Research Paper Commerce

# Manufacturers' Services – Perceptions and Viewpoints of Customers in Gulbarga

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**KEYWORDS**

**Introduction:**
Service is perceived by different people in different ways. Perception of service as perceived by manufacturers, consumers, society and Government vary due to the differences in their interests. For example, the manufacturers' interests relate to the projection of a better image for their companies and the products and distinguishing them from their competitors' products. The consumers' interests are in terms of guaranteed assurances, better deal and trouble-free performance of the product. The social interests are the long-term welfare of the consumers and socially responsible business ethics. The Government's perception of service relate to the honouring of the guarantees and adhering to the legal provisions by the manufacturers provided in the warranties and service contract.

**Manufacturers' General Perceptions of Service:**
The perception of manufacturers can be better understood by understanding the competition in the market for the products. The present market situation in India is characterized by the availability of increased number of products, proliferation of brands within the manufacturers' lines of activity and variety of competitors' brands. There are more than 100 brands of television, around 20 brands of refrigerators, 6 brands of washing machines, 4 brands of vacuum cleaners and more than 150 brands of mixers. The over-crowding of several brands of products in the market has led to an explosion in the field of advertisements. This has resulted in "choice" and "Information overload" for the customers and made it difficult for them to take a decision.

Consumers cannot re-evaluate products every time they make a buying decision. To simplify decision-making, consumers organize products into categories – they position products/brands, services and companies in their minds. A product's/brands' position is the complex set of perceptions, impressions and feelings that consumers hold for the product/brand vis-à-vis competing products/brands.

A product/brand positioning can be done either through product differentiation or service differentiation or personnel differentiation or image differentiation. Variables for positioning the product/brand through the product differentiation include features, performance, conformity, durability, reliability, reparability, style and design.

**Concept of Service:**
The word 'service' serves diverse context with various meanings. It may refer to "the human effort which provides succor to the needy. It can be food to a hungry person, water to a thirsty person, medicines to a patient, loan to a small farmer, etc.

The bottom-line definition of service is "whatever the customers think it is". It may include convenient location, breadth of selection, category dominance, speed of transaction and competitive prices.

Service frequently means repairing of a product and making it useful again for its user. It may also imply continuous maintenance of the product at a desired level of functioning, implying preventive maintenance. The service provision in this context includes both preventive maintenance and providing repairs. For the purpose of it not only makes it necessary to maintain the consumer durable but also repair them as and when any damage has been caused to them. As a consumer durable is repeatedly used with longer life, it is inevitable that the service assumes importance.

**Service Elements:**
The service elements that a marketer should identify for the post-use period in the marketing of consumer durables are;

a. The method of recording the complaint.
b. The time taken to attend the complaint.
c. The time taken to repair the consumer durable.
d. The place where the service job is to be carried out i.e., the customer's home or at the service centre.
e. The time gap between two consecutive complaints.
f. The amount of service charges to be charged.
g. The issues of product obsolescence.
h. The honour of service guarantees.
i. The provision of renewal of service contract and
j. The behaviour of the servicemen attending to the complaints.

Hence, there is a need for the marketer to spell out his policies clearly with regard to the above, and oscillation on his part and dilution of the terms of contract at the time of sale and inapplicability of the clauses in the service guarantees offered and service contract offered, may mean a continuance of anxiety for the customer and a bad word-of-mouth publicity for the product.

**General Perceptions and Viewpoints of Customers:**
In the Indian context, it is not out of place to comment that the average Indian customer does not attach much importance to the aspect of service, particularly with reference to consumer durables. This may be due to his basic interest in getting the best bargain out of the purchase he makes. It is possible that he may not aware of his rights and privileges as a customer. Further, he may think of service when the actual problem of failure arises and till that time he does not consider service as a real problem. Instances are not lacking where a customer carries on the use of the product with minor prob-

lems till it becomes major problem. Further, he often fails to understand the importance of annual maintenance charges for the products and an effective and prompt service at a low cost.

**Customers' Perceptions with regard to Brands and Service:**

Researcher has adopted 'Convenience Sampling Method' in which has distributed the schedules to the respondents and their perceptions were obtained regarding the brands selected and service of these manufacturers. The brands selected for the various Consumer Durable Products are : Four brands of Samsung, LG, Kelvinator and Voltas for Refrigerators; 3 brands of Sony, Samsung and LG for Televisions; 3 brands of LG, Whirlpool and Haier for Washing Machines; 2 brands of Eureka Forbes and Philips for Vacuum Cleaners and 2 brands of Pigeon and Maharaja for Mixers.

The schedule administered to the respondents was structured into four parts to measure their perceptions regarding pre-purchase, purchase decision, post-purchase and post-use dimensions and after-sales service perceptions in terms of the stages through which a consumer goes through the purchase process of consumer durables.

The perceptions of consumers are measured on a five point scale, in terms of five as 'most important', four refers 'more important', three refers to 'important', two refers to 'less important', and one refers to 'not important'. With the help of the following table, we can asses that whether after-sales service as an aspect of enquiry for customers.

**Table**

**Customers' pre-purchase perceptions for all products of selected brands and after-sales service as an aspect of enquiry**

| Products | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Refrigerators | 3(6) | 5(10) | 3(6) | 0(0) | 39(78) | 50(100) |
| Televisions | 2(4) | 6(12) | 1(2) | 2(4) | 39(78) | 50(100) |
| Washing Machines | 2(4) | 3(6) | 1(2) | 1(2) | 43(86) | 50(100) |
| Vacuum Cleaners | 3(6) | 6(12) | 1(2) | 0(0) | 40(80) | 50(100) |
| Misers | 1(2) | 2(4) | 3(6) | 0(0) | 44(88) | 50(100) |
| Total | 11(4.4) | 22(8.8) | 9(3.6) | 3(1.2) | 205(82) | 250(100) |

**Source: Field Investigation.**
**Figures in brackets indicate percentage.**

The above table discloses that customers of all the products of all brands did not bother about after-sales service as an aspect of enquiry. In other words they did not consider it as a variable, only 11 percent of the buyers considered it as most important put together for all products. So, majority of the buyers or dominant share of buyers have not considered this as crucial aspect. However, the buyers of Refrigerators and Vacuum Cleaners considered it as an aspect of enquiry compared to other products.

**Conclusion:**

On the basis of the present study, we can conclude that friends are the main source of pre-purchase enquiry for the consumers; quality as a most important variable and at the same time almost all the customers are least bothered about the after-sales service as a significant element.

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