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HOW DOES CUSTOMERS' SATISFACTION AFFECT BUSINESS PERFORMANCE? EVIDENCE FROM NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examines the impact of customers' satisfaction on business profitability from Nigeria perspective. The SPSS package was used to analyze the linear regression in order to establish the relationship between the variables involved in the study. The results showed a positive relationship between customers' retention and profitability which implies that mobile operators need to maximize customer satisfaction in order to influence the extent of loyalty and retention on the products' patronage. However, this study recommends that mobile operators should not just rely on profit margins as a good indicator of business performance but rather should develop strategies that better capture customers' perceptions of their service offerings.

Keywords: *Customers' Satisfaction; Customers' Profitability; Customers' Retention; Customers' Loyalty; Nigeria.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Global System of Mobile Communications (GSM) is a second-generation digital technology, which was originally developed in Europe and in less than ten years after the commercial launch which later developed into world's leading and fastest growing mobile standard (GSM Assoc., 2006). Lonergan et al. (2004) reported that at the beginning of 2004, there were over 1.3 billion mobile phone users worldwide and by 2007, the demand for mobile services would have grown at an average annual rate of 9.1%. The GSM Association estimates that the GSM technology is used by more than one in five people of the world's population, representing approximately 77% of the world's cellular market and is estimated to account for 73% of the world's digital market and 72% of the world's wireless market (GSM Assoc., 2006). This growth principally results from the establishment of new networks in developing countries rather than from an increase in mobile access lines in developed countries (Serenko and Turel, 2006).

Gerpott et al. (2001) wrote that since 1990s, the telecommunications sector has become an important key in the development of the economy of developed countries. This results from the saturated markets, de-regulation of telecommunications industry (removal of monopoly

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rights, especially enjoyed by state-owned telecoms networks), and increasing number of mobile service providers, enormous technical development and intense market competition. Szyperski & Loebbecke (1999) posited that this increasing economic importance and benefits of telecommunications firms motivated many management scholars (especially marketing experts) to devote attention to this sector. Wilfert (1999); Gerpott (1998); and Booz. Allen and Hamilton (1995) affirmed that marketing strategies are very important in telecommunications services because once customers have subscribed to a particular telecommunications service provider, their long-term link with this provider is of greater importance to the success of the company than they are in other industry sectors. Hence, service providers need to form a continuous lasting relationship with a view to understanding their customers better and adequately satisfying their needs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEWS

Studies (Gerpott et al. 2001) conducted to explore factors affecting satisfaction, loyalty and retention in mobile telecommunications industry include showed that customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention in the German mobile telecommunications among 684 respondents that customer retention do not equal to customers' loyalty and/or customer satisfaction, rather a bi-causal link can be assumed in which customer satisfaction drives customer loyalty which in turn has impacts on customer retention. However, these three factors are important for superior economic success among telecommunication service providers. Kim et al. (2004) investigated the effects of customer satisfaction and switching barrier on customer loyalty among 350 respondents in Korea and reported that call quality, value-added services and customer support have significant impact on customer satisfaction. Thus, to maximize customer satisfaction, focus should be on service quality and customer-oriented services. Switching barrier on the other hand is affected by switching costs (e.g. loss cost, move-in cost, and interpersonal relationships) and was revealed to have an adjustment effect on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Serenko and Turel (2006) investigated customer satisfaction with mobiles services in Canada and reported that perceived quality and perceived value are the key factors influencing satisfaction with mobile services. Customer care is reported to be negatively related to customer satisfaction, which means that a more satisfied customer is less prone to complain. Hence, they concluded that customer satisfaction is the only single measure that better capture the range of services, prices and quality and moreso, this measure is an important performance indicator useful for both regulators and mobile service providers. In summary, these studies support the theory that highly satisfied customers stay longer, buy more, less sensitive to price increases from their providers or price decreases from competitors.

Nigeria, a developing country, in 1992 introduced its first mobile phone services, through the joint venture between NITEL and DSL of Canada to form Mobile Telecommunications Service (MTS), (Ndukwe, 2005). In January 2001, the regulatory body NCC, modernised and expanded the mobile telecommunications network and services by granting GSM license to three service providers; MTN Nigeria, Econet Wireless (now Vmobile), and the first national carrier, NITEL (initially MTS, privatised to form Mtel). In 2002, the second national carrier, Globacom was also granted license to commence operation. Since the launch of the GSM, the number of

subscribers in Nigeria has greatly increased. Ndukwe (2005) reported that between 1998 and 2000, the number of mobile lines was 35,000 but grew to over 11 million as of March 2005, with a growth rate of more than a million lines annually since 2002. This translated to an increase from the total density of 0.4 lines per 100 inhabitants in 1998 to 9.47 lines per 100 inhabitants currently. Additionally, this sector has attracted an investment of over US \$8 billion and has greatly increased the number of employed people directly (those working with the GSM companies) or indirectly (this includes various levels of dealerships, cell phone vendors, repair shops, suppliers of accessories, fixed and mobile call shops and street recharge card hawkers) (Hoff, 2006). The number of the employed people is reported to be over 300,000 Nigerians in 2005 (Ndukwe, 2005). Other benefits include easy, affordable and quick access to phone by different categories of the population, reduced frequency of travelling, etc (Adomi, 2005), and all these benefits contribute to the socio- economic development of the country.

Despite the economic and social benefits of the mobile telecommunications to the Nigerian economy and market, unlike the developed countries, there is no marketing or management research attention to this sector. However, it is probable that the mobile operators conduct satisfaction surveys and other marketing research but contact with the mobile operators for any useful information yielded no response. This limitation affected this study in that there are currently no literature materials on customer satisfaction of the Nigerian mobile telecoms industry to consult. The majority of literature available (few in number) focuses on the study of the impact and development of the telecommunications, mobile telephony, communications, among others. Homburg and Giering (2001) posited that customer behaviours and attitudes are greatly influenced by demographic, situational, environmental and psychological factors and these factors can be used by companies and policy makers to develop strategies to meet different needs of the different customer segments. Hence, there is need to gain more understanding of the influence of these factors on customer satisfaction.

Coyne (1989) posited that customer satisfaction has measurable impact on customer loyalty in that when satisfaction reaches a certain level; on the high side, loyalty increases dramatically; at the same time, when satisfaction falls to a certain point, loyalty reduces equally dramatically. Yi (1990) expressed that the impact of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty by stating that “customer satisfaction influences purchase intentions as well as post-purchase attitude”. In other word, satisfaction is related to behavioural loyalty, which includes continuing purchases from the same company, word of mouth recommendation, increased scope of relationship.

Fornell (1992) found out that there is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty but this connection is not always a linear relation. This relationship depends on factors such as market regulation, switching costs, brand equity, existence of loyalty programs, proprietary technology, and product differentiation at the industry level. Jones and Sasser (1995) proposed that link between satisfaction and loyalty can be classified into four different groups: loyalist/apostle (high satisfaction, high loyalty), defector/terrorist (low satisfaction, low loyalty), mercenary (high satisfaction, low loyalty), and hostage (low satisfaction, high loyalty). Roger Hallowell (1996) confirmed the link between customer loyalty (in the context of behavioural loyalty) and customer satisfaction. Oliver (1999) stated that

the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is that satisfaction is transformed into loyalty with the assistance of a myriad of other factors. However, this relationship is complex and asymmetric.

High levels of satisfaction lead to high levels of attitudinal loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty involves different feelings, which create a customer's overall attachment to a product, service, or company (Lovelock et al., 2001). Gerpott et al. (2001) in their study of the German mobile telecommunication found that customer satisfaction is positively related to customer loyalty, and both factors are important parameters in the mobile telecommunications industry. Turel and Serenko, 2006, in their study of Canadian mobile telecommunications also confirmed this finding

Increasing customer satisfaction has been shown to directly affect companies' market share, which leads to improved profits, positive recommendation, lower marketing expenditures (Reichheld, 1996; Heskett et al., 1997), and greatly impact the corporate image and survival (Pizam and Ellis, 1999).

Several research works have shown that there is positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer retention; customer satisfaction has a direct effect on customer retention (Rust and Subramaman, 1992); customer satisfaction is positively related to customer retention (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993); to retain a customer, it is necessary to satisfy him. Satisfied customer is more likely to return and stay with a company than a dissatisfied customer who can decide to go elsewhere (Ovenden, 1995); satisfaction leads to retention and the retention is not simply because of habit, indifference or inertia (Desai and Mahajan, 1998); customer retention is central to the development of business relationships, and these relationships depend on satisfaction (Eriksson and Vaghult, 2000); customer satisfaction is an antecedent of customer retention (Athanasopoulos, 2000); customer satisfaction is a central determinant of customer retention (Gerpott et al., 2001); customer satisfaction is positively related to customer retention and the effect varies by customer size and the customer's current level of satisfaction (Niraj et al., 2003).

Research studies conducted by Gale (1992) and Fornell (1992) showed that higher customer satisfaction translates into higher than normal market share growth, the ability to charge a higher price, lower transaction costs, and a strong link to improved profitability. Nelson et al., (1992) also demonstrated that customer satisfaction is related to higher profitability and proved his findings statistically. Andersson et al., (1994) found a significant association between customer satisfaction and accounting return on assets. Ittner and Larckner (1996) found that shareholder value is highly elastic with respect to customer satisfaction. Fornell et al., 1996, found out that customer satisfaction is significantly related to firms' financial performance. The volume of business conducted with a firm is directly related to customer satisfaction, which in turn affects profitability (Ittner and Larcker, 1998). Other empirical findings further demonstrated that; customer satisfaction has greater influence on repurchase intentions and profits for service companies (Edvardsson et al., 2000b); customer satisfaction affects share-of-wallet (SOW) positively (Braun and Scope, 2003; Keiningham et al., 2003); customer

satisfaction leads to increased profits (Fečíková, 2004); and customer satisfaction is strongly associated with improved share-of –spending (Keiningham 2005).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Assimilation-Contrast Theory as being introduced by Anderson (1973) in the context of post-exposure product performance based on Sherif and Hovland's (1961) discussion of assimilation and contrast effect. The theory suggests that if performance is within a customer's latitude (range) of acceptance, even though it may fall short of expectation, the discrepancy will be disregarded – assimilation will operate and the performance will be deemed to be acceptable. If performance falls within the latitude of rejection, contrast will prevail and the difference will be exaggerated, the produce/service deemed unacceptable. The assimilation-contrast theory has been proposed as a way of explaining the relationships among the variables in the disconfirmation model. This theory is a combination of both the assimilation and the contrast theories. "This paradigm posits that satisfaction is a function of the magnitude of the discrepancy between expected and perceived performance. As with assimilation theory, the consumers will tend to assimilate or adjust differences in perceptions about product performance to bring it in line with prior expectations but only if the discrepancy is relatively small. The assimilation-contrast theory attempts to illustrate that both the assimilation and the contrast theory paradigms have applicability in the study of customer satisfaction.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to examine the impact of customers' satisfaction and business performance, the questionnaire survey technique was employed to collect data and the questions were self constructed. The choices of questions for this investigation include questions on personal background: age; gender; employment type- employed (public, private and self), student and unemployed; and area of residence. The other questions were on variables used to assess mobile service performance/profitability; network quality/availability, billing, validity period and customer care services. The rating scale varied from "very satisfied" to "no opinion". SPSS software package was used to analyze the linear regression in order to establish the relationship between the variables employed in its investigation as shown in Figure 1 below:

Insert Fig. 1 Here

This diagram illustrates the objective of this study, which examines the Nigerian customers' retention/rejection of the mobile telecoms services and explores the relationship between customer retention/rejection and business performance.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Factors Influencing Customer Satisfaction

To explore the relationship between mobile services attributes and customer satisfaction, the linear regression model was applied. R and R² values range between 0 and 1 with larger values indicating stronger relationship. The following sub-sections present the results.

4.2 Relationship between network quality and customer satisfaction

Insert Table. 1 Here

This result indicates that there is a strong relationship between network quality and customer satisfaction and thus, supports H₃. The implication of this result is that network quality of the telephone services is the most significant of all the mobile service attributes in Nigeria. Secondly, the result means that the customers perception of network quality strongly influence their perception of mobile operators and their satisfaction level. Network quality involves call clarity and coverage and mobile operators should focus on improving network quality to create higher satisfaction.

4.3 Relationship between billing and customer satisfaction

Insert Table. 2 Here

This finding showed that there is a weak relationship between billing and customer satisfaction and thus, contradicts H₄. This finding means that billing (pricing structure) has negligible significance out of mobile services attributes in Nigeria. Secondly, the price paid to access the mobile services has little influence on customer satisfaction level. Thirdly, the finding could indicate that billing is meaningless without aligning it with other mobile services attributes. Thus, mobile operators need to provide reasonable pricing that are aligned with good mobile services attributes to maximize satisfaction and routine satisfaction assessment should be conducted. Lastly, this result may probably be due to the fact that the mobile technology is new in the country and rapidly gaining acceptance. Please see appendix 3 for full statistical result.

4.4 Relationship between overall customer care and customer satisfaction

Insert Table. 3 Here

This result demonstrates that there is a weak relationship between overall customer care and customer satisfaction. The implication of this result is that customer care service has negligible significance out of mobile services attributes in Nigeria. Secondly, customer care service has little influence on Nigerian customers' satisfaction level. Thirdly, the result could indicate that customer care service is meaningless without aligning it with other mobile services attributes. Thus, mobile operators need to provide reasonable validity period that are aligned with good mobile services attributes to maximise satisfaction and routine satisfaction evaluation

should be done. Lastly, this result may probably be due to the fact that the mobile technology is relatively new in the country.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study aims at examining the customers' satisfaction of the mobile telecoms industry, factors influencing satisfaction and the relationship between demographic variables and customer satisfaction in Nigeria. Customer satisfaction is an experience-based assessment made by customers how far their expectations about the overall functionality of the services obtained from the mobile operators have been fulfilled. With regards to customer satisfaction measurement, the results demonstrated that customers are satisfied with the performance of the Nigerian mobile telecoms industry. The interpretation of this result could be that Nigerian customers are truly satisfied with the service performance (satisfied with experience of the mobile services use) or their satisfaction results from lack of competing services or it could be that the customers are new to satisfaction measurement and may not be able to express their perceptions well. However, mobile operators need to strive to maximize customer satisfaction which in turn can influence the extent of loyalty and retention.

Broadly, the implication of this study for mobile operators is that operators should not just rely on profit margins as a good indicator of business performance. Rather, they should develop strategies that would better capture customers' perceptions of their service offerings and these strategies can complement the internal perceptions of service offering.

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Appendices

Fig. 1 Conceptual structure of this study

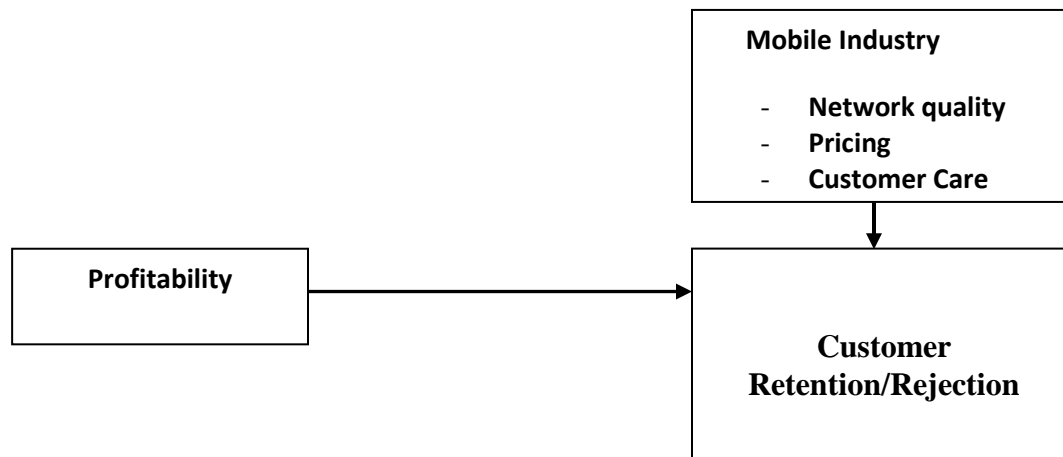


Table 1 shows the result of the relationship between network quality and satisfaction. Model Summary

Mode	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.756(a)	0.503	0.512	0.51229

Researchers’ Computation, (2016)a. Predictors: (Constant), Network

Table 2 shows the result of the relationship between billing and satisfaction
Model Summary

Mode	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.451(a)	0.286	0.297	0.7310

Researchers' Computation, (2016)a. Predictors: (Constant), Billing

Table 3 reveals the result of the relationship between overall customer care and satisfaction.

Model Summary

Mode	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.385(a)	0.269	0.368	0.7198

Researchers' Computation, (2016)a. Predictors: (Constant), overall customer care