**Introduction**

The globalization of markets has been one of the major business developments in the last three decades (Levatt, 1983; Keegan 1999, Schultz and Kitchen 2000). The pressure of global competition impacts every domestic market as well as international markets. Market places are transitioning to demand side approaches with a focus on customer needs and wants. Customer relationship management (CRM) thus should assume a central role in marketing management of products and services. The impact of globalization is still under researched area. The market segmentation and positioning strategies may need to diverge widely to accommodate customer needs and preferences. The structure of competitive environments may also vary widely from country to country, state to state as may product / service life cycle stage. Marketing itself is now concerned with understanding of target customers and develops the value proposition that customers want and need, and then creating the marketing approach.

Standardization of marketing communication can also assist in brand image consistency across markets (Kotabe & Helsen 1998). Market segmentation and positioning strategies may need to reflect wide divergence in consumer needs and preferences. The structure of the competitive environment may also vary widely from country to country, state to state not to mention current product life cycle stage on the temporal dimension. These factors will inevitably impact on marketing communication strategies and techniques. Many authors (Gronholdt et al, 2000) stress the importance of CRM in maintaining and increasing customer satisfaction in order to create brand loyalty and thus enhance business performance for organization. One says to be more competitive in market, one has to focus on customer’s expectation and not only focusing but fulfilling those expectations. This focuses something called brand choosing and brand switching. Brand is the
personality of the product. It is a perceived quality, not necessarily real. Brand positioning as a verb is the process of creating this personality. Brand positioning as a noun describes the target that marketers set for themselves in terms of how they want their product to be perceived by the consumer. If one say Airtel what comes to your mind mobile service provider, quality service, expensive, Sachin, Shahrukh Khan.

So brand is sum of associations that the company builds through the various modes of communications….. Both above the line and below the line.

Brand positioning is to position the brand in such a way that it occupies a unique place in the mind of the prospects consumers. It can be real or superficial. Brand positioning is probably the most important fundamental concept in a brand’s strategy. In simple terms, it is find a ‘niche’ in the minds of the target segment consumer in such a way that (i) the offering is perceived with a differentiation and / or (ii) takes into consideration the innate needs of the consumers whenever required. The USP and the brand meaning are strongly associated with the brand positioning. Brand positioning is also linked with managing a brand’s meaning like MICROMAX brand strongly associated with “Nothing like Anything”, LG `s brand strongly associated with “Life's Good”, MOTOROLA brand strongly associated with “Intelligence Everywhere”, VEDIOCON brand strongly associated with “Dhamake ka signal", NOKIA is a brand strongly associated with “connecting people”, RELIANCE is a brand strongly associated with “karlo Duniya muthi me”. M.T.N.L. is a brand strongly associated with “Mumbai ka khas mobile”.

Brands identify the source or market of product / services and allow consumers to assign responsibility to a particular manufacture or distributor. Consumer can evaluate the identical
product / service differently depending on how it is branded. Consumers learn about brands through past experiences with the product / service and its marketing program. They find out which brands satisfy their needs and which one does not. Brands also perform valuable functions for companies / organization. Brands can signal a certain level of quality so that satisfied buyers can easily choose the product / service again.

Brand loyalty provides predictability and security of demand for the firm and creates barrier to entry for competitors to enter the market. Loyalty also can translate into a willingness to pay a higher price – often 20 to 25%. More branding can be seen as a powerful means to secure a competitive advantage. It is endowing products and services with the power of a brand. For branding strategies to be successful and brand value to be created, consumers must be convinced that there are meaningful differences among brands in the product or service category. In today’s scenario, brand loyalty is an area which is not only topical but also confusing to marketers, given the complexities of the marketing environment – both in Western markets and in the Indian context. On the one hand, traditional literature advocates that loyal consumers are cost effective to retain vis-à-vis the cost of acquiring new consumers. On the other, present-day literature suggests that more than loyalty management, customer migration management would be effective in terms of analyzing the degree of loyalty. Another vital direction of loyalty trends is that satisfaction may not lead to brand loyalty (because of a variety of reasons). Brand switching may be an inherent behavior of most consumers. There may also be a pattern of brand switching – a consumer may buy a brand three times consecutively, try out a few other brands and then return to his original brand (perhaps in a category like soaps). Consumers may also reflect occasion-based brand buying. Brand loyalty has to be
differentiated from repeat buying. While brand loyalty may lead to repeat buying, there is difference between the two when they are considered in terms of behavior.

Repeat buying without commitment to the brand may happen when a consumer buys a brand either because there is no alternative or because he / she feels that it is not worthwhile to search for and compare several brands. Loyalty happens when the consumer is committed to a brand. A smoker of a specific brand would try in several retail outlets for his favorite brand when this brand is not freely available in the market. But that is not the case in mobile phone service providers as there are many players carrying their brand image and everyone tries to prove themselves in different market situation. So now let’s discuss branding, customer loyalty, positioning etc in certain market conditions. Current literature on research indicates that marketers could be more certain about the brand loyalty of consumers if two dimensions are strongly indicated, namely, behavioral and attitudinal loyalty. Behavioral loyalty consists of aspects like intention to buy, willing to give information to the company when required and routine re-ordering. Attitudinal loyalty includes advocating the brand to others, top-of-mind awareness, trust, psychological trust ad propensity to pay a premium. An investigation into these two dimensions would provide several insights to marketers for planning loyalty programmes, taking into consideration competitive offerings.

**Rationale of the Research**

The research on “A Study of brand preference of mobile phones” focuses in understanding the attitudes and perception of the consumer’s demographics factors towards brand choice and brand switching of mobile phones handset. In the present competitive scenario, most of the companies were shifting their focus from push system to pull system so as to grab the market as much as they
can. Mobile phone market is like a commodity market where price is not only the factor that will distinguish between the company and its competitors. Thus one needs to focus on consumers buying behavior pattern with respect to their demographics which in turn help the companies to set up their marketing strategies to go towards competitive edge. The buying behaviour of customers of mobile phones is very dynamic. Right from the time when mobile phones came to the market, pattern of Indian consumers specifically youngsters played a major role in buying behavior and thus laid researcher to think the behavioral shift of Indian customer

Study will show how different demographic factors play a major role in choosing a brand and its impact on brand switching. Researcher will also focus on the problem why people switch from one brand to another. Buying the same product may have done it for different reasons, paid different prices, used in different ways, status, have different emotional attachment towards the things and so on. The company would like to know how consumer behavior will help him design better marketing plans based on the said parameters to get those accepted within the company.

**Utility of the Study**

The utility of the study can be summarized as follows:

- If the marketers focus in knowing the important factors which are responsible for brand choice it will a value addition point to companies in designing their strategies.
- This study throws light in understanding the attitudes & perceptions of the customers of mobile phone handset users of Mumbai.
- It also facilitate in understanding the awareness level of the brands in the market that will facilitate the marketers to jot down their marketing plan.
- The researcher tries to investigate the extent of the consumer’s preference and their reasons of switching in correlation with age, income, profession and gender, so that that demographic wise analysis can be done which will give a clear view to the marketers.