

Communication Services a Comparitve Study Between the Perceptions of Rural and Urban Mobile Phone Customers in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract: Communication systems followed over a period of time has changed the life style of human being to a greater extent. The sea of changes happened over a period of time, starting with Graham Bell's land line service phone to wireless cellular services (mobile phone services) are un imaginary. The type of popularity enjoyed by mobile phones is a land mark in the history of telecommunications due to its compactness and economy. Development of technology and economy rates and the wide range of services gave an additional mileage to the mobile phones. Still there is a gap between the customer expectations and service quality offered in Urban and Rural areas. It leads to shifting the customer from one service provider to another. It is a nuisance to both the parties. Hence, there is a need to identify the gap between the customer perceptions and the service offered by the mobile phone service providers. The present study made an attempt to compare the customers' perceptions towards mobile phone services offered in Urban and Rural places of Tamilnadu state.

Key words: Tele communications, communication services, psychographics, personality, locus of control, customer perception, purchase decision

INTRODUCTION

Mobile phones play a very important role in the modern world, as they provide mobility, accessibility and convenience of communication to the user. Several companies provide mobile phone services in our country. The disadvantage of landline phones comprises limited range, no privacy and disturbances due to cable lines and does not provide security against misuse etc (Jasubhai Digital Media, 2006). As a result of the disadvantages associated with the landline phones the need for newer concept was left. The new concept of mobile phones was introduced to overcome the difficulties faced by landline phones.

Mobile communication has become integral part of the growth, success and efficiency of any business and economy. Past few years have witnessed an enormous increase in mobile phone users, appreciable reduction in tariff and increase in talk time with the entry of multiple operators in the field of mobile communication in our country. In many countries, mobile phones now outnumber land-line telephones, with most adults and many children now owning mobiles. Hong Kong has the highest mobile phone penetration rate in world, at 125.1% in November 2005 (Voice and Data, 2005). In UK now mobile phones are more than people.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Communication is the life blood for inter personal relations and for the development of social status. In formal organizations the role of communication is vital for the development of business and to perform it in a planned way. Communication plays a major role not only between individuals but also between the organizations and countries. Communication helps in exchange of ideas, thought and for sharing knowledge required to the development of society. Communication role in the discipline of management is indispensable (Madhukar, 2001). Communication systems followed over a period of time has changed the life style of human being to a greater extent. The sea of changes happened over a period of time, starting with Graham Bell's land line service phone to wireless cellular services (mobile phone services) are un imaginary. The type of popularity enjoyed by mobile phones is a land mark in the history of telecommunications due to its compactness and economy. Development of technology and economy rates and the wide range of services gave an additional mileage to the mobile phones. Still there is a gap between the customer expectations and service quality offered in Urban and Rural areas. It leads to shifting the customer from one service provider to another. It is a nuisance to both the

parties. Hence, there is a need to identify the gap between the customer perceptions and the service offered by the mobile phone service providers. The present study made an attempt to compare the customers' perceptions towards mobile phone services offered in Urban and Rural places of Tamilnadu State.

Objectives: The study was undertaken to understand and evaluate the profile and perception of mobile phone users in the state of Tamil Nadu. A comparative study is made between the perception of mobile phones users at Urban and Rural places in Tamil Nadu to understand the perceptions of the different service users.

Need for the study: The researcher feels that the present study helps to know the perceptions of the customers and the mobile phone service providers between two major segments. i.e. Urban and Rural. It gives a proper idea on the customers expectations, Which in turn helps in designing the various business plans to suit the customers in different segments.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Descriptive Research Design is used in this study to explore the issues going on the mobile phone service industry. Descriptive study is a fact-finding investigation with adequate interpretation (Krishnaswami, 2000). The methodology adopted for the study was a combination of the field survey method, personal interviews and use of the observational techniques (Kothari, 2002). A structured questionnaire was administered to total of 250 mobile phone users in two segments-Rural 125 and Urban 125.

Sample area-place of study: Sample Area is broadly divided in to 2 segments namely Urban and Rural. Urban area is Chennai City and Rural Area included the selected towns in the State of Tamil Nadu. The Rural town includes Madurai, Trichy, Erode, Thanjavur and Tirunelveli.

Sample profile: For the purpose of survey, a questionnaire is distributed to the mobile phone users in both rural and urban areas of Tamil Nadu State. The demographical attributes used for the selection of sample are Age, Gender, Education and Marital Status.

Scope and limitations of the study: The period of study is during the first half the year 2007 and was confined to two

areas so as to have a broader and representative sample. The respondents were chosen on a random convenience sampling basis and the field investigators conducted the study under the guidance of the author. However, the limitations of the study are that since the consumer attitudes keep changing the findings may not be applicable in all the cases. Another limitation could be that the size of the sample being relatively small, some of the findings may slightly vary with those of the larger universe.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics

Age

Urban: They study reveals that 55% of the users fall in the age group of 21-25 years; 24% in 26-30 years; 17% below 21 years, with the average age of the user being 24 years. The minimum age is 15 years and the maximum age is 52 years.

Rural: The study reveals that 58% of the respondents fall in the age group of 31-35 years; 26% in 35-40 years; 14% in 26-30 years, with the average age being 33 years. The minimum age is 26 years while the maximum 56 years.

Gender

Urban: It is observed that 75% of the users are males and 25% females.

Rural: It is observed that 78% of the users males and 22% females.

Marital status

Urban: The observation reveals that 70% of the users are single and 26% married.

Rural: The observation reveals that 90% of these people are married and 10% single.

Education

Urban: The study reveals that 67% of the users are graduates and 23% post graduates.

Rural: The study reveals that 55% of the respondents are graduates and 18% post graduates.

Occupation

Urban: The study reveals that 49% respondents are employed. Fourteen percent self employed and 37% students.

Rural: The study reveals that 75% of the respondents are employed and 18% self employed and 7% students.

Demographic profile

Urban: Majority of the respondents fall in the age group of 21-25 years and 26-30 years. These young adults are open to the new ideas so the prepaid card has attracted them in a big way. Males are dominant customers, as they want to be accessible anytime, to their business acquaintances and friends/relatives. Slowly but surely women are also starting to use the mobile phone services.

Majority of the users are well educated so they are in touch with the latest in technology and are always will to try out new things. Majority of the users are employed and use their cell phones mostly for official purposes. This low budget concept has replaced the pagers and allows the employers to be constantly in touch with the employees. Even students from a big portion of the customer base which shows that they want to be in touch with their loved ones at all times.

Rural: Most of the users are in the age group of 31-35 years and 35-40 years. These people like to operate within budgets and are always on the move. Here the most of the users are male. It would take certain time before women to start use of mobile phone services like urban area.

Majority of the users are well employed and the mobile phone services helped them in carrying out their business in a more efficient way. It has helped them to be in touch with their business opportunities

Psychographics

Attitude towards life

Urban: The study reveals that 72% of the people like to spend their time out doors during week ends.

Those people enjoy out door activities such as shopping, partying, trekking and long drives. They are adventuresome and extroverted by nature and therefore do not hesitate in trying out new products.

Rural: The study reveals that 68% of the people like to spend their leisure time outdoors, during week ends.

These people also enjoy outdoor activities such as watching movies and going out for dinners. They prefer a quiet evening with their family either at home or out side. They are not that extroverted by nature.

Self image and values

Urban: It is observed that 67% of the users aspire and dream of a successful career, while 17% attach prime importance to personal relations and family ties, followed by tradition and duty at 11%.

These people are ambitious and want to have a very successful career. They strive to achieve their ambitions and want to possess items of value. They are strivers life.

Rural: It is observed that 48% of the respondents attach importance to personal relations and family ties, while 24% give most importance to a successful career of business, followed by tradition and duty at 19%.

These people give prime importance to personal relations and family ties. For them family is the most important part of their life and they strive to maintain healthy relations.

Personality types

Urban: It is revealed that black is the predominant colour preferred by 33% of the respondents, while 25% prefer blue.

These personality types command respect, authority and are independent. They are willing to try out new technological innovations and give importance to style.

Rural: The study reveals that blue is most preferred by 39% followed by white at 27%.

These personality types command respect, authority and are independent. They believe in purity, peace.

Role models

Urban: The study reveals that 51% of the respondents have chosen a sports person as their role model. Twenty two percent have chosen the common man as their role model which includes family members and friends.

Rural: The study reveals that 44% of the respondents have chosen the common man as their role model which includes family members and friends, while 32% have chosen a flim star, as their role model.

These people look up to hard working people who are successful in their respective fields and whom they have observed from close quarters. They aspire to be like them and work hard to achieve their goals in life.

Locus of control

Urban: Most (81%) of the people attribute their success to hard work; 5% to fate, while 14% to both.

Rural: Most (60%) attribute their success to hard work; 21% to fate while 19% attribute it to both.

These people aspire to be successful through hard work and exhibit signs of being individualistic. They possess internal locus of control. They believe that success or failure is in their hands and are independent.

Attitude towards peer consumption

Urban: It is observed that 77% say that owning a mobile phone is become necessity while 23% consider it as a status symbol.

Rural: It is revealed that 83% say that owning a mobile phone has become a necessity, while 17% consider it as a status symbol.

These people are influenced by their friends and perceive a mobile phone as a necessity. From this we can see the transformation of a cell phone from a status symbol to a necessity. All this due to reduction in tariff and increase in talk time.

Loyalty behavior

Urban: The study reveals that 90% of the users have not shifted to any other brand and 88% of these have expressed their desire to recommend this service to others.

Rural: The study reveals that 95% of the users have not shifted to any other provider and 90% of these have their desire to recommend this service to others.

They are very much satisfied with the service and are willing to recommend it to others. These people are brand switching loyal who will not hesitate to shift to a better product in case their expectations are not met.

ANALYSIS OF PROMOTIONAL METHODS, STRATEGIES AND USAGE PATTERNS

Sources of awareness

Urban: It is seen that the primary source of awareness for most (51%) of the respondent is through friends and relatives, while the next most important source is newspapers/magazines (32%).

Rural: It is observed that the most important source of awareness for 52% of the respondents is friends and relatives, while the most important source towards awareness is newspapers/magazines (21%).

From this it can be seen that even though the effect of advertising and sales promotion is spreading, word of mouth referrals still play a vital role in spreading product/service awareness.

Influences on purchase decision

Urban: It is observed that 56% of the users have been influenced by their friends and relatives in the purchase of the mobile phone services while 27% are influenced by print advertisement in news paper and magazines.

Rural: It is observed that 64% of the users have been influenced by their friends and relatives in the purchase of the mobile phone services, while 22% are influenced by print advertisement in newspaper and magazines.

It can be seen from this that although advertisements and other sales promotional strategies play an important role in creating awareness, word of mouth referrals seem to be the key to any long standing business association, Word of mouth referrals play an important part in expanding the customer base. These people are early adopters.

CUSTOMER OPINION

Urban: The study reveals that 77% of the users are satisfied with the print ads in newspapers and magazines, 87% are satisfied with hoarding and only 9% are satisfied with the television ads. Eighty five percent is satisfied with the various sales promotion strategies and 58% are satisfied with packaging. It is also observed 62% are satisfied with pricing of product, 78% are satisfied with the availability of and 80% are satisfied with net work service.

Rural: The study reveals that 67% of the users are satisfied with the print ads in newspapers, 40% are satisfied with the hoardings and only 33% are satisfied with Televisions ads. It is also seen that 47% are satisfied with various sales promotion strategies and 55% are satisfied with the packaging. It is also observed that 72% are satisfied with the pricing of the product. Sixty seven percent are satisfied with the availability and 56% are satisfied with net work service.

This shows that there are lots of differences between Rural area and Urban area customers opinion on the various parameters. These discrepancies have to be eliminated and equal importance should be given to both the places in order to retain the customers.

SUGGESTIONS

- The packaging can be improved and the instructions can be made more lucid for the users to comprehend easily. Even the color of the package can be changed in order to make it more attractive and to differentiate it from its competitor.
- Television advertisements have to be released to cover a wide base of all the segments and created wareness among the potential customers.

- Women would be viewed as a possible segment. Line extension could be viewed as a possibility to enhance subscriber base. For this purpose they can come up with an exclusive package for women. Similarly the youth segment consisting of young adults and teenagers have to be explored to seek a broader customer base.
- As seen above there are many problems in rural areas to sales promotion strategies. The vernacular media vehicles should be used in such locations.
- Periodic surveys to gauge consumer perception have to be undertaken to gain the first hand perceptual image about the service and also to target the users better.
- Loyalty programs could also be introduced to reward high-usage segments and also to retain the customers.

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