

Corporate social responsibility: An exploration of initiatives in clothing brands

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Abstract

Ethics and accountability in design appear to have increased momentum as individuals and corporations are increasingly conscious of the detrimental implications of immoral business practices. The accountability and responsibility of both individuals and organisations are significant to business practice. This has become increasingly apparent due to the role business must play if humanity and the environment are to thrive in future. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is mounting in emphasis within corporations, as identified through various bodies of research. This paper positions ethics and accountability in design practice from the lens of CSR initiatives.

CSR is a corporation's level of focus on the wellbeing of its employees, society and contributions to charitable causes. Many clothing corporations strive for a CSR stance as research shows that CSR adds value to a corporation's image and brand. Research suggests that the reputation of clothing brands, impacted by their CSR initiatives, or lack thereof, could subsequently affect the stakeholders' level of trust in a corporation. This view fortified the proclamation of CSR disclosures, which enables the public to follow the CSR initiatives of clothing brands.

As part of a Magister Technologia (MTech) study in Fashion Design which focuses on the role of branding in corporate social responsibility, this paper aims to draw on relevant literature grounded in CSR to contextualise three South African clothing brands and their CSR initiatives. The authors begin with a theoretical positioning of the stakeholder theory and explore the notion of CSR. The stakeholder theory emerges as a means to understand the motivating factors of CSR activities in organizations. The paper then shifts to conceptually analysing the three South African clothing brands and their CSR initiatives as a means to potentially gain a broader perspective on CSR within a South African context. The authors adopt a desktop methodology, to review the stakeholder theory, define CSR and explore the CSR initiatives of three South African clothing brands. This paper contributes to the overarching themes of ethics and accountability in design practice given the scope of CSR initiatives of the three selected South African cases.

Keywords: *Corporate social responsibility; clothing brands; CSR initiatives*

Introduction

Ethics and accountability in design appear to have gained momentum as individuals and corporations are conscious of the implications of immoral business practices. The obligation, moral principle, accountability and responsible actions of both individuals and organisations are significant to business practice and humanity. Corporate social responsibility (CSR), a position of ethics and accountability in design practice, appears to be mounting in emphasis.

CSR concerns the actions, contributions and influences of corporations in bringing about global change and social development (Dahlsrud 2008, McElhaney 2009). Owazuaka and Obinna (2014, p. 221) describe CSR as the continued obligation put forward by a company to “behave ethically and to contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large”. CSR is applicable to various

categories, namely, the environment; programs for affirmative action; equal employment opportunity policies; community development; product safety; policies toward South Africa; energy policies and social responsibility disclosure (Roberts 1992; Pomeroy & Dolnicar 2007).

Edward Freeman (cited in Laplume, Sonpar & Litz 2008; Stieb 2009) posited the stakeholder theory in 1984. The stakeholder theory is a means to understand what or who the motivating factors are behind CSR activities within an organization (Freeman 1984; Roberts 1992; Campbell 2007). The term “stakeholder” is defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization’s purpose” (Freeman 1984, p. 53; Campbell 2007, p. 947). Freeman (1984, p. 54) argues that organisations that neither recognize their stakeholders, nor take into account the influence of these stakeholders, will ultimately jeopardise the corporation’s ability to deal with the concerns of stakeholders.

The stakeholder theory is three-tiered. The first level focuses on the company’s attempt to make a favourable impression on and build strong relationships with its stakeholders via socially responsible endeavours (Roberts 1992; Babatunde & Akinboboye 2013). The second level foregrounds the aim of a corporation’s management strategy to tactically position itself through active involvement with socially responsible endeavours (Roberts 1992; Basu & Palazzo 2008). The third level relates to the company’s financial standpoint. A company should provide evidence, to investors and stakeholders, of sound economic positioning to contribute to social responsibility (Tsoutsoura 2004; Campbell 2007). McWilliams and Siegal (2001:120) presume that organisations that actively support CSR are more dependable.

CSR is applicable to any field including fashion practice. Literature foregrounds CSR initiatives of global clothing brands but a gap is evident within the South African context. Adopting a desktop method and forming part of a Magister Technologia (MTech) study in Fashion Design, this paper aims to conceptually analyse the CSR initiatives of three South African clothing brands namely, 46664 Fashion, Impahla Clothing and Earthchild. The conceptual analysis of the three South African Clothing brands follows. The paper then concludes with recommendations for further studies.

46664 Fashion

Established in Cape Town, South Africa, 46664 Fashion is a clothing brand that positions itself in CSR and ethics (46664 Fashion 2015). The CSR stance of 46664 Fashion is based on the iconic inspiration and values of the late former South African president, Nelson Mandela (De Kock, n.d.).

The prison number 46664 was allocated to Nelson Mandela in 1964 upon his incarceration at the Robben Island prison facility in Cape Town (Cohen & Battersby 2009; 46664: Global Campaign for Change n.d.). In 2002, Mr Mandela authorised the use of the number 46664 as the name of a campaign to create awareness for the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic (Hoon 2005; Cohen & Battersby 2009; 46664: Global Campaign for Change n.d.). The death of the former president’s son Makgatho Lewanika Mandela as a result of HIV/AIDS led to the emergence of the 46664 HIV/AIDS campaign (Parker 2014, p. 30). The loss of Mr Mandela’s son was described as “the most poignant moment of his plight in raising awareness [of HIV AIDS]” (Parker 2014, p. 30).

To position the 46664 campaign on a global platform, musical performances by notable artists such as the Eurythmics, Bono and Beyoncé were staged in South Africa and in other countries, such as Spain, Norway and the United Kingdom (Brownell 2003; Cohen & Battersby 2009). Fundraising for the 46664 HIV and AIDS campaign served as the core goal of these performances (Brownell 2003; Cohen & Battersby 2009). The audience of these performances were encouraged to make a financial pledge and a number of celebrities responded favourably in support of the 46664 HIV and AIDS campaign (Brownell 2003; Cohen & Battersby 2009). The 46664 HIV and AIDS campaign resulted in the development of the 46664 Fashion label as a means to contribute financially to the 46664 campaign (46664 FAQs 2011; Brady 2012).

The 46664 Foundation collaborated with Brand ID, a brand development house, and Deneb, an investment company, to develop the 46664 Fashion label in 2012 (46664 2011; Brady 2012; 46664 2015). Based on the vision and philosophy of the 46664 Foundation, Brand ID were selected as preferred partners (46664 2011; Brady 2012). In 2012, the 46664 Fashion label was launched to generate additional revenue for the 46664 Foundation and to promote the philanthropic philosophies of its founder, late former president Mandela (46664: Global campaign for change n.d.). Approximately 7% to 9% of the revenue generated from sales of the 46664 clothing is donated to the 46664 Foundation (46664: Global campaign for change n.d.).

46664 Fashion produces trendy clothing discernible by its design, quality, and its imprinted quotations and phrases by late former president Mandela (Mandela's 46664 clothing line debuts 2011). Figure 1 illustrates the logo of 46664 Fashion as distinguished by a hand, known as the 'hand of Africa' symbol (Mandela's 46664 clothing line debuts 2011). The symbol of the hand resonates with the notion of hope in Africa, conveying the message or intention of 46664 Fashion (Impressions of Africa n.d.).



Figure 1: 46664, it's in our hands logo (46664 Fashion 2015)

When 46664 Fashion was launched in 2012, the designers in the clothing label included the design director and head of men's wear, Chris Vogelpoel; head of woman's wear, Barbara Tosalli; and South African designer Craig Native, head of T-shirt design (46664 FAQs 2011). 46664 Fashion manufactures 60% of the clothing locally and 40% in Mauritius, however the company ultimately intends to manufacture 100% in South Africa (De Kock n.d.). This intention is driven by the desire for the brand to position itself as a South African fashion label with locally manufactured and distributed products. Secondly, the intention is to place South Africa as a thriving fashion hub in the globally competitive fashion industry.

Taking into consideration that their clothing is manufactured both locally and internationally, 46664 Fashion endeavours to ensure that ethical working practices and legislature are implemented (46664 Fashion n.d.). Ethical working practices remain an imperative ethos of the 46664 Fashion brand to ensure social responsibility with the application of ethical codes in manufacturing practices (46664 Fashion 2015).

CSR initiatives of 46664 Fashion

46664 Fashion aims to fund many charities and projects. In 2012, 46664 Fashion invested in the Mandela Day Library Project by funding three libraries for under-privileged schools in South Africa (Brady 2012). Additionally, in 2014, 46664 Fashion supported two Cape Town-based children's homes with the intention of continued support (46664 Fashion 2015).

The late former president, Mr Nelson Mandela, stated that "children are the rock on which our future is built" and believed that education should be accessible to all (Cohen & Battersby 2009, p. 217). With this value in mind, 46664 Fashion aspires to make societal contributions to the wellbeing and education of children in South Africa. In another socially responsible initiative, 46664 Fashion supports the 20 Degrees South Run (46664 Fashion 2015). This is an expedition which crosses 3000

kilometres of Africa from the West to the East Coast (O'Hanlon n.d.). The 20 Degrees South Run aims to raise awareness about the shortage of clean water in Africa and the diminishing numbers of Sub-Saharan elephants (O'Hanlon n.d.). These CSR initiatives of 46664 Fashion aims to promote sustainability within the continent of Africa (46664 Fashion 2015). 46664 Fashion continues to expand its CSR position with international partnerships. At the beginning of 2015, 46664 Fashion announced its collaboration with the American fashion brand, Gap (Gap 2015; 46664 Fashion 2015). This collaboration permitted Gap to sell the 46664 clothing online and donate a portion of the revenue to the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund (Gap 2015; 46664 Fashion 2015). Moreover, Gap made a \$100 000 donation to the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital (Gap 2015; 46664 Fashion 2015). The collaboration between Gap and 46664 Fashion aims at increasing the 46664 Fashion brand's awareness and vision on a global platform (Gap 2015; 46664 Fashion 2015). In an interview with a member of 46664, the authors established that 46664 Fashion will be available for consumer purchase at Gap stores in the United States in 2016.

Impahla Clothing

In 2004, William Hughes, a Zimbabwean immigrant, relocated to Cape Town, South Africa and discovered a Cape Town-based t-shirt manufacturer on the brink of closure (Kaye 2010; Hardisty 2015). He purchased this corporation along with the existing staff, which resulted in the launch of Impahla Clothing in 2004 (Kaye 2010; Hardisty 2015).

Within the first year, Impahla Clothing began manufacturing sportswear for clothing brands such as Puma, Adidas, New Balance, Levis, and Cape Union Mart, and subsequently for Asics and BLK (Kaye 2010; Hardisty 2015). For the 2010 FIFA World Cup, Impahla clothing, sponsored by Puma, manufactured the soccer team kits for four African countries namely, Ghana, Algeria, Ivory Coast and Cameroon (Kaye 2010). In 2012, Impahla Clothing capitalized on an opportunity to manufacture socks and merge with textile manufacturer Tomotex, thus establishing a textile division at Impahla Clothing (Hardisty 2015). As a result of the incorporation of a textile division, the products manufactured by Impahla Clothing largely contain cotton-based and polyester textiles, and they import other textiles (Hardisty 2015). Impahla Clothing (cited in Hardisty 2015) states that they strive to import excellent quality textiles and trims that are not harmful to the wearer.

Impahla Clothing's CSR initiatives

In 2006, Puma, a major client of Impahla Clothing, issued a mandate to its manufacturers and corporations to practice "transparency in the supply chain" (Kaye 2010). Impahla Clothing responded to this mandate in a two-fold manner. Firstly, they adopted a sustainable business strategy and secondly released sustainability reports as a means to promote transparency in their supply chains (Hardisty 2010; Kaye 2010; Kaye 2013).

William Hughes affirms that the dedicated team strives to align to the vision of the company and best practice regarding transparency in supply chain (Hardisty 2010; The story of Impahla Clothing 2015). He takes on the position that supporting the values of respect, needs and human rights of employees is of utmost importance (Hardisty 2010; Kaye 2010; The story of Impahla Clothing 2015). The enforcement of labour laws at Impahla clothing coupled with above national employee remuneration has resulted in an employee growth of 390% between 2005 and 2012 (Hardisty 2010; Kaye 2010; The story of Impahla Clothing 2015). Even though labour charges from subcontracting neighbouring countries were substantially cheaper, Impahla Clothing opted to utilise local subcontractors (Rea 2009; Hardisty 2015). William Hughes (cited in Rea 2009; Hardisty 2015) states that indigenous available resources and skill sets should be utilised in support of local economic growth and development as a means for "responsible option".

Impahla Clothing strives to address environmental challenges (Rea 2009). Since 2008, the clothing brand has achieved the status of South Africa's first carbon neutral clothing manufacturer (Kaye 2010). Impahla Clothing acknowledged the emittance of large quantities of greenhouse gasses as a result of their manufacturing practices and subsequently planted indigenous trees to counteract this

situation (Rea 2009; The story of Impahla Clothing 2015). By 2012, the company planted 2374 trees across the Western Cape in areas such as schools and parks (Impahla Clothing – Textile manufacturer 2013).

In 2008, as part of the Western Cape’s administrative strategy, under the auspices of Premier Helen Zille, the 110% Green initiative was implemented in an attempt to make the province Africa’s Green Economic Hub (About 110% Green 2015). This initiative calls for 110% commitment for sustainable and green practices with the aim of encouraging the ethos of sustainability amongst corporations (About 110% Green 2015). A corporation that responds to this call is regarded as a “Flagship” and is listed on the 110% Green’s website (About 110% Green 2015). Impahla Clothing joined the 110% Green initiative and is recognised as one of the Flagships. Since then, Impahla Clothing has obtained financial support from the government through the Industrial Development Corporation in order to fulfil its pledge to sustainability (Impahla Clothing 2013; About 110% Green 2015; The Story of Impahla Clothing 2015). A total of 131 solar panels were installed at the premises of Impahla Clothing in 2012. Impahla Clothing aims for 25% of their energy usage through solar panels, but has currently only achieved 9.2% of the target (The story of Impahla Clothing 2015).

In light of the above, the business and marketing strategies and CSR ethos of Impahla Clothing is located within the scope of ethically sound working conditions, sustainable manufacturing practices and local economic development (Impahla Clothing – Textile manufacturer 2013; Kaye 2013). This is reinforced by William Hughes’ statement (cited in Rea 2009):

This is not a branding or PR [public relations] exercise for Impahla. We don't have the personnel, time or money to bother with such things. This is about repaying our debt to both society and the natural environment in which we have been given an opportunity to live and work. We MUST do the right thing. We MUST do whatever we can to ensure that we are operating our business in a manner that ensures a shared responsibility for all of us.

Earthchild

Founded in 1992 by Jonathan Katz, Earthchild is a clothing brand specialising in children’s wear (Pitman 2011; Earthchild 2014). Jonathan Katz launched the Earthchild flagship store at the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront in Cape Town, and six months later opened a store at Hyde Park Shopping Centre in Gauteng (Pitman 2011). Following the success of Earthchild, Jonathan Katz founded Earthhaddict, focussing on quality leisurewear for women (Kew 2014).

According to Pitman (2011) and Earthchild (2014), the Earthchild clothing brand appears to assume a three-fold vision, namely; 1) the company manufactures quality clothing, 2) implements environmental and ethically sound manufacturing practices and transparent supply chain, 3) supports environmental responsibility through the use of 100% organic cotton in the majority of clothing products.

Earthchild clothing is primarily manufactured using organic cotton and natural fibres (Earthchild 2014; Ndweni 2014). Earthchild attempted to manufacture clothing in South Africa but this was found to be unsuccessful and the company now outsources to the Southern African regions of Madagascar and Mauritius (Pitman 2011). Jonathan Katz believes that manufacturing should remain within the borders of Southern African regions to contribute to and promote local productivity (Earthchild 2014).

Earthchild’s CSR initiatives

Janna Kretzmar, a social anthropology and psychology graduate and a qualified yoga instructor, approached Jonathan Katz in 2006 to collaborate on a project aiming at social responsibility in rural areas (Pitman 2011; Janna Kretzmar Founder and Director EarthChild Project n.d.). Taking into consideration the CSR ethos, vision and ethical positioning of Earthchild, Jonathan Katz funded Kretzmar’s proposed venture entitled Earthchild Project (Pitman 2011; Earthchild 2014). Earthchild

Project supports underprivileged schools by providing extra mural activities such as yoga lessons, environmental education, hiking expeditions and sustainable vegetable gardening skills (Earthchild Project 2011; What We Do Earth Child Project 2015). The activities are aimed at educating and creating awareness amongst learners with regards to respect and responsibility for themselves as individuals, humanity and the environment at large (Kretzmar 2014; Earthchild Project 2014). In 2008, the Earthchild Project, as the selected community project making a positive impact to society, was the recipient of a R750 000 donation put forward by the Airports Company South Africa and Cape Town International Airport (Developing our communities 2008: ACSA Company profile n.d.). The Earthchild project currently works with eight schools in Cape Town but managed to secure further sponsors and donors due to its recognised CSR initiatives (Our Donors Earthchild Project 2015).

In 2011, Seane Corn, a qualified celebrity yoga instructor, and Suzanne Sterling, founders of the 'Off the Mat, Into the World' (OTM) project which aims to combine yoga with activism, recognised the Earthchild Project as an investment opportunity (Earthchild Project and yoga 2011). OTM donated \$20 000 to Earthchild Project to build a 10m x 7m classroom at Sakumlandela Primary School in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, for yoga and life-skills lessons (Earthchild Project and yoga 2011).

The growing success and recognition of Earthchild Project's positive CSR initiatives paved the way for iCAN, an environmentally conscious team developed under the Earthchild brand (Community Projects and Youth Programs 2014). The philosophy and motto "iCAN make a difference" aligns with the Earthchild brand of environmental and social change through an ethos of ethical consciousness and sustainability (Community Projects and Youth Programs 2014).

The iCAN team, comprising employees from Earthchild, facilitates socially and environmentally responsible initiatives within communities (Earthchild 2014). The iCAN team assumes additional projects such as beach clean-ups and the Santa Shoebox initiative (iCAN beach cleanup 2014; iCAN team Santa Shoebox 2014). For the Santa Shoebox project, the iCAN team packages and distributes shoeboxes with gifts and daily necessities to underprivileged communities during the Christmas period (iCAN beach cleanup 2014; iCAN team Santa Shoebox 2014).

In 2014 Truworthis, one of South Africa's apparel and accessories retailers, announced its purchase of the Earthchild brand (Kew 2014; Murad 2014; Ndweni 2014; Burmeister 2014). In 2015, this purchase was finalised and evident on Earthchild's website (Earthchild 2015). Truworthis stated that the purchase of Earthchild was to enhance their children's wear department (Kew 2014; Murad 2014; Ndweni 2014).

Conclusion

Corporate social responsibility is a position of ethics and accountability in design practice that appears to be gaining increased momentum in the clothing sector. This manifests in the obligation, moral principle, accountability and responsible actions of both individuals and organisations. This paper set out to conceptually analyse the CSR initiatives of three South African clothing brands namely, 46664 Fashion, Impahla Clothing and Earthchild.

The conceptual analysis describes how three South African clothing brands are engaging in CSR initiatives. Common CSR threads are evident amongst these three South African clothing brands. These include societal contributions, education, environmental and economic sustainability, ethical business strategies and transparency in supply chain. Despite this, the authors recommend further research to compare the conceptual analysis with empirical data in relation to the CSR initiatives of these three clothing brands. Further research in CSR may add value to the scope of ethics and accountability in fashion design practice. Truworthis' acquisition of the Earthchild brand may also serve as an area of further research to explore whether Truworthis maintains the social responsibility initiatives started by Earthchild.

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