Responsibility on Brand Equity in the telecom sector in India

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Abstract: *Telecom is one of the highly competitive sectors in contemporary India. Over the past few years a lot of Telecom companies have entered the market. With new companies coming in the market and the amount of competition that it leads it becomes necessary for the company to stay in the forefront of things. Some brands have exited as they were unable to stay in the market due to the pressure of its competitors. The concept of corporate social responsibility though old, has been used very incorrectly over the years. A lot of companies used to do philanthropic work, not because of their ethics or values but to vain the support and loyalty of customers. But overtime this has changed and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been made mandatory under the law. Here this research tries to study how a company increases its brand equity and stands out amongst its competitors through CSR. The paper tries to understand the vital components of achieving brand equity through various aspects of CSR. This study will be useful for corporate organizations to understand how CSR is just not a waste in the form of a mandate but essentially is a strategic tool to enhance the equity of the brand and create a consumer connect with the brand.*

Keywords: Brand, Corporate Social Responsibility, equity, telecom

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years business has increasingly been considered as a major cause of various social, environmental, and economic problems and the perception that companies are flourishing at the expense of society has highly been considered. As a result of this, companies face a lot of legal issues. Losing reputation has become a constant threat. Also in this age of rapid technological development and cut throat competition it has become mandatory for the company to have a positive brand equity in the market.

According to scholars a big part of the problem with these businesses are their outdated approach to value creation. Companies are concerned only about short term profits and not long term benefits. They do not understand the importance of sustainable development. Also in their quest for profits they land up in a lot of legitimacy issues.

So corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged like an antidote for all this legitimacy issues and crisis. All over the globe, companies in different industries are embracing CSR to build trust, strengthen brand reputation and enhance brand equity. While some regard CSR activities simply as a charitable or philanthropic deed, others argue that CSR is much more than that.

And this is where brand equity steps in. Brand equity is a combination of six crucial aspects

1. Building brand awareness,
2. Enhancing brand image,
3. Establishing brand credibility,
4. Evoking brand feelings,
5. Creating a sense of brand community, and
6. Eliciting brand engagement.

Effective completion of each step takes you closer to having a strong brand equity. Brand equity makes it easy for an organization to get noticed amongst all its competitors. A solid brand equity also has some other benefits like,

- More expansion opportunities
- Brand loyalty
- Negotiating power
- Adds value to a product
- Important tool for marketing

As per the Companies Act it is compulsory for companies to spend 2% of their profit on CSR activities. According to a report published by German development aid agency Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GiZ) in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA) Indian businesses spend an average of 1.4% of profits after tax (PAT) as CSR which is even lower than the 2% of net profits before tax (PBT) has made compulsory by the Companies Act, 2013. Where telecom and media spend the lowest on CSR, while housing spends the highest. India has one of the world's largest telecom and media sectors with an annual turnover of around $15 billion (more than Rs 90,000crore). The report shows that only 0.4% of profits was contributed for CSR by the telecom and media sector. The purpose of my research is to examine the socially responsible behaviour of the telecom sector to gain further insights into the correlation between CSR and its impact on the brand equity of a company

Aims & Objectives:

- To study the impact of CSR on Brand Equity of Telecom sector
- To understand whether CSR is a marketing strategy or an organizational function
- Impact of CSR initiatives on the customer's perceived value and customer based brand equity
- And to understand as to where the telecom sector stands as compared to the other sectors in terms of brand equity and CSR

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to a study firm is a collection of heterogeneous strategic resources states the resource based view of a firm and to achieve a sustainable competitive edge, a firm must club its specialized resources through organizational actions and behaviour (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991; Hult, 2011). All assets, capabilities, information, knowledge, informational processes, etc. falls under the purview of these heterogeneous resources (Barney 1991). By exploiting these resources, a firm can create a strategic differentiation that has an advantage over the competitors. On basis of this RBV theory, we argue that a firm can club CSR and marketing capabilities to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage in the market. If a firm's CSR perception is relatively better than compared to its previous years, a firm with stronger marketing capabilities will be able to find ways to utilize this perception improvement to gain optimal benefits and advantages deriving from the CSR-brand equity relationship. The higher a consumer's positive CSR perception of a firm, and the higher its marketing capabilities the better can a firm communicate their commitment to ethics to their stakeholders and build its brand equity. Provided that the advertising effect of CSR initiatives on corporate reputation is only of an informational nature, managers should utilize CSR initiatives to build corporate reputation and not to gain more targets in the short term. In other words there should be no hidden agenda behind doing CSR. This implication plays along the lines of a Kantian perspective (Bowie 1999) that explains the reason as to why CSR initiatives should be viewed as real options and a type of safety policy. According to him, companies invest in CSR initiatives to create positive moral capital and to support a company's intangible assets such as credibility and reputation. As a type of strategic action, CSR initiatives plays the role of a company's safety net to which protects a company from unexpected event which can have a negative impact on the country (Fombrun et al.2000). The other way in which a CSR can be implemented is if it becomes a company's insurance policy against bad situation (Godfrey 2005). He has suggested that CSR becomes the safety net because it mitigates the potential damage from negative stakeholder evaluations. The key elements of this insurance policy are the intangible assets that CSR collects, such as corporate reputation, commitment, loyalty, and legitimacy. And corporate reputation based on CSR initiatives implies that such CSR initiatives were implemented only for the welfare of the society and the company had no hidden agenda in it. When consumers regard CSR activities as stemming from a company's sincere moral behaviour, they tend to trust the company as they feel that the company will keep up to its promises (Bhattacharya et. al.1998). "In particular, the company's CSR activities are considered to create a trusting relationship between the company and the consumers in the global market" (Torres et. al.2012). Trust is a fundamental asset in business (Pivato et. al.2008). From a CSR perspective, trust is the consumers' expectation of socially responsible or ethically justifiable behaviour (Hosmer 1995; Vlachos et al.2009). Because the advertising effects of CSR initiatives on brand equity are informative as well as persuasive these initiatives can be used to enhance brand awareness and brand associations. Behavioral aspects of a consumer might change as brand equity plays more along the lines of changing consumer perceptions. Some researchers have examined the influences of emotional responses on a consumers consumption behaviour (Oliver & Raney, 2011. Also brand equity is one of the factors that is shaped by various emotional responses (Chakraborti & Roy, 2013). Gobé (2001) concluded that brand equity and commitment of the consumers for the brand is affected by their emotional response. Fournier (1998) explains as to how the touch the sensation the emotional attraction strongly influence consumer's perception for the brand. The Mehrabian and Russell model (M-R model, 1974) suggested that consumers experience of consumption environments can be divided into three major aspects: pleasure, arousal, and dominance. Some researchers have also found that corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporate brand credibility, corporate brand equity, and corporate reputation are interlinked. The study concluded that CSR has a direct positive effect on corporate brand credibility and corporate reputation. Over and above it the results also indicate that corporate brand credibility acts as mediator between CSR and corporate reputation. And lastly, corporate brand credibility and corporate reputation acts as mediator between CSR and Brand equity. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming important for many companies and they are putting their money to satisfy the mandate. Number of scholars (Bhattacharya and Sen 2004; Du et al.2010; Melo and Garrido-Morgado 2012) suggested that there are benefits that companies can gain from engaging in CSR activities, not only by obtaining favorable consumer awareness, attitude, and a sense of attachment but also by building positive corporate image and good reputation in the long run. The main point of, distinction between a CSR initiative and other marketing mix attributes is that the company, the consumers, and the society all benefit from CSR (Bhattacharya and Sen 2004). Accordingly, consumers prefer socially responsible companies (Maignan and Ferrell 2001) and value being associated with companies with good reputations (Roberts and Dowling 2002; Heikkurinen2010). According to Smith (2012), "a recent study has shown that consumer willingness to buy or recommend a product is driven more by their perceptions of the company and the rest is driven by their perceptions of the products". Surprisingly, the study has discovered that 42 % of what a consumer feels about a company is derived from their perceptions of the company's CSR efforts. If so, what mechanism underlies the links between consumer CSR perception and corporate reputation? "Within the academic literature, little is known about the way CSR perception affects corporate reputation or brand equity, even though it is widely known that CSR influences corporate reputation and brand equity" (Hsu 2012; Lai et al.2010).

Theoretical Framework

Carroll's Model of CSR

As per Carroll (1983),

"Corporate social responsibility means conducting business in a way that it is economically profitable, law abiding, ethical and socially supportive. To be socially responsible it becomes quite obvious that profitability and obedience of the law are compulsory when discussing the firm's ethics and the extent to which it supports the society in which it exists"

The various obligations that a company needs to fulfil is indicated by this pyramid

Figure 1: CSR Pyramid

Customer Based Brand Equity Model

Figure 2: Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Pyramid

The model is like a ladder in the form of a pyramid where the second and third steps of the ladder are divided into two. The customer has to climb all the steps and fulfil the requirements of all the steps to reach the top. The left side of the steps are more on the rational side and the right side of the steps are more on the emotional side.

Knowledge Gap

A considerate amount of research has been done on Corporate Social Responsibility, Brand Equity, their interrelationship and impact of corporate social responsibility on brand equity of various sectors like hospitality, travel, games, pharma, information technology etc. But the research on impact of CSR on brand equity of telecom sector was quite narrow and quite restricted. Also in the few amount of research that has been done, research using Keller's model for brand equity and Carroll's model for CSR has not been done.

Hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Economic responsibility in CSR has a positive effect on overall brand equity of a company

Hypothesis 2: Legal Responsibility in CSR has a positive effect on overall brand equity of a company

Hypothesis 3: Ethical Responsibility in CSR has a positive effect on overall brand equity of a company

Hypothesis 4: Philanthropic Responsibility in CSR has a positive effect on overall brand equity of a company

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology taken in this research is quantitative. The researcher will use here the approach of conclusive research. The main aim of using conclusive research is, when it comes to corporate social responsibility in telecom sector a lot of research has been done in other countries but when it comes to India the research is almost nil. Also, though the concept of corporate social responsibility is quite old not many companies in India especially telecom companies invest in it. So conclusive research will help in gaining an understanding of how CSR impacts brand equity of companies in the telecom sector. Survey method is used in this research. The questionnaire that the researcher will be using is a mixed one. A combination of open and close ones so that the answers are in a flow and the respondents are allowed to freely voice their opinions and views. The questionnaire will be a primary source of data extraction. A convenience sampling will be done as it is practically impossible to interview the whole population. The respondents will be selected keeping in mind their knowledge of CSR and brand equity. The respondents will be from the age group of 20 to 30 as they are the digital generation and are more driven by brand names and quality rather than prices. Also some of them are budding professionals or freshly out of management schools where they are taught varied aspects related to brands, about corporate social responsibility and various elements related to it.

A sample size of 100 people will be taken. Since the age group is 20 to 30 it will mostly be Post Graduate students.

The questionnaire will include two sections. Corporate social responsibility, brand equity and the questions will be more about comparing the various concepts of brand equity and corporate social responsibility amongst various sectors. The questions will be close ended.

The questionnaire is the heart of a research so it will be structured. Most of the questions will be close ended and few open ended. The questionnaire will either be mailed to the subjects or handed over physically.

For the telecom part 4 telecom companies will be selected which are **Airtel India, Vodafone India, Idea Cellular, and BSNL Mobile**. The reason for selecting this companies are its subscribers and its market share.

Once the data collection stage is over, to analyses the data and change it to a quantitative format Pie charts, bar diagrams and histograms will be used for various questions depending on the type of question.

IV. DATA FINDINGS

Descriptive Analysis of Data

This analysis is mainly focused on understanding the hypothesis and observations made during the study and to provide a pillar to support the hypothesis.

Profile of the Respondents

A sample of 100 respondents was taken for this study. A specific age group was selected keeping in mind their knowledge of CSR and brand equity. The profiling of

respondents includes demographic aspects like age, occupation and gender.

Table 1: Demographics

Age		Occupation		Gender	
21 - 30 years	100	Students	100	Male	28
-	-	-	-	Female	72
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100

The questionnaire was an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three parts, first was about the respondents second was about CSR and third was about brand equity. Questions were quite specific and mostly mcq based, which were to brand equity and csr and also its effect on various sectors.

- Do you think that companies should do CSR?

    95% respondents agreed that a company should do CSR even more than the regulated 2% as per the law. Only a mere 5% agreed that companies should not do CSR.

a. SECTION 1 – CSR(Caroll's Model)

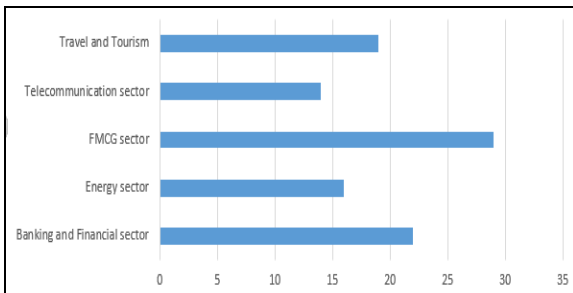- Which Sector should do more in economical CSR?

Figure 3: Economical sector

22% respondents selected banking and financial, 16% respondents chose energy sector, 29% chose FMCG sector, 14% people choose telecommunication sector and 19% people choose travel and tourism.
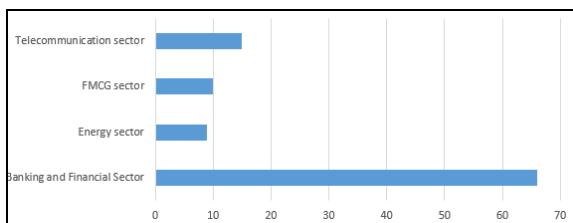
- Which sector works more legally?

Figure 4: Legal work ethics

66% respondents believe that banking and financial sector works more legally , energy sector has got a 9% vote , FMCG has got 10%, Telecom sector got a 15% vote and travel and tourism got a 0

- Do you agree that telecom sector is more ethical as compared to other sectors?

60% of the respondents feel that telecom sector does not work legally and the rest 40% feel that telecom sector work legally

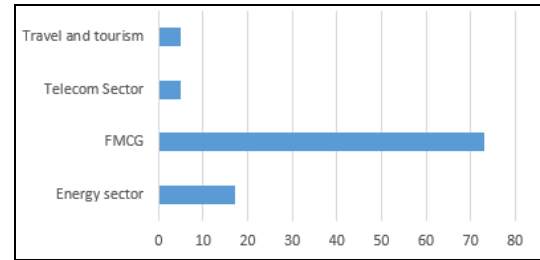- Which of the following sector does the maximum philanthropic work?

Figure 5: Sector doing most philanthropy

17% respondents say that FMCG does the maximum philanthropic work that is 73%, energy sector stands at 17%, travel and tourism and telecom sector both stand at the same level which is 5%, banking and financial sector stands at 0%.

b. SECTION 2 – Brand Equity(Customer Based Brand Equity Model)

- Which sector has the maximum brand equity?

    75% respondents which is the majority agree that FMCG has the maximum brand equity, Telecom has 10% brand equity, Travel and tourism has 11% brand equity, energy sector was given only a 4% and banking and financial sector was given a 0
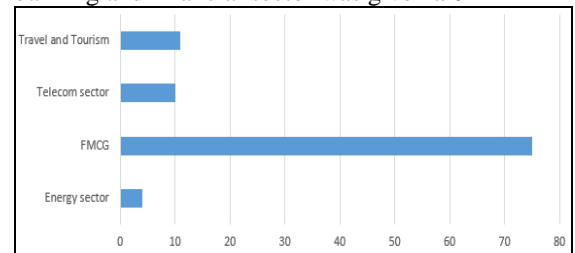

Figure 6: Sector with high equity

- To establish a brand equity which sector has a clear brand meaning – Performance and Imagery?
    According to the survey 30% respondents feel that telecom sector should have a clear brand imagery. 20% feel that energy sector should have a clear brand imagery. For FMCG its 20%, for travel and tourism also 20% and for banking and financial 6%.
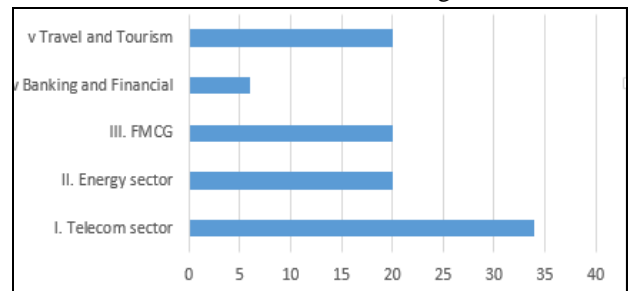

Figure 7: Sector with high imagery

- Do you think that brand response – Feeling and Judgment for telecom sector is stronger than other sectors?

  Only 22% respondents feel that the brand response of telecom sector is stronger than other sectors. Rest of the 78% feel that the brand response of telecom sector is weak as compared to other sectors.

- Which sector enjoys the best brand resonance?

  According to the respondents, telecom and banking and financial sector enjoys only 9% brand resonance. It's the highest for the FMCG sector where the brand resonance is 70%. For travel and tourism its 12% whereas for energy sector it is 0.
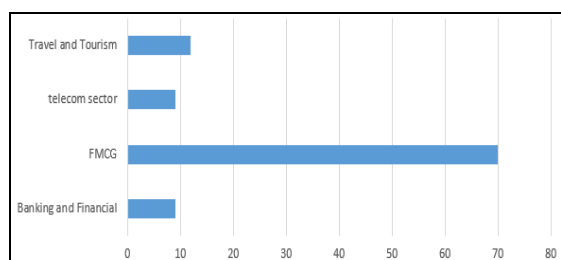

Figure 8: Brand Resonance

- Which telecom company has fulfilled all the above steps of brand equity and enjoys the best brand equity?

  Vodafone enjoys the maximum brand equity i.e. 45%, Airtel comes second with 29% brand equity, Idea comes third with 17% brand equity , fourth is BSNL which has 4% brand equity and the rest is others which has only 5% brand equity.

V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Though CSR is a fairly old term and has been made compulsory by law under the Companies Act not many companies follow the law. There are many companies who still do less CSR than the required 2%. And amongst various sectors that do CSR telecom comes last according to a report made by a German research company. Also Telecom as a sector does not enjoy a lot of brand equity or reputation. Many reasons have been found for it from the recipients itself during the course of this research. Some of them are listed below:

- Scams in Telecom Sector
- Ethical issues
- Loopholes in government Policies
- Environmental and health issues
- Losses in the telecom sector
- Political Issues in the country

Scams in telecom sector

The biggest scam that India has ever faced is the scam that happened during the sale of radio waves. This scam happened when the new technology of 3G was entering the market. A lot of big lobbyists and politicians were involved in this scam and the issue had reached the PMO also. Many of our respondents said that the first word that comes to their mind while taking about the telecom and energy sector is "scam". The Nira Radia scam was also a huge taboo for the telecom industry. The daily Indian men faces a lot of corruption issues from top level to lower level. As a result of these scams there is a political upheaval in the country and the consumer ends up paying a lot and also are in a constant confusion. These legal issues affect Brand Imagery of consumers

Ethical issues

Most of the companies and corporates are of the mind-set that business is more important than ethics. A lot of patent related issues have been faced by various companies. Even apple has not remained out of this. In 2009 Nokia sued Apple over 10 patents and apple countersued Nokia for 13 patents. In 2011 apple sued Nokia over galaxy series infringement. . Microsoft sued Kyocera for patent infringement in US federal court and seeks an important ban on 3 Android smartphones.in March 2013 Ericsson filed a patent infringement suit against Micromax and claimed that Micromax has infringed 8 of its patents.

The Delhi court granted and ex parte injunction restraining Micro max from selling, importing or manufacturing mobile devices that implemented 3G, AMR, and EDGE standards. Ericsson also had patent wars with Intex, Gionee and Xiomi. And later in march Ericsson also sued Java over patent infringement. In 2011 India received only a 6.5 million visitors as compared to China's 57 million. Everyone sector in India tries to fleece the citizens of the country and also any foreign visitors that come to India. Also this leads to a growing lack of trust amongst the various companies by the customer. Mobile Fraud calls and Phishing are other ethical issues in telecom industry.

This Ethical issue affects brand judgment and feelings of consumers

Loopholes in Government Policies

There has been lot of debates in various media regarding how to implement "TRAI's new rules regarding the compensation to consumers for call drops. The compensation will be given only if the call drops takes place due to the calling party's network". The decision taken here looked more favorable to operators. Most of the rules made by the telecom ministry are more in the favor of telecom companies rather than their customers. Also relaxation is provided to foreign companies in case of dispute. No direct legal action can be taken against the foreign company due to their indulgence in India. Due to these a lot of Indian businesses suffer. The employees suffer and since the employees are also the customers, the customers also suffer.

This legality issues brand feelings of telecom companies as well as its customers

Environmental and Health Issues

Manufacture of a mobile phone produces 60 kg of Carbon Dioxide emission. Also the power used for charging a mobile phone is also a big issue. If 10% of worlds mobile phone users turned off their chargers after use the energy saved in one year could light up 60,00 homes. Another negative outcome that occurs by the use of mobile phones is the exposure of workers to toxic metals and chemicals.

Also radiation from mobile phones during receiving text message or voice note may mean higher risk for brain's sensory system. Though there is a significant amount of distance between the top story and the terrace, but the top two stores are still exposed to quite a huge of radiation coming from the antennas which is not good for health. These days many mobile manufacturing companies are coming up with new technology to curb radiation and reduce the pollution and health issues. Also most of the mobile antennas are placed on the top of huge towers. This hazard affects brand feelings

Losses in the Telecom sector

Companies like BSNL, MTNL which are public sector telecom companies are running into constant losses. The subscription of BSNL landline phones are declining due to the simple reason that people these days prefer more of mobile phones than landlines as it is more handy. Also because Vodafone enjoys the highest brand equity people prefer it more as a network than BSNL. Also a company like Vodafone is also running into huge losses. And once the Reliance jio has entered into the market the losses have increased to $5.5 billion. Various sources have suggested that "Reliance industries and three telecom companies – Bharti Airtel, Idea Cellular and Reliance Communication have collectively lost Rs 22,522 crore of market capitalization". Due to this losses the company do not follow the CSR law and also to earn a profit many companies tend to short cuts. About which the media finds out and the overall reputation of that company is ruined completely. Due to this a biasness occurs in the customer and the customer does not trust the brand easily.

This economical issue affects Brand Imagery and brand resonance

Political Issues in the Telecom sector

Scams create a lot of political tension in the country. The opposing parties tries to defame each other. Also because of these, scams happen and the government loses out on a lot of foreign investors, due to the political instability that is created. Also a lot of employment scope is ruined. Also when government favors foreign companies and investors more than the Indian ones, a rebellious environment is created amongst the Indian owners and companies towards the foreign ones. This not only ruins foreign relations but it also has an economical effect on the government of our country. Also an atmosphere of lack of trust is created in the country where the customers do not understand as to who to trust, whether it's the politicians, leaders or on which company to choose. And due to this reason various companies lose out on a lot of customers and the companies run into losses due to which layoffs occur. It's like a vicious cycle. And at the end of the day it's the common man that suffers and end up paying more.

But in spite of all this there is still a border of silver lining around the cloud. According to an article, Telecom is the fastest growing industry in India. India stands as the second largest telecommunication market in the world. Some sources suggest, "The mobile phone industry in India would contribute US $400 billion in terms of Gross Domestic Product". The rural subscribers have also been growing at an exponential rate. Data traffic provided by 3rd generation internet service has also increased and the number of subscribers for it is constantly increasing. Also the Indian smartphone market is growing at a really fast pace. The sale of landline phones is decreasing and that of mobile phones is constantly increasing.

VI. CONCLUSION

It was found at the end of this research that even though telecom sector is a huge and growing industry it still lacks in consumer trust, reputation and brand equity. In most of the questions it was found that either telecom sector comes last or comes somewhere before it. But does not enjoy first position in any of the questions, and most of the times it's the other sectors that comes first and FMCG being the most regular in it. Also the consumer's recollection of CSR activities and advertisements done by FMCG and Travel & Tourism sector is better than their recollection of anything done by the Telecom sector. The brands are not able to connect with the consumer and consumers trust issues also play an important role in it.

Limitations in Research

Every research has its own set of limitations. The limitations can be in varied aspects. Like the respondents themselves, the questionnaire, the questions, the timeframe and also in the method selected.

The method of survey

The method of survey selected was a quantitative one. And questionnaire was prepared for that survey. The questionnaire limits the thought processes of the respondents as the answers are limited to the options available. Also the respondents cannot express their views openly. Qualitative method like observations, group discussions and in depth interviews would have worked well along with the questionnaire as they provide an insight into the thinking processes of the respondents.

The respondents

Most of the answers given by the respondents are either based on what their relatives think or what their friends think. The views are not independent of each other. Also most of the time the respondents do not read the definitions or questions in the questionnaire and just mark things randomly. This ruins the base of the research. Also most of the times the respondents do not have full knowledge about the subject matter of research and little and half knowledge hampers the research. Most of the respondents do not like parent companies so they do not like their telecom parts also. For eg. If a person does not like reliance as a company they will not select reliance jio.

The questions and the questionnaire

Most of the questions in the questionnaire are not open ended but are close ended with just a yes or no for an answer or just 4 options. Due to this the respondents have to limit their thought processes and also they run out of options. They have to stick to the options available and cannot speak their mind out. Also the questionnaire has to be prepared keeping in mind the attention span of the respondents. Most of the respondents lose their attention in a mere 3 to 4 minutes. So an ideal questionnaire has to be prepared which not only sticks to the objective of the research but at the same time interests the respondents.

But this also works as limitation because the researcher cannot ask all the questions that he wants to.

Time Frame

The respondents that have been selected are mostly PG students who have an idea about the main concepts of the research. But though they have an idea the seriousness and the maturity that comes from the executives or officials or business people is often not present. Also most of the times it so happens that the respondent has had a tiring day or a bad day and that hampers the thought process while answering a questionnaire. For eg. If someone uses an Idea network and on that day the network does not work properly the person would not select Idea as an option while answering that questionnaire.

Future Scope

Most of the researches done on this topic have been of an exploratory kind rather than of a conclusive kind. The concepts though have been explained a relation between the two has never been established. Also a lot of new innovation and legal changes have come in these aspects. So it is necessary to understand this aspects from the company's point of view also along with the customer's point of view. Also the same kind of research with a different target group can also be done to understand the topic in depth so as to understand the topic from a business point of view rather than an academic point of view.

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