**Research Project Proposal: Strategic Management and Leadership at Walmart**

And perform the statistical and validity tests

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Problem or Opportunity**

Walmart being the largest retail company worldwide is occasionally crippled by the challenge of sustaining its competitiveness in the changing market. The shift towards online sales, customer needs and preferences and emerging forces such as sustainability have so some threats and opportunities to Walmart in the recent past. The main research question that this study will seek to address is how Walmart can improve its strategic management and leadership in the organization to incorporate sustainability (Muda, Indra, & Dharsuky, 2021). This involves analyzing how sustainability is a strategic driver of growth and differentiation for Walmart based on the shifting consumer demand for sustainable practices.

## **1.2 Background and Justification**

Walmart’s sustainability strategy can be dated back to mid-2000s when the company formulated the Walmart Sustainability 360 plan. Since then the company has striven a lot in the reduction of waste in the company, efficiency in energy usage and interior sourcing of green products. Nevertheless, the company remains under pressure from activists regarding its environmental policies, like greenhouse gases emissions, plastic bags, and employees’ rights. The contribution of this study is that it can reveal to Walmart specific recommendations on how it can advance sustainability within its strategic management frameworks (Joshi, 2020). In terms of significance for the wider academic community, this research advances the current debate regarding the influence of large corporations in promoting sustainable businesses. As the focus of this research lies in Walmart, it will be possible to provide an example that reveals various issues related to the execution of sustainability initiatives within a large-scale company.

## **1.3 Research Aims and Objectives**

The objective of this paper is to understand how Walmart can improve its strategic management and leadership and how to align them with sustainability. The specific objectives of the research are:

1. To assess the latest developments in sustainability at Walmart and their alignment with the company.

2. In order to determine major obstacles to Walmart’s sustainable development goals.

3. To identify possible approaches and managerial behaviors that can be helpful for increasing Walmart’s sustainability performance.

4. To assess the likely benefits that would accrue to Walmart if the organisation adopted higher standards of sustainability in its operations.

## **1.4 Limitations and Scope**

The subject of this study will cover Walmart stores in the United States of America, with the major focus being the retailing and the supply chain processes. The study will exclude Walmart’s operations in other countries and operations conducted by its subsidiary firms. The study will also be limited by access to information on sustainability activities of Walmart since this information may be considered strategic or confidential. Moreover, that will not include belonging to other categories of management like financial management, marketing management, and others that are not core to strategic management and leadership in the context of sustainability.

# **2. Literature Review**

## **2.1 Key Definitions and Concepts**

It is therefore crucial for a clear distinction of the concepts, terms and variables in relation to sustainability, strategic management and leadership. Sustainability as applied to business, therefore implies the careful and efficient utilization of resources to ensure that future generations’ requirements are not overshadowed by those of the present. Strategic management is the management of major goals and initiatives that are undertaken by an organization’s top management while leadership is the ability to motivate and direct employees or a group of employees in the direction of their organizational goals.

## **2.2 Theoretical Frameworks**

This research will use several theoretical lenses for the analysis of Walmart’s sustainability activities. The first theory is the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm where the author posits that firms can only sustain a competitive advantage if it is able to access and commit superior resources. In the application of sustainability in the competitive landscape, this framework can be applied to examined how Walmart sustainability strategy created competitive advantages. The second theory is the Stakeholder Theory which claims that an organization should create value not just for shareholders only (Muda, Indra, & Dharsuky, 2021). The theory will be used to analyze the extent to which Walmart’s sustainability initiatives meet the expectations of customers, employees, suppliers, and the community. Lastly, to evaluate the performance of Walmart, the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) will be adopted to study the company’s effects on the social, environment, and economic realms. This framework highlights moderation being the key approach towards reaching sustainable development of these three components.

## **2.3 Critiques of the Current Literature**

The literature on Walmart published in the last ten years contributes to explaining how the company has dealt with the opportunities and threats of the global environment and how it has managed its operations during the pandemic crisis. Through this review of a number of fundamental papers studying Walmart, it is possible to identify its strategic management in diverse contexts, which include the radical COVID-19 situation, e-business system, and strategic acquisitions. Nilufer (2020) gives a kit review of business strategies in various industries including Walmart’s strategies in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The study establishes the fact that like most businesses around the world, Walmart experienced some of the largest disruptions during the pandemic. The study will be of great importance in adding to the current existing knowledge on how large retailers can effectively use strategic management to overcome global disruptions. In Alsharari (2021) the particular focus is made to the description of Walmart’s management accounting in the e-business mode. The research focuses on how Walmart has applied sophisticated management accounting practices to facilitate e-commerce, especially since the role of online selling is becoming increasingly significant.

Joshi (2020) particularly emphasizes on Walmart’s major strategic change in its retail management by entering into Flipkart’s acquisition. It is examined as the strategic business decision that is directed to the acquisition of the solid position in the rapidly growing Indian e-commerce sector. Lastly, Joshi outlines the potential benefits and consequences for customers, suppliers, and competitors due to this acquisition. The acquisition also indicates Walmart’s new direction towards Digital as a tool of competing in the global retail business. Incorporating Walmart in the retail industry, Bamidele-Sadiq et al. (2022) discuss decision tree analysis for strategic management practices. In the context of the present research, it is argued that decision tree analysis can be beneficial in decision making strategies of managers who need to assess the comparative likelihood of different opportunities as well as their risks. From the strategic efforts laid out by Walmart, the authors present instances where decision tree analysis has been used in the enhancement of decision making, risk management and optimisation of operations at the company. Muda, Indra, and Dharsuky (2021) in their paper discuss the ownership and utilization of capital for Walmart using the framework of Community Walmart Uncertainty Model. This paper analyses Walmart’s capital structure change to accommodate market risks and the need for future maneuverability. According to the authors, through the use of both debt and equity, Walmart has been able to establish a solid capital structure that has allowed it to engage in various expansion strategies.

## **2.4 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework for Research**

This research will embrace a conceptual framework that combines the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Stakeholder Theory in parallel with the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework. That is why the combined approach is needed to show the role of Walmart’s sustainability strategy, how it helpful to the firm and its stakeholders, and how it influences the organization’s outcomes. As the RBV postulates, a firm’s competitive advantage results from its capability to obtain and develop valuable, rare, inedible and non-substitutable resources. Thus, Walmart’s energy efficient programs, waste management, and sustainable supply chain management can be considered as the strategic assets that improve the firm’s position and profitability. According to the Stakeholder Theory, organizations should aim to benefit all its stakeholders and not only the shareholders. It is crucial in identifying how and where Walmart’s sustainability initiatives align best with stakeholder expectations such as employees, customers, suppliers and the community at large. It is crucial to ensure that sustainability initiatives are aligned with stakeholder expectations to retain their support and achieve business objectives. The TBL framework broadens the consideration to one of social, environmental, as well as economic performance. Incorporating TBL into the study, the research will evaluate the extent to which Walmart is able to achieve the three dimensions in order to promote sustainable business and avoid risks. This integrated framework will be used to assess the current state of sustainability in Walmart to enable a structured identification of key strategies that can support leadership and management in sustainability.

# **3. Research Methodology**

## **3.1 Research Approach and Strategy**

This research shall use a qualitative research methodology, and more specifically, a case study research design to examine Walmart’s sustainability initiatives. The case study approach is relevant for this research because it enables the analysis of the processes within a specific organisation and offers the richness of understanding the various challenges related to sustainability integration into the strategic management and leadership. The research for this paper will be both quantitative and qualitative in nature, where interviews will be conducted with Walmart employees accompanied by data obtained from company reports, sustainability reports and journal articles.

## **3.2 Data Collection Methods**

Sources of primary data for this research will involve administering a set of structured questionnaires to officers from the Walmart firm particularly seniors, officers in charge of sustainability, and supply chain officers. Dyadic interviews will be helpful in availing a vast wealth of information concerning the prospects and difficulties involved in the process of implementing sustainability in Walmart’s strategic management processes. Secondary data will be gathered through online sources such as Walmart’s annual reports, and sustainability reports as well as this academic journal and other scholarly articles (Miao, 2023). The method of data collection will be the semi-structured interview, which will be prepared according to the objectives of the research and the conducted literature review.

## **3.3 Control of Data Collection Process**

The data collection process will be carried out in two different phases. In the first phase of the study, the researcher will be interviewing employees of Walmart through face-to-face interviews or video interviews depending on the availability of participants. All the interviews will be taped and transcribed to enhance the analysis of the data. In the second phase, the researcher will use secondary data sources such as Walmart sustainability reports and studies done by other scholars.

## **3.4 Population and Sampling**

The target research participants will be the employees of Walmart, working on sustainability projects within the company, at the management level, sustainability managers and buyers. The approach that will be adopted to select the participants is purposive, which involves selecting participants who possess adequate knowledge in sustainability practices within Walmart. The participants for the study will be selected in collaboration with the human resource department of Walmart. Permission to access the respondents shall be sought from the management of Walmart.

## **3.5 Data Analysis**

Interview data will be analyzed using thematic analysis since this is a process of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data collected from interviews. Data analysis will be done in a sequential manner where the first step is to become acquainted with the data followed by coding, development of themes and interpretation. To analyze the secondary data, content analysis approach will be applied to determine how Walmart has been implementing, executing or portraying sustainability. To enhance this validity of the study, the researcher will incorporate the following measures: data source triangulation, member checking, keeping an audit trail of the research processes.

# **4. Statement of Ethics**

## **4.1 Access to Respondents and Permissions**

The researcher will seek approval from Walmart’s management to undertake the research and use the required data. This will involve obtaining permission on the participants to be interviewed and followed by tape recording them, with their understanding that the information provided will not be used in any other way except for the evaluation of the research. Regarding subjects’ rights, participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at any given time without any repercussions.

## **4.2 Confidentiality Protocol and Data Protection**

To maintain the privacy of participants, the researcher will ensure that all data collected in the study will remain private and safe. Recordings and written interviews will be kept on a password-protected computer, while the physical paper documents will be locked in a cabinet. All personal identification numbers shall be stripped out from the data during transcription, and persons in the study shall be referred by aliases in the final research report.

## **4.3 Consent and Rights of Withdrawal**

The participants will agree to the research and the role they were assigned or will be assigned in the research and they will be freely able to withdraw from the research at anytime they wish. For the purpose of informed consent, the participants shall be required to sign a consent form before participating in the research. The researcher will also give the participants a chance to review the interview transcripts and make corrections before it is analyzed.

## **4.4 Data Security Management**

The researcher will ensure security of collected data by encrypting the computer data and keeping physical documents in secure places. Data shall be archived for five years after the data collection is done and after then, data is hard erased. The researcher will also ensure that all data protection laws that may apply to the research such as GDPR will be observed.

# **5. Timeline**

The research project will be conducted over a period of six months, following the timeline outlined in the GANTT chart below:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Task | Month 1 | Month 2 | Month 3 | Month 4 | Month 5 | Month 6 |
| Literature Review | X | X |  |  |  |  |
| Development of Research Instruments | X | X |  |  |  |  |
| Data Collection (Interviews) |  | X | X |  |  |  |
| Data Collection (Secondary Data) |  | X | X |  |  |  |
| Data Analysis |  |  | X | X |  |  |
| Report Writing |  |  |  | X | X | X |
| Final Review and Submission |  |  |  |  | X | X |

The timeline proposed will help make sure that all procedures in the research process will be done in an orderly manner and within a reasonable time frame to allow ample time for data collection, data analysis and the preparation of the report. The final research report will be completed and submitted in month 6 after the last review and modifications.

# **Conclusion**

This research proposal for a scholarly study identifies the specific details and steps needed to understand how Walmart needs to improve in strategic management and leadership for sustainability. Therefore, through examining the strategy, process, and effectiveness of incorporating sustainability into Walmart’s business model, this research offers useful information for both the firm and future studies. The choice of methodology, ethics and timelines also aim at ensuring that this research will be well executed and most importantly done ethically so that it can provide invaluable information or literature to the study of strategic management and leadership.

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