



AN EVALUATION OF THE ROLE OF PERSONAL SELLING IN THE MARKETING OF CONSUMER PRODUCTS

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Abstract

This research work is conducted in order to evaluate the role of personal selling in the marketing of consumer products. So, the researcher explained that personal selling involved face-to-face sales dialogue with prospective customers with the purpose of enlisting a sale and it is promotion methods in which organisations use skills and techniques for building personal relationship with the customer which results in both parties obtaining values. The objectives of the study were to throw more light on the meaning of personal selling, nature and roles of personal selling, and the problems faced by marketers during personal selling. The researcher employed a survey research. The sample size was randomly chosen from the staff and customers of Babangida & Sons Nigeria Limited, Damaturu and questionnaire was administered on them. The study reveals that personal selling promotes and enhances marketing activities and also helps to build good and cordial relationship between the firm and the customers. Based on the findings, it was recommended that a firm or business enterprise should make personal selling a yardstick for building customer relationship.

Keywords: Consumer, Products, Marketing, Personal Selling, Business Firm.

1.0. Introduction

Personal selling is an important element in the marketing mix for many companies or firms. It is one part of a company's promotion mix along with advertising, sales promotion, and public relations. It is one of the methods used by industries or organisations to know the habit of or behaviour of the customers towards their products, to know if the product satisfies the needs of the customers, and also to expose the product to the society at large. All the above mentioned points can be realized through the interaction between the salesman who is representing the company and the customer who is the final user of the company's product. In general, if a product has a high unit value and requires a demonstration of its benefit, it is well suited for personal sales.

Personal selling offers entrepreneurs both advantages and disadvantages in comparison with the other elements of the promotion mix. It is more precise than other forms of promotion and often has a greater persuasive impact. Most personal selling is intended to build long-term relationship with customers. A strong relationship can only be built overtime and requires regular communication with a customer. Meeting with customers on a regular basis allows salespeople to repeatedly discuss their company's products and by doing so, helps strengthen customer's knowledge of what the company has to offer.

2.0 Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 The Concept of Personal Selling

Marketing is a term that performs an important function in any organisation. It helps each and every organisation to create their awareness to the public. Both profit oriented and non-profit oriented organisations make use of marketing to inform people about the existence of their product and the various benefits that customers can derive from it. This enormous function has led to the need to have personal contact with customers. According to Jobber (2004), personal selling is the marketing task that involves face-to-face contact with customers. This implies that personal selling permit direct interaction between the buyer and the seller, where the seller can identify the specific needs and problems of the buyer. Weitz et al (1995) defines personal selling as the inter-personal communication in which the salesman uncovers and satisfies the needs of the customer to the mutual benefit of both. This means personal selling is a chain that bound the relationship between the salesman and the customers. In a general term, personal selling is a personal contact with one or more purchasers with the purpose of making a sale. According to Odua (2015), personal selling is a form of person-to-person communication in which the salesman tries to influence the buyer to purchase his/her company's products or services.

Looking at the above definitions, we can see that personal selling helps the salesman to influence the prospective buyers to purchase the product of the salesman due to the personal interaction they both had, even when the buyer did not plan for it.

2.2 Importance of Personal Selling

Odua (2015) summarized the importance of personal selling as follows:

1. Build Product Awareness (Odua, 2015): personal selling helps to educate customers about new or existing products. A customer might know about a product for the first time through personal selling.



2. Create Interest (Odua, 2015): The fact that personal selling involves person-to-person communication makes it a natural method of getting customers to experience a product for the first time. In fact, creating interest goes hand in hand with building product awareness.
3. Provide Information (Odua, 2015): personal selling helps to provide information about a product. This comes up when the sales people engage with customers in conversation. The salesman will be able to know what the customer feels about the quantity, quality, price and availability of a product.
4. Stimulate Demand (Odua, 2015): personal selling helps in convincing customers to make a purchase which lead to high rate of demand for a product after the mind of the customer have been gained by the salesman.
5. Reinforcing the Brand (Odua, 2015): most personal selling intend to build long term relationship with customers. A strong relationship can only be built over time and requires regular communication with a customer. Meeting with customers on regular basis makes the salesman to repeatedly discuss about their company's product and by so doing, helps to strengthen customer's knowledge on what the company has to offer.

2.3 Nature of Personal Selling

Santosh (2009) suggested in his book the following as the nature of personal selling

1. Personal Selling has the greatest freedom to adjust the message to satisfy the customers
2. It is used when the market is concentrated
3. it is also used when the product's unit value is high, technical in nature, or requires a demonstration
4. impersonal selling is also used when the sale involves a trade-in
5. It is used when the product is in the introductory stage
6. Used when the company has fewer amounts of funds for an advertising campaign

2.4 Challenges of Personal Selling

Some of the challenges of personal selling include:

1. Personal Selling cannot reach as many potential customers as advertising, and the cost of each contact is much higher
2. It is really very difficult to get suitable salesman from company's point of view. The potential salesman so selected, trained and placed, may not guarantee loyal service to the company. The selling agents usually work for several different firms, so they are unable to devote 100% of their attention to any one client
3. Personal selling is also expensive, especially when considering the salespersons salary, commission, bonus and travel time. Some sales representatives even travel to other cities by plane. These costs are incurred regardless of whether the salesperson makes the sales

3.0 Methodology

In a bid to achieve the objectives of this investigation, the researcher adopted a descriptive research method. The research instrument used in this study is structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was a close ended type to elicit guided responses and for easy analysis. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used. The primary data was obtained through the administration of questionnaire, while the secondary sources were through the review of relevant literatures. A total of thirty (30) questionnaires were administered to both the staff and customers of Babangida& Sons Nigeria Ltd, Damaturu, Where Eighteen (18) respondents were employees while Twelve (12) were customers. The data collected was analysed using simple percentages and tables.

4.0 Result And Discussion

Out of the thirty (30) questionnaires administered, twenty three (23) were completed and returned, where Fifteen (15) were from the staff while Eight (8) were from the customers. Analysis will be based on the 23 returned questionnaires. The questionnaires will be analysed using tables and percentages.

Table 4.1.1, Question 1: If you are a staff, for how long have you been working with this organisation?

Options	Frequency	Percentage
1-5 years	9	60%
5-10 years	6	40%
10-15 years	-	-
15 and above	-	-
Total	15	100%

Source: Questionnaire Administered 2015



From the table above, 60% of the staff, representing the majority, has worked with the organisation for 1 to five years, while the remaining 40% have worked with the organisation for 5 to 10 years.

Table 4.1.2. Question 2: If you are a customer, for how long have you been patronising this organisations product?

Options	Frequency	Percentage
1-5 years	3	37.5%
5-10 years	5	62.5%
10-15 years	-	-
15 and above	-	-
Total	8	100%

Source: Questionnaire Administered 2015

Going by the above table, we can see that majority of the customers (62.5%) have patronised the company's product for 5 to 10 years.

Table 4.1.3 ,Question 3: Is personal selling essential in marketing of consumer products?

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	19	82.6%
No	4	17.3%
No Idea	-	-
Total	23	100%

Source: Questionnaire Administered 2015

We can observe from the table above that 82.6% of the respondents are of the view that personal selling is essential in marketing of consumer products.

Table 4.1.4,Question 4: Does personal selling help to build and enhance company-customer relationship?

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	18	78%
No	3	13%
No Idea	2	9%
Total	23	100%

Source: Questionnaire Administered 2015.

It is clear from the table above that most of the respondents believe personal selling builds and enhances strong relationship between the company and its customers.

Table 4.1.5,Question 5:Does the personal selling help the customers to know more about a product?

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	23	100%
No	-	-
No Idea	-	-
Total	23	100%

Source: Questionnaire Administered 2015

All the respondents believe personal selling help customers to know more about a product. This implies that personal selling is a good means of informing the public about a product.

Table 4.1.6,Question 6 Does it help to build long-term relationship with customers?

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	20	87%
No	-	-
No Idea	3	13%
Total	23	100%

Source: Questionnaire Administered 2015



The table above shows that personal selling helps to build long-term relationship with customers because 87% of the respondents believe that it builds long-term relationship.

Table 4.1.7, Question 7: What type(s) of personal selling approach do the marketing staffs apply in marketing consumer products?

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Retail Selling	6	26%
Trade Selling	5	22%
Missionary Selling	12	52%
Total	23	100%

Source: Questionnaire Administered 2015

The above table shows that 52% of the staffs make use of missionary selling, 26% makes use of retail selling, while the remaining 22% makes use of trade selling.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

From the result of the questionnaire, it is clear that personal selling is a tool that any manufacturing or distribution company must adopt in order to ensure that the marketed product penetrate into the market. Therefore, the researcher in his conducted research has the following findings:

1. It was discovered that personal selling helps customers to have full information about the product they are buying
2. It helps firms to avoid losing both potential and present customers to competitors
3. The researcher was also able to find out that personal selling promotes marketing activities
4. The researcher found out that personal selling helps firms to know how to approach different classes of customers
5. It was discovered that if a product must penetrate into the market, then personal selling is inevitable for the company
6. The researcher found out that the yardstick for customer-company relationship is personal selling

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, personal selling is very essential in marketing because it helps both the firm and customers to know the state and stand of a product. It gives room for customers to express their motives concerning a product as well as help the firm to know how to make necessary adjustment in the area of products and services. Personal selling promotes and enhances marketing activities and also helps to build good and cordial relationship between the firm and customers. The researcher has therefore come to the conclusion that if personal selling is effectively worked upon, it will be of good opportunity for the firm because the customer will always want to patronize the firm that sees them as important, even as a king in the market. Therefore, the firm must orient and train its staff and salesmen on how to approach them at different levels.

5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations of the researcher will be based on the findings of the research. The researcher therefore recommends the following:

1. A firm or business enterprise should ensure that its primary aim is to get the mind-set of customers
2. A firm should give proper training to its staff and salesmen so that they will be able to provide good information to the customer and also defend the image of the firm
3. The organisation should effectively apply the various personal selling strategies provided so as to defeat its competitors and maintain its stand in the market or business.
4. The organisation should know the best approach for the various classes of customers it is dealing with
5. A firm must make personal selling a yardstick for building company-customer relationship.

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