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Understanding and Engaging in the Customer Experience

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Introduction

It is important for the business organisations and their employees to actively participate and engage with the customer services in order to ensure a clearer sustainability and survival scope for the company. In this study, the concept of employee engagement in customer experience has been discussed. The instance of a UK based retail business organisation Harrods has been cited. Originally established in 1824, the company has been able to spread its name all over the UK. The study will discuss the ratings the company offers towards customer value, service quality and gaps in services on a 5-point basis, where 1 is least priority and 5 is of major priority. A comparison of the ratings and strategies of Harrods will be discussed against another retail organisation of Aldi, UK. It was founded in 1913, and has is one of the fastest growing supermarket chains in the UK (aldirecruitment.co.uk, 2019). The study will attempt to understand the differences in the approaches followed by the two companies regarding their customer experiences.

Part 1: Customer Value

The concept of customer value is of growing importance for the business world. It refers to customer satisfaction and their loyalty towards the company. The term value here mostly refers to economic profit for the company, which it generates by accumulating its customers (Kumar and Reinartz, 2016). There are five dimensions to customer value identified recently. These dimensions and their implementation by the Harrods are described below.

Conformance to requirements

This is one of the main components of customer value. The concept of conformance to requirement refers to the ability of the services or the products offered by the organisation to meet the demand flow of the customers (Morse *et al.*, 2016). This is done usually by conducting market researches and understanding the trends in demand.

<i>Strategy for the dimension</i>	<i>Rating</i>
Market research surveys	4
Interest flow analysis	4

Table 1: Rating for conformance to requirements strategies

The Harrods is a leading name in the industry of retail business. Retail is one of the business sectors that is difficult to be substituted. Although the level of competition is high in this sector, there is no denying the fact that the retail sectors hold chances of generating **high revenue**. The main duty here is to provide **good quality** products and services to the customers. Harrods is good at **market researches** (Williams, 2015). The **workforce** of the company effectively **evaluates** the market **trends** and the activities of the **rival** companies. This helps them understand the **interest** flow of the customers and the latest **market trends**. They are thereby able to come up with such **products** that **appeal** to the customers highly.

The organisation of Harrods believes in achieving **customer satisfaction**. It has a number of **stores** across the UK. The authorities **monitor** and **oversee** the activities in the **stores** and **outlets**. They assess the quality of services being delivered to the customers and make **amendments** if they deem necessary. They make sure that the products and services they offer are **centred** on the demands and interests of the customers. This will help them **attract** the **attention** of the buyers if more **options** are provided to them. The company will be able to **generate** higher **revenue** if they succeed

to win the **loyalty** of the customers (Lucas, 2015). This way, the customers will give them good **reviews** and **recommend** their name to the peers. The sales flow will enhance and the company will succeed in expanding its business venture globally.

Product Selection

Another important dimension of customer value is the right product selection. There can be a vast number of options regarding the products offered by most business industries. However, it is the duty of the organisation to identify its strength and thereby select the right product (Su *et al.*, 2017). This will be beneficial for the future of the company.

Strategy for the dimension	Rating
Identifying the efficiency of the workforce	3
Identifying the demand flow	4

Table 2: Ratings for product selection strategies

The industry of retail has grown over the time. Previously, this industry was known only for providing **food** and **stationary items**. However, in the recent times, the industry has incorporated other things like **fashion**, **childcare products**, **jewelleries** and **accessories**. There is normally much variety and options within most retail organisations. Harrods is no exception. It has a wide range of products to offer its customers and attract their notice. However, in order to identify and select the right product, the company needs to take out **time** and **evaluate** the market trends (Ritch and McColl, 2019). It might also analyse the previously existing products and the **impact** of the newer ones. It also needs to take into account its **infrastructure**, **financial condition** and **budget**, **raw materials** and **resources** in order to select the right products.

Harrods has been praised for providing the high quality products over the years. It ensures that the workforce of the company is **efficient** enough to **achieve** the set targets. It includes a wide range of options to the customers ranging from **food**, **wine**, **stationary**, **fashion**, **home decor** and various others. It usually conducts market researches to be sure of the credibility of a product before introducing the same (Aichner *et al.*, 2017). The company considers important factors of the **financial infrastructure** while selecting **products** and **services**. It keeps a constant **check** on the **demand-supply mix** in the market and thereby evaluates the **interest flow** of the customers. The company thereby succeeds to **select** the right **products** to sell.

Price and Brand

Most business organisations focus largely upon the end goal of commercial success. This depends upon the strategies used by the company on price and brands. The brand value and pricing strategies often determine the success or failure of the company (Datta *et al.*, 2017). They should be accumulated therefore carefully.

<i>Strategy for the dimension</i>	<i>Rating</i>
Collaborating with desired brands	5
Selecting pricing strategy based on demand flow	4

Table 3: Ratings for product and brands strategies

The impact of setting the right pricing strategy within a business organisation can be a difficult task. In order to achieve this, the company needs to be aware of the ***market trends*** and ***demand flow***. It might ***alter*** the ***existing*** pricing strategy based on this. It might also ***introduce*** new prices based on the ***demand*** and ***availability*** of a particular product. In case of retail business organisations, the ***pricing strategy*** remains ***low*** as it targets the ***majority population*** of a country. In case of ***brand accumulation***, retail organisations oversee the market conditions to get an idea of the brands that might ***benefit*** those (Murray *et al.*, 2017). The personal ***popularity*** of the brand will naturally ***attract*** the buyers towards the organisation. The brand value will therefore develop and increase.

Harrods as a retail company tries to maintain an affordable pricing strategy for reaching out to a larger consumer base. The ***fashion*** retail section has a ***lenient*** pricing strategy compared to the big fashion brands that might be difficult to ***afford*** for most people. The frequent ***market researches*** help the organisation ***evaluate*** the importance of a certain product and decide on its ***pricing*** accordingly (Som and Pape, 2015). It makes ***alterations*** depending on the ***demand flow*** and ***availability*** of the product. The organisation has also been careful in ***collaborating*** with the right ***brand*** partners. It has recently decided to collaborate with fashion brand ***Gucci***, which has ***increased*** its ***brand value*** largely. The buyers and lovers of Gucci are now customers of Harrods. Its partnership with ***Missoni x ViSpring*** has also enhanced its name in ***home decor*** business.

Value-added services

The concept of value-added services has gained significance in recent times because of the high competition level in the market. Business organisations face challenges in sustaining their grounds when they are merely offering their basic products and services (Rivera *et al.*, 2016). When the company is offering an enhanced service or product outside its structure, it is the value added services.

<i>Strategy for the dimension</i>	<i>Rating</i>
Outdoing the services provided by rival companies	5
Focusing on the customer needs	4

Table 4: Ratings for value added services strategies

For retail business organisations, the quality of services and products offered can be value added, mostly because of their affordable prices. They might also provide quick services to the customers regarding **return** and **refund** of products. This will **impress** the customers. The retail companies might also focus upon their stores to provide **assistance** and **expert advices** to the customers. They might **recommend** products that would be **suitable** for the buyers (Shakoor *et al.*, 2017). Such services provided by the companies are considered value added as they are not **paid** for doing the same. However, these services provided by the companies help them **impress** the customers. They are able to win their **loyalty** and thereby be **recommended** in the future.

Harrods attaches much importance to the concept of value added services. As there is **limited** scope for the retail organisations to develop than what they perceive, the **significance** of value added services is usually **high**. They take time to **train** their storekeepers regarding delivering the right **services** to the customers. They are advised to treat the buyers **well** and address their **queries** and **demands**. The specific **demands** of **return** and **refunds** are looked after. They often come up with **discount** offers in the stores. They also advise the customers regarding the **right** products in case they seek **help** (Kent *et al.*, 2016). Since Harrods has collaborated with a number of **brands**, it is able to provide the **options** of **exclusive** products to the customers. All these value added services has earned the company **customer loyalty** and **satisfaction**.

Relationships and experiences

Interpersonal skills and personality traits are mandatory requirements for the workforce of most business organisations. Development of proper relationships within the organisation and with the customer base helps the company develop and generate higher revenue (Ding and Tseng, 2015). With growing experience, the workforce of the company become efficient and thereby earns customer loyalty.

<i>Strategy for the dimension</i>	<i>Rating</i>
Developing personal bonds with the customers	4
Using the experience to introduce new products	5

Table 5: Ratings for relationships and experiences strategies

For most business organisations, the concept of *professional relationships* is of growing significance. In *absence* of proper *bonds* and *connections* within the work environment, the employees might lose the *enthusiasm* to work. Their developed *relationships* with the customers will help the company earn *revenue* as the customers keep coming back to the company. The *bonds* formed among the co-workers help them understand the *workflow* better and *evaluate* their own work from the *feedbacks* generated. The company also uses the *experienced* employees in the *decision making process* of the company (So *et al.*, 2016). The experience of the employees helps them *evaluate* various important matters and *decide* on the right move for the *benefit* of the company. They might also *advise* the newer employees on their *attitude* towards the *workflow*.

The organisation of Harrods uses the strategy of developing professional *bonds* with the *customers*. This is done mainly in the *stores* by *communicating* effectively and *impressing* the customers. The company also makes use of *online* communication through *social media* and the *website*. The organisation has also launched *Harrods' magazine app recently* (Vazquez and Kent, 2016). Using this, the customers can access various *games* and *information* regarding the company. The *winners* of the games get to win *gift cards*. The company uses the *expertise* of the *employees* towards the *benefit* of the company. The company itself is in business since a long time. It therefore *utilises* the overall *experience* to come up with new *thoughts* and *ideas* for its *improvement*.

Summary Table

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Ratings</i>	<i>Comparison with Aldi, UK</i>
<i>Conformance to requirements</i>	Market research surveys	4	3
	Interest flow analysis	4	4
<i>Product Selection</i>	Identifying the efficiency of the workforce	3	5
	Identifying the demand flow	4	3
<i>Price and Brand</i>	Collaborating with desired brands	5	4
	Selecting pricing strategy based on demand flow	4	4
<i>Value-added services</i>	Outdoing the services provided by rival companies	5	3
	Focusing on the customer needs	4	4
<i>Relationships and experiences</i>	Developing personal bonds with the customers	4	3
	Using the experience to introduce new products	5	4

Table 6: Summary table of rating comparison

This section therefore goes to show the importance of the five dimensions of customer value. It also discusses the strategies and ratings given by Harrods in these dimensions. A table goes to explain the comparisons between the ratings of Harrods and Aldi in the concerned strategies of customer value.

Part 2 (a): Service Quality

Service quality is the assessment or measure of determining whether a service is able to fulfil expectation of consumers or not. Organisations like Harrods evaluate the service quality that is being provided to buyers, identify related problems and make strategies to improve service. As opined by Wang *et al.* (2015), service quality is based on five dimensions including **empathy**, **assurance**, **tangibility**, **responsiveness**, and **reliability**. In case all dimensions are in good position, then buyers are getting desired or expected service. Customers are handed over service excellence and loyalty through focusing on these five dimensions. All dimensions are essential to observe whether the service is excellent or poor. It would be easier to enhance existing service and bring required changes in case Harrods gets success in these areas.

Empathy: Employees' ability to show concern and care for buyers denotes this dimension. As stated by Ciavolino and Calcagnì (2015), customers evaluate this dimension based on certain aspects such as approach of employees, ability to understand their needs, and others. Services can be provided with required specifications and employees can care about customers' requirement.

With increase in demand of retail products, and approaching of new trends, individuals requirements have been increased and this differ from person to person. In such cases, sales personnel of Harrods focus giving equal attention to everyone in terms of listening queries and problems.

<i>Services</i>	<i>Ranking</i>
Individual attention to each customer	4
Convenient services for all customers	5
Recognising specific needs of customers	4

Table 7: Ranking for Empathy

Harrods' stores are opened for customers in hours that are convenient for different customers to come and buy conveniently. Specific needs are being identified in terms of beauty products, designers accessories, and others. Further, employees give full effort not to overlook a single customer instead providing everyone special attention.

Assurance: It depends on the ability to develop trust among customers and instil confidence among people. Ivanauskiene and Volungenaite (2014) demonstrated that it is based upon ability and knowledge of employees in order to maintain courteous communication. Characteristics of this dimension can be effective communication and attitude shown to customers.

Having in-depth knowledge on retail products and customer service let building confidence and trust among employees. Harrods's employees come from diverse backgrounds and share their knowledge to others. They have different levels of education, experience, and competencies that they use to make customers loyal and trust Harrods.

<i>Services</i>	<i>Ranking</i>
Polite behaviour of employees	4
Adequate information to convey customers	4
Instilling self-assurance	3

Table 8: Ranking for Assurance

Employees are more polite and honest while dealing with customers and they do not hesitate to share product-related information. However, they have failed to instil self-assurance within buyers that has influenced the service quality up to a small extent.

Tangibility: It represents the aesthetic of the company. According to Moreno (2015), the dimension is based on an aspect specifying whether the products and other physical evidences are capable of appealing customers or not. In case customers are getting appealing products, they will remain attracted to the service always and show their loyalty for certain period.

Harrods has provided required equipment and facilities in its stores to gain customer attention. It ensures customers are getting enough materials regarding different fashion products based on which they can judge the items they want to purchase. All departments including grooming, fashion accessories, shoes, and others are being presented systematically so that customers do not face any problems while getting products.

<i>Services</i>	<i>Ranking</i>
Stores with modern equipment	4
Presence of physical facilities	4
Materials (brochures, coupons, and others)	3

Table 9: Ranking for tangible

The ranking made on tangibles showed that Harrods is ranked well in terms of providing facilities in stores and installing modern equipment that assist in better service. Somehow, the information brochures kept for customers are not enough for them during purchase.

Responsiveness: It denotes the ability of organisations to be responsive towards customers. As opined by Yarimoglu (2014), this emphasises on ability and willingness to serve customers promptly without any gap. In case customers are waiting for availing their service, they will develop a negative perception regarding the service for it would become impossible to build trust.

Employees of Harrods are much enthusiastic to help customers even in small things. They prioritise queries and complaints raised by customers. In case customers are more demanding, they try their level best to help them to ensure a fast service.

<i>Services</i>	<i>Ranking</i>
Providing timely service to customers	5
Willingness to facilitate customers' requests	4

Table 10: Ranking for responsiveness

A good response from employees can be obtained in case they are willing to help customers without any hidden motive. Harrods' employees always show an approachable behaviour in offering timely customer service and facilitating requests.

Reliability: This refers to the ability to perform service dependably and accurately. Motwani (2014) argued that three major components of this dimension include consistency in service delivery, on time and error-free delivery.

In order to enable employees to offer customers with accurate and reliable services, Harrods hires people those are knowledgeable in core products and customer services. Regular training sessions are arranged so that employees can have new knowledge on upgraded products. Employees are taught to give them correct information on products and management in each level verifies the same regularly.

<i>Services</i>	<i>Ranking</i>
Interest of staff to solve customer queries and issues	5
Fast assistance	4
Error free records	4

Table 11: Ranking for reliability

It is observed that employees are always ready to solve queries and give prompt service. Harrods' employees keep records of customers to avoid any mismanagement.

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Ratings</i>	<i>Comparison with Aldi, UK</i>
<i>TANGIBLES</i>	Stores with modern equipment	4	4
	Presence of physical facilities	4	5
	Materials (brochures, coupons, and others)	3	3
<i>RELIABILITY</i>	Interest of staff to solve customer queries and issues	5	4
	Fast assistance	4	5
	Error free records	4	3
<i>RESPONSIVENESS</i>	Providing timely service to customers	5	4

	Willingness to facilitate customers' requests	4	4
ASSURANCE	Polite behaviour of employees	4	5
	Adequate information to convey customers	4	4
	Instilling self-assurance	3	4
EMPATHY	Individual attention to each customer	4	5
	Convenient services for all customers	5	3
	Recognising specific needs of customers	4	5

Table 12: Summary table for ratings comparison

Conclusion

The above section includes six dimensions of service quality including assurance, empathy, responsiveness, and others. These dimensions have been applied in context to Harrods, UK. Additionally, all dimensions have been provided with a rank to specify the service quality maintained by Harrods.

Part 2 (b): Gaps in Service – SERVQUAL

Gaps in service

Based upon the SERVQUAL model of service quality, it can be said that there might be gaps that can hamper the overall service quality of goods and commodities sold by Harrods, UK. In terms of **tangibility**, one of the significant gaps that can be witnessed is **lack of communication** during service handling. **Use of unreliable resources** is considered to be the major gap during service **reliability**. **Lack of authorisation** is said to be common challenge that is witnessed during service **responsiveness**. In terms of service **assurance**, **lack of quality assurance** within delivered products and services can be the gap faced by Harrods, UK. **Low consumer trust** upon a specific or groups of products can be categorised, as one of major gaps in **empathy** in services of Harrods, UK.

Application of gaps in Harrods, UK and rating of each gap

Gap	Ranking
Lack of communication	1

Table 13: Gaps in tangibles

Lack of communication among the stakeholders of Harrods, UK can be considered as one of the major gaps of service management in terms of tangibility. Within Harrods, there might be circumstances where immense numbers of issues can be witnessed within the various components of service hierarchy. Collection of raw materials and manufacturing of goods is placed at the top hierarchy of service management. Lack of transfer of data insights regarding this operation can lead to severe damage at the time of product and service deliveries among the consumers of Harrods, UK.

As per the data stated in sdmimd.ac.in (2019), Harrods, UK is among the top luxury retail organisations in UK therefore, it maintains high quality of operations within its supply chain management. Internetretailing.net (2019) stated that Harrods offer high quality retail products and services from both of its in-store outlets and e-commerce. This is not possible if there are any cases of poor communication during service handling. Therefore, the particular gap is services of

Harrods is least witnessed and this is the major reason for their success within the global retail market.

<i>Gap</i>	<i>Ranking</i>
<i>Use of unreliable resources</i>	3

Table 14: Gaps in reliability

Reliability can be defined as the use of raw materials with which the organisation serves its customer base through the delivery of finished goods. Inventory management is exact operation within Harrods, UK that oversees the allocation of raw materials and other significant equipments. Use of unreliable resources can be major gap that can be witnessed in terms of service reliability. This is because the extent of quality of finished goods is solely dependent upon the choice of raw materials and quality of manufacturing.

In the words of Rogers (2019), Harrods do not focus upon market segmentation. This project that allocation of resources is done without referring to the market demands. The operations within the inventories of the organisation are supposed to be taken care by excellent market expertise, which are continuously aware the management regarding the shifts in market trends. The role of these top professionals within the organisation are said to keep the negative extent of the particular gap minimum however, the consequences are served to some negative extent.

<i>Gap</i>	<i>Ranking</i>
<i>Lack of authorisation</i>	2

Table 15: Gaps in responsiveness

Customer support is among the departments of Harrods that look after the responsiveness element of SERVQUAL. Lack of authorisation is common barrier that can void the extent of responsiveness. However, as per the insights of businesswire.com (2015) Harrods, UK has eminent brand image within the retail industry of UK and throughout the world. This proves that the feedback regarding the services quality and other aspects from the consumer's end, are dealt quite significantly. However, there might be cases registered where a consumer of two have faced issues

in terms of service quality. Thus, the extent of gap is low upon the service management of the organisation.

<i>Gap</i>	<i>Ranking</i>
<i>Lack of quality assurance</i>	3

Table 16: Gaps in assurance

Low quality issues in delivered products and quality can be termed as a major gap in Assurance elements of SERVQUAL within organisations. Products and services that do not feature high quality can lead to decrease in consumer groups within the target markets where organisations operate. Harrods, UK is using high-end digital equipments is ensuring positive responses from the targeted consumers in terms of quality. With the course of time, the organisation has used its heritage and enriched brand value to hold on to large bases of consumers. Baldwin (2015) has depicted in the research that Harrods, UK has least cases registered in termed of low consumer trust and loyalty. This is because the organisation is able to provide higher volumes of footfall within store outlets and higher aspects of traffics within their E-commerce websites. Thus, the particular gap is not seemed to project negative consequences to the business operations of the organisation.

<i>Gap</i>	<i>Ranking</i>
<i>Low consumer trust</i>	2

Table 17: Gaps in empathy

Trust and loyalty are the major components of empathy and specifically within service management the same is measured from the consumer's end in order to understand the service effectiveness of the organisations. Negative relations with the consumers by not meeting the demands of the same both at the time of service delivery and feedback aspects can develop a gap of low consumer trust. This violates the empathy element of SERVQUAL. However, as far discussed, Harrods, UK is one among the leading luxury retail chain, where most of the high income customer groups are targeted; minimum aspects of low empathy can be witnessed (Lucas, 2015). The pricing strategy of services offered by the brand is of premium category and therefore,

resolving minor feedback of those consumers is the top priority of the organisation. Thus, the gap of low consumer trust is least, as of high traffic sales of services of Harrods, UK.

Summary Table

<i>Gaps in services</i>	<i>Component of SERVQUAL</i>	<i>Ratings</i>	<i>Comparison with Aldi, UK</i>
Lack of communication	Tangibles	1	2
Use of unreliable resources	Reliability	3	2
Lack of authorisation	Responsiveness	2	4
Lack of quality assurance	Assurance	3	4
Low consumer trust	Empathy	2	3

Table 18: Summary and Comparison with Aldi, UK

Conclusion

From the covered aspects, it can be concluded that Harrods, UK stands among the iconic retail brands. This can be made evident with the fact that there are least cases of gaps with least priority within their service management and customer repertoire within the operating market.

Part 3: Overall Conclusion

In the present world of growing competition in business organisations, merely performing individual duties is not enough for the employees. They need to be involved in the overall performance of the organisation. The concept of engagement in customer experience hereby gains significance. The subject is complex as there are no specific duties that can be assigned to the employees in this regard. It highly depends upon their interpersonal skills and personality traits of the workforce to come up with ideas concerning customer services. The first part of the study goes to explain the five dimensions of customer values in context to the chosen organisation of Harrods, UK. The next part has described the dimensions of service quality, while the final part deals with the gaps in services. The ratings provided by Harrods for all these factors have been compared with the ratings provided by another retail organisation Aldi, UK. The study goes to establish the importance of employee engagement for customer experience.

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