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## A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GOLD APPLE CUSTOMER SERVICE IN BELARUS AND QATAR

Customer service (CS) is one of the key points of business success. CS is defined as “the assistance an organization offers to its customers before or after they buy or use products or services” [1]. Loyalty programs, consulting and support of customers, product suggestions, issues and complaint handling, technical support, delivery services, and feedback are general aspects of customer service.

The importance of customer service can be revealed by considering the results of McKinsey’s research on the value of improvement of customer experience. During the study, it was discovered “that improving the customer experience has increased sales revenues by 2 to 7 % and profitability by 1 to 2 %.” [2]. Customer service needs to be studied in depth, because the collected data helps to advance user experience and customer loyalty can be increased [3].

The object of the research is customer service for the cosmetics and perfumery shop “Gold Apple” in Belarus and Qatar. The research subject is the similarities and differences in Gold Apple’s customer service in Belarus and Qatar. The overall aim of the study was to analyse and compare the customer service aspects of Gold Apple in Minsk and Qatar, identifying key similarities and differences. The materials for the analysis were Gold Apple customer reviews on social media.

Our study revealed that in the Middle East, including Qatar, religion plays an important role in interaction between a business and a customer, while in Belarus it does not play such a significant role. By way of illustration, in Gold Apple in Qatar there are special cards, website design, limited edition beauty boxes and gifts for purchasing, and sales devoted to Ramadan; while in Belarus there is no special campaign during Great Lent before Easter.

Gold Apple's customers are given complementary gifts for purchasing. In Qatar Gold Apple clients are pleased with presents, but Belarusian customers are discontented.

What is more, in Qatar from time to time the company gives codes that customers can use to lower the final cost of the cart (e.g. on Valentine's Day). In Belarus, there are general sales of some products. Moreover, customers are given free bonuses that can be used while making an order, but Belarusians complain that bonuses often disappear before being used.

In the Middle East bricks-and-mortar shops are preferred by more than half of the customers, however, the delivery services of Gold Apple are available in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates; while in Belarus the shares of delivery service and purchase in the bricks-and-mortar shop are equal. In Belarus the delivery is often late or postponed, while in Qatar there are no such problems.

We can not but mention the work of Gold Apple's shop assistants. Most Qatar customers remark that sales employees are polite, knowledgeable and helpful, however, rude staff can also be met. In Belarus the situation with personnel is quite the opposite: in the reviews consultants are thought of as rude, haughty, and lacking in knowledge. Yet, it is not always the case – according to some customer reviews, some consultants are competent.

“Middle Eastern consumers are often brand-conscious, and they associate certain brands with quality, status, and luxury. International luxury brands have a strong presence in the region, and consumers are willing to invest in high-end products” [4]. Belarusians prefer to choose budget, affordable products. In Gold Apple in Qatar there are more luxury brands and niche products; in Belarus they are also present, however, they are in less demand. All the customers note that the shop has a wide range of goods, but Belarusians are not pleased with the quality of products, saying that some products are fakes.

In the Middle East people prefer the so-called “VIP”-treatment. Makeup stations to try out and compare products can be found both in Qatar and Belarus, although, in Doha, customers can find private VIP rooms to test goods, whereas in Minsk, there are no such facilities. Customers in Belarus are aware of little space in the shops, which prevents them from testing beauty products. In Qatar, special ‘relaxation zones’ were created, with free refreshments including a cup of coffee, cookies, nuts, and macarons. In Belarus, free refreshments are not available, but small relaxation zones can be found.

Talking about customer care in Belarus, the call-center works round the clock or customers can write to the support in Telegram and WhatsApp; yet in Qatar only WhatsApp is available. Along with that customers of both countries are not satisfied with the work of customer care: some problems are not solved, some questions are not answered.

On the basis of the analysis we could tentatively propose the following recommendations for the customer service improvement. The company management team should reconsider the criteria for hiring staff and provide them with a soft skills training program. A stricter approach should be implemented regarding instructions for customer care and delivery service employees. Moreover, a universal method of

complementary gifts packing should be created. Finally, goods quality and authenticity certificates should always be checked.

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### **EVOLUTION OF MARKETING: FROM PRODUCTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MARKET STRATEGIES**

The transformation of marketing is an adaptation from corporate strategies to societal needs and market realities. Initially, marketing was focused on production capacity with an accent on the large-scale production of products. Later, the focus moved to satisfying consumer demands, which led to the development of more varied and flexible market tactics. This article is intended to explore the main stages of the evolution of marketing, its adaptation to the variable conditions of the global economy and the introduction of digital technologies.

The development of marketing began after the global economic crisis caused by the crash of the stock market in America in 1929 and lasted until 1933. Since its beginning, marketing has changed significantly due to the development of production and market relations.

In the period after the global economic crisis, when there was a shortage of goods and high consumer demand, a manufacturing concept focused on high-volume production to reduce costs emerged. The key aim of this concept was to provide low-cost goods to the public. With time, the focus on scaling up production without taking into account individual consumer demands led to excessive inventory and high levels of competition. This resulted in the need to review the concept.

The growth in the numbers of companies caused a transformation to the product concept. This strategy emphasized on improving the quality of products and aggressive