



SERVICE QUALITY DELIVERY AND CUSTOMER RE-PATRONAGE IN NIGERIA TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR

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Abstract

The complexities of consumer behavior are most often linked to the increasing level of their awareness and sophistication, leading to sectoral competition amongst firms in the industry; on their proclivity to increase market share, create leading brands and increase overall productivity. The objective of this study is to examine how service quality delivery by Telecommunication firms in Nigeria could intensify customers' re-patronage of such services. The study appraises some basic concepts, theories and current trends in customer service consumption and how the proof of effective service quality delivery could boost consistent repurchases by customers. The study adopted the descriptive survey approach by administering questionnaires to respondents as well as conducting personal interviews where necessary. The outcome of the study findings was obtained using multiple regression analysis which revealed that there is a direct interrelationship between service quality delivery and customer re-patronage in the sector. The conclusions drawn were that; Telecommunications firms should intensify on improving marketing relationship management and provide necessary resources (personnel and equipment) that could enhance service quality delivery.

Keyword; Quality Service Delivery, Re-patronage, Marketing Relationship Management, Customer Retention, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty.

Introduction

The increasing pace of development in the telecommunications industry impinges on key players the need to create an operational process that is holistically sustainable. The liberalization of the telecommunications sector in the early 2000's triggered robust competition among leading mobile telecommunications companies. The efficiency of its operations hinges on the effectiveness of its raw materials procurement processes, production process, storage and delivery to end users. The strategic role of telecommunication worldwide permeates every sector of human, business and government activities, by creating multiple economic effects for sustainable growth and development, it is worth noting that Nigeria has had its fair share of

this unique opportunity; having been adjudged as fastest emerging and biggest mobile telecommunications market in the continent; with unprecedented growth. (Adedeji, 2013; Ndukwe, 2004). The intense nature of competition which has resulted in increased Gross Development Product (GDP), improved service delivery to customers and increased mobile infrastructures amongst host communities specifically centers on increasing firms margin and expanding its market share, since technology has grossly reduced the gap between product service owners and their accessibility to customers globally, hence, firms must create differential value in their product service delivery, prioritize operational decisions, increase strategic partnering, adopt

profit orienting options that will satisfy the customers (Ho, Zheng, 2004; Forslund & Jonsson, 2009; Cheng and Choi 2009).

Customer re-patronage connotes a pre-determined desire by end users to consistently patronize given product/service brand based on their evaluation of its satisfactory offering experience. Hence their pre-determination resolve to patronize same product/service offering at different times. (Orel & Kara 2014 Reinders, Dabholkar & Frambach, 2008 Marzocchi & Zammit, 2006). Based on empirical evidence, acquiring new customer and prospects could be five times more than the cost needed to retain and assuage existing ones (Kotler & Keller 2009; Frederick 1996). Hence re-patronage is an offshoot of satisfied customer which have consolidated their loyalty to a specific brand, with no intention of future brand switch. Marketing experts have embraced the difficulty involved in retaining existing customers when compared to the process of attracting new ones. The panacea for enduring customer retention lies in the ability of service providers to create, Werner Reinartz, Jacquelyn Thomas & Kumar, (2005) and maintain good marketing relationship as well as a robust feedback process whenever complaint by customers on service-related issues arise (Eshiett, 2019; Lin & Wu 2011).

The development of the mobile telecommunication industry in Nigeria is unprecedented based on the rapid transformation of the sector in recent years. Historical antecedent of this development could be traced to the deregulation of the sector by the government in 2001, this brought about huge investment by mobile telecommunication service providers and licensing of these operators by the government; Airtel formerly Econet Nigeria, MTN Nigeria M-TELL and Globacom Nigeria. These firms were mandated to provide quality mobile telecommunication services in the country. Since inception, the sector has experienced the increased level of competition with the main aim of increasing firms market share. The current projected population of 200million and a projected subscriber tele-density of 106million rank Nigerian mobile firms the most sought after by investors in the African sub-region (Nkwede & Okpara, 2017). Hence firms should not limit their activities to only wooing customers and prospects, but make frantic effort towards

satisfying and retaining them, in order to increase and consolidate their growth and development in the sector.

The survival strategy for firms in the Nigerian mobile telecommunications sector has been made complex by current trends in customers' preferences; which is basically driven by the ability of firms to provide quality service offering. Empirical evidence has shown that the continuous existence of firms in the mobile telecommunications sector has to be product services that are customer loyalty driven. Ugbomhe, Osagie and Udu (2018) stated also that the liberalization of the Nigerian mobile telecommunications sector has also made available opportunities for global industrial players to access the market, provided set regulatory standards are met by the prospective operators. Hence the need for service providers in this sector is focused consistently on outstanding quality product offering that will encourage customers to remain loyal to the brand. (Nkwede & Okpara, 2017). Customer satisfaction plays an important role to enhance the level of customer loyalty. This means the higher the level of customer satisfaction the more loyal the customer becomes attached to the product brand. Mokhtar, Maiyaki & Noor (2011). Therefore, prior to achieving existing customers' loyalty, mobile service providers need to be aware of the area of service which customers place importance on perceptually. In doing so, mobile service providers can concentrate their marketing efforts and their companies' resources on the important areas.

In essence, existing studies have shown that various authors have investigated the effect of quality service on mobile telecommunications services, (Ugbomhe, Osagie & Udu, 2018), network effects on mobile communications performances Birke & Swamm, (2006), linking quality service delivery, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions in the mobile telecommunications industry, Nimako, (2012), impact of quality service and customer satisfaction on mobile telecommunications sector (Alabar, Ode & Gbande, 2017; Negi, 2009; Rahhal, 2015; Ahmed, Nawaz, Usman, Shankat, Ahmad & Iqbal, 2010), overall customer satisfaction in mobile telecommunications industry Nimako, Azumah, Donkor & Adu-Bobbey, (2010), and the impact of quality service delivery on the duo

of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in the Nigerian mobile telecommunications sector as well as the Taiwan Mobile telecommunications sector have been considered (Nkwede & Okpara, 2017; Kiswor (2013), further evidence has shown that there is no empirical investigation on service quality and customer re-patronage in Nigerian mobile telecommunications sectors, hence the need for the authors to fill this gap

Statement of Problem

The liberalization of the Nigerian Mobile Telecommunications Industry in the early 2000's has made it necessary for one to appreciate the transformational leap experienced by customers; the long and windy history of telecommunications in the country has been that of gross inefficiency and abysmal performance prior to this period. This singular statement does not connote optimal service experience by the latter in the sector. Since the advent of mobile telecommunications facilities customers have continually lamented about fluctuating or in some cases non availability of service network in rural areas as well as thickly populated urban centers. On the other hand mobile telecommunications service operator have often complained about increased operational cost due to poor/epileptic power supply to its transmitting facilities, it must be mentioned herein that; operators must live above board by acquiring sustainable backup system for their transmitting facilities to ensure that frequent/long stretched power outages does not affect its mandate of delivering quality service to its customers.

It is quite tolerable for customers in situations where mobile telecommunication services are not available at all, but it become double jeopardy where customers are charged for services not consumed as a result of sub optimal facilities resulting in; drop calls and poor network coverage in subscribers' location at any given time, these kind of service delivery negates global best practices in the sector. Hence, mobile network owners must ensure that in delivering service to their customers, every amount spent must count with respect to product service quality and customer satisfaction.

In furtherance of the quest for quality service delivery that could motivate customer re patronage in mobile telecommunications sector the fundamental basis for a successful service

marketing campaign; lies in the ability of the operators to create a robust after sales service/ effective customer feedback system, this is rare or non-existing in the sector. In accomplishing this task, service providers must establish a reliable Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Relationship Marketing Management (RMM) units that is empowered to create; i) customer inclined products, ii) follow through on every service delivered to customers and iii) respond to all service failures/errors to ensure that at the end of every service attempt by end users, this will ensure that value paid by the customer is compensated with optimal service delivery that will satisfy the end user .

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the effect of service delivery on customer re-patronage in the Nigerian Mobile Telecommunications sector. The specific aim of this study is to also examined;(i)The effect of sustainable transmission backup systems on customer re-patronage in the Nigerian Mobile Telecommunications sector. (ii) To ascertain the effect of a robust feedback system on customer re-patronage in Nigerian Mobile Telecommunications sector.

Literature Review

Concept of Service Quality Delivery

The concept of service delivery has its basis in the capacity of firms to create long term relationship with customer, using quality service offering as a measure towards obtaining customers commitment and patronage (Kushwah & Bhargav, 2014). Service quality delivery is one concept in service marketing that has been widely investigated by various scholars, (Abdul-Aziz, Bashiru & Saeed, 2014; Martin-Consuegra., Molina. & Esteban, 2007; Hermann, Xia, Monroe. & Huber., 2007; & Gronroos, 2001). One unique description of service is that service involves an identified and distinguishable set of activities undertaken by one party to assuage the desire and expectation of an individual or group through product service offering (Hessalmaldin, 2007). Eshiett (2018), asserted the positive effect of service quality delivery in the Nigerian banking sector, a position affirmed by Adepoju and Suraju (2012) as the core antecedent of customer satisfaction and Customer loyalty in the Nigerian mobile telecommunications sector.

Other scholars have argued that the ability of service providers to determine the right pricing for product services could assuage customer (Abdul-Aziz, Bashiru & Saeed, 2014; Martin Consuegra., Molina. & Esteban, 2007 Hermann, Xia, Monroe. & Huber., 2007; Kukar Kinney, Xia. & Monroe., 2007). Moreover additional service marketing literature presupposes that customers perceptivity of quality of service offering precedes the rational and logical phases of product service offering (Hessalmaldin, 2007) in (Edvardsson Gustafsson & Roos 2005; Edvardsson 2005 Gronroos, 2001), as well as its capacity to drive end users towards commitment to the brand and consistent re-patronage, (Homburg, Hoyer & Koschate, 2005; Wang and Hing-Po (2002) From the foregoing, various other service marketing scholars have conclusively asserted that, quality service delivery and customer satisfaction is the bedrock of enduring customer re-patronage. (Abdul-Aziz, Bashiru & Saeed (2014) in (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007; Kotler and Kelvin, 2006; Wang and Hing-Po 2002 Gronroos, 2001, 2000, 1994; Parasuraman Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988)

Concept of Re-patronage

The core basis for theoretical exposition on re patronage has its roots in the concept of service quality delivery by firms (Kushwah & Bhargava 2014), this abstraction is based on firm's ability to nurture long-term relationship with end users through a quality service delivery driven customer satisfaction programme. Re patronage is solidly intertwined with the concept of customer loyalty which is explained as customers' perception to intensely clench their devotion unfailingly opt for a specific product service brand, irrespective of vigorous marketing campaign by rivals to woo them (Klaus and Maklan, 2012; Oliver, 1999) Diverse studies conducted has proven that there has been a shift in the direction of customer re patronage based on the positive value added by self service technology(SST) in service delivery processes (Eshiett; 2019;Orel & Kara, 2014 Wang, Harris & Patterson, 2013), others have also elaborated on the need to examine customers perception, (Han, Kim & Kim) Eui Keun, 2011; & Oliver; 1997), expectation based on product post usage experience (Evanschitzky Rlyer, Plassmann, Niessing & Meffert, 2006) and as a precursor to customer satisfaction,

customer loyalty and customer re-patronage (Orel & Kara, 2014; Lee, Fairhurst & Lee, 2009; Beatson, Lee & Coote, 2007). Hence, the process of retaining a customer in the Nigerian Mobile Telecommunications Industry must be rooted in a well formulated strategic process, backed up by firms' determination to maintain long- term relationships as an ingredient for enhanced satisfaction on a given product offering, this could eventually instigate the customer to make repeated purchases over competitive brands

Empirical Literature

Ascertaining the validity of any study must involve the evaluation of various studies conducted in such field of study as a platform for further investigation on other areas of interest the author(s) may have observed empirical gap in literature. In a study by Ugbomhe, Osagie & Udu, (2018), the authors examined effect of service quality on Mobile telecommunication operators from 18 local governments in Edo State, Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive survey design research technique by distributing questionnaires to respondents, data were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficient, the outcome of the study revealed that there is relationship between service delivery and customer satisfaction in mobile telecommunications in Nigeria, the study recommended that service providers should access at different times of their operations the efficacy of the quality of service delivered by their firms to ensure that the customers are satisfied.

In a similar study by Alabar, Ode & Gbande, (2017), on Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in Nigerian Telephony, the authors acknowledge quality service delivery as a key factor in satisfying customers in the Mobile Telecommunication sector in Nigeria. The study adopted the service quality theory of SERVQUAL dimension as it affects customer satisfaction, descriptive research methodology was adopted by administering questionnaires to respondents. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Correlations Coefficient, the study recommended that SERVQUAL dimension should be adopted to enhance customers' satisfaction in the mobile communications sector in Nigeria

In a similar study by Nkwede & Okpara, (2017), on Correlate of Service Quality

Dimensions and Customer Loyalty in the Nigerian Telecom Markets: Does Customer Satisfaction Play a Mediating Role? This study evaluates the link service quality delivery and customer loyalty in the Nigerian Telecom sector. SERVPERF theory of service delivery was adopted for the study to ascertain its relationship with customer satisfaction. The study adopted descriptive statistical techniques of data. Correlation technique was adopted in analyzing data. The study implication expressed that since customers' desires to network with their fellows they are bound to be loyal to their service providers once the service quality delivery is satisfactory.

In another study by Kisworo, (2013), on Exploring Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty in the Taiwan Mobile Telecommunication, the author assessed the advent of Mobile Number Portability (MNP) a unique platform that enhance retainership of phone numbers even when they switch to other mobile networks. This encourages operators to invoke the loyalty of their customers through the provision of quality service, in order to enhance their continuous identification with their service provider. The theory that opined this study was the SERVQUAL dimensions model which evaluates service delivery in lined with its five (5) dimensions, descriptive survey technique was adopted as the research methodology for the study, data collected from the study were analyzed using regression analysis, the outcome of the study revealed that there is an interrelationship between service quality and the duo of customer satisfaction /customer loyalty. The foregoing empirical assessment has revealed that; there has been no investigation conducted on service delivery and customer re-patronage in the Nigerian Mobile Telecommunications sector, hence the need for the authors to buttress and fill this gap in literature

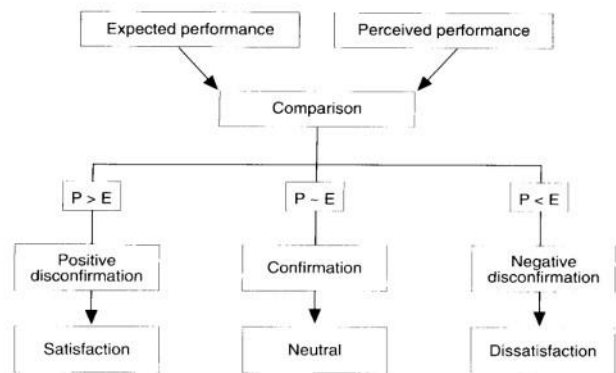
Theoretical Literature

The process of eliciting conscious effort by customers to continually patronize a given brand lies in the fact that product service offering at any point in time, must be equal to the customers level of satisfaction. This study examines the various theories of satisfaction to include; i) Equity theory, ii). Expectancy disconfirmation theory and iii) Attribution theory Adee (2004).

Having assessed the foregoing theories and their relevance with the study on hand, the expectancy disconfirmation theory fits into the study on hand, hence the need to adapt it to the study.

Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory

The expectancy disconfirmation theory refers to the process of juxtaposing the total product/service experience undertaken by a consumer based on the customers perception and expectation of the product after consumption. (Eshiett, Abubakar & Eshiett, 2019; in Ekinci & Sirakaya, 2004; Mattila & O'Neill 2003). The theory of expectancy disconfirmation has its foundation in whatever the wishes of the customers is as regards any product/service offering, here, the end user evaluates the satisfaction based on perception and expectation. The result of this assessment is what determines the customers level of satisfaction based on product offering consumption. Eshiett, Abubakar & Eshiett, 2019; Oliver, 1980).



Source: Adopted from the Disconfirmation Theory: Ekinci, . and Sirakaya . (2004).

The figure above is a detailed explanation of the disconfirmation theory which shows the outcome of the customers' experience after consuming the product, after consumption the customer expresses the desire for satisfaction or otherwise known as positive disconfirmation and the desire for dissatisfaction if the outcome of product consumption was unfavorable or otherwise known as negative disconfirmation. The two levels of customers' experience is most often driven by the ability of the service provider to ensure that quality product offering that will satisfy the customer is provided at all times. In retrospect, the study under consideration on customer re-patronage in the mobile

telecommunications sector in Nigeria could offer positive disconfirmation experience to customers if qualitative product services are delivered to the customers and vice versa if the product service offering has a negative disconfirmation experience.

Methodology

This study is based on quality service delivery as a key driver of re-patronage of product brand by customers, additional inputs which made the study include; the acquisition of sustainable transmission backup facilities and the creation of a robust after sale customer feedback system. The study was conducted in the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State (Uyo, Eket and Ikot Ekpene), the choice of this locations is based on its overall coverage of the entire 31 local government in the state. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study which involve administering structured questionnaire to respondents in the different locations as well as a comprehensive conduct of personal interviews in areas where the structured questionnaire could not cover effectively. Validity test was effectively carried out on the research instrument by mobile telecommunication professionals and marketing scholars affirm the reliability of the questionnaires administered to respondents.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

Collection, collation and analysis of data were conducted using Pearson Correlations and Coefficient techniques to assess the interconnection between service quality delivery and customer re-patronage in mobile telecommunications sector in Nigeria. A total number of 304 questionnaires were administered to respondents and shared amongst the three senatorial district in the following percentage sharing; (Uyo = 38%; Eket = 32%; Ikot Ekpene =30%), hence, the distribution were as follows; (Uyo = 116; Eket = 97%; Ikot Ekpene =91%), further analysis of the questionnaires revealed that, out of this numbers, valid questionnaires returned by respondents were 277 (91%) which were collated from the three senatorial districts of the state, also questionnaires that were not returned at all by respondents were 9(3%), while questionnaires that were actually returned but not acceptable for the study due to mutilation by respondents, invalid entry and non-eligibility were 18(6%). Based on the collation obtained, the two proposed null hypotheses were used to test and analyze the data as follows;

Hypothesis One;

Sustainable transmission backup system has no significant effect on customer re-patronage in the Nigerian Mobile Telecommunications sector.

Table 1: Correlation

		Service Delivery	Sustainable Transmission Backup Facilities
Service Delivery	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.839
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	277	277
Sustainable Transmission Backup Facilities	Pearson Correlation	.839	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	277	277

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis one as shown in the above table is the correlations coefficient analysis result which revealed a correlation $r = .839$, this means that the provision of sustainable transmission backup facilities have positive effect on service delivery that could drive customer re-patronage of mobile telecommunications in Nigeria, the sample size is represented by $N = 277$, the study level of significance $p = 0.000$, this

is less than the conventional 0.05 level of significance. In summary, the result of the analysis reveals that there correlation between the two variables as expressed thus; $[r=.839, n=277, p<.0000]$.

Hypothesis Two;

There is no significant interrelationship between a robust feedback system and customer re-patronage in Nigerian Mobile Telecommunications sector.

Table 2. Correlations

		Service Delivery	Robust Feedback system
Service Delivery	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.794
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	277	277
Robust Feedback System	Pearson Correlation	.794	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	277	277

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis two as shown in the above table is the correlations coefficient analysis result which revealed a correlation $r = .794$, this connotes the establishment of a robust feedback system have positive effect on service delivery that could enhance customer re-patronage of mobile telecommunications sector in Nigeria, the sample size is represented by $N = 277$, the study level of significance $p = 0.000$, this is less than the conventional 0.05 level of significance. In summary, the result of the analysis reveals that there correlation between the two variables is expressed thus;

[$r=.794, n=277, p<.0000$].

Discussion of Findings

This discussion of the findings of is based on the study objectives, the outcome of the hypotheses, the advanced empirical and theoretical basis;

Analysis: the result of the analysis in hypothesis one revealed that sustainable transmission backup facilities has significant effect on customer re-patronage in Nigerian Mobile Telecommunications sector thus; [$r=.839, n=277, p<.0000$]. Also, hypothesis two showed that robust customer feedback system has positive effect on customer re-patronage in the Nigerian Mobile Telecommunications sector thus [$r=.794, n=277, p<.0000$].

Theoretically: The adoption of disconfirmation theory which juxtaposes Nigerian telecommunications customers' perception and expectation product service before and after consumption, to ascertain their level of satisfaction. (Ekinici & Sirakaya, 2004; Mattila & O'Neill 2003). Hence, this theory necessitates the need to justify this study by evaluating customers' satisfaction at every point of service consumption through a robust customer

feedback process.

Empirically: the number of researches conducted by scholars in this field has been scanty, for instance, Scholars such as; Ugbohmeh, Osagie & Udu, (2018) focused on service delivery and customers' satisfaction, while Adedeji, (2013), emphasized on telecommunications and the Nigerian economy. The essence of this study became necessary based on the need for telecommunication firms to assess service provision avenues that could engage the customer to repeatedly patronize the telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The conclusion is drawn from its aim as well as the outcome findings and discussions which revealed that the solution to invoking consistent patronage of product service in the Nigerian mobile telecommunications sector is for service providers to; establish sustainable transmission backup facilities to ensure that service delivery is uninterrupted; as well as create a robust customer feedback system to provide solutions to customer queries and service error. Where these systems are optimally operational, high level of re-patronage could make mobile telecommunication operations in Nigeria more cost effective, and by extension; increased productivity and profitability to shareholders.

Mobile Telecommunication service providers in Nigeria should adapt their operational processes to global best practices to shore-up their capacity to withstand global industrial competition. To this extent, investment should be deployed into the acquisition of current technologically driven mobile telecommunications software that enhances direct interface by customers with service providers platform without personnel interference, this will increase the level of

customer satisfaction through quality service delivery, and curb the incessant complaint by end users on unsatisfactory service experience through quality product offering.

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