

The Human Issue in Channels of Distribution in Jordan: A Wholesaler's Point of View

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Abstract. Managing a distribution system is a huge task as the amount of business passing through the system and the number of customers that the system deals with are enormous. However, all channels of distribution are influenced not only by economic factors but also by behavioral factors as well. Channels of distribution are viewed as social systems affected by behavioral issues such as harmony and conflict. Good management must have proper knowledge of these behavioral issues so that their effects can be incorporated into the management's decision making. Inadequate care of these behavioral issues may cause conflict which will reduce the efficiency of the channel. Therefore, this study aims at examining the human issue in channels of distribution in Jordan. The channel level of a manufacturer-wholesaler was selected for the study and, by using a quantitative approach, conclusions are reached and some recommendations are made which could be of great importance to Jordanian manufacturers.

Introduction

Distribution systems are very important in providing customers with satisfying products and in making these products available in the right place, with the right quantity and at the right time [1, pp.412-417].

To do so, marketing channels are usually determined by consensus. Channel members coordinate their efforts for their own mutual benefit [2]. However, some distribution channels are organized and controlled by one member of the channel [3]. This member (a producer, a wholesaler or a retailer) may determine channel policies and develop the marketing mix [4]. General Motors, Mitsubishi and Toshiba, for instance, are channel leaders for several of many products they manufacture [5].

The different levels of the marketing channel can be combined vertically or horizontally under the management of the channel leader. This combination leads to the stabilization of supplies, reduction in costs and better coordination of channel members [6].

The social system of the marketing channel enhances the idea that every member of the channel plays a unique role and agrees (implicitly or explicitly) to endorse certain rights, responsibilities, rewards and sanctions for non-conformity [7]. For example, wholesalers expect producers to deliver goods on time and producers expect wholesalers to honor payment agreements and keep them informed of their needs [8, p. 315]. These issues must be fully understood to make effective channel decisions.

Importance of Channel Cooperation

Cooperation in the marketing channel is important as the importance of the soul to the body. Neither channel goals nor member goals can be reached without coordination [9]. Failure in any stage of the chain can ruin the channel [10].

While the debate on cooperation continues, no one denies that there are various methods to achieve channel cooperation. For instance, the chain of the marketing channel should consider itself as a unified system, competing with other systems [11]. This method makes individual members less likely to do things that would create disadvantages for other members [12]. Simultaneously, channel members should observe the fact that their efforts should be targeting a common market which, in turn, can help in structuring channel roles for maximum market effectiveness. Moreover, producers and intermediaries can perform reciprocal services which can also help in achieving individual objectives [13].

Although one may argue that the ultimate goal of all channel members is to distribute products profitably and efficiently, some disagreements regarding the best methods of achieving this goal occurs. Channel members may want to maximize their own profits while maintaining as much autonomy as possible. If this intention establishes misconduct of role expectations, the final result will be frustration and conflict for the whole channel [14].

Conflicts in the marketing channel appear when dealers are becoming interested in competing products or when dealing with product lines handled by more specialized intermediaries. In some cases, conflict develops because producers attempt to increase efficiency by circumventing intermediaries, as is happening in marketing channels for microcomputer software. The growing suspicion and lack of trust are contributing to mounting tensions in software marketing channels in Western markets [15].

To avoid channel conflict, all members must be able to expect acceptable levels of performance from each other. Moreover, certain measures of channel coordination must be adopted by channel members, which requires good leadership and control [16].

The Human Issue in the Marketing Channel

The notion of the "social system" of the marketing channel made researchers view these channels as "overly complex". How complex are they? Their uniqueness comes mainly from the structural complexity and from the human relations and behavior [17].

The nature of the general business and distribution system and the sociocultural tradition of any society play an important role in the complexity of these channels. Many marketing and business specialists have stressed the inextricable link between the culture and the distribution channel system. There is a general agreement within the marketing research community that distribution channels comprise a small business society. Distribution channels are strongly influenced by beliefs, attitudes, norms, religions, family relations, business customs and manners, as well as other social relationships [18].

In any distribution system, the structural and behavioral aspects are complex and mysterious, however, the structural aspects are relatively more tangible, explicit and fixed. Behavioral issues of the distribution system are more difficult for people to understand because they are intangible, implicit and profound [19]. Therefore, the behavioral aspects of any distribution system remain the most difficult to understand. Without clear understanding of the behavioral aspects, no one can view the distribution system without confusion, and no improvement of or entry into the system is possible.

The human orientation in the channels of distribution should be considered and that economic consideration must not be the only ultimate interest of any channel member. Even though the human criteria in channels of distribution are not as clear and tangible as economic criteria, they may have some underlying measures which determine the daily behavior and thinking within the distribution system [20]. Hence, the unwritten and culturally imbedded rules maybe difficult for the people living in the culture to fully understand because they are too deeply involved. Consequently, the situation may remain the same (unchanged) and no real improvements in the distribution system are made.

The aim of this study is to examine, from a wholesalers point of view, whether Jordanian manufacturers are human-oriented or economic-oriented in their daily business dealings with wholesalers in Jordan. Thus, the challenge was to find some human measures to help in understanding the functioning of the Jordanian

distribution channels [e.g. 21 and 22]. After a thorough and careful consideration, the researcher was able to conclude the following variables to be tested in this study. The linkage of these variables to the antecedent questionnaire is shown in Table 1, and these variables are:

- a) Harmony at the corporate policy level.
- b) Economic interests of the manufacturer.
- c) Manufacturers' emphasis on product competence.
- d) Rebate and margins.
- e) Manufacturers' aid to wholesalers.
- f) Manufacturers' tolerance of financially weak wholesalers.
- g) Manufacturers' business treatment of wholesalers.
- h) Manufacturers' loyalty to wholesalers.

Purpose of this Study

The overall purpose of this study is to investigate, from a wholesaler's point of view, the level of human orientation in the marketing channel in Jordan.

Study Hypothesis

Based on the literature review and the visits to various wholesalers, the researcher was able to draw the following hypothesis.

Economic factors rather than human factors are likely to be the main interest of Jordanian manufacturers in their business relationships with wholesalers in Jordan.

Research Methodology

This part describes the methodological issues employed in this study. These issues are explained below:

Reasons for selecting the channel level of a manufacturer-wholesaler

It would be preferable not to restrict the focus of this research to a particular level of the marketing channel, but any form of research has limitations and constraints which require the investigator to make a choice and this study is no exception. The second reason is related to the fact that most wholesalers in Jordan deal directly with ultimate consumers which, in turn, makes them perform some retailers' activities. Therefore, the channel level of a retailer-ultimate consumer of the marketing channel is relatively and indirectly addressed.

Data collection

The names and addresses of 856 Jordanian wholesalers (out of 1000⁸) were obtained and 500 questionnaires were hand delivered, at random, to 500 wholesalers. Of the 500 distributed questionnaires, 336 usable questionnaires were returned; hence, the response rate was 67.2%. The sample size was thought to be adequate for this type of study. In delivering and collecting the questionnaires, the researcher received the assistance of some qualified persons (i.e., MBA graduates with good research skills).

Reliability and validity of the study measurements

Reliability analysis was carried out and the results were encouraging and reported in Table 4. However, to ensure construct validity, Table 1 shows the operationalization of the variables included in the study and the linkage to the antecedent questionnaire.

Table 1. The study constructs and the linkage to the antecedent questionnaire

Construct	Reference where similar constructs are used
Harmony at the corporate level	7, 23, 24, 25, and 26
Economic interest of the manufacturer	7, 26, 27, and 28
Manufacturers' emphasis on product competence	10, 24, 26, and 29
Rebate and margins	10, 28, and 29
Manufacturers' aid to wholesalers	10, 11, 26, and 30
Manufacturers' tolerance of financially weak wholesalers	10, 24, and 26
Manufacturers' business treatment of wholesalers	24, 26, and 31
Manufacturers' loyalty to wholesalers	10, 26, 29, and 31

Data Analysis

In addition to using frequencies, a T-test was conducted in situations to examine if significant differences exist between the means of the two groups of wholesalers.

To double check on respondents' answers, each variable was measured through two scales which were later combined for analysis. When two scales or more are combined, the raw data are converted from non-parametric to parametric [32]. This, of

⁸ Based on my telephone discussion with Mr. Abdulla Atyah, Head of the Department of Research and Studies at Amman Chamber of Commerce, there is no official record of all wholesalers in Jordan. However Mr. Atyah has indicated that the total number of wholesalers in Jordan is around 1000. In addition, he has indicated that anybody with JD 5000 can obtain importers' licence. Those importers were also exempted from the study for the following reasons:

- many of them do not use the licence.
- an individual with JD 5000 (i.e., \$7500) cannot be considered as a wholesaler.

course, was done after reliability analysis was carried out and the results suggested the use of every two scales combined together (Cronbach Alpha > 0.65) as suggested by Nunnally [33]. Moreover, according to the central-limit theorem, if random samples are drawn with an overall reasonable size, then the means of these samples (the x 's) are approximately normally distributed. Therefore, the conditions of employing a T-test were met.

Discussion

The results reported in Table 2 reflect respondents' answers to question number 1 of the questionnaire. These results show that the majority (i.e., 70%) of surveyed wholesalers say that the human issue is missing from their business relationships with Jordanian manufacturers. Therefore, the concept of harmony and, as a consequence, manufacturers' distribution systems may be at risk of conflict.

Table 2. Wholesalers' opinion regarding the human issue in their business relationship with Jordanian manufacturers

Response	n	N	%
Yes	102	336	30
No	234	336	70

N= Number of cases included in the sample.

n= Number of valid observations.

O Missing value.

Many of the human-related issues were put to respondents for investigation. These issues are represented in the questions 2a, 2b,..., 9a and 9b. Table 3 reveals the frequencies of wholesalers' answers to these questions. By taking a general look at this table, one can easily detect the overall negative perception that wholesalers have of manufacturers concerning these human issues. Although the economic conditions may be a reason for manufacturers to put some emphasis on wholesalers' economic situation, nobody should underestimate the importance of having some degree of harmony within the marketing channel. As mentioned earlier in this study, lack of harmony could mean conflict and conflict may jeopardise relations within the marketing channel.

To further investigate if significant differences exist between wholesalers who said that the human issues are missing from their business relationships with Jordanian manufacturers and those who did not, a T-test was carried out. Table 4 reveals the results.

Table 3. Human issues of concern to wholesalers in Jordan

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Uncertain		Quite disagree		Strongly disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Q2a-Manufacturers stress the human and social relationships	30	8.9	36	10.7	45	13.4	105	31.3	120	35.7
Q2b-Manufacturers do not stress harmonious cooperation	126	37.5	102	30.4	51	15.2	33	9.8	24	7.1
Q3a-Economic rather than human rationale is the main manufacturer's concern	144	42.9	111	33.0	27	8.0	18	5.4	36	10.7
Q3b-Manufacturers regard the economic factor as a secondary issue when it comes to the human factor	27	8.0	21	6.3	33	9.8	117	34.8	138	41.1
Q4a-Product competence rather than human relations is usually used by manufacturers to attract wholesalers to their products	150	44.7	117	34.8	30	8.9	27	8.0	12	3.6
Q4b Manufacturers do not put too much emphasis on their product competence when it comes to attracting wholesalers	21	6.3	30	8.9	33	9.8	108	32.1	144	42.9
Q5a The economically stronger wholesalers are more likely to get manufacturers' aid than weak wholesalers	117	34.8	105	31.3	51	15.2	27	8.0	36	10.7
Q5b When it comes to aid, manufacturers disregard the economic situation of the wholesaler	39	11.6	30	8.9	45	13.4	114	33.9	108	32.2
Q6a The amount of aid (e.g., financial and technical) is of major concern to manufacturers when choosing and dealing with wholesalers	78	23.2	141	42.0	39	11.6	51	15.2	27	8.0
Q6b-Manufacturers would take into account human considerations in providing financial and technical aid to wholesalers	27	8.0	42	12.5	48	14.3	129	38.4	90	26.8
Q7a-Jordanian manufacturers tolerate financially weak wholesalers	24	7.1	36	10.7	33	9.8	126	37.5	117	34.8
Q7b Manufacturers would bother if a wholesaler is financially weak	108	32.1	120	35.7	39	11.6	51	15.2	18	5.4
Q8a-Wholesalers are very satisfied with the business treatment of manufacturers	30	8.9	42	12.5	45	13.4	99	29.5	120	35.7
Q8b Wholesalers are worried about manufacturers' business treatment	99	29.5	129	38.3	39	11.6	54	16.1	15	4.5
Q9a Taking the human issue into consideration, manufacturers are always loyal to wholesalers	27	8.0	39	11.6	27	8.0	117	34.8	126	37.5
Q9b Manufacturers would quit wholesalers for other ones	120	35.7	123	36.6	33	9.8	39	11.6	21	6.3

336 cases

0 missing values

Table 4. Wholesalers’ opinion regarding their business relationships with Jordanian manufacturers by their issues of concern

Issues of concern	Level of concern	n	N	Cronbach Alpha	T-Value	dF	Level of significance
Q2- Expressed harmony at the corporate policy level	H	234	336	.72	4.21	110	**
Q3- Economic interest of the manufacturer	H	234	336	.86	3.82	110	**
Q4- Product competence emphasis over human relations	H	234	336	.66	2.83	110	**
Q5- Rebates and margins are in favor of strong wholesalers	H	234	336	.68	3.16	110	**
Q6- Manufacturers' aid and the economic strength of wholesalers	H	234	336	.83	5.17	110	**
Q7- Financially weak wholesalers receive no tolerance from manufacturers	H	234	336	.76	4.35	110	**
Q8- Business treatment of wholesalers	H	234	336	.87	3.95	110	**
Q9- Manufacturers' loyalty to wholesalers	H	234	336	.69	2.34	110	*

n = Number of valid observations.
 N = Number of cases included in the test.
 H = High.
 * = Significant at the 0.05.
 ** = Significant at the 0.01 level.
 $\alpha > 0.65$ suggested by Nunnally 1978.

Validity was achieved through the use of constructs used in previous studies or by operationalising new constructs being guided by their definition or explanation in the literature (see Table 1).

It is clear from Table 4 that there are significant differences between wholesalers who stated that the human issue is missing from their business relationships with Jordanian manufacturers and those who did not, regarding all issues of concern at the 0.01 level, except for manufacturers' loyalty to wholesalers with significance of 0.05. The hypothesis stated earlier in this study was accepted.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although this research is considered as a preliminary study, the eight variables used seem to suggest an explanation for the lack of human orientation in marketing channels in Jordan. The lack of human orientation undermines the channel administrative behavior of Jordanian manufacturers.

The lack of harmony in the management philosophy of the channels was well supported by Jordanian wholesalers. Based on this, it can be suggested that Jordanian manufacturers have no emphasis on human and social relationships in their corporate management mottoes and the marketing channel policy.

The findings also show that there is no balance between economic and human measures in channel administration and that manufacturers are only interested in the economic factor of the wholesaler. Consequently, it could be argued that those

manufacturers regard harmony in social and human relationships of the marketing channel as a secondary issue. In addition, wholesalers expressed strong doubts regarding manufacturers' loyalty. They strongly believe that those manufacturers would switch to other wholesalers if they could find more financially sound wholesalers.

In summary, the concepts of human and social relationships such as, harmony, traditional associations, mutual cooperation and codevelopment, and loyalty are not emphasized and expressed in channel management by Jordanian manufacturers.

Based on these conclusions, it is safe to say that wholesalers are dissatisfied with manufacturers' attitudes and behavior. Therefore, manufacturers must change their conduct and endorse channel cooperation and harmony if each member is to gain something from other members. Without proper cooperation, the overall channel goals and the member goals will never be achieved. Channel policies must be created and maintained to support all members of the channel, otherwise, failure of one channel level will jeopardise the whole distribution system.

Directions for future research

This study indicated the lack of human cooperation and harmony between Jordanian manufacturers and wholesalers. Improper cooperation at any level will hinder the concept of trust amongst all channel members. Trust and cooperation play an important role in the development of long-term business strategies. Several issues (e.g., fair treatment) could be used to enhance harmony and then to get channel members to trust each other. For example, what skills are necessary to develop harmony in retailer/wholesaler, wholesaler/manufacturer, and retailer/manufacturer relationships? How should retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers identify channel partners who could participate in harmony-creating behaviors? These questions are left for future research.

The conceptual framework in this study is focused, mainly, on human rationale. Other exchange relationships as power of each member of the channel and personal characteristics of the personnel involved in the channel, etc. are not looked into.

The constructs used in this study were either similar or selected from previous studies. However doubts probably persist with regard to the validity of these constructs. Other studies are needed to verify and validate them.

Finally, though every care is taken to strengthen the findings of this study, some variables important to this study may have been left out. In addition, the findings of this study may not be generalized to other channels in other developing countries until more empirical research is carried out.

Questionnaire

Q1- As a wholesaler, would you say that the human issue is highly apparent in your business relationships with Jordanian manufacturers?

Yes..... No.....

Q2- To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statement	Level of agreement	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Quite disagree	Strongly disagree
Q2a- Jordanians manufacturers tend to express the importance of human and social relationships as basis for business management behavior at the corporate policy level.		5	4	3	2	1
Q2b- Manufacturers do not stress harmonious cooperation		5	4	3	2	1
Q3a- Economic rather than human rationale is usually the main concern of Jordanian manufacturers		5	4	3	2	1
Q3b- Manufacturers regard the economic factor as a secondary issue when it comes to the human factor		5	4	3	2	1
Q4a- Product competence rather than human relations is usually used by Jordanian manufacturers to attract wholesalers to their products		5	4	3	2	1
Q4b- Jordanian manufacturers do not put too much emphasis on their product competence when it comes to attracting wholesalers		5	4	3	2	1
Q5a- The economically stronger wholesalers are given more favorable rebates and margins		5	4	3	2	1
Q5b- When it comes to aid, manufacturers disregard the economic situation of the wholesaler		5	4	3	2	1
Q6a- Jordanian manufacturers regard aid (e.g., how much financial and technical help you need?) as an important factor in choosing and dealing with wholesalers		5	4	3	2	1
Q6b- Jordanian manufacturers would take into account human considerations in providing financial and technical aid to wholesalers		5	4	3	2	1
Q7a- Jordanians manufacturers tolerate financially weak wholesaler members		5	4	3	2	1
Q7b- Jordanians manufacturers would bother if a wholesaler is financially weak		5	4	3	2	1
Q8a- Wholesalers are very satisfied with the business treatment of Jordanian manufacturers		5	4	3	2	1
Q8b- Wholesalers are worried about manufacturers' business treatment		5	4	3	2	1
Q9a- Taking the human issue into consideration, Jordanian manufacturers are always loyal to wholesalers		5	4	3	2	1
Q9b- Jordanian manufacturers would quit wholesalers for other wholesalers		5	4	3	2	1

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الجانب الإنساني في قنوات التوزيع في الأردن : وجهة نظر بائعي الجملة

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ملخص البحث. إن إدارة الأنظمة التوزيعية الخاصة بمنشآت الأعمال تعد مهمة صعبة للغاية، وذلك لضخامة الأعمال التي تقوم بها هذه الأنظمة من تصريف للسلع من ناحية وخدمة الأعداد الهائلة من المستهلكين من ناحية أخرى. إن هذه الأنظمة تعد أنظمة اجتماعية، وبالتالي فإن الإهتمام بها لا يكون فقط لنواح اقتصادية، بل يجب أن يؤخذ بعين الاعتبار الجوانب السلوكية مثل الألفة والوفاق وتجنب الصراع. لذلك فإن الإدارات الجيدة لهذه الأنظمة لا تهتم فقط بالجوانب الاقتصادية لأعضاء النظام التوزيعي، بل تأخذ الجوانب السلوكية بعين الاعتبار وتوظفها عند اتخاذ قراراتها، لأن عدم الإهتمام بالجوانب السلوكية قد يؤدي إلى خلق الصراعات وبالتالي إضعاف كفاءة النظام التوزيعي ككل.

لقد هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من مدى الإهتمام بالجوانب الإنسانية في قنوات التوزيع في الأردن، وتم اختيار حلقة «المصنع - تاجر الجملة» للدراسة، وعن طريق توظيف الأسلوب الكمي. تم التوصل إلى مجموعة من النتائج والتوصيات التي قد تفيد المصنع الأردني في إدارة قناته التوزيعية.