

Dissertation Report
On
Customers' perception of value from eCRM features on
airline E-ticketing Websites

Submitted By
Nitin Rajput
2K12/MBA/41

Under The Guidance of:
Mr. Vikas Gupta
(Assistant Professor)



Delhi School of Management
Delhi Technological University
Bawana Road Delhi 110042

May 2014

Certificate from the Institute

This is to certify that the Project Report titled “**Customers’ perception of value from eCRM features on airline E-ticketing Websites**”, is a bona-fide work carried out by Mr Nitin Rajput of MBA 2012-14 and submitted to Delhi School of Management, Delhi Technological University, Bawana Road, Delhi-42 in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Masters of Business Administration.

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Signature of Head (DSM)

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Declaration

I **Nitin Rajput**, student of MBA 2012-14 of Delhi School of Management, Delhi Technological University, Bawana Road, Delhi-42 declare that Dissertation report on “**Customers’ perception of value from eCRM features on airline E-ticketing Websites**” submitted in partial fulfilment of Degree of Masters of Business Administration is the original work conducted by me.

The information and data given in the report is authentic to the best of my knowledge.

This Report is not being submitted to any other University for award of any other Degree, Diploma and Fellowship

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis is done as part of Master's program in Business Administration at Delhi School of Management of Delhi Technological University. There were many people who contributed towards the success of this research study and I would like to thank for their valuable time, efforts and well wishes.

I would like to thank my guide Mr. Vikas Gupta, (*Assistant professor, Delhi School of Management, DTU*) without whose guidance a successful completion of this research project might have been a very difficult task to complete. His helping ideas showed me the way to proceed. I am really grateful for that. I would also like to thank all respondents who gave their valuable time during the data collection phase.

Delhi Technological University

Delhi,

May 2014

Nitin Rajput

Summary

Companies can observe increase in profit, if the customers are in stronger relationship with them due to the very well-known fact that cost of getting a customer is five to eight times of maintaining an existing customer. Traditional marketers have been using Customer Relationship Management techniques to address these issues. To address this issue in an online environment the latest technique which the companies are using is Electronic Customer Relationship Management (eCRM). It is emphasized by researchers that every organization should educate themselves about eCRM. All the eCRM features are not important to be presented on the websites for customer satisfaction and profitability of the company due to the fact that implementation of these features may be very costly for the company. Therefore successful implementation of eCRM applications (web-based applications) is important and beneficial for both customers and companies. Problem discussion derives the need of determining customer value online from different features of eCRM. For our research travel industry was chosen due to its attractiveness in the online business environment. The number of customers who buy online airline tickets is increasing day by day making it one of the strongest performing sectors of e-Commerce. Major challenge for online travel firms is to retain customers by building effective relationship strategies. Due to the competitive nature of the online travel industry and for the successful implementation of eCRM applications it was necessary to know the customers' value perceptions about the different features of eCRM. Findings of the study shows that all the features were not important for customer satisfaction, at the same time, websites were not providing all the features discussed by theory whereas customers' showed their willingness to use those features if provided. It is also discovered that after sale services through internet, can cause customer retention.

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INTRODUCTION

Wang and Head (2006) describe two stages namely customer acquisition and customer retention for building customer base in an online business environment. First stage is related towards attracting customers to visit a retailer website, and make purchases where as in second stage properly satisfied and experienced customers return and establish a long-term relationship. Different researchers have been stressing on stronger relationships of customers with the companies.

It is observed that profits of companies can rise if their customers are in stronger relationship with them. The properly served customers can generate more profits for the companies and are good advertisers of the companies as well. Reichheld and Teal (1996) also believe that most businesses can observe an increase in profits if the customers stay longer with them. Ross (2005) has mentioned that cost of getting a new customer is five to eight times of maintaining an existing customer. The customers become more dependent on the company as their lifetime value grows with the company, and in this way there are less chances that customers will be attracted of the lower prices offers of the other competitors. He also believes that loyal customers are advocators of the business and encourage friends and acquaintances to buy.

The factors that can contribute towards customer's intention to build a stronger relationship with an online retailer are still not well understood. They believe that most research for online consumer behaviour is related to customer acquisition and there is very less research on the topic of customer retention. According to them, one of the reasons for the failure of many dot-com companies is the lack of customer retention. Due to this lack of research many organizations lose a prominent ratio of their customers each year and even do not know about why their customers are leaving or spending less, or do not care. He mentions that poor service is the most common reason for changing suppliers than the price. According to him there are four different reasons of customer defections namely, too little contact with their customers, too little individual attention, poor quality attention- especially when problems are encountered and generally poor standards. He believes that improvement in these areas can encourage customers to stay and reduce the amount of customer defection but further steps are needed to create loyal and more-spending customers. According to him "96 percent of unhappy customers never complain. But if their problem remains unsolved- they usually tell ten other customers!"

From the above discussion we can infer that it is important for companies to retain their customers by making certain kind of relationships with them, in order to be successful and profitable. This is exactly what Ross (2005) is of the view that companies for many years have been using Customer Relationship Management (CRM) methods in traditional ways in past as well. He defines the CRM as the combination of marketing, sales and service activities of an organization for the purpose of knowing its customers, understanding their needs, knowing the best product and service mix for them and providing services and values that will lead to profitability and will strengthen the relationship with the customers.

According to Gummesson (2002, p. 3) and Hughes (2003, p. 21) Customer Relationship management (CRM) emerges in the marketing world in early 1990's. Gummesson (2002, p. 3) defines CRM as "*CRM is the values and strategies of relationship marketing- with particular emphasis on customer relationships- turned into practical application.*" Hughes 2003 (p. 21-22) explains that CRM was based on the idea to gather much information about customers, prospects, promotions, and other such things and to put them in a big database. According to them there were two fundamental goals under consideration for designing CRM. First was to maintain relationships with customers based on information about the customers and to use that information to guide communications and contacts with the customers and second was to make right offering to the right customers at right time with the help of available information, so that sales can be increased and customers become happy.

According to Chaffey et al. (2003, p. 218-223) CRM is an approach towards building and keeping long term relations with the customers. CRM implicates incorporation of several marketing approaches such as relationship marketing (RM), one-to-one marketing, direct marketing and database marketing. It is quite pertinent to throw light on all these marketing approaches. According to Gordon (1998, p. 9) "*Relationship Marketing is the ongoing process of identifying and creating new value with individual customers and then sharing the benefits from this over a life- time of association. It involves the understanding, focusing and management of ongoing collaboration and sharing through interdependence and organizational alignment.*" He also states that although relationship marketing employs traditional marketing principles yet it is very different. Gummesson (2002, p. 3) defines RM as "*Marketing based on interaction within networks of relationships*". Whereas Solomon, (2006, p. 11) describes it as the phenomenon of making relationships between brands and customers that will last a lifetime where marketers interact with customers on a regular basis; give them certain facilities which cause the customers to keep in touch with the brand. *In one-to-one marketing*, according to Chaffey et al., (2003, p. 218) a unique dialogue occurs between a company and individual customers or group of customers whereas *direct marketing* is the way of targeting marketing communications and (often) delivering the value proposition itself to individual customer. Solomon, (2006, p. 11) states that another way of relation- ship building is *database marketing* which is a process of storing and tracking consumers' buying habits through the use of computer and making policies and strategic decisions according to customer's needs. Therefore a comprehensive definition of CRM can be described as "*Customer Relationship management (Anderson and Kerr, 2001, p. 2) is a comprehensive approach for creating, maintaining and expanding customer relationships.*"

There is a strong competition among businesses today therefore managers and marketers are agreed on developing long term relationships with their customers for the development and survival of the companies. Companies with stronger relationship with customers are in

the best position to retain their customers. CRM is an effective method to maintain customer database and by that company can best understand the customers' needs and more precisely their relationship need better than the other competitors. Stronger relationship with the customers is more important than low prices, big promotion offers, and advanced technology. Yaeckel et al. (2002, p. 245-246) believe that CRM is not a new concept; it is a process not a software product or technology. This process manages interactions between a company and its customers. Hardware, software, and service are one of the components for supporting the strategy of CRM. CRM can be beneficial in two ways, firstly it improves customer retention and loyalty and secondly the higher customer profitability because of less customer recruiting costs and reduced costs of sales. According to Romano et al. (2004) the latest technique which the companies are using now a day for increasing and enhancing their marketing skills is electronic customer relationship management (eCRM).

This Introduction part shows that CRM and eCRM are the strategies which companies can use for building stronger relationships with customers in order to be profitable and successful in long run.

1.1 Problem Discussion

There are many challenges for running business over the Internet. One of them is how to make Internet profitable for both Internet suppliers and users. For this reason IT industry is making efforts for defining and constructing business solutions over the Internet. Chaffey et al. (2003, p. 218-223) defines electronic customer relationship marketing (eCRM) as the use of databases, personalized web access to the databases (intranet by employees and extranet by customers), e-mail and workflow to achieve CRM objectives. By work flow they mean automation of CRM processes. They further state that many dot-coms did huge expenditures on customer acquisition but were failed to build relationships with customers which causes their business failure. ECRM is the application of e-technology (or Internet-based technology) to achieve CRM objectives.

ECRM is basically a marriage of CRM and e-commerce. Electronic Commerce (e-commerce) means conducting business online. In e-commerce, power of digital information is used to understand the need and preferences of customers so that products and services can be customized for them. Many companies are engaged in electronic commerce today for direct marketing, selling and customer service, online banking and billing; secure distribution of information; value chain trading; and corporate purchasing. If eCRM is successfully implemented, it will enable customers to access information and services about the products that are less expensive and more convenient than the traditional ways of helping customers evaluate and purchase products. Services become more convenient and less expensive for customers; companies can increase their revenues and reduce their costs and as a result can improve profitability and customer satisfaction. It is

believed that eCRM customers use self-service tools on web rather than company's employees take care of them directly and hence customers become active players in the purchase and service process. In this way companies get more knowledge about the customer and on the other hand customer is empowered to manage and control the process via the Web.

Before, there were few traditional touch points (like phone calls, meetings, seminars and correspondence between potential customers and companies) and with the advent of Internet these touch points have increased now and includes e-mail, Website visits, newsgroups, chat groups, and Webcasts. Therefore one of the important duties of eCRM is to consider how many touch points are potentially created between an organization and its customers. He states that due to eCRM, many of these touch points can be automated and their usage can be saved and recorded. He explains the fact that eCRM is about managing relationships with customers and due to excess touch points introduced by Internet and ease factor for people to access Internet; it is also superior to traditional CRM. Bergeron (2004) says that eCRM is customer relationship management on the web and includes the use of e-mail, e-commerce activity and any other internet based touch points. According to Lunsford and Marone (2005), electronic commerce ordering, product configuration, pricing and tracking are included in eCRM or Web-based applications.

Fjermestad et al. (2002) states that every organization involved in an online business should educate themselves about electronic customer relationship management. They believe that for quicker implementation of eCRM many companies began to spend money before developing a comprehensive eCRM strategy and that many companies are dissatisfied with their CRM implementations. Influenced by the lack of research in the area of eCRM and customer satisfaction Feinberg and Kadam (2002) explore the relationship between eCRM features and customer satisfaction. They stress that companies must incorporate only those features of eCRM on their websites for customers that are important for customer satisfaction and in this way companies can save their costs. All the aspects of eCRM on the websites are not important for the customer satisfaction sales and profitability and lack of any linkage between implementing those factors and their results may be the cause of CRM implementation failure. Lack of literature showing that how much eCRM features should be available on the websites can cause retailers to fill Web pages with as many features as possible according to their wishes and they can spend huge amounts on those features which are unimportant for customers and hence can cause embarrassment for the customers.

Above discussion can be summarized as

- Successful implementation of eCRM applications (web-based applications) is important and beneficial for both customers and companies.
- Organizations should educate themselves about electronic customer relationship management.

- Many companies began to spend money for quick implementation of eCRM before developing a comprehensive eCRM strategy and as a result are dissatisfied with their implementations.
- There is a lack of research in the area of customer satisfaction and eCRM.
- All features of eCRM on websites are not important for the customer satisfaction sales and profitability
- There is a lack of literature showing that how much eCRM features should be available on websites and this can cause the companies to overload the website with unwanted features. This will be costly for companies as well.

1.2 Research Purpose

Descriptive research, is used to describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied. It does not answer questions about how/when/why the characteristics occurred. Rather it addresses the "what" question (What are the characteristics of the population or situation being studied?) The characteristics used to describe the situation or population are usually some kind of categorical scheme also known as descriptive categories. Descriptive research generally precedes explanatory research. Descriptive research cannot describe what caused a situation. Thus, Descriptive research cannot be used to as the basis of a causal relationship, where one variable affects another.

The purpose of this descriptive study is to identify what features of an online e-ticketing website. In a manner that he/she is compelled to visit the same website again for the future needs.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Term eCRM has been explained and defined in Introduction part. The nature of this research purpose requires us to explore important and beneficial features of eCRM. Feinberg et al. (2002) mention eCRM features into three categories namely 'pre-sales', 'sales', and 'post sales' features where as Khalifa and Shen (2005) also has the very same classification but they name them as 'pre-purchase', 'at- purchase' and 'post-purchase' eCRM features. On the other hand Ross (2005) has divided eCRM into three main components but name them as 'marketing', 'sales' and 'service' components which are similar to 'pre-sales', 'sales', and 'post sales' features of eCRM. According to him

"1. Marketing: the activities associated with creating company branding, identifying customers, selecting product and service offerings, and designing promotions, advertising, and pricing

2. Sales: the actual selling and distribution of products and services

3. Service: activities encompassing customer support, call-centre management, and customer communication"

He further explains, how the advent of e-business applications have broaden visibility of companies to customer value, retaining and attracting new customers, increasing transaction and service capabilities, and that these applications have generated such and infrastructure which provide customers an end-to-end service which was impossible few years before.

2.1 Different features of eCRM

Discussion on different features of eCRM, as suggested by Feinberg, into 'pre-sales' (marketing features and those features which customers can get across before deciding to purchase), sales (the features which customers get across at the time of sale) and post-sale or customers service(those features which customer may need after the sale.

2.1.1 Pre-sale features of eCRM

The first phase eCRM is to provide information to customers. In this phase companies can get information back from their customers as well and can know more about them, for example, an e-mail address can be provided to customers for further interaction, a registration can be requested from the customers to get some general information and on subsequent visit Web-based software can track the way they use the site to get an idea about

what customer is looking for. E-CRM requires certain approaches to get online customer acquisition and retention. The strategy for eCRM is based on how to get new customers or to attract existing customers to the website using promotion methods such as search engines, portals and banner advertisements. It is important to provide such attractions on the website that customer must return back. It is believed that if customer could not find anything interesting he or she will not visit the site again therefore there must be such kind of incentives like sales generation offers in which customer is offered a free trial and in this way company can get customer contact information if the customer opts to get an incentive.

Companies can win customers by personalizing the communication between the seller and the buyer and customizing the product and service offering according to desires and needs of their individual customers. The advent of Internet, two-way dialogue between customers and suppliers was missing which is important to establish a true one-on-one relationship and after the advent of Internet marketers got the mechanism to activate 'personal marketing'. Ross defines 'personal marketing' as "the capability of companies to present their goods and services customized to fit the distinct personal interest and need of the customer." He describes, 'permission of the customer' as a critical feature of personal marketing before giving different offers to customers. By defining the concept of enterprise marketing automation (EMA) he means that the use of software applications can automate the marketplace function that enables companies to compile, search, and utilize customer databases to define who the customer is and then generating targeted marketing campaigns with the use of e-mail, e-fax, the Web, telephone, or other tools to reach the consumer market and that the focus of EMA is 'campaign management'. As compared with the past, the 'campaign management' is no more difficult because of the fact that EMA automates the entire campaign process.

Now, let's discuss different pre-sale features of eCRM marketing that are being used by firms as discussed by different authors.

One of the major contributors for identifying eCRM pre-sale features was Ross (2005) who described the following features as follows:

Cross-selling and up-selling: When customer is offered related products during the buying process it is called cross-selling. In up-selling customer is motivated to purchase more expensive products. Effective way is that Web sites must be able to analyse customers and prepare alternative offerings that can truly arouse customers' interest.

Marketing events: Before marketers used to arrange traditional exhibitions so that customers could get knowledge about new products and services. Nowadays they broadcast the latest marketing information through online newsletters, web-based seminars, and special web casts.

Customer Retention: EMA toolsets can assist companies to mine customer data and make models that can assist in the prediction of customer behaviour and on the basis of that customer behaviour many useful predictions are possible.

Response management: Marketers are able to use the information gathered in marketing campaign for performing several useful tasks. Marketing automation must help in altering or refining the campaign.

E-mail marketing: Companies can use customers' captured information for customized marketing campaigns via e-mail.

Feinberg et al. (2002) and Khalifa and Shen (2005) commonly agreed on 'site customization', 'alternative channels', and presence of 'local search engines' as important features of pre-sale eCRM and explained them as following,

Site customization: If the volume of information is much more than required by the customer, then it can be a weakness of Web-based CRM. The future of truly implemented eCRM is completely “one-to-one” Web sites. This feature provides customer with facility to customize information according to his/her own preferences. When site is customizable and customer customize it on one visit then on other visit customer can see the site according to his/her previous settings.

Alternative Channels: Web site is provided with different ways for contacting company, e-mail, fax, toll-free numbers, postal address, call back button and voice over IP, bulletin board are some of them.

Local search engine: This feature provides visitors with the ease of searching from within the Web site. User can enter keywords for searching different kind of information.

More features outlined by Feinberg et al. (2002) are stated below

Membership: Password can be requested by the customers so that they can surf on password protected Web pages within the Web site.

Mailing list: Web site should accept the e-mails from visitors if they want to get more information from website automatically.

Site tour: There should be site tour facility so that visitors can follow a tour through the Web site.

Site map: This is also called site overview, site index, or site map and is a kind of hierarchical diagrams of the pages on the Web site.

Introduction for first-time users: For those visitors who are first time browsing the Web site can surf to an introduction page. This page will have the information about how to use the site effectively.

Chat: This feature allows visitors to enter a real-time conversation between two or more users on the Web site. In this way users are allowed to interact with each other and with the site.

Electronic bulletin board: This kind of forum allows visitors to share information with each other. Visitor can post a message or reply to an already posted message of other user.

2.1.2 Sales features of eCRM

Before the Web-driven applications companies were dependent on individual salespersons' abilities and his knowledge of products, the marketplace, pricing and the competition and now Web applications have enabled customers' to sell directly to customers and have bypassed costly intermediary channels and hence both selling and buying opportunities have been broaden. Real-time technologies have also improved the companies' ability to effectively utilize resource and that technology-enabled selling has opened the doors for productivity for customers. Whereas the relationship between a company and customer can be achieved by sending an e-mail to customer, website personalization (displaying specific information on the website to the customer according to his profile), using the push strategy to deliver information to individuals. Many other marketing tools can be used in this stage for example loyalty schemes approach in which customer gets points on each purchase and on the basis of these points he gets some reward, news about a particular industry, product information and price promotions. Now we discuss in detail the Internet-based, or eCRM, features of Sales in detail.

Loyalty program/scheme so that customers can get point on each purchase and on the basis of these points they can get some reward in terms of dis- counts, special terms and benefits.

Web-enabled communication tools for bidirectional communication between customers and suppliers have made *simplified ordering process for the customers*. Further customers are provided *extended buying experience* by giving them the opportunity of 24/7/365 days service.

Ross (2005) explains some of the features:

Online catalogues: Online catalogues help customers for searching and comparing products, prices, and services offered by a supplier.

Online order processing: It is the most famous feature of eCRM. It facilitates customers with online access to supplier information, pricing, and fulfilment capabilities. Customers can compare, shop, search for desired quality service requirements, view product or service aggregations, participate in online auctions. Companies get the detailed information about their customers' buying habits that can be used for cross-selling, up-selling, and customer service.

Online order configurability: Here customers can design their own products and services through special configuration facilities.

Lead capture and profiling: Companies get detailed repositories of prospect inquiries, customer sales, and profile information and hence can use it for Website personalization or marketing follow-up.

Literature fulfilment: Product and service information of company can be easily accessed by customers and can be downloaded as well the availability of *online surveys*: Online surveys help marketers to judge the attitudes and possible behaviour of customers critical for web site customization and market segmentation. This activity can cause the customers to spend more time on the Website.

Khalifa and Shen (2005) stress the importance of *customer education*. They explain that *customer education* is the guidance, which a particular website offers to a customer with regard to procedures of, how to purchase the product, which criteria to consider and how to evaluate them, falls under customer education heading.

Online purchasing where visitors of websites can purchase services or products online. *Product information online* means visitors can read product information online as well. *Preview product* enables the visitor to view the product before purchasing. This could be viewed in a motion picture or a demo.

Khalifa and Shen (2005) highlighted two more important features, *product customization possibilities* and *purchase conditions*. By *product Customization possibilities* they mean that it is the possibility which enables visitors to customize their service or product online before ordering. They believe that *purchase conditions* information should be provided. They further state that *purchase conditions* includes shipping policies, return policies, warranty, guarantee and other company commitments.

Khalifa and Shen (2005) added that *payment methods* feature enables the customers to choose a preferred payment method, e.g., credit card, cash on delivery and electronic cash. Whereas *comparative shopping* feature is a facility provided to customer where he/she can compare alternative products on selected attributes. By *dynamic pricing* they mean that customized product prices are shown to customers on the basis of their order characteristics.

2.1.3 Post-sale or Customer Service

Ross (2005) states that Customer Service Management (CSM) has changed from beginning stage where customer service was about personally answering the customer correspondence for their problems and questions about the product to *help desk* where customers could directly interact with a service rep. He mentions that since 1990s CSM has changed to a wider phenomenon called *contact centres or customer interaction centres (CISs)*. He defined CISs as “Service functions sought to deploy a range of multimedia tools to not only relate order and account status, but also to manage every component affecting the customer, from product information to maintenance, warranties, and upgrades.” He explains that invention of new toolsets (Internet, wireless communications, speech recognition, and video) along with other older technologies (phone, caller-ID, fax, e-mail, and EDI) bring new dimension for CISs. These kinds of applications, according to him, enable companies to integrate all customer interactions points on a central platform and also provide

customers with more possibilities for control of services. Purpose of these applications is to create mutual productive communication between company and customer that are personalized (reflects each customers' needs), self-activating (for permitting customer to successfully self-service their questions), immediacy (for conveying critical information in real time), and intimate (so that result can provide a basis for future sales and service interaction).

Now we discuss the Internet-based, or eCRM, features of customer service that are being used by firms.

Features by Ross (2005):

Automatic call distribution: This toolset automatically divert calls to service reps with particular areas of expertise and can even prioritizing calls to favour high-profile customers and hence customer waiting time is minimized.

Interactive voice response (IVR): These systems provide 24/7/365 service of routing the calls based on customers' response typed on the telephone keypads. These kinds of applications provide call switching facility with- out human interaction. There is a new tool available which uses speech recognition capabilities instead of telephone keypad recognitions. Customers can communicate their questions verbally instead of using telephone keypad *Computer telephony integration (CTI):* Data is integrated with telephones by the use of these applications.

Internet call management: Frustrations created by IVR-driven can be eliminated by the use of Web-based self-service where customer is able to enjoy a significant level of self-driven interactivity. 'Call me' button can be added on the websites to further overcoming to frustration caused by CICs. This 'call me' button provides in-person contact.

Service cyber-agents, bots, and avatars: The goal of using these intelligence agents is to solve problems of customers with coordination of other bots. *Call centre analytics:* Holistic view requirement in effective customer service requires companies to correlate massive amounts of Web data with information in other databases. An example is quoted by Ross as "the CRM system will contain the customer profile that, when combined with behavioural Web activity will enable service reps to model the customer and architect the service criteria needed to respond effectively to customer requirements."

Performance measurement: Effective customer service management systems must contains tools for service performance monitoring. By the use of these tools customer service interactions should be gathered and recorded and be evaluated by the applications.

Feinberg et al. (2002) is in the favour of providing *FAQs (Frequently asked questions)* with their answers on the Web sites. They also support *complaining ability* of the websites which provide specific area for customers where they can lodge their complaints. Whereas Feinberg et al. (2002) and Khalifa and Shen (2005) supports the availability of *problem solving* feature where visitors can solve their problems with products or services them-

selves with the help of online self-help functionality. They also support the presence of *spare parts* which makes it possible for customers to order spare parts of products.

Presence of *feedback channels*, *order tracking* and *online communities* over the websites. With the help of surveys, email and discussion forums, customer can give feedback and evaluations about the services or product. By using *order tracking* gives customers can follow their orders. Whereas *online community* is an online space where customers can interact with each other, share their experiences, discuss products

2.2 Selection of eCRM features

By carefully looking at the 'pre-sale', 'sale', and 'post-sale' features mentioned in section 2.1, one can easily see that there are some features which are purely for the use of seller for example 'customer retention' and response management features are purely for the use of sellers or companies. Based on customer perspective of study only those features was selected which are related to customers only. Purpose of this study requires to choose features related to customers' and airline e-ticketing perspective. Customers' perspective of study requires to use 'purchase' word instead of 'sale'. Those features which customer can come across before the purchase, at the time of purchase, and after the purchase are named as the 'pre-purchase features of eCRM', 'at-purchase features of eCRM', and 'post-purchase features of eCRM' respectively.

2.2.1 Pre-purchase eCRM features

- **Permission Marketing**

Permission marketing is the combination of 'marketing events', 'e-mail marketing', 'alerts' and 'mailing list' features. Customers' permission is taken here before sending them up-to-date knowledge about products and service, newsletters, and promotions through e-mails automatically.

- Site customization
- Alternative Channels
- Membership
- Site information

This is the combination of 'site tour' and 'introduction to first-time users' and 'site map' features. First time visitors can get a tour to website and can get across an information page guiding them how to use the Website effectively. Whereas 'site map' can give them a site overview.

- Online Forums

'Chat', 'electronic bulletin boards' and 'online community' features are grouped into 'Online forums'. Here customers interact with each other and share their experiences and discuss the product. This could be through chat or electronic bulletin board or any other way.

2.2.2 At-Purchase eCRM features

- Loyalty program
- Extended buying experience
- Information about services

Is the combination of 'literature fulfilment', 'information', 'online catalogues' and 'product information online' features where common purpose of these features is to provide customers with online information about products and services through the use of web pages, articles, and downloadable information.

- Service customization possibilities

Online order configurability and product customization were the same features. This possibility enables visitors to customize their service or product online before ordering.

- Purchase conditions
- Payment methods
- Comparative shopping

'Cross-selling and up-selling' features help customers doing comparative shopping. Here the seller offers to customers different alternative products on selected attributes. It also includes dynamic pricing features because here, prices are shown dynamically.

2.2.3 Post-Purchase features

- FAQs
- Complaining ability
- Problem solving
- Order tracking
- Feedback channel

2.3 Customer Value

Each customer perceives things differently in the same situation. Companies should ensure that customer perceives value from online e-business experience for customer retention. Porter stresses the need for providing value to customers online. Management should give attention for creating and adding value for customers and for that they should examine value from customer's point of view and should not make assumptions themselves. Because it is the customer who determines whether he perceives value or not and in the second case he/she will not buy.

2.3.1 Customer value off-line

Porter mentioned that there are significant differences in the meaning of 'customer value' between online and offline environments. Traditionally in off-line environment customer value as stated by Marn et al. (2004, p. 44) means the difference between the perceived benefits received and the perceived price paid. According to them this phenomenon can be expressed in simple equation as value equals perceived benefits minus perceived price. They believe that increasing perceived benefits and decreasing perceived price can bring greater value to customers and as a result there is a greater likelihood that customers will buy.

Porter outlined three ways of deriving value in traditional marketing perspective namely 'value in exchange', 'value in use', and 'value in possession'. According to him 'value in exchange' is the outcome of product acquisition and can be represented as, according to his words, "*a favourable ratio between what one receives in the form of benefits versus what one gives up during product acquisition*". He argues that price is a key factor for understanding value in most of the value definitions for off-line cases; whereas in the case of using commercial Websites usually price is not associated therefore these models are not useful for explaining value online. He explained 'value in use' aspect of a product by giving an example of a customer who might consume coffee as a help for waking up in the morning and concluded that it is an evaluation of effectiveness of a product within particular usage. By value-in-possession he means important symbolic or self-expressive meaning of a product to consumers.

2.3.2 Customer value Online

Porter mentioned that the roles between marketer and customer are reversed in e-commerce where the consumers are the performer of relevant marketer related tasks themselves and have greater control. By reviewing the literature he concluded that consumers visit the site with specific goals and marketers must understand that purpose and should provide specific features or tools so that consumers can fulfil their goals.

According to Porter, only 'value in use' can be highly associated in an online environment. He is not in the favour of 'value in exchange' for online context because the product is related to this concept not the web- site. He relates the concept of 'value in use' with the 'usability'. He defines usability as *"the efficiency with which users are able to complete their tasks with the system, and their overall satisfaction with that process."* He describes the 'context of use' as the very basic thing for understanding usability, and that it allows the user to evaluate the value of the system. By recognizing the "human as doer" nature of consumer behaviour online he defines online customer value as *"a customer's perceived preference for and evaluation of those Web site features and functions that facilitate (or block) the performance of the tasks that are instrumental in achieving the customer's goals and purposes associated with the Web site visit."* He explains that consumers' perceived value is related to the websites' ability to facilitate user to accomplish specific usage goals and tasks, therefore if a customer judges that the website is supporting the tasks necessary to accomplish his/her goal, then according to him perceived online value will increase.

In short users evaluate any feature of website in their 'context of use' and hence their overall usability. Users perceived online value will increase if the website is providing such a feature or features which are helpful for achieving the goals or tasks of a user. From the same website feature, two users can perceive different value based on their goals.

2.4 Research Questions

Research purpose is *to give a better understanding of customers' perception of value from eCRM features on airline e-ticketing Websites*

Literature review shows that there are three major categories for eCRM features with respect to customers' expected goals and tasks namely , pre-purchase features, at-purchase features, and post-purchase features. As mentioned that customers' evaluation of website features is related to the usability and the fulfilment of their specific goals and tasks therefore it is convenient to further divide the research problem into following three research questions in order to get more refined results.

Question 1

How do customers perceive value from pre-purchase features of eCRM on airline e-ticketing websites?

Question 2

How do customers perceive value from at-purchase features of eCRM on airline e-ticketing websites?

Question 3

How do customers perceive value from post-purchase features of eCRM on air-line e-ticketing websites?

3 FRAME OF REFERENCE

Brief description of features selected along with the names of the authors who recommended them as important features of eCRM for the customers, is given below.

Pre-purchase eCRM features:

Permission Marketing

Arranging following events with customer's permission

- Marketing events (automated newsletters etc) Ross (2005)
- Email marketing/ mailing list Feinberg et al. (2002), Ross (2005)],
- Alerts Khalifa and Shen (2005) Ross (2005)

Site customization

With this facility customer can customize information contents on website according to his/her own preferences.

Feinberg et al. (2002) and Khalifa and Shen (2005)

Alternative Channels

Different ways mentioned on website for contacting the company.

Feinberg et al. (2002) and Khalifa and Shen (2005)

Membership

Password protected webpage.

Feinberg et al. (2002)

Site information

For first time visitors.

'Site tour', 'Introduction to first time visitors', 'Site map'

Feinberg et al. (2002)

Online Forums

For sharing personal experiences with other customers

Online community Khalifa and Shen (2005)

At-purchase eCRM features:

Loyalty program

Customer gets points on each purchase and gets discounts, benefits.

Khalifa and Shen (2005), Chaffey et al. (2003, p. 235)

Extended buying experience

Customers buy at any time 24/7/365 days

Ross (2005)

Information about services

Information about products and services is provided through web pages, articles, and downloadable information.

Literature fulfilment, Online catalogues Ross (2005)

In case of e-ticketing, this could be information about different services for example, seating class, fares, baggage, insurance etc.

Service customization possibilities

Customize the service before ordering (customer himself chooses what to add and what not to add)

Ross (2005), Feinberg et al. (2002) and Khalifa and Shen (2005)

In case of e-ticketing customer may choose among, seating class, insurance, baggage, meal on board, taxi, buss, cars for renting, hotels etc.

Purchase conditions

Includes shipping policies, return polices, warranty, guarantee and other company commitments.

Feinberg et al. (2002) and Khalifa and Shen (2005)

Payment methods

Customer chooses how to pay e.g., credit card, cash on delivery and electronic cash

Khalifa and Shen (2005)

Comparative shopping

Customer is provided with alternative offers as against his selected choice.

Khalifa and Shen (2005)

Post-purchase eCRM features:

FAQs

Frequently asked questions

Feinberg et al. (2002)

Problem solving

It is online self-help functionality where visitors can solve their problems.

Feinberg et al. (2002) and Khalifa and Shen (2005)

In case of travel website customers can change their booked schedule or cancel their e-ticket here.

Complaining ability

Customer can lodge their complaints on specific area

Feinberg et al. (2002)

Order tracking

Customers can track their orders Khalifa and Shen (2005).

In case of travel websites customer can track their flight schedule or e-ticket here.

Feedback channels

Evaluation of the services by the customer on the website.

Khalifa and Shen (2005)

Feinberg et al. (2002) has suggested that all the features are not necessary for companies to implement because implementation is costly and he also mentioned that there was a lack of research in this area. Discussion about customers' value online in section 2.3 shows that customers' can perceive different value from the same feature based on the context of use and subject to fulfilment of their specific goals and tasks. If they achieve their objectives by the use of particular feature or features their perceived value will be high and the vice versa.

Literature review shows that there are three major categories for eCRM features with respect to customers' expected goals and tasks namely , pre-purchase features, at-purchase features, and post-purchase features. We are now in a better positions express diagrammatically our intended study for our data collection process. It shows how customers can interact with different features of eCRM for the fulfilment of their specific goals and tasks at three different stages and as a result they perceive value. Figure 3.1 shows the names of the features.

Both phenomenon of pre-adoption and post-adoption of an eCRM feature will be studied to fulfil the purpose of CRM. Post-adoption from those features which customers already have experienced with and the pre-adoption from those features which customers have never visited but in certain context they can use that feature in future.

Table shows the names of the features.

eCRM features		
<i>Pre-purchase</i>	<i>At-purchase</i>	<i>Post-purchase</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permission Marketing • Site customization • Alternative • Channels • Membership • Site information • Online Forums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loyalty program • Extended buying experience • Information about services • Service customization possibilities • Purchase conditions • Payment methods • Comparative shopping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAQs • Problem solving • Complaining ability • Order tracking • Feedback channels

Table 1: eCRM Features

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Strategy

Research could be done either to explore, describe or explain a particular phenomenon.

4.1.1 Exploratory Research

An exploratory research as a study conducted to clarify ambiguous problems. The research for conclusive evidence follows exploratory studies and it is carried out during the initial stage of the research process and initial activities carried out to refine the problem into a researchable one need not be formal. Exploratory research is used to develop better understanding and when there is a little theory to guide predictions. Exploratory research provides a way into consumer perceptions, behaviours, and needs. Moreover better understanding of customer causes better decision making power and better recognition of market opportunities for companies.

4.1.2 Descriptive Research

Descriptive research is carried out for portraying an accurate profile of persons, events or situations. Descriptive research uses descriptive statistics including frequency counts (how many), measures of central tendency like the mean or mode, or a measure of variation like standard deviation Purpose of our research is exploratory because we are going *to give a better understanding of customers' perception of value from eCRM features on airline e-ticketing Websites.*

4.1.3 Research Design

A research strategy is a general plan showing how a researcher will go about answering the research questions. A research design is the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure. The type of research design selected for this study is Descriptive in nature. A descriptive research uses a set of scientific methods and procedure to collect raw data structures that describe the existing characteristics of a defined target population of a market structure. The data and information generated through this descriptive design can provide the decision makers with evidence that can leave to course of action.

4.2 Sampling Plan

Since it is not possible to study whole population, it is necessary to obtain representative samples from the population to understand its characteristics.

Sample size refers to the number of items to be selected from the respondents to constitute a sample. This acts as a representative to the whole respondents where the results and suggestions are derived from analysing representative samples.

Sampling Technique – Convenience Sampling

Sample Size - 83

4.3 Data Collection Method

The sources of data are primary and secondary in nature. For the purpose of collection of primary data, a questionnaire is prepared. Data collection is the process of obtaining information from the respondents. It can be obtained from primary or secondary sources. Primary data are the data obtained first hand by the researcher. Here the data is collected through primary sources.

The method used for collecting data is through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire designed for the purpose of research was distributed to the respondents online through e-mails.

4.4 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was designed based on the literature review done. A survey questionnaire was developed which consists of basic demographic details of the respondents like age, sex, income level etc. Further the questionnaire includes the objective questions regarding the main problem research i.e. the scale based questions where respondents will give rating to the services identified in the three stages of eCRM.

The Scale used is 5 point Likert scale, where:

- 1- Strongly Disagree
- 2- Disagree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Agree
- 5- Strongly Agree

4.5 Data Analysis

For the purpose of analysis statistical tools are used. The data is analysed using mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of the collected data. Through this, central tendency of the sample could be calculated, which will tell the positive or negative inclination of the sample towards the particular features of website. Data will be presented and analysed in the categories mentioned in the frame of reference.

5 Observations and Analysis

5.1 Demographic Analysis of Respondents

The figure below shows that the female respondents constitute 24% whereas male respondents constitute 76% of the total respondents.

5.1.1 Gender

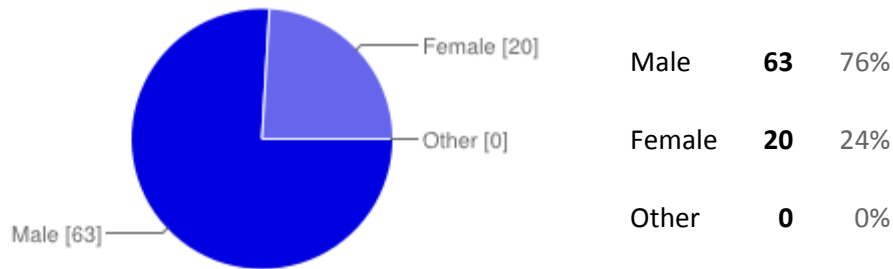


Figure 1: Gender Description

5.1.2 Age Group

84% of the respondents are of the age group 23-30 years, other age constitutes rest 16% of the respondents

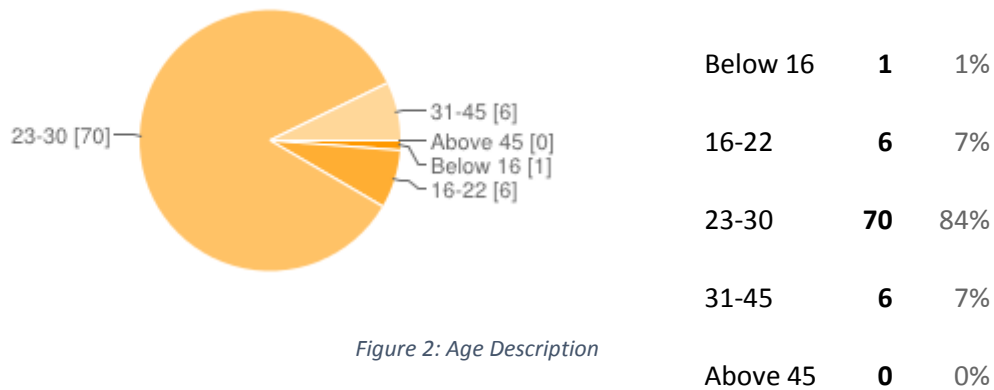


Figure 2: Age Description

5.1.3 Occupation

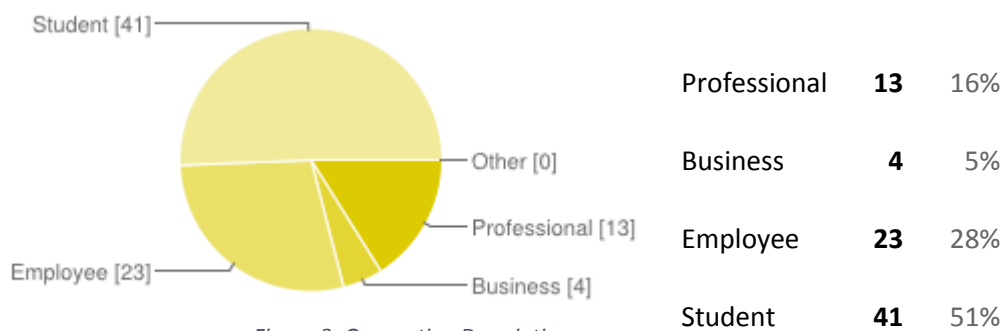


Figure 3: Occupation Description

5.1.4 Average household income (Annual)

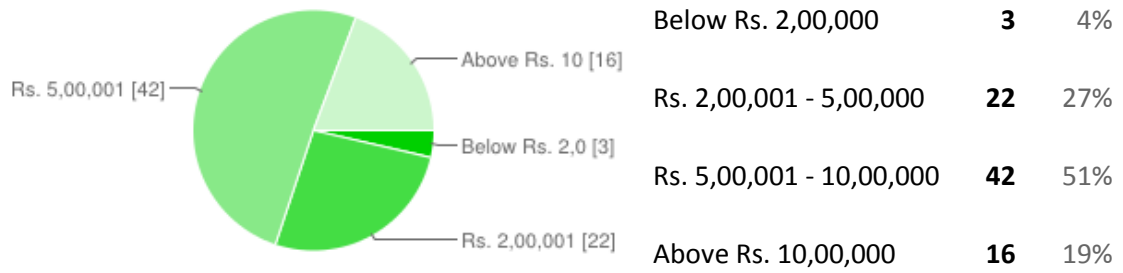


Figure 4: Income Description

5.2 Data Analysis and Findings

5.2.1 Reasons for flying

Almost 60% (34 respondents) of airline using respondents were from the income group of Rs. 5- 10 lacs. Out of which 21 used it for personal reason and rest 13 for business purpose.

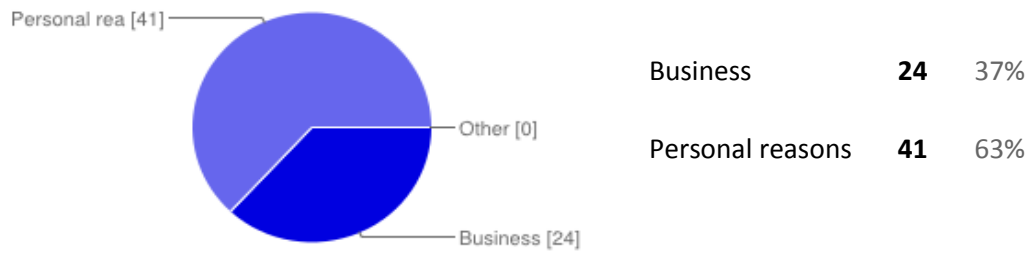


Figure 5: Reasons for using Airline

The findings of this research study in the form of answers to three research questions are presented below one by one. The conceptual understanding of variables, data gathering and then analysis of data are the basis of these findings.

Q1. How do customers perceive value from pre-purchase features of eCRM on airline e-ticketing websites?

"Online Forums" feature was among one of the decisive factors for their purchase decision. The reason may be respondents usually read from other travel forums or intended to read the experiences of other customers to get better understanding of the real time situation therefore this feature was in demand by customers.

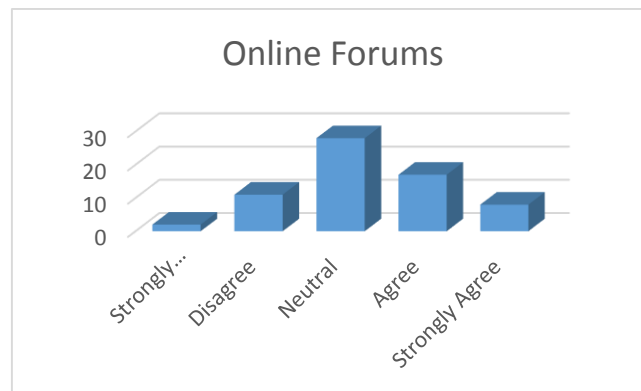


Figure 6: Online Forums (Pre-Purchase)

'Site customization' and 'site information' ('introduction page', 'site tour', and 'site map') are the most disliked features by the customers. The fact could be that customers just have to purchase the tickets and they can easily do that.

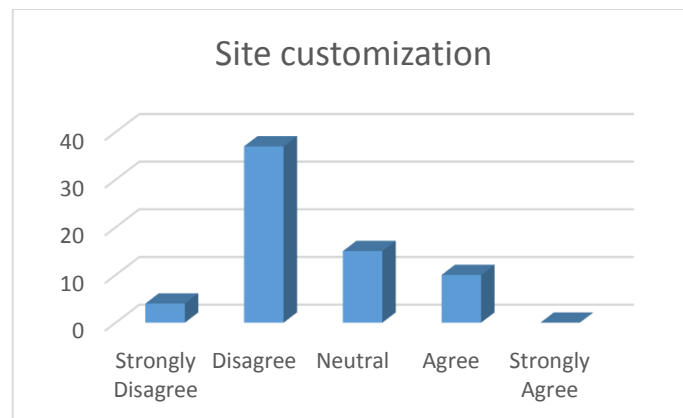


Figure 7: Site customization Analysis (Pre-Purchase)

'Alternative channels' in the form of email and phone numbers of the company, are also considered very useful by the customers. This may be because customers prefer to contact

the company through email primarily. In case of emergency or when they need immediate answers or not getting answers of their emails, their second choice is to call the company.

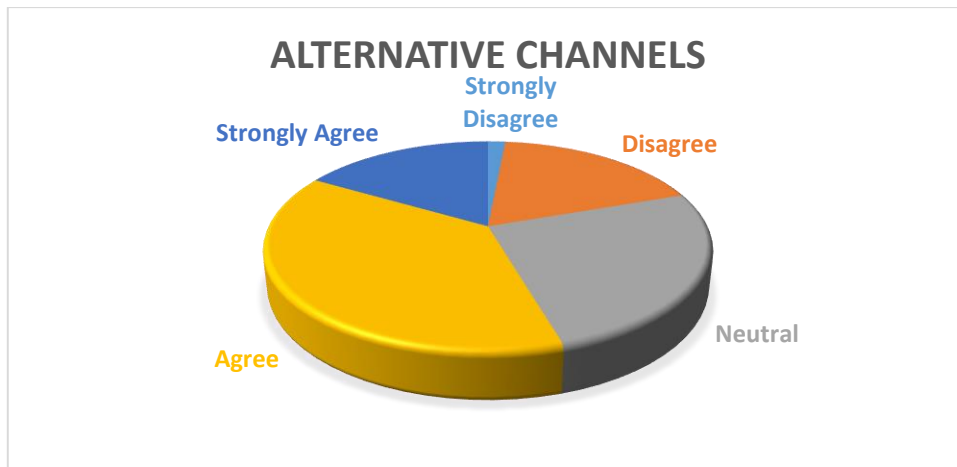


Figure 8: Alternative Channels (Pre-Purchase)

Customers subscribe and like to subscribe on the travel websites for getting emails from the company about marketing activities to get information about the cheap travel routes, fares and alerts.

Customers do like to use 'log in' feature because though they can purchase the e-tickets without it as well. But the customers showed unusual preference towards this feature. The one reason that come in mind for this can be the feature of loyalty program, which a customer can avail only after becoming member on the website.

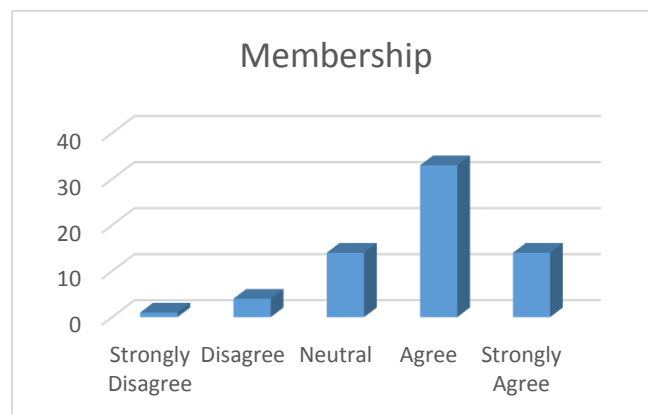


Figure 9: Membership (Pre-Purchase)

Customers perceive value from most of the features which they have adopted and have utilized them. They can also perceive value from those features which they are not using at the moment but can use on the happening of certain event or from those features which at the moment are not provided by websites but they can use them if provided. Example of the later case is 'online forums', which are not provided on certain websites and customers' views are that they want to read these forums first before making purchase decision.

Q2. How do customers perceive value from at-purchase features of eCRM on airline e-ticketing websites?

Customers' interaction with 'at-purchase eCRM features' is more than the other two categories. Among these features, 'loyalty program' is widely perceived as one of the long term relationship building feature.



Figure 10: Loyalty Program (At-Purchase)

For customers the process of booking tickets online is more convenient, less time consuming and less costly as compared to traditional way of booking of tickets from travel agents. They could buy at any time of the day.

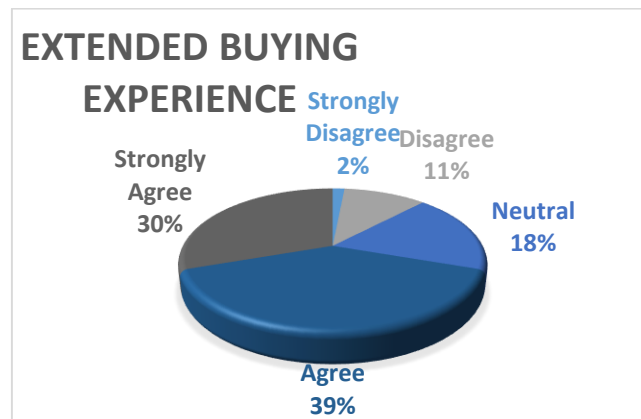


Figure 11: Extended Buying Experience (At-Purchase)

Customers get the information about the travel services easily on the travel websites.

'Service customization' is a very well observed feature by the customers while purchasing the tickets. Customers can choose among different services to add or not to add. Customers try to choose cheaper options among, seating class, their preferred time, insurance options (whether to include or not to include), and baggage options (number of baggage, special baggage), meal on the board option, rent a car at the destination and hotels at the destination option to minimize their cost of tickets.

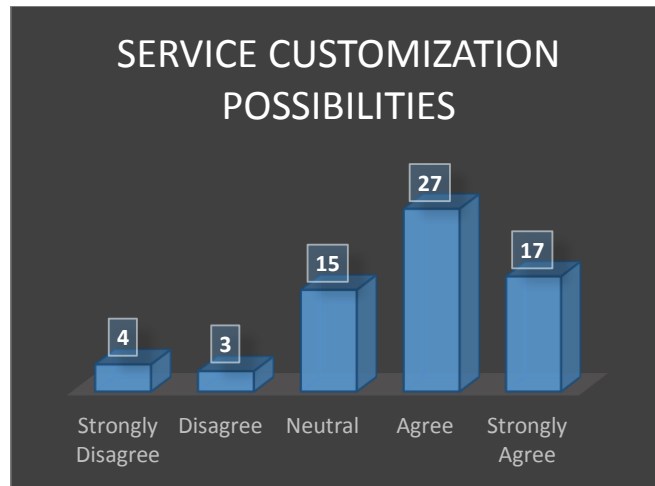


Figure 12: Service Customization Possibility (At-Purchase)

Customers usually read ‘purchase conditions’ to safeguard themselves from any kind of surprises which may result after the purchase of tickets. They want to know exactly about the fares, baggage and all other related matters.

Customers are very concerned about this feature whether the website is providing different ways of payment method or not. As some customers like to pay through credit card, some through debit card etc.

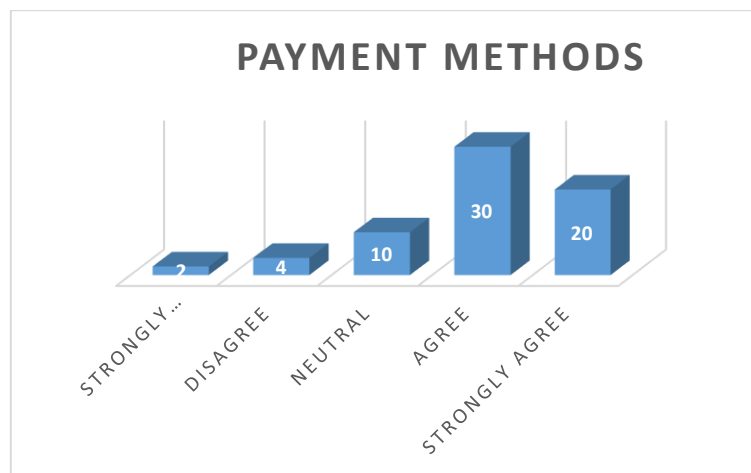


Figure 13: Payment Methods (At-Purchase)

Customers usually select their intended dates and times of travel and during the process they find it very useful when websites display other alternatives as well which causes them to change their selected choice to the one which is cheapest and they do so when their intended schedule is flexible.

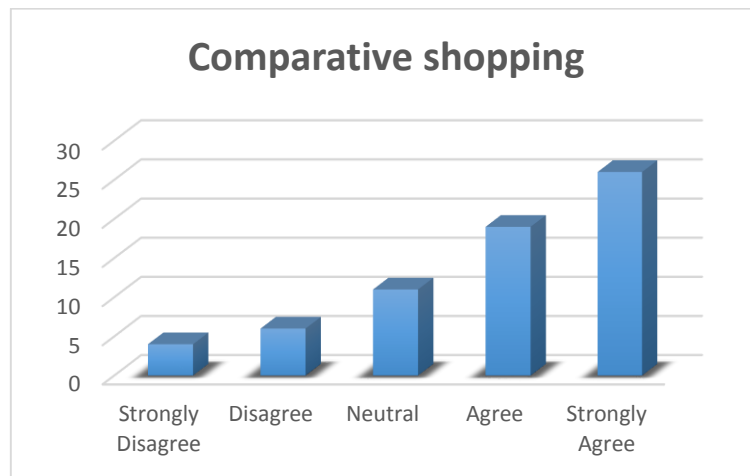


Figure 14: Comparative Shopping (At-Purchase)

Q3. How do customers perceive value from post-purchase features of eCRM on airline e-ticketing websites?

According to the survey customers are more concerned about the post-purchase features. Customers are more cautious if any contingency occurs. Here “FAQs” and “Feedback Channel” are the least decisive factor of revisit. While other factors are of ver much important for the customers.

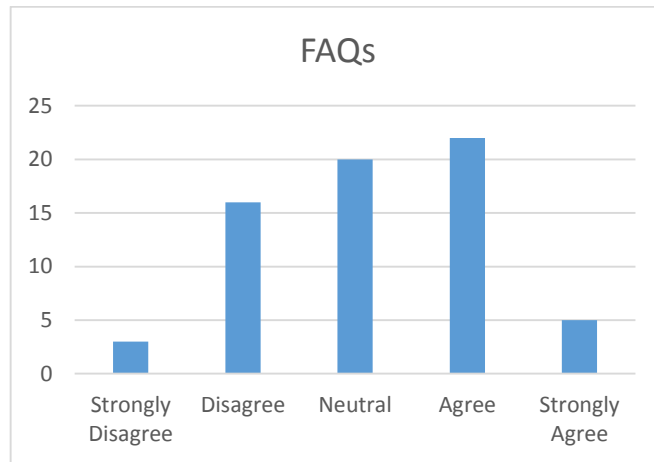


Figure 15: FAQs (Post-Purchase)

Customers will prefer to cancel their tickets or change their schedules on the websites directly, and if they do not found such feature they will contact the company for doing so. In the same way when they have to make any complaint against the company they will prefer to visit the website first for recording their complaints and if they will not find any of such features they will send the company an email.

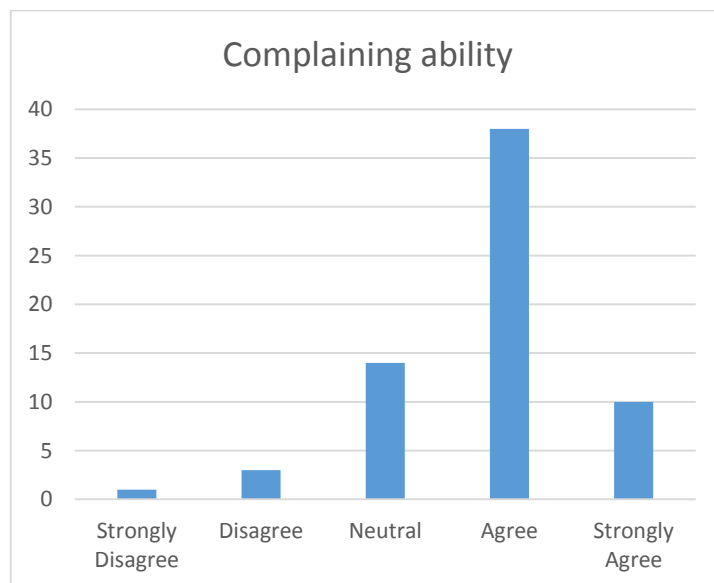


Figure 16: Complaining Ability (Post-Purchase)

Customers also look for order tracking feature as a decisive feature for revisiting a website.

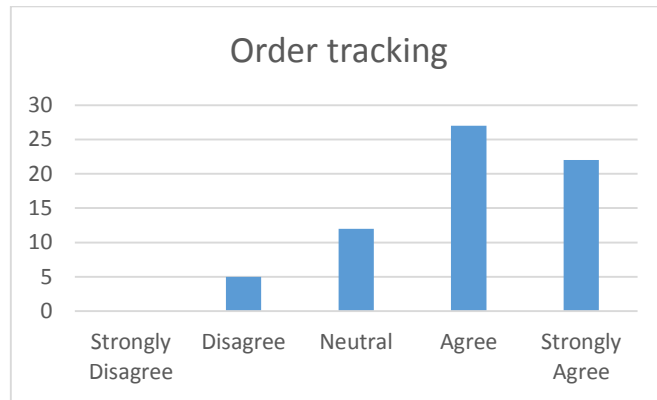


Figure 17: Order Tracking (Post-Purchase)

Finally the feature that an Indian customer values the most, which is “Best Deals” (Lowest Priced Tickets). 80% of the customers preferred Best deals as the major reason to revisit any e-ticketing website.



Figure 18: Revisiting based on Best Deals

5.3 Overall Analysis of eCRM features

From the table given below it is evident that customers value the at-purchase feature the most followed by post purchase and then pre-purchase.

Pre Purchase Features	Mean	At Purchase Features	Mean	Post Purchase Features	Mean
Permission Marketing	2.95	Loyalty Program	3.75	FAQs	3.15
Site Customization	2.4	Extended Buying Experience	3.86	Problem Solving Capability	3.65
Alternative channels	3.5	Information about services	3.67	Complaining ability	3.8
Membership	3.8	Service customization possibilities	3.75	Order tracking	4
Site Information	3	Purchase conditions	3.6	Feedback channels	3.2
Online Forums	3.3	Payment methods	3.93		
		Comparative shopping	3.9		
Overall Average	3.15		3.78		3.56

Table 2: Overall Analysis of the ECRM Features

ECRM Features vs. Best Deals

Features of Website	Average of Responses
Pre Purchase	3.15
At Purchase	3.78
Post Purchase	3.56
Best Deal	4

Table 3: ECRM vs. Best Deal

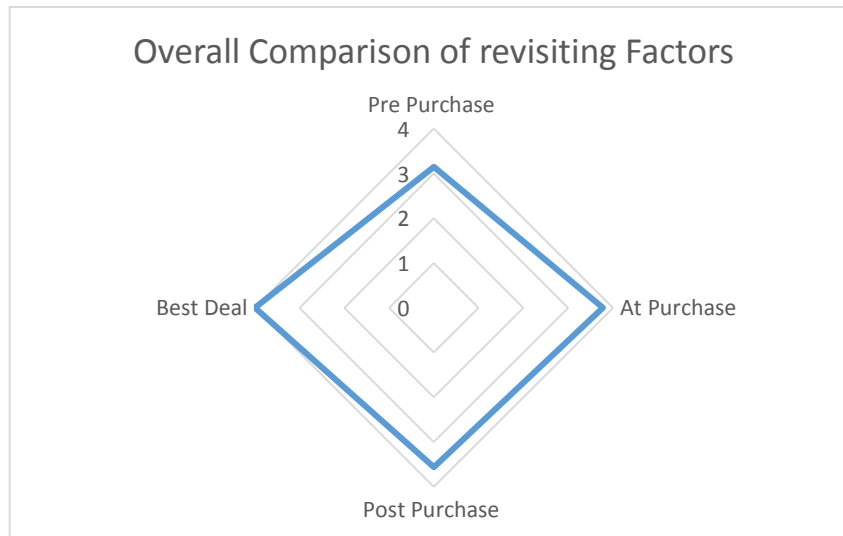


Figure 19: Overall Comparison of revisiting Factors

6 Conclusion

Based on the problem discussion, the purpose of our study was *to give a better understanding of customers' perception of value from eCRM features on airline e-ticketing Websites*. Problem discussion reveals that all the eCRM features were not important to be presented on the websites for customer satisfaction and profitability of the company due to the fact that implementation of these features may be very costly for the company. Problem discussion also gives stress for the importance of knowing value perceptions of online customers. Literature review shortlists the eCRM features for customers and the literature related to 'online customer value' shows that customers' perception of value depends on the 'context of use' scenarios and that website features can provide benefits to customers only when they feel that a particular feature can help. If customers achieve their objectives by the use of particular feature or features their perceived value will be high and the vice versa. The conceptual understanding of variables, analysis of data and the findings of the study disclose the fact that to display all the features of eCRM on travel websites may not be important. But at the same time it is also possible that customers may not be using some features owing to the fact that certain situation does not happen.

Results reveals the same situations where customers were not utilizing certain features because, those features were not provided on the travel websites, or such situation never happen when customers could use those feature but customers showed their willingness to get benefit from those features, if, either provided on the websites in case they were not present before, or such a situation happen when they have to use those features. To sum up according to customers, 'site customization', 'site information' features were most disliked features. Whereas customers are in the favour reading 'online forums' due to the fact that they may get valuable information from other customers. Same is the situation with post-purchase eCRM features where 'complaining ability' and 'feedback channels' features were not provided to customers on travel websites but according to customers they may need it in certain Qs and the feedback channel on website. Therefore use of post- purchase features should be efficiently handled on the websites. Use of email may be time consuming and phone call may be expensive for customers and may also cause them to wait for long times in queues. At-purchase features were both efficiently handled by the travel companies and were perceived beneficial by the customer.

Study also reveals the fact that the primary thing which induces the customer to purchase from certain travel website was 'cheaper fares'. At the same time customers wanted to read other customers experiences with the travel company on 'online forums' to get the better understanding of real time situation hence this could effect on their purchase decisions. Customers do believe that 'loyalty programs' are beneficial. All these points show that there is a great competition online among travel companies because for the

customers presence of eCRM features is the same on each website and they are searching for cheaper tickets. But on the other hand when customers could not solve their problems after purchasing tickets they may get dissatisfied and this dissatisfaction can cause customer defection. Therefore importance of providing efficient post-purchase features is also observed in this study.

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