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AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON MARKETING INFORMATION SYSTEM

DEEPAK S
ASST. PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF MBA
VTU POST GRADUATE CENTRE
MYSURU

DR. S. J. MANJUNATH
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
B. N. BAHADUR INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF MYSORE, MYSURU
MANASAGANGOTRI

ABSTRACT

This paper has the purpose of being familiarized with the benefits of the marketing information system in companies that operate in the retail business. A field research was done in a major retailer, by means of a case study that consisted of interviews with two employees of the company, one from the top management and one from the marketing area, based on a semi-structured script, in addition to a documental analysis. The results indicate that information and its systematization possess great importance for the development of competitiveness, contributing to the development of the operations and to the promotion of new business opportunities, as provided by the pertinent literature.

KEYWORDS

marketing information system, environmental analysis, marketing decision-making, retail business, competitiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to high competitiveness, many companies have sought resources and management tools which enable them to quickly and flexibly respond to market demands. This is how information technology tools have gained a prominent role within competitive companies, as they aim to promote reliability and fast information, contributing to the mitigation of risks in decision-making processes (Kubiak & Kowalik, 2010).

Particularly to the extent that the marketing process is concerned, its strategic dimension is in charge of providing guidance to companies as to market opportunities, aiming at the development and maintenance of competitive advantages and profits in the long run, based on the systematic and continuous analysis of the needs and wishes of current and potential clients as well as the needs and wishes of competitors (Lambin, 2000). Therefore, strategic marketing is the one that monitors the market and identifies market opportunities and segments based on the expectations of the target audience (Minciotti, 1992).

Notwithstanding, Hooper, Huff and Thirkell (2010) argue that organizational functions around business strategies are increasingly fed by marketing strategies, interpreted by marketing orientation and by its elements (consumer orientation, competitor orientation or interfunctional coordination).

Likewise, Cravens and Piercy (2006) state that information is an input which can be used as a base to solve problems, assess potential actions, improve operational performance and mitigate risks in decision-making processes, which, according to Gupta (2012), enable new opportunities to take place as well as changes in the industry.

As such, it is necessary to develop a formal and stable structure to collect information, which freely flows within the organization so that it contributes to proper decision-making processes by managers (Jaworski, Macinnis & Kohli, 2002). Such authors as Kotler and Keller (2006) and Lambin (2000) state the need for structuring and systematizing information so that marketing decisions are continuously supported.

According to Berhan, Paul and Jan (2012), it is impossible to consider marketing without an information system. In this context, Pinto *et al.* (2006) argue that many companies combine marketing policies and techniques with information technologies, enabling managers to offer distinctive services and products, create value for the clients and generate profits for the organization.

Thus, the company's structure must be learning-process oriented, capable of obtaining relevant information from the data related to the decisions to be made; such decisions pertain to the strategies and actions which enable the defined goals to be met.

By considering all the information stated above, this paper has the purpose of being familiarized with the benefits of the marketing information system (MIS) for marketing decisions in the clothing retail business. In order to meet the defined goal, in addition to approaching related subject matters, a field research was done by means of a case study method, in a major company in the clothing retail business, which is an expressive segment in the Brazilian economy.

2. MIS CONCEPT AND MODELS

The MIS is an idea which is associated with man, machine, marketing and methods for collecting information's from the internal and external source and processing this information for the purpose of facilitating the process of decision-making of the business. MIS is not new, only the computerization is new, before computers MIS techniques existed to supply managers with the information that would permit them to plan and control business operations. The computer has added on more dimensions such as speed, accuracy and increased volume of data that permit the consideration of more alternatives in decision-making process.

The scope and purpose of MIS is better understood if each part of them is defined individually, thus

1. **MANAGEMENT:** Management has been defined in process or activities that describe what managers do in the operation for their organization plan, organize, initiate and control operations. They plan by setting strategies and goals and selecting the best course of action to achieve the goals. They organize the necessary tasks for the operational plan, set these tasks up into homogenous groups and assign authority delegation; they control the performance standards and avoiding deviation from standard.

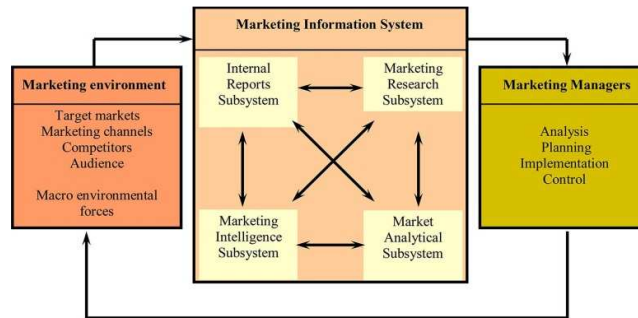
The decision-making is a fundamental prerequisite of each of the foregoing process, the job of MIS is facilitating decisions necessary for planning, organizing and controlling the work and functions of the business so that specified goals of business are achieved.

2. **INFORMATION:** Data must be distinguished from information and the distinction is clear and important for present purpose. Data are facts and figures that are not currently being used in a decision-making process and usually are taken from the historical records that are recorded and filled without immediate intent to retrieve for decision-making.

Information consists of data that have been retrieved, processed or otherwise used for information or interference purpose, argument or as a basis forecasting or decision-making regarding any business unit. Information is knowledge that one derives from facts for effective functioning of systems placed in the right context with the purpose of reducing uncertainty regarding the alternative courses of action as they are based on description and measurement of attributes of various entities associated with the enterprise.

3. **SYSTEM:** The system can be described as a set of elements joined together for a common objective. A subsystem is a part of a larger system with which one is concerned. All systems for our purpose the organization is the system and the parts (divisions, departments, functions, unit etc) are the subsystem. The system concept of MIS is, therefore one of optimizing the output of the organization by connecting the operating subsystems through the medium of information exchange. The Management information system (MIS) is a concept of the last two decade or two. It has been understood and described in a number of ways. It is also known as the Information System, the Information and Decision System, the computer based Decision System. Information is the life blood of an organization, particularly in the case of system approach management. The MIS or Information system can be define as the knowledge communicated by others or obtained from investigation or study. It is a system providing needed information to each manager at the right time in the right form and relevant one which aids understanding and stimulates the action. MIS is an organized method of providing past, present and projection information relating to internal operations and externals intelligence. It supports the planning, control and operational functions of an organization by furnishing uniform information in proper time frame to help the process of decision-making.

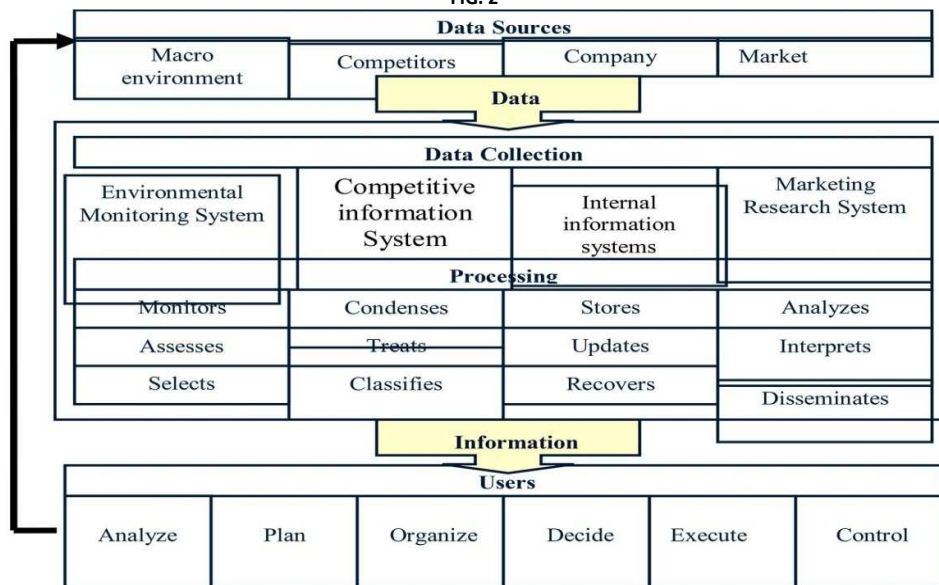
FIG. 1



Source: Kotler (1998, p. 12).

Mattar *et al.* (2009) highlight that fact that a generic MIS model must be applied and adapted to the reality of any company as long as it comprehends such activities as joining, processing, disseminating and storing relevant data and information, internal and external to the organization, for marketing decision-making processes.

FIG. 2



Source: Mattar *et al.* (2009, p.105).

IMPACT OF THE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

MIS plays a very important role in the organization; it creates an impact on the organization's functions, performance and productivity. The impact of MIS on the functions is in its management with a good MIS supports the management of marketing, finance, production and personnel becomes more efficient. The tracking and monitoring of the functional targets becomes easy. The functional managers are informed about the progress, achievements and shortfalls in the activity and the targets. The manager is kept alert by providing certain information indicating and probable trends in the various aspects of business. This helps in forecasting and long-term perspective planning. The manager's attention is brought to a situation which is expected in nature, inducing him to take an action or a decision in the matter. Disciplined information reporting system creates structure database and a knowledge base for all the people in the organization. The information is available in such a form that it can be used straight away by blending and analysis, saving the manager's valuable time. The MIS creates another impact in the organization which relates to the understanding of the business itself. The MIS begins with the definition of data, entity and its attributes. It uses a dictionary of data, entity and attributes, respectively, designed for information generation in the organization. Since all the information systems use the dictionary, there is common understanding of terms and terminology in the organization bringing clarity in the communication and a similar understanding of an event in the organization. The MIS calls for a systematization of the business operations for an effective system design. This leads to streaming of the operations which complicates the system design. It improves the administration of the business by bringing a discipline in its operations as everybody is required to follow and use systems and procedures. This process brings a high degree of professionalism in the business operations. The goals and objectives of the MIS are the products of business goals and objectives. It helps indirectly to pull the entire organization in one direction towards the corporate goals and objectives by providing the relevant information to the organization. A well designed system with a focus on the manager makes an impact on the managerial efficiency. The fund of information motivates an enlightened manager to use a variety of tools of the management. It helps him to resort to such exercises as experimentation and modeling. The use of computers enables him to use

the tools and techniques which are impossible to use manually. The ready-made packages make this task simple. The impact is on the managerial ability to perform. It improves decision-making ability considerably high.

Since, the MIS work on the basic system such as transaction processing and database, the drudgery of the clerical work is transferred to the computerized system, relieving the human mind for better work. It will be observed that lot of manpower is engaged in this activity in the organization. Seventy (70) percent of the time is spent in recording, searching, processing and communicating. This MIS has a direct impact on this overhead. It creates information-based working culture in the organization.

3. DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

USE OF THE MIS

The company has an Information System (IS) based on the software called SAP (Systems Applications and Products in Data Processing), developed by the German company with the same name. It enables to obtain information and disseminate them throughout the company so that it can be used in its activities. Regarded as slightly complex by the interviewees, it sometimes requires that some information, after being extracted and analyzed, be transferred to the Intranet, which tends to make its use easy by the users. The company's SAP system is made up of two bases called BW (Business Warehouse); one of them serves the company's commercial area and the other one serves the remaining areas.

The model can be divided into two blocks: (1) one defined from the user's profile, who has access only to their department's information, in order to perform their tasks, as seen in Figure, and (2) the other one in which the information presents itself in a disaggregated manner, more complex, and which is worked on with statistical modeling tools. Due to the merging of the Business Intelligence and Information Technology, the Intranet, based on the user's profile, at the moment, shows some "screens" or accesses under construction, as seen in Figure, by the ellipse in white.



Source: Authors, based upon the company's Intranet output.

The two interviewed managers, when questioned about the benefits the company is provided by the MIS, recognized that there are many of them, but in fact the company only allows to achieve them if they are used with other IS modules, which is not always feasible, due to the above-mentioned access restrictions. The statement is made clear when the interviewees classify in terms of importance the benefits which are solely provided the MIS, whose items were listed based on the literature review.

Both believe that the MIS allows the establishment of the foundation of retail strategies. They also speak highly of the possibility of reducing operational costs, making more accurate reports, improving productivity, controlling marketing costs, improving internal services, improving decision making, developing plans, promoting price and communication strategies, optimizing the services offered to customers, identifying target markets and new segments and managing inventories.

However, such benefits as improving distribution control, reducing the risks perceived by customers and identifying the nature of the services and products offered to the market are analyzed in the IS by other sectors and involve Logistics (factory/carrier), Purchasing and Business Intelligence. Even the contribution from the MIS to marketing results needs the monitoring of the responses from campaigns and promotions by the Business Intelligence, particularly due to information access restrictions.

Regarding the development of the main retail strategies, the information obtained contributes to strategic planning and decisions on the lines of products, price setting and store expansion and location.

As to the marketing planning, there is the concern for monitoring needs, satisfaction and customer purchase processes, performed by the Business Intelligence department, which handles the strategic function of supply and provision of information to the managers for decision-making purposes.

With a focus on the customers and maintaining its positioning within the segment in which it operates, the company invests in the integration with the factory in order to gain market and offer fashion with quality and fair prices. This integration is seen as a distinctive element over the competition, a sort of an innovative service added to the customer service. Nevertheless, for the interviewees, the integration store/factory is seen as a distinctive element which tends to enable cost reduction and improvement in price strategies over the competitors.

According to the top management interviewee, based on the analysis of market share: *"Currently, we are the second largest company in this sector, but we have been working to reach the first position soon, and in order to do so the company has worked on the integration between the stores and the group, opening of new stores and refurbishing of the existing ones, consolidation of market share in the Northern and Northeastern regions, increase in the market share in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, creation of a financial services company, strengthening of the relationship with customers by means of store cards and focus on innovation, launching of trends and products by means of market research and marketing intelligence, modernization of the manufacturing complex and implementation of information technology for operational and financial management."*

Regarding the interaction of the company with competitors, there is some difficulty obtaining information and, often times, the store's managers are the ones who visit their competitors and pass information on the Business Intelligence, Commercial, Marketing, and to other operational areas.

With the purpose of meeting market needs and maintaining its positioning, the company believes that observing and analyzing the main events and the demographic trends demand efforts, but which tend to offer more opportunities than difficulties if they are properly explored. Considering the fact that the company has many stores in other States of the country, constant studies are performed in relation to the cultures and customs of each region served, as well as in relation to the main fashion events in each region. This type of analysis is seen as an opportunity to increase sales when associated with meeting seasonal sales demand.

4. CONCLUSION

As seen in the statements from the interviewees, the acquisition of new technologies, the acquisition and use of other software and the merging of the IT and BI areas under the same management show the concern of the researched company to significantly invest in IS and in its use in an integrated manner with the MIS and with other company's databases, which allow analyzing customers, the market and, though poorly, the competition as well.

The close-knit relationship between Marketing, Business Intelligence and Information Technology shows the need for adaptation of the reality and the culture of the company to the use of information. By analyzing the benefits provided by the MIS, it is possible to see the dedication of the company to obtain information about its customers, in order to strengthen their relationship, as well as the search for meeting their customers' needs.

The company uses information more as a support to the risk reduction management in decision making than to the competitive advantage creation, although it is moving in the direction of the use of information as a strategic resource, for the purpose of providing a better performance of the operations and new business opportunities, as it has recently integrated Business Intelligence and Information Technology under the same management.

Although the information access restrictions, based on the creation of profiles, cause delays in the development of projects and in the definition of plannings, the research permitted to see that the MIS provides the benefits presented in the pertinent literature; however, in order to further enjoy such benefits, there is still the need of its integrated use with the company's IS.

Within the limitations of this work, the adopted method to perform the field research can be mentioned, as it does not allow for generalizations. However, it is important to highlight that, despite this limitation, the objective established, which is the verification of the benefits obtained with the use of the MIS, was achieved. Another evident limitation is in regards to performing a single case study; it is believed that the possible comparison with other case studies could further clarify the treatment of the flow and distribution of information, which, in this research, was limited to the access based on the creation of user profiles.

As a manner for contributing to further research, the exploration of other variables is recommended, such as the necessary information for decision-making processes and environmental analysis, regarding this research's problem. Also, it is recommended that similar research be done, and also of a quantitative nature in the business sector in question and in other relevant ones, for better assessment of the management of information that the marketing information system provides for creating and maintaining competitiveness, whether due to the scarcity of empirical studies or due to economic representativeness.

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