# **Customer Delight And Purchase Decision: A B2B Perspective**

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#### **Abstract:**

As stated by Rust and Oliver, new customer acquisition for a business and maintaining the current customers is the prime task for all marketers & researchers (Rust & Oliver, 2000). In other words, the purchase decision of the customer becomes very important from the perspective of the marketer. Once the customer has purchased from a brand it becomes the company's look out to maintain the customer satisfied and happy. A happy customer probably can buy the same brand again and again, thus being loyal to the brand. This all depends upon the happiness level of the customer and whether he/ she sees any other alternative competitor as a potential buy. If the company succeeds in keeping the customer happy, then it will result in repeated purchase of the brand by the customer. Thus, the customer satisfaction is transformed into customer loyalty which in turn is been an outcome of customer in delight. There are various developed models pertaining to the concept of Customer Delight.

This paper deals with the comprehension of the concept of customer delight and understanding different models that can be implemented in organization to achieve the customer delight. The concept of customer delight is relatively new one. So, understanding the consumer behaviours and related marketing dimensions are important from the customer delight model point of view. There can be differences as far as different products/ services are concerned in this concept of customer delight. The approach in this study will be for B2B product/ services and not for any other specific domain or industry as such. Thus, the paper tries to work out how the extant literature explains the concept customer delight and how the models help in generating most awaited reward for a marketer in terms of customer delight and the profits thereof.

#### **Keywords**

Customer delight, Purchase decision, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, B2B Purchase decision

#### Introduction

The business world is becoming competitive day by day. Customers are exposed to various alternatives products/ brands to choose from. The market is full with mature products and thus creating a competitive advantage for a brand is becoming a tough task for marketers. In the vast spread B2B market this situation is more predominant. In highly challenging environment it has become very difficult to survive, sustain, succeed and grow for an organization. The customer behaviour in the post digital era is becoming complicated. On the one hand, exposure of all brands to the customers is becoming easy with the digital channels. On the other hand, there is big data available of the customers and their transactions. The Organization has to keep track on both the fronts to keep itself updated and at the forefront of the marketing game.

### **Literature Review**

In the current literature we tried to find the relation between the Purchase Decision and the Customer Delight. Following are a few articles which were studied for understanding how the experts have worked previously on the subject matter and what their findings are. We have also referred to some articles, journals and publications that define and explain various related concepts.

# 1. American Society of Quality- (American Society for Quality, 2024)

The Dr Noriaki Kano model describes understanding of a customer's needs. The article mainly concerns with the explanation of the model from consumer point of view and used for B2C. The context of the article is quality but it clearly explains well how customer needs can be understood. So, the ASQ (American Society of Quality) explained it in following way: This is a 2-dimensional model and has:

The x-Axis- Achievement. What supplier lacked and what it did very well is represented on this axis

The y-Axis- Satisfaction. Represents how the customer satisfaction level is from dissatisfaction to complete satisfaction

The model talks about expected needs, normal needs, and exciting needs as the levels of the customer satisfaction. On the basis of these needs, the performance of the supplier is measured.

# 2. Inspiring Customer Delight Examples- (Chaturvedi, 2022)

Ms. S. Chaturvedi describes Customer Delight as first satisfying customer's expectations, then doing more than the expectations, and thus creating a very encouraging emotional user-experience for the brand. She also has given a 5-step procedure for achieving the Customer Delight. The first is to create a plan after careful engaging conversing with the customer. Then second is to communicate with the team while customer-need at the centre. The third step is to create a competitive or differentiating advantage with quicker delivery with add-ons. The fourth step deals about tracking the ever-changing client's requirements and mandates. The last step is to work for creating a very good UX for the client.

The article also deals with some excellent hints on how to get the customer delight. They areuse more personalization like hand-written communications, engage with customers in all possible events including special ones, use social media effectively, organize competitions to connect, try to minimize dissatisfactory experiences, take note of the feed-back, educate the customer, building confidence in customers.

### 3. The Ultimate Guide to Customer Delight- (Barron, 2019)

Ms Barron has worked on the Customer Lifestyle starting from a stranger to a loyal customer. Here she is trying to explain the how a stranger is being converted to a customer and then he becomes a supporter of the same brand that he has become customer of. In the study she has proposed a frame work that explains this customer lifecycle as follows:

Stranger→Prospect→Customer→Promoter
Attract→Engage→Delight

The marketer attracts a stranger to the brand or the company. The next stage is to keep the stranger engaged by various communication at the customer touch-points. The outcome of

this activity is conversion of the stranger into a lead or a prospective customer. Everyone in the company who is responsible for the customer interaction during the touch-points, is responsible to put all the efforts to gain the confidence of the stranger to convert into prospect and then to a customer. Then she argues that the customer delight is the process via which the customer can be converted to a promoter of the brand. She Defines Customer Delight as the process where the customer expectations are exceeded by the company so that the customer experiences a positive emotional feeling with the brand & going ahead becomes the promoter of the brand.

### 4. Kushagra Kulshreshtha (Kulshreshtha & Bajpai, 2018)

In this study the relation of quality-quantity compared with customer's satisfaction & delight are dealt. Kulshreshtha et al. propose that quality is what satisfies a consumer. Satisfaction of the customer through quality most of the time leads to overall happiness, gladness, joyfulness or enjoyment; in other extreme level it reaches to customer delight. In competitive world all companies are trying inculcate the quality in the product/ service as well in the services related to the service/ product. Proposition of quality of the brand is explained to customer by the integrated marketing communications (IMC). The entire campaign of the company induces quality perception of the brand. This induced quality perception in a customer's mind drives the actual purchase. Another aspect of the positive quality perception is it enhances the Customer Delight and hence loyalty amongst the customers as well as it allows the provider company to charge a reasonable premium on the price of the product.

# 5. Fatma (Fatma, 2014)

In this study Mrs Fatma has taken the customer's view towards the price as the initial cost for buying the brand. It is normally presumed that the customer buys the product/ service for a price but actually the customer buys it for the value he/she looks in the product/ service. Customer always tries to differentiate the needs he/ she has, the alternatives to satisfy these needs, and all other alternative/ substitute products available to him/ her. Finally what price he/ she pays for the product/ service as per the perception of what product experience and performance received, drives the customer satisfaction and delight. This Customer Delight is driving the Purchase Decision of the brands and if the same level of the customer delight for the same brand is maintained then the customer delight can lead to the loyalty.

# 6. Whitten et al. (Whitten, Hightower, & Sayeed, 2014)

In this study Whitten et al. studied how the customer satisfaction is dependent upon the utility value of the product. When the utility is talked about, there are various aspects that are involved. The first one is the proper functioning of the product as per the design of the product. So, the design and the quality of the delivery are crucial. The second aspect is the product must be charged with a judicious and practical price in the competitive environment. This also will cover the price- performance issues. The third and most important aspect is the ability of the brand to build and develop a sense of trust for itself among the customer. The study further states that if the utility value is been managed well, then the customer gets satisfied with the brand and further it can lead to the customer delight. With customer in a state of Delight there is most probably chances of repeat purchase from the customer.

#### **B2B Market**

We are trying to understand the role of Customer Delight on Purchase Decision in B2B market. Compared to the consumer market industrial market (B2B) has always been very vast,

complicated and difficult. Vast in the sense that the B2B market is having much larger sales volume (in Dollar or Rupee terms) than that of the B2C. So, every care needs to be taken to make sure that a right Purchase Decision is taken at the right time. B2B market is more complicated that it needs more research and calls for lengthy decision making involving a predefined buying process. As the Purchase Decision is a process, it involves various types of buyers such as user buyer, technical buyer, economic buyer and gate keeper and so on. The process becomes difficult because all types of buyers need to be satisfied by the product/solution like user buyer for its usage, technical buyer for its technical capabilities and economic buyer for its price-performance.

#### **Purchase Decision**

The entire process is been explained by the Integrative Model of Industrial Buying Behaviour as suggested by Dr Jagdish N Sheth (Dr Sheth, 2024). The model clearly described the B2B buying behaviour in great detail for the first time. There are around 13 different parts of the buying process that he considers as important which are described below. This model is very similar to the famous Howarth-Sheth model of Buying Behaviour. This new model refers more to the industrial or B2B model more than the earlier Howarth-Sheth model. Also new model relates to fewer variables than the Howarth-Sheth model.

The model describes the purchasers as purchasing agents, engineers, users, who typically are from the purchase, quality and manufacturing departments. They are the main decision makers and their psychological world/environment needs to be taken into account. The world comprises of (1a) the background of the individuals, (1b) information sources, (1c) active search, (1d) perceptual distortion, and (1e) satisfaction with past purchases. The next part is (1) Expectations of these individuals pertaining to the buying situation and various supplier brands.

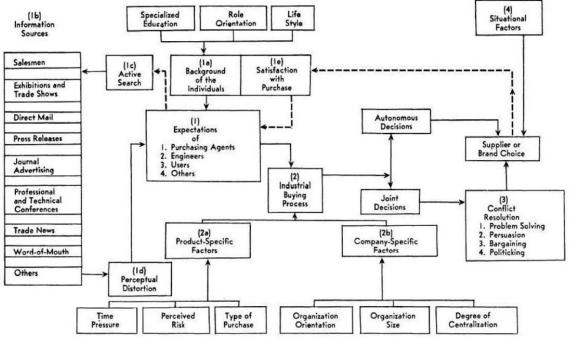


FIGURE 1. An integrative model of industrial buyer behavior.

Source: (Dr Sheth, 2024)

The model then goes on describing the (2) Industrial Buying Process that can be an autonomous or joint decisions. The decision is dependent upon (2a) product specific factors and (2b) Company specific factors. In product specific, there are 3 factors of risk, type of purchase and the time pressure. Risk considers what can go wrong in buying that brand. The type refers to either one-time big purchase like capital purchase of a big machine (say a CNC machine or an ERP system) or the first purchase that can lead to following purchases of the same brand. The time factor relates to emergency purchase or purchase under sufficiently good amount of time that can be allowed for the decision. The Company specific factors are company size, orientation and centralization degree. If the company is a large corporation, then the decision can be a joint one. A technologically oriented company will have technical/production-oriented decisions, whereas a sales dominant company will give preference to selling aspects of the purchase. If the company is too centralized and a small one, the decision will be a personal decision.

Thus, in case of a joint decision, a case (3) Conflict Resolution can arise, before the Purchase Decision or choice of the brand. The conflict resolution is the last stage in the joint decision which starts with understanding the need to buy, and then collecting the required information of available solutions in terms of products/ brands. The conflict resolution is required when there are purchasers with different objectives and perceived priorities. A purchase agent will have different perceptions than an engineer due to their different work responsibilities and different assessment criteria in the organization. In the case of the multi-departmental purchasers in the joint decision, it may lead to an all-inclusive decision if we follow the persuasive or problem-solving attitude. Alternatively, a bargaining or politicking stand in the decision-making process may lead to irrational, unrealistic decision that can be very much harmful to the organization (Dr Sheth, 2024).

Dr Sheth also gives importance to the (4) Situational factors. In real life the B2B decisions are also taken on ad-hoc basis as in case of a B2C situation. These decisions are not taken with following a systematic process generally to be followed in the company. The situations demand an irrational, unrealistic approach to the decision making which can lead to such adhoc decisions. The situations can be from external or internal environment. Internal environment problems can be a serious machine failure, or cash crunch, or a factory-accident or a workers-on-strike or leadership change and so on. The external environment problems can be country wide recession, situation like COVID-19, currency depreciation, import-export issues, supplier facing some delivery issues or Government rule changes. There can also be issues from competitor's actions like aggressive advertisement campaigns, new product introduction or price war. There can be enormous situations where a company may not take any joint, procedural decision but will resort to Situational approaches in decision making. Thus, we can conclude that apart from the ad-hoc situations, there are usually systematic Purchase Decisions are taken in B2B market. The industrial or B2B purchase decisions tend to be logical, holistic, unbiased and rational (Dr Sheth, 2024).

### **Customer Delight**

Before going to the discussions on Customer Delight, let us first understand what are the customer needs and we describe them. Some marketers believe that the customers don't know their needs, they need to be told their needs. But this is not true. What is lacking in this situation is the customers cannot express well what they need; we need to find the needs. Once we find the needs then we can offer them to the customer accordingly. So, it is very

essential to know what the customers need and create our product/ services to satisfy them in a better way with:

- The features that need to be included or excluded &
- The features that will 'maximize' and the features that provide a basic level The above understanding is based on the fact that:
- Users value some features the most, so focus on them to yield better results.
- Users do not value some features, but are needed; so, provide them with the least focus. A lot of focus and the least focus will yield the same result.

Thus, try and find out the features/ attributes of the product/ service those need to be focussed for the best outcome. There was the first model introduced in 1959 with the two-factor theory Thet was based on the two groups of the factors:

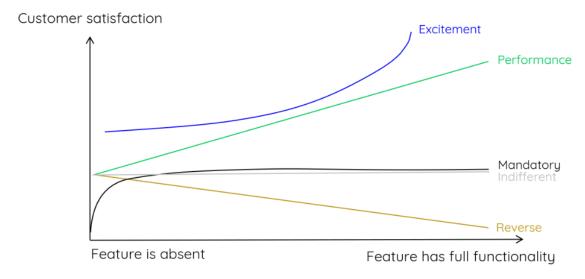
- Hygiene factors these are the factors have no effect on the level satisfaction for the customer; but their absence will lead to dissatisfaction. Such factors/ attributes have to be included in a product/ service but need not be focussed/ maximized
- Motivators these are the factors have very great effect on the level satisfaction for the customer. Such factors/ attributes must be focussed/ maximised for greater level of customer satisfaction.

There are models which are proposed from 1959 onwards that go beyond this two-factor theory. Noriaki Kano developed Kano Model in 1984 that helps us making the most use of this two-factor theory for customer satisfaction (Wells, 2021).

#### The Kano Model:

There are five categories in Kano model for the attributes and features like Mandatory, Performance, Excitement, Indifferent, Reverse. These categories are arranged on two- axes.

- The horizontal axis can represent the functionality (i.e. what exactly the customer gets of this functionality) or it also can represent the resource invested by the company like time, money in that feature. If you have higher resource investment, then obviously the functionality will also be higher; so, either of both can be represented on the X-axis.
- The vertical Axis can represent the satisfaction level of the customer Now each feature or attribute or factors make a different sense which we will see after the figure below:



Source: (Wells, 2021)

### **Mandatory Feature:**

These features are also called as the 'must be', 'must have' or 'threshold' features/ factors/ attributes. They are similar to the Hygiene-Factors in the two-factor theory. These factors are a must to be included in the product/ service and their presence goes unnoticed while their absence attracts dissonance in the customers and the product/ service.

In terms of the customer satisfaction, a little presence of these factors increases the satisfaction but further presence or increase in it has no effect on the satisfaction level. Say for example a B2B insurance product is created by a Fintech company for an Auto company to sell insurance with their car. The expected uptime of the insurance product (online or offline) is 99%. The product being introduced will create some satisfaction. The Fintech company can invest more in the product uptime which will not change the satisfaction level of the auto company. But a one-time failure of their system can lead to a great amount of dissatisfaction.

#### **Performance Feature:**

These features are also called as the 'satisfied' or 'dimensional' features/ factors/ attributes. They are the ones that create the first-time satisfaction for the customer, and when they are increased or improved further (as per the functionality increases), the satisfaction level of the customer also increases. These factors indicate a linear relationship between the performance factors and the satisfaction level of the customer. This is indicated in the Kano model by a straight line with a positive slope. In the above example of the Fintech company creating an insurance product for an Auto company, say we increase the UI (user interface) of the product. This leads to the ease-of-use of the product (functionality increase) for the Auto company which will definitely increase the satisfaction level for the customer.

#### **Excitement Feature**:

These features are also called as the 'delighter' or 'attractive' or 'differentiator' features/ factors/ attributes. These factors and the performance factors together are termed as 'motivators' in the two-factor theory.

Excitement factors are the ones which are not expected from the customer. So, when these differentiator features are experienced by the customer, it creates a resonating effect between the product/ service and the customer. This is really what any marketer can expect the most from any feature of the product/ service. So, a company must prioritize on increasing such factors while delivering the product/ service.

There is a caution in increasing the investment in the excitement factors. These factors keep on increasing the satisfaction level of the customer up to a certain point. Thereafter the increase in the excitement factor ceases to increase the satisfaction level; just like the law of diminishing returns. So, one has to be careful while making these increments in these factors. Let us consider how it will work in above example of Auto company getting an insurance product from a Fintech company. Say the Fintech company offers insurance for the show-room of the Auto company with heavy discount. As this is an unexpected offer from the Fintech can offer such discounts in fire insurance, accidental insurance and say insurance against theft for the Auto company. Any further offer from the insurance company for the employees of the Auto company, may not be so attractive to the show-room owners.

#### **Indifferent Feature**:

There may be some factors that may not be of any concern for the customer. So, any investment or incremental value in them will not have any effect on customer satisfaction. These factors must not be funded further, as it may lead to wastage of the investment.

Let us consider the example of Auto company getting an insurance product from a Fintech company. Here the Fintech company can invest in some different platform on their IT network, which the customer is not at all concerned with. The customer expects 99% uptime irrespective of any preference of Fintech company's IT platform. So, such investments do not affect the customer satisfaction and should be avoided from customer satisfaction point of view.

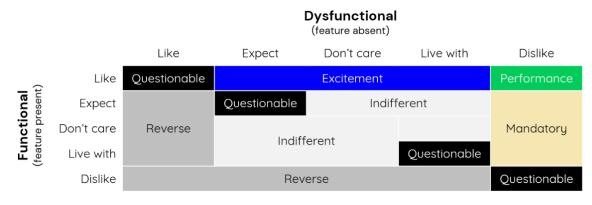
### **Reverse Feature:**

These factors/ attributes/ features are the ones that will cause dissonance between the customer and the product/ service. The Kano model normally excluded these types of features from the analysis as they are obviously not offered to the customer at the first place.

In the above example of the Fintech company and the Auto company, say the Fintech company offers some feature which may expose the customer data to the public or to the hackers, then that can be detrimental/ fatal to the Auto company which will have the negative effect. Even with slight doubt about such exposure, the customer will start disassociated with the Fintech company.

The Kano model implementation requires that one needs to conduct the survey for 15-20 features, and not more than that. The 'collectively exhaustive' list of attributes or features more than 20 will make the study too lengthy. This restricts the researchers from using Kano model for complicated studies that need to consider more features. There have to be minimum two questions per feature; one referring to the functionality and the other referring to not having that functionality (Dysfunctional). The answers have to be 'mutually exclusive' such as 'I like it', 'I expect it', 'Don't care', 'Live with', 'I dislike it'. If we use the third question about the importance of the feature/ attribute to them, it may add more authenticity or contextual value. The answers in that case can be 'Absolutely not important', 'Not important', 'Neutral', 'Important', and 'Most important'.

Following the first two questions, we can draw conclusion that we get



Source: (Wells, 2021)

So, in above table, blue represents Excitement, green represents Performance, yellow represents Mandatory, white represents Indifferent, and the grey represents Reverse factors. The Black band represents Questionable answers. This can be easily understood by the very

first case when you 'like' the 'function' you cannot 'like' its 'dysfunction', and so on. Thus, we have seen how the customer views a particular feature (attribute/ factor) as exciting or mandatory or performance or not important or adverse feature (Wells, 2021).

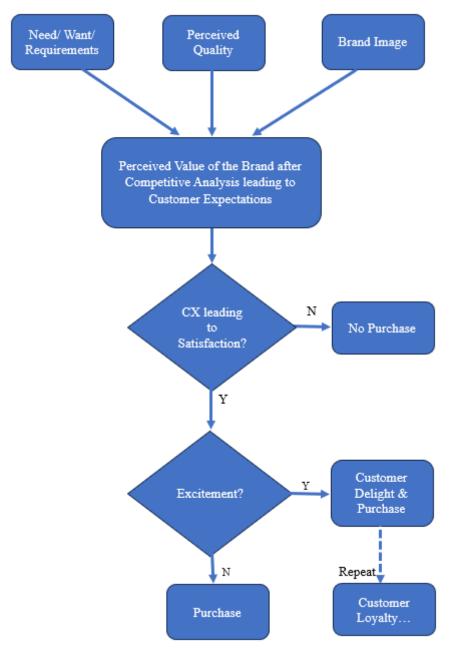
# **Meaning of Customer Delight:**

Customer delight is a very positive state of mind when a customer experiences that the product or service offered to him/ her has gone beyond the expectations levels leading to excitement. Thus, Customer Delight is an emotional reaction to some unexpected benefits that add more value. From modern concepts in marketing what a customer is buying is not the product or a service but buying the value that is been offered by the product or service. Thus, a marketer has to offer not only need satisfaction but also the benefits beyond expectations added with personalization and empathy to wards the customer. Customer Delight can be an outcome at various customer touch-points. It can be while delivering superior product/ service quality, very caring attention to the customer in during plus after sales, offered better loyalty rewards, some very emotional attachment (Sukhraj, 2016).

When we talk about customer delight, it is mostly the post purchase phenomenon. But in a very few cases it can take place much before the purchase, when the expectations of a prospect are exceeded creating a 'Wow' effect. But as explained above, most of the customer engagements or ouch-points are after one becomes the customer. So, it is termed a Customer Delight. The outcome of Customer Delight will be repeat purchases, thus retaining the customer giving you the much-needed economic advantages. The repeat purchase also leads to generating customer loyalty. The other economic advantages are in terms of promoting the product/ service. A delighted customer will be your supporter and give mouth-to-mouth publicity or referrals. It can be in terms of personally advocating the brand or using his/ her skills in writing articles, reviews etc (LinkedIn, 2024).

# A suggested Framework

The above discussions can lead to development of a Framework for Customer Delight as detailed below. The framework starts from the customer need and moves towards other level of customer loyalty. It takes into account the perception about the quality of the product/ service. The Brand Image and the price of the product/ service. The sum total of quality need, quality perception, brand image, price against the value of product results in the customer expectations. The customer or user experience (CX or UX) as against these expectations, lead to the level of satisfaction from dissatisfaction- satisfaction-excitement. This in turn results in the next purchase decision which may lead to customer loyalty.



Source: This Study

The suggested frame work can be explained in the figure above. It can be discussed pointwise:

- A) The need of the customer initiates the product search. The technical specs, various delivery aspects and commercial terms are mainly considered first. The promotional communications create a brand image in the mind space of customers.
- B) All these aspects when analysed as per the respective competitions, create a perceived value for the product/ service. If the product/ service scores better in this analysis with comparison of the competition, the expectations about the product/ service are formed and the prospect moves towards becoming a customer.

- C) If the customer's expectations are not satisfied, then there is no purchase and simply our case of purchase decision ends at this point. So, the customer satisfaction is really important for any Purchase Decision. Thus, a satisfied customer goes through a process of buying the product/ service. If this Customer Experience is exciting, then we see that the customer is in the positive state of emotion called Customer Delight. Then the customer is supposed to indulge in positive Purchase Decision remain a delighted customer. Thus, Customer/ User Experience (CX/ UX) is very crucial from the marketer's point of view. In case of the customer remains only state of Satisfaction and not extended to excitement, then also customer will indulge in Purchase Decision as it was the best decision then. Later on, whether the repeat purchase is done or not depends upon individual future situations leading to satisfied or excited UX or CX.
- D) In modern world marketers have started understanding the importance of customer experience ((CX) or user experience (UX). The delighted customer who has made a Purchase Decision, is all set for getting converted to the Loyal Customer, if we maintain the expectations and CX similar. It is very easy to maintain a current customer than to gain a new one, as you know more about the expectations of the customer which are satisfied earlier.

### **Conclusion**

In today's marketing, customers are exposed to all sorts of information as there exist a lot of channels including digital one. These channels can provide you the required information when searched for. The digital channels provide very handy and user-friendly search engines that can lead to meaningful and right information. So, when someone wants to know more about the needs/ wants/ requirements, umpteen number of resources provide this information. In the highly competitive market, we need to know where the customer is looking for the value in our product. With respect to B2B customer the information gathering is very easy for the Purchase Agents and other members of the purchase team. That is why in B2B market the expectation about the needed product/ service is very demanding. The purchaser thus demands a very specific and customized requirements from our product/ service. If that value is proposed to the customer there will be a positive response from the customer for our product.

To understand the customer expectations, one can use the empathising technique used where the marketer wears the shoes of the customer. Being aware of the customer expectations, the products can be tuned to satisfy these empathised needs for creating good customer experience. Thus, we can create a satisfactory product for the customer. This can be sufficient in some markets where hard competition is not present. Here positive Purchase Decision can take place with just matching the customer expectation

In case of very hard, tough and highly competitive markets, just complying with the customer expectations may not be sufficient. In such cases the competition is so tough that almost all the elements of the value chain are performing with all the competing brands. Here we talk about the brands because this hard competition is a reality in the situation of competing more than one brands. They are not just need-satisfying products/ services. All aspects of value chain including the primary activities and support activities are being tried to be optimised by every brand maker. But in such a situation, we need to find at least one item in the value chain that can differentiate our brand from the rest of others. This will create a much needed 'Wow' effect and the customer will be inclined towards our product emotionally. This emotionally

delighted customer will be our real asset that will keep on buying our brands repeatedly. The brand thus will have several delighted customers who can become Loyal Customers. The only care to be taken is to be in touch with such customers and satisfy them on all the touch-points (engagement opportunities) with due care. This has a capacity to keep on funding our revenue channel again and again.

Thus, a Delighted Customer is sure to indulge in a Positive Purchase Decision at the same time keeping doors open for the customer to be converted to Loyal Customer.

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