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Rethinking strategies for overcoming challenges in marketing service(s) to customers/clients

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Abstract

Generally, sharp differences exist in applying marketing strategies for marketing goods/products and service(s). Goods/products and services are in two different continuums. While goods/ products are tangibles and therefore the customer/client can straightforwardly determine the quality of the goods/products, the situation is different for marketing service(s). In marketing service(s) the marketing strategies are focused on the intangibility and other inimitable characteristics of service(s). Ultimately, providing value or satisfaction to the customer in terms of service quality is indispensable in service marketing. Using a desk-top review research approach, this article is intended to highlight the challenges in marketing services. The article concludes by proposing recommendations to marketers, practitioners 'and academics in overcoming the challenges of marketing service(s)

Keywords: Differentiation, intangibility, heterogeneity, satisfaction, strategies, service quality

Introduction

The essence of this article is to examine the challenges of marketing services in the marketplace, and to highlight the strategies that could be adopted by marketers and practitioners in overcoming such marketing challenges. Understanding of service (s) and service quality provides an appreciation of what the service firm is presenting in the marketplace, and the type of service (s) the customer expects the service firm to deliver. These two constructs are expanded here. In literature, service (s) and quality constructs are viewed from many angles. Some definitions of service(s) are reviewed here. Scholars Ganesh, Arnord, & Reynolds (2000:65) ^[15] succinctly defined service (s) "as something which can be bought and sold but which cannot be dropped on your feet".

Another definition of services is given as: "Services are economic activities offered by one party to another. Often time-based, performances bring about desired results to recipients, objects, or other assets for which purchasers have responsibility. In exchange for money, time, and effort, service customers expect value from access to goods, labour, professional skills, facilities, networks and systems; but they do not normally take ownership of any of the physical element involved" (Karmarkar, 2004:101) ^[34]. Services have also been described as "intangible, inseparable, variable, and perishable products that normally require more quality control, supplier credibility and adaptability" (Kotler & Keller, 2012: 349) ^[36]. Critical scrutiny of the definitions reveals commonalities in themes such as economic activities, an indication that an exchange of value has occurred between two parties, the buyer (customer) and the seller (service firm). Both parties expect some performance, within a time frame (time-based) with desired results. These definitions also reveal that the customer expects value Grönroos (2000:399) ^[19] from the transaction in terms of the service firm's time, effort, and other inputs in providing the service (Ganesh *et al.*, 2000:65; Karmarkar, 2004:101) ^[34].

However, Prakash & Mohanty (2013:1051) consider services to include "all economic activities whose output is not just a physical product is generally consumed at the time it is produced, and provides added value in forms (with such features as building blocks, which are considered indicators for service quality) that are essentially intangible concerns of its purchaser". Ultimately, the customer's value expectation comes through value-creation elements instead of transfer of ownership (Karmarkar, 2004:101) ^[34]. By contrast with the assertions of Karmarkar (2004:101) ^[34], Grönroos (2000:12) ^[19] considers service(s) from a process conjecture. Grönroos (2000:12) ^[19] argues that service is a progression that results in an almost instantaneous creation and consumption process. This definition seems apposite to

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The airline industry. At every stage of the passengers' service-encounter process, passengers expect Services to be simultaneously produced and consumed (Tope, 2012:62). Whether marketing goods/products or service(s) quality is pivotal to the customer/client.

Literature Review

This review examines key concepts which are antecedent to understanding service marketing and its challenges. These concepts are "quality", and "service quality". In the literature the noun "quality" has a variety of definitions; it cannot be limited to one which is conventionally or universally accepted. Some of these definitions as found in literature are reviewed. Quality is defined by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) 9000 as the "degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfil requirements" (ISO, 2015:1). Scholars (Ng & Ang, 2011: 237; Palm & Wiklund, 2014:1) ^[50] stated that "quality is generally about conformance to standards". However, the quality concept goes beyond conformance to standards, to including other constructs. The Japanese expert in quality, Kaoru Ishikawa, defined quality this way: (1) "Quality and customer satisfaction are the same thing; and (2) quality is a broad concept that goes beyond just product quality to also include the quality of people, processes, and every aspect of the organisation" (Hoyer & Hoyer, 2001:56) ^[28]. In the literature, a recent definition of quality states: "Quality is a dynamic state associated with products, services, and people and environments that meet or exceed expectations and helps produce superior value" (Goetsch & Davis, 2010: 13) ^[16]. Indeed, quality of goods and services is essential in providing value to the customer and keeping the service firm in continuous operation. Accordingly, Goetsch & Davis (2010: 6) ^[16] emphasised the importance of quality by declaring that... "Organisations survive and thrive in a globally competitive marketplace by providing superior value to customers. Achieving organisational excellence is about developing the ability to consistently providing superior value to customers... Superior value has three basic elements: superior quality; superior cost, and superior service". Additionally, in the context of service-management literature, the definition of quality is viewed from four perspectives, namely, the philosophical approach, the technical approach or manufacturing-based approach, the user-based approach, and the value-based approach.

The philosophical approach considered quality identical with natural excellence, e.g. attainment of pre-eminence, achieving attractiveness, or becoming valuable. The technical approach or manufacturing-based quality is measured against set standards to determine variances or defects under a zero-defect policy; this is particularly suitable for mass-production (Prida & Grijalvo, 2008:344; Linder, Schmitt & Schmitt, 2014:867) ^[38]. The user-based approach is taken from the user standpoint, and is based on the premise of the individual customer's perceptions. The customer's assessment is the key determinant of the product's quality, and its conformity to high technical standards. The value-based approach to quality examines quality from a value and price perspective, thus creating synergy interplay between conformance to price, and quality (Prida & Grijalvo, 2008:344) ^[56].

Prior studies provide various definitions of services quality of which some are examined in this study. The American

Marketing Association (AMA) defines service quality as "an area of study that has developed to define and describe how services can be delivered in such a manner as to satisfy the recipient. High-quality service is defined as delivery of service that meets or exceeds customers' expectations" (AMA, 2015:1). Similarly, service quality is generally considered as the customer's opinion of either the weakness or superiority of the services provided by the firm (Wang, Hsu, Lin, & Tseng, 2011:437). The most frequently used definition of service quality is the degree to which a service provision satisfies customer requirements or expectations (Wisniewki, 2001: 380). Additionally, service quality is defined in other literature as "the dissimilarity between customer expectations of service and perceived service (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985:41-50) ^[52].

Some scholars consider customer satisfaction as "a positive post –purchase assessment to which a business is able to meet customers' needs and/exceed their expectations" (De Meyer & Mosert, 2011:80; Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2006:742). In other words, when expectations are exceeded, service is perceived to be of excellent quality, and also surprisingly satisfying, to the pleasure of the customer. However, when expectations are not met, service quality is deemed undesirable. Understanding precisely what customers expect is the most crucial step in defining and delivering high-quality service (Kotler & Keller, 2012:32; Lo, Wu, & Tsai, 2015: 169). In the same vein, service quality has been defined as "a function of the difference between service expected and customers' perceptions of the actual service delivered" (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988:12-40). While these definitions are specific and straightforward in their own right, in literature, other constructs are used by comparing service(s) with physical goods. For example, the reality behind what constitutes service(s) is that services are different from physical goods; and therefore it is important to make the distinction (Schneider & White, 2004:5) ^[58].

Ultimately, from the perspective of the service customer, the crux of the matter is the customers' satisfaction and attainment of value for money. The service delivery and the experience from the customer should be such that the customer would wish to repeat the service encounter with the same service provider. The judgment of the customer apropos of the level of service is crucial to the service encounter. (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988:12-40. Where customers' expectations of service delivery meet or exceed the services delivered, customer will be satisfied, remaining loyal patrons of the service firm. Conversely, if customers are displeased with the service quality delivered by the service firm, customers will explore alternative options. There is the possibility that, by word of mouth, customers will spread their concerns to potential customers about the poor quality of service received from the service firm, which may damage the image of the service firm. Determining what customers require, and measuring service quality, are not easy tasks. However, the SERVQUAL-Gaps model Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1985) ^[52], Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1988) ^[53] has been found by many researchers to be reliable (Shahin, 2006) ^[59]. Indeed, customers are the only adjudicators of service quality, measuring what is wished for or expected against what the customer perceives he or she is receiving (Kotler & Keller, 2012:32) ^[36]. These unique characteristics of service(s) are examined in the following paragraphs.

Unique characteristics of service (s)

Broadly, the distinction between services and physical goods arise from their inimitable characteristics and features. In service management literature, services and goods are categorised using the following inimitable characteristics: intangibility, inability to be inventoried as a service, relative inseparability, relative heterogeneity, simultaneously produced and consumed, perishability, proximity to the customer, and having both technical and functional dimensions of services (Kotler & Keller, 2012:380; Schneider & White, 2004:5; Metters, King-Metters, Pullman, & Walton, 2006:7) ^[46]. These key inimitable characteristics and features of services are now explicated.

Relative intangibility

The first critical characteristic of services is that services are intangible: services cannot be seen, touched, held, or stored in physical form. As a consequence, intangibility of pure services essentially describes processes experienced by the consumer (Wei-Chuan, 2015: 4; Schneider & White, 2004:6; Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2011: 20; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011: 43). For most tangible products the consumer is afforded the opportunity of seeing the product and physically testing the quality and suitability of the product before making a purchase decision.

By contrast, intangible products such as service cannot be touched or seen. The consumer relies on the status of the service firm for efficient service delivery. In respect of intangible products, service firms sometimes have problems in describing the service package because of its intangibility (Coye, 2004:54) ^[9]. For a restaurant, the quality of the meal is as important to customers as the atmosphere. A customer of a bank may perceive and evaluate the services being received in addition to the cheerfulness of the teller and the length of time spent in a queue. Similarly, in a situation in which an audience is enjoying music in a theatre, the music provided by the musicians has no physical form or tangible attribute, yet the quality of the entertainment cannot be touched (Coye, 2004:54; Kotler & Keller, 2012:380) ^[36]. However, Lovelock and Wirtz (2011:37); Schneider & White (2004:6) ^[58] emphasised that not all services are “pure services” because many have both tangible and intangible elements. In respect of a restaurant business, the customer pays for both the physical meal (tangible component) and the (intangible component)—the delivery of the meal and the comfortable environment in which the meal is enjoyed, is part of the purchase price. Similarly, a manufacturer of personal computers sells both the computer hardware (tangible) and the software (intangible) to the customer. This means that, in reality, many products are made up of both tangible goods and intangible delivery experiences (Schneider & White, 2004:7; Wei-Chuan, 2015: 4) ^[64]. Accordingly, the ability to provide service quality delivery depends on the firm’s ability to clearly distinguish between tangible and intangible goods because consumers’ evaluation of intangible service differs from their evaluation of tangible goods Metters *et al.*, (2006:7) ^[46].

Services cannot be inventoried

The second characteristic of service (s) is that services cannot be inventoried. The intangible nature of services makes it impossible for such services to be inventoried. The implication is that customers will either have to be turned

away or wait for the service firm to be ready to deliver the service, there being no inventories to purchase (Metters *et al.*, 2006:7) ^[46].

Simultaneity

The third characteristic of service (s) is the element of simultaneity. Since service (s) cannot be kept in an inventory they are consumed simultaneously. While finished goods may be stockpiled in a storage unit or warehouse, inventory records being used to monitor their movement, the situation is different for service (s) (Wei-Chuan, 2015: 4; Keh & Pang, 2010: 55; Luk & Layton, 2004:36) ^[44]. For example, in the entertainment industry services such as football games, fans have to wait for the match organisers and the players to deliver the services simultaneously; these services are not inventoried. Should a football fan miss the game time, there will be no refund to claim from some inventory. The inability to inventory services requires that service firms develop dynamic pricing, reservations, and promotional techniques in marketing the service to the consumer (Metters *et al.*, 2006:7) ^[46].

Relative inseparability

Literature further explains (the fourth characteristic) that pure services are wholly based on delivery occurring, the production and consumption of the product or service being concurrent (Wei-Chuan, 2015: 4; Keh & Pang, 2010: 55; Kotler & Keller, 2012:381) ^[36]. An example is an orchestral concert producing music which the patrons consume at the time of arrival. The production processing and the consumption cannot be separated: these actions take place simultaneously. As far as pure services are concerned the production and consumption of the service should occur concomitantly. The service cannot be saved (unless the live musical concert is recorded for future use). In view of the inseparability of pure service into discernible parts, it is understandable that quality control checks become a challenge to the service firm, which must ensure that a service is produced without defects. Another challenge for the service firm is to obtain a maximum number of people to consume the service (Keh & Pang, 2010: 55) ^[35].

Relative heterogeneity

The fifth characteristic is that services are heterogeneous. Generally, there are differences between physical goods and services, owing to the heterogeneous nature of services, in contrast with goods which are not heterogeneous in terms of production and delivery. The process by which services are produced and delivered involves an interface between the service personnel and the customer. This may lead to a situation in which no two services will be indistinguishable and produced in the same manner (Prakash & Mohanty, 2011:1051; Wei-Chuan, 2015: 4) ^[64]. Accordingly, diverse customers may have diverse demands that must be met, or service personnel might use various approaches to meet the customers’ demands. A typical example is in a banking environment in which a variety of services may be demanded by customers; service personnel will answer these demands using different methods and approaches. This situation makes the production and the delivery of the service less standardised. The heterogeneity of services is complicated to evaluate, especially when implementing quality controls in advance, guaranteeing consistent standards (Prakash & Mohanty, 2011:1051)

Perishable commodity

The sixth characteristic of a service is that it is considered a perishable commodity. This is based on the argument that, since services cannot be stored, an opportunity for service to either the buyer or the seller of the service is lost forever, if that service is not rendered by the service firm, and the customer does not buy the service. For example, since services cannot be hoarded and are perishable, a lost opportunity may occur if airline seats are unoccupied, a hospital or dentist practice firm is without patients for an hour, or a hotel room is without a guest for a night (Wei-Chuan, 2015: 4; Kotler & Keller, 2012:383) ^[36].

Technical and functional dimensions

The seventh characteristic examines the technical and functional dimensions of service(s). Typically, there is the “how and what” component of service. The “how” component is the technical outcome element of the service, while the “what” component is the functional dimension of the service (Grönroos, 2007:73) ^[23]. The “how” of service concerns the service delivery process itself, e.g. going to a restaurant, ordering a meal, the meal being delivered by the restaurant staff and immediately consumed. That which is delivered is the “what” of the service delivery (e.g. the meal eaten in the restaurant). Both the technical and the functional aspects of the service are important contributors to total service quality perceptions (Luk & Layton, 2004:36) ^[44].

However, over the years’ literature in service marketing and management has been focused on the delivery component side—the functional dimension. The key issue is that there is both the technical side and the functional component of service; this distinction should always be made (Luk & Layton, 2004:36) ^[44].

Non-ownership characteristics of services

The eighth unique characteristic which distinguishes physical goods from services is the transferability of ownership to the customer (Vargo & Lusch, 2004:20) ^[62]. While ownership of physical goods is easily transferable, services are not transferable, which therefore poses marketing and managerial challenges in dealing with services (Lusch & Vargo, 2014:159; Lovelock and Gummesson, (2004:20; Vargo & Lusch, 2004:20) ^[62]. Since services and ownership are not transferable the question is what exactly is being delivered to the customer/client? An answer to this question is that customers are given temporary access to the service firm’s facilities for rental for a period of time, without owning the facilities. Some examples of temporary accessibility include the renting of a hotel room, or an air passenger renting an aircraft seat for a short period to travel to a destination. The temporary rental of the resource by a customer does not constitute transfer of ownership to the customer. Customarily, service firms temporarily allocate their resources to customers for a specific time in exchange for a fee, without transferring ownership of the asset to the customer (Vargo & Lusch, 2004:20) ^[62].

Therefore, existing literature has heightened the challenges posed to marketers in marketing services as a result of the unique characteristics of services (Janawade, Bertrand, Léo, & Philippe, (2015) ^[31] Grönroos, 2000:24. The various characteristics of service(s) as mentioned above makes marketing of services daunting; and therefore the same

marketing strategies cannot be used for both goods and services. Additionally, critical examination of elements of services reveals that services permeate every facet of humanity and influence economic activities in the world. Service firms should appreciate the criticality of services in the economy so as to stimulate the need to provide excellent service quality (Cheng (2013) ^[7]. While excellent service quality may be the keystone in marketing services, there are specific strategies which may be adopted by service firms.

Methods

In writing this article a literature review or desktop research method was adopted. This research method is about reviewing available scholarly works from different sources - including periodicals, books and the internet, articles, discoursed theories which provide empirical results significant to the subject-matter under consideration (Zikmund, Babin, Car, Adhikari, & Griffin 2016). In utilising this method a comprehensive analysis was carried out from the works of the following scholars: (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, (2011) ^[14]; Grönroos (2000) ^[19]; Lovelock & Wirtz (2011); Lovelock and Gummesson, (2004); Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1985) ^[52]; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1988) ^[53], Schneider & White, (2004) ^[58] Wei-Chuan, (2015) among many others. The literature review unearthed various strategies, and are examine in the next section.

Service marketing strategies

Underlying the strategic-service vision of the service firm is the designing of specific service strategies in promoting service quality. In literature, three competitive services strategies were identified by Porter in the 1980s, namely, overall cost leadership, differentiation, and focus (Laudon & Laudon 2016: 129; Gomes, Yasin, Lisboa, & Small, 2014:976; Morosan, 2015:227) ^[45]. Other service - oriented marketing strategies are individualization (Harvey & Turnbull, 2015:311) ^[26] the target market segment strategy, and service marketing mix strategy (Doyle & Stern 2006: 361) ^[5]. These strategies for service marketing are now briefly discussed:

Overall cost leadership

An overall cost leadership strategy requires a well-organised grip on amenities, tight expenditure and operating cost control, combined with a great deal of pioneering technology or know-how. When a service firm positions itself in cost leadership, it becomes the pioneer and pace-setter for less efficient firms in the industry. Low-cost and inefficient firms find it difficult to compete with cost-leader firms. Low-cost firms require high capital equipment investment and aggressive pricing in order to compete (Laudon & Laudon 2016: 129; Gomes *et al.*, 2014:976; Harvey & Turnbull, 2015: 311) ^[26].

Other features of cost leadership are that low-cost customers are in demand because it usually costs less to serve such customers. Certain standardised and routine services such as tax preparation may fall under overall cost leadership, as this task may be conducted at low cost. Cost-leadership strategy firms reduce the personnel element in service delivery, which is convenient and acceptable to the customer (Harvey & Turnbull, 2015: 311) ^[26]. For example, banks provide access to customers at Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), a feature convenient to the customer,

while reducing the operating costs of the bank. Reducing network costs and taking operations offline are some of the measures which may be used under the low-cost leadership strategy (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2011:41) ^[14].

Differentiation

The differentiation strategy concerns ways in which a service firm can uniquely differentiate its services from other competing service firms (Laudon & Laudon 2016: 129) ^[37]. In the global airline industry environment, rivalry is intense. To meet service quality demands of passengers, the services of the airline company must be uniquely differentiated through superior service quality (Yang, Cheng, & Lin 2015:825; Erdil & Yıldız, 2011:1232; Hutt & Speh, 2004: 288) ^[29]. For example, in the airline industry factors which determine passengers' preference for a particular airline are based on choice and differentiation, from the passengers' perspective (Hutt & Speh, 2004:288; Martin, Roman & Espino (2008). Consequently, service firms should attempt to provide unique, superior service quality to differentiate the firm from its competitors (Yang *et al.*, 2015: 825) ^[66]. It is incumbent upon service firms to offer a superior service, recruiting and retaining of customers, while attempting to gain competitive advantage (Erdil & Yıldız, 2011:1232; Wang *et al.*, 2011:420; Yang *et al.*, 2015: 825) ^[66]. The quintessence of a differentiation strategy is the creation of service perceived as inimitable. This may take many forms such as image, brand, technology, dealer network, and other dimensions, with due consideration for cost reduction and intention of broadening the customer loyalty base (Terblanche 2015:200) ^[60]. Additionally, service firms such as airlines may use the following measures to differentiate their services: making the intangible services tangible, customising the standard product, reducing perceived risks, controlling service quality, and paying attention to personnel training (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2011:42; Karatepe & Vatankhah, 2014: 115; Yavas, Karatepe & Babakus, 2011:304).

Once the service market has been defined and analysed the subsequent strategy is to create a positioning concept, -a differential advantage which gives resilient motive for the customer to desire the service (s) of the service firm. The positioning or service concept should be based on the premise of what the customer considers the most essential service attributes, where competitors have failed in providing the potential or actual service expectation to consumers. The positioning or service concept should include superior dependability of the service, quicker response or delivery time, improved work, greater convenience and other features which should all enhance the service provisioning. Communication to the consumer is pivotal in service marketing strategy and the service firm should strategically plan how the designed service (s) will be communicated, delivered and promoted to the customer/client. Other factors to be considered should include facilities, human resources, standards needed for provision of the service (Doyle & Stern 2006: 361) ^[5].

Focus strategy

The focus strategy is based on a plan to serve the targeted segment of the market by addressing customers' particular requirements. The underlying contention about focus strategy is that the firm can serve a restricted market more

successfully or economically than the entire marketplace (Laudon & Laudon 2016: 129; Gomes *et al.*, 2014:987) ^[17]. The strategic vision for service quality by service firms provides the opportunity for aggressive competition; and service firms should find the means of avoiding service failure.

Individualised marketing strategy

In the airline industry differentiation of services is difficult to articulate. According Martin *et al.* (2008:200), in the airline industry it appears that low-cost carriers and legacy airlines have generally adopted the same marketing strategies, thus making it impossible to differentiate between services in the marketplace. Martin *et al.* (2008; 199) are of the view that the traditional cost and differentiation strategies have been switched to many-sided options. Low-cost airlines (LCA) are offering value-added services which passengers are paying for. The legacy airlines can similarly adapt and integrate other services into their traditional offerings, such as drinks, and meals, which are often included in the ticket price (Martin *et al.*, 2008; 199).

Scholars (Morosan, 2015:227; Amadeus, 2011:1; Jainchill, 2012:39) have reckoned that airline revenues are declining as result of the global economic recession, and the high price of fuel. Consequently, airlines should adopt individualised marketing strategies by offering "ancillary" services or new types of services which will boost revenue of the airline, while at the same enriching travellers' experience (Morosan, 2015:227) ^[45].

In order for an airline to offer ancillary services, there is the need to personalise the service: this therefore calls for individualised marketing strategies (Morosan, 2015:227) ^[45]. The main tool for individualisation strategies in offering ancillary services is the mobile phone industry, for the following three reasons: firstly, in most countries mobile phones are ubiquitous, thus providing a means for passengers to conduct purchases while travelling (Zhang, Zhu, & Liu, 2012:1902; Morosan, 2015:227) ^[45]. Secondly, mobile phones may be designed as personalised technologies thus enabling individuals to customise their interaction with the service provider when travelling (Wang, Park, & Fesenmaier, 2012:371). Finally, mobile phones are continuously connected to the Internet; which allows passengers to be open to persuasive marketing messages from service firms (Wang *et al.*, 2012:371).

By identifying the passenger's propensity for valued information through mobile communications, the airline can adopt a strategy, marketing service products to the passengers. This will enhance passengers' travelling experience and perception of the service, while providing monetary benefit to the airline (Morosan, 2015:238) ^[45].

The individualised marketing strategy for service quality by service firms provides the opportunity for aggressive competition.

Target market segmentation strategy

The primary task is for the service firm to define and analyse the market where the service is to be delivered. Essentially, the target market should be dissected into segments in accordance with customers' needs and price sensitivity. The service firm should evaluate the attractiveness of the diverse segment(s) and select the most appropriate option. Consideration should be given to the

size of the market segment, its growth rate, the power of competition, average profit margins, and the fit to the organisation's own current or potential capabilities (Doyle & Stern 2006: 361) ^[5].

Additionally, empirical research is essential with regards to identification of the precise requirements of the clients. The empirical research should focus on satisfying the service quality requirements of the customer/client. The service firm should also research about competitors operating within the same marketplace or segment.

Service marketing mix strategy

The traditional marketing mix which have been the cornerstone of marketing are product, price, place, and promotion. These have never changed over the years. Some marketing professional called these the four (4) P's of marketing mix, and marketing strategies generally are developed around these constructs. While these four (4) P's of marketing mix have generally been effective in marketing products, these constructs apparently are inadequate in marketing services, due to the intangible nature of services. Therefore, three new marketing mix constructs such as people, physical evidence and procedures in delivery the service(s) have been added by marketers, making them, the seven (7) P's of marketing. For example, in delivering service to a client in a restaurant, the client will take into consideration the people factor. All human performers who actively participated in service delivery will impact the client's opinions: specifically, the restaurant employees, and other customers in the service setting. Additionally, the restaurant client will peruse the physical evidence of the restaurant-the facilities. The environment in which the service is delivered is critical to client. Such environment should have some tangible element which will make it possible for the performance and delivery of the service. Furthermore, the client may be interested in the actual procedures, mechanisms, and flow of activities by which the service is delivered—the service delivery and operating systems (Doyle & Stern 2006: 361) ^[5].

Information Technology – a strategic tool for marketing Service (s)

The Customer Relations Management (CRM) system is a critical technology which may be used to enhance service quality delivery (Boland, Morrison, & O' Neill 2002) ^[6]. The CRM system's capability of managing the relationship between a service firm and the customer ensures continuous customer patronage and loyalty. At same time, CRM systems have the capability of identifying the needs of the customer, and satisfying those needs (Kortle & Kerller, 2012:42). Prior studies have listed wide-ranging benefits of CRM in the business environment. The benefit of CRM to a service firm comprises an upturn of revenues and profit growth, cheap marketing cost, concise decision-making as a consequence of better appreciation of the customer's needs, resulting in customer satisfaction and retention, and providing competitive advantage to the service firm (De Meyer & Mostert, 2011:80; Laudon & Laudon 2016) ^[37]. The other benefits of CRM to the customer have been identified, inter alia, to include: maintaining long-standing interactions with the service firm, customers' confidence in the quality of the product or service being presented, and individualization of the product or the service to meet the needs of the customer (Grönroos, 2004:36; Jobber,

2004:798-799; Temporal & Trott, 2001:37).

The advent of the Internet, E-commerce applications, the social media platforms, and mobile communication systems, have strengthened the use of automated and self-managed technologies in service marketing (Laudon & Laudon 2016) ^[37].

Recommendations

Based on the literature review the following strategic recommendations are proposed to marketing practitioners, scholars 'and service providers in overcoming service marketing challenges:

Alignment of service marketing plan and corporate vision

The service firm should aligned its service marketing plan with the corporate vision/mission of the service firm. Irrespective of the adopted service marketing plan designed by the service firm, ultimately the corporate vision/ mission of the firm should be attainable.

Integrated approach

There are innumerable strategies for marketing service. Therefore, service marketers should research and adopt an integrated approach in marketing services in order to win the hearts and minds of potential service clients.

Excellent quality service

This paper recommends that services firms should at all-times provide excellent service to the customer which will at least meet or exceed the expectation of the customer. Prior research has revealed that delivery of service quality in the services' industry is precursor for the survival of service firms because of fierce competition (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1985); Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1988) ^[53], Lovelock & Wirtz (2011); Schneider & White, (2004:6) ^[58] Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, (2011) ^[14]. The ultimate reason the customer is engaging the service firm is to obtain satisfaction and value from the quality of the service. Therefore, the service firm should deliver excellent quality of services to the customer/client.

Tapping into customer loyalty programs

The pre-condition for dedicated customer loyalty is excellent customer service. The underpinning factor driving customer loyalty is customer fulfilment as a consequence of excellent service quality, which leads to an increased customer base for the service firm (Johnson, Sivadas, & Garbarino, 2008:353; Reinartz & Kuma, 2002: 86) ^[57]. In view of the fact that differentiation in the service industry is minimal, service firms rely more on customer loyalty and customer relationship management (CRM) in establishing their unique identity (De Meyer & Mostert, 2011:80) ^[10]. This ultimately leads to attaining competitive advantage, increased customer loyalty, and greater market share (Archana & Subha, 2012: 51; Chen, Hu, & Hu, 2013:1087). Accordingly, it is recommended that service firms should tap into customer loyalty programs as a strategy for retention of customers.

Information Technology Systems in Service Marketing

It is highly recommended that Information technology and communication systems should be incorporated into every service marketing strategies. The Internet and utilisation of E-commerce platforms has transformed commerce and trade

in the last two decades Laudon and Laudon (2016:28) ^[37] in general, and has also influenced the manner in which service quality is being delivered. Virtually most service providers are using the Internet and E-commerce and the social media platforms to market services to customers/clients. Amidst the challenges which some customers face in using technology, the Internet is playing a pivotal role in enabling service providers to deliver services to customers (Edvardsson, Tronvoll, & Gruber: 2011: 327; Geum, Lee, Kang & Park, 2011:128) ^[24]. For example, passengers can browse the Internet, select the best airfare, and purchase a ticket online in the comfort of their homes, unlike in the past when passengers would have to rely solely on airline ticket agents when booking, or making a purchase. Services are multi-dimensional in character, therefore service firms are utilising a variety of competencies including information technology systems (Ojiako 2012:585) ^[49]. Information technology systems drive these competencies, which in effect improve service delivery to the customer/client. Consequently, marketers should utilise information technology systems as strategic tools to market services to clients/customers.

Conclusion

This article has examined the challenges of marketing services in the services industry. The composition of quality and service are contentious issues among academics and practitioners. This is because services differ from products/goods in terms of characteristics, production, delivery, and consumption. While services are intangible, product/goods are tangible. However, some services have elements of both characteristics. In view of the unique characteristics of services, marketers should design different strategies in order to satisfy the requirements of customers/clients, while standing up to competition from competitors. The criticality and the importance of services in the economy of a country cannot be overemphasised- contributing greatly to the overall economic performance of the country (Cheng (2013) ^[7]). While challenges may exist in marketing service(s) because of their uniqueness, marketers and practitioners may adopt some the recommendations proposed in this article to effectively market service(s) to customers/clients. The extensive narratives from the examined literature have underscored the need for service quality by service firms. However, some service firms, may have challenges in providing excellent service quality to customers/clients; nevertheless, excellent service quality delivery should be embraced as a strategic tool for competitive advantage. Service marketers must confront the organisation's challenges and adopt strategies to overcome these challenges as examined in this article.

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