

Competitive Strategies In The Context Of Political Marketing

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Abstract: *By implementing effective marketing strategies organizations can achieve their strategic objectives and be competitive. The main objectives of the study are: 1). presentation of the main characteristics that define market strategy in the context of political marketing; 2). analysis of the competitive strategies according to the position held by an organization on the market; 3). presentation of the main trends of competitive environment in the contemporary business context. To obtain the vote of the electorate political parties apply specific competitive strategies according to the position they hold on the market. Electoral success depends largely on how political parties (or candidates) manage to gain the voters' trust by using effective strategies in order to improve and maintain their position on the market over a long period of time.*

Key words: strategy, political marketing, competitiveness

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1.Introduction

Organizations achieve their goals by implementing effective competitive strategies managing to maintain their market position. In order to achieve tactical and strategic

objectives on a short and long term basis, an organization must face the challenges coming from the environment in which it operates, the permanent need being that of adjusting the activity according to dynamic environmental trends characteristic to the

current stage. This study aims to highlight the main features of competitive strategies used by both companies and political entities closely linked to the position they hold on the market. Competitive strategies are a central element in an organization's marketing policy and a careful and rigorous implementation of these strategies can only lead to increased turnover for manufacturing firms, and to attracting a large number of voters for parties / candidates who wish to obtain electoral success. To enjoy successful competitive strategies organisations need to exploit the opportunities offered by the competitive environment by applying an appropriate marketing mix to accomplish the desired performance. Achieving competitive advantages, correct information about direct and indirect competitors, the ability to meet customers' needs at a higher level and a better knowledge of competitive business environment trends are essential prerequisites for achieving success.

2. The market strategy and its characteristics in the context of political marketing

Political entities take into account political marketing features by applying marketing tools in the electoral field. Osuagwu (2008) considers that "political marketing can be conceptualised as the application of marketing concepts, principles and approaches in political issues by persons, groups, organisations and nations" (Osuagwu, 2008, pp.794), because "marketing concepts, principles, strategies and analytical methods have considerable applicability in political marketing" (Osuagwu, 2008, p.798). Political marketing principles and strategies are used by political

organizations and parties in order to achieve their objectives and targets. Osuagwu (2008) considers that "political marketing strategy, generally, is a series of persuasional techniques deployed in competitive situations to construct and reinforce a political entity's image, products and persons" (Osuagwu, 2008, pp.800).

Moreover, "political marketing strategy, specifically, seeks to describe how political entities and persons attempt to market their programmes, policies, persons and ideas to the relevant publics, while being sensitive to the realities of the political environment" (Osuagwu, 2008, pp.800).

Firms will seek key competitive advantages which can differentiate from competitors. Competitive advantages can be of two types, namely: cost advantages (firms practice a low price) and performance advantages (companies focus on quality and efficiency) (Bruhn, 1999, pp.80). Also, Bruhn (1999) argues that "implementation of strategy within the company" requires the "creation of internal assumptions market performance" (Bruhn, 1999, pp.86). With respect to organizations setting strategic objectives represents the key to achieving expected performance.

According to Osuagwu (2008) "political marketing strategy may be applied (or be relevant) to such areas of governance/politics as interest/lobby groups, local government, legislature, the civil service, public service etc." (Osuagwu, 2008, pp.800).

3. Competitive strategies according to market position

According to the market position occupied by a firm (organization) the following market structure can be mentioned: 40% is

held by the market leader, 30% is held by the market challenger, 20% is held by the market follower and 10% is held by the market nichers (Kotler and Keller, 2006, pp.349). These four positions

held by the firms (organizations) on the market assume different strategies.

Figure no 1: Market positions and main competitive strategies

Position	Characteristics	Strategies
Leader	Hold 40% of market share Defense strategies	Expand total market and share
Challenger	Hold 30% of market share Attack strategies	Attack leader, similar or smaller competitors
Follower	Hold 20% of market share Copying the leader strategies	Counterfeiter duplicates, clone, imitate or adapt the leader's products
Nicher	Hold 10% of market share Avoid competing with large firms	Create, expand or defend niche

Source: adapted from Butler, P., Collins, N. (1996), *Strategic analysis in political markets*, *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 30, No. 10/11, pp.36.

According to Osuagwu (2008) “political marketing strategy addresses different issues, such as how political organisations listen to the people they seek to serve, determine what they offer to the public and achieve their goals. It studies politics from the supply side (political parties) and from the demand side (voters, relevant audience)” (Osuagwu, 2008, pp.800).

Market leaders should permanently defend their position. The dominant firm uses defense strategies in order to “reduce the probability of attack, divert attacks to less

threatening area, and lessen their intensity” (Kotler and Keller, 2006, pp.353). According to Butler and Collins (1996) “market leaders in politics are seldom able to expand their appeal without risk” (Butler and Collins, 1996, pp. 36). But there are several dangers for the leader, such as technological changes, dissatisfied voters, or even “losing market share to new venture” (Butler and Collins, 1996, pp. 36). To gain the voters’ attention and trust a market leader should be creative, friendly and reputable. In various situations if the market leader cannot sustain his/her offer to the electorate, he/she might adopt a defensive strategy in order to reinforce his/her image in voters’ mind (Butler and Collins, 1996, pp. 37).

Challenger

A challenger’s performance depends on using various attack strategies to improve and maintain its position over a long period of time. In competitive terms, the challenger’s role is to “depose the leader”, by using active strategies that “require an aggressive approach” (Butler and Collins, 1996, pp. 37).

Butler and Collins (1996) note that challengers take into account three fundamental conditions for “a successful attack on the market leader”, such as: “the challenger must have a sustainable competitive advantage; the challenger must be able to neutralize the leader’s other advantages; and there must be some impediment to the leader’s retaliating” (Butler and Collins, 1996, pp. 37).

For a challenger, having a strategy of the electoral system is a fundamental factor, because “the more proportional the system the less are the rewards of an aggressive stance” (Butler and Collins, 1996, pp. 38). Challengers use various strategies for anticipating voters’ preferences and wishes such as

“back-door strategies” or they often “reduce policy differences and rely on rival claims of competency, reliability or honesty” (Butler and Collins, 1996, pp. 38).

Follower

According to Kotler and Keller (2006) “a market follower must know how to hold current customers and win a fair share of new customers” (Kotler and Keller, 2006, pp.360). In a competitive environment “the follower is susceptible to attack by challengers engaged in a strategy of engaging the leader indirectly through taking over other competitors” (Butler and Collins, 1996, pp. 39). A market follower uses the following main strategies: counterfeiter duplicates, cloning, copying and adapting the leader’s product (Kotler and Keller, 2006, pp.360-361). Counterfeiter strategy involves the fact that “the counterfeiter duplicates the leader’s product and package and sells it on the black market” (Kotler and Keller, 2006, pp.360). Cloning strategy “involves close imitation” of the leader’s product, copying strategy “involves replicating other market products, but with just enough differentiation to avoid retaliation” and adapting strategy “involves taking other market products, but marketing them in different markets or segments to avoid direct confrontation” (Butler and Collins, 1996, pp. 39).

In the political arena parties “act to circumscribe their political market” for “protecting traditional supporters” and they use several strategies in order to develop “in the recognition of their limitations in appealing to a wide cross-section of the national market” (Butler and Collins, 1996, pp. 39).

Nicher

According to Kotler and Keller (2006) “an alternative to being a follower in a large

market is to be a leader in a small market, or niche” (Kotler and Keller, 2006, pp.362). Nicher strategy targets a market segment and its fundamental objective is to satisfy customers’ needs. A market nicher uses several strategies in order to “create, expand and defend niches” (Butler and Collins, 1996, pp. 40). In the political field “niche parties may be reliant on votes from a distinctive part of the jurisdiction”, because “some electoral system allows very specialist nicher strategies” (Butler and Collins, 1996, pp. 40).

4. Competitive environment – futures in the contemporary context

The whole process of setting an organizational strategy involves finding the most appropriate ways in which business skills and competitive strategy adopted by organisations could interact with the influences of economic, political, social and technological environment. In the context of this approach it is necessary to ask the following key questions: “What is the company’s mission? What does it want? What will it do?” (Popa, 2004, pp.62). After setting the company’s mission, setting strategic objectives and evaluating competitive strategies, the organization can choose the final strategy whose implementation leads to the achievement of the performance desired. Business environment has several important trends that need to be known by the companies if they want to accomplish the strategic objectives in terms of efficiency. These trends are: evolution of technique and technology in contemporary context creates various possibilities for innovation and creativity, “enhancement of business legislation, enhancing the role of interest groups and political entities”, “international

orientation in cultural domain towards an altruistic society, and towards consistent and sustainable values" (Stanciu, 2002, pp.82). In order to develop strategies on long-term basis it is necessary for organizations to know these interesting trends (Stanciu, 2002, pp. 82). Connecting organization activity with the environment is an essential condition for identifying the opportunities and threats that could affect its evolution over time. There are three types of environment, namely: **stable environment** - characterized by changes that are easy to predict and takes place over a long period of time, being also the base line for future analysis, **changing environment** - characterized by constant changes that are generally predictable and are characteristic also to the present period, firms facing this type of environment in the current stage, **turbulent environment** - characterized by sudden and unpredictable movements, being specific to the "top branches", having thus a permanent character (Stanciu, 2002, pp. 78).

5. Conclusions

A market leader implements strategies in order to expand global market by diversifying its product range and creating innovative products (in the context of political marketing, political offer and social objectives supported by a major party / candidate can lead to obtaining the voters' vote). Firms ranked second (challenger) are trying to expand market share by using offensive strategies and firms ranked third and fourth, respectively follower firms and small companies (niche) take a fight for survival, trying to maintain position market by using competitive strategies in order to attract new customers.

According to the position held on the market firms use different competitive marketing strategies. This study summarizes these various competitive strategies by presenting the main characteristics of competitive marketing strategies used by manufacturing firms, and also by political parties, in order to obtain the expected performance.

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