



## Relationship Or Hardship?

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Welcome to the future of customer relationships! Are we ready for this?

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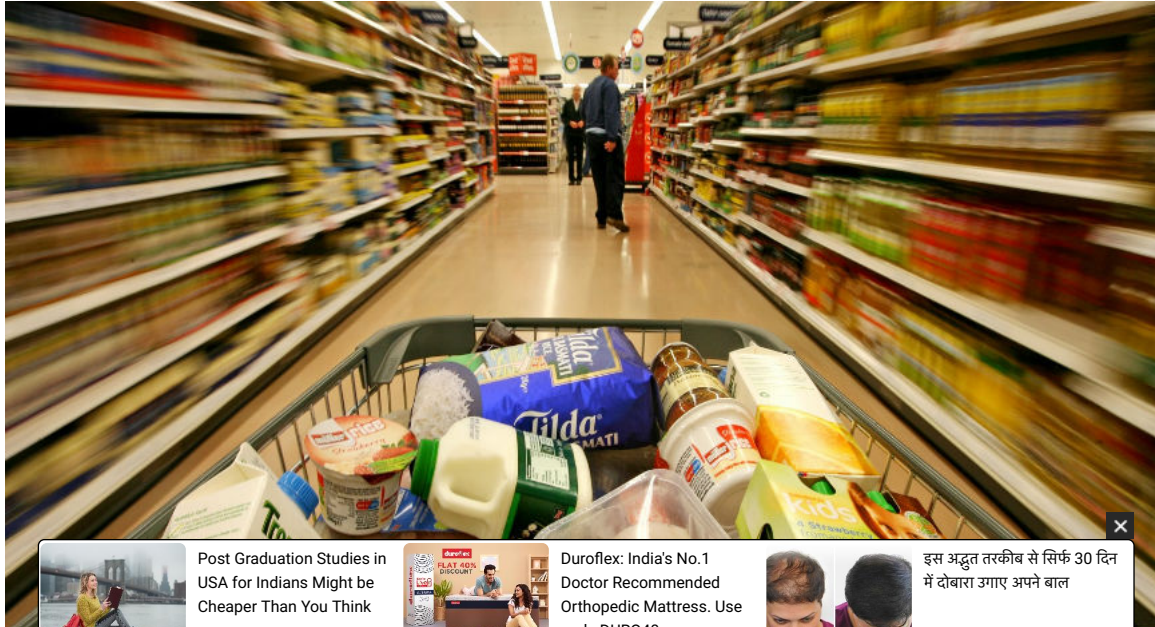
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ARTY

13 February, 2021 by Dr M Muneer

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Bhujlal's kirana store wants to have a relationship with me ever since the launch of FB-Jio marketplace platform and the pandemic-induced disruption.

Bhujlal's son, a freshly minted MBA (from one of those UK Universities' one-year fast track programme that is not valid for work in that country) and the marketing honcho at the store, has "educated" his papa all about relationship marketing, CRM and how customers should be valued.

"You have to get up-close and personal with your customers," the son says. "Your customers are more than a Rs 357.95 transaction. They have names.... Feelings.... Personalities.... You have to get to know them before your competition does...."

He continues: "To get close to them, you have to be like the airlines. Even Jet Airways will do. People fly the same airlines to get points that they redeem for a free trip. You can be like the big guys, too, and have a customer for life."

Bhujlal Sr is impressed and convinced, and he agrees to change the name of the kirana store to B-Mart and expand it a bit to imbibe a super market style, almost similar to the numerous ones we see today in every neighbourhood. He has also launched the B-Mart Club Card.

### 2023 AD

I wake up one Saturday morning to a knock at my front door. It is Bhujlal Sr himself.

"Where have you been? I was worried for you. Every second Friday for the last eighteen months you have bought whole-wheat atta. You did not buy it yesterday. Did I do something to keep you away? Don't you know how much I appreciate your business? We've been through so much. Remember those beautiful birthday cakes?" (He had sent me cakes for my birthday two years in a row.)

I tell Bhujlal Sr that I bought normal atta yesterday for a change. That's all.

Oh, he is relieved. He then proceeds to tell me in detail why his whole-wheat atta is so great because my lifestyle category in his database is described as "information seeking."

He jots an e-mail to his MIS person: "Why didn't normal atta show up on my report for this customer?" He turns to me, "Was that a national brand -- like Annapurna or Pilsbury?" He elaborates further for my understanding. I tell him I don't remember.

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Bhujlal then enters my house and goes to the kitchen to greet my better half. He spots a bottle of the recently launched, flavoured cheese spread on the kitchen table. He cross checks it against a printout he pulls from his briefcase. "You did not buy this from me. You have been to Food Mart, haven't you? This is how you treat a friend?"

I have had enough. I pull my B-Mart Club Card out of my wallet and shove it into his palm.

"No, no, no," cries Bhujlal. "You can buy from these chain guys if you want. I just want you to know that I care. Don't you understand? You're family. To show how special you are, I'll double your points on all purchases for the next month, OK?"

I simply nod. Bhujlal is really trying. May be he really does care? He does know my name. Good friends are hard to come by. I read in the media a research where 75 percentage of people said they don't have any reliable friends at work.

Bhujlal hands over a 1000 gm pack of whole-wheat atta to me just to demonstrate his gratitude for being with B-Mart.

That evening, a boy in a familiar red uniform, drops into my apartment. "Here's your chicken and mushroom," he informs.

"I did not order any pizza," I reply.

"It is Saturday, the 2nd week of October. Last year on the 2nd Saturday of October you ordered a chicken and mushroom. You are hungry, aren't you?"

I hand him over Rs 500 and tell him to keep the change. He tells me that it's not enough. Apparently, it seems, last year I gave him a bigger tip.

I slam the front door shut.

The telephone rings.

It's the greeting cards shop. "We have just sent your cousin in Alappuzha a Rs 175 card for her birthday next week," a telemarketing rep announces. This so-called cousin of mine died last month.

I have to get the card diverted from Coorg to Mumbai where a nephew's birthday is due. My Coorg cousin has been purged from my profile.

#### 2024 AD

It has been reported in Reader's Digest that 75% of males now carry purses because they could not fit all of their club and other cards in their wallets.

Whatever you do requires a card. I can't go into the toilet without a card. Well, I can, but without inserting my Rest Room Card into the wall unit, I lose valuable points toward my forecasted disposable diaper relationship. Use of the card over the next 13 years will guarantee me a truckload of adult diapers, which will make me loyal to no other brand.

#### 2025 AD

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Did you know that a man named Amarjit Mishra in Mumbai eats Kellogg cornflakes at a 150 index when it is 24 degrees or colder, will buy a 500 ml Kissan TomChi bottle every 25 days, has never had pickles, is strictly a vegetarian, is married to a woman named Shree, whose best friend Janet, had a C-Section done by Dr Kishore, and likes to shop at Shopper's Stop for her dresses?

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