



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Literature Review on Impact of Customer Service in Logistics Sector

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ABSTRACT

Customer service plays a vital role in organizations. It can prove helpful to companies looking for having a competitive edge over others. With main objective of communicating at all stages with clients, it can also assist in resolving complex situations in a subtle manner. This research paper is based on secondary resources and examines the working platform, process flow and importance of logistics service providers with respect to client retention, loyalty and perception of service quality of logistics versus actual services offered by logistics service provider (LSP) to their customer (exporters/ importers). The derivation of service quality gap is client expectation minus the service offering to them. This paper highlights customer service aspects important for any logistics service provider to sustain in long run. The outcome of this study uncovers impact of customer service on logistics company and their customers' business performance.

Keywords: Customer service, Logistics, Supply Chain Management (SCM), Quality gap, Customer loyalty, Export-import (EXIM), Logistics Service Provider (LSP), Third Party Logistics (3PL), Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), Multinational Companies (MNC), Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

INTRODUCTION

“Change is the only constant in life” mentioned by Heraclitus, a Greek Philosopher refers to the inevitable change. In today's context businesses - work processes, thought processes, business ideas, mindsets are also constantly evolving.

Global markets continue to grow in terms of Third-Party Logistics (3PL), logistics and supply chain management demands. Because of vast opportunities and a highly fragmented market it provides humungous opportunities for organizing, structuring, governing, and building a sustainable supply chain in coming times.

For companies engaged in export-import activities- the choice of a dynamic supply chain partner has seen a significant surge. Over the last decade, term logistics vendor has seen upgrade as – logistic partner. Because, managers have started understanding the importance of reliable Logistics Service Providers (LSP's) and treat them as a part of their team.

Sometimes, even before executing international business orders managers consult and appoint a reliable LSP rather than deciding on choosing them for services directly. We can observe recent practical trends wherein overseas traders prefer to make LSP a part of their execution team to take care of third party logistics activities and understand requirements from manufacturing till last mile delivery, which in turn helps them to retain foreign clientele in long run. Also, from a reliable and quality offering Supply Chain LSP, it is perceived by customers to be cost effective, will

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deliver on-time, may have a dedicated team and in special cases - a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for key clients, which in turn would lead to client satisfaction. As international trade has grown, the world has become smaller in terms of reach, shipping, customer demands at both ends have evolved and will continue, which need to be addressed.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) had discussed in their paper about 22 item factor, SERVQUAL model, potential applications in future of their model. The authors explained about definitions, meaning and link of quality, expectations and actual deliverance to customers. Various related aspects like perceived versus objective quality; quality as attitude; quality versus satisfaction; and expectations compared to perceptions were discussed.

As per Cronin, Jr. and Taylor (1994) consumer satisfaction exerts a stronger influence on purchase/loyalty than service quality. SERVQUAL serves partial purpose in understanding service quality, but the perception versus deliverance of service and cost association also needs to be considered.

Voss *et al.* (1998) in their study showed that price fluctuations is common among services industries. When price and performance are consistent, expectations have an assimilation effect on performance and satisfaction judgments and when it is inconsistent, expectations have no effect on performance and satisfaction.

Sinha and Babu (1998) had discussed about measuring the efficiency of the supply chain. Also, companies use two performance measures that is fraction of overall demand satisfied during the month and overall inventory system. This is how improving demand fulfilment forces company management to have more inward attention and stay focused on customer.

As per Durvasula *et al.* (1999) logistics is challenging and is complex also. Relationship

development, vendor development, service improvisation are its key parts. SERVQUAL has received most recognition amongst all proposed quality measures. Relationship marketing has less power over customers perception of performance quality service influencing customer decisions. To succeed liners/LSP's need not only offer quality services but also need to quantify customers feedback towards the offered services. In Business to Business (B2B) - fulfilled commitments rather than over-promising acts would give repeated business.

As per Dabolkar *et al.* (2000) understanding whether service quality and customer satisfaction are same or is customer satisfaction a result of service quality is crucial to understand. Though disconfirmation model had been studied, many researchers had raised issues with it. Experience of Church Directory (before and after sales from sales of National Photographic Company, with (Service Quality) SERVQUAL scale measure, was taken into consideration. Customer perception plays a major role over disconfirmation. For future, measured disconfirmation was suggested rather than longitudinal study.

As per Payne and Frow (2005) the role of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is to enhance customer and shareholder value. Authors had identified five key cross-functional CRM processes: a strategy development process, a value creation process, a multichannel integration process, an information management process, and a performance assessment process.

Seth *et al.* (2006) advised that logistics impacts not only own business, but consumers across the globe with its quality. Despite its importance - service quality in supply chain management (SCM) has been less researched. Study on forward and reverse logistics gaps had been done in this paper. As per author there are no standard instruments to measure 3PL service quality with businesses, different dimensions need to be studied which impacts final

consumer, inter-organizational gaps etc. Extent of outsourcing logistics needs to be defined by organization in all sectors. 3PL decision is influenced by perception of decision maker and client relations at all levels.

As per Davis and Mentzer (2006) there have been many studies on SCM and customer service but gap identification on perception of customer and LSP for offering service is less explored. One of the important function identified by authors was developing relation at organizational level with relevant department or manager. Another aspect identified was size of the customer, which may directly impact deliverance towards client like big sized or small sized, big clients were identified as already having a set perception that they want responsibility along with desired service levels from their LSP's. Tolerance levels in big customers is narrow and in small ones there may be a wider acceptance. In logistics there are two important aspects: CS and responsiveness. Different types of gaps identified by researchers are service gap and perception gap.

Rust and Chung (2006) in their study showed that a firm improves its profitability when it can observe the reservation prices of the different consumers. This can be done by observing consumer purchasing behaviour. One way for a firm to know what kind of pricing strategy it should adopt is by looking at the type of service the firm provides.

Sahay and Mohan (2006) had discussed that 3PL practices have gained a slow pace in Indian economy, more than 55% of businesses prefer a good 3PL partner for timely and efficient delivery, along with warehousing, distribution services. There is consideration of logistics cost control, focus on core product manufacturing and, improvised return on asset investment. Infrastructure in India was found poor with reference to road / rail / water draught, as compared to nations like Singapore, European Union and United States of America.

Seth *et al.* (2006) in a framework for measurement of quality of service in supply chains,

discussed that poor quality service ultimately leads to depleting business. In past, many studies have focused on service industries but not SCM as a whole. Gap analysis would help in improvising SCM service quality. He also discussed about implications of various factors on SCM, and also considered minimum input and maximum output concepts. This paper also discussed about forward and reverse logistics management along with the concept of Quality Loss Function (QLF).

As per Forslund (2007) Logistics Quality Deficiencies (LQD) examples include delayed lead time and incorrect deliveries. Author elaborated on inter-organizational performance gaps, impact of choosing low cost LSP's, and how customer may not be happy with delivery or final product receiving process/ over production, stock piling up etc.

Lumsden and Mirzabeiki (2008) discussed in their paper about value level of information in supply chain, its importance with all the relevant partners. This study showed that there is a positive relationship between a company's supply chain and their customers with reference to decision of reducing or highlighting certain information in their supply chain management.

According to Theeranuphattana and Tang (2008) SCM theories have gained attention, but supply chain (SC) performance measurement has not yet grabbed attention. Defining SC metrics is a barrier. SC Council (2006) listed 05 attributes of (Internal) SC performance: SC reliability, responsiveness, flexibility, costs, asset management. The authors discussed Chan and Qi's model of SCM performance metrics: cost, time, capacity, capability, productivity, utilization and outcome. Authors elaborated on supply chain operations reference (SCOR) weaknesses - it focuses on process and efficiency and not strategy and suggested that it is better to measure SCM performance as a whole rather than a collection of separate processes. Customer facing metrics were identified as - reliability, responsiveness, and flexibility

and internal facing metrics as - costs and assets. Despite having a significant positive impact on Indian businesses, 3PL is still in nascent stage compared to business opportunities ahead.

Bienstock *et al.* (2008) discussed on aspects of logistics service quality (LSQ), LSP's perception, customer perception about company/ service. Authors had discussed Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and about understanding the intent of technology and then implementing it. LSP's play vital role in process but information technology (IT) plays a booster in terms of transparency, long term relationship. IT tools perception of client plays a vital role especially in a global supply situation. As per author logistics process leads to logistics success, and high quality consistent delivery creates loyalty. They had also identified that clients would prefer to use LSP's IT tools, if they find it easy to recall and operate.

Carter and Rogers (2008) discussed how to define sustainability and link with SCM and discussed how would it create a long term economic success. The authors discussed definition of sustainability with ecological reference and identified triple bottom line of sustainability and linked that SCM risk management for a firm means managing: economic risk, environmental risk and social risk. Mostly modern times organizations have started shifting definition of bottom line from profit generation to sustainable workplace. The concept and the term seems attractive, but it brings meaning in long term only. Some companies were identified as exploiting resources and in turn providing stale wages and poor living conditions to workers. On other hand cost of illegalities create expensive environment for the whole society. Often corporate social responsibility (CSR) overtakes this thought and creates a rift among managers and management in understanding meaning of sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) versus CSR.

As per Baki *et al.* (2009) an application of integrating SERVQUAL and Kano's Model into Quality

Function Deployment (QFD) for logistics services, authors had discussed about understanding gaps between customer perceptions and expectations in SCM. Kano model is implemented by many researchers to discuss customer service and customer satisfaction. SERVQUAL 5 dimensions, SERVQUAL gap analysis have been discussed and need analysis has been considered helpful in understanding practical and applied information. Global business competition has raised a surge in requirement of competitive SCM solution providers. Apart from cost control - transparency, deliverance, reliability have also become important as per author.

Beheshti (2010) discussed that firms are trying to achieve operational efficiency and cost control by methods like - Economic Order Quantity (EOQ), Economic Production Quantity (EPQ) and, Just in Time (JIT). He also said that total SCM costs are sum of all individual member costs. The author had identified that focus on demand versus supply gap, managing people / inventory and acting as a team would assist a lot in controlling SCM costs.

Cahill *et al.* (2010) had studied that price satisfaction and relational satisfaction seemed to be of little relevance to loyalty. The authors examined moderating effect of conflict frequency on the satisfaction-loyalty linkage in logistics outsourcing relationships, high levels of customer conflict mixed with low relational satisfaction was found as leading to different type of conflicts between service provider and customer, such as dysfunctional, disruptive, and "disease-like" in nature harming business relationships. It had been identified by authors that a good business relationship should appreciate and accept healthy conflict, and is one of the factors that does not impact loyalty negatively or lower business share.

Soinio *et al.* (2012) had researched that Finnish companies spend 13-16% of total sales on logistics, the logistics model was examined from client and service providers perspectives. Authors identified that

small and medium enterprises (SME's) did not consider implementing logistics seriously as compared to larger corporations. More than logistical movement, it is logistics network design implementation which is a challenge, due to lack of need and understanding of skills concepts like - just in time (JIT), logistics get ignored. If SME's bifurcate choosing as per requirements, logistics service providers' on asset based / non-asset based services can provides a greater efficiency in logistics services.

Wieland and Wallenburg (2012) discussed that supply chain risk management (SCRM) helps in improving organizations performance. They found that agility and robustness have a positive impact on supply chains and performance dimensions and customer value.

As per Jang *et al.* (2013) world would not have globalised as we see now, if shipping didn't exist; as ocean freight constitutes 60% of global shipping. 23 studies since 1990 have been published discussing shipper, shipping line and perspectives of both for identifying service perception gap. Author had discussed about importance of two aspects: Operational Logistics Service Quality (OLSQ) and Relational Logistics Service Quality (RLSQ), research proved clients are behaviourally attached than being emotional towards LSP. OLSQ ensures customer satisfaction but misses trust and RLSQ influences trust and satisfaction but doesn't impact commitment.

Morali and Searcy (2013) did a content analysis of 100 Canadian corporate sustainable development reports and in-depth interviews with 18 Canadian experts on SCM, based on primary and secondary research, it was understood from respondents how SSCM can be implemented in long run. The results showed sustainability in SCM is a strategic call based on stakeholders reviews. Sustainability referred to concerns of- economic, environmental and social implications of business decision. This can be improvised by educating vendors about collaboration, performance measurement and timely monitoring and audits of vendors.

Setia *et al.* (2013) discussed importance of understanding customer requirements, aligning own company policies with customer demands and implementing a user friendly digital business strategy. The authors illustrated its importance on how digital technologies can be leveraged to build customer-centric organization, create information quality and enhance customer service performance.

As per Haque and Islam (2013) collaboration and information sharing along with logistics design and IT infrastructure have significant impact on customer satisfaction. As per Kumar *et al.* (2013) managers in MNC's, firstly monitor the factors and examine the degree of comfort before implementing any strategies. Kalia *et al.* conducted a web survey among 308 respondents, who had made at least one online shopping in past six months from any given four retail websites and they concluded that the satisfaction level of consumer through online shopping acted as an intermediary between online service quality and future purchase intentions.

As per Bell *et al.* (2013) a cost-based maritime container assignment model involves three evolution stages of a port - setting, expansion and specialization. Author said that microscopic studies are extensive and impossible due to confidentiality reasons and macroscopic study prove helpful while studying global containerization improvement / methods. Route, link, leg/ s, path are important to be understood. Point (Origin) to Point (Destination) (P2P), Point (Origin) - Transshipment Point - Point (Destination) (P-T-P), Point - Transshipment 1 - Transshipment 2 - Point (destination) (P T-T-P). Container ship sizes affect the route capacity/ optimization. Investment to revenue calculation is important for each defined route, such as Evergreen Shipping Line may operate: Mundra (Origin) to Colombo (Transshipment point) to Hamburg (Destination) and COSCO Shipping Line may operate Mundra (Origin) to Hamburg (Destination) on direct service, the decision lies with line manager as to which route to use to optimize vessel operational cost

and turn that route choice profitable. As per Sebjan *et al.* (2014) organizational factors are reflected in the three types of orientations - process, technological and innovation orientation of organization.

As per Bompolis and Boutsouki (2014) the companies are moving from product centric to customer centric business culture. Traditional customer relationship management (CRM) is moving to social CRM and the key concept in this new marketing and business environment is customer engagement.

Zhang *et al.* (2015) the managers of MNC's who perceive higher legitimacy pressure, tend to have broad local knowledge which leads to increase in customer involvement. As per Bolumole *et al.* (2016) 3PL places their employees near to their customer manufacturing sites or where they are conducting their business. More freedom to employee in their job functions leads to clarity of their role and increases customer responsiveness. As per Kilibarda *et al.* (2016) discussed that there have been many papers in past for measuring service quality of logistics but quality assessment from customer perspective is lacking. LSP's are fragmented due to scattered industrial clusters. Recent trend of increasing logistics outsourcing had been identified. Assessment of service quality for logistics companies can be based only on basis of services provided like: transport, freight booking, customs brokerage, insurance or any combination of them. Service quality is directly related with relation level between LSP and clients and type of services offered by LSP to clients.

Robert and Adina (2016) discussed that definition of CS has been evolving over decades. From just simple end to end delivery, it has evolved to need analysis, time stipulation, JIT, considering negative impact of delays etc. LSP was identified as creator of balance between offered / committed services and financial gains. In the present business environment, the customer service is essential for any company which wants to be successful. Sohn *et al.* (2017) had

discussed that semiconductor companies expect small and medium enterprises (SME's) / SCM companies to operate in a qualitative manner till last delivery. Since 1900's there have been many researches on product quality and logistics quality but Kano approach is less applied in logistics. Also, very few studies have been conducted on triadic relation - Supplier - Buyer - LSP. Gaps can be identified by understanding supply context and buyers requirements. Service quality dynamics can be: delivery on time, with minimized claims, with minimum / no damages at correct place and with proper packaging. Also the gaps can be perceived versus actual delivery and purchase versus actual experience. The SCM companies need to adjust their perception to customers' perception in order to attain contractual longevity, and process quality along with capability must go hand in hand with IT investment by LSP.

Carman (2017) had identified that Parasaruman *et al.* made substantial contribution by making people understand concept of quality and factors influencing it by identifying gaps. Different industries may have multiple layers of service, such as in air travel an amalgam of services includes booking, boarding, in flight experience, baggage and departure. One important highlight was how to gauge SERVQUAL by asking users about their expectations but there may be a biased constraint, whereas based on experience of product, users can give a clear input on perception minus the expectation.

Ali and Kaur (2018) had discussed that global 3PL is rapidly growing, the industry is mainly dependent on mergers and acquisitions or takeovers for further scope of expansion. Indian logistics and supply chain market (L & SCM) is highly fragmented. The L & SCM market is optimistic with Government initiatives like Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC), Hyperloop, dedicated commercial highways etc. In India customization has taken over the concept of uniformity because of robust market size and demand.

According to author, some studies indicated satisfaction is related to product/ s ability to match expectations whereas some suggested it is perception which affects (pre / post consumption). Need analysis rather than fixed set of services was identified as the need of hour along with strong trust levels with clients.

As per Bae and Park (2018) LSP's play a vital role for providing quality service to shippers by collaborating with ports. Authors claimed no research was done on relation between international LSP's with ports. They also discussed level of inter-corporate relations in port process and performance dimension in port logistics. All shipping origin movement activities were described by the author. For shipping lines - freight forwarders are Non-Vessel Operating Common Carriers (NVOCC's) but for a shipper the same LSP becomes a common carrier. Communication with ports is in line with requirements of exporters. Once committed task is executed successfully, fulfilment leads to repeated business for an LSP. ANCOVA is used for analysing gaps in performance in clusters. ANCOVA represents the financial performance which is affected by customer performance.

Wudhikarna *et al.* (2018) in their literature review showed the four different gaps in the literature such as limited adoption of intellectual capital (IC) method in logistics studies in their paper. Organizations fail to consider human capital, and lack of academic research among different IC elements.

As per Lata and Narta (2019) unlike old times, emerging telecom companies are facing competition in terms of better infrastructure and service providing for clients. Focus has shifted from only revenue increase to clientele increase and creating loyal base. CS and service quality are the keys to retain existing clients. Company image, higher initial charges, low connectivity, slow after sales response were a couple of reasons found affecting the customer network operator switching reasons. As per Daugherty *et al.*

(2019) many companies routinely mine information from customer phone calls, online / social media responses. This can maintain the transparency and communications to help shippers and logistics providers understand each other's operations and collaborate in positive ways). Service satisfaction is the most important factor having direct impact on customer loyalty, and price is secondary factor that has influences loyalty (Singh, 2015).

As per Patel *et al.* (2020) the Service Profit Chain (SPC) showed that loyal, capable and satisfied employees drive higher customer satisfaction and loyalty. The study was conducted in a branch of a bank of northern state in India, and this study demonstrated the importance of throughput orientation in service chains. Study by Gomez *et al.* (2020) validated the effects of the three CRM components (sales, marketing and services) on customer knowledge management and innovation, as well as on the companies' efforts toward digital transformation and sustainable business model innovation.

As per Kumar *et al.* (2020) Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and SCM have significant impact on performance of the organisation. Unal and Metin (2021) suggested that most important aspect in foreign trade is transportation cost and least one is firm size. The nature of international trade lies in sharing risk and responsibilities between buyer and seller. The most important factor concluded to be influencing decision is cost and other factors play minor role in affecting Incoterms selection decision.

Contreras *et al.* (2022) in their study explored the resilience of Puerto Rican companies after Hurricane Maria. They identified how all companies faced critical issues with business continuity and restoration as infrastructure failed which was affecting their CRM activities. The study described the CRM resilience strategies to mitigate the damages from two aspects i.e. external like natural disasters or terrorism and internal like sabotage, strikes etc. Their model

employed the event driven process chain (EPC) to establish relation between key CRM elements and resilience strategies.

Singh *et al.* (2022) had investigated the logistics, store environment, store communication, assortment, perceived price and employee impact on customer satisfaction in multi-brand apparel retailing. The authors collected responses from the top multi-brand apparel retail outlets located in a tier-II city in India and identified value perceptions in apparel retailing, customer satisfaction leading factors and factors affecting customer loyalty.

According to Gupta (2022), employees directly relate customer service output to human resource practices, also interpersonal relations within an organization may positively or negatively impact customer service delivery. Factors like employee handling, teamwork, inter-departmental information sharing and communications play a positive/negative impact on employee for customer service delivery. Managerial practices that think from customer perspective and inculcate organizational positive values in employees has a direct relation with customer service output and satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

The world is shrinking in terms of connectivity between buyers and suppliers. One of the key factors which impacts the business across the world is logistics and supply chain management. In today's scenario organizations are trying to attain financial success with decisions based on cost control and optimum performance. An organizations financial and business performance may get positively or negatively impacted based on their logistics decisions. With vast opportunities in 3PL market, there is a stiff competition amongst logistics service providers to offer sustainable, cost effective logistics solution and retain clients in long run. Managers seek to have better control on procurement and supplies, at an

optimum level of cost, this is where concepts like JIT play a vital role in inventory management, order management and cost control. When LSP's understand gap and bridge them for their clients, it becomes easier for both the manager and LSP to do business hand in hand with minimum conflicts, resulting in customer loyalty. Some aspects which are noticeable with respect to customer service activity are as follows - clients have high level of expectations from their service providers, the degree of professionalism in terms of solution offering, sales and after-sales services, the quality levels of customer service, the loyalty of clients gradually takes a shift towards LSP's that enable and provide a seamless end to end customised solution, relationship management at all levels with internal customers (within own organization) as well as external customers (clients organization) and in global business environment, customer service has become an important aspect for any organization to be successful in long run.

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