



The Model of Marketing and Sales Outcomes in the Bitumen Market

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Abstract

Marketing and sales outcomes are typically shaped based on long-term and interactive relationships between companies. These markets often involve complex and specialized products and services that require technical knowledge and a deep understanding of customer needs. The marketing and sales process in these markets comprises multiple stages, including identifying customer needs, presenting customized proposals, conducting complex negotiations, and establishing long-term contracts. In this environment, intercompany relationships are highly significant, and decision-making is primarily carried out by purchasing teams composed of managers and various experts. The objective of this study was to present a model of marketing and sales outcomes in industrial markets. This study is applied in terms of its objective and qualitative in terms of methodology, employing a grounded theory approach. Data and information were collected through a literature review and semi-structured interviews. Based on purposive sampling, 14 managers and experts from companies operating in the bitumen industry were selected in 2024. The conducted interviews were coded using ATLAS.TI software. The results identified the marketing and sales outcomes model, including increased market share, enhanced customer satisfaction, improved profitability, market differentiation, and optimized marketing performance. The marketing and sales outcome model in the bitumen market necessitates specific approaches that differ significantly from other industries. In this industry, emphasis is placed on establishing long-term customer relationships, extensive networking, and maintaining strong connections with key customers. Therefore, companies must actively engage in forming strategic relationships with major customers, such as construction contractors and road construction companies, to leverage the long-term benefits of these relationships.

Keywords: *Marketing, Sales Management, Industrial Marketing, Bitumen Market, Outcomes*

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1. Introduction

Today, rapid transformations in various fields, including culture, economy, technology, and politics, have increased the complexity of the operational environment for organizations, impacting their sustainability and the dynamism of businesses. These changes present companies with a new competitive landscape. Currently, business environments are experiencing reduced predictability and increased risk, which challenge the stability of market and industry boundaries [1, 2].

Given the growing significance of industries and businesses in the economy, and the necessity of their growth and development, greater attention to marketing is essential. This focus contributes to the expansion of knowledge regarding businesses, their planning activities, and marketing strategies across industries. Due to their unique characteristics, businesses employ marketing approaches that differ from those of other sectors. The lack of entrepreneurial perspectives and improper organization of marketing activities can lead to a deficiency in other capacities. Consequently, the success of marketing strategies, both scientifically and practically, depends on understanding consumer behavior [3].

Industrial organizations are under pressure to adapt to changing external conditions to ensure their long-term survival and growth [4]. Organizations that effectively respond to market disruptions are more likely to establish a competitive advantage over their rivals [5]. Macro-environmental forces, including new opportunities, competitive threats, and shifting customer expectations, remain beyond managers' control. Therefore, organizations must swiftly and effectively adapt to ensure continuous prosperity [6].

While organizations in industrial settings face pressure to change, their salesforces are also under pressure to implement necessary market strategies to facilitate these changes [7]. These changes may involve minor adjustments to the marketing mix but can also play a more significant role in the long term, such as entering a new market, launching a new product, or adopting a new distribution channel. Such actions may be required in response to external changes but can also aim to enhance internal effectiveness [8]. Rackham and De Vincentis (1999) highlight that sales departments must remain adaptable and prepared for change to respond to organizational and industrial dynamics [9]. Marketing dynamics and sales performance form a crucial link between these two forces [10].

Sales management plays a fundamental role in shaping and implementing strategic plans. These managers, through their direct interaction with the market, possess greater awareness of emerging competitive developments and evolving customer needs. This information can be gathered and analyzed through marketing operations to generate appropriate strategic responses. These responses must then be executed, and sales managers monitor the impact of these implementations, thereby closing the internal feedback loop within the industry. Over time, this cycle drives organizational change [11, 12].

Marketing performance is only effective if it adequately aligns with market developments. Homburg et al. (2008) emphasize that marketing departments sometimes have limited knowledge of the market and products, and that information sharing between sales and marketing is often insufficient [13]. Consequently, if sales and marketing are not effectively integrated, neither function—nor the organization as a whole—will be able to accurately identify and respond to market changes [14]. High integration between marketing and sales enables organizations to respond swiftly to market shifts [15].

Sales management is a crucial component of the change process, as it informs the organization of external opportunities and threats. However, an often-overlooked aspect is the efficiency of methods used to disseminate this information within the organization. Long-standing challenges have been reported regarding mobilizing the salesforce for participation in market intelligence activities and effectively transmitting the collected data to the organization. These challenges are primarily attributed to the salesforce itself. The key question remains: how much market intelligence actually reaches the organization? This largely depends on the extent of information communicated by the salesforce, yet this issue is frequently ignored [16].

Jones et al. (2005), in their review of sales management and industrial change literature, emphasize that companies that effectively integrate market fluctuations into their sales and marketing activities gain a competitive advantage over their rivals [17]. They stress the importance of understanding the role of sales management in driving organizational change efforts and adapting sales and marketing functions to environmental shifts [18]. Beyond sales, the influence of market orientation in other departments has also been studied, but research on the role of sales performance in shaping marketing strategies and execution remains limited [19]. Scholars have identified sales performance as a valuable source of market intelligence, yet Lebon and

Maronka (2006) note that only a few industries fully capitalize on this potential. Sales representatives who establish strong relationships with their customers are positioned to gather valuable insights into products, pricing, competitive projects, and customer behaviors and long-term preferences [20].

A review of past studies indicates that Mohammadi-Pour et al. (2024) found that relationship marketing strategies significantly impact corporate financial and market performance. Eskandari and Bigloo (2022) identified several key components for evaluating industrial marketing, including “developing potential market opportunities,” “market share analysis,” “sales analysis,” “forecasting,” “competitor analysis,” “benchmarking competitors,” “assessing new product adoption and potential,” “business trend studies,” and “determining sales quotas.” [21]. Heydari et al. (2021) found that personal selling, product characteristics, and the study of organizational buyer behavior were the most influential factors affecting corporate performance [22]. Haghighi Kafash et al. (2021) demonstrated that marketing objectives, pricing strategies, and distribution strategies were the primary elements shaping marketing strategies in the food distribution industry, whereas relationship-oriented sales team competence, sales team performance, and transformational leadership were the key drivers of sales strategy development [23].

The bitumen industry in Iran, with over 80 production units, multi-billion-dollar private sector investments, and an annual production of 6 million tons across the country, is responsible for supplying the bitumen needed for construction and infrastructure projects. Analyzing industry developments in Iran and worldwide over the past year reveals significant trends. Due to international sanctions in recent years and widespread industrial stagnation, Iran’s bitumen industry has largely retained its traditional structure, particularly because of the disruption of trade relations. However, with the lifting of sanctions, increased commercial interactions with advanced economies and the entry of major international firms are expected, which will intensify competition in production and distribution.

Failing to adopt appropriate marketing and sales strategies and disregarding their comprehensive dimensions may result in the elimination of Iranian distribution companies and local producers from the market. Most distribution firms in Iran operate at a loss due to

inefficiencies. However, their reliance on producers sustains their operations. In reality, manufacturers establish distribution firms to get closer to the market and control associated variables, offering distribution services primarily to serve their own production needs. Due to the lack of structured strategies and clear mechanisms, the primary objective of these firms remains covering products across various distribution channels. Consequently, producers factor in distribution losses when pricing their products, ensuring that their final profit is recognized at the factory gate while offsetting distribution-related losses.

This study, as a case study, aims to answer the question: What is the model of marketing and sales outcomes in the bitumen market?

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach. In the quantitative phase, the validation of the marketing and sales model in industrial markets within the bitumen industry was conducted. Data collection in the qualitative phase was carried out through interviews. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used within the framework of grounded theory analysis. The research data were analyzed using the systematic coding approach of Strauss and Corbin’s grounded theory model (1998). In this research design, the stages of data analysis in grounded theory were conducted through open, axial, and selective coding. The statistical description of the field study participants consisted of 14 individuals. Experts were selected through purposive sampling.

3. Findings and Results

For the open coding process, all data were entered into ATLAS.TI software. The necessary analyses were performed, and the relevant codes were extracted. Labeling of codes was conducted based on interview data, ensuring that the researcher adhered to participants’ perspectives to minimize potential bias as much as possible. Throughout the coding process, the researcher remained committed to theoretical sensitivity, which is a fundamental principle in grounded theory research. A sample of the coding process is presented in the following table. The highlighted sections in the interviews indicate the initial extracted codes from the software. A sample of the codes and corresponding interview excerpts is presented below:

Table 1. Interview Questions and Sample Responses

Code	Interview Excerpt
Viscosity and Consistency	The viscosity of bitumen must comply with specific standards required for different applications.
Softening Point	The temperature at which bitumen softens must be within a defined range.
Flash Point	The temperature at which bitumen becomes flammable must be safe and acceptable.
Durability and Stability	Bitumen should resist environmental factors such as heat, humidity, and UV radiation.
Asphaltene and Maltene Content	The ratio of these components in bitumen should provide appropriate physical and mechanical properties.
Presence of Additives	Various additives, such as polymers, can enhance the properties of bitumen.
Crack Resistance	Bitumen should withstand stress and temperature variations without cracking.
Fatigue Resistance	Bitumen should endure repeated dynamic loads without significant degradation.
Oxidation Resistance	Bitumen should have sufficient resistance against oxidation processes that may reduce its lifespan.
Water and Moisture Resistance	Bitumen should not absorb water and should retain its physical properties in humid conditions.
Adhesion to Aggregates	Bitumen should adhere well to aggregate materials to form a stable and homogeneous surface.
Compatibility with Additives	Bitumen should integrate well with various additives without losing desirable properties.
ASTM and AASHTO Standards	Compliance with international standards for bitumen quality and characteristics is essential.
Stability During Transportation	Bitumen should maintain its quality during storage and transport.
Storage Conditions	Bitumen should remain stable under standard storage conditions without requiring special preservation measures.

Following this, open and axial coding was performed to identify the key components of the grounded theory model.

After extracting the initial codes, categorization and conceptualization were conducted after each interview, with continuous comparison to refine and develop final concepts and categories.

Through axial coding, the identified categories from open coding and secondary coding were placed within a structured framework of outcomes. The identified marketing and sales outcomes include market share growth, customer

satisfaction improvement, profitability enhancement, market differentiation, and optimized marketing performance.

The main stage of grounded theory analysis is selective coding, where the researcher formulates a theoretical framework based on the results of open and axial coding. At this stage, the root causes and underlying factors contributing to these conditions are examined in the form of theoretical memos, which contain the analyst’s reflections and insights on the research conditions.

Table 2. Open Coding of Qualitative Data (Outcomes)

Selective Code	Axial Code	Initial Code
Outcomes	Market Share Growth	Expansion into new markets Attracting new customers Marketing effectiveness in target markets Retaining existing customers
	Customer Satisfaction Improvement	Positive word-of-mouth marketing Customer loyalty Satisfaction with product quality and after-sales services Development of long-term customer relationships Establishing trust-based relationships Customer loyalty programs
	Profitability Enhancement	Cost optimization Utilization of sustainable resources Effective pricing strategies Increasing profit margins
	Market Differentiation	Product innovation Implementation of corporate social responsibility initiatives Product diversification Better management of market fluctuations Strong branding
	Optimized Marketing Performance	Prominent market positioning Effective data-driven marketing analytics Digital marketing Maximizing audience engagement

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to develop a model for marketing and sales outcomes in the bitumen market. A qualitative research method was used for data collection. The research findings were then analyzed.

The identified outcomes include market share growth, customer satisfaction improvement, profitability enhancement, market differentiation, and optimized marketing performance, which align with the findings of Crick et al. (2022). One of the key outcomes of effective marketing and sales in industrial bitumen markets is market share growth. This can be achieved when companies adopt appropriate strategies to identify and meet customer needs and preferences. By implementing market analysis and customer-oriented strategies, companies can strengthen their market position and gain a competitive advantage. Over time, this market share expansion can contribute to brand growth and increased corporate credibility, ultimately serving as a sustainable competitive advantage.

Another critical outcome is increased customer satisfaction, which is often a direct result of market share growth. When companies effectively respond to customer needs and enhance product quality, customer satisfaction rises. This increased satisfaction fosters greater customer loyalty and higher repeat purchases, ultimately leading to greater profitability. Given that acquiring new customers is generally more expensive than retaining existing ones, companies can significantly enhance their profitability by focusing on customer satisfaction and relationship maintenance.

This study sought to comprehensively consider all key factors influencing the development of marketing strategies. Therefore, it is recommended that during the marketing strategy formulation process, all components of this model be simultaneously and integrally considered, and their interrelationships analyzed carefully. Given the critical role of marketing objectives in the formulation and execution of a successful strategy, a bitumen company should precisely define all its marketing objectives, including sales targets, market share goals over different time horizons, expected profit margins from distribution operations, and customer satisfaction targets. Additionally, all operational activities should be designed and executed in alignment with these objectives.

To ensure the effectiveness of these goals, it is necessary to evaluate the entire supply chain's performance over both

short-term and long-term periods, identify deviations, and refine processes accordingly. Therefore, it is suggested that bitumen company managers carefully assess their target geographical areas, the most effective market entry strategies, and the optimal marketing channels and target customers, structuring their actions accordingly. Entering a market requires careful planning for an optimal distribution portfolio, including one or more well-established brands. Decisions regarding entry into specific geographic regions and the inclusion or exclusion of particular product categories and brands in the distribution portfolio should be made based on corporate objectives and available resources.

Precise coordination among various marketing strategy components—including target market selection, marketing objectives, optimal resource allocation, competitive advantage creation, and pricing and distribution strategies—can enhance organizational synergy and ensure that the marketing strategy improves overall performance. Therefore, special attention should be given to aligning these strategy components when developing a marketing plan.

Additionally, it is recommended that sales team performance be assessed on a daily basis and that sales commissions be determined per customer transaction whenever possible. This will allow organizations to monitor the impact of performance evaluations and commission payments on individual sales outcomes, enabling the early detection and correction of deviations. Furthermore, implementing mechanisms for greater alignment and integration between marketing and sales strategies—such as establishing a marketing-sales coordination unit and structuring marketing teams around product group management—can significantly improve organizational performance.

Focusing on all aspects of sales strategy, including proper customer segmentation, a revised approach to target markets, and the exploration and restructuring of sales methods, can greatly enhance organizational performance. Additionally, precise sales team performance evaluations and fair commission-based compensation based on actual sales can serve as strong motivators.

In this study, only the perspectives of chief executives and marketing managers were considered as the primary sources for developing the proposed model. Future research could expand the statistical population to include other individuals involved in the marketing and sales processes or examine the marketing and sales model from their perspectives. Further studies should also explore various aspects of marketing and sales development.

One of the limitations of this study is that the identified variables for measuring constructs are primarily based on studies conducted in foreign contexts, and adapting these studies to the local context often presents challenges and shortcomings. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be easily generalized to other organizations. Additionally, response biases such as leniency bias, central tendency bias, and the halo effect were beyond the researcher's control and were not analyzed in this study. Moreover, due to the use of a questionnaire, only cross-sectional data were analyzed, without considering changes in the perspectives of the statistical population over time.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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