four elements of an ideal mission statement as prescribed in the Ashridge mission model – purpose, strategy, behaviour standards and values – as codes for analysing the data from the assignments and for presenting and discussing the study's findings. The students had also analysed their respective corporate mission statements using the same codes.

4. RESULTS
4.1 Distribution of marketing managers by sector
The respondents, whose assignments constituted the unit of analysis in this study, were distributed as shown in Table 1 below. The sector with the highest number of respondents in the sample (total 5) was education—two were employed in a university, two in a polytechnic college, and one in a pre-school. This was followed by the tourism, hospitality and fast food sector (employing four managers) and, telecommunications, financial services, and agriculture and mining; each of which had three respondents in the sample. Energy was the sector with the smallest representation on the sample with a single respondent. Immediately above energy, the sectors with the least number of respondents, two each, were defence and non-governmental organisations, health, and transport and auto spares. Overall, this means that 22 of the 25 student marketing managers in the sample were employed in the services sector. The distribution of respondents in Table 1 by sector is the de facto distribution of organisations in the sample, save for the two organisations with two managers each in the programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number of Organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defence/Security &amp; NGO</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial services</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism, hospitality &amp; fast food</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture &amp; mining</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport &amp; auto spares</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Ashridge mission model compliance level in Zimbabwean mission statements
The results of the content analysis of the 23 mission statements assessed in the 25 postgraduate marketing students’ assignments are as shown in Table 2 below. The analysis includes ‘indirect values’ and ‘indirect behaviour standards’ because some students indicated that their organisations had independent values and behaviour standards statements listed immediately after their mission statements in relevant company documents.

4.3 Purpose
An overwhelming majority of managers in the sample, 23 out of 25, indicated in their assignments that the mission statements of their organisations were in compliance with the purpose element of the Ashridge mission model. Only two of the managers, whose organisations were in the transport and auto spares and hospitality and fast food sectors, stated that their corporate mission statements were not in compliance with the element.

Table 2 – Ashridge Mission Model Components (n=25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission Statement Component</th>
<th>Total “Yes’s” and/or “No’s”</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour Standards</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect Values</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect Behaviour Standards</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the 23 managers who indicated that their organisations’ mission statements were in compliance with the purpose component said:

This comes out very clear in the ... [organisation name stated] University mission statement. The university is there to enable people to realise their full potential.

A manager in the hospitality and fast food sector who indicated that his organisation’s mission statement was not compliant with the purpose element said:

The ... [company name cited] mission is not conclusive in terms of purpose. The question ‘what business is the company in?’ is not addressed in the mission statement. The mission statement lacks depth and direction in terms of revealing the three pillars of purpose as expounded by the Ashridge mission model. It is not clear from the mission statement for whose benefit the company is in existence.

4.4 Strategy
The majority of the respondents, 19, said their organisations’ mission statements were consistent with the strategy component of the Ashridge mission model and only 6 indicated that they were not compliant. This suggests that most of the mission statements in the sample were designed from a context where it was recognised that strategy should be reflected.

One of the 19 respondents who agreed that their corporate mission statements were consistent with the strategy component said:
The mission statement of my organisation is 'to be the leading supplier of world class medical, surgical, dental and laboratory products that meet our customers' needs at affordable prices. The inclusion of the phrase 'affordable prices' shows that strategy is reflected in the mission statement. My conclusion is that the organisation's mission statement is compliant with the strategy element of the model.

Among the six managers who acknowledged that their corporate mission statements were not consistent with the model's strategy element, one said:

The mission statement of ... [company name given] fails glaringly to define the business domain in which the company is operating. Generally, the strategy of the company is not clearly expressed in the mission statement.

The manager, from the fast food chain also stated that the mission statement needed to have included at least a phrase that reflected the strategy. The phrases that he suggested are 'the market the company competes in', 'the position the company holds in industry', and 'distinctive competences or competitive advantages that the company has or plans to create'.

4.5 Values
Only 10 of the managers in the sample agreed that the mission statements of their organisations were directly compliant with the values aspect of the Ashridge mission model while six affirmatively stated that they were not compliant. However, a further seven respondents from the sample stated that their organisations were indirectly compliant with the values aspect. That is because they acknowledged that the corporate documents where mission statements of their respective organisations were captured also included a values statement which was stated immediately after the mission. Overall, 17 of the organisations in the sample can be said to be in compliance with the values aspect of the model.

Among the 10 managers who categorically admitted that the values element was directly reflected in their corporate mission statements, one of them stated:

The mission statement of ... [company name provided] expresses specific values that the organisation believes in, though in the [corporate] mission statement these values are captured as principles.

The mission statement of the very organisation reads:

At ... [company name stated] we believe that in order for us to be happy in this life, we need to base our lives on certain principles that, when developed in our character, will lead to happiness and success. The principles that we want to develop and stand for at ... [company name stated] are: integrity, respect and development of the individual, customer focus, quality, and responsible citizenship.

Apparently, the organisation with the mission statement above is the only one in the sample whose mission statement neither reflects the purpose nor strategy element, contrary to the prescription of Campbell and Yeung's (1991) Ashridge mission model. It is the mission statement of a leading Zimbabwean fast food chain.

Among the six respondents in the sample who indicated that their corporate mission statements did not reflect the values component is a manager who said:

Our company's mission statement is completely silent on values and this is inconsistent with the Ashridge mission model which postulates that the [mission] statement should, indeed, identify the values that link with the organisation's purpose and act as beliefs that employees feel proud of...The silence on values is perhaps not surprising given the absence of clarity on strategy in the [organisation's] mission statement.
4.6 Behaviour standards
Fifteen out of 25 managers in the sample (a majority) affirmatively stated that the mission statements of their organisations were not in conformity with the behaviour standards element of the Ashridge mission model. At the same time, only three managers categorically agreed that the corporate mission statements were consistent with the framework's behaviour standards prescription. A further six managers suggested that their organisational mission statements were indirectly consistent with the behaviour standards component as their organisations had a behaviour standard statement coming after the mission statement. This means that nine respondents only agreed that their organisations' 'missioning' effort acknowledges the importance of behaviour standards while 15 seem to suggest that this element is not critical. Only one manager in the sample did not indicate whether his organisation's mission statement was consistent with the behaviour standards element. Overall, this means that the behaviour standards component was the least reflected component of the Ashridge mission model in mission statements of the organisations in the sample.

A manager among those who categorically stated that their mission statements were inconsistent with the behaviour standards element said:

"...’s [company name supplied] mission statement lacks the component of behaviour standards. However, the company expects its employees to behave in a certain way but it has not captured that in its mission statement. For instance, the organisation always supplies genuine products and regards the safety of its clients as crucially important. It educates customers on safety issues regarding the use of its products. This could be viewed as part of behaviour standards. However, the company mission statement has no word or phrase that includes these things.

Another student in the cluster of respondents whose corporate mission statement did not include the behaviour standards component said:

My company’s mission statement does not describe the critical behavioural standards that serve as beacons of the strategy and the values—and this is not surprising given that the strategy and values are not given in the first place. Consequently, ...’s [company name stated] employees cannot judge whether they have behaved correctly or otherwise as there is no guidance on behaviour standards from the mission statement."

A respondent from a mining company among the students who agreed that their corporate mission statements were consistent with the behaviour standards component of the Ashridge mission model said:

"...’s [company name supplied] mission statement describes important behavioural standards that serve as beacons of strategy and values. These include utilizing resources responsibly, conducting business in an environmentally responsible manner, safeguarding the health and safety of all stakeholders, continuously improving all systems and expression of commitment by staff.

The behavioural standards are described in such a way that individual employees can judge if they have behaved correctly or not. These behavioural standards have also been translated into policies and behavioural guidelines. The company's Seven Cardinal Rules on Safety as well as consistent Safety, Health and Environment (SHE) inductions, for example, were derived from the need to safeguard stakeholders’ safety and health as well as conducting business in an environmentally responsible manner."

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS
5.1 Discussion
This study assessed marketing managers’ perceptions of the application of the Ashridge mission model as a managerial tool for analysing the quality of corporate mission statements in Zimbabwe. Data to fulfill the study's objective were gathered from a convenience sample of 25 postgraduate marketing students in a
leading university in the country. The students are employed in marketing management jobs. Nearly all mission statements in the sample were in compliance with the purpose, strategy and values elements of the Ashridge mission model. But only fewer than half of the mission statements were in conformity with the model’s behaviour standards component. This is a worrying revelation because Campbell and Yeung (1991) suggest that behaviour standards encompass the behaviour patterns that underpin the competence and value system of the organisation.

In addition, there were no excellent mission statements in the sample as none of them reflect all four essential elements of an ideal mission statement as prescribed in the Ashridge mission model. However, the majority of mission statements reflect either the two hardware components or one of them. These are; purpose and/or strategy, and at least one of the software components namely; values and behaviour standards. As such, the quality of mission statements in the sample ranges from ‘good’ to ‘average’. Only one of the 23 mission statements, belonging to a leading fast food chain in the country, can be rated as poor because it is in compliance with the values aspect of the Ashridge mission model only and no other element. All mission statements in the sample also reflected at least one component of the model hence there was no ‘very poor’ mission statement. Overall, the content of the majority of mission statements in the sample reflect the prescription of Campbell and Yeung’s (1991) Ashridge mission model. While the organisations’ internal stakeholders may not have been aware of the model at the time the mission statements were crafted, the fact that they reflect the tool suggest that the model is useful for marketing planners as a starting point in mission analysis and designing.

5.2 Conclusion
Although based on perceptions of a small and convenience sample of postgraduate marketing students in one of the leading universities in Zimbabwe, the findings of this study, seem to prove that the Ashridge mission model is being applied to design corporate mission statements in the country because the majority of mission statements in the sample are consistent with the purpose, strategy and values components of the model. Consequently, marketing managers in the country can apply the model to analyse and design organisational mission statements. Nonetheless, given the convenience nature of the sample, it is fundamental that any future investigations on the relevance of the Ashridge mission model are based on large and probability samples of respondents if the results are to be generalised.

6. REFERENCES

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Marketing managers' perceptions of the applicability of Ashridge mission model to organisations in Zimbabwe


