

Channel Administration And Sales Performance Of Monitor Publications Limited, Kampala, Uganda

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Abstract

Motivation of channel intermediaries can also be enhanced by setting good commission policies, since the main aim of the marketing channel's participants is to get profits. Lastly, manufacturers have to build trust between and among intermediaries. To be competitive, business marketers have to build effective networks and collaborations within channels, and successful cooperation exists only when the partners trust each other. 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, channel administration and channel management technologies 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 administration was found to positively predict the sales performance of the Daily Monitor Newspaper by 10.5%, 7.6% and 14.7 % respectively. The study found that MPL had not fully utilized the internet and social media to support Daily Monitor Newspaper sales, yet a significant number of respondents were using the internet and social media. Utilizing qualitative data from 34 informants, however, some customers revealed that it was not easy to access the Daily Monitor Newspaper out of town, while others reported that some of the vendors lacked business etiquette and delivered the wrong consignment of Newspapers. The study recommended that MPL should also develop measurement tools to track performance of vendors, and improve on communication with intermediaries and customers to build stronger relationships at each step of the channel.

Keywords: Daily Monitor, Newspaper, Channel Administration, Sales Performance, social media, Marketing.

Introduction

Like other areas of business, marketing channels require careful administration, as superior channel management policies and strategies help a firm attain a differential advantage, but concomitantly, are difficult to duplicate (Shusterman, 2013). Marketing channel management refers to the process of analyzing, planning, organizing, and controlling a firm's marketing channels (Coughlan et al., 2005). As discussed in numerous articles and textbooks, it comprises seven decision areas: (1) formulating channel strategy, (2) designing marketing channels, (3) selecting channel members, (4) motivating channel

members, (5) coordinating channel strategy with channel members, (6) assessing channel member performance, and (7) managing channel conflict (Mehta et al 2000). Hutt & Speh (2013) emphasize that the primary roles of channel administration are; selection of channel members and motivating channel members.

The list of probable intermediaries can be reduced to a few, by getting the information about the candidates from different sources: current partners, sales people, potential and actual clients or through databases and professional communities (Coughlan et al., 2005).

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Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the process of choosing the intermediaries is not a one-way street at all, thus the company should bother about its reputation if it wants to have the opportunity to choose the best intermediaries (Kumar & Venkatesan, 2005). After the channel members / intermediaries have been selected, they should be maintained through motivation. According to Hutt & Speh (2013), if the company wants to build strong and beneficial relationships within its marketing channels, the company's strategies should be tied up to the capabilities and aims of its distributors, representatives and suppliers. The company's managers should constantly remind themselves that the intermediaries are independent and profit-oriented and thus as soon as they are not satisfied with the current state of affairs they will leave the marketing channel (Hutt & Speh, 2013).

The motivation of the channel members starts with the realization that every relationship within the channel is a partnership (Kumar & Venkatesan, 2005). The communication can be improved by product training, recognition programs, consultations with the manufacturer's representatives and informational meetings, where the plans and strategies will be discussed in detail. The goal of joining the plans and strategy should be prioritized (Kumar & Venkatesan, 2005). Additionally, in order to enhance the performance of the channel, the manufacturer has to improve the information flow among channel's participants. This can be made by setting periodical council's meetings among the representatives whose aim will be to review distribution policies, provide advice on marketing strategy and supply industry intelligence (Hutt & Speh, 2013).

Statement Of The Problem

In a separate report by MPL's circulation department, other factors that undermined MPL Newspaper sales were; inadequate facilitation for effective field operations e.g. transport for key accounts and regional sales representatives, lack of laptops to aid reporting, poor commission structure at vendor and agent level, limited market support thereby affecting awareness, negative attitude/culture among channel partners (since the Newspaper is viewed as a low profit product) and minimal point of sale materials (MPL report, 2010). According to Fenez et al. (2009), improved sales performance of a Newspaper is achieved by a consumer purchasing a copy, which is dependent on the readability, stimulated by the content of the Newspaper, plus its availability, navigability and visibility. Additionally, 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 important to carry out an analysis on the delivery and sales management of the Monitor Newspaper in order to better understand its marketing channels, and also identify and provide possible solutions to any shortcomings, so as to optimize sales.

Objective Of The Study

To determine the effect of channel administration on the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited.

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Research Question

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

Hypothesis Of The Study

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

Methodology

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. The study population was composed of field sales supervisors, agents, distributors, retailers/vendors and customers of Monitor Publications Limited. 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:

Purposive sampling was used to select staff of MPL, as well as agents and distributors of the Daily Monitor Newspaper. Purposive is a non-probability sampling technique that enabled the researcher to select respondents based on who has the required information; that is Key Informants (Sekaran, 2003). Simple random sampling technique was used to collect information from vendors of the Daily Monitor Newspaper. This technique has high generalizability of findings, hence, is suitable for a large study population (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). The researcher allocated a number to every agent of the accessible population, placed the numbers in a container and then picked numbers at random. The subjects corresponding to the numbers picked were included in the sample (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003).

Results

A descriptive analysis of responses from vendors, agents, distributors and sales supervisors was done to find out how the marketing channel of Monitor Publications Limited was managed. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for Channel Administration

Channel Administration	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
MPL has the best commission policies in Uganda's Newspaper industry	226	1	5	3.9	1
There is good communication between the retailers / distributors and MPL	226	1	5	3.9	1

The way MPL manages the distribution channel of the Daily Monitor Newspaper has played a significant role in meeting the customer's needs	226	1	5	3.9	1
The way MPL manages the distribution channel of the Daily Monitor Newspaper has had a significant impact on its sale performance	226	1	5	3.9	0.9
MPL has made good progress in understanding how to manage the process of distributing the Daily Monitor Newspaper	226	1	5	3.7	1.1
MPL organizes periodical meetings with retailers and distributors to review its distribution policies to protect distributors and retailers	226	1	5	3.6	1
MPL offers sales support to strengthen the channel partner relationship with retailers and distributors	226	1	5	3.5	1.1
MPL shares Newspaper industry intelligence information with retailers / distributors to boost Daily Monitor Newspaper sales	226	1	5	3.3	1.1
I am satisfied with the recognition programs for retailers and distributors who meet or exceed their sales targets	226	1	5	3.1	1.2
MPL frequently trains retailers / distributors on customer management	226	1	5	3	1.2
Average				3.6	

Source: *Primary data*

The study found out that Monitor Publications Limited had acceptable commission policies in Uganda's Newspaper industry and communicated with its retailers / distributors well (Mean of means, 3.6). It was found that Monitor Publications Limited well managed the process of distributing the Daily Monitor Newspaper and organized periodic meetings with retailers and distributors, to review its distribution policies and strengthen the channel partner relationship. However, Monitor Publications Limited was not rated well on a number of channel administration aspects. A significant number of respondents expressed dissatisfaction (Mean 3.5 and below) with MPL's efforts in sharing Newspaper industry intelligence information with retailers / distributors, recognition programs for retailers and distributors who meet or exceed their sales targets and trainings for retailers / distributors on customer management.

After ascertaining how the channels for distributing the Daily Monitor Newspaper were managed, the researcher went ahead to measure the relationship between of channel administration and sales performance. Results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Pearson's Correlation Coefficients for Channel Administration and Sales Performance

		Channel Administration
Sales Performance	Pearson Correlation	0.284**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00
	N	214

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

There is a significant positive relationship between channel administration and sales performance $r = 0.284$ (Sig < 0.01). This means that the channel administration of Monitor Publications Limited significantly positively associated with its sales performance.

After confirming the relationship between channel administration and sales performance, the researcher used hierarchical regression analysis to ascertain the percentage of variance of the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited explained by channel administration. Results are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Showing the Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Channel Administration and Sales Performance

Variables	Model 2
Channel Administration	0.284**
R Square	0.080
Adjusted R Square	0.076
Dependent Variable: Sales Performance	

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

Source: Primary data

The second objective of the study was tested by regression model 2, by assessing the predictive power of channel administration on the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited.

Channel administration was found to significantly and positively predict the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited with $\beta = 0.284$ ($p < 0.01$). Channel administration was found to contribute to the change in sales performance by 7.6% as given by the adjusted R statistic.

After confirming the relationship between channel administration and channel performance (Table 2), and how channel administration was done at Monitor Publications Limited (Table

3), the researcher developed keen interest in how the distribution process of Monitor Publications Limited can be improved through channel administration. Findings from interviews conducted among customers are presented in table 4 below.

Table 4: How to improve the distribution process of Monitor Publications Limited

Answer Themes
Hire more staff to ease delivery to the many customers
Always confirm the copies delivered
Motorcycles should have box bodies so that even when it rains it doesn't inconvenience delivery
Train their delivery personnel on customer care
Provide client location data (e.g. GPS systems) to their personnel who deliver the Newspaper

Source: *Primary data*

Majority of the customers interviewed revealed that there was need for Monitor Publications Limited to increase the number of vendors to ease delivery to the several customers. One respondent from Computer Facilities Ltd said, *“Apart from these offices which receive the papers delivered to them, in certain areas you have to walk up to town to access the paper especially over the weekend. If MPL would have more vendors on key stages that would be better.”* Increasing the number of vendors would also address the issue of late deliveries, a challenge that was attributed to having one delivery personnel tasked with delivering to a big number of clients in a given area. Some customers also revealed that the vendors sometimes deliver the wrong consignment of Newspapers. For instance, one subscriber from JW Services Ltd said,

“Monitor is good but their customer profiling is sometimes lacking. We have had incidences where they deliver to us papers of another client.”

Therefore, vendors were advised to always confirm the copies delivered, to avoid scenarios of customers missing the needed Newspapers.

Another customer from Ernst & Young emphasized;

“The vendors should always confirm the copies delivered, because sometimes we miss a paper or two. MPL should also put in place a separate person to check whether papers were actually delivered to clients”.

Customers advised that Monitor Publications Limited and its vendors should improve on the means used to transport the Newspaper to customers. Most customers (subscribers) revealed that most vendors used motorcycles while others

carried them by hand. As a result, some customers were receiving torn and untidy Newspapers, especially when it rains or when the roads are dusty.

Monitor Publications Limited and its distribution team were advised that if motorcycles must be utilized, they should have box bodies so that even when it rains, it doesn't hamper delivery.

Another suggestion made by customers to make access of the Daily Monitor Newspaper more convenient was to train the vendors in good customer care practices. Two unsatisfied customers from CPA Uganda and TILDA Uganda respectively revealed that most vendors were illiterate motorcyclists who lacked business etiquette. These customers emphasized that Monitor Publications Limited should train vendors on how to approach of clients, dress code, greetings and formal language. Lastly, customers suggested that Monitor Publications Limited should provide client location data (e.g., GPS systems) to their vendors who deliver the Newspaper. A customer from Infocom Uganda Limited lamented:

"I don't know what MPL uses to inform their agents on the correct location of the clients. Since we moved into this place, we missed papers for some good days, so I think it would be better for them to provide GPS location systems to their personnel who do the delivery, it saves time and it may be one of the ways to avoid inconsistency."

Discussion

As Shusterman (2013) stated, marketing channels require careful administration, since superior channel management policies and strategies help a firm attain a differential advantage. In this study, the researcher investigated the relationship between channel administration and the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited. Findings revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between channel administration and the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited. Additionally, channel administration predicts sales performance by 7.6% when all other variables were controlled; confirming indeed that the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited are affected depending on how channel intermediaries are selected and/or motivated. This finding is in agreement with Behan & Lamoureux (2015), who stated that channel administration affects sales performance by helping to protect brand value, allowing vendors to sell their products at a premium, while enabling the channel to up-sell the proper services and support offerings that meet the customer's needs. The study found out that Monitor Publications Limited had acceptable commission policies in Uganda's Newspaper industry, and communicated with its retailers / distributors well. MPL also managed well the process of distributing the Daily Monitor Newspaper and organized periodic meetings with retailers and distributors to review its distribution policies and strengthen its channel partner relationships.

Channel administration is particularly important to the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited, because channel administration is responsible for creating and maintaining customer loyalty, while strengthening the channel partner relationship, as revealed by Behan & Lamoureux (2015). Unfortunately, Monitor Publications Limited was not rated well on a number of channel administration aspects.

A significant number of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with MPL's efforts in sharing Newspaper industry intelligence information with its retailers / distributors. Its recognition programs for retailers and distributors who meet or exceed their sales targets and trainings for retailers / distributors on customer management also scored poorly. In certain areas, some customers had to walk up to town to access the paper especially over the weekend. Some customers also revealed that the vendors sometimes would deliver the wrong consignment of Newspapers, while some Newspapers were delivered torn and/or untidy, especially when it rains or when the roads are dusty. Some customers also revealed that most vendors were illiterate motorcyclists who lacked business etiquette.

Coughlan et al (2005) posits that the most important step to be made in order to fulfill the marketing goal is to secure good intermediaries. Additionally, once good intermediaries have been identified, they should be motivated and empowered to optimize sales. Stemming from the challenges concerning administration of marketing channels for the Daily Monitor Newspaper, customers advised that MPL ought to increase the number of vendors so as to ease delivery to the many customers. Vendors were advised to always confirm the copies delivered, to avoid instances of customers missing the needed newspapers. MPL and its vendors were advised to improve on the means used to transport the Newspaper to customers. Monitor Publications Limited and its distribution team were advised that if motorcycles must be maintained, they should have box bodies so that even when it rains, it doesn't inconvenience delivery. Customers emphasized that MPL should train vendors on how to approach of clients, proper dress code, greetings and formal language.

Summary

Channel administration was found to significantly positively predict sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited by 7.6%, when all other variables were controlled. The study found out that Monitor Publications Limited had acceptable commission policies in Uganda's Newspaper industry and communicated to its retailers / distributors well. Monitor Publications Limited also managed well the process of distributing the Daily Monitor Newspaper and organized periodic meetings with retailers and distributors to review its distribution policies and to strengthen the channel partner relationship. However, Monitor Publications Limited was not rated well on a number of channel administration aspects. A significant number of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with its efforts in sharing Newspaper industry intelligence information with retailers / distributors, recognition programs for retailers and distributors, who meet or exceed their sales targets and trainings for retailers/distributors on customer management. Majority of the customers interviewed revealed that there was need for Monitor Publications Limited to increase the number of its vendors to ease delivery to the many customers. Some customers also revealed that the vendors sometimes would deliver the wrong consignment of Newspapers. Therefore, vendors were advised to always confirm the copies delivered so as to avoid instances of customers missing the needed newspapers. Customers also advised that Monitor Publications Limited and its vendors should improve on the means used to transport the Newspaper to customers. Another suggestion made by customers to render access of the Daily Monitor Newspaper more convenient was to train the vendors in good customer care practices, dress code, greetings and formal language. Lastly, some

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customers also suggested that Monitor Publications Limited should provide client location data e.g. GPS systems to their vendors who deliver Newspapers so as to save time wasted by vendors while looking for new customers locations.

Conclusion

The study concluded that there was a significant positive relationship between channel administration and sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited. Channel administration was able to predict the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited, holding other variables / factors were controlled; confirming indeed that the sales performance of Monitor Publications Limited were affected depending on how the channel intermediaries are selected and/or motivated. The study also found out that Monitor Publications Limited had acceptable commission policies in Uganda's Newspaper industry, and communicated well with its retailers / distributors. Monitor Publications Limited also managed well the process of distributing the Daily Monitor Newspaper and organized periodic meetings with retailers and distributors to review its distribution policies and to strengthen the channel partner relationship.

However, some respondents said that Monitor Publications Limited did not often share Newspaper industry intelligence information and organized limited trainings for retailers / distributors on customer management. Some customers had to walk up to town to access the Daily Monitor Newspaper, especially over the weekend. Some vendors lacked business etiquette and delivered the wrong consignment of Newspapers. Some Newspapers were delivered torn and/or untidy. Monitor Publications Limited ought to increase the number of vendors so as to ease delivery to its many customers. Vendors should always confirm the copies delivered, improve on the means used to transport the Newspapers to customers, and learn how to approach clients in terms of having a decent dress code, greeting and formal language.

Recommendations

Monitor Publications Limited should develop measurements and track performance of vendors to know who its best sales performers at each point in the channel. By tracking orders, volume and total revenue at each point, MPL can identify and improve on under-performing partners and motivate the top performing vendors in order to even help them to perform better. Tracking the performance of vendors will enable MPL to address challenges such as vendors who lack business etiquette and/or those who deliver the wrong consignment of Newspapers, thus improving sales performance.

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