

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

OBJECTIVES

HYPOTHESES

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

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QUALITY DIMENSIONS IN MARKETING OF SERVICES: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

Service quality is the order of the day. The present paper explores the importance of service quality in service industries with special reference to Airtel Cellular Services. The Mobile market in India is very robust and is the second largest mobile telecom market in the world, adding nearly 20million subscribers every month. This rapid growth in the mobile segment has been driven by an enabling policy framework and intense competition. With up to 12 competing operators in a circle, the tariffs in India are the lowest as compared to global benchmarks. In such a hyper-competitive scenario service providers make an all out effort to attract and retain customers. There is an ongoing effort from the service providers to improve the service and enhance customer delight. There are evidences that despite favorable mobile service quality, companies are losing important buyers of their products and services every day. This paper highlights the important aspects of mobile service quality and the association between mobile service quality and customer satisfaction.

KEYWORDS

Customer Satisfaction, Service Providers, Mobile Service Quality, Telecom Industry.

INTRODUCTION

In the service literature service quality is interpreted as perceived quality which means a customer's judgment about a service. In the SERVQUAL model, service quality is defined as the gap between customer perceptions of what happened during the service transaction and his expectations of how the service transaction should have been performed. SERVQUAL refers to five dimensions of quality:

- Reliability (delivering the promised outputs at the stated level).
- Responsiveness (providing prompt service and help to customers; the reaction speed plays a vital role here).
- Assurance (ability of a service firm to inspire trust and confidence in the firm through knowledge, politeness and trustworthiness of the employees).
- Empathy (willingness and capability to give personalized attention to a customer).
- Tangibles (appearance of a service firm's facilities, employees, equipment and communication materials).

This paper explores the importance of service quality in service sector with special reference to Airtel cellular services. The service sector in India has become a dominant sector for the economic development of India since 1990's. Though there are number of service segments in the service sector, telecom services is contributing to the sectoral development to a greater extent. The telecommunications sector is playing vital role in the economic advancement of developed as well as developing countries.

The Indian telecommunications industry is one of the world's fastest growing industries, with 1200.93 million mobile phone subscribers as on April 2013. It is also the second largest telecommunication network in the world in terms of number of wireless connections after China. The Indian Mobile subscriber base has increased in size by a factor of more than one-hundred since 2001 when the number of subscribers in the country was only 5 million.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Mobile market in India is very robust and is the second largest mobile telecom market in the world, adding nearly 20million subscribers every month. This rapid growth in the mobile segment has been driven by an enabling policy framework and intense competition. With up to 12 competing operators in a circle, the tariffs in India are the lowest as compared to global benchmarks. And with Mobile Number Portability introduced in India, the competition will only increase further. In such a hyper-competitive scenario service providers make an all out effort to attract and retain customers. There is an ongoing effort from the service providers to improve the service and enhance customer delight. All service providers have made huge investments towards setting up sophisticated, state-of-the-art customer care centers, Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems with consumer friendly, menu driven options that can easily cater to an entire gamut of services.

Researchers note that service dimensions vary across different industries, which emphasizes a need for developing multiple scale items that provide adequate measures of service quality in a particular context (Bolton and Drew 1994). Also, a model of service quality needs to be developed from the consumer's perspective-what consumers seek and evaluate in the market (Gronroos 1984).

Only a handful of academic researchers have looked at service quality in the mobile services context. For instance, Lee et al. (2001) studied service quality of mobile services as predictors of satisfaction and customer retention in France. Their study, however included a limited scope of service quality (i.e., network quality). Current consumer surveys reveal that consumer's complaints and dissatisfaction are determined by a broad range of service offerings, such as billing issues and rudeness of service representatives, as well as technical quality (Cap Gemini 2003; Consumer reports 2005; McKinsey Quarterly 2005). Hence, this study identifies a comprehensive set of relevant service quality items in the mobile services context.

Dimensions of mobile service quality incorporate both technical (e.g., pricing plans, network quality and various data services) and functional attributes (e.g., billing system and customer service quality) of mobile services. Such a collective measure of service quality is expected to provide a clear picture of consumer's evaluative criteria for mobile services.

FIGURE 1.1: IDENTIFICATION OF CONSUMER'S PERCEIVED QUALITY OF MOBILE SERVICES

Dimensions	Examples
Technical Quality:	
1. Pricing plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offering the best plan that meets a customer's need. Ease of changing service plans Superiority of overall pricing options Delivery of information about products and services.
2. Network Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequency of Dropped calls. Voice quality Coverage
3. Mobile Data Services:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Messaging Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sending SMS Receiving SMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entertainment Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receiving sports information Listening to music from the internet Playing online games
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locator services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing location/map/direction services Receiving weather reports Receiving news
Functional quality:	
1. Billing system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of accurate billing Ease of understanding and resolving billing issues.
2. Customer service quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resolving billing issues quickly Ability of fixing a problem Courtesy of customer service representative Provision of consistent advice/instructions from a call center Accurate representation of service and terms.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To find out the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction .
- To find out the satisfaction levels of Airtel customers.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

H₁: There is no significant correlation between Mobile Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction.

DATA SOURCES

The data sources required for the study include both primary and secondary. The primary data sources were the subscribers of Airtel cellular mobile telephone services in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh.

The secondary data sources were: relevant websites, national and international refereed journals, business magazines and news papers, working papers and monographs relevant to the area of research.

SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

Sampling frame comprised of the subscribers of cellular mobile services of Airtel, in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. Non-Probability Quota sampling technique was used.

The total number of Airtel customers in Chittoor District is 8, 68,823 as on August 2013. Since customers are spread geographically, may be because of their mobility, it is found to be very difficult to meet them for data collection if probability sampling technique is adopted.

A total of 500 customers were contacted over a 3 months period (Aug-Oct 2013) via a structured questionnaire.

DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

The data collected from the field survey was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical package for social sciences) 11.5 software package. Statistical techniques included simple percentages, standard deviation, correlation and regression.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR MOBILE SERVICE QUALITY

Table 1.1 presents the descriptive statistics for mobile service quality dimensions. The overall perception of respondent's on mobile service quality is above average (3.43 on a 5-point scale). The mean value for the wide coverage of Airtel network is 4.83. Airtel educates its customers about their products/services (4.40). Airtel provides high voice quality (4.64).

TABLE 1.1: MEAN, STD.DEV AND VARIANCE FOR THE DIMENSIONS OF MSQ (N = 500)

S.No	Items	Mean	Std.Dev	Variance
	Overall	3.43	.155	.024
1	Airtel offers the best possible plan that meets my need.	3.92	.747	.558
2	Airtel has innovativeness in terms of offers.	3.91	.643	.413
3	Airtel makes it easy to change service plans.	4.67	.643	.414
4	Airtel educates its customers about their products/services.	4.40	.747	.558
5	Overall, Airtel provides superior pricing options compared to other service providers.	3.36	.951	.905
6	Airtel provides accurate billing.	4.27	.663	.440
7	Airtel resolves billing issues quickly.	4.46	.773	.597
8	Airtel has wide coverage.	4.83	.474	.224
9	Airtel provides high voice quality.	4.64	.684	.467
10	Airtel has dropped calls frequently.	2.04	.830	.690
11	Airtel repeatedly fails to fix a problem.	2.30	.776	.602
12	Customer service representative at Airtel is rude	1.83	.651	.423
13	Call centre personnel at Airtel are not able to help me in many of my problems.	1.96	1.016	1.032
14	Airtel fails to provide accurate information about services	2.15	.681	.464
15	Different service agents give different responses at Airtel customer care on the same problem.	3.51	.848	.719

5 point scale: Strongly disagree (=1) to Strongly Agree (=5).

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR CONNECTIVITY

Actually Connectivity is a part of mobile service quality. But due its importance in MSQ when compared to other dimensions, it has brought under a separate heading. The mean value of overall perceptions of the respondent's related to connectivity is good. How do you rate Airtel in terms of connectivity (4.71). What is the level of connectivity (4.81).

Do you face any problem in getting connected, while in roaming (4.38). Network becomes busy in peak hours (3.59). Network remains busy in offer periods (free/slashed rates) (3.72).

TABLE 1.2: MEAN, STD.DEV AND VARIANCE FOR THE DIMENSIONS OF CONNECTIVITY (N = 500)

S.No	Items	Mean	Std.Dev	Variance
	Overall	4.21	.42	.17
1	How do you rate Airtel in terms of connectivity?	4.71	.514	.26
2	What is the level of connectivity?	4.81	.42	.18
3	Do you face any problem in getting connected, while in roaming?	4.38	.88	.78
4	Network becomes busy in peak hours.	3.59	.66	.43
5	Network remains busy in offer periods (free/slashed rates).	3.72	.86	.75

5 point scale: Strongly disagree (=1) to Strongly Agree (=5).

H₁: There is no significant correlation between MSQ and Customer Satisfaction.

This hypothesis has been tested by using correlation and regression (Table 1.3 and 1.4). It has been observed from the results of correlation coefficients matrix that there is significant positive correlation between Mobile Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction. The corresponding correlation coefficient is highly significant at 1% level. Hence we can conclude that there is strong association between MSQ and Customer Satisfaction. But R² value is less. It indicates that there are many other factors other than MSQ that influence Customer Satisfaction of the respondents. Only 5% of the variability in Customer Satisfaction can be predicted from MSQ. In other words, a large number of residual variability is presented in Customer Satisfaction.

TABLE 1.3: CORRELATION MATRIX

		QMS
BL	Pearson Correlation	.240**
	p-value	0.0000

TABLE 1.4: REGRESSION ANALYSIS RESULTS

(a)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	.240	.058	.056
2	.259	.067	.064

(b)

ANOVA					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	1.704	1	1.704	30.524	.000 ^a
	Residual	27.805	498	.056	
	Total	29.509	499		
2 Regression	1.985	2	.993	17.923	.000 ^b
	Residual	27.524	497	.055	
	Total	29.509	499		

(c)

COEFFICIENTS						
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error				Beta
1 (Constant)	2.060	.235		8.776	.000	
	Quality	.378	.068	.240	5.525	.000
2 (Constant)	2.295	.256		8.962	.000	
	Quality	.378	.068	.240	5.550	.000
	Connectivity	-.056	.025	-.098	-2.252	.025

Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction.

In cellular mobile telecommunication services, currently there are twelve service providers in India in different circles, offering services to users with two different digital transmission systems GSM and CDMA. Among the 12 service providers, Bharti Airtel shares 28.31% of the market share, followed by Vodafone Essar (23.62%), Idea (15.89%) and BSNL (14.85%). Airtel is the Market leader in cellular services market. In 2010, its market share was 30%. But it came down to 28.31% in 2011. After mobile number portability being implemented in India, Airtel is also one of the biggest losers. So it becomes imperative for Airtel, to search for ways of improving its market share. One of the measures is improvement of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. In view of this felt need, it is necessary to identify the key drivers of customer satisfaction and get to know the influence of them on customer loyalty.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- The repurchase intentions of customers are above average.
- Complaining behavior of customers is also on high side.
- Customers responded that they will switch to a competitor if they experience a problem with Airtel's Service.
- Customers are doubtful about their continuity with Airtel after the implementation of MNP (during the period of data collection, MNP was not implemented in AP).
- A slight dissatisfaction is observed on the complaint handling mechanism of Airtel Cellular Services.

- Customers responded that in terms of innovativeness in offers, Airtel is not on par with the competitors.
- Customers felt that pricing strategies of new players like Uninor, Tata Indicom are better when compared to Airtel.
- Customers opined that different employees in the customer care are giving different responses on the same problem.
- Customers are price sensitive. They want to shift to the competitors, if their services are available at cheaper prices.

The hypothesis of the model was tested and the findings corroborate with the view that mobile service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty are related.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOBILE SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IS SIGNIFICANT

The results of correlation and regression analysis of the study indicated that there is a significant relationship between perceived value of mobile services and customer satisfaction. This finding is similar to those of the previous research works of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1996) and Zeithaml (2000). They proposed a positive relationship between perceived value of mobile services and customer satisfaction. This finding is further supported by the studies of Anderson and Sullivan (1993); Caruana and Pitt (1997); Johnson (1995); Mc Alexander *et al.*, (1994); Mittal *et al.*, (1998); Powpaka (1996); Taylor and Baker (1994); Taylor and Cronin (1994).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Airtel has to take steps to improve their ratings on the following:

- **Develop Loyalty Programs** Loyalty programs play an important role in retaining the existing customers. We can develop loyalty programs, an offer where an operator gets free minutes, when their customers reach a certain level of usage.
- **Customer Support** Airtel must empower its customer service representatives to take care of the problem quickly and efficiently.
- **Value-added Services(VAS)** Selling more to the existing subscribers is relatively easier as compared to acquiring new customers.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Drawing Sample from a Single company Drawing sample from a single company limits the generalisability of the study.

Sample size : The 500 sample size may be reported as small for few researchers from their point of view and this can be concluded as further limiting factor for the generalization of findings.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

- What is the effect of psychological characteristics of customers on loyalty in cellular services? Whether these factors function as adjusting variables in the existing interaction?
- What is the impact of inertia and customer indifference on brand loyalty in telecommunication services?

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