ENGINEERING A FRAMEWORK FOR ENHANCING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE FOR THE INDIAN DTH INDUSTRY

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Abstract:

Purpose:

Indian Direct to Home (DTH) market is currently growing at a very rapid pace. One of the major challenges faced by this industry is customer retention which is the result of high churn (about 14-16%).Customer experience is turning out to be a major source of customer retention and competitive advantage. Currently there is no framework available in the Indian market for DTH service providers to help enhance customer experience for the DTH services. Hence the objective of this paper is to design a conceptual framework in order to determine the dimensions that can enhance customer experience forDirect to Home (DTH) services.

Design/Methodology/Approach:

A conceptual framework is proposed in which determinants affecting customer experience for DTH customers have been discussed. We explore six specific determinants with 25 attributes which include Brand Image, Installation& Usage experience, Store or delivery experience,

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Customer service, Assurance & Billing experience and Brand offering Primary data of 500 DTH customers was collected through a questionnaire using both online as well as personal interview method out of which response was received from 440 DTH customers. Factor analysis has been used to group the25 attributes into common factors which affect customer experience for Direct to Home Service customers.

Findings and Practical Implications of the study:

All six dimensions stated above explain significant contribution in enhancing customer experience. Customer Levels of association exist between 25attributes to explain the framework significantly. Limited research has been done with respect to identification of determinants that affect customer experience for the Indian Direct to Homeindustry. This paper provides a framework for creating and delivering superior customer experience for DTH service providers.

Keywords: Customer experience (CE), CE framework, DTH industry, Service attributes

Introduction

Direct to Home (DTH) refers to Direct to Home Television. DTHis defined as the reception of satellite programs in the home of an individual user with the help of a personal dish.DTHenables the broadcaster and consumer to connect directly by doing away with local cable operator. The satellite programs are received by the cable operators and further distributed to various households.

The DTH industry growth has surpassed all expectations by growing at an unprecedented pace[1]. According to Media Partners Asia report of 2013, the Indian DTH market is expected to be valued at \$3.9 billion in 2017 and \$5 billion in 2020[2].A key growth driver for the DTH industry is the government's mandate for digitization[3].The other major drivers are technology, increased value proposition, simplified but enhanced television viewing experience for the customer. One more major driver for growth of DTH industry is customer service as it acts as a major differentiator for the DTH players[4]. Some of the major challenges faced by the Direct to Home

Industry are low Average Revenue per user (ARPU), and high churn rate. Currently the rate of churn for the DTH industry is 14-16%.[5]

Thus, it is essential to develop effective methods to retain the existing customer which includes two major steps. One is to *manage the customer experience* and second is to *generate service value* for the customers. Customerexperience can be termed as the total of various experiences received by a consumer at the various touch-points where the company and customer interact. It is an intentional effort on the part of the company to develop and maintain good experience which is differentiated from the competition, consistent at every touch point and most importantly valued by the customer.

Service offerings can be seen in various service industries such as tourism, airlines, telecom, etc., but the service experience varies for each service vertical. In the Indian market, no studies have been done for improving customer experience for the DTH services.

Currently there is no framework available for DTH service providers to improve customer experience. Hence the objective of this research was to create a framework and determine the dimensions that will enhanceCustomer Experience for DTH service industry based on various touch-points in the DTH service life cycle.
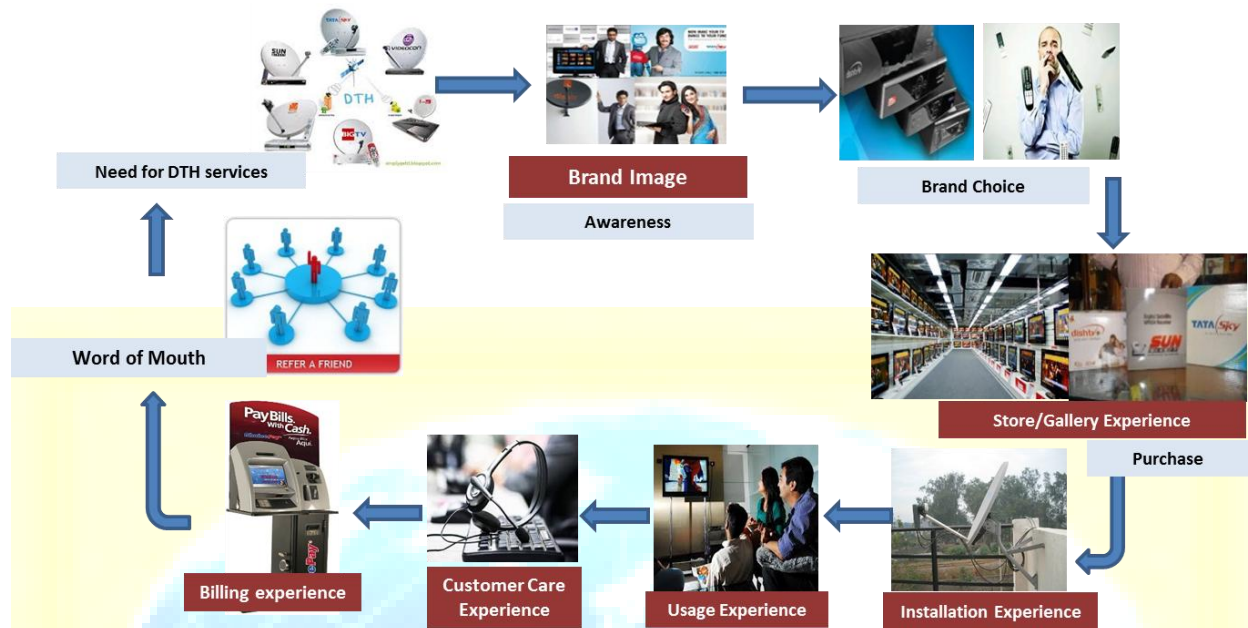
1.1 The DTH Customer Life Cycle

Figure 1: Customer Service Interaction Points

The DTH service lifecycle broadly explains the various customer interaction points with the Service Provider: Need for service, Brand Awareness, Brand Choice, Pre-Purchase Decision, Post Purchase Experience and Brand Loyalty. When the need for DTH services arises, the customer then looks out for all the brands available and learns about them. After this phase, brand choice is made along with purchase. The post purchase experience impacts the overall brand performance. If this impact is positive, the customer will remain loyal to the brand. In the service lifecycle awareness/knowledge of the brand plays a major role in evaluating the brand and making a purchase decision. The post-purchase experience includes all the experiences obtained from activation, usage of the service, billing and customer care.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Customer experience, a source of competitive advantage

In the highly competitive landscape existing in the Indian DTH industry today, customer experience is coming out as a very important concept for creating competitive advantage. Davidson (1992) has already opined that the best way to gain customer loyalty and differential

advantage is by enhancing the customer experience. According to Bitner and Hubbert (1994), Oliver (1997), the perceived value of a service is affected by the experience a customer gets from a service delivery. As per Carbone and Haeckel 1994, for every service, there will be an experience attached. In the opinion of Liljander and Strandvik (1997), it is important for companies to provide good experiences as they can lead to customer satisfaction. Initial studies on customer experience have been done by Pine and Gilmore (1998 and 1999) in which they have reiterated that since services are getting commoditized, companies are trying to compete based on experiences. According to O'Sullivan and Spangler (1998, p. 326, the main focus of organizations or individuals is to gain a differential advantage by delivering excellent customer service. As proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1998), and also supported by studies of Prahlad and Ramaswamy (2004) and Johnston and Kong (2011), customer experience is being viewed by organizations as a medium for achieving differential advantage over competitors. As per the studies of Yu and Dean (2001), Pullman and Gross (2004), and Mascarenhas *et al*. (2006), it is important for companies to provide good experiences, as they lead to customer loyalty. Studies conducted by Pine and Gilmore,(1998); Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), Shaw and Ivens (2005) Johnston and Kong (2011), clearly reflects the trend that companies are now utilizing customer experience as a way of creating a differential advantage by giving better experiences to the customer. According to Zomerdijk and Voss (2010), a customer will create a judgement or assessment about the service based on how much they have gained or benefitted as a result of the experience they get of the service provided. Thus the literature review clearly stresses that customer experience is now being viewed by organizations as a medium of achieving competitive advantage and to gain customer loyalty and retention.

2.2 Customer experience defined

Fortini-Cambell (2003) have tried to define the concept of multiple touch-points. They are of the opinion that more complex the service more will be the number of experiences that a customer may go through. Meyer and Schwager (2007) have defined customer experience on the basis of customer response and interaction with the company (which could be internal and subjective in nature) at various touch-points of a company. Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussens (2008) defined customer experience as the customer's direct and indirect experience of the service process, the

organization, and the facilities and how the customer interacts with the service firm's representatives and other customers. Customer experience, as perceived by Zomerdijk and Voss (2009), is a holistic concept which is a combination of the combined aspects of a product/service offering of a company.Clatworthy (2011) is of the opinion that customer perception of value whether positive or negative with respect to a service is created as a result of the combined experiences that he gets at the various touch-points.

Thus as stated earlier, Customer experience can be termed as the total of various experiences received by a consumer at the various touch-points where the company and customer interact. It is an intentional effort on the part of the company to develop and maintain good experience which is differentiated from the competition, consistent at every touch point and most importantly valued by the customer.

From the above definitions of customer experience, it can be concluded that understanding the various touch-points is crucial element in creating and delivering a positive customer experience. Therefore, it is important for a company to understand the various touch-points and also understand their behaviors related to the brand.

2.2 Touch-points defined

For the purpose of this study the following six dimensions have been considered which affect customer experience based on various touch-points for a customer in the DTH service life cycle.

Customer service can be termed as all those service related activities provided to customer before he purchases the service, whilst he is consuming the service, and even after purchase has taken place. According to Turban et al. (2002) Customer service can be termed as those set of activities which help in meeting service expectations of the customer and result in improvement of experience for the customer.

Assurance & Billing attributes explain the application of the processes by a DTH Provider such that the service delivery meets the pre-defined standards of quality of service which helps in enhancing experience of the DTH customer. These include determinants like recharge flexibility, accurate billing etc.

Brand Offerings capture experience related attributes like plans & offers, variety of packages, valued customer etc. these attributes explain the service offerings of the company. The service offering includes all aspects related to the service such as quality, features as well as any attached warranties, installation etc. associated as part of the service offering

Brand Image includes the attributes such promotions, advertisements etc. which create an image of the service provider brand in the customer's mind. This captures the customer's expectations with respect to the perceived image of the brand.

Installation experience captures attributes like user friendly equipment, continued service. It aptly signifies something as an apparatus (set-top box, dish, etc.) placed in position or connected for use.

Store & Delivery experience explain the dealer's accessibility, experience at outlets, & service change and relocation experiences of the customer. It apprehends the proficiency of the DTH provider to deliver & meet customer expectations.

2.3 Identification of GAP

Although the importance of customer experience concept as a source of competitive advantage for service industry has been well understood not many studies have been conducted on the same in the telecommunication space specifically in the DTH sector. Very few researchers have studied the customer experience as a separate construct. For example Holbrook and Hirschmann (1982), Babin et Al (1994), have stressed on the experiential aspects of consumption. Authors like Zeithaml and Berry (1988) have stressed on measurement of customer satisfaction and quality of service which has also been the purpose of study of authors Verhoef, Langerak and Donkers (2007), have stressed on measuring customer satisfaction and service quality. Schmitt (1999), in their study have tried to explore how organizations can create experiential marketing by using cognitive, conative and behavioral aspects and relate it to the company brand. Some researchers like Parasuraman and Berry, Carbone and Haeckel (2002) opine that customer experience can be created by providing buyers with such "clues"during the buying process. According to them an experience clue can be anything (functional or emotional) which can be seen or even sensed. All these clues put together account for the total customer experience.

De Chernatony and Segal-Horn (2003) are of the opinion that it is very important for organizations to deliver the brand promise to a customer consistently and through various touch-points, robust processes and by showcasing customer centric behavior. Authors like Berry (2000), Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004),have discussed about the relationship of service brands and customer experience which has also been the purpose of study of Sandstro¨m and Edvardsson (2008) and de Chernatony (2006).Frow and Payne (2007), in their qualitative case studies based research suggested that managers need to carefully manage the customer touch points. Gentile, Spiller, and Noci (2007) researched the reasons for success of some well-known products which they opine was a result of provision of different experientialfeatures. According to an Ericsson end-user study [6] almost 40% of subscriber churn happens as a result of lack of customer experience provision on part of service providers. As the literature review suggests, from the work of Carbone and Haeckel (1994) and Bate and Robert (2007) and H.M. Government (2007) the main challenge faced by the organizations is how to create customer experiences in order to satisfy the threefold objective of customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction and increase in bottom line growth. The Indian DTH market is currently growing at a very rapid space and is expected to be valued at $3.9 billion in 2017 and $5 billion in 2020. One of the major challenges faced by the Direct to Home Industry is high churn rate. Currently the rate of churn for the DTH industry is 14-16%. Hence it is essential for DTH operators to retain customers which can be achieved by improving customer experience.

Although it is clear that customer experience is an important construct for organizations there is a lack of literature in the telecommunications domain especially with respect to DTH services, as to how superior customer experience can be achieved.

Thus we can confer that a theory based conceptual framework is required which can act as a basis forenhancing customer experience for DTH services. Hence, the objective of this paper is to build a conceptual framework toenhance customer experience based on various touch-points in the DTH service life cycle. A set of 25 attributes were finalized based on the literature review, interaction with DTH operators and studying the touch-points with the customer in the DTH service lifecycle. These parameters were clubbed up in 6 different buckets namely Brand Image, Installation &Usage experience, Customer service, Store & delivery experience, Assurance &

Billing experience and Brand offering. To obtain quantitative inputs, a questionnaire was prepared containing questions related to these dimensions. The response was measured on a scale of 1-7. Secondary literature review was carried out to help build data models which would later on provide a multi-dimensional view of customer experience. Both the primary and secondary inputs helped in carrying out the research which aimed at the following: Detailed customer segmentation, Classification of service attributes.

3 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework has been designed in this study in order to determine the dimensions that can enhancecustomer experience for the Indian DTH services so that DTH service providers can deliver superior experience to their customers. The framework is designed by studying the literature on customer experience framework on telecommunication services, studying the complete lifecycle for the DTH customer and discussion with DTH service providers with respect to the various DTH service touch-points.

Based on literature review, the following conceptual framework has been designed in this study in order to determine the dimensions that can enhancecustomer experiencefor the Indian DTH services.
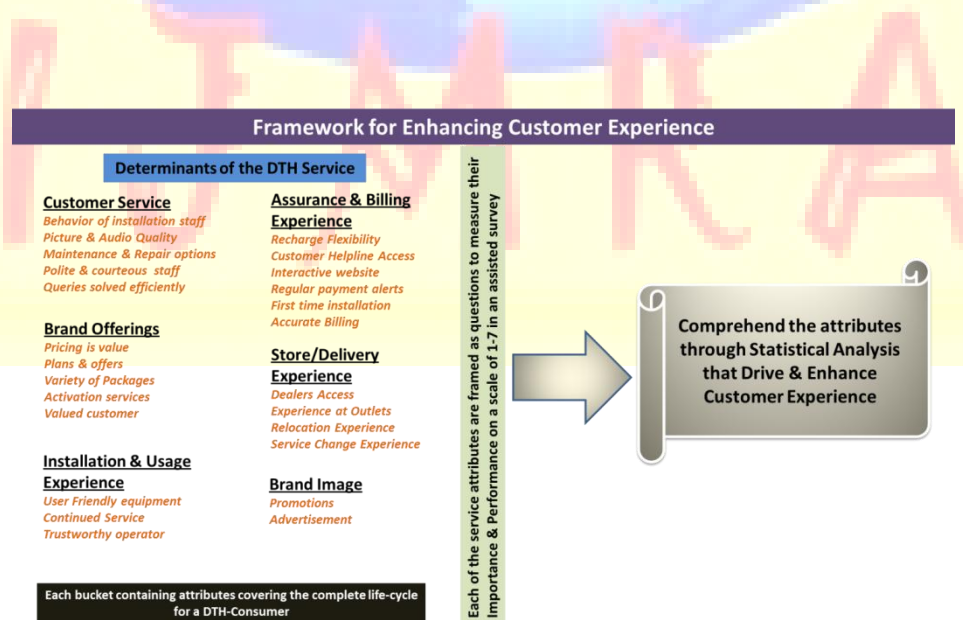
Figure 2: Research Framework

4 Research Methodology

4.1 Research objective: The objective of the research was to create a framework to enhance customerexperience for the DTH services based on various touch-points in the DTH service life cycle. The research aims to come up with a set of dimensions that will help to enhance the experience obtained by a customer during different phases of the DTH service lifecycle.

4.2 Research DesignA personally administered survey was conducted with the help of a questionnaire on a sample of 440 DTH customers in Pune followed by statistical analysis on the obtained primary data. A Scale reliability test based on the responses was carried out for initial validation. These analyses were carried out to prove the considered hypothesis and achieve the research objective.

4.3 Research Flow:

Figure 3: Research Methodology

5Hypothesis Formulation

The review of literature gave deeper insights into the dimensions affecting customer experience forDTH services. For hypotheses formulation in this study researcher has considered

H1:-Customer service is an important factor which influences customer experience for DTH services.

H2:- Assurance& Billing experience is an important factor which influences customer experience for DTH services.
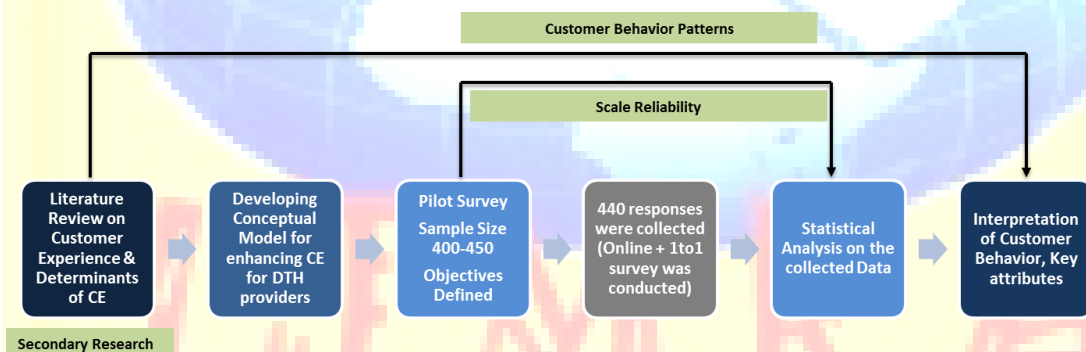
H3: Brand offerings an important factor which influences customer experience for DTH services.

H4: Store/Delivery Experiences an important factor which influences customer experience for DTH services.

H5: Installation & Usage Experiences an important factor which influences customer experience for DTH services.

H6: Brand Images an important factor which influences customer experience for DTH services

6 Scale Reliability Test

To verify that a 7-pt scale is reliable and sufficient for obtaining the desired results. Reliability test was done with the help of Cronbach Alpha coefficient. The Cronbach alpha coefficient is an indicator of internal consistency of the scale, validating the questionnaire's apt capture of importance & performance.The Cronbach Alpha for the Importance Scale is 0.964, where as it is 0.971 for Experience Scale. This indicates very good reliability of the scale.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.964	25

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.971	25

7 Outcome of Factor Analysis:

Factor Analysis was performed using SPSS on the 25 attributes. The importance of the six dimensions and the 25 parameters can be visualized by the figures from rotated component matrix & the factor loadings which are generated by performing principal component factor analysis.

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	14.741	58.963	58.963	14.741	58.963	58.963	5.090	20.360	20.360
2	1.449	5.795	64.758	1.449	5.795	64.758	3.497	13.987	34.346
3	1.057	4.229	68.988	1.057	4.229	68.988	3.259	13.037	47.384
4	.909	3.637	72.624	.909	3.637	72.624	2.691	10.765	58.149
5	.779	3.115	75.739	.779	3.115	75.739	2.657	10.627	68.776
6	.728	2.911	78.650	.728	2.911	78.650	2.469	9.875	78.650
7	.654	2.616	81.266						
8	.518	2.071	83.337						
9	.501	2.005	85.341						
10	.443	1.772	87.113						
11	.419	1.676	88.789						
12	.354	1.417	90.206						
13	.318	1.273	91.479						
14	.285	1.140	92.619						
15	.263	1.051	93.670						
16	.230	.922	94.591						
17	.209	.838	95.429						
18	.188	.752	96.181						
19	.185	.739	96.920						
20	.169	.674	97.594						
21	.154	.614	98.209						
22	.133	.533	98.742						
23	.112	.447	99.188						
24	.110	.438	99.627						
25	.093	.373	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Eigenvalues: The eigenvalue for a given factor measures the variance in all the variables which is accounted for by that factor. The ratio of eigenvalues is the ratio of *explanatory importance* of the factors with respect to the variables. A low eigenvalue indicates that it is contributing little to the explanation of variances and may be ignored as redundant with more important factors. Eigenvalues measure the amount of variation in the total sample accounted for by each factor.

The SquaredLoadings: Component loadings in Principal Component Analysis, is the percent of variance that is explained by the indicator variable. This depicts that Customer Service explains 20.36% of the data surveyed; similarly service bucket 2 explains 13.987% of the data. Further measured, the cumulative variance explains 78.650% of the data.

Service Dimensions	% of Variance
Customer Service	20.36
Assurance & Billing Experience	13.987
Brand Offerings	13.037
Store/Delivery Experience	10.765
Installation & Usage Experience	10.627
Brand Image	9.873

Table 1: Loading Values (% of Variance)

"Assessed research parameters justifies the customer experience framework significantly"

Rotated Component Matrix[a]

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
q2_1b						.805
q2_2b						.816
q2_3b			.679			
q2_4b			.749			
q2_5b	.409		.457		.463	.422
q2_6b			.597		.451	
q2_7b			.516		.457	
q2_8b		.532	.420			
q2_9b	.544		.565			
q2_10b	.818					
q2_11b	.740					
q2_12b		.446			.602	
q2_13b	.465				.658	
q2_14b				.578	.523	
q2_15b				.607	.437	
q2_16b				.653		
q2_17b	.517			.623		
q2_18b		.624		.466		
q2_19b		.631				
q2_20b	.717					
q2_21b	.669					
q2_22b	.734					
q2_23b		.519				
q2_24b	.411	.560				
q2_25b		.711				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Rotated Component Matrix: Depict the correlation coefficients between the variables and factor. Equivalent to Pearson's R correlation coefficient, it highlights the factors whichvariable is

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loaded most strongly & correlated to the respective service bucket. *This further depicts the association of the considered parameters.*

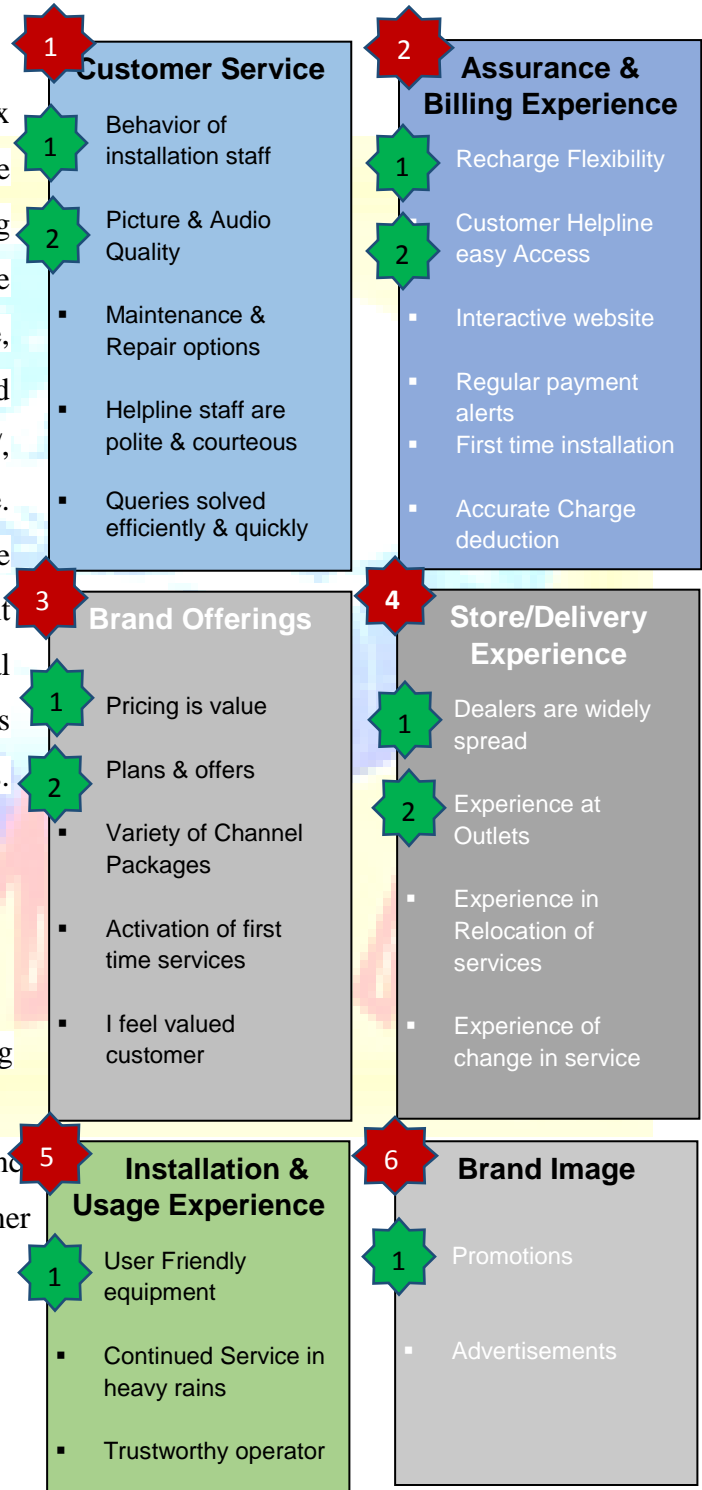## 8 Hypothesis testing using Factor Analysis (Service dimensions)

The output of the factor analysis mentioned six underlying constructs/dimensions which are significant contributors for enhancing customer experience for DTH services. These six dimensions are Customer service, Assurance and Billing experience, Brand Offerings, Store/Delivery experience/, Installation /Usage experience, Brand Image. The hypothesized factor "customer service experience" came out as the most important factor explaining 20.36% per cent of the total variance and grouping 5 different attributes justifying the acceptance of the 1st Hypothesis.

H1:- Customer services an important Factor which influences customer experience For DTH services.

"Assurance and billing experience" came out As the second most important factor explaining 13.08% of the variance. Justifying the second hypothesis, **H2:-** Assurance & Billing experience is an important factor which influences customer experience for DTH services.

Brand offering came out as the third most factors explaining 13.03% of the variance thus the hypotheses 3 stands accepted.

1 Customer Service
- 1 Behavior of installation staff
- 2 Picture & Audio Quality
- Maintenance & Repair options
- Helpline staff are polite & courteous
- Queries solved efficiently & quickly

2 Assurance & Billing Experience
- 1 Recharge Flexibility
- 2 Customer Helpline easy Access
- Interactive website
- Regular payment alerts
- First time installation
- Accurate Charge deduction

3 Brand Offerings
- 1 Pricing is value
- 2 Plans & offers
- Variety of Channel Packages
- Activation of first time services
- I feel valued customer

4 Store/Delivery Experience
- 1 Dealers are widely spread
- 2 Experience at Outlets
- Experience in Relocation of services
- Experience of change in service

5 Installation & Usage Experience
- 1 User Friendly equipment
- Continued Service in heavy rains
- Trustworthy operator

6 Brand Image
- 1 Promotions
- Advertisements

H3: Brand offering is an important factor

Which influences customer experience for DTH

services. Store/Delivery experience came out as

the fourth important factor explaining 10.76% of

the variance justifying the 4th Hypothesis,

Figure 4: Service Buckets

H4: Store/Delivery Experience is an important

factor which influences customer experience for

DTH services.

Installation and usage experience as the fifth important factor justifying the fifth hypotheses **H5:** Installation & Usage Experience is an important factor which influences customer experience for DTH services.

Brand Image as sixth important factor explaining 10.62 % and 9.87% of the variance respectively justifying the sixth hypothesis **H6:** Brand Image is an important factor which influences customer experience for DTH services. All the six factors or dimensions account for 79% of the total variance cumulatively. Thus, the factor analysis, total variance explained and the reliability test support the six dimensions emphasizing that these six dimensions influence customer experience.

8 Managerial Implications:

The findings of this research convey a strong message to Direct to Home service providers that customer experience can be enhanced by focusing on the 25considered service attributes.

Suitable justification for both the hypotheses signifies the strength of the framework for enhancing customer experience. The research also captures the influence of the service attributes on generating positive customer experience.

Customer service has come out as the most important factor affecting customer experience for DTH services. Hence while devising the service delivery and customer experience strategy, managers must ensure that in order to enhance customer service the customer care staff as well as the installation employees should showcase good behavior, they must be polite and courteous

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toward customers, picture and audio-video quality should be very good and employees should be trained to be responsive while handling maintenance and repair issues.

Secondly, Assurance and billing has come out to be the second most important factor affecting customer experience for DTH services hence while devising the customer experience enhancement strategy managers must ensure that issues related to billing such as flexibility of recharge, regular payment alerts, first time installation charges, accuracy in charges etc. are taken care of so that customers are not worried of losing money on account of inaccuracy in billing.

Brand offering has come out to be third most important factor so while devising the product and brand strategy, they must ensure that the service is adequately charged (value for money); they must ensure that plans and offers are consistent with market offerings and communicated to customers. They must offer a variety of channels packages so that customer has choice, and they must ensure that the customer feels valued.

10Limitations of the Research

The sample size was relatively small and the study was limited to students, professional & employees, only in Pune area. An increase in sample size and varied demographics would provide a more heterogeneous sample.

11Scope for Future Research

The conceptual model can be tested on a larger scale to include more customer & industry insights. This tested study can further be applied to other telecom verticals such as broadband & mobile and even other service industries.

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