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MARKETING STRATEGIES AND COMPETITIVE POSITIONING OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES (CASE STUDY: ABC COMPANY)

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to analyze how the marketing strategies adopted by ABC, a company located in the city of Tete, influence its competitive positioning in the local market. The study was guided by three specific objectives: to identify the strategies used, to assess competitive positioning, and to understand how these strategies contribute to consolidating the organization's position. The methodology applied combined document analysis, questionnaires for employees, and semi-structured interviews with managers, allowing for the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data. The results showed that the company uses various practices, including digital presence, seasonal promotions, branding, customer relations, and participation in events. These actions contribute to strengthening the company's image and differentiation, especially through the quality of its products and customer service, attributes that are recognized as distinctive elements in the market. However, it was found that such initiatives are still fragmented and limited by internal factors, such as budget constraints, internal communication failures, lack of performance metrics, and brand visibility that falls short of what is desired. It is concluded that marketing has a positive influence on ABC's competitive positioning, but only partially and conditionally. The future competitiveness of the organization will depend on its ability to overcome current constraints by adopting a structured, planned, and measurable marketing process based on the integration of internal areas, the use of data and performance indicators, the strengthening of organizational communication, and investment in consistent digital strategies.

Keywords: Strategic marketing; Competitive positioning; SME; Marketing strategies; Differentiation.

Introduction

To remain competitive in the market, companies need to adopt a strategic positioning that guides their growth, regardless of the current economic scenario. One way to achieve this competitive positioning is through the development and implementation of marketing strategies.

Marketing is considered one of the main factors for the success of organizations, as it involves the set of strategies used to promote products and services with the aim of attracting, satisfying, and retaining customers. This management does not take place in isolation, requiring the use of various tools and processes that provide reliable and relevant information for decision-making.

The developing economy of the city of Tete, located in central Mozambique, focuses on mining, agriculture, fishing, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the basis of the local economy.

The overall objective of this study is to analyze consumer behavior in response to marketing strategies. To achieve this, we have set the following specific objectives:

i) Identify consumer behavior; ii) identify the marketing strategies adopted by companies in the city of Tete; and iii) Explain how marketing strategies influence consumer behavior in the city of Tete.

In the city of Tete, whose economy is heavily dependent on local and mining activities, it is essential to understand consu-

mer behavior in relation to marketing strategies, which are increasingly present and noticeable in all areas of business, and how this influences the economic and financial stability of local small and medium-sized enterprises.

The topic is increasingly relevant and even more complex with the constant increase in the speed with which we have access to a wide range of information.

Seeking to know and understand values has been the fundamental role of marketing for organizations that increasingly seek customer satisfaction.

Marketing seeks to meet the demands of an ever-changing social and technological environment that is increasingly competitive.

More than just desires and needs, marketing seeks to exceed expectations, and companies must not only seek satisfaction but also delight customers with the services they offer.

This situation requires decisive action on the part of the business sector in order to boost the market for goods and services and contribute to a stable and secure economy where consumers have confidence and economic instability is avoided. That is why we believe it is important for business agents to know their consumers, their level of purchasing power, and their preferences in terms of substitute products.

A basic marketing concept holds that companies exist to satisfy consumer needs. These needs can only be met to the extent that marketers understand the people or organizations that will use the products and services they sell and believe that they do so better than their competitors.

A lack of in-depth knowledge of consumers contributes significantly to low sales levels, difficulty in expanding in the market, and consequently, business closure.

The above raises the following starting question: How do marketing strategies contribute to the competitive positioning of SMEs (particularly in the case study company ABC) in the city of Tete?

The research may reveal strategies that the business sector can adopt to overcome financial barriers, driving innovation and increasing competitiveness in the local and regional market by understanding the behavior of its consumers. This study may serve as a basis for future research on the topic.

This scientific article is limited to the city of Tete and the period under analysis of 2023 from a behavioral point of view.

Literature Review

Economic literature has discussed various topics, including marketing; how marketing strategies influence the competitive positioning of companies;

Marketing is the science of exploring, creating, and adding value to satisfy the needs of a target audience (Philip Kotler cited in (Ribeiro, 2022) .

According to (Ribeiro, 2022) , *marketing* is the set of techniques and methods applied to **the study of market needs** and their main components, such as audiences, sales, and products for business development. It is the study of the causes, objectives, and

results produced through the different ways in which companies deal with the market.

Marketing also involves analyzing consumer needs and analyzing accurate information to design or produce products and services that meet consumer expectations (BOONE; KURTZ, 2009 cited in (Lucas & Campos, 2015) .

Marketing is a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering, and exchanging products of value with others. This definition of marketing is based on the following core concepts (KOTLER, 1998, p. 27) cited in (Andrade, 2021)

According to Pinheiro et al., (2006) cited in (Ribeiro, 2022) The study of consumer behavior is extremely important for marketing professionals, as it allows them to know who the consumer is, what they think and believe, what their judgments are about themselves and others, what their income level, age, and lifestyle are, as well as their reaction to stimuli present in the act of purchasing, which are fundamental to understanding them.

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Marketing strategy involves planning and executing actions to achieve brand-related goals, such as increasing visibility, boosting sales, or strengthening the positive reputation of the business (De Assis, 2011) .

A consumer is any individual or legal entity that purchases goods and services for consumption (De Assis, 2011) .

Position indicates where something or an object is located in relation to a reference point in terms of space;

Positioning comes from the word position, which in a certain way tells us where a brand is framed and/or mentally viewed by the public.

Competing is the act of fighting for something or someone;

Competitive refers to something or someone with the abilities or qualities to compete.

Competitive positioning demonstrates how the company is perceived by the target audience or customers, i.e., what determines their choice over other brands.

Within marketing strategies, competitive positioning is a strategy that aims to differentiate a company, product, or service from its competition in order to create a competitive advantage in the market.

Competitive positioning is the method used to establish a relevant and leading position with your customers, so that they not only perceive the value and benefits offered by your company, but also place them above the offers of your competitors.

a) Organization

It is a socially established system consisting of a set of values expressed by individuals who are part of it, which are assimilated and transmitted successively by individuals (KANAAANE, 1994, cited in (Milan, 2008) .

An organization is a human grouping that requires certain rules and a specific order to coexist properly and achieve its objectives. These aspects are established through an organizational culture that allows an organization to withstand the test of time (Milan, 2008) .

b) Benefits of Competitive Positioning

The competitive positioning of a brand or company has several competitive benefits worth highlighting:

Brand strengthening: it builds a stronger image, with greater recognition, and increases brand value;

Cost reduction: makes the company more efficient in attracting and retaining customers, reducing marketing and advertising costs.

Increased sales: attracts new customers and increases the conversion of leads into sales;

Differentiation from the competition: allows the company to stand out in a saturated market, making it more attractive to the target audience;

Customer loyalty: creates an emotional connection with customers, making them more likely to buy from the company again and recommend its products or services;

Increased sales: attracts new customers and increases the conversion of leads into sales;

Consumer or customer satisfaction is a way for the company to seek to remain in the market, based on winning over and retaining its consumers, which is why the topic of satisfaction has gained greater importance in the context of business administration and management. High competitiveness leads organizations to increasingly add value to their products and services, and their human capital becomes an increasingly fundamental part of this process (De Deus, 2009)

Satisfaction is offering products or services that meet the needs and expectations of customers” (VAVRA, 1993, p. 164) cited in (Lucas & Campos, 2015) .

As a result, this general dissatisfaction can lead to a loss to competitors who can better meet these needs. Consumer satisfaction is something that needs to be worked on every day; it is a bargaining chip between the company and the consumer, and it is not just one side that wins, but both.

Needs can only be met to the extent that marketers understand the people or organizations that will use the products and services they are trying to sell and believe that they do so better than their competitors.

Consumers change their behavior because they live in a new context and also because they call the shots in the market. It is essential to know them better and more deeply.

Consumers seek products, services, and customer service that satisfy them. To do this, marketers need to know the market

in which the company operates and use research and other communication tools to understand their desires and needs so that they can satisfy them.

c) Consumer Purchasing Processes

According to Kotler and Keller (2006) cited in (Mascarenhas, 2014) , consumers follow a sequence for purchasing products, which they call the five-stage model for the purchasing decision process; however, there are situations in which consumers do not follow some steps or reverse them, depending on the product to be purchased. The consumption process occurs through the following stages: recognition of need; information search; evaluation of alternatives; purchase; post-purchase experience; use; and disposal.

The purchasing process does not end at the moment of purchase, but also in after-sales, the company must use communication processes to find out the consumer's opinion regarding the service, product, and service purchased, thus strengthening the partnership between the company and the consumer (De Deus, 2009) .

d) Factors that Influence Consumers in the Purchase Decision Process

It is increasingly difficult to understand what influences the consumer purchasing process. There are several means and variables that influence this process, but it is becoming increasingly complex to understand the factors that influence it (Sheth; Mittal; Newman, 2001 cited in (Lucas & Campos, 2015) .

Studies, analyses, and tools are required to accurately diagnose the factors that influence the purchasing process; it is from this that it is possible to organize and devise

appropriate strategies to attract customers' attention.

e) Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Every human being strives hard to satisfy their personal and professional needs. It is a scheme that presents a hierarchical division in which the needs considered to be of a lower level must be satisfied before the needs of a higher level. According to this theory, each individual must climb a hierarchical ladder of needs to achieve full self-actualization.

f) Types of Consumers

Consumers can take many forms during the purchasing process, and it is important for organizations to adapt to each type of consumer, taking into account the group to which they belong. According to Kotler and Keller (2006), cited in (Lucas & Campos, 2015) , consumers are classified into five groups: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards.

g) Marketing Mix

The marketing mix is the moment when all the data collected is used to achieve Lana (2007), it is a package to satisfy customer needs, maximizing the company's performance. Nascimento (2017), Takashiet et al. (2016), and Pianaro & Marcondes (2008) define the marketing mix as product, place, promotion, and price, which seeks to produce a response for its target markets.

Product

Products are finished or semi-finished goods that constitute the object of an organization's commercial activity.

The company's product mix must be analyzed very carefully in order to offer the

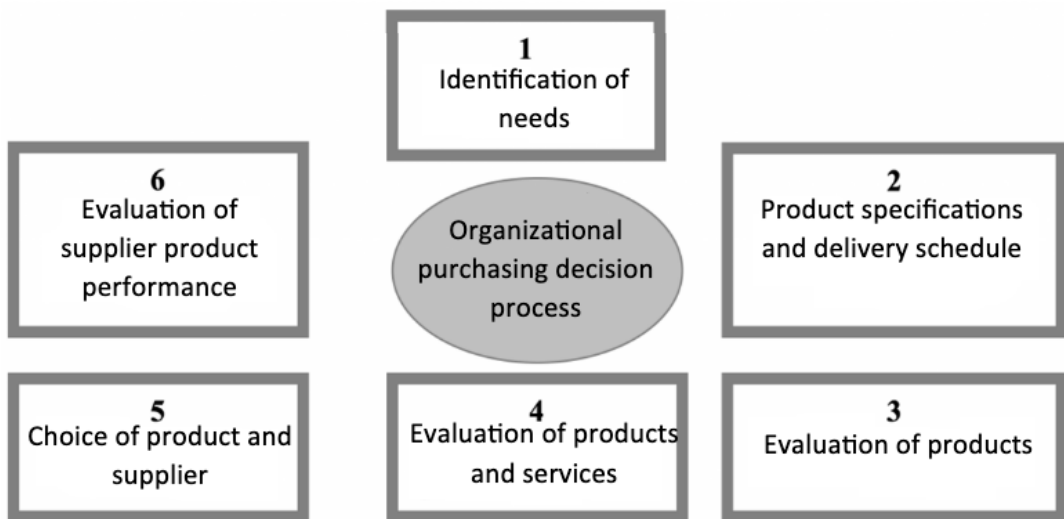


Fig1: Stages of the decision-making process for purchasing products and/or services

Source: Adapted from Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (2000) cited in (Mascarenhas, 2014) .

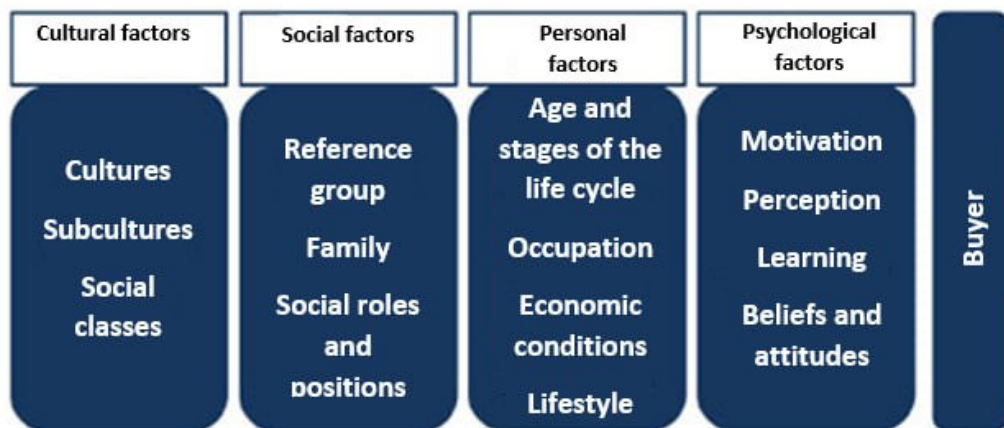


Fig 2: Factors that influence consumers in the purchasing decision process

Source: Adapted from Kotler (1998, p.163) cited in (Lucas & Campos, 2015)

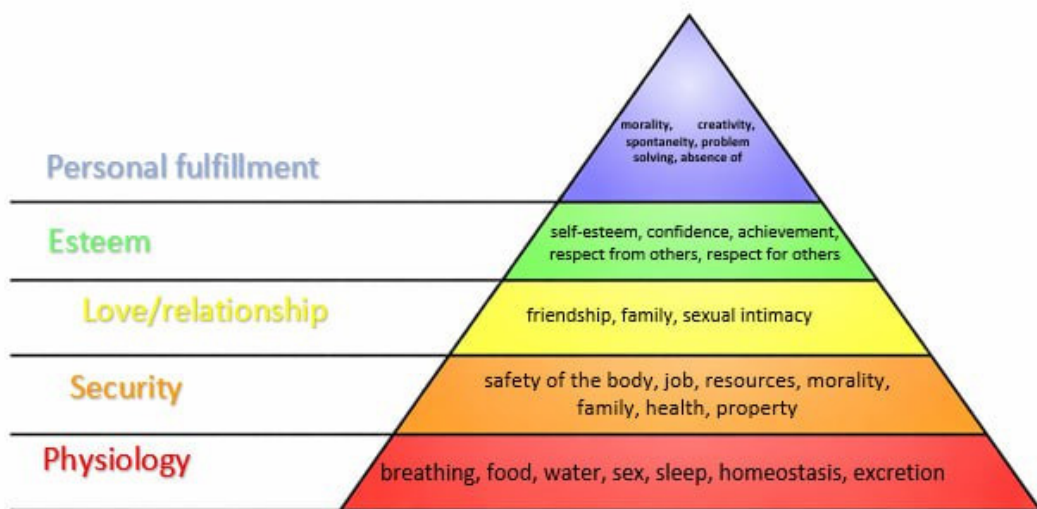


Fig 3: Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Source: Adapted from Kotler (1998, p.163) cited in (Lucas & Campos, 2015)

market products that meet the needs of its target audience.

For Sarquis (2003), the product mix is considered one of the most important points of the marketing mix, taking into account the characteristics, benefits, and, above all, customer perception of the products offered.

Hooley, Piercy, & Nicoulaud (2011) add that the reasons that lead customers to choose a product can be simple or complex, such as an emotional or rational choice.

Price

In terms of price, it is necessary to develop a way of thinking about how this value will be constructed and presented to the market. When setting the price, it is necessary to take into account production costs, economic value to the customer, competitors' price levels, desired competitive

positioning, corporate objectives, and price elasticity of demand (Hooley, Piercy, & Nicoulaud, 2011).

These pricing decision factors can be influenced by issues related to the product life cycle.

For product introduction into the market, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2007), pricing can be skimming or penetration.

According to Ambrósio (2007), price is a very complex and sensitive issue, as it affects revenue and profitability. Price construction involves many variables, from product cost to final sale price.

Price is also a very sensitive issue for consumers, as products that are too expensive or too cheap can negatively influence their choice.

According to Pinheiro and Gullo (2011), it is from the price that companies obtain the necessary resources for the deve-

lopment of their products, whether goods or services, to invest in marketing in order to generate market demand and sales among their customers.

Place

Defining how products will be distributed, where they will be distributed, and how they will arrive are strategic aspects.

For Mondo and Costa (2010), distribution points are important within the marketing mix because they are responsible for the relationship with the end consumer. Hooley, Piercy, and Nicoulaud (2011) add that the distribution strategy focuses on how products will be delivered to customers.

There is the possibility of selling products through intermediaries or directly to consumers. Intermediaries are wholesalers and retailers who buy the product and resell it. Direct sales occur with internal sales teams that may rely on the assistance of outsourced personnel. In the organization of the sales channel, few manufacturers sell to the end consumer. For the most part, they rely on a sales channel with intermediaries selling to end consumers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2007).

Promotion

After defining the sales channels, it is necessary to define how the existence of the product will be communicated to the target audiences.

Mondo and Costa (2010) indicate that promotion or marketing communication is part of the mix responsible for making the company's product visible to the market.

Marketing promotion, or communication, refers to the dissemination of messages to communicate what is available to satisfy the needs and desires of people and/or companies in the current market and to communicate the emergence of new products and brands for existing segments (Pineiro & Gullo, 2011).

According to Ambrósio (2007), promotion brings together the activities developed by the company to communicate with the market, that is, the information reaching its target audience. Companies can use tools such as advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal sales, and direct marketing to achieve the goal of connecting the customer to the company and encouraging them to use the products/services.

For Hooley, Piercy, and Nicoulaud (2011), there are a number of decisions to be made in order for the communication process to be advantageous, namely: What message will be conveyed? What communication tools will be used? How and through which media will the message be transmitted? How much is to be spent on the communication plan? To assist in deciding these steps, there is a basic model to be followed that aims to facilitate communication between the company and its audience, called AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action).

According to these authors, there are six different tools that can be used to develop a company's communication: advertising, public relations, sales promotions, personal sales, direct marketing, and sponsorship.

SMEs, however, have some qualities that make them more than just smaller versions of large companies. They offer exceptional contributions, in that they provide

new jobs, introduce innovations, stimulate competition, assist large companies, and produce goods and services efficiently (Longenecker, Moore, and Petty, 1998).

Methodology

This scientific article is part of a dissertation on the competitive positioning of small and medium-sized enterprises in the city of Tete, which was based on bibliographic research and a case study of the company “ABC.” That is, research in existing manuals or bibliographies that address the subject. It is qualitative research, as it sought to understand how marketing strategies contribute to the competitive positioning of small and medium-sized enterprises.

It is qualitative because it is characterized by the description, understanding, and interpretation of facts and phenomena (Lakatos & Marconi, 2009). For Gil (2007), one of the characteristics of qualitative research is precisely that the direct source of data is the natural environment and, naturally, the researcher is the main instrument. According to Sampieri, Collado, and Lúcio (2006, p. 5), it “is based on data collection methods without numerical measurement (...) its purpose is to reconstruct reality as observed by the authors.”

The analysis of the results was based on the theoretical discussion of the available information, that is, as this is a bibliographic study, the available information was cross-referenced with the understanding of the author of this article, producing a well-founded synthesis.

Discussion of Results

The location of this research is the ABC company in Tete, a supermarket that is part of an international chain, recognized worldwide for its excellence in the food and non-food retail sector. The chain was founded in the Netherlands in 1932 and has expanded to more than 45 countries, including Mozambique, where the brand is operated by different local investors, under the supervision of ABC International’s international standards.

In Mozambique, ABC has experienced strong growth since the 2000s and is present in several strategic cities such as Maputo, Beira, Nampula, Chimoio, and Tete. ABC Tete was created with the aim of bringing a modern retail model to the central region of the country, combining quality, diversity, convenience, and competitive prices.

Located in the city of Tete, capital of the province of the same name, the supermarket is positioned in an urban area marked by rapid economic growth, mainly due to large investments in the mining sector (coal and energy) and the consequent increase in population, urbanization, and commerce. This situation makes the city a strategic consumption hub, attracting goods and services companies and favoring the development of modern infrastructure such as ABC Tete.

ABC Tete is mainly dedicated to the sale of food and non-food goods, including bakery products, meat, fish, fresh fruit and vegetables, beverages, groceries, personal hygiene items, household cleaning products, and household goods. The store adopts a management model focused on customer service, product diversification, and quality in order to meet the needs of different segments of the population.

In terms of social and economic impact, the company directly employs dozens of people (including cashiers, stockers, logistics, management, marketing, and security), in addition to generating indirect employment through supply and transportation chains. It is estimated that the supermarket serves hundreds of customers daily, including local families, private company employees, civil servants, and consumers in transit, which highlights its relevance in the regional market.

Many small businesses do not invest in marketing for their business, either because demand and competition are low, or because their interest is sometimes only in staying in the market and not necessarily growing and migrating from a micro to a large company. Kotler (1996, p. 54) (Andrade, 2021) .

According t , companies must launch more marketing strategies if they want to remain in the market; the fact that a company has been in the market for years does not translate into good results. The dynamics of the modern world require owners and employees to recognize the need to use marketing and innovation tools to fully exploit the company's internal potential. Retaining existing customers is a must for the company, which is expected to seek solutions to the weaknesses found.

Companies should seek to learn more about their consumers, and to better understand them, there are some questions that help marketers get to know their consumers, namely: how they feel, how they see, how they think, what consumers are afraid of, how they act, what influences them, what their frustrations are, and their real desires and needs.

The answers to these questions will enable companies to understand and get to

know their consumers, thereby enhancing consumer satisfaction. Analysis of the internal and external environment is an opportunity to find solutions to existing problems and maintain the position established by the company.

Knowing, studying, and monitoring consumer behavior today has become a major differentiator in the field of entrepreneurship, mainly due to the high level of market competitiveness and globalization.

According to (De Deus, 2009) , quality customer service is one of the main strategies for keeping a company productive and competitive in the market, and this reality is seen as positive at all organizational levels.

Final Considerations

The purpose of this research was to analyze how the strategic application of marketing can influence the competitive positioning of ABC, a company located in the city of Tete.

The analysis undertaken allows us to conclude that marketing, when conceived as a structured process oriented towards clear objectives, plays a central role in strengthening the organizational image, differentiating it from its competitors, and directly supporting commercial performance.

With regard to the overall objective of analyzing ABC's marketing strategies with a view to its competitive positioning, it was found that the company adopts a diverse set of practices, including digital presence, seasonal promotions, branding, customer relations, and participation in events.

With regard to the first specific objective of identifying the marketing strategies adopted, it was found that the company

uses a variety of tools, ranging from digital actions to direct contact with strategic customers. This diversity demonstrates an intention to keep pace with market changes, particularly in the digital sphere.

Regarding the second specific objective, to assess ABC's competitive positioning, it was concluded that the company occupies a moderate competitive position, being recognized mainly for the quality of its products and its differentiated customer service, attributes that constitute solid bases for distinction from the competition.

Regarding the third specific objective, to understand how marketing strategies contribute to competitive positioning, the results revealed significant perceptions among employees and management.

Thus, the answer to the central problem question is unequivocal: the strategic application of marketing influences the competitive positioning of ABC by reinforcing its image, generating differentiation, and sustaining commercial performance.

However, the full effectiveness of this contribution will only be achieved when the company overcomes its current internal constraints and consolidates marketing as a structural part of its strategic management, ensuring that each action is not merely tactical and isolated, but integrated into a cohesive process of building competitive advantage.

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