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SUSTAINABILITY OF THE KEDI HEALTHCARE NETWORK MARKETING MODEL IN NIGERIA

ABSTRACT

This systematic review examines the sustainability of KEDI's network marketing model, with a focus on the integration of sustainability principles within its marketing strategies. The sustainability of marketing strategies has emerged as a critical contemporary issue in the business landscape. The sustainability of the network marketing model refers to its ability to maintain and grow over some time. By analyzing the current literature on sustainability in network marketing, the paper highlights the key factors that influence the sustainability of KEDI's model, including environmental, social, and economic dimensions. The findings suggest that while KEDI's model has the potential for long-term success, it must address challenges such as distributor retention, ethical practices, and product quality. The review concludes with recommendations for enhancing the sustainability of the model.

Keywords: Sustainability, Network Marketing, Marketing Strategies, KEDI Healthcare

1.0 Introduction

The concept of sustainability has become increasingly critical in modern business practices, particularly in network marketing models such as KEDI's. Introduced by the World Commission on Economic Development (WCED) over two decades ago, sustainability encompasses environmental responsibility, social responsibility, and economic sustainability (Crittenden et al., 2010). In the context of network marketing, sustainability refers to the model's ability to maintain and grow over time by attracting and retaining distributors, generating sales, and ensuring ethical practices.

This paper aims to explore the sustainability of KEDI's network marketing model by reviewing relevant literature on sustainable marketing strategies, with a focus on the integration of environmental, social, and economic considerations.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Sustainability Marketing

The sustainability of the network marketing model refers to its ability to maintain and grow over some time. The model relies on recruiting individuals to become distributors promoting products or services to their networks.

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The key to the sustainability of this model is the ability to attract and retain new distributors, as well as the ability of existing distributors to generate sales. Factors that can impact the sustainability of this model include the quality of the products or services, the compensation plan, the support provided to distributors, and the overall market demand for the products or services (Jahf and Huhtilainen, 2015). Network marketing's sustainability hinges on a shift in focus from rapid recruitment to building a loyal customer base and empowering distributors with the tools and knowledge to succeed. By prioritizing product quality, ethical marketing, and distributor development, network marketing companies can cultivate a more sustainable business model for the long term. (Ageron, Gunasekaran and Spalanzani, 2012).

2.1 Defining Sustainability in Marketing Strategies

Sustainability in marketing strategies involves the integration of environmental, social, and economic considerations into the planning, implementation, and evaluation of marketing activities. It goes beyond short-term profitability and focuses on creating long-term value while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and society (Beltz & Peattie, 2012). Sustainability has become a requirement and is no longer an option (Charter, Peattie, Ottoman & Polonsky, 2006). As a result of sustainability and sustainable development issues becoming more of an obligation, accompanied by the fact that stakeholders increasingly influence organizations to adopt sustainability in their marketing strategies, authors argued that it is crucial to implement sustainable criteria into marketing strategies to survive (Kumar & Satsangi, 2021). Organizations have to balance their marketing strategies in such a way that customer needs can be fulfilled after maintaining profitability, public interests and ecology (Vagasi, 2004). As markets and organizations have come to understand the importance of acknowledging sustainability issues and the influence these have on companies' marketing strategies, it also becomes evident how forming activities under sustainability issues may lead to competitive advantage (Belts & Schmidt-Riediger, 2010). Market-focused sustainability could be a strategic resource that leads to competitive advantage for the organization and, ultimately, to superior performance. Sustainable marketing includes three facets which are green marketing practice, social marketing, and critical marketing (Gordon, Carrigan, & Hastings, 2011). A sustainable marketing strategy emphasizes added value to customers as well as the establishment of long-lasting customer relationships, beneficial for businesses, society and the environment (Kumar et al., 2012).

2.2 Factors Contributing to the Significance of Sustainability in Marketing Strategies

- i. **Environmental Concerns:** The pressing global environmental challenges, such as climate change, deforestation, and pollution, have heightened awareness of the need for sustainable practices. Consumers are increasingly eco-conscious and seek products and services that minimize environmental impacts. By incorporating sustainability into marketing strategies, companies can address these concerns and cater to the growing demand for environmentally friendly products and practices (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2019).
- ii. **Social Responsibility:** Businesses are expected to contribute positively to society and address social issues. Consumers are more likely to support companies that demonstrate social responsibility through fair trade practices, community engagement, and ethical sourcing. Marketing strategies that emphasize

sustainability and social impact resonate with consumers and enhance brand reputation (Belz & Peattie, 2012).

- iii. **Regulatory Environment:** Governments and regulatory bodies are implementing stricter regulations related to sustainability and environmental standards. For example, restrictions on carbon emissions, waste management, and product labelling require companies to adapt their marketing strategies to comply with these regulations. Failure to do so can result in legal and reputational risks. (Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2023)
- iv. **Competitive Advantage:** Sustainable marketing strategies can provide a competitive edge by differentiating companies from their competitors. Businesses that proactively integrate sustainability into their marketing activities can attract environmentally conscious consumers, build brand loyalty, and foster innovation (Lucas, Singh & Chakravarti, 2020). Companies that fail to address sustainability may lag behind and lose market share to more sustainable competitors.
- v. **Long-Term Viability:** Ensuring the long-term viability of businesses requires a focus on sustainability. By adopting sustainable marketing strategies, companies can optimize resource use, minimize waste, and mitigate environmental risks. This approach enhances operational efficiency, reduces costs, and improves resilience in the face of changing market demands.

2.3 Areas of Concern in Sustainability of Marketing Strategies

- i. **Environmental Sustainability:** Environmental sustainability in marketing strategies encompasses practices that reduce carbon emissions, conserve resources, minimize waste, and support eco-friendly product development (Kotler et al., 2019). It involves adopting green marketing approaches, such as promoting energy-efficient products, using sustainable packaging, and implementing recycling initiatives. Companies embracing environmental sustainability can enhance brand reputation and meet the evolving expectations of environmentally conscious consumers.
- ii. **Social Sustainability:** Social sustainability in marketing strategies focuses on promoting social well-being and addressing social issues through responsible business practices (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). It involves fair trade, ethical sourcing, philanthropy, and community engagement. Socially sustainable marketing strategies contribute to positive societal impact, strengthen stakeholder relationships, and foster brand loyalty.
- iii. **Economic Sustainability:** Economic sustainability in marketing strategies emphasizes long-term profitability and economic viability while considering the impacts on various stakeholders (Belz & Peattie, 2012). It involves responsible financial management, ethical pricing, and creating shared value for both the company and society. By aligning marketing strategies with economic sustainability, companies can achieve sustainable growth and maintain stakeholder trust.

2.4 Sustainable Marketing Strategies

- i. **Green Marketing:** This involves promoting and positioning products or services as environmentally friendly, emphasizing their sustainable features, materials, or production processes. It focuses on meeting consumer demand for environmentally conscious products and fostering environmental stewardship (Polonsky, Carlson & Fry, 2018).

- ii. **Cause-Related Marketing:** This refers to partnerships between businesses and nonprofit organizations to support social or environmental causes. This strategy involves aligning marketing efforts with a specific cause, raising awareness, and contributing a portion of sales or profits to support the cause (Kotler & Keller, 2016).
- iii. **Ethical Marketing:** Ethical marketing focuses on conducting business and marketing activities in an ethical and socially responsible manner. It involves adhering to ethical standards, promoting fair trade practices, and ensuring transparency and honesty in marketing communications (Crane & Matten, 2016).
- iv. **Sustainable Product Design and Innovation:** This involves developing products or services that minimize environmental impacts throughout their life cycle, from sourcing materials to disposal. This strategy emphasizes resource efficiency, recyclability, and the use of renewable materials (Charter et al., 2002).
- v. **Stakeholder Engagement and Communication:** This involves actively involving and communicating with various stakeholders, such as customers, employees, communities, and suppliers, regarding sustainability initiatives and practices. It fosters transparency, builds trust, and allows for feedback and collaboration (Maignan et al., 2005).

These sustainable marketing strategies help organizations integrate sustainability principles into their marketing practices, align with consumer preferences, and contribute to environmental and social well-being.

2.5 Benefits of Sustainable Marketing Strategies

The adoption of sustainable marketing strategies offers several benefits. Firstly, it allows companies to differentiate themselves from competitors and attract environmentally and socially conscious consumers (Lucas et al., 2020). Secondly, sustainability-driven innovation can lead to the development of new products, services, and business models that meet evolving market demands (Wittman, Johnson-Chappell, Abson, Kerr, Blesh, Hanspach, Perfecto & Fischer 2017). Thirdly, by managing risks and improving operational efficiency, companies can achieve cost savings and long-term financial stability (Kotler et al., 2019).

2.6 Dimension of the Network marketing sustainability model

There are several dimensions of network marketing sustainability model. These dimensions are discussed as follows;-

2.6.1 Convergence

The first dimension of the Network marketing's sustainability model is convergence, which is a prerequisite for connection formation. Relationship marketing aims to create profitable, mutually satisfying long-term relationships at multiple levels - economic, social, and technical (Kotler and Keller, 2006). It is predicated on the idea that B2B relationships arise from "subjective cost-benefit analyses that attempt to maximize benefits and minimize costs" (Palmatier, 2008). Researchers such as Morgan and Hunt (1994) have emphasized since the mid-1990s that a company's ability to stay ahead of the competition is largely based on the connections it has built and maintained with its suppliers.

2.6.2 Commonality

Since marketing is context-driven, commonality positions itself as a deciding factor for comparable or subsidiary parties to engage and pursue mutual interests. As a result, the development of true partnerships is heavily reliant on context variables. According to Festing and Maletzky (2011), returning to the same locations is a sign of shared interests and upholds the principles of understanding across cultural boundaries. Commonality includes the significance of psychological and geographic proximity in relationship occurrence as a well-managed relationship should minimize risk and ambiguity. Talking about the problems here. Khojastehpour and Jones (2014) emphasized the significance of overcoming the mental gap, a notion that covers multiple differences (language, culture, education, business principles and practices, country development, etc.), in the context of company pre-internationalization. Although the impact of mental distance on the internationalization process is often indirect, it nonetheless hinders the development of relationships and necessitates contextual learning as well as the reification of trust (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009).

2.6.3 Compatibility

Since it is well known that the biggest obstacle to forming international partnerships and collaborations is to modify values, manners, and points of view following economic interests and to locate resources for compatibility, concessions are necessary to achieve compatibility, particularly in the early stages of relationship building (Caliguri and Tarique, 2012; Hohenthal et al., 2014). Furthermore, the parties would be able to reduce the mental barrier between them by fostering compatibility and regular mutual exposure, laying the groundwork for a fruitful economic partnership (Rodriguez and Wilson, 2002). Accordingly, the main goal of communication must be to overcome any obstacles that may arise between partners due to cultural differences in politics, social norms and values, or even religion (Khojastehpour and Johns, 2014; Samaha et al., 2014). and the focus should be on creating regular encounters, taking the partner's interests into account, and abstaining from opportunistic activities (Barnes et al., 2010).

2.6.4 Credibility

As social exchanges take place and commitment and trust are built via each pleasant contact and shared experience, credibility is established (Andrei and Zait, 2014; Catulli et al., 2006; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Nijssen and van Herk, 2009; Samaha et al., 2014). The credibility factor here embodies some important ideas, some of which have already been discussed coherently. For example, Khojastehpour and Johns (2014) go into detail on loyalty, trust, and keeping commitments. The foundation of the partnership's sustainability is communication, which acts as a powerful catalyst for commitment, trust, and experience as well as satisfaction. Similarly, Shaladi (2012) states that commitment, trust, customer orientation/empathy, experience/satisfaction, and communication are likely to be the cornerstones of durable partnerships in global business situations. According to the author, commitment is "the strongest predictor of voluntary decisions to

remain in a relationship" (Shaladi, 2012), which demonstrates the critical role that commitment plays in the emergence of long-term commercial partnerships.

2.6.5 Connectivity

The model's fifth component, connectedness, emphasizes the value of maintaining constant communication with the most significant partners and solidifying connections inside a network structure. The strategy is based on the claim made by Gummesson (2008) that "relationship marketing is interaction in networks of relationships" as well as the findings of the IMP group, which show that dyadic relationships in a network context are the foundation of successful business evolution and consolidation (Brodie et al., 2008; Ford, 2003; Johanson and Vahlne, 2009). D'Andrea et al. (2010) operationalized the idea of "social networks" by describing them as consisting of nodes (actors) and ties (connections) with varying levels of interdependency and influence, while Scott (2000) noted that each actor's position and ties may determine its importance and function. As its players simultaneously build intra- and inter-organizational ties within a collaborative macroenvironment, the network transcends the bounds of the organization (Apetrei et al., 2015; Dumitrescu et al., 2015; Nowicka et al., 2012).

2.7 Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were established in 2015 as a wide-range set of 17 goals, and 169 targets on a social, economic and environmental nature, agreed at the United Nations General Assembly, which reveals common objectives with different expectations and actors towards a sustainable pathway, including countries and governments, businesses and society to make efforts into a new direction, which the business sector has also an important role (United Nations, 2015; Scheyvens, Banks, & Hughes 2016; Chang, Zuo, Zhao, Zillante, Gan & Soebarto, 2017; Jones, Comfort & Hililier 2018). They are, no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry; innovation and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace, justice, and strong institutions; and partnerships for the goals (en.m.wikipedia.org). The SDGs recognize the crucial role of companies through corporate sustainability (CS) marketing strategies aligned with the SDGs' focus on creating value while addressing these global challenges. By incorporating the SDGs into marketing strategies, organizations can contribute to broader sustainability objectives and demonstrate their commitment to global well-being. The SDGs offer a roadmap for companies to engage with stakeholders, to create new sustainable strategies and innovations.

2.8 Challenges to Sustainability

A key concern is the high dropout rate among distributors. Studies by Vandenheuvel (2023) and the FTC (2022) highlight that a significant portion of participants see minimal success. This can be attributed to factors like unrealistic income expectations, saturation in certain markets, and a lack of essential business skills among distributors. Furthermore, the FTC emphasizes the potential for deceptive practices within the network

marketing model, where the focus shifts from product sales to recruitment, creating an unsustainable pyramid structure. This not only harms consumer trust but also discourages genuine product sales and long-term business growth.

2.9 Building a Sustainable Future

There are steps network marketing companies and participants can take to promote a more sustainable model:

- i. **Focus on Product Value and Customer Satisfaction:** Research by the Direct Selling Association (DSA) (2023) suggests that prioritizing high-quality products and customer satisfaction can lead to repeat business and a more sustainable customer base.
- ii. **Transparency and Education:** Vandenhoevel (2023) emphasizes the importance of transparency regarding income potential and business realities. Companies should provide adequate training and support to equip distributors with the necessary skills for success.

3.0 Theoretical Review

The sustainability of marketing strategies has emerged as a pressing contemporary issue due to the complex interplay between environmental, social, and economic factors. This theoretical review aims to explore the conceptual underpinnings and theoretical frameworks surrounding the sustainability of marketing strategies as a contemporary concern.

3.1 Triple Bottom Line Theory

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) theory provides a foundational framework for understanding sustainability in marketing strategies. Coined by Elkington (1997), the TBL theory posits that businesses should consider three dimensions of performance: environmental, social, and economic. Mohr and Webb (2005) discuss the positive impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, including environmental and social practices, on consumer attitudes and behaviour. They emphasize that integrating sustainability into marketing strategies can enhance brand image and consumer perceptions. Porter and Kramer (2006) discussed the concept of shared value, which involves aligning social and environmental goals with business strategies. They argue that businesses can achieve both competitive advantage and social benefits by integrating sustainability into their marketing strategies. TBL theory emphasizes the need for businesses to balance their activities to achieve long-term sustainable development. In the context of marketing strategies, the TBL theory suggests that organizations should integrate environmental and social considerations into their decision-making processes to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

3.2 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory provides a valuable perspective on sustainability in marketing strategies by emphasizing the importance of considering the interests and expectations of various stakeholders. According to Freeman (1984), stakeholders include not only shareholders but also employees, customers, communities, and the environment. Sustainable marketing strategies should strive to meet the needs and expectations of these

stakeholders while minimizing negative impacts. Hartmann and Slapnicar (2020) explored the linkages between stakeholder theory and various sustainability practices, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainable supply chain management, and stakeholder engagement. It highlights the role of stakeholder theory in driving sustainable business practices, fostering innovation, and enhancing organizational resilience. By engaging stakeholders in the marketing process, organizations can build mutually beneficial relationships and enhance long-term sustainability.

3.3 Corporate Social Responsibility

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) plays a vital role in understanding the sustainability of marketing strategies. CSR suggests that businesses have a responsibility to contribute to society beyond their economic objectives. It is a self-regulating business model that helps a company be socially accountable to itself, its stakeholders, and the public (Shaikh, Shetty, Poddar & Agarwal 2022). It addresses several issues like human rights, education, health, and safety, while also covering corporate governance, working conditions, environmental sustainability, and more (Shaikh et al., 2022). It is based on the idea that market offerings must not only be profit-driven but must also reinforce social and ethical values for the benefit of citizens (Adegbola, 2014). Sustainable marketing strategies incorporate CSR principles by considering the impact of marketing activities on the environment, society, and various stakeholders (Kotler & Lee, 2005). According to Adegbola (2014), CSR can be said to be doing business in a responsible fashion that delivers value not only to the organization but also to its stakeholders and the community within which it operates. McWilliams and Siegel (2017) argue that strategic CSR initiatives can lead to the creation and capture of value for firms. They propose that CSR activities can generate tangible and intangible resources that contribute to competitive advantage.

4.0 Methodology

This review is based on a systematic analysis of existing literature on the sustainability of network marketing models. The literature was sourced from academic journals, books, and reputable online databases, with a focus on studies that address sustainability in marketing strategies, network marketing models, and the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) theory. The review also incorporates insights from corporate social responsibility (CSR) and stakeholder theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the sustainability of KEDI's network marketing model.

5.0 Findings

The sustainability of KEDI's network marketing model is influenced by several key factors:

- 1. Dimensions of Sustainability:** The study identifies the Dimension of the Network marketing's sustainability model which includes; Convergence and commonality. Compatibility, Credibility and Connectivity.

2. **Benefits of Sustainability Marketing:** The study highlights the Benefits of sustainability marketing strategies such as; allowing the companies to differentiate themselves from competitors and attract environmentally and socially conscious consumers.
3. **Environmental Sustainability:** KEDI must integrate green marketing practices, such as promoting environmentally friendly products and sustainable packaging, to enhance its brand reputation and meet consumer expectations (Kotler et al., 2019).
4. **Social Sustainability:** The model's success depends on its ability to foster social responsibility through ethical marketing practices, fair trade, and community engagement (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). By prioritizing social well-being, KEDI can build stronger relationships with its stakeholders and enhance its brand loyalty.
5. **Economic Sustainability:** KEDI's long-term viability requires a focus on economic sustainability, which includes responsible financial management, ethical pricing, and creating shared value for both the company and society (Belz & Peattie, 2012). The model's success is also dependent on its ability to maintain distributor retention and minimize dropout rates.
6. **Challenges:** The review identifies challenges such as high distributor dropout rates, potential deceptive practices, and market saturation as significant barriers to the sustainability of KEDI's network marketing model (Vandenheuevel, 2023; FTC, 2022). Addressing these challenges is crucial for the model's long-term success.

6.0 Conclusion

The sustainability of KEDI's network marketing model is a multifaceted issue that requires a holistic approach to address environmental, social, and economic dimensions. While the model offers unique opportunities for entrepreneurship and community building, it also faces significant challenges that must be addressed to ensure long-term success. By integrating sustainable marketing strategies, such as green marketing, ethical practices, and CSR initiatives, KEDI can enhance its sustainability and maintain a competitive edge in the market.

7.0 Recommendations

1. **A Framework:** A Framework is recommended that encompasses the factors influencing the sustainability of KEDI'S network marketing. By prioritizing ethical practices, distributor development, market understanding and digital marketing, KEDI can foster sustainable and successful network marketing operations.
2. **Focus on Product Quality and Customer Satisfaction:** KEDI should emphasize the development of high-quality products that meet consumer needs and expectations. By focusing on customer satisfaction, the company can build a loyal customer base and reduce the reliance on rapid recruitment.
3. **Enhance Transparency and Education:** KEDI should provide transparent information about income potential and business realities to its distributors. Adequate training and support should be offered to equip distributors with the necessary skills for success, thereby reducing dropout rates.

4. **Adopt Ethical Marketing Practices:** KEDI should promote ethical marketing practices, such as honest advertising and responsible social media usage, to rebuild consumer trust and create a more sustainable marketing environment.
5. **Incorporate Sustainability into Corporate Strategy:** KEDI should integrate sustainability into its overall corporate strategy, aligning its marketing efforts with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This approach will not only enhance the company's brand reputation but also contribute to global sustainability efforts.

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