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CUSTOMER AND MARKETING OF SERVICES

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Introduction

Marketing as a concept is concerned not only with the selling of Physical Products like soap, toothpaste, music system, cars etc. It is also connected with the marketing of service. In the recent years there has been a phenomenal growth of service industries. The 1990's have witnessed dramatic changes occurring at the market place, be it for Products or services. The changes are visible in the form of the emergence of the service economy, rising affluence, drastic changes in the life style pattern, sharp changes in the demography set up and radical revolution in communication technology.

The Customer today is more demanding with the growing affluence, more leisure and the growing complexity of goods and services, marketers are seeking ways to build a proper fruitful and functional relationship with their customers. The nature of service industry is quite different from that of marketing of Products. The service industries are quite varied. It will include the government sector, the private nonprofit sector and the private business sector. The government sector firms offering services include-Courts, Employment Bureau, Airlines, Hospitals, Financial Institutions, Defence Service, Railways, Police and Fire Departments, Post Offices, certain regulatory agencies, school and colleges, Insurance companies. The private nonprofit sector will include museums, various charity institutions, religious institutions, educational institutions, and hospitals. And the private business sector include-airlines, financial institutions, law firms, consultancy firms, advertising firms, hotels, communication companies, real estate, plumbing repair companies and so on.

Services Marketing Concept

Philip Kotler has defined service as any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Its production may or may not be tied to a physical product.

In case of service also, there has to be a match between the offering of services as conceived by its conceptualisers and the Perceptions and expectations as seen from the customer's point of view. From the customer's point of view it must be clearly visible how the services offered by the particular organization is positively differentiated from the competitive services, if any in terms of services outcome, customer benefits and value to customer.

Objective of the study

- To know the concept of Marketing Services.
- To know the advantages of Marketing of Services.
- To study the perception of consumers towards Marketing of Services.

Hypothesis of the study

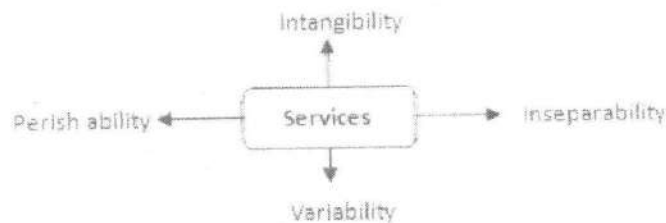
- How Services marketing is different from the marketing of Products.
- Why is it necessary for firms to market their services?
- How firms offering services do market segmentation and how do they select the various marketing mix elements.

Research Methodology

For preparing the paper secondary data helped in understanding the prior work on the same or related topic and also used the Marketing Journals Books on Marketing, Websites etc.

Nature and characteristics of 'service'

Services have four characteristics that must be considered while designing marketing programs.



Intangibility:

Services are intangible. Services cannot be seen, felt, tried out, tasted, heard, touched or smelled before they are purchased or bought. For instance, a lady visiting a beauty parlour cannot be sure of the outcome before the purchase. Similarly, a patient visiting the doctor with an ailment cannot know the outcome before availing the services of the doctor. The Purchaser or buyer has to have confidence and faith in the service provider. At times, some services are more tangible than others: a lawyer's advice is more intangible than a stay in the hotel room, though in both cases the purchaser of the service does not receive permanent evidence of a service.

- Intangible Service
- Quality Perceptions.
- Value Perceptions.
- Organisation or Institution or Industry
- Brand name (here it must be noted that a successful brand, for the customer will be one that is identified as having relevant and unique added values which matches closely with their expectations and needs.)
- Corporate Image.
- Reputation.
- Other users (buyers of services) recommendations.

Inseparability:

With Conventional Products, the making of the Product and its sale precede consumption. That is, a physical product will exist whether or not its source is Present. In case of a service, it is inseparable from its source, whether it will be a person or thing. With Services the making of the service and its Consumption frequently occur at the same time.

For example of this kind of inseparability is a 'live' musical performance by 'Ustad Zakir Hussain', which is also produced and consumed, at the same time. Ustad Zakir Hussain and the other supporting musicians may practice their performances, but on the night of the concert they are producing or offering their service in front of the audience. Here also the audience can be by the service offered by Zakir Hussain only to the amount of time he will give to his concert.

Variability:

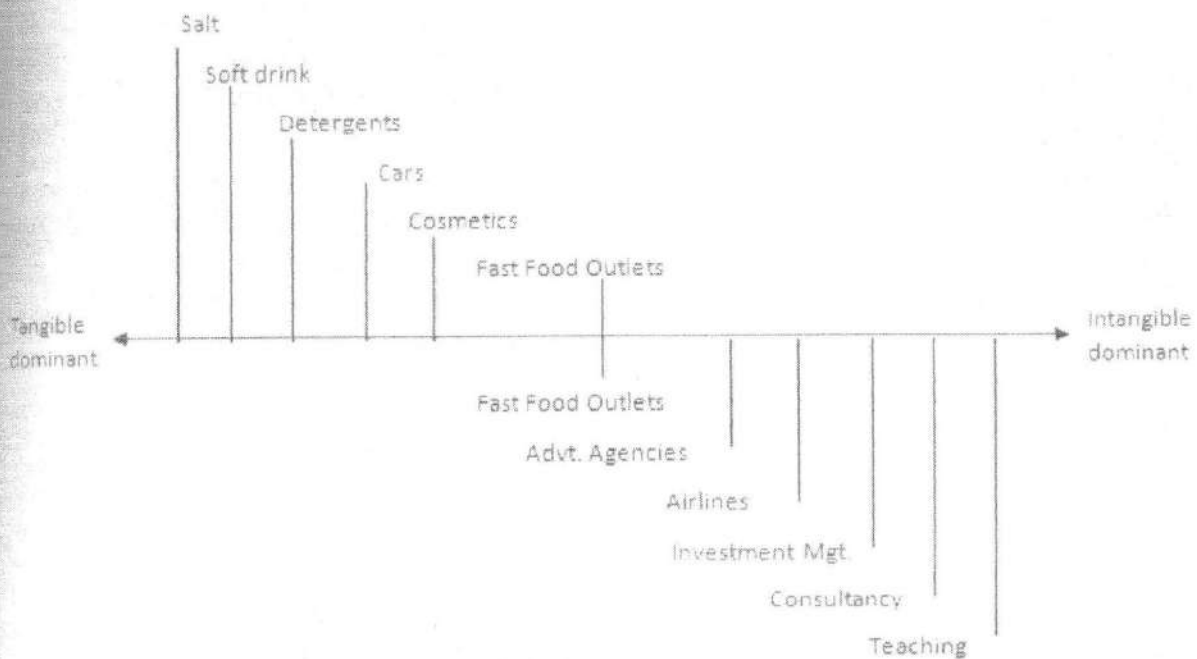
The inseparability of services means that it is difficult to standardize them. Thus Services are highly variable, since it depends on the one who provides them and also where and when they are provided. An operation performed by a senior surgeon at the Apollo Hospital is likely to be of a higher quality than one performed by a new or recent surgeon. And added to this, the above senior surgeon's surgical performance or skill will be based on his or her energy and mental set at the time of each operation, Thus this variability of the service quality will depend a lot on the personnel who deliver it. And this service quality, more than the conventional goods, will directly be dependent on the service provider.

Perishability:

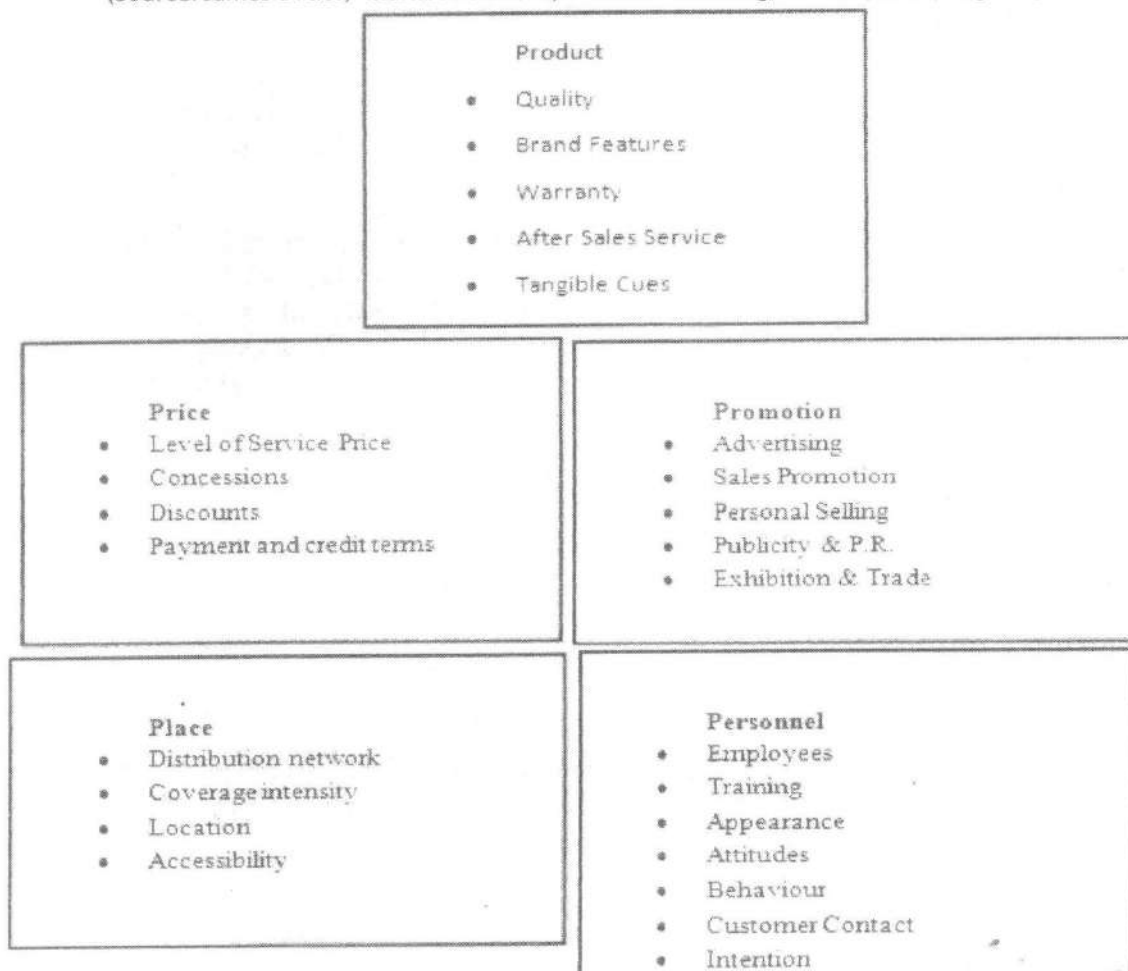
Services, unlike goods cannot be stored. The services can be availed of only at the time of actually receiving it. This is why while making advance hotel room booking, one is required to make a token of advance payment. This means that in case of missed trip or visit, the service value existed only till the time the customer did not turn up.

Where there is a steady demand perishability of service is not a problem, because it will be easy to staff the services in advance. However, when demand fluctuates, the service firms have difficult problem. For instance more public transport buses are required in the morning when it is known as the 'Peak demand time' whereas in the afternoon the demand for these buses is not very heavy in Comparison to the morning rush.

Tangible cues in Product element are Physical indications of Service quality. These are very necessary because of the intangible nature of service.



Tangible and intangible of goods & services according to G.L. Shostack
 (Source: James Butler, 'Market Relations,' Pitman Publishing, London, 1996, Page 68)



Marketing mixes for services

Under product service, the term tangible cues are Physical indications of Product quality. This is very necessary since it is a vital aspect of the service quality. All the elements used by the service organisations is to increase the tangibility of the Product (service) mix in the Perception of the Potential customers. The tangible cues may include the Physical environment in which the services take place, for example the interior décor of a hotel, or the bank Premises etc.

Service Quality

It is difficult for customers to evaluate services as compared to conventional products. It is because of this reason that service providing firms give a lot of thought to the physical environment in which the service is delivered. They try to build up a service image with tangible features. Many such tangible service features are included in the advertising and promotional literature.

Some may argue that service quality means focusing on satisfying customer's needs and in that sense it is not much different from Product Quality which also focuses on satisfying consumer needs. However, service will be intangible and can be experienced by the customer only. This experience or feeling about the service received may vary from customer to customer. So sometimes it becomes difficult for the firm to gauge customer expectations.

Usually firms have been concentrating on the following factors to influence customer expectations. These factors are:

- Assurance
- Reliability
- Tangibles
- Responsiveness
- Empathy

Thus ability of the service providing firm to deliver a quality service will be dependent on identifying the needs of customers. Once these needs are determined it will become easy for the firm to work on the service production and then delivery it.

Conclusion

It will be apt to say that service providers must always develop a marketing plan keeping in mind firm's operating area, its existing and potential customers need and requirement and on all the services they (firm) will be able to provide to the target market.

The Indian Consumer has started setting high standards for service providers. So the clear winners in the service industry in the future will be those who will build category Propositions by doing researches on targeted consumer needs, create these categories, build a brand image and communicate to the target customer as to what can be expected from them-invest aggressively in people, associate culture and infrastructure to deliver the brand promise, and keep the promise, without fail every time.

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