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The role of network marketing for the Iraqi cement company in improving entrepreneurial behavior (An exploratory study of the opinions of a sample of company leaders)

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Abstract

The research aims to shed light on the role of network marketing in improving entrepreneurial behavior in the Iraqi Cement Companies. The concept of network marketing is one of the modern management concepts that have emerged in the business world along with economic, social, and technological changes. This is because there is an urgent need for business organizations to adopt modern management practices in the present time, as the internal and external changes in the current environment require a revision of their policies and practices. The success of agencies entering the twenty-first century will depend on their ability to adopt modern managerial practices. To achieve this, the study relies on the analysis of questionnaire variables as a primary tool for data and information collection. The practical results have shown a significant positive impact of network marketing on improving entrepreneurial behavior, which is a good indicator of the influence of network marketing in enhancing entrepreneurial behavior in the company under study.

Keywords: Web marketing, entrepreneurial behavior, questionnaire

Introduction

The escalating competition resulting from technological advancement and market liberalization necessitates organizations, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, to focus on modern marketing methods, including network marketing. Network marketing relies on creativity and innovation to achieve an organization's objectives, consequently fostering growth and profitability derived from sustained capabilities and risk reduction (Caitlin *et al.*, 2019) ^[17]. According to Sadiku-Dushi *et al.* (2019), institutions should be proficient at exploring available opportunities and providing unique services to acquire new customers and retain existing ones in the face of rapid changes in customer needs and desires. These are modern marketing methods epitomized in network marketing.

In order to maintain market leadership and confront an array of challenges, small and medium-sized companies must rely on customer opinion and customer-to-customer interaction, as well as their ability to meet needs and desires. Customers can achieve this if modern methods also offer quantity services (network marketing), which reflect in achieving a competitive advantage and high levels of performance (Hamali *et al.*, 2016) ^[19].

For companies to have a high degree of responsiveness to competitive forces, an organization must possess a high degree of proactive activity in the markets. Herein lies the role of pioneering behavior, which leads workers to seek innovative methods and creative initiatives, contributing to improving the value of the internal process chain of the institution. Consequently, this improves operational performance components, reflecting on the institutional performance, which includes standards such as flexibility, efficiency, cost, product quality, and delivery effectiveness (Devaraj *et al.*, 2007) ^[22].

The study by Musa (2018) ^[9] refers to the dynamics and issues of online marketing in today's business institutions. Online marketing is a form of direct selling or selling through individuals. Direct sales reached nearly 2 million people in the United States this year in 2015, and the profit ratio or material value of sales through this group of people reached approximately \$36.12 billion, an increase of 4.8% when sales were made in 2014, and these changes are still in progress, growth, and development.

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On the other hand, a study by Awja (2017) [6] focused on understanding the role of strategic agility in its four dimensions (planning, organizing, individuals, and technology) and its impact on achieving entrepreneurial behavior among a sample of hotel managers in the city of Najaf Ashraf, Iraq. To achieve the study objectives, the researcher designed a questionnaire to collect data and relied on a research sample of 42 individuals.

Also, Bird's 2010 [23] study referred to entrepreneurial behavior, aiming to analyze entrepreneurial behavior in the field of entrepreneurship. During a phase when individual actors or team members' behavior should be a significant focus to achieve a successful start in recording and measuring entrepreneurial behavior, the study employed a descriptive-analytical method in its theoretical study.

First Chapter: Methodology

Firstly: Research Problem

Through the exploratory study, the researcher identified several inquiries as follows:

1. What is the role of network marketing in enhancing the entrepreneurial behavior of the Iraqi Cement Company?
2. To what extent is the study sample interested in network marketing?
3. Is the study sample concerned with entrepreneurial behavior?
4. What is the extent of the impact of network marketing on entrepreneurial behavior?

Secondly: Importance of Research

1. The integration of the mentioned variables has a significant impact on behavior improvement generally, especially given the existence of a type of coherence between the theoretical frameworks of all variables. This correlation and integration will inevitably lead to a better understanding or perception of entrepreneurial behavior.
2. The nature of intellectual frameworks, the dimensions of the adopted study variables, and their role in improving entrepreneurial behavior by encouraging the study sample organizations to abandon traditional concepts in managing the marketing process and adopt modern strategic approaches, through which internal and external environmental variables can be diagnosed within a broad and integrated vision.
3. The scarcity of studies and research that addressed the study variables, especially the variable of entrepreneurial behavior; as it is considered one of the topics that its features have not been completed yet, and no study has addressed the connection between the current study variables either on the local or regional level.

Thirdly: Research Objectives

The research seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Emphasizing the importance of network marketing in increasing demand through an integrated marketing policy.
2. Highlighting the importance of applying marketing concepts in the production field, which has become more essential for any country that wants to advance its productive sector.

3. Demonstrating the strong impact that network marketing now represents in improving the entrepreneurial behavior of the researched company.
4. Indicating the extent to which the Iraqi Cement Company uses network marketing in marketing its services and its effect in improving the quality of its services provided to customers.

Fourthly: Research Hypotheses

1. There is no statistically significant relationship between network marketing and entrepreneurial behavior.
2. There is no statistically significant impact of network marketing on entrepreneurial behavior.

Fifthly: Research Boundaries

1. Temporal boundaries: The process of data and information collection on the research topic was conducted over a period of no less than two months in 2022.
2. Spatial boundaries: The research was applied in the Iraqi Cement Company.
3. Human boundaries: The study was limited to the employees of the company holding the following degrees (Ph.D., Master's, Higher Diploma, Bachelor's, Diploma) considering they are the ones closest to the subject of study.

Sixthly: Research Method

This research relied on the descriptive-analytical approach which involves studying and analyzing the phenomenon to reach precise conclusions about the phenomenon and interpreting it. To achieve the research objectives, two primary sources of information were relied upon:

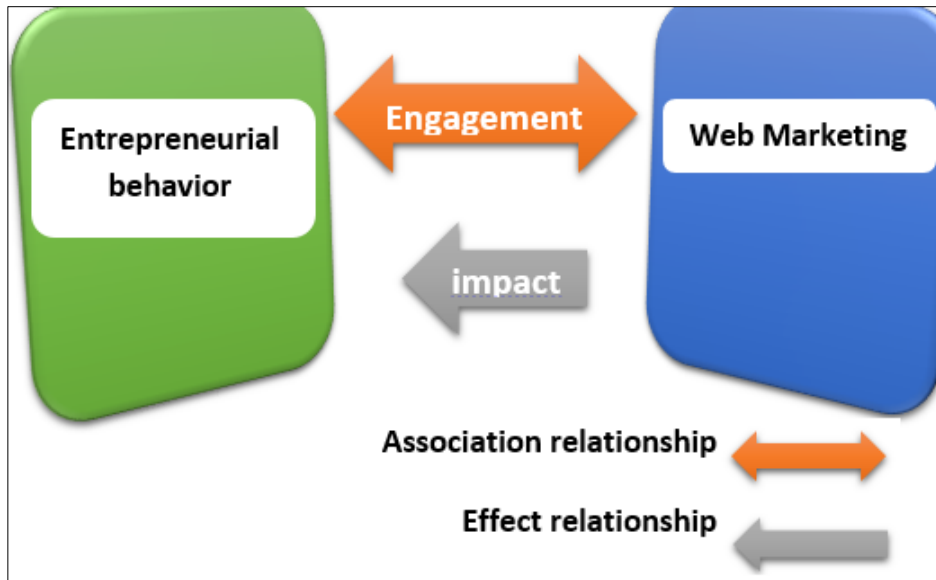
1. Secondary sources: Arabic and foreign books, journals and periodicals, specialized scientific research, articles, bulletins and local, Arab and global reports, and various internet sites.
2. Primary sources: The researcher prepared a practical field side to handle the analytical aspects and survey opinions on the research topic based on a questionnaire designed for this purpose, directed at a sample of degree holders in the Iraqi Cement Company.

Seventhly: Research Model Variables

Based on the opinions of several researchers in previous studies to review the independent variable (network marketing) and its impact on the dependent variable (entrepreneurial behavior) as shown in Figure 1.

Eighthly: Study Population and Sample

The study was limited to a sample of employees from the Iraqi Cement Company. The researchers relied on a stratified probability sample from the study population of the Iraqi Cement Company, represented by individuals holding the following qualifications (Ph.D., Master's, Advanced Diploma, Bachelor's, Diploma). These degrees are considered the closest to the study subject, and according to the company's statistics, the population size is 75 individuals. The sample size for this population is based on the global models (De Morgan). To determine the sample size for a significance level of 0.05, the highest was 0.01, where the sample size according to the model was 63 individuals, i.e., 84% of the total study population, as shown in Table 1.



Source: Prepared by the researcher

Table 1: "Determining the Study Sample Size"
 "A table for determining the sample size of a population."

C	Z	C	Z	C	Z	C	Z	C	Z
338	2800	260	800	162	280	80	100	10	10
341	3000	265	850	165	290	86	110	14	15
246	3500	269	900	169	300	92	120	19	20
351	4000	274	950	175	320	97	130	24	25
351	4500	278	1000	181	340	103	140	28	30
357	5000	285	1100	186	360	108	150	32	35
361	6000	291	1200	181	380	113	160	36	40
364	7000	297	1300	196	400	118	180	40	45
367	8000	302	1400	201	420	123	190	44	50
368	9000	306	1500	205	440	127	200	48	55
370	10000	310	1600	210	460	132	210	52	60
375	15000	313	1700	214	480	136	220	56	65
377	20000	317	1800	217	500	140	230	59	70
379	30000	320	1900	225	550	144	240	63	75
380	40000	322	2000	234	600	148	250	66	80
381	50000	327	2200	242	650	152	260	70	85
382	75000	331	2400	248	700	155	270	73	90
384	100000	335	2600	256	750	159	270	76	95

" Z " is population size Note

" c " is sample size

Ninthly: Validity and Reliability Measurement

- Validity Testing:** The researcher presented the questionnaire to a group of experts in the research field. The researcher responded to the reviewers' opinions and made the necessary changes in light of the suggestions provided, producing the final version of the questionnaire.
- Reliability Testing:** Cronbach's alpha is used to compute the reliability coefficients for survey instruments that use response sets of the Likert scale type, whether three, five, or seven. Cronbach's alpha estimates the reliability of the tool's (questionnaire) responses as rated by individuals, indicating the tool's consistency. Cronbach's alpha ranges from zero to one, with higher values suggesting that the items are measuring the same dimension. Conversely, if Cronbach's alpha is low (near 0), this suggests that some or all of the items do not correspond to the same dimension. Negative numbers are also possible. A negative number suggests some form of error in the

data. Acceptable Cronbach's alpha values are 0.60 and above, which are considered good.

Table 2: Test the stability of the research variables using Cronbach's coefficient A

No.	variants	Cronbach alpha coefficient
1	Web Marketing	0.871
2	Entrepreneurial behaviour	0.978
3	Total	0.911

From the results displayed in the table above, it is apparent that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient value for the study is high, with the overall value for the research variables at 0.911. This is greater than the acceptable ratio (0.60), signifying a high reliability value. These results affirm the validity and reliability of the study questionnaire and its suitability for application to the main study sample, analysis of the results, and answering the study's questions and testing its hypotheses.

**Second Section
Theoretical Review**

Firstly: The Concept of Web Marketing: Marketing is defined as the management activity that oversees the flow of goods or services to customers or consumers to achieve social and economic objectives (Hassan, 2001: 13) [12]. The most comprehensive and best definition of marketing is one that sees it as an administrative activity that complements a range of managerial activities such as production, design, purchasing, and financing, aimed at delivering the right product at the right time to consumers in terms of quantity and quality to achieve the larger organizational goals of satisfying its current and future customers, earning their satisfaction, and achieving profitability. The American Marketing Association, in 1960, articulated it as a sequence of activities or processes that transport goods or services from producers to consumers or end parties. This definition was criticized extensively until the association changed it to a new formal description in 1985, stating it as a set of actions encompassing planning, execution, creation, pricing, promotion, and distribution, in response to the needs of consumers, pricing and distribution of ideas, goods or services. The customer completes the current sales process

between them and the organization to achieve the organization's objectives (Filali, 2008: 16-17) ^[7]. Thus, marketing can be said to be a strategic, organized process related to the goods, services, customers or consumers' operations.

Regarding indirect marketing, it is a process of delivering goods or services from the producer to the consumer or client through a third party that represents the sales (Hrouz, 2013: 16) ^[2].

Network marketing is an innovative approach in the science and art of marketing, which is based on forming a customer network through which the producer benefits from another customer network, where the network is used to promote and sell their products in exchange for financial commissions. This type of marketing is often represented by a tree model (Musa, 2018: 147) ^[9].

Therefore, network marketing is defined as "a marketing program in which the company sells products or goods or services to new customers or marketers according to the sequential vision of marketing, and therefore provides commissions and financial incentives to new marketers" (Ashkar, 2006: 4) ^[1].

Also known as a sales channel based on the compensation system for its distributors or network members, compensation comes in two forms (Matthews, Manalel, and Zakaria, 2007: 160) ^[11].

First Form: Individual sales, i.e., as a distributor, the person receives compensation from his sale of the good or product to customers who are not members of the network.

Second Form: He receives compensation through the sale and purchase movements made by a group of people affiliated with him, who act as network members, referred to as the downlines or the bottom lines in the network. Accordingly, network marketing is a "marketing plan that heavily and exclusively relies on personal selling and compensating sales agents when purchasing or selling products or finding new agents to purchase and sell the product or service." Some believe that network marketing is a form of direct marketing based on people who are not employees, and marketing grows via the social networks of these individuals. (Oksanen, 1999: 2) ^[13].

There exist numerous terminologies within the realm of network marketing. Some perceive network marketing as multi-level marketing, tiered marketing, pyramid marketing, or hierarchical sequence marketing, or as a marketing strategy for potential commissions. The definitions outlined above categorize network marketing either as a marketing strategy or a method to activate an organization or a system that permits building a network of individuals for independent distributors as part of direct selling, which is seen as a misconception. As author Don Failla pointed out, based on his insights and discussion points on the differences between network marketing and the three mentioned distribution methods (direct marketing, multi-level marketing, and pyramid sequence), there are five main and fundamental ways to distribute a product from a consumer's perspective. They are as follows (Gregor, 2013: 6-7) ^[12]:

1. **Retail Sale:** This is the primary form of distribution conducted by retail branches like the main market or in stores through online auctions.
2. **Direct Sale:** Typically found in encyclopedias and insurance sales, where the product goes only to the seller, hence preventing the formation of a distribution

network. In other words, to sell a product or service, one needs to be employed by the company or institution providing the service and goods as a sales employee or vendor, thus not working for his own profit, as he is an employee in a company that has an owner, unlike in multi-level selling.

3. **Multi-Level Marketing or Network Marketing:** The author derives his definition from marketing that involves the transfer of a product or service from the producer or service provider to the consumer. Multi-level marketing is thus seen as a system that rewards individuals involved in selling the product or providing the service. In this type of distribution, those involved in the sale are those who recommend purchasing the product directly from the producer, service provider, or a specific organization. Every sale is rewarded according to a reward system, usually a multi-level reward system that directly rewards the recommender, enabling each person to build their distribution network for consumers.
4. **Mail-order Selling:** This type of sale occurs when an institution lacks its retail outlets, so the customer offers a product recommendation through a direct request to the company after learning about the product via television, phone, or through a visual or written statement about the product.
5. **Pyramid Selling:** This is an illegal organizational sales method based on a misperception of multi-level marketing. One aspect of its illegality is its portrayal as multi-level marketing. There is no sale of goods or products, nor can there be marketing for it. Because it's pyramid marketing and selling, all returns are included in the treasury of the institution's owner, the primary service provider, or the employer, hence a distinction exists between multi-level marketing and pyramid sequence. Every participant in a sale process in multi-level marketing obtains a reward and profit according to their participation regardless of their employment status.

Concept of Entrepreneurial Behavior

It is noteworthy that entrepreneurial behavior remains elusive to many entrepreneurial institutions to date, as its elements range from providing new business opportunities or acquiring new resources that contribute to the continuity of the organization's operations (Al-Qubba and Al-Khafaji, 2014: 64) ^[8]. Entrepreneurial behavior revolves around the ability to create something from almost nothing and is defined as "behaviors and practices characterized by initiating creative and proactive initiatives that may be risk-based, with a clear impact on the organization's survival, success, and superiority."

In this regard, entrepreneurial behavior is a standard that determines the direction of the organization and shapes its operations through the implementation of a set of actions and procedures characterized by initiative and capitalizing on opportunities to develop and improve its products or services in response to environmental changes (Al-Masri, 2021: 33) ^[10]. From Dejong's perspective (2011:3), entrepreneurial behavior is the "ability of entrepreneurs to identify and capitalize on opportunities in new businesses to elevate organizations in a manner that reflects on individual behaviors and risk-taking initiatives."

Haniff (2016: 2475) ^[18] views it as a "set of entrepreneurial efforts exercised by an individual, which require organizational resources to propose ideas and implement creative activities such as offering new and unconventional products or services." Al-Husseini (2015: 176) ^[4] considers entrepreneurial behavior to be indicative of integrated entrepreneurial resources. It is the practice of entrepreneurial thinking, through which individuals take risks and engage in creative and proactive actions contributing to propelling the organization towards success. From Kilenthong *et al.*'s viewpoint (2010) ^[21], entrepreneurial behavior is a proactive approach towards available and emerging opportunities, regardless of the resources owned by the organization, based on improvement processes, resource redistribution, and harnessing creativity and innovation tools that facilitate transforming opportunities into tangible and realistic goals. Jones & Rowley (2012) ^[20] propose that entrepreneurial behavior is supposed to encompass a set of behavioral aspects traditionally researched in leadership, innovation, customer relations, and managing those relationships. Based on the preceding, entrepreneurial behavior is a set of "behaviors and practices aimed at seizing distinguished opportunities in a way that contributes to increasing the competitiveness of the organization and positioning it among successful organizations."

Importance of Entrepreneurial Behavior

The study of entrepreneurial behavior is essential for several reasons (Al-Masri, 2021: 35) ^[10]:

1. It is considered among the inputs of the decision-making process related to the optimal use of available resources to launch a new product or service, and to develop new work methods and procedures.
2. The fundamentals of management are employed at a time when the pattern of entrepreneurial behavior is determined, as it challenges bureaucracy and encourages creativity.
3. It is responsible for stimulating and encouraging creativity within the organization by selecting and implementing new opportunities and exploiting and acquiring resources to produce new goods and services.
4. The organization's leadership includes a variety of positions and procedures that enhance its ability to take

risks, adhere to opportunities, and be creative. Section Three: Empirical Analysis and Testing

First: Description of the Sample

This section aims to elucidate the primary characteristics of the sample subjects in the Iraqi Cement Company, using the data collected from the distributed questionnaire. Below is a brief description of the sample subjects.

1. Gender: Table number (3) demonstrates that the number of males was (26), accounting for (43.3%) of the total sample size (60), whereas the females amounted to (34), constituting (56.7%) of the total sample size.
2. Age: As indicated in Table (3), the age group (under 35 years) represented the highest proportion, with a count of (21) individuals, or (35.0%) of the total sample size of (60). This is followed by the age group (35-45 years) with (20) individuals or (33.3%), the age group (46-55 years) with (13) individuals or (21.7%), and finally, the age group (56 years and above) with (6) individuals, accounting for (10.0%) of the total sample size.
3. Educational Qualification: Table (3) indicates that the vast majority of respondents held a bachelor's degree, with (34) out of the total sample size of (60), representing the highest proportion at (56.7%). The count of master's degree and diploma holders amounted to (7) individuals each, making up (11.7%) of the total sample. The count of PhD holders and those with a higher diploma reached (6) individuals each, accounting for (10.0%) of the total sample size. However, the majority of respondents were well-educated and had sufficient academic capability to respond to the questionnaire, which made their responses more accurate and objective.
4. Years of service in the company: Table number (3) shows that the service period (11-15 years) constituted the highest proportion, with (21) individuals or (35.0%) out of the total sample size of (60). Meanwhile, the service duration (16 years and above) was represented by (20) individuals or (33.3%), the service duration (6-10 years) by (13) individuals or (21.7%), and finally, the service duration (5 years and less) by (6) individuals or (10.0%) of the total sample. This suggests that the sample under study is characterized by intellectual maturity and skillful integration across all levels.

Table 3: Characteristics of a sample

No.	variants	categories	Frequency	Percentage %
1	sex	males	26	43.3
		females	34	56.7
		the total	60	100.0
2	the age	Less than 35 years old	21	35.0
		35-45 years	20	33.3
		46-55 years	13	21.7
		56 year and more	6	10.0
		Total	60	100.0
3	Qualification	Ph.D	6	10.0
		Master's	7	11.7
		Higher Diploma	6	10.0
		Bachelor's	34	56.7
		diploma	7	11.7
		Total	60	100.0
4	years of service in the company	5 years and under	6	10.0
		6-10 years	13	21.7
		11-15 years old	21	35.0
		16 years and over	20	33.3
		Total	60	100.0

Second: Testing the Research Hypotheses

This topic focuses on testing the research hypotheses that have been adopted in the current study with the purpose of determining whether these hypotheses are valid for the study sample or not. This section addresses the testing of effect hypotheses using simple linear regression.

1. The first main correlation hypothesis: (There is no statistically significant correlation between network marketing X and entrepreneurial behavior Y).

Table number (4) reveals a statistically significant correlation between network marketing X and entrepreneurial behavior Y at the overall level. The correlation coefficient recorded a positive and meaningful correlation between network marketing and entrepreneurial behavior, with a value of (0.403**). This correlation is statistically significant at the (0.01) level, as the P-value (level of significance) is less than the 0.01 significance level. Therefore, this result confirms the existence of a statistically significant correlation, indicating a positive relationship between network marketing and entrepreneurial behavior. The nature of the relationship is direct, meaning that as the focus on network marketing by the researched company increases, so does the attention to entrepreneurial behavior. This leads to the rejection of the first main correlation hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, which states that there is a statistically significant correlation between network marketing X and entrepreneurial behavior Y.

Table 4: Demonstrates a correlation between network marketing X and entrepreneurial behavior Y

X / Y	Web Marketing X
Entrepreneurial behavior	.627**
P-value	0.000
Significance level at ≤ 0.01	moral

2. The Second Principal Effect Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant influence of network marketing X on entrepreneurial behavior Y.

Table number (5) illustrates the results of the simple linear regression analysis of the impact of network marketing on entrepreneurial behavior. It can be observed that network marketing achieved a significant effect on entrepreneurial behavior, where the calculated F value was (17.561) with a significance of (0.001) and degrees of freedom (1) and (58), which is less than the significance level (0.01). This suggests that the independent variable's (network marketing) influence on the dependent variable (entrepreneurial behavior) is statistically significant. The coefficient of determination (R2) explained (23.2%) of the contributions that occurred in entrepreneurial behavior, while its ratio (76.8%) is attributed to other factors not included in the regression model. From table (5), it is noted that the constant term (a = 1.597) is statistically significant, with a calculated t value of (2.161) and significance (0.035) with a degree of freedom (58), which is less than the significance level (0.05). This means that the constant term is statistically significant, and the marginal slope value (b) was (0.665) which is statistically significant as its calculated t value is (4.191) with significance (0.001) at degrees of freedom (58) and is less than the significance level (0.01). This means that the marginal slope (b) is statistically significant. These results indicate the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis which states: "There is a significant statistical effect of network marketing on entrepreneurial behavior."

Table 5: Shows the effect of network marketing X on entrepreneurial behavior Y

The Independent Variable / Network Marketing X	Entrepreneurial behavior							
	fixed limit a	t calculated	marginal tendency b	t calculated	The value of the coefficient of determination R2	F value calculated	Moral	the decision
	1.597	2.161	665.0	191.4	232.0	561.17	001.0	Moral

The value of (F) calculated at a significant level of 0.05 and two degrees of freedom (1.58)

The value of (F) calculated at a significant level of 0.01 and two degrees of freedom (1.58)

The value of (t) calculated at a significant level of 0.05 and a degree of freedom (58)

The value of (t) calculated at a significant level of 0.01 and a degree of freedom (58)

Fourth Topic

Conclusions and Recommendations

First: Conclusions

1. There is a statistically significant correlation between network marketing and entrepreneurial behavior.
2. There is a statistically significant impact of network marketing on entrepreneurial behavior.
3. The company has credibility in marketing its products.
4. Network marketing products represent a higher value to customers compared to traditional marketing.
5. Customer satisfaction is a strategic goal for the company.
6. Price is a primary factor for the company in facing competition.
7. The company seeks to achieve a competitive advantage by reducing costs.

8. The company realizes that meeting customer needs and desires comes through offering a low-priced product.
9. The company keeps its customers updated with everything new about the products and new services.
10. The company consistently commits to specified deadlines when delivering products to its customers.

Second: Recommendations

1. Deliver customer product orders faster than competitors.
2. Utilize a safety stock policy to secure responsiveness to changing orders.
3. Maintain communication with customers after product delivery to confirm on-time delivery.
4. Establish long-term relationships with customers.
5. Market many different products through global goods alliance.

6. Develop marketing plans based on market studies and identifying customer needs and desires.
7. Involve customers in promoting the company's goods and services.
8. Offer incentive gifts by the company to customers to convince them of its services and products.
9. Develop training programs in line with advancements in developed countries.
10. Document research and studies presented in conferences and scientific seminars related to the company's work.

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