

The Effect of Psychological Barriers on Delivery of Service Marketing in Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Psychological barrier is a cankerworm that has been eaten deeply into the fabric of service marketing system for over a decade, particularly in the third world countries. In spite of the fact that service marketing is the most profitable venture if the service provider build a strong corporate image in the mind of the potential and realized customers who will later turn to be the best advertisement (Ben, 1980).

The snail growth rate of service marketing can be succinctly attributed to the unscrupulous practices of the service-marketing providers, which had predominantly built barriers in the mind of customers. Marketing with its jungle of interpretations has got myriad of definitions, but, universally, marketing is defined as the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customers requirements profitably (Walsh, 1989). Wright from the evolution of marketing, the profession has been perceived as an act of selling goods to actual customers for a profit and that ends the transaction but marketing is more than mere selling, it involves other activities like delivery, financing, promotion just to mention a few.

The growth of marketing during the manufacturers era welcomed the producers concept which stated that producers were kings, and they did produce product that they have the resources to produce and by so doing they dominated the market without any breathing space for the customers. The manufacturers' era gallantly gave the producers a strong edge to grow at the devastating expense of the noble customers. This catholic era was embraced by the push strategy where the producers produce product and push it to the hands of the customers, salvaging their scarce resources, during this era the customers were encroached and be wildered of the right to quality products, satisfaction and opportunity of maximizing choices.

The advent of tangible and intangible technology in the period of scarce economic resources had awakened the era of consumerism

as a sole ingredient towards customer satisfaction. "Customer satisfaction" is a phrase that cannot be swept under a carpet because the survival of any organization may be profit or non-profit is hinged on it.

The early marketers failed to take proper cognizance of the psychological views and behaviours of the customers as strong barriers to successful marketing. Unsatisfied customer is a cankerworm to an organization because he will relentlessly and endlessly beleaguering the product and the company, which eventually leads to the negative growth of the organization particularly the service, oriented companies. In this respect service marketing in whatever form it might take requires a proper attention for its survival and growth.

PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS

Customers see product as a bunch of attributes and the importance of these attributes are the expectations of customers. The attributes play a vital role in building customers product image. The psychological dimensions (product performance) of customers are the main forces that marketers should properly address if they want to continue existing in the business; the psychological views are the main hindrances to successful service marketing. These forces can even negate the best marketing intentions. People generally have negative perceptions and attitudes about various products and marketing techniques, and for a marketer, "it is very important to understand the ranges and depths of these negative attitudes before designing and implementing marketing campaigns" (Leon, 1997).

The negative attitudes and potentially negative reactions to products and promotions seem to be deep within the psychic of actual and potential customers (Afrad, 1979). These attitudes and reactions are independent of the marketing situations, they preceded any contact and only come to force when a prospect is confronted with the possibility of making a final purchase decisions. To give context to the thought, barriers

could be viewed as: fear, confusion, perception and culture, inertia and anxiety, all these kick off customers from buying a service (Richard, 1979).

* Fear as a kicking force, it initiates negative responses; some of which can be easily explained while some are very complex and difficult to explain. These responses might be called instinctive reactions.

The prevalent examples that depict fear is the problem of marketing contact lenses in African countries, the sale of this was unwholesomely welcomed despite of the accrued advantages. People defaced the idea of putting a "glass" directly attached to their eye bulbs, because they ignorantly believed that it causes blindness and that they even feel disgusted for seeing people using contact lenses. Another good example is the poor acceptance of oral contraceptive pills to institute family planning; families negate the concept because they perceived that it would lead to permanent sterility.

Viewing it from another dimension, it is people's belief that service men are thieves. The stomach of an owner of an Automobile quakes when he sees an Auto mechanic approaching his car, or when an electronic service man shakes his head. They get a queasy feeling in the pit of the stomach when he says that the set has to come out and get to his repair shop. These feelings are perfectly cemented in the mind of customer. Furthermore the customers also feel that serviceman will discharge his service unscrupulously and dubiously by changing good parts and replacing them with defective ones from his "Junk shop" to deceive customer and make money at his own expense.

The fundamental factor in the aforementioned examples is the fact that potential buyers are turned off even before they actually evaluate the product or meeting the serviceman. Human, being rational being will not just act negatively without any strong reason that has conditioned his mind against products and services. Obviously unless something can be done to soften the negative reactions or assuage fear, sales will continue to suffer. A clear phenomenon said, "whatever goes up, must come down" the problems of innate fear have to be addressed by the marketers, especially with the products that will lend themselves to changes. The marketing tool for this task is "guarantee", it helps but interactive marketing will play a vital role in rekindling the lost image in the mind of customers. The best

strategy for the company is to develop and train the direct contact personnel on customer orientation. Although it is unusual for a serviceman not to find that an additional part or service is necessary upon opening up the defective areas, in this situation the service provider should inform the owners of the defective items as early as possible and get their approval before going ahead with the repairs that is beyond what they originally agreed upon. In order to placate the like manner situation the service man should secure the approval of the owner before replacing the defective ones with the new parts. Similarly the repairman should always return all defective parts to the owner, although the owner may say "throw them away" but at least, the provider displayed an impression of being scrupulously honest.

* Fear of new product. Naturally many people have a strong tendency to find fault with all new concepts and new products, and they will raise negative attitude towards their introduction, and if possible kill them at the embryonic stage without witnessing any sign of growth. Apparently, the fear that such product is a nuisance and might even create a source of health hazard to their wellbeing. Hence it will result to demarketing the product at the introductory phase. For example the introduction of Teflon coated cooking utensils was disbelieved and then avoided as dangerous to use although the product was admirably suited to in-store display and demonstration.

Furthermore, the early advent of coloured Television set generated a measurable degree of fear in the people for they radically developed an impression that the slightest ultra violent rays emanating from the screen was dangerous to health, because this could cause glycoma and end up in permanent blindness.

A bank depositor that was given a Pass-book as a legal proof or evidence of contract between the depositor and the banker, where the entries of the depositors saving were done manually, apparently he developed a negative impression that such bank is unrealistic, since manual entry can be manipulated at any given time, and as a result the inherent fear hindered the good patronage of the bank. In order to alleviate these predicaments marketers should mapped out a number of strategies to address fear and doubts surrounding new products that will enhance customer satisfaction and indirectly beneficial to

the marketers. Thus, the most effective strategy is the "free sample," because psychologically, when a product can be touched, tasted, smelled and operated, these practices give the potential users the opportunity to try the product and this may even reduce cognitive dissonance. Eventually may ginger the customer to develop a strong interest and desire to have the product.

Industrial equipment or costlier products can be offered on trial basis or with a money back guarantee. Suppose the new product is electronics, getting it into his house or office for trial under normal conditions will convince the potential customer of the advertised product qualities.

A serious barrier arises when a big purchase is being anticipated since a final buying decision calls for careful consideration before taking a final step (Ball, 1986), when customers are in such dilemma a marketer could help by translating price into value (Jerome, 1987). Hence the core value of the product should be emphasized in order to win the customers and position the product in their minds. Furthermore, it is the marketer's task to uncover the pressing needs, hiding under every product and to sell product benefits not features, so that sales would be consummated.

* The strong heart breaker called conf-usion inhibits sales. It is quite easy to swamp the shoppers with an array of products and lose the sales. But in situation where a shopper is facing limited or extensive response problem solving becomes confused, he will be making purchase decisions in the air, and at the end he shall not be able to concretize the purchase decision (Newman, 1977). Considering the dilemma of a woman buying shopping product like perfume, she smells various scents in the product class before making a purchase decision. The saleslady sprays on her arm the first scent, another and then another scent. Considering the nature of perfume by the time she has tested four or more scents, the olfactory senses became confused and additional samples will definitely confuse her the more. The customer being deeply confused will restlessly be moving around the store like a barbers wheel. In order not to lose the sales the saleslady is advised, firstly to discuss with the customer her perfume experience paying attention to the product of her own interest, and the price ranges. After the customer has focused on a particular perfume then the sales lady could offer

samples.

Trained sales lady could successfully carry out this task, because she has to disseminate pertinent information to the potential customer laying more emphasis on the importance of products attributes. Similarly the strategy could also be applied to products like camera, film and other products that are selectively distributed.

Customers want quality products but unless they could be fed with sound reasons to convince them for paying higher price, they will prefer buying low price product. However, the opportunity for marketer is to stress the product quality and its unique features, especially the core product and convert it to tangible product by tangibilizing the intangibles. It is apparent that marketers should disseminate an in-depth and pertinent information about the product to the customer by so doing, the marketer is helping them to cope with dissonance. Marketing experts (Kotler, 2000; Richard, 1989) stated that customers should be educated by the salesman i.e. the customer contact officer in the organization, he is expected to convey the required information and clearly point out product benefit to both the potential and realized customers.

The best strategy to resolve the problem is to place "tell all label" on the items. The "tell all label" must point out the unique advantages of the product, it must precisely describe various attributes of the products it must carry information on: who made it, where and a when it was made, the expiration date, and how to safely use the product. Above all label should be able to speak by its own and promote the product, but where the product is complex or sophisticated customers will need more information and as a result salesman should be ready to educate the customers in order to reduce their purchase risk.

How can the problem be abated? People who are resilient to changes cannot be pushed hard or fast, otherwise they will virtually fight back. But human, been rational beings, they are amenable to constructive suggestions, and social changes; hence the salesman has to sympathize and condicent with the old, and apparently introducing the new version, preferably not an extreme variation of the old product. The salesman explains carefully while the new product is superior to the old fashion and gives reasons to support its superiority. More over after winning their interest and desire he can now recommend

the new product to the potential customer for acquisition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sequel to the discussion the author does simply recommend to both the actual and potential marketers the strategies that will change the attitudes of the customers. Ben (1980) looked at attitude as the positive or negative evaluations of people, object, ideas or events. The attitude of people either positive or negative has basically three major influences: social influence or influence of other people; cognitive influence or the influence of our reasoning and logic or influence of our own behaviour. Which jointly mold our earliest attitudes and may even change the attitude for life.

Unsatisfied customer who suffered from the axe of unscrupulous serviceman will certainly develop a negative attitude towards serviceman and this unfavourable impact will stereoly reach the potential customers, which may eventually kill the growth of service marketing in Nigeria.

The task of transforming negative attitude to positive attitude for the benefit of marketers could be carried out through effective and persuasive communications. However, effective communication should have the characteristics of credibility, attitude, cognitive dissonance, realized, logic attractiveness and simplicity. Communication with high credibility, reputation for impartial, un bias and honesty produce more attitude change than low communication (Zimbardo, 1997). A campaign can be designed to minimize the possible latent negative forces. Although each product requires its unique combination of tactics, but whatever tactics to adopt should be accompanied with a follow up programme that will enhance customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction could be enforced through augmented services in order to gain their confidence, loyalty and become the font of good will for the future.

Time is ripe to give service marketing a break to move forward through absolute honest and sincerity in dealing with customers. In congruous the fortunate serviceman has the potential to personal economic growth, if he rekindles the light of prudence and keep the flag of service

marketing flagging for prosperity. But so doing the chain of growth and development will continue to ginger economic development.

KEYWORDS Perception. Fear. Anxiety. Attitudes. Confusion.

ABSTRACT The paper focussed on the psychological barriers that had hindered the growth and development of service marketing in the developing countries, from Nigerian perspective. Service marketing is a noted laudable profession if the provider takes cognizance of customer satisfaction. The study examined the barriers; fear, anxiety, confusion, perception and the attitudes of customers' to these barriers. The study revealed that these barriers are deterrent to the growth of service marketing because they kick off customers from patronizing the offers. The negative human attitudes to services and service providers had become a 'cancer' that is being passed from generation to generation. The perception of customers is that servicemen are thieves, carrying out their functions unscrupulously, deceiving customers in order to make their money at the expense of customers. Customers in the developing countries resented new services because of confusion, not knowing the significant differences between the old and new services. The question now is who will soften the mind of customers and change their negative attitudes towards service marketing to positive ones. This task could be carried out through effective and persuasive communications. Customer satisfaction should be enforced through augmented services. Service providers should execute their offer with prudence and honesty.

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