

Who cares!**Dhaleta Surender Kumar**

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The eighth P - Policy

Consumer durables and automobiles should go for 7 Ps instead of the four, as 'service' is an inseparable part of the package

Twenty years ago, when colour televisions were a sign of the lower middle class moving up to the upper middle class; and which one to buy – was an easy choice. BPL of course, and Kelvinator for a refrigerator. The decisions were taken by my parents, and if I thought Sony was better, my choice didn't matter. While the dynamics have shifted a bit in favour of children's opinion, however, the final choice would eventually boil down to the experience and hearsay about the after sales service of the product - at least for me.

Surprisingly, marketers fail to make service as their USP. Last year, when I was looking to upgrade to a sedan and was looking at the Chevrolets and the Hyundais and the Tatas, I was being dissuaded by friends for the last for the want of its good after-sales service. The brand that makes top class products has often failed me in its after-sales service department, and the experience goes back to the times when the mother brand had entered the telecom business. Even after disconnection of the service – of course after frustration – I was haunted for years by their billing department. As much I hate to do this, I had to flex my journalistic status to ask a favour from one of their marketing heads, to rid me and my mother of the phone threats she received that there was a warrant against me in the offing if I didn't pay the 'phoney' bill.

Recently, a sales executive at the brand's retail chain convinced me to buy their private label air conditioner. In two days, the product was back in their stores, after the company failed to install it on the given time. I didn't have time to wait for them.

I am not an MBA and didn't know about the 4 Ps of marketing till a few years ago. Ms Vinita Bali, the lady responsible for Britannia's turnaround, called the marketplace

as her biggest teacher, in an interview to Pitch, a couple of months ago. How true. As a member of the editorial team of a marketing magazine, I have learnt marketing by not referring to Kotler, but by thinking as a consumer and what I would want from a product. As a consumer, I don't want to be tied to a non-functional brand. I want the company to be responsive and I could be unreasonable at times as I have invested so much of my time and money. That means quick after sales service and the ability to understand the problem. Maruti's one of the company owned workshop, lost me because it failed to recognise or understand the problem, even after repeated visits.

One of my colleague and friend, recently got rid of a DTH connection, when her service provider launched the a la carte option. The company would not take her choices on the phone. Instead, she was referred to a website. After selecting the channels, the 'Submit' button would not take her ahead. The problem was reported back to Customer Care, who refused to take her complaint and asked her to complain through an email. The most, the executive could have done is made a check herself by going on the website and report it to the concerned department. Why was she there if the consumer eventually has to write an email?

While I may disagree with Jai Ram Ramesh for his comments on the "poor" faculty at IIMs in India, I strongly feel that we should stop referring to the 4 Ps of marketing, which in today's era are not enough. Instead go for the more inclusive 7 Ps, as I believe, even consumer durables or automobiles or even IT have to get down to service too. Probably, we could do with the eighth as well – Policy – for Accountability. ■

The views expressed here are of the author alone, and do not necessarily reflect the views of Pitch.