

Customer Experience Management: A Paradigm Shift in e-Retailing

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ABSTRACT

The marketing world has witnessed a drastic change in the last two decades. The emergence of customer experience management as a construct has changed the entire paradigm. The focus of the business houses has moved towards a customer-centric approach, with the customer being at the focal point of the organization. The behavior of shoppers has been changed with the emergence of self-service technology, social media and various other virtual advancements. Organizations are trying to reap the benefits of these advancements to its fullest and lead towards a successful business. The overall success of a product or brand now depends a lot on its target customer. The managers are working through different latest tools and tactics to analyze and measure the overall performance of the business houses. In this paper, the researchers' have tried to explore the tools evolved in the recent e-Retail environment to ensure better customer experience. Further, it highlights the recent E-retail strategies practiced by the e-retailer to deliver memorable customer experience. The paper also discusses the theoretical framework and the origin of customer experience, its development from tradition to modern perspective and the emerging online customer experience.

Keywords : E-retail, Customer Experience, Tools, Strategies, Competitive advantage

INTRODUCTION

The customer nowadays has immense marketing opportunities and choices in the prevailing dynamic world. The advertisers and organizations have now moved towards customer-driven methodology and the driving force, offering complete customer experience in the market. Customer experience management is the backbone of the organization which empowers them to drive towards their objectives and targets (Singh A, 2015). According to Bolton et al., 2014 and Badgett et al., (2007) devising meaningful Customer experience management is considered as an imperative tool to attain success and retain loyal customers. Various organizations are successful by integrating the customer experience management as their business plan of

action. Despite the fact that the experts in the business have acknowledged the significance of the Customer experience management as a construct, yet the scholarly writing doesn't throw enough light on the construct. Subsequently, additional research is required to comprehend the development of customer experience and its management through recently evolved tools and strategies to deliver good customer experience. Keeping above-said statement in mind, researchers have endeavored to explore the tools evolved in the recent E-Retail environment to ensure better customer experience, and have further highlighted the recent E-retail strategies practiced by the e-retailer to deliver memorable customer experience. The study starts with a note on the origin of customer experience.

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Theoretical Framework:

The origin of Customer Experience:

The idea of Customer experience management isn't owned by anybody, yet it is, for the most part, credited to Bernd Schmitt (2003) who characterized it as the procedure of governing total encounter of the customer with a company. De Keyser et al. in the year 2015 stated that Customer experience is helped through different component while having indirect and direct encounter while transacting for goods and services. These elements are cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial, spiritual, and social. According to Customer experience management as an idea was featured by Holbrooke and Hirschman (1982) in one of the important Journal of Consumer Research. Researchers' stated that experience is the result of customers feeling, which is made when they endeavor to understand and use the product. Pine and Gilmore (1998) highlighted that services are ending up with more commoditized experiences, hence the preeminent organizations have begun competing on experiences. The experience, being delivered to the customers must be properly planned out, governed and controlled before delivering to the customer. One of the important components of present research scenario is customer experience, which is a key differentiator. During the 80s, quality, usefulness were the key differentiators. In the 1990s, brand and valuing of the item was the key and subsequently the flow of information, the quality of service and delivery became the norm (Shaw and Ivens, 2002). The customers were offered product and services by the organizations dependent on their presumptions; what customer anticipates from the product. Creating value for the customers became the emphasis of the marketing managers as they shifted their approach (Mc Alexander et al., 2002). In this way, the idea of relationship marketing turned into the focal point of the advertisers. Relationship marketing is yet a challenge by proof that those customers who are rejoicing a good alliance with the organization still probably won't come back to the service provider (Gerpott et al., 2001). At the functional level, the customer-supplier connections in trading to customer markets have for the most part flopped in their endeavors to copy the interpersonal relationship (Palmer, 2010). Brand and emotional attachment turned into the subject of interest for the

marketers in the academic literature in the context of customer experience in the mid-2000s (Narayandas, 2005; Anderson et al., 2006). Making positive customer experience is the most favored approach to generate customer assurance and a unique selling point for the organization (Badgett et al., 2007). These interactions between the organization and the customer help to derive perceived value (Helkkula et al., 2012).

Customer Experience: Traditional to Modern perspective:

Earlier the emphasis was on service attributes and attributes of products; however, customer experience doesn't take into account only the components that are under the control of service providers such as the user interface, product variety or price. It is pertinent to mention that customer experience takes into account those components, which are beyond the control such as the influence of one on another, the impact of internet-enabled gadgets like mobile phones, virtual executive of the company etc. Past researchers examined Customer experience from viewpoint of moments of truth which considers customers being latent in the entire activity (Normann, 2001). As per Berry et al. (2002), at whatever point a customer buys an item from an organization, he generally has an experience. In-store atmospherics, appropriate service delivery, and post-purchase interaction are basic elements of Customer experience yet customers associate convenience in order to connect with the product or services. Experiences are having utilitarian value along with hedonic perspectives (Vargo and Lush, 2006). With the emergence of the web, online networking, self-service advancements, and smartphones marketers can gain insight into what a customer is looking for in the market. A considerable number of organizations has begun to utilize and execute the idea of aggregate customer experience to build a loyal customer base (Mascarenhas, Kesavan, & Bernacchi, 2006). Organizations nowadays are observing customer experience management as their main business objective and tool to achieve success (Johnston and Clark, 2008). A paradigm shift has been observed in the e-retailing due to various advantages being offered recently which include comparison features, 24x7 customer support, more user-friendly interface and much more secure transactions. Hence, organizations should plan out

their strategies so as to create a lasting favorable experience.

Online Customer Experience:

In recent years, due to increased penetration of the internet and increased introduction of e-retail companies, online customer experience has become the point of research for the marketing researchers (Nambisan and Watt, 2011). The trigger for the move is largely assigned to the evolution of E-Commerce platforms. The website portals have turned out to be more interactive and dynamic offering a superior interface for the customers to explore the offerings. Customer's online buying behavior is affected greatly by the online Customer experience (Bridges and Florsheim, 2008). Different researchers have proposed different features of the web and online experience like E-S-QUAL structure (Parasuraman et al., 2005); Website design and its effect on customer experience are studied by Novak, Hoffman and Young (2000). Among the different studies, the emphasis is generally on the 'idea of flow' on the website featured by Novak et al. (2000) to deliver better customer experience. According to Smith and Sivakumar (2004), the idea of flow is a useful method to see how purchasers interact with online interfaces. Yet at the same time, there is an absence of lucidity on how customers interact on the web (Weinreich et al, 2008). More and more studies have tried to explore the online customer experiences in different contexts subsequently (Verhoef et al., 2009) terming it as a relatively new construct. Hahn & Kim (2009) stated that by ensuring seamless transaction in both online to offline or offline to online mode, customer trust can be preserved. Sorooshian et al. (2013) came up with online customer experience (OCE) model to identify factors which affect the customer experience in online channels. Marketers have been trained to adopt new procedures and tactics to survive and succeed their business with the emergence of customer experience. Considering the explored literature and research gap in mind, researchers have tried to work on the below-mentioned objectives.

OBJECTIVES

- To explore the tools evolved in recent E-Retail environment to ensure better customer experience.

- To highlight the recent E-retail strategies practiced to deliver memorable customer experience.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

On the basis of objectives to be achieved in the study as mentioned above, the research design adopted is exploratory in nature. This paper attempts to narrate the tools and strategies adopted by e-Retail companies in recent trends to elaborate the importance of customer experience explored through literature available on various websites and portals. Whereas the research literature exploration was done through research journals, marketing reports, and books. Finally to assemble the issues considered in objectives, and to reach on the findings content analysis approach was applied.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Emerging tools and strategies in E-Retail environment:

Under this head, the tools, strategies and cases of e-retail companies that have been adopted in recent trends in order to provide memorable customer experience thereby creating a positive lasting impression in the minds of the customers will be discussed.

- A) Tools: Certain tools that have been adopted by the e retail organizations are being discussed below:

1. Self-Service Technology:

Self-service technology empowers the exchanges to the customers, which don't require any relational contact between a purchaser and a seller. An organization should endeavor to offer that customer experience at various touch points which in turn create a loyal and valuable customer. However, Maklan and Klaus in the year 2011 said that to do as such, organizations need to comprehend how customer experience affect the consumer buying behavior and eventually the company's success. Self-service technology refers to that technology under which there is no direct collaboration between the company and the client. It enables the customer to avail different benefits and offerings of the customers on their own without the customer

representative or executive being involved in the entire process (Chang et al, 2016). Self-service technology has turned into a substitution for the conventional one to one delivery of service(Wang et al., 2012). The utilization of SSTs empowers organizations to institutionalize their delivery of service and thus diminish their expenses considerably, for the most part, because of lower labor costs (Curran and Meuter, 2005). Self Service Technologies are being utilized over the wide range by means of various interfaces like Intuitive Voice Reaction (IVR) for telebanking, flight information, and order status. On the web interface is utilized for tracking of packages, information related to accounts, e-commerce, ATMs, restaurant, petroleum stations, auto rentals, and information of tourist etc. In E-retail environment, self-service technology is of particular interest as the entire process is managed by the customers itself. Selecting, sorting, applying filters, comparison of products, placing the order, tracking order status, return & cancellation etc are those activities which are performed at the customer end.

Both societal and monetary antecedents motivate the customer experience Kleinaltenkamp et al. (2012). Customer experience is resultant of the different experience drivers. Experiences are holistically assessed by the customers in an organization (Verhoef et al., 2009). In this way, customer experience requires an efficient systematic framework (Grewal, et al., 2009). Earlier studies recommend that variables like employees, brands, innovation, and product or services comprise customer experience (Johnston and Clark, 2008; Meyer and Schwager, 2007), whereas recent organizations have now started shifting to latest tools to deliver better customer experience. Therefore, the self-service technology is noteworthy in enabling the organization to deliver a seamless experience to customers and thereby enhancing the total customer experience.

Big Data and analytics:-

As technology improves, the way data is measured and collected also changes. The problem here faced by the organization is that technology has grown to the point where organizations have "too much" data(Barton, D., 2012). Deciphering and organizing

information from this huge data is getting difficult with the large numbers of percentage, facts and figures available. With the help of big data analytics, business houses can gain access to valuable information in a combined form at one place Chaudhuri & Dayal (1997). Particularly, the e-commerce business owners can use these analytics to scrutinize emerging and ongoing trends to attract more customers, thereby succeeding in their businessPrahald & Hammond (2002). Firstly, it helps in analyzing the shopper's behavior and shopping pattern such as shopping times, products that is being searched upon etc. With this information the e-retail companies can plan and implement their marketing strategies and social media advertising to boost their sales and engagement in the competitive market (Chaffey et al, 2009; Singh A, 2014; Duhan P, & Singh A, 2013). Secondly, it helps the e-retail organization to deliver improved customer services. Although having knowledge about the needs and wants of the customers is vital for an organization, but making it effortless for the customer to transact with the business, resolve query and looking after their convenience is far more important consideration now a day (Quinn, 1997). Big data provides the information needed to see how fast customers are able to complete these jobs. Big data not only helps in tracking experiences of customers but also helps in monitoring potential problematic issues and resolve them even before the customer gets involved Camillus, J. C. (2008). Thirdly, big data has helped in making the online payment easier and more secure Tankard, C. (2012). It has integrated all the payment function on one centralized platform(Gupta O, Singh A, 2017). The analytics offered by big data also helps in identifying the fraud and offers a proactive solution. Thus, it is evident that big data has enhanced the e retailing process and made it easier for online stores to be useful.

Virtual Assistant Program:

Even in a digital world, customized benefit is an essential part of customer experience Wertime & Fenwick (2011). That is the reason why more organizations are putting resources into loyalty programs and mobile applications that strengthen the connection between buyer and seller(Jaiswal, S,

Singh A, 2018). As customers have turned out to be familiar with conversing with virtual assistants like Siri, Cortana, and Alexa, organizations are endeavoring to impersonate with virtual personal assistant and concierge applications of their own. A good virtual assistant can resolve customer query through a phone call, electronic mail, real-time chat/discussion and on social media (Ardichvili & Wentling, 2003, Duhan P, & Singh A, 2013). It can judiciously govern the issues of the customers, handle consignments that are lost and many more things thereby persuading the customer to buy the deal. Virtual assistant offers human support while the customer is still on the website, thereby increasing the rate of conversion of the organization Bolman (2017). Moreover, a virtual assistant program also looks after the possibility of cross-selling and up-selling while having an interaction with the customers. Taking into account the e-retail company, a virtual helper can likewise process orders, oversee return and trades, screen stock levels, refresh the site to show the stock providers have in hand and in their distribution centers and let the association know when it has to recharge certain items.

B) Strategies:

1. Insight Communities:

Insight communities are a large number of clients who themselves choose to be a part of a gathering and disbursing the information. They also offer ordinary appreciation and criticism to enhance products and the customer experience Greenberg (2010). This information gives an organization the data and knowledge about the product and customers and their experiences, through Net Promoter Score (NPS) or Customer Effort Score (CES)(De Haan, Verhoef & Wiesel, T., 2015). Insight communities help in building trust between the customers and the organization by providing a more profound comprehension of the customer's requirement and aspirations(Duhan P, & Singh A, 2014). As this method is based on the interaction across the entire journey of the customer, therefore it provides more quality insights to the organization. Insight communities consist of customers, employees, shareholders and other stakeholders of the company. The ROI yield from surveying even a small community like this is far greater than

acquiring the feedback from thousands of customers in the traditional way.

Not only insight communities offer proposals to enhance the customer experience, but they also provide a platform for emerging thoughts, enabling a brand to experiment and improve new ideas(Kumar et al (2010). It has been seen in the past trends that a brand launches the best product or services, but also it can look for criticism to recognize problem areas in order to endeavor and to settle them.

A leading E-retail organization, "eBay" had endeavored to acquire a response from a small group of its client but as the organization developed, it was not getting the same input from its customer. The organization launched an insight community in the year 2015 to resolve this issue. An understanding network empowered eBay to get some data about specific thoughts, ask for new thoughts, and test thoughts with speed and adaptability, all for building up the sentiment of network and organization with its merchants that is fundamental for the association's prosperity. Brian Burke, eBay's director of Customer stated the insight community helps the organization to involve their customer at a much higher level that it would have achieved by doing its own, highlighting the potential of these insight communities. The information provided by these communities has helped the companies to be more productive and enhanced their overall customer experience.

2. Omni Channel Strategy:

Since now the customer interacts with the organization through various touch point on multiple platforms and channels, the focus of the marketers shifted on the overall customer experience. Omni Channel strategy has turned into the new standard (Brynjolfsson et al., 2013; Verhoef et al., 2015). The term Omni-channel was first time featured by Rigby (2011) in scholarly writing, referring to experiences of customers during the sale of product both in the online and offline mode. He defined Omni-channel strategy as one, which provides access to customer anytime and anywhere both in virtual and physical store along with seamless experience. As per Sunil Chopra (2016) an organized Omni-channel inventory network can be both cost saving and receptive to customer needs by

using the strength of offline or physical stores and the inventory network of the offline mode. Omni-channel retail is gaining huge attention globally. Amazon Go, VanHeusen, and Raymond's are some of the examples. A survey conducted by Big Commerce showcased the fact that millennial (67%) and Gen-Xers (56%) alike would prefer to search for products and purchase them online, rather than doing so in a physical store. However, there are numerous paths that a customer can take to buy a product - a social media ad, a digital ad, a chatbot on Facebook Messenger, a website, or an email. Omni-channel retail strategy seeks to convert every touch point of an organization into a potential conversion be it in the form of application on mobile, kiosks or physical store. All the available channel of the business should endeavor to provide persistent and stable customer experience. Omni-channel strategy's main idea is based on the fact that customer should have access to brand irrespective of the fact of the place where they are. The most important thing that the organizations need to consider is that customers want a consistent experience. They want things to be simple, accessible and presented to them without any confusion.

CONCLUSION

The researchers in this paper have tried to explore the tools evolved in the recent E-Retail environment to ensure better customer experience, and have also highlighted the recent E-retail strategies practiced by the e-retailers to deliver memorable customer experience.

Therefore, to with regard to the findings, it is relevant to mention that consistently changing components of customer communications over the distinctive touch points has to lead the experience of the customer more fundamental for the organization and can hugely affect the profitability. Advertisers have begun to withdraw from the customer relationship management approach. The marketing focus has now moved towards the customer-driven methodology, analytics of data has turned into a pivotal piece of each advertiser's competitive strategy and has offered a more advanced understanding of the entire process and customer journey. The development of Omni-channel has profoundly shocked the prevailing norm and made advertisers to reexamine their systems. Advertising is moving towards a blend of human-centered

designs and digital reality however it requires a lot of efforts from marketers to look after the need of the changing dynamics. The marketing activity of taking customer criticism by means of insight communities has helped the advertisers to convey value to the clients. The utilization of new advancement and innovation, for example, computerized stages, big data analytics investigation, artificial intelligence, shopper bits of knowledge has made feasible for an organization to give all-encompassing customer experience.

On the basis of the above, it can be said that the job of customer experience administrator will be enormous in the future and the business will surpass desires by merging it in its integrated business strategy.

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