CHAPTER - VI

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter highlights Summary Findings of the Study, Conclusion of the Study and Research Contributions and Future Research Direction

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As we know Customers' experience is the key to building or breaking of their decisions to purchase from and stay loyal to a particular brand or product. Marketing practitioners need to look beyond meeting basic expectations of customers and should engage in a committed and passionate relationship, create a sense of belongingness among customers, and provide a social platform for easy interaction among the customers and the company. Building personal collaborative relationship with customers aims to generate and maintain an advantage. Marketing that pass through different stages of its progress has followed some ultimate approaches starting from the product centric marketing to the customer centric modern approaches that address customer relationship management. Now price and product quality alone seized to be the sole differentiator in the fiercely competitive market. Therefore, creating a long-term relationship with the customers and other stakeholders has engrossed attention of the researchers and the practitioners in the field of marketing. The only solution to the marketers is the customer engagement, a new dimension of marketing which is more strategic in its approach. The present study is a systematic investigation about the concept of customer engagement, customer engagement practices of select Indian fast moving consumer goods companies, customer engagement scenario in India and development of conceptual model of customer engagement suitable for Indian scenario.

6.2 SUMMARY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The research investigation about the customer engagement practices in select fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs) companies in India is an important contribution that provides useful managerial insights for marketing practitioners in the present spirited milieu.

The exploration of the first objective i.e., to study the evolution and development of 'customer engagement' thought, clearly drawn a picture about the genesis of the concept 'customer engagement'. Early in this century, research interest in engagement regenerated and different Conceptualizations of engagement came up. The existing research confirms that the concept customer engagement has been developed and evolved in its own way in a
variety of parent disciplines like social psychology, organizational behaviour, marketing as well as consumer behaviour. The term customer engagement in connection with the marketing and consumer behaviour encompasses winning, sustainable and effective loyalty on the part of the customers. Some important findings of this chapter are as mentioned below:

- The parameters of customer engagement are: involvement, attachment, self brand connection and socialization that are used for measuring customer engagement level.
- Exposure and awareness can be considered as the pre conditions to pave the way through Involvement to Socialization (i.e. communalization of customer attitude towards an object or objects) constructs of customer engagement.
- Socialization plays the crucial and potent role supported by other parameters of customer engagement in the process of customer engagement.
- Customer loyalty is segregated in two composite parts i.e., cognition led loyalty and cognition- affective led loyalty where the latter one is formed by rationality duly moderated and mixed up with emotions which blocks the free play of rationality expressed in the form of intensely pursuing self interest and assumed to be contributing to the socialization process of customer engagement.

As the theme of the present study is apparent as a core area of consumer behaviour therefore an attempt has been made to give a glimpse of Indian consumer behaviour taking into consideration of different segments of Indian consumers, their spending behaviour and changing trends in Indian consumer behaviour and further enlighten over Indian fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs) sector, relating distinguished features, scope and prospects of the industry and role of Indian consumers which will facilitate for better understanding the present study.

The research investigation over Customer Engagement practices of select Indian fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs) companies validate the practices of customer engagement initiated by the companies like HUL, ITC, P&G, DABUR and GODREJ. It is being observed from the executive survey of the respective select companies that customer surveys by phone or post, front-line sales people, service calls, point-of-sale data, qualitative research (e.g., focus groups), online/interactive feedback, are most relying prime methods of collecting customers' informations as long term perspective & strategic component of CE practices. Further the survey substantiates the practices followed by the select companies which are highlighted below:

- The practices like engaging touch points for customers across computer and phone applications, a consistent interface across multiple products, data sharing to generate
personalized communications and product offers, improve customer acquisition and retention by delivering more personalized and interactive service, increase the number of direct interaction with customers, helping target customers to develop their own communities of likeminded customers over the matters relating to brand/product, create a blog where technical support staff and customers can communicate directly, create a blog where product developers and consumers can communicate directly, monitoring of customer’s complaints and monitoring submitted online review over a brand/product etc are presently followed by all the select five companies.

- Introducing Levercare, sustainable model development, establishment of dedicated call centers, launching “Customer License” programme and appointing an Ombudsman are some considerable initiatives taken by HUL.

- Market surveys, personal contacts/visits, events, customer satisfaction surveys, joint development and improvement projects, key account management, multi-level interfaces at dealer-customer-end user, personalized lifestyle privilege programme etc are some major initiatives taken by ITC.

- Identifying common consumers’ needs, develops new product innovations and upgrades & builds brands creation of a broader and deeper product portfolio dragging core strengths like consumer knowledge, innovation, brand-building, go-to-market capabilities etc are some initiatives taken by P&G.

- The company Dabur stimulated consumer engagement programmes across Haats and Melas to provide consumers with the opportunity to touch, feel and experience their products by setting up a stall and a mobile van during the Kumbh Mela showcasing its popular products.

- No extraordinary initiatives for the customer engagement or for the promotion of customer engagement were noticed during the last five years period especially for the personal care products in case of the company Dabur.

- The company Godrej conducting in house employee engagement survey and incorporating international businesses and international center, strong research and development (R&D) led initiatives.

- The companies are also undertaken major initiatives to engage customers through mass media in different ways. The select companies provides services like giving alerts about the new products & informations, regular updates & press releases, access of past newspaper reports on the company from news archive in the media
section, availability of annual reports, contact availability, feedback of the customers facility, facility to post in company’s blog, enquiry over mail etc. The companies are also responses to the customer’/ investors’ enquiry about the product and related information (derived from website survey).

- The practices of activities performed by the select Indian companies as reflected in social platform are creating community page/ profile of the company in social sites like facebook, twitter etc, Post/ updates to the public/ consumers profile in social sites and Post in social website like facebook, Twitter, and others as well (derived from social site survey).

- The social interactions of customers about personal care products/brands of select FMCGs companies (HUL, ITC, P&G, DABUR and GODREJ) in India are in infant stage. Customers’ focus of social interaction is found more in personal and entertainment purpose and not necessarily with the products or brands.

The research inquiry about the customer engagement scenario over the personal care products Category in India shows meager customer engagement scenario in India at present in spite of continuous and major initiatives taken by marketing practitioners of the select companies (i.e., HUL, ITC, P&G, DABUR and GODREJ) to engage their customers. The search for the reasons of meager customer engagement scenario prevailing in India at present over personal care products of fast moving consumer goods companies supposed to be due to weak congruence of engagement exercise with customer-environment interface and not influencing the target customers.

In view of crucial objective set forth in the present study i.e., to frame a customer engagement model suitable for Indian market scenario the present study provide an extended model of customer engagement where it is being highlighted that the possible limitations are exist in customer-environment interface which consists of psychographics domain, customized technology & innovations domain, social media domain and social engagement domain. Equivalently some innovative suggestions are also being offered for surmount the prevailing scenario of meager customer engagement in India. The offered suggestions are highlighted below:

- Marketing practitioners must try to partake more social events for pushing up the customer’s value and get them motivated towards the group identity and community feelings as well.

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Marketing practitioners should try to sponsor socio-cultural events as much as possible where the ego of the customers is attached with the brands or events sponsoring brands.

Social events participation through quiz, competition, reality shows are suggested to imbibe the mindset of group identity and community feeling towards the brand.

Social cause partnership of brands with events and projects concerning social welfare in general or community services in particular has great potential to generate community feelings towards the brands that further foster group identity and group competition associated with different brands.

As we know India as a country is so heterogeneous in nature that it is complex for a marketer to identify common threads of Indian culture and core values. There are many different sub-cultures coexist in Indian society with their own distinctive values, norms, beliefs and behaviors. So, peoples are socialized by getting input from their cultures and core values. Indian customers are more society domain, festive, beliefs in God and more inclined towards religion supported by cultural value system. The growth in internet and communication technology (ICT) and social media could not play a major role to engage Indian customers. It is so because of their preoccupation with ICT-led social media engaging them heavily in other social and personal interactions predominantly for entertainment and networking purpose and not necessarily with the products or brands and product and brand related positive or negative experiences. Reasons lie in prevailing Indian culture and value system. This is reflected in Indian value system that carries value like collectivism, forgiveness, fate as the controlling force for events in life and console for eventualities by peer groups which affect Indian consumers’ reaction to their brand engagement.

In such state of affairs marketing practitioners should work in social domain in the form of social event participation, social events sponsorship, social events partnership and cause branding. Once the initiatives in social domain fabricated the base, mass communication technology platform automatically become potent and productive and marketing practitioners can expect better customer engagement consequences out of it.

6.3 CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

Customer engagement practices in select fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies in India are in infant stage. In spite of rapid growth of internet and communication technology (ICT) in India a meager customer engagement was observed. India as a country is unique with its own social, psychographics, cultural values and norms and squeeze unique characteristics due to its unique set of values & norms in relation to other parts of the world.
Therefore it demands a separate model of customer engagement. The model presently applied in India for customer engagement is not working just because of improper framing & application of the engagement model, weak congruence of engagement exercise with customer-environment interface. The marketers should carefully read the Indian’s mind, prevailing socio cultural values and customers’ value as well and should work more in social domain in the form of social- events participation, social- events sponsorship, social- events partnership and also the cause branding (i.e., social domain). Once it is successfully done on social domain, mentioned above, it may automatically be the part of customers’ interactions on social media through ICT (i.e., technology platform) or be applied by the engagement executives on the same platform for the said purpose. And this is highlighted in the proposed extended model of customer engagement.

6.4 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION
The present study is successful in defining the socialization as a crucial and potent parameter of customer engagement which was not found in any existing research. Further, the study segregated loyalty in two composite parts i.e., cognition led loyalty and cognition- affective led loyalty where the latter one assumed to be contributing to the socialization process of customer engagement. In addition to the above it is found that for various cultural and value system interference in customer engagement process, the technology led customer engagement paradigm failed to deliver the expected role. Therefore, social domain can be explored as the platform of customer engagement with the brands in question as it can fill-up the missing gap between the engagement efforts on part of the companies and actual engagement of the customers. Test of efficacy and efficiency of the proposed model of customer engagement in Indian context may be the subject matter of another research.

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