A Qualitative Study On Service Channels In The Indian Telecom Industry

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Abstract Purpose: To measure the degree engagement, satisfaction with service channels and reason for dissatisfaction on the usage of digital self-service by telecom consumers. Design: To study the first objective purposive survey done with random sampling for customers were using the different types of the service channel. Service channels were explored through exploratory study. The second objective was determined using Net Promoter Survey (NPS) with promoter, detractor and passive analysis. The third objective was explored through qualitative research with multistage sampling, the analysis was done using semi-structured interviews to systematically collect and analyzed the data to generate a model for factors analyzing customer's reason for dissatisfaction towards the digital app. Grounded theory approach has been used to code the verbatim and used for the development of a model. Findings: study shows call centre is having highest users, NPS score of the digital channel was better over the call centre. Six influencing dissatisfaction factors of digital self-service factors identified through axial coding are app speed, unwanted information, incomplete information, Information /service not available, App response failure rate, Difficult to navigate. Originality/Value: This paper provides insights on the self-service app of the mobile operators and model can be used to improve the digital self-service.

1 INTRODUCTION

According to the Assocham-PwC study data usage in India will grow from 71,67,103 to 10,96,58,793 million MB during period 2017 to 2022 (The Economic Times,2019) This shows the digitalization acceleration in coming days, many companies like Swiggy, Zomato, Amazon, Flipkart, PhonePe, Digital PM are called as born-digital companies which promote only digital service channel for servicing the customers. Affordability of data prices, cheaper mobile handset, faster data (Christoph Schmitz 2016) and cheaper servicing model are the key drivers of the digital drive in India (Christoph Schmitz et al. 2016). Traditional brick and mortar model has limitation on the cost of servicing, more manpower investment non-scalable on different geographic locations unlike the digital model of service. As telecom companies are going through huge financial loses (S Jasrotia et al. 2018) they are searching for different modes to reduce the cost of servicing and digital mode of service is the best cost-effective solution for this problem.

The purpose of this research paper is
1. To measure the degree of engagement with different service channels in the Indian telecom industry
2. To do a comparative study on satisfaction level for call centre and digital self-service
3. To examine factors affecting dissatisfaction for digital self-service users in the Indian telecom industry.

To study the first objective purposive sampling survey was done with the mobile consumers to understand different service models they are using for the service. To explore the second objective Net Promoter Survey (NPS) was done for customers using digital self-service applications and the call centre of different operators. Here self-service mobile application means, mobile applications developed by the mobile operators for servicing customer queries, requests complaints about their customer. And call centre mean service provided by the mobile operators for servicing their customers. For determination of the third objective in-depth interviews of customers who were using Digital self-service application is taken and a conceptual model was generated using Grounded theory approach. Grounded Theory Approach is a qualitative type methodology that gives guidelines on data collection and analyzing the data – figure no 1. The theory was discovered by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The process of Grounded theory begins with “concrete data and ends with rendering them in an explanatory theory” (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2007). The Qualitative Interviews were examined using Grounded theory approach to identify the reason for the dissatisfaction of the customers on the digital self-service.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The capacity of the semiconductor circuit used is doubling every two years (Moore’s law 1965), results processing power of the semiconductor will surpass the human brain by 2020. Labour costs, price of fuel, cost of real estate, increasing accessibility and betterment technology are encouraging factors for service firms to consider offering technology-based self-service options to consumers (Dabholkar 1996). In the last decade, because of exponential growth in social media and digital technology, companies realize that there are other ways over purchases by which customers can contribute to the company, like posting comments on social media or giving feedback on the website/app. This results to the rise of the concept of customer engagement (CE), which is defined as “the mechanics of a customer’s value addition to the firm, either through direct or/and indirect
contribution" (V. Kumar 2017). As per AMDOCS leading service provider to the telecom industry, Digital self-service is widely service channel in the telecom industry. Digital self-service failure can lead to dissatisfaction (Michael Peterson 2010) and results in uninstallation of mobile application which leads to losing a service opportunity through self-care. This allows understanding the current service channel, satisfaction of the exiting service channel and failure of the digital self-service channel.

3 DIGITAL SELF-SERVICE
As described in the launch of the Jio, Mr Mukesh Ambani, Chairman of Reliance Industries said “data is the new oil” and Digital is key to success for companies. Below table no 1 shows that all operators are continuously pushing more facilities on their apps for inquiries/request/complaints. Digital self-service provides scalable and more accurate service to customers, (Christoph Schmitz et. al 2016) states that digital self-service is very important in service management.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
There has been very little study available on the digital self-service and its comparative study in Indian telecom specific market. For mobile companies to reduce the cost of service it’s very important to move the customers to digital self-service, this paper provides insights on how many mobile consumers are using the digital self-service and their satisfaction level about the digital self-service applications and reason for dissatisfaction in the present scenario. The degree of engagement is a way of measuring how users are engaging with the product/service. The more users mean high level of engagement, this also means that more users are getting attracted toward the product/service and they are promoting this. (Wikipedia, customer engagement definition) There are different types of measuring customer satisfaction like net promoter score, customer loyalty index, how much would you miss us? Repeat purchase rate, upselling ration, customer engagement number (Pascal 2016), (Userlike Live Chat 2019) The most popular way of measuring customer satisfaction is the Net Promoter Score (NPS) (Gert Van Dessel 2011) Net promoter score was introduced by, Fred Reichheld in 2003, for understanding the relationship between people and loyalty in the company (Reichheld, Fred 2003). Net Promoter Score, asks one most important question: How likely are you to recommend product/service? Not only this but also asks how satisfied a customer is? (Reichheld Fred 2006). For the first objective, 200 customers from Western & South part of India were analyzed with a purposive survey to obtain data of the service channels used by these customers. Samples were collected from the consumers who have used the service in the last 30 days. List of the service channels was explored with the help of industry experts, articles and internet sites. Then to explore the Second objective, digital self-service user and call cent users were taken (from 200 samples) for Net Promoter Score survey. Users were asked questions about how satisfied they were while using the respective channel? and asked to rate this on the scale 0 to 10. This response is put on the NPS scale to find out the promoter, passive and detractors, finally NPS score. To avoid the biases respondents were given options only once to give the feedback and no probing or discussion was allowed during feeling the NPS survey. The detailed information on the NPS survey was given to the customer, more than below information was kept in the questioner so that the customer understands the scaling.

10 represents "will recommend" and 0 represent "will not at all recommend"

Information on the promoters, detractors and passive scaling was shared with respondents with a visual presentation in the forms of smiles along with verbal information

- symbol was added over 10 & 9 scale which represent promoters
- symbol was added over 0 to 6 scale which represents detractors
- symbol was added over 7 & 8 scale which represent passive

For 3rd objective multistage sampling is used, the sample has been taken which were using the digital self-service (from 2nd objective sample) and a Grounded theory approach (Charmas K 1996) was used through analysis and collection of data (Strauss A. and Corbin J. 1998). In this study, 45 digital self-service users were interviewed until the attainment of data saturation. (figure no 2) Data saturation is a point when no new information is given by the respondents (Strauss, A. and Corbin J. M. 1990) Every interview was then converted into a verbatim. Before starting the survey & interview, the complete information about the purpose of the was shared to the respondents. The interview was carried out in different languages like Hindi, English and then verbiages were converted into English for calibration of the information.

5 ANALYSIS OF DATA
The purposive sampling data collected for the first objective of 200 respondents was used. multistage sampling was used for objective 2 & 3 with an in-depth interview. These responded were mixed kind of demographics on age, their visit to service channels, education and Gender (refer table no 2) For 2nd objective, NPS question is asked to the responded as to how do you recommend the service you used? and then NPS score is calculated based on the promoter, passive & detractors with below methodology. (Reichheld Fred and Markey Rob 2011)

NPS Score = % of Promoters - % of Detectors (on overall valid responses)
NPS scale: 9, 10 promoters; 7, 8; passive; 0 to 6 detractors
(Schneider et al., June 2008)

For determination of 3rd objective users of digital self-service were interviewed. The interviews were converted into a verbatim then performed open coding of the transcripts which generated general statements showing general of customers towards digital self-service and their preferences after that a round of axial coding (refer table
no 3) was done and these statements were narrowed down and similar statements made one factor and like this total six factors were generated which gives reason for customer dissatisfaction towards digital self-service. The emerged conceptual model is given in Figure no 3 and all the factors have been summarized below.

6 DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY
Out of a total of 200 customers studied for the research, 81% of the customers are using the call centre as a service channel followed by the 30% digital channel. Details are tabulated as below figure no. 04 on the breakup wise channels usage by the customers. Since customer's request /complaint & inquiry is not getting answered on single service platform customers are using the multiple service channels. After plotting the promoters, passive & detractors score Digital self- service NPS score is derived as +30.36 for digital self-service & call centre as -10.19. More detailing can be referred in the table no 04. NPS score range is from -100 to 100 and "positive " NPS score is termed as good, +50 score is excellent,70+ score is referred to as "world-class" (Amaresan, Swetha 2019). Hence we can rate Digital self-service NPS score as "Good" And can be concluded that customers are happier while using the digital self-service mode of customer service channel than a call centre.

7 FACTORS AFFECTING DISSATISFACTION FOR DIGITAL SELF- SERVICE IN INDIAN TELECOM INDUSTRY
Customer service is very important in every industry but it varies from industry to industry and in the service industry there is a relationship among profitability and customer satisfaction. So, in the service industry, telecom operators need to retain customers to maintain their profitability and become market leader and satisfaction is one of the key element to retain the customer (Keaveney, S.M. 1995). Here investigated some factors that have led to dissatisfaction for the customer using the digital platform in the telecom industry in India.

App speed:
Johnson (2015) has examined that for computing the satisfaction level of the mobile app, quality and speed performance of the app are important factors (Johnson 2015)

Customer: “App speed is very poor it took me 3 minutes just to open the app”

"It takes a long time to submit the request for IR activation through the app "

Customers were not able to distinguish between the app speed and network issue. But they were referring that all other applications were working only self-service app was very slow.

Unwanted information:
Feeding of unwanted information about the product when the customer wants service is a major reason for dissatisfaction (Aitchison I. 2019) as per most of the respondents they said, that I want service from the app and they try to sell me new products.

“so much unwanted information, I just want to activate the DND but I have to read all useless information like take this plan etc.”

Incomplete information:
App with missing pictures can lead to an unhelpful and unpleasant experience for users who like to get information (Suzanne Scacca 2018)

Customer "I tried to redeem the voucher though app but it was not working, latter after calling to call centre I got to know that it was valid only for 24 hrs."

"on the app, 100% cashback of Rs 300 was mentioned, after inquiry I got to know that this offer is Rs 50 /- per month spread across 6 months"

Information/service not available:
There is a positive relationship between the quality of the mobile application and information/service available in the app (Alin Zamfiriu 2014) Because of technical feasibility, few services are not available on the apps but this is never informed to the customer during the installation of the app. Customer “My balance is deducted because of caller tune this dispute resolution service is not available on APP” “I don’t know how come my caller tune is activated. I tried to find out this service but it’s not available on App, I am forced to call at a call centre”

"I am facing network issue, unable to raise the complaint on the network with the app and forced to called at a call centre"

App response failure rate:
An individual experiences several negative experiences such as bugs and errors, app response failure results in poor customer experience (Beniwal K. and Sharma A. 2013) As per the study by Venkata, 71 % of app users have given the reason as app response failure rate for their dissatisfaction. (Venkata 2014). The propensity of churn is more for the app failure base (Keaveney, S.M. 1995).

Customer: “Most of the time, while making bill the payment though app transaction failed”

"last time when I tried my IR pack activation was failed, after calling at the call centre they told me that it required some deposit"

Difficult to Navigate:
61% of the customer love the app which is easy to use & navigate (Peggy Anne Salz 2017) While building any self-service platform service tab should be easily accessible to the user (Yuvraj Sharma et al. 2017), time is taken to search the service also affects the factors influencing quality of mobile application (Venkata 2014).
Customer:
"I am not able to find the email change request form on the app in the first attempt, my friend has guided me."
"It's easy to search the store location on Google than App"
"I am not able to locate my favorite caller tune in app"

It has been found during exploring these apps that most of the time while developing apps by mobile operator’s preference will be given to upsell the exiting lager ticket products, hence service tab required more number of click to locate.

8 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS
Companies need to check the top call drivers at all touchpoint and put them at the front panel to avoid the dissatisfaction on the navigation. This can put like this supposed operator is getting the top calls on the VAS related issues than the front page of the app should have information on the VAS. On app failure issues, companies must track these failures on a regular interval and arrange the service recovery callback to all failure transactions customers this will help to win back the customer confidence level. On the app speed, unwanted information, incomplete information, information/service not available companies should carry out the frequent universal acceptance test (UAT) of their mobile app at different geographical locations. This will help to identify the bugs, customer expectations and weak areas of the app which will help to increase the satisfaction

9 CONCLUSION
Customer’s first choice of the touchpoint is a call centre for inquiry, request or complaint, out of sample studied 81% of the customers are still using the call centre serves as a mode of interaction. Digital mode of interaction is has used by 29% of the users followed by a visit to the company store 15% and multiband outlet 11%. Customers are reluctant to travel to the company store or multiband store since the call centre and digital self-service can be operated from anywhere and has the lowest cost hence most preferred. Live web-based chat from the website is not preferred by the telecom consumers as it required the customer to go on the internet and then logged in for the live chat option. Multiple factors app speed, unwanted information, incomplete information, information/service not available, app response failure rate, difficult to navigate are the major reason for dissatisfaction for the digital self-user. App speed is the nothing but how fast app resounds to the given query, request and complaint to the user, hence customers are giving dissatisfaction on the app speed when other applications and internet is working fine on the mobile. Unwanted information is now a day becoming an issue for the digital mode of communication, companies try to push and more promotional content on the app which is no more relevant to the customer. As per customer, he is getting information on the movie promotion, plan promotion whereas he wanted a quick resolution on his complaint of balance deduction. Incomplete information nothing also summery of product, the customer expects that all information should be available whereas because of limitation on words/space detailed information is placed on another link which customer thinks that incomplete information at the first place. Sometimes it also happens that customers don’t get the key information like the validity of product, taxes information on the front panel resulting interpretation gap causes dissatisfaction to customer. Information and service not available are the gaps between what customer expects and what company deliver on the service channel platform, non-availability of desired information like deactivation of VAS products give high dissatisfaction to customers. Few VAS services need to be deactivated through the handset only like WAP, content download hence customer becomes more anode and gives the dissatisfaction score on NPS. The app failure rate is the failure of the service delivery after request, hence customers puts the request but because of bugs its getting failed like payment transaction or failure between two systems like payment gateway and app interface, customers are least bother on these technical issues when it comes to service delivery. They are giving the dissatisfaction score when it comes to failure. Difficult to navigation can be also taken to search the desired panel on the app. If it’s taking too much time to search the desired tab customers are giving the score as negative on NPS scale. NPS for the Digital self-service channel is at 30 against call centre -10, which shows that customer is happier while using the digital self-service than a call centre.

![Grounded Theory Approach](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6318722/)
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