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Author(s): Ali Al Gafly

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Abstract

Businesses have always been striving to adopt the best strategies to ensure that they achieve their strategic goals and objectives. These efforts have always been influenced by the changes in the macro and microeconomic environments where the businesses operate. The 20th century was memorable in this regard because, during this century, a paradigm shift in organizational strategy from standardization to customization occurred. Towards the end of the century and as the 21st century began, new technologies especially the Internet and computers added an impetus to this strategic shift. The outcome was the emergence of new concepts- mass customization and the experience economy. This study aims to explore the role of technology innovation in mass customization and the experience economy. Through a case study of Adidas' mass customization program, miAdidas, the paper applies relevant innovation theories and analysis to achieve the purpose. According to the findings, Adidas relied on technology and innovation to introduce miAdidas. The success of the program to date can also be partly linked to the role of technology and innovation. This research studies teach important lessons as well as shows implications on other customers, organizations as well as other stakeholders.

Introduction

Over the years, for businesses to meet their strategic objectives and goals, they strive to ensure that they adopt effective and the best strategies. This has resulted in major and significant changes in the ways and strategies firms adopt in the different periods; this has been the case from the early industrial periods to the modern technological eras. Changes within the macro and microenvironments have been influential in these transformations. Apparently, businesses operate in unstable environments where changes

often occur, putting pressure on the businesses to make some changes in their strategies (Harrison 305; Potterfield 126) [4]. Since businesses exist to make profits, they must ensure that they are able to convince customers to buy or consume the products and services that they offer. Therefore, only the business that have adopted the best strategies such as marketing strategies are the once able to accomplish this goal. In order to achieve this goal, the businesses must understand their operation environments that include technological changes and the market.

Over the years, technology being a major factor has influenced business strategies. Since the advent of traditional technologies such in manufacturing to the advent of ICT (information and communication technology), there has been a major impact on business strategies. With specific regard to marketing, technological changes have seen businesses increasingly adopting new technologies for their marketing strategies. While the specific impacts of technological changes are varied, one of the main impacts has been in the transformation from the era of standardization to customization. Standardization was the main business strategy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Golembiewski 756) [3]. Back then, businesses adopted standardization because of the potential benefits that included cost efficiencies, economies of scale, and easier marketing strategies (Baalbaki and Naresh 182)[1]. However, in the 20th century, businesses started realizing that standardization was not effective, especially in a heterogeneous market where the needs, preferences, and tastes of consumers varied (Kotler 11-12) [7]. They started adopting a new strategy- customization. With customization, more organizations started to target specific market segments based on their specific needs and characteristics. This resulted in new organizational forms and

diversified product/service offerings (Golembiewski 756) [3]. The coming up of new technologies such as ICT, has made the customization strategy to advance to more new levels.

New technological innovations have taken root since the late 20th century and the 21st century hence becoming the major elements of a business strategy. Companies are now capable of integrating technologies in their marketing strategies for effectiveness enhancement. With regard to customization, new technologies such as social media and smartphones have made customization more relevant and convenient. In the contemporary world, many companies are realizing the importance of using technology to integrate the advantages of both standardization and customization to have better outcomes. Customization proved to be quite complex and costly (Gilmore and Joseph 91) [2]. Therefore, companies started to find ways of retaining it but overcoming these challenges. The outcome of this has been a new concept known as mass customization.

Mass customization is increasingly replacing the eras of standardization and customization. It is becoming the norm in contemporary businesses. It takes advantage of some elements of both standardization and customization. Mass customization is becoming more popular because of the availability of technological innovations that enhance customization of products and services in high volumes without high-cost implications (Gilmore and Joseph 91) [2]. Through mass customization, companies intend to develop, produce, market and deliver affordable products in wide varieties such that almost everyone gets what they want (Pine 44) [14].

The objective of this paper is to critically analyze the roles of technological innovation in mass customization through the use of a case study of miAddidas. This

paper will use and rely on an extensive body of scholarly literature and appropriate theories of innovation. In terms of structure, the paper comprises of five main sections: introduction, literature search, research method, findings and discussion, and conclusion. Technological innovation is an important element of mass customization as it helps organizations to apply this strategy effectively.

Literature Review

Introduction. The issue of mass customization is not new, as it emerged in the mid-20th century (Golembiewski 756) [3]. This means that mass customization has existed for six decades or more. Through this period, it has been subject to multiple research studies and explorations by various entities including marketing professionals, scholars, and strategists. There exists a wide range of literature on the subject of mass customization. The different kinds of literature focus on different aspects of the subject including the meaning, features, advantages and disadvantages, and outcomes among others. Researchers have been trying to find out more on mass customization issue which includes its changes over the years as well as its beginning. Therefore, this has resulted in the creation of wide databases of scholarly literature such as books and journal articles that enlighten and provide information on this concept. These literatures can be easily accessed through various platforms including traditional libraries, the Internet, and online databases. In view of this reality, this paper relied on the various relevant literature available on the concept of mass customization to create a strong background and highlight some of the fundamental elements such as the emergence, definition, application, and changes in mass customization. Moreover, it was particularly important to ensure that a clear background of mass customization was provided to have a better

understanding of how technological innovations have influenced its application and the outcomes. Finally, the literature review provides an important starting point to structure the research appropriately in terms of deciding what to cover. In the end, the literature review section provides the opportunity to look back at the concept of mass customization from its emergence to the current context.

Evolution of Organizations and Organizational Marketing Strategies. To understand the concept of mass customization better, it is important to consider its roots. Specifically, it is important to examine the period prior to the emergence of this concept to understand what dynamics were involved. A good place to start from is reviewing existing literature on organizational forms and strategies. According to Golembiewski (756) [3], an organizational form is the logic in overall that shapes an organization structure, strategy and management processes. By reviewing the relevant literature on the changes in organizational forms over the years, then there will be the potential of figuring out when mass customization was adopted to be a central or major organizational strategy.

As illustrated in table 1 below, three major eras are important in understanding the emergence of mass customization. These eras include standardization eras, innovation and early customization. Standardization was the earliest strategy adopted by organizations in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Golembiewski 756) [3]. During the classical management era, hierarchical structures were the dominant forms of organizational structures and specialization and segmentation formed the key capabilities of firms. Achieving high-efficiency levels was a major consideration for organizations. In pursuit of this goal, many organizations relied on standardization as the means through which they could achieve service reliability and minimal defects (Wang et al. 4) [18].

Standardization involved treating the entire market as a homogenous entity where the needs and preferences of the consumers were similar. Hence, companies produced used standardized processes to produce standardized products for the entire market.

Organizations that were good at standardization were more competitive because of incurring low costs and economies of scale. However, the era of standardization would soon end.

Table 1: Evolution of Organizational Strategies

Historical era	Standardization	Customization	Innovation (Mass customization)
Organizational form/structure	Hierarchical	Network/matrix	Cell
Core asset	Capital goods	Information	Knowledge
Key capability	Specialization, segmentation	Flexibility, responsiveness	Design creativity
Influential manager	Chief operating officer	Chief information officer	Chief knowledge officer

Source: (Golembiewski pg.756) [3].

In the mid-20th century, the era of customization began (Golembiewski 756) [3]. In the beginning, organizations integrated new forms into the hierarchical forms leading to matrix structures. The core asset shifted from capital goods to information and key capabilities changed from specialization and segmentation to flexibility and responsiveness (Golembiewski 756) [3]. It is important to note that it was during this era that information technology was emerging. It was in the 1940s that the first electronic

computers, Zuse Z3, were introduced (Kaisler 7) [6]. Since then, the era of information technology began as new technologies including computers, computer programs, email, and the internet emerged. With these technological innovations, information became the core organizational asset. As technological innovations rose to higher levels especially in the turn of the century, knowledge became the core asset. Organizations began to consider design creativity as the key capability (Golembiewski 756) [3]. Overall, the combination of technological innovations and changing consumer needs influenced the transition from the era of standardization to customization (Wind and Arvind 17) [19]. Mass customization became more common towards the end of the 20th century. The new technological innovations such as the internet technology and personal computers played a significant role in this transformation.

In the modern world, many organizations use mass customization as the dominant approach in marketing for both the international and the local levels. In fact, new technological innovations and changing market dynamics are pushing mass customization to a new level referred to as customerization. According to Hart (13) [5], mass customerization involves “using flexible processes and organizational structures to produce varied and often individually customized products and services at the price of standardized mass-produced alternatives”. Like mass customization, customerization relies on information technology extensively (Wind and Arvind 15) [19].

Mass Customization and the Experience Economy. The concept of mass customization emerged in the mid-20th century but took root towards the end of the century. Stanley Davis invented the term “mass customization” in his 1989 book, *Future Perfect*, where he foresaw a future where new technologies including flexible factory,

telecommunications, and computers would enable marketers to customize their products for individual customers (Kotler 13) [7]. Before then, business only engaged in mass marketing by treating the entire market as a homogenous block with similar consumer needs. However, with the emergence and continued technological innovations, this changed and the era of mass marketing ended towards the end of the 20th century. As Kotler (47) [7] puts it, “today’s computer technologies and automation capabilities within factories now allow us to bring out affordable, individualized versions of products – every customer’s dream.” From this statement, it is clear that technology played an important role in the emergence of mass customization. However, what does mass customization really mean?

Various scholars have provided different definitions of mass customization. Hart defined the concept as the use of “flexible processes and organizational structures to produce varied and often individually customized products and services at the price of standardized mass-produced alternatives” (qtd. in Wind and Arvind 14) [19]. From this definition, some elements stand out. For example, it is quite apparent that mass customization incorporates elements of standardization and customization. The element of standardization is the pricing that follows that of standardized products for the mass market. The customization element is the production of individually customized products. Therefore, mass customization cannot be said to be a completely new concept or strategy in marketing. Rather, it borrows from previous marketing concepts and strategies to form a reconditioned concept that suits the contemporary market. The realization that treating the entire market as a homogenous entity through mass marketing was no longer effective is the main force that drove the introduction and growth of mass customization.

The growing adoption of mass customization is evident across the world. In the contemporary world, almost all executives appreciate the need for providing outstanding customer services. With this realization, they have increasingly grown to appreciate the importance of mass customization as the new marketing strategy that promises to ensure enhanced customer satisfaction through better the customer experience (Wang et al. 6) [18]. Mass customization has resulted in the emergence of another concept-the experience economy. According to Pine and James (97) [13], the experience economy is a new concept where meeting customers' need through the production of great products and services is not the ultimate objective. The ultimate objective is to meet and exceed the needs while creating an unforgettable experience for the customers. This experience occurs when a firm deliberately "uses services as the stage and goods as props to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event" (Pine and James 98) [13]. Moreover, as opposed to traditional economic offerings – goods and services – that were external to buyers, experiences exist in the mind of the individual customer where it is inherently personal. As such, there is no likelihood that two or more customers can share the same experience (Pine and James 98) [13]. Therefore, mass customization is a key factor in the experience economy that is taking over in the contemporary world.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Mass Customization. The popularity and increasing adoption of mass customization by organizations across the world is a clear indication that it has some potential advantages or benefits. Otherwise, this would not be the case. One of the main advantages of mass customization is that it enables companies to focus more on customers by providing products and services that meet and exceed the needs of individual customers. Companies are embracing new procedures and programs to ensure

that they meet every need of the customers (Gilmore and Joseph 91). By focusing more on customers in their marketing strategies, companies are realizing customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Additionally, mass customization provides an opportunity for companies to overcome the drawbacks of previous approaches, specifically standardization and customization, by providing unique customer value efficiently (Gilmore and Joseph 91). This is possible because companies use customer information to understand their needs and strategize on how to meet these varied needs effectively and efficiently. However, mass customization has its potential pitfalls too.

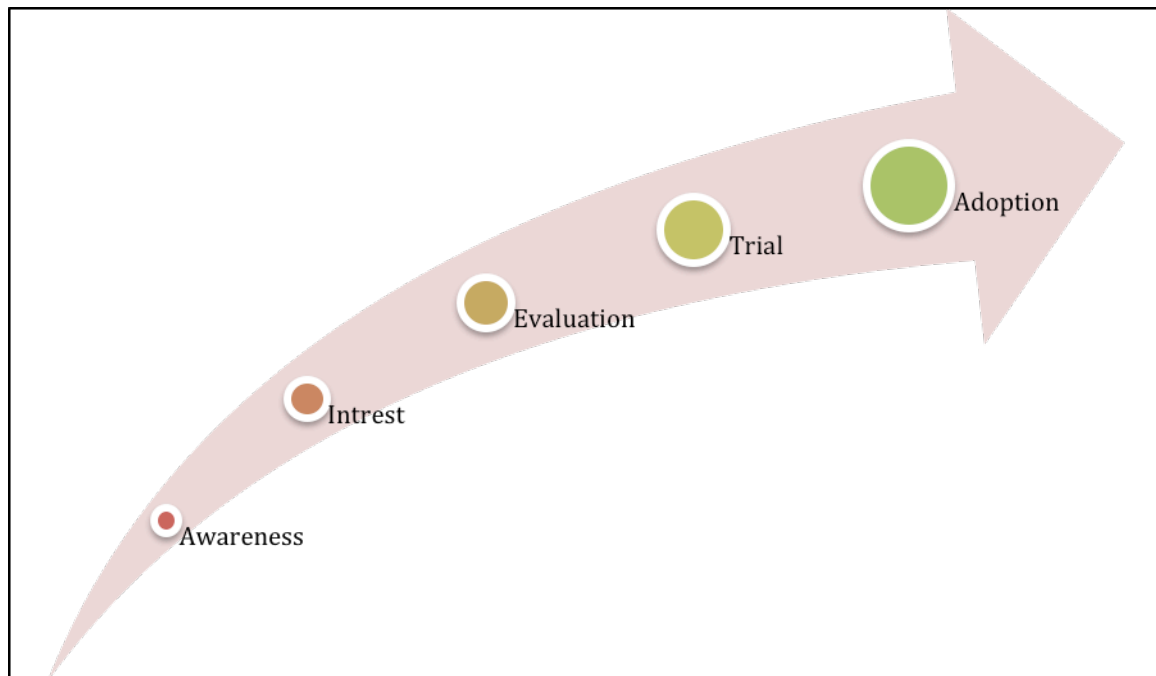
When considering the adoption of mass customization, business executives need to understand that this does not guarantee the success of additional benefits. Many organizational managers have come to the shocking realization that mass customization can lead to unnecessary complexities and costs (Gilmore and Joseph 91). According to Wang et al. (6-7) [18], customization implies higher customer involvement, longer waiting time, and higher costs. When the customization is inadequate in meeting the specific customer needs and expectations and creating memorable experiences, the mass customization strategy may fail with significant cost implications for the company. Moreover, because of the varied and constantly changing customer needs and expectations, it can be quite difficult for companies to keep up with the market changes by providing products that are customized to the needs of individual customers.

Role of Technological Innovation. Various theories of innovation have been presented to explain how innovations occur and influence fluctuations in organizations in terms of structure and strategies. One such theory is Schumpeter's theory of innovation, which postulates that innovation is the main reason behind increased business fluctuations and

investments. According to this theory, innovation refers to the changes in the approaches for production and organization that often includes the adoption of new methods, new material, and new technologies (Sweezy 93). This theory can be applied in explaining how and what specific innovations influenced the adoption of mass customization in Adidas. The other relevant theory of innovation is the diffusion of innovations.

Everett Rogers developed the diffusion of innovation theory in the second half of the 20th century at a time when technological innovations were beginning to show a significant increase. The theory provides an explanation of the process of innovation. It shows that innovation is a systematic process that requires communication via specific channels and over time across a social system (Rogers 10) [16]. Roger developed a five-stage process of innovation that shows how innovation begins and proceeds (see diagram 1). While the process seems smooth, it is not. The theory notes various potential barriers could occur at any stage and prevent successful innovations. For example, resistance to change could undermine innovation. This model will be useful in exploring the innovation process behind Adidas' mass customization.

Diagram 1: Roger's Diffusion of Innovation



The emergence and increasing adoption of mass customization were made possible by the technological innovations that provided new opportunities for meeting individual customer needs while providing memorable experiences (Gilmore and Joseph 91). Through the advent of ICT, businesses could now harness these technologies to overcome some of the challenges that they had experienced in terms of meeting customer needs as well as adopt flexible pricing strategies to suit different times of the day or seasons. They could also tailor coupons and discounts based on the past purchasing behaviors of individual customers (Wind and Arvind 23) [19]. Moreover, new technological innovations emerged that made it possible for businesses to provide memorable customer experiences even before the products or services are produced (21). Overall, technology provided opportunities that were hitherto unavailable for companies to focus more on customers and develop offerings that met individual customer needs while creating unforgettable experiences. Looking back, it is quite apparent that without technological innovation, the reality of mass customization and the experience economy

could still be an illusion. How would organizations be able to keep up with the rapidly changing market dynamics, especially customer needs and preferences without applying innovative ideas and technologies? How could companies adopt more flexible systems to provide customized marketing strategies including flexible pricing, flexible product and service offerings, and individualized customer experiences? Such questions provide a glimpse into the significant role that technology and innovation played that ultimately lead to the experience economy where mass customization is a key element.

Discussion of Research Method

Research Approach and Methodology. The paper adopts an exploratory approach. This approach is appropriate because it provides the opportunity to critically and deeply explore the role of technological innovation in mass customization and the experience economy. Exploratory research, as the name suggests, is used when exploring a phenomenon to gain new insights and ideas about it (Majumdar 23) [8]. Specifically, the case study method will be utilized. Case studies provide an important methodology to explore a phenomenon in detail in its real-world context (Yin 4) [20]. Through a case study, the researcher will focus on a particular organization that has embraced mass customization and that has relied on technological innovations to do this. From a research perspective, by studying a particular organization, the research will provide deeper insights that go beyond the surface to reveal crucial underlying factors and dynamics. These will enrich the quality of the research findings and the entire research.

Apart from the in-depth analysis, the case study is also appropriate for this particular study because various organizations have embraced mass customization that can provide perfect cases for exploration. Both secondary and primary sources of data as

well as other sources are available on these firms. While primary resources provide fresh information, the research will rely on secondary data because of several reasons. First, there is a huge database of secondary sources readily accessible from the internet and other sources such as books. Second, secondary data can be easily compared and contrasted to establish consistencies and inconsistencies that will be useful in deriving the findings and discussing them. Finally, secondary sources were preferred because of the difficulty in accessing primary data because most managers and key people in organizations tend to avoid involvement in studies that require them to provide information about their organizations' strategies. The researcher was concerned that using primary research would not yield adequate data because of this potential barrier.

Sampling. As this is a case study, a single organization was selected for analysis. Non-probability sampling, specifically convenience sampling, was used because of the need to identify and include an organization that had demonstrated the application of mass customization and whose information was readily available (McCormack and Elizabeth 55) [9]. Therefore, the researcher relied on some background research to select the organization.

Data Collection. Data for the case study was collected through a review of relevant secondary sources. Specifically, the research first identified relevant data on the organization from an extensive internet search through Google search and through various online databases including ProQuest and Google Scholar. After identifying relevant sources with the required data, the researcher then proceeded to categorize and review them. To supplement the secondary data and enhance the credibility of the research findings, primary data from one of the employees in Adidas was also used. The

employee, who happens to be a close friend to the researcher, provided crucial data that also informed the research findings.

Analysis. The analytic process partly coincided with the data collection process. The researcher reviewed the collected data sources to come up with the findings. The analysis was largely qualitative. Therefore, the researcher applied coding and personal judgment in the analysis. This would result in the identification of major themes and sub-themes that formed the findings of the research.

Results and Evidence

Company Background. Adidas AG is one of the largest manufacturers of sportswear in the world. The company was established in 1924 as Dassler Schuhfabrik by Adolf Dassler and his brother Rudolf. After several years of working together and seeing the successful growth of the business, the two brothers disagreed on how to continue managing the business. This led to their separation in 1948 where Adolf Dassler registered Adidas while Rudolf founded a rival company, Puma. However, Adidas continued to grow over the years with additional product lines and markets such that it soon became the dominant manufacturer of sportswear and sports equipment. However, this period of almost unhindered growth was to end shortly when new competitors such as Reebok and Nike emerged (Nauright et al. 273) [11].

As the competition continued to grow, Adidas acquired Reebok in 2006 in an attempt to position itself as the largest sports manufacturer in the world. However, Nike also acquired Umbro in 2007, a strategy that increased rivalry between the two companies and in the industry in general. Apart from this, other changes in the industry pushed Adidas to adopt mass customization. For example, with increased internet and

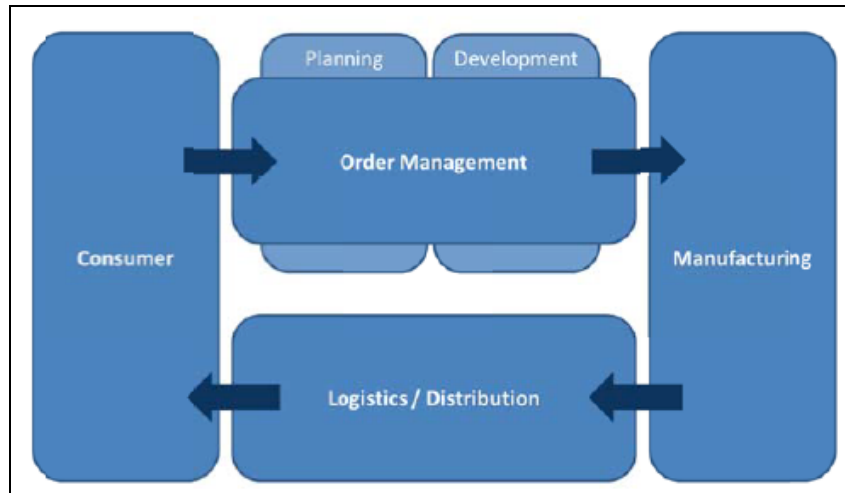
technological use, many consumers were able to access information about the companies and products more conveniently such that they became more diverse in terms of their needs and preferences. This pushed the sportswear companies to diversify their product offerings. However, as Adidas would come to realize in the turn of the century, this was not enough. In 2000, the company introduced the concept of miAdidas, a mass customization strategy that would prove to be a great success (Seifert et al. 695-696) [17].

Concept of miAdidas. miAdidas is a mass customization strategy introduced in 2000 by Adidas in response to the changing market dynamics. According to Moser (125) [10], a growing trend towards individualization and innovativeness was a primary driver of this strategic move by the company. miAdidas forms the main and the original mass customization program by Adidas. It focuses on the company's performance shoes by allowing customers to be involved in the design process in terms of fit, form/design, and function/performance. Prior to its introduction in 2001, the company had taken about two years to plan and test miAdidas. Currently, customers can use miAdidas to customize their shoes from the company via traditional stores or via the online miAdidas website (Moser 125) [10].

The value chain of miAdidas is unique. As illustrated in diagram 2 below, it begins with a configuration process involving Adidas and the consumer through the consumer interface such as miAdidas online interface. The customer selects the specific fit, design, and performance of the shoe. These customer specifications are then processed by the company's order management system. After the order processing, the relevant manufacturing process is triggered within the corresponding manufacturing facility. At the manufacturing facility, the shoe is manufactured according to the

customer's specifications and then it is distributed to the consumer within the shortest time possible (Moser 125) [10].

Diagram 2: miAdidas Value Chain



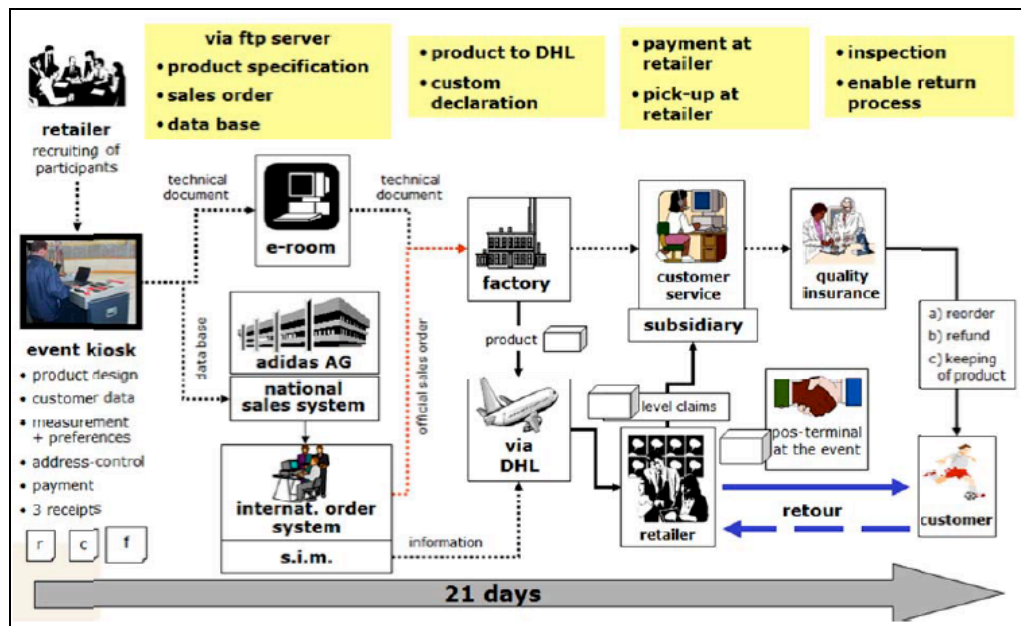
Source: (Piller, Evalotte, and Frank 9) [12].

To adopt the miAdidas mass customization product, Adidas had to be innovative. Specifically, the company had to find ways of meeting the different customer needs and expectations while ensuring the costs of production remain relatively low as in standardized production. To achieve this, Adidas conducted extensive market research through pilot studies and tests that provided important insights such as the program's feasibility and likely reception (Seifert et al. 695-696) [17]. The outcomes of these extensive pilot studies were used in coming up with the unique mass customization program. To keep production costs low, the company used the standard inline products by the same manufacturers located in different countries such as Indonesia and China. This means that customers do not design their shoes from scratch. Rather, the company only provides three design options including design, fit, and function. This allows the

company to integrate mass production while meeting the individualized customer preferences. Coming up with such a system was not a simple undertaking.

As illustrated in diagram 3 below, the entire process from the configuration process to the delivery of the customized shoes is enormous and complex. It required the use of innovative ideas and technologies. For example, the company was able to fully automate its supply chain management in 2006 to improve the process (Piller, Evalotte, and Frank 12) [12]. Automation made it possible to integrate the various processes and parts including the various manufacturers in different countries to ensure a seamless system.

Diagram 3: miAdidas Complex Process



Source: (Piller, Evalotte, and Frank 13) [12].

Role of Technology Innovation. Technology innovation played and continues to play an important role in the adoption and continued application of miAdidas. The entire program is based on a technological system that combines supply chain management automation

and ICT. Irrespective of whether the customer visits an Adidas's physical store or uses the online platform to engage with the company in designing their own shoes, technology is used. The technology allows for the integration and automation of the entire process from the customer engagement step to the order management to the manufacturing and then to the delivery of the customized shoes. Based on Schumpeter's theory of innovation, the process of adopting miAdidas is a real innovation because it involves changes in the production process from standardized production to mass customization and involves the adoption of new technology (Sweezy 93).

Roger's diffusion of innovation theory is also relevant in explaining the adoption of miAdidas. This theory considers innovation as a systematic process that takes time and efforts to be successful (Roger 10) [13]. This was evident in Adidas. Before the program was officially adopted, the company engaged in extensive planning and tests through pilot studies (Seifert et al. 695-696) [17]. The process appears to have followed the five stages of innovation diffusion including awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption (Piller, Evalotte, and Frank 10-11) [12]. Before the company actually rolled out miAdidas officially, it had to ensure that adequate preparations and tests had been conducted to confirm its feasibility. This demonstrates the fact that the process leading to the development of adoption of miAdidas relied on innovation and could actually be referred to as an innovation.

The miAdidas program also depicts the typical market customization strategy where customer experience is also a major component. This program provides a memorable experience to the customers through allowing them to be involved in the production process through deciding on the design, fit, and functionality of their shoes

(Moser 125) [10]. The entire experience is extraordinary and not many other companies in the sportswear industry provided the same. Therefore, Adidas was able to create the unique customer experience that made customers feel as part of their entire value chain by inputting their ideas.

Because of the customization of shoes according to customers' individual preferences and the addition of the memorable customer experience, miAdidas has been largely successful. The company has invested in the program since the introduction in 2001 and has now become available across the entire organization.

Conclusion, Implications, and Suggestions for Further Research

Companies are continuously looking for innovative approaches to ensure that they meet the needs and expectations of their customers in a better way. As technology continues to advance, the society is becoming more informed. This has significant impacts on their behaviors including on their consumption behaviors and patterns. Unlike any other time before, consumers are more informed and more conscious in their consumption patterns. The easy access to information through ICT also gives them more power to influence how companies meet their needs. This has resulted in changes in the way companies are meeting the changing demands of the market. Mass customization and the experience economy are the new frontiers in organizational innovation where meeting the individual needs and expectation of customers while keeping costs low is a major objective.

Through miAdidas, Adidas has demonstrated the role of innovation in ensuring successful business that provides customized products/services and unforgettable experiences. The company went through an innovation process that involved extensive planning and testing before it actually adopted the program. The outcome has been a

successful strategy that continues to differentiate the company from competitors. The miAdidas can also be said to be a major success factor for the company's leadership position in the global sportswear industry. From the successes of this program, other companies can draw important lessons including the proper way of embracing and supporting innovation.

The findings from the case study of miAdidas have several implications for various stakeholders. For the organizations, the success of miAdidas demonstrates the urgent need for embracing mass customization and providing memorable experiences to their customers. Companies that do not embrace these innovations stand to lose out because of not meeting or exceeding customer needs and expectations. However, for companies that embrace mass customization and the experience economy like Adidas, they are poised to gain additional benefits such as increased customer satisfaction and loyalty. For the consumers, the study provides additional information regarding the available choices. By realizing the new offerings such as miAdidas that extend their experiences beyond the ordinary, customers will become more conscious when shopping. They will actively look for and demand better products and services accompanied with amazing experiences.

Although the study provides important insights into the subject of mass customization and the experience economy, there is still a need for additional research to cover areas that have not been covered in this study. For example, additional research is needed to highlight the barriers to mass customization as well as the various ways that organizations can provide memorable experiences across all industries. Mass

customization and the experience economy are still new concepts that need further exploration.

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