

Marketing Mix Strategies of Bottling Companies and Dealers' Sales Performance in Benin City

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Abstract

The study examined the impact of bottling companies' marketing mix variables: product strategy, promotion strategy, price strategy and place strategy on dealers' sales performance in Benin metropolis. As a cross-sectional survey, study employed quantitative and correlational research designs. A total of 50 dealers, the major distributors of the Nigerian Bottling and Seven Up Bottling companies constituted the sample for this study. Purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting the sampled dealers in different areas in Benin metropolis between March and April, 2023. Descriptive and inferential analyses including percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, and regression test were performed for data analysis. The findings indicated that the marketing mix variables adopted by the bottling companies are effective in the areas of product strategy, promotion strategy, price strategy and distribution strategy. In a similar manner, findings clearly showed that sales performance of the dealers is significantly high. No significant relationship was found between product, promotion strategy and dealers' sales performance except price and place strategies. It was therefore recommended that bottling companies should give special attention, time and resources to pricing and effective distribution of products to improve market coverage and profitability.

Keywords: Marketing mix, Sales performance, 4Ps, Bottling companies.

INTRODUCTION

Most organizations need to synergize their marketing strategy with their overall organizational strategic intent and this, most times, is related to the overall competitiveness and sustainability of the organization (Ferrell, Hartline & Hochstein, 2021). No enterprise, whether large, medium or small scale, can survive the competition without thorough understanding and adoption of sustainable marketing strategies. For organizations to make huge sales, there is need to develop sustainable practices in the design of marketing strategies (Gituma, 2017; Saguti, 2015).

In the opinion of Kotler (2012), marketing mix is the set of tactical marketing tools product, price, place, and promotion that the firm blends to produce the response it wants from the target market. Green, Inman, Birou and Whitten (2014) and Adewale and Oyewale (2013) noted that marketing strategies are very important in the long run performance of entrepreneurs. This is particularly true for entrepreneurs who are involved in the distribution of global brands like those of Seven Up Bottling Company (SBC) and Nigeria Bottling Company (NBC).

Most companies do not record so much increase in their sales level and this often result in dwindling revenue that is often traced to the inept and unsustainable marketing strategies (Rodriguez & Perterson, 2012). Based on how crucial this discourse is to the growth and sustainability of the operations of the business, this study sets out to examine the impact of marketing strategies on the sales performance of the soft drink bottling companies in Benin City. Getting the appropriate marketing strategy mix has overtime proven to be a challenge to most organizations as the variables at play usually are so unfixed that it can leave one confused about what plan of action to commit to in the bid to achieve the desired sales level (Kasiso, 2017). In attempt to address issues relating to marketing mix strategies, Odia and Ibrahim (2017) conducted a comparative study of consumer perception of female and male market intermediaries' marketing mix strategies. Nevertheless, the study of Odia and Ibrahim (2017) did not dwell on the investigation of the relationship between market mix elements and sales performance of the Bottling Companies. Like that of Onyeri, (2021), available literature indicated that other authors have studied the isolated impact of price, promotion and product strategy on sales performance, however, the joint impact of the key traditional marketing mix variables on the sales performance of middlemen entrepreneurs of the soft drink bottling companies in Benin City may not have received the needed attention.

Also, Odia and Dakare (2019) conducted a study on the impact of middlemen' six marketing mix variables on the final consumers' satisfaction. The study was done from the perspective of the final consumers. It was not focused on the middlemen, the intermediate buyers' perception/assessment of the effectiveness of the bottling companies' marketing mix strategies. Given the fact that the effectiveness of the soft drinks supply chain runs across the activities of the supplier, producer, middlemen to the consumers, it is therefore important to view the effectiveness of marketing mix variables from the point of view of the manufacturers, middlemen as well as the final consumers.

The inconclusiveness and incompleteness in the existing studies on the impact of marketing mix variables on key organizational performance necessitate the need for more recent studies. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this knowledge gap by conceptually and empirically investigating the effects of marketing mix strategies on the sales performance of the Seven Up Bottling Company and Nigeria Bottling Company's middlemen (Dealers) in Benin City. The study on marketing mix strategies of bottling companies and dealers' sales performance in Benin City will be of significant importance for various stakeholders and contributes valuable insights to academia and industry. Knowing the right blend of marketing mix strategies would in no measure enhance the performance of the bottling companies and their dealers, it will indirectly contributes to increased revenue, job creation, and overall economic growth in Benin City.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study was to examine the impact of marketing strategies on the sales performance of the middlemen in selected Bottling Companies in Benin City, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the research were to:

- i. determine dealer's perception of selected bottling company's marketing mixes in Benin City.
- ii. ascertain if sales level is high among dealers of the selected bottling companies in Benin City.
- iii. investigate the extent to which the bottling company's marketing mixes (Product, Price, Promotion and Place strategies) affect dealers' sales performance in Benin City.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sales Performance

Sherman and Thompson (2019) conceptualize sales performance as the degree to which the organization sales teams are able to achieve their sales objectives and help the organization reach its' financial goals via increase in the sales generated within the period. Oluwasanmi (2022) opined that successful organisations must learn to set sales targets within a stipulated period to achieve desired level of revenue. If there are no timelines for sales evaluation, organisations may drift away from their plans and objectives.

Measurement of Sales Performance

Onyango (2017) noted that sales performance can be measured quantitatively and qualitatively, the qualitative measurement of sales performance looks at the non-concrete, behavioural measures while the quantitative measurement looks at non-behavioural aspects of the sales team such as the skills of the sales professionals, customer's relationship, product knowledge, awareness of competitive products and the competitive strength of the sales employee's offering relative of those of competitors. Kotler and Armstrong (2017) explained that the concept of sales performance has been expanded to include both the outcome and behavioral dimensions. Sales outcomes can thus be viewed as the evidence of behavioral performance by oriented sales people, and as a result, a positive relationship has been discovered to exist between the job involvement component of commitment and sales performance. Sales outcomes are the measurable results of sales activities (Egbo, 2017) In other words, committed salespeople are expected to put in more effort on the job, which has a direct impact on job performance. The quantitative measures look at concrete and non-behavioural aspects of the sales workforce and their efforts such as amount of sales generated, number of calls/visits to customers, number of closed sales/sealed deals, and number of more or new requests by existing and new customers (Oluwasanmi, 2022). This study adopted a blend of behavioral and non behavioural measures in the assessment of sales performance among soft drinks dealers in Benin City.

Marketing Mix Strategy

The concept of marketing mix strategies: product, price, place, and promotion and sales performance were examined briefly in this section.

Product Strategy

Mustapha (2017) explained that product is the physical appearance of the product, packaging, and labeling information, which can also influence whether consumers notice a product in store, examine it, and purchase it. Kotler (2015) defines product as anything that can be offered to the market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption, thus satisfying the want or need of the customer. Since product is the most important thing, a good strategy is required to push a product successfully to the consumers.

At its core, product strategy revolves around the features, functionalities, and characteristics of a product or service that differentiate it from competitors and provide value to customers (Fetcher, 2021). This means that it is primarily concerned with the unique qualities and benefits that set a product or service apart from competitors and bring value to customers. It encompasses various aspects, including product design, quality, branding, packaging, and innovation. Ultimately, an effective product strategy requires a deep understanding of customer needs, market dynamics, and competitive landscape.

Promotion Strategy

Promotion encompasses all activities undertaken to communicate and promote products to the target market. Mustapha (2017) stated that promotion is the key to the market exchange process that communicates with present and potential stakeholders, and the general public. Advertising, sales promotions, personal selling, and publicity are all part of the promotional mix (Kamba, 2019). Outside advertising, sales promotional tools such as discounts, coupons, free samples, contests, loyalty programs, and point-of-sale displays are also used as short-term marketing activities to stimulate sales and encourage customer action. In addition to Public Relations (PR), - media relations, press releases, events, sponsorships, and community engagement, personal selling builds relationships, addresses customer needs, and increases sales conversion rates (Kennedy, 2022).

Price Strategy

Aliata (2018) defines price as a cost of producing, delivering and promoting the product charged by the organization. Price is the sum of money customers are willing to spend on a thing. Marketers must consider supply costs, seasonal discounts, rival prices, and retailer markup in addition to connecting the price to the product's actual and perceived value (Alexander Twin, 2023; Kamba, 2019). Company managers should learn to use pricing strategies such as premium pricing, value-based pricing, penetration pricing, cost plus pricing, competitive pricing, price skimming, going rate pricing, geographical pricing, segmented pricing, product mix pricing, psychological pricing, and discriminatory pricing (Nagle & Singlton, 2017).

Place Strategy

Harsono (2017) states that place as strategy, refers to the methods and location an organisation uses to make its' products easily accessible to target customers. Dang (2014) opined that in marketing, place strategy includes the distribution channel through which a company gets its goods and services in front of customers. According to Fayyaz and Azizinia (2016), distribution channel is defined as a group of interconnected organizations involved in the process of making a product or service available for consumption or use. Physical movement, warehousing, product ownership, presale transaction, post-sale activities; order processing, credit and collections; and other types of support activities are also examples of distribution channels (Ndungu, 2012; Dang, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Marketing Mix

The marketing mix theory serves as a theoretical framework for this study. Developed by Neil Borden and popularized by E. Jerome McCarthy in the 1960s, the marketing mix theory, also known as the 4Ps framework, provides a structured approach for understanding and managing marketing activities. The marketing mix theory, or 4Ps framework, states that a successful marketing strategy involves the careful management of four key elements: product, price, place, and promotion. These elements collectively shape the marketing approach and impact consumer behavior. The theory emphasizes the need to develop a desirable product, set an appropriate price, ensure convenient distribution, and effectively promote the product to target customers (Drummond, Ensor & Astiford, 2008). By balancing and integrating these elements, organizations can create a competitive marketing strategy that meets customer needs, differentiates from competitors, and achieves marketing objectives.

The marketing mix theory is relevant to this study because it provides a framework to analyze how product, price, place, and promotion strategies impact sales outcomes in the local market. By understanding and optimizing these elements, bottling companies can enhance their sales performance and gain a competitive advantage. Marketing mix strategies, the model propounded by McCarthy in 1964 provides a theoretical framework for exploring sales performance of the selected bottling companies in the present study. See Table 1.

Table 1 Marketing Mix

PRODUCT	PRICE	PLACE	PROMOTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Features of the product ● Quality ● Design ● Brand ● Packages ● Services ● Warranty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Price level ● Price discrimination ● Price maintenance ● Price recommendation ● Discounts ● Credit ● Hire-purchase ● Geographical variations ● Seasonal variations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Channel type ● Mode of transportation (road, rail, air, and water) ● Inventory level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advertising level ● Advertising media ● Advertising theme ● Sales force size ● Sale promotion (method and levels) ● Publicity

Adapted from Jerome E. McCarthy, 1981. P. 43

The Balanced Scorecard Model

The balanced scorecard model was initially propounded by Dr. Robert Kaplan and Dr. David Norton in the early 1990s. They introduced this strategic performance management framework through a series of academic articles and subsequent publications. Their work revolutionized the way organizations measure and manage performance by providing a balanced view that extends beyond financial metrics.

The balanced scorecard model is a strategic performance management framework that helps organizations measure and manage their performance across multiple perspectives (Leonardo, 2017). It goes beyond traditional financial metrics and incorporates other key areas that drive success. The balanced scorecard typically includes four perspectives: financial, customer, internal processes, and learning and growth (Harvard Business Review, 2019).

The Financial Perspective is one aspect of the balanced scorecard. It focuses on financial outcomes and measures that indicate the organization's financial health and performance, such as revenue, profitability, and return on investment (Ted, 2016). It helps assess the effectiveness of financial strategies and the overall financial sustainability of the organization.

The customer perspective looks at how the organization is perceived by its customers and how well it meets their needs (Harvard Business Review, 2019). It includes metrics related to customer satisfaction, loyalty, market share, and customer acquisition. This perspective helps organizations understand their competitive position and identify areas for improving customer relationships.

The internal perspective examines the internal processes and operations that drive value creation and customer satisfaction. Jackson (2023) opines that it includes metrics related to process efficiency, quality, innovation, and time-to-market. By measuring and improving internal processes, organizations can enhance their overall performance and deliver better products or services to customers.

The balanced scorecard model aligns with the marketing mix strategies by providing a comprehensive framework to measure and manage performance across different dimensions. It considers the financial outcomes, customer perspectives, internal processes, and learning and growth aspects of the marketing mix. This alignment enables organizations to assess the effectiveness of their marketing strategies, track customer satisfaction and loyalty, improve internal processes, and foster innovation in marketing efforts.

Following Kaplan and Norton's (1996) model will entails measuring sales performance of bottling companies in the following areas: increase in sales, customer satisfaction, willingness to recommend bottling company to potential dealers, satisfaction with sales figure, increase in dealers' profit; customer and dealer's loyalty company's products; willingness to continue to sell the company's products, ability of dealers to attract new buyers.

Empirical Review: Marketing Mix Variables and Sales Performance

This section reviews empirical works relevant to the subject matter of this research work. Using Nairobi's Unga Feeds Ltd. as the focal point, Gituma (2017) assessed the effects of the marketing mix on sales success. The study employed descriptive research. 127 middle level employees were the intended population at Unga Group Limited. A sample size of 96 was chosen using stratified random sampling. Data were gathered using structured questionnaires. The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. According to the findings of the study, product quality has a positive impact on sales performance, brand awareness influences organizational performance, and pricing strategy increases sales volume. Furthermore, store design and the use of appealing stimuli such as music has a positive effect on consumer purchase and sales volume, as well as geographic location, and has a significant impact on profitability, advertising, direct marketing, and sales volume.

Amin's (2017) investigation studied the influence of marketing strategies on the performance of SMEs in Abuja, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to examine the influences of product, price, promotion and place marketing strategies on the business performance of SMEs in Abuja. A sample of 339 was drawn from a population of 2825 which comprised of all the SMEs in Abuja registered by SMEDAN. Regression analysis was used for data analysis and results presented in tables and figures. The findings revealed that the most adopted marketing strategy was product strategy which contributed the most to the model. There was a positive relationship between the study variables, (promotion, pricing, place and product strategies and business performance), implying that the application of marketing strategies positively influenced SME performance in Abuja. The research concluded that the performance of SMEs in Abuja was positively influenced by marketing strategies. And recommended SMEs should produce quality products, charge equitable price, position suitably, and promote extensively to the final consumers.

Pourhosseini and Shahrokh (2013) carried out a study on how marketing strategy affect sales performance in internal and external environment. The aim of this study was to identify performance implications of marketing strategy and moderating effects of transformational leadership, demand uncertainty and competitive intensity on sales performance. This study was a mixed research that combines qualitative and quantitative methods. The population entails sales and marketing managers of companies in food industries that are members of Tehran stock exchange. The sample sizes in qualitative and quantitative study were 23 and 66 respectively. The study adopted the stratified sampling procedures. Analyses of survey and secondary data provide evidence that marketing strategy has positive and meaningful relationship with sales performance while transformational leadership and competitive intensity were found to exert moderating effects on this relationship.

Okeke (2017) studied the effect of marketing strategies on the sales performance of selected small and medium enterprises in Abia state, Nigeria. The objectives were to examine the effect of pricing policy on the sales volume of selected small-scale enterprises; ascertain the product branding strategies for the product availability of selected small-scale enterprises; examine the effect of promotional strategies on product positioning of selected small-scale enterprises; and

to analyze any existing relationship between product strategies and sales growth of selected small-scale enterprises in Abia State. The study adopted survey research design. The opinions of the respondents were elicited in the research process. A well-structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data from 48 respondents. The primary data (survey) from the respondents were analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation and multiple regression models. The conclusions from the research findings were that the pricing strategy, promotion strategy and branding strategy have strong and positive relationship with the sales growth of selected small scale enterprises. Also, quantity sold, branding, product price and availability were significant and positively affects the sales growth of the selected small scale enterprises.

Adewale, Adesola and Oyewale (2013) studied the impact of marketing strategy on business performance with respect to selected Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Oluyole Local Government Area, Ibadan, Nigeria. The survey research design method was used in this study which involves using a self-designed questionnaire in collecting data from one hundred and three (103) respondents. Correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the data with the aid of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20. The results showed that the independent variables (Product, Promotion, Place, Price, Packaging and after sales service) were significant joint predictors of business performance in term of profitability, market share, return on investment, and expansion. The marketing variables jointly explained 46.5% of variance in business performance.

Uchegbulam, Akinyele and Ayodotun (2015) examined how competitive strategy can affect the performance of one hundred and fifty (150) selected Small Medium Scale Enterprises in Ikeja and Surulere local government areas of Lagos, Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed a link between product features and customer base; product customization and sales growth, value added products and revenue growth. Omar (2017) analysed competitive strategies effect on performances of Small and Medium Scale Enterprise in Kenya. A total of 560 SME's was selected for this study. Using Pearson correlation ANOVA and multiple regression were used to analyze data. The study investigated four variables of competitive strategies which are cost leadership, differentiation, focus and strategic alliances which were found to have a significant relationship with the performance of SME in Kenya. It also revealed that the three generic strategies have a coalition with strategic alliance to influence the performance of the SMEs in Nairobi, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The research design, population of the study, sample/sampling technique, research instrument, validity/reliability of instrument and method of data analysis are presented in this section. This study is a cross-sectional survey research which employed the quantitative and correlational research designs. The population of the study comprised all dealers of the two major bottling companies operating in Benin City. The study focused on marketing strategies of Seven-Up (7up) Bottling Company (SBC) and Nigeria Bottling Company (NBC) in Benin City, Nigeria within the periods of April to May 2023. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were employed in this work. Inclusion involved the major dealers as the sample elements while other categories, sub-dealers were excluded. The major dealers surveyed in this study are those registered with

the two bottling companies in Benin. Based on this method, a population of 50 dealers was obtained and used as census for the study. The purposive sampling technique was used to administer questionnaire to all the fifty (50) respondents (dealers) of the Seven up bottling company (22) and Nigerian bottling company (28) located in Benin City.

The research instrument used for the study was a well-structured questionnaire. This instrument was broken into two parts, one set for NB and the other for SBC. Each questionnaire contained the same set of questions. The questionnaire was divided into two (2) sections. Section A consists of questions on the demographic characteristics of respondents such as age, sex, marital status etc., while Section B contains questions that addressed the research objectives, using the five point Likert scale format of strongly agreed (SA), agreed, (A), Undecided (U), Disagreed (D), and strongly disagreed (SD) options.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

The research instruments designed for this study was validated by marketing experts in terms of the formulated objectives. The reliability of the questionnaire was determined using the Cronbach’s Alpha statistic. See Table 2 for the coefficient values:

Table 2 Reliability Test

S/N	Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha Value
1	Product Strategy	9	0.762
2	Promotion Strategy	9	0.854
3	Price Strategy	9	0.839
4	Place Strategy	14	0.854
5	Sales Performance	11	0.936

Source: Fieldwork

In the research reliability pilot test conducted, all the reliability coefficients for the 5 key variables were above 0.7 which is the acceptable alpha level. The results of the test clearly indicate that there is internal consistency in the instrument.

Method of Data Analysis

The data retrieved were analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics using frequency, mean and standard deviation and regression analysis. Furthermore, the analysis of variance was used to check for significant relationship between dealers’ age, education and years in existence. For sex variable, t-test was used to test relationship. All statistical tests were performed at 0.05 (5%) level of significance with the aid of SPSS version 20.0

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, data were analyzed, presented and interpreted. Descriptive analyses were followed by hypotheses testing.

Analysis of Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The respondents' demographic characteristics were analyzed using frequencies and percentage as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Dealers Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Type of Company	NBC	28	56.0
	SBC	22	44.0
	Total	50	100
Gender of Dealer	Male	24	51.1
	Female	23	48.9
	TOTAL	47	100.0
Education	Primary	1	2.2
	SSCE/WAEC or equivalent	6	13.0
	OND/NCE or equivalent	6	13.0
	B.Sc., B.A., HND or equivalent	27	58.7
	Postgraduate Degree	6	13.0
	Total	46	100.0
Age of Dealer	Under 20 years	1	2.2
	21- 30 years	6	13.0
	31 – 40 years	6	13.0
	41 – 50 years	27	58.7
	51 – 60 years	6	13.0
	Above 60 years	0	0
	Total	46	100.0
Years of Experience	Under 5 years	7	15.9
	5 – 10 years	15	34.1
	11 – 15 years	13	29.5
	16 years and above	9	20.5
	TOTAL	44	100.0

Field Work (2024)

Company Type: As indicated in Table 3, majority of the respondents, 28 were dealers of Nigeria Bottling Company (NBC) and this represents 56% of the total respondents, while 22 of the respondents are dealers of Seven-up Bottling Company (SBC) representing 44%. Thus, dealers of SBC accounts for lesser proportion of the respondents.

Sex: As highlighted in Table 3, majority of the respondents, 23 are females and this represents 48.9% of the total respondents, while 24 of the respondents are males representing 51.1%. Thus, female accounts for lesser proportion of the respondents.

Educational Qualification: As indicated in Table 3, only 6 respondents, representing 13.0% have SSCE/GCE qualification, another 6 respondents representing 13.0% have (OND/NCE) qualifications, the majority 27 respondents representing 58.7% possess (HND/BSc) first degree certificate, while the remaining 6 respondents representing 13.0% have post graduate qualification.

Age: As revealed in Table 3, only one dealer respondent (1, 2.2%) was below 21 years old. 6 (13%) dealers fell into the age group of 21-30 years, 6 of the respondents constituting 13.0% of the total respondents were found to belong to age group of 31-40 years, majority (27) of the respondents constituting 58.7% of the total respondents were within age group of 41-50 years, 6 respondents representing 13% of the total respondents fell into age category of 51-60 years, none of the respondents fell into age category of 61 years and above. From the statistics, it is very obvious that majority of the respondents were in their mid-age in life.

Years of Experience: As arrayed on Table 3 above, 7 (15.9%) of the surveyed dealers were less than 5 years in the distribution of the bottling companies products, the majority 15 which represent 34.1% of the dealers have been in the business for between 5-10 years. 13 (29.5%) of respondents acknowledged that they have been in the distribution business for between 11- 15 years, while the remaining 9 (20.5%) said they have been distributors for upward of 15 years.

Descriptive Analysis of Marketing Strategies and Dealer Sales Performance

The description of the marketing mix variables was presented in the order of product strategy, promotion strategy, price strategy and place strategy. This was immediately followed by dealers’ sales performance.

Table 4 Product Strategy

S/N	Variables	Descriptive Statistics	
		Mean	SD
	Product Strategy		
1	The colour of the soft drink company’s (NBC and SBC) products makes them attractive to customers	4.06	1.058
2	The taste of the soft drink company’s (NBC and SBC) products is the major reason for increase in sales	3.96	1.224
3	The soft drink company’s (NBC and SBC) products are easily identified among other completing brands	4.38	.795
4	The soft drink company is very innovative in its product quality	3.81	1.161

S/N	Variables	Descriptive Statistics	
5	The soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) quality control measures are very effective	3.90	1.057
6	I believe the soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) products are produced under very high hygiene condition	3.96	.832
7	I like bottle design and shape of the soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) products	3.94	.867
8	The bottle sizes of the soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) products make them more attractive	3.67	1.162
9	The soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) brand name is a household name and highly visible in the market.	4.49	.739
	Overall	4.02	.622

Source: Researchers' Field Survey

On product strategy Table 4 indicates that with a mean of 4.06 dealer respondents agreed to the statement that product colours help to attract customers both to SBC and NBC's brands. Table 4 also shows that the taste of SBC and NBC's products is a major reason for increase in their sales with a mean of 3.96. With a mean of 4.38, the surveyed dealers of both SBC and NBC agreed that both companies' products are unique and are easily identified and distinguished from other competing brands of soft drinks in the markets. On the issue of innovation, dealer respondents indicated with a mean of 3.81 that both companies are innovative in their product design and qualities.

Similarly, on the statement of the effectiveness of quality control measures adopted the two surveyed bottling companies; a mean response of 3.90 was recorded indicating that both companies were concerned about the quality of products sold to consumers. Relating to the hygienic condition of the production process, dealers affirmed with a mean of 3.96 that the health condition of their production system is safe. Dealers' assessment of the bottle design and shapes of both companies indicated that they are attractive with a mean value of 3.94. In a similar manner, the respondents slightly agreed with a mean of 3.67 that the bottle sizes are instrumental in attracting consumers to both companies' products. Lastly, both companies' brand names were considered with a mean value of 4.49 as household names; by implication, making the brands highly visible in the market place. None of the parameters measuring effectiveness of product strategy adopted by both companies was rated negative. The overall mean evaluation for both companies was 4.02 which is a clear confirmation that product strategies were right in the areas of colour, taste, brand name, design and sizes as well as quality control measures.

Table 5 Promotion Strategy

S/N	Variables	Descriptive Statistics	
		Mean	SD
	Promotion Strategy		
1	The soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) promotion is effective in increasing customer awareness of its products	4.10	1.134
2	The effectiveness of the soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) promotion efforts is evident in consumers' intention to buy its products	4.04	1.021
3	Dealers are given bonus incentives to boost their sales	4.24	.902
4	The soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) TV adverts are very convincing and helpful in creating awareness	4.06	1.029
5	The soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) radio advertisement seems to be more believable compare to those of other competing brands	3.52	.974
6	The soft drink company (NBC and SBC) deploys attractive celebrity endorsers in promoting their products.	3.92	.922
7	The soft drink company (NBC and SBC) is effective in the use social media in promoting the products.	3.64	1.045
8	The soft drink company (NBC and SBC) offers price discount in the promotion of its products	3.88	1.154
9	The coupon redemption rate of the soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) is satisfactory	3.53	.975
	Overall	3.58	.702

Source: Researchers' Field Survey

On promotional strategy, Table 5 indicates that with a mean of 4.10, dealers agreed on the effectiveness of promotion in increasing customer awareness of SBC and NBC products. The same Table 3 also shows that this effectiveness of promotion is also evident in consumers' intention to buy both SBC and NBC brands' products with a mean of 4.04, With a mean of 4.24, the surveyed dealers of SBC and NBC agreed that they are given bonus incentives to boost their sales. On the issue of TV adverts, dealers indicated with a mean of 4.06 that both companies' TV adverts are very convincing and helpful in creating awareness.

Similarly, the statement on the believability of the radio advertisement, adopted by both bottling companies was analyzed. A mean response of 3.52 was recorded indicating that SBC and NBC's radio advertisement was more believable compared to those of other competing brands. Relating to the adoption of celebrity endorsement by SBC and NBC, dealers affirm with a mean 3.92 that both companies deploy attractive celebrity endorsers in promoting their products. Dealers' assessment of both companies' use of social media was affirmed revealing a mean value of 3.64, indicating that SBC and NBC are effective in the use social media in promoting their products. In a similar manner, the respondents agreed with a mean of 3.88 that both SBC and NBC brands offer price discounts in the promotion of their products. Lastly, both companies' coupon redemption rate was considered with a mean value of 3.53 proposing the

companies' coupon redemption rate as relatively satisfactory. None of the parameters measuring effectiveness of promotional strategy adopted by both companies was rated negative. The overall mean evaluation was 3.58 which is a clear, confirmation that the companies' promotional strategies are relatively right in the areas of bonus incentives, TV adverts, radio adverts, celebrity endorsement, use of social media, price discount and coupon redemption rate in enhancing customer awareness and consumers' intention to buy their products.

Table 6 Price Strategy

S/ N	Variables	Descriptive Statistics	
		Mean	SD
	Price Strategy		
1	The soft drink company compete on the basis of price	3.72	1.228
2	The soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) price strategy is effective in the launching of new products	3.60	1.161
3	I believe the soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) customers are satisfied with the company's product prices	3.04	1.288
4	The soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) products are cheaper for customers than other competing brands	3.22	1.200
5	The pricing strategy adopted by the soft drink company (NBC and SBC) has significantly and positively boost customer attitude towards products	3.37	1.185
6	Credit sales to dealers is a good motivation for them to sell the company's products	3.60	1.400
7	The soft drink company usually employ price discrimination in selling it's products in different locations	3.69	.926
8	The soft drink company will find it difficult to compete on the brand price	3.06	1.245
9	The soft drink company offers discounts to encourage dealers to distribute its products.	3.92	1.115
	Overall	3.50	0614

Source: Researchers' Field Survey

On price strategy, Table 6 indicates that with a mean of 3.72, dealers agreed that SBC and NBC brands compete on the basis of price. In a similar manner, Table 4 clearly shows that the effectiveness of SBC and NBC pricing strategies was evident in the launching of new products with a mean of 3.60, With a mean of 3.04, the surveyed dealers of the companies slightly agreed that they believe SBC and NBC customers are satisfied with the companies' product prices. On the issue of the affordability of SBC and NBC products, dealers indicated with a mean of 3.22 respondents slightly agree that SBC and NBC products are cheaper for customers than other competing brands.

Similarly, the statement on the effect of the pricing strategy on customer attitude, a mean response of 3.37 was recorded indicating that the pricing strategy adopted by SBC and NBC

brands has slightly and positively boosted customer attitude towards the companies' products. Relating to the adoption of credit sales to dealers, dealers affirmed with a mean of 3.60 that the credit sales is a good motivation for them to sell the companies' products. Dealers' assessment of the companies' use of price discrimination was affirmed revealing a mean value of 3.69, indicating that the company occasionally employs price discrimination in selling their products in different locations. Contrarily, the respondents slightly agreed with a mean of 3.06 that SBC and NBC companies will find it difficult to compete on the brand price. Lastly, both companies' discount offers were considered with a mean value of 3.92 proposing that the companies offer discounts to encourage dealers to distribute their products. All but two (related to customers' satisfaction of SBC and NBC prices and difficulty of SBC and NBC to compete on the brand price) of the parameters measuring effectiveness of pricing strategy adopted by both companies was rated highly positively. The overall mean evaluation was 3.50, confirming that pricing strategies are right in the areas of launching of new products, customers' satisfaction, affordability, customer attitude, price discrimination, competition and discount offers.

Table 7 Place/Distribution Strategy

S/N	Variables	Descriptive Statistics	
		Mean	SD
	Place/Distribution Strategy		
1	The soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) distribution strategy is effective	3.77	1.356
2	The soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) lead time for delivery is short because of the effectiveness of the trucks	3.19	1.409
3	The soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) products are distributed and delivered in healthy/good conditions	3.67	1.117
4	The soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) salesmen are not aggressive enough to increase sales (reversed coded)	3.27	1.233
5	The distribution of the soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) products to dealers is effective	3.33	1.214
6	The distribution channels/dealer are too few to increase sales	3.14	1.472
7	The soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) distribution strategies to new markets/territories is effective	3.51	1.244
8	The distribution strategy adopted by the company is effective in returning defective products	3.10	1.503
9	The drivers of the soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) trucks are well experienced and careful	3.63	1.149
10	The driver are trustworthy and they deliver right order to dealer and customers	3.60	1.086
11	The soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) salesmen have knowledge about the company and its products	3.92	.932
12	The soft drink company's (NBC and SBC) salesmen are friendly	3.92	.964
13	The soft drink company (NBC and SBC) is effective in managing	3.61	1.115

S/N	Variables	Descriptive Statistics	
	channeled conflicts amongst dealers		
14	The distribution strategy employed by the soft drink company (NBC and SBC) is effective in harvesting feedback information from the customers	3.65	1.158
	Overall	3.56	.760

Source: Researchers' Field Survey

On place/distribution strategy, Table 7 indicates that with a mean of 3.77, dealers agreed that SBC and NBC distribution strategy is effective. The mean of 3.19 shows that SBC and NBC lead time for delivery is marginally short, in other words the trucking system is moderately effective. With a mean of 3.67, the surveyed dealers slightly agreed that NBC and SBC products are distributed and delivered in healthy/good conditions. On the issue of the aggressiveness of SBC and NBC's salesmen, with a mean of 3.27 the dealers indicated that the salesmen were not aggressive enough to boost sales.

In response to the effectiveness of the distribution of SBC and NBC products, a mean response of 3.33 was recorded indicating that the distribution of SBC and NBC products to dealers is moderately effective. Relating to the quantity of the distribution channels/dealer, dealers affirmed with a mean of 3.14 that the distribution channels/dealers were too few to increase sales. Dealers' assessment of the companies' distribution strategies to new markets/territories was affirmed revealing a mean value of 3.51, indicating that the companies' distribution strategies to new markets/territories is effective. The respondents slightly agreed with a mean of 3.10 that the distribution strategy adopted by NBC and SBC is effective in returning defective products. Also, the companies' drivers experience level was considered with a mean value of 3.63 proposing that the companies' trucks drivers are well experienced and careful.

Furthermore, the statement on the trustworthiness of both companies' drivers were surveyed, a mean response of 3.60 was recorded indicating that their drivers were trustworthy as they delivered the right order to dealers and customers. Relating to the knowledge level of sales men, dealers affirmed with a mean of 3.92 that SBC and NBC salesmen have knowledge about the respective company and their products. Dealers' assessment of the friendliness of the salesmen was affirmed revealing a mean value of 3.92, indicating that both companies' salesmen were friendly. In a similar manner, the respondents agreed with a mean of 3.61 that SBC and NBC are effective in managing channel conflicts amongst dealers. Lastly, the distribution strategy effectiveness in harvesting feedback information from the customers was considered with a mean value of 3.65 proposing that the distribution strategy is effective in harvesting feedback information from the customers. All but one (related to the effectiveness of the distribution strategy in returning defective products) of the parameters measuring effectiveness of place/distribution strategy adopted by both companies was rated highly positive. The overall mean evaluation was 3.56, confirming that place/distribution are slightly right in the areas of lead time for delivery, conditions of delivered goods, sales men attributes (aggressiveness, knowledge level, friendliness), drivers attributes (trustworthiness, experience), quantity of distribution channels/dealer, new markets/territories, returning defective products,

managing channel conflicts amongst dealers and harvesting feedback information from the customers.

Table 8 Dealers’ Sales Performance

S/ N	Variables	Descriptive Statistics	
		Mean	SD
	Dealer Sales Performance		
1	The soft drink company’s (NBC and SBC) friendly price policy has helped in improving my sales.	3.69	.993
2	The price discount offered during sales promo by the soft drink company (NBC and SBC) helps in boosting the sales position of my business	4.14	1.000
3	The sale of the soft drink company’s (NBC and SBC) products increases my profitability	3.98	.934
4	With the soft drink company’s (NBC and SBC) products, I exceed my sales goals	3.67	1.107
5	I will gladly recommend the sale of the soft drink company’s (NBC and SBC) products to new entrants wishing to start the sale of soft drinks.	4.10	.984
6	I foresee the future market share of the soft drink company (NBC and SBC) growing as my sales are growing	3.96	1.060
7	Our customers are loyal to the company’s products.	3.96	1.110
8	New customers are buying the company’s products because of the word of mouth referrals by existing users.	3.88	1.013
9	I am generally satisfied with my sales volume of the company’s products	3.33	1.197
10	I don’t think I can sell another company’s products.	2.92	1.336
11	I am generally satisfied with my sales volume	3.49	1.277
	Overall	3.78	.771

Source: Researchers’ Field Survey

On dealer sales performance, Table 8 indicates that with a mean of 3.69, dealers agreed that SBC and NBC friendly price policy has helped in improving their sales. The same Table 6 also shows that the price discount offered during sales promo by SBC and NBC helps in boosting the sales position of dealers with a mean of 4.14, With a mean of 3.98, the surveyed dealers agreed that the sales of the companies’ products increases their profitability. On the issue of their sales goal, dealers indicated with a mean of 3.67 that with SBC and NBC products, they exceed their sales goals.

Similarly, on willingness to recommend SBC and NBC products, a mean response of 4.10 was recorded indicating that they will gladly recommend the patronage of SBC and NBC products to new entrants, other dealers wishing to start the sales of soft drinks. Relating to their estimation of NBC and SBC future market growth, dealers affirmed with a mean of 3.96 that they foresee the future market share of both companies growing as their sales were growing.

Dealers' assessment of their customers' loyalty to SBC and NBC products was affirmed revealing a mean value of 3.96, indicating that customers were loyal to SBC and NBC products. The respondents agreed with a mean of 3.88 that new customers are buying SBC and NBC products because of the word of mouth referrals by existing users. Also, the dealers' satisfaction with the sales volume of NBC and SBC products was rated with a mean value of 3.33 proposing that they are generally satisfied with their sales volume of SBC and NBC products.

Furthermore, the statement on their thoughts on selling other products were surveyed, a mean response of 2.92 was recorded indicating that they fairly think they can sell another company's products. Relating to their general satisfaction of sales performance, dealers affirmed with a mean of 3.49 that they are generally satisfied with their sales performance.

All but one (related to their thoughts on selling other products) of the parameters measuring dealers' sales performance was rated positive. The overall mean evaluation was 3.78, confirming a slightly significant sales performance of dealers of SBC and NBC products.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1 and 2

H₀₁: The marketing mix variables adopted by dealers of the selected bottling companies in Benin City are not effective.

H₀₂: The level of sales performance of the dealers of the selected bottling companies in Benin City is poor.

Table 9: Effective of Marketing Mix and Sales Performance (One-Sample Test)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-value	P-value
Sales Performance	49	3.78	.771	.110	7.041	.000
Marketing Mix	50	3.80	.495	.070	11.431	.000
Test Value = 3						

Source: Researchers' Field Survey

The marketing mix (3.78) in use by the bottling companies was also adjudged effective with a t value of 11.431 at 0.000 level of significance. Thus, hypotheses H₀₁ is rejected. Hence, it can be concluded that the marketing mix variables adopted by dealers of the selected bottling companies in Benin City are effective. In similar manner, the one sample t-test result with a t-value 7.041 clearly showed that sales performance of the dealers is significantly high at 0.000

level of significance. Thus, hypotheses H_{02} is rejected. Therefore, the level of sales performance of the dealers of the selected bottling companies in Benin City is considered to be significantly good, above average.

Restatement of Hypothesis 3

H_{03} There is no significant relationship between product, promotion, price and place strategies and the sales performance of dealers in the bottling company in Benin City.

Table 9: Relationship between Marketing Mix Variables and Sales Performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.717 ^a	.515	.471	.561	11.667	.000 ^b
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	-.313	.662		-.474	.638
	Product strategy	.464	.158	.378	2.929	.005
	Promotion strategy	-.141	.130	-.129	-1.089	.282
	Price strategy	.361	.145	.288	2.485	.017
	Place strategy	.410	.114	.407	3.607	.001

a. Predictors: Place strategy, Price strategy, Promotion strategy, Product strategy

b. Dependent Variable: Sales Performance

The value of R^2 which is .515(51.5%) indicates that all the independent variables, product, promotion, price and place strategies adopted by the bottling companies jointly explain about half (51.5%) of the variations in the dealer’s sales performance. The difference of 48.5% could not be accounted for by the formulated model, except by other variables not considered in this study when adjusted, the R-square value reduced to .471 (47.1%) (see Table (9)). The F-statistic of 11.667 and P-value of .000 implied that the jointed relationship between sales performance and the four marketing mix variables of the bottling companies is significant at 0.000 level of significance (See Table 9).

At individual level, the t-value of 2.929 and p-value of .005 implied that the product strategy adopted by the bottling companies significantly impacts on dealer's sales performance. Thus, the hypothesis that states that there is no relationship between product strategy and sales performance was rejected in favour of the alternate (see Table 9).

The t-value of -1.089 and P-value of .282 are clear indications that sales performance of the dealers is not significantly influenced by promotion strategy in use by the bottling companies. By this result, the hypothesis that proposes a relationship between promotion strategy and sales performance was accepted (see Table 9). Thus, therefore conclude that the sales performance of the dealers is not influenced by promotional strategy

Table 9 shows clearly that there is a significant relationship between bottling companies' price strategy and dealers' sales performance. The level of relationship between the two variables can be seen from the t-value of 2.485 and P-value of 0.017. By implication, the statistical relationship between both variables is at 1.7% level of significance. On this note, the null hypothesis which says there is no significant relationship between price strategy and sales performance was rejected.

The p-value of 0.001 shows that there is a significant relationship between bottling companies' place strategy and sales performance of the dealers at 0%. The degree of relationship between the two variables was also captured in the t-value of 3.607. In conclusion, the alternate hypothesis that proposed a significant relationship between bottler's distribution (place) strategy and sales performance of the dealers was accepted (See Table 9). Therefore there is a relationship between bottling companies' place strategy and sales performance.

Discussion of Results

The preliminary descriptive data analysis indicated that the marketing strategies in use by the bottling companies are effective. This finding may be the explanation for their existing long survival in the market place. In a similar vein, the finding also revealed that dealers' sales performance is good and high. By implication, the bottlers' marketing variables in the right mix are a boost to dealers' performance. This finding is in line with the expected apriori expectations. The output of the regression model shows that price and place were significant strategies for improving sales performance. The finding in this regard is akin to that of Gituma (2017), Okeke (2017) and Onouha (2021) which showed that there is a significant negative relationship between price and sales revenue. Our findings here partially agreed with those of Amin (2017) and Pourhosseini and Shahrokh (2013) on the impact of the four traditional Ps on sales performance. The findings of this research on the impact of price on sales performance does not specifically align with that of Onyeaghala, Danladi and Amadi (2019). Their study indicated that cost plus and mark-up pricing strategies do not significantly influence sales performance. Nevertheless competitor-oriented pricing was found to exert influences on sale performance.

The non-significance of promotion strategy in explaining dealers' sales performance may stem from the fact that the two surveyed bottling companies: Nigeria Bottling Company and Seven Bottling Company are well established brands in the bottling industry particularly in the

Nigerian market. This is because they are the two global brands that are popular among soft drink buyers in the world. Since they are already well known brands, it will be wasteful investing more resources in their promotion as such efforts will amount to economic waste.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study investigated marketing mix of selected bottling companies and dealers' sales performance in Benin City. It specifically examined the influence of bottling companies' marketing mix variables: product strategy, promotion strategy, price strategy and place strategy on dealers' sales performance in Benin metropolis. A total of 50 dealers, the major distributors of the Nigerian Bottling and Seven Up Bottling companies constituted the population. Purposive and quota sampling technique were employed in selecting the sampled dealers in different locations or axes in Benin metropolis. It was a primary source of data collection through questionnaire administration. T-test and least square regression method were used for the purpose of testing hypotheses formulated.

The study finds that the marketing mix in use by the selected bottling companies to be effective in the areas of product strategy, promotion strategy, price strategy and distribution strategy. In a similar manner, findings clearly showed that sales performance of the dealers is significantly high. No significant relationship was found between product, promotion strategy and dealers' sales performance except price and place strategies.

Based on the findings in this research, the following recommendations were made.

For the bottling companies to continue to enjoy customer patronage and loyalty, they should continuously give attention, time and resources to the development of their products. Since pricing strategy was found to be critical in gearing up dealers' sales performance, both NBC and SBC should ensure that their product prices are customer friendly and give value for money. While doing this, the effects of cost-plus, mark-up and competitive pricing on sales performance should be continuously evaluated. This study recommends that NBC and SBC management should study the market situation to enable them adopt suitable pricing policies and strategies that would build their sales.

Effective distribution of the products to ensure adequate market coverage is important. This is particularly apt given the fact that place strategy was identified as one of the significant factors that determine level of dealers' sales performance. Given the finding that promotion strategy was not significant in explaining increase in dealers' sales performance, it was suggested that the bottling companies should be less emphatic on scaling up investment cost of promoting their products but much emphasis should be on product development to keep their customers ever delighted.

Suggestions for Further Studies

The study suggested that similar studies could be replicated in other states in Nigeria as environmental differences may produce different findings. Furthermore, the study could be carried out by seeking the opinions of the bottling companies' salesmen instead of the major dealers. The companies' salesmen as internal stakeholders may be able to have access to the

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company's actual sales figure for robust evaluation of the impact of marketing mix. Future researchers can expand the marketing mix variables to include more variables.

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