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CREATING VALUE THROUGH CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Customer relationship management is of utmost importance. Nobody wants one time customers who come and go. With the ever increasing cost of acquiring customers it becomes important that we optimize the process while maintaining and nurturing a deeper relationship with customers who are already onboard. In order to do that, a company should have a clearly defined method of nurturing customers. From acquiring information to approaching potential buyers, following up, offering relevant content as well as loyalty programs and promotions. Organizations face different levels of implementation barriers. The reason for this is the circumstances that vary from organization to organization. In this study, we have tried to understand the future probabilities of CRM implementation and its fruitful benefits in the automotive industry in India. India is a prominent auto exporter and has strong export growth expectations for the near future. According to the Society of Indian Automotive Manufacturers (SIAM), Indian automotive sector is expected to achieve a turnover of \$300 billion- clocking a CAGR of 15%. The Automotive Mission Plan (AMP) was drafted in 2006 to map the aspirations of the auto and auto component industry, to promote India as a preferred global manufacturing destination and introduced intervention and prescription mechanisms for promoting the industry. The ideal tagline for CRM (Customer Relationship Management) in the automotive industry should be "Specify what you want and we will build it for you." We have tried to analyze the level of interaction of a car company with its customers, the satisfaction in the whole process in terms of money, time and efforts expended through a survey. This paper discusses about the present as well as future prospects of automotive industry in terms of increased customer involvement and thereby establishing long lived relationship with current and potential customers.

KEYWORDS

eCRM, mCRM, automotive, customer relationship management.

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INTRODUCTION

Customer relationship management (CRM) is a strategy that enables organizations to reduce costs, increase profitability and strengthen loyalty of their customers. CRM collects information based on all data sources within the organization (and when it is possible, beyond organization) and represents a holistic insight on every customer in real time.

The emergence of CRM strategy as a management approach is the result of several important trends that characterize contemporary society that reflects a shift in business focus from transactional to relationship marketing that involves:

- Understanding that customers are business associates, not just commercial audience;
- Transitions in the structuring of the organization at the strategic level, from functions to processes;
- Recognition of the advantages of using information proactively rather than only reactively;
- Greater use of technology in the management and the maximum value of information;
- Accepting the need to balance the delivery and extraction of customer value;
- Development of "one to one" marketing approach.

There are many technological solutions for CRM, but to think of CRM just in technological terms is a mistake. CRM is primarily a business strategy or set of processes, people and technology used by the companies to successfully attract and retain customers for the maximization of growth and profit of the organization. Each sector of the economy and industry, non-profit organizations and government institutions use CRM benefits in work with its customers or clients. Different CRM strategies, depending on one or the other economic sector, are often different, and they are in connection with products and services offered to customers. CRM has become available and necessary with the development of electronic commerce, and it is supported by web applications and the rapid growth of the Internet. What is the approach to manage and develop CRM (gradually or all at once, internal development or purchase of solutions, etc.); to what extent technology purchase solves the implementation of CRM strategy; what customer information must be known and collected; what knowledge must be developed within the organization; how to measure the effectiveness of implementation; where to begin – from the customer's needs, internal processes or technology – these are all issues that are constantly imposed. A good CRM solution, with close relationships with customers, brings the possibility of early recognition of new customers and their specific requirements and in this way they can be satisfied faster than the competition. In this way, an efficient CRM provides leadership in quality of products while at the same time it improves the customer satisfaction and their readiness to purchase superior products. By combining appropriate software with analytical tools, CRM helps the organization to integrate customer data from various sources, and to conduct deep analysis and gain comprehensive view on relations between the organization and customers. A typical organization tends towards finding solutions that will solve all known and unknown problems. In order to be more pragmatic, it is more likely to start from the processes that are essential for the organization, then choose and define those that are not possible to adopt at the beginning.

CRM PRACTICES IN AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

As per the automotive analyst, new vehicle profit margins are wafer thin. Additionally, in a growing multi-channel world, it has been discovered that customers are ultimately interested in the final product and don't really care what kind of touch point was used to interact with car dealers. Traditionally, the distribution

system of the automotive industry was such that the manufacturers and end customers were largely distanced. For most automotive manufacturers, their real customer was the 'dealer' and focus was on how to keep them happy. Once the vehicle reached the dealer the only interest that the manufacturers had was to ensure that the dealer succeeded in making a sale. Manufacturers were concerned with keeping their factories running, car production and shipping them - after which the final on us to sell the car is transferred to the dealer. However, as progressing time gave birth to the much evolved customer; many manufacturers are today regretting having ever had this outlook. Having washed their hands off all proximity with the end customer, a large volume of customer related information was lost - customer preferences played a small role in vehicle manufacturing.

When we talk about "CRM built cars", there are two important steps which the industry needs to take forward. First of all, the manufacturing process flexibility has to be increased and secondly dealer-manufacturer integration must be improvised.

The biggest reason to concentrate on 'built to order' (BTO car models) is to do away with waste that occurs due to large left-over inventories. In an ideal automotive world, the manufacturer will start building the car only after getting specific orders from customers thereby leading to smart use of inventories and negligible wastage. This is the crux of CRM in the automotive industry - customer inputs kick start production. Inline production like paint, seating or other last minute job can be delayed a little until the exact customer preference gets conveyed.

The idea is to have a fewer number of cars but more customized, thereby eliminating features or options that customers do not even want. There needs to be a shift from the stagnant mentality that quota fulfillment is more important than a satisfied customer.

AUTOMOTIVE SALES TEAMS AND CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MAPPING

The sales teams who believe in CRM system and is convinced to work for the greater vertical good, have the potential to bring in huge value to the customer and vendor relationship management process. A comprehensive CRM strategy can help achieve the following:

- a) **Foresee demand** - The automotive industry faces an on-going issue of accurate demand measurement, the solution to which is not just technological. Sometimes, certain options in cars are not even offered to customers, as a result of which gauging the demand for it is out of the question. Through a comprehensive CRM solution which incorporates social CRM, sales reps can make note of customer requirements/ interests and establish links between features and specific customer demands while simultaneously tracking competitors' offerings. This can then be put forth to the manufacturer for consideration. However, this is only effective with high user adoption.
- b) **Track open activities** - Customers often have strict preferences with regards to when they want to be contacted by sales people and often request pertinent written material/ reviews/ catalogues prior to further discussions or negotiations. This information and related tasks can be captured in the CRM system for each customer in the database, making it available through a central repository. In addition, escalation rules can be customized to ensure efficient follow-ups.
- c) **Auto-populate campaign participants** - Connections between customers and marketing programs can be established through an effective CRM solution - customer names can pop up against a particular marketing program or a specific segment can be suggested to optimize lead generation.
- d) **Calculate ROI for new initiatives** - Integrate with multiple systems and collate expenses and outcomes of various vendors/ dealer related marketing activities and incentives on single CRM software to ensure accurate calculation of return on investment(ROI)

Automotive industry CRM programs must incorporate two vital principles in order to succeed:

- **Understanding purchase-cycle intimacy** - A productive CRM system must dig deep into what drives the purchase decision before the purchase is made, and unlock real value by recognizing that different customers tread on different purchase paths.
- **Analyse ownership experience** - Since different customers follow different paths of ownership, good CRM systems must establish a deep link to every individual's ownership experience, their relationship with the seller throughout the cycle of ownership. A single repository with details of all related purchases (services, annual maintenance contract, insurance, accessories, etc.) and complaints will facilitate analytical insights and redesign of strategies to optimize customer experience.

Present era is an era of experiential marketing and providing an unmatched experience garners the loyalty of the consumers. A unique experience can only be created through a seamless expertise- providing a solution in the most hassle-free way possible. This is where CRM makes an impact. It involves keeping track of customer information and trends; therefore, it is more than just about database as it involves a fair amount of management strategy and customer insight to launch a successful goal- oriented campaign for customer retention.

In order to engage potential customers across multiple devices in multiple channels, you need data and processes. And with CRM software, you are able to create a 360 degree overview of each person you connect with.

CURRENT IT APPLICATION IN THE INDUSTRY

The Top 10 CRM Systems in India are:

1. Oracle, including its Oracle Siebel, People Soft and Oracle On Demand products
2. SAPCRM
3. Microsoft Dynamics CRM
4. Salesforce.com
5. Sage, including ACT!, Sage CRM and Sales Logix
6. Pivotal from CDC Software
7. Talisma
8. Amdocs from Clarify
9. SugarCRM
10. ImpelCRM

The Tier 1 enterprise software market is dominated by Oracle Siebel, SAP CRM and Amdocs. SAP and Oracle were early entrants to the India market in 1990s. Oracle's Siebel product and Amdocs have largely penetrated the Indian software landscape along vertical markets, while SAP CRM has been more broadly adopted in largest part riding on the coattails of SAP's highly successful enterprise resource planning (ERP) software suite. While Oracle CRM and PeopleSoft are gradually being phased out on a global basis, these legacy solutions may operate longer in India than other global regions as many local companies have less desire to upgrade than their international counterparts. The small and midsize business (SMB) market has also been historically pursued along industry lines by suppliers such as Pivotal CRM and Talisma, however, now finds itself in new competition with broader CRM software competitors such as Microsoft Dynamics CRM, Sage Sales Logix, Salesforce.com, Impel CRM and SugarCRM. The last three years have witnessed the rise of on-demand CRM solutions like Salesforce.com and Microsoft Dynamics CRM entering the India customer relationship management software landscape and opening the doors to a very large and growing SMB market space. Competing software as a service (SaaS) solutions Right now and Netsuite have started establishing their presence in India following the early success of Salesforce.com.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Reichheld and Sasser (1990) indicated that an improvement of 5 percent in customer retention leads to an increase of 25 percent to 75 percent in profit of automobile companies. It costs more than five times as much to obtain a new customer than to keep an existing one. Moreover, with loyal customers, for example, companies can increase their revenue. First, loyal customers are less price sensitive, and the premiums of loyal customers increase 8 percent annually in the personal insurance industry (Reichheld and Teal, 1996). Day and George (1969) introduced the concept of commitment to loyalty studies, and reported that commitment to the brand is necessary in determining the loyalty. The study seeks to develop a conceptual framework of brand image on customer commitment and loyalty. Therefore, the purpose of study is to evaluate how corporate brand image affects customer commitment as well as impact on loyalty in automobile

sector. Bose (2002) noted that CRM was invented because the customers differ in their preferences and purchasing habits. If all customers were alike, there will be little need for CRM. As a result, understanding customer drivers and customer profitability, firms can better tailor their offerings to maximize the overall value of their customer portfolio. Chen and Popovich (2003) argued that CRM is a complicated application which mines customer data, which has been retrieved from all the touch points of the customer, which then creates and enable the organization to have complete view of the customers. The modern customer relationship management concept was shaped and influenced by the theories of total quality management and by new technological paradigms. Kotler (2000) assured that CRM uses IT to gather data, which can then be used to develop information acquired to create a more personal interaction with the customer. In the long-term, it produces a method of continuous analysis and reinforcement in order to enhance customer’s lifetime value with firms. Chinetal (2003) stated that that due to many technological solutions available for CRM automation, it is often misconstrued as a piece of technology. But they maintained that in recent times many companies have realized the strategic importance of CRM, and as a result, it is becoming a business value-effort rather than technology- centric effort. Using information technology as an enabler. For customers, CRM offers customization, simplicity and convenience for completing transactions irrespective of the kind of channel of interaction used (Gulati and Garino, 2000). Many businesses today realize the importance of CRM and its potential to help them achieve and sustain a competitive edge (Peppard, 2000). This view was further boosted by Bose (2002) that as a result of changing nature of the global environment and competition, firms cannot compete favorably with minor advantages and tricks that can easily be copied by competing firms. The implementation of CRM is an enabled opportunity to rise above minor advantages with real focus on developing actual relationships with customers. Firms those are most successful at delivering what customers want are the more likely to be leaders of the future.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary research objective is to analyze the after sales service practices of vehicle, and consumer satisfaction which broadly covers all the points below:

1. To understand the level of transparency from service station to customer,
2. To analyze the level interaction of car company with customer and,
3. To study the functioning of Staffs at service station.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A structured questionnaire was floated to the people to meet the objectives. The sampling frame is generally colleagues, relatives and friends. The sampling size is 100. The research is majorly done in Delhi NCR with the age group ranging from 19 to 45 and both male and female are the respondents. And, the sampling process is convenience sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling technique and that involves sample drawn from people which are close at hand. The respondents were asked a range of questions in two major categories.

- The interaction with dealership or service center.
- The work satisfaction in the whole process (Time/Experience/Money)

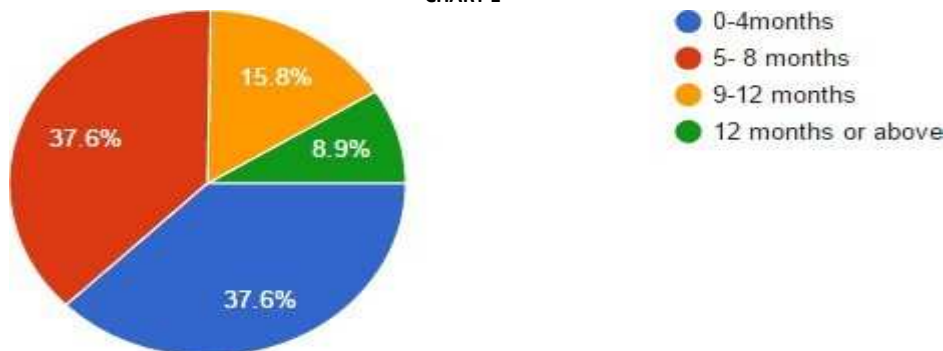
The parameters which are taken into account while making questionnaire are explained with the findings below.

RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Following questions were asked to the respondents through questionnaire:

1. How often do you take your vehicle to the workshop (service center)?

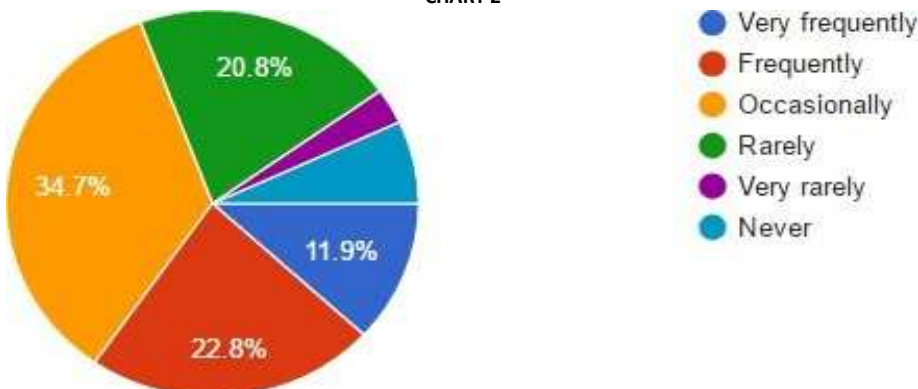
CHART 1



The frequency of taking one’s vehicle to the workshop which reflect the ¾ sample take their car at service station for routine check-up, servicing or any other issue in span of 0-8months.

2. How often you receive a call from the service center for any purpose in a quarter (3months)?

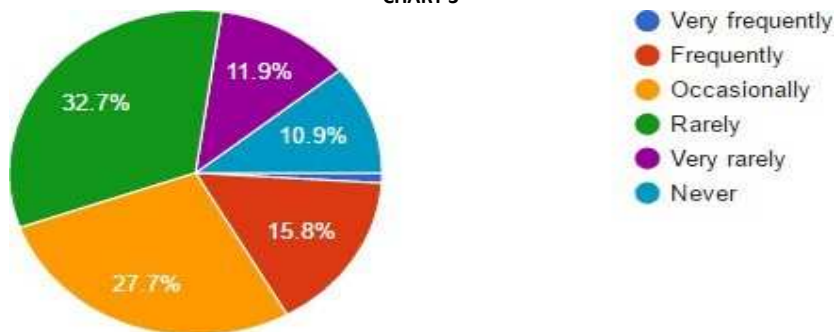
CHART 2



Telephonic call from Dealer workshop or service center or any third party vendor accounts around 70% of sample ranges from very frequently to occasionally. The idea behind asking this question is to find how much effort Dealer or service station tries to generate the lead from customer.

3. How often you answer a call from the service center for any purpose in a quarter (3months)?

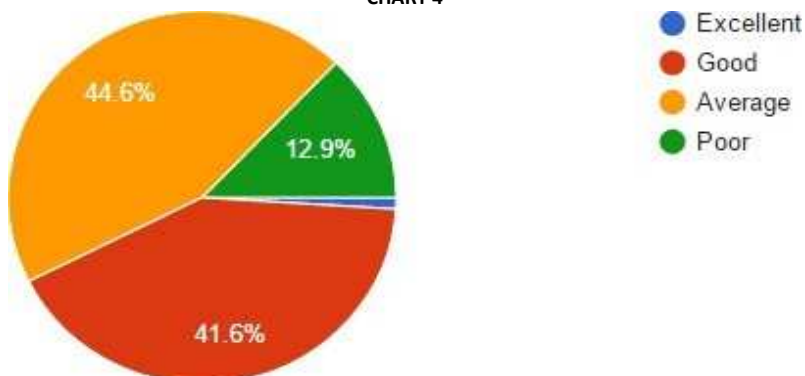
CHART 3



The purpose of asking this is to check the level of interaction from Dealer to Customer because majority of people don't pick up the random calls or calls generally made in busy schedule. Well there is about 50% of sample that don't respond the telephonic call actively.

4. How is the knowledge and understanding of the Service Advisor at service station?

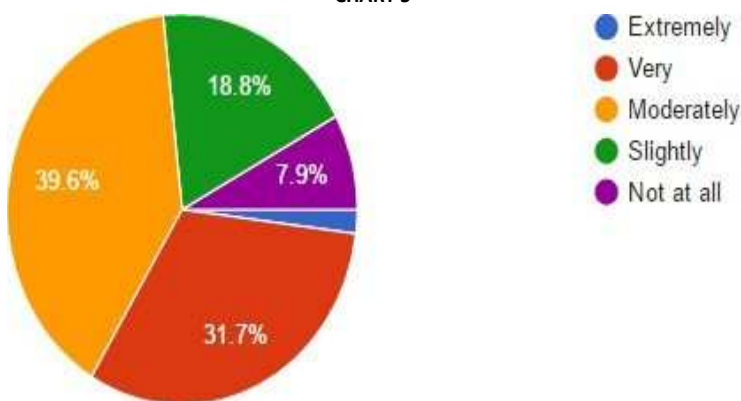
CHART 4



The Service advisor is the first interaction with customer when he/she take the vehicle to service station, the knowledge and understanding plays vital role because that is the time after purchase and 2 way interaction is happening between customer and brand. If both the parameters are up to the mark then there should be no problem in retaining the customer, but that is not the case as we can see around 58% of chunk have seen poor and average understanding of service advisor.

5. How convenient/ suitable are the vehicle service appointments?

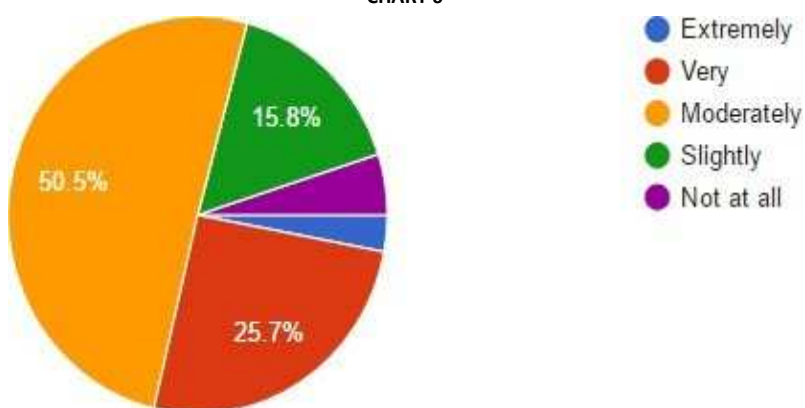
CHART 5



The parameter which are trying to measure over here is telephonic service appointment which is generally taken by service station or third party vendor and it shows around 2/3 of sample did not find suitable from moderately to Not at all. When we say convenient or suitability it covers the aspect of keeping customer in Queue and Waiting.

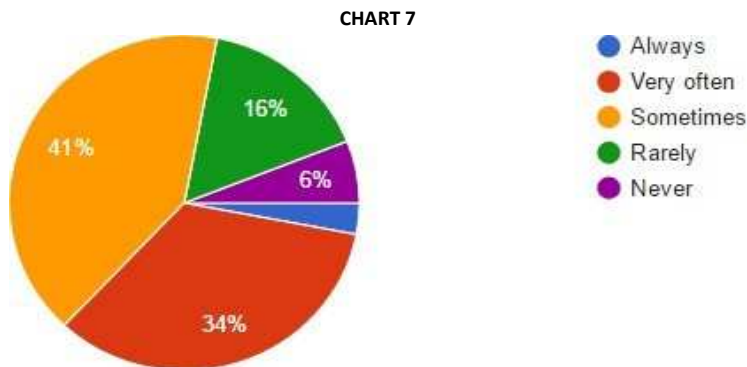
6. How easy is it to communicate any requirement for your vehicle while work on your car is in progress?

CHART 6



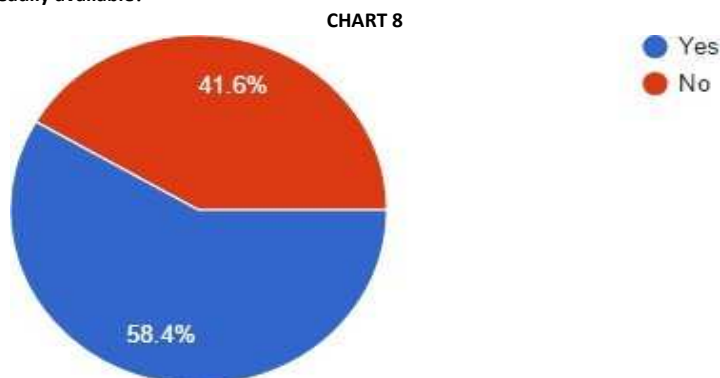
There has been several time that customer come up with something while work in progress on customer vehicle, that time the service advisor tries to stick to the Job card and repair order of vehicle. But from above data we can see very few people had faced this problem. Around 20% of the sample faced this kind of situation. Here we trying to capture the agility of after sales service process

7. Was the above requirement metwith?



As we have seen very few people have faced this problem, the people who have faced with any ad hoc requirement, they generally (70% of times) got their requirement met.

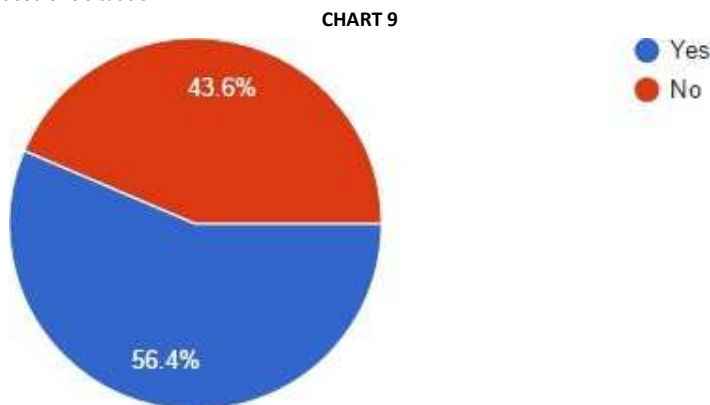
8. Were spare parts for your vehicle readily available?



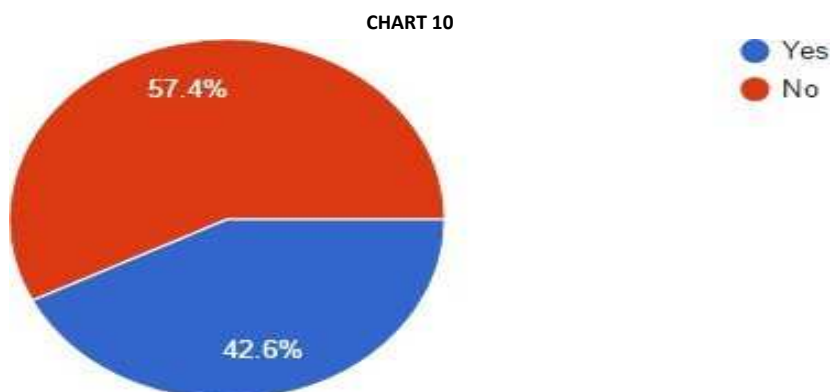
Well the inventory of spare part is one of the pillars of post purchase service and the non- availability creates the negative image in customer’s mind and he/she will try to find alternative solution outside the premises of service station and jeopardize with the health of car. Around 40% of Sample faced the issue spare parts availability.

9. Was your vehicle ready for collection on agreed time?

This is the most crucial time for customers when service advisors have to say “No” to customers and though the timeline were already shared with them. As per the above data around 40% of sample faced this situation.



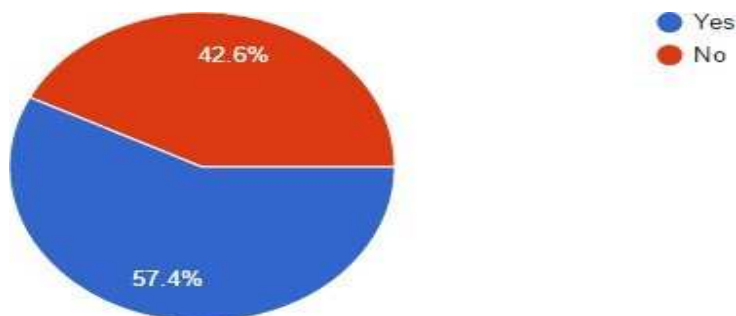
10. Did customer service executive try to cross sell any other car accessories?



The cross selling any accessories is most effective way to increase the profit margin of the dealer and service station. Vehicle accessories have huge profit margin as there is no regulation from company and no such check on the quality of accessories. It completely ethical to cross sell and show the accessories on designated shelf space. Around 40% of the sample experience cross selling of accessories.

11. Was your experience at the service center pleasant?

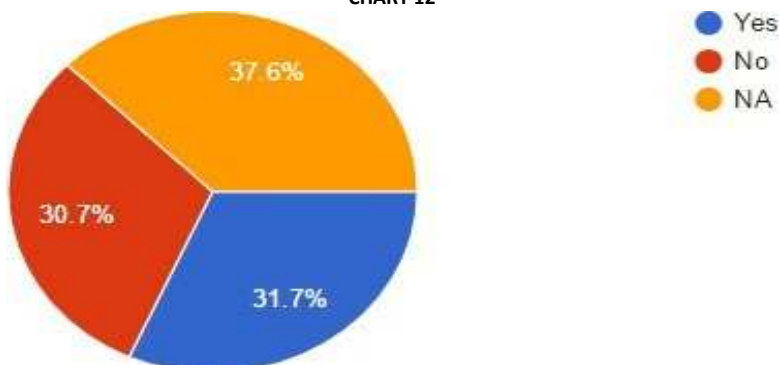
CHART 11



Here what we are trying to capture is the experience of customers at service station, be it in a waiting lounge or hospitality of Service station or not getting appropriate result after investing time and money. Any one of the reason will sabotage the relations with customer and probability of retaining the customer lowers down. 43% of sample faced this kind of experience.

12. If not, was the issue resolved by the service station manager?

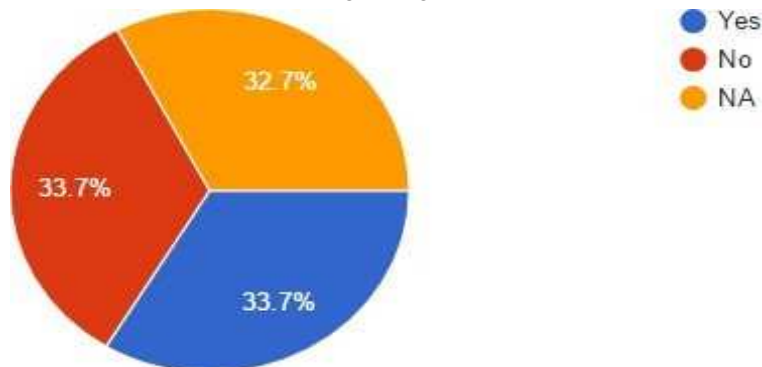
CHART 12



In case of any non-satisfactory result, customer tends to approach to manager and the resolving of issue should become priority of manager, but it doesn't seem to be happening as per above data which is around 1/3rd of people have faced.

13. In case of escalation, did you approach any forum?

CHART 13

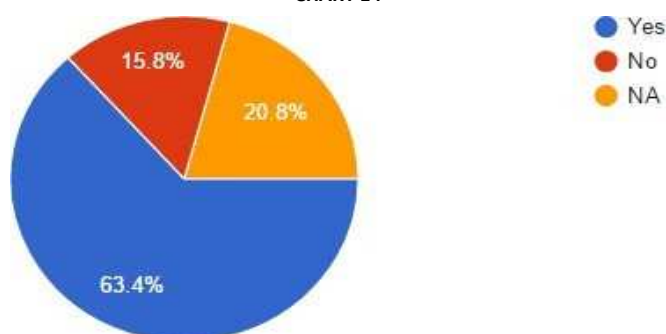


Escalation of any issue to any forum like consumer voice, automotive forum like team bhp etc. create impact and which helps the customer to get some support and the company can look into the matter of issue and revert to the customer.

1/3rd of people actually approached to any forum. Basically, approaching to forum also comes under the social CRM practices where companies try to revert in best possible manner to maintain its image.

14. If given a choice, would you go for a product offering with better after sale service over a better product offering with poor/no after sale service?

CHART 14



Around 2/3rd of people look for better post purchase sales services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The visiting of consumers to service station is decent enough, but can be increased by giving them seasonal offers like Washing or free check-up.
- Gone are those times where interactions were on calls or sending postcards. In era of technology advancement, the mails and SMSes also don't work for long term perspective. The service provider needs to look for another alternative for retaining customers.
- The service advisor should possess domain knowledge and one needs to be transparent with customer in order to gain customer trust.
- The communication channel should be direct from consumer to service advisor and must be acknowledged properly.
- The vehicle delivery agreed time is not met most of the times and it might turn up the satisfactory work into a negative one.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY & FUTURE PROSPECTS OF CRM

According to this study, we have covered the holistic view of post purchase experience of customer where company role is being played by dealer workshop or service station. Here only dealer tries to divert from company policy and look for monetary benefit from customer which is a short term approach. Limitation of this research is that we have not deep dived into various processes as mentioned below;

- Process of servicing a vehicle
- Role of service advisor at different stages
- Cashless Insurance Process
- Spare Parts and OEM

Need of hour is that the company should look at after sales services practices by utilizing new technology like Mobile CRM (mCRM), Customer profiles etc. mCRM is going to elevate the future of the automotive industry. With properly implemented CRM initiatives, the future will encounter automotive websites making adjustments according to customer profiles and preferences. Successful automotive CRM systems will harness crucial customer feedback and data will flow back to dealers and manufacturers, thus enabling them to design the correct follow up campaigns to seal the gap between sales and marketing. Good CRM means better multi-channel access and transparency with regard to offers, quotes and pricing.

Tight dealer-manufacturer integration is also essential to avoid information overload and inconsistent customer details while collaboratively optimizing strategies and products. Another critical factor for CRM success in the automotive industry is capturing a holistic picture of its leads, customers, partners and vendors.

When we talk about mCRM, it is more likely the subset of eCRM only but it caters number of issues which have changed according to the trend where people are moving from Desktop to Mobiles. The clicks changing to swipes, answering the call is changing to request in Application. mCRM is defined as "services that aim at nurturing customer relationships, acquiring or maintaining customers, support marketing, sales or services processes, and use wireless networks as the medium of delivery to the customers. However, since communications is the central aspect of customer relations activities, many opt for the following definition of mCRM: "communication, either one-way or interactive, which is related to sales, marketing and customer service activities conducted through mobile medium for the purpose of building and maintaining customer relationships between a company and its customer(s).

eCRM allows customers to access company services from more and more places, since the Internet access points are increasing by the day. mCRM however, takes this one step further and allows customers or managers to access the systems for instance from a mobile phone or PDA with internet access, resulting in high flexibility.

There are three main reasons that mobile CRM is becoming so popular. The first is that the devices consumers use is improving in multiple ways that allow for this advancement. Displays are larger and clearer and access times on networks are improving overall. Secondly, the users are also becoming more sophisticated. The technology to them is nothing new so it is easy to adapt. Lastly, the software being developed for these applications has become worthwhile and useful to end users.

CONCLUSION

Marketing executives are discovering that mere implementation of a CRM system is not the only solution to woo, communicate with and retain customers. There is often a communication gap between customers and companies which IT systems alone cannot bridge. According to studies, auto company-customer interaction occurs few times in a year which does not provide sufficient data to answer questions like which customer should receive what offer and product, when, etc. This brings forth a crucial fact that automotive companies need that approach to CRM that marketers and customers both can embrace with ease. The consumer is now well equipped with knowledge to distinguish between brands. Hence, since the midst of 21st century, the focus on building brands with more products has left the market in an unstable state. Increase of competitors in the market means more available options for the customer. Dynamics between the customer and provider has drastically evolved today. Consumers know which brand to purchase, so to sweeten the purchase up, businesses need to provide an added benefit to the customer. As the Internet is becoming more and more important in business life, many companies consider it as an opportunity to reduce customer-service costs, tighten customer relationships and most important, further personalize marketing messages and enable mass customization to establish and maintain long term relationship with customers.

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