MARKETING CHANNEL CONDUCT AND MARKETING MARGIN ON MARKETING PERFORMANCE OF SOFT DRINK DISTRIBUTORS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigates the causal relationship between soft drinks marketing channel conduct and margin on the performance of distributors in Maiduguri. Specifically, the study focuses on the different channels involved, power relationship and margin determinant on the general performance in terms of profitability, sales output, and customer attraction. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 120 out of the 150 total questionnaire distributed from the total population of 403 Soft Drink marketers (comprising of producers, wholesalers and retailers) using purposive and simple random sampling technique from markets and Distributors in Maiduguri metropolis. Analytical tools used were descriptive statistics, market margin and multiple regression analysis. The result showed a margin of 39.8% which could be attributed to the marketing functions. The result of the regression analysis revealed an R^2*value of 63.8%, F-value of 8.93 and a very low standard error of 0.38889. The result further revealed that initial capital,cooling cost and handling costs were positive and significant at different levels indicating that they were the major determinants of profitability, sales output, and customer attraction in the area. The study identified a decentralized distribution channel in the area and that marketing and marketing margin affects marketing performance in the study area. It is recommended that marketers should form a strong co-operative society in the area. Inventories should be stored to smooth out sales, increase profits and customer satisfaction.*

Keywords: Marketing channel, Market margin, Marketing performance, Soft drink, Nigeria

Introduction

New markets have emerged in both domestic and international arena because of turbulence created by environmental factors such as technological advancement, deregulation of markets and globalisation and have significantly affected every facets of marketing activities. These factors have also changed the dynamics of the market place at different paces and depths, thereby promoting the profile of time based competition and causing unpredictable shift in channel power. Customers are also becoming unrestricted in their choices from the global marketplace. To effectively satisfy customer needs therefore, marketers should provide opportunities for serving different customer segments, creating synergies, and exploiting economies of scale, coordinated preparation of manufactured goods according to their type and volume as well as space and time are required so that supply deadlines can be met or estimated demand can efficiently be fulfilled.

Distribution encompasses a system of all actions that are related to the transfer of goods between producers and consumers which is termed as a distribution system. Distribution systems are usually divided into: (a) acquisition distribution, and (b) logistic or physical distribution. Haque, Akteruzzaman, Hashem, and Haque, (2016) maintained that these divisions are not entirely accurate, since both subsystems exhibitcertain common starting points. According to the authors,acquisition distribution systemcomprises the management of distribution routes, which is also known as distribution channels. While logistic distribution system is focused on bridging the space and time by transportation and storage, order processing and shipment and supply logistics, i.e. materials movement. The term distribution channels can be described as consisting of interdependent and interrelated institutions and agencies, functioning as a system or network collaboratingin their efforts to produce and distribute a product to end users (Cravans & Piercy, 2009). Distribution of soft drinks in Nigeria simply incorporates the system through which the soft drinks are brought to the prospective final customers. Generally most of the companies have deports designated at strategic places andsupply their products to the wholesalers and then, to the retailers. In some instances, the producers sale directly to retailers and large buyers who sell to the final consumers.

Market performance of the channel member is the appraisal of the extent to which the interactions of the buyers and sellers in the market stimulate results that are consistent with social purposes (Hastings & Saren, 2003). The main features used in assessing market performance are the level of profit, scale and utilization of plants and firms, scale and promotion costs and character of the product and progressiveness (Alrubaiee, Aladwan, Abu Joma Idris, & Khater 2017). Jancenelle, Storrud-Barnesand and Javalgi (2016) disclosed that marketing performancemain purpose is to achieve key outcomes and objectives to optimize group, individual, or organizational performance, hence,it is possible to evaluate the impact of structure and conduct characteristics on market performance. Accordingly, Nzima, Dzanja and Kamwana (2014) affirmed that the type of market structure that prevails in a market determines efficiency of market system.

Most of the previous studies conducted in the area of market structure, conduct and efficiency were in the area of agricultural marketing portraying its peculiarity and market characteristics(See Bukar, Mohammed, Wakawa, Shettima & Muhammad 2015; Huq, Alam & Akter 2004; Nzma, Dzanja & Kamwana, 2014; Tuffour&Dokurugu, 2015). Few numbers of prior studies examined the determinants of marketing efficiency for soft drink in Nigeria (See Oteh & Njoku, 2014),their findings indicated that competence with which the market structure performs its designated function by focusing on the demographic variables. In view of these arguments therefore, this study examines the existing marketing system of soft drink, the efficiency of the channel members, and the constraints in distributing soft drink in Maiduguri metropolis.

Literature Review

Marketing channels are regarded as a complex term because the intermediaries involved are not only those who participate in the physical flow of a product from the production point to the end user, but also those that have a role in the transfer of product ownership, as well as other intermediary institutions that participate in the value distribution from production to consumption (Adachiy, 2017). According to Kotler and Keller, (2008), there are three types of marketing channels; the communication channels, distribution channels and service channels. Similarly, Adachiy (2017) and (Kar, Biswas, Sen, Nath, & Nath (2017) asserted that distribution comprises a system of all activities that are related to the transfer of economic goods from producers to the end users. These include a coordinated preparation of manufactured goods according to their type and volume, space and time, so that supply deadlines can be met (order fulfillment) or estimated demand can be efficiently satisfied (when producing for an anonymous market). Distribution systems are usually divided into: (a) acquisition distribution system (b) logistic, i.e. physical distribution system (Haque et al,. 2016) The authors further argued that this division is not completely accurate, since both of these subsystems exhibit certain common starting points. Acquisition distribution system management includes the management of distribution routes, i.e. distribution channels. Logistic distribution system is focused on bridging the space and time by transportation and storage, as well as order processing and shipment, supply logistics, in other word the movement of materials (Zhao & Priporas, 2017).

Marketing Channel

Marketing channels (MCs) are sets of inter-reliant organizations involved in the process of making a product or service available for consumption or use (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008).The channel design decision must meet the needs and behaviors of customers. MC is simply the path of a commodity from its raw form to the finished product or the route of a product as it moves from the producers to the end users (Haque et al., 2016; Zhao & Priporas, 2017). MCs are vital components in evaluating marketing system as the channels indicate how the various market participants are organized to accomplish the movement of product from the producer to the final consumer.

Malone1 and Hall (2017) categorized MCs as centralized and decentralized channels, a centralized MC is one in which the productsare brought together in larger central and terminal markets. The processors orwholesalers purchased product from commission men or brokers who act as the selling agents for the manufacturers. Whereas the decentralizedchannel is one that does not use such established large market facilities, ratherwholesalers and processors purchase directly from the producers (Paul, Habib, Sarker, Mustafa, & Marma, 2017).Olukosiet al. (2005) disclosed that MC is the sequence of intermediaries or middlemen and the marketers through whichgoods are moved from producers to consumers. Based on these arguments, marketing channels are viewed as more valuable because it shows ata glance various agencies and ways the product moves, it also helps in assessing performance of a market.If the route is too long, it shows there are too many middlemen in the marketing system and thecost is likely to be high.

Marketing Performance

Marketing performance (MP) is described as the strategic end result of market adjustments engaged in by buyers and sellers (Olukosi & Isitor 1990). Furthermore, MP is considered as the appraisal of theextent to which the interactions of the buyers and sellers in the market stimulate results that are consistentwith social purposes (Hastings & Saren, 2003; Alrubaiee et al., 2017). The main determinants used in assessing MP are the level of profit, scaleand utilization of plants and firms, scale and promotion costs and character of the product andprogressiveness (Jancenelle et al., 2017).According to Ebitu (2016) as in Mustapha (2017),firm performance can be measured based on growth, market share and profitability. The higher the indices indicates the greater the performance of the business and vice versa. Ebitu (2016) opined that there is a relationship between structure and conduct characteristics on MP.

Equally, Jancenelle et al. (2017) maintained that MP remains the true reflection of structure and conduct as measured in terms of variable such as prices, cost and volume of output. Even though performance is judgmental and therefore subjective in nature, Olukosi and Isitor (1990) pointed out that, it is difficult to measure the nature of market performance. However, performance measures could be modified to suit the nature of the problem. Gross margin, marketing margin and marketing efficiency are the major indicators of MP, while costs and returns are the indicators for firm profitability analysis (Kaleka & Morgan, 2017; Alrubaiee et al. 2017). Therefore, Gross margin is used as a tool for measuring efficiency and profitability among different enterprises. While net returns would roughly equal to return to the middleman's capital, if the market were perfectly competitive. Iheanacho (2000) uses the Gross Margin method in his study of millet production under different cropping systems to measure profitability.

Marketing Margin

kur et al. 2017 and Olukosi and Isitor (1990) defined marketing margin as the difference in prices paid for a product at different stages of the marketing systems. Time, place, form and possession are important factors that affect MM. Therefore, it represents difference in price of a giving product at different stages of time, form, place and possession as it moves fromthe primary producer to the ultimate consumer (Bukar et al. 2015). Therefore, marketing margin is referred to the difference in price paid to the first seller and that paid by the last buyer of the product. Kopp (2017) viewed marketing margin as the difference between purchase price, transportation cost, as well as trader's profit.. Paul et al. (2016) pointed out that MM provides only one point of reference in the measurement of performance and should be compared with measures of profits earned by marketing firms in order to ascertain whether the margins are excess. However, middlemen in the course of discharging their role in the marketing system, bear the cost of labour, equipment, and transportation in carrying out their marketing functions. Marketing costs are often erroneously assumed to be synonymous with MM in essence, the true relationship is that, MM includes marketing costs in addition to the normal profit or loss earned by the intermediaries, as the commodity passes through the marketing systems (Olukosi & Isitor 1990). According to perfectly competitive model for market behaviours, the net margin received by middlemen is not larger on the average than that needed to keep them in that particular business. If there are larger profits, other firms would be attracted into the industry and profits would decrease eventually. However, if entry into the industry is restricted as a result of some market imperfections, therefore, middlemen may obtain larger MMs than would be possible if the number of buyers is greater and competition piercing (Kur et al., 2017). Jones (1996) opined that MM and net returns to trading are low, unless the traders are able to finance risk and inter-seasonal storage.

The theory of perceived risk proposed by Bauer (1960) has been used to explain distributors' behaviour in acquiring the products and final sale or disposal of the product as theoretical framework in this study. Bauer (1960) is the first person that developed perceived risk from psychology theory which explained the consumers' behavior involved risk because their purchasing actions will produce consequences which he cannot anticipate with anything approximating certainty, and some of which at least are likely to be unpleasant. The marketing margin may fluctuate due to the marketing services provided, risk and uncertainty borne by each of the market participants, breakages and damages of the commodity as well as the number of marketing agents involved. Cox (1967) proposed the perception that consumer get from the buying action is related to "Financial" or" Social-psychological". In addition, Roselius (1971) indicated consumer might suffer time loss, hazard loss, ego loss and money loss. Jacoby and Kaplan (1972) added financial risk and physical risk, proposed five types of perceived risks: financial risk; functional or performance risk; physical risk; psychological risk; and social risk.

Methodology

Primary data was collected from both strategic sales deports (SSDs) and the high volume outlets (HBOs) of soft drink distributors making a total population of four hundred and three (403) in Maiduguri in thirteen (13) different designated sales locations using questionnaires and focus group discussions. The distributors are in two main categories as indicated (HBOs and SSBs). Stratified random sampling method was used to sample a total of 150 distributors in the 13 locations as indicated below. The locations are Hausari, Ngomari, Kano Motor Park, Old GRA, Monday market, New GRA, Polo road, KasuwanShanu, Gwange, Muna Motor Park, BamaMotor Park, BagaMotor Park andUmarariBaga road. Cross-sectional data was used and multiple regression using the ordinary least square (OLS) regression technique was applied to determine the effect of marketing cost on the marketing performance. The model was specified as follows;

Y=f (X1, X2----X10)			
Where Y=quantity of		soft drink sold	(N)/month
X1	=	InitialCapital investment	
X2	=	Cost of unit of product	(N)
X3	=	Cooling cost in	(N)
X4	=	Electricity bills cost	(N)
X5	=	Handling charges/crt	(N)
X6	=	Storage Cost	(N)
X7	=	Transportation cost/crt	(N)
X8	=	Labour /crt	(N)
X9	=	Market Union tax	(N)
X10	=	Local Government tax	(N)
Ei	= Error term		
Bi= Coefficient of Independent variables to be estimated.			

A priori, the coefficients of the independent variables were expected to be positive and have significant relationship with the dependent variable, indicating effect of marketing cost on marketing performance.

Marketing Channel: Marketing channel was identified using the participants and the route through which product was transferred from producers to consumers and a distribution channel was drawn.

Findings

Channel strategy was discovered to have sales, stock availability, order cycle time and frequency of stock out was measured on ratio scales. A promotion had been programmed to provide distributors sales incentives to depersonalize the low sales experienced during the business cycle. Stock availability had a minimum of 123 cases and a maximum 5234 cases. Management desired a minimum stock of 300 cases for SSDs and HBOs operators and ice plant operators. Other types of distributors needed to carry at least four-days stocks based on daily sales. Inventories should be stored to smooth out sales, increase profits and customer satisfaction. Order cycle time measuredin days was a minimum of one day and maximum of five days. Management desired a maximum order cycle time of one day. Clearly order cycle times exceeding one day reduces the stock available if daily sales are held constant. Frequency of stock outs was measured in the number of times distributors experienced stock outs during the study period. Maximum number of stock outs was average of 15 especially during peak season times. Management needed to reduce the frequency of stock outs to nil for all distributors.

The complex network of participants in the marketing system of soft drink include: the factories from which goods moved to others – depot, SSBs, HBOs, traders/distributors, wholesalers, retailers, hawkers down to the final consumer. These people were necessary in fulfilling their marketing objectives and goals: maximizing consumption, customer satisfaction, and profitability. The nature of the product compounds the task of marketing intermediaries, making their task more demanding and complex. Therefore, efficiency of the marketing system in enhancing the prompt delivery of goods cannot be overemphasized. The emphasis on marketing channel and system analysis is to show the systematic linkages in performing marketing functions and cost spread in moving soft drinks from the producer to the consumer and the quantity of services rendered to facilitate the flow.

There are Five (5) major channels that can be identified in the market; Channel 1 consisted of producer/firm who sales to Distributor (SSD) then to HBO, retailer, and finally goes to the consumers. The SSB then incur storage, transport and to reach consumers.Channel 2 consists of producer/firm who sales to Distributor (SSD) then in turn sale to retailer and finally to the consumers. The SSB then incur storage, transport and to reach consumers.Channel 3 has producer/firm who sales to Distributor (HBO) then to retailer, and finally to consumer.The retailers in channels 2 and 3 consisted of retail shop/Hotel owners, super markets and dealers. Channel 4 consisted of the HBO who then incur storage, transport and cooling process to service the final consumers. Channel 5 comprised of the SSB who then incur storage and transportation cost to reach retailers and end users.The dominance of few sellers in most markets implies low competition among sellers. This would in turn makeproducers receive low prices for their produce. It would also make other potential traders fail topenetrate the markets resulting into no further innovations in the industry.

Conduct of soft drink markets in the study area indicates that there were no trader based organizations or marketing groups in all the markets to affect the bargaining power.This means that setting of prices was done on company and individual at the lower levels. The behaviour was reflected in purchase of products from producers. The company has the distribution, wholesale and retail prices even though most traders especially the retailers do not adhere to these prices in that,the individual traders most of times determine the price. The determination of prices in soft drinks markets was dependent on the seasonality of demand (32%), electricity and cooling cost (22.7%), competition (16.9%) and purchase price (18.9%) among other factors.On the issue of performance of soft drink markets**,** price spread method was applied to assess efficiency of marketing channels by removing marketing costs.Traders' surplus was calculated as a percentage of the total marketing costs to determine how well marketsperform in terms of prices. The Distributor's surplus was 58.5%, wholesale-retailer's surplus was 115.3%,retailers' surplus was 36.5% (for channel 2) and 105.5% (for channel 3). This implies that all the intermediariesmake super normal profits as they are above the acceptable range of 20-30%.

Table 1: Regression Estimates of Soft Drink Distributors

Explanatory Variable	**Exponential Equation**	**Double Log**
Constant Term	2.880	4.428
X1 Initial capital	0.00002812	0.08868
	(1.371)	(1.985)**
X2 cost of unit of products	0.000199	0.0645
	(1.224)	(1.727)*
X3 Cooling cost	0.0462	0.315
	(2.759)***	(6.162)***
X4 Electricity cost	-0.00119	0.0259
	(-1.588)	(0.470)
X5 Handling charges	0.00449	0.159
	(3.795)***	(2.866)***
X6 Storage cost	0.000405	-0.00319
	(2.850)***	(-0.161)
X7Transportation cost	-0.000103	-0.0120
	(-0.824)	(-0.251)
X8 Labour Cost	-0.000449	0.000418
	(-0.997)	(0,018)
X9 Market union tax	0.000228	-0.00553
	(0.310)	(-0.200)
X10 L.G.A. tax	0.000347	0.157
	(0.920)	(2.752)
R^{-2}(%)	58.7	63.8
F- value	7.23*	8.93*
S- error	0.41495	0.38889

*** Significant at 1 % level;** at 5 % level; * at 10 % level

Source: Researchers computation (2018)

The effect of marketing cost on performance was estimated via the multiple regressions. Result revealed that initial capital, cost of products, Cooling cost and handling charges were significant at 10%, 5% and 1% levels respectively indicating a positive relationship between selling price and profitability, sales output and customer attraction in all the markets. The positive and significant coefficients show that they are the major determinants of selling prices of market performance in the study area. Electricity cost, product tax and LGA tax also had positive coefficient, the implication is that, these variables also have an effect on the performance by decreasing it. Transportation and storage costs have negative coefficients, this implies that, in the study area, marketers do not pay transport and storage costs, the sellers supply the products to their shops at different locations.

Conclusion

There are Five (5) major channels that can be identified in the market; they consisted of producer/firm, Distributor/strategic sales deport (SSDs) and the high volume outlets (HBOs), retailer, and final consumers. Marketing of soft drink is a capital intensive and lucrative business. The company has the distribution, wholesale and retail prices even though most traders especially the retailers do not adhere to these prices. They usually in most of times determine the prices. The determination of prices in soft drinks markets was dependent on the seasonality of demand (32%), electricity and cooling cost (22.7%), competition (16.9%) and purchase price (18.9%) among other factors..

Recommendations

There is a need for the formation of a strong co-operative society by marketers so as to ease the problem of margin for the distributor comfort in the business. Inventories should be stored to smooth out sales, increase profits and customer satisfaction.Government should assist marketers by reducing tax.

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