

Customer Service, a Competitiveness Factor for Operations: Its impact to the Buying Behavior of Clients in selected Medium Sized Supermarket in Gudaibiya, Kingdom of Bahrain

Dr Marluna Lim Urubio

Planning and Development Director, Faculty – College of Administrative and Financial Sciences

AMA International University Bahrain, Kingdom of Bahrain

Member, Bahrain Management Society

Member, Philippine Institute of Industrial Engineers

Abstract: The research is about the customer service experience and how it affects the buying behavior of customers of Aswaq Al Awafi and Gulfmart. The research confirmed that there are 3 important aspects of customer service which are staff behaviour, expertise on products and service information and staff availability. The buying behaviour of the customers is influenced by how good or how bad their experiences are. These three factors lead to customer satisfaction. Findings also emphasized the necessity to ensure that staff or employees meeting customers in the front line on a daily basis should develop a successful relationship with the customers. Buying behaviour is influenced by the customer service experience. A good customer experience promotes positive result for the supermarket as they continue to come back for their needs even after 2 years of good experience. However, a bad customer service will drive customers away and will result to negative image as they tend to share their bad experiences with other people. Overall, customer service affects buying behaviour which at end results to customer loyalty.

Keywords: Staff availability, staff behaviour, buying behaviour, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, product and service expertise.

I. INTRODUCTION

Every company's number one objective is sustainability of existence in the market. Sustainability is attained when the company can stay in the market and be competitive in the industry. Competitiveness means how effectively an organization meets the wants and needs of customers relative to others that offer similar goods or services [1].

Customer service is the assistance or support accorded to the customers by the company. Customer service does not mean giving the support only during the time customers are buying the product or getting the service. It is both before, during and after customers purchase the product or take the service. Many articles have said that maintain existing customers is a lot cheaper than to finding new ones who would love to buy your product or take the service [2].

This research intends to study the impact of customer service as a competitiveness factor for operation in selected medium-sized supermarket in Gudaibiya,

Kingdom of Bahrain, specifically Gulf Mart and Aswaq Al Awafi. Specifically, it intends to answer the following questions: (a) How do the clients rate the customer service performance of the supermarket in terms of staff behaviour, expertise on products and service behaviour and staff availability, (b) what is the buying behaviour of the respondents as affected by their customer service experiences? (c) what is the relationship between buying behaviour and customer service and (d) what is the long-term impact of customer service experience in buying decisions?

The following objectives that are expected to be met after the conduct of this research:

1. To know how staff behaviour, expertise of product and service information and availability of staff are viewed and rated by the customers.
2. To understand how customer loyalty is being affected by the customer service experience.

3. To see the long term effects of the customer service experience on buying decisions.
4. To know the relationship between loyalty of the customer and customer service.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher used descriptive – evaluative approach in order to answer the questions stated in the statement of the problem.

Descriptive research is an effective tool when the researcher wants to incorporate the accumulation of facts, data and figures [3]. The interpretative and explanatory style of the technique enabled the researcher to process the raw data and later develop the information that led to conclusions and recommendations.

Under this method, clients/customers of Aswaq Al Awafi and Gulf Mart are the respondents to be given questionnaires as they enter the supermarket or as they leave or even while they are doing their activity in the supermarket. This method helped the researcher gather opinions of the respondents relative to the services provided by the supermarket staff.

Descriptive method was also applied to gather the information regarding the focus of the research [4].

The data used to complete this research will be obtained through the use of a validated questionnaire that will lead to answer the specific questions mentioned in the statement of the problem. The questionnaire is validated through using the questionnaire with the some clients of Universal Food Corporation and GSF Supermarket, which are in the same business as Gulf Mart and Aswaq Al Alwafi.

The main tool for the data gathering and collection in this research will be the questionnaire devised to evaluate how staff behaviour, expertise on products and service and staff availability are viewed by clients. The questionnaire will see how customer service experience can affect the buying behaviour in terms of loyalty and the long term impact of customer service experience in buying decisions. At the end, the questionnaire will determine the relationship between the loyalty of the customer and customer service?

Using a questionnaire is an effective way for data collection especially when the information the researcher wants to collect is about perception, attitudes, opinion and behavior.

The questionnaire that has been used has been divided into 5 parts to be as follows:

1. Part 1 – Data about store visit and purchase amount
2. Part 2 – Customer Performance Assessment
3. Part 3 – Assessment on Buying Behavior and Customer Service Experience
4. Part 4 – Other related questions

The questionnaire that has been adapted for the research has multiple choice questions and Likert Scale questions[5].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Rating on the customer service performance of the supermarket in terms of Staff behavior.

The first statement of the problem is to know how clients are rating on customer service performance of the supermarket in terms of staff behaviour. With the 1000 respondents coming equally from both supermarkets namely Aswaq Al Awafi and Gulfmart, Table 1 shows that respondents rated the staff behavior to be excellent (4.595) The sector of supermarket in US showed a drop in its ratings and one of the reasons for the said drop is its ratings slide in a number of categories, including staff courtesy and helpfulness [6].

b. Rating on the customer service performance of the supermarket in terms of expertise on products and service information.

Another part of statement of the problem No. 1 is knowing how clients are rating on customer service performance of the supermarket in terms of staff expertise on products and service information . Based from Table 2, respondents coming from both supermarkets namely Aswaq Al Awafi and Gulfmart, shows that they rated the staff expertise on product and service information to excellent (4.597).

A research done by Nguyễn Thị Thu Thương, showed that customer service performance specifically on staff expertise in explaining the product details is very important for customer satisfaction along with loyalty of the customers [7]. The

article had important conclusion that, product, price, personal interaction of staff with customers and overall convenience experienced in the supermarkets have a positive influence on customer satisfaction. [8].

a. Rating on the customer service performance of the supermarket in terms of staff availability

The last part of statement of the problem No. 1 is knowing how clients are rating on customer service performance of the supermarket in terms of staff availability. Based from Table 3, respondents coming from both supermarkets namely Aswaq Al Awafi and Gulfmart, shows that they rated the staff availability to excellent (4.61).

A research done by Ram Mohan, had conclusion that staff availability and responsiveness to enquiry, Staff assistance during purchase, Price of products, Billing procedure time, Correctness of billing, Quality of products, Promotion schemes and offers are significant factors in customer satisfaction, especially in retail supermarkets [9].

1. What is the buying behavior of the respondents as affected by their customer service experiences?

Based on Table 4, it can be seen that a buying behavior will be influenced by good customer experience. It will make the respondents come back to the supermarket where they have experienced a positive encounter with the staff. Respondents from Aswaq Al Awafi and Gulfmart gave a mean of 4.53 which has a descriptive meaning of strongly agree.

Respondents from Aswaq Al Awafi and Gulfmart also strongly agreed with a score of 4.72 when asked whether they will tell others, to include their friend, relatives and acquaintances about their good experience with the supermarket. In addition, respondents from Aswaq Al Awafi and Gulfmart strongly agreed with a score of 4.49 that they will purchase more from the same supermarkets where they had good customer experience. In fact, they will continue to buy even after 2 years of their good customer experience as shown in the mean of 4.77. Meanwhile, they also strongly agreed that even after 2 years of bad experience, they will still not come back anymore to the same supermarket as manifested by the mean of 4.75.

Kate Legget in her article written in Zendesk, emphasized that happy customers will always end up to be loyal customers. From her article, she added that it is not only customer satisfaction that is the result of good customer experience, but more so, the loyalty coming from these customers. [10].

The article stressed that it is very important not to make the customers frustrated and dissatisfied because customers are the best source of marketing and promotion for any product or company.

In another article on Customer Experience and Loyalty, it stressed that in the very near future, customer service will be the next brand differential which will overtake price and product. [11]. This means that the factors being considered for loyalty will be shifted from the traditional product, price and quality factor to customer service experience factor as a reason for loyalty.

What is the relationship between buying behaviour and customer service?

To answer the question on relationship between buying behaviour and customer service, the hypothesis is rejected for the staff availability with a Pearson correlation value of .100 as reflected in Table 5. This means that staff availability is significantly related to the buying behaviour of the respondents. It is something that can influence them to consider visiting a particular supermarket. On the other hand, the hypothesis is accepted for staff behaviour and expertise on product and service information. The table shows a value of .038 and .051 respectively.

1. What is the long-term impact of customer service experience in buying decisions?

- From Table 6, it can be seen 808 respondents (80.8%) out of the total population of 1000 said that the loyalty to the supermarket will be affected by the kind of customer service that they received while 192 (19.2%) said otherwise.

From Table 7, 55.5 % of the respondents said that there are several reasons that can be attributed for a good customer service experience like having any problem or issue solved quickly and not having to go from one person to

another just to address the problem and issues about the product or service. Another factor which they deem important is having nice staff to assist them

On the other hand, there are some factors that will lead to experiencing bad customer service as shown in Table 8. It included the following: problems and issues were passed on from one person to another and it was not at all resolved. Also, another factor is not having accommodating staff. There are 664 respondents or 66.4% which agreed that all of the above mentioned factors are really to be taken seriously by the management of any supermarket if they do not want customers to be unhappy and unsatisfied with their customer service efforts.

A bad customer experience will drive away customers. As reflected in Table 9, 538 respondents or 53.8% of Aswaq Al Awafi and Gulfmart respondents both strongly agreed that in case they have experienced a bad customer experience in any supermarket or any store, they will stopped buying from the supermarket and even switched to another branch or supermarket and even recommend to others not to buy from the same.

In the same way that if they had a very good customer service experience, then they will continue to buy even more from the supermarket and recommend to their friends and relatives as agreed with 36.1% of respondents as shown in Table 10.

From an article by Chuck Ciarlo, it discussed that customers are more likely to buy from a company where they receive good customer service. In the same way that stop dealing with those who let them down. It is also interesting to know that in every type of business, people are affected by a positive or negative experience. Whether it is a good or bad experience, it will be result to a long-term impact of that lone encounter. From the same article it was reported that almost 25% of respondents stayed with a company that treated them right for two years while nearly 40% stayed away from a company that did not deliver acceptable service.

A conclusion from the article revealed that a positive or negative customer service experience will affect not only the existing and potential customers as well. Social media has opened up a number of channels for consumers to voice their displeasure, or to recommend a product or service to their friends.

Table 11 shows which among the staff behaviour, expertise on product and service information and availability of staff is liked most by the respondents. 58.1% of the respondents considered the expertise while 27.6% of the respondents said it is the availability of the staff and 14.3% said it is the staff behavior. In any case all these 3 factors are considered very important.

IV. CONCLUSION

Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter presents the summary of findings that were taken after processing and interpreting the data, after which the conclusions are drawn and eventually, coming up with the recommendations to further improve the incentive programs and its implementation.

1. On the ratings of the clients on the customer service performance of the supermarket in terms of staff behaviour , expertise on products and service behaviour and staff availability.

The respondents rated the staff behaviour, Expertise on products and service behaviour and Staff availability to be excellent. They appreciated that the staff from both the supermarkets under research (Gulfmart and Aswaq Al Awafi) are courteous and helpful. This leads to the conclusion that these 3 factors are important factors that can lead to customer satisfaction. A research by Oguz Turkay of the Sakarya University and Serkan Sengul of Abant Izzet Baysal University in Turkey indicated that it is important that a successful customer - staff relationship leads to customer satisfaction [12]. The research emphasized the necessity to ensure that staff or employees meeting customers in the front line on a daily basis should aim to develop a successful relationship with the customers.

It is therefore recommended that supermarkets where the level of customer is high should invest on training their staff to further improve expertise on the products and /or services that they offer and further ensure that a good number of staff are available to assist the needs of the customers.

2. On the respondents' buying behaviour as affected by their customer service experiences.

Results of the data clearly indicated that good customer service leads to positive outcome for the business as clients strongly agreed about doing themselves the marketing through advertising the supermarket to their friends and relatives. Amitava Kundu in his research emphasized that buying behavior is greatly affected by a positive or good customer service. In fact, it even determines the longevity of customer relationship [13]. This would mean that the better is the experience remembered by the customers, the longer the time they will stick to patronizing your products and services

In conclusion, buying behaviour can be expected to be influenced by the customer service experience. Customers will continue to buy even in big bulks with increased frequency from the supermarket even years after having the good experience. In the same way that customers will continue to avoid the supermarket where they were not able to get good customer service. It is therefore recommended that supermarkets should ensure that all staff who are in contact with the clients to always display good manners and ethics as they deal with the customers.

3. On relationship between buying behavior and customer service.

Based from the results of the survey filled up by 1000 respondents, among the 3 factors of customer service, it is only the staff availability which is significantly related with the buying behaviour while the staff behaviour and expertise is not related at all. It is concluded that customers pay more attention to the availability of staff that can assist them during their visit in the supermarket. Having this result, it is recommended that supermarkets should ensure that their staff are available to assist customers anytime. The breaktime should be scheduled among staff so that there will be staff that will be available the entire store hours.

In some where there are peak periods, it is recommended that part-time staff maybe hired although this may not be applicable in every company. By hiring part time staff, the supermarket can address the need to assist customers. This is easier to implement since people who work on this set up are already used to working on different schedule, different shifts on different days. [14].

4. The long-term impact of customer service experience in buying decisions

Data shows that the long term impact of the customer service can be translated in the form of loyalty of customers. There are consumer reports surveys whose results show that around 91 percent of its customers will not do business with the same company for the second time if you botch during the first encounter [15]. This loyalty can be manifested from the frequency and longevity of visits which the customers are doing. It is concluded that maintaining old customers are much more easier than winning new ones and therefore any company should always take care of its customers through excellent customer service.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researcher is expressing her great appreciation to the following people, who have been instrument in making this research possible and workable.

First, to the respondents whom I disturbed while they were doing their grocery activities at Aswaq Al Awafi and Gulf Mart.

Second, to **Dr Romiro Bautista** who is the researcher's colleague and friend, for his assistance in doing the SPSS of the data. Without his help, chapter 4 and 5 cannot be completed,

Fourth, to the researcher's family who serves as inspiration in all the researcher's undertaking,

Lastly, to God Almighty, for the strength and guidance, motivation to complete the research despite lots of tensions and pressures.

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BIOGRAPHY

Dr Marluna Lim Urubio completed her Bachelor of Science in Management and Industrial Engineering from Mapua Institute of Technology while she took her Master in Engineering Management with specialization in Manufacturing Management from Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila.

She earned her Ph.D in Technology Management from the Technological University of the Philippines. Her dissertation is about the solar technology implementation in the Philippines. She has taught in Mapua Institute of Technology as well as De La Salle University Dasmarias where she was Dean of Engineering, Architecture and Technology. She presented lectures in Widya Mandala Catholic University in Surabaya Indonesia and has a wide industry exposure in semiconductor industry.

Currently, she is an Assistant Professor in the College of Administrative and Financial Sciences and concurrently the Head of Planning and Development Office at AMA International University Bahrain

Table 1: Rating on the Staff Behaviour

Staff Behaviour		Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1	Staff greeted you and offered to help you.	4.62	Excellent
2	Staff was friendly and cheerful throughout.	4.58	Excellent
3	Staff was courteous throughout.	4.58	Excellent
Grand Mean		4.595	Excellent

Table 2:

Expertise on products and service behaviour		Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1	Staff showed knowledge of the products or services.	4.52	Excellent
2	Staff answered your questions	4.68	Excellent
3	Staff offered pertinent advice.	4.66	Excellent
4	Overall, how would you rate the customer service?	4.54	Excellent
Grand Mean		4.597	Excellent

Table 3: Rating on Staff Availability

Staff availability		Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1	Staff is available in a timely manner.	4.64	Excellent
2	Staff is ready to assist anytime	4.67	Excellent
3	At anytime that you need assistance, a staff is available	4.53	Excellent
Grand Mean		4.61	Excellent

Table 4: Buying Behavior Of The Respondents As Affected By Their Customer Service Experiences?

Buying Behavior		Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1	I will continue to come back to the store where I have a good customer service interaction.	4.53	Strongly Agree
2	I will tell others about my good customer service experiences.	4.72	Strongly Agree
3	I will purchase more after my good customer service experience	4.49	Strongly Agree
4	I continue to avoid buying even after 2 or more years of my bad customer service experience.	4.75	Strongly Agree
5	I will continue to buy even after 2 years or more of my good customer experience.	4.77	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean		4.653	Strongly Agree

Table 5: Relationship Between Buying Behaviour And Customer Service

Customer Service Experiences		Buying Behaviour	Decision
Staff Behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.038	Accept Ho
	p-value	.225	
Staff availability	Pearson Correlation	.100*	Reject Ho
	p-value	.001	
Expertise on products and service information	Pearson Correlation	.051	Accept Ho
	p-value	.107	

*significant at .01 level

Results:

Staff behaviour is not related with their buying behavior.

Staff availability is significantly related with their buying behavior

Expertise on products and service behavior is not related with their buying behavior.

Table 6 : Loyalty and Customer Service

Will your loyalty with us be affected by the kind of customer service that we have?	Frequency	Percent
1. Yes	808	80.8
2. No	192	19.2

Table 7: Ranking of Factors that affect Good Customer Service

What specific action gave you a good customer service experience?	Frequency	Percent
1. The problem or issue I had was solved quickly	39	3.9
2. The person who helped me was nice.	91	9.1
3. The problem was resolved in one interaction, no passing around with multiple people	127	12.7
4. The outcome came as per my expectation.	188	18.8
5. All of the above	555	55.5

Table 8: Ranking of Factors that Result to Bad Customer Service

What specific action gave you a bad customer service experience?	Frequency	Percent
1. I had to explain my problem to multiple people.	10	1.0
2. The person I dealt with is not accommodating.	36	3.6
3. It took a long time to resolve my problem	62	6.2
4. My problem was never resolved.	228	22.8
5. All of the above	664	66.4

Table 9: Effects of Bad Customer Service

With the specific bad customer service experience,	Frequency	Percent
1. I stopped buying from the company/branch.	33	3.3
2. I switched to different company/branch to buy the same product	87	8.7
3. I was less likely to consider buying from them in the future.	121	12.1
4. I recommended other not to buy from the company/branch	219	21.9
5. All of the above	538	53.8

Table 10: Effects of Good Customer Service

With the specific good customer service experience,	Frequency	Percent
1. I purchased more from the company/branch	265	26.5
2. I recommended my friends to buy from the company/branch	374	37.4
3. All of the above	361	36.1

Table 11: Staff Behaviour, Expertise on Product and Service Information and Staff Availability as factors for Customer Service

What did you like best about our customer service?	Frequency	Percent
1. Staff (courteous, friendly and cheerful)	143	14.3
2. Expertise on product and service information	581	58.1
3. Availability of the staff to assist customers	276	27.6