

Customer service at marks and spencer



Retail market in UK is highly competitive and dynamic, competition parameters are changing, and now high product quality is not the only thing that creates customer satisfaction and loyalty. Since customers are more demanding and their expectations with customer service are increasing day by day making competition more intense; companies are now focusing on improving and maintaining high standards for their customer service. Companies with poor customer service lose market share more rapidly no matter how well their products or services are.

Many retail brands invest heavily on training their employees and find new ways for better satisfying their customers so that overall satisfaction with the brand increases that not only comes with good product quality but also influenced by the services provided by the retail brand. There are small elements in customer service that matter in building in over all images like greeting the customer, paying attention to their queries and being empathic; and sometimes these small gestures are vital in winning the customer loyalty (Love, Faughnan, & Wright, 2007).

Marks & Spencer is one of the leading retail store in UK, with more than 895 outlets it employees more than 6500 people, they have set high standards for their customer service. Marks & Spencer Hounslow is one of their outlet with high turnover and high customer walk in, our study will focus on this particular store and will explore the customer's level of satisfaction with customer service at this particular store.

Study Rationale

Along with corporate strategy, marketing tactics, and strategic management of brand; it is customer service that have a direct impact on customer's perception of company's product and services, customer's perception about company is build from the services it receives from company.

Customer's direct contact with company is their customer service representatives, for customer they are the company and the way they treat the customer builds the image and perception about company. In retail business customer has a direct contact with representatives and the services they provide and they way they are provided play vital role (Hansemark, & Albinson, 2004).

Marks and Spencer have set high standards for their customer service representative and they give proper attention on this part of their customer contact. Employees are empowered to make decisions regarding service delivery and they are encouraged to avoid lengthy procedures in handling any complaints.

Marks & Spencer Hounslow is a discounted store that offers various discounts on their different products, customer walk in rate is high in this store with seasonal effect that also increases the rush in store, as this being a discounted store with more rush the customer service level is expected go down in case of any heavy walk in situation, but customer expectation level never goes down and they seek the same practices and standards that they are presented with in main stores. Keeping this expectation level in mind we see that if there is any gape in the service level of a discounted store and

other outlets of the same company that will create a dissatisfaction level among customers and will negatively affect overall image of the organization.

Customer service practices are standardized and does not vary from outlet to outlet, that is what make the overall image of the company, build trust in organization's products and services, any variation that caused by any reason will create undesirable perceptions, that is why this gape is to be avoided. Rationale of this study is to closely watch and study the customer service standards on both regular and discounted stores on Marks & Spencer and find any gapes if available, and then devise the ways to avoid such gapes to improve the overall perception in the mind of customers (Hansemark, & Albinson, 2004).

Research Objectives

Marks & Spencer is a successful organization with high standards for its customer service levels, however as customer's perceptions and expectation are always changing there is need to study them on regular basis, below are presented objectives that are to be fulfilled via this research (Boote & Beile2005).

To review current literature on customer satisfaction and customer service

To analyse customer satisfaction with customer service level at Marks & Spencer Hounslow

To compare customer service level at Hounslow outlet with other M&S outlets

To find the gaps in customer service levels

To devise the steps that will increase the customer service level at M&S

Hounslow and will increase customer satisfaction level

Literature Review

Customers are the heart of every business and they are purpose of every business that is why their satisfaction with organization is very important (Zairi, 2000). There are many other researchers that equally advocate the importance of customers. Since customers are important their satisfaction with organization is also very important, if customer is not satisfied with organization's products or services they are not going to come back and purchase again in other words customers are the source of all profits, that is why there is shift in modern day organizational focus, rather focusing on profits, organization are focusing on customers as they are source of all the profits.

Talking about customer satisfaction, different researchers has defined customer satisfaction differently as customer satisfaction is an overall reaction or attitude towards organization's products or service in comparison of what was expected and what actually delivered in order to satisfy any need or want (Hansemark & Albinsson, 2004) or in other point of view according to Kotler (2000) satisfaction is " a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance (or outcome) in relation to his or her expectations" other researchers say that satisfaction can be associated with the feeling of fulfillment, enjoyment, excitement (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2001).

If we go through this customer satisfaction has two aspects, one the perceived performance from the product or service and other is the actual performance of product and service. There are certain benefit that every brand and product makes in order to attract the customer and whenever customer makes the purchase decision these perceived benefits are expected to be fulfilled, now actual benefits are realized when product or service actually performs. Whether that need for which product or service was purchased is satisfied or not decides the reaction of the customer, if that needs is fully satisfied for which product was purchased then there comes the feeling of fulfillment and joy and this feeling of fulfillment can be called satisfaction.

Now talking about customer service let us see what commentators have to say about it, according to many researchers customer service is series of activities that are target towards satisfying the customers, this can be listening to them, handling their problems and answering their queries and so on. Customer service has a direct link with product's value proposition, not only it satisfies their customers but also good customer service can enhance the overall value of product in the eye of a customer (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2001).

When we say good customer service it mean we say that good customer service representatives, because they are the one who are in contact with customers and are actually providing them real time services. Since the emergence of modern day business, companies are now realizing the importance of good customer service and its relation with product's perceived value (Kotler, 2000).

There are small but important things that customers remember as service and these small actions create values in their minds, such as smiling when greeting the customers, using appropriate greeting according to age and gender of the customers, being visible and available to customers whenever they need, smiling and saying good bye to customers; these are small things but make an impact in the minds.

Customer service can be vital in many ways; a good customer service may include a good system of handling customer complaints, well trained outgoing and empathic staff that not only listen to customer but also try to help them in every possible way. It is said that customer do not purchase product, and brand is not a tangible thing, customer buys feelings and satisfaction and that cannot come without good customer service (Kotler, 2000).

Customer service and customer satisfaction are a visible and vital relation in every industry and specially retail industry; in retail business customer is in direct contact with customer service representative and most of the time they need representatives to solve their problems, in this way these representatives play a key role in delivering good quality service and affecting overall customer satisfaction. Every successful company has set standards and strict rules regarding their customer services that are mandatory to be followed by their employees that are closely monitored and regularly evaluated. There are no two opinions about the fact that in retail industry customer service has a key role to play and there is a strong and unavoidable link between customer service and customer satisfaction.

Research Methodology

Framework

Since this research is based on customers' satisfaction about customer service practices at Marks & Spencer stores, this research will use customer service theory as a framework. This research will show how higher level of customer service increases the level of satisfaction among customers, what are the indicators of a high level quality customer service and how this level can be achieved. This research will try to explore that what are main steps in serving customers that are important in views of customers and how these steps are applied in Marks & Spencer. This research will also explore that where Marks & Spencer Hounslow lack in customer service as compared to Marks & Spencer other outlets what is overall satisfaction level of customers regarding this (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2001).

There is a good amount of literature available online and in libraries related to customer service and customer satisfaction. To make this research more authentic only reliable resources will be used for literature review and other purposes.

Research Approach

There different approaches used by researchers for their different kind of researches, most popular among them are Qualitative and Quantitative research. Both of these approaches have their own benefits and limitations, but to make this research more fruitful and to get the most reliable results I have decided to use mixed approach that is both qualitative and quantitative techniques will be used for getting this research done (Strauss & Juliet, 1990).

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This research will be following inductive approach and empirical studies will be done, qualitative and quantitative data will be collected both from employees and customers. Data collected from employees will be used to analyze the customer service procedures and data collected from customers will be used to understand satisfaction level with customer service. Once collected then both kind of data (qualitative and quantitative) will be separately analyzed and their results will be compared. Presence of both kinds of data will make sure that there is consistency in results and sample results portray the true picture of real situation. In ideal situations both qualitative and quantitative data depicts the same results, this authenticity of research will be made sure.

Data Collection

To know about customer service standards data will be collected from employees present at store, since we are going to use both qualitative and quantitative approach, so I shall use two techniques of data gathering, one is questionnaires and other is interview, adding more into it efforts will be made to conduct focus groups with employee to get the insight of their understanding about customer service and its standards.

Designed questionnaires will be distributed among employees that will complete the quantitative data part, and then employees will be interviewed as well, and then focus group also be conducted to have the final and refined idea about the first part of the research. This practice will be done with Hounslow store and other randomly selected store of Marks & Spencer.

To understand customer satisfaction level and their perception about customer service of Marks & Spencer Hounslow and other outlets, designed survey form will be distributed among customers; the plan is to distribute the same questionnaire among the customers of Hounslow store and then among the customers of main Marks & Spencer outlets, same procedure will be adopted for interview section and customer's of Hounslow outlet will be interview along with customer's of main outlet.

Efforts will be made to conduct a focus group by customers at different outlets and try to know their view points. Moreover questionnaires distributed among different stores will have different serial numbers so that they can be separately analyzed and their results can be compared, which is the main purpose of this research.

Sampling Techniques

Basic sampling technique which is to be used in entire study is random sampling as it minimizes the biasness error and helps in providing clear picture of the study. For employees in Hounslow store maximum number of participants will made sure to be included. As long as interviews are concerned 5 employees from each store will be selected for interview, and for focus group discussion one group of four randomly selected employees will be made and focus group will be conducted, same practice will be carried out for one other randomly selected Marks & Spencer main outlet (StatPac, 1997).

For customer's part, in Marks & Spencer Hounslow store, around 200 customer's will be provided with their questionnaire to seek their feedback,

around 20 customer's will be randomly selected for interview and one focus group will be made of 4 customers to discuss customer service level. These questionnaires and interview will be done at on different days and on different timings including weekend to make sure that maximum and varied representation is there.

After conducting this research on Hounslow store, 5 Marks & Spencer main store will be selected and same questionnaire in same quantity will be distributed in these 5 stores and same number of interview will be done there. It means 200 questionnaires will be filled at 5 Marks & Spencer stores and on the same lines interview will be divided among stores. In this way it will be made sure the samples are random and maximum variation of respondents is there.

Data analysis

After collection data will be analyzed through statistical analysis software and results will be presented to make decision.

Ethical Issues

As far as literature review is concerned data is available in libraries and online and it is for everyone to access, for empirical data it will be made sure that all participants in the research are well aware of the purpose of the research and their personal details are not collected and mentioned anywhere, more over their anonymity is respected in focus groups, empirical data will be destroyed once used for research.

It will be made sure that concerned organization permits such research in their premises and they have no issue with that, it will also be made sure

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their only those customers who are does not have any issue with such activity are contacted for focus groups.