



Marketing Research

Student's name

Institutional affiliation

GOLDESSAYS

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Part I: Secondary Research

Nowadays there are many companies that operate in the global market of personal computer manufacturers. The top companies in the industry today are well-known Hewlett-Packard Co., Apple Inc., Dell Inc., Lenovo Group Ltd., Acer Group and others. The most contemporary data about these companies is presented in the chart below. It addresses the key components such as the shipments in the thousands of units and the market cap for each particular company. The chart below illustrates that Hewlett-Packard Co. is the second in the list of the top computer manufacturing companies in the target industry with 14,7 thousands of units shipped compared to Lenovo Group Ltd., which has 15,7 thousand of units shipped. The market share of these companies is rather close, which is 18,8% and 20% accordingly. The other company listed in the middle of the chart is Dell Inc. with 10,7 thousand of units shipped and a market cap of 13,3%. The next two companies are Apple Inc. and Acer Group that have shipped approximately an equal number of thousand units, which is 4,9 and 6,6 accordingly.

Chart 1.

<i>Third Quarter 2014</i>	Shipments (thousand units)	Market cap (%)
Hewlett-Packard Co.	14,7	18,8%
Apple Inc.	4,9	6,3%
Dell Inc.	10,4	13,3%
Lenovo Group Ltd.	15,7	20%

Acer Group	6,6	8,4%
Other	26	33,1%
Total	78,5	100%

Source: IDC Worldwide Quarterly PC Tracker, October 8, 2014. Press Release.

<http://www.idc.com/getdoc.jsp?containerId=prUS25187214>

Hewlett-Packard Co. is one of the manufacturers of personal computers that operates in the global market. The marketing strategy of Hewlett-Packard Co. is focused on bringing the most value to its customers by offering high quality products and services all over the world. At the same time, HP Company seeks to offer its products and services at reasonable prices, including regular and the most sophisticated customers worldwide. HP uses new technologies in order to gain the power over its target market. Thus, it uses digital information technologies to position its products and services in the target industry. It does not have many competitors with the top ones addressed above. However, the most concern of the marketing strategy is aimed at the companies such as IBM and Dell. The objective of the company is to market its products and services to the new customers. A special concern is directed towards marketing its products and services to the repeated customers all over the countries that present Hewlett-Packard Co. globally. Thus, the overall marketing strategy is to use 4Ps such as “product, pricing, promotion, and place”. The overall marketing strategy of Hewlett-Packard Co. is aimed at creating opportunities for solving problems of its customers through the online help desks in order to make the lives of their consumers stress free. This strategy is enhanced with the willingness to offer high quality products and services at reasonable prices. Thus, the HP Company also

addresses the target needs of the key customers through the promotion techniques. The major place to purchase the products of HP is in the top online stores all over the world, including Wal-Mart, BestBuy and others. Consequently, it operates successfully in the competitive environment by applying the above mentioned strategies across the demographics of the company internationally (HP, 2014).

The other top manufacturers of personal computers in the industry, such as Apple Inc., Dell Inc., Lenovo Group Ltd., and Acer Group, have many advantages regarding the marketing strategies. They have a strong positive impact on the competitive environments and demographics of the PC manufacturing companies. For example, the market strategy of Apple Inc. addresses the following key aspects: to ignore the critics, manufacture the products with respect to transforming an ordinary product to a beautiful one, offer the end products at reasonable prices, communicate the language of the target audience, improve the customer care experience, generate a tribe and become a brand (Apple, 2014). At the same time, the marketing strategy of Dell Inc. refers to the manufacturing of simple solutions for the PC industry that are greatly supported online. Dell Inc. also tends to obtain new customers by offering the leading solutions for the PC users all over the world. Finally, it seeks to scale alternative PC solutions all over the world (Dell, 2014). The other example is the marketing strategy of Lenovo Group Ltd., which is to use the networking experience, unique supply chain management, and innovations. Lenovo Group Ltd. also uses its strengths as opportunities for building a better future for the PC users by offering its extraordinary products and services all over the world (Lenovo, 2014). The marketing strategy of the Acer Group is aimed at finding new markets for the purposes of growing internationally, building alliances with the other companies that are leaders in different marketing segments such as Microsoft, McAfee and others. The idea is to create the basis for

international growth and development of the brand with various needs of the target customers in different segments of the market (Acer, 2014). Overall, the marketing strategy of the top computer manufacturers envisages the improvements in the competitive environments and demographics of these companies. However, it is possible to manage based on the constant actions towards the innovative enhancements that will make a marketing strategy more valuable. As a result, the companies will be able to provide better quality products and services, which will lead to the greater satisfaction of its target customers and result in higher annual revenues for all the top PC manufacturers (Mckeown, 2012).

Part II: Developing a Research Design

The use of focus groups is one of the greatest examples that the PC manufacturing companies can use in order to understand their customers better. At the same time, the idea is not only to understand what specific PC tools and instruments the target customers may need but also being able to offer them the most explicit computer solutions. The goal is to satisfy the needs of the most sophisticated customers by understanding what the client may need in the future. In this case, the use of the focus groups should be aimed at using the opinions of the new generations as they have the most aptitudes for the target needs of the PC world. In other words, the focus groups should be based on the collection and analysis of information that is split among the customers of different categories. For example, these customers could be divided into two sections. One section is aimed at the anticipated needs of the followers who are not the actual customers yet. However, they may become these customers in the nearest future. At the same time, the other section could consist of the existing customers who already have at least one item of the products that the companies offer. It should also address the use of the customer services by them. In fact, it is important to understand their opinion regarding their satisfaction of the

work of employees in the customer service departments. Therefore, the focus groups should be used to conduct qualitative and quantitative surveys. The best way to manage these surveys is both online and offline, as this will measure a greater market share of the target customers. As a result, the companies will be able to have a better vision for the marketing needs and will be able to adjust their marketing strategies to address the needs of the target customers. The overall aspects of concerns should be aimed at understanding the perceptions of the target customers regarding their attitudes and beliefs towards the quality of products and services offered by the PC manufacturing companies. However, these focus groups should be measured through the use of interactive settings that would put the existing and potential customers into the position of sharing accurate and precise information towards the quality of products and services of the companies (Shaw, 2012).

In addition, the companies should consider the possibilities of using different types of the focus groups at the same time. It would have a great advantage for the companies since it will provide the data of a higher quality while different research results will increase value of one another. In other words, the companies could benefit from the focus groups that are managed in two ways such as the observation of one focus group by another and overall discussion of the research results. The companies can also benefit from using several moderators in all the focus groups. In this case, it is important that one moderator is in charge of the topic coverage and other one are responsible for the overall progress of discussion and analysis of the research results. Simultaneously, the PC manufacturing companies could use the debating moderate focus group that will have several moderators with opposing opinions. It is also important to acknowledge that these moderators should address different issues during the process of discussion on the final results. At the same time, the companies can use the so-called

“respondent moderator focus groups” where only one moderator is requested to respond while another one is silent for a definite time agreed in advance. Moreover, it makes sense to use the focus groups that will position the client participation, which will provide the companies with more detailed information on the quality of both products and services of the companies. It is also important to address the needs of the customers by asking the representatives direct questions that address the weaknesses and threats of the companies in the target market of PC manufacturing. It will provide more detailed answers from the position of the actual customers and will give more topics for the discussion during the analysis of the results. In addition, the companies can use the focus groups with a minimum number of research participants. It will provide the same replies on the research questions with respect to the opinions and attitudes of a small group with around ten people. Moreover, it will allow the companies to evaluate the research results from the position of minorities in the target market that address the needs of small groups of the target customers. Finally, it makes sense to conduct the same interviews with the focus groups over the Internet. In other words, this is the time when the companies can use telephone networking to conduct the online surveys and manage personalized interviews with the research participants (Swaha & Sritama, 2012).

Overall, the companies need to be ready to face the challenges and difficulties while managing the focus groups and conducting offline and online surveys to address the marketing research objectives. One of such challenges and difficulties is that the research participants may provide incorrect data while answering the research questions. It is possible due to the fact that the research participants have different reasons for participating in the marketing research surveys. On the one hand, some of the respondents are willing to participate on their own will. On the other hand, these research participants are pushed to participate by their companies. In

both cases the research participants do not communicate with their management personnel to know about their answers on the research questions. Therefore, there is a great likelihood that the respondents will provide incorrect or improper answers to the research questions, which will result in a percentage of incorrect answers. As a result, such research results will be considered invalid, which could have a negative impact on the outcomes of the marketing research studies. In this case, there is a vital need to use the informed consent in order to guarantee full confidentiality of the research participants and their personal details. At the same time, the companies need to ensure the respondents in a complete anonymity in their replies. There is only one exception for the cases when the research participants are willing to share their personal information and opinions with the public. In this case, the research participants could be more favorable while answering the research questions. However, there is still likelihood that a certain percentage of the research respondents will provide partly incorrect data. It means that the research results will be not as precise as it was intended by the PC manufacturing companies. As a final point, in order to minimize the errors in the research results, the PC companies should conduct the marketing research in the countries where they operate. In other words, such data would be more favorable and will provide the research results at a higher quality. In addition, since the research participants know their private information is not shared with the public, they will be willing to provide more information that could improve the overall quality of products and services that the PC manufacturing companies offer in the target markets (Shaw, 2012; Swaha & Sritama, 2012).

Part III: Developing Hypotheses and Questionnaire Design

Generally, the questionnaires could be different for all the PC manufacturing companies. They could explore different aspects based on the level of their development and growth in the

target market. It also depends on the number of years the companies operate in the industry, including the number of offices all over the world, in case of the global PC manufacturing companies. For this reason, the major question of concern for the research questionnaire is to address the variables. These include the value that the target products and services bring to the target customers globally, the overall effectiveness of the customer care and support departments, the efficiency of the selling and marketing operations, and the overall scalability of the business activities (Swaha & Sritama, 2012). In other words, the research questions could be managed in the following way:

- What is the value that the target products and services bring to the target customers globally?
- What is the overall effectiveness of the customer care and support departments while they serve the target customers through both online and offline operations?
- What is the efficiency of selling and marketing operations in the target industry compared to similar operations of the competing PC manufacturing companies?
- What are the opportunities to scale the business processes and improve business activities to address the needs of the target customers in both online and offline operations?

The position of the marketing research questionnaire is aimed at understanding the global aspects of the business. In other words, the questionnaire intends to see the overall image of the company in the target market. However, there is a need to pay attention to the details. On the one hand, it makes sense since the companies need to have an overall vision of the company in the target market in order to adjust the marketing strategies. On the other hand, the answers to the

research questions that address mainly the aspect of global perspectives is not enough to envision any possible details that relate to the needs of servicing the target customers. Hence, by asking the research participants about the details of the target products and services, the companies could have a broader vision of their position in the target market. At the same time, such a questionnaire will help them to understand the hidden needs of the customers. It will also be helpful to predict the needs of the most sophisticated customers in order to address them in the new version of the products and also apply them to the servicing needs of the customers. Therefore, almost every research question could be improved. On the one hand, the companies could add more details into every single question of the survey. These details could address both the questions and the options for the answers of the research participants. It is also important to address the position of asking questions in both global and local perspectives. At the same time, the companies could improve the questionnaires by differentiating them in every specific location where the companies have offices all over the world. The idea is to use the certain specifics of the local populations where the companies are presented internationally. These specifics relate to the needs of age, gender, social status, employment opportunities, ethnic groups, and other characteristics that are specific for every single location of the companies. As a result, the heads of the PC manufacturing companies will have a more detailed vision where they are regarding marketing their products and services globally. It will also be helpful to address the anticipated improvements based on the research results while heading to where the companies are willing to be in the next decade (Shaw, 2012).

Finally, in order to improve the marketing research questionnaire and its outcomes, there is a need to address all the types of questions. It makes sense since many people have different opinions and attitudes towards similar products and services. It takes place for various reasons

that are specific for every single customer. However, different types of questions should be addressed in the questionnaire since it helps to cover the perceptions of the research participants in the most detailed way. For example, the companies could use the contingency questions that address the reply of the research participants to the previous question. The questionnaire could also address the use of matrix questions that refer to the different response categories with multiple questions. It could address the closed ended questions such as those with yes and no answers. It could also refer to the multiple choice questions and scaled questions that approach different specifics of the people all over the world. At the same time, there is a need to use open ended questions in order to address different inclinations of the company. For example, these questions could address the structure of the opinion that people have towards both products and services of the company. It could also relate to the associations of people that could be used to enhance the new marketing strategies of the companies. At the same time, it makes sense to use those open ended questions that require the customers to complete the sentences based on the example. In addition, the questionnaire could address the questions where the customers are required to answer any particular question by providing a short story about the experience of using either products or services of the companies. As a final point, the companies could involve the visionary questions, which results could be used in the marketing campaigns of the companies in the future. Overall, the idea is to use the open and closed format questions, as well as those with classifications such as leading, importance, Likert, dichotomous, bipolar, and rating scale ones in order to understand the target customers in depths. In conclusion, it is important to avoid some sorts of questions that address the target customers regarding embarrassing them by having negative connotations, and also the hypothetical questions that could ask self-contradicting information (McKeown, 2012).

Part IV: Data Analysis and Conclusions

The research hypothesis and overall assumptions should be managed with respect to the marketing research. The core aspects of concern are as follows:

- The overall quality of the products and services;
- The value that the target products and services bring to the target customers in the international perspectives;
- The opportunities for the companies to scale their business processes and improve business activities by addressing the needs of the target customers in both online and offline operations;
- The overall effectiveness of the customer care and support departments while serving the target customers through both online and offline operations;
- The efficiency of selling and marketing operations in the target industry compared to the similar operations of the competing PC manufacturing companies.

Established Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that the variables addressed are independent. However, there is likelihood that in case one variable or another is lacking, the company could experience difficulties in marketing its products and services in the target industry.

Table 1.

	Increased annual revenue	Stable annual revenue	Total
Quality	45	17	62

Value	41	29	70
Total	86	46	132

Calculating Chi-square

$$\text{Chi square} = 132[(45)(29) - (17)(41)]^2 / (62)(70)(46)(86) = 2,842.$$

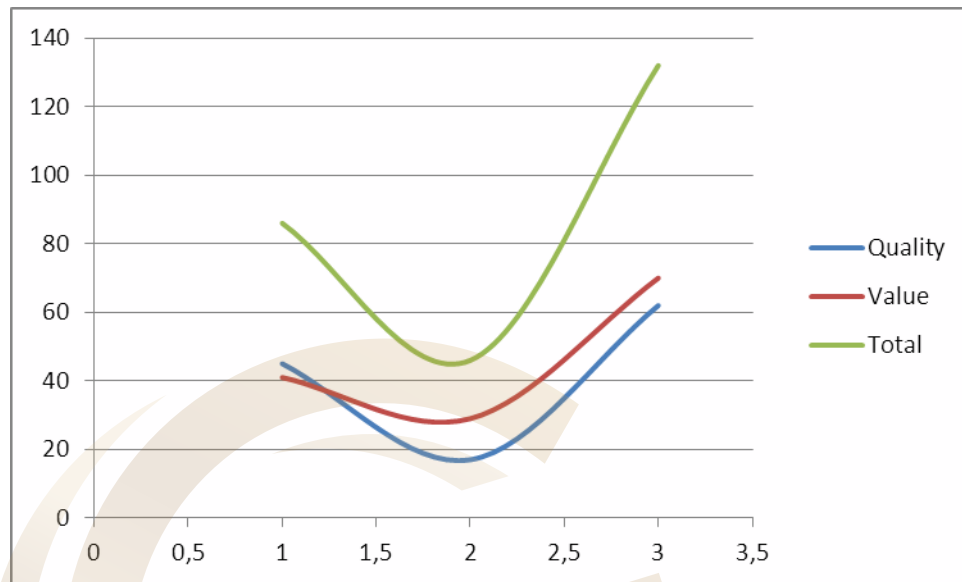
Based on the Chi Square distribution table, the predetermined alpha level of significance is 0,10.

Calculating Degrees of Freedom or the Significance Level

$$\text{DF} = (2-1) \times (2-1) = 1.$$

Therefore, the level of significance is 0,10, and the degree of freedom equals 1. This means that the corresponding probability is in-between the levels of 2.706 and 3.841, which is 2,842. The p-value is 0.09, which is more than the level of accepted significance of 0.05, namely $p > 0.05$. In this case, the outcomes indicate that it is not possible to reject the null hypothesis. Hence, the statistical calculations indicate that there is not specific difference regarding the issue what aspects of concern make more sense for the target customers. In other words, there is no specific difference for the target customers what variable helps them to make decisions towards purchasing the products of services use of the particular PC manufacturing company. For a graphical representation of the data, refer to the graph 1 below:

Graph 1.



The SPSS output illustrates that the variables used in the statistical analysis correspond to the fact that the null hypothesis could not be rejected. In other words, all the variables that were used in the calculations are independent. It means that the likelihood that customers would prefer making their decisions based on one or another variable is minimal. It may not strongly impact the experience of the companies regarding the difficulties they face while marketing their products and services in the target industry. In other words, the companies need to focus on all the variables in order to guarantee the purchase decisions of the target customers is oriented towards using one or more products of a particular manufacturing company. It also means that all the variables are equally important for the companies to operate effectively in the target market. Consequently, the companies need to provide the quality while offering the best possible products and services in the target market. However, they need to make sure the overall quality of the products and services directly correspond to the image of the companies in the industry. At the same time, it makes sense to acknowledge that if to compare the quality of products or services, both aspects should be on the top level of the proficiency for the particular company. It is also important to address the value of the target products and services. The idea is to achieve

the stage at which the companies are able to bring the maximum possible value to the target customers by offering their products and services. However, such a high level of quality for the products and services should be provided in the international perspective. Otherwise it will have a negative impact on the overall image of the company in the target market. The next concern is the ability of the companies to use the opportunities they have in the industry. The goal is to determine the strong points of the company and use them as an advantage over its competitors. It could be managed with a simple but effective analysis of strength and weakness, including the opportunities and threats of the particular company. Once these aspects are managed in the SWOT analysis, the companies can adjust their marketing strategies to promote their products and services more effectively in the target international markets. Consequently, the companies will be able to scale their businesses by improving their operational processes. It will also help to enhance the business activities through the use of strong points that every PC manufacturing company has in the target market. In addition, by addressing the needs of the target customers, the companies could position themselves more effectively using different marketing solutions for both the online and offline operations. Another important concern that the PC manufacturing companies should deal with is the overall effectiveness of the customer care services, including the operating effectiveness of the support departments. The aim of these departments is to provide an explicit communication and offer an outstanding support to the existing customers. At the same time, the idea is to serve not only the existing customer but also to offer all the required information to the potential customers. As a result, the companies will be able to serve their target customers in the best possible way. The most important aspect is that such a high level of services should be equal for both online and offline operations of the PC manufacturing companies. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the companies should manage their

operations as effectively as they can. At times, it requires outsourcing while searching the other companies that could contribute to the overall business success. However, the most important emphasis of the PC manufacturing companies should be made towards the efficiency of their operations regarding both selling and marketing. In fact, these operations are considered as the most important ones in any target industry. The idea is that the companies can use their strong points in order to improve their operations while selling and marketing their products and services in the target industry. Hence, compared to similar operations of other competing PC manufacturing companies, some of them could become more valuable due to the overall recognition of the public. As a result, such operations of any manufacturing company could result in the improvements of the number of attracted customers and correspondingly the increase of the annual revenues of the companies in the target industry.

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