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OPTIMIZING SUPPLY CHAINS FOR PROFIT ENHANCEMENT, QUALITY OF SERVICE AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

Supply chains that are responsive and efficient are essential for business success in the fiercely competitive global market of today. Three fundamental pillars of sustainable business performance—profitability, service quality, and customer satisfaction—are all concurrently improved by the integrated optimisation approach our study suggests. The framework takes a comprehensive strategy that synchronises internal operations with changing customer expectations, in contrast to traditional models that place an emphasis on cost reduction. It strategically coordinates production, distribution, logistics, and procurement by utilising knowledge from supply chain management, operations research, and customer relationship management. In order to improve total service quality, the model emphasises the significance of digital technology, lean techniques, real-time information flow, precise demand forecasts, inventory optimisation, and cooperative supplier relationships. It illustrates how businesses can combine operational benchmarks and customer-centric indicators to strike a balance between cost effectiveness and value development. In the end, the framework views supply chain optimisation as more than just a means of increasing profits; it is a strategic driver of improved customer experience, service quality, and long-term loyalty.

***Keywords**: Supply Chain Optimization; Customer Satisfaction; Service Quality; Profitability; Integrated Optimization Framework; Digital Technologies; Demand Forecasting.*

INTRODUCTION

In today's fiercely competitive global marketplace, the supply chain stands as the crucial differentiator for sustained business success and market leadership. Traditional approaches to Supply Chain Management (SCM) have historically focused on cost reduction and internal operational efficiencies, often viewing profitability and service quality as sequential, rather than concurrent, objectives. However, this siloed perspective is proving insufficient in a landscape where customer expectations are highly dynamic and demand responsiveness, transparency, and consistent quality of service. This research posits that achieving sustainable business performance requires moving beyond conventional optimization tactics to implement a comprehensive, integrated approach that simultaneously enhances the three fundamental pillars of competitive advantage: profitability, quality of service, and customer satisfaction.

This paper introduces a novel optimization framework designed to address this critical gap. Drawing from expertise in operations research, SCM best practices, and Customer Relationship Management (CRM), the proposed model strategically coordinates core functions—including production, logistics, distribution, and procurement—by utilizing real-time information flow and digital technologies. Unlike cost-centric predecessors, this framework emphasizes balancing internal operational benchmarks with external customer-centric indicators, ensuring that cost-effectiveness directly translates into heightened value creation. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that true supply chain optimization is a strategic necessity that creates a reliable foundation not just for profit enhancement, but for establishing an enduring river of customer experience, service quality, and long-term brand loyalty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The 1990s saw several new business trends, including lean manufacturing, outsourcing, downsizing, and strategic partnership, as well as paradigm shifts in corporate processes. All businessmen must follow the aforementioned trends in order to secure their survival, sustainability, and market expansion as consumer knowledge rises. The rise of value chains is one of the most significant and relevant developments to all of these new business adaptations (Chen and Paulraj, 2004; Lambert et al., 1998). After outsourcing the secondary procedures and competencies to company partners, the entrepreneur began concentrating on their core expertise. All businessmen quickly realised that the transacting firms were key partners in the value chain to provide the best possible service to the consumer, rather than competitors, as their reliance on business partners grew. Value chain competition took the place of competition at the individual firm level. The phrase value chain was persuasively supplanted by the more inclusive word supply chain since each company in the value chain provided goods or services to its next partner. Today, supply chains define every business. Supply chains are similar to a circulatory system that includes all information, financial, and product-service exchanges between organisations. Synergistic relational transactions, in which each transacting entity is viewed as a customer, have supplanted the conventional methods of conducting business, which involved reciprocal exchange at arm's length (Stank et al., 2001). As a logical extension of this idea, each supply chain participant concentrates on providing quality, value, and satisfaction to the immediate consumer in order to generate profit (Shemwell et al., 1998). The supply chain is made up of the manufacturer, supplier, distributor, retailer, logistics provider, and final customer. The phenomena of globalization together with information technology revolution has changed the world into a global village and metamorphosed the arm’s length tradition of business transactions into close knit business networks.

METHODOLOGY

- **Service Quality**

Service quality refers to the degree to which a service meets or exceeds consumer expectations. Service quality is defined by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry as an overall assessment of a service's superiority based on a comparison of customers' expectations and their perceptions of actual performance. Therefore, the underlying difference between what clients believe a service should be and what they actually receive is what constitutes service quality. Numerous aspects of service quality have been offered by various academics. Lehtinen and Lehtinen emphasise interaction quality (interaction between employees and clients), corporate quality (image and reputation), and physical quality (concrete features). Gronroos contrasts between technical quality (what is delivered) and functional quality (how it is delivered), highlighting that both influence customer satisfaction. Edvardsson and associates emphasise system coordination and the outcomes of service delivery by include components like integrative and outcome quality. According to Armistead, service quality can also be evaluated by both firm (time, accuracy, and flexibility) and soft (behaviour, style, and attitude). In order to emphasise that quality encompasses both observable results and the mode of delivery, Szmigin divides it into three categories: hard quality, soft quality, and outcome quality. Services cannot be returned, resold, or kept like things. When they are to be consumed, they are generated. After they are produced, they cannot be inventoried, which makes it challenging to adjust to changes in market demand. If services are not used promptly, they are wasted.

Service quality was described as a "global judgement, or attitude, relating to the superiority of service" by Parasuraman, Zeithmal, and Berry (1981). They viewed service quality as the extent and direction of the gap between the expectations and perceptions of customers and connected it to the idea of perceptions and expectations. "A basic business strategy that provides goods and services that completely satisfy both internal and external customers by meeting their explicit and implicit expectations" is how Tenner and DeToro (1992) defined service quality. Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) suggest that service quality is formed in the interaction between a client and several parts of the service organization and characterised service quality as, 'physical quality', 'corporate quality' and 'interaction quality'. Physical quality denotes quality of physical parts of the service such as equipments, 'Corporate quality' indicates company's image or profile, and the 'Interaction quality' is quality in the interaction between contact personnel and clients.

"Technical quality" refers to what the customer receives, and "functional quality" refers to how the service is provided, which includes the attitudes and behaviour, appearances and personality, service-mindedness, accessibility, and approachability of the customer-contact personnel, according to Gronroos (1984). Edvardsson, et al, (1989), explain that quality is of four types 'technical quality' which include skills of service personal and design of the service system, 'integrative quality', which is ease with which different portion of the service delivery system work together 'functional quality' which embraces all aspects of the manner in which the service is delivered to the customer, including style, environment and availability, "outcome quality" which is whether or not the actual service product meets both service standards or specifications and customer needs/expectations. The service dimensions were divided into "soft" and "firm" categories by Armistead (1990). The 'hard' dimensions are time, fault-freeness, and flexibility, while the'soft' dimensions are style, steering, and safety. Szmigin

(1993) point out that quality is of three types viz; 'hard quality', 'soft quality' and 'outcome quality". The 'hard quality refers what is actually received by the customer from the service provider. The 'soft quality' refers the way in which the service is delivered by the employee of the service provider and 'outcome quality' refers whether the outcome of the service process is in line with the objectives of the customers.

Service quality is not judged by the customers on a single factor but they judge service quality on multiple factors/dimensions. Parasuraman, Zenithal and Berry (1985) have identified ten determinants/dimensions which the customers use in evaluation of the service quality. These dimensions are: reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, and communication, credibility. understanding the customer, security and tangibles. Garvin's (1987) has identified eight dimensions of service quality- performance, features, reliability, conformance, durability, serviceability, aesthetics, and perceived quality which customers use while making assessment of service quality and satisfaction judgment. Later, Parasuraman, Zenithal and Berry (1988) refers that customers use only five dimensions; tangibility reliability responsiveness, assurance and empathy, which are composed of twenty-two sub-dimensions.

Quality Assurance Institute (1989) identified twenty dimensions of service quality upon which customers evaluate the service quality. These twenty dimensions are: fundamental requirements, accuracy of output, system reliability, response to problems, on-line availability, implementation schedules, ease of use, timeliness of output, overall service quality, response time, attitude and communications, system flexibility, quality of output, cost-effectiveness, cost estimates, back-up and recovery procedures, adequacy of documentation, distribution of output, adequacy of training, data security. Johnston et, al. (1990) and Silvestro and Johnston (1990) have identified fifteen dimensions of service quality, which they categorized as 'hygiene factors', enhancing factors' and 'dual threshold factors'. Collier (1991) identified twelve dimensions of service quality-accuracy, volume and activity, convenience, time-oriented responsiveness, reliability, professionalism and competence, friendliness and consumer empathy, atmosphere and aesthetics, security and safety, productivity and efficiency, overall market and performance indicators, technology. Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Malhotra (2000) identified eleven dimensions of service quality-access, ease of navigation, efficiency, personalization, flexibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance/trust, site aesthetics, and price /knowledge. Lewis, Ioannou and Cui (2002) identified eight dimension of service quality tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, customer contact personal, commitment to customer, service portfolio, access and image. While there are many dimensions of the service upon which customers evaluate the service quality and make satisfaction judgment, customers have different quality expectations upon these dimensions and their satisfaction/dissatisfaction depends on the quality delivered on them.

SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Service quality is evaluated by the customers on the basis of expectations and perceptions. Customers compare actual performance of service with the expectations, a reference point against which they compare the performance. Customers have two types of expectations as a reference. One is 'desired level of expectation' and another is 'adequate level of expectation'. The desired level of expectation is the level of the service customers hope to receive or wished for level of performance (Gronroos 1982) and the adequate level of expectation is the level of service customers will accept and below that they will not accept. Customers typically hold similar desired expectations while as the adequate service expectation level on the other hand may vary from firm to firm within a category or subcategory. Customer's expectations are influenced by many factors such as the explicit service promises, implicit service promises made by advertisement and sales force, word of mouth communication customer's personal needs, and their past experience competitive offers in the market by other service firms etc.

- **Service Quality Gaps**

As shown in figure 1, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) suggested that there are five types of gaps that hinder the delivery of high-quality services: market information gap (GAP-1), service standard gap (GAP-2), service performance gap (GAP-3), internal communication gap (GAP-4), and customer gap (GAP-5). Of these five gaps, the first four determine the fifth gap (customer gap), which is the gap between the customer's expectations and their perceptions. This gap is the primary quality gap and the determinant of customer satisfaction.

- **Information Gap in the Market (GAP-1)**

This gap, which is the difference between what customers expect and what management believes they should expect, results from service firms' lack of understanding of customers' needs, wants, and expectations as well as their partial or erroneous knowledge of those expectations.

- **Gap in Service Standard (GAP-2)**

This gap is the disparity between the management's perceptions of consumers expectations and the quality standard established for the service delivery. This gap emerges owing to the divergence between the customer-driven standards and corporate driven standards.

- **Gap in service performance (GAP-3)**

This quality gap, which results from the difficulty of maintaining standardisation and adhering to the firm's standards and guidelines because of employee performance variability, is the difference between the service provider's actual performance on specified delivery standards and those standards.

➢ **External Communication Gap (GAP-4)**

This quality gap, which occurs when customers' expectations are inflated by too optimistic claims made in advertisements and the service is not supplied in accordance with those promises, is the difference between the service delivery and external communication.

➢ **Gap with Customers (GAP-5)**

One of the most important gaps in providing customers with quality and ensuring their satisfaction is the quality gap that exists between their expectations and perceptions; it is a dependent variable of the other four quality gaps. Companies must reduce these quality gaps, which are crucial to customer satisfaction, if they hope to attract customers and successfully compete in today's cutthroat market.

Conceptual Model of Service Quality are given bellow in Figure 1 below:

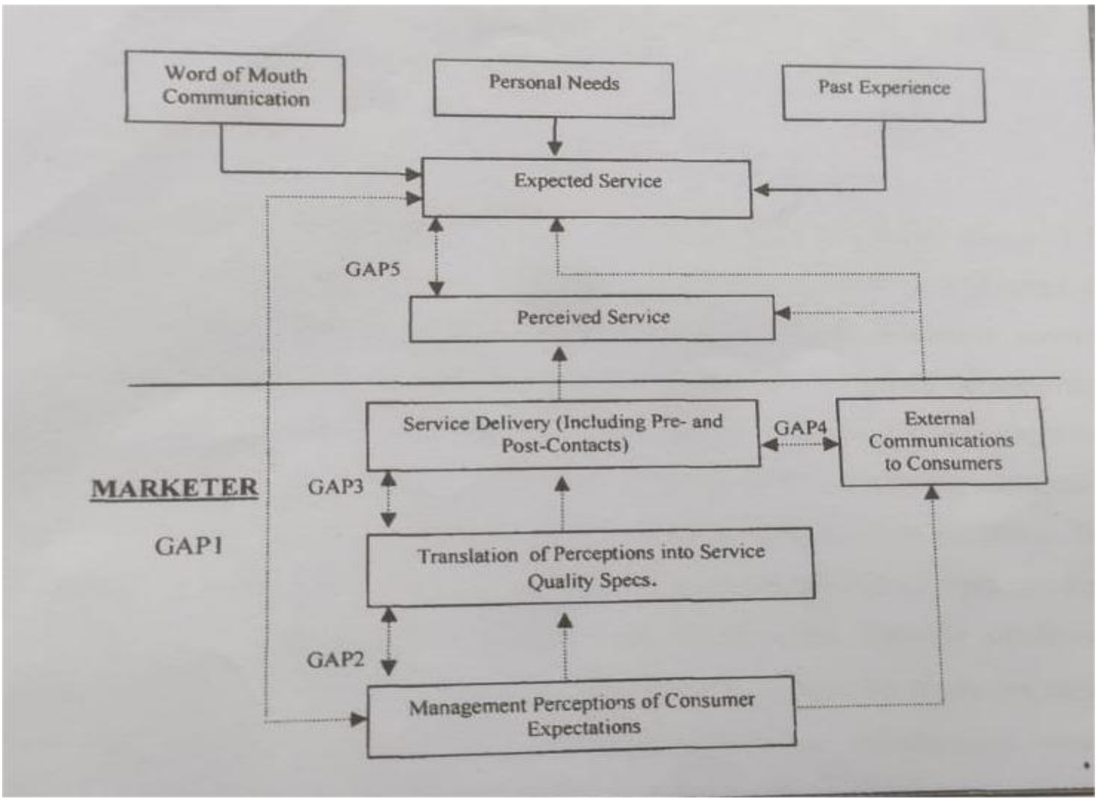

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Service Quality

Source: Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985)

- **Customers Satisfaction**

Customers assess whether a product or service meets their needs, desires, and expectations; if it does not, they are dissatisfied. The two perspectives that are typically used to discuss customer satisfaction are cognitive and emotional. The former considers satisfaction to be a positive emotional state that results from the consumption experience, while the latter considers it to be the "buyer's cognitive state of being adequately rewarded for sacrifices he has undergone and highlights satisfaction and dissatisfaction encompasses several that customers make revealed other concepts." Oliver (1980) assesses customer happiness or discontent by contrasting their pre-consumption expectations with their opinions of the service's performance. There is positive (negative) disconfirmation and an expected increase (reduction) in satisfaction if the performance is above (below) expectations. As a result, he disclosed that expectations determine consumer pleasure, and that disconfirmation and predictive expectations serve as the benchmarks. He thought that when a customer may readily make a performance difference and when there is significant salience or participation, the disconfirmation hypothesis of customer happiness is stronger. Furthermore, Oliver (1997) proposes that "assimilation" and "contrast-effect" are the two fundamental forces that propel the expectation-disconfirmation process of consumer satisfaction. Similar to Helson's (1964) adoption-level theory, which views expectations as the anchor for future performance evaluations, assimilation strategy suggests a strong reliance on expectations in reaching satisfaction judgements. In other words, consumers are believed to assimilate performance towards previously held expectations. On the other hand, customers tend to overestimate perceived performance levels, so that performance levels that surpass expectations are typically rated significantly higher than they actually are. This is how contrast effects show up in satisfaction assessments. Consumers are thought to amplify performance perceptions in the direction of performance discrepancy. According to Zeithaml (1988), customer satisfaction is the total evaluation of a product or service's usefulness based on the perceptions of what is provided (price paid and other expenses related to the purchase) and what is gained (benefits obtained). Two levels of aggregation have been used to determine customer satisfaction: a "overall assessment" and a "transaction-specific assessment" (Bitner & Hubbert, 1994; Parasuraman et al., 1994; Teas, 1993). Customer satisfaction is described as "the emotional reaction following a disconfirmation experience which acts on the base attitude level and is consumption-specific" at the first level (transaction-specific) (Oliver, 1980). From this perspective, it is to be assumed that an accumulation of transaction- specific assessments leads to a global assessment represented by perceived quality, i.e. the direction of causality is from customer satisfaction to service quality (Bitner, 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1991; Parasuraman et al., 1994). Customer pleasure will therefore come before the company's perceived quality. But at the second level, when customer satisfaction is described as a "overall assessment" (Anderson & Fornell, 1994; Bitner & Hubbert, 1994; Parasuraman et al., 1994), it means that the customer is generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the company based on all of their interactions and experiences with that specific company (Bitner & Hubbert, 1994).

Customer's satisfaction is influenced by many factors viz; service related factors, personal related factors and environmental factors. Price et al. (1995) has observed that customer satisfaction is influenced by his emotions and his satisfaction is enhanced by positive emotions such as the happiness, pleasure, elation and sense of warm heatedness. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1994) point's satisfaction is a function of his or her assessment of service quality/product quality and price. Folkes (1988) argues that attribution which is the perceived cause of events, influence perceptions of customer satisfaction. When a customer is surprised by an outcome bad or good, he tends to look for the reasons and their assessments of the reason can influence his satisfaction. Customer's satisfaction is also influenced by the perceptions of equity and faimess i.e. they make a comparison of the fairness of treatment given in comparison to other customers. In addition customer's satisfaction is also influenced by his individual feelings and his belief.

PROFITABILITY AND SERVICE QUALITY

The James L. Heskett, W. Earl Sasser, Jr., and Christopher W. L. Hart (1990). introduced "Service Profit Chain" concept. Their "Service Profit Chain" illustrates that growth and ir profit chain is as; service quality leads to the customer satisfaction, customer satiprofitability of a service firm is due to the series of relationships among different elements. The customer satisfaction leads to customer loyalty and customer loyalty leads to firm's revenue growth and profitability. Kordupleski, Rust and Anthony (1993) gave a model of service quality-market share and profitability. In this model the chain of effect is as; service quality leads customer's positive word- of-mouth and the positive word of mouth by the customers leads to the attraction of new customers and when new customers are attracted to the firm they increase Rust, Zahorik and market share and hence it leads to firm's profitability. Keiningham (1994) argued when service is performed well on quality level, it leads to customer satisfaction and customer satisfaction directly leads to the customer retention. The customer retention further leads to market share and finally lead to the profitability of the service firm. Thus when a service firm provides the quality service, customers get satisfied which result in profitability. The elements of these profit chain are customers' behavioural intensions which are the determinants of firm's profitability. These behavioural intensions are Loyalty, Word-of-Mouth, and Switching Behaviour.

When customers are satisfied with a service, they become loyal to the business; these customers create long-term bonds with the business that lower marketing costs through repeat business, lower operating costs through familiarity with the business's operating system, and increase revenue through less price sensitivity. The loyal customers give the business a steady, ready market with few fluctuations in service sales, and their base of satisfied and loyal customers gives the business more bargaining power with suppliers, partners, and channels. As a result, customer loyalty leads to net cash flow and lowers production costs for the business.

Word-of-mouth advertising is a common phenomenon among the satisfied and loyal customers and is the most effective promotional tool in today's competitive market. When customers are satisfied with the quality service they receive, they spread positive word-of-mouth in their interactions with other customers and recommend the firm's products to their friends, relatives, colleagues, and others. Their recommendation promotes the firm's services and attracts new customers, which decreases/saves the accusation costs of attracting new customers. As a result of their familiarity with the service firm's procedures, customers who remain with the company and do not transfer to other service providers secure future revenue for the company and lower the cost of future transactions, including those related to communications, sales, and services. The more customers that remain with the company, the more stable the customer base is, providing a relatively predictable source of future revenues and higher net cash flows.

CONCLUSION

For contemporary firms, supply chain optimisation for increased profitability, better service quality, and more customer satisfaction is a game-changing strategic strategy. Organisations must embrace integrated, customer-centric frameworks in place of traditional cost-reduction strategies as global competition heats up and customer expectations continue to change. The conversation emphasises how customer views, expectations, and satisfaction are greatly influenced by service quality, which is defined by dependability, responsiveness, tangibility, assurance, and empathy. Long-term relationships are eventually strengthened by high service quality, which closes the gaps between what clients expect and what they receive. Behavioural intents like loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and decreased switching behaviour are further driven by customer satisfaction, which is influenced by emotional, cognitive, and experiential elements. These behaviours serve as the foundation of the service profit chain, demonstrating how long-term profitability, operational effectiveness, and revenue stability are all influenced by happy customers. Additionally, devoted consumers save marketing and maintenance expenses while boosting supply chain bargaining strength and maintaining consistent demand. Businesses can better align internal operations with external expectations by using lean principles, digital technologies, precise demand forecasts, and cooperative supplier relationships. In the end, supply chain optimisation becomes a strategic enabler of value creation, sustainable growth, and long-lasting customer trust rather than just an operational requirement.

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