

IMPACT OF CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPECTATIONS BASED ON GENDER

Roshan Lal Joseph

ABSTRACT

Customer satisfaction is a critical factor in business success, influenced not only by product quality but also by customer service. This study explores gender-based differences in customer service expectations and perceptions, analysing how men and women react differently to service quality, response time, product options, and communication styles. Through primary data collection via surveys, the research identifies key behavioural tendencies such as men preferring efficiency and directness, while women value flexibility and detailed options. The findings highlight the importance of tailored customer service strategies to enhance satisfaction and brand loyalty while addressing gender biases in service delivery.

Keywords: *Customer Service, Gender Differences, Consumer Behaviour, Service expectations*

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the most crucial elements for any business in the world is pleasing a consumer. The high level of bargaining power of customers in today's highly competitive business climate, when there are many substitutes on the market with various product offers, makes it difficult to please customers. Any business's ability to succeed and even continue to exist depends on its ability to satisfy its customers. Customers and their level of satisfaction from the business, in other words, lay the foundation for a successful business.

However, customer satisfaction and content not only depend on the quality of the product offered. Even though the product forms a large part of customer satisfaction consumer service is now an indispensable part of a business. By providing after-sale services, grievance redressal systems, spreading knowledge, or acknowledging needs of the customers businesses and firms aim to build their brand image and loyalty. These customer services are applicable not only to commercial businesses and firms but also to institutions such as schools, colleges, banks, and more where the commodity of exchange is a service rather than a product.

The following paper conducts research on the impact of customer service expectation on a gender basis. It aims to study how customer service is perceived by males and females and the distinctions in feelings, sentiments, and contentment between both. Additionally, the research includes collection of primary data through a questionnaire survey to conduct the research analysis.

2. CUSTOMER SERVICE AND ITS IMPORTANCE

The direct, one-on-one connection between a customer purchasing something and a representative of the business selling it is known as customer service. Customer service is crucial because it serves as a direct line of communication between your clients and your company. It keeps clients and gets more value out of them. Businesses can recover their expenditures associated with customer acquisition by offering excellent customer service. It is an indispensable part of a business organisation as it not helps consumers and build their loyalty but also builds a positive brand image.

Consumer satisfaction is a mindset that resembles judgement after a purchase or a string of encounters with a product from a customer. As happy customers refer 4 to 5 others, whereas unhappy customers refer 9 to 12 others, creating a negative image and negative word of mouth, customer satisfaction encourages customers to stay longer with the business and strengthen their relationship with it. When the given product is an intangible called "service," achieving customer pleasure becomes more difficult. An act or performance that benefits customers by bringing about the intended change in or on behalf of the recipient is referred to as a service. Due to the diverse qualities

of services, such as heterogeneity, perishability, intangibility, and other issues, making clients happy also gets more challenging.

3. CONSUMER PERCEPTION AND EXPECTATION

Based on our personal prejudices and perceptions of gender, our responses to service and our loyalty to companies and employees may differ. Customers frequently react favourably to service employees who fall into the "expected" gender in the establishment they frequently visit. For instance, we usually expect flight attendants to be female and therefore anticipate a caring and hospitable service from them.

This naturally makes client satisfaction more complicated than one might originally believe. Customers perceive your brand differently because of their various perceptions of your service standards and quality, which are all based on their distinctive attitudes, beliefs, and personalities. This basically indicates that the perception of the consumer is often more important than the service itself or the gender of the provider. It can be incredibly challenging to predict, let alone control, this.

4. DIFFERENCES IN CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGIES WHILE DEALING WITH MEN AND WOMEN

4.1 Deadlines and due dates

While dealing with any customer it is important that the firm or organisation does not overpromise their delivery. This will not only cause distress amongst the customers but will also create a negative image of the brand among them.

However, it has been observed that men tend to like more specifications when it comes to timings and deadlines. In these cases, a flexible deadline may lead to losing the customer altogether. On the other hand, females though are equally satisfied with a strict deadline or timing might even be equally content with a flexible time commitment.

For instance, let us assume that there is a watch repairing shop with two customers, one male and one female. The watch repairer while sharing the date of repair should prefer to specify a particular day such as the 20th or 21st to the male consumer, while dealing with a female customer he/she might give a flexible time period such as the next week. In other words, men tend to like more specific dates while women feel much more comfortable with a flexible schedule.

4.2 Guide to action

Men tend to appreciate a given set of rules and specifications while following a course of action such as setting up a piece of furniture or creating an ID on an online website or even cooking a recipe. On the other hand, women tend to lean towards more unique and creative out-of-the-box approaches towards any product or service.

Hence, with men a systematic and to-the-line approach works better whereas women tend to like a customised approach.

4.3 Experience

Consumer loyalty and happiness are greatly impacted by creating a distinctive, smooth contact centre experience. Men frequently perceive phoning customer support as a time-consuming, tiresome chore, while women frequently value the chance to learn about novel or improved options when doing so. In other words, encounters with female customers on a contact centre channel may be an excellent sales opportunity.

Because of this, any up-selling or cross-selling that goes beyond what the female customer has explicitly asked for must be rapid, effective, and simple to carry out. With female clients, you might have more time and freedom to present them with additional options. Talk to them and ask questions to determine any new or evolving needs.

4.4 Products/Options offered

While seeking customer service, there lies a huge difference between male and female consumers when it comes to the options offered. While men tend to be easily satisfied by a few and reasonable options, women are much more likely to explore a greater number of options or future paths.

This arises due to the inherent differences in the male and female psychology where men tend to look for lesser options to choose from than women. It has also been seen that men tend to get confused and perplexed by a greater number of options and therefore tend to look for fewer options.

4.5 Timings

Following the female psychology of seeking a greater no. of options of service offered, they are much more likely to dispense a greater amount of time while dealing with sales service representatives. On the other hand, men tend to like quicker and clear-cut road of action and therefore do not like to spend a greater amount of time while dealing with service representatives.

Therefore, while dealing with the different genders it is important to accommodate their needs and expectations. This will enable a much more efficient service and would lead to happy and satisfied customers.

5. BANKING SECTOR: ROLE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Numerous research studies have been done to assess contentment differences between men and women. Several research have revealed that satisfaction is gender-neutral while many have stated otherwise.

Studies have discovered that there are differences between the perspectives of male and female employees on customers' satisfaction and comparative advantage. When compared to women, males score the bank's satisfaction and competitiveness more highly thanks to the use of the CRM (customer relationship management) approach. According to previous research, customers who have had a terrible experience with a business in the past tend to be more unsatisfied in the future.

Women are more inclined to adhere to the "ethic of caring," which prioritises relations and empathy, whereas men are more likely to conform to the "ethic of justice," which stresses rules and personal freedoms. Men are usually expected to reflect actions from a more individualistic or rational standpoint, whereas women are traditionally believed to represent behaviours that come from a community perspective (e.g., a greater care for others). However, these viewpoints may alter based on the type of function that men and women perform in a particular social scenario.

As a result, men may conduct in a stereotypically macho manner while women may behave more stereotypically feminine. The degree of pleasure in the banking industry may also be impacted by this behavioural disparity among men and women.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Sources of data

The following study involves two types of sources of data-

1. Primary Data: This sort of data is gathered by researchers directly from primary sources through experiments, surveys, and other methods such as interviews.
2. Secondary data, usually referred to as second-party data, is any dataset that was gathered by a different party than the one using it.

6.2. Limitations of the study

1. The study is conducted for all types of consumer service without focusing on any particular brand of company.
2. The analysis and interpretation process only utilise the respondents' responses.
3. The analysis may not be generalised as the data collected doesn't include people from all sectors of the economy.

6.3 Findings

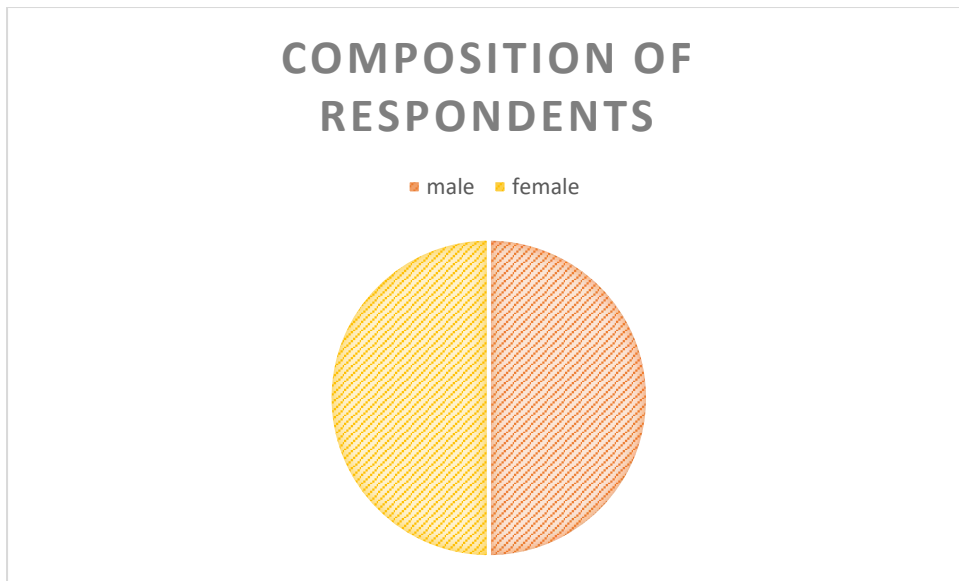
In the given study the data has been collected from 100 respondents which were divided equally among male and female. In other words, the survey has been conducted from 50 males and 50 female respondents through telephonic survey or physical interaction. Following are some of the questions which had been asked within the survey-

1. How much time are you willing to dispense while dealing with a customer service representative?
 - 5-10 minutes
 - 15-20 minutes
 - Up to 30 minutes
 - Can't say
2. How willing are you to reach out to a customer service representative?
 - Very willing
 - Not willing
 - Unbiased
3. How do you prefer to receive service?
 - Telephonic interview
 - Physical interaction
 - Either
4. On the basis of your experience, how likely are you to recommend our organisation to your friends and family?
 - Not likely
 - Very likely
 - Can't say
5. How would you rate your satisfaction level?
 - Low
 - Average
 - High
 - Can't say
6. How would you rate the effort it took to reach our consumer service representative?
 - Low
 - Average
 - High
 - Can't say
7. Was the representative polite and friendly?
 - Yes
 - No
8. Were you made aware of all the options available to you?
 - Yes
 - No
9. Was the representative willing to explain the functionality aspect of the product?
 - Very willing
 - Not willing
 - Neutral
10. Did you get a fair deal while purchasing?
 - Yes
 - No
11. . Did you get a trial for different products.
 - Always
 - Sometimes

- Rarely
12. How would you like to rate your overall experience?
- Bad
 - Average
 - Good
 - Excellent

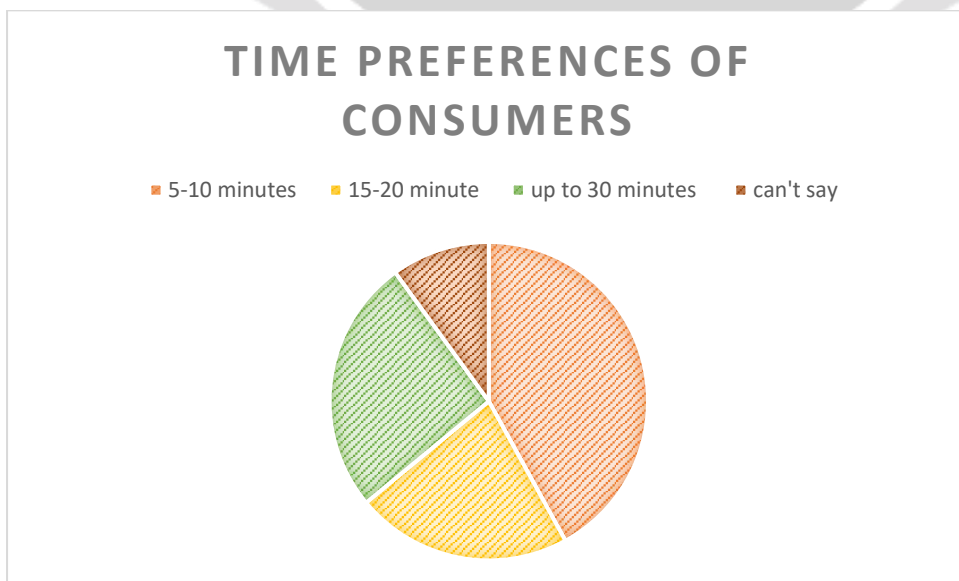
6.4. Results

The following graph (Figure 1) shows the composition of respondents in the survey i.e., 50 male respondents and 50 female respondents.



(Figure 1: Composition of respondents)

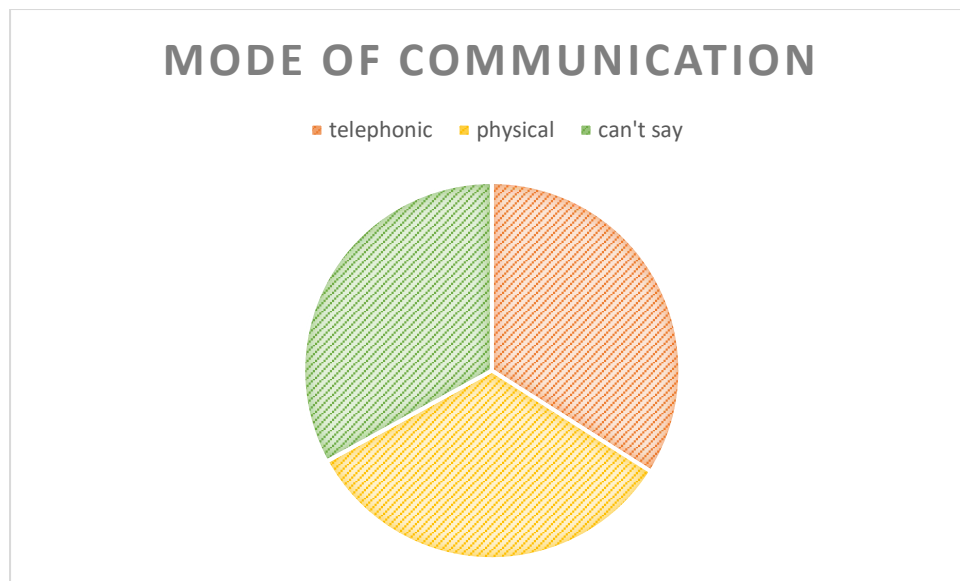
Upon analysing the primary data, it was seen that men were much more likely to appreciate customer services within a short period of time while women were satisfied with a much longer and detailed procedure. 38 out of 50 male respondents and 4 out of female respondents wanted a service of 5-10 minutes, 8 male and 14 female respondents wanted 15-20 minutes, 4 male and 22 female respondents appreciated a service of up to 30 minutes while only 10 female respondents were comfortable with any duration of time. (Figure 2)



(Figure 2: Time preferences of consumers)

Upon inquiry about their willingness to reach out to a customer service representative about 60% of male respondents were unwilling to reach out while only 20% of female respondents answered the same. Upon inquiry it was found that while male respondents required help navigating through their difficulty, they much preferred carrying out the task themselves and reached out to the representative as a last resort, while female respondents reached out to them as their first course of action.

Astonishingly, the mode of customer service interaction was found out to be equally divided between modes of communication. Hence, respondents as a whole were equally likely to accept customer service through technological means (telephonic service) or physical means of communication. (Figure 3)



(Figure 3: Mode of communication)

Men and women have different requirements as far as number of options are concerned. It was found that women needed to have a detailed information of different brands and they used to select from a number of options available to them. On the other hand, men usually limit themselves to one or two options provided it met their requirement.

Women were found to be less responsive to functionality aspect of the product. They seek shared experiences and strive for outside influence while making a decision. Men used to give lots of importance to the functionality aspect and they make their purchase decisions based on intuition. The study revealed that only 15% of women responded to functionality aspect of the product while 65% of men responded to product functionality.

There is a night and day difference between the manner in which men and women think about the product before purchasing. Women used to gather lot of information about the product before purchasing them especially if it is a luxurious product. Men tend to stick to a particular aspect of the product and they buy the product if that specific feature or a certain quality exist in the product. It helps them to make a faster decision than women. Men don't try different products and stick to the specifications only while women prefer to try all the options available in the store. The survey revealed that 85% of women liked to explore different options while 26% of men showed their inclination to explore different options.

Women enjoy deals and gift system a lot. They tend to buy lots of products if good deal is available to them. A good customer service representative can easily persuade women to buy by offering different deals to them - buy one get one free, buy two or more get 50% discount, on the purchase of a certain amount, free gift etc. It was found from the survey that more than 70% of the women tend to buy more, when purchase option comes with a deal. On the other hand, only 30% men opted for deal purchase.

Similarly, it was found out that there exists a large no. of differences in how male and female customers are actually treated and how they are treated in reality.

7. WAYS TO DIMINISH GENDER BIASES IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

7.1 Consider needs over circumstances

Sometimes businesses approach consumers based upon their genders rather than their needs and requirements. Even though this sometimes may lead to a better service, it carries a huge risk of creating segmentations and presuppositions among customers.

This can lead customers to believe that the firm or brand is biased against their gender and may as well lead to switching of brands. Therefore, first and foremost the customer service should focus upon the needs of the audience, their motivation, triggers, and what is needed to elevate and advance their customer experience.

7.2 Targeting customers appropriately

It is crucial to ensure that the customer service employees do not believe in preconceived notions based on gender bias. They should follow more data-based and guidelines-based procedure to ensure that all people are treated with equal attention.

Humans regularly assume gendered stereotypes, such as favouring women during the summer vacation for family outings. It's critical that we try harder to overcome our reflexive and implicit gender biases since all these targeting choices add up.

7.3 Product offerings

To this day, gender targeted marketing is followed by many businesses. When searching for gifts for girls, consumers often come across shaded that are conventionally more feminine such as pastels and cool tones, on the other hand when it comes to searching gifts for boys, we often observe that product offered are usually shaded of blue and black.

Hence, in order to adapt to the changing environment companies could adopt gender neutral products such that they equally suit everyone. By creating an environment that is accepted by all genders it will create a much more positive environment for the brand.

7.4 Training of employees

It is crucial to provide staff members especially customer service staff with training in speaking to people without prejudice. Being the most sensitive touch points, these can be the breaking point of how people perceive your brand.

These interactions, whether verbal, textual, or telephone-based, can make or break the way clients see your company; for example, utilising gendered pronouns like "darlin" or "sweetheart" to address women. Consumers are much more likely to feel better and supported if they receive the appropriate service, and additionally employees will feel much more confident in their jobs when provided with appropriate training but it must be provided in a way that engages the audience and provides them the chance to ask questions in a welcoming, judgment-free setting.

Companies could also think about collaborating with organisations that might increase employee awareness of gender bias.

8. CONCLUSION

It can finally be seen that there lies a huge difference in customer service on a gender basis. While methods adopted for dealing with men and women may be different, they both are equally efficient. Though exceptions may take place it is usually seen that women appreciate a much more flexible creative and unique men tend to like a much more detail oriented, quick and successive course of action.

Therefore, it is extremely crucial to strategically adopt strategies according to the gender of the customers and offer services accordingly. This will enable the customer service representative to function much more efficiently and will also create a much more positive image of the brand as customers would be happy and satisfied.

Demographic research, such as that on gender, can assist guide the all-centre operations, boost sales or customer retention, and help the clients feel good about doing business with you. However, one crucial point even after taking factors like gender, geography, income level, and age into account; When it comes down to it, you're dealing with people. Everyone should be treated with concern, regard, and compassion.

9. REFERENCES

1. Fonolo (2018). How Gender Expectations Impact Customer Service. Retrieved from <https://fonolo.com/blog/2018/08/how-gender-expectations-impact-customer-service/>
2. Research Leap. (n.d.). Study on the Impact of Gender Differences on Customer Satisfaction in the Educational Sphere. Retrieved from <https://researchleap.com/study-impact-gender-differences-customer-satisfaction-case-educational-sphere/>
3. Calabrese, A., Costa, R., & Rosati, F. (2016). Gender Differences in Customer Expectations and Perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibility. Retrieved from [https://backend.orbit.dtu.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/128740053/Calabrese A. Costa R. Rosati F. 2016 . Gender differences in customer expectations and perceptions of corporate social responsibilit.pdf](https://backend.orbit.dtu.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/128740053/Calabrese_A_Costa_R_Rosati_F_2016_Gender_differences_in_customer_expectations_and_perceptions_of_corporate_social_responsibilit.pdf)
4. ResearchGate. (2021). Exploring the Role of Gender on Customer Satisfaction: A Customer Relationship Perspective from the Banking Sector. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351577601_Exploring_the_role_of_gender_on_customer_satisfaction_A_customer_relationship_perspective_from_banking_sector
5. ResearchGate. (2012). Customer Service: Understanding Gender Differences of Frontline Employees. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241674736_Customer_service_understanding_Gender_differences_of_frontline_employees