

A Critique on the Word "Customer"

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It is neither ethical nor professional to call people who are made out of flesh and blood just like us "customers". Unlike what you might think, calling people customers is not an act of respect, quite contrary, it is reducing them to a simple purchase item.

In fact, the term "customer" divides people into two groups: customers and non-customers. That is to say, people either choose to buy your brand or not. If they choose to be your customer, they will be treated nicely which is awful because it is not out of respect, but a fake attitude toward people who have accomplished their purchase mission appropriately. On the other hand, if they don't buy your brand, they have no other choice other than doing their duty (to buy). Therefore, the ultimate meaning one can use for ads would be the term fraud. Looking at people as customers is not an act of respecting, but an act of neglecting them. Actually, in such approaches that human beings think as human beings, regard human beings as customers.

It's a mistake to address human beings with titles like customer or potential buyer. Also, we would make a mistake when we divide people based on factors like their age, education, salary and so on. In fact, there is no one named customer in the real world. Let's say they are ordinary people who are living their lives every day. Actually, when we discuss the concept of

customer we are imagining them as some obedient subjects who is obliged to obey every single purchase command. Therefore, it could be argued that a managing director is a dictator whose commands must be obeyed. Actually, advertisements are the modern version of the ancient heralds, the same structure but more elegant. The commands are transcribed on the billboards, magazines and commercial ads to invite the Customers to do this or that. Of course, since these ads are designed for a public audience, they are decorated with a disgusting dose of cheer and plastic smiley faces. There's no whipping in an ordinary sense, alright; but as John Burger notes: ads are designed in a way to evoke your jealousy for having the promoted product. Therefore, what we are faced with are mental whips.

However, audiences are more mature than before. Many of them react to such plastic smiley faces, with sneer. But the fact is, the managers do not notice these sneers because while the audience are reacting to the ads, they are in their important business meetings with their abacuses calculating annual profit for every single audience. These calculations will never end. If the desired result isn't achieved, they would think of improving their ads. So they start repeating the same commanding words with a smile on their face. And since people don't hear them, they turn up their voices and add some doses of rubbish popular

music, use some attractive people in their ads to deliver a silly rhythmic speech to the audience. They might also create a complete decoration for a 15 seconds advertisement, and repeat some nonsense thousands of times to sell for example a juice. This amount of vulgarity to sell something like a juice is not fair.

The fact is, the only thing they care about is themselves and not the people. They never care about the preoccupations of a person who leaves his home with a headphone on, a person who's back home so tired and the only thing he can think of is to call his friends to have a little bit fun. They never ask themselves why a salesperson in the neighborhood's supermarket must be spying on something. They would never ever think about such issues. It reminds one of a quote from the Iranian movie *Going By* (2001) where the little girl in a grocery shop suddenly burst into tears and asked herself: "what am I seeking? What am I seeking?" actually, she was looking for herself, who she couldn't find.

The audiences are looking for

themselves in order to as Nietzsche said, become who they are. Unlike the content of many advertisements, the audiences are looking for something to get closer to themselves. They constantly measure everything. For instance, they might ask themselves: is this juice for me or people better than me? They always try to find something that would represent them better than what they really are. Therefore, to have a better image, they would ask themselves questions including: what brand of cigarette is better for me? What style of coat should I buy? What sort of book should I read to become like others?

A brand that is understanding and responsive in relation to its audience, will definitely achieve more profits. However, the famous brands would have their great interest anyways, whether the market is hot or not. Even the economic boycotts cannot endanger their profits. Anyways, there is no problem with these brands' high profits, what the article tries to assert is that no brand deserves the profits that is achieved through fraud, lies, devastating ordinary people's lives, and endangering environment. Otherwise, nobody would disagree when a brand or factory that tries to solve a social problem or provide a lot of job positions becomes famous and rich. Everything would change if the companies change their minds about their commercial slogans - which would create the image of for example the best juice

brand in the Middle East - and write something like "we have something special for a person who walks home from work tiredly while thinking about his small dreams". Such rethinking would change the nature of everything including pricing, advertisement, packaging, logo, commercial slogan, website content, social media content, voluntary jobs, etc. By this rethinking, we do not mean that the brands or companies should start lying and deceit people by doing voluntary works. Quite opposite, we believe the companies' social responsibilities should be in a perfect harmony with their main task. For instance, a bank's responsibility is not to build schools, provide school stuffs for poor kids in the slums, or other similar deceitful activities that are nothing but some advertising tools. Fortunately, such ideas do not even affect the tired audience who's walking back home from work. But, if the bank offers those slummers loans with zero bank interest or provides a homeless person with better financial offers, then we would certainly admire it. This is the heart of the matter of ISO 26000.

According to this standard, social responsibility means doing your duty well while thinking about all prerequisites and aftermaths. In other words, your social responsibility is to do your duty responsibly. Unless a company stop considering people a part of their statistics, charts, diagrams and math calculations and start having empathy with them and caring about their demands and expectations, it is nothing but a dictator that is constantly talking without having an enthusiastic audience. Such companies totally forget this fact that people are not their obedient soldiers. So what should they do? They have to encounter with the populism temptation and do their best to be more responsive in their relation with the people. They have to look at people as real human beings and take their responsibility toward them. Actually, the managers are better to be with people and against themselves, at least for their own benefit. So the best strategy for them is to regard people as their priority.

In the modern era that we live in, where the mass production giant is waving hands from the factory funnels, and the stores are full of mass production packages, all products would be somehow alike. So to distinguish them from each other, some commercial painters are invited to draw something for the boxes and packages. Hence, the unemployed painters become commercial painters. They start drawing labels and signs while

producing some commercial announcement that promotes the producer's name on the packages. But it should be noted that all people are not necessarily educated, so they cannot read the names of the factories on the packages. That is why the producers ask the painters to draw something unforgettable on the packages for the uneducated people to remember the products later. Today, we call these simple signs and drawings logo. Logo symbolizes a brand's loyalty toward people. Logos are designed for the uneducated people. Yes, higher profits has been the main motivation for the brands, but it doesn't jeopardize anyone's life. The only way the businesses would solve the social problems without any damage or populist tricks, is to change their mind about their audience and look at people as people, not customers. This is the very lesson business managers should learn from designers.



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