There is a perceptible and irreversible shift of the market power from banks to their customers in recent years in Indian Banking scenario. The lowering of entry barriers, blurring product lines of banks and non-banks, deregulation of interest rates and advent of information technology are fast changing the oligopolistic nature of Indian banking and transforming it into a relatively free market place. The survival and growth of Indian banking will depend upon their ability to adjust themselves to customer orientation and bring about an improvement in the service standard which will match to global standards.

The present study entitled 'Evaluation of Marketing Strategies of Commercial Banks' was focused on profitability through customer satisfaction which is the ultimate aim of every marketing strategy. The review of earlier studies proved that marketing is still not fully accepted as an organisational imperative by Indian banks. Under the administered banking culture, marketing was not given adequate attention. More over the banks in their role as catalysts of economic development has forgotten the basics of customer orientation.

In order to have an assessment of the customer satisfaction in Thrissur district of Kerala, 360 bank customers belonging to six branches of three banks representing public sector, private sector and co-operative sector were interviewed for the study. Inter-bank, inter segment and spatial comparisons were made based on the opinion of the respondents. The banking habits of the customers, the speed of transactions,
behavioural aspects of employees, customer amenities, credit related services, technical aspects, service charges and pricing were the main parameters used to assess the customer satisfaction. Further attempt was made to study the awareness of respondents towards banking services and promotional strategies adopted by sample banks.

The findings of the study can be summarised as under:

Indian banks had grown tremendously since nationalisation in the volume of business and number of clientele served. But in recent years the rate of growth was comparatively slow.

The commercial banks in Kerala also recorded significant growth in deposit mobilisation but the credit deployment has not increased correspondingly. The credit deposit ratio was found decreasing over the years.

The primary survey showed that the salaried group were the highest among the respondents. In SIB rural 55 percent of their respondents were salaried, SIB main and DCB rural had more respondents from business group.

Female respondents are scarcely found in business category. This was in contradiction to their achievements in other spheres of life. Sample banks were not able to attract more of them as customers through suitable deposit and credit schemes.
Comparatively poor distribution of respondents below 25 years category showed that the younger generation were not cared much by banking sector. Similarly the senior citizens were not given adequate attention as customers.

The business group were found dominating the high income category and their number was more in SIB main.

More than 83 percent of the sample respondents had secondary level education and above. The salaried group had more qualified respondents.

It was found that 57 percent of the accounts maintained by sample banks were less than 5 years duration. SBI main had more long duration accounts. The salaried groups were maintaining highest number of long duration accounts.

 Majority of the respondents preferred their branch because of convenience. Quality of service and popularity of branch were given subsequent preference. While 52 percent urban customers ranked proximity, 71 percent rural respondents opined in favour of proximity.

Fifty percent each of all urban bank respondents agreed the necessity of someone known in the branch to expedite their transactions. The opinion differed among rural branches from 22 to 48 percent in this regard.
Familiarity of the respondents to the bank staff were checked and found that middle level officers were more popular than other categories.

Regarding the speed of transactions SIB main and rural branches were found more efficient than others. The satisfaction of rural respondents were higher than that of their urban counterparts in the matter of efficiency of transactions. The salaried group had better satisfaction than other categories. Negative discriminant values were seen in withdrawal of cash, issue of demand draft and updating pass book. Efficiency was noticed in renewal of fixed deposits. The rural branches were found more efficient than urban branches in speedy delivery of transactions.

More than 97 percent of the customers could not find the time norms displayed in the banks. The bankers were not interested in the proper display of time norms.

The awareness of the norms were also very poor among all customer groups and banks. Customers were not getting an opportunity to compare the standard fixed by IBA with the actual performance of their bankers.

Interest rates for deposit and loans were noticed by 61 percent of respondents. While 77 percent urban customers opined favourably, only 45 percent rural customers gave positive response.
Regarding the behavioral aspects, SBI urban and rural had higher ratings in the character of politeness. While DCB main had lowest rating its rural branch recorded high rating.

The attitude of managerial category towards the customers were reasonably good in all banks. But SBI main and rural and DCB main could achieve a comparatively low rating regarding the courtesy extended by clerical staff. Wide variation did not existed in the discriminent values among customer groups in the rating of different cadres of bank staff.

Very high satisfaction existed regarding the presence of bank staff during business hours. For all banks positive discriminent value was obtained.

The availability of complaint box was reported by 36 percent respondents. Very poor response was given by DCB respondents in this regard.

A sizable number of customers lodged complaints to their banks and the business group had given more complaints than others. The frequency of complaints indicated the poor performance of the banks in certain respects.

Analysing the nature of complaints it was found that more than 60 percent were concerning delay in transactions followed by errors in pass book entries. DCBs had the
highest number of complaints received. All customer groups were concerned with
delay in transactions. About 94 percent of the complaints were given at the branch
level itself.

Nearly 50 percent of respondents reported favourable treatment of their
complaints. The business group were of the opinion that their complaints were taken
sympathetically but the problem remained unresolved.

The present working time of the branches were found suitable to 71 percent of
the respondents. While the urban respondents expressed 66 percent satisfaction it was
75 percent among rural customers. The farmers group had the highest satisfaction in
this regard.

Among those opined against the suitability of working time, majority
demanded extension of business hours up to 4. pm. Only 15 percent of the respondents
required their branch to open on Sundays.

Maximum positive response were recorded regarding timely opening and
closing of branches.

Majority of the customers expressed satisfaction with the space available in
the branches. But poor response was recorded among rural branches.
Regarding availability of other basic amenities like drinking water, seating facility and fan facility, highest satisfaction was recorded among banks and customer groups. But toilet facility and availability of reading materials were not found satisfactory.

Although 75 percent of the respondents expressed satisfaction regarding the number of bank offices available, the rural respondents had only 52 percent satisfaction.

More than 80 percent of the customers visited their branches personally once in a week. Much difference was not found in the behaviour of customer groups and rural-urban respondents in this regard. The same trend was reported in the case of visiting the branches through others or agents. A good number of respondents take their passbook to the branches for depositing and withdrawal of money. Majority of DCB rural customers followed this practice.

Most of the respondents update their passbooks in less than four times a year.

Poor clarity of passbook entries were reported by SBI main customers and by farmers group. Abbreviations used were cited as the major reasons for non-clarity. Errors in the passbook were reported by 27 percent respondents. The business group reported the highest number of errors.

Less than 20 percent respondents were found giving standing instructions to their banks. But most of them reported timely execution of such instructions with
maximum accuracy. Poor usage of this facility may be an indication of the lack of proper awareness.

About 70 percent of the sample respondents were having fixed deposits with their branches. But only 43 percent received intimation before maturity of their term deposit.

Nomination facility was availed by majority of the respondents. SIB main respondents had the highest positive response followed by SBI main. Among customer groups business group were found availing nomination facility more than other groups.

It was found that the availability of nomination facility was not properly displayed by the bankers. Poor response was reported from customer groups. Only 54 percent respondents received advice from bank staff to use nomination facility.

Regarding credit related services, 51 percent of urban and 49 percent rural respondents were found borrowing from their branches. Among business groups more than 87 percent were borrowers.

It was revealed that 69 percent borrowings were in the form of loans. Overdraft and cash credits were comparatively low. About 58 percent respondents opined for the need of influence of some sort to get credit facility. 44 percent of business group were of this opinion and the influence of bank staff was considered prominent.
The application format was found cumbersome by 43 percent customers. The business group were mostly dissatisfied with the application format and asking of unavailable information by bankers.

A good number of respondents were still depending on money lenders for their emergent needs and quick availability and simple formalities were quoted as the reasons for such borrowing.

On an aggregate 63 percent respondents were satisfied with the interest rates on deposits. Much difference was not found in the opinion of customer groups. Almost similar views were held in the matter of interest rate on loans.

Interest rate was not found as a major influencing factor in the preference of bank deposits. Safety and liquidity were ranked important. But business group gave first preference to liquidity.

The awareness level of sample respondents with regard to deposit schemes of the banks showed that new schemes are not known to many of the customers.

Excepting the traditional loan schemes knowledge about new credit schemes were also poor.

In the case of remittance services better awareness was found in SIB main and rural customers. Among the occupational groups, the salaried had better awareness than others. Likewise the urban respondents were found more aware about remittance services than rural customers.
As regards miscellaneous services, out of the ten services listed six were known to more than 50 percent of respondents. Here also SIB main and rural respondents had better awareness. Similarly among occupational groups the salaried were having more awareness. But in general it can be seen that the awareness level of the sample respondents were poor in relation to their educational background.

The analysis of the sources of awareness revealed that the bank staff were the most important source for majority of customers. The media preference of the respondents revealed that urban customers preferred news paper advertisement while the rural respondents gave maximum preference to information through bank staff.

It was found that banks were not effectively using the cheapest strategy of sending greeting cards on important occasions to build up customer friendship.

As a whole 55 percent customers reported receipt of intimation to customer meets and the participation level was also found poor. The passive attitude of bankers towards customer meets were reflected in the responses of customers.

Banks were not so keen in intimating their new schemes to the customers in time. The response from urban and rural customers were not encouraging in this respect. Similar views were also expressed by the different occupation groups.

Very few respondents received investment advice from banks and those received the same found it useful. Hence banks are not taking advantage of their ability to guide the customers in their investment decisions.

Customer satisfaction index showed that SIB main had the highest index of 61 followed by SIB rural with 53. The average index was only 49. When the urban respondents ranked an index of 53, it was 46 among rural respondents. So it can be
inferred that the private sector banks are better in customer service. The indices show that the banks have to go a long way in satisfying their customers.

Recomentations

Based on the findings of the study the following suggestions are put forward for the consideration of the sample banks.

1. Banks should tailor both deposit and credit schemes to attract the younger generations. Regular contact with the students community and helping to solve their financial problems will bring in loyal customers in future.

2. Entrepreneurial talents of women should be encouraged through proper financial consultancy and assisting in the project formulation. The bank-shy female section should be brought into the orbit of banks.

3. The branch managers must be given adequate freedom to formulate location specific strategies and their fear of risk should be minimised through proper management support and motivation.

4. Branch level marketing strategies should be formulated giving opportunity for all sections of the staff to contribute their intelligence towards framing of strategies.

5. Display of time norms, interest rates and availability of nomination facilities should be done not as a matter of compliance of R.B.I. directions but as a felt need.

6. Employers must be given proper motivation and training in dealing with all categories of customers without discrimination.
7. Banks should effectively introduce awareness programmes in its operational area. This will to a certain extent eliminate misunderstanding of the customers and they will co-operate with the bankers in genuine system failures.

8. Introduction of computers in all areas of banking is a must for survival and efficiency. This will to a great extent reduce the customer complaints regarding delay in routine transactions and clerical errors.

9. Physical facilities of the branches, especially rural branches should be improved and this will create a good image in the minds of the customers.

10. Extension of business hours should be done at the earliest to suit the convenience of different customer groups and opening the branches on Sundays and public holidays will add customer satisfaction.

11. Customer meetings be made more informal and the promises of previous meetings should be given proper attention in subsequent meetings.

12. Non-fund based services must be publicized and customers be encouraged to practice using them.

13. Customer's standing instructions should be promoted to the maximum as it has wider scope in recent years.

14. Collection of local and outstation cheques be handled at least possible time and undue delay in this respect will lead to customer defection in future.

15. The concept of relationship banking be practiced as the retention of an existing customer is more easier than getting a new one.

16. Further simplification of procedures and unnecessary paper work will enhance customer satisfaction in future.
17. Simple promotion techniques like sending of greeting cards on important festivals should not be ignored.

18. Environmental scanning should be done frequently to get in touch with the changing life style of customers.

19. Market research at branch level is more realistic and should be encouraged to the maximum.

20. Personal selling is preferred by the majority of the customers surveyed and banks should equip their sales staff to meet all such challenges.

Scope for Further Research

Since a lion share of deposits of banks in the state is from Non-Resident Indians, the satisfaction of these customers is of paramount importance. Further research should concentrate on the needs and expectations of these customers. Moreover extensive research on low level of Credit Deposit Ratio in the state is also an area of importance.