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Services Marketing Mix Efforts of a Global Services Brand: The Case of DHL Logistics

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is identifying the services marketing mix (7Ps- product/service, place, promotion, price, people, processes and physical evidence) decisions of a logistics company. The significance of services marketing mix on creating a logistics services brand has received little attention in the literature. In this paper, the case of a global brand, DHL Logistics is presented. Case study was conducted by using secondary data obtained from DHL Logistics' reports and by conducting semi-constructed interviews with DHL Logistics' executives and employees. Due to the reputation and operations of the company, this framework will act as a guideline for the other alike companies. The marketing mix decisions made by DHL Logistics affect both B2B and B2C customers' brand perceptions and enhance the brand equity of DHL Logistics.

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1. Introduction

Even though the academic researches that focus on traditional marketing mix constitute the majority, in the last decade a stream of researching the topic "services marketing mix" has emerged. Marketing mix tools hold an

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important place for actualizing marketing and positioning strategies. Traditional marketing mix, 4Ps, is made up of four components namely product, place, promotion, and price, constitute the marketing mix (Borden, 1953; McCarthy, 1964; Aghaei et al., 2013). In 1995, Rafiq and Ahmed extended the concept of 4Ps to 7Ps, namely product, place, promotion, price, physical evidence, processes and people, for services industry.

Marketing tools and strategies of firms are being shaped in accordance with their positioning decisions. Hence, management of a firm's decisions on components of marketing mix occupy an important place for actualizing positioning purposes. Positioning covers decisions and activities intended to create a concept of the firms' product in the minds of customers (Ferrell, 1997). Lamb, Daniel, and McDaniel (2004) explains positioning as a process of developing a marketing mix in order to influence customers' perception of a product line, brand or organization in general.

Marketing strategies hold an important place for logistics service providers since logistics firms play a vital for companies in gaining competitive advantage and cost efficiency, risk-sharing, freeing up resources, and accessing to resources that are not available at one's own organization (Green et al., 2008). However, there exists numerous logistics companies offering similar services. Additionally, according to Porter's five forces of competition framework, logistics companies are in a disadvantageous position since the industry contains high threat of entry, high intensity of rivalry, medium level of substitution risk, medium to high level of bargaining power of buyers and medium level of bargaining power of suppliers (Manatayev, 2004). Hence, for logistics service providers, marketing efforts have a significant influence on changing their disadvantageous position into a more advantageous position. In this paper, the marketing efforts of DHL Logistics, an important player in the industry, are being analysed.

2. Importance of Marketing Mix in Services Industry

4Ps of the marketing mix, described as "the holy quadruple of the marketing faith written in tablets of stone" by Kent (1986), is a conceptual framework that identifies the decisions made by managers in configuring companies' offerings to meet consumers' needs (Goi, 2009). Positioning decisions and usage of marketing mix tools constitute a byzantine. Decisions and activities that aim to create a concept of the firm's product/services in the minds of customers, constitute positioning of the firm (Ferrell, 1997).

In services industry, marketing mix efforts hold an important place for positioning. As for logistics services industry, there exists thousands of logistics companies offering similar services. However, most of the companies prefer to work with a small number of logistics service providers that have good brand reputation or image (Baker, 1984; Fuller et al., 1993; Gordon, 2003; Marquardt et al., 2011). Hence, the logistics companies have begun to realize the impact of marketing efforts.

3. Methodology

In this paper, a case-study approach is implemented in order to analyse services marketing mix efforts of a global logistics service provider, Deutsche Post DHL. Using a combination of semi-structured interviews and secondary data analysis enabled us to actualize the aim of uncovering taken actions and decisions regarding to services marketing mix.

Five semi-constructed interviews were done with DHL Logistics' executives and employees including air freight supervisor, sales territory manager, global air commercial center specialist, corporate communication manager and human resource specialist. Each interview lasted around 40 minutes. The interviews were done by two of the researchers and the themes of the interviews were determined as positioning, brand image, pricing, service quality, promotion, service attributes, service processes, place-service supply chain, physical evidence and people. As for the secondary data analysis, DHL marketing reports were analyzed.

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