

Realigning Distribution Strategies For Effective Marketing Operations Of A Business: An Empirical Study Based On Tropicana

** Dr. Suman Kumar Dawn*

INTRODUCTION AND NEED FOR THE STUDY

In today's globalised economy, the marketers do not sell their goods directly to the final consumers. Between them and the final consumers, a host of marketing intermediaries exist who are performing a variety of functions.

Stern and El-Ansary (1988) define marketing channel as a set of interdependent organisations involved in the process of making a product or service available for consumption. Alderson (1958) has defined that the goal of marketing is to match supply and demand of the desired products and services according to the preference of the customers.

In a competitive market, particularly in consumer goods market like Tropicana product, distribution channels have a distinct role in the successful implementation of marketing plans and strategies. The channel members perform the following marketing functions in the operations of distribution, which are very important. They have:

(i) To search out for buyers and sellers, **(ii)** To match goods to the requirements of the market, **(iii)** To persuade and influence the prospective buyers, **(iv)** To provide feedback information, marketing intelligence and sales forecasting services for their regions to their suppliers, **(v)** To participate actively in the creation and establishment of market for the products.

Developing a distribution model involves integrating channel members and network coverage. Channel members play an important role in the distribution system in any industry. Therefore, to design an effective distribution system, the understanding of market dynamics and the needs of customers are very much important.

The study on developing the distribution strategies for Tropicana started with the market mapping in Kanchrapara and Kalyani, West Bengal. This study also provides insight into the current market offerings in the juice segment and consumer perception regarding the same. This has helped to identify the strong and weak areas with respect to juice segment. Therefore, this study would be helpful to the marketing managers to cover and penetrate in other market areas and also give some light in developing suitable distribution strategies at the time of marketing their products.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The marketer has certain objectives towards improving the distribution channel, which has to be taken care of with utmost importance to make the business flourish and secure a safe position in the competitive market.

- a)** To ensure availability of the product (Tropicana) at the retailers' point.
- b)** To build channel members' loyalty.
- c)** To stimulate channel members to put greater selling efforts.
- d)** To develop managerial efficiency in channel organization.
- e)** To develop and design an efficient and effective distribution system so that the product and services will be available readily, regularly and equitably in a fresh form.

HYPOTHESIS

In view of the objectives set for the study, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

H₁: The consumers are homogenous on fruit juice consumption irrespective of their ages.

H₂: The consumers are homogeneous on fruit juice consumption irrespective of their monthly income.

** Assistant Professor- Marketing, Centre for Management Studies, JIS College of Engineering (Under West Bengal University of Technology), Nadia, West Bengal. E-mail : skd_hooghly@yahoo.co.in*

LITERATURE REVIEW

✿ **Eichel and Bender (1984)** have suggested three types of distribution performance evaluation approaches. They are: (i) Competitive approaches (e.g. comparison with average or comparison with the best), (ii) outcome oriented approaches (e.g. objective output measures such as sales or sales improvement, sales against potential, market share or market share improvement, profit contribution, quota achievement; or more subjective output measures such as service to customers, customer retention and loyalty), and (iii) input oriented approaches (e.g., objective input measures such as total sales calls, territory potential, years of experience, extent of training; or mere subjective input measures such as technical knowledge, presentation skills, personality, human relation skills, etc.).

✿ According to **Anderson and Narus (1990)**, building up cooperative relationships with distributors for better sales, growth and profitability would be considered as an effective vehicle for enhancing competitive advantages.

✿ **Notarantonio and Cohen (1990)** have argued that on a sales counter, a salesperson can deliberately alter his/her style to achieve maximum effectiveness and conclude that adaptive and flexible communication behaviour would be a necessary part for effective managerial performance, not just sales performance.

✿ **Webster (1992)** has suggested that to be an effective marketer in today's global market place, it requires cooperative relationships with its broad network of players. They are goods suppliers, service providers, competitors (in strategic alliance), and distributors.

✿ **Morgan and Hunt (1994)** have also advocated that the success of cooperative relationships depends on a considerable degree of commitment and trust among the parties involved.

✿ **Parasuraman et al. (1995)** has talked about the determinants of service quality, which are: Reliability, Responsiveness, Competence, Access, Courtesy, Communication, Credibility, And Security, Understanding/knowing the customer.

✿ **Levins (1998)** has suggested that Internet using can enhance one-to-one relationship between manufacturers and the customers. Engaging one-to-one relationship is the modern version of data base marketing. He has concluded that in the process of generating feedback, marketers can learn more about customer's preferences with future offers.

✿ **Richard Sale (1998)** has observed several developments that occur in recent years with respect to transferring power from the manufactures to retailers. With the advent of optical check out scanners and sophisticated in store computer systems, retailers can get access to data- related to sales, appropriate sales promotional tools and also will be informed easily which products make money. He has advocated that retailers use this information to analyze sales of manufacturers' products and then demand discounts and other promotional support from manufacturers of lagging brands.

✿ **Zeiger (1999)** has advocated about the customization of product and services, which meet very specific needs of individual customers. New technology has emerged that facilitates the selection to consume the final product. He has argued that mass customization would further transform into relationship marketing with its associated demands of greater understanding of each customer, which leads to better customer servicing.

✿ **Srivastava et al. (1999)** proposed three core business processes that should be managed by the companies. They are product development, supply chain and customer relationship. They stress that marketers success will not only depend on their functional excellence, but will also require cross-functional competence to ensure the implementation of marketing ideas.

✿ **Asroft and Hoey (2001)** have studied about e-business and concluded that the web can be used to raise the profile of an organization which increases awareness in different groups - both user and non-user. They have suggested that it could be achieved in various ways: (i) Through the promotion of new initiatives, (ii) Through a change of improvement of image or (iii) Through improving or enhancing customer service.

✿ **Gilbert and Jackaria (2002)** have advocated for the free trial promotion for effective marketing. The sample may be sent through the post, handed over in the store or delivered by door-to-door process through salespersons. However, the promotion is noticeable and that facilitates brand recognition and brand recall for future purchases. They have argued that if an additional free amount is given to consumers, it might turn to persuade them to buy the product, provided they feel that the deal is a fair one and provides value for money.

✿ **Stremersch and Tellis (2002)** have studied about price bundling in products for effective marketing promotion. It is defined as two or more products that are packaged together and sold to customers for effective promotion and

marketing. They have concluded that bundling is typically as pro-competitive tactics are to offer consumers a preferred combination of components and can be used by a firm to gain more market power.

✳ **Sayulu and Surender (2004)** have studied about customer satisfaction, their likings, disliking, behavior etc. They acknowledge that consumer behavior is important for effective merchandising and for efficient execution of various marketing efforts and practices. The objectives of their study are to analyze the consumer brand preference with regard to decorative paints and also to investigate the usage pattern of decorative paints in the light of socio- economic background of sample respondents. The methodology is based on collecting both the primary and secondary data. The target group for the study is essentially the middle-income group and the upper income group. Statistical tools such as ratios, trend analysis etc. are used in the process of analyzing the data. They have found that brand preference is seen on the part of the consumer due to the following reasons: **(i)** Change in the lifestyles of Indian consumers, **(ii)** Increase in the disposable income of consumers, **(iii)** Transformation of sellers market into buyers market, and **(iv)** Customers are becoming selective in purchasing various brands.

PROFILE OF THE COMPANY AND ITS PRODUCT TROPICANA

PepsiCo is a world leader in the convenient foods and beverages. In 2006, worldwide, it's revenue was \$35 billion and the strength of employees was more than 157000. PepsiCo was founded in 1965 through the merger of Pepsi- cola and Fritolay. Tropicana is an international brand of PepsiCo. Anthony Rossi, who had a fruit packaging business in Florida founded it in 1947. PepsiCo acquired Tropicana, the only true global juice business, in 1998.

PepsiCo, a multinational company is based in New York, USA, which entered India in 1989 and in a short span of time, it has grown into the country's largest selling food and beverages. The company has extensive product portfolio, which includes refreshment beverages like Pepsi, &Up, Mirinda and Mountain Dew. In addition to this, low calorie beverages are also present like Diet Pepsi, 7Up, Light and Caffeine free Pepsi; 100 % natural fruit juices and juice based drinks like Tropicana and Slice also exist.

Therefore, through Tropicana, PepsiCo has made its foray into the juice segment. This stand will be a profitable venture for PepsiCo as people have become more health conscious globally and Tropicana has been well accepted by this segment in various parts of the world.

DISTRIBUTION AND DISTRIBUTION STRATEGIES: A CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

I) FACTORS AFFECTING THE DECISION REGARDING THE CHANNEL DESIGN

A marketer has to design the distribution system with utmost care and explore several alternatives before designing a particular system because a system once developed cannot be modified frequently. The choice of a particular distribution system is influenced by the following factors.

a) Product Characteristics: Products' nature and characteristics influence the choice of a particular distribution channel. Products, which do not have much technical complexity, can be moved through channel members. Products which are bought frequently for consumption can be distributed widely through retail outlets. Certain products, which are perishable in nature, require storage and safety facilities.

b) Customer Characteristics: Consumer's buying habits and their geographical location also influence the distribution channel decision. It also implies the attitude towards waiting time, expectations with regard to special conveniences and preference for buying in comfortable and more relaxed environments.

c) The Company's own Characteristics: A Company's characteristics such as the size and financial ability also influence channel choice. The channel design is influenced by the company's long-term objectives, financial resources manufacturing capacity, marketing mix and even its philosophy.

d) Intensity of Competition: Whether a competitor seeks exclusive distribution or intensive distribution is an important point, which will be considered while making channel choice. In the case of exclusive distribution, a competitor may choose a limited dealer network with exclusive rights to distribute the company's products, whereas, an intensive distribution involves stocking its products in as many as possible outlets along with a rival's products. Therefore, the nature and intensity of competition in the industry will determine the distribution pattern of a firm.

e) Intermediaries' Characteristics: This refers to the middlemen's aptitude for service, promotion and handling

negotiations, storage, contract and credit. Another important aspect is that the channel members should provide information for product improvement, market research and arrange for advertising campaign.

f) Environmental Characteristics: Environmental characteristics like government policy, statutory provisions, state of the economy and technological and infrastructure developments also affect distribution decisions of the firm. The global economic changes have brought new types of distribution channel outlets in many product categories.

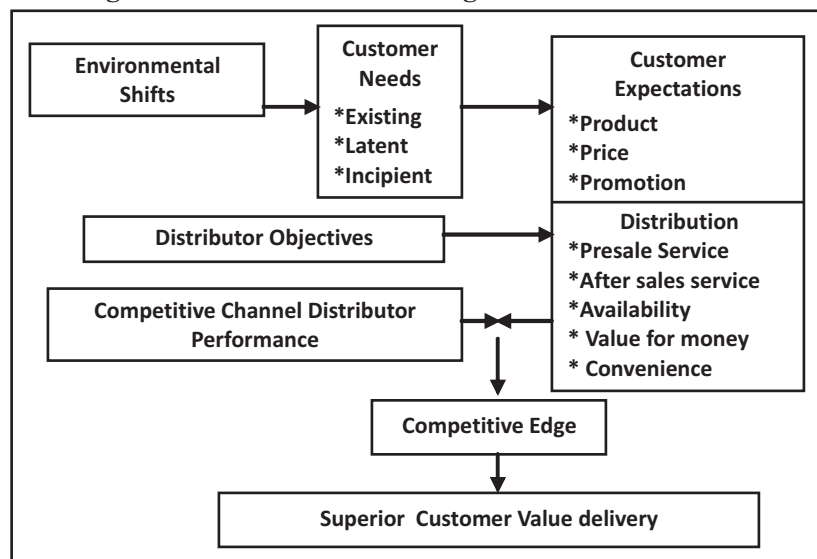
II) DEVELOPING A MARKET DRIVEN DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

In developing an effective distribution strategy, the marketer must be enough flexible in responding to the changing market conditions. A number of factors may influence distribution channel design decisions. This includes PLC stages, objectives, desired market coverage intensity and evaluating and replacing of middlemen.

a) Setting Channel Objectives: In managing the channel network, a marketer must set objectives in clear terms. The marketer should strike a balance between his own interest, channel members' interest and the interest of the customers by setting workable and realistic objectives. Some general objectives are: **(i)** Convenience to customers, **(ii)** Effective target market coverage, **(iii)** Cost-effective distribution.

Distribution decisions need to be modified keeping in view with the PLC stage of a product. As a product passes through different PLC stages, it attracts different adopter groups. During the introductory phase, specialist stores may add value, speciality or dedicated stores may be appropriate during growth stage and during maturity and decline stage, low cost channels and discount stores may be appropriate. Figure 1 discusses the basis of setting up distribution channels.

Figure1: Framework Of Setting Distribution Channels



The marketers must understand what customer expects from the channel; relationship and how much is being provided by the company. The company must understand the customers' expectations. It must also assess the value delivered by them to their customers, which lead to the relative competitive edge. The distribution channel has to be competitive in providing edge over competitors activities which is related to sales, market share, profitability, continuity of supply, market development, promotional assistance, creditworthiness etc.

b) Intensity of Market Coverage: The marketers must determine the distribution coverage intensity, which depends on the nature of the product, target market and availability of other competing products. In intensive distribution coverage, the products are used routinely and on an ongoing basis and require no post sale service. To meet consumer demand efficiently, intensive distribution is necessary and companies use all available distribution channels that offer deep market penetration in each geographic location. For exclusive distribution, the products are infrequently purchased and consumed over long period of time. The distribution arrangement is called *exclusive* because it involves exclusive dealing arrangement and often includes exclusive territorial agreements and the intermediaries do not handle any other competitors' products.

c) Channel Terms And Conditions: The producers develop better mutual understandings with channel partners that usually include price policy, trade margins, payment terms, territorial demarcation, warranty and return policy, and mutual responsibilities etc. As the price policy and trade margins are very vital, therefore, it should be fair and requires manufacturers to establish a price list, trade margins and trade allowances.

d) Training And Motivation Of Channel Members: Training is a necessary part for effective performance on sales and profitability. Depending on the nature and characteristics of the products, appropriate training of middlemen must be required for selling and servicing. Moreover, appropriate motivational techniques such as high margins, commission on productivity, sales contests, allowances on displaying and advertising can stimulate the interest of the distribution channel members and it will help to gain for efficient working.

e) Evaluating And Replacing The Channel Members: Producers should evaluate periodically the performance of middlemen against some laid down parameters. Companies often use a set of criteria that may include some combination of factors with different weight given to each element in order of its importance, such as achieving the sales targets within the stipulated period, inventory maintenance (stock), customer delivery (on time), customer service (on time), training cooperation and performing promotional activities etc.

Jain (1999) has identified six effective stages for developing an effective distribution channel, which are: **(i)** Channel structure strategy, **(ii)** Distribution scope strategy, **(iii)** Channel modification strategy, **(iv)** Channel control strategy and **(v)** Conflict management strategy.

Channel structure strategy determines whether the goods should be distributed from the manufacturer to customer directly or infinitely through one or more intermediaries. It is aimed at reaching the optimal number of consumers in a given time schedule at the lowest possible cost while maintaining the desired degree of control. Distribution scope strategy is advantageous for establishing the distribution of goods and services effective with the target customers. This strategy is followed with the objective to serve chosen markets at a minimal cost while maintaining the desired product image. Multiple channel strategy employs two or more different channels for distribution of goods and services. Multiple channel distribution has two categories - complementary and competitive. In complementary approach, each channel handles a different non-competing product and in competitive type, two different and competing channels sell the same product. Channel modification strategy evaluates performances of current channels and makes necessary changes in distribution perspective to accommodate environmental shifts. Channel control strategy focuses on vertical marketing system to institute control. Finally, Conflict management strategy helps in resolving conflict among the channel members. This strategy is followed to devise a solution acceptable to the conflicting members so that they will co-operate to make it work.

McCommon et al. (1965) has stated that conventional marketing channels are highly segmented networks in which manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers bargain with each other aggressively over terms of sale. In contrast, vertically co-coordinated marketing channels are relationship-dependent systems where one of the channel member (manufacturer/wholesaler/ retailer) own/control the other. Vertically coordinated marketing channels as stated by **Bucklin (1972)** are professionally managed and rationalized. According to **Hardy and Mcgrath (1988)**, distribution takes care of utility creation for the customer-form utility (quantity and assortment), time-utility (storage, inventories, order taking, expediting), place-utility (transportation, material handling, delivery), possession utility (knowledge gap- information dissemination and feedback; and ownership gap-buying and selling, credits, collections, financing and title transfer). To reduce the gap between the manufacturer and ultimate customer, marketer has to carry physical / virtual and other activities.

Stern and Sturdivant (1991) have suggested an eight-step process to create customer focused distribution system. The eight steps in designing the market driven distribution are as follows:

a) To Know What Customers Want: The starting point in the evolution of market driven distribution strategies is getting to know what customers want.

b) To Decide On The Outlet: Based on getting the above information, the marketer may develop clusters or segments that provide different services for different customers.

c) To Determine The Costs Of The Ideal Outlet: Once the outlets have been selected, the marketer should determine what would be the costs. The marketer should also determine the costs of the ideal outlet and support required from other channel members.

d) To Evaluate The Performance Of Ideal Outlet: The ideal outlet should be tested against: **(i)** Efficiency in costs,

revenue and profits, (ii) Efficiency, especially in the market share, (iii) Adaptability and ability to accept to new products in distribution.

e) To Compare The Alternative Channels: The next stage is to compare the existing and proposed distribution with regards to volumes of products that flow through channels as well as by margins, functions and value addition at each level.

f) To Review Assumptions In The Light Of The Research.

g) To Confront The Gap Between The Ideal And Actual Distribution System.

h) To Implement Changes In The Distribution System, If Required.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

(a) Research Design : The research design is based on field operations. The data that has collected basically is related to perception, attitudes, usages and behavioral intentions of the respondents.

(b) Data Sources : Very little secondary data relevant to the study are available; therefore primary data has been collected.

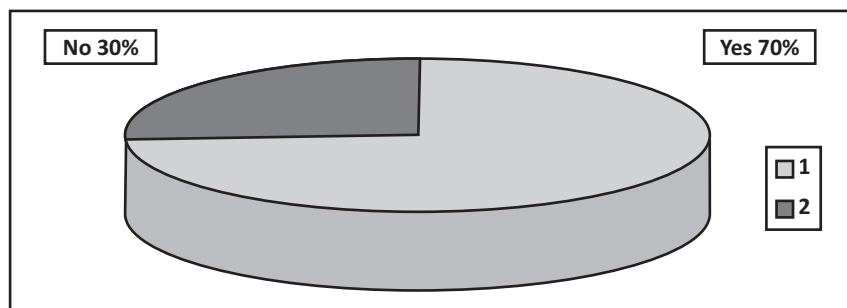
(c) Development of Data Collection Instrument : On the basis of hypothesis, a structured undisguised survey questionnaire had been prepared. All the questions in the questionnaire were both close ended and open ended.

(d) Sampling : For the data collection, random convenience sampling is adopted.

(e) Survey Procedure : On the basis of questionnaire, one-to-one interview has taken form 62 outlets and 200 respondents.

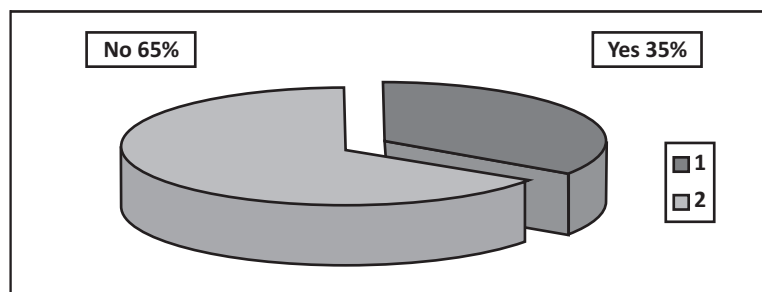
FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Figure 2: Macro Analysis of Brand Awareness of Tropicana in Kalyani, West Bengal



By analyzing the brand awareness and product availability of Tropicana, it can be said that about 70 % of the retailers are aware of the brand Tropicana. Although brand awareness is 70%, still Tropicana is available in 42% (approx) shops. Thus, the main criteria should be to identify the service gaps and attempts should be made to fulfill those gaps besides improving its marketing communications strategy. Then only it can make its presence felt intensely in the market and can gain large chunk of market share in the juice market. Tropicana relies heavily on **Pull Strategy** with which promotion is directed at the ultimate consumer. The objective is to motivate the distributors for augmenting the

Figure 3: Macro Analysis of Brand Awareness of Tropicana in Kanchrapara, West Bengal



sales. Therefore, the communications strategy should be a proper mix of **Pull and Push Strategy** and it must rely on advertising as well as the various forms of sales promotions tools and tactics, which will be both consumer promotions and trade promotions. By analysing the Kanchrapara market, it was found that 35% of the retail customers are aware of the brand Tropicana; whereas the major percentage of the respondents are unaware of the brand Tropicana. One of the major factors contributing to this low-sided view is the weak distribution system. However, there are some other critical factors, which have led to lower penetration and low brand awareness in the market.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution Of Average Weekly Consumption Of Fruit Juices Among Different Age Groups

Age (in Years)	Weekly Consumption Of Tropicana (in Litres)	Weekly Consumption Of Other Juice (in Litres)
25-35	0.20	0.90
35-45	0.26	0.70
45-55	0.35	1.20
55-65	0.25	1.10
65-75	0.10	0.40

Average weekly consumption including of all age groups (in litres):

Tropicana: 0.232 litres

Other Juice; 0.86 litres

Table 2: Two- Way ANOVA Between Age And Fruit Juice Consumption

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	F crit
Age	0.322	4	0.8054	2.6118	6.3882
Fruit Juice	0.986	1	0.986	31.9754	7.70865
Error	0.12334	4	0.3083		
Total	1.4314	9			

From the above Table 2, it has been found that there is no significance between the “age” as the calculated Value of F, F_{cal} (2.6118) falls short of the critical value of F, F crit (6.3882) at 0.05 level of significance. This means that the null hypothesis for age (H_{01}) is accepted implying all ages are homogenous. But on the other hand, there lies significant difference among weekly fruit juice consumption as F cal for fruit juice (31.974) is greater than the corresponding

Table 3: Frequency Distribution Of Average Weekly Consumption Of Fruit Juices Among Different Income Groups

Monthly Income (in ₹)	Weekly consumption of Tropicana (in Litre)	Weekly consumption of other Juice (in Litre)
0-10000	0.16667	0.3167
10000-20000	0.345	0.62223
30000-40000	0.450	0.812
40000-50000	0.560	1.115
50000 and above	0.70	1.20

Table 4: Two Way Anova Between Income And Fruit Juice Consumption

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	F crit
Income	0.6354	4	0.15883	11.746	6.38823
Fruit Juice	0.3402	1	0.34013	25.1539	7.7086
Error	0.5308	4	0.01352		
Total	1.0296	9			

critical value of F (7.70865) at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that null hypothesis for fruit juice (H_{02}) is rejected. In other words, we can conclude that consumption of fruit juices is heterogeneous in nature. From the Table 4, it has been found that there is significant difference between “Income” as the calculated value of F, F_{cal} (11.746) is greater than the critical value of F, F_{crit} (6.38823) at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis for income (H_{01}) is rejected implying all incomes are heterogeneous. But on the other hand, there lies significant difference among fruit consumption, as the F_{cal} for fruit juice (25.1539) is greater than the critical value of F (7.7086). This implies that the null hypothesis for fruit juice is rejected. Therefore, “Income” has a serious influence on the consumption of fruit juices.

Table 5: Paired t-test For Two Samples (Tropicana and Other Juices)

	Variable 1 (Other Juice) (In litre)	Variable 2 (Tropicana) (in litre)
t- statistics	5.01536	
t-critical one tail	2.1318	
t-Critical two tail	2.7764	

From the above table 5, we have seen that when the pair “Other Juice” and “Tropicana” are taken together, the calculated value of t (5.01536) is exceeding the corresponding one -tail critical value of t (2.1318). This implies that alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted, rejecting the null hypothesis (H_0). Therefore, we can conclude that performance wise weekly consumption of “Other Juice” is significantly better than Tropicana.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and keen insight of the study, a number of well-thought suggestions have been made with the aim to improve its sales, operations, growth and profitability of Tropicana brand. They are as:

- (a) The company should segment its market and ensure the product availability to its entire outlet by revamping its distribution operations. As it has been seen that the distribution operations of Tropicana brand is on average in Kalyani and Kancharapara so the company must look after this area because in an globalized economy like India, distribution is one of the main part of marketing functions and without distribution strategy, no strategies will hope to succeed.
- (b) As the channel intermediaries hold vital positions in the distribution operations, so the company must adopt motivational activities for its channel members by understanding the needs and wants of the markets. The company may focus on the motivational programmes on financial and non-financial rewards. Financial rewards include higher margins, extended credit facilities, bonuses and allowances and sharing intermediaries' promotional expenses. Non-financial rewards include sales and display contests, recognition for outstanding performance etc.
- (c) The company must carefully outline training programmes for its channel intermediaries. The purpose of imparting training is to sharpen the channel members' product knowledge and finally, this will enhance selling skills to offer better service, which will satisfy customers.
- (d) The company should use all the available distribution outlets for making its product (Tropicana) available to consumers. As the product is low cost convenience product and is used routinely and also, the consumers want to purchase it immediately from the nearest location where they live and do not wish to devote much time to search for the product. Therefore, product availability in the retail outlets is important. Hence, to meet consumer demand efficiently, intensive distribution is necessary. The company may also use selective and exclusive distribution by making their product available in shopping malls, restaurants, cinema halls etc.

In a competitive environment where product offer or prices alone may not constitute differentiation, distribution constitutes a major source of competitive strength. In developing and designing distribution strategies, companies should consider factors related to customer, demographic criteria, competition, PLC (product life cycle) stages, objectives and desired market coverage intensity. Motivation of channel members focuses mainly on financial and non-financial rewards. Dealers' performance criteria include sales target, inventory maintained, promotional activities, customer service, and attending training etc. Hence, distribution helps to satisfy the customer needs more directly than other marketing mix variables. It is more important than symbolic product offer, its pricing or communication. The ultimate user will not remain satiated unless the product flows to satisfy their needs.

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