

Customer need identification through company website analysis for competitive advantage achievement

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Abstract

Achieving a competitive advantage in saturated markets is difficult due to the power of choice practiced by customers. Consequently, identifying the values that drive customer choice is of the utmost importance to companies. In this paper, a need analysis was carried out based on the information available on the Coca-Cola website. The identified needs were categorized according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and competitive values were derived from it. The results indicated a disproportionately higher count of psychological needs in contrast to non-existent physiological needs, with a dominant presence of self-actualization needs. The conclusion is that brands like Coca-Cola, in order to achieve success, should target the higher category of customer psychological needs, rather than basic physiological needs. This indicates that customers perceive values derived from needs such as safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization as the most valuable choice criteria.

Keywords: Coca-Cola, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, competitive advantage, customer value

1. Introduction

The soft-carbonated drink market is undoubtedly a saturated one. The proof lies in the fact that countless different brands of drinks of the same kind can be seen on the same shelf in every store. How can brands in this category of drinks achieve a competitive advantage over others? The most important criterion is the criterion of value. But what is value? Value is defined in the simplest way as the 'benefits gained from the product or service' (McDonald & Dunbar, 2012, p. 8). This statement is further expanded by Varey (1996), who explains that the 'needs of individuals cause them to want products and services which provide value and

satisfaction, and demand is created' (p. 3). Additionally, Bayus (2008) describes customer needs as 'a description of the benefits desired by customers' (p. 119). In other words, the needs of customers initiate the buying process, but the choice they make is conditioned by their wants. Customers want those products or services that will provide them with the highest perceived value. Consequently, to achieve a competitive advantage, organizations need to 'understand what customers value in their product category and effectively and efficiently translate these consumer needs into concrete product offerings' (Van den Heuvel et al., 2007, p. 296). These statements show that 'needs,' 'values,' and 'benefits' are closely related terms,

maybe even synonyms. In this paper, an analysis of key customer needs will be provided based on the available information on the Coca-Cola website, which will derive conclusions on values relevant to achieving competitive advantage in the success of the Coca-Cola Company.

2. Literature review

Not every company promoting its brand achieves success solely through the presence of its brand name as a differentiating device. The value of a brand is built as a 'result of a coherent organizational and marketing approach that uses all elements of the marketing mix' (de Chernatony et al., 2011, p. 28). The American Marketing Association defines the marketing mix as 'the tools with which marketing realizes its objectives' (Lancaster & Reynolds, 1998, p. 11). It consists of four instruments: product, price, promotion, and place. However, in the context of services, this list was expanded to include additional elements such as people, processes, and customer service, with a note that 'some authors argue that physical evidence should form a separate element of the services marketing mix' (McDonald et al., 2011, p. 38).

The World Wide Web (WWW) is a powerful tool for information search and is very appealing to audiences. Therefore, organizations use this technology to distribute information about themselves, their products, and their services. Information is stored in a web page, which represents a document on the Internet that has other inter-related documents linked together (Kenreth & Tucker, 2000). Therefore, organizations also communicate with their customers through the Internet. Communication, according to Theodorson and Theodorson (1969), represents the 'transmission of information, ideas, attitudes, or emotion from one person or group to another (or others), primarily through symbols' (Fill & Turnbull, 2016, p. 41). Organizational communication is an integral part of promotion, which is one of the instruments of the marketing mix.

The Coca-Cola brand is no exception. In order to achieve and maintain a competitive advantage, it has to satisfy customer needs by providing value through all the instruments of the marketing mix. For example, in analyzing the product instrument

of the mix, Coca-Cola introduced 'Zero Calorie Plus, which helps to inhibit fat absorption and decrease triglycerides in the blood after eating' (Chu, 2020, p. 98). Additionally, Coca-Cola introduced 'Coca-Cola Life,' a cola beverage with less calorie content because of stevia leaf extract and cane sugar instead of regular corn syrup (Vāvere, 2014, p. 2). These product features directly target customers seeking a healthy lifestyle, which represents a very important choice value. Uncu and Çalişir (2019) state that the design of the Coca-Cola bottle symbolizes the idea of 'youthful exuberance of America,' emphasizing the experiential need among the youth, while Pöhler (2017) states the importance of serving the drink ice-cold because, according to Walsh (2011), 'the taste is unique and quenches thirst but also creates an energetic feeling of refreshment' (p. 33).

Analyzing the promotional instrument of the marketing mix, Pöhler (2017), referring to the mission statement, states that the Coca-Cola company aims to bring 'refreshment, value, joy, and fun to customers so that they can experience the happiness and lightness of Coca-Cola' (p. 32). The promotion of happiness and joy are primary needs or values highlighted in the mission statement. According to Bekimbetova et al. (2021), Coca-Cola exploits man's fantasies and dreams of youth, friendship, belongingness in a certain social community, and the desired behavior in this social community through advertising. The needs for belongingness and friendship are targeted as primary values. Coca-Cola targets specific political and cultural issues in various countries through various forms of advertising (Agustia, 2018), thereby influencing the creation of a positive customer attitude towards the brand. The Coca-Cola brand is positively associated with specific cultural values that are related to respect and acceptance, for example.

This paper focuses on value creation through the promotional aspect of marketing by exclusively analyzing the Coca-Cola website with its available information as a communication channel with its customers. The information analysis will suggest a list of needs and categorize them according to Maslow's hierarchy. This will provide insight into the values that Coca-Cola promotes as a means to achieve a competitive advantage.

3. Need identification and analysis

3.1. Methodology

According to the article's topic, the Coca-Cola USA website was selected for analysis. The main link to the website is <https://us.coca-cola.com/>, and all relevant subpages were examined. A three-fold step qualitative analysis was employed to identify needs. The first step involved identifying keywords on a specific subpage. Next, a possible need was inferred from the identified keywords. Finally, the identified need was categorized according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs was utilized due to its widespread appeal, extensive use and applicability. Also because of its neat systematic span of needs from basic to higher psychological ones hierarchically categorized which allows for clear measurements and demarcations between specific categories. Maslow's

five basic needs are: physiological, safety, love, esteem and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943). To avoid duplicates on the same subpage, all keywords that pointed to the same need were combined and counted as one need. A mathematical method was utilized to quantify and interpret the results of the analysis.

3.2. Research analysis

The Coca-Cola USA website (Discover Real Magic | Coca-Cola®, n.d.) contains multiple subpages, and each relevant subpage was analyzed. The primary objective was to analyze each product subpage and subpages where promotional or communication messages towards customers were presented. A total of 26 subpages were analyzed.

Table 1 gives an example of the step-by-step analysis representation, but for the sake of clarity, just a summary of the complete analysis results is presented in Table 2 and Picture 1.

Table 1: The Coca-Cola need analysis example

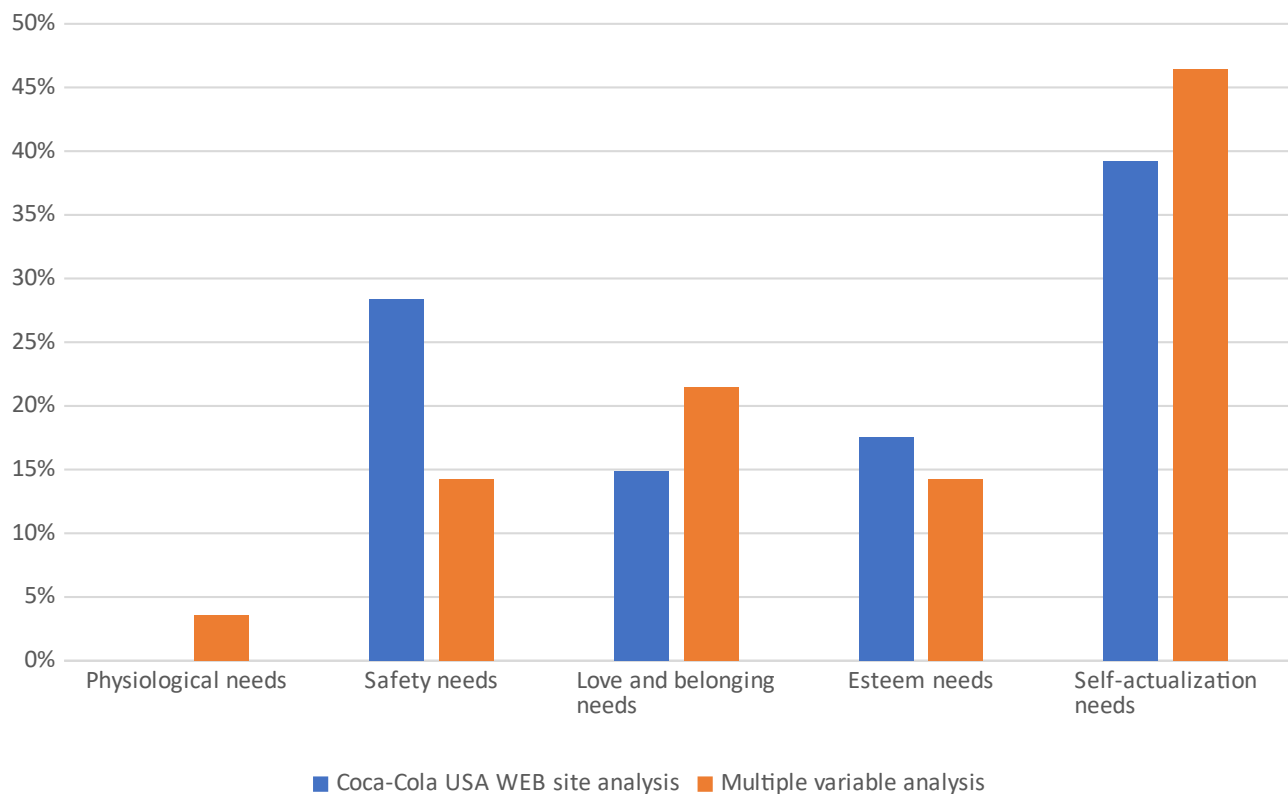
WEB subpage (product or other)	Identified keywords	Identified need	Classification according to Maslow
Coca-Cola®	Enjoy the crisp, refreshing, delicious, and original taste	Experience	Self-actualization
	Taste to share	Friendship	Love and belonging
Coca-Cola® Zero Caffeine-Free	Enjoy the crisp, delicious and refreshing taste	Experience	Self-actualization
	Taste to share	Friendship	Love and belonging
	No caffeine, no calories and no sugar	Health	Safety
Marshmello's Limited Edition Coca-Cola®	Newest hit, sparkling and refreshing beverage, discover the unexpected flavor of strawberry and watermelon flavor with the same familiar great taste with an added mix of Marshmello's best tracks.	Experience	Self-actualization
	Inspired by the world-renowned artist Marshmello	Identification with the artist	Self-actualization
	Other natural flavors	Health	Safety
	Limited edition	Prestige	Esteem

Source: author

Table 2: The Coca-Cola need analysis comparison

Classification according to Maslow	Coca-Cola USA WEB site analysis		Multiple variable analysis (Marjanović & Stanimirović, 2022)	
	No. of needs	%	No. of needs	%
Physiological needs	0	0%	1	4%
Safety needs	21	28%	4	14%
Love and belonging needs	11	15%	6	21%
Esteem needs	13	18%	4	14%
Self-actualization needs	29	39%	13	46%
TOTAL	74	100%	28	100%

Source: Author

Picture 1: Graphical representation of the Coca-Cola need analysis comparison

Source: Author

A similar analysis was already made where a suggested list of possible needs that the Coca-Cola drink fulfills was presented according to the criteria of product features and other marketing activities (namely: promotion, product features, brand, logo design, and packaging), that is presented in Table 2 and Picture 1 under the name of "Multiple

variable analysis". The mentioned analysis was compared with the current one in this paper as a reference point for the purpose of drawing additional conclusions.

The comparative analysis in Table 2 and Picture 1 shows similarities in all categories of need. Self-actualization needs are the most represented

in both studies, and physiological needs are barely represented, while completely lacking in the current study. There were no mentions of words like “thirst” that can be directly correlated with those needs.

Safety needs in the current study are the second most important, with an overwhelmingly high score (17 out of 21 needs, or 81%) representing health as dominant need in this category. This can be substantiated with an existing high variety of Coca-Cola drinks that are caffeine and sugar free, indicating the existence of a large health-conscious base of customers.

Both studies show closely related results with the exception of safety needs in the current study, while self-actualization remains the dominant targeted need. Brands like Coca-Cola tend to shift focus with their marketing activities, especially with promotion, targeting higher psychological rather than lower physiological needs according to the Maslow's hierarchy.

4. Discussion

Why is the emphasis on higher needs so important to Coca-Cola, and how they relate to the Coca-Cola success? The main goal of any profit-oriented company is to make profit. In order to achieve that, high sales results must be reached by persuading customers to buy more of its products even to the detriment of the competition. To persuade customers a company must understand needs that determine their choice behaviors. The presented analysis indicates that in a situation where the market is saturated with similar brands, that satisfy the same need with a similar product, customers have a choice, and if they have a choice they will take advantage of their given privilege to choose. If Coca-Cola emphasizes higher psychological needs especially through their promotional activities, these higher needs seem to be the key to its success. Customers do not care that much about physiological needs when choosing competing soft carbonated drinks in this category but rather care about needs as safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Finally, it can be concluded that the key to conquer customers lies in the higher category of psychological needs,

creating emotional bonds between the brand and customers rather than emphasizing functional properties of products.

The main limitation of the paper is reflected in the fact that the analysis covered only one brand. It is recommended that the research be extended to similar brands in the same product category. This would allow for a comparison and evaluation of value differences between the needs categorized by Maslow. Furthermore, the research can be expanded to different aspects of the offering, analyzing not only the web as a promotional tool but also all available promotional activities, including other elements of the marketing mix such as product and price. Lastly, the research can be extended to different product categories to identify whether patterns in need values can be identified on a broader scale in the market.

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Identifikacija potreba kupaca kroz analizu informacija na mrežnim stranicama tvrtke kao sredstvo za postizanje konkurentske prednosti

Sažetak

Postizanje konkurentske prednosti na zasićenim tržištima je izazovno zbog moći izbora koju prakticiraju kupci. Posljedično, prepoznavanje vrijednosti koje utječu na izbor kupaca od najveće je važnosti za tvrtke. U ovom radu provedena je analiza potreba na temelju informacija dostupnih na mrežnoj stranici Coca-Cole. Identificirane potrebe kategorizirane su prema Maslowljevoj hijerarhiji potreba, a iz nje su izvedene konkurentske vrijednosti. Rezultati su ukazali na nesrazmjerno veći broj psiholoških potreba u odnosu na nepostojeće fiziološke potrebe, s dominacijom potreba za samoaktualizacijom. Zaključak je da brendovi poput Coca-Cole, kako bi postigli uspjeh, trebaju ciljati na višu kategoriju psiholoških potreba kupaca, umjesto osnovnih fizioloških potreba. To ukazuje na to da kupci vrijednosti izvedene iz potreba kao što su sigurnost, ljubav i pripadnost, poštovanje i samoaktualizacija percipiraju kao najvažnije kriterije izbora.

Ključne riječi: Coca-Cola, Maslowljeva hijerarhija potreba, konkurentska prednost, vrijednost za kupca