

Consumer Experience Analysis

Focus Groups - Research Findings

Research Objectives

- The specific research objectives of this **qualitative study** are to:
 - Analyse separately the four electronic communication services offered in Malta for quality levels and consumer experience
 - Identify consumer satisfaction levels with the services provided by the main electronic communication operators in Malta
 - Identify any shortcomings and problems generally encountered by the consumers with regards to the services offered by operators
 - Establish whether these problems can be solved via **ex-ante regulatory intervention**
 - Complement other MCA surveys and studies to be factored into our ongoing analysis
 - If major areas of concern were to be identified this study would be followed by a quantitative survey on a national scale

Research Methodology

- The MCA commissioned M. Fsadni & Associates to conduct this qualitative research study with **private household respondents**
- The object of this study was to obtain qualitative information from these respondents via **Focus Group** sessions in order to assess areas for further study via a quantitative survey
- A total of 5 focus group sessions – having an aggregate participation of 40 respondents – were held
- The selection of participants for the focus group sessions was based on pre-established respondents' profiles to ensure a good representation of respondents of different age brackets, males and females and hailing from different localities in Malta

Focus Groups

- A focus group **Moderator Guide** research instrument was drawn up to guide and stimulate discussion throughout the sessions
- Focus Groups like any other research instrument are not a perfect science and tend to suffer from certain biases:
 - A fundamental difficulty with Focus Groups is the issue of observer dependency where participants are either influenced by the researcher or other participants in the group
 - The informal setting chosen for these sessions may also provide for a colloquial rather than a more structured discussion
- Though we have been careful to control these biases, human nature may have had the better hand in some occasion and it is therefore important to keep this in mind when analysing and discussing the forthcoming findings
- The observations highlighted in this presentation reflect the respondents' knowledge and perceptions at the time, and may not necessarily be correct or factual

Key Findings – Fixed Telephony (1)

- ✓ **Positive Attributes**
 - ✓ Overall both GO and Melita customers participating in the Focus Group sessions were satisfied with the telephone service being provided
 - ✓ Melita offers cheap fixed telephony services
- × **Turn-offs**
 - × Melita's line is sometimes not clear and there are frequent disconnections, especially after 15 minutes of being on the phone
 - × Melita customers do not have the fixed telephony service if there is a power cut
 - × Some Melita customers pointed out that they are unable to make international calls
 - × Suspension of GO's Easyline service for those customers not spending the annual minimum requirement

Key Findings – Fixed Telephony (2)

Wish Haves

- # GO customers would like to have free calls to all fixed line numbers, irrespective of which operator the recipient of the call is subscribed with
- # Melita customers would like to have cheaper international call services, similar to GO's 1021 service
- # Customers would like to know whether they are calling On-net or Off-net

Key Findings – Mobile Telephony

✓ Positive Attributes

- ✓ In general, all those participating in the Focus Group sessions were satisfied with the mobile service being provided
- ✓ Vodafone was highlighted as the operator which offers the best mobile reception and the best service when being abroad

× Turn-offs

- × Some GO customers registered problems with their mobile service when they were abroad
- × Vodafone was said to charge high exit fees when terminating a contract
- × GO was criticised for changing its mobile telephony offer on the Homepack
- × GO's letter to this effect sent to all its Homepack customers was described as being unfair and viewed as a 'take it or lose it all' approach
- × Few participants could mention the name of the mobile plan they are subscribed to

Key Findings – Pay TV (1)

✓ Positive Attributes

- ✓ Melita's pay TV service is considered as being of a higher quality than GO's
- ✓ GO are considered as offering a more efficient service than Melita

× Turn-offs

- × Stopping TV service with Melita described as 'impossible':
 - × Keep on mailing bills after termination of service
 - × "unreasonable" and "excessive" fees when terminating the service
 - × Major hassle to stop the service of a deceased person (~7 months)
- × Some participants said that the GO DTTV card blocks frequently
- × There was a high level of dissatisfaction with the channel line-up of both operators

Key Findings – Pay TV (2)

- × Participants complaining about the channel line up argued that channels that have been removed were not adequately replaced, referring to Living TV and Comedy Central, while the price remained the same
- × TV programmes aired on the channels available are too repetitive and are back dated
- × Pay TV prices of both GO and Melita are considered expensive
- × Satellite was considered as the best service in Malta with better picture quality and an extensive channel line up

Wish Haves

- # A better channel line up – some respondents would like to have the possibility to build one's own TV channel list and pay accordingly
- # Those who like watching football would like to have the possibility to pay to see certain matches only rather than paying to have the whole season
- # With regards to Pay TV offers, customers would like to have the 'opt in option' rather than the 'opt out option'

Key Findings – Broadband Internet

✓ Positive Attributes

- ✓ Melita's broadband was described as very good by some respondents
- ✓ GO customers were overall satisfied with the broadband service offered

× Turn-offs

- × Operators do not inform the clients of the download speed their wires can support and sell this download speed irrespectively. Some say download speed is less than that advertised on the media
- × Some Melita subscribers complained of a poor internet service during bad weather
- × The 'opt out' letter Melita sent to its clients with regards to an upgrade to the internet speed was described as unfair as they had never asked for such an upgrade
- × Some GO customers complained about the service being disrupted on a regular basis
- × The exit fee on Vodafone's internet key offer is too expensive and unreasonable

Key Findings – Other Issues (1)

- ✓ Positive Attributes
 - ✓ The majority of respondents opted for a bundle of electronic communication services in their household. The main advantages highlighted include:
 - ✓ It makes sense financially
 - ✓ Receive one bill for all services
 - ✓ GO's bundle exit fees were described to be reasonable
 - ✓ Bills are simple and well understood by the customers
 - ✓ There is awareness on the possibility to ask for an itemised bill
 - ✓ Generally, Melita have been found to explain contract matters very well to their customers
 - ✓ No particular issues relating to the technicians or installers of services have been reported

Key Findings – Other Issues (2)

- × **Turn-offs**
 - × The two year contract for bundles is a turn off for some participants, arguing it is too long
 - × It is very unfair that operators change the terms and conditions of a bundle before the end of contract
 - × The late payment fee imposed by GO on bills is considered as unreasonable
 - × Melita's hard selling techniques are a nuisance, and respondents described their customer care to be arrogant and rude
 - × Vodafone were criticised for the hard selling techniques used in public places
 - × A high level of inconsistency and lack of uniform information by the customer care service of both GO and Melita was highlighted by the participants

Key Findings – Other Issues (3)

Wish Haves

- # All respondents wish that contracts bind both parties involved
- # All respondents would like to see more consistency and better product knowledge by the customer care representatives of both GO and Melita
- # Melita should stop its hard selling techniques
- # Electronic communication services should be cheaper. Exit fees should also be more reasonable
- # Most respondents called for operators to be more loyal to their existing customers – offers apply mostly for new customers

General Remarks – Our Assessment

- No major or serious issues have emerged from this qualitative study. Most areas for improvement are either being addressed or are outside the scope of the MCA regulatory remit
- Overall people are satisfied with the services they get and complaints have more of an individual dimension
- In terms of the general pricing levels most participants were overall satisfied, with the exception of TV where many argued that they were not receiving good value for money – (in comparison to satellite)
- Originally this study was to be followed up by a full blown quantitative survey to assess the issues arising from these focus groups on a national scale
- This quantitative survey, however, is likely to produce the same results found in the consumer perception surveys
- Since there are no major areas of concern that need to be analysed the survey would be futile



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