A study on customer relationship practices in telecom companies in Karnataka

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Abstract

In the past ten years, India's telecommunications sector has undergone substantial changes in terms of development, market share, and technological advancement. The telecommunications business has experienced such velocity and quick growth that it has attracted more companies, increasing rivalry. Users' expectations have also grown as a result of increasing service awareness and consumer bargaining power, driven by service providers' desire to increase their market share. Any drop in service quality makes clients unhappy and compels them to switch service providers. Customer Relationship Management is a relationship-marketing strategy that service companies use to reduce customer attrition. Evidence of CRM's contribution to bettering service quality aids businesses in retaining clients. As a result, the purpose of this research is to examine how CRM has helped Indian telecom network operators improve the quality of their services. The comprehensive analysis uncovered doubts about CRM's ability to raise service quality. Furthermore, it was discovered that the effect of CRM differed depending on the customer's demographic background. The present research advises additional investigations that cover all of India based on these findings. It is advised that clients from various demographic groups be included in order to fully understand how CRM techniques can help telecommunication network providers deliver higher-quality customer care. After deregulation, the Indian telecom industry has had to contend with fierce competition. Early in the new millennium, several important things happened. It is anticipated that telecom service providers would have to deal with challenging difficulties related to new technologies and value-added services as a result of ongoing advancements. The churn phenomenon affects practically every service industry, but it is particularly significant in the telecom sector because users subscribe and cancel in a very short period of time. As a result of the high churn rate, the telecom industries' bottom line is suffering greatly. Customers change providers for a variety of reasons. By managing, synchronizing, and coordinating customer interactions across all touch points, including the web, customer contact centers, field organizations, and distribution channels, CRM in the telecom sector ultimately aims to provide a comprehensive array of software applications that enable them to improve their revenue, productivity, and customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Customer Relationship Management, customer attrition, distribution channels, customer satisfaction

Introduction:

Telecommunication industry is one of the key drivers of rapid growth of any developing economy, as the world is increasingly driven by information transfer (Arora, 2016). Fueled by the Liberalisation policies and corresponding de-monopolization, the telecommunication industry witnessed a rapid growth in the last decades and it currently

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stands as one of the fastest developing sectors in India. Furthermore, the industry has become one of the key employment generators of the nation and provides a lot of value addition to the society through its diversified services. However, this rapid growth of the telecommunication sector has invited more players into the industry, which in turn increased competition among players to capture the market share. All these companies are providing a wide range of services as a part of winning customers and capturing the market share. Along with the normal services, other additional services, such as high-speed internet facilities, free roaming, and other value added services, are provided by these players. However, the quality of these services has declined year after year, which is not noticed by a majority of providers. The decline in service quality causes dissatisfaction among customers and they switch to other service providers. This attrition creates a huge impact on the profitability of providers. Hence, in order to curtail customers' attrition, service providers adopt a relationship-marketing tool, such as customer relationship management (CRM), which helps them to maintain a strong and long-lasting relationship with their customers. CRM is a business strategy to understand and manage the requirements of potential customers of the organisation. It is defined as "the practise of analysing and utilizing marketing databases and leveraging communication technologies to determine corporate practices and methods that will maximize the lifetime value of each individual customer" (Kumar & Reinartz, 2006). CMR is a strategy that enables organisations to use personality account information and develop an association with every valued customer to provide outstanding customer service (Kotler & Keller, 2006). CRM functions as a differentiator among customers for providing a sustainable competitive advantage to organisations. These strategies aim at building and maintaining strong relationships with customers and hence bridging the gap between the company and its customers. This enables organisations to identify the shifting pattern of customer behaviour and formulate proactive strategies of retaining their customers. In today's increasingly competitive market, a majority of customers make purchasing decisions based on how they are being treated by organisations or service providers. In this context, CRM focuses on understanding customers' requirements and designing suitable strategies. CRM plays a vital role in the formulation of organisational strategies, which have become relationship centric, and the relation-based differentiation has become the need of the hour (Arora, 2016). CRM targets customers who always search for a value in their transactions and are willing to pay for such values. Organizations bet on this knowledge as it enables them to design appropriate marketing and promotional strategies to capture the attention of customers. Proper CRM practices help organisations to create value, which binds customers to the company and prevents them from switching to products of other companies. Further, companies sell their products effectively by building long-lasting relationships with their customers through CRM. In other words, the whole purpose of practicing proper CRM strategies is to enhance the quality of services through interactions with customers, which increases customers' loyalty and satisfaction. Telecommunication industry is highly customer-centric and any decline in the service quality results in the mass attrition of customers, thereby resulting in the collapse of service providers. Hence, the implementation of efficient CRM practices is essential in the telecommunication industry (Shanthi, 2005) to prevent such shifts. Thus, CRM evolved as an important aspect in the telecom sector for building and retaining relationships with customers. In this backdrop, the present paper reviews the existing service quality of telecommunication providers in India and the role of CRM practices in improving the service quality of the telecommunication service providers in India with specific reference to Karnataka state.

Practitioners and academics are paying more attention to customer relationship management (CRM), and an increasing number of businesses are implementing customer-centric strategies, tools, programs, and approaches. They understand that in order to develop tight partnerships and cooperative connections with their customers, they require comprehensive and integrated customer information. The introduction of new channels and methods is fundamentally changing how businesses interact with their consumers, and this development has led to a higher level of integration between the customer service, marketing, and sales activities within organisations. CRM is seen by practitioners as an enterprise strategy to gaining complete information of customer behaviour and preferences as well as to creating plans and programmes that motivate clients to consistently improve their commercial relationships with the organisation. Marketing academics are researching the characteristics and use of CRM and conceptualising the benefits and method of cooperative and collaborative relationships between buyers and sellers. Many academics with interests in a variety of marketing sub disciplines, including channel, services marketing, advertising, business-to-business marketing, and others, are actively investigating and studying the theoretical underpinnings of managing client relationships. They are interested in methods for categorizing and selecting customers, developing one-on-one relationships with specific clients, key account management, client business development, loyalty programs, frequency marketing, cross-selling, and up-selling opportunities, as well as various forms of strategic alliances with clients such as co-branding, joint-marketing, development, and others.

What is Customer Relationship Management (CRM):

It would be helpful to define CRM before we look at its conceptual underpinnings. Relationship marketing and customer relationship management are phrases that are frequently used in marketing literature. According to Nevin (1995), these terminologies have been employed to express a number of themes and views, some of which have been influenced by a wide and somewhat paradigmatic perspective while others have been influenced by a restricted functional marketing perspective. Database marketing initiatives connected to database work provide a detailed view of client relationship management. Another limited perspective on CRM is to view it merely as a means of attempting to retain customers through a range of post-sale marketing strategies that result in strong customer relationships. Focusing on individual or one-to-one interactions with customers while integrating database knowledge with long-term customer retention and growth strategy is a more straightforward strategy given the recent application of information technology.

Review of Literature:

Customer relationship management (CRM) operations are ongoing, according to a 1999 study by **Michael and Biner** on "CRM in the Telecommunication industry: the case study of Swisscom." Therefore, it is crucial to keep client orientation in mind when you improve current programmes and roll out new ones. The study was carried out at Swisscom, a Swiss telecommunications business that has linked CRM to increased performance (profitability and shareholder value). But the study also shows that CRM success cannot be assessed without a well-defined strategy. In a market that was rapidly becoming commoditized, it was necessary to stand apart from the competition. The study demonstrates how Swisscom competed and prevailed by understanding their customers, rethinking the processes that interact with them, and putting in place technology that would enable them to stay ahead of the curve rather than by utilizing conventional price and promotional methods. The telecom industry in India has undergone a transformation from a monolithic regime to an era of deregulation and privatization, where it has seen the rapid rise of market players who offer innovative goods and services.

Vani and Shanthi (2011) conducted a study on "CRM implementation in India Telecom industry evaluating the effectiveness of mobile service providers using data envelopment analysis." It focuses on clients who are willing to pay for the amount and look for value in all of their transactions. A business that has established a long-term partnership with its customers' advertising and promotion can be more successful in generating returns, pursuing aggressive development, cutting costs, and attracting repeat business. The goal is to create business models that will improve their customers' experiences and interactions, resulting in more satisfied and devoted clients.

The study conducted by **Rakshita Puranik** (2013) on "The study on factors influencing customer relationship management (CRM) of telecom companies" in their article reviews that globalization and the global dynamics of the market are many foreign enterprises to develop new strategies, the customer relationship is no longer only connected to products and services - the shift from a supply-driven market to a demanding market has already taken place, and it is currently exclusively related to the customer's experience. Business information that is easy to differentiate, customize, personalize, and distribute through networks at extraordinary speed is the foundation of today's economy. CRM strives to increase customer value, interaction, and participation, and it also aids in product customization.

In their article reviews, Meera Arora (2013) conducted a study on the "Role of Service Quality in Customer Relationship Management: An Empirical Study of Indian Telecom Industry." One of the key support services for every emerging economy's rapid expansion is telecommunication, which is also one of India's fastest-growing industries. In the global telecom market, India stood at the base of the pyramid. However, the industry, particularly the mobile segment, is witnessing enormous development with the opening of the telecom sector for competition through liberalization, disinvestments, privatization, and DE monopolization efforts adopted by the government of India. We are currently the second-largest telecom market in the world, with growing engagement and rising cost of customer acquisition; telecom service providers are constantly looking for new ways to acquire, retain, and grow their subscriber base and are challenged by the difficulties of offering a high level of services to draw in and keep their customers. As a result, service providers should improve service quality to increase client retention.

In their article, **Agbaje Yinusa Toyese and colleagues** (2014) evaluated customer relationship management in the Nigerian telecommunications industry and its consequent impact on customer loyalty. CRM is anticipated to assist the organisation in providing goods and services in accordance with customers' preferences and to increase

dependability. CRM was described as a managerial strategy that assists organisations in gathering, analyzing, and managing customer-related information through the use of information technology tools and techniques in order to satisfy customer needs and establish a long-term mutually beneficial relationship. Overall, it is anticipated to lower operational costs and increase revenue. The potential of CRM as a successful approach for client retention is quite alluring. Some advantages that accrue to telecommunications companies embracing the CRM endeavour are improved customer communication, enhanced efficiency, and increased efficacy.

In their article evaluations that have concentrated on the impact of trust of customer happiness in the mobile phone sector, Abdulla and Nor Azila (2014) conducted a study on "The influence on trust on customer satisfaction in the mobile phone market and empirical investigation of the mobile phone market." SPSS and smart (PLS) have been used to investigate the link between the independent variable (faith) and dependent variable (consumer happiness). Mobile phone users provided the study's data; of the 113 surveys given, 130 useable questionnaires were returned. The survey's findings regarding the interaction between the independent and dependent variables of the mobile phone were confirmed in complete agreement with the resource-based perspective of earlier studies that sees customer satisfaction as a deciding factor for both long-term success and a competitive advantage. The conclusion of this study includes a discussion of its limitations as well as suggestions for future research and funding sources for aspirant scholars to consider, According to Danish and Dilpazir's (2017) research on "Relationship Management Practices in the Telecom Sector: Comparative Study of Public and Private Companies," relationship building requires a strategic perspective and cannot be carried out by a small number of people inside an organisation. Instead, it is a comprehensive strategy that necessitates the participation of every member of an organisation. However, how much top management pushes CRM will determine its success. CRM has been the focal point of all marketing efforts in any organisation since the 1990s as a result of the globalization and technology-driven corporate climate. Globally, telecom businesses compete fiercely to draw in new clients and keep existing ones. Although diminishing client loyalty is a problem for the entire service sector. To recruit and keep as many clients as possible, telecom companies are working hard.

According to a study by **Jadhav**, **NR** (2018) on "Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Practices in the Telecom Sector in Maharashtra State," the telecom sector needs to understand its customers' needs and come up with better ways to meet them if it is to succeed in the current environment. Customer relationship management has become a well-liked business approach in today's cutthroat business environment, therefore companies will need to develop marketing tactics that will not only attract new consumers but also keep them for life. It is a discipline that enables the telecom industry to pinpoint and identify their most lucrative clients. It was created as an original technology that might significantly alter the overall output of businesses and services.

Service quality expectations and perceptions of telecommunication service providers in India:

Due to the significance of service quality in retaining customers, this paper reviews studies conducted on various aspects of service quality and makes an effort to identify the variations in mobile customers' expectations and perceptions of the service quality provided by service providers. In a study of 1318 mobile phone consumers across India, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI, 2008) found that just 5 out of 11 providers met the 90% service quality criteria (study, 2008). Paul Rajan and Rajkumar (2011) did more research on how service quality affects the choice of service providers. The writers, however, did not adequately address whether customers were satisfied with service quality from service providers. However, the authors emphasized how important service quality is in deciding which service providers to use. Munshi (2011) examined what mobile phone users in New Delhi expected and thought about the network providers' level of customer care. The authors showed a substantial discrepancy between mobile phone users' views and expectations, highlighting the poor service quality provided by the service providers. Customers' dissatisfaction with the level of services rendered by their mobile network service providers was shown by Farid and Jha (2013). The main cause of the authors' frustration was a lack of effective customer communication to understand their needs. As a result, the authors recommended that service providers take the lead to improve communication. This conclusion is supported by Arora (2013), who said that poor service quality from mobile service providers in India hurt their clientele and that these companies were acting to improve communication in order to better comprehend their needs. In his study of the discrepancy between expectations and perceptions of the service quality offered by network providers in Kerala, Srikumar (2014) identified a sizeable one. In terms of mobile customers' expectations and views of the service quality of service providers, Kushwah and Bhargav (2014) found a comparable disparity. Customers in West Bengal's major cities were reportedly extremely

dissatisfied with the level of service provided by mobile service providers, according to Ghosh (2014). Customers' attitudes regarding customer service and value-added services provided by providers, according to the author, were unsatisfactory. Customers' complaints about the service quality of mobile network providers were analyzed by Prasanna Kumar et al. (2014), who also suggested implementing effective customer-based services. Additionally, clients' expectations and perceptions of service quality differ, according to Kannan and Thomas (2015). In their research conducted in Northern India, Sharma and Jhamb (2017) also showed the discrepancy between mobile customers' expectations and views of the service quality offered by mobile operators. According to Sugunanthi and Shanti (2017), the telecommunications companies were not focused on providing their clients with high-quality services. In order to deliver high-quality services and satisfy its clients, the Indian telecommunications industry needs to be strategically positioned, according to Keerthi et al. (2017). Boora (2017) added further attention to the disparity between expected and perceived service quality and the significance of closing this gap by recommending that telecom operators should prioritize both customer retention and service quality improvement. However, Kalpana and Chinnadurai (2006) refuted the claims of poor service quality by demonstrating that Coimbatore residents were pleased with the telecom service providers' offerings. The general satisfaction of mobile customers in Coimbatore with the service quality of providers was underlined by Bhanumathy and Kalavani (2006). In a similar vein, Amulya (2013) reported in her study of Mysore mobile users that service providers in the study area guaranteed a minimal level of quality. Srikumar and Devaprasanna's (2017) study also showed how satisfied Airtel and Vodafone consumers were with the network coverage and voice quality of their service providers in Coimbatore and the Nilgiris. To maintain the level of service quality, all of these authors also spoke to the need for the adoption of more effective customer engagement strategies.



Above image showing major benefits of CRM in Telecom domain

CRM practices and service quality of telecommunication service providers:

As mentioned in the section above, many research supported the use of suitable CRM as a measure to improve the effectiveness of service quality providers. Seth et al. (2008) mentioned the design of an instrument to get client input on how they feel the service quality is. The results showed that changes in their service in response to client feedback had improved the quality of their offerings. Desai et al. (2007) asserted that the introduction of CRM could

have adverse consequences on mobile network providers' performance in the lack of dynamic capabilities. Haridasan and Venkatesh (2011) provided evidence that effective CRM implementation aided mobile carriers in Chennai in maintaining contact with their clients. The narrow study location and sample size, however, prevented the results from being more broadly applied. Relationship marketing methods and their effects on the Indian telecom business were studied by Reddy et al. (2012). According to the authors, relationship management techniques have a big impact on how well service providers treat their clients, which has an effect on how satisfied customers are. Agariya and Singh (2012) also created a CRM index to pinpoint CRM's contribution to mobile service providers' increased service quality. The authors made the case that the CRM index would help mobile network service providers increase customer acquisition, retention, and profitability. The authors, however, were unable to show an improvement in the aforementioned criteria. In the meantime, Swarnkar et al. (2013) showed how Indian mobile service providers were heavily utilizing CRM to determine their customers' needs and how their CRM practices assisted service providers to improve the quality of their services, Mohammed (2013) also demonstrated how CRM practices at Airtel and Zain have improved the caliber of their services. According to the author, effective CRM implementation assisted providers in better understanding consumer wants and responding accordingly, which in turn improved the caliber of service providers. In a study he conducted with 262 respondents across India, Arora (2013) established a link between CRM and service quality. Cotian et al. (2014) created a decision-supporting system in another study to gain insights into client requirements. According to the authors, the deployment of this supporting system enabled to properly deliver services based on the inputs of the consumers and resulted in an improvement in the quality of service offered by mobile network providers. According to Rajini and Sangamaheswary (2016), telecom firms can raise service quality, relationship development, brand perception, price perception, trust, and customer expectations by knowing their consumers' preferences and choices. Arora (2016) came to the conclusion that network service providers in the National Capital Region had a better ability to produce higher-quality services, which in turn boosted consumer happiness and loyalty. Through his research on mobile clients in Mysore, Jaday (2018) further demonstrated the critical impact of CRM practices in providing good service quality. According to Sekhar and Malyadri (2019), CRM procedures were crucial in assisting service providers to keep up a two-way dialogue with clients, which in turn improved the providers' level of customer service. Additionally, according to Raina and Pazir (2017), the use of CRM services is a lifeline for telecom companies looking to capture the largest market share possible through solid client relationships.

Conclusion:

In-depth research was done in order to determine how CRM practises may help Indian telecommunication service companies give better customer care. The study examined customers' expectations and opinions of Indian telecommunications companies' service quality. Additionally, a thorough analysis was conducted to investigate the contribution of CRM practises to the enhancement of service quality. According to the reviews, several studies (TRAI, 2008; Farid & Jha, 2013; Arora, 2013; Kushwah & Bhargay, 2014) have called attention to the subpar service quality of Indian telecommunications companies. The majority of these studies (Farid & Jha, 2013; Arora, 2013; Sharma & Jhamb, 2017) cited a number of issues with the use of communication measures to understand customer wants as the causes of subpar service quality. Even though Kalpana and Chinnadurai (2006) and Bhanumathi and Kalavani (2006) refuted the claim that service providers offer subpar services, these authors also suggested that in order to maintain service quality, effective customer engagement strategies must be adopted. Additionally, it was deduced that factors affecting customer relationships, such as assurance, responsiveness, reliability, and communication, had a big impact on how well network service providers provided their services (Seth et al., 2008; Sharma, 2011; Surachith & Singh, 2013; Choudhari & Upreti, 2013; Sugunanthi & Shanthi, 2017). Thus, the role of CRM practices in raising the level of service provided by Indian telecom carriers was examined. Numerous studies have proven the importance of CRM practices in raising service providers' levels of quality. The reasons made by Desai (2007) and the failure of Agariya and Singh (2012), however, raise some questions about the efficacy of CRM in raising service quality. In the absence of dynamic capabilities, Desai (2007) stated that the introduction of CRM could have a negative impact on the performance of mobile network operators. Agariya and Singh (2012) were unable to demonstrate how CRM deployment has improved service quality. In addition, the research shows that the influence varies depending on the type of customers. According to different consumer demographics, CRM has varying effects (Desai, 2007; Haridasan and Venkatesh, 2011). Additionally, there were few studies that looked at how CRM practices were used by network service providers in North-East India, Following these conclusions, the study advises additional investigations across India, involving clients from varied demographic backgrounds, in order to gain a thorough understanding of the contribution of CRM practices to raising the level of service quality provided by telecommunication network providers.

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