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Sustainable competitive positional advantage of English dailies: a research proposal

Abstract

A theory of sustainable competitive positional advantage has been proposed as an important tool for identifying the sustainable competitive position of products and services in the minds of consumers. In order to verify this theory, one of the growing sectors, print media has been selected. It is observed that there are more than twenty English dailies brands available at the National and State level in India. The researcher has proposed the study in line with the conceptual and research propositions postulated by Sunder G. Bharadwaj et al. (1993). The objective of the study is to identify and describe the sustainable competitive positional advantage of various English dailies in general and cost leaderships (price) as well as differentiations in particular based on demographics, psychographics, reading activity, opinion and interest. In addition, the study is attempted to draw perceptual maps of top of mind brands of English dailies based on cost leadership and differentiation dimensions. The study has been designed based on a new marketing scale (A. Selvarasu and C. Kathiravan, 2007). There are eight variables adopted from Todd McCauley and Mary Nesbitt (2004), namely, *Motivators*, *Inhibitors*, *Personality*, *News Content*, *Advertisement Content*, *Innovation*, *Quality*, and *Service Excellent* to describe competitive advantage of English dailies. All the eight variables of English dailies have been redefined using four variables of sustainability, namely, *rare*, *valuable*, *inimitable* and *non-substituable* (Barney, 1991 and Coyney, 1986). The overall scores for SCPA have been computed at three levels such as *low score*, *medium score* and *high score* of English dailies in accordance with approach of competitive advantage as cost leadership, differentiation and focus (Michael Porter, 1980-1985).

Keywords: sustainable competitive positional advantage, English dailies, cost leadership, differentiation, strategies, readership, motivators, inhibitors, personality, news content, advertisement content, innovation, quality, service excellent, rare, valuable, inimitable and non-substitutable.

Introduction. An overview

English Dailies' publishers strive for a competitive advantage as that of many other firms but few truly understand how to achieve and sustain the position in the market. According to Michael Porter (1980-1985), competitive advantage (CA) has been gained by offering three different generic strategies, viz., *cost leadership*, *differentiation*, and *focus*. A firm utilizing a cost leadership strategy seeks to be the low-cost producer relative to its competitors. A differentiation strategy requires that the firm possesses a "non-price" attribute that distinguishes the firm as superior to its peers. Firms following a focus approach direct their attention to narrow product lines, buyer segments, or geographic markets. "Focused" firms use cost or differentiation to gain advantage, but only within a narrow target market. In order to maintain leadership in the competition, a company wants the gap between perceived value and cost of the product to be greater than the competition. The competitive advantages have been obtained by providing the customers with a value differentiation, namely, *product differentiation*, *service differentiation*, *image differentiation*, *quality differentiation*, and *innovation*.

According to Barney (1991) and Coyney (1986), a firm is said to have a "sustainable" competitive advantage when its competitors are unable to duplicate the benefits of the firm's strategy. In order for a firm to attain a "sustainable" competitive advantage, its generic strategy has been grounded in an attribute that meets four criteria. It has to fulfill the criteria such as *valuable*, *rare*, *inimitable* and *non-substitutable*. The first criterion '*valuable*' means that the newspaper is of value to the reader. The second criterion of sustainability '*rare*' indicates that it is not either available in common or easily obtained. The third criterion '*inimitable*' means that it cannot be easily imitated or copied by competitors. The last criterion of sustainability – '*non-substitutable*' – means that consumers cannot or will not substitute another product or attribute for the one providing the firm with competitive advantage.

Shoasck (1987) has indicated various positioning alternatives of sustainable competitive advantage as *reduced divergence* (a standardized, cost-efficient service), *increased divergence* (greater customization for specific segments), and *increased complexity* (addition of services tiding toward a multi-service poison) as differentiation possibilities. Each of these poisoning alternatives results in differences in customer's perception of value which leads to shift in customers from one competitor to other competitor.

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The researcher proposed the study by way of combining competitive positional advantage and sustainability of competitive advantage s.v. "*Sustainable Competitive Positional Advantage"* (SCPA) (A. Selvarasu and C. Kathiravan, 2007) in line with the conceptual and research propositions postulated by Sunder G. Bharadwaj et al. (1993).

Research problem. A new theory of sustainable competitive positional advantage has been proposed as a tool for redesigning strategies to position in a competitive market. In order to verify this theory, one of the growing sectors, print media, has been selected. It is important to understand the application of SCPA from its basic level of competition on a routine basis rather than seasonal or intermittent marketing events. In this direction English dailies have been selected as one of the basic and routine levels of market. Tamil Nadu as one of the states in India, has been identified for the purpose of the study. It represents a diverse readership and convergence in various forms of English dailies. Therefore, sustainable competitive positional advantage of English dailies in Tamil Nadu is set as the research problem.

Need for the study. English dailies have occupied above 38.3 percent out of the total publishers of newspapers and periodicals. It is inferred that more than 50 percent of the circulation is held by 2 percent of the publishers in the form of English dailies. The researcher has identified the area of concern in terms of circulation and the number of publishers. It is important to note that the competitive advantage of publishers of English dailies has evinced interest in the circulation and other related features of newspapers. The study has attempted to verify the level of competitive positional advantage and the extent of sustainability. As there is research gap identified in the review of various literatures the researcher has attempted to verify the sustainable competitive positional advantage as one of the new marketing theories categorized under market competition. The concept of sustainable competitive positional advantage is studied as an emerging area of research in the field of English dailies (ED).

Research objective. For the purpose of describing the sustainable competitive positional advantage of National dailies as one of the best forms of print media, the following objectives have been proposed as primary and secondary ones.

Primary objective. The primary objective of the study is to identify the sustainable competitive positional advantage of various English dailies in relation to cost leaderships (price) and differentiations (motivators, inhibitors, personality, news content, advertisement content, innovation, quality, and service excellent) based on the existing profile of readers in Tamil Nadu.

Secondary objectives. The following are four secondary objectives proposed by the researcher in line with the primary objective to identify the SCPA score of English dailies with two dimensions:

- to describe the sustainable competitive positional advantage of English dailies due to cost leadership and differentiation based on demographics (age, gender, religion, marital status, occupation, education, income, members of the family, type of house);
- to explore the sustainable competitive positional advantage of English dailies due to cost leadership and differentiation based on psychographics (values and lifestyles);
- to indicate the sustainable competitive positional advantage due to cost leadership and differentiation among English dailies based on reading activity, interest and opinion (reading time, hours, page, look, access, pleasure and language preference);
- to draw perceptual maps of top of mind brands of English dailies based on two dimensions of SCPA as cost leadership and differentiation.

1. Area of the study: English dailies and their market competition

National English dailies in print and online forms provide Indian and International news on hourly and daily bases. In India, there are seventeen various forms of English newspapers prevailing, such as *English Daily Newspaper*, *English Newspaper Online*, *Times English Newspaper*, *Indian English Newspaper*, etc. In the ambit of Indian information media, the growth of print media has been reported around 12.93 percent last year. It is observed that there are about twenty English dailies' brands available at the National and State level in different proportions.

In the context of registered number of print media as newspaper and periodicals in India, English language shares about 9,064 out of 62,423 registered newspapers which are about 14.5 percent in the year 2006 according to the office of Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI). It is evident that there are about 2,130 numbers of dailies being published in the country which has been reported by RNI for the years 2005-2006. It is surprizing to note that in total only 3.4 percent of registered publishers apply with submission of statement of accounts among all the registered publishers. In case of English dailies, about 201 publishers

which are about 2.2 percent of total registered English publishers have furnished statement of account for the year 2006. The registered publishers, who have furnished their statement of accounts, have claimed a circulation of 88.86 million copies for the year 2006. In the same direction, publishers of English dailies have claimed the circulation of about 34.1 million copies in the year 2006.

According to Indian Readership Survey (IRS), the circulation of top ten dailies has been reported as 40.2 million in the year 2008. The leading brands of English dailies at the National level are *Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *The Hindu*, *The Telegraph*, *Deccan Chronicle*, *The Economic Times*, *The New Indian Express*, *Mid-day*, *Mumbai Mirror* and *DNA.* Among the top ten dailies, the circulation of *Times of India* has been reported with a maximum of 13.6 million out of 40.2 million which is about 34%. *The Hindustan Times* has a circulation of 6.3 million which is about 16% among the key English dailies. In the third place, *The Hindu*, with around 5.6 million circulations has been reported which is about 14% among the top of ten English dailies.

2. Review of literature

The extensive collection of literature on the topic of study is presented for competitive advantage, competitive positional advantage, sustainable competitive advantage and sustainable competitive positional advantage.

Alderson (1965) states that bases for differential advantage are *technological*, *legal*, and *geographical*. The research has suggested four strategies for achieving differential advantage, such as *segmentation*, *selective appeals*, *transaction*, and *differentiation*. Hall (1980) states that successful companies achieve either the lowest cost or the most differentiated position. Henderson (1983) states the unique advantages of one firm over competitors are those who adopt either the best or the fastest gain as an advantage over competitors. Michael Porter (1985) introduces the idea of the "*value chain*" as the basic tool for analyzing the sources of competitive advantage (CA).

According to Jack Trout and Al Ries (1969; 1981), "positioning is not what you do to a product, positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect". Positioning is the technique in which marketers try to create an image or identity for a product, brand, or company in the perception of the target market. It is expressed relative to the position of competitors. Typical positioning tools include *graphical perception mapping*, market surveys, and certain statistical techniques.

Youngme Moon (2005) has introduced three variations of positioning strategies used to break free from product life cycle thinking, namely *reverse*, *breakaway* and *stealth positioning*. Competitive positional advantage referred in marketing management texts and cases is of three bases: *functional*, *symbolic* and *experiential*. The '*functional*' base of competitive positional advantage has been established by providing solution to the problem and *benefits* to the customers. The second base of (CPA), '*symbolic*', has been established by *self image*, *Ego identity*, *belongingness*, *social meaningfulness*, *and affective fulfillment*. The third and the last base of CPA, '*experiential*', has been positioned by way of providing sensory and cognitive stimulation.

Coyne (1986) gives explanation of the conditions needed for an SCA to exist as the idea of capability gaps. Ghemawat (1986) discusses about advantages that tend to be sustainable as size in the targeted market, superior access to resources or customers, and restrictions on competitors' options. Day and Wensley (1988) state that Asset Stock Potential sources of advantage are superior skills and superior resources in assessing ways to achieve SCA from both competitor and customer perspectives. Dierickx and Cool (1988) have stated that sustainability is based on *substitution* and *imitation*. Prahalad and Hamel (1989) said that SCA results from *core competencies* and firms consolidate *resources* and *skills* into competencies quickly by changing opportunities.

Sundar G. Bharadwaj et al. (1993) have proposed a concept of sustainability in competitive positional advantage. The concepts such as *differentiation advantage* and *cost advantage* have been focused as a measure of long-term performance with reinvestments in resource and skills. Barney (1991) and Coyney (1986) have explored four essential requirements, such as *valuable*, *rare*, *imperfectly imitable* and *non-substitutable.*

Research gap. It is identified that there is a gap in the concept of competitive advantage in the form of combining sustainable competitive advantage and competitive positional advantage. It is termed as the theory of 'Sustainable Competitive Positional Advantage' (SCPA).

3. Methodology

This section of the research report contains a framework of all the stages of research from research problem to the scope of the research. It presents the research propositions, design of research, sampling method, sample size, SCPA marketing scale, statistical tools, data collection, limitations

and scope of the study. The description of all the aspects of methodology has been presented in the following subsection.

3.1. Research propositions. Top ten English dailies have been considered for the study in the direction of sustainability and its competitive positional advantage. English dailies have been verified with two dimensions of sustainable competitive positional advantage, viz., cost leadership and differentiation. The cost leadership of English dailies is determined with five variables. The first variable is about price of English dailies (CPA) which is redefined based on variables represent sustainability (SCA). In case of the second dimension the variables were used to determine brand and product differentiation using eight variables to determine competitive positional advantage based on variables to depict the sustainability. The researcher has proposed the following proposition to verify SCPA of English dailies.

H1: SCPA score of all English dailies does not vary in terms of demographics, psychographics and lifestyle of newspaper readers.

In a given situation, any English daily is expected to have higher SCPA based on its circulation. The above proposition has been used to verify SCPA of English dailies in terms of average score against the circulation of English dailies in a given market.

In the existing market situation, profile of readers of English dailies certainly varies with demographics, psychographics and interest. The researcher has proposed the following second proposition to examine the association of SCPA against the profile of readers.

H2: SCPA of English dailies is not significantly influenced by the demographic, psychographic, and reading behavior profile of newspaper readers.

English dailies have been described from the perspective of sustainability of competitive positional advantage against demographics (age, gender, religion, marital status, occupation, education, income, members of the family, type of house), psychographics (values and lifestyles) and reading (reading time, hours, page, look, access, pleasure and language preference) behavior of readers. An important attribute or key of SCPA has been predicted using discriminate function. The researcher has proposed the following third proposition as the predictive discriminate score of SCPA using cost leadership in relation to other attributes of differentiation in competitive positional advantages.

H3: The score of SCPA for English dailies proportionately varies with its coefficients of SCPA dimension.

The discriminate score and its co-efficient of all the nine attributes have been used to reflect images of English dailies. All the possible dimensional image maps have been broadly described and an image map of cost and differentiation has been drawn.

3.2. Research design. A research design specifies the methods and procedures for conducting the research work. According to Kerlinger (1983), research design is the plan, structure and strategy of investigation conceived so as to obtain answers for research questions.

The present study is descriptive in nature and it describes sustainable competitive positional advantage (SCPA) of English dailies as competitive positional advantage and sustainable competitive positional advantage. The survey has been conducted in Tamil Nadu which is one of Southern states of India. The study has been designed based on a marketing scale developed by A. Selvarasu and C. Kathiravan (2007). The dimension of competitive positional advantage (Michael Porter, 1985) and dimension of sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Coyney, 1986) have been combined in order to formulate a new theory of sustainable competitive positional advantage. There are eight variables adopted from Todd McCauley and Mary Nesbitt (2004) (*motivators*, *inhibitors*, *personality*, *news content*, *advertisement content*, *innovation*, *quality*, and *service excellence*) to describe competitive advantage of English dailies. Four variables of sustainability, namely *rare*, *valuable*, *inimitable* and *non-substitutable* have been adopted from Barney (1991) and Coyney (1986). Other descriptive variables have been identified based on three sets of classifying variables, namely *demographics*, *psychographics* and *reading behavior*. The study area has been randomly selected based on multi-stage sampling and distributed in the state of Tamil Nadu.

3.3. Description of SCPA marketing scale. The scale has been prepared, tested and validated by A. Selvarasu and C. Kathiravan (2007). The scale comprises eight variables for competitive positional advantage based on variables to indicate position of sustainable competitive advantage. All these variables have been used to describe two dimensions of SCPA, the first dimension has been adopted as cost leadership competitive positional advantage. The response for the variable under competitive positional advantage has been recorded with the seven intervals as semantic differentials from a strong cost leadership of cheap price to a weak cost leadership

of expensive price. A maximum score of seven has been given to a favorable response towards cheap price and a minimum score of one has been assigned for an expensive price. The sustainable competitive advantage of cost leadership has been studied with a response from agreement to disagreement. All the four variants of sustainability, namely *rare*, *valuable*, *inimitable*, *non-substitutable* have been recorded with a minimum score of one for disagreement response and a maximum score of five for agreement response and three for neutral response.

The second dimension of SCPA has been studied with eight variables representing differentiation of an attribute for SCPA. The first four variables are: *price*, *motivator's agreement*, *inhibitor's agreement* and *personality*. The responses for the entire four variables have been recorded in the form of one for disagreement response, five for agreement response and three for neutral response.

Fifth and sixth variables of differentiation which are *news content*, *advertisement content* and *innovation* have been collected in the form of 'most important' to 'least important'. The responses have been coded with the minimum of one for the least important and a maximum of five for the most important and three for neutral responses.

The seventh and eighth variables, *quality* and *service excellence*, have been rated from a favorable response of 'excellent' to unfavorable response of 'bad'. A maximum score of five has been assigned for the 'excellent'. The response of minimum score of one for the bad response and the score of three for the neutral response.

The overall scores for SCPA have been computed at three levels such as low score (45-99), medium score (100-144) and high score (145-243). The reference key for SCPA due to cost leadership has been grouped as low score (5-13), medium score (14-17) and a high score (18-27). The other dimension of SCPA due to attributes of differentiation has been referred with cumulative score as low score (40-86), medium score (87-127) and high score (128-216). All the eight attributes of differentiation and the sustainable competitive positional advantage have been verified independently with a low score (5-13), medium score (14-17) and high score (18-27) as that of cost leadership. English dailies have been rated based on the scores obtained for SCPA under the three different categories. Each of the categories has been set to distinguish the level of sustainable competition in English dailies based on its own score of SCPA. The English dailies with the lowest score of SCPA have been inferred that the top of mind brand has low sustainable competitive positional advantage. On the contrary, English dailies with the highest score of SCPA have been reported as having high level of sustainable competitive positional advantage. Any English daily which is having medium score of SCPA has been referred to as having a moderate SCPA. The scale also has three sections to identify the profile of readers based on demographics (age, gender, religion, marital status, occupation, education, income, family dependents, house type), psychographics (thinkers, believers, achievers, strivers, experiencers, makers, innovators, survivors), and reading activities interest and opinion (reading time, hours, page, look, access, pleasure and language preference). The scale has a section to verify top of the mind of English dailies, hard share and market share. The description of variables used under the competitive positional advantage and sustainable competitive advantage has been presented in the following section.

4. Pilot study

The scale has been developed by A. Selvarasu and C. Kathiravan (2007) to study the sustainable competitive positional advantage (SCPA) of English dailies with two sections as one for competitive positional advantage (CPA) and sustainable competitive advantage (SCA). There are eight attributes maintained in the questionnaire under two dimensions of SCPA. The responses for competitive positional advantage have been defined in bipolar semantic differential scale type and the sustainability of CA has been defined in the form of Likert's type, importance scale and rating scale.

The field of application has been tested in newspaper sector of the print media. The study area has been identified as one of the state provinces of India, viz., Tamil Nadu. The pilot study has been carried out in Chidambaram town which is coming under the B3 category of socio-economic class in two phases. The first phase has been carried out during the working days to meet the respondent and seek the responses. The second phase of field study as pilot exercise has been carried out on holidays. In the first phase around 75 respondents approached and around 60 responses have been used for reliability study using Cronbach's Alpha test. The results of the study have been verified and it was found to be favorable for bipolar scale with 0.69 alpha coefficients which is expressing the competitive positional advantage part of SCPA. The sustainability part of SCPA where the items have been adhered to Likert's scale type, importance scale and rating scale type of questions, the result has been found below 0.33 alpha coefficient.

The researcher has discussed with the select group of respondents as to how comfortable it is to answer the questions during the survey for them. The respondents have expressed that the construct of the language does not reflect the regional orientation in terms of the English language expression. In order to make the respondents comfortable in answering the questions, the construct of the language has been revised to suit the state of Tamil Nadu, India. The real reason for the toughness of language is due to the process of adapting the items from Readership survey, USA. The researcher has taken necessary care to revise and simplify the usage of items in the construct.

In the second phase of the pilot study, the researcher has distributed the survey as per the actual sampling plan in all five districts of Tamil Nadu about 15 respondents in each district to a total of 75. The responses collected after the field survey have reflected the easy and quick access to the items used in the questionnaire. In line with the reliability the study was carried out after the first phase, similar test has been done using statistical software package. The results of the test have indicated that out of two dimensions used, differentiation has the reliability score of 0.65 alpha coefficient in the form of bipolar semantic differential scale and cost leadership has 0.045. In the case of items coded with Likert's type scale, the reliability score is 0.551 alpha coefficient, for importance scale, it is 0.39 alpha coefficient and for rating scale items, 0.47 have been computed.

5. Main study

The study is based on multistage sampling method using state level districts as group and agents as clusters. The simple random sampling method of statistical probability sampling of "lottery method" has been adhered at the third stage of identifying sample respondents. In Tamil Nadu, among the thirty districts, the researcher has selected five districts such as Chennai, Madurai, Trichy, Virudhunagar, Cuddalore. During the process of preparing a sample frame, from those five districts, based on the socio-economic classification of one town under the class of A1, B1, C1, D and E, the list of subscribers from agents of all English dailies has been summarized. The list has been prepared using the monthly ledger given by agents of the respective five towns.

5.1. Sampling method. In order to establish the probability simple random sampling a lottery method of lucky draw has been used. The researcher has personally drawn 220 draws to identify the ID No of subscribers. The representative sample of respondents has been contacted by field investigator under the supervision of agent as well as researcher. In total 1,100 respondents have been personally contacted to get a sample size of 1,000. The researcher has distributed the questionnaire among three hundred of subscribers in each district of each town. For the purpose of the study out of all the filled questionnaires, 220 questionnaires have been used for further analysis.

5.2. Sample size. The researcher has used the following formula to obtain the desired size of the sample (Scheaffer, Mendenhall, and Ott, 2005).

Using the formula based on normal distribution the sample size is as follows:

$$n \geq \frac{N_o{}^2}{(N-1)D+\sigma^2};$$

$$D = \frac{(Margin\ of\ Error)^2}{Z^2_{\alpha/\partial}},$$

where n – sample size, z – standard normal variate (1.9645), N – circulation of English dailies in Tamil Nadu (25,00,000), e – accepted error (0.10), and σ – standard deviation (1.607) of the key variables based on the respondents approached in the pilot study in Tamil Nadu during 2005. The margin of error value is 'D' (0.0026). The calculated sample size is equal to 993 (Approx. 1,000) which is above the prescribed large sample size of 30 numbers. Hence, the total sample size of 1,000 numbers has been maintained by the researcher throughout the study. In order to have variation within the sample area (state), five sample units (districts) have been identified and a proportion of 200 samples in each district has been maintained.

5.3. Statistical tools. The researcher has adopted relevant statistical tools for analyzing data describing SCPA, CPA, and SCA, such as, ANOVA, cross-tabulation, chi-square correlation, discriminant analysis/Multidimensional scaling (MDS), factor analysis and cluster analysis.

6. Limitations of the study

The present investigation, though carried out on scientific lines, suffers from the following limitations. The study is made for a specific period only and not continuously for all periods. However, the above limitations in no way affect the validity of the findings of the study. The advantage of the local language in dailies has been found to be a limitation as there are changing lifestyles and literacy towards westernized culture having a base of the English language.

Conclusion

An attempt has been made to ascertain the sustainable competitive positional advantages of the English dailies in Tamil Nadu. The special focus of the study is to evaluate two dimensions of competitive positional advantage in the form of cost leadership and differentiation. All the results of the study have been examined from three different perspectives of English newspaper readers. In addition, the top of the mind brand has been compared with the sustainable competitive positional advantage. The comparison has been done to explore the possibilities of establishing sustainability of English dailies in the long run. This proposal has been studied in other sectors after identifying the variables of competitive advantage.

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