

ASSESSING THE E-SERVICE QUALITY AND SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN B2B E- MARKETPLACES

WITH REFERENCE TO INDIAMART

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The Indian B2B eCommerce market is expected to reach \$700 billion by 2020 which has 14 million retailers driving the market. The B2B eCommerce segment is one of the most promising sector which has higher profitability unlike the B2C segment. If B2C eCommerce relies on heavy discounts the B2B eCommerce gives greater emphasis on quality rather than on price, and higher volumes of purchases, etc. In this context, this article aims to assess the service quality and supplier relationship management practices in B2B e-marketplaces with special reference to IndiaMART, Coimbatore.

The primary objective of the study was to assess the supplier evaluation of the service quality and supplier relationship management practices in B2B e-marketplaces. Using a structured questionnaire survey is conducted with 150 samples. The questionnaire is designed for the supplier evaluation of IndiaMART website using service quality components such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance. A supplier relationship management practice of the IndiaMART which is one of top player B2B e-marketplaces is also measured.

Better supplier development practices such as evaluating supplier performance and providing feedback, collaborating with supplier, recognition of quality products and suppliers along with well organized website, prompt response and accurate delivery service well enhance the supplier performance as well as the a competitive strength in the B2B e-marketplace.

Keywords: E- Service Quality, Supplier relationship management, B2B e-market place, suppliers

Assessing the E-Service Quality and Supplier Relationship Management Practices in B2B E- Marketplaces

Introduction

The Indian B2B eCommerce market is expected to reach \$700 billion by 2020 which has 14 million retailers driving the market. The B2B eCommerce segment is one of the most promising sector which has higher profitability unlike the B2C segment. If B2C eCommerce relies on heavy discounts the B2B eCommerce gives greater emphasis on quality rather than on price, and higher volumes of purchases, etc. In this context, this article aims to assess the service quality and supplier relationship management practices in B2B e-marketplaces with special reference to IndiaMART, Coimbatore.

B2B companies can be found in every industry, from manufacturing to retail. B2B online businesses in India generated an estimated 4.5 million in revenues in 2016. The top B2B businesses are Indiamart.com, Alibaba.com, Tradeindia.com, matexnet.com, Thomasnet.com, etc. The study of business-to-business interactions and relationships offers new ways of collaborating across organizational boundaries. Companies can profit from various benefits of B2B E-marketplaces which are clustered into three groups: process improvements, cost reductions and new business generation. However, in order to gain sustainable and tangible success, a company needs to thoughtfully analyze the different B2B E-marketplace concepts and approaches before implementing a specific one. In this context, service quality of the e-marketplace and the development of relationship between two parties are critical factors which will determine the success.

E-service is different from traditional service, which is based on interactive information flow between customers and service providers companies can achieve competitive capabilities by offering good e-services to customers (Oliveria et al, 2002). E-service quality has been regarded as having the potential not only to deliver strategic benefits, but also to enhance operational efficiency and profitability (Cronin,2003).

E-service is becoming even more critical for companies to retain and attract customers. Companies can achieve competitive capabilities by offering good e-services to customers (Oliveria et al, 2002). Service quality has strong impact on customer satisfaction as well as performance of companies. Improving e-service quality to satisfy and retain customers is becoming a challenging issue. Quality of e-service is still in its infancy, both theoretically and empirically. In this scenario, this study focuses on assessing the e-service quality and Supplier Relationship Management of the B2B e-marketplace.

Research in the business to business (B2B) field is still very limited and these studies in the field of e-commerce between firms (B2B) have been very minimal (Akinci et al, 2010; Ding et al, 2011). Started as a business directory IndiaMART has continuously improved and established an e-marketplace, where sellers and buyers could interact and do business. To reduce the customer churn as well as to provide a better service, the company realized the importance of developing a large database of sellers. Hence, to build the database, it offered 'free listing with free query forwarding' to the sellers. With the increasing penetration of mobile phones and internet, the company increased the speed of customer acquisition, and also adopted a Freemium (free + premium) business model, where it offered certain services for free to the MSMEs and charged for the registration fee for the premium services. This approach helped to build awareness and acceptance among the MSMEs, especially those who are not willing to avail the fee based services without seeing the results. This study focuses on this area in particular, a business model known as the B2B e-marketplace (Anni Gupta et al, 2017).

To conceptualize e-service quality, an examination of the SERVQUAL scale is required since most of the current e-service quality scales are developed based on the SERVQUAL instrument. The SERVQUAL scale was developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988), aiming at providing a generic instrument for measuring service quality across a broad range of service categories. The widely used SERVQUAL instrument is composed of five dimensions, which are based on the original ten dimensions developed by them. The five dimensions of SERVQUAL for online platforms are:

Tangibility

Services are tangible as customers derive their perception of service quality by comparing the tangible associated with these services provided. It includes appealing and well organized website, consistent and standardized navigation, well-organized appearance of user interface, quickly downloading, easy use of the online transaction.

Reliability

Reliability means that the company delivers on its promises. It includes accurate delivery service, complete order service, company being truthful about its offering, the online service always correct, keeping service promise, keeping promotion promise, accurate online booking records, website always available.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness dimension emphasizes attentiveness and promptness in dealing with customer's requests, questions, complaints and problems. It includes adequate contact information and performance, prompt responses to customers, timely responses to customers, adequate response time, quickly solve problems.

Empathy

Empathy means firms provide caring individualized attention the firms provide its customers. It includes good personal attention, adequate contacts, and address complaints friendly, consistently courteous.

Security

Security is the degree to which the site is safe and protects customer information. This dimension refers to the protection of personal information associated with the risk perceived when making a purchase online.

Supplier relationship management practices in B2B marketplace

Supplier relationship management systems were developed to coordinate and automate the process concerned with the supplier integration and communication. Supplier relationship management deals with all aspects of the business relationship between companies and their suppliers. It describes the business structures and processes required by companies to communicate with their suppliers, and managing the interactions with suppliers while providing methods, processes and tools to support the different phases of a direct supplier relationship, e.g. identification, evaluation, qualification, and if necessary termination (Mettler and Rohner, 2009). In practices, SRM entails creating closer, more collaborative relationship with key

suppliers in order to cover and realize new value and reduce risk of failure. Companies interact with suppliers-negotiating contracts, purchasing, managing logistics and delivery, collaborating on product designs, etc (Hughes, J. 2010).

As B2B e-marketplace are increasingly hypercompetitive. It is important for the existing players to provide good e-service quality and maintain supplier relationship to gain competitive advantage. IndiaMART being the India's largest online B2B marketplace connecting global buyers with suppliers aims to build long-lasting relationships with its users. The company chose dynamic remarketing for its ability to re-engage buyers with personalized messages, increase the conversion rates for its display ads, increase lead volume and meet a target cost-per-lead. This study focuses on "Assessing the service quality and Supplier Relationship Management practices in B2B E-marketplaces".

i) To measure the suppliers perception of e- service quality of B2B e-marketplace brand.

ii) To identify supplier relationship management practices in B2B e-marketplace brand.

It aims to measure the supplier evaluation of website service quality and supplier relationship management practices and highlights the areas where company is performing well and show those which require improvement.

Review of Literature

B2B electronic commerce has a potential impact on any area of business, from the supplier's side, the company's infrastructure, company's management processes, the interface with the customer to linkages to the distributors (Hartmann, E. 2013). The business models vary by the number of buyers and sellers trading on the electronic marketplace. It has three types of focusing on marketplace: marketplaces focusing on sellers, marketplaces focusing on buyers and neutral marketplaces, which do not favor either sellers or buyers but attract both (Kaplan & Sawhney 2000; Rosson 2000).

Electronic Commerce is the commercial transactions using computer and communications technologies which involve the exchange of money, goods, obligations, information or ideas (Zwass 1996, Guay & Ettwein 1998, Standifird 2001). The unique feature of a B2B exchange is that it brings multiple buyers and sellers together in a virtual sense in one central market space and enables them to buy and sell from each other at a dynamic price, which is determined in accordance with the rules of the exchange (Malone et al.,1994, Nokkentved ,2000).

E-marketplaces has been classified into two according to their transactional content as vertical or horizontal (Balocco et al., 2010; Barrat and Rosdahl, 2002; Lee, 2005; Chien et al., 2012; Janita and Miranda,2013). Vertical e-marketplaces offer goods and services directly related to the production process of a specific industrial sector. Horizontal e-marketplaces offer indirect goods and services common to all industrial sectors, and necessary although not strategic to firms' activities in different sectors of industrial activity (Popovic, 2002; Lee , 2005 ; White et al, 2007; Wang et al., 2012), A second classification of e-marketplaces is in terms of ownership (Lee, 2005; Kaplan and Sawhney, 2000; Ordanini and Pol, 2001).

The e-marketplace is defined as to a place, meeting point, or location at which the transaction takes place (Segev et al. 1999; Gulledge, 2002; Brunn, Jensen and Skovgaard, 2002; Petersen et al., 2007), the system of information about products or services (Choudhury et al., 1998), as an intermediary or business community (Brunn, Jensen and Skovgaard, 2001; Dai and Kauffman, 2002;), or as a medium that assigns different roles to the members of the community and establishes conditions for participation (Grieger, 2003).

While work in the business-to-consumer (B2C) field is still very limited, studies in the field of e-commerce between firms, business-to-business (B2B), have been even fewer and farther between. It is precisely this area which is the focus of the present work – in particular, a business model known as the B2B e-marketplace or e-marketplace (Akinici et al., 2010 and Ding et al , 2011). It also offers various value-added services that improve relationships between buyers and sellers (Janita and Miranda, 2013) .

E-SERVICE QUALITY

Companies can achieve competitive capabilities by offering good e- services to customers. Service quality has strong impacts on customer satisfaction on the performance of companies. Oliveria et al., (2002) propose a theoretical scale to measure e-service quality, which provides fresh insight into the dimensions of e-service quality.

"E-SQ can be defined as the extent to which a website facilitates efficient and effective shopping, purchasing, and delivery of products and services." As one observes in recent research in the B2B context, academic interest has been directed to measuring the quality of e-service"(Zeithaml et al.,2002).

E-service quality has been regarded as having the potential not only to deliver strategic benefits, but also to enhance operational efficiency and profitability”(J.J. Cronin,2003). E-service quality, is unanimity among researchers about its multidimensionality; The lack of consensus concerning the nature of e-service quality dimensions results in different approaches and outcomes as well as the existence of research gaps. Therefore, the literature on e-service quality calls for its more complete and comprehensive understanding and conceptualization” (Kim and Stoel , 2004).

Scales to measure E-service Quality

Scale	Author	Dimensions	Context
SERVQUAL	Zeithaml, et. al (2002), Li and Suomi (2009)	Tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy	E-service quality
E-S-QUAL	Parasuraman et al.(1985,1988)	Efficiency, system availability, fulfillment, and privacy, and the three measures of the recovery dimensions are responsiveness, compensation, and contact	Online retailing
SITEQUAL	Yoo and Donthu (2001)	Ease of use, aesthetic design, processing speed, and security.	Online retailing
WEBQUAL	Lociacono et al. (2000)	Information, interactivity, trust, response time, website design, Online intuitiveness, flow, innovativeness, integrated communication, business process and substitutability	Online retailing service quality
E-TailQ	Wolfenbarger and Gilly (2002)	Website design, reliability, security, and customer service.	online shopping

To improve the service provided to users and ensures their future loyalty, it would be interesting for managers to be aware of these dimensions and to invest in improving these aspects for the future.

Supplier Relationship Management Practices

Supplier development refers to an organization’s efforts to create and maintain a network of competitive suppliers with a long-term cooperative effort to enhance a supplier’s performance and capabilities (Watts and Hahn ,1993; Chavhan et, al, 2012). Supplier development practices include measuring supplier performance, involving key suppliers in product design, identifying key personnel and creating a cross functional team, measuring supplier’s readiness for change, build commitment through collaboration, implement system-wide changes, transition out of the supplier’s organization, establish follow-up and recognition procedure (Hartley and Jones, 1997; Chenoweth, et.al., 2010).

Supplier relationship management activities include criterion in selecting suppliers, supplier involvement in product development, establishing long term supplier buyer supplier relationship, etc. A close relationship means that channel participants share the risks and rewards and have willingness to maintain the relationship over the long term (Stuart, 1993). The suppliers not only design the components but also help develop the new product concept. Early supplier involvement is important in the product development process to reduce the time –to-market on new product introduction. Reduction of the supplier base is a unique characteristic of contemporary buyer-supplier relationship as the multiple sourcing has several disadvantages (Lilliecreutz 1998).

(Dickson,1996) states that three factors are the ability to meet quality standard, the ability to deliver products on time and the performance history are the most critical determinants in choosing suppliers and in measuring their performance. Strategically managed long-term relationships with key suppliers can have a positive impact on the firm’s financial performance (John N. Pearson, 2000).

Methodology

This research adopted descriptive design where it aims to explore the suppliers’ perception of an e-market place. Population for this study are the suppliers who used IndiaMART website for selling their product. Using a structured questionnaire, a survey is conducted with 150 sample through convenience sampling

technique. Sample respondents are selected only based on the criteria of usages of IndiaMART to promote and their sell products. Product specifications are not considered for this research. The questionnaire is designed for the supplier evaluation of IndiaMART website using service quality components such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance and the supplier relationship management practices.

Discussion and Analysis

Suppliers' opinion on the Services of IndiaMART

IndiaMART always ensures the quality of the product it supplies to its customers. Suppliers who promote their quality products through IndiaMART get more leads and better profit. The following table describes the suppliers' opinion on the various factors of relationship between IndiaMART and its suppliers.

Table 1: Suppliers' opinion on the Services of IndiaMART

Scale Variables	No: of Respondents	Percentage
Years of Relationship with IndiaMART		
1-3 years	64	42.7
4-6 years	37	24.7
7-9 years	23	15.3
More than 9 years	26	17.3
Referrals for IndiaMART suppliers		
Through website	57	38.0
Employee of the company	28	18.7
Friends	48	32.0
Others	17	11.3
Leads Generated		
Very Low	7	4.7
Not as promised	12	8.0
As promised	78	52.0
More than expected/promised	53	35.3
Services Offered by IndiaMART are satisfactory		
Yes	97	64.7
No	28	18.7
Can be improved	25	16.7
Continuation of Relationship at IndiaMART		
Yes	124	82.7
No	25	17.3
Willingness To Recommend		
Yes	137	91.3
No	13	8.7
Value of the Generated Leads by the company		
Highly Satisfied	15	10.0
Satisfied	33	22.0
Neutral	48	32.0
Dissatisfied	38	25.3
Strongly Dissatisfied	15	10.7

Establishing a good supplier relationship ensures the longevity of the business. The years of relationship between IndiaMART and its suppliers showcases the consistency in the performance of both parties involved. Among the sample respondents, 42.7 percentages are using IndiaMART for 1-3 years, 24.7 percentage are using for 4-6 years, 15.3 percentage are being suppliers on IndiaMART for 7-9 years, and 17.3 percentage are in relationship with more than 9 years.

Referrals are who promote products or services to new customers either for fees or based on their experience which is very important in B2B businesses. Among the sample respondents, 38% came to know about IndiaMART through website, and 18.7% through employee of the company and 32% through friends for the remaining 11.3 % the referral came through various other sources.

The suppliers are attracted to IndaMART due its unique policy of Freemium based promotion. Initially the suppliers are offered free services to try the IndiaMART offer. Later they have to subscribe the e-portal to continue the services they have received. The service is of generating leads for the suppliers' products. Among the sample respondents 52% stated that the leads generated are as promised by the company and 35.3% expressed that the number of leads generated are much higher than the promised number. However, 8% and 4.7 % reported that the leads generated are much lower than the required. While Majority 64.7% stated that they are satisfied with the services offered by India, other 16.7% of respondents would like IndiaMART to improve their services and remaining 18.6 % are not satisfied.

The relationship either ends abruptly or continues over the time period. Suppliers' intention of continuation of relationship among the sample respondents are as follows- 82.7 % intend to continue their relationship with IndiaMART while the remaining have other ideas. Willingness to recommend a product or service depends on the satisfaction and quality of the services provided. Suppliers willingness to recommend the IndiaMART reveals that IndiaMART is giving its best to satisfy both their suppliers and customers. Majority 91.3% of sample respondents said that they will recommend IndiaMART e-market place to other people.

Supplier relationship, referrals, satisfaction everything is related to the value of the leads given by IndiaMART. Nearly 32 % of the suppliers are satisfied and another 32% expressed neither satisfaction nor satisfaction on the statement.

Supplier evaluation of IndiaMART website

Supplier evaluation of IndiaMART website is done by adopting the dimensions of e-service quality which are the tangibility, reliability, responsiveness and empathy. The mean score value are shown in the below table.

Table 2 : Supplier evaluation of IndiaMART website

Dimensions	Specific elements	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Mean Score Value
Tangibility	Appealing well and organized website	9	67	53	12	9	2.63
	There is consistent and standardized navigation	18	18	55	20	39	3.29
	Easy use of online transaction	5	35	47	38	25	3.29
	Quickly downloading	4	53	33	32	28	3.18
Reliability	Accurate delivery service.	10	54	66	15	5	2.67
	Complete order service	5	62	40	32	11	2.88
	Company being truthful about its offering	43	28	35	24	20	2.67
	The online services is always correct	25	22	51	41	11	2.94
	Keeps services promises	19	24	61	26	20	3.03
	Keeps promotion promise	21	28	44	35	22	3.06
	Website always available	13	18	75	19	25	3.17
Responsive ness	Adequate contact are provided	13	17	74	22	24	3.18
	prompt responses to customers	35	24	42	44	5	2.73
	Timely responses to customers	21	16	45	33	35	3.30

Empathy	Good personal attention	43	23	60	24	0	2.43
	Adequate contacts	36	13	53	41	7	2.80
	Addresses complaints friendly and promptly.	29	10	50	45	16	3.06
	Consistently courteous	27	12	45	54	12	3.08
Security	Protects user's information	11	36	45	53	5	3.03
	Privacy statement and e-mail notification accompany e-commerce orders	9	20	35	51	35	2.75

Source: Primary Data

Suppliers agree that there is a consistent and standardized navigation (3.29), easy online transactions and quick downloading of the catalogues and product information on IndiaMART website along the tangibility dimensions. They agree that IndiaMART keeps its promise on the services provided (3.03), promotions (3.06) and also the availability of the website on the reliability dimension. Suppliers agree that IndiaMART provides timely responses to customers (3.30) and also enough contact persons are available when faced with a problem or query. On the Empathy dimension respondents gave high score for the company's efforts on addressing complaints friendly and promptly(3.06) and being courteous(3.08 with their users. Another important dimension on the e-service quality is security which includes the protecting users' personal information and informing and educating the users about the privacy policies of the company which was scored 3.03 and 2.75 respectively.

Supplier Relationship Management Practices

Supplier development refers to an organization's efforts to create and maintain a network of competent suppliers. Supplier relationship management activities includes supplier evaluation, feedback, raising performance expectations, education and training for supplier personnel, supplier recognition, and so on. Supplier opinion on the basic supplier relationship management practices of IndiaMART are depicted in the below table.

Table 3 : Supplier Relationship Management Practices

Supplier Development Practices	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score Value
IndiaMART evaluates performance of the suppliers	13	43	72	10	12	2.77
IndiaMART provides feedback to suppliers for further improvement.	11	36	45	53	5	3.03
Specific and clear criteria's are established regarding the quality of products promoted on IndiaMART.	23	34	72	21	0	2.61
They provide training for suppliers to improve their performance	27	23	32	30	38	3.19
Intensive information exchange happens between IndiaMART and its suppliers.	6	58	42	21	23	2.98
There is an engagement and sponsorship in IndiaMART from top management.	14	67	41	28	0	2.55
IndiaMART strives to establish long-term relationship with suppliers.	9	48	55	21	17	2.93

Sources: Primary Data

From the table, it could be inferred that suppliers agree that IndiaMART provides feedback to the suppliers, training for suppliers to improve their performance (3.19) strives to establish long term relationship with suppliers (2.93) and also enough interactions are happening between the company and its users.

FINDINGS & SUGGESTIONS

The data collected were analyzed and the following findings were drawn

Profile of the sample suppliers - Majority of the respondents are Suppliers of IndiaMART for about 1-3 years and website are major source of information. Majority of the respondents are satisfied with the services offered by the IndiaMART and accepted that it provides promised leads for their products thus are willing to recommend the usage of IndiaMART and also continue their relationship with the e-market place.

IndiaMART can come up with referral programs which will encourage its employees and others to promote IndiaMART to suppliers as well as to customers. It can also ensure its presence on various websites and can highlight the advantage of choosing IndiaMART as the platform in the B2B e-marketplaces.

Supplier Relationship Management- IndiaMART provides training for suppliers to improve their performance. Supplier disagree that there is low engagement and sponsorship in IndiaMART from top management. IndiaMART strives to establish long term relationship with suppliers and rely on high quality suppliers.

IndiaMART can encourage constant communication with suppliers and its customers which will help suppliers to come up with better product design and improve product deliveries. A system should be established to ensure the quality of the products promoted on the website.

Majority of the sample suppliers are ready to continue their relationship with IndiaMART, thus IndiaMART can focus on improving its supplier relationship management practices to gain competitive advantage. IndiaMART needs to discuss with its suppliers and can devise payment policies for the mutual benefit of both the parties.

Suppliers expect IndiaMART to evaluate their performance and feedback for further improvement. They also expect IndiaMART to establish specific and clear criteria regarding the quality, design etc of the products as per customer expectations. Collaborating with suppliers in product development and plant visits will ensure quality products.

IndiaMART need to establish clear criteria and policies in selecting suppliers and can provide guidance to their supplier in their business development process which will earn supplier trust and enhance the relationship with suppliers.

Suppliers who provide best quality products may not be able to give products at low cost all the times; thus suppliers expect IndiaMart to select supplier based on quality and lead time in delivering products rather than the cost.

Supplier evaluation of IndiaMART website based eservice quality components - IndiaMART offers consistent and standardized navigation, easy online transaction, IndiaMART keeps its service and promotion promises and the website is always available. IndiaMART provides timely responses to customers and addresses complaints friendly and promptly and courteous.

Supplier expect well organized website and accurate delivery service to customers and transparency and truthful about their offering and also personal attention to customers. Better supplier development practices such as evaluating supplier performance and providing feedback, collaborating with supplier in product development , sourcing products from limited number of suppliers , recognition of quality products and suppliers and regular plant visits to ensure quality and also proper supplier management orientation and well organized website with prompt response and accurate delivery service well enhance the supplier performance as well as the competitive strength in the B2B e-marketplace.

CONCLUSION

The supplier relationship management results in better quality, customer services and supplier performance. The primary objective of this research is to assess the e service quality of IndiaMART website and the supplier relationship management practices of IndiaMART. It revealed that the suppliers expect conducive environment which promotes interactions between suppliers and the company and generating quality leads will give a competing edge for the e market place. This research is limited to the suppliers from Coimbatore only, thus the results cannot be generalized.

To conclude, e-business organization who compete in the hyper-competitive B2B e-marketplace, need to focus on better supplier development practices, and managing long term relationship with quality

suppliers, providing e-service quality and well organized accessible website to improve the supplier performance and thereby ensuring competitive advantage in delivering quality product on time to customers.

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