International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management
United Kingdom Vol. IV, Issue 7, July 2016
http://ijecm.co.uk/ ISSN 2348 0386

EFFECT OF MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES ON PRODUCTIVITY OF SOFT DRINK DISTRIBUTORS IN KENYA

A SURVEY OF KISII BOTTLER'S TERRITORY, KENYA

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Abstract

Productivity in Kenya remains fairly low, and in line with the trends in Africa, it is only one twelfth of the levels in the USA. As a result of this, business owners continue to report poor sale returns, and low profits. It is based on this observation that the current study sought to identify the strategies that affect the productivity of soft drink distributors. Specifically, the study was guided by four objectives: To examine the extent to which sales target planning affect Distributor Productivity in Kenya, to investigate extent to which Human Resource planning affect Distributor Productivity in Kenya, to determine the extent to which marketing initiatives affect distributor productivity in Kenya and to establish the extent to which Cost reduction programs affect distributor productivity in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive research design. Target population was 62 respondents from 62 soft drink distributors operating in Kisii Bottler's territory where purposive sampling was applied. The primary data was collected by administering questionnaires to respondents. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings enabled manufacturers to structure their strategies in line with their business visions, making them more effective in terms of helping to improve organizations leading to better performance. The study revealed that to succeed in soft drink industry, products should be perceived to be of high quality which can be done through reconciling low cost with high quality production and technological progressiveness so as not to affect profitability. The study recommended greater emphasis on marketing orientation philosophy and culture plus customer orientation.

Keywords: Strategies, Productivity, Territory, Product Differentiation, Resource Based View

INTRODUCTION

The main goal or objective of any business organization according to Lucey and Fox (1993) is to make and maximize profit while other secondary objectives include going concern, growth, corporate social responsibility, benefits to employees and so on. Though other objectives are also considered very important as listed above, the profit maximization is usually the ultimate because it maximizes the shareholders wealth which is the ultimate aim of investing in a business. People will naturally prefer to invest in a highly profitable business (Lucey and Fox, 1993). Therefore, in the long run only the profit maximizers survive in the business environment. However, for adequate profit to be recorded from a business there is a need for adequate control of cost.

Organizations therefore aim at boosting productivity which is a measure of units of output arising from known units of input. It is therefore a ratio between input and outputs. Inputs are the amount of resources such as human resource, money, time, physical, technological and effort spent working in the organization, while output are the result. If the inputs are small relative to the outputs, the worker is considered productive. When the employees are productive, they accomplish more in a given amount of time. In turn, efficiency saves their company money in time and labour. When employees are unproductive, they take longer time to complete projects, which cost employers more money due to the time lost (Ikeanyibe, 2013). To achieve a given set of organizational goals and objectives, companies conceptualize, design, and implement various strategies. These strategies can be corporate, business, or functional. Marketing strategies constitute one of the functional strategies amenable to application by contemporary companies in order to enhance performance. Further, a growing number of organizations use quality management as a strategic foundation for generating a competitive advantage and improving firm performance (Reed, et al., 2000).

Huang (2001) in a study in United States of America (USA) identified that companies which closely coordinate strategies such human resource planning ensures that firms achieve better performance than companies that do not. Jackson and Schuler (2002) noted that businesses require employees to possess specific skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to implement their competitive strategies and the development of the desired behavior and abilities depends on the design and implementation of specific human resource management planning and thus firms adopting an innovation strategy must be prepared to adapt to rapid market change and technological progress. Further Kumar (2006), noted that all over the world, especially in Europe and North America, organizations that have business models and technologies different from those of market leaders are mushrooming, as a result, such companies offer products and services at prices dramatically lower than the prices established businesses charge, often by harnessing the forces of deregulation, globalization, and technological innovation.

The productivity levels of firms in emerging economies are much lower compared to that of developed economies and this is basically attributable to the difference in the level and extent of technological adoption (Afzal & Manni, 2013). Karabag and Berggren (2014) in their study analyzed the impact of firm strategy and industry structure as well as business group membership and state support on firm performance in an advanced emerging economy, Turkey. Their results indicated that firm-related factors (competitive strategies) do not significantly influence performance; instead factors related to industry structure and business group membership are the strongest determinants of firm performance; further, state support interacts with business group membership and was found to be positively related to productivity.

Within the context of developing countries, Tybout (2000) on the other hand examined the performance of manufacturing firms in developing countries and identifies the following reasons for the poor performance of many developing-country establishments compared to global best practice: limited market size (which maybe aggravated by insufficient transport services), lack of human capital, and difficulties in accessing manufactured inputs and infrastructure services at competitive prices and quality.

Eifert, et al. (2005) analyzed the share of “indirect” costs for firms in 42 countries. Most of these indirect costs are attributable to services-related inputs into production; energy, transport, telecom, water, insurance, marketing, travel, independent professionals and accounting. They found that in countries such as China, India, Nicaragua, Bangladesh and Morocco, indirect costs account for 13-15 percent of total costs, around half the level of labor costs. In most African countries, indirect costs average as high as 20-30 percent of total costs, often dwarfing labor costs.

Statement of the Problem

Productivity in Kenya remains fairly low and in line with the trend in Africa, it is only one twelfth of the levels realized the USA. As a result of this, business owners continue to report poor sale returns, and low profits. This creates a vicious cycle of low salary payments by the employers. This low productivity is linked to adoption of wrong strategies. Empirical research in the field of firm productivity with focus on strategic management issues within the context of developed economies has received adequate attention whereas the empirical review on the strategic management issues on enhancing firm productivity in developing countries has not been adequately researched. The empirical studies in the field of strategic management that enhance firm productivity reviewed include those of Okoye and Ezejiofor (2013) who conducted a study on the effects of human resources development on organizational productivity; Huang (2001) conducted a study within the USA; Schuler and Jackson (2002) also conducted a study in USA; on the other hand Isaac and Anthony (2014) conducted a study on the Guerrilla and traditional marketing interface in improving the productivity among small and medium size enterprises in Nigeria; Akinyele (2010) conducted a study on the effect of marketing strategies on the performance of firms in Nigerian oil and gas industry. Spillan and Parnell (2006) conducted a study on marketing resources and firm performance among SMEs in the United States; Oluwagbemiga, et al. (2014) conducted a study on cost management practices and firm's performance of manufacturing organizations within Nigeria. The reviewed studies indicated that most of the empirical research had been conducted in United States of America and Nigeria. As a result, there is a paucity of the studies on the strategies affecting organizational productivity within the context of developing countries and in particular, within Kenya and therefore this study sought to identify the management strategies that affect productivity of soft drink distributors. In particular, it sought to examine the effect of sales planning strategies, HR planning, marketing initiatives and cost reduction programs on distributor productivity.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the extent to which sales target planning affect Distributor Productivity in Kenya.
2. To investigate extent to which Human Resource planning affect Distributor Productivity in Kenya.
3. To determine the extent to which marketing initiatives affect distributor productivity in Kenya.
4. To establish the extent to which Cost reduction programs affect distributor productivity in Kenya.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Product Differentiation Theory

Product differentiation refers to such variations within a product class that (some) consumers view as imperfect substitutes. Consumer goods are available in a variety of styles and brands and as a result require some differentiation. Product differentiation is aimed at influencing people's perception of a brand in such a way that they are persuaded to act in a certain manner, such as buy and use the products and services offered by the firm (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005). In an attempt to differentiate products, firms need to provide relevant meaning and experience to people across multiple societies. To do so, strategies need to be devised that takes account of the brands own capabilities and competencies, the strategies of competing brands, and the outlook of consumers which has been largely formed by experiences in their respective societies (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005). According to Kanagal (2013), product differentiation is the main domain of decision making for marketing initiatives. Marketing initiatives involves deciding customer segments an organization will serve and functions to be supported from those segments plus technologies used to support the functions. Smith (1995) contends that product differentiation and marketing initiatives are closely related though have some important differences. The study asserts that, while product differentiation is concerned with bending of demand to the will of supply, marketing initiatives is concerned with development on demand side of the market.

Porter's Five Forces Theory

The five forces theory by Michael Porter provides a useful starting point for strategic analysis even where profit criteria may not apply (Johnson, et al. 2008); this is because it gives the firm a framework with which to ensure competitiveness in a market where there is stiff competition.

According to the theory, in order to create a strategy it is very important to have enough knowledge about the industry in which the company operates. In addition to the rivalry among the existing competitors, Porter's Five Forces model identifies another four forces that characterize the intensity of competition within an industry: Bargaining power of suppliers, bargaining power of buyers, threat of substitutes and threat of new entrants (Porter, 1979). The interaction of these Five Forces is a constant threat to the success of a company (Dalken, 2014). Barriers to entry are one of the principal forces of competition that shape the performance of firms and industries in any economy (Porter, 1980). This theory is considered to be important in informing the cost reduction programs that firms adopt. In doing so, firms are placing themselves strategically as to be competitive in a market that is often dominated by pricing strategies as a tool to ousting the competitor. This theory therefore also informs the study's objectives on the effect of cost reduction programs on the distributor productivity and effect of marketing initiatives on distributor productivity. According to Renko, et al (2013), Porter's model is used to analyze industrial structure which gives solutions on how to develop marketing initiatives given changes and unpredictability of the changing conditions of markets.

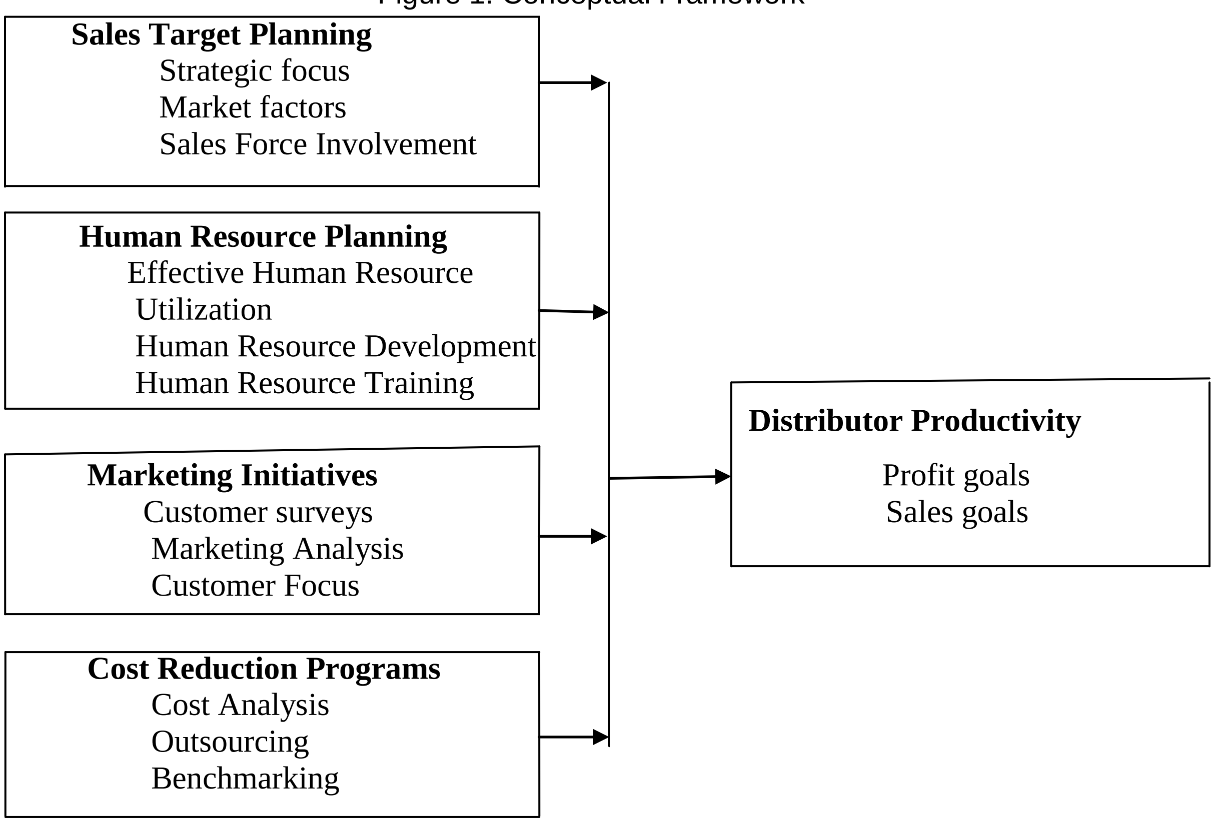
Resource Based View Theory

A resource-based view (RBV) of a firm explains its ability to deliver sustainable competitive advantage when resources are managed such that their outcomes cannot be imitated by competitors, which ultimately creates a competitive barrier (Hooley & Greenley 2005, Smith &

Rupp 2002). RBV explains that a firm's sustainable competitive advantage is reached by virtue of unique resources being rare, valuable, not easily imitated, non-tradable, and non-substitutable, as well as being firm-specific (Makadok, 2001).

Makadok (2001) wrote about the view that a firm may reach a sustainable competitive advantage through unique resources which it holds, and these resources cannot be easily bought, transferred, or copied, and simultaneously, they add value to a firm while being rare. It also highlights the fact that not all resources of a firm may contribute to a firm's sustainable competitive advantage. Varying performance between firms is a result of heterogeneity of assets (Helfat & Peteraf 2003,) and RBV is focused on the factors that cause these differences to prevail. The RBV theory is relevant to the current study because organizations need to identify their resources and how they can use such resources to deliver quality services and thus remaining competitive in the market, marked by stiff competition. Human Resource is one of the most valued resources in an organization and is the basis of competitive advantage for most firms. The theory therefore strongly relates to the study's objective on the effects of HR planning on distributor productivity. This view is supported by Waiganjo, et al (2012) who contends that sustainable competitive advantage is brought by an organization's human resources.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Research Gap

A critical review of past literature showed that several conceptual and contextual research gaps existed in the discourse of strategies affecting productivity among firms. The reviewed literature was for instance, Okoye and Ezejiofor (2013) who conducted a study on the effects of human resources development on organizational productivity; Huang (2001) conducted a study within the United States of America (USA); Schuler and Jackson (2002) also conducted a study in USA; on the other hand Isaac and Anthony (2014) conducted a study on the Guerrilla and traditional marketing interface in improving the productivity among small and medium size enterprises in Nigeria; Akinyele (2010) conducted a study on the effect of marketing strategies on performance of firms in Nigerian oil and gas industry. Spillan and Parnell (2006) conducted a study on marketing resources and firm performance among SMEs in the United States; Oluwagbemiga, et al. (2014) conducted a study on cost management practices and firm's performance of manufacturing organizations within Nigeria. The reviewed studies indicated that most of the empirical research had been conducted in United States of America and Nigeria. This therefore indicated that research especially in Kenya has not received considerate attention and as a result the current study therefore, examined the strategies affecting productivity of firms and particularly among the soft drink distributors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study used a descriptive survey research design to study effect of management strategies on productivity of soft drink distributors in Kenya. According to Orodho (1998), descriptive design is used when collecting information about people's attitude, opinions and habits. The target population was 62 respondents who was either a director or manager from each of the sixty two soft drink distributors operating in Kisii Bottler's territory.

This study employed purposive sampling method to engage either a director or manager from each of the sixty two soft drink distributors operating in Kisii bottler's territory thus making a sample size of 62 respondents. Purposive sampling method was appropriate in this study since the researcher picked a director or manager who had experience plus enough knowledge of the distributor they worked for and were willing to provide information (Tongco, 2007).

This study adopted a closed ended type of questionnaire to obtain qualitative data for analysis. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics which involved use of frequency tables, percentages and charts. According to Saunders, et al. (2009), pilot testing refines the questionnaire so that respondents will have no problems in answering the question. A pilot test was conducted to test reliability of questionnaire of this research. The questionnaire was discussed with two randomly selected managers whose comments were reviewed and incorporated to enhance the validity of questionnaire. To assess reliability of the questionnaire, pilot testing was conducted on six respondents not included in the final study to avoid survey fatigue.

Reliability analysis was done to measure internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha which established if a certain item within a scale measured the same construct. According to George and Mallery (2003), Cronbach Alpha value not more than 0.6 means that internal consistency is questionable.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Sales target planning	0.697	7
Human resource planning	0.750	9
Marketing initiatives	0.826	11
Cost reduction programs	0.715	6

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics was used to discuss findings of the study and hence presentations are in form of tables, charts, frequencies and percentages. Sample size of the study was 62 respondents where only 58 filled questionnaires were picked by the researcher making a response rate of 93.5% which was satisfactory to make conclusions for the study as more than 30% of the total sample size is a good representative of the opinion of whole population (Hidiroglou, et al., 1993).

Sales Target Planning

Table 2: My Boss Will Increase Responsibilities If Performance Is Above Targets

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	3	5.2
Disagree	5	8.6
Neither agree nor disagree	8	13.8
Agree	30	51.7
Strongly agree	12	20.7
Total	**58**	**100**

The table above reveals that most of respondents agreed that their boss would tend to increase job responsibilities if their performance was to be above targets given, as shown by a percentage of 51.7. Increasing job responsibilities would ensure that able employees work to their full potential. This supports findings of Badovick (2000) who contend that failing to meet a performance target may produce emotional reactions that may negatively affect motivation.

Human Resource Planning

Table 3: Human Resource Development Leads to Accomplishment of Company Objectives

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	0	0.0
Disagree	2	3.4
Neither agree nor disagree	3	5.2
Agree	28	48.3
Strongly agree	25	43.1
Total	**58**	**100**

The table above reveals that most of respondents agreed that human resource development leads to accomplishment of company's objectives as shown by a percentage of 48.3. When employees are trained to understand better what they do, they will be more effective in producing goods and services at a low cost which in turn increases profits. This agrees with the findings of Okoye and Ezejiofor (2013) who asserts that, one of the major functions of human resource development is the engagement of people to work in order to achieve sales growth and profitability plus contribute to achievement of organizational goals.

Marketing Initiatives

Table 4: Individuals from all Departments Interact with Customers to Learn their Needs

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	2	3.4
Disagree	2	3.4
Neither agree nor disagree	0	0.0
Agree	37	63.8
Strongly agree	17	29.3
Total	**58**	**100**

The table above reveals that most of respondents agreed that individuals from their service departments interact directly with customers to learn how to serve their needs better as shown by a percentage of 63.8. This kind of interaction helps in customer retention rather than losing them to competitors and also attract new brand of clients who are referred by the existing loyal ones. This assertion concurs with findings of Spillan and Parnell (2006) that conducted a study on marketing resources and firm performance among SMEs in the United States and found out that a greater emphasis on marketing orientation philosophy and culture including customer orientation is a significant part of organizations' marketing efforts.

Cost Reduction Programs

Table 5: Cutting Overhead Costs Has Been Used As Part of Cost Reduction Programs

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	2	3.4
Disagree	9	15.5
Neither agree nor disagree	3	5.2
Agree	33	56.9
Strongly agree	11	19.0
Total	**58**	**100**

The table above reveals that most of respondents agreed that cutting overhead costs has been used as part of cost reduction programs as shown by a percentage of 56.9. Reducing cost of doing business helps to realize higher profits which in turn help in funding daily operations of organizations. This supports findings of Barney and Hesterley (2006). According to their study, sources of cost advantage depend on industry structure and may come from economies of scale, economies of scope, propriety technology, and preferential access to materials among other factors. It is important to have cost advantages like cutting overhead costs for this will enable firms to have above-average returns or command prices.

Organizational Performance

Table 6: Company's Products Are Perceived to have High Quality than of Competitors

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	0	0.0
Disagree	1	1.7
Neither agree nor disagree	2	3.4
Agree	29	50.0
Strongly agree	26	44.8
Total	**58**	**100**

The table above reveals that most of respondents agreed that their products were perceived to have high quality than of their competitors as shown by a percentage of 50.0 which is why they have succeeded in soft drink market. The perceived high quality is probably brought by unique product attributes coupled with the strong marketing strategies that coca-cola adopts for its products. This agrees with findings of Grant (2005) who argues that common to the success of companies in consumer goods industries has been the ability to reconcile low cost with high quality and technological progressiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the study concludes that when employees' performance is above targets given, their bosses would increase their job responsibilities. The study also concludes that one of human resource development major functions is to engage people to work in order to achieve sales growth and profitability plus contribute to achievement of organizational goals.

The study further concludes that individuals interact directly with customers and this interaction helps in customer retention rather than losing them to competitors. Cutting overhead costs has been used as part of cost reduction programs and this helps to realize higher profits which in turn help in funding daily operations of organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings, the study recommends that businesses should implement better ways of increasing employee responsibilities so as to create a continuous improvement culture that will enhance productivity.

The study also recommends that companies should employ adequately skilled workers and also carry relevant on the job training and development to improve organization's performance and growth. It is evident that human resource development leads to better accomplishment of company's objectives since the employees will be more effective in producing goods and services at a low cost which in turn increases the firm's profits.

It is recommended that employees in sales and marketing departments should continuously interact with customers so as to learn how to serve their needs better. This kind of interaction will help in customer retention. It has been shown again and again that it is cheaper to maintain a loyal client than to recruit a new one. Losing customers to competitors is very costly for companies, and must be avoided.

Organizations should develop better ways of reducing overheads if they want to remain lean and effective. The process of cost cutting should be well managed so as not to hurt the very areas requiring more growth such as sales. The study further recommends adoption of modern technology to help firms in reducing cost of doing business which in turn help in improving growth. It is important to have cost leadership as this will enable firms to have above-average returns on investments.

The study also recommends soft drink producers to manufacture and distribute high quality drinks and lower cost of production without compromising quality as this would position them strategically in the current dynamic business environment.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDIES

The present study involved finding out effect of management strategies on productivity of soft drink distributors in Kenya. Limitations of the study were that it involved only one soft drink producer found in Kisii County and due to this reason, the study surveyed the whole territory of the producer. Though the study involved a wide geographical spread of distributors, it lacked adequate funds plus there was fear of victimization which some employees had when discussing sensitive subjects like attitude of their leaders and impact of cost cutting measures. Future researchers may undertake a similar study but focusing more on dairy producers and distributors.

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