
Editorial: Revisiting Customer Centric Services Marketing

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The leisure and tourism industry has attracted new management strategies in the 21st century by improving the service processes to deliver quality driven customer value. Reinventing intangibles to improve the functionality of services has become challenging to most of the companies as customers' preferences are rapidly shifting due to competitive moves of companies in the marketplace. The travel and tourism industry is facing major challenges of services disruptions and consequently the agility of customer value. Service innovations in the companies involve innovating intangible products without service-logic perspective that challenges the conventional attribute-based view of innovation. In fact to meet the service market challenges, companies need to take radical steps in services innovation and turn tactical to get customer centric in the marketplace. However, it has been observed that services companies tend to shift toward innovating customers' value co-creation roles rather than innovating products and services. Hence, service-logic innovations change the customer's role as a buyer and show how companies can innovate through smart offerings and drive different value integration approaches for sustainable growth in the competitive marketplace (Michel et al., 2008).

The effectiveness of customer relationship management (CRM) has major impact on the customer centric services marketing in the global and regional marketplaces as the quality of services has emerged as one the principal factors for consumer defection. Thus, most companies have become adept at the art of managing business relations with consumers by co-creating the services marketing-mix comprising product development, pricing, positioning of services, delivery of services (place), and promotions to boost the

marketing of services. Enormous resources are invested in collecting data on consumer preferences and behavioural attributes to categorise consumers into ever-finer segments to deliver preferred products and services through customer focused services solutions. However, research in marketing of leisure and tourism services always scuffles with paucity of the data as companies collect the information only on the points where the customer comes into contact with the company either during purchasing the services or inquiring about its features. Few businesses could effectively map the customer scenario in reference to the attributes of consumers towards selecting, buying, and using the products and services. By developing a customer scenario companies can assess qualitatively how consumers tend to analyse the competitive advantages, set buying preferences, expect services quality, and express on the social media. Some eco-tourism companies in Asia and Latin America have learned the importance of decentralising their routes to market and activated Internet shopping sites actively by lowering costs and adding higher levels of profit margins through virtual platforms (Seybold, 2001).

Twentieth century companies had relied largely on push marketing to sell their products and services by entering into the price-wars and investing in promotions to outperform their competitors. Such strategies have resulted in narrow product differentiation and overlapping effect on services delivery causing confusion among consumers in decision making. However, the emphasis shifted to relationship marketing by the end of this century and in the 21st century, services companies have turned to total customer-centric strategies and developed approaches towards delighting customers as the only tool to sustain the market competition. However, while implementing such strategies most companies are unable to manage the power of customers as it continues to grow. In response to meet the demand of consumers, innovative companies are now trying to offer consumers with open, honest, and complete information with an intention to strengthen their decision making abilities and then finding the products with competitive benefits to them. The customer-centric services companies are truly representing their customers' best interests and stand ahead as advocates rather than just sellers for them. In this manner, if a company advocates for its customers, they will reciprocate with their trust, loyalty, and purchase intentions for current buying or in the future (Urban, 2004). A customer oriented company with quality services and effective customer relations might command higher prices for its products and services, as many customers will be willing to pay for the value added benefits and belongingness. As customers develop trust on a company, the psychodynamics would guide positively the social media, increasing the inflow of consumers and reducing the costs to company towards acquiring new customers.

In this issue of the journal there are five papers that address the issues of services and customer value, travel decisions of international tourists, customer value implications, identifying new travel segments, and understanding relationship value in leisure and tourism industry. All papers are focused around the consumer centric research propositions and focus on consumer decision making in a competitive marketplace. I hope the anthology of research papers in this issue will enrich the existing literature and stimulate future research.

References

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