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SMALL MANUFACTURING FIRMS PRODUCT-MIX AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT
Product-mix is the catalyst around which satisfaction of customers revolve. If product-mix is strong and appealing, it will fetch more & more customers, markets, product acceptability and much more. The present paper takes into consideration small manufacturing firms product-mix and customer satisfaction. The hypotheses were examined by analysing primary data collected from 368 customers who were using the products manufactured by small functional manufacturing units sub-divided into ten lines of operation in district Udhampur, J&K State. Validity and reliability of the scale in the construct were assessed through BTS and Cronbach-alpha test. The results of regression analysis and ANOVA revealed that customers satisfaction is dependent upon product quality, product features, product image and product services offered along with the product and there exists significant mean difference as far as customer satisfaction is concerned with regard to their age, qualification and profession. To nurture customer satisfaction small scale industries should come up with regular advertisement, reputed brand, more products features and delighted after sale service

KEYWORDS: Customer satisfaction, Small manufacturing firms.

INTRODUCTION

Product–mix is part of marketing-mix and is given lot of emphasis. Product-mix encompasses product features, quality, after sale service, image, brand, packaging, colour, tag, labels, ingredients, size, design, shape, guarantee, warrantee, etc. If a company product-mix is good, its obvious that customer satisfaction would be high. Rising competition, consumer's purchasing power and new technological opportunities make a very complex environment for consumers decisions. Customer satisfaction represents a meaningful challenge for marketers and strategic sales directors. The marketing and sales managers must distinguish consumer groups, consumer products and the corresponding preferences. Today consumer satisfaction represents a fundamental part of the marketing literature. It is the key to contemporary marketing success. Marketers can study actual consumer purchases to find out customer expectations that have ascended to very high standards and it becomes very daring for the marketer to retain & build long term relations with customers (Quinn, 2000 and Elmuti, 2003). Companies through effective supply chain relationships between intermediaries are focusing on revenue increasing methods, cost reduction and improving customer satisfaction. In consumer marketing and consumer research, customer satisfaction has most often been defined as "The degree to which a consumer's pre-purchase expectation are fulfilled or surpassed by a product". Even Small Scale Industries (SSI's) are fulfilling the place needs of its customers (Lewis, 2000) and builds relationships between channel members that are contingent on the level of satisfaction of each firm. Hines et al. (2002) suggest that companies should integrate customer expectations into their firms strategies and designs. In other words, management should be able to understand how their customers perceive them and whether their performance meets these expectations (Hill et al. 2003). Customer satisfaction is a measure of how the products and services provided by a company meet or exceed customer expectations that offers an important indication of how successful an organisation is at providing products and/or services to the marketplace (Anderson, 2004). In market conditions of increasing levels of product variety and customisation, the ability to respond to customer orders in a timely fashion can provide a critical competitive advantage across industry sectors (Sako et al., 1994; Kalwani & Narayandas, 1995 and Storey, 1994).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Customer satisfaction or responsiveness identifies the business success or failures (Stuart & McCutcheon, 1996; Leuthesser & Kohli, 1995 and Nielson, 1998). Further, empirical findings of various studies reveal association between business growth and the size of their customer bases (Storey, 1994). In a market-oriented business one is concerned with the satisfaction of both the customers and the firm. The customers are in general believed to be satisfied when the offered products meet their needs, desires and requests. The firm is satisfied when exchanges result in profitability. This duality has been called attention to in many publications since the marketing concept came into use at the end of the 1940s. Nevertheless, the implementation of the marketing concept has been rather

heavily focused on the customers needs. Very few firms have knowledge of the costs incurred and the profitability obtained by exchanges (Shapiro et al. 1987; Howell & Soucy 1990 and Foster et al. 1996). Even, marketing leaders are recognize that relationships throughout the supply chain and customer satisfaction are needed to produce high quality products (Deming, 1993 and Feigenbaum, 1982). Organisations depend upon both suppliers and their distributors for feedback, ideas and suggestions so that they can improve the value of their offerings (Hines, 1994; Kumar, 1996 and Womack & Jones, 1996). Further, many research studies have documented that developing customer satisfaction with product quality is a valuable, profitable way for competitive advantage (Brown et al., 1991 and Buzzell & Gale, 1987). Indeed, companies recognize that to succeed in the marketplace they must serve their customers with improved quality and reduced costs. Many researchers have argued that strengthening the network of suppliers and distributors is a critical way that organisations can meet these competitive pressures (Dyer & Chu, 2004; Harrison & St. John, 1996; Hines, 1994; Kumar, 1996; Toni & Nassimbeni, 2000 and Womack & Jones, 1996). Presently, it has been observed that the contemporary competitive market environment is making new kinds of demands on suppliers and retailers. The present research studies customer satisfaction regarding small manufacturing products operating in district Udhampur of J&K State.

TESTABLE HYPOTHESES

Hyp1: Customer satisfaction is dependent upon product quality, product image, product features and product services.

Hyp2: There exist significant mean differences among customer satisfaction with regard to age.

Hyp3: Customers with different qualification enjoys different satisfaction with regard to product mix of small manufacturing firms.

Hyp4: There exists significant difference among customers satisfaction belonging to different professions

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research design and methodology comprises area of research, nature of data/information (Primary or secondary), questionnaire/schedule, research tools applied etc. The research methodology adopted proceeds as follows:

Sampling and data collection

The study was conducted on 368 customers using the products of small scale industries operating in district Udhampur of J&K state. The total number of registered SSIs with Directorate of Industries and Commerce, J&K is 49,426 providing employment to over 2,25,963 persons. Of these, 3838 units are registered in district Udhampur and 90 percent of functional SSIs representing 44 in number, operating under SIDCO and SICOP are included in the present study for measuring customer satisfaction regarding the products manufactured by these industries. These manufacturing units are further sub-divided into ten lines of operation comprising cement (8), pesticide (3), steel (3), battery/lead/alloy (5), menthol (2), guns (2), conduit pipes (2), gates/grills/varnish (5), maize/atta/dal mills (3) and miscellaneous (11). Snowball/referral sampling had been applied because the present research includes only those customers who are using the products manufactured by small scale industries of district Udhampur.

The Survey Instrument

Information was collected by administering self developed questionnaire prepared after consulting experts and review of literature which comprised of general information and 20 statements regarding customer satisfaction. Statements in the questionnaire were based on five -point Likert scale, where 1 stands for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. The survey instrument was based on ranking and ordinal scale (5<---->1) ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5). The primary data were collected by making three to four visits for getting response from respondents. The secondary information was collected from various sources namely books, empirical papers from online & hard copies of journals.

Statistical tools applied

Various multivariate tools such as Mean, standard deviation, correlation and linear regression were used to test hypotheses for drawing meaningful inferences.

Reliability and validity of the instrument

Reliability: As evident from Table 1.1, Four factors were obtained after scale purification falling within the domain of customer satisfaction for product mix in supply chain management of small manufacturing firms. The Cronbach's reliability coefficients for all 20 scale items underlying ten factors ranged from 0.77 to 0.98. The alpha reliability coefficients for F_1 (0.98), F_2 (0.88) and F_3 (0.78), F_4 (0.77), is higher than the criteria of 0.77 obtained by Gordon and Naryanan (1984) indicating high internal consistency. However, the overall alpha reliability score for all factors revealed satisfactory value of (0.85). Adequacy and reliability of sample size to yield distinct and reliable factors is further demonstrated through Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy that is 0.901 and all factor loadings between items and their respective constructs being greater than equal to 0.55.

Validity: All the four factors obtained alpha reliability higher and equal to 0.50. Apart from these measures, KMO value is also satisfactory at 0.901, indicating good validity of the construct (Hair et al., 1995).

CUSTOMERS PROFILE

As portrayed in Table 1.2, customers profile has been examined with regard to Locality, Profession, Age, Gender, Qualification, Expenses and Income. A brief description of customers profile is as under:

Locality

As far locality of the customers is concerned, maximum of the respondents were from Udhampur area (325) representing 88.3% of the total respondents. About 43 (11.7%) respondents belonged to other areas.

Profession

More of the respondents (150) belonged to service class and were 40.8%. Those belonging to business class, self employed, student and others were 80, 11, 4 and 123 respectively.

Age

Age wise analysis shows that majority of respondents was from the age group of 31 – 40 years (124) who constitute 33.7% of the total respondents. Customers in the age group of 21 – 30 years constitute only 22.6% (83) and 28.5% (105) respondents belongs to the age group of 41 – 50 years. The age group 51 – 60 years comprised of 40 respondents and contributes 10.9% of the total respondents. Thus, it was found that it's the middle age group customers who are more purchase oriented.

Gender

65.8% of the respondents (242) were male and 126 were female representing 34.2%.

Qualification of respondents

It has been found that 30.4% (112) of the customers were graduates and 21.2% (78) were post-graduates. Those who were below metric were just 22 in number constituting 6.0% of the total respondents. 61 customers were just metric pass constituting 16.6% of the total respondents. Another group of customers who were qualified upto higher secondary were 16.8% (62). Those who had done technical courses (others) were 33 out of total 368 respondents. Thus, it becomes clear that large proportion of customers is well educated and enlightened.

Expenses

Majority of customers representing 327 were spending upto Rs. 20000. Those spending between 20000-40000 constitute 10.9% of the total population.

Income

Most of the respondents were having income upto 20000 representing 55.4% of the total sample size. Customers having income between 20000-40000 were 153 in number. There were only 10 respondents whose monthly income was between 40000-60000.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Factor analysis was applied to the collected data and the suitability of data obtained from SSIs customers is examined through Anti-image, KMO value, Bartlett's Test of Sphercity (*p*-value = 0.000), Principal Component Analysis and Varimax Rotation (Stewart, 1981; (Dess et al., 1997 & Field, 2000). The KMO value (0.901) and Bartlett Test of Sphercity (3590.192) indicated extreme acceptable and significant values. The process of R-Mode Principal Component Analysis (PSA) with varimax rotation retained all the 20 statements originally kept in the domain of customer satisfaction for product mix. The 20 statements got grouped into four factors Therefore, factor loadings are consistent with conservative criteria, using Kaiser Criteria (i.e. eigen value ≥ 1) with 60.64% of the total variance explained. The communality for 20 statements ranged from 0.60 to 0.86, indicating moderate to high degree of linear association among the variables. The factor loadings ranged from 0.652 to 0.822 and the cumulative variance extracted ranged from 20.98 to 60.64 percent. The percentage of variance explained by each factor came out to be F_1 (20.98%), F_2 (15.52%), F_3 (12.06%), F_4 (12.06%), and is displayed in the Table 1.1. A brief description of factors emerged is as under:

Factor 1 (Quality): The first factor in product mix ejaculated with eight variables namely, "Products supplied to you are of good quality"; "Proper after sale service is provided as per promise"; "The products are competitive"; "Products are durable as compare to other national brands"; "Products are attractive by colour and packaging"; "The products are generally branded"; "The products carry right information on their wrappers" and "Sellers provides necessary information regarding product features". The mean values of all the variables ranged between 4.14 – 4.50 which connote that all the variables obtained good mean score. The factor loadings crotched within .653 - .793 which depicts that all variables are significantly contributing to the factor. The communalities for this factor hovered within .605 to .865 which highlights linear association between variables. The overall mean score of the factor is 4.37 indicating its significant contribution to domain of customer satisfaction regarding product mix.

Factor 2 (Image): The second important factor excogitated with six variables i.e. "Wide distribution of products is ensured during shortages"; "Complaints are quickly handled";

"Sellers provides prompt and courteous service"; "Products carry tested (ISO, ISI) marks"; "Products are well known to the customers because of their image" and "New products with new features are informed to you by sellers". The variable "Complaints are quickly handled" scored low mean value (4.02) and standard deviation (.818) among rest of the variables but good factor loading among all (.794) with good communality (.725). The other variables mean score wavered between 4.04 to 4.42 implying good mean score. Factor loadings fluctuated within .656 - .822 and communalities from .606 to .725.

Factor 3 (Product features): The third factor egresses with four variables namely: "Products are socially strong and useful"; "You prefer local made products to others"; "The products are customised according to needs" and "The products are innovative in nature". The variable "Products are socially strong and useful" gushed with highest mean score (4.24) and factor loading (.791) indicating

considerable contribution of the variable to the factor. The statement "You prefer local made products to others" came up with lowest mean score (4.08) among all but with considerable factor loading (.736). The communalities for the factor varied within .606 to .672. The overall contribution of this factor to the domain of customer satisfaction for product mix is remarkable as denoted by its mean score 4.26.

Factor 4 (Services): The fourth consequential factor dawned with three variables namely: "Safe handling techniques are properly informed to you"; "The products ensures regular buying and selling" and "The products do match with the personality of the customers" The mean values forked between 4.38 – 4.59 divulging good mean responses. The factor loadings swerved within .698 - .749 and communalities from .610 to .684. The variables gave notable mean scores and factor loading denoting vital contribution of the variable to the factor. The overall mean score of the factor is 4.49 which suggest its valuable contribution to the domain of customer satisfaction. Table 1.3 shows output from regression analysis. The result of step-wise linear regression analysis enticed four independent factors as significant in predicting the dependent variable. These were: "Image", "Product features", "Services", and "Quality". The correlation between predictor and outcome was positive with values of R as .907, .912, .923 and .929 which signifies high correlation between predictor and the outcome which signifies high correlation between predictor and the outcome. In model 1, R is .907 which indicates 90% association between dependent and independent variables. R-Square for this model is .823 which means that 82% of variation in customer satisfaction can be explained from the four independent variables. Adjusted R square (.820) indicates that if anytime another independent variable is added to model, the R-square will increase. Accordingly, the rest of the models portray association between dependent and independent variables. Further beta values reveal significant relationship of independent variables with dependent variable. Change in R square is also found to be significant with F-values significant at 5% confidence level. Errors in regression are independent as indicated by Durbin-Watson value (2.363). The above findings support the first hypothesis ***"Customer satisfaction is dependent upon product quality, product image, product features and product services".***

To test the second hypothesis age of the respondents (customers) was taken into consideration and the respondents age had been classified into six categories viz., upto 20 years, 21-30 years, 31-40 years, 41-50 years, 51-60 years and above 60 years. The result of ANOVA (Table 1.4) depicts that respondents belonging to different age group have different level of satisfaction as the *p* value is less than .05 ($p < .05$, Sig. .000). Therefore, the second hypothesis ***"There exist significant mean differences among customer satisfaction with regard to age"*** is accepted.

To test the third hypothesis, the qualification of the respondents was classified into six categories viz., Below metric, Metric, Higher secondary, Graduate, Post graduate and others (Technical courses etc). The results of ANOVA (Table 1.5) revealed that customers with different qualification level differ significantly with regard to product-mix satisfaction (Sig. 0.000) as the *p* value is less than .05. Therefore, the third hypothesis ***"Customers with different qualification enjoys different satisfaction with regard to product mix of small manufacturing firms"*** is also accepted.

To test the last hypothesis profession of the customers is taken into consideration and had been classified into five categories viz., Government service, Business, Self employed, Student and Others. The result of ANOVA (Table 1.6) depicts that respondents belonging to different profession have different level of satisfaction as the *p* value is less than .05 ($p < .05$, Sig. .000). Therefore, the last hypothesis is also accepted.

CONCLUSION

Customer satisfaction is the only mantra for business success now-a-days. The satisfaction of customers therefore gold stone which brings in profitability, wider market share and product diversification. Product quality, image, features and services associated with the product are seen as the basic ingredients for product acceptability and satisfaction. Further, customer satisfaction varies with regard to age, qualification and profession. Therefore, the small scale industries should take initiatives to organise trade shows, seminars, workshops, conferences in order build customer satisfaction with the help of channel intermediaries. The findings of the study is limited to the products manufactured and sold by small scale industries and the customers/users of the same products of district Udhampur of Jammu & Kashmir state, so results drawn cannot be generalized for medium or large scale industries functioning in other parts of country having dissimilar business environment. Future researches can be undertaken to note down the customer satisfaction from the perspective of medium or large scale industries.

Table 1.1: Results Showing Factor Loadings and Variance Explained After Scale Purification (Rotated Component Method) for Customer Satisfaction Regarding Product Mix

Factor-wise Dimensions	Mean	S.D	F.L	Eigen Value	Variance Explained %	Cumulative Variance %	Comm-unality	α
Product Mix								
F1 (Quality)	**4.37**	**.679**		**7.616**	**20.981**	**20.981**		**.9823**
Good quality	4.50	.622	.793				.700	
Proper after sale service	4.40	.705	.773				.763	
Competitiveness	4.43	.689	.769				.865	
Durability	4.40	.587	.710				.718	
Attractiveness	4.14	.855	.697				.768	
Branded	4.20	.601	.683				.684	
Right information on wrappers	4.44	.713	.670				.711	
Sellers provides necessary information regarding product features	4.48	.660	.653				.605	
F2 (Image)	**4.19**	**.705**		**2.217**	**15.527**	**36.508**		**.8841**
Wide distribution	4.04	.776	.822				.701	
Complaints redressal	4.02	.818	.794				.725	
Prompt and courteous service	4.22	.704	.770				.701	
ISO, ISI marks	4.25	.635	.728				.687	
Well known image	4.42	.612	.670				.698	
New products arrivals	4.20	.688	.656				.606	
F3 (Product features)	**4.26**	**.776**		**1.775**	**12.067**	**48.575**		**.7830**
Socially strong and useful	4.24	.869	.791				.668	
local made products are preferred	4.08	.886	.736				.672	
Customisation according to needs	4.35	.701	.696				.606	
Innovativeness	4.38	.650	.652				.620	
F4 (Services)	**4.49**	**.656**		**1.126**	**12.065**	**60.640**		**.7791**
Safe handling techniques are informed	4.51	.626	.749				.610	
Ensures regular buying and selling	4.59	.582	.739				.684	
Personality of the customers	4.38	.761	.698				.642	

Footnotes: KMO Value = .901; Bartlett's Test of Sphercity = 3590.192, df = 210, sig. =.000; Extraction Method Principal Component Analysis; Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation; Rotation converged in 6 iterations; 'FL' stands for Factor Loadings, 'S.D' for Standard Deviation and 'α' for Alpha

Table 1.2: A Brief Profile of Customers

S.NO.	Variables	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Locality	Udhampur Others	325 43	88.3 11.7
2.	Profession	Govt. service Business Self employed Student Others	150 80 11 4 123	40.8 21.7 3.0 1.1 33.4
3.	Age	Upto 20 years 21 – 30 years 31 – 40 years 41 – 50 years 51 – 60 years Above 60 years	6 83 124 105 40 10	1.6 22.6 33.7 28.5 10.9 2.7
4.	Gender	Male Female	242 126	65.8 34.2
5.	Qualification	Below metric Metric Higher secondary Graduation Post graduation Others	22 61 62 112 78 33	6.0 16.6 16.8 30.4 21.2 9.0
6.	Expenses	Upto Rs. 20000 20000-40000 40000-60000	327 40 1	88.9 10.9 0.3
7.	Income	Upto Rs. 20000 20000-40000 40000-60000 Above Rs. 60000	204 153 10 1	55.4 41.6 2.7 0.3
	Total		**368**	**100**

Table 1.3: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate	F value ANOVA	Sig. level	β	t	Sig. level	Durbin-Watson
1.	.907	.823	.820	.2321	271.69	.000	.315	4.885	.000	2.363
2.	.912	.832	.828	.2269	191.67	.000	.132	2.535	.013	
3.	.923	.852	.847	.2142	166.09	.000	.251	3.894	.000	
4.	.929	.863	.857	.2070	143.28	.000	.256	3.027	.003	

a) Predictor: (Constant), Image
b) Predictor: (Constant), Image, Product features
c) Predictor: (Constant), Image, Product features, Services
d) Predictor: (Constant), Image, Product features, Services, Quality
e) Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction is dependent upon product features, quality, image and services.

Table 1.4: ANOVA for Age

	Description of Age	Mean	Nature of Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Age	Upto 20 yrs	4.35	Between Groups	41.051	3	13.684	13.045	.000
	21 – 30 yrs	4.57	Within Groups	381.819	364	1.049		
	31 – 40 yrs	4.45	Total	422.870	367			
	41 – 50 yrs	4.32						
	51 – 60 yrs	4.14						
	Above 60 yrs	4.21						

Table 1.5: ANOVA for Qualification

	Description of Qualification	Mean	Nature of Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Qualifi-	Below Metric	4.05	Between Groups	128.142	3	42.714	27.998	.000
cation	Metric	4.00	Within Groups	555.325	364	1.526		
	Higher Sec.	4.15	Total	683.467	367			
	Graduate	4.02						
	Post Graduate	4.11						
	Others	4.12						

Table 1.6: ANOVA for Profession

	Description of Profession	Mean	Nature of Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Profession	Govt. service	4.04	Between Groups	114.762	3	38.254	13.714	.000
	Business	4.13	Within Groups	1015.31	364	2.789		
	Self employed	4.44	Total	1130.07	367			
	Student	3.95						
	Others	4.23						

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