Chapter 9

Strategic Sustainability Marketing and Social Responsibility in the Textile Industry: Opportunities and Challenges in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The global social, economic, and ecological sustainability challenges are immense, particularly in Africa. Given the continent’s specific characteristics, there is a strong need to either shape “traditional” business models or to consider alternative corporate strategies. Those should in particular foster social change and progress through economic development. Social entrepreneurship is regarded as such an alternative approach. In addition, stronger aligning firms’ business models to CSR dimensions as laid out in international standards such as ISO 26000 might be a valuable trajectory. By using an exploratory comparative case design and qualitatively analyzing the websites of four African textile companies, this chapter illustrates how social sustainability is being pursued. The findings suggest that sustainability-oriented textile companies strongly emphasize social sustainability, in particular labor practices, community involvement, and development. This enables further research on drivers and implications for sustainability marketing strategies in global textile value chains.

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INTRODUCTION

As the world’s second largest continent, the African setting provides a particularly interesting environment in terms of local, cultural and institutional variety (George, Corbishley, Khayesi, Haas, & Tihanyi, 2016; Kolk & Rivera-Santos, 2018; Thomas & Bendixen, 2000). In fact, the distinct characteristics of its environment are seen to reflect new growth opportunities (George et al., 2016). Globally operating multinational companies have increasingly been investing in Africa as a sourcing base and integrating local firms into their global production and value networks (You, Salmi, & Kauppi, 2018). At the same time, productivity and effectiveness of business in Africa are considered to decisively affect further development (Zoogah, 2008). From an organizational management perspective, this also implies the prospective commitment to truly and uniquely African-oriented leadership and management theories, cultures and practices repudiating Western imposed management paradigms (Nwagbara, 2011). This particularly proves true for the global textile industry where value and supply chains connect European and US-based firms with the developing world and, thus, face various cultural, normative, institutional and historical constraints.

Textile industries in Africa are assumingly minor compared to international markets and vary regionally in terms of economic scope and success. At the same time, rich in tradition, they are well embedded and contribute significantly to local economies (Brautigam, Weis, & Tang, 2018; Mbate, 2016; Momberg, Jacobs, & Sonnenberg, 2012). Furthermore, African-oriented motifs and forms have long been an inspiration for collections of primarily Western fashion companies and designers, thereby spurring outside attraction towards African indigenous prints and clothing styles. In this way, they are contributing to community and artisan development in Africa as well as enhancing the role and relevance of African textiles and fashion in a globally interconnected marketplace (Fianu & Zentey, 2000; Loughran, 2009).

Significant social and environmental harm caused by global clothing and fashion production and consumption (Franco, 2017) are also hitting Africa. Exemplarily, vast amounts of toxic chemicals and water are used for conventionally produced cotton in South Africa, negatively influencing the country’s natural resources and environment as well as waste creation (Momberg et al., 2012). Social costs of Africa’s textile sector include, among others, an only little consideration of adequate working conditions at garment manufacturing sites in Ghana (Vandyck & Fianu, 2012). Yet, while research on environmental aspects of sustainability has been proliferating, the role of the social dimension of sustainability is often neglected in respective academic publications (Missimer, Robèrt, & Broman, 2017). Furthermore, social and cultural aspects linked to both, production and consumption, as well as their holistic consideration and integration in textile business
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