Mystery Shopping: A Performance Evaluation Technique for Customer-Retailer Experience

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Abstract: This paper will discuss the phenomenon of Mystery shopping in the field of customer-retailer experience. By utilizing the writing about Mystery Shopping definitions and confinements of this instrument will be exhibited. Total Solution Group has helped me in conducting this research by providing me time and resources related to my study based on an ayurvedic brand: KAMA AYURVEDA. TSG provides mystery shopping service as a tool to its clients to help them in evaluating and improving customer service. Nowadays, it is not sufficient anymore to have excellence in services, processes and relationships. Now is the time to create excellence in customer experiences, as the only way to create a competitive advantage in the market. The goals of this paper are (1) Understanding how mystery shopping ensures business excellence. (2) Role of mystery shopping in the Ayuvedic industry (3)To understand the factors which will help in offering superior shopping experience to customers (4) To measure customer experience& satisfaction on various parameters. The study includes the parameters on which the employees have been evaluated and suggested measures to improve upon the service quality and customer experience. The development and implementation of a mystery shopper programme are closely linked to human resource management and employee involvement as it can be used as a useful and effective tool to evaluate employees at the workplace. The research findings identify how mystery shopping is used and the methods used to maximize the reliability of the technique. Therefore, this research states that mystery shopping can be a useful tool in addition to the more often-used survey methods.

Keywords: Mystery Shopping, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Experience, Service Quality, Human Resource Management.

INTRODUCTION

Total Solutions Incorporated
Total Business Solutions is a consultancy firm based on the concept of Mystery shopping. This company provides assistance to various major brands in ensuring quality service and customer delight. The firm helps its clients in conducting mystery audits and providing them with a vision of their brand and its outlets through the eye of a customer. It helps in highlighting the loopholes present in the services offered by a particular brand and thereby helps the brand in resolving the same.
What is Mystery Audit?
Mystery audit is the set of certain processes that enables the organization to monitor its performance anonymously and confidentially
What is Mystery Shopping?
Mystery shopping or a mystery consumer or secret shopper is an instrument used externally by market research companies, watchdog organizations, or internally by companies themselves to measure the quality of service, or customer experience, or to gather specific information about products and services. The mystery consumer's specific identity is generally not known by the employees.
Ayurvedic Industry
As the world is speedily inclining towards pure and organic stuff, the most ancient science of medicine and healthcare, Ayurveda is reliving with its glory. The future of Ayurveda is looking fabulous as more and more players are entering the market with innovative products, quality packaging, and strategic marketing activities.

About the Focused Company- KAMA Ayurveda:
•   Kama Ayurveda was started in 2002 in India, to promote the message of benefits of Ayurveda, universally. Today, Kama Ayurveda's high quality, beautifully packaged products are sold globally and used by some of the world's leading hotels and. Kama Ayurveda creates a completely natural remedy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

P Allison, D Severt, D Dickson (2010)- This study addressed the need for more research regarding mystery shopping evaluations by conducting a grounded theory analysis of the motivations of mystery shoppers, integrating quantitative survey data into the results. The results identified 14 dimensions of mystery shopper motivations and a model was presented showing these motivators as variables that are influential in the motivation to perform mystery shops.
Candice Benjes-Small and ElizabethKocevar-Weidinger (2011) The research showed that interpersonal communication between library staff and patrons. The interpersonal communication between the two was just as important to the patron as whether a question was answered correctly. In this exercise, shoppers posed as patrons and asked a library staff member a few questions. Immediately following the encounter, the shoppers reported on the service provided.
C Tarantola, P Vicard, I Ntzoufras (2012)- The author analyzed data from mystery shopping surveys via Bayesian Networks in order to examine and evaluate the quality of service offered by the loan departments of Greek Banks. It was inferred that customer satisfaction is directly related to the services provided by the staff and it proved to be useful in deciding the strategies of the company.
Rachel J. C. Chen and Clayton W. Barrows (2015) - Mystery shopping has been used to objectively measure whether employees follow the visions of a company's quality service standards. It then creates a feedback process that allows companies to train their employees to consistently deliver quality services and achieve service excellence.
MsPriyanka Singh, MrGauravVerma (2014) This paper enhanced previous concepts of customer image and perception by introducing the concept referred to as Customer Intelligence management and its tool as mystery shopping/audit. The goals of this paper were (1) to discuss the enhanced conceptual and operational benefits of mystery shopping in respect of brand positioning. (2) To discuss the requirement of shop auditor to measure customer intelligence 3) Components constructed to train the shop auditors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
•   Understanding how mystery shopping ensures business excellence.
•   Role of mystery shopping in the Ayurvedic industry.
•   To understand the factors that will help in offering superior shopping experience to customers
•   To measure customer experience & satisfaction on various parameters such as-
Store Ambience: Hygiene and Cleanliness, Store Window Display, In-Store Experience
 Staff Assessment: Greetings & Grooming Standards, Body Language + Attitude, Selling Skills
Product Knowledge & Demonstration
Selling Skills
RESEARCH DESIGN: Descriptive research design was adopted for carrying out this research.

SAMPLE OF THE STUDY
   1   **Sample Population:** The sample population is the retail stores of Kama Ayurveda.
   2   **Sample Size:** Total number of respondents was 22 all over India in which the Mystery Audit exercise was conducted as assigned by the client to the company(TSG)

TOOLS OF DATA COLLECTION

   ● **Mystery Shopping/Mystery Audit:**

Mystery Shopping is the art of evaluating customer services discreetly and professionally. Whenever there is an interaction between a customer and sales staff, there is an opportunity for Mystery Shopping. The reason it is called Mystery Shopping is because our auditors are required to carry out evaluations in a discreet manner.

Mystery audit is an audit that offers an opportunity to the organisation to access and monitor the quality of services provided from point of view of a customer. Mystery audit is a tool and technique used by the owner (client) to check the services offered by its organisation to its customer.

- **TSI Portal:** Total Solution Group works on 2 portals i.e. Shop Matrix and Sassy. The current research will be based on Sassy Portal on which the shoppers upload data instructed by the organisation. **Sassy Portal**(https://www.mysteryauditindia.in/index.norm.php)

- **Shopper's Report:** TSG has developed an application that is installed on the auditor's mobile device. The application has the entire checklist where the auditor can fill in the report immediately after the audit as well as upload the media proofs.

- **Sources of data**
  1. Data used in the study is Secondary in nature. The Data was taken from TSI portal; **Sassy**.
  2. Data relating to the concept of Mystery shopping was collected from various websites mentioned in the bibliography and books for service marketing.
  3. Data pertaining to the importance of the service of mystery shopping is provided by Total Solutions Group.
  4. The audits related data was collected from the previous reports (Questionnaire) and data sheet is provided by the company.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

- There are several parameters and sub parameters on which the overall score depends of a store.
- The data here interpreted is taken by the work done by 22 shoppers from different locations all over the country.
- The questionnaire consists of open ended and closed ended questions both to ensure the correctness and reliability of the data.
- Each question consists of several marks which contribute in the overall score in the report. Few questions are scoreless, just to check and get the full information.

  1. **Parameter- Store Ambience**

     - Hygiene & Cleaniness

     - Store Window Display

     - In Store Experience

Store Name	Store Ambience	Hygiene and Cleanliness	Store window display	In store experience
OBEROI MALL - MUMBAI	**100**	100	100	100
SEAWOODS	**93**	100	100	83
DLF GALLERIA - GURGAON	**100**	100	100	100
DYVASANDRA VILL.KRISHNA RAJ PURAM – BANGLORE	**93**	100	100	83
QUEST MALL- KOLKATTA	**85**	100	100	67
Phoenix market city mall – Kurla	**100**	100	100	100

PACIFIC MALL - TAGORE GARDEN	**100**	100	100	100
Ambience Mall , VasantKunj	**93**	100	100	83
DLF PROMENADE MALL-VASANT KUNJ	**100**	100	100	100
Esplanade One Mall - Bhuvneshwar	**100**	100	100	100
VR CHENNAI	**100**	100	100	100
Express Avenue Mall	**100**	100	100	100
Lulu Shopping Mall - Kochi	**100**	100	100	100
Panjagutta – Hyderabad	**100**	100	100	100
Jaipur Store	**100**	100	100	100
Phoenix Market City –Whitefield	**93**	88	100	100
KHAN MARKET- New Delhi	**93**	100	100	83
GK-1 - New Delhi	**93**	100	100	83
MG ROAD MALL-BANGLORE	**100**	100	100	100
Inorbit Mall Malad	**100**	100	100	100
SELECT CITY WALK –SAKET	**92**	100	100	80
SECTOR -18 – NOIDA	**93**	100	100	83
Total	**96.73%**	99.45%	100%	92.95%

Table 1.

INTERPRETATION:-Quest Mall Kolkata scored **85%** which is the lowest score in store Ambience. Maximum stores scored **100%** in store ambience. Overall score is **96.73%** for this quarter.
- Overall Hygiene and Cleanliness score 99.45%
- Overall Store Window Display score 100%
- Overall In Store Experience score 92.95%

2. **Parameter- STAFF ASSESSMENT**
   - Grooming
   - Body Language + Attitude

Store_name	Staff Assessment	Grooming	Body language + attitude
Oberoi mall - mumbai	**94**	90	100
Seawoods	**94**	88	100
Dlf galleria - gurgaon	**100**	100	100
Dyvasandra vill.krishna raj puram - banglore	**87**	75	100
Quest mall- kolkatta	**94**	89	100
Phoenix market city mall – kurla	**100**	100	100
Pacific mall - tagore garden	**94**	90	100
Ambience mall , vasantkunj	**87**	75	100
Dlf promenade mall-vasant kunj	**100**	100	100
Esplanade one mall - bhuvneshwar	**67**	75	60
Vr chennai	**85**	100	70

Express avenue mall	**78**	75	80
Lulu shopping mall - kochi	**90**	80	100
Panjagutta - hyderabad	**73**	75	71
Jaipur store	**100**	100	100
Phoenix market city –whitefield	**40**	63	14
Khan market- new delhi	**80**	75	86
Gk-1 - new delhi	**82**	90	71
Mg road mall-banglore	**73**	88	57
Inorbit mall malad	**94**	90	100
Select city walk -saket	**65**	86	50
Sector -18 – noida	**76**	80	71
Total	**84.23%**	**85.64%**	**83.18%**

Table 2.

INTERPRETATION:-Phoenix Market City -Whitefield scored **40%** which is the lowest score in Staff Assessment and even less than 50%. Many stores scored **100%** in Staff Assessment. Overall score is **84.23%** for this quarter.

- Overall grooming score 85.64%
- Overall Body Language and attitude score 83.18%

3. Parameter- SELLING SKILLS

STORE_NAME	SELLING SKILLS
OBEROI MALL – MUMBAI	78
SEAWOODS	86
DLF GALLERIA – GURGAON	86
DYVASANDRA VILL.KRISHNA RAJ PURAM – BANGLORE	70
QUEST MALL- KOLKATTA	87
PHOENIX MARKET CITY MALL – KURLA	91
PACIFIC MALL - TAGORE GARDEN	74
AMBIENCE MALL , VASANTKUNJ	83
DLF PROMENADE MALL-VASANT KUNJ	71
ESPLANADE ONE MALL - BHUVNESHWAR	74
VR CHENNAI	92
EXPRESS AVENUE MALL	58
LULU SHOPPING MALL – KOCHI	86
PANJAGUTTA – HYDERABAD	52
JAIPUR STORE	83
PHOENIX MARKET CITY –WHITEFIELD	46
KHAN MARKET- NEW DELHI	55
GK-1 - NEW DELHI	77
MG ROAD MALL-BANGLORE	91
INORBIT MALL MALAD	78
SELECT CITY WALK –SAKET	56
SECTOR -18 – NOIDA	50
TOTAL	73.82%

Table 3.

INTERPRETATION:-Phoenix Market City -Whitefield scored **46%** which is the lowest score in Selling Skills and even less than 50%. Not even a single store scored **100%** in Selling Skills. Overall score is **73.82%** for this quarter.

4. Parameter- PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE & DEMONSTRATION

Store_Name	Product Knowledge & Demonstration
OBEROI MALL - MUMBAI	75
SEAWOODS	75
DLF GALLERIA - GURGAON	88
DYVASANDRA VILL.KRISHNA RAJ PURAM – BANGLORE	63
QUEST MALL- KOLKATTA	88
Phoenix market city mall – Kurla	75
PACIFIC MALL - TAGORE GARDEN	75
Ambience Mall , VasantKunj	75
DLF PROMENADE MALL-VASANT KUNJ	75
Esplanade One Mall - Bhuvneshwar	50
VR CHENNAI	63
Express Avenue Mall	38
Lulu Shopping Mall - Kochi	75
Panjagutta - Hyderabad	38
Jaipur Store	75
Phoenix Market City –Whitefield	13
KHAN MARKET- New Delhi	75
GK-1 - New Delhi	50
MG ROAD MALL-BANGLORE	75
Inorbit Mall Malad	88
SELECT CITY WALK –SAKET	38
SECTOR -18 - NOIDA	38
Total	**63.86%**

Table 4.

INTERPRETATION:-Phoenix Market City -Whitefield scored **13%** which is the lowest score inProduct Knowledge & Demonstration and even less than 50%. Not even a single store scored **100%** in Product Knowledge & Demonstration. Overall score is **63.86%** for this quarter.

5. Parameter- OVERALL EXPERIENCE

A scale of 1 to 10 is used to decide the overall experience of an auditor.

Store_name	Store ambience	Staff assessment	Selling skills	Product knowledge	Evaluation score
OBEROI MALL – MUMBAI	100	94	78	75	**86**
SEAWOODS	93	94	86	75	**88**

DLF GALLERIA – GURGAON	100	100	86	88	**93**
DYVASANDRA VILL.KRISHNA RAJ PURAM - BANGLORE	93	87	70	63	**77**
QUEST MALL- KOLKATTA	85	94	87	88	**87**
Phoenix market city mall – Kurla	100	100	91	75	**93**
PACIFIC MALL - TAGORE GARDEN	100	94	74	75	**85**
Ambience Mall , VasantKunj	93	87	83	75	**85**
DLF PROMENADE MALL-VASANT KUNJ	100	100	71	75	**84**
Esplanade One Mall - Bhuvneshwar	100	67	74	50	**74**
VR CHENNAI	100	85	92	63	**87**
Express Avenue Mall	100	78	58	38	**71**
Lulu Shopping Mall – Kochi	100	90	86	75	**88**
Panjagutta – Hyderabad	100	73	52	38	**66**
Jaipur Store	100	100	83	75	**89**
Phoenix Market City –Whitefield	93	40	46	13	**51**
KHAN MARKET- New Delhi	93	80	55	75	**73**
GK-1 - New Delhi	93	82	77	50	**77**
MG ROAD MALL-BANGLORE	100	73	91	75	**86**
Inorbit Mall Malad	100	94	78	88	**88**
SELECT CITY WALK –SAKET	92	65	56	38	**63**
SECTOR -18 - NOIDA	93	76	50	38	**65**
TOTAL	**96.72%**	**84.23%**	**73.81%**	**63.86%**	**79.82%**

Table 5.

INTERPRETATION

- o Section wise score can be interpreted through this table
- o Overall score for store enviroenment-79.81%, staff assessment-96.72%, selling skills- 73.81%, product knowledge- 63.86%.
- o Average score for all the store assigned to TSG is 79.82%
- o Above data is also showing the figures which are less than 60% store wise and parameter wise.

FINDINGS

- ● The findings of the store environment shows the clear picture of the higience and cleanliness of the store
- ● The Mystery Shopper responses and research found that staff are committed, professional, pleasant and the supply of information generally good.
- ● Throughout the actual Mystery Shopping exercise, on most occasions, the manner and helpfulness of the staff was polite, courteous and professional. On some occasions a more

informed, attentive and less rushed approach would have helped improve the customer experience.
- Improvement in the relationship between your employees and customers, enhanced approaches by employees of which customers have immediate benefits.
- Clients have to work hard to satisfy its customer and enhance its sales by improving the performance of the employees.
- Most of the auditors are assigned with the audits on monthly basis.
- Majority of the people are satisfied with the service provided by the stores of Kama Ayurveda
- Phoenix Market City –Whitefield was the only store which scored only 51% overall. The client needs to manage the store and improve the performance of it
- The overall score was more than 75% which is quite good but less than the previous month and the client needs to work extra hard to achieve their service quality goals.

SUGGESTIONS

- Shoppers must be made aware about the status of reimbursement process.
- The employees must show the demonstration while informing about the features of the products to ensure satisfaction.
- All the staff should be informed and trained before starting any new campaign or offer to ensure proper information to be shared to the customers.
- Staff training should prepare staff for what to do if they cannot deal with an enquiry or answer a question.
- All the samples should be made available to the customers to enhance its sales and customer base.
- Consideration be given to a Customer Services Policy and Standards developed in full consultation with customers. These should reflect the recommendations outlined in this report. It should be noted that the participation process in determining standards may also identify other standards important to the customer.
- Mystery shopping exercise should be adopted by the companies to ensure the service quality and customer satisfaction of the customer.

CONCLUSION

High levels of satisfaction were experienced by the Mystery Shoppers. Staffs were polite and efficient. However consistency is required in the information provided to the customer regarding exchange of product, features, benefits etc.
A good level of satisfaction was experienced by the clients. However the consistency is required in following the guidance provided by the Total Solutions Group.
Almost all the mystery shoppers believe that the way TSI employees handle their shoppers is appropriate. According to most of the respondents, TSI employees adhere to professional standards of conduct. They find the employees courteous and have appropriate knowledge. They say that the staffs are able to handle their grievances effectively.
The Mystery Shopper responses and research found that staff are committed, professional, pleasant and the supply of information generally good. However, the Council should consider clearer presentation of staff name badges, privacy options if required and consistent high levels of service across all staff members.
Now a day's many companies are using mystery shopping to improve their products and services as well as reputation of the company

Mystery Shopping companies like, Total Solutions Incorporation, are gaining importance with the time and come up with a unique concept which will help bigger brands to keep a check on their stores across India and can have control as well. Mystery Shopping is helping in enhancing the satisfaction level of the customers as well as the sellers.

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