

Process Improvement and Benchmarking Customer Experience Management

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research paper is to examine which road the companies have walked down to in order to provide better experiences to their customers. Purpose of the paper is to identify certain best practises for customer experience management. A total of seven Customer Experience (CX) professionals and seven organizations were chosen. Out of these seven companies, five were B2B and two were B2C company. An inquisitive study was done as a part of the secondary research. This research was spread over a span of two months. Industries best practises where analysed by approaching, connecting to and interviewing them to collect information for Analysis. Similarities in Approaches of Different industries/business. The paper recommends "Seventeen Industry Best Practices" which can be helpful to improve the existing framework. The study of this paper reveals that what the selected companies do in order to improvise their customer experiences. The best practise framework may suggest significant changes in the customer experience management domain of any organization. The support has been taken from the existing literature about customer experience. It gathers insights on how organizations gain maturity in areas of customer experience management. A seventeen industry best practices framework has not been developed so far.

Keywords

Customer Experience; Customer Satisfaction; Process Improvement; Quality Improvement; Benchmarking; Feedback Mechanisms; Training Methods; Technological Innovation

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Introduction

The very first writers or scholars to uncover the concept of customer experiences were Pine & Gillmore (1998), Schmitt (1999). They explained why customer experience is important for the organizations. The customer experience has become a differentiating factor, for a brand, to the customers. The companies are employing dedicated Customer Experience Professionals in roles like CX Strategist, Customer Experience Managers, CX Analysts, CX Quality Specialists, Customer Experience & Digital Leaders etc. who only concentrates on understanding the touch points, the customers have while interacting with the organization.

Most of the companies which used to believe in 'push' strategy are now adapting the 'pull' strategy as push strategy ensures quick financial gains but pulling customers towards a product or a service helps gaining a customer. It helps gain the loyalty and achieving the customer satisfaction. Companies are losing control over customers and the experiences they have with them. It is completely customer driven. Social pressure, word of mouth are the main influencers of customer experience. It is challenging for the companies to fulfil the demand of the clients and still be at the top in the business in terms of profit.

Knowing the nascent stage at which the literature of customer experience is, there is a need of extensive research in the field of the same. There is logical research work is carried out in certain aspects like journey mappings, customer personas, moments that matter, but now there is a need to bring all their search done together and improve in

other aspects like technology that can be helpful to upgrade experiences of the customers or the trainings programs that involves the employees to empower them with the required skills and knowledge of handling the customers. Revamping feedback mechanisms and certain extension of basic methodologies that can help. With this, it aims to gain the understanding of consumer behaving and customer experience.

As "Customer Experience" is a new buzzword in the market, it has become a necessity to bring together what an already existing literature has to say and what the study says as a part of the secondary research. For the same, this paper has been arranged in different segments. First segment will talk about the industry scenario, what do customer experience means, what is the need to improve the customer experience. The next segment will read about what methodology been used in order to gain insights from industry experts in certain focus areas related to customer experience. And lastly, it will arrive at the findings, recommendations, with the support of literature that can be incorporated in current system which will help any organization achieve a better version of customer experience management.

Literature Review

This part will uncover answers to certain questions like what do customer experience mean? How important is customer experience management in customer centric market? A basic underlying process which mostly all the companies follow as a part of replenishing their relationships with customers.

2.1. Customer Experience - Defined

The customer experience is critical to businesses. If any organization wants to differentiate themselves in a market place especially if the product or service is commoditised and if the organizations do not want to compete in terms of price which, in a longer run, is a losing battle then they should focus on customer experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, 1999; Shaw and Ivens, 2002; Voss, 2003; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Meyerand Schwager, 2007). There are three main elements of an experience (See Table 1) (Schmitt 1999, 2003; Verhoef et al. 2009).

Table 1 Elements of Customer Experience Management

Element	Description
Functional	What does an Experience do to the customer
Accessible	How easily is it available to the customers
Emotional	Differentiates in hearts and minds of the customer. Can be good or bad

Source: The author (compilation from various resources)

What will really stand out is when an organization actually goes back to the customer after the problem is fixed and that will make customer realize that the brand truly cares about them. 81% say they expect to compete mostly or completely on the basis of CX.

2.2. Importance of Customer Experience

Every interaction a customer makes with the organisation tends to leave an impression in the minds of the consumer. They have certain emotional, rational and subconscious experiences which has the power to dictate the return order. The primary purpose of providing delightful experience is to increase the customer retention power. Satisfaction, customer loyalty are few factors which can tell how much customer wants to stay with the brand. Studying customer experience is important as it will help identify factors that impact client conduct and results, however normally the potential touch points are, by default, by the firm the factors. Reichheld (2003) has brought in concept of Net Promoter Score which quantitatively measures the extent of customer's satisfaction. Customer perceptions are measured by these factors which play pivotal role in overall understanding of customer experience. Moreover, more extravagant models are expected to distinguish key agony focuses from the client point of view and to make an interpretation of these agony focuses into explicit firm chances to improve the CX.

The era of internet and social media is changing the way the CX is understood. With the advent of technology, retailers are moving to e-commerce platforms giving more comfort and variety to customers. The need is now being converted to want and that is controlled by these online brands. The consumer buying patterns have changed a lot in the past decade. B2C companies are now more inclined towards better services and a delightful experience to its customers rather than the product. B2B companies are still struggling as they are farther to customers in the supply chain than B2Cs. The rapid transformation in marketing and

advertising field is also playing a major role in CX. Companies are now focussing more on emotional touch points rather than physical ones.

2.3. Customer Buying Behaviour Process Models

There are certain strong models which concentrates or studying different aspects like recognition of the need, consumer buying patterns, interactions of consumer with the organisations. According to Pucinelli et al. (2009) and Verhoef et al. (2009) model, journey of consumer while purchasing is to be looked for deeply to improve customer experience management. Another researcher, Schmitt (2003, p. 68) creates upon the process that takes care of all the engagements that the customer has in the journey. How working on each touch point in the 'customer decision or purchase journey' chain can overall bring a huge difference to the entire process. Studies have widely evaluated and affirmed the impacts of fulfilment on client conduct and firm execution, and they fill in as early proof of experimental linkage models to distinguish key drivers and results of fulfilment.

2.4. Customer Relationship Management

The main motive is to optimize Customer Lifetime Value (CLV). Long-term relationship is necessary but it is not sufficient. A company along with stronger customer base need strong revenue and good profits to survive. Different studies have thought about how firms can upgrade client obtaining, client maintenance, and advancement methodologies in such a path as to streamline the extricated CLV, which can result in investor esteem creation (Lewis 2006; Kumar and Shah 2009).

2.5. Customer Focus and Customer Centricity

Literature is now trying to make things clear. The companies are not getting the idea of being customer centric and customer focus clear. Customer focus is achieved by going through four stages (1) Collate the customer's data (2) Explore patterns (3) Symbiotically coordinate with the customer (4) Responding real-time to customer needs (Gulati and Oldroyd 2005). Concentrating on client centricity as a procedure that adjusts an organization's items and administrations to the requirements of its most important clients to augment the long-term monetary estimation of those clients. This move has empowered associations to be more prepared for the interdisciplinary and cross-practical coordination needed to configuration, comprehend, also, oversee client experience (Fader 2012).

2.6. Service Quality and Relationship Management

The other models focus on service marketing rather than marketing goods, and identify that service blueprinting as an early attempt can be used to map customer journeys or reporting customer's make or break points called as moments that matter (Bitner, Ostrom, and Morgan 2008). Relationship marketing has enriched the understanding of emotions (Verhoef and Lemon 2015), experiences, intimacies, passion (Bugel, Verhoef, and Buunk 2011; Yim, Tse, and Chan 2008) and perceptions of customers and

has extended the scope of study of customer experience management.

Managing relationships is important as it involves cost of switching and emotional factors like trust and loyalty. In particular, in the B2B and channel settings, exchange cost hypothesis-based builds, for example, relationship specific speculations and advantage, have been treated as forerunners of relationship quality (Gopalakrishna, Houston and Palmatier 2006).

The literature has provided enough knowledge of models, factors and aspects which are being taken into account form so many years since the study of customer experience has started. The whole process has been analysed well in terms of journey, moments, relationships but the technical or logical aspect is missing. This gap will be bridged by analysing and dwelling deeper into elements that a company need to work upon like training programs, technological innovations, feedback mechanisms that can support the marathon of understanding and improving of customer experience from within the organization at a base level.

Methodology

Quantitative data is needed to support the analysis and see if any process in a particular organisation works in right direction or not. Customer Experience Management also has some metrics which are used to test how much a company is able to satisfy its customers. The very first step of the methodology were to select the companies and the metrics helped to select some organizations. The basic metrics which were identified:

- Net Promoter Score (NPS) – It is a metric where index ranges from -100 to 100. It categorises the customers in to three categories of detractors, passives and promoters. It is the score which tells the likeliness of a customer to recommend a brand to any other. These categories are on the basis on 11-point scale from 0 to 10. Score of less than 6 makes them detractors. Detractors is a category where customers who would not buy again from that brand lies. They are not satisfied with the product or services of the company. The brand can get a negative effect due to bad word of mouth through detractors. Customers with score of 7 or 8 makes them passives. Passives is the neutral category. Passives are not unhappy with the services but they can easily switch in case they get better offers, services and products. Last ones, with the score of above 8 are the promoters. These are the ones any company focuses to make. They market the company free of cost with the positive word of mouth. They tend to spread the positive word which helps the brand to attract more customers.

- Customer satisfaction Score (CSAT) – This metric helps a company to know about their customers and their satisfaction level of their interactions with the company. A survey helped to know the customers and the rating of 0-5 defines the range from “Least Satisfied” to “Highly Satisfied”.

- Customer Effort Score (CES) – This metric determines the efforts a customer makes to interact with the company. It ranges on 5-point scale where 0 means “Low effort” and 5 means “High Effort”. The CES is identified by sharing a survey to the customer soon after the customer had

an interaction with company in terms of purchasing a service or a product or in manner for that fact.

- Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) – A ranking system developed by World Bank Group. This metric requires a questionnaire which needs to be filled by the customer and shows how much easy it is to establish a relationship with any particular organization and to pursue business with. This includes all the regulations and economies of scale a company follows which make it easier to work with.

These metrics were kept in mind when the list of companies, whose CX professionals were intended to interview to, was collated. Also, to analyse the process, many literatures were read to gain insights about a very basic underlying process of how customer experience management process works in any organization. The analysis says it’s a 4-step process (See Table 2).

Table 2 Basic Framework of Customer Experience Management Process

Stage No.	Stage Name	Sub Processes Within Each Stage
1	Initiation of the Project	Identify Business Problem
		Create personas depending on the profiles of the customers
2	Gather and Document Customer Input	Gather feedback from the customer
		Interview customer or collect surveys as feedbacks
		Measure Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) to know current status of the customer experience management
		Create Journey Maps of all the interactions customer have had with the organization
		Within the Journey Maps, identify Moments that Matter
3	Design and Development	Incorporate Voice of the Customer (VoC) in the project solution
		Ideate the Best Possible Solution
4	Post Development	Deploy the best identified solution
		Collect Customer Feedback again
		Re-measure EoDB
		Analyse improvement by comparing the earlier and the current status through EoDB

Source: The author (compilation from various resources)

Once the basic standardized framework was developed, the list of 27 companies was made, a mix of B2B and B2C companies. The NPS metric was considered to list down the companies because finding NPS is commonly used metric and is relatively easier to find. The list consisted of companies amongst which the highest NPS is 96 out of 100 and lowest one is 37. These brands were from diverse sectors like manufacturing, service industry, technology, retail, fast-moving consumer goods, logistics, e-commerce etc. next step was to find and connect with the CX

professionals of these companies. The process of finding was the initial step of the process. LinkedIn as a platform was used to find and connect to the leaders. The stage of finding and connecting with the people was a continuous process and lasted for around two and a half months. The step to find the right people for the interviews who can actually help with their time and efforts, was bit of a tough task. It was great to know that many professionals after working in Customer Experience Management domain in giants had quit and started their own firm which provides CXM solutions to the companies across the world. Nearly fifty professionals were contacted and out of those seven agreed to share their insights.

Interview Questionnaire was the pre-requisite of for the next step. So, seven focus areas were identified around which the questions were designed. These focus areas were identified on the basis of the gaps in the literature which revolved around the customer journeys, moments that matters, customer personas. These focus areas were:

1. Perspectives of Professionals about Customer Experience
2. Customer Experience Maturity Level of the companies they work with
3. Customer Experience Management Process they follow
4. Trainings Programs the companies follow to train the employees in order to provide the customers the best experience
5. Feedback Mechanisms, companies use in order to anticipate the needs of the customer
6. Technologies, the companies use to improve the interactions and connections with the customers
7. Customer Experience culture that their companies follow

The questions based on these focus areas helped to know the process deeply and inside out as the questions focussed on individual aspects that can uplift the customer experience management process. The following are the detailed questions under each of the focus areas (See Table 3).

Table 3 Focus Areas - Questioned

S. No	Focus Areas	Questions
1	Perspective of CX	What according to them is Customer Experience?
		How important is CXM in today's scenario of customer centric markets?
2	CX Maturity Level	How do they rate their organization in terms of CX?
3	CX Process	Which all mechanisms do they follow in order to anticipate customers' requirements so that they have an upper hand.
		Which all teams are dedicated to draft VoC, empathize with customer's problem and operationalize those measures?
		How much time does these measures take on average to implement in the system?
		How to make sure that the

		changes have worked to solve the customers issues?
4	Training Programs	How the organizations educate and train its employees about CXM? Any training programs or workshops being conducted?
		How do they make sure that employees learn about the changes which are decided to be done?
		How often they encourage changes in their employee training programs.
5	Feedback Mechanisms	What measures their organization take up to collect feedbacks from customers? Any definite steps involved?
		What kind of problems have they faced from Customer's perspective like Latency Issues, Governance issues, Reachability issues, Fulfilment issues?
6	Technologies Used	Does technology play any part to uplift the CXM? How?
		Does their organization take help from third party or perform it in house, studying CXM and improving it?
7	CX Culture	What is the terminology should be used for CX culture in any organization – Customer Centric, Customer focused, or customer obsessed?

Source: The author (compilation from various resources)

These questions were continuously written and scrutinized to make them qualitative ones. The idea was to keep the questions open-ended so that the interviewee can share as much as they can, in all the directions. The appointments were taken from the professionals. Most of the interviewees were from outside India so different time zones was a challenge. Interview used to start with brief introduction followed by the brief working of the company and then questions were asked in a flow. Average interview time was forty-five minutes. It took one and half months to cover all the seven interviews. After each interaction was done, the pointers mentioned by each one of them were analysed and were broken down in to basic CX framework and the processes which may be present in one but lacking in another.

Secondary analysis was done in order to reach to the findings and the recommendations. Two rounds of analysis were done. Once all the interviews were completed, the third and the final round of analysis and the results were collated. The next section of the paper will talk about the analysis, findings and recommendations which any company should

take care of and must incorporate in order to gain better results.

Findings & Recommendations

Once the interviews and analyses were over, the results were combined and it led to some findings and recommendations which the companies can incorporate. The literature and the interviews helped to know a basic customer experience management framework that is followed in all the companies, sectors of the companies and profile of the company does not make any difference to this. The interviews helped to focus on particular areas and find out the missing links in them. The missing links were categorized into four categories (See Table 4).

Table 4 Categories in which Missing Links are categorised

S. No	Categories	Details
1	Team Involvement	This tells about which all teams need to be involved within customer experience management. Also, how team helps to connect the organizations and the customers.
2	Feedback Mechanisms	Continuous loops of feedbacks from the customer helps the Customer experience process to evolve. It helps the company to anticipate the demand and provide the customer what is needed and what is expected out of the company.
3	Training Methods	The methods under this category explains what are the different ways by which the employees of the company can be trained to provide and awesome experience to their customer. These are the learning loops for employees and management at all levels.
4	Practices/Methodologies	These are the additional practices which are analysed by either studying B2B companies or small start-ups which will prove to be really helpful.

Source: The author (compilation from various resources)

The pointers under each category is labelled as either ‘Must-To-Have’ or ‘Nice-To-Have’. Must-To-Haves are the ones which should definitely be used by every company. They

must be the part of their customer experience management system or the process. They should be the considered from the beginning of the process whereas Nice-To-Have are the ones which will be fruitful in the long if applied or used but if the company is not in the position to absorb those may be, they can be considered at a later stage.

4.1. Must-To-Have

1. Teams Involvement

- Volunteers or Coordinators – These are those group of people or teams who voluntarily want to be part of CX improvement process. A team of volunteer should be formed.
- Advisory Board – This team shares insights and advises within an organization. This team mainly should include people from the top management who can check if the company goals are inline with the team’s goals.

2. Feedback Mechanisms

- Exploratory Customer Interviews – These are the type of interviews which should be directed to the customers in order to gain their feedbacks after any purchase or any interaction the company. Exploratory interviews mostly have open- ended questions to foresee customers’ needs. The questions are kept subjective in order to get as much negative or positive feedbacks as it can.
- Automated Calls – This a method to get feedback where customer receives an automated call from the service centre of the company to see if they are happy with the product or the service. These are also helpful for training the newbies.
- Social Media Posts – In today’s era where social media is gaining popularity, the method is becoming very powerful and useful for the companies to gather responses through posts, comments, likes. People nowadays are becoming influencers for the other people. This helps to search for those people who can give an honest feedback and can market the brand on the social media.

3. Training Methods

- Mentorship Programs – Identify people in the company who can dedicatedly mentor their colleagues. Assign groups of employees, a dedicated mentor for easy Knowledge Transfer. The concept of Knowledge Transfer is very old for the service companies but now it has been adapted by the product companies as well.
- Webinars – To train the employees for Service Marketing or Customer Relationship Management workshops must be conducted by an experienced CX Specialist. Many well know CX Specialists exists whose job is to train the employees to give a better experience to the customers.
- Fun Competitions – Learning can take place through fun activities in the company. Many giants conduct competitions within the company where people though these activities scan learn how to treat customer. It may involve fun quizzes, case solving scenarios.

4. Practices/Methodologies

- Empower Customers – Customer don't like to be controlled by the companies. They want to create experiences. So, companies must keep in mind that now the control has shifted from companies to the customers. They should be given authority or independence where they have the charge to create connection. Roll out extra features so they don't need to call up Service Centre for every other thing can empower them. For example, an e-commerce firm started a tracking system which empowered the customer to track their shipment at every step. Similarly, small changes in the process will be liked by the customers.
- Adapt some B2C Practices – B2B companies directly are in touch with their customer and deal with them directly. Therefore, there are some processes or attributes which any B2C company can adapt from them. B2C companies must adapt certain Best Practices like technological innovations, dedication toward their customers, efforts to make customer happy. They go an extra mile to retain the customers.

4.2. Nice-To-Have

1. Teams Involvement

- Escalation Board – This team takes on issues that need more senior level attention. The cases which go out of control and cannot be handled by the other employees due to some payment issues or lead time issues are escalate above and are then handled by this team. It helps and gives them a chance to help customer and retain them anyhow.
- Review Teams – This team is needed to keep a check on the level of improvement. This team sets own KPIs, to review of employees and customer experience Team quarterly or weekly.

2. Feedback Mechanisms

- Transactional Surveys – There are several methods to collect feedbacks from the customer out of which one is to make them service calls and purchase calls after the transaction has been initiated or completed.
- Email & Customer Contact Forms – Connect with the customers over email and make them fill contact forms for the easy reachability.
- In Message Surveys – These are the In-Product Surveys to get the responses from the customers. In message surveys can be used in the frequent basis.

3. Training Methods

- Role Plays – This gives the team and the employees a practical hand on experience to handle the customers. Create a real time environment with fake customers. These role plays are mostly done in service centres. Job shadowing is another way to do this which helps in on the job learning to face dynamic real time issues

4. Practices/Methodologies

- Cross Trainings of Employees – Employees need to be educated on all the current projects of the company so that they can help the customer with anything and everything. Make employees an all-round expert in all the applications to serve the customer with anything.

Conclusion

The study was conducted with 7 customer experience professionals in 7 companies. These companies were mix of B2B and B2C. Interviews and literature support helped to understand a basic CX framework which is followed almost in all companies. This led to the realization that there are certain methods and processes which are not well known across and are only used by specific organizations. Perspectives of CX, Maturity Level of CX, CX process, Training Programs, Technological Innovations, CX Culture were the seven focus areas which the questionnaire was based on. Once the professionals were interviewed, analysis was done and seventeen recommendations were recognized. These suggestions were categorised into categories of Teams Involved, Feedback Mechanism, Training Methods, other Practices. To make them more significant these were further identified as “Must-to-Have” and “Nice-To-Have”. Customers do not buy products and services; they tend to buy experiences. A company does not thrive for a five-star rating rather it strives hard for a repeat order. There can be nothing greater than a lifetime customer for any organization. Every company focuses on increasing their profits, revenues and market share. Market share always grows with the percentage of customer selecting that brand. Companies must realize it and start working for the same to for and prosper in the long run

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