

Effect of Channel Design on the Sales Performance of Monitor Publications Limited, Kampala, Uganda

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Abstract

The process of selecting channel members / intermediaries is an ongoing process due to the fact that they tend to leave the channel from time to time, basing on different circumstances: market's changes, problem within their businesses. Thus, the process of choosing intermediaries should be very well managed in order to reduce the cost of identifying them to the minimum. The most important step to be made in order to fulfill the goal is to secure good intermediaries. Distributing a newspaper calls for creation of marketing channels through which it will move from the publishing house to the end-user (the reader). In this study, the researcher set out to assess the effect of channel design on the sales performance of the Daily Monitor Newspaper, a publication of Monitor Publications Limited. Quantitative data was collected from 226 respondents and analyzed to derive the following findings. Channel design, channel administration and channel management technologies were found to positively predict the sales performance of the Daily Monitor Newspaper by 10.5%, 7.6% and 14.7 % respectively. The study revealed that the design of marketing channels for the Daily Monitor Newspaper was generally good, and MPL had acceptable commission policies. Based on the above findings, the study recommends that MPL should devote more resources to channel management and preferably appoint at least one dedicated manager, whose sole responsibility is to manage customer relationships and to develop marketing programs meant to drive revenue through the channel. Dedicating more resources to channel management would enable MPL address issues like gathering or sharing Newspaper industry intelligence information, and organizing trainings for retailers / distributors to improve customer management.

Keywords: Radio, Newspaper, Channel Design, Sales Performance.

Introduction

Uganda today has got a vibrant media industry with a number of Newspapers. (Uganda Radio Network, 2021). New Vision is Uganda's oldest and leading English Newspaper. It is a state owned newspaper and has got the largest nationwide circulation. Daily Monitor is an independent newspaper and second oldest after New Vision. The two papers dominate the print media in Uganda (Uganda Radio Network, 2021). In this study, the researcher wanted explore how Monitor Publications Limited, the publisher of Daily Monitor Newspaper, manages its marketing

channels, and how these channels affect its sales performance.

Global Newspaper circulation revenues are larger than Newspaper advertising revenues for the first time this century, according to the annual World Press Trends survey released by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA, 2021). In media, it is said that “if content is king, then distribution is queen” (Dignited, 2015). Distributing a Newspaper calls for creation of marketing channels through which it will move from the publishing house to the ultimate reader. Indeed, Mehta, Rosenbloom &

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Anderson (2022) define a marketing channel as the route, path, or conduit through which products or things of value flow, as they move from the manufacturer to the ultimate user of the product. Much as there are various factors that determine the successful operation of the sales and distribution channels of Newspaper organizations, the reach and popularity of a Newspaper to a large extent depends on its distribution network (Sridhar et al., 2012). Therefore, it is up to the Newspaper agencies to communicate to the customer that their Newspaper can deliver all the values a customer may look for (Sridhar et al., 2012). In the Middle East and Africa, circulation rose by 3.7% over 5 years, indicating that the Newspaper industry is not one of doom and gloom (WAN-IFRA, 2015). However, there are some issues that can adversely affect the Newspaper. For example, internet-enabled devices and online based companies such as Google, YouTube and Facebook have taken over information/news dissemination, to the extent that media industry hard copy production and circulation vibrancy has been threatened (Fenez et al., 2009; Rammile and Nel, 2012). In line with this, purchase of a hard copy has been affected because consumers are increasingly becoming sensitive on what they buy on daily or weekly basis, which has forced some to switch from buying hard copies to internet usage, radio listening and television watching (Tumwine, Omagor & Agaba, 2014). Uganda's Newspaper agencies/companies are not immune to the effects of technological advancements. In a presentation, Mr. Justus Katungi, the circulation manager of Monitor Publications Limited, remarked that apart from; low readership culture, high inflation,

political interference, arrival time and poor infrastructure, MPL Newspaper sales were affected by alternative media channels (Katungi, 2015).

A firm can design any number of channels they require. Channels are classified by the number of intermediaries between producer and consumer (Kotler, Keller & Burton, 2009). Designing a marketing channel calls for analyzing customer needs, establishing channel objectives, and identifying and evaluating the major channel alternatives (Kotler, Keller & Burton, 2009). In designing the marketing channels, the marketer must understand the output levels desired by the target customers. Channels produce five service outputs, which include; *Lot size* - the number of units purchased on/in one occasion; *Waiting time* - the average time customers of that channel have to wait to receive the goods; *Spatial convenience* - the degree to which the marketing channel makes it easy for customers to purchase the product; *Product variety* - the assortment breadth provided by the marketing channel (normally customers prefer greater assortment because more choices increase the chance of finding what they need); and lastly, *Service backup* - the add-on services (e.g. credit, delivery, etc.) provided by the channel (da Silva, 2008).

According to da Silva (2008), channel objectives should be stated in terms of targeted service output levels. Channel objectives vary with product characteristics. The company's channel objectives are influenced by; nature of the product, company characteristics, characteristics of intermediaries, competitors' channel and environmental factors.

Nature of the product: Perishable products for

example, require more direct marketing to avoid delays and prolonged handling (Kotler, Keller & Burton, 2009). *Company characteristics*: The company's size and financial situation for example, determine which functions it can handle, how many channels it can use, and which transportation can be used.

Characteristics of intermediaries: Intermediaries differ in their abilities to handle promotions, customer contact, storage and credit. For example, the company's own sales force is more intense in selling.

Competitors' channel: Some companies may prefer to compete in or near the same outlets that carry competitors' products, yet some may not (e.g. Daily Monitor Newspaper wants to locate near the New Vision Newspaper). *Environmental factors*: Economic conditions and legal constraints affect channel design decisions. In a depressed economy for instance, producers want to distribute their goods in the most economical way, using shorter channels (Kotler, Keller & Burton, 2009).

After the channel objectives have been determined, the company should identify its major channel alternatives in terms of; (1) types of intermediaries, (2) the number of intermediaries needed, and (3) the terms and responsibilities of each channel member (Kansal, 2011). The firms need to identify the different types of available intermediaries to carry on their channel work. Intermediaries are individuals or businesses that make it possible for the product to make it from the manufacturer to the end user, essentially facilitating the sales process (Kumar & Venkatesan, 2005). There are four basic types of marketing intermediaries, which include: agents, wholesalers, distributors and

retailers. An *Agent* is an independent individual or company whose main function is to act as the primary selling arm of the producer, and represent the producer to users. Agents take possession of products but do not actually own them (Kansal, 2011).

Agents usually make profits from commissions or fees paid for the services they provide to the producer and users. *Wholesalers* are independently owned firms that take title to the merchandise they handle. The wholesalers own the products they sell. Wholesalers purchase product in bulk and store it until they can resell it.

Wholesalers generally sell the products they have purchased to other intermediaries, usually retailers, for a profit. *Distributors* are similar to wholesalers, but with one key difference. Wholesalers will carry a variety of competing products, for instance Pepsi and Coke products, whereas distributors only carry complementary product lines, either Pepsi or Coke products. Distributors will take title to products and store them until they are sold. A *retailer* takes title to, or purchases products from other market intermediaries. Retailers can be independently owned and operated on a small scale, or they can be part of a large chain. The retailer will sell the products it has purchased directly to the end user for a profit (Kansal, 2011).

After major intermediaries have been identified, the company should decide on the number of intermediaries to use. Three strategies available are; Exclusive distribution, Intensive distribution and Selective distribution (Kotler, Keller & Burton, 2009).

Exclusive distribution involves a limited number of

intermediaries with an exclusive dealing arrangement, where the resellers agree not to carry competing brands. This strategy is appropriate for specialty products which are expensive, infrequently bought and require service or information to fit them to buyers' needs, such as Rolex watches, Mercedes-Benz and Rolls Royce vehicles (Kotler, Keller & Burton, 2009). In *Selective distribution*, only selected available outlets in an area are chosen to distribute a product. The company does not have to dissipate its efforts over too many outlets, enabling the producer to gain adequate market coverage, with more control and less cost than intensive distribution (Kotler, Keller & Burton, 2009). Kotler, Keller & Burton (2009) add that it is appropriate for shopping of products, which consumers are willing to spend more time visiting in several retail outlets to compare prices, designs, styles, and other features of these products.

Intensive distribution is the use of all available outlets to distribute a product. It is suitable for convenience products such as soft drinks, bread, candy, Newspapers, etc., because they have high replacement rate and require almost no service (Kotler, Keller & Burton, 2009). Multiple channels (i.e. convenience stores, service stations, supermarkets, discount stores) are used to sell these products. Each channel alternative needs to be evaluated against; Economic, Control and Adaptive criteria. Vibhash & Lakshmi (2008) explain that under; a) Economic criteria, a company compares the likely sales, costs and profitability of different channel alternatives; b) Control criteria, the company must also consider

control issues, since using intermediaries usually means giving them some control over the marketing of the product, and some intermediaries take more control than others; and finally, c) Adaptive criteria, the company must apply adaptive criteria because channels often involve long term commitments, yet the company wants to keep the channel flexible so that it can adapt to environmental changes. A channel involving long term commitments should be greatly superior on economic and control grounds (Vibhash & Lakshmi, 2008).

After the number of intermediaries needed has been identified, the terms and responsibilities of each channel member should be set (Kansal, 2011). Each channel member must be treated respectfully and given the opportunity to be profitable.

The main elements are; 1) Price policy – price list, schedule of discount and allowances; 2) Conditions of sale – payment terms and producers' guarantees; 3) Distributors' territorial rights – distributors' territories and the terms under which the producer will enfranchise other distributors; and 4) Mutual services and responsibilities - particularly in franchised and exclusively-agency channels. The franchiser provides promotional support, training, recordkeeping system, etc. (Kansal, 2011). This study was carried out to determine how Monitor Publications Limited has designed a marketing channel in terms of channel objectives, selection of agents / distributors and retailers, allocation of tasks to channel actors and how the constraints encountered are addressed in the course of distributing / selling the Daily Monitor Newspaper.

Statement of the Problem

In as much as the Newspaper industry is growing steadily in the Middle East and Africa (WANIFRA, 2015), recent circulation reports of Monitor Publications Limited indicate that sales of the Daily Monitor Newspaper have declined over the past five years. In April 2010, the average daily sales of the Daily Monitor Newspaper were 23,489 copies (Katungi, 2015). By April 2015, the average daily sales of the Daily Monitor Newspaper had reduced to 20,148 copies (Katungi, 2015). The decline in the sales of the Daily Monitor Newspaper could be attributed to inadequacies in marketing channels of Monitor Publications Limited, which is evidenced by the readers' shift to alternative media sources, rather than buying hardcopies of the Daily Monitor. In this study, the researcher carried out an investigation on how marketing channel design, administration and the technologies used by channel intermediaries affect sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited.

Objective of the Study

To examine the effect of channel design on the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited.

Research Question

What is the effect of channel design on the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited?

Hypothesis of the Study

Channel design positively affects the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited.

Methodology

Research Design

A cross-sectional co-relational survey design was adopted. A cross-sectional study (also known as a cross-sectional analysis, transversal study, prevalence study) is a type of observational study that involves the analysis of data collected from a population, or a representative subset at one specific point in time (Amin, 2005). This design enabled the researcher to capture data and information from the staff, agents, distributors and retailers of Monitor Publications Limited in Kampala district.

Study Population

The study population was composed of field sales supervisors, agents, distributors, retailers/vendors and customers of Monitor Publications Limited. Table 1 below shows the numbers of potential respondents in each population category.

Determination of Sample Size

The researcher used multiple sampling techniques to scientifically arrive at an appropriate sample size to be used in the study (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003).

The sample size of the Retailers/Vendors was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970)'s formula to select respondents. From a population of 22,547, a sample size of 412 was selected as shown in table below:

Table 1: Population and Sample Size

Population category	Population	Sample Size	Sampling technique
Field sales supervisors	10	10	Purposive
Agents	35	35	Purposive
Distributors	2	2	Purposive
Retailers/Vendors	2,500	335	Simple random
Customers	20,000	30	Convenience
Total	22,547	412	

Results

Response Rate

In total, 412 respondents were targeted for study and 30 respondents for the qualitative study. For the qualitative study, 34 respondents were successfully interviewed and 226 filled in the questionnaire. Overall, out of 412 respondents initially targeted, 260 respondents participated in the study representing a response rate of 63.4 %. This response rate generally indicates good participation in the study, since majority of the target respondents were accessed and participated in the study (Amin, 2005).

Empirical Findings

This section entails descriptive statistics, correlation, regression and content analysis. To measure channel design, channel administration and channel management technologies, respondents were offered a Likert type scale (1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4Agree and 5-Strongly agree) to express their opinions. The means of the ratings were ordered from the highest to the lowest, to show the best and worst rated aspects of each variable. The average of the means is also presented to show overall rating of each variable.

Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to establish relationships between variables as per the objectives of the study. Pearson's correlation coefficients gave an indication on how relationships between constructs vary (i.e. positive or negative), and determines the statistical significance of the relationship.

Following the study objectives, the researcher used Hierarchical Regression Analysis to ascertain the percentage of variance of the dependent variable explained by the independent variables. Independent variables consisting of; channel design, channel administration and channel management technologies were examined to ascertain how they predict the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited.

Customers were asked to provide any remarks, comments and challenges encountered when accessing the Daily Monitor Newspaper. From the interviews, many answers were given by the various respondents and content analysis was done to enable the researcher group the remarks, comments and challenges into themes in relation to the objectives

of the study. Qualitative data captured from the 34 interviews was summarized and grouped under answer themes, and are presented under findings for each objective.

Table 2 below presents a descriptive summary of responses from vendors, agents, distributors and sales supervisors on the design of the marketing channel of Monitor Publications Limited.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Channel Design

Channel Design	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
There are various ways in which customers can access the Newspaper	226	1	5	4.3	0.7
MPL prefers to locate Daily Monitor Newspaper near other Newspapers (like the New Vision Newspaper).	226	1	5	4.3	0.8
MPL is flexible on methods of delivering the Newspaper	226	2	5	4.2	0.7
It is easy to transport the Daily Monitor Newspaper	226	1	5	4.2	0.8
The Newspaper is easy for customers to purchase	226	1	5	4.1	0.9
MPL has made good progress in understanding how to effectively design channels for distributing the Daily Monitor Newspaper	226	1	5	4.1	0.8
MPL deals with agents / retailers / distributors respectfully and treats them well	226	1	5	4.1	0.9
MPL's payment terms give an opportunity to agents / retailers / distributors of the Daily Monitor Newspaper to do business profitably	226	1	5	4.1	0.7
MPL is flexible on methods of paying for the Newspaper	226	1	5	4	0.8
MPL first analyzes customer needs before deciding distributing the Daily Monitor Newspaper	226	1	5	3.7	1.1
Average				4.1	

Source: Primary data

Most of the respondents agreed that the channel design was good with a grand mean of 4.1 on a scale of 1 to 5. Respondents confirmed that the Daily Monitor Newspaper was located in close proximity to other Newspapers like

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the New Vision Newspaper, which made it easy for customers to purchase it. Respondents added that MPL analyzed customer needs and understood how to effectively design channels for distributing the Daily Monitor Newspaper, same as in the above. Lastly, that Monitor Publications Limited appreciated the role of agents, retailers, and distributors and treated them well.

After ascertaining how effectively the channels for distributing the Daily Monitor Newspaper were designed, the researcher went ahead to measure the effect of channel design and sales performance. The results are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Pearson's Correlation Coefficients for Channel Design and Sales Performance

		Channel Design
Sales Performance	Pearson Correlation	0.33**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.01
	N	214

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between channel design and sales performance given by $r = 0.33$ ($p < 0.01$). This finding means that the design of marketing channel is positively associated with sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited.

Additionally, the researcher used Hierarchical Regression Analysis to ascertain the percentage of variance of the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited, explained by channel design.

Results are presented in Table 10 below.

Table 4: Showing the Hierarchical Multiple Regression of channel design and Sales Performance

Variables	Model 1
Channel Design	0.330**
R Square	0.109
Adjusted R Square	0.105
Dependent Variable: Sales Performance	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: Primary data

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The first objective of the study was tested by model 1, by assessing the predictive power of channel design on the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited. The effect of channel design and sales performance was found to be significantly and positively associated with $\beta = 0.330$ ($p < 0.01$). This essentially meant that a unit improvement in channel design would result into 0.33 units of increase in sales performance. The variable of channel design on its own was found to contribute to the change in sales performance by 10.5%, as given by the adjusted R statistic.

After ascertaining how the marketing channels for daily monitor were designed, and how channel design affected sales performance, customers were interviewed to get their thoughts on the design of the marketing channel of Monitor Publications Limited. The customers gave additional in-depth information on channel-design related issues such as accessibility of the newspaper, which affect the sales performance of MPL. Results for channel design from the interviews are presented in Tables 11 below.

Table 5: Experience of accessing the Daily Monitor Newspaper

Answer Themes
Accessing the paper in town is easy
Accessing the Newspaper out of town is difficult
MPL and its vendors take long to adjust to customers' needs
Online versions of the Newspaper are not available for a long time

Source: *Primary data*

Most respondents revealed that accessing the Daily Monitor Newspaper in town was easier than accessing it out of town. One of the respondents for instance, with regard to this issue noted that:

"I think vendors are doing well but most of them are concentrated in town. Newspapers carry information and we ought to be informed everywhere we are, both in town and outside town. They should contract more vendors to work in areas outside Kampala town."

Another issue raised about the experience of accessing the Daily Monitor Newspaper was that vendors were taking long to adjust to customers' needs. A customer from AAR revealed that sometimes vendors continued supplying the Daily Monitor Newspaper even after being told by the customer that he never wanted more delivery.

Discussion

Firms, such as Monitor Publications Limited need to design marketing channels (identify intermediaries) to facilitate the sales process of carrying their products from the manufacturer to the end-user. There are four basic types of marketing intermediaries, which include: agents, wholesalers, distributors and retailers. In this study, the first objective

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was to look at how Monitor Publications Limited had designed marketing channel(s) in terms of channel objectives, selection of agents / distributors and retailers, allocation of tasks to channel actors in order to facilitate the distribution/sale of the Daily Monitor Newspaper. Most of the respondents agreed that the channel design was good (Table 8, Page 37). Respondents confirmed that the Daily Monitor Newspaper was located in close proximity to other Newspapers (like the New Vision

Newspaper), which made it easy for customers to purchase it. Respondents added that Monitor Publications Limited analyzed customer needs and understood how to effectively design channels for the distribution of the Daily Monitor Newspaper. The study further measured the empirical significance of channel design on sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited. The motivation for this in-depth analysis was an observation made by Palmatier et al (2008), that when a company's sales channels realize their full potential, they not only boost revenue and share but also create a high-performance organization, pulling together for breakthrough financial results. Correlational results for channel design and sales performance indicated that actually, there was a significant positive relationship between channel design and the sales performance of Daily Monitor Newspaper.

A significant positive relationship was also confirmed by regression model 1, showing that channel design positively predicted the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited by 10.5%. This finding confirmed that aspects such as channel objectives, channel selection, channel alternatives, tasks of channel members and constraints, could singularly predict the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited by 10.5%, holding other factors / variables constant. This finding confirmed Metha et al (2000)'s postulation that channel partners provide the route, path, or conduit through which products or things of value flow, as they move from the producer to the end-user, and Kotler et al (2009)'s supposition that for a company to guarantee good sales, it must design good marketing channels.

Most of the customers, 24 out of the 34 that were interviewed, were subscribers of the Daily Monitor Newspaper, implying that vendors were directly delivering the Newspapers to customers' work places or homes. Only 10 of the customers interviewed were buying the daily monitor newspaper from roadside vendors, kiosks or supermarkets. Most customers revealed that accessing the Daily Monitor paper in town was easier than accessing it out of town. Regarding the experience of accessing the Daily Monitor Newspaper, it was found that vendors were taking long to adjust to customers' needs. Some customers told the researcher that online versions of the Daily Monitor Newspaper did not remain available for a long period of time. These discoveries showed that Monitor Publications Limited needed to reexamine the design of the marketing channel for Daily Monitor Newspaper, so as to improve customers' buying experience. This is important because good, strong and long-term relationships of the channel partners with customers affect the firm's performance, and sales performance in particular, as earlier highlighted by Morgan and Hunt (1994).

Summary

Channel design was found to significantly and positively predict the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited by 10.5%. This finding confirmed that aspects such as channel objectives, channel selection, channel alternatives, tasks of channel members and constraints could singularly predict the sales performance of Monitor

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Publications Limited by 10.5% holding other factors / variables constant. Most of the respondents agreed that the channel design of Monitor Publications Limited was good (mean of the means, 4.1). Respondents confirmed Daily Monitor Newspaper was located in close proximity to other Newspapers (like the New Vision Newspaper), which made it easy for customers to purchase it. Respondents added that Monitor Publications Limited analyzed customer needs and understood how to effectively design channels for distributing the Daily Monitor Newspaper. Most respondents revealed that accessing the Daily Monitor Newspaper in town was easier than accessing it out of town. Another issue raised about the experience of accessing the Daily Monitor Newspaper was that vendors were taking long to adjust to customers' needs. A customer from AAR revealed that sometimes vendors continued supplying the Newspaper even after being told by the customer that he never wanted more delivery. Some customers told the researcher that online versions of the Daily Monitor Newspaper did not remain available for an extended period time.

Conclusion

The study revealed a significant positive relationship between channel design and the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited. Channel design was able to positively predict the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited. Most of the respondents agreed that MPL's channel design was good. The Daily Monitor Newspaper was located in close proximity to other Newspapers (like the New Vision Newspaper) which made it easy for customers to purchase it. However, some customers revealed that accessing the Daily Monitor paper in town was easier than accessing it out of town. Some online versions of the Daily Monitor Newspaper were not available for a long time. These discoveries showed that MPL needed to re-examine the design of the marketing channel for Daily Monitor Newspaper so as to improve the customers' buying experience and to optimize sales.

Recommendation

Based on the above findings, Monitor Publications Limited should consider adopting the following recommendations so as to improve its marketing channels and sales performance.

Monitor Publications Limited should devote more resources to channel management and preferably appoint at least one dedicated manager whose sole responsibility is to manage customer relationships and to build marketing programs that drive revenue through the channel. Dedicating more resources to channel management will allow MPL to address issues like gathering/sharing Newspaper industry intelligence information, and organizing trainings for retailers/distributors so as to improve customer management.

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