Customer Delight: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract
Making customers happy should be retailers’ first priority. The concept about the satisfaction and delight is made clear in this paper through different models and theories. Neither one should get confused with satisfy and delight nor are they same. We can say that delight is a higher version of satisfaction. Studying your customers’ behavior in decision making process is very important because the retailer should know the need and expectation of their customers then only delight strategies can be created. Take proper measures to convert dissatisfied customers into satisfied one. As per Kano Model the time factor is also important when you form a strategy to delight your customers. If the strategy is not practiced at the right time then the idea can get outdated. One should be thorough with the concepts before implementing any strategy. Customer delight requires lot of research work in order to analyze different ways of delighting. Surprising customer is important because surprises last for a longer period of time in mind than just an ordinary experience or situation. When customers are just satisfied this experience of satisfaction may fade away in the long run but one delight experience will be a lifelong memory to your customers. When your customers’ complaint comes down to zero, that is the sign of a happy customer.

Keywords: Customer, Consumer Behavior, Customer Satisfaction, Customer delight, Customer dissatisfaction, Customer centric

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Introduction
We say that the customer is the king of the market. He is the main visitor to the premises of any outlet wherein the seller is dependent on the customer who is part of the business. In fact the need of customer is an opportunity to the sellers. If a seller wants to make a huge amount of profit, satisfying customer is just not enough because to retain your customers for a longer period and to gain their loyalty there is a need to delight your customers.

Earlier there were a few retailers and manufacturers in the market and that’s why the market was more of product centric and competition centric. As the years passed by, competition increased in the market and customer started getting a wider choice which made the market...
customer centric. The retailers and manufacturers had to pull customers towards them and moreover the challenge was to retain the customers. To assure retaining the customer for a long time customer satisfaction was not enough. In addition to that, a wow factor was needed and that is ‘Customer Delight’. This is how customer delight comes into the spotlight when it comes to retaining the customer.

There has always been confusion between satisfying a customer and delighting a customer. To put customer delight into action one should be clear with the concepts. We can classify customer satisfaction as primary stage and customer delight as a secondary stage.

Philip Kotler (2009) has defined Consumer Behavior saying that it is the study of How, What, When and Why customers buy the product or service? From the above questions we can interpret that consumers will buy goods and services when they have series of needs which leads to decision making process for purchasing product which is going to satisfy their needs and desires. But satisfying any customer has become a common task to all. So to make your customers sense that they are special we need to take a step ahead and think of delighting customer that is adding a ‘wow factor’ to your customers expectations.

The paper highlights on the conceptual background of customer satisfaction and customer delight and also highlights upon the difference between the satisfaction and delight.

**Literature Review**

According to Wassim Farouq Tawfiq Masrouje (2009), Marketing is one of the function of an organization and a process of generating, communicating, giving significance to customers and managing customer relationship in order to make organization more profitable, in turn, benefiting its shareholders. Without customers a firm has no revenue, no profit and no market value (Vidhya & Samudhra Rajkumar, 2013). The competitors must plan their strategies and offer the goods and services to the target market and retailers should see that they deliver value to their customers (Philip Kotler, 2009).

Having and generating loyal customers is very important to every business. With Internet the world has become small and as customers are well informed, they expect more than just satisfaction from the sellers (Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller, 2008). Everyone makes a purchase decision with expectations about what the product or service will do when it is used, and satisfaction is the hoped-for outcome. Satisfying customers is just not enough to retain because a slight special treatment given by the competitors can shift your customers towards your competitors (Benjamin Schneider & David E. Bowen, 1999). Therefore, business has now become more customer centric by giving more emphasis on creating customers, retaining customers, maintaining customer relationship, satisfying and delighting customers by providing quality products and services (Alexander Preko, Samuel Kwami Agbanu, and Mawuli Feglo, 2014).

One can differentiate between Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction but there are many who get confused when it comes to customer delight and customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is matching with customers expectations whereas customer delight is creating a positive impact by surprising your customers by providing them more than what is expected (Barry Berman, 2005).

With the growing competition one should not just satisfy the customers but to keep customers coming to you more frequently there is a need to make them feel special by providing customers more than their expectation. This gives rise to the term called customer delight (Gaurav Purohit and Divya Purohit, 2013). Delighting customers can change the financial position of any company.
because customer delight leads to customer loyalty and when customers are loyal one can predict their future revenues and have a successful growth in business (Gaurav Purohit and Divya Purohit, 2013).

Rakesh Seth & Kirti Seth (2005) mentioned in their book that retain existing customers because business typically spends five times more money getting new customers than retaining existing ones. They also mentioned to satisfy your internal customers along with external customers because balance between the two is required for sustained customer delight. So, the key is to “Strive for sustainable customer delight and a growing share of wallet and loyalty” (Rakesh Seth & Kirti Seth 2005).

To keep customers’ attention towards your product and to convert them into loyal customers, one should surprise and delight customers by providing good pre purchase and post purchase experience. There are some companies like Apple and Starbucks who sell good experiences to their customers (Martin Zwilling, 2016). Customer Delight is positive emotion backed by surprise and positive performance level. Giving an example of customer delight, Buffett said that he does not remember the price of the car he bought a few years ago, but he remembers the experience that he had with the sales person (Jeremy Quittner, 2016).

Thomas A. Stewart and Patricia O’Connell (2016) have focused on 10 E’s in order to delight customers namely Empathy, Expectation, Emotion, Elegance, Engagement, Execution, Engineering, Economics, Experimentation, and Equivalence. If services are designed and delivered skillfully, there will be proper arrangement of strategic goals, customer’s needs and the relationship between customer and the seller. That alignment is a function of 10 key elements. A culture of providing great customer experiences doesn’t happen by chance, and it requires more than just excellent operational procedures. Surprising and delighting customers as the new norm requires a backdrop of strong leadership, deliberate planning, and integrity in execution. It requires brand-building at its best. According to a recent American Express survey, more than 3 out of 4 customers say they have spent more with a company and recommended it to friends because of a history of positive experiences (Martin Zwilling, 2016).

Database marketing can also enable the achievement of that milestone beyond satisfaction. The better you know your customer, the better you can serve him/her so try to get as much information about them. Each and every interaction with the consumer is important since it has a multiple effect. Try and delight your customers whenever you can. One interaction could be worth more than many thousands of rupees of mass marketing (Rakesh Seth & Kirti Seth, 2005). Matt Ehrlichman (2014), Founder and CEO of Porch recommends 8 principles to delight customers they are: Always be timely, Always listen to your customers, Give them what they need, Give customers little things when they don’t expect it, Give customers a point of contact, Give customers space, Have policies, Always be flexible and Tell your customers how will you help them.

Scope and limitations

Based on the theoretical knowledge of this paper, one can do a detailed study on customer delight and use some analytical tools to investigate more on customer delight. One can use different sectors to study customer delight using the theoretical base. This paper has a combination of all important theories and thoughts of customer delight given by different authors which makes it easy for reference purpose for further study.
The main limitations of this paper are firstly, no analytical tools are used to prove customer delight as it is a theory based paper. Secondly, this paper is limited to few references and theories. Lastly, the paper gives a general information on customer delight no detailed study has been conducted.

Customer satisfaction

According to Le Xue and Chun Yang (2008), “Satisfaction means sense of fulfillment, contentment, pleasure, relief and ambivalence with positive and negative experiences.” Satisfaction is derived from the Latin words ‘Satis’ which means enough and ‘Facere’ which means to do or make. This indicates providing goods and services to the customers which is enough to meet their expectations. Satisfaction is the point of fulfillment where the customers observe the product characteristics and a pleasurable consumption level (Richard L. Oliver, 2010).

Customer Satisfaction brings positivity in an organization profit margin because satisfied customers form the base of any successfully growing business as it leads to frequent purchase, loyalty towards brand, and good word of mouth (Biljana Angelova and Jusuf Zekiri, 2011). The benchmark for customer satisfaction is expectation. Expectation rises from prior information collected by the customers from word of mouth, advertising, websites, etc. and the usage or experience of the product or service which adds to the customer’s knowledge. These sources of information influence the customers to expect more from the company in terms of satisfaction. So, Customer expectations deals with what information does the customers have about the product or service (ACSI, 2008). Providing customer satisfaction and maintaining it is one of the greatest challenges faced by business today (Robert Christie Mill, 2011).

The theories which explain customer satisfaction are disconfirmation paradigm and expectancy-value concept. Disconfirmation theory refers to customer comparison with new experience with the standard developed. Customer comes with the belief that the service experience should match with the standard. In expectancy-value theory, customers make judgment on the product and its benefits and the possible outcomes of product usage. Consumer will behave positively on positive outcomes (Robert Christie Mill, 2011).

Customers who are satisfied are likely to do repeat purchases and give positive word of mouth to their friends and relatives. Customers will be satisfied when service that is provided exceeds their expectations and if it is less there will be some reason for such dissatisfaction (Robert Christie Mill, 2011).

Firm’s responsibility is to satisfy their customers by providing goods and services according to their wants and desires. Customers have a feeling of high expectation from the organization. That means the business organization should also see that the customers are happy and also provide value for money by providing them quality experience (Abadh Jibi Ghimire, 2012).

It all starts from customer decision making process. In order to satisfy your customers one should know how the customers make their buying decisions. There are all together five stages and customers go through these five stages when taking a buying decision. Let us observe the diagram below-
As given in Figure 1 Consumer buying process includes identifying problem or need recognition, search for information, evaluating alternatives, Purchase and post purchase behavior. Customer satisfaction is a part of post-purchase evaluation because in this stage customer actually experiences the product and compares it with its expectations and if the expectations are fulfilled then we can call the customer as a satisfied customer and if the results are below the expectation then we call that customer as a dissatisfied customer. In order to satisfy your customers one should know their needs. Now customer’s needs will be well shaped based on the information collected and evaluation of alternatives and this will lead to higher expectations in some cases. So collecting more information and more evaluation of alternatives may lead to higher expectation. (Paul R. Timm, 2002) explains that every product or service has information attached to it which includes instructions of usage of product, advertisement highlighting characteristics of product and promises made by the sellers, all these information that is provided gives an opportunity to exceed customer expectation. Expectation will also exceed from past experience, word of mouth, advice from friends & family and information from competitors (Philip Kotler, Kevin Lane Keller, Abraham Koshy and Mithileshwar Jha, 2009).

Acquiring new knowledge from provided information and experiencing the product personally gives a feedback to a person and sets a benchmark for similar situation (Leon G. Schiffman & Leslie Lazar kanuk, 1999). In case, there is an urgent requirement of some product then the customer will directly go for purchase decision skipping the second and third step in the Consumer Buying Process (Figure 1). That means in this case the customer will not have any high expectations and will be happy with availability of that product. If the company gives high customer expectations by showing advertisements with promises of meeting their expectations more dissatisfied customers will be generated if these promises are not fulfilled. So the company should see that customer expectation does not exceed by such means and low customer expectation will help to induce patronage (Robert Christie Mill, 2011).

Customer buys the product for various purposes such as the product can be purchased for personal use, resale, industrial use and production purpose. Customer always expects to get a good value on their purchases and also expects care that is after sales service by the business organization. So, business organization should see that the value for money is provided and make the customers feel happy by providing them quality product as per their wants. Also accept customer’s feedback and their opinions. It will be better if the organization follows CRM program. (Oladejo Akolade Adegbola, 2010).
**Customer Delight**

*Figure 2: Customer delight based on customer perception and memorableness of event*

![Diagram showing the quadrants of customer delight based on customer perception and memorableness of event.](image)

Source: Alain Guillemain (2012), Customer Delight, (1st Ed.)

Alain Guillemain (2012) in his book defines Customer Delight using quadrant which is shown in Figure 2 where in Customer Perception is on the x-axis and Memorableness of Event is on y-axis. According to Alain Guillemain (2012) the bottom right quadrant describes a state where the customer perceives a business experience to be positive, but the event itself is not memorable. This type of event produces Customer Satisfaction. The bottom left quadrant describes a state where the customer perceives a business experience to be negative. Fortunately for the business, the event is trivial and so not memorable. This type of event produces Customer Displeasure. The top right quadrant state where the customer perceives a business experience to be positive and the event is outstanding and memorable. This leads to Customer Delight. The top left quadrant is the opposite of Customer Delight wherein it states the customer perceives a business experience to be negative, and unfortunately for the business, the event is significant and memorable. This leads to Customer Contempt.

Customer Delight refers to positive emotion generated from exceeding expectations by providing a high degree of surprise to the customers (Oliver, Rust & Varki, 1997).

If customer satisfaction is rated from one to five scale; at level one, that is the lowest level the customers are likely to dumb the company and even give negative word of mouth. From level two to four, customers feel satisfied but still there are chances of switching to the competitors brand if better options are offered. At level five, the customer is highly satisfied which means he/she is delighted and an emotional bond is attached to the brand or the company and customers tend to be more loyal and spread positive word of mouth at this stage (Kotler, 2009).

In short, when customers are delighted, it adds on to the company’s success providing a strong base to grow. A satisfied customer acts as an opportunity for the company to try and keep going with their business. Whereas, dissatisfied customer makes the company very difficult to survive in the market and in order to attract customers these companies has to go for price cut strategies. If a company has dissatisfied customers then the efforts and luck of the company can go in vain (John Hunter, 2013).

Andy Hanselman (2011) has mentioned 6 Ingredients of Customer Delight in his blog which are as follows:
Ingredient 1: It produces a 'wow' reaction!
Ingredient 2: It appears spontaneous or unexpected!
Ingredient 3: It’s the personal touch!
Ingredient 4: It makes customers feel ‘valued’
Ingredient 5: It’s genuine!
Ingredient 6: It creates a ‘talking point’!

Customer wants and desire should be monitored so as to study the experience of the customer. Customer can be delighted only if you have a highly knowledgeable and professional manpower that looks for value addition of organization and by providing upgraded offers as per type of customer you are dealing with. It is very important to monitor your customer from their purchase so that they become loyal customer (Loyale, 2015).

Figure 3: Kano Model

![Kano Model](image)


In the above Figure 3 of Kano Model, H refers to High side and L refers to Low side to measure the degree of satisfaction achieved. The points coming in the higher range show positive emotions and points coming in lower range show negative emotions. Time intersects between X-axis and Y-axis showing that the time taken to satisfy the customer plays a very important role and no outdated means can be used to delight customers.

Kano model was founded by Professor Noriaki Kano in 1984. This model show customer satisfaction based on customers perceived value and the effect on customer satisfaction on product attributes. The model highlighting customer satisfaction divides product attributes in three categories namely Threshold (or basic attributes), Performance and Excitement (Figure 3).

Threshold or basic attributes are the ‘musts’ of product which means the customers expect these basic attributes in product that they need. The presence of these attributes will not make any difference to the customer’s emotions but in case of absence of this attribute the customer can give a negative response. For example when we buy a pizza, must have attribute is cheese. If the pizza is served without cheese then it can make a customer feel unhappy but when it is given there will be no positive emotion because cheese is expected with the pizza.
Performance attributes is judged based on the performance of the seller. If the performance is good the customers feel happy and satisfied and if the performance is weak then it will lead to negative word of mouth. For example, a wedding planner asks his customer about what arrangements has to be done on the wedding day. After taking all specifications from the client the wedding planner organizes the event. In case the wedding planner performs below the expectations of the client then he/she may get upset which can harm the business growth. On the other hand, positive outcome can satisfy the customer and the client may recommend your business to his/her friends or relatives.

Excitement attributes are surprising and unexpected performance by the seller delights customers. The absence of this will not have any effect because the customers have no expectations but the presence of this attribute will have a drastic change in customer’s emotion and this customer will be loyal and spread positive word of mouth. The excitement will last for a short period of time as the excitement will turn to expectation and therefore to excite a customer one should come with more creative ideas (Kano, 1984). Now the delighted customer will not get delighted with the same surprise because the earlier surprise which delighted the customer will now be his/her expectation (John Hunter, 2013).

Kenneth K. Kwong and Oliver H.M. Yau (2002) focussed on 5 attributes in their paper which can bring delight to the customer. The framework highlights five basic human needs namely justice, esteem, security, trust and variety. These needs add to delight stimuli. For example, Esteem in case of personalized service or product availability, security in case of shopping experience, trust related to the information that is provided to the customers or always keeping their words and variety in terms of product availability which will add on to the customer’s choice. If all these 5 attributes are met, it will add on to delight.

Steve Denning (2011) says, “Delighting the customer is not just profitable. It’s hugely profitable. Delighting others is our shot at making a lasting mark in our short passage on this little planet. A focus on delighting others is not a fad or hype or dumb. It is how we advance along a path of genuine excellence.”

Customer Satisfaction v/s Customer Delight

Customers are satisfied when performance meets expectation and delighted when performance exceeds expectation. A highly satisfied customer has high repurchase rate than less satisfied customer. This means delight your current customers so that they are likely to become loyal towards your brand and are likely to spend more money on your brand in the future (Loree McDonald, 2014). To meet customer expectations is very difficult task but customers will be loyal only when services provided exceeds customer satisfaction level. It is said that satisfied customer may forget your brand so to make customers a loyal patron of your brand one should delight the customer (Zonka feedback, 2014).

A customer who is delighted will think twice before switching towards your competitor whereas in the case of satisfied customers the chances of switching towards your competitor is very high that means customer delight creates a competitive edge. Delight is a positive reaction that everyone would like to experience it more frequently so, there is a high possibility that your customers will come to your outlet each time with an expectation when you make delight a habit which creates loyalty. Customers like to share their experiences to their near and dear ones giving rise to word of mouth which helps in developing good brand image (Sai Sundhar, 2015).
By taking the points of other researchers, we can interpret that delighted customers are more loyal than just satisfied customers. Customers that are delighted give publicity to your brand by spreading positive word of mouth and attract more customers than that of satisfied customers. When customers are delighted and converted into loyal customers the next challenge to the sellers is to retain the customers. On the other hand, when the customers are only satisfied the sellers challenge towards this type of customers is to find out ways to delight satisfied customers. Delighted customers are more likely to do repeat purchases than satisfied customers because satisfied customers can switch on to alternatives or next best product which they feel can delight them. Delighted customers expectations will be higher than the satisfied customers because as the customers are already delighted with the unique service or product now the same customers will be looking at the next big thing to happen.

**Dissatisfaction, Outrage, Satisfaction and Delight**

*Figure 4: A model of dissatisfaction, outrage, satisfaction and delight*

The model in Figure 4 helps us to differentiate between dissatisfaction, outrage, satisfaction and delight. As per this model, in case when the expectation exists we can have two possibilities i.e. if the expectations are met then it will result in satisfaction (positive performance level) and if not dissatisfaction (negative performance level). On the other hand outrage and delight will occur when there is no prior expectation i.e. a negative surprise will lead to outrage whereas positive surprise will lead to delight.

The difference between delight, satisfaction, dissatisfaction and pain is the element and degree of surprise. The arrow going from no prior expectation to the existing expectation tells us that over a period of time customer piles up expectation from experiences.

The customer service staff must be able to identify problems and efficiently solve those problems with speedy response which will provide a wow factor. There should be knowledgeable manpower and expertise in the required field. When there are experts having technical and professional knowledge they clearly know what to do and they need not have to depend on their managers or colleagues (Business.com, Editorial Staff, 2014).
Our view on Customer Delight

Most of the retailers or sellers feel that satisfying customer is their only goal. But one should just not stop there. By providing extraordinary services/products the sellers should surprise (delight) the customers. Some feel that delighting customers will add on to the cost but researchers have proved that getting new customer is costlier than retaining the existing one. So it is clear that customer delight is or can be a cost effective strategy wherein you can retain your customers.

Delighting a customer is a major task because ones you delight your customer with one surprise the same strategy cannot be used to delight the customer next time because now the customer expectation has increased and he/she will be looking for more output from the seller. A higher expectation in turn leads to more challenge which sellers have to face.

Sometimes even small things can delight customers like communicating with your customers in a very friendly manner, by giving them attention, by solving complaints of dissatisfied customers can make the customers happy, making them feel special on their birthdays, anniversary, etc. the seller can give special discounts or greet their customers on their special day, invite feedbacks because taking opinion from customer helps seller to improve their services and also customers will be happy as their opinions are been heard by their sellers this creates a cordial relationship between the sellers and the customers. One can even go for CRM program which is a bit costly option but this may help the seller to know more about their customer’s need and expectation by maintaining customer database, give special offers on the festive seasons, be in touch with your customers, get emotionally attached to your customers show that you really care for their need and expectations, give them lot of options to select from, make their shopping more easy and convenient, etc. all these small things can do wonders in retailers or sellers business.

Satisfaction is the stepping stone to delight. So focus on customers’ needs and satisfy their needs first. Now this is up to the retailers how they are going to satisfy customer needs. One can satisfy customers need by providing extraordinary services which will also add on to delight. Satisfying needs by providing ordinary services will only satisfy the customer. So in order to delight your customer on their first visit, fulfill their needs by providing them what they have expected but in an unexpected way that is by providing extraordinary services.

Delighting customers will help in making your customers more loyal towards your brand. The customers will start recommending your product/services to their family and friends and customers strongly believe in the recommendation of their family and friends because this is a most trusted source of information than any other source. This will add on to more customers coming to your store and in addition you get a free advertisement or publicity done by your happy customers. In order to compete with the customer one should know how to stand out and differentiate them self from their competitors. Customer Delight is one such thing which can make you different from your competitors. If you want to be in a spot light start delighting your customers.

Conclusion

Customers are important stakeholders of the company and their satisfaction should be the top most priority to the management. Researchers have proved that quality of service is directly associated with customer satisfaction (Jenet Manyi Agbor, 2011). Even if the business is providing good quality services and products and if they don’t consider the customer’s expectations then this can give a negative result. So, to avoid negative scenarios the business organization should know their customers’ needs and accordingly frame the organization’s strategies towards
achieving customer satisfaction (Oladejo Akolade Adegbola, 2010). With the raising competition, every company wants to be the customers' first choice. To achieve this, business organization should conduct research in this area and this will help the organization to achieve customer satisfaction and in turn increase profits (Jenet Manyi Agbor, 2011).

In order to achieve customer satisfaction the organization should start working on solving the complaints of the customers and converting the complaints into opportunity. Welcome feedbacks, build a strong bond with your customers and clear all the doubts and barriers. All these will help the company in achieving its objectives (Oladejo Akolade Adegbola, 2010). Customer experiences have become a distinct economic offering that can make or break you. If business organization wants their customers to remember them and turn towards them then they should do something extraordinarily that is delighting their customers wherein they will stand out from their competitors (Jeff Crowe, 2014). Make each customer feel special, like they are the only customer you have. Make every interaction and customer experience smooth and practically effortless for them; great products and offerings must be complemented by customer service for customers to feel like they are being given red carpet treatment (Emily Newman, 2015). It’s not possible to create wow factor every time so delight your customers by being consistent in your performance. Always provide satisfactory service and delight customers at favorable moment this will be enough to retain your customers (Jeff Toister, 2013).

References


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