

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF SERVICE DELIVERY ON CONSUMER SATISFACTION: A CASE STUDY OF FORD - GAUTENG PROVINCE (REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA)

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ABSTRACT

An increasing amount of businesses and organisations in recent times are realising that being capable of providing acceptable levels of customer service delivery may, be the deciding factor of whether or not they will exist in the future. In this modern age of technology, competition has increased dramatically due to the fact that, the internet is able to bring many options into the hands of the consumer and has increased the pace of globalisation. Therefore, consumers have more bargaining power than ever before and, are aware of all the information options available to them in order to make informed decisions. The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of service delivery on consumer satisfaction at Ford as exemplified in the title of the paper.

Keywords: *Impact, Service Delivery, Consumer, Investigation, Satisfaction, Globalization, Businesses, Organizations, Technology, Information, Competition*

1.1 Introduction

According to Jansson-Boyd (2010:1), consumer psychology is more highly applicable in the world we live in today, than ever before due to the higher levels of consumption associated with Western Culture, and is an important part of society. According to Machado and Diggins (2012:2), the average provider of customer service in a business environment does not really understand the actual meaning. According to Lapshinoff (2001) cited in Machado et al. (2012:9), “a business that wants to develop a good relationship with customers must provide quality customer service.”

1.2 Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate the impact of service delivery on consumer satisfaction for Ford in Gauteng.

1.3 Research Objectives

According to Zikmund and Babin (2010:51), research objectives are the goals to be achieved by conducting research. The goals of this study are highlighted below:

- To explore the impact of service delivery on consumer satisfaction.
- To explore the factors that influence consumer satisfaction
- To identify the challenges faced by Ford in customer service delivery
- To make recommendations on improving customer services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining Terms

2.2.1 Customer

According to Machado et al. (2012:4), a customer refers to consumers who buy goods and services and further mention that customers are people who interact in the market place.

According to Machado et al. (2012:4), these customers have the ability to enhance the reputation of the company and contribute to the business growth and expansion of the business. According to Harris (2000) cited in Machado et al. (2012:4), customers wants and needs vary and these are:

- **Service** - Customers place a certain expectation on the level of service depending on the item or service being paid for.
- **Price** - Due to financial constraints, customers place a huge emphasis on the prices of commodities.
- **Quality** - Customers focus on the quality of the products purchased such as durability and functionality, this has become a main concern for customers.
- **Action** - If customers experience a problem with the products and services received, customers should feel free to call the company complaints department and report their concerns.
- **Appreciation** - A simple thank you can go a long way, this gesture ensures that customers are highly appreciated for their support.

2.2.2 Service

The American Marketing Association (1960) cited in du Plessis et al. (2007:310) defines services as “activities, benefits or satisfaction which are offered for sale or are provided in connection with the sale of goods”. Businesses are normally associated with customers in the market place when selling goods or providing a specialised service and in so doing, interact with customers who want to purchase these goods or services (du Plessis et al., 2007:310).

2.2.3. Understanding Customer Expectations

According to Harris (2014:23), consumer’s personal vision which they believe will be the outcome that will be achieved from their specific experiences is known as customer expectations and elaborates that the primary expectation arises from satisfying customers basic needs, like buying food or clothing, while secondary expectation are based on primary expectations. According to Harris (2014:24), the scope of influence which is usually negative reviews by customers who had bad experiences reach out to many people whilst great customer services are usually shared amongst close family members. Harris (2014:24) further emphasises that when customers share information about their bad experiences, they can easily influence others to abstain from interacting with that company which can impact negatively on the business. Machado et al. (2012:2) advise that the average provider of customer service in a business environment does not really understand the actual meaning. This is evident in all types of business environments whether private or government sector. According to Cronin and Taylor (1994) cited in Tsotsa (2002:43), consumer satisfaction is generally defined as an evaluative response concerning the perceived outcome of a particular consumption experience and further asserts that customers become brand loyal when they receive excellent services and are then willing to re-purchase from the company and share their positive experiences with family and friends. Crous (2005:3), provides a compelling argument stating that customer satisfaction can be achieved by organisations by investing in a specialised focus to improve customer satisfaction showing initiative to customers, by continuously improving the standard to work performed and ensuring that employees are rewarded for contributing to customer satisfaction by maintaining or exceeding customer expectations.

The general public expectation when interacting in the marketplace is to receive good customer service. At FMCSA, there dealership networks are independently owned, thereby limiting the control that Ford has on the dealership network.

2.4 Factors Affecting Customer Satisfaction

According to Harris (2014:25), reputation management is the process of identifying how a company is perceived and establishing an action plan to correct, maintain, or enhance the company's reputation. Tsotsa (2002:49) explains that value and quality of services are what influences customer satisfaction while Parasuraman (1985) cited in Nyadzayo et al. (2010:173) further elaborates that the perception of service quality and excellent service

delivery, influences the purchase behaviour of customers. At FMCSA, there has been increased growth in the dealer network over the past two years. This translates into the fact that there is an increased outreach in South Africa compare to before. This platform is significant as it provides further opportunity to provide improved service delivery to more consumers in the automotive market.

2.4.1 Credibility

According to Harris (2014:28), “credibility is made up of the combination of current knowledge, reputation, and professionalism”. Harris (2014:28) takes his argument further by stating that credibility can be cultivated by organisations practicing consistency, delivering on promises, continuous improvement in customer service delivery and showing dedication to customers as they will be satisfied knowing that they are dealing with a credible and reputable organisation. There is a host of other factors that affect customer satisfaction.

2.5 The Importance of Customer Satisfaction

According to Nienaber (2010:52), if customers are satisfied with service delivery, and if service delivery meets the perceived expected delivery of the customer, this will result in customer loyalty and greater profits for the company. According to Nyadzayo and Roberts-Lombard (2010:167), customer satisfaction is based on the overall experience and assessment at the service provider. According to Theron, Bothma and du Toit (2003:10), good customer service is important because happy customers cost less money.

2.5.1 Communication

According to Harris (2014:85), “communication is the process in which information, ideas, and understanding are shared between two (or more) people.” Harris (2014:86) further advises that there are important communication skills needed when dealing with consumers such as being able to clearly hear and understand the consumer, write information conveyed on paper in an understandable manner, being able to read and comprehend written information, and possess good non-verbal expression as the body language can express employees feelings.

2.5.2 Internet Communication

According to Collier (2011:28), customers find it difficult to have long conversations on the phone and some find it time consuming and frustrating. With today’s technology, customers have other useful means of communicating via the internet. Collier (2011:47) further highlight that companies use the internet to connect with their customers as businesses create a website which has an extranet that allows them to freely communicate with customers

2.6 Challenges Faced by Businesses in Service Delivery

2.6.1 Building a Relationship with Customers

According to Zikmund et al. (2010:37), an important function that marketing research can perform is the surveillance of the competition posed in the business environment for leads that could indicate a possible business opportunity. In some instances, these forms of research can provide motivation in order to fulfil consumer desires to the benefit of the firm as well as consumers (Zikmund et al., 2010:37). According to Harris (1996:17) cited in Machado et al. (2012:141), there are some key areas in which organisations must work towards so as to exceed consumer expectations and these are gaining knowledge of the customer base, determining what the customer expectations are, keeping consumers informed of the level of service offered, being able to live up to the created expectations and by being consistent rendering a high level of service consistently. According to Theron et al. (2003:15), delivering good customer service entails communicating with customers, welcoming customers when speaking to them, demonstrating effective ability to manage the overall service experience while being able to handle difficult situations with class, displaying the ability to manage a service-driven team and more importantly being able to transform the whole team into a customer service oriented team.

2.6.2 Challenges in Managing a Brand

According to Klopper et al. (2011:359), there are various challenges when managing a brand, like maintaining relevance as the market changes, creating products that are affordable and avoiding visible negatives where a brand can easily lose its customers and cause disrepute to

the company. Machado et al. (2012:61) mention that businesses can effectively manage a brand service delivery by facilitating customer complaints, responding to the customer based on these complaints, encouraging sales staff to probe customers for problems, training staff to handle complaints, developing a complaint response procedure, appointing a senior manager to take ultimate responsibility for customer complaints, and in addition in clear instances where the company was in the wrong, management should give customers vouchers or hampers although this sort of arrangement should be handled with care and not abused.

2.6.3 Building a Corporate Brand

According to Klopper et al. (2011:361), top management involvement requires them to allocate resources to create brand awareness through public speaking, media responses, and communicating closely to stakeholders externally as well as internal stakeholders. According to Klopper et al. (2011:361), companies need to focus on their corporate social responsibility which employees need to be involved in since employees play a central role and integral part in engaging with external stakeholders and should have good product knowledge and should assist in communicating or delivering the brand message which makes it fundamentally important to train employees on brand values.

2.6.4 Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

According to Brink and Berndt (2008:21), a step towards achieving excellent customer services is by implementing CRM, which can assist companies in creating a pool of satisfied customers as CRM can assist marketers by bringing customer focus and creating customer engagement with their brands. Brink and Berndt (2008:21) further advises that CRM also communicates with customers trying to match their needs and wants and custom designing services that meet those needs with the use of a CRM technology with specialised software that is designed by a software engineer, which can prove to be expensive but worth the investment as it matches the needs of the customers in which the business operates in, to the businesses products and services offered. CRM software can potentially organise and more importantly synchronise the processes of a business like sales, marketing and customer service or technical support electronically (Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, 2014:214).

According to Van Zyl (2005:70), in order for businesses to gain competitive edge, they should consider hiring a customer relationship manager to bridge the gap between customers and businesses by creating long lasting relationships with customers and understanding their needs. Van Zyl (2005:70) further advise that CRM can assist companies to identify key areas of what a customer expects from the company, will ensure customer loyalty and that businesses will remain profitable by keeping their customers happy and seeing to their needs constantly. Gilbert (2000) cited in Nyadzayo et al. (2010:173) provides insight as to further benefits to customer relations management in the sense that it ensures that customers do not switch to competitors by creating customer value and ensuring customers are always happy. Managers in dealerships should have sound knowledge and should also manage their relationships with their customers.

Brink et al. (2008: 32) further argue that in order to get an upper hand on competitors and stay one step ahead, companies should invest in time getting to understand the wants and needs of customers as they gain trust with companies after a long scrutiny since consumers are not easily trusting. According to Nienaber (2010:57), by creating a customer strategy it ensures that customers form part of the company's mission statement by understanding what value means to customers. Managers should be able to understand customers change in needs and wants and be able to provide for these needs. Therefore managers need to communicate with customers frequently.

2.6.5 Creating a Customer Retention Programme

According to Harris (2014:158), developing a customer-retention programme is beneficial in order to retain current customers and can be achieved by examining the customer base and what specified needs they have, identifying specific objectives to be realised by the program, creating a manageable program for customer retention as well as creating a culture that stimulates customer interest.

Along with the important component of CRM to build a successful business, the customer retention part of can be one of the most important tools when trying to convince a customer why a business should be given a second chance. In some instances of poor customer services that occur, they should not have happened in the first place and are purely silly mistakes, and may be a once off as well. In other instances, when these instances of poor customer services occur, it's not highlighted to the customer services department or the relevant authority so the business never ends up fixing the issue and continues with business as usual. The customer retention program would provide an opportunity for the business to find out exactly why the customer is deciding to part ways and will have the opportunity to improve, which will benefit the business in the long run and the customer base. Usually a gesture of goodwill can be offered to disgruntled customers by offering them something in return, like a service free of charge for example, which may end up helping to retain the customer or calm them down so that they don't spread the word of their poor experience which could tarnish the image of the brand. According to Hammond (2009:118), there are various factors identified that contribute to poor customer services and needs to be addressed immediately in the event that business identify employees with bad conduct engaging in the following actions at any point, as if it gets out of hand, it may be very difficult to convince angry customers not to switch to another service provider:

- Coming to work upset and taking out frustration out on customers.
- Hanging up on angry customers
- Failure to return phone calls or voicemail messages
- Putting callers on hold or speaker without their permission or informing them
- Eating whilst speaking to the customer
- Putting callers on hold for a long period until an available operator answers the call.
- Failure to say please, thank you or goodbye.
- Engaging in conversation with colleagues whilst talking to customers.
- Giving one word answers to customers
- Using SMS language when typing emails to customers
- Telling customers to call back another time
- Rushing and talking to customers and not listening to them
- Openly telling customers that they hate their jobs

2.6.6 Training

According to Machado et al. (2012:111), training entails gaining skills that can help one achieve their objectives and enhancing their competence in the work place with benefits such as assisting individuals understand the company's vision, mission, values, culture and strategy, the ability to gain skills on how to interact with customers follow processes, understand company policy and procedures, increase product and service knowledge, increase the ability to serve customers well and maintain service quality, and promote teamwork.

2.6.7 Porters Generic Strategies

According to Kotler and Keller (2012:73), Michael Porter has provided three proposals on generic strategies that give a good starting point in terms of strategic thinking with relation to overall differentiation, cost leadership, as well as focus.

- Overall cost leadership refers to being cost effective by achieving the cheapest production as well as distribution costs compared to competitors so that products can be sold cheaper in order to gain market share.
- Differentiation refers to businesses focusing on superior performance in an important area that benefits customers, which are valued by a significant portion of the market.
- Focus refers to businesses focusing on one or many marketing segments and tries to understand them closely and then pursues either differentiation in the targeted market segment or cost leadership.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Target Population

According to Saunders et al. (2016:166), when there's difficulty to access an entire population in order to conduct a study, researchers may choose to redefine the population to make it more manageable and further explains that in most cases it is a subset chosen of the actual population and is referred to as the target population. The target population was Ford vehicle owners residing in Silverton, Gauteng.

3.2 Limitations of the Research

This research was conducted to investigate the consumer satisfaction related to customer services of Ford in Silverton, Gauteng. Considering the resource and time constraints, the research was limited to vehicle owners in Silverton, Gauteng, and therefore cannot be representative of the whole of Gauteng province or South Africa. In addition, information as to the number of vehicle owners that specifically own Ford vehicles in Silverton was not available and therefore, a specific amount of consumers on the target population could not be specified. Other limitations originate from the research tool used, which were in the form of a questionnaire and were close ended, as well as respondents being anonymous, which limits the researchers ability of being able to get additional follow up information from the survey.

The limitations in terms of this cursory study were not significant and did not hinder or affect the limited study as a whole. It is recommended that other researchers explore the parameters of this study in more detail. This will allow further studies to add to the body knowledge of the subject matter in greater and significant detail.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Presentation and Discussion of the Findings

This study aimed at identifying if superior customer service delivery can result in an increase in customer satisfaction.

In an effort to achieve this, the following research objectives were explored in details in order to yield the desired results:

- To explore the impact of service delivery on consumer satisfaction
- To identify the challenges faced by Ford in customer service delivery
- To explore the factors that influence consumer satisfaction
- To make recommendations as to whether Ford needs to add a more a specialised focus on customer services, as well as to the opportunities for improvement, as a tool to retain loyal customers, and to attract new customers

The findings were arranged into three parts for ease of interpretation and presentation. The first part will concentrate on feedback relating to the importance of customer service to automotive consumers. The second part focuses on identifying the challenges faced by Ford in customer service delivery. The third part explores the factors that influence consumer satisfaction. The overall survey response rate achieved is 89%.

4.2. The Impact of Service Delivery on Consumer Satisfaction

Section A of the questionnaire focused on identifying the level of service demanded by automotive consumers so as to ascertain the level of service that automotive manufacturers need to meet in order to keep consumers satisfied. In addition, this section also aimed at identifying the importance of customer service to consumers so as to identify the scope of creating a specialised customer focus as a brand definition in order to gain competitive advantage in the market place.

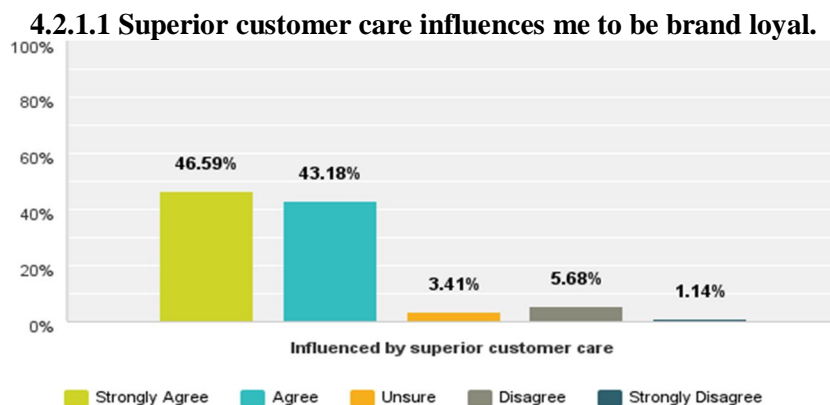


Figure 4.1: Superior Customer Care

The findings in figure 4.2 reveal that 89.77% agreed (46.59% strongly agreed, 43.18% agreed), 3.41% were unsure and 6.82 disagreed (5.68% disagreed, 1.14% strongly disagreed). According to Cook (2008:1), as time progresses, more organisations have focused more on customer service in order to achieve a competitive advantage and further emphasises that customers are the foundation of businesses and keeps it in existence... According to Nienaber (2010:52), if customers are satisfied with service delivery, and if service delivery meets the perceived expected delivery of the customer, this will result in customer loyalty and greater profits for the company. With account to the fact that the extremely high results for the number of respondents that agree reflect that in order for automotive manufactures to grow their market share, they have to be customer centric to gain the competitive edge in the automotive industry.

4.2.1.2 I believe that good customer service influences my decision when purchasing a new vehicle.

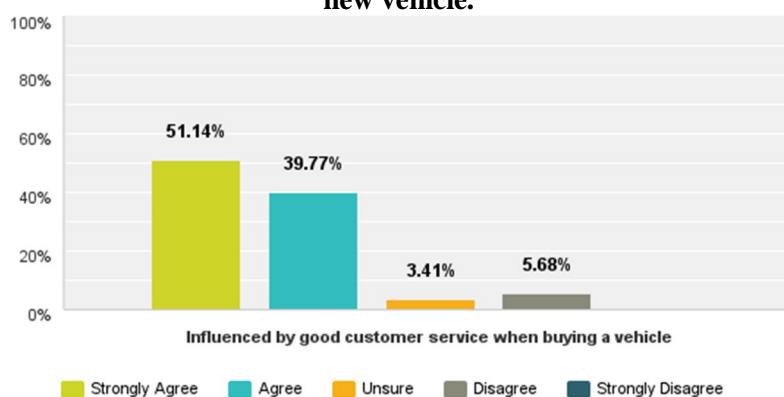


Figure 4.2: Importance of Good Customer Service

This question aimed at ascertaining the importance of good customer service to automotive consumers when making vehicle purchase decisions. The results in figure 4.3 indicates that 90.91% agreed (51.14% strongly agreed, 39.77% agreed), 3.41% were unsure and 5.68% strongly disagreed. According to Nyadzayo and Roberts-Lombard (2010:167), customer satisfaction is based on the overall experience and assessment at the service provider. According to Theron, Bothma and du Toit (2003:10), good customer service is important because happy customers cost less money. It can cost a company millions in order to get new customers yet it will cost less just to retain the customers that they currently have. Unhappy customers will leave due to bad customer experiences and can be very dreadful not only for the consumer but the company itself. According to Cook (2008:14), organisations should ensure that they deliver on the brands promise to customers in order to increase the likelihood

of the customer recommending the brand to their friends and family and further explains that when a company creates a product they should do so with the customer in mind. The brand should appeal to the customer, the customer should receive the perceived benefits from the brand, and the brand should create customer satisfaction which in turn leads to customer loyalty and retention (Cook, 2008:14).

4.2.1.3 I value people’s opinions about customer service before buying a vehicle.

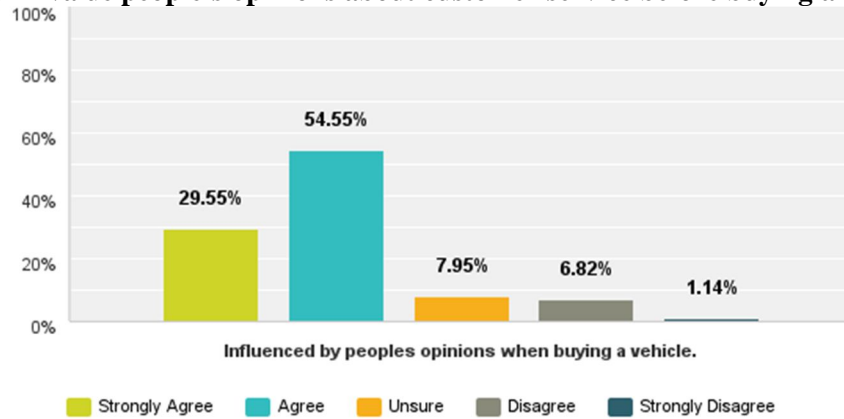


Figure 4.3: Value People’s Opinions when Buying a Vehicle

This question aimed to determine whether or not people’s opinions about specific vehicle brands influence the decisions of consumers when making vehicle purchase decisions. The results in figure 4.4 indicates that 84.1% agreed (29.55% strongly agreed, 54.55% agreed), 7.95% were unsure while 7.96% disagreed (6.82% disagreed, 1.14% strongly disagreed). According to Harris (2014:24), the scope of influence which is usually negative reviews by customers who had bad experiences reach out to many people whilst great customer services are usually shared amongst close family members. Harris (2014:24) further advises that when customers share information about their bad experiences, they can easily influence others to abstain from interacting with that company which can impact negatively on the business as clients can easily share their experience on social media like Facebook, Twitter and other websites which could hurt the reputation of the company and reduce market share.

4.2.1.4 A company with a well-developed customer relations focus makes me feel valued and important as a customer.

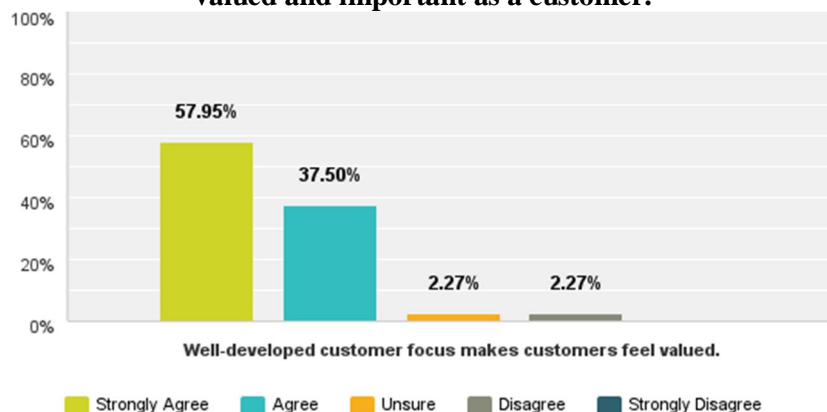


Figure 4.4: Customer Focus makes Consumers Feel Valued

This question aimed to determine the impact of a well-developed customer focus on consumers. The results from figure 4.5 indicate that 95.45% agreed (57.95% strongly agreed, 37.5% agreed), 2.27% were unsure and 2.27% disagreed. According to Brink and Berndt (2008:21), a step towards achieving excellent customer services is by implementing CRM,

which can assist companies in creating a pool of satisfied customers. CRM assist marketers by bringing customer focus and creating customer engagement with their brands as we as to communicate with customers trying to match their needs and wants and custom designing services that meet those needs (Brink and Berndt, 2008:21). With a specialised customer focus, organisations are able to identify their very important customers and ensure that special efforts are made to keep them satisfied so as to retain their brand loyalty. It is more cost effective to focus on the current customer base, than to attract new customers, although these specialised efforts need to be made in parallel, in order to gain market share.

4.2.1.5 Reliability of service does influence me to be brand loyal.

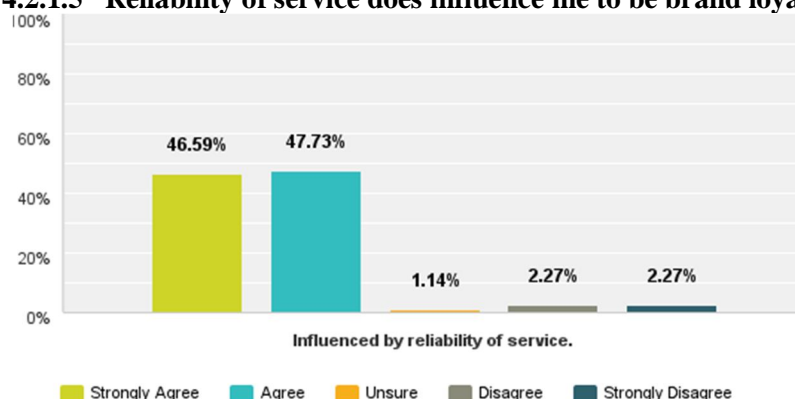


Figure 4.5: Reliability of Service

This question is focused on determining if consumers are brand loyal when they are confident that they will receive the level of customer service they expect or deserve. The results in figure 4.6 reveal that 94.32% agreed (46.59% strongly agreed, 47.73% agreed), 1.14% were unsure and 4.54% disagreed (2.27% disagreed, 2.27% strongly disagreed). Soudagar et al. (2012:18), mention that there are four important factors relating to trust that are important to providing a satisfactory customer experience namely reliability, convenience, responsiveness and relevance. The most essential and prevalent factor, which is a pre-requisite to the other three factors, is reliability due to the fact that if businesses cannot consistently deliver on promises made to consumers, they will not care about convenience, responsiveness or relevance (Soudagar et al., 2012:18). According to Cook (2008:14), organisations should ensure that they deliver on the brands promise to customers in order to increase the likelihood of the customer recommending a brand to their friends and family. Businesses need to ensure that they deliver on their promises on time, every time and to the same consistent standards. This will create confidence in the minds of consumers and enhance the image and reputation of the company.

4.2.1.6 I will be satisfied waiting in a queue for a reasonable amount of time as long as I receive quality customer service.

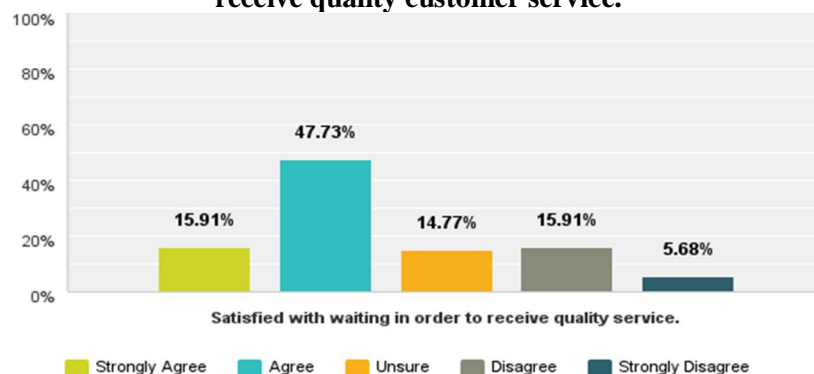


Figure 4.6: Waiting in Order to Receive Quality Service

This question focused on determining the level of importance of customer services to consumer such that they will even be prepared to wait a reasonable time to receive quality customer service. The results in figure 4.7 reveal that 63.64% agreed (15.91% strongly agreed, 47.73% agreed), 14.77% were unsure and 21.59% disagreed (15.91% disagreed, 5.68% strongly disagreed). According to Tsotsa (2002:49), value and quality of services are what influences customer satisfaction. Consumers have a perception of the level of service they should receive in their mind and have the tendency of having a tolerance in terms of waiting a reasonable period of time in order to receive their desired level of service (Machado et al. 2012:142). Ideally, organisations need to ensure that this waiting period is as short as possible to ensure that the adequate levels of consumer services can be met.

4.2.1.7 The high quality of goods or services rendered ensures that I am always a satisfied customer.

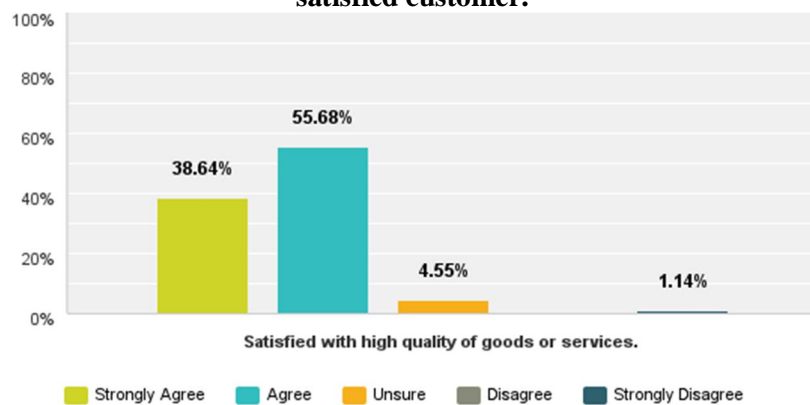


Figure 4.7: Satisfied with High Quality of Goods or Services

This question aimed at determining if consumers always have an expectation of receiving quality customer services. The results in figure 4.8 indicate that 94.32% agreed (38.64% strongly agreed, 55.68% agreed), 4.55% were unsure and 1.14% strongly disagreed. According to Machado et al. (2012:142-143), desired service is an ideal service scenario a consumer would wish to receive and the level of consumer expectations at this point tends to be long term and quite stable. Consumers pay for a level of service they think they will receive, when they decide to pay a certain price for goods and services (Machado et al., 2012:142-143). Organisations need to ensure that they communicate adequately, the level of service they are able to provide so as not to create a perceived value in the customer’s mind that cannot be met. In this way, the consumers will have a fair opportunity to choose a service provider that can deliver the level of service that they require and pay for.

4.2.1.8 I have switched vehicle brands in the past in the pursuit of improved customer services.

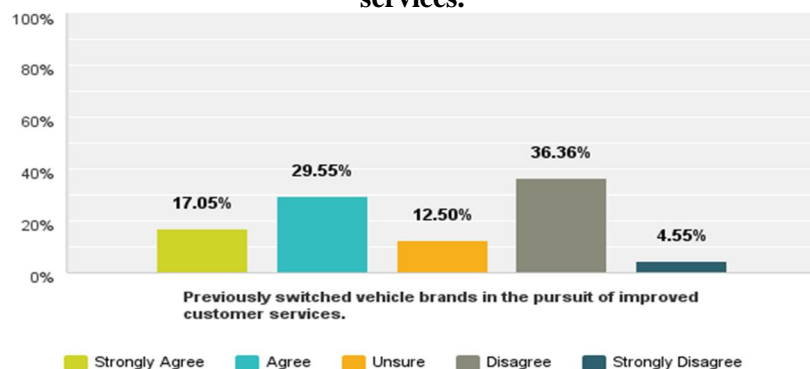


Figure 4.8: Switched Vehicle Brands in the Pursuit of Improved Customer Services

The results in figure 4.9 reveal that 46.6% agreed (17.05% strongly agreed, 29.55% agreed), 12.5% were unsure and 40.91 disagreed (36.36% disagreed and 4.55% strongly disagreed). According to Cronin and Taylor (1994) cited in Tsotsa (2002:43), consumer satisfaction is generally defined as an evaluative response concerning the perceived outcome of a particular consumption experience as customers become brand loyal when they receive excellent services and are then willing to re-purchase from the company and share their positive experiences with family and friends. Tsotsa (2002:43) further explains that if the expectation of service exceeds the customer’s perception, the customer will be pleased to pay a premium price for that service and will most likely purchase services from that company again.

4.2.2 Challenges faced by Ford in customer service delivery

The focus of section B focused on identifying potential difficulties faced on order to be able to provide consistency in service delivery. The variability of service is a challenge in the automotive industry where majority of dealerships are independently owned thereby limiting the level of control and influence by automotive manufacturers.

4.2.2.1 I believe that the standard of customer service delivery is consistent amongst dealerships.

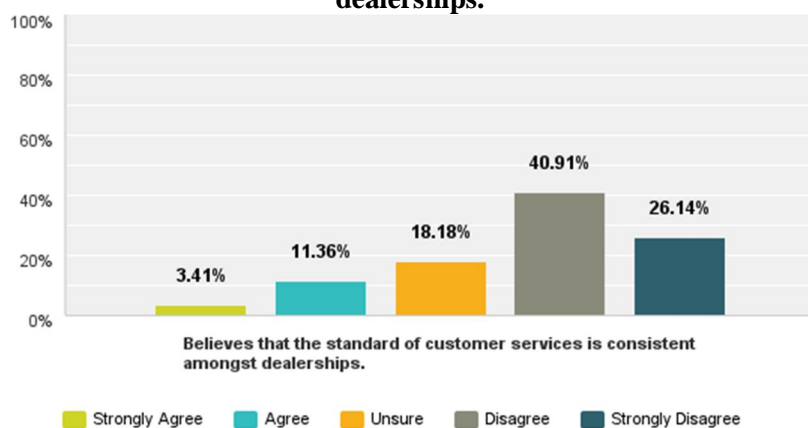


Figure 4.9: The Standard of Customer Services amongst Dealerships is Consistent

This question aimed to establish if a consistent level customer service delivery existed amongst dealerships. The results from figure 4.10 reveal that 14.77% agreed (3.41% strongly agreed, 11.36% agreed), 18.18% were unsure while 67.05% disagreed (40.91% disagreed, 26.14% strongly disagreed). According to Crous (2005:3), customer satisfaction can be achieved by being committed to customer satisfaction by showing initiative to customers, by continuously improving the standard to work performed and ensuring that employees are rewarded for contributing to customer satisfaction by maintaining or exceeding customer expectations. Therefore, taking into account these various aspects of customer satisfaction, it’s of paramount importance that the customers are highly satisfied with the services rendered by service providers so that they will continue to do business with the company on an on-going basis, which is ultimately the aim of ensuring customer satisfaction. The findings therefore reveal that there is an inconsistency in the level of service received from dealerships and therefore has a negative impact on service delivery. Automotive manufacturers need to ensure that dealerships are closely monitored and adhere to strict customer service guidelines in order to maintain consistency in customer service. In addition, they should investigate the option of either owning dealerships or owning a significant stake in the dealerships in order to have more influence and control thereby improving their level of service and providing more opportunity to provide consistency and more satisfied customers.

4.2.2.2 I have always had a great customer experience with my vehicle brand when it came to customer service delivery.

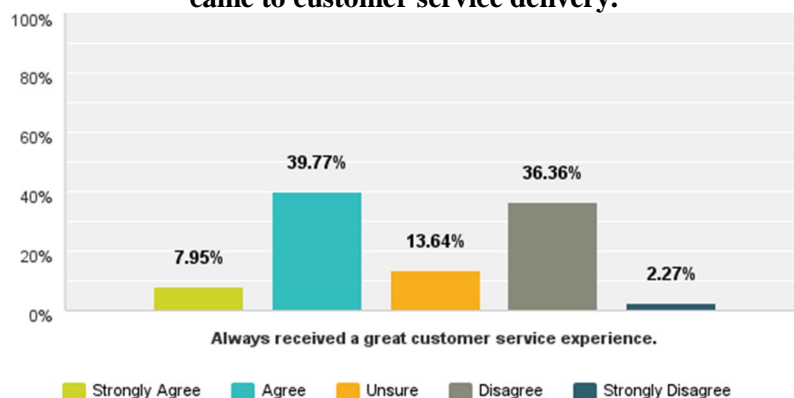


Figure 4.10: Received Great Customer Service Experiences

The results from figure 4.11 indicate that 47.72% agreed (7.95% strongly agreed, 39.77% agreed), 13.64% were unsure while 38.63% disagreed (36.36% disagreed, 2.27% strongly disagreed). According to Cook (2008:17), companies should not over exaggerate to customers, promises should be limited to what the product can offer the individual, companies are better off under-promising customers but instead deliver more, this can impress the customer and customers become reluctant to change. The findings therefore indicate that there are challenges faced by dealerships in terms of being able to provide a consistent level of service delivery to consumers. Cook (2008:17), further elaborates that it normally starts out easier to maintain a small customer base of happy customers but the problem stems when businesses customer base grows and then they find that they are not adequately set up to provide the same level of customer service, which starts to deteriorate. Along with market share growth, it is important that business increase their focus on ensuring a higher level of service in order to maintain and build on the brand reputation (Cook, 2008:17).

4.2.2.3 I am satisfied with the process of getting my car serviced or repaired.

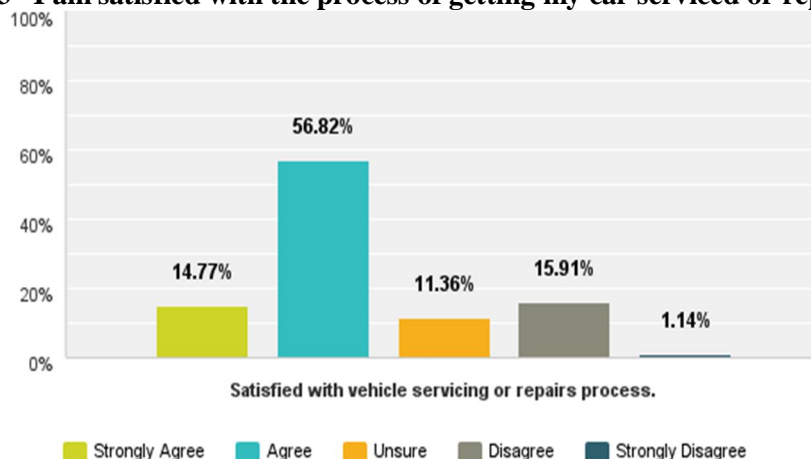


Figure 4.11: Vehicle Servicing or Repairs Process

This question directed focus on ascertaining if consumers were satisfied with the process of sending their vehicle for service or repairs. The results from figure 4.12 indicate that 71.59% agreed (14.77% strongly agreed, 56.82% agreed), 11.36% were unsure and 17.05% disagreed (15.91% disagreed, 1.14 strongly disagreed). The findings reveal that majority of consumers are satisfied with the process of having their vehicles service or repaired, however there are consumers who are not satisfied which translates into the fact that there is a challenge that has room for improvement. According to Lewin (2006:1), in order to keep customers happy and loyal, Toyota is focused on speeding up the time it takes to get vehicles serviced through an express option called the Toyota Express Service Scheme where customers can have their

vehicles serviced with an hour. According to General Motors (GM) (2015) cited in Cokayne (2015), GM has launched a customer new care initiative called “Complete Care” which is a global campaign by the brand which is focused on creating customer service as a brand definition by re-affirming the brands commitment to provide superior sale and aftermarket services. General Motors (GM) (2015) cited in Cokayne (2015) further advises that a research done by GM in South Africa has indicated that customers did not realise that many elements of customer care they provided came with when the customer had actually purchased a vehicle in the first place. Although there are new service offerings introduced internationally by the large automotive manufacturers, where vehicles can be service while the customer waits, this level of service is not widely implemented in South Africa. An opportunity exists for automotive manufacturers to implement this speedy vehicle service offering in South Africa as a superior service offering in order to gain competitive advantage.

4.2.2.4 I have always had a great perception of Ford when it came to customer service.

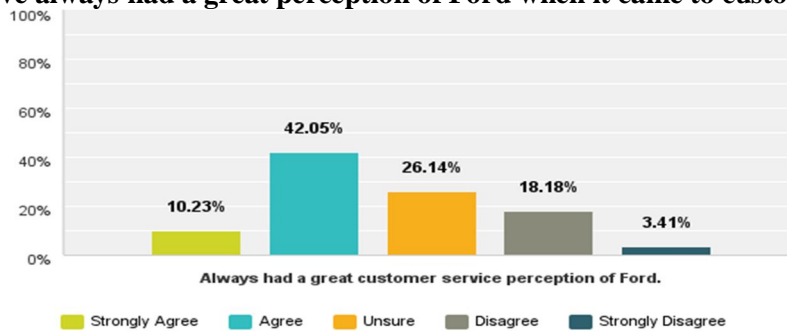


Figure 4.12: Brand Image of Ford

This question aimed to reveal the overall consumer perception of Ford in relation to the quality of customer services rendered. The results in figure 4.13 indicate that 52.28% agreed (10.23% strongly agreed. 42.05% agreed), 26.14% were unsure and 21.59% disagreed (18.18 disagreed, 3.41 strongly disagreed). According to Tsotsa (2002:48), a company’s image plays a vital role in attracting potential customers and retaining current customers and further advises that how a customer perceives value differs from individuals, customers may find price of the product, attributes, tastes and characteristics of the product which may influence the value of a product. Consumer’s perception of quality ranges from target audience, the brands and the company image (Tsotsa, 2002:48). According to Cook (2008:14), brands are most valuable when they have a good image associated with it as consumers will be willing to pay more money and tend to value the goods more since their perceived value in which they receive through the brand association, will be greater. Brand image is very important, especially for businesses working towards growth in market share. The results further indicate that there is room for improvement for Ford to enhance their reputation and brand image in order to gain customers by increasing their efforts of providing superior customer service as a brand definition.

4.2.2.5 I believe that communication is a barrier to my receiving good customer service.

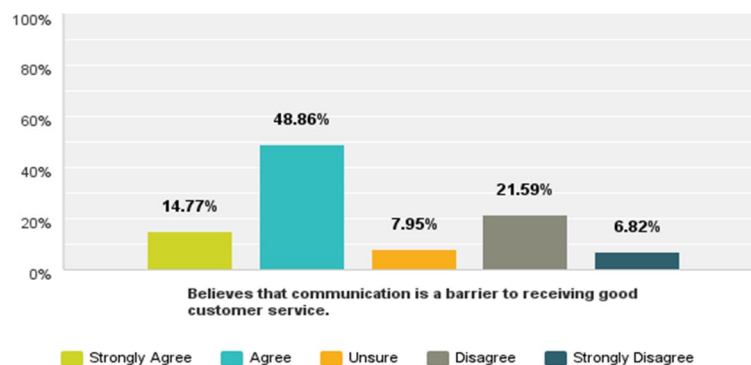


Figure 4.13: Communication is a Barrier to Receiving Good Customer Service

This question aimed to establish if communication barriers exist which may be attributed to the deterioration in the ability to effectively provide the required level of customer service consistently. The results from figure 4.14 indicate that 63.63% agreed (14.77 strongly agreed, 48.86 agreed), 7.95% were unsure and 28.41 disagreed (21.59 disagreed, 6.82 strongly disagreed). According to Collier (2011:28), customers find it difficult to have long conversations on the phone and some find it time consuming and frustrating. According to Harris (2014:102), language barriers are one of the biggest problems businesses face between customers and employees. The findings therefore indicate that communication barriers are a challenge that Ford is faced with in order to deliver good customer service consistently. In South Africa, there is a high amount of different languages and cultural backgrounds which could account for communication barriers. Businesses should strive to ensure that their staffs are highly trained in order to effectively communicate with customers in order to meets their needs efficiently and adequately.

4.2.2.6 I believe that my vehicle brand does not understand me and my needs as a customer.

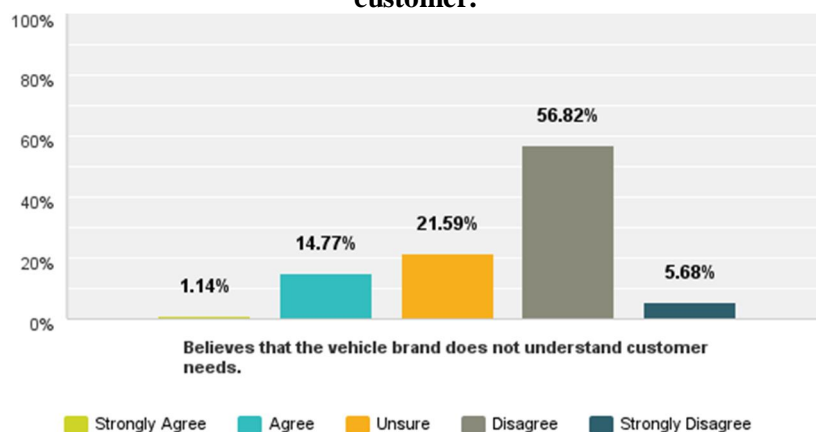


Figure 4.14: Vehicle Brand Does Not Understand Customer Needs

This question aimed to determine if a gap existed between vehicle manufacturers and automotive consumers in terms of fully understanding customer requirements and expectations. The results reflected in figure 4.15 indicate that 15.91% agreed (1.14% strongly agreed, 14.77% agreed), 21.59 were unsure and 62.5% disagreed (56.82% disagreed, 5.68 strongly disagreed). According to Nienaber (2010:57), by creating a customer strategy it ensures that customers form part of the company’s mission statement by understanding what value means to customers. Managers should be able to understand customer change in needs and wants and be able to provide for these needs and therefore need to communicate with customers frequently (Nienaber, 2010:57). According to Joubert (2013:20), expectations of customers are based on their perceptions. The results indicate that consumers do believe to a large extent that automotive manufacturer to understand their needs and requirements, although room for improvement does exist to bridge the small gap. In addition, understanding these needs of consumers is one important aspect, and fulfilling these needs is another and more difficult task.

4.2.2.7 I have experienced bad customer service with my vehicle brand but have never complained about it.

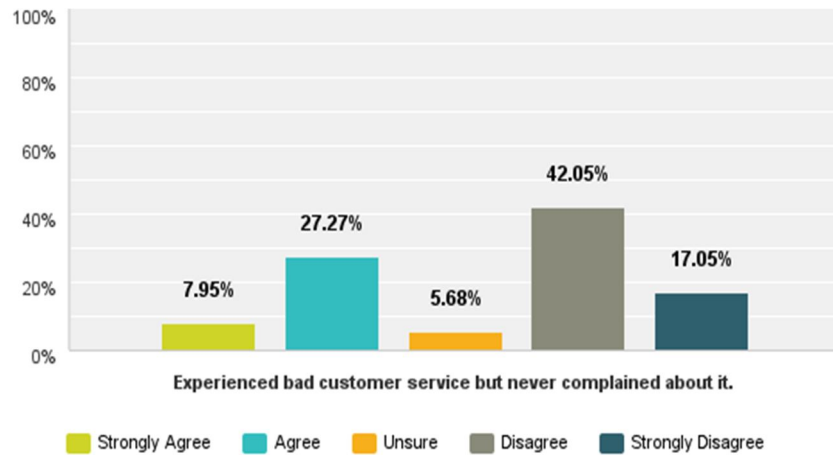


Figure 4.15: Received Bad Customer Service but Never Complained about it

This question aimed to identify the amount of consumers who may have received poor customer services, but have not complained, thereby causing the relevant vehicle service provider to be unaware of the possible deterioration in service delivery. The results indicated in figure 4.16 indicate that 35.22% agreed (7.95 strongly agreed, 27.27 agreed), 5.68% were unsure and 59.1% disagreed (42.05% disagreed, 17.05% strongly disagreed). According to Blem (1995:19), there are different types of customers that react differently to poor customer service starting with passives, who do not complain because they believe that no improvement will be made, voices, who feel that by complaining, it can have a positive impact on service delivery, irate, who communicate bad experiences with other consumers and easily switch to competitors and activists who complain through every medium possible in order to get the required attention in order to have their issues resolved. A complaint is a gift in disguise. Organisations need to make every effort to ensure that systems are in place to receive and encourage consumers to complain, so that the gaps in their customer service can be speedily closed. In addition, businesses need to ensure that they adequately compensate consumers in occurrences where they were clearly wrong, in order to keep the consumer satisfied and happy.

4.2.2.8 I have switched dealerships in the past in the pursuit of improved customer services.

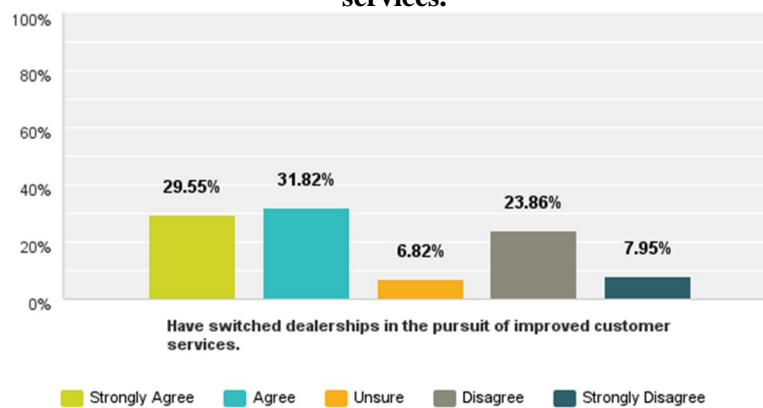


Figure 4.16: Switched Dealerships in the Pursuit of Improved Customer Services

This question aimed at revealing if difficulty existed for vehicle manufacturers to maintain a consistent level of service delivery throughout the dealer network. The results in figure 4.17 indicate that 61.77% agreed (29.55% strongly agreed, 31.82% agreed), 6.82% were unsure and 31.81% disagreed (23.86 disagreed, 7.95 strongly disagreed). According to Gilbert (2000) cited in Nyadzayo et al. (2010:173), customer relations management ensures that customers do not switch to competitors by creating customer value and ensuring customers are always happy. Managers in dealerships should have sound knowledge and should also manage their relationships with their customers. According to Brink et al. (2008: 32), a customer relations manager needs to continuously gather information on its customers. Some consumer may decide to switch dealerships in an effort to find improved customer services and may only chose to switch their vehicle brand totally if this effort fails. It is important that businesses are aware of the reasons as to why customers have left so that they can make the relevant improvements so that they don't continue to lose more customers before fixing the problem.

4.2.3 Factors that influence consumer satisfaction

The section C of the questionnaire focussed on identifying what make the consumers satisfied. In order to provide good customer service, it first needs to be ascertained as to what the needs and requirements of consumers are.

4.2.3 1 Knowledgeable, trustworthy and expert staff gives me great customer satisfaction.

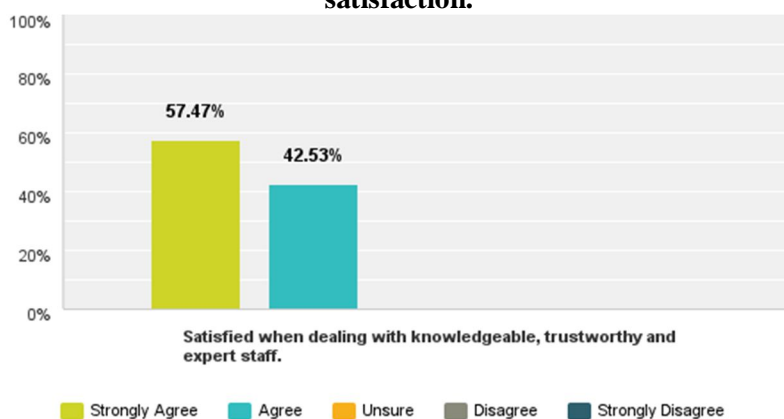


Figure 4.17: Dealing with Knowledgeable, Trustworthy and Expert Staff

This question aimed to identify if factors such as knowledgeable, trustworthy and well trained staff at dealership outlets have a positive impact on automotive consumer satisfaction. The results in figure 4.18 reveal that 100% of the respondents agreed (57.47% strongly agreed, 42.53 agreed). According to Cronin and Taylor (1994) cited in Tsotsa (2002:43), consumer satisfaction is generally defined as an evaluative response concerning the perceived outcome of a particular consumption experience as customers become brand loyal when they receive excellent services and are then willing to re-purchase from the company and share their positive experiences with family and friends. According to Machado et al. (2012:111), training entails gaining skills that can help one achieve their objectives and enhancing their competence in the work place as training helps individuals understand the company's vision, mission, values, culture and strategy thereby gaining skills on how to interact with customers, follow processes, and understand company policy and procedures. Employees should have a sound understanding of the products and services they offer (Machado et al., 2012:111).

4.2.3.2 I would be satisfied as a customer if the dealerships use my preferred way of communication.

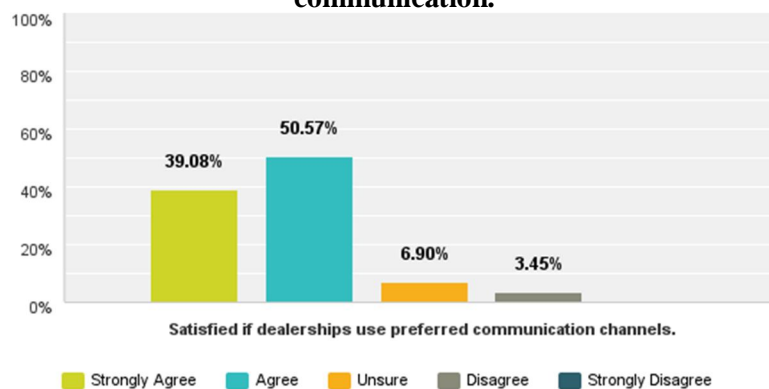


Figure 4.18: Communication Channels used by Dealerships

This question focused on identifying if consumers preferred specific communication channels when being communicated to. The results in figure 4.19 reveal that 89.65% agreed (39.08 strongly agreed, 50.57% agreed), 6.9% were unsure and 3.45% disagreed. According to Harris (2014:26), communication with customers should be done using their preferred method, like E-mail communication or SMS or face to face interaction. According to Anderson (2015:1), there are important aspects that can improve the CSI when dealing with customers in vehicle service and repair centres like using their preferred method of communication of which consumers need to be asked what their preference is and should not be assumed at any time. There are studies that indicate that 63 percent of customers prefer text messages for the status updates which can also be interpreted that 1 in 3 customers will either prefer another method of communication such as telephone calls or E-mail (Anderson, 2015:1). Organisations need to acknowledge that by using customers preferred communication method, they will continue to remain satisfied and trust in the fact that the organisation cares enough so as to respect and value their preferences.

4.2.3.3 I value attractive vehicle styling over superior quality of products or services.

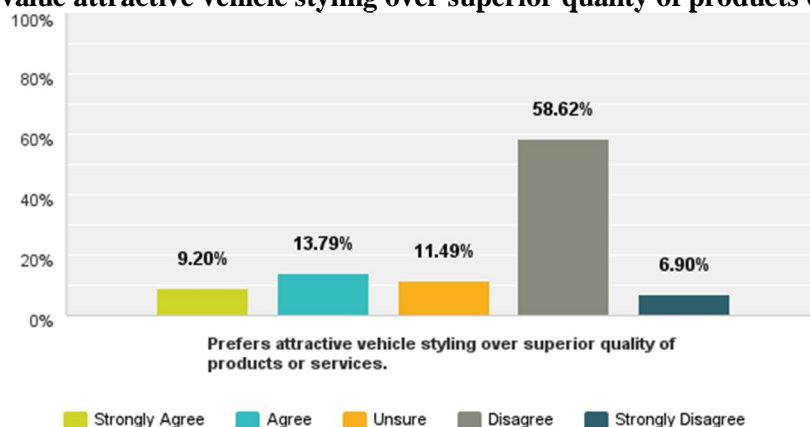


Figure 4.19: Attractive Vehicle Styling over Superior Quality of Products or Services

This question aimed at identifying if good looking vehicles were preferred by consumers over quality customer services. The results in figure 4.20 indicate that 22.99% agreed (9.20 strongly agreed, 13.79% agreed), 11.49% were unsure and 65.52% disagreed (58.62% disagreed, 6.9% strongly disagreed). According to Tsotsa (2002:49), value and quality of services are what influences customer satisfaction. According to a Parasuraman (1985) cited in Nyadzayo et al. (2010:173), the perception of service quality and excellent service delivery influences the purchase behaviour of customers. According to Cook (2008:14), customer

engagement is the relationship between the customer and the brand of which organisations should ensure that they deliver on the brands promise to customers. Cook (2008:14) elaborates that when a company creates a product they should do so with the customer in mind and that the brand should appeal to the customer, the customer should receive the perceived benefits from the brand, and the brand should create customer satisfaction which in turn leads to customer loyalty and retention.

4.2.3.4 A convenient dealer location with tidy offices at the dealership outlets influences me to choose a brand.

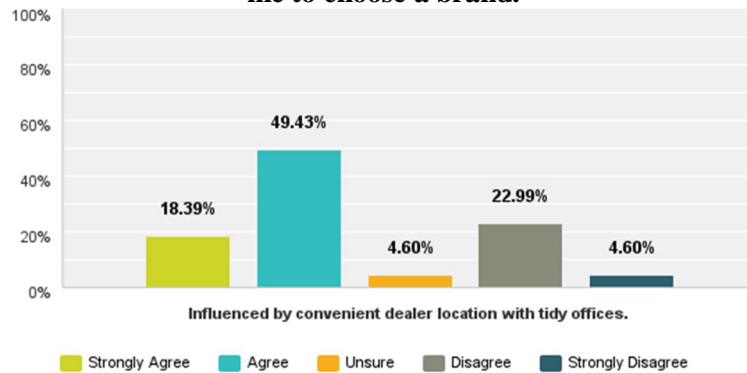


Figure 4.20: Convenient Dealer Location with Tidy Offices

This question focused on identifying if dealer location and overall presentation have an impact on automotive consumers in terms of preference. The results in figure 4.21 indicate that 67.82% agreed (18.39% strongly agreed, 49.43% agreed), 4.6% were unsure and 27.5% disagreed (22.99% disagreed, 4.6% strongly disagreed). Soudagar et al. (2012:18) mention that there are four important factors relating to trust that are important to providing a satisfactory customer experience namely reliability, convenience, responsiveness and relevance. According to Moffit et al. (2011:23), managing the customer or brand experience is the key to running a successful enterprise as customers have the power to control a company’s brand by demanding for excellence in customer services. According to Tsotsa (2002:48), a company’s image plays a vital role in attracting potential customers and retaining current customers. Customers will chose to purchase from a certain business if they believe that it will be easy doing business with the organisation in terms of making their life simpler and if they want to be associated with the brand to enhance their own image. The power of brand association is strong in the mind of customers as it enhances the perceived value they receive from the service provider and is a pivotal focal point exploited by marketers to a high degree.

4.2.3.5 Employee’s professionalism, appearance and attitude at dealerships are an influential factor when I choose a brand.

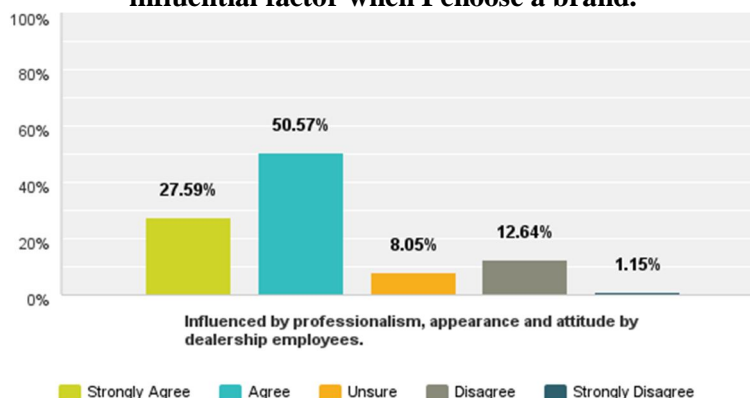


Figure 4.21: Professionalism, Appearance and Attitude by Dealership Employees

This question aimed to establish if dealership employee professionalism, appearance and attitude significantly contributed to consumer satisfaction. The results in figure 4.22 indicate that 78.16% agreed (27.59% strongly agreed, 50.57% agreed), 8.05% were unsure and 13.79% disagreed (12.64% disagreed, 1.15% strongly disagreed). According to Machado et al. (2012:111), employees are the brand and are the first point of contact and therefore they should deliver quality service and should represent their companies with a professional and respectful attitude. According to Barlow and Moller (2008:125), employees should dress professionally in order to be taken seriously by customers and further advises that when a customer encounters professional, well-mannered staff with good appearance, it provides a sense of confidence that such an individual would be able to provide to them the level of service they require. First impressions are always important because and service staff need to ensure that the customer always remains happy so that they will not become over critical or lose confidence in the employees ability to provide the desired level of service (Barlow and Moller, 2008:125).

4.2.3.6 When I call to set an appointment for the service of my vehicle, short waiting time with calls being answered timeously, influence me to choose a brand.

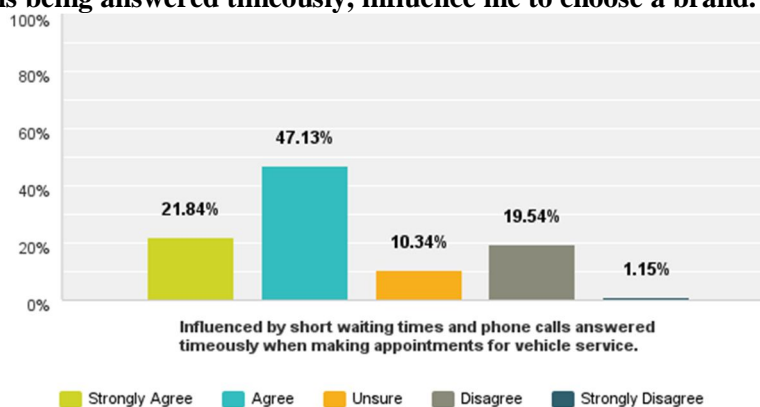


Figure 4.22: Appointments for Vehicle Service

This question aimed to identify if quick turnaround time when making vehicle appointments significantly contributed to consumer satisfaction. The results from figure 4.23 reveal that 68.97% agreed (21.84% strongly agreed, 47.13% agreed), 10.34% were unsure and 20.69% disagreed (19.54% disagreed, 1.15% strongly disagreed). According to Lewin (2006:1), in order to keep customers happy and loyal, Toyota is focused on speeding up the time it takes to get vehicles serviced through an express option called the Toyota Express Service Scheme where customers can have their vehicles serviced with an hour. According to General Motors (GM) (2015) cited in Cokayne (2015), GM has launched a customer new care initiative called “Complete Care” which is a global campaign by the brand which is focused on creating customer service as a brand definition by re-affirming the brands commitment to provide superior sale and aftermarket services. When consumers believe that they are getting the level of service they perceive, they can become very frustrated and lose trust in service providers when they realise information to the contrary. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that automotive manufacturers aim to clearly state the level of service that consumers can expect and also ensure that this level is consistent across their business operations globally, so as not to make consumers feel cheated due to the fact that higher levels of service may be offered elsewhere, for a similar price.

4.2.3.7 Innovation in customer care has the ability to increase my satisfaction as a customer.

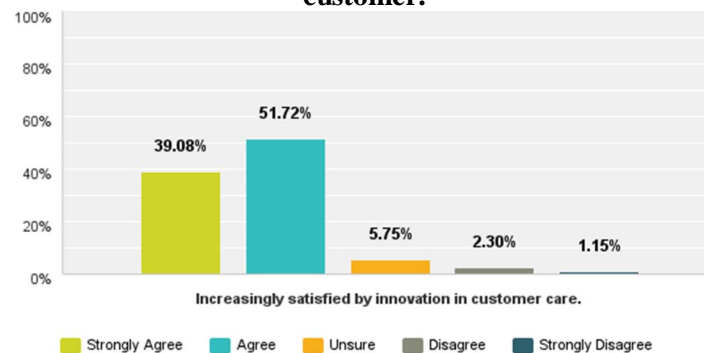


Figure 4.23: Innovation in Customer Care

This question aimed to establish if ease of communication by the use of technological advancements have an influence on consumer satisfaction. The results from figure 4.24 reveal that 90.8% agreed (39.08% strongly agreed, 51.72% agreed), 5.75% were unsure and 3.45% disagreed (2.3% disagreed, 1.15% strongly disagreed). According to Klie (2012:1), there are some companies that invest in new technology in order to be proactive, before waiting for problems to first occur to justify the cost of purchase, rather it's the company's commitment to delivery excellent customer service which is the driver or justification of the costs incurred for the purchase decision. By making interactions with consumers simpler, organisations will be able to provide encouragement for consumers to become more open and communicate more frequently. This is important in the sense that business will now be a step closer to identifying customer wants and needs, identify if these needs are being fulfilled, and also have the ability to gain a head start in case a gap in service is identified, before actually losing the customer. It also has the effect of enabling business to manage a large customer base more closely and efficiently.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Findings from the Study

5.2.1 Findings from the Literature Review

- By establishing a relationship of trust between a business and consumer, an emotional bond can then be created which is the basis for consumer loyalty (Soudagar, Lyer and Hildebrand, 2012:17).
- If customers are satisfied with service delivery, and if service delivery meets the perceived expected delivery of the customer, this will result in customer loyalty and greater profits for the company (Nienaber, 2010:52).
- Organisations should ensure that they deliver on the brands promise to customers in order to increase the likelihood of the customer recommending the brand to their friends and family (Cook, 2008:14).
- Customer satisfaction is based on the overall experience and assessment at the service (Nyadzayo and Roberts-Lombard, 2010:167).
- According to Harris (2014:24), the scope of influence which is usually negative reviews by customers who had bad experiences reach out to many people whilst great customer services are usually shared amongst close family members. Good customer service is important because happy customers cost less money (Theron, Bothma and du Toit, 2003:10).
- With a specialised customer focus, organisations are able to identify their very important customers and ensure that special efforts are made to keep them satisfied so as to retain their brand loyalty. It is more cost effective to focus on the current

customer base, than to attract new customers, although these specialised efforts need to be made in parallel, in order to gain market share.

- There are four important factors relating to trust that are important to providing a satisfactory customer experience namely reliability, convenience, responsiveness and relevance. The most essential and prevalent factor, which is a pre-requisite to the other three factors, is reliability due to the fact that if businesses cannot consistently deliver on promises made to consumers, they will not care about convenience, responsiveness or relevance (Soudagar et al., 2012:18).
- Customers become brand loyal when they receive excellent services and are then willing to re-purchase from the company and share their positive experiences with family and friends and expectation of services exceeds the customer's perception, the customer will be pleased to pay a premium price for that service and will most likely purchase services from that company again (Cronin and Taylor 1994 cited in Tsotsa, 2002:43).
- Important factors to consider in order to provide good customer services is, reliability by being able to fulfil promises made to consumers, convenience which is an important factor by providing a service offering choice, being consistent and providing services in a timely manner, responsiveness by possessing the ability to listen to consumers requests and then being able to respond swiftly and lastly relevance by having the ability to provide offerings that are personalised and provide meaning to consumers (Soudagar et al.,2012:18).
- A company's image plays a vital role in attracting potential customers and retaining current customers. How a customer perceives value differs from individuals, customers may find price of the product, attributes, tastes and characteristics of the product which may influence the value of a product. Consumer's perception of quality ranges from target audience, the brands and the company image (Tsotsa, 2002:48). According to Cook (2008:14), brands are most valuable when they have a good image associated with it.
- Customers find it difficult to have long conversations on the phone and some find it time consuming and frustrating (Collier, 2011:28). According to Harris (2014:102), language barriers are one of the biggest problems businesses face between customers and employees.
- According to Blem (1995:19), there are different types of customers that react differently to poor customer service starting with passives, who do not complain because they believe that no improvement will be made, voices, who feel that by complaining, it can have a positive impact on service delivery, irate, who communicate bad experiences with other consumers and easily switch to competitors and activists who complain through every medium possible in order to get the required attention in order to have their issues resolved.
- According to Gilbert (2000) cited in Nyadzayo et al. (2010:173), customer relations management ensures that customers do not switch to competitors by creating customer value and ensuring customers are always happy.
- According to Harris (2014:26), communication with customers should be done using their preferred method, like E-mail communication or SMS or face to face interaction.
- According to Lewin (2006:1), in order to keep customers happy and loyal, Toyota is focused on speeding up the time it takes to get vehicles serviced through an express option called the Toyota Express Service Scheme where customers can have their vehicles serviced with an hour. According to General Motors (GM) (2015) cited in Cokayne (2015), GM has launched a customer new care initiative called "Complete Care" which is a global campaign by the brand which is focused on creating customer service as a brand definition by re-affirming the brands commitment to provide superior sale and aftermarket services.

- According to Machado et al. (2012:111), training entails gaining skills that can help one achieve their objectives and enhancing their competence in the work place as training helps individuals understand the company's vision, mission, values, culture and strategy thereby gaining skills on how to interact with customers, follow processes, and understand company policy and procedures. Employees should have a sound understanding of the products and services they offer (Machado et al., 2012:111).
- There are some companies that invest in new technology in order to be proactive, before waiting for problems to first occur to justify the cost of purchase, rather it's the company's commitment to delivery excellent customer service which is the driver or justification of the costs incurred for the purchase decision (Klie, 2012:1).

5.2.2 Findings from the Primary Research

- A collective 89.77% of consumers are influenced to be brand loyal by vehicle brands offering superior customer care which indicates that there's definitely a strong demand in the automotive market for superior customer services.
- A collective 90.91% of consumers indicate that the ability for vehicle manufacturers to offer good customer services is an important consideration when making vehicle purchase decisions. The research therefore indicates that service providers offering high levels of customer services are in a strong position to attract new customers to their brand.
- A collective 84.1% of consumers will consider people's opinions about specific vehicle brands influence them when making vehicle purchase decisions. The research indicates that there this is a significant percentage of consumers who first research information about vehicle brands so that they can make an informed decision.
- A collective 95.45% of consumers agree that a well-developed customer focus made them feel valued as a customer. The research therefore revealed that that there is an extremely strong and therefore directly proportional relationship between service delivery and customer satisfaction.
- A collective 94.32% of consumers are brand loyal when they are confident that they will receive the level of customer service they expect or deserve. The research therefore indicates that that a consistent level of superior services has a very high ability to retain the existing customer base.
- A collective 46.6% of consumers have completely switched from a vehicle brand and moved to one that promised an improved customer service experience which is a significantly high percentage when in the automotive context of business because it indicates a customer retention rate of around one in two customers.
- The research reveal that a collective 67.05% of consumers disagreed with the statement that a consistent level customer service delivery existed amongst dealerships which translates into the fact that there is difficulty being experienced by Ford to ensure consistent levels of service across its dealer network.
- A collective 38.63% disagree with the statement that they have received consistent level of good customer service from their vehicle brand in general. The research reveals that there is a gap in terms of service delivery in the automotive market.
- A collective amount of 52.28% of consumers agree with the statement that their overall consumer perception of Ford is that the brand has the ability to provide quality customer services. The research further reveals that there's a possibility of only one in two potentials customers will consider to buy a Ford vehicle.
- The research uncovers that a collective 63.63% of consumers agreed that communication barriers exist which reduces the ability of service providers to effectively provide the required level of customer service consistently.
- The research indicates that collective 35.22% of consumers have received poor customer services, but have not actively complained about it. This is very concerning and may have a direct relationship to the high percentage of 38.63% of consumers

who have indicated that there is a gap that exists in the automotive market in terms of service delivery. When consumers do not complain, the service provider is often unaware that there is in fact a possible failure on their part to keep a customer satisfied.

- The research uncovers that a collective 61.77% of consumers have switched dealerships in the past in the pursuit of receiving an improved level of customer service. This result is very concerning because when customers switch dealerships, it often the last resort, before they may decide to completely change their vehicle brand by selling their car and purchasing from a competitor.
- The research reveal that collective a 65.52% of consumers disagreed with the statement that good looking vehicles were preferred over quality customer services which indicate that its more feasible for automotive manufacturers to reduce their investments on creating good looking vehicles, and direct that funding towards ensuring quality in their products and services as this adds more value to the consumer.
- The research indicate that a collective 68.97% of consumers have agreed that quick turnaround time when making vehicle appointments contributed to consumer satisfaction.
- The research reveal that a collective 100% of consumers prefer dealing knowledgeable, trustworthy and expert staff which contribute to consumer satisfaction.
- The research reveal that a collective 90.8% of consumers prefer ease of communication by the use of technological advancements have an influence on consumer satisfaction.

5.3 Conclusions

This study was undertaken to investigate the impact of service delivery on customer satisfaction so as to identify possible gaps in service delivery that Ford can improve on, as well as to ascertain the feasibility for Ford to create a specialised focus on customer services as a brand definition, in order to increase their market share and ultimately become the number one selling vehicle brand in the automotive market.

The objectives of the study were to explore the impact of service delivery on consumer satisfaction, to explore the factors that influence consumer satisfaction, to identify the challenges faced by Ford in customer service delivery and to make recommendations on improving customer services.

The study has indicated that service providers offering high levels of customer services are in a strong position to attract new customers to their brand and that consumer's first research information about vehicle brands before making their final selection. Increased competition due to globalisation with the birth of the internet being one of the main catalysts, consumers have access to more information and bargaining power than ever before. Consistent levels of superior customer service have a very high ability to retain the existing customer base, so much so that consumers are willing to switch between dealerships in the hope to receive a better level of service and as a last resort will completely switch from a vehicle brand and move to one that promises an improved customer service experience. The study has contributed in identifying that there is an inconsistent level customer service delivery that exists amongst dealerships which translates into the fact that there is difficulty being experienced by Ford to ensure consistent levels of service across its dealer network and the fact that there is a gap in terms of service delivery in the automotive market for Ford. The research further revealed that there's a possibility of only one in two potentials customers will consider to buy a Ford vehicle and a strong indication that is work to be done by Ford to improve this, if their goals of being the number one vehicle brand in terms of sales is to be realised. Communication is an important part of business and effective communication is central to the running of any business. Consumers have indicated that communication barriers exist which reduces the ability of service providers to effectively provide the required level of

customer service consistently. Customers who complain play an important role in assisting businesses to identify areas of improvement and also provide them with an opportunity to rectify issues so as to retain loyal customers. The study indicated that not all consumers who have received poor customer services actively complained about it. This is very concerning and may have a direct relationship to the high percentage of 38.63% of consumers who have indicated that a gap exists in the automotive market in terms of service delivery. Consumers have further indicated that good looking vehicles were not as important as receiving quality customer services which further reveals that its more feasible for automotive manufacturers to reduce their investments on creating good looking vehicles, and direct that funding towards ensuring quality in their products and services as this adds more value to the consumer. Time is money and for consumers there are much more important things to do than wait long periods of time to receive their goods or services. The study was further able to identify the factors that contributed to consumer satisfaction where consumers prefer quick turnaround time when making vehicle appointments and prefer the use of technological advancements when communicating with service providers.

These findings are significant as it provides a concise indication to Ford Motor Company of Southern Africa that there is in fact a very strong impact of service delivery on customer satisfaction which shows that there is a viable business case for the company to invest in a specialised focus on improving service delivery in order to retain loyal customers and attract new ones in order to further grow the company's customer base and eventually become the number one selling vehicle brand in the country.

5.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to Ford Motor Company of Southern Africa:

- Create a specialised focus on Customer Services as a brand definition in order to improve service delivery so as to enhance the brand perception by consumers and gain market share.
- Implement technology such as a Customer Relations Management (CRM) System and employ the services of Customer Experience Managers (CEM) and Customer Relations Managers (CRM) to ensure that customers form a close bond and increase communication with Ford.
- Improve control over the dealer network by either implementing closer monitoring systems or by reducing their independence by purchasing shares partially or entirely in the dealerships to provide for more control by Ford thereby increasing the ability to maintain a consistently high level of customer service delivery.
- Promote customers to lodge complaints by offering incentives.
- Create specialised complaint channels that are quick and easy, like a cell phone App that allows consumers to lodge all complaints that go directly to Ford and not the specific dealership, to ensure that Ford is aware of the complaint, and is able to put the required pressure on the dealership for corrective actions.
- Implement Ford Quick Lane express vehicle services in South Africa which is currently offered in other markets, so that customers waiting time is reduced.
- Provide in depth training to all staff at dealerships to ensure effective communication skills, smart appearance, positive attitudes and professional conduct.

5.5 Area/s for future Research

This study focuses on investigating the relationship between service delivery and consumer satisfaction of Ford in Gauteng. Opportunities to expand on this study will be to conduct a similar research in the other provinces in the county or even South Africa as a whole. A further research opportunity would be to conduct this study for other vehicle manufacturers other than Ford.

5.6 Conclusion

The findings from the literature review and primary research plays a fundamental role in assisting the researcher to achieve the objectives of this study. The study reveals that there is a

very strong directly proportional relationship between service delivery and customer satisfaction. It further reveals that there are difficulties faced by Ford with regards to maintaining consistent service delivery. Further to this, recommendations to address the findings were made, as well as for possible areas for future research.

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NOTE: The entire bibliography used in the study is cited for ease of reference to other students and researchers to consult.

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