

THE IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN RELATION TO CUSTOMER LOYALTY AND RETENTION

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Abstract

With liberalization and subsequent de-monopolization in the telecom service segment in India, the development of the telecom sector has experienced a major transformation in terms of its growth, technological content, and market structure. As the market scenario changed from that of single-player to multi-players, the expectations of the customers have also increased, since they not only have luxuries of choices but also have enough freedom to enjoy a higher bargaining power and exercise their preferences.

To match the expectations of the consumers, the Indian telecom service providers, have become more receptive and responsive to the customers' needs and choices and endeavor to give them greater satisfaction by providing them with a plethora of value additions, apart from the basic service offerings.

Keywords: *Customer Satisfaction, Customer loyalty, Customer Relationship Management, Indian telecom Industry.*

1. Introduction

For years, companies have focused on improving the efficiency of internal processes in order to reduce costs. Liberalization, globalization and privatization together have changed the entire Indian business operations. There is a major shift from seller's market to buyer's market, due to innovation, development in new technologies and changes in the customer expectations. Recently, companies have been focusing on the customer-centric roles of their operations with a goal to offer the customer appropriate services, products, and supporting functions during the entire customer relationship Life Cycle.

Thus technological and economical development has forced companies in competitive markets, to change their strategic focus, as a result of which the customer oriented organization is on the rise. Optimizing internal processes and extending market share are no

longer the cornerstones of strategy. Instead, the central question is how a company should operate to create the highest possible added value for customers (new and already existing). In order to stay ahead of the competition, companies are increasingly turning to their customers as a means of securing their future competitive edge. Both the value of the individual customer and the development of personalized relationships with them have made CRM a top-three topic in boardrooms around the world.

Times are tough for telecom service providers also as the telecom industry is experiencing a transformation from being a monopoly market to a competitive market. Fuelled by this dramatic increase in competitive pressure, the telecom players are required to design and deploy customer-centric strategies not only to grab the share but also sustain the share in the long run. The players have realized the importance of constant service quality delivery

to the customers for long term sustainability.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The biggest management challenge for a business in the new millennium of liberalization and globalization is to serve and maintain good relations with customers. In the past, Sellers took their customers for granted as the customers were neither demanding nor they had many substitute sources of supply or suppliers where from they could obtain the product. But today there is a radical transformation due to changing business environment by economic liberalization, growing competition, high consumer choice, enlightened and demanding customer, more emphasis on quality and value of money etc. All these changes have forced today's producer to shift from traditional marketing to modern marketing, which calls for more than developing a product, pricing it, promoting it and making it accessible to target customers. It demands building and binding trust, a binding force and value added relationship with the customers to win their hearts. The new age marketing aims at winning customers for ever, where companies acknowledge the customers, create products to suit their requirements, work hard to develop life time customers through the principle of customer's delight, approval and enthusiasm.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Oliver (1981) emphasizes that satisfaction is a major outcome of marketing activity and serves to link processes culminating in purchase and consumption with post purchase phenomena such as attitude change, repeat purchase and brand loyalty. He has further defined satisfaction as a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under-or-over-fulfillment. According to **Tse and Wilton (1988)** satisfaction is the

consumer's response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and the actual performance of the product as perceived after its consumption.

Kotler (2011) describe satisfaction as: "A person's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance (or outcome) in relation to his or her expectations".

Hoyer and MacInnis (2001) articulate that satisfaction can be associated with feelings of acceptance, happiness, relief, excitement, and delight. Further the factors that affect customer satisfaction include friendly, courteous, knowledgeable and helpful employees, accuracy, timeliness and clarity of billing, competitive pricing, service quality and good value.

Rust and Zahorik (1993) propose that Customer satisfaction is now becoming a corporate level strategy. In the words of **Drucker (1973)** Customers satisfaction is the base for business success. It is an overall customer attitude towards a service provider, or an emotional reaction to the difference between what customers expect and what they get, regarding the realization of some need, goal or desire.

Claycomb and Martin (2002) highlight that customer satisfaction is foundation for relationship between marketing and management and **Anderson et al., (1994)** advocate customers satisfaction as a source of competitive advantage for organizations.

Bena (2010) emphasizes that in the present, competitive market conditions, where companies need to battle for their continued existence, building and managing relationships with customers is very important. At the basis of every long term relationship lies the customer satisfaction, which is a predictor for repurchase intentions, word-of-mouth and loyalty.

Morgan and Hunt (1994) point out that the key elements of a Customer Relationship Management program are customer trust and commitment. A relationship based on trust and commitment will be more fruitful, as customers will be more open to the company's requests, policies and communications as well as being more proactive and willing to cooperate

Deng et al. (2010) argues that out of the contributories of customers satisfaction, perceived service quality is significant determinant of customers satisfaction. He also found that customer satisfaction enhances customer loyalty along with trust and switching cost.

CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Bansal and Gupta (2001) propose that building customer loyalty is not a choice any longer with businesses while it is the only way of building sustainable competitive advantage. Building loyalty with key customers has become a core marketing objective shared by key players in all industries catering to business customers.

Kandampully (1998) says that Service loyalty of firms leads to loyal customers. He further found that loyal services offered to customers fulfills both present and future needs of customers. Customer's loyalty and trust is gained by service provider's commitment to provision of services, quality of services.

Mclroy and Barnett (2000) define loyalty as customer's commitment to do business with a particular organization, purchasing their goods and services repeatedly, and recommending the services and products to friends and associates".

Anderson and Jacobsen (2000) iterate that customer loyalty is actually the result of an organization creating a benefit for a customer so that they will maintain or increase their

purchases from the organization. They said that true customer loyalty is created when the customer becomes an advocate for the organization, without incentive.

Bowen and Chen (2001) accentuate that there is a positive relationship between customer loyalty and profitability. Today, marketers are seeking information on how to build customer loyalty. The increased profit comes from reduced marketing costs, increased sales and reduced operational costs. Finally, loyal customers cost less to serve, in part because they know the product and require less information. They even serve as part-time employees. Therefore loyal customers not only require less information themselves, they also serve as an information source for other customers.

Barnes (1997) emphasizes that loyal customer would keep recommending to others which helps the organization to earn more customers.

Gupta (2004) in his paper brings out a simple guide in building and managing customer loyalty so as to become truly customer driven. He had described a Customer Relationship Management model consisting of 17 key issues.

These include: focused marketing, embedding core values into the sales process; taking the cream from the market place and enhancing life time customer value. This will result in higher loyalty and low customer attrition. Further there are two major uplifts which an organization can get from managing customer lifetime values upwards. Firstly the conversion to sales ratios is improved to double and secondly managing the process of customer life time values brings the –built in benefit of extending them. The earnest business of prolonging customer life time value by keeping them deliriously, constantly and actively satisfied should become a permanent quest as it will bring prosperity, growth and profit for the business. Once the organizations turn the spotlight on amazing customers at every opportunity and exceeding their

perception of service and value, the complaints also plummet to all time low as the customers feel happy and satisfied and thus reducing the customer loss rate. All of this, supported by radically improving standards in customer performance, brings in other benefits such as positive word of mouth and referrals. These are the unsolicited testimonials with which the customer rewards those with whom they are wholly content, those who get it right, leaving them actively satisfied, by telling the world about it.

Thomson (2004) suggests that **in competitive markets where customers have a choice between similar products and pricing, 70 per cent of the customer decision making is based on how customers are treated. Loyalty experts have concluded that loyal attitudes and behavior are driven by customer's perception of value, which is an amalgamation of what customers receives; how it's sold, delivered, and supported; and how much it costs. Value is created every time a customer is made to feel welcome, important and valued.**

Subramanyam (2003) in his study analyzes that the corporate growth is highly dependent upon the customer network and relationships maintained with them. "Customer loyalty has always been valuable, but today it has become more vital for success." CRM provides an integrated view of a company customer to everyone in the organization, and thus ensuring that everyone in the enterprise is focused on the customer. He has tried to establish the relationship among the various factors like Company's ability to quickly identify, contact, attract and acquire new customer, understanding of the customers – their wants and needs, appropriate product and service offering and match it to the customer's unique needs, company's sales cycle, cross-selling and up-selling opportunities, relation of existing customers through after sales service and support.

CUSTOMER RETENTION IN TELECOM INDUSTRY

In this highly competitive scenario, churn is the widely recognized problem today being faced by most mobile telecommunications providers. Though retaining a customer might require seven times more effort the acquiring the one, it definitely makes more economic sense. Even from a long-term perspective maintaining a good relationship with not just profitable customers but all prospective customers will pay huge dividends. Only a churn management system can provide a better understanding of the customer, the operator's most valued asset. It is important to deliver value to the customer and put in place new products and services that ensure loyalty. A churn management system can help devise more attractive incentives, loyalty schemes and proactive customer service along with acquisition strategies to attract the right type of customer, thus reducing fraud and bad debts—all key to a better bottom line (**Financial Express, 2003**)

Krishna and Khatri (2008) suggest that mobile industry is witnessing exceptional growth rates and amidst growing competition it would be tough for mobile operators to survive, unless they provide value added services and understand what will lead customers to enter into a long-term relationship with them. The results of the survey show Seven Desired Value Added Services (7DVAS), viz.: variety of service, price, advertisements, employee behavior, Customer service, accuracy in billing and timely information.

Shanthi (2005)¹⁰⁸ emphasizes that falling prices, hyper competition and increasing attrition rates have led to near-saturation in with cellular service providers exploring the possibilities of implementing scientific methods to retain customers. Deploying proactive strategies through predictive churn modeling is gaining its acceptability as an

effective tool to reduce churn. The basic prerequisite of a good churn model is a focused and customized CRM system backed by a powerful database management system. The system should be evolved through, a continuous learning process and constantly updated so as to measure and analyse the churn properly.

Pezeshki et al. (2009) investigate the asymmetric relationship between performance of service attributes and customer satisfaction, and through a case study in the mobile telecommunication industry, attempt to prove that the importance of a service attribute is a function of the performance of that attribute. The results indicate that there is a dynamic relationship between service attributes and overall customer satisfaction. Also this research concludes that the major weaknesses in the Mobile Telecommunication industry that cause the highest customer dissatisfaction are the range of phones, the accuracy of billing and payment, and the service plans, whereas the major strengths as a source of customer satisfaction are customer service quality, value for money and network performance.

Ling and Run (2009) in their study examine the factors that influence customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in telecommunication services. The findings of the study indicate that factors with significant impact on customer satisfaction are: promotion, cost efficient plans, free services, technology factors, line quality, convenience and handiness, while factors affecting customer loyalty are service quality, subscription status, promotion and inconvenience in switching phone number.

Pathak and Rastogi (2007) state that churn in Indian telecom is among the highest in growing telecom markets. The future churn is dependent on satisfaction level of the customer with the service provider, attitude, and loyalty of the customer.

Kim et al. (2004) found that call quality, value

added services and customer support play a significant role in building customer satisfaction for cellular service subscribers and they tend to keep using current service as the level of the customer satisfaction is high that leads to customer loyalty.

Iqbal et al. (2008) affirm that satisfied customers of telecom sector have high extent of usage and intentions to repurchase in future. Greater the level of satisfaction of customers greater will be repurchase chances of customers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Indian Telecom is advancing day by day in every aspect. The competition is increasing and many players are ready to grasp the hands of customers by using CRM techniques and solutions to manage relationships across customer interaction points. They are looking at CRM to provide an impact on their top lines and bottom lines through the ability to improve understanding of their customers, anticipate customer needs, and build customer equity across enterprise.

The following are the objectives of the present study:

1. To find out customer satisfaction towards telecom service providers
2. To establish a relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty

SAMPLING PROCEDURE AND THE SAMPLE

The study is carried out through the random sampling method based on 262 mobile customers of telecom industry.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The study has been completed mainly with the

help of primary data. For the purpose of collecting primary data, a comprehensive questionnaire has been designed and administered to the sampled customers of the telecom companies

HYPOTHESIS

- (H_1) The higher is the level of customer satisfaction, the higher is the customer loyalty.

RESULTS

Table 1: Distribution of customers on the basis of Demographic Factors

Demographic variables	Categories	Number of Customers
Age	Below 20 years	23 (11.5%)
	20-40 years	142 (71%)
	Above 40	35 (17.5%)
Gender	Female	107 (53.5%)
	Male	93 (46.5%)
Educational Qualification	Below Graduation	19 (9.5%)
	Graduation	110 (55%)
	Post-Graduation	71 (35.5%)
Marital Status	Married	111 (55.5%)
	Unmarried	89 (44.5%)
Occupation	Business	15 (7.5%)
	Salaried Class	77 (38.5%)
	Self Employed	6 (3%)
	Retired	7 (3.5%)
	Student	48 (24%)
	Any Other	47 (23.5%)

Source: primary data

Table 1 presents demographic profile of telecom customers. The results reveal that out of 200 customers, 11.5 per cent are in the age group of below 20 years, 71.0 per cent are in the age group of 20-40 years and 17.5 per cent are in the age group of above 40 years. Further 53.5 per cent customers are females, while 46.5 per cent customers are males. In terms of educational qualification, 9.5 per cent customers are undergraduates, 55 per cent

customers are graduates and 35.5 per cent customers are post-graduates. Out of total respondents, 55.5 per cent customers are married and 44.5 per cent customers are unmarried. Further, 7.5 per cent customers belong to business class, 38.5 per cent belong to salaried class, 3.0 per cent are self-employed, 3.5 customers are retired, and 24.0 per cent customers are students while 23.5 per cent customers are house-wives.

Table 2: Telecom Company wise distribution of customers

S.No.	Telecom Company	Number of Customers
1	Bharti Airtel	77 (29.4%)
2	Idea Cellular	31 (11.8%)
3	Vodafone	55 (21.0%)
4	TATA	41 (15.6%)
5	Aircel	7 (2.7%)
6	Reliance	37 (14.1%)
7	BSNL	10 (4.6%)
8	MTNL	4 (1.5%)

Source: primary data

Table 2 presents distribution of customers on the basis of Telecom Company with whom they have connection. The results indicate that maximum customers (29.4 per cent) belong to Bharti Airtel which is the largest service provider in India, followed by Vodafone (21.0 per cent), TATA (15.6 per cent), Reliance (14.1 per cent) and Idea Cellular (11.8 per cent). State owned telecom companies BSNL and MTNL have least number of customers (4.6 per cent) and (1.5 per cent) respectively.

Hypothesis 1 (H_1): *The higher the level of Customer Satisfaction, the higher is the Customer Loyalty.*

The hypothesis (H_1) "The higher the level of Customer Satisfaction, the higher is the Customer Loyalty" has been tested using correlation and multiple regression analysis.

Measurement Variables

Customer Care	Customer Service
Customer care executive keeps you waiting on hold	Network
You have to explain several times	SMS rates
Customer care executive doesn't know how to handle the problem	New schemes and offers
Gives you wrong information	Customer Care
Gives unclear answer	Recharge outlets
Has to ask others	Call Rates
Speaks slowly	Value Added Services
Disorganized	Billing System
	Voice Clarity
Customer loyalty	
Are you planning to change your service provider	
Would you recommend your service providers to others	

The Customer Satisfaction has been computed on two dimensions namely **Customer Care** and **Customer Service**. Further eight items have been analyzed to measure the opinion of customers towards customer care, using a five point likert scale (Strongly Disagree= 1 and Strongly Agree =5). Customer Service given by the service provider has been measured on nine dimensions namely Network, SMS rates, New Schemes and Offers, Customer Care, Recharge Outlets, Call Rates, Value Added Services, Billing System and Voice Clarity. A five point likert scale (Excellent=5 and Poor=1) has been used to rate the services on the basis of customer satisfaction.

Table 3 : Mean and S.D of perception of customers towards Customer Care services

Customer Care		
Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Customer care executive keeps you waiting on hold	3.36	1.055
2. You have to explain several times	3.22	1.085
3. Customer care executive doesn't know how to handle the problem	2.76	.995
4. Gives you wrong information	2.19	.790
5. Gives unclear answer	2.46	.920
6. Has to ask others	2.73	.935
7. Speaks slowly	2.56	.827
8. Disorganized	2.60	.964

Table 3 explains the overall mean and standard deviation of various Customer Care experiences of the customers. It is very much apparent from the table that customers are neutral towards most of the statements related to their customer care experience. Also customers have shown agreement towards the statements that the customer care executive keeps them on hold and they have to explain several times. (mean value being more than 3.0 in all the statements), but the value of standard deviation of these two statements is above 1.0, which indicates that there is a wide variation in the opinion of customers towards these issues.

Table 4 : Mean and S.D of opinion of the customers towards various Services of the service providers

Customer Service			
S.No	Service	Mean	Standard Deviation
a)	Network	3.37	1.007
b)	SMS Rates	2.85	1.022
c)	New Schemes and Offers	2.66	1.014
d)	Customer Care	2.79	.861
e)	Recharge outlets	3.23	1.127
f)	Call Rates	2.85	1.065
g)	Value Added Services	2.61	.831
h)	Billing System	3.16	.897
i)	Voice Clarity	3.23	1.005

Source: Primary Data

Table 4 explains the overall mean and standard deviation of the level Customer Satisfaction towards various services of the service provider. It is very much clear from the table that customers have rated the services 'Network', 'Recharge Outlets', 'Billing System' and 'Voice Clarity' from Good to Very Good. (mean value being more than 3). However the value of standard deviation for 'Network', 'Recharge Outlets' and 'Voice Clarity' is more than 1.0 which indicates that there is a wide variation in the opinion of customers across the service providers towards these services.

Further the results indicate that customers have rated 'SMS Rates', 'New Schemes and Offers', 'Customer Care', 'Call Rates', 'Value Added Services' and 'Billing System' as Average to Fairly Good (mean value being more than 2.0). Also the value of standard -deviation for 'SMS Rates', 'New Schemes and Offers', and 'Call Rates' is above 1.0, which suggests that perception of customers towards these issues varies across the various service providers.

Reliability Analysis

Table 5 shows reliability analysis of the variables by computing the coefficient of Cronbach Alpha, which measures the internal consistency of the items. As per the table all Alpha coefficient values range from 0.61 to 0.86, thus signifying good consistency among variables within each dimension.

Table 5 : Cronbach Alpha Coefficient for Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

S.No.	Name of the Variable	Cronbach Alpha
1	Customer Satisfaction	
	Customer care	0.862
	Customer services	0.863
2	Loyalty	0.616

Source: Primary Data

Table 6 presents mean and standard –deviation values of Customer Loyalty, Customer Service and Customer-Care variables.

Table 6: Mean and Standard Deviation of Customer Loyalty and Customer Satisfaction variables

S. No.	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Customer loyalty	3.90	0.921
2	Customer Service	3.01	0.606
3	Customer Care	3.28	0.678

Source: Primary Data

Pearson coefficient of correlation has been computed to test the formulated hypothesis (H1). The results presented in table 7 indicate that both the Customer Satisfaction variables show significant relationship with Loyalty at 0.01 level of significance. The variables of Customer Satisfaction are positively correlated with Customer Loyalty. Further 'Customer Service'(r=0.678) has moderately high correlation while 'Customer Care' (r=.314) has moderately low correlation with Customer Loyalty.

Table 7 : Correlation between Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty

Correlation	Customer Service	Customer Care
Customer loyalty	0.678 (.000)**	0.314 -0.213

Source: Primary Data

Note: ** Correlation is significant at one percent level of significance (two-tailed)

Table 8 : Regression Model summary

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.678	0.560	0.556	0.679	1.652

Source: Primary Data

The results of regression relationship between Customer Loyalty and Customer Satisfaction given in Table 8 signify high proportion of explained variance as the values of R square (.560) and adjusted R square (.556) are found to be statistically significant. Further standardized coefficient of beta and t-values of multiple regression analysis presented in Table 9 point out that among the Customer Satisfaction variables, 'Customer Service' best predicts Customer Loyalty. In order to check the correlation between residuals, Durbin –Watson test has been applied. As evident from the table the value is close to 2, thus indicating that

residuals are un-correlated.

Table 9 : Regression Analysis: Customer Loyalty coefficients

Variable	Un-standardized coefficients		standardized coefficients	t-value	Significance level
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	0.966	0.304	-	3.177	.002**
Customer service	0.730	0.070	0.678	14.765	.000**
Customer care	0.376	0.062	0.415	4.236	0.249

Source: Primary Data

Note: ** significant at 0.01 level

CONCLUSION

In telecom industry where competition is fierce, good customer experience can generate sustainable competitive differentiation, improving prospects for long term profitability. Thus customer care is the foundation of a service industry like telecom and companies are obligated to treat their customers well. Also, it is suggested that the telecom operators should take less time for the solving customer's queries and must ensure enhanced technical support for customer complaint handling with follow up satisfaction calls to ensure timely redressal of their grievances.

To sum up it is recommended that instead of spending billions of dollars on traditional marketing mix elements, companies should strategize on result oriented approach. Such strategies may include; ensuring high service quality, considerably improving customer care, offering reasonable prices, creating consumer panels as well as incentivizing the word of mouth.

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