



Influence of Product Strategies on Sales Performance of Cultural Artefacts: A Case of Maasai Artefacts in Mwanza City, Tanzania

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Article History

Received: 17/10/2023

Accepted: 24/10/2023

Published: 26/10/2023

Vol – 2 Issue – 10

PP: -81-90

Abstract

The study explores the influence of product strategies on the sales performance of cultural artefacts, specifically the Maasai Artefacts in Mwanza City. It is a Qualitative enquiry, where purposive sampling was used to select respondents. In-depth interviews and observation were used to gather primary data. Content analysis approach was used for data analysis as it aimed at knowing the marketing practices the dealers in cultural artefacts engage in, and how those reflect on sales. The study observes that the artefacts enterprises in Mwanza City strategize their product offerings to boost sales performance by employing quality elements such as product differentiation, product innovation, durability of product and variety of product offerings. Also, “the Maasai brand” is used as an overall brand name and “handmade brand” is used as a secondary brand name. These brand names significantly influenced sales performance because they are perceived as trustworthy, reliable and synonymous with high value and quality. As stipulated in the literature, product packaging does not operate as a bearing for the sales performance of Maasai cultural products, for their nature and dealership. Buyers want to see, inspect and test the items of purchase, in some instances, wear straight away. This makes packaging to be perceived as non-useful in this category of business. The study recommends that: the artefacts enterprises should strategize on appropriate and suitable packaging and register their brand name to give legal protection to their artefacts and boost their business, especially for tourists and foreign markets. Government should strategize artefacts enterprises as part of effort towards poverty alleviation by linking it with the tourism business and advancement of soft loans to boost their capital investment.

Keywords: *product strategies, sales performance, product quality, product packaging, branding and Maasai cultural products*

1. Introduction

Cultural artefacts businesses are among the important business undertakings that must be incorporated into modern business initiatives. Cultural artefacts refer to commodities that communicate concepts, symbols, and societal practices. These items are crafted by skilled individuals, either entirely by hand or with hand tools or mechanical devices. However, the artisan’s direct manual involvement must remain the predominant factor in the final product (UNESCO, 2022). According to the world tourism barometer, Cultural artefacts are now a major business and have moved from their historical origins to be central to the tourist experience (UNWTO, 2022).

In this study, Cultural artefacts in a business context have two dimensions. One is the consumer dimension, which may focus on factors such as immediate needs and attractiveness of the products from the marketing point of view defined by price and utility. The other is the producer dimension where the producer’s concern is to see that their products meet their prospective consumer’s expectations and beat competition amongst themselves or from other substitute products. What matters for the producer is the perceived quality, packaging and branding, the factors named together as product strategies. In general, product strategies are related to sales performance, as they are used in different combinations in marketing to boost sales and gain a competitive advantage.

A study conducted in France reveals that cultural artefact firms are characterized by overspecialization. The industry



links its marketing strategy with singularity to promote its products. Therefore, this distinctiveness serves as the fundamental basis for the enterprises' survival, although it does not inherently enhance their ability to effectively address market demands and enhance their sales success in terms of profitability (Gundolf et al., 2018). In Bangladesh Shafi et al. (2019) highlights the challenges faced by small creative enterprises in the cultural artefacts sector in Asia amidst the era of globalization and industrialization. These challenges include market competitiveness and a short product life cycle. The advent of machine-made equivalents has had a detrimental impact on cultural artefact enterprises, as these alternatives provide significantly lower prices and a wide range of options, hence exacerbating the challenges faced by such firms. Another study in Pakistan by Yang et al. (2018) demonstrates that most businesses dealing with cultural artefacts have failed to record increased sales revenue due to poor marketing skills among business firms. The decision-making process for selecting and implementing appropriate product strategies has not been as effective as it should be.

Also, according to a recent study conducted in Egypt, the infiltration of foreign products and the subsequent lack of competitiveness pose significant weaknesses and risks (Elrab, 2021). Another observation derived from a study conducted in South Africa reveals that producers of artefacts periodically release novel items and consistently enhance current ones. The company believes that its products possess distinctive characteristics and exhibit superior quality. However, these companies encounter difficulties from a dearth of market demand for their goods and the inherent complexity of identifying potential clients interested in their offerings (Makhitha, 2019). Another study in Ethiopia reveals that cultural artefacts' business challenges are primitive production and poor marketing and distribution strategies (Wondirad et al., 2021).

According to USAID research published in 2016, Tanzania has generated a diverse array of unique cultural items not commonly found in other regions. The assortment of artefacts encompasses a wide range of items, such as basketry, mats, ceramics, beads, pottery, hand-woven fabrics, woven products, toys, jewellery, purses, decorations, leather products, paintings, drawings, batiks, wood carvings, and mask-craft. The production of these things is widespread across several areas in Tanzania and serves as a significant means of employment for vulnerable demographics, such as women and youths. Despite the importance of cultural goods, the sector has encountered numerous problems, including industrialization and globalization, leading to unmatched competition. Consequently, the artisans become increasingly incapable of competing with well-organized imported industrial products. As a result, cultural goods lose the market slowly. A study conducted by Anderson and Sanga (2019) points out that the major problems that hinder cultural artefacts' marketing efficiency in Tanzania include a lack of market information, technical know-how and limited resources.

Despite the influence of globalization and cultural dependence in Tanzania, the Maasai tribe are the only cultural group that has stood the test of time by firmly embracing their cultural identity and traditional ways of living. The Maasai culture and tradition have persevered without being significantly impacted by the forces of modernization that have influenced other societies. Throughout history, the Maasai people have demonstrated a profound understanding and expertise in crafting diverse marketable handmade products, showcasing their indigenous knowledge and talents. According to a study by Aikaeli and Mkenda (2019), the Maasai community produces traditional body decorative goods, which presents significant potential for business ventures. The question was whether the Maasai business enterprises follow marketing principles in offering their products to the markets. Also, Maasai, as a community with a unique identity in Tanzania and East Africa at large, was not yet unveiled how that identity assisted them to become economically viable at the firm level, to begin with, and country level as a benefit for the tourism industry. In countries where the tourism industry is booming, the artefacts are often tailored to the tourists' preferences (Nepal, 2019).

Most of the studies conducted in Africa, generally and Tanzania in particular, were done on different industries such as the soft drinks industry (Ike, 2019; and Bwana, 2020), Breweries (Ejike, 2020), Fashion Industry (Shwastika & Keni, 2021), Automotive fuels (Kiprotich, 2018) and printing firms (Ndumia et al., 2020). These industries use modern technology, knowledgeable personnel, and different operationalization in their business undertakings. Also, these studies were concerned with branded products with legal trademarks, while this study dealt with relatively unbranded products. We cannot easily use their research findings to justify the problem of handmade cultural artefacts. The conceptualization and measurement of product strategy vary between industries, lacking a universally standardized approach. Any industry must formulate plans firmly grounded in its competitive market's prevailing dynamics. Thus, this study aimed to explore how product strategies influence the sales performance with special focused on cultural artefacts.

2. Literature review

As pointed out in the foregoing section, there are two dimensions discerned over cultural artefacts in a business context namely the consumer and producer dimensions respectively. Each one of these has specific observatory lenses for understanding the marketing forces at work in the related dynamics. The first one for instance focuses on product attractiveness and utility to the consumer, hence value for money reflected in price. From the producer's angle, the concern is satisfying the consumer's utility at acceptable price of a product within the consumer's expectations, at the same time fending off competition from rival producers and products such as substitutes. The producer's focus will therefore be matching quality perceptions between the consumer and themselves. Marketing theories point out product quality, product packaging and product branding as the base factors for product strategies in striving to meet

consumer expectations as mentioned above, at the same time achieve satisfactory sales performance.

In the following subsections, the three variables are briefly explained each in turn. However, these are also discussed in the context of the consumer-based 'utility theory' as the driver for the producer's strategizing strategies. A note is made here that, the ultimate goal is to positively influence sales revenues. The theory is briefly presented below.

2.1. The Utility Theory

The concept of utility theory, alternatively referred to as consumer behaviour theory, was founded upon many fundamental assumptions. Firstly, it posits that customers can rank various options available to them. Secondly, it asserts that total utility is consistently preferable to lesser utility. Additionally, the theory suggests that a combination of goods is superior to a collection consisting solely of one particular product. Lastly, it assumes that customers are rational actors when making decisions (Rice, 1997). The choice is predicated on the assumption of rationality, wherein the customer endeavours to optimise the advantages derived from acquiring a particular product or service.

Gaining insight into consumers' decision-making process is a crucial objective within the field of Marketing. As stated by Akkaya (2021), within the field of marketing, the concept of utility pertains to the ability of a product to fulfill the needs and desires of clients, influencing their decision to engage in a transaction. This is also supported by Alvino et al. (2018), who suggest that utility theory helps to strategically identify what elements influence consumer purchasing behaviour and integrate those elements into product offerings. Also, a study conducted by Colen et al. (2020) revealed, applying utility theory aids in comprehending the cognitive processes employed by rational consumers while assessing a product. Consumers utilise a variety of accessible signals or cues about a product to construct a perception of each relevant notion during their decision-making process, ultimately forming a judgement regarding the product. Some cues influencing consumer behaviour include the perception of quality, branding, and packaging. It is postulated that the rational consumer will opt for the variant of the branded product that yields the most consumer surplus. A further study posits that packaging and branding serve as a means of conveying the perceived quality of a product to consumers, hence streamlining the search process and diminishing the associated expenses consumers incur in their search efforts (Di Marcantonio, 2020).

In conjunction with the utility theory, is a discussion of the product quality, product packaging, and product branding for product strategies in Maasai cultural artefacts.

2.2. Product Quality

According to literature, product quality is expressed in product differentiation, product innovation, product durability, and availability of its varieties to give a consumer a range of choices.

Product quality refers to the comprehensive attributes and qualities inherent in a product or service that directly impact its capacity to meet explicit and implicit consumer requirements (Kotler & Keller, 2016). A study conducted in Indonesia reveals quality factors as the main focus to increase competitiveness for the cultural artefacts, that quality will enhance product acceptance and ultimately lead to sales performance (Wolok, 2020). In Thailand, a study found that niche differentiation strategy of cultural artefacts positively relates to sales performance (Traiyarach & Banjongprasert, 2022). Another study in India suggests that a quality artefact is such a product that when a buyer likes it, is ready to pay the price because it indicates a unique style with rich culture (Megha, 2019).

Apart from product uniqueness, Hikmah et al. (2021) revealed product differentiation as one of the essential quality attributes to enhance sales performance. His study indicates that product differentiation strategy significantly influences buyers' purchase decisions. A separate research endeavour was undertaken in China to investigate the relationship between innovation within traditional handicraft firms and the pursuit of sustainable development. The study demonstrates that implementing innovation is crucial to maintain consistent product quality, business longevity, and competitive advantage (Shafi et al., 2022). Another study conducted in South Africa reveals that the product aspect that businesses rated more favourably is product quality. Craft producers must implement rigorous quality control processes before distributing their products to consumers (Makhitha, 2019).

Moving from the studies done elsewhere, the application of product quality as a strategic component for marketing of Maasai cultural artefacts in the scope of this study (Mwanza) has remained open. The operationalization of other factors viz product innovation, durability, and availability of varieties are reported in the findings of this study elsewhere.

2.3. Product Packaging

Product packaging refers to a multifaceted procedure encompassing a product's safeguarding, conservation, and containment to facilitate distribution, storage, sales, and utilisation (Nzumile & Taifa, 2018). A study conducted in Pakistan by Shafi et al. (2021) reveals that packaging is crucial for cultural artefacts' sales performance and overall business competitive advantage. Consumers tend to prefer meticulously packaged products as long as such advancements do not compromise the inherent qualities and attributes of the products. Another study conducted in India by Shukla et al. (2023) reveals that attractive packaging influences purchase intention and plays a pivotal role in enhancing the value of products served as gifts since artefacts are likely to be purchased as gifts.

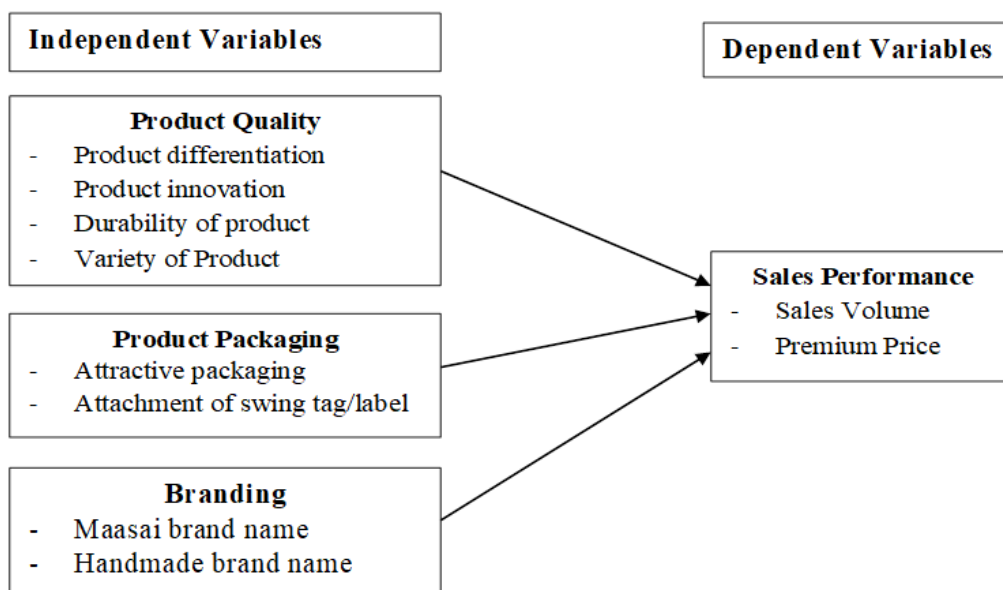
A positive association between packaging and sales performance of cultural artefacts was observed in a study conducted in South Africa by Makhitha (2019) in the African context. The study proposes the utilization of appropriate packaging and adequate packaging materials for certain items, incorporating the inclusion of the company's name and contact

information of the producer on the packaging. This practice aims to establish a high-quality perception and facilitate identifying the product's source or origins. This recommendation is further substantiated by Ding (2022), who asserts that visitors desire comprehensive information regarding the manufacturing process and the specific materials employed in producing the product. When presented on a swing tag, the provided information can serve as a valuable tool for marketing endeavours, particularly for gift stores that focus on attracting tourists. Specific field inputs with regard to the area covered in this study follow later.

2.4. Product Branding

A brand is defined as the collection of consumer perceptions regarding a specific product originating from a specific producer. In essence, it represents a commitment made by the producer to the consumer regarding the advantages that the consumer's business will gain from the said product (Zimmerman & Blythe, 2018). The study conducted by Do and Polska (2018) demonstrates that local handmade brands possess greater monetary value in terms of consumer product price estimation and readiness to pay than non-local brands. The assertions stated by Teo et al. (2020) align with the present findings, as they demonstrate that the handmade brand exerts a favourable influence on customers' perception of product attractiveness, leading to a willingness among buyers to pay a premium price for handcrafted products.

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework



3. Methodology

The study used a qualitative approach and an exploratory research design that aligns with the interpretivism research philosophy. The study was conducted at Nyamagana District, in Mwanza City. A sample size of 12 respondents was drawn using purposive sampling procedure. Primary data was collected using semi-structured interviews and observation. Thematic data analysis was employed with the help of a content analysis approach.

Among the interesting things in cultural artefacts is the use of 'handmade' as a branding aspect. Ko et al. (2019) conducted a study in Austria that unveiled a competitive advantage of handmade goods over machine-made ones. Additional research conducted in Vietnam has uncovered that establishing a brand identity for cultural artefacts within the country has presented a favourable circumstance for the Vietnamese artefacts business to enhance its market standing and broaden its reach in the international market. The official trade designation utilised by the artefacts sector in Vietnam is "Vietcraft Excellence" (Teo et al., 2020). Additionally, the sales success of artefacts on a global scale necessitates the implementation of branding strategies that effectively integrate the product, individuals, and location (Mastracci & Edgar, 2020).

For field underpinning, the product strategic factors presented above are summarized in a conceptual framework as below

2.5. Conceptual Framework

The product strategy, an independent variable, comprises three sub-dimensions: product quality, packaging, and branding. On the other hand, sales Performance is the dependent variable, which includes indicators such as sales volume and premium price.

4. Findings and Discussion

An analysis and discussion of the study resulting from interviewee's responses on how product strategies influence the sales performance of cultural artefacts is presented. The presentation is organised according to the research questions employed by the qualitative research approach.

4.1. Genesis of Maasai Cultural Products Business in Mwanza City

The Maasai cultural products business in Mwanza City started with a few herbalists in the early 1990s. At that time, their products were mainly traditional herbs to offer solutions for various health-related challenges. Over time, the Maasai cultural group started diversifying their product portfolios into other products in line with emerging and changing customer needs in the study area. Nowadays, the Maasai run a vibrant retail business in Mwanza City that is booming and getting more customers daily.

4.2. Product Quality and sales performance

Product differentiation, as a process of distinguishing a product from others to make it more attractive to a particular target market, is mentioned by most respondents as one of the quality elements the Maasai uses to gain a competitive advantage. The Maasai artisans have managed to create a stand-out feature in the artefacts industry in Mwanza City and capture the attention of potential customers outside their tribe and attracting them to make purchases. The distinct features possessed by Maasai artefacts are products with cultural decorations, customized product offerings, and superior traditional working tools.

The major feature that Maasai differentiate their product offering is by making cultural decorations. The artisans differentiate their products by adding features to normal leather products like belts, handbags, and sandals. Also, they decorate sticks carried as a symbol of authority from the Maasai perspective. Decorations are made using beads of various colours, making them above average in the market. Cultural decorations make their product more appealing to customers willing to offer premium prices. One respondent, who is also an artisan, said: *“A normal leather belt is sold for Tanzanian shillings 10,000/=, but after decorating them with beads, their price rises to 30,000/=.* This is because, unlike other belts, they become distinctive and cultural; thus, customers looking for cultural costumes become interested in buying.” A similar opinion was given by a customer who said that; *“I am a long-time loyal customer of Maasai cultural products because I love bright colours. The way they decorate their products with beads of various bright colours attracts me to their products.”*

Also, the Maasai business enterprises in Mwanza City can offer customized products as one of the means to differentiate their product offerings and thereby attract more buyers. Artisans can manufacture and offer various designs and details for one product, made specifically to a buyer's liking. At their shop, a customer can make a special order for a product by selecting features like colour, design, size, components, or other options to make a more unique item than a mass-produced one. These influence their sales performance and give them a competitive edge because the customized product, especially a cultural product, provides a deep feeling of ownership when customers design and select certain elements of their purchase, like mix and match offering and customized product commands a lucrative price. This strategy is supported by a customer who said *“If you*

want to appear cultural, distinguished in a special occasion or ceremony, you order a Maasai woven dress. They are so beautiful but very expensive.” Moreover, ordering and purchasing customized products gives the artisans insights into customers' likes, preferences, and perceptions and thereby able to modify their future product offerings.

Furthermore, the sales performance of Maasai artefacts in Mwanza City is influenced by the selling of superior quality traditional tools and weapons useful for livestock keeping. They offer various stick types, cattle bells, and weapons against wild animals, such as spears, swords, arrowheads, and shields. These products appear to satisfy customer needs by serving the purpose and standards of traditional tools for pastoral activities. This study also reveals that customers have diversified the uses of traditional Maasai weapons meant for pastoral communities. Nowadays, customers use them as a weapon for self-protection. One respondent, who is also a lorry driver, said that; *“Most lorries across the country have the Maasai stick or sword or both for protection. They are the most common weapon we carry for self-protection on our journey.”*

The findings on product differentiation are similar to previous studies. For example, a study by Soegoto (2018) shows that product differentiation is the essential quality attribute to enhance sales performance. The element of product differentiation was also emphasized by a study conducted by Hikmah et al. (2021), who revealed that product differentiations positively affected buyers' purchase decisions. Thus, product differentiation is a universally useful tool, even for cultural product offerings.

Another quality element which emerged is product innovation. The Maasai artisans have introduced changes to their artefacts that improve design, feel, look, and overall user experience. These factors necessitate their products to be relevant in the market and make their business presence grow and improve over time. One respondent explains that; *“Many years back, the colour of beads used to decorate our products was predominantly red, blue, yellow, and white. But now we use all variety of colours to attract more customers.”* Also, the practice of diversifying the use of different colours necessitates producing matching items which attract customers who want distinctive appearances. This was explained by a customer who said that; *“I love the Maasai products because they are cultural, and you can choose the colour to match your dresses.”*

The findings on product innovation agree with a previous study by Shaffi et al. (2022), who revealed that innovation is essential to ensure continuous quality products. Since cultural traditions are rooted in cultural artefacts, innovation is essential for sales performance, business survival and competitiveness. The precaution was also given that cultural artefacts lacking innovation will likely become obsolete. Thus, artisans must adopt incremental innovation to survive, grow, achieve better market results, and maintain local communities' cultural values, identity, and history.

However, in this study, one respondent presented his concern regarding product innovation and the preservation of culture. We cannot innovate a cultural artefact and maintain its traditional meaning to him. To some extent, the artefact turns out to be something different from the original intention of promoting Maasai culture. The respondent said; *“When artefacts are fabricated without considering traditional colours but only in favour of customer preferences, they don’t promote the Maasai culture.”* To this end, we can note that although innovation of cultural artefacts to some extent makes them lose their traditional pattern, innovation is inevitable in business. Like any other conventional products, cultural artefacts must undergo product innovation to survive the constantly changing customer tastes and preferences. The task remains with the artisans to ensure that cultural and traditional cues do not fade away with those innovations.

Moreover, most of the respondents mention durability as one of the quality elements which influence the sales performance of the Maasai cultural artefacts. The durability of Maasai artefacts is strongly associated with the raw material used to fabricate their products. For example, for leather products, Maasai artisans are accustomed to using pure leather. Some of the leather products fabricated by Maasai artisans are belts, various forms of footwear, wallets, key holders, and handbags. Thus, customers consider their product usage to last long enough before the product deteriorates. Durability as one of the essential attributes which influence sales performance is supported as follows; *“The Durability of Maasai products is because we use pure leather as raw material for leather products. Thus customers are confident that when they buy Maasai artefacts, they buy something genuine.”* Product durability was also mentioned as one of the factors which influence the sales performance of tools which are made for livestock keeping. Obviously, a variety of wood can be used to carve traditional sticks used for cattle rearing and other usages, but Maasai artisans use African black wood (one of the most hard wood) to carve their sticks. One respondent said; *“Maasai-made sticks and other traditional products for pastoral activities are durable and can last for years. We use mpingo trees (African black wood) as raw material to carve sticks. This kind of tree is rare, but even if it is found, other tribes lack the necessary skills to carve them. Thus, the best option for customers is to buy products made by the Maasai.”*

Another respondent presents a different perspective emphasising the reparability of Maasai cultural products compared to industrial products. Reparability is a suggested post-purchase activity toward extending the useful life span of a product. How the product is designed, and the material used will determine how likely a product will be repaired rather than replaced. The respondent said; *“Our customers are interested in our products because they are easily correctable and adjustable. Because most of our products are fabricated at our shops, when a customer buys them, they can return them soon for modification and repair for free. Also, customers can repair them cheaply in any other place.”*

The research results about the durability of products were consistent with the earlier investigation conducted by Mesa et

al. (2022), which highlighted the significance of product durability as a key aspect of product creation to attain a competitive edge in the business domain. Implementing solutions such as reuse, repair, and refurbishment enables the extension of a product’s lifespan while minimising its environmental impact.

Furthermore, variety of cultural products that serve a wide range of customer needs, is also revealed as one of the key quality attributes which boost the sales performance of the artefacts business. The Maasai Cultural products sold at Mwanza City can be categorised into first, fashion and beauty products (beaded necklaces, earrings, wallets, handbags, bracelet bangles, leather bracelets, wristbands, beaded sandals, and key holders). Second, traditional costumes (Variety of footwear, belts, woven garments, and Maasai shuka’s.). Third, traditional tools for pastoral activities (Variety of sticks, spears, arrowheads, shields, swords, and cowbells). Fourthly, herbal medicine. A variety of product offerings helps to convert prospects into customers. The more you have, the more options you can give the customer and the more individual tastes you can cater for, and ultimately sales volume is enhanced. One shop keeper said; *“When tourists visit our shops, they become so excited, and they want to buy almost a variety of each artefact they find.”* The findings on the variety of products mirror a study by Santos et al. (2020), which shows that a variety of products is a powerful strategy because organisations often use it to obtain a competitive advantage.

4.3. Product Packaging and Sales Performance

The Maasai artifacts enterprises in Mwanza City put less emphasis on product packaging. To Maasai, seeing a product in its nakedness the way it is visually is what counts, rather than keeping a product in a box or other wrappings. This is how Maasai sells its products even when street dust descends on them, portraying its natural environment. They don’t consider packaging part and parcel of their product offerings even after selling, except for herbs in powder form or liquid form, wrapped in any available material such as newspaper or discarded material such as used bottles.

One respondent considers the issue of product inspection and testing as one of the reason why packaging is less considered. That unpacked product eases customer inspection and testing before purchase. The respondent said; *“I display my products in their natural state so that customers can inspect them to feel and see their worthiness. Most customers demand to put on our products to test their fitness and appearance before purchasing.”* Another respondent introduced an issue of the cost involved in purchasing packaging material as a hindrance factor towards utilising packaging strategy. The respondent pointed out that; *“After-sale packaging may cost up to Tanzanian Shilings 500/= to buy disposable bags. This amount is costly and may lead to price changes and loss of customers.”* Also, resistance to change among the Maasai cultural group is another reason for non-adherence to packaging strategy. They conduct their business in their traditional setup and are accustomed to resisting new ways of doing things not rooted in their culture. This was revealed by

a respondent who said; *“We do not easily accept things not rooted in our culture. We imitate what our ancestors were doing.”*

Previous literature on product packaging shows that packaging strategy influences the sales performance of cultural artefacts. They recommend using suitable and appropriate packaging materials for certain products, with the name and contact details of the producer on the packaging, to create an impression of the quality and identity of its source/origins. Also, attachment of a swing tag to carry important information and instruction about the product (Makhitha, 2019). This appears to be crucial if the artefact target tourists, as Ding (2022) recommended, who reveals that tourists want details on how the product is made and the type of materials used. This information is normally written on packaging material or swing tag.

4.4. Branding Strategy and Sales Performance

“The Maasai brand” is used as an overall brand name and “handmade” as a secondary brand name, without any printing, image or symbol. One respondent highlight that; *“The Maasai cultural products are called Maasai products. We identify and name their products like that because their cultural products are produced and sold by the Maasai only.”* Moreover, the Maasai have created a strong brand awareness even though their products are not labelled. Maasai’s ways of life promote the Maasai brand. They conduct their life and business affair in their traditional setup, including their dress code. These create vivid distinctions between the Maasai and other people in town and other business competitors. Because the Maasai and what they’re doing are inseparable, the brand name and awareness of their artefacts become well-known and ultimately influence sales.

One respondent introduces an issue of ethical principles that originated in Maasai tribe but also applied in their day-to-day business conduct. Among the ethical principles is that Maasai people are accustomed to not watering down the quality of their products. This means: in fabricating their artefacts, they don’t change to cheap quality raw material to minimize cost. The second ethical principle is that Maasai are accustomed to speaking the truth no matter what. In his explanation, the respondent said; *“Most of us here adhere to certain principles rooted in our culture, which influence customers to buy our product and from us only. Some of our business ethical principles are that we don’t water down the quality of our product and we speak truth.”*

The use of the “Maasai brand name” for cultural products produced and sold by the Maasai artisans is closely similar to the study findings conducted by Mastracci & Edgar (2020) in Zambia, who shows that there is a growing market demand for authentic items from socially responsible brands. In addition to the product itself, consumer’s desire transparency and a narrative about the origins of the product, including information about the individuals involved in its production. Their study also reveals that the sales performance of artefacts on a global stage demand branding that ties together product, people, and place. The awareness of the “Maasai brand” and

its influence agree with a previous study conducted by Bwana (2020), who revealed a robust and statistically significant positive correlation between brand awareness and the sales success of soft drinks. Thus, the significance of brand awareness for conventional and cultural products applies to the same. Furthermore, the correlation between the “Maasai brand” and business ethics resembles the findings of Doman’s (2023) research, which elucidated that adopting an ethical framework in business endeavors bolsters the enterprise by leveraging loyal customers as a potent marketing force. Businesses establish themselves as reputable and dependable brands through ethical sales practices.

The secondary name used to brand Maasai cultural products in Mwanza City is “handmade brand name.” The production of Maasai cultural items involves using artisanal techniques, which may encompass entirely manual processes, the assistance of hand tools, or a combination of manual and mechanical methods. However, it is important to note that the primary and most significant contribution to the final product is the direct manual labour provided by the artisan. Thus, taking into consideration that the majority of conventional products are industrial products, the way the Maasai manufacture their products makes them be branded as “handmade products.” The majority of the respondents relate handmade products and business success. For example, one of them said; *“Because our products are handmade, customers are attracted to purchase and even not hesitant to pay a premium price.”*

Also, several respondents come up with insight into why handmade brand names influence the sales performance of cultural artefacts. One of the reasons is that handmade products are unique. When we compare handmade with mass-produced industrial products, we can note that each item is a unique display of craftsmanship. The issue of uniqueness is highlighted by a respondent who said that; *“We possess the necessary knowledge and skills to fabricate our products in a way that cannot easily be copied/imitated or machine produced. This creates uniqueness in our products.”* Moreover, handmade products are synonymous with high value and high quality for the different needs of the end user. The value in terms of time devoted and dedication to create a beautiful item that celebrates their craftsmanship. One respondent explained that; *“The artefacts produced by Maasai artisans carry the spirit of love to our culture. That’s why we don’t temper the quality of raw materials used in our craftsmanship. A handmade product is built to last.”* Additionally, peculiarity of handmade products and how they are perceived to be a good gift to offer to someone was also explained by one customer who said; *“I once bought a Maasai woven dress as a gift to my Swedish friend. She was so much excited and grateful.”*

The findings on “handmade brand name” is closely related to a previous study conducted in Austria by Ko et al. (2019), who demonstrated that when handmade artefacts are bought as a gift, the givers possess strong preferences for the product and are willing to pay more comparing to machine made products with equivalent function. This is because love

conveyance positively influences customers' purchasing intention of handmade artefacts. This is also supported by Teo et al. (2020), who reveals that the handmade brand positively affects a product's perceived attractiveness by customers, a significant factor influencing their purchasing decisions.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The study aimed to explore how product strategies influence the sales performance of cultural artefacts. It focused on primary data collected from the Maasai artefacts enterprises in Mwanza City. The product strategy, an independent variable, comprises three sub-dimensions: product quality, packaging, and branding. On the other hand, sales Performance is the dependent variable, which includes indicators such as sales volume and premium pricing. The respective findings are such that Maasai artefact dealers strategize their product offerings by employing four quality elements: product differentiation, product innovation, product durability, and variety of product offerings. The outcomes of these elements are enhancing sales volume and charging at a premium price. This, in turn, happens to be the main input for sales performance.

The study also observes that, as stipulated in the literature, product packaging does not operate as a bearing for sales performance of Maasai cultural products, for their nature and dealership. Buyers want to see, inspect, and test the items of purchase, and in some instances, wear them immediately. This makes packaging to be perceived as non-useful in this category of business.

Moreover, on the branding issue, the study observes that the Maasai artefacts sold in Mwanza City have no printed brand name, symbol, or image to market their cultural products. But "Maasai brand" is used as an overall brand name, and "handmade brand" is a secondary brand name. The Maasai brand name significantly influenced sales performance because customers consider it trustworthy and reliable. Also, handmade brand name significantly influence the sales performance of cultural products for reasons such as handmade brands are unique, synonymous with high value and quality, scarce in the markets, and can easily be customized to customer's tastes and preferences.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby presented:

- I. The artefacts dealers should take advantage of the booming tourist market in Mwanza City by tailoring their product offerings to the tourist's preferences and boosting their business to another level. This can be done by strategize on appropriate, attractive, and suitable packaging with all the necessary information printed on a packaging material or an attached swing tag.
- II. The artefacts enterprises should organise themselves and register their trademark or brand name. This will give legal protection to their brand and artefacts. Also, their artefacts will require printed brand names, images, or symbols especially in

foreign markets that demand socially responsible branded products.

- III. The Artefacts enterprises should be strategized as part of the government effort towards poverty alleviation by purposive measures to increase the market share of the artefacts business. This can be done by linking artefacts' business to tourism activities. Cultural artefacts should be available to tourists in major circuits where they stay and visit. This will boost the artefact's business in terms of sales volume and lucrative price.
- IV. The government's effort to promote medium and small-scale enterprises should be tailored towards the artefacts industry. The artisans have the knowledge and skills to manufacture marketable products but lack substantial capital to increase their product supply and widen their distribution points. Government soft loan programs for small and medium-scale enterprises are ultimately important to cultural artefacts enterprises.
- V. Policymakers should view cultural artefacts as part of a national heritage that must be legally protected, promoted, and conserved for generations. Registration of trade names, brand names, or patent rights may sound unnecessary to local cultural practitioners, but it is important. The government can initiate and register a country brand name for artefacts produced in Tanzania or a tribe brand name for artefacts produced by a particular tribe. This will enable artefacts from Tanzania to permeate into global markets.

This study venture on product strategies, one of the four controllable marketing variables (marketing mix) that a business enterprise uses to pursue the desired level of sales in the target market. The remaining controllable marketing variables are price, place, and promotion. The study provides insight into how product strategies can influence the sales performance of cultural artefacts. Still, there remained a knowledge gap on how much business enterprises involved in cultural artefacts will charge for the product offerings (price) and how it will make the offering available to target consumers (place), finally, how it must communicate with target customers about the offering and persuade them of its merits (promotion). This provides a fertile ground for further research.

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