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Sparkling quality a global nextmark?

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Indian industry is married to quality processes, but not to perceptible quality in the customer's hand that Japanese and Korean companies deliver. Implementing quality process engineering is a hygiene factor that delivers no competitive edge. Unless the society's state of mind is driven by the consciousness of quality supremacy, no quality system will fall in place for Indian brands to meet the challenge of global competition.

Quality in customer's hand first creates trust; in long term usage it becomes believable. It's totally non-visible, a hidden factor. The customer experiences this quality at the discretion of the enterprise providing it.

In postgraduate institutes or customer centricity training workshops for Indian companies, whenever I've tried to expose the hidden quality factor that creates customer trust and loyalty, I've confronted a wall called quality process. R&D engineers, marketing, customer service and top management revere ISO, TQM, deming or six sigma quality, which translate to working in a system that brings discipline and defect-free processes. But when every company follows the same system in a category, does it create differentiation that the customer receives? As a product's repeat purchase is dependent on customer choice, surely the customer's appreciation of

the "quality spark" beyond any process is the paramount quality parameter to run after?

Some of my professional friends who've undergone my training sessions and are now working expatriates in Germany and Korea, have called me to endorse this "quality spark" that customers want. They've said they're actually experiencing what they couldn't appreciate in India. Realising the value of quality as the rational factor for a customer to confidently and repeatedly buy a brand, they've said, "Developed society is highly differentiated, products are matched minutely to specific customer unstated needs. Their ecosystem is driven by quality that world class products and technologies compete in." Another comment was, "Pent up demand is huge in India, and low price is the driving factor. Indian industrial development has accordingly been based on need, not experience or expression. Products are considered okay when it satisfies the basic intended purpose."

Neither manufacturer nor employees easily understand or focus on the hidden rational quality. They call Mercedes, BMW, Louis Vuitton, Mont Blanc among others as costly lifestyle and status brands, but never ask how they've become so recognised globally. No education or training system has apprised them of the invention, innovation and sustaining quality guaranteed on the lifecycle of these products. I've never heard anyone here talk about the many trials, failures, tests and customer clinics these brands have undergone. They admire the brands only from visible glamorous advertisements.

That tells me that India's cultural experience ignores the grid of quality excellence. In

general, saris sell on weaving style and folkloric designs from different states. Sari shops give no guarantee on colour as they say there's no single, processed cleaning system. Consumers happily street-shop beautifully designed footwear at amazingly low prices. They don't bother with quality, just design and colour. In jewellery, weight of gold is the first check, next is design. Rarely do women focus on the clasp's robustness, which is intrinsic to quality. Unhygienic selling conditions at mom&pop stores or small eateries are tolerated if the food tastes fine. These few examples among others show that quality consciousness is vulnerable. Will Indian brands sustain the future when global brands fiercely compete in India with sparkling quality, affordable price?

My long European society experience has taught me the importance of hidden quality that's their cultural phenomenon. On curious probing, I always got the answer that keeping historical records meticulously creates the grid of benchmarking with the best. It established that Mozart remains the master music composer of all time, whereas George Stephenson is respected for his invention of the steam locomotive, although that's since been bettered with the Chinese CRH380A becoming the world's fastest train running at 302.8mph.

Industrial production of unlimited quantity made the West conscious of customer expectation of unquestionable quality that sustains the long term and becomes widespread. Product development with differentiating character requires time and money. The more solid and unparalleled the quality of reproduction compared to competitors, the more can you eventually sell. The product's market longevity improves to encash high return on investment.

"It works well for me" is the functional factor of a customer delivery. Functionality is the prime criterion of a selling proposition. Human society development always happened with excellence of functional upliftment.

For example, from stone lithography copy to carbon copy, cyclostyling to photocopy to digital scan reproduction shows functional upliftment where better technology easily makes the old obsolete.

The key factor is rational, which I've found very difficult to make people here understand. Rational means non-visible quality support for emotive and functional attributes to sustain product longevity. For example, in the hospitality industry, if a hotel uses sophisticated German sanitaryware but maintenance is poor, you have to close your nose to get rid of the stink. This totally bypasses the rational factor in the service industry, and mitigates the heavy spend on sanitaryware to look good.

The "looks good" factor is the fragile emotive attribute that instantly differentiates a product or service. But repeat purchase cannot happen if functionality fails. If a perfume bottle looks beautiful but the spray jet, the functional part, hurts your body, you will never buy the perfume again. To make the functional part soothing requires superfine technology that customers cannot see. This non-visible rational part is the manufacturer's discretion to make the spray system acceptable.

You can experience functionality upfront, see and appreciate the emotive factor, but you have to trust the company's brand for the product's intrinsic quality at the moment of purchase. How do you build that?

I don't believe people regularly buy a product or service based on emotion through its ad or sophisticated presentation. Customer believability for repeat purchase lies on "**sparkling quality**" that's non-visible. Quality is the assurance of the product's functionality during its lifecycle. So you need to define "QCW" (quality customer wants) specific to your brand.

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