Service Excellence in Marketing for Firms: Strategies and Initiatives

Pratap Chandra Mandal, Indian Institute of Management, Shillong, India

ABSTRACT

Innovation and differentiation are imperative for companies to sustain competition. Innovation and differentiation are possible more in services than in physical products. It is difficult to imitate differentiation incorporated in services. The study discusses the various marketing strategies adopted by service companies and the roles played by service profit chain. Service companies adopt different initiatives to achieve excellence. These include a strategic orientation, commitment from the top management, maintaining high standards, having profit tiers, monitoring service performance, and prompt action on customer complaints. The study discusses differentiation of services, management of service quality, and management of service productivity. The study analyzes the strategies taken by service companies to achieve excellence. Proper implementation and execution of strategies provide a direction for service companies to excel, delight their customers, and develop long-term customer relationships.

KEYWORDS

Customer Delight, Differentiation, External Marketing, Innovation, Interactive Marketing, Internal Marketing, Service Quality, Strategic Orientation

1. INTRODUCTION

Product companies find it increasingly difficult to differentiate their offerings based on physical products (Ma & Wooton, 2020). It is difficult to differentiate because physical products are tangible and chances for any form of differentiation of getting copied are higher. It is difficult to survive and sustain in the competition without differentiation. So, companies focus on delivering services. Services are intangible and it is difficult to copy the differentiation incorporated in services (Nobre & Faria, 2017). High profitability can be achieved if differentiation in services is incorporated and executed properly. Superior services may include on-time delivery, better and faster responses, or quicker resolution of complaints. Service companies understand the importance of delivering superior services and also of creating superior customer experiences (Barari, Ross, & Surachartkumtonkun, 2020). Service companies are becoming important because customers look for exceptional services. Companies will be able to provide exceptional services only when they have focus and excel in their performance (Ishola & Olusoji, 2020). Companies are keen to improve upon these parameters which help them to excel in the marketing of services.

Services is gaining in importance in the recent years (Nedaei, 2018). Services account for almost 80 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) (CIA World FactBook, 2016). Services is also the major offering in world economy. It is growing at a fast rate and constitutes 63 percent of the gross world product (CIA World FactBook, 2016).

DOI: 10.4018/IJSSMET.290331

This article published as an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and production in any medium, provided the author of the original work and original publication source are properly credited.

Different firms in the services industry offer a variety of services. Governments of countries are a major service provider for the public. Governments offer a number of services through hospitals, courts, employment services, police and fire departments, military services, postal services, and schools. There are private not-for-profit organizations which offer services. These include charities, colleges, hospitals, museums, churches, and foundations (Jiao, Harrison, & Chen, 2020). Business organizations also offer services. Such organizations include airlines, hotels, consulting firms, banks, insurance companies, medical and legal practices, entertainment and telecommunications companies, real estate firms, retailers, and others (Barari et al., 2020).

The task of service providers is to make the service visible to customers and convince them about superior quality. Customers have high expectations from the services provided by companies. Such expectations provide both opportunities and challenges for companies. Companies providing services should accept the challenges, convert such challenges into opportunities, try to satisfy the expectations of customers, and even aim for customer delight. In the healthcare sector, Mayo Clinic does this well (Hansel, 2009). It is difficult to judge service quality for hospitals. The operations of hospitals are complex and patients cannot judge service quality before actually availing the services. Before choosing a hospital, most people search for evidence that the facility is caring, competent, and trustworthy. The Mayo Clinic strives hard to achieve these while serving their patients. It offers patients honest evidence of its dedication to “providing the best care to every patient every day” (Hansel, 2009).

The staff is trained to display genuine concern and care for patient well-being. For example, doctors show concern by calling on patients at home to keep track of their progress. They also discuss with patients before scheduling appointments (Berry & Bendapudi, 2003). The ambience inside the clinic premises is positive and includes physical facilities which send the right signals. The premises are carefully designed to offer a place for refuge, display caring and respect, and signal competence. Mayo Clinic like other hospitals and clinics facilitate communications among patients and the employees. The patients can chat directly with others who have taken treatment from the clinic or employees who work in the clinic. The Mayo Clinic makes maximum usage of the social media – blogs, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest – to enhance patient experience. Both patients and employees share their experiences on the Mayo Clinic blog. Such initiatives result in highly loyal customers who willingly spread the good word of mouth to others, building one of the most powerful brands in health care (Hansel, 2009).

Services are becoming important offerings in the present-day business scenario. Many of the companies achieving business excellence are from the services sector. So, it is important to analyze the various aspects related to business excellence for services. Although the topic is of importance, few studies have tried to analyze the various aspects of services. The study tries to address this research gap.

The objective of the study is to understand how companies in the services sector are performing to delight their customers, build customer relationships, and achieve business excellence. The study highlights and analyzes the strategies and initiatives taken by different companies to achieve business excellence.

The novelty and the contributions of the study lie in the fact that the various aspects related to services and how to achieve business excellence in services are dealt with in details. The strategies adopted and the initiatives taken by companies offering services to achieve business excellence are highlighted. Examples of achieving business excellence in various sectors – airlines industry, call centres, and entertainment industry – will enable practitioners to realize how some of the most important sectors strive to achieve business excellence. Managers and practitioners will be able to understand the best practices adopted in services to achieve business excellence.

1.1. Methodology

The methodology adopted is the qualitative and conceptual analysis of the literature on excellence in services by different companies. The study discusses various dimensions of services and how

companies providing services aim to excel in each of those dimensions. Examples and initiatives taken by various companies are cited to understand how companies operating in the services sector delight their customers and achieve business excellence. The study does not conduct an empirical analysis by collecting and analysing primary data.

The study is structured as follows:

Section 2 discusses about marketing excellence with services with specific focus on external marketing (sub-section 2.1), internal marketing (sub-section 2.2), and interactive marketing (sub-section 2.3). Sections 3 and 4 focus on marketing strategies for service companies and the service profit chain respectively. Section 5 discusses about the involvement of technology and its impact on achieving excellence in services. Section 6 discusses about the different initiatives by companies for achieving excellence in services with special focus on strategic orientation (sub-section 6.1), commitment from the top management (sub-section 6.2), maintenance of high standards (sub-section 6.3), profit tiers (sub-section 6.4), monitoring of service performance (sub-section 6.5), and prompt action on customer complaints (sub-section 6.6). Section 7 discusses about differentiation of services with special focus on primary and secondary services (sub-section 7.1), innovation in services (sub-section 7.2), and management of service differentiation (sub-section 7.3). Sections 8 and 9 discuss about management of service quality and management of service productivity respectively. Section 10 discusses about excellence in services marketing in action with specific focus on excellence in airlines industry (sub-section 10.1), improvement and service excellence in company call centres (sub-section 10.2), excellence in entertainment industry (sub-section 10.3), and excellence in brokerage industry (sub-section 10.4). Section 11 focuses on the salient points of the study along with theoretical implications (sub-section 11.1) and managerial implications of the study (sub-section 11.2). Section 12 concludes the study with limitations of the study (sub-section 12.1) and avenues of future research (sub-section 12.2).

2. MARKETING EXCELLENCE WITH SERVICES

Companies require focusing on three broad areas to excel in services. These areas are external marketing, internal marketing, and interactive marketing (Homburg, Theel, & Hohenberg, 2020; Wulandari & Suryawardani, 2020). These three broad areas are explained in the following sub-sections.

2.1. External Marketing

External marketing refers to the basic job of preparing, pricing, distributing, and promoting a service to customers (Wulandari & Suryawardani, 2020; Casey, 2019). It relates to how companies and outside parties collaborate with each other to excel in marketing of services.

2.2. Internal Marketing

Internal marketing refers to training and motivating employees so that they are knowledgeable and enthusiastic while serving customers (Paul & Sahadev, 2018). Skilful and motivated employees are able to serve customers better. The most important contribution of the marketing department of an organization is to be “exceptionally clever in getting everyone else in the organization to practice marketing” (Marinova, Ye, & Singh, 2008).

2.3. Interactive Marketing

Interactive marketing refers to the communication skills of the employees with their customers. While judging the quality of a service, customers not only look for technical quality, but also for functional quality (Abdelwahab, 2019). For example, for a surgery, technical quality will be answered by the question, “Was the surgery successful?”. Functional quality may be answered by the question, “Did the surgeon show concern and inspire confidence?”. Companies should be able to convince their

customers that they are compassionate and truly care for customers (Raja, Frandsen, & Mouritsen, 2017).

Interactive marketing requires team work and is more about collaboration among the employees in an organization (Abdelwahab, 2019). A company will not be able to delight its customers unless the employees across different functions and departments work together towards the common goal to exceeding customer requirements. Companies providing services empower their frontline employees by entrusting them with authority to provide quick solutions. It provides greater service flexibility and adaptability through problem-solving, closer employee cooperation, and more efficient knowledge transfer (Mandal, 2020).

Companies providing services require focusing on all the three aspects – internal marketing, external marketing, and interactive marketing. A proper coordination among these three aspects are required to deliver superior services to customers. Each employee in the organization should work towards achieving this goal.

3. MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR SERVICE COMPANIES

Service companies providing excellent services develop marketing strategies to position themselves in the minds of the target market and serve them well (Yang, Chen, & Yang, 2020; Zhurylo & Prygara, 2018). Service companies develop market definitions of their businesses to attract customers. Enterprise Rent-A-Car gives you “Car rental and much more”; Zipcar offers “Wheels when you want them”; St. Jude Children’s Hospital is “Finding cures. Saving children.”; Walgreens meets you “at the corner of happy and healthy.”; and at CVS Pharmacy “Expect something extra” (Marshall & Mayer, 2012). Service firms position themselves through traditional marketing mix activities. Again, services require additional marketing strategies because services are different from tangible products. Importance of marketing strategies in achieving excellence in services and the various marketing strategies adopted by companies providing services are elaborated in subsequent sections (section 6 and its sub-sections, section 7 and its sub-sections, section 8, section 9, and section 10 and its sub-sections).

4. THE SERVICE PROFIT CHAIN

In services, frontline employees of companies and customers interact closely to co-create the service (Lucia-Palacios, Pérez-López, & Polo-Redondo, 2020). Such interactions depend heavily on the skills and motivation of employees and the support provided by their companies. Thus, service companies need to satisfy both customers and their employees to be successful. Companies are in business to generate revenues and profits. Companies providing services require understanding the connections between delivering superior services and generating higher profits (Briggs, Deretti, & Kato, 2020). Such companies understand the service profit chain which links service firm profits with employee and customer satisfaction (Cavazotte, Moreno, & Lasmar, 2020). The chain has five important linkages which are mentioned as under:

Internal Service Quality: It depends on internal processes of companies like recruiting and selecting motivated people and providing them training. Unless the employees are trained in their jobs, it will be difficult for them to deliver superior services to customers. Superior quality also requires a conducive work culture and environment, and support from all the functional areas and from the top management, especially for those employees who deal directly with customers (Marshall & Mayer, 2012). Such processes result in ...

Satisfied and productive service employees. More satisfied, loyal, and hardworking employees, which results in ...

Greater service value. More effective and efficient customer value creation, engagement, and service delivery, which results in ...

Satisfied and loyal customers. Satisfied customers who remain loyal, make repeat purchases, and refer other customers, which results in ...

Healthy service profits and growth. Superior service firm performance.

For example, Zappos understands the importance of keeping their employees satisfied (Turner, 2020). The online shoes, clothing, and accessories retailer knows that employees will not be able to satisfy customers unless they themselves are happy, dedicated, and energetic. At Four Seasons, satisfying customers is everybody's business and this starts with satisfied employees (He, Morrison, & Zhang, 2019).

Four Seasons specializes in the art of high-touch and carefully crafted service. Customers at Four Seasons expect to have their minds read. Four Seasons does not disappoint such customers. One Four Seasons Maui guest once told a manager, "If there's a heaven, I hope it's run by Four Seasons". Four Seasons is able to create customer delight because of the quality of its employees. Four Seasons knows that happy and satisfied employees make for happy and satisfied customers. So, apart from satisfying its customers, Four Seasons focuses on respecting and pampering its employees (He et al., 2019).

Four Seasons hires the best people, pays them well, orients them carefully, instill in them a sense of pride, and rewards them for outstanding service deals. Employees are treated as Four Seasons would have treated its most important customers (Nart, Sututemiz, Nart, & Karatepe, 2019). For example, all employees, irrespective of designations, from room cleaners to general managers, dine together free of charge in the hotel cafeteria. Also, each employee of Four Seasons is entitled to stay at any of the Four Seasons resort, six free nights per year after completing one year with the company. The stays allow employees to understand and realize all those aspects which customers expect from Four Seasons. The stays also allow such employees to be pampered like guests and motivate employees to perform better in their services. One Four Seasons employee says, "You come back from those trips on fire. You want to do so much for the guests" (Marshall & Mayer, 2012). Because of such initiatives, the annual turnover for full-time employees is only 18 percent which is half the industry average. Four Seasons was also included for 18 straight years on Fortune magazine's list of 100 Best Companies to Work For (Marshall & Mayer, 2012).

Marketing of services requires more than applying traditional external marketing. Services marketing requires internal marketing and interactive marketing. Internal marketing involves the motivation and satisfaction of frontline employees who come in direct contact with customers. It also includes employees from support services. Such employees play an integral role in satisfying customers. Internal marketing also means that all employees should be motivated enough and be customer-oriented. It is imperative to satisfy employees before satisfying customers. So, internal marketing must precede external marketing. For example, Zappos hires only those individuals who are motivated enough to serve customers. Such employees are then provided proper orientation, training, and inspiration so that they are able to provide unparalleled customer service. The idea is to convince employees about the brand so that they can deliver the brand's promise to customers with authenticity (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017).

Interactive marketing indicates that there should be a close coordination between buyers and sellers throughout the process of transaction. Service quality depends a lot on the quality of buyer-seller relationship and how they behave during the service encounter (Frei, 2008). This is in contrast with product marketing where although buyer-seller relationship is required, it need not be as much involved as it is in case of services marketing. In services marketing, the quality of service depends both on service providers and the quality of delivery. Service marketers, therefore, have to master interactive marketing skills (Abdelwahab, 2019). For all these reasons, Zappos selects only those individuals who have an innate passion to serve. Zappos also trains its employees in the art of interacting with customers for the highest level of satisfaction. All new recruits are required to undergo and complete a four-week customer loyalty training program (Mandal, 2020).

In the present-day business, competition is increasing. Costs incurred in the delivery of any offering are also increasing. Simultaneously, productivity and quality are decreasing. These are true

for service companies also. All these call for sophistication in services marketing. Service companies face three major marketing tasks. They want to increase their service differentiation, service quality, and service productivity (Halbheer, Gärtner, Gerstner, & Koenigsberg, 2018).

5. INVOLVEMENT AND IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY FOR ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE IN SERVICES

Technology is an enabler which automates the different processes in an organization (Lattie et al., 2020). Productivity of service workers increases due to such automation. In 2008, US Airways deployed handheld scanners to track baggage. The initiative helped US Airways to have a faster process and better handling of baggage by almost 50 percent than the year before (McGregor, 2009). In the first year itself, customer complaints dropped by 35 percent (McGregor, 2009).

New technology results in unanticipated benefits for service firms. BMW introduced Wi-Fi facilities in its dealership outlets so that customers are able to utilize their time effectively while they wait for their cars getting serviced (Ferrell & Ferrell, 2012). Because of this initiative, customers prefer waiting at the outlets rather than using loaner cars. Dealers were able to cut down costs in maintaining loaner cars (Ferrell & Ferrell, 2012).

Different processes get automated because of technology and this helps companies in increasing productivity. However, too much focus on technology may result in negative perceived quality for services. Companies introduce standardization in processes to increase productivity (Castañeda & Mauricio, 2020). Standardization may result in less innovation. Service providers must deliver “high touch” as well as “high tech”. A balance needs to be found between technology and innovation (Sadgui & Benchekara, 2018). For example, apart from producing some of the most advanced technological innovations, Amazon keeps customers extremely satisfied. When a problem arises, the company tries to resolve it immediately with the help of its technological innovations (Furr & Shipilov, 2018).

The internet is one of the technological innovations which allows firms to improve their service offerings (Mandal, 2020). The internet allows companies to customize their offerings, practice e-commerce, enable interactive chat services between customers and companies, and to collect customer reviews online. The internet also allows companies to strengthen their relationships with customers by allowing for true connectivity, customer-specific and situational personalization, and real-time adjustments of the firm’s offerings (Martin & Murphy, 2017). Collection of information about customers becomes easier because of the internet. Companies can collect information about customers online and also track the online activities of customers. However, such activities have raised concerns about safety, security, and privacy of customers (Guerbouj, Gharsellaoui, & Bouamama, 2019). Companies need to assure customers about the safety and security of information provided by customers (Feltus, 2019).

6. INITIATIVES BY COMPANIES FOR ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE IN SERVICES

Companies adopt a number of policies and measures to achieve excellence in the marketing of services. They share a strategic concept, a history of top management commitment to quality, high standards, profit tiers, and systems for monitoring service performance and customer complaints. Each of the approaches is explained below.

6.1. Strategic Orientation

The major objective of any company is to delight its customers. Companies should be obsessed about their customers. Unless companies are obsessed with customers, they will not have the intensive involvement required to delight their customers. They understand the requirements and preferences of customers and target them accordingly. Based on the understanding, companies formulate strategies

to satisfy their customers and exceed their expectations (Chitty, D'Alessandro, & Gray, 2019). For example, at Four Seasons luxury hotel chain, the recruitment process is rigorous and job applicants require to pass four rounds of interviews before being hired. The applicants are provided with different situations to test whether they will be able to delight their customers or not. The hotel chain also employs “guest historians” who track and analyze guest preferences (Mandal, 2020). Employees are trained appropriately so that they provide the best services to the customers. Edward Jones brokerage stays close to its customers by employing a financial advisor and an administrator to each of its offices (Jones, 2013). Although employing a financial advisor and administrators is costly, Edward Jones employs them to serve their customers better, delight them, and develop long-term customer relationships.

6.2. Commitment from the Top Management

Commitment and support from the top management are imperative to maintain and improve service quality. World-class companies like Disney, USAA, and Marriott have support from the top management. The top managements of such companies analyze not only the monthly financial performance, but also the overall service performance (Rust & Huang, 2012). Ray Kroc of McDonald's measured each of its outlets on conformance to QSCV: quality, service, cleanliness, and value (Devanshi, 2017). Several service companies attach a reminder on the payslips of their employees: “Brought to you by the customer.” Sam Walton of Wal-Mart required the following employee pledge: “I solemnly swear and declare that every customer that comes within 10 feet of me, I will smile, look at them in the eye, and greet them, so help me, Sam.” (Hagen, 2011). All the above-mentioned instances emphasize the importance of delighting customers to excel and grow in business.

6.3. Maintenance of High Standards

Top service companies set and strive hard to maintain high standards (Shcherbakova, 2020). Citibank tries to respond to phone calls within 10 seconds and customer letters within two days. Companies involved in providing services set the standards very high. A 98 percent accuracy standard may sound good for companies. However, it will result in 64000 lost FedEx packages a day; 6 misspelled words on each page of a book; 400000 incorrectly filled prescriptions daily; 3 million lost USPS mail pieces daily; no phone or internet or electricity 8 days per year or 29 minutes per day; 1000 mislabelled or mispriced products at a supermarket; and 6 million people unaccounted for in a US census (Kapner, 2012). Competition makes it imperative for companies to set and maintain such high standards.

6.4. Profit Tiers

Delighting its customers is important for any company. However, not all customers are equally important for companies. Consequently, service companies do not provide all customers with the same levels of service quality. They vary the quality of service provided based on the profitability of customers (Osei-Frimpong, Asante, Nkrumah, & Owusu-Frimpong, 2019). Companies charge full fees and lower services for customers who buy infrequently and focus on regular and high margin customers. Customers who generate higher revenues and profits receive discounts, promotional offers, and other special services. Customers who generate lower profits may not receive discounts and special offers, may get stripped-down services, and voice messages to process their inquiries (He, Ho, Zhang, & Dey, 2016). Time and resources thus saved from low-profit customers are invested to serve and delight customers from higher-profit tiers.

During recession, Zappos decided to curtail down its services provided to its first-time buyers. It stopped offering complimentary overnight shipping to them (Gal & Rucker, 2011). The service was offered only to repeat buyers. The money saved was invested in providing VIP services to its most loyal customers (Gal & Rucker, 2011). However, discrimination of customers based on services should be done cautiously by companies. Companies which provide differentiated levels of services to their customers depending on profit tiers should be careful about the backlash which may occur from

customers receiving fewer services. Customers receiving lower levels of services may be frustrated and may spread bad word of mouth. This might affect the reputation of companies. Again, companies cannot maximize both customer satisfaction and company profitability at the same time (Ibrahim, Abdallahamed, & Adam, 2018). Top level service companies always try to optimize the two objectives.

6.5. Monitoring of Service Performance

World-class companies providing services keep a track of service performance on a continual basis (Kim, Kim, & Lennon, 2018). Companies implement voice of customer (VOC) measurements to monitor customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction. VOC measurements enable companies to understand the actual requirements of customers and what more should be done for them. VOC measurements use comparison shopping, mystery or ghost shopping, customer surveys, suggestion and complaint forms, service-audit teams, and customers' letters to the top management (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2013). The quality of services can be understood based on customer importance and company performance. A number of attributes are fixed to measure customer importance and company performance. These include tangibility, reliability, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy as proposed by SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Customers rate each of the attributes on the two parameters. Mean rating of each attribute is calculated. The ratings are plotted and decisions are taken based on the plot. The measurement helps companies to increase customer satisfaction.

6.6. Prompt Action on Customer Complaints

Dissatisfied customers stop doing business with a company. Research has shown that 40 percent of dissatisfied customers stop availing the services (Rust & Huang, 2012). On the other hand, if customers feel that the complaints were attended promptly and effectively, they continue availing services from the company. Customers not only look for solutions. They want to feel assured that companies really care for them.

Customers are willing to continue doing business with a company if they feel that once a service failure has occurred, the company is able to offer service recovery to their satisfaction (Jin, Nicely, Fan, & Adler, 2019). Dissatisfied customers of world-class service companies are encouraged to complain. Such companies also motivate their employees to go out of their way and provide instant solutions to the satisfaction of customers. Such companies generate higher revenues, profits, and result in higher customer loyalty than companies that do not adopt a systematic and prompt approach to resolve customer complaints (Kasabov, 2010). Many companies make it easier for customers to reach out to them by providing toll-free numbers. For example, Pizza Hut prints its toll-free number on all its pizza boxes. Customers can lodge complaints on the toll-free number. A voice message reaches the store manager. The store manager is required to respond within 48 hours and resolve the complaint (Mandal, 2020). Such prompt actions help Pizza Hut to win the hearts of customers and create a lasting impression.

Frontline employees of an organization are the people who have direct access to customers. They understand customer requirements better. Also, customers judge a company based on the responsiveness of the frontline employees. Frontline employees have the important task of advocating the interests and image of the company to customers (Martinaityte, Sacramento, & Aryee, 2019). However, they need to be empathetic in understanding and solving customer complaints (Prentice, 2019). Customers evaluate complaint incidents in terms of the outcomes they receive, the procedures used to arrive at those outcomes, and the nature of interpersonal treatment during the process (Chan & Wan, 2012).

7. DIFFERENTIATION OF SERVICES

Companies are able to differentiate their offerings more in case of services than in case of physical products. Services are intangible offerings, depend on the expertise of service providers, coproduction

between the service provider and customers, and the variability incorporated in the services each time a particular service is delivered. All these aspects allow companies to introduce differentiation in services. Any service company needs to differentiate its services from the services provided by other service companies. When customers perceive a service as fairly homogeneous, they care less about the service provider than about the price (Zeithaml et al., 2013). Companies need to differentiate their services from that of their competitors. Otherwise, customers will perceive the brands as a commodity (DeVine, Lal, & Zea, 2012). The following sub-sections discuss about how service companies incorporate differentiation through primary and secondary services, through innovation in services, and through proper management of service differentiation.

7.1. Primary and Secondary Services

Customers always look for value addition while going for any offering. Companies add value to their offerings with the help of people and processes (González & Nuchera, 2019). Customers expect a primary service package. Customers feel frustrated when a company is unable to provide the primary service. Vanguard, the second-largest no-load mutual fund company, has a unique client ownership structure that lowers costs and permits better fund returns. Vanguard differentiates itself from its competitors and helps grow its brand through word of mouth, viral marketing, and public relations (Mandal, 2020).

Customers look for secondary service features apart from the primary service. These features are not a part of the core service. For example, in the hotel industry, various chains offer free breakfast buffet, merchandise for sale, and loyalty programs (Mandal, 2020). However, secondary service features will not matter if a company fails to deliver the primary service.

Companies providing services should keep in mind that competitors may copy the offerings and innovations. So, the innovator loses the first mover advantage. Also, challengers and imitators may copy and improve upon the innovations and leave the innovator behind in the competition (Upbin, 2012). It is imperative for companies to introduce continual innovation to overcome temporary advantages over competitors.

Schneider National believes in continual innovation to remain ahead of its competitors. Schneider National is the world's largest long-haul truckload freight carrier. The company generates \$3.7 billion in resources. It employs more than 54000 bright orange tractors and trailers on the roads (Hempel, 2009). The company excels in its core service of movement of freight from one location to another. However, the company views its business from a broader and holistic perspective in the form of providing complete customer solutions. It provides service guarantees and monetary incentives for drivers who meet tight schedules. Drivers are provided training so that they perform better (Hempel, 2009). It was the first company to provide in-cab satellite technology and mobile technology to every driver. Due to such efforts and for showing concerns for its customers, Schneider won a number of awards in 2009 for excellent customer service, solutions, and commitment to the environment from shippers, government organizations, and industry media (Hempel, 2009). Schneider selects the best drivers for providing services. Schneider advertises on television shows such as Trick My Truck, on satellite radio, in newspapers, and online. It also offers webinars, employs public relations, and partners with AARP, local organizations, and veterans' groups. Schneider created awareness about safety by painting its trucks Omaha orange.

7.2. Innovation in Services

Companies providing services require continual innovation to survive and excel in the industry. Starwood lost its customers to Hilton and Marriott hotel competitors for a number of years. Starwood realized the importance of continual innovation in order to satisfy customers. Starwood decided to invest \$1.7 billion in its Sheraton chain of 400 properties worldwide to give them fresh décor and brighter colors as well as more attractive lobbies, restaurants, and cafes. One hospitality expert comments, "There was a time when Sheraton was one of the leading brands. But it lacked in introducing

new design and service concepts and developed a level of inconsistency” (Yu, 2008). Starwood could improve its brand image with investment in innovation.

Companies require introducing new service categories continuously to satisfy ever-changing customer requirements. For example, the “blow-dry bar” salon concept introduced by Alli Webb focuses on the simple promise “No Cuts. No Color. Just Blowouts for \$40” (Upbin, 2012). Registered users of Reddit, an online digital bulletin board can post content or links in the active forums and have discussions among themselves (Anders, 2012). Online start-up, Carelinx is a matchmaking site for families with at-home elderly and non-medical caregivers who can provide home care (Leiber, 2012).

Innovation in existing services result in high payoffs for companies. Ticketmaster introduced interactive seat maps which allowed customers to choose their own seats instead of being allotted one (Savitz, 2011). Because of such convenience provided to customers, the conversion rate from potential to actual buyers increased by 25 percent to 30 percent. An “I’m going...” message on Facebook targeted towards potential ticket buyers adds an extra \$5 in ticket sales on an average. Providing reviews of a show on the website also doubled the conversion rate (Savitz, 2011).

Several new service categories have emerged in the recent years. Companies have introduced creative solutions and innovations in such categories (Mandal, 2020). Some of those categories are explained below.

Online Travel: The internet facilitates the growth of e-commerce. Online transactions have become faster and convenient. Customers can book tickets for traveling practically from anywhere through online travel agents such as Expedia and Travelocity (Reinhold, Zach, & Laesser, 2020). Customers can book conveniently from any location at discounted prices. Charges are imposed only when customers book tickets from the websites of the travel agents. Several travel agents like Kayak apply the Google business model of collecting money on a per-click basis. Kayak provides better search options for customers with more alternatives and flexibility (Andrea Jacobs, Klein, Patrick Holland, & Benning, 2017).

Retail Health Clinics: It is difficult for companies providing health care services to innovate. Health care system is designed to solve a small number of complex cases. In reality, health care clinics solve a large number of simple cases. Retail health care clinics like Quick Care, Redi Clinic, and Minute Clinic are located in drugstores and also inside retail chain stores like Wal-Mart and Target (Banjo, 2012). Such clinics provide services like handling minor illnesses and injuries like colds, flu, and ear infections with the help of nurse practitioners. The clinics also differentiate themselves by providing various health and wellness services such as physicals, examinations for high school sports, and vaccinations for kids. The services are offered in a convenient manner and at affordable and transparent prices. Prior appointment is not required and the services are available seven days a week. Most visits are short (less than 15 minutes) and cost between \$25 and \$100 (West, 2009). Health care services require developing an emotional attachment between customers and the service provider. Companies providing health care services can utilize the nature of services to develop strong bonds with customers and build long-term customer relationships.

Private Aviation: Aviation was previously restricted only to service providers appointed by the government. However, now-a-days, aviation has been thrown open to private players also. Initially, private aviation was restricted to owning or chartering a private plane. NetJets pioneered the innovative concept of allowing customers to have fractional ownership by paying a percentage of the cost of the private plane plus maintenance and a directly hourly cost (Sharkey, 2012). Marquis Jets further innovated with a simple idea of combining prepaid time on the world’s largest, best maintained fleet, offering the consistency and benefits of fractional ownership without the long-term commitment (Sharkey, 2012).

Now-a-days, with the wide popularity and usage of the internet, companies providing services utilize the web to the maximum possible extent. The internet makes providing services faster, more convenient, and at a lower cost. Companies like Salesforce.com use cloud computing that is a centralized computing service delivered over the internet. It maintains customer databases

for companies (Dougherty & Murthy, 2009). Haagen-Dazs needed to spend \$65000 to maintain a centralized customer database which would help the company understand its customers better and to stay in touch with its retail franchises across the country. Haagen-Dazs collaborated with Salesforce.com to set up an account. In the process, it saved money by paying only \$20000 to set up the accounts. It only pays \$125 per month for 20 users to remotely monitor franchise via the web (Dougherty & Murthy, 2009).

7.3. Management of Service Differentiation

Competition is immense at present because of competitive pricing of offerings. Service companies require to differentiate their services from those of competitors. However, it becomes difficult to differentiate services. If customers view the services provided as same or similar, they care less about the service provider than the price (Zeithaml et al., 2013). Service companies should try to differentiate themselves based on offer, delivery, and image.

The offer may include innovative features which will differentiate one company's offer from that of competitors' offers (Morell, 2012). For example, retailers differentiate themselves with offerings that take customers well beyond the products they stock. For example, Apple stores offer a Genius Bar for technical support. Apple also offers a number of free workshops for its iPhone, iPad, and Macs to the intricacies of using iMovie to turn home movies into blockbusters. At REI stores, customers can have a first-hand experience with merchandise before buying it via the store's mountain bike test trail, gear-testing stations, a huge rock-climbing wall, or an in-store simulated rain shower (Morell, 2012).

Service companies can create differentiation in their service deliveries. Superior service delivery requires able, reliable, and motivated customer-contact people, development of a superior physical environment in which the service is delivered, or design of a superior delivery process (Toporek, 2014). For example, grocery chains now differentiate their offerings by providing online shopping and home delivery. This is convenient for customers because they do not have to drive, park, and wait in line. Again, many financial institutions and banks allow payments, checking of account balances, and making mobile check deposits. One Citibank advertisement says, "Sign, snap a photo, and submit a check from anywhere. It's easier than running to the bank." (Morell, 2012)

Service companies can differentiate their brand images through symbols, logos, and the way they communicate (Toporek, 2014). For example, Aflac adopted the duck as its advertising symbol. At present, the duck is immortalized through stuffed animals, golf club covers, and free ringtones and screensavers. The iconic symbol of duck helped Aflac to spread awareness about the previously unknown brand. It also made the insurance company memorable and approachable (Morell, 2012). Other well-known service characters and symbols include Progressive Insurance's Flo, Allstate's "good hands", the Twitter bird, the GEICO gecko, McDonald's golden arches, and the freckled, red-haired, pig-tailed Wendy's girl (Toporek, 2014). Based on its distinguished character, Progressive's Flo gathered more than 5 million Facebook Likes.

8. MANAGEMENT OF SERVICE QUALITY

Service firms can impress customers by delivering services which are superior to that provided by competitors. Like manufacturers of products, service firms have joined the customer-driven quality movement (Babu & Thomas, 2020). Like product marketers, service marketers also need to identify what target markets prefer and want with respect to service quality.

Service quality is difficult to define, determine, and judge than it is for product quality. For instance, it is more difficult to determine the quality of a haircut than that of a hair dryer (Morell, 2012). Service quality can perhaps be best measured by customer retention. Customer retention determines whether a service firm is able to satisfy its customers consistently by delivering value to them.

World-class service companies set high service quality standards for themselves (Toporek, 2014). They keep a close watch on the service quality provided by competitors and also by themselves.

Such companies aim for 100 percent defect-free service. For example, a 98 percent performance standard may sound good, but using this standard, the U.S. Postal Service would lose or misdirect 356000 pieces of mail each hour, and U.S. pharmacies would fill more than 1.5 million prescriptions incorrectly each week (Morell, 2012).

Manufacturers of tangible products can adjust their machinery, inputs, and settings to manufacture products with superior quality. However, service quality will vary each time a service is generated. Generation of services depends heavily on the interactions between service providers and customers. Even the best service companies will have an occasional late delivery, burned steak, or grumpy employee (Toporek, 2014). Once a service failure has occurred, companies can impress and win the hearts of customers by providing prompt and efficient service recovery. In fact, a good service recovery can win more customer purchasing and loyalty than if things had gone well in the first place (Morell, 2012).

Southwest Airlines has a proactive customer communications team. The job of the team is to find solutions for any of the services where the delivery went wrong. The service failures may occur because of bad weather, mechanical delay, medical emergency, or a berserk passenger. Customers will be delighted if companies remedy the bad experience quickly, within 24 hours if possible (Langaro, Loureiro, & Soares, 2020; Morell, 2012). The team can communicate with dissatisfied passengers through emails, tweets, blogs, or messaging on Facebook or on any other social media. The communications may include three basic components – a sincere apology, a brief explanation of what happened, and a gift to make it up, usually a voucher in dollars that can be used on their next Southwest flight. Studies show that if Southwest Airlines handles a service failure promptly and efficiently, it receives 14 to 16 points higher than on regular on-time flights (Toporek, 2014).

Now-a-days, service companies can utilize social media to the maximum extent possible with the help of Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp and remedy customer dissatisfaction with service. Companies use social media to track customer issues and reactions and provide responses in real time (Rajendran, 2020). For example, Southwest Airlines has a dedicated team of 29 people who respond to roughly 80000 Facebook and Twitter posts monthly. A prompt and effective solution may turn a frustrated customer into a brand evangelist (White, 2015).

9. MANAGEMENT OF SERVICE PRODUCTIVITY

Service firms require to increase productivity because of ever-increasing costs. This is true for companies from all sectors. Productivity in the services sector may be increased by providing training and developing skills of current employees or hiring efficient and motivated employees with better skill sets (Toporek, 2014). Firms can optimize service quality by giving up some quality. Finally, a service provider can employ the latest technological advances to increase service productivity. Technology helps companies to save time and reduce costs. It also helps service workers to be more productive (White, 2015).

Service companies, however, should not increase productivity at the cost of quality. Streamlining the operations of a service or cutting down on costs may be efficient in the short run. However, pressing hard on service productivity may affect the long-run ability to innovate, maintaining service quality, or responding to customer needs and preferences (White, 2015). Airlines companies learnt this lesson the hard way as they try to economize by cutting down on costs. The human or personal touch is missing with airlines companies opting for time-saving check-in kiosks rather than personal counter service. Many of the airlines reduce costs by not providing products and services which were once offered for free. At present, little things such as an in-flight snacks and checking luggage to aisle seats are charged. This results in frustrated customers (Toporek, 2014). In their attempts to improve productivity, many airlines have mangled customer service.

To improve service productivity, service firms should be careful about how to create and deliver customer value (Wijaya & InnocentiusBernarto, 2020). They should provide the service as desired by

customers. Service companies may sometimes have to lower service productivity in order to improve service quality. This in turn allows service firms to maintain higher prices and profit margins (White, 2015).

10. EXCELLENCE IN SERVICES MARKETING IN ACTION

The previous sections highlighted and discussed the various approaches for achieving excellence in services. Service companies should understand these approaches before adopting specific initiatives to achieve business excellence. Companies providing services undertake a lot of initiatives to excel and to delight their customers. The initiatives allow companies to develop bondage and relationships with customers. This section discusses some of those initiatives taken by service companies from different domains and explain the manner in which those initiatives help service companies from diverse industries to excel in providing services to customers and to build customer relationships. Examples are gathered from different domains like airlines industry, company call centres, entertainment industry, and brokerage industry. These four domains are selected because competition is tough in these four domains and companies require doing continual innovation and introducing differentiation to delight their customers. Also, industry growth is high in these four domains. All the domains mentioned are service-oriented and will not be able to delight their customers and grow without excellence in services marketing. Service companies may be able to have a strategic orientation based on the analysis of the four domains.

10.1. Excellence in Airlines Industry

Airlines industry is often characterized by bankruptcy and dissatisfied customers (Mandal, 2020). However, there are exceptions. For example, Southwest Airlines and JetBlue excelled in delighting their customers, generated revenues, and achieved financial stability (Rooney, 2013). The two companies followed different routes to excel in delivering services. Southwest Airlines adopted a business model which is unusual for an airline to follow. The model focused on short hauls only with no travel agents, no meals, no gates at major airports, and no fees (Tuttle, 2013). The airlines introduced many new and innovative practices. It is also determined to avoid the bag, ticket change, and other fees adopted by competing airlines. It is estimated that the airline loses \$1 billion in revenue from lost bookings (Whelan, 2011). Southwest Airlines is able to charge low fares from customers because of its focus on saving costs. It has a low turnaround time which allows to keep planes in the air and seats filled. The company maintains a friendly and informal style while interacting with customers. Those people who are motivated to serve and are obsessed about customers, are recruited as employees. Employees are empowered to be friendly with customers and solve their issues (Rooney, 2013). JetBlue followed a different business model. It primarily targets leisure travellers at its JFK hub in New York City. Like Southwest Airlines, it has a low-cost structure. However, unlike Southwest Airlines, JetBlue offers comfy seats, live TV, and choice of snacks (Tracy, 2013). It has a \$25 million lodge at JetBlue University in Orlando. It encourages an open and cordial culture among its employees. It provides extra options for business travellers, including fancier and more expensive seating on its transcontinental routes (Bachman, 2013). Southwest Airlines and JetBlue follow different strategies. However, the basic purpose remains the same – delighting their customers.

10.2. Improvement and Service Excellence in Company Call Centres

Customers are empowered now-a-days and do not wish to accept poor services. Many companies providing services have realized this truth the hard way. Customers want prompt and effective solutions to any problems which they face. Only companies equipped with facilities to excel in services will be able to provide such solutions. After Sprint and Nextel merged, they set out to run their call centres as cost centres (Jasmand, Blazeovic, & de Ruyter, 2012). The company did not treat its call centres as a means to enhance customer loyalty. Employees were rewarded when they kept calls from customers

short. Management even started to monitor bathroom trips. This action frustrated the employees. The employees were not motivated enough to deliver better customer services. This resulted in customer dissatisfaction. Once customer churn reached critical level, Sprint Nextel emphasized quality of service over efficiency (Chan & Wan, 2012). Several initiatives were taken. A chief service officer was appointed. Those employees who solved customer problems the first time they called, were rewarded. Focus was given on solving a specific problem rather than keeping the calls short. Because of better services, the number of calls customers made, reduced from eight to four (Walker & Silverman, 2012). All these initiatives helped the company to excel in providing services.

Call centres are established in those countries where the cost of operations is less. Companies like AT&T, JP Morgan Chase, and Expedia established their call centres in Philippines. Call centres were set up in Philippines rather than in India because Filipinos speak lightly accented English and are more steeped in US culture than Indians. Indians speak British-style English and use unfamiliar idioms (Bajaj, 2011). Companies choose which calls to transfer off-shore. They homeshore by directing complex calls to highly trained and efficient domestic customer service representatives. They have flexible working hours and are allowed to work from home. They provide higher-quality service at a low cost. Because of higher employee satisfaction, turnover is lower for such representatives (Shroeck, 2011).

The number of customer service representatives to be appointed is decided based on the number of calls received. One study revealed that eliminating four representatives from a team of three dozen representatives at a call centre resulted in increasing the number of customers put on hold for four minutes or more from zero to eighty (Bajaj, 2011). Each representative also delivers more. When companies like Marriott, Key Bank, and Ace Hardware consolidated their call centre operations, the companies were able to execute their operations from fewer locations. It also allowed the companies to reduce the number of representatives in the process (Shroeck, 2011).

The success of call centres depends to a large extent on the hiring and training of employees. An extensive study by Xerox demonstrated that a good call centre employee with a high probability to stay the six months necessary to recoup the company's \$5000 investment was likely to have a creative rather than an inquisitive personality (Jasmand et al., 2012). Attitudes of employees are more important than their job experiences. For example, for recruiting employees for its call centres, Xerox focuses on individual characteristics like "I ask more questions than most people do" and "People tend to trust what I say" (Chan & Wan, 2012). The statements reveal inquisitiveness and trustworthiness of an individual. Both the qualities are essential for success as a call centre employee.

Companies match the requirements of customers and the capabilities of call centre agents with the help of Big Data analytics. Call centre agents are allocated to customers based on such analysis. For example, companies collect data from online dating sites and apply advanced analytics technology to mine transaction and demographic information about customers (Walker & Silverman, 2012). It may contain details about products or services they have purchased, contract terms and expiry date, record of complaints, or average call waiting time. Average call handling time and sales efficiency of call centre agents are analyzed. Based on the analysis, optimal matches between customers and call centre employees are identified in real time (Walker & Silverman, 2012).

Internal marketing is required to keep call centre employees happy and motivated. The employees are then motivated enough to offer excellent customer services (Akanji, 2016). For example, American Express allows its call centre employees to choose their own working hours and to swap shifts without a supervisor's approval (McGregor, 2007). All such initiatives are taken to motivate employees towards providing excellent services to customers.

10.3. Excellence in Entertainment Industry

Continual innovation is done by world-class service companies to delight their customers and stay ahead of the competition. In the process, it becomes important to reinvent a service category. This is also true for entertainment industry. Cirque du Soleil (French for "circus of the sun") is a company

which repeatedly broke loose from circus convention in its more than 25-year history (Mandal, 2020). The company presents traditional ingredients like clowns, trapeze artists, muscle man, and contortionists, and presents them in unconventional settings with lavish costumes, spectacular stage designs, and new age music (Krantz, 2009). Animals are not used in any of the shows. Each of its stage shows has a story and the shows are connected with a theme such as “a tribute to a nomadic soul (Varekai)” or “a phantasmagoria of urban life” (Saltimbanco). In the beginning, the group used to perform on the streets of Quebec. The company went ahead of the competition because of its dedication and superior performance. Presently, it is a half-billion-dollar global enterprise with more than 3000 employees on four continents entertaining audiences of millions annually (Krantz, 2009). The company is successful because it encourages a culture of artistic creativity and innovation. The vibrant culture protects the brand. To maintain quality performance, only one new production is created each year. The creation is done in-house, the production is unique, and there are no duplicate touring companies. The brand is promoted through a mix of media and local promotion. The Cirque Club has million-plus members who remain connected through an extensive interactive e-mail program. Fans and members help in selling tickets with 20 percent to 30 percent of sales coming from club members (Eng, 2011). The company is able to generate an annual revenue of more than \$800 million. The brand has expanded to encompass a record label, a retail operation, and resident production in Las Vegas (five in all), Orlando, Tokyo, and other cities (Eng, 2011). Cirque du Soleil is able to create a lasting impression in the minds of customers due to its unique features and innovation. Customers feel that Cirque du Soleil is of superior quality and excels in performance.

10.4. Excellence in Brokerage Industry

Companies in the brokerage industry require delivering superior services to their clients. Charles Schwab is a company which has achieved marketing excellence in services. It is one of the largest discount brokerage houses in the United States. It creates a combination of a high tech and high-touch services with the help of telephone, internet, and wireless devices (Mandal, 2020). It provides services to more than 8 million individual and institutional accounts. Charles Schwab offers account information and proprietary search from retail brokers, real-time quotes, an after-hours trading program, the Schwab learning centre, live events, online chats with customer service representatives, a global investing service, and marketing updates delivered by e-mail. Charles Schwab Bank offers annuities, bond trading, mutual funds, and mortgages (Morris, 2010). Charles Schwab is successful because of its focus on superior service (online, via phone, and in local branch offices), low prices, and innovative products. It realizes that customers who come for availing services look for value for money. The company reviews customer feedback daily to understand customer requirements better. It responds to customer queries within the next day so that customers feel that the company is prompt in providing responses. A Schwab representative contacts its customers to understand their problems, helps them in filling out feedback forms, and addresses how the problems can be solved (Markey, Reichheld, & Dullweber, 2009).

11. DISCUSSIONS

Companies involved in marketing of services face challenges and opportunities in the 21st century. Companies providing services face challenges because of the new realities of customer empowerment, customer coproduction, and the need to satisfy both customers and employees at the same time. Previously, service industry did not have marketing strategies and lagged behind manufacturing industry in adopting and using marketing concepts and tools. The situation has changed with time. Companies providing services understand the importance of delighting their customers. Excellence in services marketing cannot be achieved only by external marketing. Service companies require doing internal marketing to satisfy their employees. Unless the employees are motivated enough,

they will not be enthusiastic and empathetic while serving customers. Service companies also require exceling in interactive marketing to emphasize the importance of both “high tech” and “high touch”.

11.1. Theoretical Implications

Based on the discussions presented in the study, academicians may study and analyze the existing strategies, understand the shortcomings, and suggest improved strategies. Efforts were made to include the relevant and the latest literature related to services marketing and the relations among differentiation, innovation, and strategic orientation. Developments are happening regularly in the field of services. Researchers and practicing managers may utilize the discussions to delve more into the importance of achieving excellence in services marketing for generating better customer insights and delighting the customers. They also require keeping themselves updated about the latest trends and developments to understand the roles of differentiation, innovation, and strategies to achieve excellence in services marketing and to delight customers.

11.2. Managerial Implications

Companies require exceling in delivery of services because services are becoming the most important offering at present. The discussions will sensitize practicing managers about the importance of achieving excellence in services marketing and its importance in delighting customers. World-class service companies need to have a strategic orientation, commitment from the top management towards maintaining quality, commitment towards and maintenance of high standards, establishment of profit tiers, monitoring of service performance, and undertaking of prompt action on customer complaints. Service companies will be able to delight their customers and develop long-term relationships with them when they excel in each of the above-mentioned parameters. Service companies differentiate their brands through primary and secondary services and continual innovation. Different service companies like Cirque du Soleil from the entertainment sector and JetBlue and Southwest Airlines from the aviation sector have exceled in delighting their customers. Managers should study such companies which excel in delivery of services, develop strategies, and adopt initiatives to delight their customers.

12. CONCLUSIONS

The study discussed the various aspects of achieving excellence in services marketing. Companies providing services adopt various strategies and initiatives to excel and aim for customer delight. The study reviewed the different strategies companies adopt to achieve excellence in services marketing. Roles of differentiation in services were discussed. Companies require doing continual innovation to delight their customers, to grow, and to remain ahead of the competition. Companies will realize the importance of differentiation in services, service quality, and service productivity. All these aspects are factors for achieving excellence in services marketing. All these initiatives will help companies providing services to understand and delight their customers, develop customer relationships, and achieve business excellence.

12.1. Limitations of the Study

The study focused on doing a qualitative and conceptual analysis of the literature on achieving excellence in services by companies. The study did not collect primary data and did not conduct an empirical analysis to understand the effectiveness of various strategies and initiatives taken by companies to achieve business excellence in services.

12.2. Avenues of Future Research

Various avenues for future research emanate from the discussions done in the study. Achieving excellence in services marketing has become imperative for companies to sustain in the competition. Companies may look for setting standards for evaluation of performance. Formulation of such standards should be guided by customer requirements. Research needs to be conducted to set such service standards. Not all customers are equally important to companies. Companies should evaluate their customers based on some criteria like revenue generated and profitability. Different levels of services should be provided to different categories of customers. Companies should also evaluate which services should be provided to which groups of customers so that the returns for both companies and customers get maximized. Service companies will be evaluated based on their performance and the ability to understand and exceed customer expectations. Research may be conducted to set the standards and norms for different service companies across different domains. The companies will be evaluated based on such standards and norms. Based on the evaluation, it might be determined where companies have excelled in performance. It might also help in identifying the areas where they need to improve and also how to improve.

Academicians may study and critically analyze the strategies adopted by service companies, their advantages and disadvantages, and suggest new strategies for delighting customers. Practitioners and marketers may understand the benefits and shortcomings of the various strategies service companies adopt. They may also evaluate which strategies already exist and which strategies need to be implemented to achieve excellence in services marketing. Companies should perform a continuous evaluation of customer requirements, do continual innovation to fulfil those requirements, and delight their customers.

The study aimed at doing a qualitative and conceptual analysis of the literature on achieving excellence in services by companies. The study did not conduct an empirical analysis. Researchers may collect primary data and conduct empirical analysis to understand the effectiveness of the various strategies and initiatives taken by companies to achieve excellence in services.

REFERENCES

- Abdelwahab, M. A. (2019). The Impact of Interactive Marketing on improving the Quality of Services in Egyptian Tourist Companies. *Journal of Association of Arab Universities for Tourism and Hospitality*, 16(1), 136–145. doi:10.21608/jaauth.2019.57498
- Akanji, B. O. (2016). A case study on occupational stressors and effective stress management interventions from a call center perspective. *International Journal of Research Studies in Psychology*, 5(2), 13–24.
- Anders, G. (2012, November 19). What is Reddit worth? *Forbes*, 56–60.
- Andrea Jacobs, J., Klein, S., Patrick Holland, C., & Benning, M. (2017). Online Search Behavior in the Air Travel Market: Reconsidering the Consideration Set and Customer Journey Concepts. In *Hawaii International Conference On System Sciences (HICSS)*. Association For Information System. doi:10.24251/HICSS.2017.476
- Babu, F., & Thomas, S. (2020). The relationship between total quality management practices and organisational image in the hospital industry: An empirical examination. *International Journal of Productivity and Quality Management*, 29(1), 1–23. doi:10.1504/IJPQM.2020.104517
- Bachman, J. (2013, June 13). How JetBlue Aims to Grab Some High-Dollar Traffic. *Bloomberg*.
- Bajaj, V. (2011, November 25). A new capital of call centers. *New York Times*, 25.
- Banjo, S. (2012, August 23). Wal-Mart's new health push. *Wall Street Journal*.
- Barari, M., Ross, M., & Surachartkumtonkun, J. (2020). Negative and positive customer shopping experience in an online context. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53, 101985. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.101985
- Berry, L., & Bendapudi, N. (2003). Clueing in Customers. *Harvard Business Review*, 81(2), 100–106. PMID:12577657
- Briggs, E., Deretti, S., & Kato, H. T. (2020). Linking organizational service orientation to retailer profitability: Insights from the service-profit chain. *Journal of Business Research*, 107, 271–278. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.08.038
- Casey, R. (2019, April). External marketing. In *BSAVA Congress Proceedings 2019* (pp. 298-299). BSAVA Library. doi:10.22233/9781910443699.39.2
- Castañeda, P., & Mauricio, D. (2020). New Factors Affecting Productivity of the Software Factory. *International Journal of Information Technologies and Systems Approach*, 13(1), 1–26. doi:10.4018/IJITSA.2020010101
- Cavazotte, F., Moreno, V., & Lasmar, L. C. C. (2020). Enabling customer satisfaction in call center teams: The role of transformational leadership in the service-profit chain. *Service Industries Journal*, 40(5), 380–393. doi:10.1080/02642069.2018.1481955
- Chan, K. W., & Wan, E. W. (2012). How can stressed employees deliver better customer service? The underlying self-regulation depletion mechanism. *Journal of Marketing*, 76(1), 119–137. doi:10.1509/jm.10.0202
- Chitty, W., D'Alessandro, S., & Gray, D. (2019). *Services marketing*. Oxford University Press Australia and New Zealand.
- CIA World FactBook. (2016). *CIA World FactBook*. www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook
- Devanshi, D. (2017). Global marketing strategies of McDonald's Corporation (with Reference to India and Russia). *International Journal of Applied Research*, 3(1), 870–875.
- DeVine, J., Lal, S., & Zea, M. (2012, January). The human factor in service design. *The McKinsey Quarterly*, 1, 118–123.
- Dougherty, D., & Murthy, A. (2009). What service customers really want. *Harvard Business Review*, 87(9), 22–23.
- Eng, D. (2011, November 7). The rise of Cirque du Soleil. *Fortune*, 39–42.
- Feltus, C. (2019). Deriving Information System Security and Privacy From Value Cocreation Theory: Case Study in the Financial Sector. *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering, and Technology*, 10(4), 1–25. doi:10.4018/IJSSMET.2019100101

- Ferrell, L., & Ferrell, O. C. (2012). Redirecting direct selling: High-touch embraces high-tech. *Business Horizons*, 55(3), 273–281. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2012.01.004
- Frei, F. X. (2008). The four things a service business must get right. *Harvard Business Review*, 86(4), 70–80. PMID:18435008
- Furr, N., & Shipilov, A. (2018). Building the right ecosystem for innovation. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 59(4), 59–64.
- Gal, D., & Rucker, D. D. (2011). Answering the unasked question: Response substitution in consumer surveys. *JMR, Journal of Marketing Research*, 48(1), 185–195. doi:10.1509/jmkr.48.1.185
- González, R. L. H., & Nuchera, A. H. (2019). Dynamics of service innovation management and co-creation in firms in the digital economy sector. *Contaduría y Administración*, 64(1), 1802.
- Guerbouj, S. S. E., Gharsellaoui, H., & Bouamama, S. (2019). A Comprehensive Survey on Privacy and Security Issues in Cloud Computing, Internet of Things and Cloud of Things. *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering, and Technology*, 10(3), 32–44. doi:10.4018/IJSSMET.2019070103
- Hagen, P. (2011, April 18). The rise of the chief customer officer. *Forrester Reports*, 24.
- Halbheer, D., Gärtner, D. L., Gerstner, E., & Koenigsberg, O. (2018). Optimizing service failure and damage control. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 35(1), 100–115. doi:10.1016/j.ijresmar.2017.11.001
- Hansel, L. (2009, January 22). Mayo Hits the Blogosphere. *McClatchy-Tribune Business News*.
- He, J., Morrison, A. M., & Zhang, H. (2019). Improving Millennial Employee Well-Being and Task Performance in the Hospitality Industry: The Interactive Effects of HRM and Responsible Leadership. *Sustainability*, 11(16), 4410. doi:10.3390/su11164410
- He, T., Ho, W., Zhang, Y., & Dey, P. K. (2016). Organising the business processes of a product servitised supply chain: A value perspective. *Production Planning and Control*, 27(5), 378–393. doi:10.1080/09537287.2015.1128571
- Hempel, J. (2009, February 17). Salesforce hits its stride. *Fortune*, 29–32.
- Homburg, C., Theel, M., & Hohenberg, S. (2020). Marketing Excellence: Nature, Measurement, and Investor Valuations. *Journal of Marketing*, 84(4). doi:10.1177/0022242920925517
- Ibrahim, M., Abdallahamed, S., & Adam, D. R. (2018). Service Recovery, Perceived Fairness, and Customer Satisfaction in the Telecoms Sector in Ghana. *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering, and Technology*, 9(4), 73–89. doi:10.4018/IJSSMET.2018100105
- Ishola, O. A., & Olusoji, M. O. (2020). Service Sector Performance, Industry and Growth in Nigeria. *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering, and Technology*, 11(1), 31–45. doi:10.4018/IJSSMET.2020010103
- Jasmand, C., Blazevic, V., & de Ruyter, K. (2012). Generating sales while providing service: A study of customer service representatives' ambidextrous behavior. *Journal of Marketing*, 76(1), 20–37. doi:10.1509/jm.10.0448
- Jiao, L., Harrison, G., & Chen, J. (2020). The effect of stakeholder culture on managers' perceptions of stakeholder attributes in Australian not-for-profit organizations. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 79(1), 60–75. doi:10.1111/1467-8500.12394
- Jin, D., Nicely, A., Fan, A., & Adler, H. (2019). Joint effect of service recovery types and times on customer satisfaction in lodging. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 38, 149–158. doi:10.1016/j.jhtm.2019.01.005
- Jones, G. (2013, May 31). Jim Weddle is positioning Edward Jones to be the top of mind choice. *Smart Business*.
- Kapner, S. (2012, October 4). Citi won't sleep on customer tweets. *Wall Street Journal*.
- Kasabov, E. (2010). The compliant customer. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 51(3), 18–19.

- Kim, J. H., Kim, M., & Lennon, S. J. (2018). E-service performance of apparel e-retailing websites: A longitudinal assessment. *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering, and Technology*, 9(1), 24–40. doi:10.4018/IJSSMET.2018010103
- Krantz, M. (2009, August 24). Tinseltown gets glitzy new star. *USA Today*.
- Langaro, D., Loureiro, S. M. C., & Soares, A. (2020). When Consumers' Complaints Fall Into Public Domain: Negative e-WOM on Social Media. In *Exploring the Power of Electronic Word-of-Mouth in the Services Industry* (pp. 124-137). IGI Global.
- Lattie, E. G., Nicholas, J., Knapp, A. A., Skerl, J. J., Kaiser, S. M., & Mohr, D. C. (2020). Opportunities for and Tensions Surrounding the Use of Technology-Enabled Mental Health Services in Community Mental Health Care. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 47(1), 138–149. doi:10.1007/s10488-019-00979-2 PMID:31535235
- Leiber, N. (2012, October 29). Elderly care, a click away. *Bloomberg Businessweek*.
- Lucia-Palacios, L., Pérez-López, R., & Polo-Redondo, Y. (2020). How situational circumstances modify the effects of frontline employees' competences on customer satisfaction with the store. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 52, 101905. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.101905
- Ma, J., & Wooton, I. (2020). Market size, product differentiation and bidding for new varieties. *International Tax and Public Finance*, 27(2), 257–279. doi:10.1007/s10797-019-09559-4
- Mandal, P. C. (2020). Achieving excellence in services marketing: Roles in customer delight. *International Journal of Business Excellence*, 20(3), 359–374. doi:10.1504/IJBEX.2020.106366
- Marinova, D., Ye, J., & Singh, J. (2008). Do frontline mechanisms matter? Impact of quality and productivity orientations on unit revenue, efficiency, and customer satisfaction. *Journal of Marketing*, 72(2), 28–45. doi:10.1509/jmkg.72.2.28
- Markey, R., Reichheld, F., & Dullweber, A. (2009). Closing the customer feedback loop. *Harvard Business Review*, 87(12), 43–47.
- Marshall, J., & Mayer, D. (2012). Activate a Brand Internally. *Marketing Management*, 37-44.
- Martin, K. D., & Murphy, P. E. (2017). The role of data privacy in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45(2), 135–155. doi:10.1007/s11747-016-0495-4
- Martinaityte, I., Sacramento, C., & Aryee, S. (2019). Delighting the customer: Creativity-oriented high-performance work systems, frontline employee creative performance, and customer satisfaction. *Journal of Management*, 45(2), 728–751. doi:10.1177/0149206316672532
- McGregor, J. (2007, March 5). Customer service champs. *BusinessWeek*.
- McGregor, J. (2009, March 2). When service means survival. *BusinessWeek*, 2, 26–30.
- Morell, K. (2012, August 24). Horrible Flight? Airlines' Apology Experts Will Make It Up To You. *McClatchy-Tribune News Service*.
- Morris, B. (2010, May 31). Chuck Schwab is worried about the small investor. Does that mean we should be worried too? *Bloomberg Businessweek*.
- Nart, S., Sututemiz, N., Nart, S., & Karatepe, O. M. (2019). Internal marketing practices, genuine emotions and their effects on hotel employees' customer-oriented behaviors. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 18(1), 47–70. doi:10.1080/15332845.2019.1526509
- Nedaei, M. (2018). Scheduling Analysis and Strategic Service Planning for Optimum Operation of Two Parallel Machines Under Effect of Sequencing: A Case Study of a Manufacturing Company in a Job-Shop Environment. *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering, and Technology*, 9(4), 57–72. doi:10.4018/IJSSMET.2018100104
- Nobre, H., & Faria, J. (2017). Exploring marketing strategies in architectural services: The case of the architecture firms in Portugal. *International Journal of Business Excellence*, 12(3), 275–293. doi:10.1504/IJBEX.2017.084438
- Osei-Frimpong, K., Asante, K., Nkrumah, M., & Owusu-Frimpong, N. (2019). *15 Developing Customer Loyalty in Healthcare*. Health Service Marketing Management in Africa.

- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). Servqual: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perc. *Journal of Retailing*, 64(1), 12.
- Paul, J., & Sahadev, S. (2018). Service failure and problems: Internal marketing solutions for facing the future. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 40, 304–311. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2016.08.007
- Prentice, C. (2019). Managing service encounters with emotional intelligence. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 51, 344–351. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.07.001
- Raja, J. Z., Frandsen, T., & Mouritsen, J. (2017). Exploring the managerial dilemmas encountered by advanced analytical equipment providers in developing service-led growth strategies. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 192, 120–132. doi:10.1016/j.ijpe.2016.12.034
- Rajendran, S. (2020). Improving the performance of global courier & delivery services industry by analyzing the voice of customers and employees using text analytics. *International Journal of Logistics Research and Applications*, 1-21.
- Reinhold, S., Zach, F. J., & Laesser, C. (2020). E-Business Models in Tourism. *Handbook of e-Tourism*, 1-30.
- Rooney, J. (2013, April 22). Southwest airlines CMO Kevin Krone explains what's behind the new grown-up ads. *Forbes*.
- Rust, R. T., & Huang, M. H. (2012). Optimizing service productivity. *Journal of Marketing*, 76(2), 47–66. doi:10.1509/jm.10.0441
- Sadgui, R., & Benchekara, M. (2018). Cooperation in incremental innovation activities: An empirical analysis of moroccan firms. *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering, and Technology*, 9(3), 48–61. doi:10.4018/IJSSMET.2018070104
- Savitz, E. (2011, February 18). Can Ticketmaster CEO Nathan Hubbard fix the ticket market. *Forbes*.
- Sharkey, J. (2012, August 20). Clearing skies for private jets. *New York Times*.
- Shcherbakova, T. (2020, May). Service Business Model-a New Approach to Improving Efficiency in the Digital Economy. In *2nd International Scientific and Practical Conference "Modern Management Trends and the Digital Economy: from Regional Development to Global Economic Growth" (MTDE 2020)* (pp. 1012-1017). Atlantis Press.
- Shroeck, M. (2011, March 15). Why the customer call center isn't dead. *Forbes*.
- Toporek, A. (2014, April 24). Southwest Airlines: A Service Recovery Surprise. *B2C*.
- Tracy, D. (2013, August 19). JetBlue revives plans for trainee hotel at Orlando Airport. *Orlando Sentinel*.
- Turner, P. (2020). What Is Employee Engagement? In *Employee Engagement in Contemporary Organizations* (pp. 27-56). Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-36387-1_2
- Tuttle, B. (2013, May 7). One Airline that stubbornly refuses to pile on the fees (for now). *Time*.
- Upbin, B. (2012, June 29). Why Hipmunk is the world's best travel site. *Forbes*.
- Walker, J., & Silverman, R. (2012, September 20). Meet the new boss: big data. *Wall Street Journal*.
- West, P. (2009, August 31). Retail Medical Clinics Offer Quality Care: Study. *HealthDay*.
- Whelan, D. (2011, July 18). All grown up. *Forbes*.
- White, M. (2015, October 20). Lost Bags, at 140 Characters, and Airlines Respond. *New York Times*, p. B6.
- Wijaya, A. P., & InnocentiusBernarto, A. P. (2020). How to Achieve Value Creation in Digital World? The Influence of IT Response on Value Creation and Customer Satisfaction. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, 29(3), 6705–6715.
- Wirtz, J., & Lovelock, C. (2017). *Managing People for Service Advantage*. World Scientific. doi:10.1142/y0011

Wulandari, A., & Suryawardani, B. (2020). The effect of internal, external, and interactive marketing on customer decisions. In *Understanding Digital Industry: Proceedings of the Conference on Managing Digital Industry, Technology and Entrepreneurship (CoMDITE 2019), July 10-11, 2019, Bandung, Indonesia* (p. 35). Routledge. doi:10.1201/9780367814557-11

Yang, K. J., Chen, S. H., & Yang, C. C. (2020). Establishment and applications of quality management system for service industries. *International Journal of Financial, Accounting, and Management*, 1(4), 199–207.

Yu, R. (2008, August 26). Sheraton has designs on fresh look. *USA Today*, p. 4B.

Zeithaml, V., Bitner, M. J., & Gremler, D. D. (2013). *Service innovation and design. In Services Marketing: Integrating Customer Focus across the Firm* (6th ed.). McGraw Hill.

Zhurylo, V. V., & Prygara, O. Y. (2018). International Positioning Strategy of Ukrainian Advertising Service Companies on European Media Market. *Journal of Applied Economic Sciences*, 13(2).

Pratap Chandra Mandal is an Assistant Professor (Marketing) at Indian Institute of Management, Shillong, India. He has completed graduate degree from the reputed Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur (IIT Kharagpur), India (Bachelor of Technology in Mechanical Engineering), post-graduate degree from Vinod Gupta School of Management, IIT Kharagpur (Masters in Business Administration), PhD (Marketing) from Vinod Gupta School of Management, IIT Kharagpur. His research concerns customer relationship management, customer satisfaction, services marketing, marketing intelligence, and qualitative methods in management. He is the editor-in-chief of two international journals and is on the editorial board of journals like Journal of Global Marketing. Pratap has won several prestigious scholarships and awards throughout his academic career.