Channel Management and Performance of Table Water Companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study examined the effect of channel management on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State-Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the effect of distribution-scope strategy, multiple-channel strategy, channel modification strategy, channel control strategy and channel conflict management strategy on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State. The study is anchored on Resource Base View Theory. The population of the study is made up of 631 staff of the selected Table water companies operating in Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State. A sample size of 245 was determined using Taro Yamane (1967) formulae. Data was collected from respondents through structured questionnaire and analyzed using multiple regressions. The findings revealed that channel management has positive effect on performance. Particularly, distribution-scope strategy had β=0.214, t=3.603, P=0.010; multiple channel strategy β=0.269, t=2.944, P=0.016; channel modification strategy β=0.261, t=2.752, P=0.013; channel control strategy β=0.260, t=2.750, P=0.024; and channel conflict management strategy β=0.264, t=3.679, P=0.001. The study concluded that the usage of distribution-scope strategy, multiple-channel strategy, channel modification strategy, channel control strategy and channel conflict management strategy have improved the performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State-Nigeria. It is recommended that Managers of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State should continually improve on the implementation of distribution-scope strategy, multiple-channel strategy, channel modification strategy, channel control strategy and channel conflict management strategy so as to enhance the performance of their companies.

Key words: channel management, distribution-scope strategy, multiple-channel strategy, channel modification strategy, channel control strategy and channel conflict management strategy performance

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Globalization has necessitated companies to seek out the best ways of managing their channels of distribution. Having an efficient distribution network has been confirmed to be one of the most crucial and critical factors in any manufacturing company or organization (Poulaki, and Katson 2020). Over the years, it has been noticed that if any business lacks an effective distribution channel, that would affect badly the profits leading to a business failure

(Kulinskaet et al., 2020). Having an adequate, accurate and a consistent distribution network gives any company a competitive advantage to thrive in its operating market (Rambocaset et al., 2015). Distribution Channels are the routs along which goods and services travel from producer/manufacturer through marketing intermediaries (such as wholesalers, distributors, and retailers) to the final user. Marketing channels are sets of mutually dependent organizations focused on making a given product available to the final consumer (Kozlenkova *et al.*, 2015). A marketing channel is a series of exchange relationships that create customer value in the purchase, usage, and disposition of products and services. However, markets and their needs are always changing; therefore, marketing channels operate in a state of continuous change and must constantly adapt to tackle those changes (Zhang *et al.*, 2010).

Marketing channel decisions are among the most important decisions that management faces today. Some companies could want to deal directly with their customers; where as other companies could want to use a distribution channel to take products to consumers. Considerable thought, effort, and investment are required to create and maintain a distribution channel. From the major strategies of the marketing mix's, the greatest potential for achieving a competitive advantage now lies in distribution (Rangan, Kasturi, Menzes, and Maier, 2010). Distribution channel is a way of communication that helps the company in building a long-term relationship with customers by providing them with constant supply of their desired products in the retail stores. The success of this distribution channel is counted by measuring the quantity sold from products, as it is an indicator of the ability of the customers to reach to the brand easily by the aid of these channels. In addition, the good relationship between the brand and the customers requires a good relationship between the manufacturer and distributor or retailer as that will be reflected in the availability of the products on their shelves (Seitz, 2015). Moreover, Farra et al. (2019) stated that distribution channels are not only participating in creating a long-term relationship with customers, but they can also contribute in building good brand image for the manufacture's companies.

Distribution channels have several benefits. First, place utility as they help in moving the goods from one place to another. Second, time utility as they provide the customers with the needed products in the suitable and convenient time. Third, convenience value as they provide the customers the goods with convenient shape, unit, size, style and package to match with their needs and preferences. Fourth, possession value as it gives the consumers the opportunity of owning or obtaining the goods. Therefore, it could be said that such channels help provide the product to consumers when, where, and in the amounts, they prefer (Mondal et al., 2017). Channel decisions tend to be relatively permanent which cannot be easily and quickly changed. Today; companies are faced with the choice of distribution path or strategy that will make product readily available to potential customers. Designing optimal marketing channel system to boost sales, formulating innovative distribution strategies and managing channels system effectively is the need for other institutions or intermediaries in the delivery of goods is sometimes questioned, particularly since the profits they make are viewed as adding to the cost of the product. The thought of distribution deals with where and how product and Services are to be offered for sale, all essential mechanism and logistical supports for the transfer of goods and services as well as ownership of goods and services to the customers (Obaji, 2011).

An effective channel management strategy, when properly implemented at the right time in the right proportion under appropriate conditions with the right sales people can lead to improved performance in any organization. Firm performance is a subjective measure of how well a firm can use assets from its primary mode of business and generate revenues (Johnson, Richard & Devinney, 2006). This term is also used as a general measure of a firm's overall financial health over a given period of time, it can be used to compare similar firms across the same industry or to compare industries or sectors in aggregation. There are many different ways to measure financial performance, but all measures should be taken in aggregation. Line items such as revenue from operations, operating income or cash flow from operations can be used, as well as total unit sales. Furthermore, the analyst or investor may wish to look deeper into financial statements and seek out margin growth rates or any declining debt (Johnson & Scholes, 2003).

Table water consumer's needs change rapidly, and the distribution strategy must be able to adapt the dynamic change of customer needs. With the involvement of distributors, wholesalers and retailers, distribution channels help to deliver product or service offerings from manufacturers to end users and sales through these channels account for about one-third of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Dasgupta & Mondria, 2012; Hyman, 2015; Palmatier et al., 2014). However, this level of global economic contribution by distribution channel systems can be attributed to adaptation of channel practices to major changes in the global business (Watson et al., 2015). Some of these changes in the business environment which have been reshaping and redefining marketing channel strategies are the shift to service-based economies, application of multichannel practices, development of new channel formats, increased online shopping and globalisation (Palmatier et al., 2014). Deloitte (2017) industry report captured this as a period of transformation globally for the retail, wholesale and distribution practices, which necessitated adaptation and changes in firm's distribution channel strategies to suite prevailing changes in the business environment.

Moreover, a report on the African consumer market by the African Development Bank Group revealed that, the heterogeneous and segmented nature of the Africa's consumer market was having significant influence on distribution channels practices across the continent due to cultural, geographical and language differences (African Development Bank Group (AFDB), 2012). Challenges of poor distribution channels and underdeveloped transportation and other infrastructure were reported as affecting Table water manufacturing companies firms servicing consumer market. These, the bank stated have been raising the need for strong sales networks such as direct distribution and wholesale within the continent by firms in order to gain market share. Studies in extant literature have focused on the implementation of channel strategy from different perspectives: Gabrielsson et al. (2002) focused on multiple channel strategies in the European personal computer industry; Jurate et al. (2011) investigated changes in marketing channel formation; Kabadayi et al. (2007) studied the performance implication of multiple channels strategy; Karanja et al. (2014) focused on distribution strategy and performance of mobile service provider intermediary organizations in Kenya et al. (2015) studied multiple channels in industrial wholesaling; Stojkivic et al. (2016) focused on multichannel strategy as a dominant approach in modern retailing. However, none of these studies focused specifically on channel strategy and organizational performance in the table water manufacturing companies, which necessitated why this study focused on this gap in literature.

Liwali (2013) identified some of the factors that constrained the effective implementation of channel strategies in Nigeria to include cost, crime, culture and language, technology, infrastructure, interconnectivity, trade rules and laws, taxes and other monetary issues, lack of professional staff. In addition, Sule et al. (2013) noted that non-availability of adequate and reliable market information on the taste, demand pattern of the consumers, improvement trends in quality and company's operational performance in relation to other competitors and inadequate infrastructural facilities that should facilitate an efficient channel system are challenges faced by firms while implementing channels strategies for consumer goods (which table water is included) in the country. All these resulted in ineffective products availability to the final consumers and poor organizational performance within the Table water sector in the country. It is against this background that this study is set out to empirically investigate the effect of channel management on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue state.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Effective channel management is expected to give any company a significance improvement in organizational performance. When a company has a good distribution scope strategy, adopt multiple channels to sale its products, frequently modify existing channels to suit changes in the environment, ensure adequate control over channel members and resolve channel members conflict to ensure healthy relationship; it will definitely perform better. A lot of studies have been carried out on the effect of channel management and performance of Table water companies, but however, gaps have existed in such similar previous studies which have necessitated the need for the present study. Similar studies has been carried long time ago, for instance, Kabadayi, Eyuboglu and Thomas (2008) Belay (2011), Oladun (2012), Adeniran (2015), Oaga (2015), Chen (2017), Mehabaw (2017), Ayaga and Alabar (2017), Judith (2017), Nyaboke (2018), Wanjiku (2018), Karanja (2017), Odero (2017), with changes and development in the business and economy, the findings of such studies becomes questionable in the business with the present world, the development demands a new study to establish the   actual effect of channel management on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State.

Previous similar studies have been carried out outside the study area including Mwanga and Inagari (2015), Kwansontoro, Roali and Kader (2017), Karanja (2017), Judith (2017) Wanjiku (2018), Karanja et al. (2017), Kalubanga, Tumwebez and Kakwesi (2018), Sharon (2018), Adimo and Osoro (2019), Mungai, Kinota and Kibera (2019) which has also created a gap this present study seeks to close. The population of such similar previous studies such as Kwansontoro, Roali and Kader (2017), Mehabaw (2017), Judith (2017), Ikegwuru and Acee-Eke (2020) were not as much as the present one. Similar other studies have concentrated on channel management and other different dependent variables, Mohsen et al. (2023), Ikegwuru and Acee-Eke (2022), instead of channel management and general performance of table water companies which the present study investigates. Many studies used different tools of analysis which were either qualitative in nature or softly in nature but the present study intends to use quantitative date with sophisticated tools for analysis, like multiple regressions. Therefore, this study fills up this gap by empirically investigating the effect of channel management on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis of Benue state.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to determine the effect of channel management on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State. The specific objectives are to;

i. determine the effect of distribution-scope strategy on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State;
ii. examine the effect of multiple channel strategy on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State;
iii. investigate the effect of channel modification strategy on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State;
iv. analyze the effect of channel control strategy on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State; and
v. evaluate the effect of channel conflict management strategy on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State.

1.3 Significance of the Study and Scope of the Study

This study seeks to investigate the effect of channel management on Performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue state. The study is expected to be relevant in various ways to the different stakeholders; Academicians, management, government, competitors, customers, publics, investors among others. In the variable scope, the study has two variables; Channel management which is the independent variable and is proxied into distribution-scope strategy, multiple-channel strategy, channel modification strategy, channel control strategy and channel conflict management strategy; and Performance which is dependent variable is measured by market share and customer satisfaction. In the geographical scope, the study is limited to the selected Table water firms operating in Makurdi Metropolis. They include. They are selected because of their large market share, quality table water, superior distribution network which include middlemen and large customer base and easy accessibility. In the time scope, the study covers a period five years, beginning from 2017 to 2022.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

This section focuses on review of related literature on channel management and Performance. It will be discussed under the following sub-headings: theoretical framework, conceptual framework, review of related empirical studies and summary of the literature reviewed.

2.1   Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Resource base view theory that relates to channel management and Performance as discussed below:

2.1.1   Resource-Based View Theory

This theory was propounded and put-forward by Penrose in 1959 and was popularized by the works of Wernerfelt (1984) and Barney (1991). The resource-based view theory is based on the premise that firms differ, even within an industry. The difference occur in the firms resources and the main theory is that a firm's strategy should depend on its resources- if a firm is good at something, the firm should try to use it (Wernerfelt, 1984). In the resource-based theory (RBV) of the firm, a firm's performance is affected by firm-specific resources and capabilities (Barney, 1996). This implies that, in the RBV, resources

are allocated heterogeneously (unevenly) within an industAry (Penrose, 1995; Barney, 1991). Organizations therefore must be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, as they have to develop strategies on how to outperform competitors with the given resources bundles and capabilities (Barney, 1991; Wernefelt, 1984). Furthermore it is argued that a firm's resources are not "perfectly mobile across firms" (Barney, 1991). Resources in the RBV and as used in the following refer to a firm's "assets, capabilities, organizational processes, firm attributes, information, knowledge, among others. Controlled by a firm that enable the firm to conceive of and implement strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness"(Barney,1991). In other words, they are the "inputs into the production process" (Grant, 1991). Valuable resources and their strategic utilization help to seize opportunities or neutralize threats in an organization's environment (Barney, 1991).

The RBV places emphasis on the resources and internal capabilities of a firm as its sources of competitive advantage, essentially viewing the firm as a bundle of resources (Barney, 1991). Since each firm has its own history, has grown over time, acquired assets, skills, and experiences along the way, and cultivated its own distinctive organizational culture, no two companies are alike (Barney, 1991). The optimal combination of these resources and their efficient allocation towards specific problems and opportunities sets a firm apart from the competition. The goal of a resource-based approach is therefore to implement a strategy that is based on the firm's heterogeneous resources and that is not being implemented by competitors. This strategy would provide a sustained advantage due to its inimitability. Scrutiny and assessment have pointed to a number of unresolved problems in the resource-based view theory. These criticisms relate to the unit of analysis, the circularity or tautological nature of the resource-based theory, the exogenous nature of value, the neglect of the environment, the condition of heterogeneity and the behavioural assumption underlying the condition of non-imitability. However, the study relies on its advantages only in applying the theory. RBV is more relevant as it emphasize that firms should use its distinctive and available resources to a distribution strategy which their competitors cannot imitate, as this will put the firm in a strong competitive advantage position and therefore, outperform its competitors. Firm distribution channel do not come for free; they bring cost to the company. So, it is the company with strong resources base that can succeed in managing profitable channels.

2.2   Conceptual Framework

This section discusses the concept of channel management and performance and their corresponding dimensions.

2.2.1 Channel Management

Channel management refers to the process where the company develops various techniques as well as strategies to reach the widest customer base, support the partners helping the distribution process and ways to manage vendors. Palmatier et al. (2016), opined that, channel strategy is the set of activities focused on designing and managing a marketing channel to enhance the firm's sustainable competitive advantage and financial performance. In another perspective, channel strategy is concerned with the entire process of setting up and operating the contractual organisation that is responsible for meeting the firm's distribution objectives (Rosenbloom, 2013). Kotler and Keller (2009), and Segetliga et al. (2012), identified two major channel strategy alternatives to be the direct channel and the

indirect channel. According to them, in a direct channel, the producer sells directly to final consumers through its own sales force. But, this has evolved overtime from the traditional face-to-face selling in the market place to modern selling through the internet in the market space (Berkowitz et al., 2000). Where it is employed, direct channel strategy leads to disintermediation or elimination of supply chain middlemen (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006). The practice of direct channel strategy is usually aimed at enhancing the efficiency of marketing activities in the areas of communication and distribution and building loyal and profitable customer base (Moller and Halinen, 2000). Indirect channel involves the use of independent intermediaries in the target market (Nhem, 2016). However, this is further characterised by first-tier and second-tier structures depending on the channel objectives of firms. The first tier structure involves the use of value-added resellers to sell directly to end customers, whereas the second tier structure involves the existence of an additional level, the distributors, between the sales subsidiary and the resellers or retailers (Gabrielsson et al., 2002).

2.2.2 Dimensions of Channel Management

Channel management can take different forms but for the purpose of this study, the dimensions of channel management includes distribution-scope strategy, multiple-channel strategy, channel modification strategy, channel control strategy and channel conflict management strategy. This dimensions are coined from Mohsen et al. (2023), Affran (2019); Obaji (2011); Rosenbloom (2007, 2013) and Liwali (2013).

i.   Distribution-Scope Strategy

For an efficient channel network, the manufacturer should clearly define the target customers it intends to reach. Implicit in the definition of target customers is a decision about the scope of distribution the manufacturer wants to pursue. Distribution-scope strategy entails defining clearly who are the target customers of the company or manufacturer desired to pursue. The strategic alternatives here are; exclusive distribution, selective distribution, and intensive distribution (Mohsen et al. 2023).

ii.   Multiple-Channel Strategy

The multiple-channel strategy refers to a situation in which two or more different channels are employed to distribute goods and services. The market must be segmented so that each segment gets the services it needs and pays only for them, not for services it does not need. This type of segmentation usually cannot be done effectively by direct selling alone or by exclusive reliance upon distributors (Rosenbloom, 2013). Market segmentation, however, may be possible when selling directly to one class of customer and to another only through distributors, which usually requires different services, prices, and support. Thus, a multiple-channel strategy permits optimal access to each individual segment.

iii.   Channel-Modification Strategy

The channel-modification strategy is the introduction of a change in existing distribution arrangements based on evaluation and critical review. Channels should be evaluated on an ongoing basis so that appropriate modification may be made as necessary (Mercer, 1994). Channels of distribution may be evaluated on such primary criteria as cost of distribution, coverage of market (penetration), customer service, communication with the market, and control of distribution networks. Occasionally, such secondary factors as support of channels in the successful introduction of a new product and cooperation with the company's promotional effort also become evaluative criteria. To arrive at a distribution channel that

satisfies all these criteria requires simultaneous optimization of every facet of distribution, something that is usually not operationally possible.

iv.   Channel-Control Strategy

Channel arrangements traditionally consisted of loosely aligned manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers, all of whom were trying to serve their own ends regardless of what went on elsewhere in the channel structure. In such arrangements, channel control was generally missing. Each member of the channel negotiated aggressively with others and performed a conventionally defined set of marketing functions (Mercer, 1994). For a variety of reasons, control is a necessary ingredient in running a successful system. Having control is likely to have a positive impact on profits because inefficiencies are caught and corrected in time. This is evidenced by the success of voluntary and cooperative chains, corporate chains, franchise alignments, manufacturers' dealer organizations, and sales branches and offices. Control also helps to realize cost effectiveness vis-à-vis experience curves. For example, centralized organization of warehousing, data processing, and other facilities provide scale efficiencies. Through a planned perspective of the total system, effort is directed to achieving common goals in an integrated fashion. The focus of channel control may be on any member of a channel system: the manufacturer, wholesaler, or retailer. Unfortunately, there is no established theory to indicate whether any one of them makes a better channel controller than the others (Rosembloom, 2007).

v. Conflict-Management Strategy

It is quite conceivable that the independent firms that constitute a channel of distribution (i.e., manufacturer, wholesaler, retailer) may sometimes find themselves in conflict with each other (Kotler, 1994). The underlying causes of conflict are the divergent goals that different firms may pursue. If the goals of one firm are being challenged because of the strategies followed by another channel member, conflict is the natural outcome. Thus, channel conflict may be defined as a situation in which one channel member perceives another channel member or members to be engaged in behavior that is preventing or impeding it from achieving its goals. Disagreement between channel members may arise from incompatible desires and needs.

2.2.3 Concept of Performance (PER)

Performance is understood as achievement of the organization in relation with its set goals. It includes outcomes achieved, or accomplished through contribution of individuals or teams to the organization's strategic goals. The term performance encompasses economic as well as behavioural outcomes. By measuring a firm's performance, a company can identify its strengths and weaknesses, upgrade the extant performance in terms of seeking new opportunities internally or externally, redesigning better strategies or action plans, obtaining overall business performance and capabilities improvements, and acquiring sustainable growth in the long run. To ensure the continuous benefit of performance in firms, it must be measured at all times (Navickas, Skackauskiene and Navkaite, 2014). In the views of Kolsun (2014), Performance provides the basis for an organization to assess how well it is progressing towards its predetermined objectives. They add that the process helps to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses, and decides on future initiatives, with the goal of improving organizational performance. Whatever the definition adopted and regardless of the size of the firm, a firm performance evaluation is very crucial to monitor the success or failure of the firm so as to take proper actions to ensure competitive advantage (Trkman, 2009).

2.2.4 Measures of Performance

Shukri and Mahmood (2014) identified the most effective and common performance measures to include but not limited to: market share, sales volume, company reputation, return-on-investment (ROI), profitability, and established corporate identity. For this study, performance measures are market share, customer satisfaction and sales growth.

i. Market share: Market share is the percentage of a market accounted for by a specific entity. It may be defined as the percentage of an industry or market's total sales that is earned by a particular company over a specified time period. Market share is calculated by taking the company's sales over the period and dividing it by the total sales of the industry over the same period. This metric is used to give a general idea of the size of a company to its market and its competitors. Marketers need to be able to translate and incorporate sales targets into market share because this will demonstrate whether forecasts are to be attained by growing with the market or by capturing share from competitors. The latter will almost always be more difficult to achieve. Market share is closely monitored for signs of change in the competitive landscape, and it frequently drives strategic or tactical action (Farris, Bendle, Pfeifer and Reibstein, 2010). Increasing market share is one of the most important objectives of business. The main advantage of using market share as a measure of business performance is that it is less dependent upon macro environmental variables such as the state of the economy or changes in tax policy.

ii. Customer Satisfaction: Customer satisfaction is a term frequently used to describe a measure of how products and services supplied by a company meet or surpass customer expectation. It is a mental state which results from the customer's comparison of a) expectations prior to a purchase with b) performance perceptions after a purchase (Oliver, 1996) and it is defined as the number of customers or percentage of total customers whose reported experience with a firm, its products, or its services (ratings) exceeds specified satisfaction goals (Farris, et al 2010).

2.3 Review of Related Empirical studies
This section reviews a lot of studies on channel management and performance and many of them to show a positive relationship between the study variables;

Mohsen et al (2023) investigate the impact of different distribution channel strategies and types on the consumer buying behaviour of convenience products such as protein bars. A conclusive research design was used by describing attitudes towards various distribution strategies and types and also to test the effect of various distribution channels' strategies on consumers' buying behaviour. The researchers conducted self-administered questionnaires among a sample of 120 consumers using a non-probability judgmental sampling technique. The data were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to test the research hypotheses. The research findings revealed that consumers' buying behaviour is affected by different distribution channel strategies and types specifically the intensive and selective distribution strategies in the research context that examines buying behaviour of a convenience product. The research results provide insightful implications for distribution managers of convenience products such as a protein on how to effectively distribute their products to create favourable buying behaviours towards their product by selecting the suitable distribution intensity and type.

Ikegwuru and Acee-Eke (2022) study focused on channel control systems and marketing effectiveness in Rivers State. A causal study was structured to handle the four (4) hypotheses

expressed for the study. The survey research method was adopted for the study on a population comprised of 35 fast moving consumer goods companies domiciled in Rivers State. Afterward, the simple sampling technique was used to draw sixty executives from the sampled companies as the study's respondents. A 5-point likert-scale questionnaire was administered to sixty respondents, of which 53(88%) were returned useful for the study. The study adopted descriptive statistics and the simple regression method for data analysis. The results reveal that direct channel has a very strong, positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction and customer retention, and multi-channel has a very strong, positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction, and had strong positive and significant influence customer retention. The study therefore, concludes that, channel control systems significantly influences marketing effectiveness of fast moving consumer goods companies in Rivers State, and recommends amongst others that fast moving consumer good firms should leverage on the knowledge acquired through their relationship with customers in the use of channel control systems to shape offerings, reap customer's lifetime value and achieve marketing effectiveness for their organizations.

Ikegwuru and Acee-Eke (2020) study was to empirically test a framework identifying the relationships between marketing channel design and sales cycle time duration with special emphasis on table water manufacturing firms in Rivers State of Nigeria. Data for the study were collected from a sample of 79 table water manufacturing firms operating within the city of Port Harcourt in Rivers State. The research framework was tested using simple regression. The results indicate that marketing channel design has direct positive and significant impact on sales cycle time duration. This study therefore concludes that the outcome of the quantitative assessment of the study's result is an indication that marketing channel design has direct positive and significant impact on sales cycle time duration. By developing and validating a construct of marketing channel design and by showing evidence of its value in improving sales cycle time duration of table water manufacturing companies, it provides Table water manufacturing managers with useful tool for evaluating the efficiency of their current marketing channel design policies. The paper recommends that managers should adopt marketing channel design programs that are capable of attracting positive sales cycle duration time for greater efficiency in their organizations.

Mungai, Kinoti and Kibera (2019) examined the influence of marketing channel dynamics on the relationship between market entry strategies and organisational performance of multinational corporations in Kenya. The main objective was to determine the moderating effect of marketing channel dynamics on the relationship between market entry strategies and organisational performance. The study employed descriptive cross-sectional research design. The study established that marketing channel dynamics moderates the relationship between market entry strategies and organisational performance. The study found out that market entry strategies and marketing channel dynamics explained 52.1% of change in organizational performance measured using financial performance indicators. The study also established that market entry strategies and marketing channel dynamics explained 62.3% of change in organizational performance of multinational corporations in Kenya measured using non-financial performance. The study recommends that marketing channel dynamics should be considered when going international, this will enhance the performance of the organisation. The results findings makes a contribution to theory development, policy

and marketing practice in relation to the effect of market entry strategy and organisation performance coupled with the influence of market channel dynamics on this relationship.

Adimo and Osodo (2019) investigated the relationship between differentiation strategy and performance of Sameer Africa Ltd located in Nairobi, Kenya. Informed by the study this paper discusses the extent to which channel differentiation strategy adopted by Sameer Africa (K) Limited influenced the company's performance. The study employed a correlational research design. The study targeted 112 employees of Sameer Africa (K) Limited comprising of senior management, HODs and junior staff and 90 dealers based in Nairobi. A sample of 134 respondents was selected by use of stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Primary data was collected through self-administered questionnaires. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of tables and inferential statistics in the form of Pearson correlation and regression analysis with significance level of 0.05 to test the hypothesis. From the findings of the study, majority of the respondents believed that Sameer Africa (K) Ltd could achieve competitive advantage through channel differentiation. This suggest that an increase in channel differentiation strategy such as use of market trends to determine most appropriate channel strategy, use of different channels with the aim of minimizing cost of distribution, selling some of the products and services through intermediary and complementary firms and applying different distribution channels so as to satisfy unique customer needs would result in an increase in performance through market share, revenue, sales and customer satisfaction. The study sought to provide an empirical evaluation of the relationship between differentiation strategy and organizational performance.

Adefulu and Adeniran (2019) evaluated the way channel strategy influenced marketing performance of selected consumer goods firms in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study was 592 staff in the sales and marketing department of the selected consumer goods firms in Lagos State, Nigeria. The selected firms control more than 70% of the market share for consumer goods in Lagos State and are actively involved in implementation of channel strategies. A structured questionnaire with close-ended questions was used as research instrument. Five hundred and ninety-two copies of the questionnaire were administered to respondents. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential (simple and multiple linear regression analyses) statistics. Findings revealed that channel strategy had a significant influence on marketing performance of selected consumer goods firms in Lagos State, Nigeria (β=0.335, t (503)=7.594, R2=0.465, p<0.05). Significant positive relationships were also found between some of the channel strategy constructs and individual marketing performance constructs. The study concluded that channel strategies are predictors of marketing performance for the selected consumer goods firms in Lagos State, Nigeria. It was recommended that management of consumer goods firms should pay adequate attention to channel strategies that showed significant positive relationship with each of the marketing performance constructs in order to improve on marketing performance.

3.0   **METHODOLOGY**

The research employed the survey method in obtaining the needed data. The choice of the survey method is consistent with Hair, Money, Samuel and Pages' (2007) submission that such a method is interested in the assessment of the characteristic of the population of the study. The area covered by this study is the effect of channel management on performance of Table Water companies. This study is domiciled in Makurdi metropolis. Makurdi is the capital of Benue State, North-Central Nigeria. The population of this study consisted of the entire 631 staff of the selected Table water companies with a sample size of 245. Simple random sampling was adopted and data was collected through administration of questionnaire. Validity stood at .752 with average reliability index of .858. In this study Performance is regarded as a function of Channel Management. In this vein, this study suggest that,

$$PER = f(CMS) \text{ - } \text{ - } \text{ - } \text{ - } \text{ - } \text{ - } \text{ - } \quad (1)$$

Where; PER = Performance

CMS = Channel Management

Given that Channel Management comprises five dimensions, the implicit form of the model is given as follows:

$$PER = f(DSS, MCS, CMS, CCS, CCM) \text{ - } \text{ - } \text{ - } \text{ - } \quad (2)$$

Where:

DSS = Distribution-Scope Strategy;

MCS= Multiple Channel Strategy;

CMS =Channel Modification Strategy;

CCS = Channel Control Strategy; and

CCM=Channel Conflict Management Strategy

Thus, the explicit form of the model for the study will be as follows:

$$PER = \alpha + b_1 DSS + b_2 MCS + b_3 CMS + b_4 CCS + b_5 CCM \, \varepsilon \text{ - } \quad (3)$$

Where:

α = Intercept of the Model (constant)

b_1 to b_4= coefficients of X_1, X_2 ......X_5 respectively

ε = error term

3.10   Data Analysis Techniques

The study used descriptive statistics and inferential statistics with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 21) for data presentation and analysis using descriptive and inferential statistics. ***Decision Rule****,* If the P-value is greater than 0.5, then accept null hypotheses and reject alternate hypothesis but if the P-value is less than 0.5, then reject null hypotheses and accept alternate hypothesis.

4.0   **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents data collected from the respondents, analysis of results, test of hypotheses and discussion of findings.

4.1   Data Presentation and Analysis
Table 5: Demographic Attributes of Respondents

Attributes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	140	58.9
Female	98	41.1
Total	**245**	**100**
Age		
18-27 years	74	31.2
28-37 years	91	38.4
38-47 years	57	24.1
48-57 years	11	4.5
58 years and above	4	1.8
Total	**245**	**100**
Educational Qualification		
SSCE	15	6.2
OND/NCE	104	43.7
HND/B.Sc/B.A	174	31.3
M.Sc/M.A//Ph.D	42	18.8
Total	**245**	**100**
Years of Experience		
1-5 Years	21	8.9
6-10 Years	48	20.1
11-15 Years	43	17.9
16-20 Years	52	22.8
21-25 Years	49	20.5
26 Years and above	23	9.8
Total	**245**	**100**
Cadre in the Organization		
Junior Staff	127	53.6
Senior Staff	80	33.5
Management Staff	31	12.9
Total	**245**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The distribution of the respondents by gender as presented in Table 5 revealed that 140 (58.9 %) were males while 98 (41/1 %) were females. This implies the participants who were staff of Table Water Manufacturing Firms in Makurdi Metropolis included both male and female. The age distribution of the respondents as presented in Table 5 indicated that

74 (31.2 %) respondents were from 18-27 years, 91 (38.4 %) 28-37 years, 57 (24.1 %) 38-47 years while 11 (4.5 %) were from 48-57 years and 4 (1.8 %) were 58 years and above. This implies that the participants were old enough to understand the topic under investigation. The educational distribution of the respondents indicated that 15 (6.2 %) have SSCE, 104 (43.7 %) have ND/NCE qualifications while 74 (31.3 %) have HND/Degree qualifications and 42(18.8%) have postgraduate qualifications. This indicates that majority of the participants were literate and have good knowledge on channel management and performance of Table Water Companies in Makurdi Metropolis. The distribution of the respondents by experience showed that 21 (8.9 %) respondents have experience from 1-5 years, 48 (20.1%) 6-10 years, 43(17.9 %) 11-15 years while majority of the respondents 52 (22.8 %) have experience from 16-20 years and 49 (20.5 %) have experience from 21-25 years. Also, 23 (9.8 %) respondents have experience from 26 years and above indicating that the participants have many years experience working the table water industry with good knowledge on the topic under investigation. Finally, the result in Table 5 indicates that 127 (53.6%) of the respondents were junior staff, 80 (33.5%) were senior staff while 31 (12.9%) were management staff. This implies that the participants cut across all staff categories since they all had knowledge about the topic under investigation.

Table 6: Respondents Views on Distribution-Scope Strategy (n=238)

Item	Mean	ST.D	Decision
Intensive distribution makes a product available at every possible outlets	3.47	0.753	Significant
An exclusive dealership is more willing to finance	3.45	0.668	Significant
Fewer outlets are easy to control	3.54	0.601	Significant
Selective distribution guaranteed higher sales volume	3.43	0.750	Significant
Selecting few capable outlets covering the market limit unnecessary cost Significant	3.52	0.674	

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The response collected from the respondents on items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were presented using mean scores and standard deviation. The result in Table 6 indicates that the respondents agreed with all the statements which showed that these are determinants of Distribution Scope Strategy (DSS) that affect the performance of Table Water Manufacturing Firms in Makurdi Metropolis. The mean scores ranged from 3.43 to 3.54 and they were all above the 2.50 cut-off point.

Table 7: Respondents Views on Multiple Channel Strategy (n=238)

Item	Mean	ST.D	Decision
Multiple-channel strategy permits optimal access to each individual segment	3.54	0.685	Significant
Complementary channels help to reach unserved market	3.34	0.875	Significant
In a saturated market, company may use different channel for new entry	3.28	0.944	Significant
Your company uses competing channels to eliminate cost associated with developing additional channels	3.28	0.859	Significant
Your company develop multiple Competing channels to respond to changing environment	3.46	0.872	Significant

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The response collected from the respondents on items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were presented using mean scores and standard deviation. The result in Table 7 indicates that the respondents agreed with all the statements which showed that they are multiple channel strategy factors that affect the performance of Table Water Manufacturing Firms in Makurdi Metropolis. The mean scores ranged from 3.28 to 3.52 and they were all above the 2.50 cut-off point.

Table 8: Respondents Views on Channel Modification Strategy (n=238)

Item	Mean	ST.D	Decision
Your company modify existing channel as a result of change in cost of distribution	2.50	1.133	Significant
Your company modify existing channel base on market coverage	2.58	1.104	Significant
Your company modify existing channel base on changes in customer taste	3.09	0.732	Significant
Communication flow determine modification of existing channel	3.19	0.815	Significant
Level of control determine modification of existing channel	3.49	0.796	Significant

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The response collected from the respondents on items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were presented using mean scores and standard deviation. The result in Table 8 indicated that majority of the respondents agree with all the statements as channel modification strategy factors

affecting the performance of Table Water Companies in Makurdi Metropolis. The mean scores ranged from 2.58 to 3.49 and they were below the 2.50 cut-off point.

Table 9: Respondents Views on Channel Control Strategy (n=238)

Item	Mean	ST.D	Decision
Having control helps to correct inefficiencies on time	3.39	0.838	Significant
Control helps to realize cost effectiveness	3.23	0.960	Significant
The focus of channel control may be on any member of the channel system	3.31	0.946	Significant
Your company controls their channels centrally	3.22	0.903	Significant
Your company uses contractual vertical system to control their channel	3.63	0.836	Significant

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The response collected from the respondents on items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were presented using mean scores and standard deviation. The result in Table 9 indicates that the respondents agreed with all the statements which showed that they are channel control strategy factors that affecting performance of Table Water Companies in Makurdi Metropolis. The mean scores ranged from 3.22 to 3.63 and they were all above the 2.50 cut-off point

Table 10: Respondents Views on Channel Conflict Management Strategy (n=238)

Item	Mean	ST.D	Decision
Your company settle conflict among members through bargaining strategy	3.21	0.961	Significant
Company handles conflict through diplomacy	3.31	0.874	Significant
Interpenetration strategy is used to resolve conflict	3.28	0.833	Significant
Conciliation and mediation are adopted by your company to reconcile aggrieving members	3.27	0.797	Significant
Your company apply arbitration to resolve conflict among members	3.30	0.909	Significant

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The response collected from the respondents on items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were presented using mean scores and standard deviation. The result in Table 10 indicates that the respondents agreed with all the statements which showed that they are channel conflict management

strategy factors that affect the performance of Table Water Companies in Makurdi Metropolis. The mean scores ranged from 3.21 to 3.31 and they were all above the 2.50 cut-off point.

Table 11: Respondents Views on Performance (n=238)

Item	Mean	ST.D	Decision
Intensive distribution increases your company's market share	3.19	0.808	Significant
Selling through multiple channels enhance growth in market share	3.28	0.862	Significant
Modifying channels appropriately improves market share	3.42	0.725	Significant
Ensuring adequate control over channel members increases company's market share	3.10	0.836	Significant
Prompt handling of conflict among members grows company's market share	3.22	0.834	Significant
Many channel members increase availability of the company products	3.18	0.808	Significant
Applying multiple channels enhances customer satisfaction	3.29	0.862	Significant
Modifying existing channels increases customer satisfaction	3.38	0.725	Significant
Effective channel control burst customer satisfaction	3.15	0.836	Significant
Timely conflict resolution enhance customer satisfaction	3.20	0.834	Significant

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The response collected from the respondents on items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were presented using mean scores and standard deviation. The result in Table 11 indicates that the respondents agreed with all the statements which showed that they are performance indicators. The mean scores ranged from 3.10 to 3.42 and they were all above the 2.50 cut-off point.

Table 12: Model Summary

R	R-Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
.803[a]	.692	.671	.8628	1.690

a. Predictors (Constant), Distribution-scope strategy, Multiple channel strategy, Channel modification strategy, Channel control strategy and Channel conflict management strategy
b. Dependent Variable: Performance

Source: Researcher's Computation using SPSS Output, 2024.

The result from Table 12 shows that coefficient of determination (R square) explains the variation in the dependent variable due to changes in the independent variable. The R square value of .692 is an indication that there was 69.2 % variation in performance of Table Water Companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria due to changes in Distribution-scope strategy, Multiple channel strategy, Channel modification strategy, Channel control strategy and Channel conflict management strategy at 95% confidence interval. Also, the value of R (.803) indicated that there was a strong relationship between the study variables.

Table 13: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	15.105	5	3.021	4.406	.000[b]
Residual	149.533	400	.374		
Total	164.638	405			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance
b. Predictors (Constant), Distribution-scope strategy, Multiple channel strategy, Channel modification strategy, Channel control strategy and Channel conflict management strategy

Source: Researcher's Computation using SPSS Output, 2024.

The result from the ANOVA statistics in Table 13 indicates that the processed data, which is the population parameters, had a significance (p-value) level of .000 which is less than 5%. This implies that Distribution-scope strategy, Multiple channel strategy, Channel modification strategy, Channel control strategy and Channel conflict management strategy significantly affect the performance of Table water Companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. The significance value was less than 0.05 which indicates that the model was statistically significant (F = 4.406, P = .000 < 0.05).

Table 14: Regression Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.535	.469		5.403	.000
DSS	.321	.075	.214	3.603	.010
MCS	.283	.088	.269	2.944	.016
CMS	.267	.086	.261	2.752	.013
CCS	.265	.086	.260	2.750	.024
CCM	.420	.095	.264	3.679	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Performance
Source: Researcher's Computation using SPSS Output, 2024.

The result in Table 14 indicated that a unit change in distribution-scope strategy will affect the performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis by 32.1%, a unit change in multiple channel strategy will affect performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis by 28.3 % and a unit change in channel modification will affect the performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis by 26.7 %. The study also revealed that a unit change in channel control strategy will affect performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis by 26.5 % while a change in channel conflict management strategy will result to 42.0% increase in performance of Table water companies. The p-values for Distribution-scope strategy, Multiple channel strategy, Channel modification strategy, Channel control strategy and Channel conflict management strategy (.010, .016, .013, .024 and .001) respectively were less than 0.05 implying that Channel management significantly affects the performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis. The coefficients of the variables were as follows: Distribution-scope strategy (.214), Multiple channel strategy (.269), Channel modification strategy (.261), Channel control strategy (.260) and Channel conflict management strategy (.264). The result shows that Channel conflict management strategy has more significant effect on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria.

4.2 Test of Hypotheses and Discussion of findings

4.2.1 Effect of Distribution-scope strategy on the performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria

The analysis of the data collected from the respondents revealed that distribution-scope strategy has significant effect on the performance of Table water companies in Makurdi

Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis at 5 % level of significance and the p-value (0.010) was lower than the significance level. This can be statistically given as P-value $0.010 < \alpha = 0.05$. This result agrees with Mohsen et al (2023) who found that consumers' buying behaviour is affected by different distribution channel strategies and types specifically the intensive and selective distribution strategies.

4.2.2 Effect of multiple channel strategy on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria

Findings of the study indicated that multiple channel strategy has significant effect on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis at 5 % level of significance and the p-value (0.016) was lower than the significance level. This can be statistically given as P-value $0.016 < \alpha = 0.05$. This finding is supported by Ikegwuru and Acee-Eke (2022) who found that multi-channel has a very strong, positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction, and had strong positive and significant influence customer retention. Also Nguyen (2019) found that there is a positive influence of multi-channel distribution on brand awareness, customer attraction as well as on consumer buying behavior. Kalubanga, Tumwebez and Kakwezi (2018) confirmed that multi-channel distribution management practices significantly influence firm performance.

4.2.3 Effect of channel modification strategy on the performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria

Findings indicated that channel modification strategy has significant effect on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis at 5 % level of significance and the p-value (0.013) was greater than the significance level. This can be statistically given as P-value $0.013 < \alpha = 0.05$. In line with the result, Mehabaw (2017) who found that channel modification strategy has positive effect on performance of the company.

4.2.4 Effect of channel control strategy on the performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria

Result of the analysis of the data collected from respondents revealed that channel control strategy has significant effect on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis at 5 % level of significance and the p-value (0.024) was lower than the significance level. This can be statistically given as P-value $0.024 < \alpha = 0.05$. The result of previous studies by Ikegwuru and Acee-Eke (2022) also found that channel control systems significantly influences marketing effectiveness of fast moving consumer goods companies in Rivers State.

4.2.5 Effect of channel conflict management strategy on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria

Result of the analysis of the data collected from respondents revealed that Channel conflict management strategy has significant effect on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis at 5 % level of significance and the p-value (0.001) was lower than the significance level. This can be statistically given as P-value $0.001 < \alpha = 0.05$. The result is in agreement with Ayaga and Alabar (2017) who found that conflict affects the performance of the channel members negatively.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents the conclusion, recommendations, limitations of the study and suggestion for further studies

5.1 Conclusion

The study was carried out to examine the effect of channel management on performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. Findings of the study showed that channel management significantly affects the performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. The study concluded that the use of distribution scope strategy has positively affected the performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. The study also concluded that the use of Multiple channel strategy has helped in improving the performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. The study further concludes that Channel modification strategy has helped in improving their performance and Channel control strategy significantly affects the performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria by allowing customers to carry out transactions with ease. Finally, the study concludes that Channel conflict management strategy positively affects the performance of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

i. Managers of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria should always improve on implementation of chosen distribution scope as this will enhance their performance.

ii. Managers of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria should always improve on implementation of multiple channel strategy as this will burst their performance.

iii. Managers of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria should always improve on implementation of channel modifications strategy as this will enhance their performance.

iv. Managers of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria should always improve on implementation of channel control strategy as this will enhance their performance.

v. Managers of Table water companies in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria should always improve on implementation of channel conflict management strategies as this will improve their performance.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

In the course of carrying out this study, the researcher faced some limitations. The study was limited to only table water companies in Makurdi metropolis of Benue. Some of the respondents were not willing to provide information that regards their companies. The researcher explained the content of the work to them and assured of confidentiality of their responses. Another limitation of this study was the geographical coverage. Since the study was conducted in Benue state, the result can only represent the viewpoint of organizations in Benue state context. Hence, the result generated might not be generalized to organizations over the world. Another limitation of this study was the use of closed-ended questionnaires.

The target respondents were restricted to the certain range of answers provided in the distributed questionnaires. They were required to select only the extent to which they agree or disagree with the questions in the survey. Hence, the researcher might not able to gather more precise results and findings based on the questionnaires responded. The researcher however ensured that responses provided by the respondents were accurate and valid.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Studies

Based on the limitations of the study, the researcher suggested that the coverage of this study should be expanded beyond Benue State-Nigeria. Further studies on this topic should provide wider range of question options in order to generate more reliable findings. Researcher should provide more open-ended questions instead of close-ended questions to target respondents. With provision of open-ended questions, the respondents may raise their opinions in questionnaires and generate different perspectives on the topic. Finally, it is suggested that further studies should be conducted on the effect of digital distribution on performance of manufacturing companies in Benue state, Nigeria. Also, a study should also be carried out on the effect Logistic management on sales performance of medium-scale businesses in North Central-Nigeria.

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