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CUSTOMER CENTRICITY: ANTECEDENTS AND BARRIERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper talks about antecedents of customer centric marketing and building blocks of customer centric organisation. Further it talks about being customer centric in Pharma sector. In addition to it; it discusses case study of Proctor and Gamble and how it attempts in identifying customer needs and satisfying them. At last discusses barriers at being customer centric.

KEYWORDS

consumer centric marketing, market diversity, financial metrics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world of globalisation customer centricity has become the buzzword. Every company claims itself to be customer centric without understanding the essence of it. In a customer-centric organization, the customer is at the core of everything as they pass the customer lifecycle. All processes and company activity are done in support of what the customer is trying to accomplish. "Thus, the customer-centric organization creates products, processes, policies, and a culture that are designed to support customers in their endeavours and to provide them with a great experience as they are working towards their goals." (Marshak, 2013)

2. OBJECTIVE & RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objective

To understand what is customer centric approach and how is it different from product centric approach. To look into what companies are doing to become customer centric.

Research Methodology

The paper is based upon the secondary data, which is collected from published reports, journals, magazines, websites etc.

3. ANTECEDENTS OF CONSUMER CENTRIC MARKETING

3.1 Marketing productivity problem

Over the years marketing productivity has declined. There is a need for a new method to analyse cost and benefit of the amount spent on marketing activities. There has been improvement in non-marketing activities like manufacturing and operations due to use of six sigma, zero-defect processes, just in time approach, automation. Other departments like finance, human resources and accounting have improved efficiency by downsizing, outsourcing and business process re-engineering. (Sheth, Sisodia and Sharma, 2000)

3.2 Market diversity

Market diversity is increasing in both consumer as well as business market. In business markets, diversity is increasing due to size, location and type of business. These differences have led to diversity in the needs, wants and resources of business customers. In case of household market there is diversity in lifestyle as the number of working women have increased. There is ethnic as well as age diversity. Hence more need to be consumer centric. (ibid.)

3.3 Technology applicability

Technological advancement is helping companies get more consumer centric as it helps to provide unique solution to individual customer. Internet is playing a major role in distribution of information and completing a transaction in fraction of costs compared to other means. (ibid.)

4. BUILDING BLOCKS OF CUSTOMER CENTRIC ORGANIZATION

4.1 Customer life cycle view

Customer centric organisations do not treat a sale with a customer as a one-time process but they focus on the evolving customer lifetime needs through his childhood, adulthood and parenthood. Some companies have used technology to tailor their approach, Amazon.com is one such company. Amazon uses information on customer's past purchases and browsing behaviour, to give recommendations to the customers. That's life-cycle marketing which focuses on the customer rather than the product being sold. (Egol, Hyde, Ribeiro and tipping, 2004)

4.2 Solution mind set

Do not try to sell a product to the customer but sell a solution. A customer is looking for it. So, if you sell a truck do not say we are selling a truck but say that we are selling a means to reduce your transportation costs. Solutions should replace the product as the basic unit of value proposition. Due to this companies have stopped selling "off the shelf" products and are offering customised solutions along with advisory relationship. (ibid.)

Truly customer-centric companies do not hesitate to work with competitors to fulfil customer needs. "For Example, GE Transportation's Aircraft Engines unit, for example, moved beyond manufacturing and selling its own jet engines to repairing and maintaining all manufacturers' engines and spares. Now, instead of selling engines, the unit sells thrust and reduced engine life-cycle costs to airlines, and today services as many of its competitors' engines as it does its own." (ibid. p 2)

TABLE 1

Industry	Traditional product	Traditional value proposition	Value added services	Customer centric value proposition
Truck manufacturing	trucks	sell and service trucks	Financing and service	Can help you reduce your lifetime transportation costs
pharmaceuticals	drugs	Sell pharmaceuticals	Product support and customer driven database	Can help better manage your patients base.

Source: (Egol et. al, 2004, pg. 2)

4.3 Advise bundling

Consumer centric Companies engage in a continuous dialogue with the customer long the product is sold and long after the purchase. The thing is to do it cost effectively. Earlier advice bundling was done for only High Net worth individuals only. But now it is being done for the general public as well. Citibank’s Citipro is an example where the customers financial information is put in the software by the financial analyst at the branch and based on that data the software produces the desired solution. This helps the bank also as they are able to expand their customer base. (ibid.)

4.4 Empower front line

Customers interact with people in the frontline so they should be provided with skills and training to solve customers’ problems on the spot. These employees have better understanding of customer needs and problems but often are not authorised to take the remedial action. The policies in pricing, marketing and planning generally flows from top to bottom. But at Ritz Carlton the authority to take decisions is decentralized to frontline employees. (ibid.)

4.5 Customising business processes

A same business process cannot be followed for all the products. Like for stable products/services a less expensive channel can be used and the complicated part of the offering can be delivered through customised streams to reduce costs. (ibid.)

4.6 Cross functional, collective effort

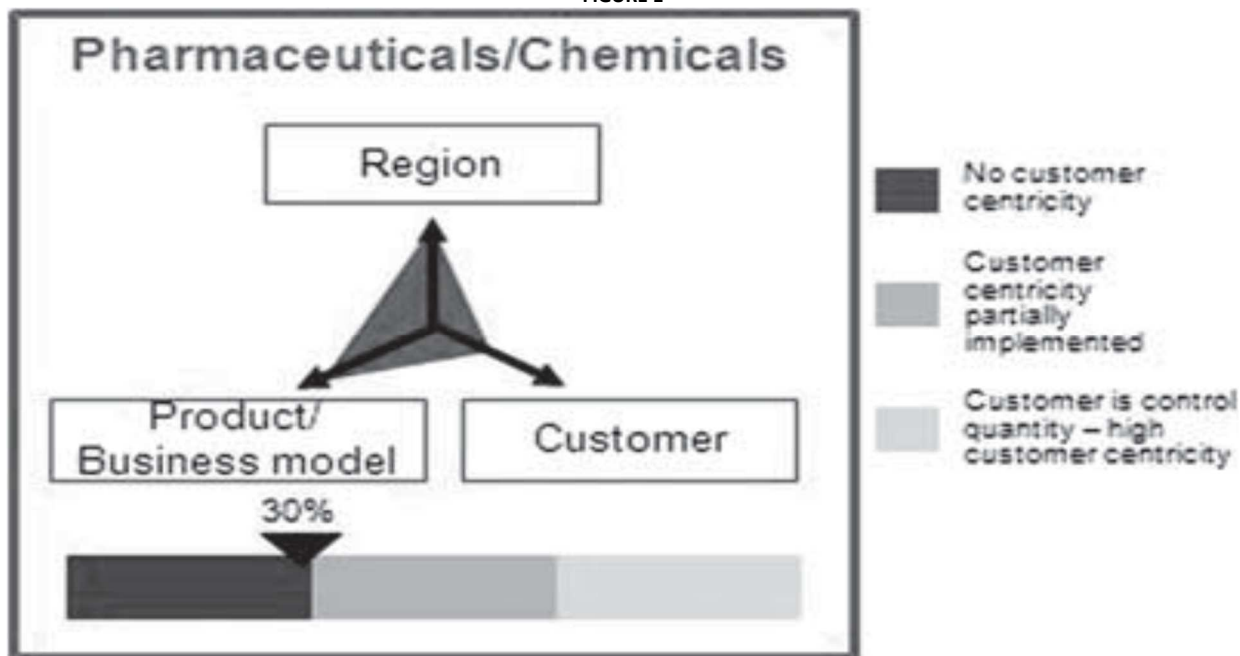
To be a customer centric company finally you require a collective effort by the different departments of the organisation. It’s unlike product centric approach where the functions are compartmentalised. In an organisation a sales person should not be the only one responsible to understand customer needs. Linkages has to be developed across the organisation and a better understanding of customer needs has to be developed at every level. (ibid.)

5. CUSTOMER CENTRICITY IN PHARMA SECTOR

Presently there is a lot of competition in pharma sector. The patents of the breakthrough drugs are going to expire. Also, the completion in the generic drug market is intensified due to the pressure of keeping prices low of vital drugs. In order to be successful new unique selling propositions, need to be evolved. (Burmam, Jorg & Meurer, Kanitz,2010)

According to a study from KEYLENS (research firm) customer centricity is very low in pharmaceutical sector. They focus more on traditional channels and rely heavily on sales force to know the effects and side effects of a particular drug. The results of the study are shown below: (ibid.)

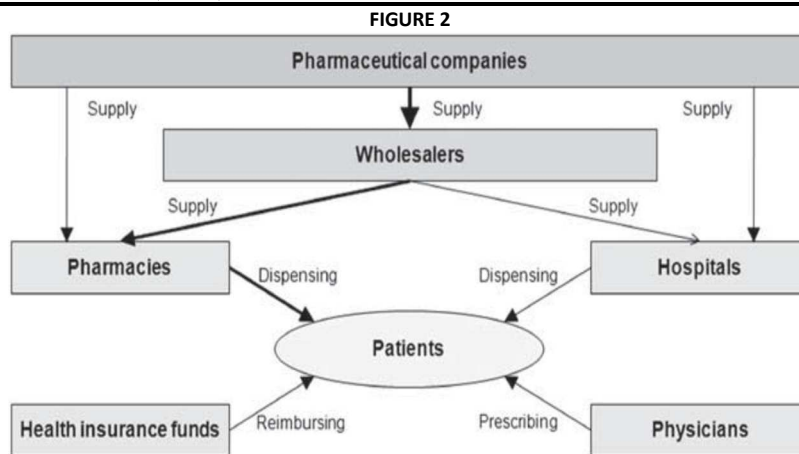
FIGURE 1



Source: (Customer centricity as a key to success in pharma by Burmann, Meurer & Kanitz, 2010, Pg. 50)

More and more drugs and pharmaceutical products are becoming replaceable due to expiring patents, contracting research line and upcoming generic drugs. To this customer centricity offers a solution. It is an approach of integrating customers’ needs in strategic goals, providing customized offerings and implementation of customer oriented activities. (ibid.)

Customer centricity approach is different from customer relationship management (CRM). Under CRM focus there was on collecting data and not on how to apply the data and satisfy customer needs. The management got lost in the technical aspects of CRM. Hence the evolving customer centricity approach closes this gap of managing customer needs. Particularly in case of pharmaceutical industry the debate arises about “who is the customer actually?” here the buyer, decision maker and the consumer are separated. In case of prescriptive drug, the patient is consumer. But the insurance agencies repaying health expenses and the physician prescribing the drug has a major role in decision making. Hence the network of consumers is quite complex. (ibid.)



Source: Pharmaceutical customer network (European Commission) Pg.51

In western markets the payer’s group – the insurers who does reimbursement have become more and more critical. The government regulations also have a role to play. (ibid.)

Three-step approach of customer centricity:

Step 1: Customer segmentation and segment strategies

The initial step for developing a customer centric orientation is gathering knowledge about financial value of customer and requirement of customers. The question here which becomes important is which customers to manage and how to manage? (ibid.)

Step 2: Redesign of customer contacts and the marketing logic

The orientation of pharma company to focus on products need to be shifted to consumer focusing. At this point, providing customised offerings, redefining customer touchpoints can play a major role. (ibid.)

Step 3: Adjustment of control mechanisms and cultural change

The top management commitment is must to shift the focus to customer centricity. “Customer” has to be treated as the major KPI, to bring this cultural change. (ibid.)

Physician centricity

Physicians were and are the focus among pharmaceutical companies. But the valuation of customer is product centric and past based. Overall value of the customer is not gauged by the firms. (ibid.)

Pharma companies need to address these issues:

“With which of the physicians do we want to grow.

Which of the physician do we want to keep?

In which of the physicians do we want to disinvest?” (ibid.)

KEYLENS investigation revealed that 10% of the physicians are at the top while 30% are unprofitable. The top physicians need to be catered with customer specific strategy. On the lower 30% investments can be switched. While for the middle 60% a selective approach can be employed. (ibid.)

Thus, the value segmentation should be on 3 parameters.

It has to be cross product

Estimating future potential of the physician

The value segmentation has to be EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization) (ibid.).

Method 1- summarizes all prescription and subtracts the prescription by company X.

Method 2- count the sales under therapy area covered by company X.

Method 3- it also considers the probability of gaining prod. C share from co. Y. (ibid.)

FIGURE 3

	Company X		Company Y	
	Product A	Product B	Product C	Product D
	Therapy area I	Therapy area II	Therapy area I	Therapy area III
Sales (in €)	10	10	20	30
Profit margin	50%	25%	40%	20%
Value of physician (in 1,000€):				
Method 1:	10	10	20	30
Method 2:	70			
Method 3:	20		50	
Potential of physician (in 1,000€):				
Method 1:	70-20		70-50	
Method 2:	40-20		60-50	
Method 3:	x*(40-20)		y*(60-50)	
Profitability of physician (in 1,000€):				
	Average profit margin			
Physician 1:	10	10	37.5%	
Physician 2:	0	20	25%	

Source: (Customer centricity as a key to success in pharma by Burmann, Meurer & Kanitz, 2010, Pg. 55)

Patient centrality

Patients are also an important pillar of customers of pharma industry. With the spread of internet customers are becoming more informed. In most cases they do the initial diagnosis themselves. So a segmentation of customers' needs to be done. It can be socio demographic or need based segmentation. Like for consumer buying over the counter drugs direct to consumer advertising is more beneficial. Development of new therapies requires patient's acceptance. Hence patient centrality is vital for pharma research and product development. (ibid.)

Payer's centrality

Payers market consists of the insurance agencies. Which bear the cost of treatment? Due to rising health cost and decreasing budgets this segment has become crucial. The payer's market is quite heterogeneous therefore it needs to be segmented. Firstly, the segmentation between health insurance fund and regulatory institutions is must. Then a geographical segmentation can be done. (ibid.)

Drivers and barriers in implementing customer centrality

Internal top level commitment
 Customer centrality knowledge
 It includes customer insights, segmenting and applying customer strategies.
 External market view
 Knowing the customer. (ibid. p 57)

Practical implications

Changing the business model is crucial – whole organisation has to be roped in to rebuild it.
 Develop measures to identify customer values and formulate segment strategies.
 Hence the pharma industry is changing fundamentally; customer centrality offers a promising solution to cope with the change. (ibid.)

6. PROCTER AND GAMBLE'S CONSUMER CENTRIC APPROACH TO WEB

Procter and gamble is one of the leading FMCG Company. Even it has realised that being customer centric is the need of the hour. It has spent a lot of time, effort and money to understand consumer but even then, the P n G executive admit that they have to go a long way to fully exploit digital technology. They do not have data of the results achieved by other traditional companies like P n G but they surely are aware of the success achieved by new entrepreneurial companies and by companies like Amazon and Dell. (Cleary, 1999)

It launched 200 projects online but that is not enough in optimising the use of digital technology. The reasons being:

6.1 Unable to fully respond to customer need and expectations when they enter the digital platform. (ibid.)

Earlier through the traditional means of marketing a wide range of ads were broadcasted and the consumer expected a monologue. But now the consumer lives in a time starved environment. They choose the messages they want to see. Internet is an interactive medium customer's want that companies should listen to them and respond. (ibid.)

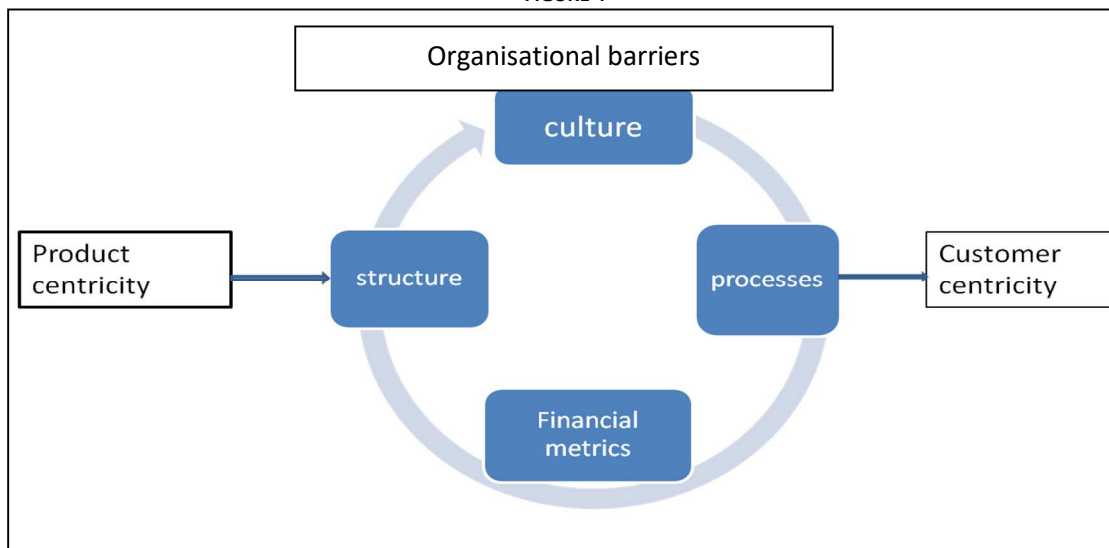
6.2 Approaching the internet as just another medium of broadcast. Most companies work on the internet with traditional mindset, objectives and tools. Usually the question is asked "how much the company spends on internet advertising?"

Well the question should be how much value is being added using the internet. (Cleary, 1999)
 The dynamics have changed and internet offers a huge opportunity for FMCG firms like P n G. the consumer is spending more and more time on internet. They can choose the messages they want to see hence internet cannot be seen as an alternate medium of broadcasting advertising message. (ibid.)
 At P n G the business is built around mass marketing so a radical change is required.
 The company has to be consumer centric in 3 fundamental areas:
 Become consumer centric while redefining the notion of brand.
 It should not be about the benefits that the product offers but should be about the whole experience of the brand. The consumer is not looking for your product but is rather looking for a solution to his problem. Amoazon.com is such company which offers a wide variety of range of books, uses technology to collect and prepare advice on books for individual customers, and offers price and convenience. (ibid)
 Similarly, Dell computers also collect and notes the specification provided by the customer and then delivers the required configuration. Hence the medium is used by these companies to provide benefit and not only to deliver message. (ibid.)
 Be more consumer centric in developing and delivering the message.
 Consumer centric in organisational structure.
 Compartmentalisation of departments with each department focusing on achieving their own target can be detrimental for the organisation as a whole. Hence all should work together to satisfy the customer. (ibid.)

7. POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO CUSTOMER CENTRICITY

The issues and challenges faced by a company while shifting from product centrality to customer centrality are as follows:

FIGURE 4



Source: (The path to customer centrality by Shah, Rust, Parasuraman, & Day, 2006 in Journal of Service research, Pg. 116)

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

A customer centric organisation is one that has its all functional activities integrated to provide a satisfying experience to the customer. This is in contrast to a product centric company that is divided into functions. These companies will have product managers focusing on the sales of the particular product. This results in pushing products to the customers without understanding their needs. An informal coordination between departments can help overcome this deficiency. One of the advantages of customer centric marketing is that it creates accountability for customer relationships; this will imply that ownership of marketing resources needs to be transferred from brand/product manager to customer segment manager. (Shah et al, 2005)

PROCESSES

"Payne and Frow (2005) surveyed a number of CRM executives and identified five generic processes that are essential for a firm to be customer-centric:

- The strategy-development process that includes not only a business strategy but also a customer strategy,
- The dual value creation process that is at the heart of the exchange process,
- The multichannel integration process that encompasses all the customer touch points,
- the information-management process that includes the data collection and data analysis functions, and the performance-assessment process that ties the firm's actions to firm performance." (ibid.)

Another challenge is to meet customer expectation with right product/service. The better the company segments the customer into homogenous groups the better it can serve them. This segmentation will result into personalisation which will result into more profitability. (ibid.).

With rise of IT sector, it is easier to engage with customers. However, it has to be used with care, as banks made investments in IT to automate dealings but later they realised that they had lost personal touch with the customers. (ibid.)

FINANCIAL METRICS

It is important to measure the financial impact of shifting to customer centric organisation as it involves huge resources. But it is difficult to measure as shifting provides intangible benefits like customer satisfaction, advocacy and loyalty which is not directly measurable. (ibid.)

Recently, the concept of Customer lifetime value has got a lot of prominence. So, some researchers say that measuring individual customer value helps in managing resources at customer level. Like customer equity is taken as a proxy of firm value. (ibid.)

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Culture has multiple levels and facets that is why it is resistant to change; customer centric organisations believe that customer lies at the centre of all decisions. Employees need to share information among themselves to better serve the customer's needs. Customer centred culture believe in spending time with customers to get insights. Culture change is followed by behavioural change. Here senior management should help the employees in seeing the benefit of new behaviour and helping them overcoming the impediments. (ibid.)

8. CONCLUSION

Customer centricity is about change in mindset first and then about the processes and tools deployed. It is the understanding of evolving customer needs rather than development or 3rd and 4th generation tools. Customer centricity is much broader than just understanding needs, behaviour and preferences of customers. These are just a building block toward customer centricity. It basically involves change in strategic thinking at the top level and development of products/services and solutions at ground level. The ultimate goal should be to stay close to consumer. (Roll, 2015)

If a CEO of a company takes out time and interacts with customers than we can say that the customer centric culture is imbibed in the company at the top level. It is only the duty of marketing department to understand customer needs. Customer co-creation can be of great help. Take ideas from customers and bring them to retail shelf. (ibid.)

Customer centric companies are the one which build their entire organisation around the customers. They strive to fulfil evolving customer needs and they are proactive in this approach rather than reactive. In product centric approach where the focus lies on the product the customer is the kingpin in customer centric approach.

Customer centric companies do not treat a sale with customer as a one-time process but take a lifetime customer view. So, build a relation with your customer; spend time with them in order to know them better. They are not looking for your product but are rather looking for a solution so offer them that. These companies do not hesitate to work jointly with their customer to fulfil its customers need. Empowering of frontline is also very important because they are the people who interact with customers and better understand their problems. Therefore, they should be given the authority to solve the problem as and when it arises.

Most importantly satisfying the customer is not only the job of the marketing department. The whole organisation should work towards customer satisfaction.

There are barriers like culture, organisational structure and processes to the customer centric approach but the benefit this approach entails are much larger.

Technology is serving in a big way by helping companies get insights about their customers. Companies are offering customised products and services to their customers because that is the need of the hour. Customer is no longer the passive player in the market. They already have a lot of information at their disposal. So being customer centric is the only way to survive in the market today.

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