

Strategic Management and Sustainability –

A case study of Vodafone



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1. Introduction

The report will be prepared for carrying out a strategic review of Vodafone's corporate and business strategies. Additionally, the report will evaluate the strategic choices that the chosen brand Vodafone used in actions to accelerate the brand's competitive edge over its rivals. Relatively, the resources and capabilities of Vodafone will be analyzed to assess the brand's strategic direction in future. Moreover, a range of strategic analysis tools such as the VRIO analysis framework, Porter's generic strategy, Ansoff Matrix and SAF framework will be analyzed to assess ways the telecommunication brand used the strategies to improve the brand's competitive edge worldwide. Additionally, the sustainability efforts and goals of Vodafone will be evaluated through the lens of interpreting the brand's sustainability reports.

2. Company Background

Vodafone Group Plc is a British multinational telecommunication brand established in 1991 by Ernest Harrison and Gerry Whent and headquartered in Newbury, England, UK. Additionally, in January 2024, Vodafone expanded its network across 21 countries and developed partnerships with global leaders to expand the telecommunication network in 44 countries.

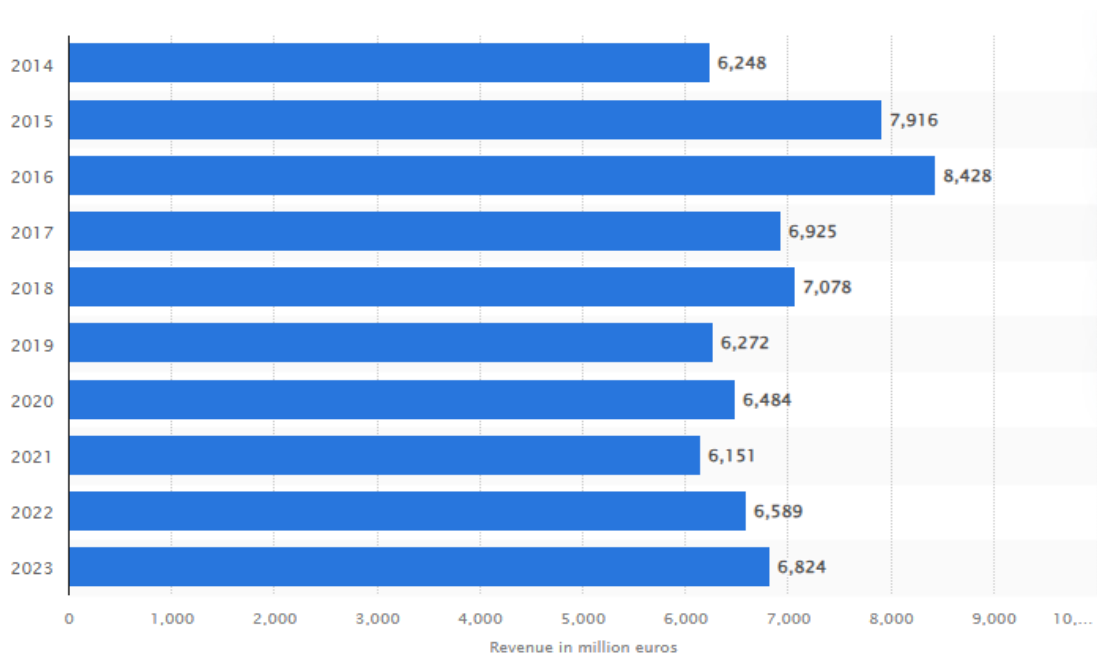


Figure 1: Revenue earnings of Vodafone Group Plc from 2014 to 2023 (Sherif, 2023)

It has been evident that Vodafone Group's revenue earnings have been increased gradually from 6,151 to 6,589 to 6,824 million euros in the respective years of 2021, 2022 and 2023 (Sherif,

2023). This has stimulated the service brand to engage 104,000 employees in 2023. Additionally, the service sector contributes to the UK economy by enhancing employment generation and technological growth. Relatively, Vodafone offers a range of services including 5G telecom, broadband and wireless internet services to potential customers worldwide (Vodafone, 2024b).

3. Business and Corporate key strategies

3.1 Application of Porter's Generic Strategies

Vodafone formed the strategy of integrating sustainability across the operations and focused on enhancing sustainable growth that drives returns. According to the report of Vodafone IR (2023), the brand formed a new roadmap based on three priorities: customers, simplicity and growth. This has emphasized the brand balancing business and consumer through expanding the product portfolio range. Moreover, Whittington *et al.* (2020) have stated that business strategy innovates the process and aids individuals in implementing changes in operation.



Figure 2: Porter's generic strategies (Bruin, 2021)

Additionally, Bruin (2021) has stated that a theoretical overview of Porter's generic strategy explained that a brand should develop strategies such as cost leadership, differentiation and focus for accelerating the brand's competitive edge in the market. Further, Vodafone's focus strategy

lies in assessing the cloud infographic to acknowledge customer usability preferences. It facilitated the brand in reshaping the services with the inclusion of improvising the services. Moreover, it has been identified that the competitive advantage of the brand depends on differentiation and focus strategy. It has been evident from the report of the GBR Editorial Team (2021), that the brand's differentiation strategy lies in investing capital in research and development to address the key trends and include it for improvising the services. Moreover, Vodafone offers free calls from Vodafone to Vodafone for a lifetime and provides better internet connection over the network for strengthening the network connectivity and reaching a height in offering telecommunication services worldwide. Moreover, Lynch (2018), has opined that the strategic management approach aided the brand in exploring the factors that stimulate the brand's operations and functioning and aided the brand in investing capital in core areas that need improvement. According to the report of Vodafone UK (2015), the service brand unleashed the use of big data analytics for understanding consumer behaviour and included the demanded services into the product portfolio. Furthermore, the cost-leadership strategy lies in creating new and integrated communication solutions and instructing the leaders to implement them across the operations to lower costs. This has been evident in fulfilling goals of integrating sustainability across the operations for enhancing sustainable growth.

3.2 Ansoff Matrix

It has been evaluated from the opinion of Barney and Hesterly (2019), that strategic management is a tool that brands require for streamlining strategic analysis. As opined by Vaidya (2022) theoretical approach of the Ansoff Matrix lies in influencing the brands to accelerate the brand's competitive advantage through evaluating market penetration, development, product development and diversification strategy. In relevance to this, it has been evaluated that Vodafone fostered the market penetration strategy by developing a partnership with Accenture to commercialize its shared operations across the regional and global markets to enhance customer services. According to the report of Curtis (2023), the strategic partnership with Vodafone facilitated the brand in providing high-quality services while enhancing the brand's service speed by increasing the product offerings to the global market.

Additionally, Vodafone fostered the product development strategy by an inclusion of assessing market trends. Vodafone has partnered with Amazon Web Services to provide high-speed and extremely low latency dispersed multi-access edge computing (MEC) throughout Europe. The

initial application will focus on road safety, linking drivers with government agencies and giving real-time safety information. Vodafone intends to test Extended Reality in agriculture, logistics, manufacturing, entertainment, and social health, enabling remote modifications (Turner, 2023).



Figure 3: Ansoff Matrix (Vaidya, 2022)

As reported by Moorhead (2022), Vodafone transformed the business from Telco to TechCo for revamping operations into digital transformation to enhance customer experience and differentiating the value proposition of the brand through leveraging 5G, IoT and edge investments. The service brand Vodafone diversified its product range and explored a new market, which is the banking sector, to expand the business sphere. Relatively, Johnson (2017) Balogun and Hailey (2016), have suggested that a strategic overview of business practices aided businesses in forming relevant strategies based on organisational structure, values and strategic priorities. According to the report of Devlight (2020), Vodafone's development expertise allowed the brand to assess the banking market quickly, discover insights and find the best-matching app to offer customer services to the banking customers.

4. Vodafone Resources and Capabilities

4.1 Value chain analysis

The theoretical underpinning of Porter's value chain model explains the brand's primary and secondary activities for strengthening the brand's product portfolio and attaining success. As referred by Eby (2018), inbound logistics, operations, marketing, sales and services are the primary activities of an organization's value chain. In relevance to this, Vodafone forms public policy for contributing to the wealth and development of nations, regions and local communities. The brand worked closely with partners, governments and international organizations to analyze market trends (Vodafone, 2024d).



Figure 4: Porter's value chain analysis (Eby, 2018)

Primary activities:

- Inbound Logistics - Vodafone manages the acquisition and transportation of devices, network equipment, and SIM cards from suppliers to its distribution centres.
- Operations - this involves managing the network infrastructure, including towers, cables and data centres, to provide telecom services to customers

- Outbound Logistics - Vodafone utilises its retail shops, internet platforms, and independent dealers to provide services to clients.
- Marketing and Sales - Vodafone uses marketing and sales strategies like as advertising, sales promotions, and relationships with customers to attract and keep members.
- Service - offering customer support and technical aid help to guarantee consumer happiness and commitment.

Support activities:

- Firm infrastructure - to support its operations, Vodafone purchases network equipment, technology licences, and IT services from vendors all around the world.
- Human Resource Management - Vodafone ensures the availability of competent workers to support its operations through recruitment, training and talent development efforts.
- Technology Development - The advancement of technology is centred around the improvement of customer experience, the creation of new services and the enhancement of network capabilities through research and development.
- Procurement - To support its operations, Vodafone purchases network equipment, technology licences, and IT services from vendors all around the world.

According to Lero, Hermuningsih and Rinofah (2024), the net profit margin may be maximised by growing sales and minimising operating expenses, demonstrating its importance for boosting profitability. The company's net margin was 25.9% in the fiscal year 2023 up from 4.9% in 2022 (MarketLine, 2024).

According to the report of Vodafone (2023a), the brand organized a “Best One-Off content campaign” to explore the usability techniques of digital platforms over the customers who have used offline platforms until the date. This campaign facilitated the brand in raising awareness across customers worldwide. In this context, Morden (2016), stated that principles of strategic management lie on strengthening the risk management approach, risk assessment, business planning and forecasting with the evaluation of organisational values, leadership and governance. Furthermore, service activities are human resource management, firm infrastructure, technological development and procurement. In accordance with this, technological development in the service sector facilitated Vodafone in pioneering mobile technology building the world's largest Internet of Things (IoT) platform for strengthening network security and safety during earthquakes and other disasters (Vodafone, 2024e). Additionally, the human resource

management of Vodafone emphasizes integrating diversity, inclusion and equality within the workforce for enhancing productive growth and influencing the brand to fulfil goals of integrating sustainability across the operations. In this circumstance, Leon (2017) believes that management techniques for business sustainability throughout challenging times are an important resource for strengthening sustainable supply chain and performance evaluation.

4.2 Vodafone through the lens of the VRIO framework

Resources	Valuable	Rare	Inimitable	Organized	Competitive advantage
<i>Global presence</i>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Temporary competitive advantage
<i>Capital investment</i>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Temporary competitive advantage
<i>Intellectual Property Rights</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sustained competitive advantage
<i>Brand</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sustained competitive advantage
<i>Supply-chain network</i>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Temporary competitive advantage
<i>Skilled workforce</i>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Temporary competitive advantage
<i>Customer base</i>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Competitive parity

Table 1: VRIO framework (Created by author)

It has been evaluated from the above framework that Vodafone operated across 17 operating countries including Europe, Middle Eastern nations and the rest of the world in 2023. Additionally, the brand has 45 partner markets and provides 4G roaming services to 168 nations (Vodafone, 2024f). This has emphasized the brand for investing capital into product development and diversified the product portfolio. Relatively, it has been obtained from a report by Lohchab (2023) that Vodafone invested capital in rolling out the 5G network and further expanding the 4G network across the Middle Eastern nations to enhance customer value of 220 million. However, a wider supply chain network facilitated the service brand Vodafone to operate across the world offering the best quality of services.

Brand and Intellectual Property Rights are valuable, relatively rare, distinctive and organised, which might provide Vodafone with an advantage in the long run. Possessing strong brands and proprietary technology may give them an advantage in the market and make it hard for other businesses to copy.

5. Evaluation of strategy in action

Vodafone has taken the support of a differentiation strategy that supported the company in gaining a competitive edge over its rivals. Vodafone provides free phone call services to customers, which has enhanced its network strength over other competitors (Vodafone Idea Limited, 2024). The competitor of Vodafone happens to be BT Group Plc and Telefónica. BT earlier enjoyed a monopoly within the markets of the UK until Vodafone entered the market and won the initial UK cellular license (Nuttall, 2022). Vodafone has been competing with Telefónica and BT by providing high-speed broadband services while racing to lay fibre network lines across the UK. The company values the contribution of stakeholders that aid the company in winning more resources and this ensures the success of the projects undertaken by Vodafone (Vodafone, 2021a). Vodafone differentiates its services by ensuring better product performance in comparison with the existing competitors.



Figure 5: Suitability, Acceptability and Feasibility framework (Cuofano, 2021)

Vodafone has been competing against BT as the competitor has launched a cloud infographic that allows customers to move data to the cloud systems at their convenience (Hadani, 2016). Similarly, Vodafone has a suitable strategy that utilizes cloud infographics to acknowledge customer usability preferences (Bruin, 2021). Moreover, the strategy has been focused on sustainable growth that drives returns (Vodafone, 2023b). The acceptability has been assessed based on whether the proposed strategies meet stakeholder expectations. As a result, it has been noticed that Vodafone powers devices through the cloud, which has been well-accepted by the

stakeholders. Storing processing power in a public, private, or hybrid cloud ensures that a bulky frame is no longer needed to run AR (Augmented Reality) applications.

The feasibility factor has aided in analyzing whether this has been a good fit for the strategic plan while avoiding ethical concerns. Vodafone has been competing against BT by ensuring that consumer data that is stored in the cloud remains protected and is not accessed by third parties (Vodafone, 2024a). According to MarketLine (2024), revenue and profitability growth help the organisation allocate cash for development and expansion. Its sales rose 0.4% to 45,706 million euros in the fiscal year 2023.

6. Sustainability efforts

6.1 Examining the company's sustainability efforts

The company report of Vodafone (2023c) has aided in forming the realization that the company has been committed to operating responsibly and ethically as part of its corporate transparency program. Vodafone has committed to reducing its environmental impact by the year 2025 as the focus has been on attaining energy efficiency, eliminating network waste, and acquiring renewable energy supply that aids in mitigating the environmental impact of the business growth. Moreover, there has also been an increase in demand for data amongst the customers of Vodafone. Furthermore, Quoquab, Thurasamy, and Mohammad (2018) proposed that green consumerism can be enhanced through strategic sustainability marketing initiatives to promote a brand sustainably. Considering the spread and size of the operations, Vodafone has developed this ambition as part of the global effort to reduce carbon emissions (Vodafone, 2023d).

The report of Vodafone (2024c) has aided in the analysis that the company is highly optimistic about the way technology and connectivity can improve future conditions that influence the lives of people and consumers. Vodafone has contributed to the creation of a digital society besides supporting even the digitalization of agriculture with specific services and products. In addition to this, it has been driving action to restrict device waste while aiming to attain the objective of reusing, reselling, and recycling 100% of the network waste.

6.2 Sustainability Goals of Vodafone

Vodafone aims to fully use renewable sources to power its network by the year 2025 while the aim has been to eliminate carbon emissions by 2030. In the view of Tomás (2023), Vodafone expects to complete its aim of net zero emissions across the whole value chain by the year 2040.

The company has contributed to the UN-developed SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) by pledging to acquire 100% of energy needs from green energy by 2025 while the objective has been to reduce GHG emissions by 50%. The sustainable business strategy of Vodafone is such that it practices empowerment of the women and the youth while paying attention towards attaining energy innovation, which has been a part of the corporate strategy. As part of sustainable development, which focuses on the business sector, innovation and infrastructure, Vodafone has built 164,000 ground stations with 65,000 server systems and 4,200 buildings as part of its worldwide infrastructure, which links more than 100 nations (Vodafone, 2019).

The report of Vodafone (2019) further revealed that Vodafone maintains supply chain integrity and safety while ascertaining digital rights and freedoms for the masses. As part of its corporate social responsibility, Vodafone provides comprehensive and fair access to high-quality education, while also fostering opportunities for continuous learning for everyone. Vodafone has made a dedicated effort to assist 10 million young individuals in acquiring digital skills. The Vodafone Foundation aims to support and provide access to digital education to 5 million young refugees, especially girls (Vodafone Plc, 2019). This sustainability goal has been aligned with the corporate strategy of the company as it continues to support the employees by recognizing the continual need to learn not only on a professional level but also on a personal level (Schuppen, 2019).

7. The company's strategic directions in future

Vodafone has aimed at reducing costs and stimulating its revenue while the objective has been to deliver strong growth in emerging markets. The report of Informa (2006), has aided in the realization that the company continues to innovate and deliver the promises to satisfy the total communication needs of its customers while the portfolios are managed actively to maximize the returns. Furthermore, Vodafone aligns the capital structure and shareholder return policy to strategy. Vodafone continues to roll out a variety of services with the future aim of gaining high-value customers and retaining existing customers. Satisfying the needs of the customers permits the company to gain a competitive advantage.

8. Recommendations for further sustainability practices

Technological development facilitated the brand of enhancing the brand's efficiency by diversifying the brand's product portfolio to reach global customers. It has been evident from the

report of Vodafone (2021b) that Vodafone plans to build digital platforms with the hands of 7,000 new software engineers. This would facilitate the brand in strengthening Vodafone's technology to operate in pan-European nations. Additionally, Vodafone plans to invest € 8 billion in technology and digital projects to build a user-friendly telecommunication network worldwide. This would benefit the brand Vodafone by increasing its competitive advantage in future. Moreover, Vodafone formed sustainability goals for fulfilling the net zero carbon emission across the value chain in 2040 (Tomás, 2023). This has emphasized the brand in using renewable sources for reducing electric dependencies and initiating to reduce carbon footprint relatively.

9. Conclusion

A conclusion has been formed by evaluating the core aspects of strategic management. In relevance to this, Vodafone invested capital in technologies and digital capabilities to diversify the product portfolio. Additionally, the service brand collaborated with 10,500 suppliers to ensure supply availability. Moreover, it has been evaluated that global presence and enhanced brand value facilitated the brand Vodafone in reducing the threat of substations in the UK market.

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