

Impact Of Strategic Placement On Product Accessibility In The Nigerian Food And Beverage Industry. A Case Study Of Unilever Nigerian Plc

By

IBOJO, Bolanle Odunlami

Department of Business Administration,
Faculty of Management Sciences,
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo Nigeria
Emails: bo.ibojo@acu.edu.ng
Odunibojo@gmail.com

DUNMADE, Emmanuel Olaniyi

Department of Industrial Relations and Personnel Management,
Faculty of Management Sciences,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin Nigeria
Email: dunmade.eo@unilorin.edu.ng

Abstract

The food and beverage industry is a competitive sub-sector of the manufacturing industry. This study examines the impact of strategic placement on product accessibility, using a case study of Unilever Nigerian Plc in the food and beverage industry. The objectives were to; examine the impact of coverage on product accessibility, evaluate the impact of channels on product accessibility, verify the impact of location on product accessibility and determine the joint effect of coverage, channels and location on product accessibility. Questionnaire was employed to gather necessary and relevant data from the respondents. Questionnaire was used in order to minimize the problems associated with data collection and to ensure that the results are visible and bias free as expected. The data were analyzed using inferential and descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics involves frequency table, while the hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis and Pearson Correlation, which indicates that coverage independently account for 61.7% of the variation in product accessibility. The Pearson Correlation shows that there is a positive correlation between strategic placement and product accessibility ($p = .000$). With this value, it means that 1% change in strategic placement will result in 87.7% change in product placement. The analysis further shows the three sub-variables of strategic placement namely coverage ($r = .808$, $p = .000$), channels ($r = .850$, $p = .000$), and location ($r = .821$, $p = .000$). From the findings it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between coverage and product accessibility, there is a significant relationship between channels and product accessibility, more so, there is a significant relationship between location and product accessibility and lastly, coverage, channels and location jointly affect product accessibility. In other words, there is a significant relationship between strategic placement and product accessibility. It is hereby recommended that for easy product accessibility. This will assist middlemen and other distribution agencies in order to create favourable product accessibility. More so, organizations should take strategic decisions that will fast tract the distribution of goods and services.

Keywords: Food and Beverage Industry; Product Accessibility and Strategic Placement

1. Introduction

Marketing is a concept that identifies, defines, measures and produces goods and services to satisfy the needs and wants of target market (Kotler, 1993). In other words, it identifies the needs of the target market, how the needs can be solved, and the production of goods and services to solve the needs. It determines which target market the organization can serve best, and also on the appropriate products and strategies that can be used in meeting the needs of the target market at a profit. It also determines the price, programmes and placement of producing the needed products in satisfying consumers and at the same time achieving organizational objectives.

For an organization to achieve its stated objectives in an effective and efficient manner such as employee satisfaction, stakeholders satisfaction, low cost, profitability, growth, expansion, increase in sales turnover and increase in market share (Ibojo & Olawepo, 2012), it is necessary for such an organization not to only combine its resources in an effective and proportionate manner but to also consider the application of various strategies to the marketing variables in achieving organizational objectives (Robert. & David, 1987). In achieving the stated objectives, there is the need to apply various marketing strategies. Marketing strategy has become important tool globally for any organization to remain in competitive market environment. Aremu and Lawal (2012) see strategy as a pattern of resource allocation decisions made throughout an organization.

The major aim of marketing is to know and understand the customers so well, identify their needs and create/design the product or service that fits them well. Having examined a customer who is ready to buy, making the product or service available is not all that is needed to achieve the organizational objectives; rather a clear understanding of the environmental intervening variables of market is a must if a workable integrative marketing web is to be institutionalized. Application of strategies to the marketing mix variables is important in ensuring the realization of the corporate objectives.

The central figure of any business organization is the target market. Implicitly, the ultimate existence of business organization is hinged on the realization of customer satisfaction through strategic marketing mix variables (Pride & Ferrell, 2008). Only a balanced or proportionate mix of these variables can achieve the desired customer satisfaction in the target market being served.

Based on the importance attached to the target market, the dynamism of any business organization is a necessity for the actualization of its business objectives. Having realized the fact that the target market is a critical factor in the actualization of business objectives, every organization must not only be progressive but also dynamic in nature and structure because the environment and nature of target market are dynamic in nature. Organizations must constantly watch the degree of target market dynamism, and be able to adjust accordingly to such market dynamics. These changes will affect all the identifiable marketing mix and help in creating successful and favourable relationships with the target market.

Mc Donald (2007) opined that strategic marketing mix must focus on the product, pricing, promotion and placement of items in order to make the organization a success. He was also concerned about how the firm will fulfill the needs and wants of its customers and in activities associated with maintaining the relationship with its stakeholders. He reiterated the fact that marketing strategies must feature customer orientation, input, and accessibility in the fight to the top of the market. The essence of creating a favourable relationship with the target market

engenders a long lasting partnership that will help in satisfying the needs of the target market as well as achieving the objectives of the organization. The objectives of organizations vary; some of them are profit maximization, growth, expansion, and increase in market share (Bamiduro, 2006). It is not the desire of any business oriented organization to just sell products to target market, but to create a friendly atmosphere that will create repeat purchase, good organizational image, brand loyalty, and continuous relationship between the organization and the target market.

Bamigboye (2000) also identified four marketing mix variables – products, price, place and promotion. These are marketing components on which marketing decision variables hinge. Marketing managers can vary the types and amount of these elements/variables. These variables are often viewed as controllable variables because they can be changed and controlled by the marketing manager unlike the uncontrollable factors such as technology, culture, political, legal, economic etc.

The marketer's major task is to devise strategic marketing plans/strategies of assembling fully integrated marketing programmes to create, communicate, and deliver value for customers (Kotler 1993). Such marketing programmes may consist of numerous decisions on value enhancing marketing activities to use.

Strategic Placement variables include channels, location, transportation and coverage. Mehta, Rosenbloom and Aderson (2000) define a marketing channel as the route, path, or conduit through which products or things of value flow, as they move from the manufacturer to the ultimate user of the product. Much as there are various factors that determine the successful operation of the sales and distribution channels of the organization's products, the reach and popularity of a product to a large extent depends on its distribution network (Shoham, A. 2002). Therefore, it is up to the organisation to communicate to the customers that their products can deliver all the values a customer may look for (Shoham, 2002).

Marketing mix variables- product, price, promotion, and place serve as link between the organization and the target market e.g placement helps the organization in deciding its locations at strategic places that are easily accessible by their target market. Aside from producing goods at affordable prices, it is necessary to place such goods in strategic locations that can be accessed by target market (Kotler, 1993).

Unilever Nigeria Plc is one of the largest nutritional and food companies in the world. In Nigeria, the company's Head Office is located in Lagos, Nigeria. The prices of their products are affordable because people patronize their products, and the products are meeting customers' needs.

Despite the fact that many organizations are in the same industry, and competing with one another, the significance of the effect of strategic placement variables cannot be overemphasized in the actualization of business objectives. Therefore, the objectives of the study are to:

- i. examine the impact of coverage on product accessibility
- ii. evaluate the impact of channels on product accessibility
- iii. verify the impact of location on product accessibility
- iv. determine the joint effect of coverage, channels and location on product accessibility

2. Literature Review

2.2 Conceptual Review

2.2.1 The concept of Placement

Placement has been viewed from different perspectives. Jones, (2007) defines place as any way that the customer can access a product or receive a service. Bowersox and Closs (1996) give distribution as another strategic name for placement. According to them, it is the undisputable element of the marketing mix, and it envelopes all decisions and tools which relate to making products and services available and accessible to customers. Place strategy calls for effective distribution of products among the marketing channels such as the wholesalers or retailers (Berman, 1996). Owomoyela et al, (2013); Amine and Cavusgil, (2001); and McNaughton (2002) agree that place has significant effect on business performance.

Placement strategy is an integral part of marketing strategies in achieving organisational performance. Previous studies have established relationships between marketing strategies and performance (Owomoyela et al, 2013; Shoham, 2002; Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003). Leonidou, Katsikeas and Samiee (2002) propose a study in which a meta-analysis was also conducted to evaluate the relationships between the marketing strategies and performance.

2.2.2 Place and Strategic Importance of Channel of Distribution

Place can be likened to channel of distribution. According to Frances and Stephen (2006), a marketing channel can be defined as the structure linking a group of individuals or organizations through which a product or service is made available to the customers or industrial users. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2006), Place includes company activities that make the product available to target consumers.

Placement under marketing mix involves all company activities that make the product available to the targeted customer (Kotler & Armstrong, 2004). Based on various factors such as sales, communications and contractual considerations, it involves various ways of making products available to customers. (Lazer, 1971).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 The Marketing Mix Approach

The term marketing-mix was first popularized by Borden (1964). The ingredients in Borden (1964) marketing mix include product planning, pricing, branding, distribution channels, personal selling, advertising, promotion, packaging, display, servicing, physical handling and fact findings and analysis. Frey (1961) suggested that marketing variables should be divided into two parts: the offering (product, packaging, brand, price and service) and the methods and tools (distribution channel, personal selling, advertising, sales promotion and publicity). On the other hand, Lazer and Kelly (1962), and Lazer, Culley and Standt (1973) suggested three elements of marketing mix: the goods and service mix, the distribution mix, and the communication mix.

The Borden (1964) ingredients have been grouped by McCarthy (1964) into the four variables that today are known as the 4ps of marketing. These four Ps are the parameters that the marketing managers can control, subject to the internal and external constraints of the marketing environment. However, the goal is to make decisions that center on the four Ps and the customers in order to create perceived values and generate a positive response.

The marketing mix framework was useful in the early days of the marketing concept when physical products represented a larger portion of the economy. Today, with marketing being more integrated into organizations, and with a wider variety of products and marketing, some authors have extended the approach by proposing a fifth P as packaging. However, another approach has extended the 4Ps to 7Ps (Booms & Bitner, 1982; Medha, 2008) and (Blythe, 2006). This approach takes cognizance of the original version of the 4Ps-Product, price, place and promotion while introducing three new Ps- people, process and physical environment. Medhae (2008) was of the opinion that the theory of the 4Ps has been long used for the product industry while the 7Ps approach has emerged as a successful proposition for the service industry.

2.3.2 Strategic Management Approach

Looking at the perspectives of David (1989) and Ansoff (1990), strategic management can be said to be the act of formulating, implementing and evaluating cross-functional decisions that will enable an organization to achieve its objectives. It is the process of specifying the organization's objectives, developing policies and plans to achieve these objectives, and allocating resources to implement the policies and plans to achieve the organization's objectives. Strategic management, therefore, combines the activities of the various functional areas of a business to achieve organizational objectives. It is the highest level of managerial activity, usually formulated by the Board of Directors and performed by the organization's chief executive officer (CEO) and executive team. Strategic management provides overall direction to the enterprise.

2.3.3 Strategic Marketing Management

Strategic marketing management can be viewed as the art and science of formulating, implementing and evaluating cross functional decisions that enable an organization to achieve its marketing objectives (Achumba, 2000). From this definition, strategic marketing management focuses on integrating marketing activities to achieve organizational objectives. From the perspective of Akinyele (2010), there are four goals of strategic marketing management that needs to be understood by those wishing to use strategic management to craft profitable strategies.

2.4 Empirical Review

Behan and Lamoureux (2015) channel management affects sales performance by helping to protect brand value, allowing vendors to sell their products at a premium, thereby giving room to product accessibility

According to Anthony and Owino (2017) there is a significant relationship between channel differentiation strategy adopted by Sameer Africa (K) Limited and organizational performance. The study findings indicated that there was a positive significant relationship between channel differentiation and performance of Sameer Africa. Channel differentiation with a beta of 0.165 was at a statistically significant level and was a good predictor of performance, Product accessibility is an integral part of performance.

3 Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study examines the impact of strategic placement on product accessibility, using an organization in the food and beverage industry. It is a survey research design that allows for the use of questionnaires in eliciting data from the respondents.

3.2. Study Population/Sample

The population of this study is the entire members of staff of Unilever Nigeria Plc in the food and beverage industry, using stratified sampling

Top Level Managers	Middle Level Managers	Lower Level Managers	Total
8	58	88	154

Source; Researcher field survey 2020

3.3. Sampling and Sample Size

A stratified sampling method was used. In order to ensure that returned copies of questionnaire are sizeable, the researcher administered questionnaire to 70% of the population which constituted 108 staff. However, 90 questionnaire copies were returned which constitutes 88.3%.

3.4. Sources of Data

Primary and secondary sources were used. In carrying out this research, the use of questionnaire was employed in gathering necessary data from the respondents. Questionnaire was used in order to minimize the problems associated with data collection and to ensure that the results are visible and bias free as expected. The questions were designed to sample the views of the respondents on the subject matter (impact of strategic placement on product accessibility).

3.5. Methods of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using inferential and descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics involves frequency tables while the hypotheses were tested using regression and Pearson correlation.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

The demographic profile in terms of educational qualification, status, department, sex, age, marital status and length of service are shown below.

Table 4.1.1 Distribution by Educational Qualification

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid B.Sc/HND	64	71.1	71.1	71.1
M.Sc/MBA	12	13.3	13.3	84.4
ND/NCE	14	15.6	15.6	100.0
Total	90	100.0	100.0	

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2020

The above table show that B.Sc/HND has 71.1%, M.Sc/MBA has 13.3%, and ND/NCE has 15.6%. This implies that majority of the members of management staff has first degree. This also shows that the organization has members of management staff that are educated and therefore have the disposition, knowledge and the tendency of moving the organization to a greater height:

Table 4.1.2 Distribution by Status

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Assistant Manager	29	32.2	32.2	32.2
Full Manager	30	33.3	33.3	65.6
General Manager	6	6.7	6.7	72.2
Manager	5	5.6	5.6	77.8
Senior Manager	6	6.7	6.7	84.4
Supervisor	14	15.6	15.6	100.0
Total	90	100.0	100.0	

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2020

The above table shows that Assistant Managers grade has 32.2%, Full Manager 33.3%, General Manager 6.7%, Manager 5.6%, Senior Manager 6.7%, and Supervisor has 15.6%. This implies that the organization has a workforce of greater status, who can engineer the effective realization of the organizational objectives.

Table 4.1.3 Distribution by Department

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Administration	18	20.0	20.0	20.0
Engineering	18	20.0	20.0	40.0
Finance	11	12.2	12.2	52.2
Marketing	12	13.3	13.3	65.6
Personnel	8	8.9	8.9	74.4
Production	23	25.6	25.6	100.0
Total	90	100.0	100.0	

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2020

The table above shows that Administration has 20.0%, Engineering has 20.0%, Marketing has 13.3%, Personnel has 8.9%, and Production has 25.6%. This implies that all the departments

have capable management staff that can plan, organize and coordinates the activities of their respective departments for the actualization of corporate objectives.

Table 4.1.4 Distribution by Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	20	22.2	22.2	22.2
Valid Male	70	77.8	77.8	100.0
Total	90	100.0	100.0	

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2020

The above table shows that the female gender has 22.2%, while male has 77.8%. This implies that the organization has more male staff than female staff.

Table 4.1.5 Distribution by Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
31-40 years	30	33.3	33.3	33.3
Valid 41-50 years	54	60.0	60.0	93.3
Above 50 years	6	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	90	100.0	100.0	

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2020

The table above shows that members of management staff that fall between the age bracket of 31 – 40yrs have 33.3%, members of management staff that fall between the age bracket of 50yrs and above have 6.7%, while members of management staff that fall between the age bracket of 41 – 50yrs have 60.0%. This implies that the organization has active workforce that can help actualize the vision and goals of the organization.

Table 4.1.6 Distribution by Marital Status

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Married	58	64.4	64.4	64.4
Valid Single	32	35.6	35.6	100.0
Total	90	100.0	100.0	

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2020

The above table shows that married constitutes 64.4% while single constitutes 35.6%. This implies that majority of the members of management staff are married.

Table 4.1.7 Distribution by Length of Service

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Above 10 years	60	66.7	66.7	66.7
Valid Between 5 and 10	30	33.3	33.3	100.0

Total	90	100.0	100.0
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Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2020

The table above shows that members of management staff that have spent between 5 and 10yrs are 33.3% while members of management staff that have spent 10years and above constitute 66.7%. This implies that the organization has men and women of vast experience needed to actualize the objectives of the organization.

4.2 Test of Hypotheses

i. Hypothesis One

Ho₁. There is no significant relationship between coverage and product accessibility

Table 4.2.1 Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.786 ^a	.617	.613	.401

Source: Author's Computation, 2020

a. Predictors: (Constant), Coverage

b. Dependent Variable: Product Accessibility

The value of R² (0.617) indicates that coverage independently account for 61.7% of the variation in product accessibility. This aid in rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting the alternative hypothesis.

ii. Hypothesis Two

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between channels and product accessibility

Table 4.2.2 Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.870 ^a	.756	.878	.488

Source: Author's Computation, 2020

a. Predictors: (Constant), Channels

b. Dependent Variable: Product Accessibility

The value of R² (0.756) indicates that channels independently account for 75.6% of the variation in product accessibility. This aid in rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting the alternative hypothesis.

iii. Hypothesis Three

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between location and product accessibility

Table 4.2.3 Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.857 ^a	.734	.708	.476

Source: Author's Computation, 2020

a. Predictors: (Constant), Location

b. Dependent Variable: Product Accessibility

The value of R^2 (0.734) indicates that location independently account for 73.4% of the variation in product accessibility. This aid in rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting the alternative hypothesis.

iv. Hypothesis Four

Ho₄: Coverage, channels and location cannot jointly predict product accessibility

Table 4.1.4 showing multiple regression and Pearson Correlation

Variable	R	R ²	Pearson correlation	F	sub-variables	Pearson correlation	P	Rmks
Strategic Placement	.812	.659	.877	17.973	Coverage	.808	.000	Sig
					Channels	.850	.000	Sig
					Location	.821	.000	Sig

Source; Author's Computation 2020

Table 4.1.4 shows multiple regression value of R^2 (0.659) which indicates that coverage, channels and location jointly explain 65.9% of the variation in product accessibility. The Pearson Correlation shows the relationship between strategic placement and product accessibility. The analysis shows that there is a positive correlation between strategic placement ($r = .877^{**}$, $p = .000$) and the dependent variable (product accessibility and are significant at .01 level of significance this show that strategic placement as a whole exhibits a strong relationship with product accessibility. With this value, it means that 1% change in strategic placement will results in 87.7% in product placement. The analysis further shows the three sub-variables of strategic placement namely coverage ($r = .808^{**}$, $p = .000$), channels ($r = .850^{**}$, $p = .000$), and location ($r = .821^{**}$, $p = .000$),

4.3 Discussion of Findings

Table 4.1.1 to 4.1.7 show the demographic profile in terms of educational qualification, status, department, sex, age, marital status and length of service. It shows that B.Sc/HND has 71.1%, M.Sc/MBA has 13.3%, and ND/NCE has 15.6%. This implies that majority of the members of management staff have first degrees. This also shows that the organization has members of management staff that are educated and therefore have the disposition, knowledge and the tendency of moving the organization to a greater height: It also shows that Assistant Managers grade has 32.2%, Full Manager 33.3%, General Manager 6.7%, Manager 5.6%, Senior Manager 6.7%, and Supervisor has 15.6%. This implies that the organization has a workforce of greater status, who can engineer the effective realization of the organizational objectives. More so, Administration has 20.0%, Engineering has 12.2%, Marketing has 13.3% , Personnel has 8.9%, and Production has 25.6%. This implies that all the departments have capable management staff that can plan, organize and coordinates the activities of their respective departments for the actualization of corporate objectives.

It also shows that members of management staff that fall between the age brackets of 31 – 40yrs have 33.3%, members of management staff that fall between the age bracket of 50yrs and above have 6.7%, while members of management staff that fall between the age brackets of 41 – 50yrs have 60.0%. This implies that the organization has active workforce that can help actualize the vision and goals of the organization. More so, married constitutes 64.4% while single constitutes 35.6%. This implies that majority of the members of management staff are married.

Lastly, members of management staff that have spent between 5 and 10yrs are 33.3% while members of management staff that have spent 10years and above constitute 66.7%. This

implies that the organization has men and women of vast experience needed to actualize the objectives of the organization.

Considering the test of hypotheses, table 4.2.1, the value of R^2 (0.617) indicates that coverage independently account for 61.7% of the variation in product accessibility. This shows that there is a significant relationship between coverage and product accessibility. This aid in rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting the alternative hypothesis. In hypothesis Two, The value of R^2 (0.756) indicates that channels independently account for 75.6% of the variation in product accessibility. This aid in rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting the alternative hypothesis. In hypothesis Three, The value of R^2 (0.734) indicates that location independently account for 73.4% of the variation in product accessibility. This aid in rejecting the null hypothesis and accepting the alternative hypothesis. In hypothesis four, Table 4.1.4 shows multiple regression value of R^2 (0.659) which indicates that coverage, channels and location jointly explain 65.9% of the variation in product accessibility. This implies that there is a significant relationship between strategic placement and product accessibility. The Pearson Correlation shows the relationship between strategic placement and product accessibility. The analysis shows that there is a positive correlation between strategic placement ($r = .877^{**}$, $p = .000$) and the dependent variable (product accessibility) and are significant at .01 level of significance this show that strategic placement as a whole exhibits a strong relationship with product accessibility. With this value, it means that 1% change in strategic placement will results in 87.7% in product placement. The analysis further shows the three sub-variables of strategic placement namely coverage ($r = .808^{**}$, $p = .000$), channels ($r = .850^{**}$, $p = .000$), and location ($r = .821^{**}$, $p = .000$), With these respective values, it means that, a 1% change in coverage, channels and location will bring about 80.8%, 85.0% and 82.1% in product accessibility. The table also shows that the model is statistically significant. The F- statistics of 17.973 which reveals that the model is statistically significant. This also attests to the significant relationship between strategic placement and product accessibility.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examines the impact of strategic placement on product accessibility. The Food and Beverage Industry is at the fore in the manufacturing of dairy products, beverages, seasoning, convenience foods, confectionaries and staple foods. From the results of the regression analysis, there is a significant relationship between coverage and product accessibility, a significant relationship between channels and product accessibility, and a significant relationship between location and product accessibility. The results of the multiple regression and Pearson Correlation shows that there is a strong positive correlation between strategic placement and product accessibility. One can therefore conclude that there is a significant relationship between strategic placement and product accessibility. In line with this conclusion, it is hereby recommended that;

Organizations should take into consideration the vitality of strategic placement variable. More so, scholar and researchers should embrace the value of transportation as a sub-variables when considering strategic placement.

Organisations should understand the fact that the target customers constitute the target points of marketing, therefore there is the need to make sure that products get to respective customers at the right time and at the right place.

Government should provide good roads for easy product accessibility. This will assist middlemen and other distribution agencies in order to create favourable product accessibility.

Organisations should take strategic decisions that will fast tract the distribution of goods and services and create superior customer value.

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