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An Analysis of Customers' Perspective of the 4Ps Marketing Mix Applied by selected meat suppliers on their FMCG and the Causes of Low Sales in Processed Dairy Products: The Case of Mansa Outlets in Luapula Province

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Abstract. The study intended to analyse customers' perception of selected meat suppliers 4Ps of Marketing Mix on its FMCG and causes of how sales processed dairy products in its Mansa outlets. The objectives of the study were to establish the fast moving consumer good with the highest positive perception of the Marketing Mix of selected meat suppliers' FMCG and to investigate factors contributing to reduced sales in processed dairy products. The study design comprised of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The sample had the categories of participants: (n40 customers) and (n10 marketing specialists). Primary data was collected through questionnaires administered on customers. While an interview guide was applied on marketing specialists. Purposive sampling was used to come up with the sample. Customers (55%) indicated a fair perceptive on the overall pricing of selected meat suppliers' products while meat products had the most positive perspective in terms of quality. Further, the study established that the major factor contributing to low sales in processed dairy products was the emergency of alternatives. The study concludes that customers' perspective on the Marketing Mix strategies applied by selected meat suppliers' on its FMCG is highly varied with greater look on the pricing and product quality. On the other hand, the emergency of alternative to processed dairy products, is presenting an inevitable negative effect on sales volumes on the later.

Index Terms- Marketing mix, FMCG, dairy products, selected meat suppliers, customer perception, sales decline

I. Introduction

Selected meat suppliers is one of Zambia's largest agri-businesses, offering a wide range of FMCG including processed dairy products. Despite brand recognition, some product lines, especially dairy, experience low sales. The marketing mix—Product, Price, Place, and Promotion—is a strategic framework for analyzing how these elements impact customer behavior.

This research investigates how customers perceive the 4Ps and explores the underlying causes of poor performance in dairy product sales in Mansa. The research questions include:

- How do customers perceive the value and pricing of selected meat suppliers dairy products?
- Are promotional strategies effective in reaching the target market?
- What role does distribution play in sales volume?

The study aims to identify actionable insights for improving marketing strategy and enhancing sales performance.

II. Literature Review

1. Consumer Attitudes Changing

Perceived worries over certain attributes associated with dairy products are contributing to reduced sales volumes. The presence of allergens and hormones in such products raise health concerns among consumer populations. According to the National Institute of Health (Ngigi, 2004), the many milk ingredients can cause gastroiritestirical discomfort and disorders. Evidently, CMPA is a leading food allergy and appears mostly in the early years of human life, but sometimes continues in adulthood.

A number of milk ingredients, including lactose and cow’s milk proteins could potentially have led to discomfort since milk decreases gut bacterial activity. On the other hand, dairy products such as kefir and yogurt play a modulation effect on gut microbiota. In turn, and a worrying factor, cow’s milk associated with effects on gut microbiota renders humans susceptible to food-borne infectious diseases (Cresswell, 1997).

2. Quality Perception of dairy Products

Product quality is all about meeting the needs of customers, expectations and performance level. Skeen Kamp (1990) states that quality attributes are the functional and psychosocial benefits derived from a product. Psychosocial constructs are at play in describing quality attributes of beef products.

The intrinsic properties of meat and its products are essentially flavor, texture, color, freshness, stability and nutritional content. On the other hand, extrinsic characteristics are equally critical in defining the quality aspect and these are type of cut and shelf life.

In either case- intrinsic and extrinsic –we understand both as quality cues since they relate to information stimuli that appeal to the senses prior to determining the degree of quality. Similarly, in earlier studies such as that of Garavaglia and Mariani, 2017 the aforementioned attributes of quality were considered.

Brondz (2018) observe that a number of influential leaders from both Judaism and Islam have tried to provide answers to the question why these religions prohibit to eat meat and have indicated that the Lord has prohibited the eating of all unclean meat, including pork. And from the Christian community in our society, biblical prohibitions against eating pork are derived from the Old Testament in relation to dietary laws. Consequently, in contemporary society, conservation of the

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laws of Moses has led to some Christians avoid consuming pork and its products in preference for beef products.

3. Product Packaging Perception

The material around a product is essentially described as customer's perception of packaging is highly psychological as the package itself is perceived from the functional and material dimensions.

From the functional perspective, performance is highlighted. This is concerned with how the packaging meets the desired goods at the packaging (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017). Therefore, critical features customers look for include packaging ability to provide information. For example, packaging in would in most cases contain information on product type, quantity expiry date and the brand name, among other information. On the marketing side, information that is essential on a given package would include aesthetic features- images or graphics, company name and information on the benefit of consuming that product (Agyeman, 2020). All these are considered in building a customer's perspective on a particular packaging.

In addition, the protection aspect of packaging comes to the mind of a customer on the functional purpose of packaging. In fact, the fundamental purpose of packaging is to provide protection to a product. In the case of meat products, fundamentally, packaging provides product with protection from contamination.

Meat products packaging basically embraces the functional dimension aligned towards product protection, while in some other cases, packaging is tailored at both perspectives and marketing objectives. For example, product pre-packaging is seen in selected beef and pork products including polonies. Pre-packaging plays an important role in brand enhancement and in influencing consumer perception.

Price is the amount a business entity charges its customers for its product or services. Price is that which is given in return for a product in a commercial exchange (Cresswell, 1997). Price also means the value customers sacrifice to benefit from receiving or using a particular good or service. For this reason, price is that element in the marketing mix that generates revenue.

Price is a value indicator on the side of the producer as well as the consumer. A high price therefore is associated with high value. Conversely, a low price indicates less quality or value of a product or service (SteenKamp, 1990)

Types of prices are identified and these include: market price is the prevailing price for a certain product or service. According to the corporate finance institute (Angelopulo, 2013), the term market price refers to the amount of money for what an asset can be sold in a market. This price is a point of convergence of the demand and supply for that good. Put differently, the market price of a particular good is highly linked to the demand and supply factors of such a product. Discount price on the other hand, is a price that is lower than the regular price of a product or service. Mostly a business comes up with a discount price purposefully such as increasing sales. Auction price is seen especially during auction sales. In such a price, demand and supply in competitive and real-time bids are the essential features.

Pricing decision is affected by a number of factors arising from both internal and external environments. In the former case, the following are typical examples: product line cycle and cost. Regarding the cost element, a firm has to consider production costs involved-fixed or variable costs count here. In addition, marketing objectives of a business coupled with the marketing mix strategy, are both critical elements in the pricing decision.

External factors in influencing pricing decision include competition (Peppler, 2024). In this context, a business analyses the pricing structure of a similar competitor's goods in order to arrive at its own price. In a perfect competition, goods are primarily homogenous and consequently lead to brand switching. When this occurs, a business is not able to have influence over the price set, but simply adopts the prevailing market price.

In a monopoly, a particular business entity does not have any competitor in its product line. For this reason, such a firm has significant control over pricing and is well placed to come up with the highest price possible for a particular product. This in turn, maximizes profits.

In monopolistic competition, monopoly and perfect competition are both prevalent. In this case, producers offer goods that are slightly differentiated but intended to serve the same purpose for clients. This kind of competition still enables individual producers to have a significant degree of control of pricing strategies.

There are various pricing strategies applied in marketing. According to Gontzknow, (2019) "these include cost-plus pricing, dynamic pricing, penetration pricing, skimming pricing, rule based and consumer-centric pricing."

Penetration pricing is one that is aimed at penetrating a particular market. This price is usually lower than the regular price. A business applies this pricing strategy in order to generate wide awareness of their product/service. This pricing enables such a business to penetrate through other established market participants and take its desired share. Cost-plus pricing is essentially a markup pricing (Cresswell, 1997). This pricing is a markup percentage added to the total cost that is needed to produce a unit of a given product. Businesses apply cost-plus pricing with the aim of covering all expenses.

Dynamic pricing is a strategy used by businesses to adjust prices in response to market conditions and customer behavior. Consequently, this pricing strategy is described as surge pricing or demand pricing.

In value-based pricing, a business sets prices based on how much customers value a particular product or service. This suggests that a business base it's pricing on how much a product is worth (Gaan, 2020).

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Consumer-centric pricing is a pricing strategy that takes into account the needs and expectations of customers when pricing its products.in this strategy, customers come to the fore as a business determines the optimal price.

Data analysis of customer needs and expectations is executed when applying consumer-centric pricing (Cresswell, 1997). In this data analysis, a business understands what influences a customer to make a purchasing decision. Further, a business is enabled to anticipate the needs of its customers and subsequently optimizes pricing accordingly. When this is executed by a business, a positive effect is created such as building customer loyalty and enhanced customer satisfaction.

A product is a good or service that a business offers to meet the needs of its customers (Ngigi, 2004). In fact, in the market mix, product is usually seen as the first P.

Product categorization is mostly identified as consumer products and industrial products. In the former, these are products that the ultimate consumer purchases for direct use. Put differently, consumer purchases are the products consumers buy to essentially satisfy their personal needs. In this category of products, we have a further categorization as described below:

Convenience products are those consumer goods that can be purchased in a convenient manner. This entails, they can be bought less or no effort and are frequently bought. Examples are toiletries since they are regularly bought and demanded by many consumers.

Specialty products on the other hand are those products that demand some effort to be bought. Such products are not regularly bought as convenient goods- in other words; these goods are not regularly bought.

Industrial products are those products which are used to facilitate for the production of other products. Industrial products are not designed for direct consumption- they are meant for business and non-personal use (SteenKamp, 1990). Whereas the demand for consumer goods is high, industrial goods are less on demand. Machine and machine parts are examples of industrial products. These products are primarily used in the manufacturing process. A further categorization identifies capital items- these items are goods used to manufacture finished goods. According to Brontz, (2018). “Finished goods are those that have completed the manufacturing process but have not yet been sold to the final consumer”. Industrial goods and services that facilitate the manufacturing process are described as business services and supplies. Examples here include lubricants and stationary.

A product life cycle is the time it takes from when a product is first developed until it is no longer available for purchase. Kopp (2024) defines product life cycle as the length of time that a product is available to customers - it starts when a product is introduced into the market and ends when it is no longer available on the market. The life cycle of a product is divided into four stages as explained below:

The introduction stage is the introductory phase when customers are introduced to the new product. In this stage, a business invests heavily in advertising efforts in order to reach a wide prospect base. The business ensures that that advertising messages carry benefits of the product. In the introduction stage, competition in the market could either be present or not at all. And since this is the introduction phase, a business usually experiences setbacks in sales because the product is not yet popular on the market. Therefore, a business may opt for promotional pricing strategies.

The growth stage is the second stage in the life cycle of a product (Hellmich, 2018). As the growth stage sets in, the product becomes more popular and can be recognized by a considerable portion of the market. Still, at this stage, advertising efforts by a business continues especially if competition from other producers is perceived. In addition, the marketing department at this stage may opt for product differentiation or simply refine the product on the functionality aspect in accordance to customer preference. Generally at growth stage, sales grow rapidly (Brontz, 2018), new buyers enter the market while previous buyers become repeat buyers. For this reason, production is pushed higher in order to meet the growing demand from both new and repeat buyers.

At mature stage, the market becomes saturated. Production is matched with demand and demand growth slows steeply. This is characterized by reduced number of first- time buyer's while the number of repeat buyers is more pronounced. In addition, the product faces intense competition. As competition grows at this stage, the business resorts to intensive promotional activities with the aim of maintaining its market share.

The decline stage is characterized by a drop in sales. There is a high intensity in rivalry activities among competitors. Due to this high competition, with resultant drop in sale, some businesses

III. Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was used, combining structured questionnaires distributed to 60 customers and interviews with 5 selected meat suppliers employees. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were employed to interpret customer feedback and staff insights.

IV. Results

The results showed that customers found the pricing slightly high compared to similar local brands. Promotion efforts were rated low, with few visible advertisements. Product quality was rated positively, but poor product visibility and limited access in outlets were frequently cited issues.

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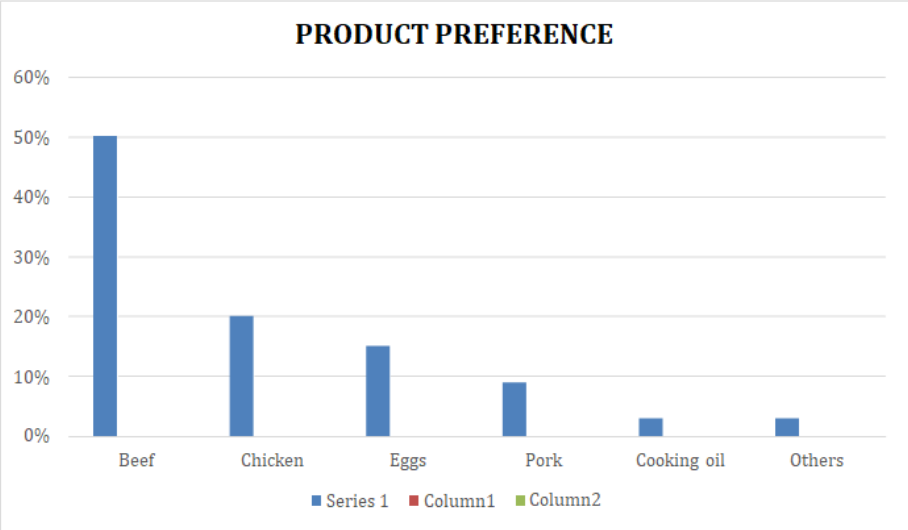
V. Discussion

Product preference was found to be highly inclined to beef/beef products (50%). This was followed by chicken (20%), eggs at (15%) and followed by cooking oil (5%). This is described in the bar charts below:



On the other hand, the major cause of reduced sales volume in processed milk products was the availability of alternatives. Participants reported that in a society where a variety of goods were readily available, as consumers, they cannot limit themselves on to processed milk products. They further indicated that nutritional considerations in some respects tend to show that constituent elements of processed dairy products, are equally found to in other foods, and not necessarily in milk. For this reason, as consumers, they can never entirely depend on processed milk products as a source of calcium, or vitamin D, or other nutritional considerations.

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VI. Conclusion

Some selected meat suppliers' dairy products have potential in the Mansa market but are undermined by gaps in marketing execution. This study recommends revising promotional strategies, aligning pricing with local expectations, and expanding retail access points to improve sales.

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