

Identify and Analyse Consumer Misbehaviour

Introduction

Research and studies have shown that consumer misbehaviour is becoming highly prevalent in certain sectors of the market. This kind of misbehaviour shown by consumers has serious implications both socially as well as financially and efforts to control such types of consumer misbehaviours are very vital issue for both the consumers as well as practitioners (Harris & Dumas, 2009). Since consumer misbehaviour has been highly important and acknowledged yet ignored topic by the researchers in this essay we will study consumer misbehaviour by first identifying what is consumer misbehaviour and analysing it by linking it with Consumption Theory. Then we will relate these three real life examples of consumer misbehaviour with the various aspects of marketing mix (4P's). Finally after thorough analysis we will define that how these three real life consumer misbehaviour examples have suggestions for the marketers which they can adopt to handle consumer misbehaviour or what techniques would be the best for the marketers to tackle consumer misbehaviour.

What is Consumer Misbehaviour?

Traditionally it has been found by the market researchers that the consumers most of the times behave in complaint as well as rational manner, while purchasing, or using as well as disposing off the products or services (Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985). But it is seen that misbehaving customers are rapidly increasing mostly during the service encounters (Fullerton & Punj, 1997) (Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998). Consumer misbehaviour can be better defined as the behavioural acts shown by the consumers which go against the generally applicable or acceptable codes of conduct in varied situations of consumption (Fullerton & Punj, 1993).

Mostly the acts of misbehaviour by any consumer include physical or verbal abuse, creating a loss or cost, trashing, theft as well as vandalism (Huefner & Hunt, 2000) and these are conceptually not the same as the other more appropriate (but -ve) behaviours just like switching, exit or a legitimate complaint. Most of the consumer misbehaviour examples

show that they have severe and adverse social, financial as well as psychological costs to be incurred by the organisations, other consumers and the company employee's too (Fullerton & Punj, 1993) (Harris & Reynolds, 2003). Thus the behaviour which violates the mostly accepted norm prevailing in the society is defined as consumer misbehaviour. There are various types of misbehaviours shown by consumer and some of them are stealing goods or shoplifting from retail stores. There is seen to be rapid rise in organised retail crime as there are groups of people who are being paid or pay others for just shoplifting the goods from retail stores, which are further sold in the black market by these organised crime groups.

Another quite common form of consumer misbehaviour which is quite prevalent is consumer fraud. Consumer fraud involves taking purposeful actions so as to either take advantage of or / and harm others. Some of the common examples which can be seen in the society and are prevalent are false claims of insurance, returning any clothing item after wearing it, stealing identity or identity theft and obtaining checks, bank accounts or credit cards through fraud. One more very common form of consumer misbehaviour which is commonly witnessed is piracy, sharing or copying of the video games, music, computer software and movies etc. Finally the biggest area of concern which is present in relation to the misbehaviour amongst the consumers is the rude consumers who are physically or verbally highly abusive or /and are non-cooperative, which results in violation of some of the company policies (Pride & Ferrell, 2014). Thus consumer misbehaviour can be seen as a subset of human deviance

Here are few illustrations of three real life consumer misbehaviour examples which have been observed by me during the course of my life. The first real life misbehaviour example which I saw was that of shoplifting. During shopping at a retail store I saw a group of school students and out of which one teenage girl shoplifted some cosmetics items while the salesperson was showing others the products. It has been seen that customer theft poses a major issue for most of the retailers across the globe although they have been continuously investing in retail security (Bamfield & Tonglet, 2000). Some of the researchers even call misbehaviour as the "dark side" of consumer behaviour and some consumer misbehaviours are illegal while some are immoral. Shoplifting is an illegal behaviour which is always considered to be immoral. It is not just the retailers who get affected by shoplifting but it is the honest customers also who get impacted by this misbehaviour. Shoplifting finally results in increased prices which the retailers start charging so as to cover the cost of shoplifting. At the same time increased retail security will impact the shopping experience in negative

manner (Tonglet, *Consumer Misbehaviour: Consumer's Perceptions of Shoplifting and Retail Security*, 2000).

Although shoplifting is considered to be a behaviour which is criminal by nature but it is also a type of consumer behaviour rather misbehaviour as it is a part of the manner people conduct while they assume the role of consumer (Fullerton & Punj, *What is Consumer Misbehaviour?*, 1997). Even the rational choice theories of crime also suggest that the criminal choice is quite similar to other behavioural choices (Cornish & Clarke, 1986) (Young, 1994). Thus clearly suggesting that shoplifting mainly occurs because of the choices as well as the decisions which are being made in retail environment. Therefore shoplifting behaviour shows many similarities just like the 'consumer behaviour', because just like consumer behaviour it also is the outcome of the coincidence of three factors mainly which are: desirable products; motivated consumer and the chance/ opportunity found to buy (steal) products (Felson, 1994) (Hayes, 1999). The Theory of Planned Behaviour has been used as a framework for analysing the determinants of shoplifting behaviour and it can also be applied to various diverse areas like dishonest actions (Beck & Ajzen, 1991), leisure choice (Ajzen & Driver, 1992), investment decisions (East, 1993) etc.

The second real life example of consumer misbehaviour which I saw was while dining out with my family I saw a consumer screaming very loudly, using abusive language and cursing the waiter just because the wrong order was taken by the waiter and thus he placed wrong items on his table. But this kind of misbehaviour was making other consumers also feel uncomfortable as it was disrupting other consumer's meals and in some cases it might even ruin the entire evening of some consumers who might have turned up in the restaurant to celebrate their special occasion. The chances are there that the waiter who received the scolding from the misbehaving consumer will underperform all through the rest of the evening due to tongue lashing received by him. This way all the other customers are also affected by the misbehaving actions of single customer. Abusive customers in such cases disrupt the whole exchange process. Rather for the exchanges to happen in orderly manner the expectations of the marketers, the consumers as well as the other consumers need to coincide with each other. Both shoplifting as well as abusive consumers are responsible for disrupting the exchange process (Fullerton & Punj, 2004).

There are many evidences which suggest there are many service encounters which are affected and impacted due to consumer misbehaviour (Harris & Reynolds, 2003, 2004) Harris

& Reynolds 2003, 2004). Traditional research methods often hinder the understanding of consumer misbehaviour as they have their own limitations which include options like written scenarios which are followed by self-report surveys. There are social desirability biases also which create reluctance in the minds of consumers to admit that they are misbehaving even in case of confidential or anonymous survey (Keeffe, 2005). The challenges especially in case of such situations where consumer misbehaves in service environments the challenges of consumer misbehaviour can be tackled by creating a simulation game for exploring consumer misbehaviour (Solomon M. , Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985).

Another real life example of consumer misbehaviour which has been seen quite often these days is sharing, copying and transferring movies and music files online or through computer accessories. Even my group of friends does so quite often instead of buying the CD or DVD of the new released movies they download the pirated versions from the internet and then all of the group members share these movie files thus watching latest movies free of cost without paying even a single penny. This is another quite common form of consumer misbehaviour which is visible these days and affects the organisations which produce movie and music. It is seen that people buy or exchange illicit goods an trade of contraband earns profits of millions every year. This kind of consumer misbehaviour has been analysed through a model which has four measurement predictors to find why consumers misbehave by buying pirated or illicit goods. These four predictor measure used are: buying situation; price; product type and perceived criminal risk. Part-worth conjoint analysis is being used for finding out the impact of individual predictor measure and the impact of every measure on the willingness to buy the illicit product. In this research it was found that every person had different criterion for evaluating the illicit goods in different manner. Thus a Cluster Analysis is done to segment these respondents and discriminant analysis is conducted for assessment of the variable importance. It is seen that the impacts varied as per clusters and the main predictors for buying or exchanging illicit goods were product type, price as well as the buying situation. While for some clusters it is seen that the interaction between the price and product type on one hand while the interaction of risks with the product type on the other hand also acted as a significant predictor (Albers-Miller, 1999).

The computer fraud is also a type of consumer misbehaviour which refers to any activity which is being conducted in illegal manner by either using Internet or by using computer technology. Some other forms of computer fraud are Identity theft; Computer hacking & spreading computer virus; illegal downloading of electronic material (Lake, 2009). The third

real life example falls in the category of illegal downloading of electronic material. With the rapid pace of technology improvements the ability of consumers has grown several times to get involved in sharing of illegal videos, video games, music and software. There are numerous sources which can be used by consumers for illicitly downloading any kind of electronic material for example peer-to-peer networks. Although the consumers have several alternatives for purchasing downloads immediately, but then too they keep on sharing videos, movies, software etc. in illegal or illicit manner (Moore, 1984). Such kind of misbehaviour costs the business millions of dollars as theft. The business loses money not just from the direct sale of the products but also loses money from the product which is being passed from one consumer to the other without any cost as done in the above stated example. Thus this kind of sharing results in decreased demand for the product purchase thus is costing the company profits.

It is seen that there are several internal reasons which motivate consumers to show misbehaviour and the fact is that consumers do get motivated by several reasons to show misbehaviour. Better understanding of the motivations does not make handling misbehaviour easier to handle or simply does not help in avoiding it, but it certainly provides you with ample amount of knowledge which helps you in sensing misbehaviour (Hiew, 1981). This knowledge once gained will definitely assists you in being aware as well as helps in taking preventive measures for avoiding consumer misbehaviour whenever and wherever possible. Few motivational factors which cause misbehaviour amongst consumers are : unfulfilled aspirations; seeking thrill; lacking learned moral constraints; pathological socialization; situational factors; differential association; compulsion and opportunism.

Learnings for Marketers and Businesses

Thus from the above analysis of consumer misbehaviour we can better understand the concept of misbehaviour shown by consumers mainly in the form of consumer dysfunction or consumer deviance. The thorough review of the marketing literature studied and conducted regarding consumer misbehaviour will help the marketers to differentiate the two main perspectives which the researchers hold about consumer misbehaviour which are : misbehaviour as deviance and secondly misbehaviour as a wider conduct. It has been found that mostly the marketers overlook or ignore consumer misbehaviour and thus put down the

whole cost of running a business lower. Moreover it has been found that the marketers are burdened by the idea of sovereignty of consumer which is governed by the dictum that “consumers are always correct”. But it is quite visible that even the customers lay, cheat, abuse or harass. This shows that consumer misbehaviour is multifaceted phenomenon which itself creates difficulty to pin down one single definition for misbehaviour (Lewin & Gollan, 2012). Therefore after reviewing several definitions consumer misbehaviour which also covers online or cyber misbehaviour, the researchers have found that the disruption thought or point of view of consumer misbehaviour is much more beneficial from managerial angle instead of the point of view which is based upon the violation of norms. The reason being the disorder caused in the business is not just unlawful or harmful, but it can also lead to loss of material resources, reputation of the organisation / or individuals and loss of well being.

The marketers thus need a Pre-di-post framework to deal with the issue of any type of consumer misbehaviour. Most of the marketers lay much focus on the deviance aspect of misbehaviour, which just puts a limit on types of problems to be focussed on as well as the range of solutions which can be normally considered. Thus the marketers need to adopt an alternative perspective about consumer misbehaviour which should be viewed as an unremarkable consequence of normal conditions which will in turn provide a wide range of handling strategies to the marketers (Lawrence & Koslow, 2012).

Marketers can effectively prevent shoplifting by thoroughly understanding the reason why the consumers get involved in this kind of misbehaviour, thus the above mentioned studies are helpful in utilising the consumer behaviour approach to get some understanding for the marketers regarding how the attitudes as well as beliefs of potential shoplifters combine with their point of view regarding the retail environment so as to influence their decision of stealing things (Tonglet, 2002). There are studies which indicate the shoplifting decision is mainly influenced by the pro-shoplifting attitudes, opportunities provided by retailers for shoplifting, viewpoints regarding lower risks of apprehensions as well as certain social factors, therefore the marketers need to reassess the deterrent messages they use while marketing their products to avoid shoplifting misbehaviour.

A more innovative approach to handle the difficulties in consumer misbehaviour research is to use another alternative research method and this could be developing a simulation for activating realistic cognitive, behavioural, accurate, and emotional responses amongst the respondents (Michael & Chen, 2006). Such types of simulation game have both

methodological as well as practical implications for the marketers. This will provide practically better understanding of consumer misbehaviour which will help the marketing managers for creating and development of right kind of policies to deal with consumers who misbehave. This will also help in creating much more effective training systems for training the service employees. Such kind of changes in the marketing environment will certainly have the potential to either bring a decline in the number of consumer misbehaviour incidences and / or will also assist in decreasing misbehaviour (Drennan, Drennan, & Keeffe, 2007). This will in turn bring about increased well being of the service employees and will also provide much safer and more agreeable workable environment.

Furthermore the marketers can use such kind of simulation games for training the frontline employees by modifying them a bit, so as to deal with misbehaving consumers in effective manner (Huefner & Hunt, 2000). Therefore more contextually accurate as well as flexible methods for assessment of drivers along with results of consumer misbehaviour can be developed which will provide deeper insight into the aspects of consumer misbehaviour as compared to the traditional research methods, thereby simulation games will act valuable tool for the marketers in enhancing their capacity (Drennan, Drennan, & Keeffe, 2007).

Then too, it is seen that even if the marketers understand all the motivations which cause misbehaviour in consumers, then too it is simply impossible to avoid all the misbehaviours which impact the business. However some of these misbehaviours conducted by consumers can be avoided. It is seen that mostly the consumer misbehaviours are not at all personal, rather these are the internal issues or problems with which the consumers deal and sometimes these issues do not have any kind of explanations (Kraut, 1976). The marketers can use information as well as knowledge which they have gained through deeply studying their consumers for understanding the consumers in better manner and thus finally being able to deter their misbehaviours. Marketers should adopt the strategy where just like they market their unique products and competitive pricing, they should also market the fact that the misbehaviour on the part of consumers will also not be tolerated. This can be done by applying deterrents like policies and signs (Lake, 2009). The business which does not have a no-tolerance policy which is public, then the consumers has in their mind that their misbehaviour will go unpunished. For example if the marketers want to deter the misbehaviour of shoplifting, then the consumer and business should be made aware of the signs associated with shoplifters and the business should also display a notice board in public about no-tolerance for shoplifting stating the shoplifting policy. The business can show their

policies regarding shoplifting by using signs as well as cameras along with security guards within their stores showing that shoplifting will not be tolerated.

Thus it is quite evident that although consumer misbehaviour cannot be avoided completely however it can certainly be minimised by exercising some steps of prevention by staying in tune with the customers and recognising few warning signs of misbehaviour. It can also be handled by devising effective policies and procedures which have consequences perfectly in place for the consumers who misbehave.

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