

Preface

In the present era of globalization, every business firm is facing intense competition. In order to stay ahead in the competition, most organizations are spreading their horizons to new markets in new countries. As the organizations spread to other countries, the sole objective becomes that of staying ahead of competition. While the process is beneficial to organizations, at the same time, it may create certain operational and functional issues in service delivery. In a service firm, with little tangibles to exhibit, the entire delivery process of services becomes highly dependent on the service encounter. A service encounter is explained in literature as the period during which the customer and the service provider interact. This period of time was coined by Jan Carlzon to as the 'moment of truth'. During this period, two parties of customer and service seller interact forming a dyad. Service literature has given a lot of importance to this time period of interaction coining the term service encounter.

The service encounter takes place between the customer and the service provider in a service setting. Thus the fact that the service providers as well as service setting play a crucial role in satisfying the service customer is an established fact. When the service encounter is considered, it is also a social interaction as two different individuals communicate with each other with certain purpose. In such an interaction, since the people component is involved, therefore there could be an influence of cultural background of the people involved in the service encounter. Service marketing literature accepts the fact culture with its different levels; dynamism and manifestations play a role in service encounter. Literature further highlights there may be the presence of culturally diverse markets within the national boundaries of a country and understanding such cultural diversities may lead to better customer service and satisfaction. A better understanding such cross cultural differences in an ethnically and racially diversified area may provide the service provider a better insight into consumer behavior and consumer segmentation. This study, therefore, emphasizes on empirically establishing that even a small segment of ethnically and culturally different group of customers may have their own sets of needs and wants from a service encounter which may be different from the mainstream population. Such an understanding may enable the service provider to customize their service delivery process with little modification and higher satisfaction from each and every service encounter. The study tries to highlight the fact that cross cultural studies and differences may not

be limited to comparing national cultures only. Even within a nation, there could be the presence of different cultural and ethnic tribes which gives enough fertile ground for cross cultural research. The research tries to explore whether customer behavior differ for different sector and the role of cultural variables across the sectors. The findings present interesting results that may be helpful in service delivery.

The study tries to empirically explore the role of demographic variables on the cultural background of the customers and its combined impact on the service encounter. The findings of the study highlight that such variables does play an important role in service encounter and the combined effect seems to change the perceptual and behavioral aspects of customers.

The overall findings of this exploratory study provide valuable insights into the influence of cultural variables on consumer behavior in the study area. The fact that even for a small state like Assam, there could be difference in consumer behavior among the culturally diversified population could give ample ground for more exploration from both academics as well as marketing

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