

HOW CAN COMPETITOR ANALYSIS CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVING PHILIPS' CURRENT MARKETING EFFORTS IN THE LOW-END SHAVING PRODUCT RANGE IN THE JAPANESE MARKET?

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, Japan has witnessed a significant shift in its grooming sector, driven by an increasing focus on grooming rituals, particularly among men. This trend underscores a cultural preference for meticulous personal care practices and skincare routines. Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) informs this study, examining how cultural values shape Japanese consumer behavior and grooming preferences. Companies like Philips, Braun, and Panasonic adapt their marketing strategies to align with these cultural norms, emphasizing discipline, respect, and self-expression in grooming. The study includes a competitive analysis of the low-end shaving product market, integrating SWOT analysis and Hofstede's cultural dimensions to understand market dynamics. Recommendations for Philips include continuous competitor benchmarking, unique value proposition development, dynamic pricing strategies, optimized distribution channels, and targeted marketing campaigns. These strategies aim to enhance Philips' market position and consumer engagement in Japan's low-end shaving product segment.

Keywords: *Consumer Culture Theory, Competitive Analysis, Japanese Market, Grooming Habits, Shaving Products, Marketing Strategy, Philips, SWOT Analysis, Cultural Nuances, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Japan's grooming sector has undergone a significant transformation, marked by a growing emphasis on grooming rituals among Japanese consumers, particularly men. This evolution is reflected in the increasing demand for shaving products, indicating a deep cultural preference for grooming habits and skincare regimens. Understanding the dynamics of shaving demand in the Japanese market necessitates a comprehensive examination of consumer behavior, encompassing cultural influences, customer preferences, and the complexities of the competitive landscape.

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is instrumental in comprehending the complexities of consumer behavior in Japan. The country's rich cultural heritage places a high value on precise personal care rituals, which are evident in the grooming traditions of its citizens. Historically, Japanese men have viewed grooming as a symbol of discipline, respect, and self-expression, embodying cultural ideals deeply embedded in societal norms. Additionally, the cultural emphasis on maintaining a youthful appearance has driven the widespread adoption of skincare and shaving regimens among Japanese consumers.

Understanding these cultural nuances is crucial for companies like Philips, Braun, and Panasonic, which aim to align their marketing strategies with the nuanced expectations and preferences of their target audience (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Belk, 2014). The

competitive landscape of the Japanese shaving industry is dynamic and varied, with both domestic and international competitors striving for market dominance. A thorough competitive analysis is particularly vital for companies seeking to enhance their marketing efforts in the low-end shaving segment.

Competitive analysis involves a detailed examination of competitors' product offerings, pricing strategies, distribution networks, and marketing communication approaches. This rigorous investigation enables businesses to identify market gaps, exploit competitive weaknesses, and strategically position their products to capitalize on emerging opportunities (Porter, 2008). For companies like Philips, Braun, and Panasonic, a strategic focus on technology, innovation, and marketing is essential for expanding their product portfolios and engaging their target audience.

To achieve these objectives, this research employs a sophisticated triangulation of various data sources, including online repositories, publicly available Philips documents, and established strategic frameworks. Central to this research framework is the implementation of a SWOT analysis, which serves as a foundational tool to illuminate Philips' internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as the external opportunities and threats inherent in its existing marketing paradigm (Hair et al., 2019). This analytical rigor is complemented by the integration of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, providing scholarly insights into the intricate cultural dynamics that shape consumer behavior in the Japanese market. This cultural lens is crucial for refining marketing strategies to ensure alignment with the nuanced preferences and values of the target audience (Hofstede, 2001).

The ultimate goal of this research is to provide Philips with a robust and actionable roadmap for refining its marketing approach, including strategic positioning and effective promotion of its low-end shaving products within the complex and culturally nuanced landscape of the Japanese market (Gupta et al., 2004). This orchestration encapsulates the essence of strategic marketing as a harmonious interplay between technological prowess, cultural acumen, and consumer engagement (Keller & Kotler, 2016).

Problem Statement: The shaving industry, particularly in the low-end segment, is experiencing a paradigm shift in consumer behavior and preferences in the Japanese market. As Philips seeks to enhance its market presence and competitiveness in this segment, a critical examination of the role of competitive analysis becomes imperative. The challenge lies in strategically positioning Philips' low-end shaving line in the Japanese market, considering the diverse and evolving preferences of customers. The study aims to investigate how competitive analysis can help refine and optimize current marketing activities. The focus is on understanding how insights derived from competitive strategies, such as product positioning, pricing, and marketing messages, can be used to tailor Philips' approach in the Japanese market. The research aims to deliver actionable recommendations to help Philips effectively navigate the competitive landscape, ultimately leading to an improved market position and increased consumer engagement in the low-cost shaver segment.

THEORETICAL BASIS AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

4Ps Theory

The marketing mix forms the basic framework of a company's marketing strategy and is a comprehensive set of strategic tools companies use to elicit specific responses from their designated target markets. This holistic approach encompasses a range of actions that a company can take to influence demand for its products or services, navigating the complex landscape of consumer behavior and market dynamics. The classic articulation of the marketing mix is encapsulated in what is universally recognized as the '4Ps,' a paradigmatic

framework established by Harris et al. (2016). These four elements represent essential components of a firm's marketing strategy, carefully designed to address different facets of the marketing process and shape consumer perceptions and behavior.

The first element, product, refers to the tangible or intangible offerings that a firm provides to meet the perceived needs and wants of its target market. This includes considerations such as product features, design, quality, and branding, all of which play a key role in shaping consumer choices and perceptions. Companies must continually innovate and refine their products to remain competitive in dynamic markets.

The second element, price, refers to the monetary value attached to the product or service. Pricing strategies, which include discounts, bundling, and promotional offers, are critical factors that directly influence consumers' perceptions of value and, subsequently, their purchasing decisions. Effective pricing strategies require a delicate balance between profitability and affordability for consumers.

The third element, place, involves the strategic management of the distribution channels through which products or services are made available to consumers. This includes decisions about the choice of distribution channels, retail locations, and logistics, all of which contribute significantly to the accessibility of the product in the target market. Companies need to ensure that their products are readily available to consumers when and where they need them.

The fourth and final element, promotion, encompasses a range of communication strategies used to raise awareness of the product, increase brand visibility, and stimulate demand. Advertising, public relations, sales promotions, and various other promotional activities fall under this umbrella and together influence consumer behavior throughout the purchase process. Effective promotional strategies engage consumers at multiple touchpoints, creating memorable experiences and fostering brand loyalty..

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Ferrell et al. (2014) delve into the influential work of Geert Hofstede, whose identification of four cultural dimensions—individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity—profoundly shapes the dynamics of the business environment. An inherent challenge for organizations in this cultural context is the self-reference criterion, a psychological phenomenon where individuals unconsciously lean on their cultural values, experiences, and knowledge, potentially leading to misinterpretations and misunderstandings. An alternative perspective, as highlighted by Hofstede and others, is cultural relativism. This approach recognizes the divergence of moral standards across cultures and underscores that judgments about business practices may be contingent upon cultural norms.

The strategic application of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory has significant implications for a wide range of components of a company's foreign negotiation strategies. Drawing on Hollensen's (2008) ideas, this paradigm sheds light on the negotiating approaches influenced by several cultural variables such as masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, and power distance. Hollensen (2008) found that cultural negotiation tactics vary significantly based on masculinity and femininity. Masculine cultures tend to prioritize assertiveness, independence, and task orientation, often employing competitive strategies leading to a win-lose outcome. In contrast, feminine

cultures place a premium on cooperation, nurturing, and empathy, preferring collaborative or compromising techniques that result in mutually beneficial, win-win solutions.

Uncertainty avoidance, as defined by Hollensen (2008), refers to people's level of comfort in risky situations. High uncertainty avoidance cultures rely on rigorous standards and trust in close relationships, whereas low uncertainty avoidance cultures seek flexibility and compromise when handling difficult issues. Individualistic societies value tasks over relationships, emphasizing independence. Conflict tolerance is high, and individual demands frequently take precedence over group goals. Negotiations in individualistic societies often presuppose that the opposite party has unilateral decision-making authority. Hollensen (2008) defines power distance as the recognition of inequalities in authority between those in power and those affected by it. Cultures with a large power distance place a premium on formal hierarchy and etiquette, which frequently includes direct participation in discussions by senior executives, such as the CEO.

Applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions to Japan provides subtle insights into the country's unique cultural traits. Japan has an average masculinity score, indicating a society that values assertiveness, nurturing, success, ambition, and competitiveness. Simultaneously, Japanese culture values caring for others and maintaining societal harmony, demonstrating a combination of masculine and feminine characteristics. Uncertainty Japan promotes stability, organization, and conformity to established norms and traditions, emphasizing predictability and avoiding uncertainty. The low individualism score reflects the importance of group cohesion, cooperation, and loyalty over individual desires.

Japan's large power distance reflects a hierarchical society that prioritizes authority and social prestige. Unequal power and authority distribution is widely accepted and expected in Japanese institutions and culture. In contrast to indulgence, Japanese culture values restraint, self-discipline, and compliance with societal norms. The low indulgence score indicates a tendency to favor self-regulation over immediate fulfillment.

Consumer Culture Theory

Previous research in Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) provides valuable insights into understanding consumer behavior and cultural influences on consumption patterns, which is crucial for analyzing competitive dynamics and improving marketing strategies. Examining CCT literature provides a theoretical framework for exploring how competitive analysis could improve Philips' Japanese low-end shaver marketing efforts.

Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) suggests that consumption is not merely a utilitarian act, but is deeply rooted in cultural contexts, social relationships, and symbolic meanings. To develop effective marketing strategies for Philips' low-end shaving products, it is crucial to comprehend Japanese consumers' cultural values, preferences, and grooming practices rituals. Belk (1988) highlights the influence of culture on consumer behavior and points out that cultural norms and traditions have an impact on product choice and brand perception. Using CCT in competitor analysis, Philips can gain insight into how cultural factors influence consumer preferences for shaving products in Japan and identify opportunities for market differentiation.

Consumer Culture Theory also highlights the importance of symbolic consumption and identity formation in shaping consumer behavior (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Consumers may associate certain shaving brands with certain social identities or lifestyle aspirations in the Japanese market, where grooming and personal appearance are culturally

important. Thus, competitive analysis should not only focus on product features and pricing but should also consider the symbolic meanings attached to competing brands and their resonance with Japanese consumers' self-image.

The influence of social networks, communities, and brand communities on consumer behavior is highlighted in the literature on CCT. When analyzing competitors in the context of Philips' low-end shaving products, it is important to investigate how rival brands engage with Japanese consumers through online platforms, social media, and influencer marketing. An understanding of the dynamics of online communities and consumer conversations can provide valuable insights into emerging trends, consumer sentiment, and competitive positioning strategies in the Japanese market. Philips can develop more culturally relevant and consumer-centric marketing strategies for its low-end shaving range in Japan by incorporating insights from CCT research into a competitive analysis. This enables Philips to adapt messages, product positioning, and promotions to the values, desires, and lifestyles of Japanese consumers.

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis serves as a pivotal organizational tool within the realm of strategic planning and management, facilitating the development of effective strategies and the assessment of competitive positioning. Guided by the System Approach, organizations are conceptualized as complex systems interplaying with internal and external environments, featuring various sub-systems. To engage in strategic management prudently, a comprehensive analysis of both internal and external environments becomes imperative, a process encapsulated by the acronym SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) (Gürel & Tat, 2017).

This strategic analytical framework is a potent and straightforward approach employed by organizations to gauge resource strengths, limitations, market prospects, and external risks (Gürel & Tat, 2017b). At its core, SWOT encompasses a meticulous examination of four fundamental components: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Through a diligent evaluation of these elements, organizations gain profound insights into their current standing, enabling informed decisions in crafting future strategies and actions

RESEARCH METHOD

Literature Study Strategy Design

The research method adopts a literature study approach. This method of research entails a process of searching for and reading various sources, including books, journals, and other publications, in order to address existing issues or problems within the field of study.

The thesis focuses on competitor analysis as the independent variable. This involves systematically identifying, evaluating, and interpreting information about competitors' strategies, strengths, weaknesses, and market positioning in the low-end shaving product range in the Japanese market.

The sources of literature consulted in this research include:

1. Google Scholar
2. JSTOR
3. ScienceDirect
4. Japan E-commerce

5. Philips' Official Website
6. Websites that provide reviews about shaving products in Japan

Literature Study Criteria

The inclusion criteria used in this study include:

1. Articles and journals that contain the same keywords as the research topic.
2. Articles that are full papers and are not limited to a particular research method.
3. Articles that are international.
4. User comments or testimonials on the official website.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Literature Study Results from Articles and Journals

This section presents an in-depth summary of the literature study results, focusing on the main themes, methods, variables, and research findings from each article reviewed:

No	Title	Author(s)	Method(s)	Variables	Research Results
1	Consumer culture theory (CCT): Twenty years of research	Arnould, E. J., & Thompson, C. J. (2005)	Literature Review	Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)	After twenty years of research, Consumer Culture Theory has evolved into a comprehensive framework that sheds light on the intricate relationship between consumers and culture, offering valuable insights into consumption behaviours, meanings, and societal influences.
2	You are what you can access: Sharing and collaborative consumption online.	Belk, R. W. (2014)	Literature Review	Sharing and Collaborative Consumption Online	Online sharing and collaborative consumption have emerged as significant trends, reshaping traditional notions of ownership and commerce. These phenomena present opportunities for new forms of exchange and community-building, impacting various sectors of the economy.

3	Valuing customers	Gupta, S., Lehmann, D. R., & Stuart, J. A. (2004)	Empirical Research (Quantitative Analysis)	Customer Valuation	Effective customer valuation methods are essential for businesses to optimise resource allocation, enhance customer relationships, and maximise profitability. Understanding customer lifetime value and segmentation can inform targeted marketing strategies and drive long-term success.
4	Strategic marketing (8th ed.)	Cravens, D. W., & Piercy, N. F. (2006)	Literature Review	Marketing Strategies	Provides insights for developing a comprehensive marketing strategy that is aligned with business objectives. Their work highlights the importance of market analysis, competitive positioning, and the implementation of integrated marketing tactics to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.
5	Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviours, institutions, and organizations across nations.	Hofstede, G. (2001)	Cross-cultural Analysis	Cultural Dimensions	Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework highlights the significance of cultural variations in shaping behaviours, values, and institutions across societies. Recognizing and understanding these differences is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication, management, and marketing strategies.
6	Marketing management (15th ed.).	Keller, K. L., & Kotler, P. (2016)	Textbook	Marketing Management	Effective marketing management requires a holistic approach encompassing market analysis, strategic planning, and tactical execution. By aligning marketing efforts with organisational goals and customer needs, businesses can create sustainable competitive advantage and drive growth.

7	Principles of marketing (17th ed.).	Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2018)	Textbook	Principles of Marketing	Principles of marketing provide a foundational understanding of key concepts and frameworks essential for developing successful marketing strategies. By applying these principles, businesses can identify opportunities, target markets effectively, and create value for customers and stakeholders.
8	Porter, M. E. (2008). Competitive strategy: Techniques for analysing industries and competitors. Simon and Schuster.	Porter, M. E. (2008)	Textbook	Competitive Strategy	Developing a competitive strategy involves analysing industry structure, assessing competitive forces, and leveraging organisational strengths to achieve sustainable advantage. By understanding the dynamics of competition, businesses can position themselves strategically to outperform rivals and thrive in the marketplace.
9	Competitive intelligence in the digital age.	Fleishman, S. R., & Evans, J. (2020)	Literature Review	Competitive Intelligence	In the digital age, competitive intelligence plays a vital role in informing strategic decision-making and enhancing organisational competitiveness. By gathering and analysing relevant information about competitors, markets, and industry trends, businesses can identify opportunities and threats, mitigate risks, and gain a competitive edge.

Literature Study Results from Websites

	Phillips	Panasonic	Braun
Design			
Series	Shaver 3000X Series	ES-RT4AU-A Series	310s Series 3
Price	¥8,800 or €56.58	¥5,300 or €34.07	¥6,071 or €40.30
Waterproof System	Yes Waterproof IPX7*	Yes (IPX7 standard)	Yes IPX7
Power	Rechargeable, 1-hour charge for 45 minutes of use	Rechargeable, fast charging for 2-hour charge	Rechargeable, fast charging for 1-hour charge
Performance	4D flex head	Rotating motor drive	Triple suspension head system
Colour	Blue, Celestial Blue, and Dark Forest Green	Blue, Silver, Black, and Dark Navy	Blue
Accessories	Pop-up Trimmer, Protective Cap	Cleaning Brush	Mesh Blade Cap, Power Cord
Blade Type	Power Cut Blades with 27 blades and an automatic polishing system	Deep Shaving Blade X2	Deep catch net blade
Time of Use (in one charging period)	Quick 5-minute charge, 1-time use	2 Hours, 10 days of use	20 minutes of use

Availability	Retail websites and Physical retail stores	Official website, retail websites, and physical stores.	retail websites and physical stores.
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Cultural Aspects Influencing Marketing Strategies

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) provides a nuanced understanding of how Japanese consumers perceive and engage with products. It highlights the importance of cultural symbols, rituals, and practices in shaping consumer behaviour. For Philips, aligning their marketing messages with local cultural narratives and values can foster deeper connections with consumers.

The rise of online sharing and collaborative consumption in Japan signifies a shift towards more community-oriented and sustainable consumption patterns. Philips can leverage these trends by promoting the environmental benefits of their products and encouraging user-generated content and reviews, fostering a sense of community and trust among consumers.

Japan scores high on uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation, indicating a preference for stability, reliability, and future planning. Philips should emphasize the durability, quality, and long-term value of their products in marketing communications. Highlighting features like advanced technology, robust build quality, and energy efficiency can resonate well with Japanese consumers.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

Philips boasts a strong brand reputation and technological innovation, with self-sharpening blades and adaptive shaving heads ensuring consistent performance. This fosters consumer trust and loyalty, essential for maintaining a competitive edge in the market.

Weaknesses

High production costs may limit Philips' ability to compete on price in the low-end segment. Furthermore, focusing predominantly on premium products might cause Philips to miss opportunities in more price-sensitive market segments.

Opportunities

The increasing demand for personal grooming products presents a growth opportunity for Philips. By leveraging technological advancements, such as AI-driven shaving systems and enhanced battery life, Philips can innovate and differentiate their offerings, attracting a broader customer base.

Threats

Intense competition from brands like Panasonic and Braun, along with emerging local competitors, threatens Philips' market share. Market saturation in the low-end segment also poses a challenge, necessitating continuous innovation and differentiation to remain relevant and appealing to consumers.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATION, RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

The research highlights Philips' strategic focus on offering premium quality products in the Japanese market by aligning marketing efforts with local cultural values, such as high uncertainty avoidance and collectivist tendencies. This approach includes forming partnerships with influencers and celebrities to enhance brand visibility and appeal, ensuring that marketing messages resonate deeply with Japanese consumers.

By incorporating Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions into marketing strategies, Philips has successfully expanded its online retail presence and improved responsiveness to customer demands. Continuous monitoring of competitors and adapting to market trends are crucial for maintaining agility and strengthening Philips' position in the Japanese low-end shaving products segment.

Japanese consumers value the diverse features and performance offered by Philips, Panasonic, and Braun shavers. Preferences vary regarding design, color options, and accessories. While Philips and Panasonic excel in battery performance, the absence of self-cleaning features and limited design options may impact consumer satisfaction. Enhancing online availability and integrating additional features could further improve overall customer experience and satisfaction.

Theoretical Implications

This study integrates Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions to develop effective marketing strategies tailored to culturally diverse markets. It explores how technology-driven organizations can leverage innovation in alignment with Kotler and Armstrong's Marketing Strategy principles. By focusing on sociocultural dimensions emphasized by CCT, this research enhances understanding of consumer behavior across cultures, aiding in the design of culturally relevant marketing strategies. The study also advances theoretical perspectives on product positioning and strategic approaches in the low-cost consumer goods sector, offering practical insights aligned with the 4Ps Theory for success in diverse cultural landscapes.

Managerial Implications

This research aims to enhance global marketing practices by integrating technological innovation with cultural insights. It provides actionable recommendations such as continuous competitor analysis and crafting unique value propositions based on Kotler and Armstrong's principles. The study emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural competence in executing culturally tailored campaigns that resonate with local audiences, fostering long-term customer relationships grounded in trust and cultural understanding.

Limitation

1. **Scope:** The research focuses exclusively on a comparative analysis of three specific shaver models (Philips Shaver 3000X Series, Panasonic ES-RT4AU-A Series, and Braun 310s Series 3). Findings may not generalize to other products within these brands or other competitive landscapes.
2. **Depth:** The study does not comprehensively explore how design, color options, and accessories influence consumer decisions. Additionally, it lacks an analysis of shavers with self-cleaning features, which could be important considerations for consumers.
3. **Data Sources:** Insights regarding technological features are primarily based on manufacturer descriptions without independent validation. This may limit the accuracy and reliability of the technological comparisons presented.

4. **Empirical Testing:** The effectiveness of tailored marketing strategies or the impact of influencer and celebrity partnerships was not empirically tested. Future research could validate these strategies through empirical studies or consumer surveys.
5. **Market Impact:** Although the study suggests expanding online retail presence, the actual impact on sales or market share was not assessed. Detailed mechanisms for continuous competitor and market monitoring, essential for maintaining a competitive edge, were also not provided.
6. **Data Accessibility:** Confidentiality constraints prevent the disclosure of specific internal data and proprietary information from Philips, limiting the depth of analysis in certain areas.

Recommendations

To enhance Philips' marketing efforts in the Japanese low-end shaving product market:

1. **Continuous Competitor Analysis:** Engage in ongoing benchmarking to stay updated on competitor product features, pricing strategies, and marketing tactics. This proactive approach will enable Philips to adapt swiftly and maintain a competitive edge.
2. **Highlight Unique Features:** Emphasize Philips' strengths such as advanced skin protection, ergonomic design, and superior battery life to differentiate from competitors. Implement a dynamic pricing strategy to adjust prices in response to market demand.
3. **Wide Availability:** Ensure Philips products are widely available across various platforms, including online retail channels. Strengthening distribution channels will enhance market penetration and consumer convenience.
4. **Emphasize Product Strengths:** Tailor marketing messages to resonate with Japanese consumers, focusing on reliability, innovation, and value for money. Address competitors' weaknesses to shift consumer preference towards Philips products.
5. **Influencer Engagement:** Strengthen digital and social media presence through influencer partnerships and content marketing. This approach will expand market reach and deepen engagement with tech-savvy consumers.

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