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The Importance of Marketing

There is a close relationship between a marketing strategy and its ability to realise its mission, vision, and business strategy. A case in point is the Nike brand that focuses on creating meaningful stories for its loyal fan base. It achieves this by inducing emotions into the customer base through "emotional branding" to realise its vision of expanding human potential by creating groundbreaking sports innovations. Nike's marketing campaign strategy involves building meaningful stories and tag lines using a traditional narrative of a hero who overcomes every challenge brought forth through its slogan of "Just Do It." The brand also has a distribution strategy of using subsidiaries like Converse, Jordan, and Hurley and channels like retailers, e-commerce, and supermarkets to reach out to millions of its customers (Mahdi, Abbas, Mazar, & George, 2015). To achieve its mission of bringing innovation and inspiration to every athlete globally, the brand has invested in top-notch technologies like hyper-adapt as part of a marketing strategy.

Building a Marketing Strategy

There are various tools for analysing a marketing environment. The most common ones are SWOT analysis, PESTLE, Porter's Five Forces of Competitive Advantage, and Scenario Planning. SWOT analysis involves a business identifying the strengths that it possesses and how to use marketing to capitalise on such strengths, realising the weaknesses and ways of minimising them and making the most of opportunities through aggressive marketing (Gürel & Tat, 2017). Finally, SWOT also helps a business identify the threats available in the marketing environment and find ways to reduce such threats. The PESTLE Analysis tool helps establish the marketing environment by assessing the political, economic, social, and technological, and legal factors that are resourceful

in determining how a business can operate in such an environment and the type of marketing required to penetrate a business.

The other popular tool used in the marketing environment analysis is Porter's Five Forces of Competitive Advantage. The five are the direct competition that the business faces, the possibility of new entrants into the market, suppliers' power, the power of consumers, and the threat of alternative products (Shokeen, 2016). Scenario planning is an environmental analysis technique that involves building diverse views about the business's possible future and the marketing techniques required for the business to identify itself with such possibilities. Apart from the above-identified marketing environment analysis tools, other notable tools used to assess the marketing environment are MOST analysis, Heptalysis, De Bono's Six Thinking Hat, Catwoe, and Five Whys. All the above help a business develops a marketing strategy tailored to meet the business environment's needs in question.

Market research plays a critical role in the decision-making of any business. First, it helps a business better understand the type of customer it stands to encounter in the market. Through market research, the business can establish whether the customers are savvy purchasers, industry influencers, or end-user customers. It also opens eyes to the products, trends, and opportunities beyond the business. It makes an entity aware of different variables like disruption, emerging technologies, a rise in competition, and a shift in the customer's preference. The market research also helps establish socio-economic changes in the business environment, new regulations, potential new suppliers, and growth and sinking of the market (Sutapa, Mulyana, & Wasitowati, 2017). Finally, market research also helps a business make prudent investment decisions like

which market to increase spending. Its potential is to grow even bigger and re-evaluate the investment in markets with low demands.

Stage 2: Planning

There is an excellent relationship between a marketing strategy, strategic market analysis, marketing goal, and marketing action. An example is the Nike Company, whose marketing strategy is selling aspiration to its target audience. The marketing action of selling hope to the customers is by being socially conscious by engaging in several community outreach activities to provide solutions to society's social issues. Before they identify which social cause to invest in, they do conduct a market analysis of every market segmentation's needs that the product has a presence in and come up with ways of being part of the solution to such need. The other marketing strategy that the company uses to realise its marketing goals is by focusing on product quality and creating a product that can help athletes perform better. This is evidenced by the 2016 Olympics, where athletes wearing Nike brands outshined others with a competitive advantage and won a total of 77 medals.

Nike's strategic position and the understanding of its competitors have an impact on the marketing strategy. While it is the market leader, the company faces stiff competition from other apparel companies like Adidas and Umbro. To overcome the competition and remain a market leader, the company developed a strategy embracing technology by developing tech-savvy products like a lighter and sturdier shoe like Flyknit. The strategy also involves having a global presence to reach out to millions of its customers around the globe. Currently, the company has more than 800 stores worldwide, and it has offices in 45 countries. This makes it easier for customers to access their products without too much hassle (Akdoğan & Altuntaş, 2015). This is unlike its competitors that

have a lesser global presence resulting in Nike controlling 35% of the industry's market as others share the remaining.

There is a close connection between growth strategies and strategic marketing objectives. To achieve the growth strategy, a business develops a marketing objective of choosing a target area for growth, conducting market research and industry research, setting growth goals, and planning action. When choosing the area of growth is a strategic marketing objective that involves various initiatives, including the expansion of the current offices, new branches, penetration into new markets, the addition of new products, and growth of customer base. Conducting market research may involve doing surveys on existing and potential customers to shape the market expectations, growth goals, and marketing strategies that are resourceful in realising such goals. The growth strategy also involves setting growth goals and planning a course of action through marketing strategies of realising such goals.

Marketing strategies contribute heavily to a business achieving sustainable competitive advantage. First, an effective marketing strategy ensures that a business makes more sales than it used to do. This is achieved by the consumers being more aware of the market's product and the benefits that accrue by buying such a product. By making more sales, a business stands in a great position of having a competitive advantage over others. Strategic marketing also helps a business has a good reputation through transparency, regular engagement with the customers, and corporate social responsibilities. In marketing, image is everything, and a good reputation ensures that a business carries a brand that the competitors may be lacking, thus achieving a competitive advantage over them (Kozlenkova et al., 2015). Strategic marketing also helps a business learn more about the

target audience and tailor its products to address the needs of the audience, thus gaining customer loyalty, thus differentiating it from others.

The other reason right marketing strategies contribute to sustainable competitive advantage is that they help a business earn the customers' trust. Trust helps a business has customers ready to invest in the products and services that such an entity provides. On top of that, marketing strategies enable a business to understand what works and what doesn't work when engaging the market, thus utilising the resources prudently by concentrating on the business's strengths. Additionally, an effective marketing strategy also helps an entity to build its brand. The competitive business advantage is not about identifying new leads and turning them to customers (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016). It is about expressing the values, culture, and mission of the company. With right marketing strategies, this can be achieved, helping a business have a powerful brand that every customer wishes to be associated with.

Four factors influence consumer choice and behaviour. First, there are cultural and social factors that influence how a product is perceived in the market. Marketing teams spend vast resources to influence a product's perception in the market in full realisation of how culture can affect a product's sales. Apart from cultural reasons, social factors like family, religious beliefs, and a person's role in society also affect consumers' choice of products. Strategic marketing involves the drive to attract as many customers as possible without offending anyone's culture. The second factor is the personal behaviour of the consumer. The taste of consumers changes with time and any business needs to understand the consumers' profile, including their age, caste, class, and educational background. Lifestyle, personality, and economic status also influence what a customer chooses.

The other factor that is critical in consumer choice and behaviour is the individual customer's psychological status. Under the psychological factor in decision making, there is motivation, perception, learning, and attitude. Motivation is the customer's internal need, while perception involves the customer viewing the product's effectiveness in a particular way (Rana & Paul, 2017). Finally, learning and attitude influence decision-making because customers like to be communicated to through pictures and images, while others feel irritated. The final factor that influences decision making and customer behaviour is the demographic factor. This is the customer's physical location and the distance between the customer and the product in need. Many customers like to have an easily reachable product without them having to travel miles searching for the product. However, some do not mind sacrificing their time to go for their favourite product, however far it may be located.

Stage 3 – Segmentation

There is a difference between market segmentation and product differentiation. Market segmentation divides a heterogeneous market into homogenous segments based on geographical area, demographics, psychographics, and the target customer's behaviour. Demographic segmentation uses data to segment the market into different categories like age, income, location, and education, while psychographic segmentation is categorising consumers based on factors like personality, values, and lifestyle. Behavioural segmentation involves basing on behaviours like spending habit and purchasing habit to make a marketing decision. In contrast, geographic segmentation classifies customers using factors like country, climate, and urban or rural. Market segmentation helps a business develop a strong marketing message, establish the most effective marketing strategies, design hyper-targeted advertisements, and attract quality leads (Venter,

Wright, & Dibb, 2015). It is also resourceful in building deep customer affinity and identifying niche market opportunities.

On the other hand, product differentiation involves distinguishing a product from others by making it more attractive to a particular market. An example of product differentiation is an internet service provider providing the highest speed compared to the competitors in a particular market. There are three main categories of product differentiation: horizontal differentiation, vertical differentiation, and mixed differentiation. Horizontal differentiation is where the differentiation is not related to the product's quality or the price. The customer's preference is what matters in this type of differentiation. Vertical differentiation is differentiating a product or service mainly based on price, while mixed differentiation bases on a combination of factors to make a product stand out from the rest. Some of the factors of product differentiation include quality, design, customisation, and pricing.

There are four notable market targeting approaches that a business can employ. The first is undifferentiated marketing, which occurs when there are no significant differences in the consumers' characteristics. Additionally, the cost of coming up with a unique marketing mix may outweigh the benefits generated from such differentiation. As such, a business decides to apply a single marketing mix for the whole market. The second market targeting approach is multi-segment targeting. This involves developing a unique marketing strategy tailored to address the needs of each market segment. Different brands and campaign slogans are developed for different markets (Nadube & Didia, 2018). This is the most effective market target strategy since studies indicate that it generates more sales, enables a business to have a large market share, and eventually leads to higher profits.

There is also a concentrated targeting strategy in situations where a company establishes several segments, but it cannot serve them all. Under this strategy, a business resolves to target just one market segment and concentrate on maximising the benefits in such a segment. The strategy is suitable for businesses limited by the resources that risk being stretched should they target many segments. One problem with this strategy is that a business risk running out of business should the concentrated segment become unprofitable. The final market targeting strategy is customised marketing, where individual customers' requirements are unique to the level that products have to be customised to meet their tastes and preferences. The strategy is resourceful in developing a close working relationship between customers and suppliers since all their needs are addressed in the final product. However, it is a very costly strategy to employ as compared to the other market targeting techniques.

Market positioning involves the application of various steps to achieve it. The first step is understanding the dynamics of the market. The dynamics include the market category that a business plans to venture into, the target market segment, the factors that buyers evaluate before choosing a product, and how buyers view the competitors' products. An example is Best Limited, a start-up business in the manufacturing industry. Before starting the business, Best evaluated and established that buyers evaluated price and quality keenly before choosing the building cement they could purchase. This is why the company opted to have its cement products priced marginally lower than the competitors without compromising on the quality of its products (Zhao, Libaers, & Song, 2015). Regarding the target market, the company realised that its pricing strategy is popular among the middle class, leading cement buyers.

The second step is identifying the competitive advantages of the business. The advantages may be in terms of price, features, or benefits. In the case of Best, the competitive advantages that the company identified are price and benefits. The company's products are priced slightly lower, thus edging out competitors that offer similar products at a higher price. The company's cement is also of the highest quality; thus, the building's benefits using Bestoc's cement make it's brand popular. The next process is defining the positioning strategy. Some of the position strategies include positioning oneself as "owning," ideal, distinctive, or preferred alternative. An example of a business that positions itself as a preferred alternative is Wal-Mart retail shops with their lowest prices. The final process is communicating and positioning the strategy. This involves aggressive marketing campaigns on why customers should choose the company's products over competitors.

Market positioning has a crucial function in the success of any business. One, it enables a business to position itself as an interface between brand loyalty and brand image. The position is also the most significant source of competitive advantage for any organisation. On top of that, positioning plays a crucial role in differentiating a product on the market. The differentiation may be in terms of price, quality, easy to use, or accessibility. Consumers also want easy solutions to the buying process. This is precisely what market positioning seeks to address itself by ensuring that the consumers can easily access their products through subsidiaries, branches, retailers, intermediaries, and wholesalers (Díaz, Rodríguez, & Díaz, 2015). By ensuring that the purchasing process is convenient to the buyers, the business can position itself through customer trust and loyalty.

Implementation and the marketing mix

The marketing mix plays an essential role in the implementation of any business's marketing strategy. First, it helps clean a mix creation by ensuring that all P's are compatible with each other. In that case, the price of any product needs to be compatible with the product placement because customers can easily access the product, however favourable the price is. At the same time, the product needs to be compatible with the message in the promotions. The marketing mix is also resourceful in the development of new products into the market. Bestow's cement products penetrated the market by correctly identifying the pricing, place, and promotion. Simultaneously, Wal-Mart uses a low pricing strategy to induce customers to prefer their products over the competitors'. Additionally, the marketing mix is also used to increase the portfolio of a product and differentiate it from the other products.

Product development and branding play a crucial role in marketing. First, it leads to the competitive advantage of a business as compared to rivals. New products give a business a competitive advantage through new sales, more space on the shelves, and customer impression. On top of that, innovation through product development makes a company acquire the image of creativity and a brand of solving consumers' problems. The other role of product development and branding is that it tests the trends of the consumers. The consumers are continuously evolving, and the same applies to their tastes and preferences. By introducing new products, a business can be ahead of the consumer trends and provide solutions to their needs (Cooper, 2019). Finally, product development and branding is also resourceful in exploring technology and coming up with innovative ways of producing products at a lesser cost.

Costing and pricing decisions have a significant impact on the competitive advantage of any business. When a business prices its product at a slightly lower price than the direct competitors,

such business stands to have an advantage over its competitors. This is informed by the fact that price is one of the factors that influence the purchasing decision. Consumers are likely to choose a lower-priced item over a highly-priced similar item if other factors like quality and reliability are constant. A company with customers preferring its products based on price carries a competitive advantage through a high volume of sales and profits. The profits may be recouped by investing in research and technology, thus establishing superior competitors.

Marketing communication plays an integral role in the realisation of the marketing mix objectives. Marketing communication ensures that the four P's in the marketing mix are realised. This is achieved by using various communication channels to sell the brand of the product to the customers. Some of the channels in the integrated marketing communication include advertising on various platforms like social media, print and electronic media, and billboards. There is also direct marketing where a company uses sales representatives to market its product to the customers. The sales representatives also ensure that the product is easily accessible to the customers. The other marketing communication strategies used in the marketing mix are database marketing, sales promotions, sponsorships, exhibitions, and personal selling (Martin, Javalgi, & Ciravegna, 2020). The combination of all these marketing communication techniques helps a company to the marketing mix.

Retailing and channel management contribute heavily to the competitive advantage of a business. Regarding retailing management, it saves time and ensures that consumers can conveniently access any company's products. When customers are served conveniently, and without any hitches, there is a possibility of such a business building a long working relationship with the customer, thus giving a business a competitive advantage through customer retention. When it comes to channel

management, a business can create a program that enables it to sell and service customers within a specified channel. This helps a business have a competitive advantage since it streamlines communication between the customer and the business, thus gaining the customer's trust. The act is achieved by segmenting customers based on their needs so that the needs are all addressed.

There are various similarities in the marketing strategies in the commercial, non-profit organisations, and the public sector. First, in all the sectors, the marketing communication channels are similar. All three sectors use print and electronic media, social media, and direct sales to advertising their products and services. The other similarity with the three sectors is that they have marketing departments that are independently bestowed to sell their brand to the corporate world. However, there are also differences in their marketing. While the public sector offers its products and services for free or at a small fee as part of marketing, that is not the case with the commercial and non-profit sector marketing (French, 2017). The other difference between the three sectors is that non-profit organisations do not engage in aggressive marketing like commercial and public sectors since such organisations do not have any sales targets.

The marketing technique used in the public sector is offering products and services for free or at a small fee since organisations in the public sector are mostly for service, not profit. Organisations in the public sector also use policy marketing to convince specific sections of the population to accept the policies are new laws. The marketing technique used in the commercial sector is to conduct making with the sole purpose of increasing sales and revenue through such marketing campaigns. That is not the case with non-profit organisations whose primary marketing strategy is

bringing a positive impact into society through programs like eradicating poverty or providing water to those in need.

Marketing plays a central role in social and political change in any environment. In terms of the role it plays in social change, marketing can influence society's eating habits. An example is a campaign against the consumption of calories in a population. Such a campaign can influence society to change their eating habits so that it can attain a healthy lifestyle. Marketing also influences political changes in society. Currently, there is a massive campaign on the need to reduce global warming. Such a campaign has influenced political leadership to develop policies meant to contain climate change (Ingenbleek, Meulenberg, & Van Trijp, 2015). Some of the policies include the ban on plastics and encouraging society to protect and plant more trees.

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