

## **COURSE: FUNDAMENTALS OF MARKETING**

### **LECTURE 12: CHANNELS OF DISTRIBUTION**

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**Lecture learning outcomes:**

**At the end of the lecture, you will be able to:**

- 1. Understand the concept of channels of distribution**
- 2. Examine the functions, importance and classification of channels of distribution**
- 3. Explain and discuss types and factors influencing criteria for selecting channels of distribution**

### **CHANNELS OF DISTRIBUTION**

The term distribution collectively refers to all the acts or services rendered by various agencies. It consists of operation or series of operation which physically brings the goods from the producer into the hands of the final user. The Word Channel is derived from the French Word “Cannal”. The channel of distribution refers to the pathway taken by the goods as they flow from the point of production to the point of consumption.

Channel of distribution is the pathway or course or route through which the product delivered or spread out.

*According to American Marketing Association* defines distribution channel as, “structure of intra-company organization units and extra-company agents and dealers, wholesale and retail, through which a commodity, product or service is marketed.”

*According to Philip Kotler*, “distribution channel is the set of firms and individuals that take title, or assist in transferring title, to the particular good or service as it moves from the producer to the consumer.”

According to the American Marketing Association,” A channel of distribution or marketing channel is the structure of intra – company organization units and extra company agents and dealers, wholesalers and retailers through which a commodity, product or service is marketed.”

The distribution channel is independent organization involved in the process of making a product or service available for use or consumption.”

## **Marketing channel functions**

Distributors are concerned with number of key functions such as:

- 1) Research:** It is concerned with gathering of information necessary for planning and facilitating exchange.
- 2) Promotion:** It is concerned with development and dissemination of persuasive communications about the offer.
- 3) Contact:** It is concerned with searching out and communicating with the prospective buyers.
- 4) Matching:** It is concerned with shaping and fitting the offer to the buyer's requirements like grading, assembling and packaging.
- 5) Negotiation:** Here the attempt is to reach final agreement on price and other terms of the offer so that transfer of ownership or possession can be effected.
- 6) Physical Distribution:** It is concerned with transporting and storing of the goods.
- 7) Financing:** It is concerned with acquisition and dispersal of funds to cover the costs of the channel work.
- 8) Risk-taking:** It is concerned with making assumption of risks in connection with carrying out the channel work.

## **Importance of channel of distribution**

A channel of distribution for a product is the route taken by the title to goods as they move from the producer to the ultimate consumer or industrial user. It brings maximum profit to all. The channel of distribution is very important to the producer and the consumer. There is a big gap between the producer and the consumer and the gap is shrunk by the channel of distribution. The middlemen in the channel of distribution collect the outputs of various products, subdivide the products according to the needs of the consumers and gather this in the assortment wanted and disperse this assortment to consumers or industrial buyers. The middlemen are specialists in concentration, equalization and dispersions. They create time, place, form and possession utilities.

## **Classification of distribution channels**

### **1) Zero-level channel**

It is also known as direct channel. It consists of manufacturer selling directly to consumers. The major direct channel selling are door-to-door selling, mail order selling and manufacturer-owned stores. Manufacturer to Consumer.

## **2) One-level channel**

It contains only one selling intermediary in the form of retailer. In this channel, manufacturer depends on retailer for selling his product.

## **3) Two-level channel**

It contains two intermediaries in the form of wholesalers and retailers through whom the manufacturer channelizes his products to consumers. Many companies opt for this channel as it is very convenient in the movement of goods.

Manufacturer -Wholesaler/ Retailer /Consumer

## **4) Three-level channel**

It contains three intermediaries, the jobber is the new entry here. The task of jobber is to intervene between the wholesalers and retailers, that is jobber buys from wholesalers and sells to the retailers of small scale who are not serviced by the large wholesalers. The jobber is known as “*Semi-Wholesaler*.”

Manufacturer -Wholesaler -Jobber /Retailer Consumer

## **Types of distribution channel**

### **Consumer channels**

Manufacturers may reach out to consumers either directly i.e. without using distribution channels, or by using one or more distribution channel members.

#### **1) Manufacturer to consumer**

The company contacts customers directly through salespersons, mail, telephone, or internet and makes sales. The products are sent directly to customers by the manufacturers.

*For example:* Avon cosmetics, Tupperware, Aqua guard and Amazon.com.

#### **2) Manufacturer to retailer to consumer**

Retailers have grown in size. Growth in retailer size means that it has become economic for manufacturers to supply directly to retailers rather than through wholesalers.

*For example:* Supermarket and corporate retailers like Wal-Mart.

#### **3) Manufacturer to wholesaler to retailer to consumer**

For small retailers with limited order quantities the use of wholesalers makes economic sense. Wholesalers buy in bulk from producers and sell smaller quantities to numerous retailers.

#### **4) Manufacturer to agent to wholesaler to retailer to consumers**

A company uses this channel when it enters foreign markets. It does not have enough sales to warrant the setting up of a sales and distribution infrastructure, and therefore, it delegates the task of selling its product to an agent who does not take title to the goods. The agent contacts wholesalers in the foreign market and receives commission on sales.

## **B. Industrial channels**

Industrial channels are usually shorter than consumer channels. It includes the following:

### **1) Manufacturer to industrial customer**

This is a common channel for expensive industrial products like heavy equipment's and machines. There needs to be close relationship between the manufacturer and the customer, because the product affects the operations of the buyer. The seller has to participate in many activities like installation, commissioning, quality control and maintenance jointly with the buyer. The seller is responsible for many aspects of the operations of the product long after the product is sold.

### **2) Manufacturer to agent to industrial consumer**

A company that sells industrial products can employ the services of an agent who may sell a range of products from several producers on a commission basis. Such an arrangement spreads selling costs and is beneficial to companies who do not have the resources to set up their own sales and distribution operation.

### **3) Manufacturer to distributor to industrial customer**

For less expensive, more frequently purchased products, distributors are used. The company has both internal and field sales staff. Internal staff deals with customer and distributor generated enquiries and order placing, order follow-up and checking inventory levels. Outside sales staff is proactive.

### **4) Manufacturer to agent to distributor to industrial customers**

The manufacturer employs an agent rather than a dedicated sales force to serve distributors mainly because it is less expensive to do so. The agent may sell the goods of several suppliers to an industrial distributor, who further sells it to the business user.

## **Service channels**

Distribution channel for services are usually short, and are either direct or use an agent.

### **1) Service provider to consumer or industrial customer**

Agents are used when the service provider is geographically away from customers and when it is economical for the provider to establish its own local sales team.

### **2) Service provider via internet to consumer or industrial customer**

Increasingly, services like music, software solutions and financial information are being distributed via internet. It is a very useful channel for information products.

*For example:* e-tickets.

## **Factors influencing the selection of a channel**

### **1. Market consideration**

**(a) Nature of the market:** This is one of the important factors in market consideration. Consideration takes place about the product which is meant for customer or the industrial buyer. Long channel will have to be employed if the product is meant for consumer market and industrial market.

**(b) The number of potential customers:** There is the need for a number of middlemen service if the number of potential customers is large. If the number of potential customers is small direct selling is suggestible.

**(c) Geographic Concentration of the Market:** Direct selling is effective if the customers are concentrated in a few places. If they are situated over the whole country, then a large number of middlemen will have to be employed.

**(d) Order Size:** If the sales volume is large, direct selling is suitable. Industrial distributors sell industrial operating supplies.

**(e) Customer Buying habit:** This affects the channel policies very much. When the buyer's habit and purchase pattern of consumers are frequent and small in size, then indirect selling is suitable.

### **2. Product consideration**

**a. Unit sale value of the product:** When the unit value of a product is high, direct channel is effective. On the other hand, when the unit value is low, the direct channel is ineffective. If the product is of low value, larger and cheaper channels will be better. Short and costly channels may be used of the products is of high value.

**b. Bulk and Weight:** To minimize the freight, heavy or bulky goods may be sent by train or truck.

**c. Perishable Nature:** Perishable products such as milk, dairy products, bread, meat etc are sent by shorter channel or direct channel, while long channel is used for non perishable products.

**d. Technicality:** The technical nature of the product requires services. Hence, sales and servicemen are needed to explain the use of the product to the customers. For products like computers, business machines etc., direct channel is more advantageous.

**e. Seasonal: Sales** of the product are subject to seasonal variation, for example, woolen clothes etc. Hence to sell these seasonal products intermediaries are needed. Direct selling is ineffective.

### 3. Company consideration

- a. **Financial Strength:** Financially sound companies are in a better position to select and design their distribution channel. As such, direct channel is adopted. On the other hand, financially weak companies have to select indirect channel, as they depend on the intermediaries.
- b. **Reputation:** It has been said that reputation travels faster than man. There are many companies, which have good reputation because of the product preference by the customers. Many intermediaries are eager to have connection with such companies.
- c. **Market Control:** When a firm wants to exercise control over the price, the way in which customers are served etc., direct channel is suggested.

### 4. Middlemen consideration

The middlemen, who is able to offer a good facility of storage may be considered. The channel which facilitates maximum sales must be preferred. The cost of each attractive channel may be estimated on the basis of unit sale. The best type of channel which gives a low unit cost of marketing may be considered.

### 5. Consumer consideration

The characteristics of buyers as to their number, location, frequency of the purchase, quantities bought by them etc influence the channel selection. If the customers are scattered geographically, a long channel can be adopted. Consumers may wish to have the product at a convenient place; for example daily consumption items like milk, paper, breadetc, consumers may like to have them at the door. The channel adopted must facilitate the commodities produced to be available to the consumers in time.

### **Factors governing or criteria for selecting a Channel of distribution**

#### **1) The nature of the product**

These factors include physical characteristics of a product and their impact on the selection of a particular channel of distribution. It includes:

##### ***a) Perishability***

Products which are perishable in nature are distributed by employing a shorter channel of distribution so that goods could be delivered to the consumers without delay. For example, fruits, vegetables, milk products etc.

##### ***b) Size and weight of product***

Bulky and heavy products like coal and food grains etc are directly distributed to the users because they involve heavy transportation costs. In order to minimize these costs a short and direct distribution channel is suitable.

***c) Unit value of a product***

Products with lesser unit value and high turnover are distributed by employing longer channels of distribution. Household products like utensils, cloth, cosmetics etc take longer time in reaching the customers. On the other hand, products like jewellery having high product value are directly sold to the consumers by the jewellers.

***d) Product lines***

A manufacturer producing different products in the same line sells directly or through retailers and lesser time is consumed in their distribution. On the other hand, a manufacturer dealing only in one item appoints sole selling agents, wholesalers and retailers for selling the product. For example, in case of “Vanaspathi Ghee” longer distribution channel is undertaken.

***e) Technical nature of products***

Industrial products which are highly technical in nature are usually distributed directly to the industrial users and take lesser time and adopt shorter channel of distribution. In this case after sale service and technical advice is provided by the manufacturer to the consumers.

**2) The nature of the market**

This is another factor influencing the choice of a proper channel of distribution.

***a) Number of prospective buyers***

If the number of buyers is likely to be more, the distribution channel will be long. On the other hand, if the number of consumers is expected to be less, the manufacturer can effectively sell directly to the consumers by appointing salesman.

***b) Size of the order***

If the size of the order placed by the customers is big, direct selling can be undertaken by the manufacturer as in case of industrial goods. But where the size of the order is small, middlemen are appointed to distribute the products.

***c) Geographic concentration of market***

Where the customers are concentrated at one particular place or market, distribution channel will be short and the manufacturer can directly supply the goods in that area by opening his own shops or sales depot.

***d) Buying habits of customers***

This includes tastes, preferences, likes and dislikes of customers. Customers also expect certain services like credit and personal attention and after sales service etc. All these factors greatly influence the choice of distribution channel.

## **THE NATURE OF MIDDLEMEN**

Middlemen refers to, such institutions or business concerns situated in the marketing channels at points between the producer and the final buyers.

According to American Marketing Association, “A middlemen is one who specializes in performing operations or rendering services that are directly involved in the purchase and sale of goods in the process of their flow from the producer to the final consumer.”

Marketing intermediaries are vital components in the distribution of goods. They greatly influence the marketing of goods.

### ***a) Cost of distribution***

Cost of distribution through middlemen is one of the main considerations to be taken into account by the manufacturer. Higher cost of distribution will result in the increased cost of product. The manufacturer should select the most economical distribution channel.

### ***b) Availability of desired middlemen***

Sometimes desired middlemen may not be available for the distribution of goods. They may be busy in dealing with the competitive products. Under such circumstances the manufacturer has to make his own arrangements by opening his branches or sales depots to distribute the goods to the consumers.

### ***c) Unsuitable marketing policies for middlemen***

The marketing policies of the manufacturer may not be welcomed by the middlemen for the terms and conditions may not favour the middlemen. For example, some wholesalers or retailers would like to act as sole selling agents for the product in a particular area or region.

### ***d) Financial Soundness***

In appointing middleman, the manufacturer must take into consideration the financial stability and reputation of the middleman. A financially sound middleman can provide credit facilities to customers and make prompt payment to the manufacturer.

## **2. The nature and size of the manufacturing unit**

The nature and size of the manufacturing unit has a great impact on the selection of a distribution channel.

### ***a) Manufacturer reputation***

Reputed and financially sound manufacturing concerns can easily engage middlemen as compared to lesser reputed and newly established units. Generally, a financially weaker unit cannot operate without the help of middlemen.

### ***b) Experience of the undertaking***

Industrial undertakings having ample marketing ability and experience can effectively manage their distribution activities themselves. They have lesser dependence on undertaking intermediaries.

### ***c) Services provided by the manufacturers***

The selection of marketing intermediaries is also influenced by various services provided by the manufacturer. These services include extensive advertisement for the product, after sales services and facilities of credit. The manufacturers providing these services can easily avail the services of reputed retailers and wholesalers.

### **5) Government Regulations and policies**

Government policies and regulations also influence the choice of distribution channels. The government may impose certain restrictions on the wholesale trade of a particular product and to takeover the distribution of certain products. All these restrictions have a direct impact in selecting the channel of distribution.

### **6) Competition**

The nature and extent of competition prevalent in an industry is another detrimental consideration in selecting a distribution channel. Different manufacturers producing similar products may employ the same channels of distribution.

### **Classification of middlemen**

There are two types of middlemen in distribution. They are Functional middlemen (Mercantile Middlemen) and Merchant middlemen.

**1. Agent middlemen :** They are mostly engaged in wholesale dealing. They assist in negotiating sales or purchase or both on behalf of the seller or buyer. They do not take title of the goods which they handle.

**Importance of middlemen :** Middlemen are very important in the modern ever widening market, by making the distribution easy and smooth. Organised markets for many commodities are created by them. They create time, place and possession utility. Middlemen concentrate their effort on marketing and distribution of goods.

**Function of middlemen:** Middlemen's functions are known as marketing functions. The marketing functions are the functions of exchange, functions of physical supply and facilitating functions. The functions of middlemen are:

1. The middlemen are the connecting link between the sellers and buyers. They help the sellers and buyers to enter into a contract of sale or purchase.
2. They direct the flow of goods from the producer to the ultimate consumer.
3. Merchant middlemen perform the function of merchandising by making the goods fit for the market segmentation.
4. Middlemen is responsible for the flow of goods.
5. Large scale production is possible with the help of middlemen. They collect huge orders and large purchases of products lead to large scale production.

### **KINDS OF AGENT MIDDLEMEN**

1. **Broker:** A broker is an agent. He represents the buyer or the seller in negotiating purchases or sales without having physical control over the goods involved. His main service is to bring the buyer and the seller together. He is the agent of the owner of goods, seeking a buyer other than the agent of a buyer who is seeking for supply.
2. **Commission Agent:** Commission agent is an agent – individual, firms or even companies. It negotiates the sales of goods belonging to the principal. It customarily exercises physical control over the sale of goods. It has the power on price, and terms of sale under the condition that it must obey the instructions of the principals.
3. **Manufacturer's Agent:** Manufacturer's agents are employed by the manufacturers to sell their products. The agent receives a percentage of commission based on his sales. He uses his techniques. He employs his sales representatives, who work for him. Selling is his main function. This type of middlemen are important in the marketing of industrial goods.
4. **Selling Agents:** Selling agent is an independent middlemen. He operates on a contractual basis. He negotiates all sales of a specified line of merchandise or the entire output of its principal. He has authority over the price, terms and other conditions of sale. He is the sole selling agent for the line.
5. **Resident buyers:** Resident buyer is an independent agent, and he specializes in buying for retailers. He receives compensation or a fee on commission basis. He operates in lines of trade, such as furniture, garments etc. He has his

office in the market place. The resident buyers are purely and simply an independent agent specialized in buying for principals who are retailers.

6. **Auctioneers:** They are generally appointed by business firms. The auctioneer receives the goods and invites bids for the goods. The highest bidder gets the goods and the auctioneer collects the amount from him.

### **Merchant middlemen**

Merchant middlemen buy and sell goods on their own account and risk. They take the title to goods. They resell the goods at profit. They are of wholesalers and retailers.

### **Functions of merchant middlemen**

1. They are the connecting link between the producers and consumers and goods are supplied where they are in demand.
2. They match the demand with production.
3. They perform the important functions of advertisement, display etc.
4. They know the purchasing powers of customers and by informing the producers, fix reasonable price.
5. They offer too many communications between producers and customers.

## **WHOLESALE**

A wholesaler is a businessman who specializes in performing wholesale activities. The word wholesaler means to market goods in relatively large quantities.

According to American Marketing Association, "Wholesalers buy and resell merchandise to retailers and other merchants and to industrial institutions, and commercial users, but do not sell in significant amounts to ultimate consumers.

### **Functions of the wholesalers**

1. **Buying and Assembling:** The wholesalers procure varieties of goods from various producers regularly and preserves them in his shop for resale.
2. **Warehousing:** The wholesaler stores goods in large quantities in his own or hired warehouses. This ensures uninterrupted supply of goods to the retailers.
3. **Transporting:** Transportation involves the bringing of goods from the plant door to his godown and also from his godown to the retailer's shop.

**4. Financing:** He offers financial assistance to the retailers through extension of credit facilities. On the other hands, he buys from the manufacturers for cash or for relatively shorter period of credit.

**5. Risk bearing:** Since he acquires the title over the goods in which he deals, he assumes the risk arising out of changes in demand, spoilage and deterioration in quality of the goods kept in his godown.

### **Services rendered by wholesalers**

#### **1. To manufacturers**

- a. Wholesalers act as an intermediary between the manufacturer and the retailer.
- b. He is the selling assistant of the manufacturer.
- c. Manufacturer's cost of delivery and storage is reduced by wholesalers. They store goods in their godown and they deliver the goods from the place of production to place of demand.
- d. Wholesalers hold stocks when the price is very low at the time overproduction and sell the stocks when the price is high.
- e. Wholesalers offer financial help to manufacturers. Producers do not give credit facilities to retailers. But wholesalers give credit facility which will enable more sales of products.

#### **2. To retailers**

- a. Wholesalers have a large stock of varieties of goods. Hence retailers are free from holding big stock of goods. The wholesaler's warehouses serve as a reservoir for retailers. They can buy things as and when they need.
- b. Retailers have only limited capital resources. Hence they cannot buy large quantities from the manufacturer. Wholesalers buy large quantities and resell them to retailers in small quantity.
- c. If the retailers purchase goods from the manufacturer, then there will be delay in delivery. On the other hand, if the wholesaler has the stock of goods, he can deliver the goods to the retailers promptly.
- d. Wholesalers grant credit to their permanent retailers. After selling the product, retailer settles the accounts with the wholesaler. He will repay the money once a month or as agreed upon.

- e. Wholesaler informs the arrival of new goods to the retailers. The manufacturer advertises the new product. The wholesaler helps the retailers in efficient window display of the new products in his job.

#### **Services to the consumers**

- a. It is the wholesaler who introduces fashion and new changes in the market. It increases the standard of living of the people.
- b. Selection of goods is possible as he has a number of varieties of goods. Retailers and consumers can select the required goods from there.
- c. Specialisation leads to decrease in cost and so the retailers and consumers can buy the goods at the low cost.

#### **Disservices of the wholesalers**

- 1. The wholesalers make the distribution channel unduly long and prevent the producers and ultimate consumers from coming into close contact.
- 2. The wholesalers maintain their existence at the cost of others. Their existence in the marketing channel has considerably increased the distribution costs which ultimately fall on the final consumer.
- 3. The worst type of disservice which the wholesalers can render to the society is by the clever method of cornering. By hoarding the goods in large quantities, they can create artificial demand for such product and indulge in black marketing.

### **RETAILERS**

The word retailer is derived from a French word *retailen* which mean “to cut again.”

According to Cundiff and Still, “ a retailer is a merchant or occasionally an agent whose main business is selling directly to the ultimate consumer.”

#### **Importance of retailers**

It is one of the important functions of marketing process. The retailer is an intermediary in the marketing channel of distribution. He is both a marketer and consumer. He is a specialist is selling the goods to the ultimate consumer. Retailers create place, time and possession

utilities. He supplies the needed goods from the place of production to the place where it is demanded. He sells the goods at a reasonable price at the time when the customers want the goods.

### **Functions of retailers**

1. Provide personal services to all.
2. Provide two way information.
3. Facilitate standardization and grading.
4. Undertake physical movement and storage of goods.
5. Assemble goods from various sources. Etc.

### **Services of the retailer**

1. The primary job of a retailer is to assemble different varieties of goods from various wholesalers.
2. A retailer helps in the physical flow of the goods from the producer to the consumer. The retailer satisfies the daily wants of the people by creating place utility.
3. He provides the availability of many varieties of goods from many manufacturers. He provide varieties of choice enabling the consumers to select the commodities easily.
4. A retailer attracts consumer's attention to new goods and their arrival by personal salesmanship. He brings new products and new varieties to the knowledge of consumers.
5. The retailer gives advice and guidance to the consumers regarding the purchase of goods. It is essential for him to establish permanent and continuous relationship with consumers.

### **ELIMINATION OF MIDDLEMEN**

Wholesalers and retailers act as middlemen between producers and consumers. Apart from the services offered, the cost of their function is an addition to the final price which is recovered from the ultimate consumers. Some people are of the opinion that wholesalers may be eliminated, leaving the retailers, as they cannot be eliminated from the distribution system. It is generally felt that a good amount of the final price is eaten away by the middlemen.

### **ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF MIDDLEMEN**

1. There are many functions like assembling, warehousing, transporting etc are performed by the middlemen. They also take active part in the distribution of finished goods.
2. The important functions of distribution and its risk burden are assumed by middlemen, and the producers have been freed.
3. Because of the services of the middlemen, goods are brought to the places where they are needed.
4. Specialization, which is the result of division of labour, is important in modern marketing, when there are specialized dealers.
5. We can eliminate the middlemen, but we cannot eliminate their functions. It means someone has to perform the functions. The marketing functions cannot be eliminated.

### **ARGUMENTS AGAINST MIDDLEMEN**

1. The appearance of middlemen in marketing functions costs about 35% to 50% of the price paid by the consumer.
2. There are large numbers of middlemen between the consumers and producers. Some of these middlemen do not perform any function but these people create hindrance in the free flow of goods towards the market.
3. All types of risks arising out of depression and recession, strikes, scarcity are not shouldered by the middlemen.
4. They enter into black marketing in time of scarcity and emergencies with a view to earn huge profits, by boosting the price. Communications have been developed extensively, and different modes of transporting systems are available regularly. Hence, middlemen can be eliminated.

### **ARGUMENTS AGAINST WHOLESALERS**

1. Most of them are only order takers for profit at the cost of the consumers.
2. Relation between producer and consumers is hindered.
3. Encourage black marketing for higher profit.
4. They aim only at higher commission.

5. They do not offer any valuable services to anyone.

### **Conclusion**

1. Elimination of middlemen does not mean elimination of the marketing functions.
2. There is no sense in eliminating the functions of specialists.
3. Middlemen are essential to deal with the distribution of perishable goods and some of the convenience goods.
4. It is not possible for the producer to distribute the goods to the ocean of customers. To be more effective, the chain of middlemen should be shortened. Longer the chain, greater the cost.

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