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Multi-level marketing strategies as a mechanism to achieve competitive superiority (exploratory research of the opinions of a sample of workers in the Al-Wareth factory for the production of refrigeration)

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Abstract. Through this research, the researchers sought to shed light on the concept of multi-level marketing, as it is an important and broad concept that applies to the approach of the factory in question, and to try to find out ways to follow its strategies in order to reach competitive superiority after shedding light on the latter. The researchers also endeavored to find out the extent of the impact of marketing strategies. Multi-level in achieving competitive superiority, as is the case to know the type of correlation between them. In order to achieve this, Al-Warith Factory for producing cooling devices was chosen as a field in order to test the research hypotheses through a questionnaire distributed to a sample of (100) workers in the factory. Through their research, the researchers reached many conclusions, the most important of which is (all multiple regression models were significant, which means that all strategies can be used to achieve competitive superiority, even to varying degrees) and among the most important recommendations that came out of the research (management's attention and guidance to workers in order to consolidate the idea of multi-level marketing And adopting it as a main means of achieving competitive superiority .

Keywords. multi-level marketing, competitive superiority, Warith factory for the production of cooling devices

Introduction

The openness that the world is witnessing and the ease of access for customers to what they need has made organizations today face a major challenge, which is how to attract customers' attention to their products and gain their loyalty to them. This is what made them intensify their marketing efforts and follow new marketing strategies, perhaps the most prominent of which are multi-level marketing strategies in order to Attracting customers through sales forces that work in exchange for receiving commissions for selling products.

After discussing the topic of multi-level marketing and presenting its strategies, the researchers decided to highlight it as an important fundamental factor through which the organization achieves its competitive superiority over its counterparts.

The first topic/methodological framework for the research

First: The research problem:

Researchers have endeavored to address the issue of multi-level marketing strategies in a way to highlight its importance to the organization in order to achieve the competitive superiority it aspires to achieve. In light of this, the research problem can be formulated in the following form (Do multi-level marketing strategies play an essential role in achieving competitive superiority for the Al-Warith factory for the production of cooling devices?).

Second: Research hypothesis

The research is based on a main hypothesis (the existence of a correlation and impact between multi-level marketing strategies and competitive superiority in its dimensions), from which the two hypotheses of impact and correlation branch out:

- 1- There is a significant effect of multi-level marketing strategies on competitive advantage.
- 2- There is a significant correlation between multi-level marketing strategies and competitive superiority.

Third: Research hypothesis

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- 2- There is a significant correlation between multi-level marketing strategies and competitive superiority.

Fourth: The importance of research:

This research is of very great importance because it deals with an important topic for organizations in our time, because organizations strive to follow various methods to market their goods according to their available capabilities in order to achieve competitive superiority, and from here the research began, highlighting the importance of multi-level marketing strategies as an administrative approach concerned with It involves managing contemporary organizations in order to achieve the required competitive superiority.

Fifth: Research objectives:

Through the research, the researchers sought to achieve a set of goals, the most important of which are:

- 1 -Highlighting the concept of both multi-level marketing strategies and competitive superiority.
- 2 -Determine the extent to which multi-level marketing strategies are followed by the management of the Al-Warith factory for the production of electrical appliances.
- 3 -Understanding the level of competitive superiority that the management of the Al-Warith Factory for the production of electrical appliances seeks to achieve.
- 4 -Testing the nature of the relationship and impact between multi-level marketing strategies and competitive superiority in Al-Warith Electrical Appliances Production Factory.

Sixth : Limits of research:

The limits of the research included:

- Objective boundaries: multi-level marketing strategies and competitive superiority.
- Spatial boundaries: In order to test the research hypotheses, Al-Warith Factory for producing electrical appliances in Karbala Governorate was chosen as a research community.
- Time limits: The time limits of the research were the period extending between the date of distribution of the questionnaire form, which was from 9/18/2023 to 9/28/2023.

Seventh: Population and research sample:

In order to know the impact of multi-level marketing strategies in creating competitive superiority for Al-Warith Factory for the Production of Electrical Appliances, this research was conducted in an applied form by distributing 100 questionnaires to a sample of workers at Al-Warith Factory for the Production of Electrical Appliances using a random sampling method, and it was obtained in a format suitable for statistical analysis.

The second section

Theoretical framework for the research

First: multi-level marketing

1- The concept of multi-level marketing:

In light of the era of globalization, openness, and rapid electronic and technological development, organizations today seek to build long-term profitable relationships with their customers, and they can achieve this by resorting to direct sales, specifically multi-level marketing (Sparks at el, 2006: 170). Where the organization intends to provide products and services directly to its customers through individual contact points in the place where the customer is located (home, workplace,..., etc.) by following a special marketing structure for each partner through which he is rewarded according to his followed marketing plan (Peterson ,2007:32). Marketing can be classified into five basic categories for product distribution: (Muncy, 2004: 13).

•**Retail:** This is the popular and approved approach to marketing through the organization's retail branches, such as clothing and shoe production companies that have several retail branches.

•**Direct selling:** In this type, the sale of goods is limited to the product only because it is not possible to open retail branches or because production is limited or demand is limited to the product in a specific place. It is possible to employ a person who works in the sales department and who does not work for himself as in marketing. Multi-level, but works for the benefit of the productive organization.

•**Multi-level marketing:** This type of marketing shows the way products reach customers through an intermediary person who adopts his own individual marketing structure that may achieve profit or loss without harming the organization.

•**Electronic sales:** where there are no retail sales branches in which the product is received in exchange for its value, where the consumer reaches the product by watching the advertisement on social media or television and communicating with the producing organization electronically, either through e-mail or modern electronic means of communication.

•**Pyramid selling:** It is the illegal form of selling and is often confused with multi-level marketing. The difference that makes pyramid marketing illegal and multi-level marketing legal is the inability to market a product if no actual sales are achieved for it, where in multi-level marketing all The level (distributor) is responsible for his profits, both positive and

negative. In pyramid marketing, an agreement is made for the producer to receive the price of the goods along with the profits, without taking into account the failure of marketing the product and thus harming all levels of the pyramid except the head of the pyramid (the producer).

(Muncy ,2004:13) aimed to adopt this division to clarify the difference between multi-level marketing, pyramid marketing, and direct selling.

Some concepts of multi-level marketing can be discussed in the following table:

Table (1): The concept of multi-level marketing

sequence	Source	Concept
1	Albaum & Peterson , 2011:345	The sale and consumption of the organization's products through sales representatives who adopt multi-level selling structures that operate
2	Hubble , 2022 :6	The art of selling products through independent distributors who rely on personal relationships and a communications system to market their products
3	Gonzales,2009:43	It is a method of marketing the product without the need to incur huge marketing costs or transfer the ownership rights to the product to another person
4	Taylor, 2011 :5	It is a system for distributing products through several independent sales forces who receive commissions through their sale of products, as well as through the recruitment of other sales forces organized by the organization.
5	TRajanovska, 2013 : 22	It is a marketing system based on direct and retail sales using multi-level structures, where they work as independent sales representatives.

Among the advantages of multi-level marketing are: (Marimin, at el., 2016: 111)

- 1.The chances of success are equal for everyone.
2. Profits are divided among the distributors according to the company’s revenues from its products and services.
- 3.Each member has an independent marketing entity.
4. Member registration fees are very cheap.
5. The company’s profits are represented by what all members earn from the marketing operations they carry out.
- 6.Distributors are not allowed to store and keep the goods with them
7. The returns that customers receive are in a non-cash form, represented by interests and benefits for the company.

Second: Multi-level marketing strategies:(Keep at el., 2013:190)(Kiki ,2017:32).

1 -*Single level marketing strategy*: According to this strategy, the process of moving the members of the multi-level marketing structure horizontally, as the organization works to encourage the members and try to raise them to the highest levels. The organization also avoids expanding vertically for fear of risk, but rather deliberately To achieve profits through one person who delivers its products to the largest number of consumers.

2 -*Two-level marketing strategy*: According to this strategy, parallelism is achieved by allowing the member to add equal numbers of marketers on the right and left and at one level, and commitment to a specific depth is not required, unlike (one-level strategy), and if the organization follows this The strategy will achieve high profit rates, but it requires great effort in order to achieve a balance between the two parties.

3 -*Matrix marketing strategy*: This strategy is based on achieving a balance between width and depth through the formula (depth x width), where members are allowed to include a limited number horizontally (width), for example 4 members horizontally and 5 levels in depth, so the number of members for the organization In such a case (6 x 5 = 30), despite the expansion of the organization’s activity, its profit rate will be low.

4 -*Separate marketing strategy*: When the organization follows this strategy, when it reaches a point of horizontal and vertical expansion, the sales force center (members) is separated from the organization in terms of distributing wages to the members working within the center, where it is sufficient to give a specific wage to an official. Sales Force Center (members) only.

5- *Mixed marketing strategy*: where the organization intends to use all or some of the above strategies according to its economic conditions and goals.

Second: Competitive superiority:

1- The concept of competitive superiority

Technological changes, the development of information systems, and the emergence of multiple means of communication have made organizations compete to excel over their counterparts, as they must create products that achieve lasting satisfaction for their customers, which prompted them to adopt various strategies to achieve competitive superiority over their counterparts in the industrial sector (Mezher & Oleiwi, 2023:318). In order to achieve the desired competitive superiority, the organization needs to study its internal and external situation in order to know its strengths to enhance and its weaknesses to address, as well as to know the opportunities and try to exploit them and identify the threats that it may face and thus avoid them or prepare to confront them (Sheremata at el., 2010: 34). and some concepts of competitive superiority can be presented in Table No. (2).

Table (2): The concept of competitive superiority/preparation of female researchers based on the aforementioned literature

sequence	Source	Concept
1	Hosseini , et al., 2018 :5	The value that the organization possesses and attracts customers to it through it

2	Potjaruwit,2018:111	The organization's ability to produce a product that is distinct from what is available in the market at a lower cost.
3	Popa , et a., 2011: 63	The organization's ambition is to develop its competitive ability to confront competitors.
4	Vahdati, et al., 2018:9	The organization focuses on success factors in the industrial sector and monitors opportunities that lead it to achieve competitive advantages.
5	Mathur,2015:68	The organization's superior administrative performance compared to other organizations.

We can summarize the most important ways through which the organization achieves competitive superiority as follows: (Mutsune, 2006: 492).

- The organization's distinction is based on the products provided.
- The method of performing the organization’s activities is considered a strong competitive factor.
- Excellence is represented by drawing a unique image of the organization among its customers.
- Leadership effectiveness in facing internal and external challenges.

In this context, it is possible to highlight the most important features of competitive superiority: (Bridson, & Evans, 2004:406).

- Competitive superiority is achieved in a relative and not absolute manner.
- Competitive superiority gives the organization an advantage over its competitors.
- Creating value for the organization that comes from within.
- Competitive superiority is reflected in the organization’s performance and the efficiency of the products it provides.
- Competitive superiority creates awareness and awareness among customers about the organization and its products.
- Focusing on excellence and developing methods for achieving it can make it long-term.

2- Dimensions of competitive superiority:

Researchers differed in defining dimensions of competitive superiority. Through what Table 3 displays, it is possible to know the extent of disagreement and agreement on these dimensions by some researchers.

Table No. (3): Dimensions of competitive superiority / number of female researchers

Sequence	Researcher	Dimensions
1	Krajewski et al , 2013:32	Flexibility, creativity, speed, delivery, time, cost.
2	Day & Wensley , 2017 : 7	Creativity, cost, customer value, quality.
3	Torres , 2018 : 462	Competitiveness, customer identification, customer evaluation, customer relationship management, cost.

4	Piriyakul & Piriyakul, 2021: 9	Customer value, customer relationship management, customer knowledge, competition.
5	Bag , et al . ,2021:182	Cost, quality, delivery, flexibility, creativity.
6	Wahyuningsih , et al ., 2022 : 6	Cost, quality, flexibility, customer retention, creativity.

It is clear from the table above that the dimensions of competitive superiority agreed upon by most researchers are (cost, quality, flexibility, creativity). In this research, we will adopt the dimensions most agreed upon among researchers, as they are most consistent with the research requirements. The following is an illustrative explanation of each dimension:

1 -Cost: It is considered the most important competitive element for the organization, as through it organizations seek to reduce their prices in order to compete in the industrial sector, and this depends on the organization’s market share in the field of industry, as the broader the market share makes the organization able to bear more production costs, as well In the context of reducing costs, the organization must strive to search for the best resources and suppliers at the lowest wages, as well as pay attention to packaging and export materials in order for the product to reach the customer with high quality and at the lowest cost.

2 -The quality: It means designing products that perform the task for which they are designed very well. This requires the organization to add characteristics and features to its products to enhance their value to its customers to reach the highest possible value compared to what competitors offer.

3 -Flexibility: It has several interpretations, including that it is the organization’s ability to offer a variety of products at the same time, or its ability to shift from one production sector to another, and it can be described as the organization’s ability to change its direction towards a group of customers in terms of needs or age group.

4- Creativity: It requires the organization to add characteristics and features to its products that make them innovative in the industrial sector, and customers always look forward to obtaining a product with unique characteristics through its design combined with the latest technology, or its trademark, in addition to unique services that the customer receives when he purchases the product. Creativity also takes into account the final cost of the product, and this is reflected in providing protection for the organization and customers by creating loyalty to the brand that makes the organization safe from the fluctuations that occur in the industrial sector and thus achieving continuous profits.

The third section /the practical aspect

1- Reliability test

The researcher sought to test the reliability of the research scale, and used the Cronbach alpha test, where the test value for the variable of multi-level marketing strategies (0.75), and the competitive superiority variable (0.76), both of which are within the acceptable ratio in social research.

2- Descriptive statistics and correlation relationship

Table (4) shows the descriptive statistics of the study variables and the correlation relationship

Table(4)

	Mean	Sd.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
S.L.M.S	4.09	0.66	1								
T.L.M.S	4.05	0.64	.40**	1							
Ma .M.S	3.98	0.74	.30**	.26*	1						
S.M.S	3.95	0.71	.20	.07	.46**	1					
Mi.M.S	3.71	0.81	.36**	.17	.42**	.52**	1				
Co.	3.96	0.48	.31**	.14	.56**	.71**	.74**	1			
Qu.	3.43	0.83	.24*	.12	.53**	.51**	.64**	.61**	1		
Fle.	3.48	0.76	.30**	.13	.20	.44**	.49**	.44**	.52**	1	
Cre.	3.70	0.60	.31**	.25*	.42**	.32**	.53**	.47**	.54**	.43**	1

**Significant at 01.

*Significant at .05

The above table shows the following:

- 1- Single level marketing strategy achieved mean of (4.09) with a standard deviation of (0.66). Which means that this strategy is adopted in the factory study population. The consistency of the sample answers is observed by the low standard deviation value.
- 2- Two-level marketing strategy mean was (4.05) with a standard deviation (0.64), means well knowledge by the study community of the importance of this marketing strategy, and this realization was reinforced by a large agreement between the answers of the sample.
- 3- Matrix marketing strategy achieved mean (3.98) with a standard deviation of (0.74), which indicates the adoption of the mentioned strategy by the study population and high agreement through the decrease in the value of the standard deviation.
- 4- The mean of separate marketing strategy was (3.95) with a standard deviation (0.71), which indicates the adoption of the strategy in the study population, and the value of the small standard deviation indicates the strength of the compatibility of the answers of the study population.
- 5- Mixed marketing strategy mean was (3.71) with a standard deviation (0.81) It is noted that the adoption of this strategy was the least among other strategies, and this means that the aforementioned factory seeks to adopt one marketing strategy and not more than one strategy.
- 6- The factory seeks to reduce the total costs, this was shown by the high value of the mean (3.93) with a standard deviation (0.48), which indicates the strength of adopting this strategy to achieve competitive superiority.
- 7- The factory adopts a quality strategy, but to a lesser degree than the reduce cost strategy, and this is evident through a mean (3.43) with a standard deviation (0.83).
- 8- The flexibility strategy with precedence is more important than the quality strategy by mean (3.48) with a standard deviation (0.76). Which indicates that the factory strives for high flexibility.
- 9- The creativity strategy is one of the important strategies to achieve competitive superiority, as it came in second order in terms of its adoption by the factory through a mean (3.70) with a standard deviation (0.60).

3- Test the hypotheses of the study

The test the hypotheses of the study was as follows:

1- First hypothesis

(H0) There is no significant correlation between multi-level marketing strategies and competitive priorities.

(H1) There is a significant correlation between multi-level marketing strategies and competitive priorities.

The values of correlation given in Table (4) above that test the first hypothesis show the following:

1-1: All correlations between the Single level marketing strategy and the competitive superiority factors were significant at the level of .01 or .05 and this indicates the possibility of benefiting from this strategy to enhance factory competitive superiority.

2-1: The correlation between the Two-level marketing strategy and the factors of competitive superiority were not significant, except for the relationship with creativity. This means that this strategy is useful to promote creativity in the factory.

3-1: The correlation relations between Matrix marketing strategy and competitive superiority factors were significant except for the relationship with flexibility. This means that this strategy can be used to enhance most of the factors of competitive superiority.

4-1: The correlation between the separate marketing strategy and the competitive superiority factors were significant at the .01 level, which means that this strategy can contribute to enhancing all the competitive superiority factors available at the said factory.

5-1: All correlations between Mixed marketing strategy and competitive superiority factors were significant at the level of .01, which reflects the importance of this strategy in developing competitive superiority in the factory.

2- Second hypothesis

The researcher seeks to test the second hypothesis

(H0) Multi-level marketing strategies do not affect competitive edge

(H1) Multi-level marketing strategies affect competitive edge

The researcher used multiple regression to test the above hypothesis . Table (5) shows the impact of multi-level marketing strategies on competitive superiority factors

Table(5)

	Co.		Qu.		Fle.		Cre.	
	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t
S.L.M.S.S	.04	.48	-.05	-.59	.11	1.31	.07	.71
T.L.M.S	-.02	-.28	-.03	-.34	.03	.37	.11	1.04
Ma .M.S	.22**	2.86	.29**	3.29	-.12	-1.46	.21*	2.13
S.M.S	.47**	5.51	.13	1.39	.22*	2.55	.02	.188
Mi.M.S	.41**	5.48	.50**	6.07	.31**	3.90	.29**	3.07
F	40.02**		22.90**		10.02**		8.11	
Constant	-.93		.32		1.54		1.12	

The above table shows the following:

1- Both Matrix marketing strategy by (.22) and Mixed marketing strategy by (.41) affect the reduction of costs for the factory population of the study, this effect is significant at the level of 0.01. This means that the factory must pay attention to these two strategies if

factory wishes to reduce the total costs and achieve competitive superiority. Note that the multiple regression model was significant overall through the significant value of F of 40.02.

2- Both Matrix marketing strategy by (.29) and Mixed marketing strategy by(.50) affect the enhancement of the quality of factory products, noting that this effect is significant at the level of 0.01. This means that these two strategies can be used for the purpose of enhancing the quality of factory products and increasing competitive superiority. The multiple regression model was significant overall through the significant F value of 22.90.

3- Both separate marketing strategy by (.22) and Mixed marketing strategy by (.31) affect the enhancement of the flexibility of the factory, knowing that it is a significant effect at the level of 0.01. This means that these two strategies can be used for the purpose of enhancing factory flexibility and increasing competitive superiority. The multiple regression model was significant overall through the significant F value of 10.02.

4- Both Matrix marketing strategy by(.21) and Mixed marketing strategy by(.29) affect the creativity in the study population, which is a significant effect at the level of 0.01. This means that these two strategies can be used for the purpose of introducing new products and increasing competitive superiority. The multiple regression model was significant overall through the significance of the F value of 8.11.

The fourth section: conclusions and recommendations

- **Conclusions**

1- The existence of a clear perception among the employees in the factory for the nature of multi-level marketing and its importance in achieving competitive superiority.

2- The factory's adoption the dimensions of competitive superiority and to varying degrees, where it is noted that the factory is interested in competing on the basis of the lowest cost, then flexibility to achieve competitive superiority, and this is a result of the nature of great competition in the Iraqi market.

3- Positive correlations showed that multi-level marketing strategies can contribute positively to enhancing the competitive superiority of the study population.

4- Influence relationships have shown that the two most important strategies that can contribute to enhancing competitive superiority are Matrix marketing strategy and Mixed marketing strategy and, to a lesser extent, the Separate marketing strategy.

5- All multiple regression models were significant, which means that all strategies can be used to achieve competitive superiority, albeit to varying degrees.

6- There is a variation in the strength of the impact of multi-level marketing strategies in competitive superiority, which means that the laboratory can maneuver in using any of them to achieve its goals and according to its circumstances.

- **Recommendations**

1 -Directing the factory management's attention to adopting all dimensions of competitive superiority, taking into account the factory's capabilities.

2 -Increased focus on multi-level marketing strategies to achieve competitive superiority for the factory.

3 -Management's interest and guidance to employees in order to consolidate the idea of multi-level marketing and adopt it as a main means of achieving competitive superiority.

4- Creating a conviction among the factory workers of the importance of all multi-level marketing strategies to create competitive superiority and considering it as their work platform.

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