



## CUSTOMER'S QUALITY PERCEPTION AND BRAND PREFERENCE OF TELECOMMUNICATION FIRMS IN BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA.

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| <p><b>Received:</b> 24<sup>th</sup> December 2021<br/><b>Accepted:</b> 26<sup>th</sup> January 2022<br/><b>Published:</b> 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022</p> | <p>Telecommunication services have played a critical role in boosting the growth of many sectors of the economy. This study therefore seeks to determine the relationship between customer's quality perception and brand preference of telecommunication firms in Bayelsa state. Data were collected from four hundred (400) customers of telecommunication firms in Bayelsa state where only 381 of the questionnaire were found valid and useful for analysis using Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient with the aid of SPSS version 23 to test two (2) formulated hypotheses. Findings show that customer's quality perception has a strong impact on brand preference of Telecommunication firms in Bayelsa state. The study therefore recommends that by continuing to deliver high-quality services, telecommunications might acquire and keep consumer satisfaction. Again, telecommunication service providers should also have assessment and incentive systems to guarantee that good performance is tracked and rewarded.</p> |

**Keywords:** Information Security, Service Availability, Customer Satisfaction, Brand Preference, Customer Satisfaction, Quality Perception.

### INTRODUCTION

Telecommunications services have become one of the fastest expanding industries on the planet, and they have played a critical role in boosting the growth of many sectors of the economy during the last several decades. Mobile phone handsets are used for data download and internet access in addition to making and receiving calls, and sending text messages (SMS). As a result, mobile phones have evolved into multi-tasking devices, with speech accounting for 70% of usage and data accounting for 30%. This reflects the truth that customers' perceptions of telecommunication service quality influence their brand choice. As a result, businesses view quality as a source of competitive advantage, which they aim to obtain at all times.

In the telecommunications industry, service quality is becoming more crucial as a way to set yourself apart from the competition. The extremely competitive industry is characterized by similarly priced, look-alike services from a range of mobile service providers, and those that deliver good service quality will earn the majority of market share (Forough, et al. 2017). Customer satisfaction is critical to any company's success since it results in the retention of current customers, the attraction of new customers, the loss of

fewer consumers, more protection from price competition, and fewer blunders that may need the redesign of goods/services (Forough, et al. 2017).

Furthermore, high-quality service enhances client retention and leads to repeat purchase behaviour, which raises a company's market share and creates high revenues. Consumers buy a product or service because it satisfies their identified wants. Nonetheless, the Nigerian telecommunications industry has experienced organizational inadequacies as a result of insufficient infrastructures, unstable power supplies, and high material costs, all of which have a direct impact on their operations and impede the successful achievement of organizational goals, resulting in customer complaints about service quality, prompting research into the field. In the telecommunications sector, the dynamics of liberalization and globalization have pushed corporations to focus on maintaining their present consumers in order to maintain market share. They are increasingly challenged to retain their members by delivering high-quality services that are tailored to their tastes. Telecommunication firms are always looking for innovative ways to attract, maintain, and grow their subscriber base as the cost of acquiring new consumer's



risers. As a result, in this market, the ability to retain existing subscribers is becoming increasingly important. The various mobile phone service providers in Nigeria play an important role in meeting the needs of consumers; they also offer a variety of mobile phone services from which Nigerians can choose; however, customers have complained about network service delivery, which cannot be attributed to customer satisfaction. Despite the fact that Nigerian mobile customers are among the top ten consumers of mobile services in the world, the country's four telecoms service providers continue to disappoint them with their service delivery. Consumers of these services, on the other hand, had little options owing to a lack of providers, coverage, and knowledge of technology and GSM, and were willing to accept the service as it was. However, as the year progressed and new network providers entered the market, customers' awareness of technology and Mobile Number Portability grew, and subscribers began to demand features and value for their money. As a result, network users experience complete network failures, dropped calls, poor service quality, bad customer support, and unsustainable operations. As a result, these variables influence subscribers' choice to transfer network providers. As a result, operators in the telecommunications business must explore ways to enhance the quality of their service, expand their client base, and retain consumers, resulting in increased competition. However, Muminu, Anuoluwapo, and Aderemi (2002) looked at network characteristics; Aminu and Hartini (2008) examined the marketing mix, including value

added service, pricing, and promotion; and Oyeniyi and Abiodun (2010) studied the marketing mix, including value added service, price, and promotion. The main objective of this study was to determine factors influencing mobile phone users' choice of a mobile phone service provider in the Bayelsa state mobile telecom market. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. Determine the relationship between information security and customer satisfaction
- ii. Examine the relationship between service availability and customer satisfaction

**Study Variables and Conceptual Framework**

The independent variable for this study is customer quality perception with its dimensions as information security and service availability while the criterion variable is brand preference with its measures as customer satisfaction which is mathematically represented as:

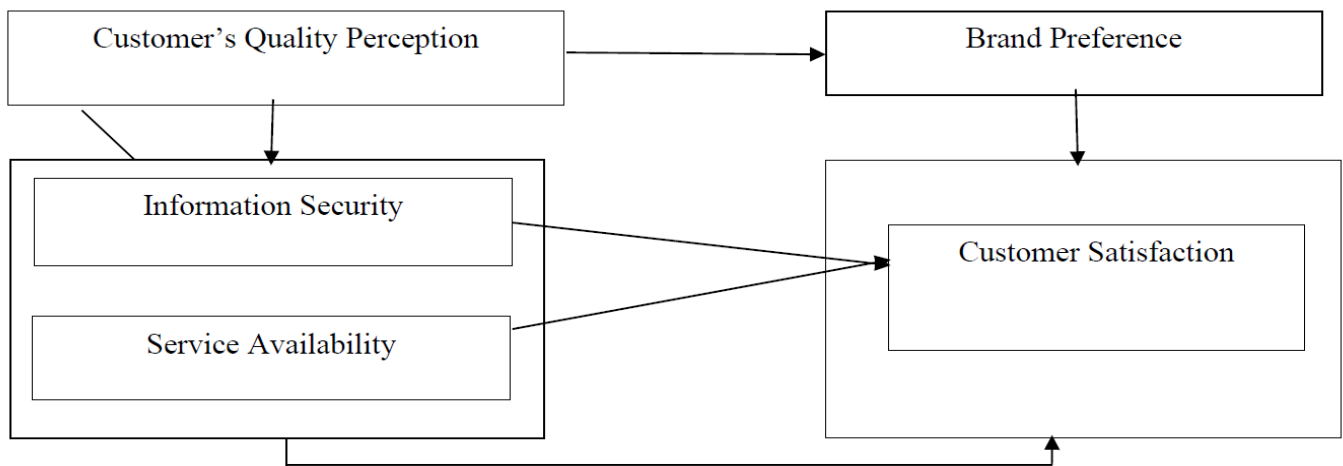
$$CQP = f(BP) \dots\dots\dots (i)$$

$$CQP = f(IS, SA) \dots\dots\dots (ii)$$

$$BP = f(CS) \dots\dots\dots (iii)$$

Where:  
 f= Function  
 BP= Brand Preference  
 CS = Customer Satisfaction  
 CQP= Customer Quality Perception  
 IS= Information Security  
 SA= Service Availability

**Operational framework**



Figur. 1 Operational Framework of Customer's Quality Perception and Brand Preference

Source: Research Desk; as adapted from Paulrajan, & Rajkumar, (2011)



## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Theoretical Framework

**Theory of satisfaction:** The theory underpinning this study is the theory of satisfaction, which according to Rai (2013) is influenced by both psychological and physiological factors. Satisfaction is seen as a latent construct that cannot be directly observed and can only be assessed through indicators (Geise & Cote, 2000). As a result, pleasure has both causes (determinants) and effects (consequences). Because satisfaction does not have a single universal definition, its causes are likewise various and different. Satisfaction, for example, may be determined by an individual or collective standard and the degree to which the standard may be reached. It might be a person's state of mind or attitude that has a significant impact on their mental patterns. It may even be thought of as standing back from an experience and assessing it (Clinton and Wellington, 2013).

Satisfaction may take many forms, including the achievement of a life goal, exceptional performance, work satisfaction, fundamental physical functioning, and so on. Because satisfaction is defined as a state of enjoyment, contentment, or fulfillment, it is conceivable for a person to be dissatisfied. There may be a proclivity to experience unpleasant emotions such as dissatisfaction, boredom, or despair. Dissatisfaction is the term for such a circumstance. As a result, a variety of factors—environmental, sociocultural, psychological, and an individual's personality, to name a few—can have a significant impact on pleasure. The type of satisfaction under consideration, as well as the participants' assessment of satisfaction, will have a significant impact on the specific determinants of satisfaction (Aziri, 2011; Rai, 2013; Stephen & Ayaga, 2014). The authors, on the other hand, believe that an individual's or a group's knowledge base, world view (belief and value systems), perception (which is a function of knowledge), choice (which reflects personality), and the environment are all powerful facilitators or inhibitors of satisfaction in many situations.

### Customers Quality Perception

Consumers or users of services determine the quality of such services (Agyekum, Haifeng, Agyeiwaa, Agyekum, Haifeng, and Agyeiwaa, 2015). Telecommunication companies' success is dependent on smart efforts and realistic expenditures. In a competitive market, the service provider should focus more on the pricing and quality of services to match the needs and expectations of customers. The definition of quality utilized in this study was the perceived quality of telecommunication

companies. The attitude that arises from a comparison of expected and perceived service is referred to as perceived quality. The perceived quality is viewed as the result of external customer communication and the service delivery process.

According to Wang and Lo's (2002) study on cellular mobile service quality, after-sales services and network are two major aspects that influence quality perception. Kim, Park, and Jeong (2004) discovered that customer service quality expectation and perception, as well as innovation and network, are the two most important elements in cellular phone service expectation and perception. The Nigerian telecoms industry's competitiveness is solidified; therefore rivalry among the few players is fierce. As a result, it's become necessary to analyze client perceptions (Osotimehin, Hassan, & Abass, 2015). According to Olu (2010), in underdeveloped and emerging nations like Nigeria, there is scarcity of empirical literatures pertinent to the area. As a result, this study evaluates customers' perceptions of service quality in the Nigerian telecommunications business in order to give additional empirical data in the area.

### Information Security and Customer Satisfaction:

Information security is of significant relevance and interest to everyone in the world of technology today, whether you use a mobile phone or a personal computer, which is why it is of the utmost importance in our daily lives and in the sectors of IT technology. A data security breach occurs when sensitive and confidential information and information systems are not protected from illegal access, use, or disclosure. Telecommunications operations necessitate the collection of a large amount of personal information from customers for reservation purposes and to support customer loyalty programmes. It's crucial to remember that knowledge is one of a company's most precious resources and assets. Identity theft can occur as a result of data breaches involving telecommunication customers' personal information. Identity theft is when a third party uses your personal information for personal advantage or to commit a crime (Spendonlife.com, 2009).

Credit card fraud was the most often reported type of identity theft (17 percent). Payment card transactions have become an important aspect of the telecommunications industry (Cobanoglu, 2007; Levin & Hudak, 2009; Tenczar, 2008; Volpe, 2009). With the rise in credit card transactions, the security of cardholder information has become a major concern. In today's economic environment, it's impossible to picture a telecommunications company competing in the



market without taking credit cards. However, the convenience of cashless payments raises concerns about the susceptibility of private information and security breaches for telecommunication companies. Financial costs, brand reputation harm, and/or changes in consumer behaviour are all possible outcomes of an information security breach for phone users. Despite the fact that information security is not a key emphasis of telecommunication companies, it is one of the components of their total service and experience.

Telecommunication companies acquire a lot of sensitive data from their consumers personal information, financial information, service preferences, and so on. As a result, it is the obligation of telecommunications companies to safeguard this valuable asset. If this does not occur, the total quality of the service may be harmed since one of its components (information security protection) was not adequately given. According to consumer behaviour and services marketing literature, the total quality of a hotel's service correlates to overall visitor satisfaction (Akbaba, 2006; Reid and Bojanic, 2009; Zabkar et al., 2009; Zeithaml et al., 2006). It is also possible to claim that consumer satisfaction influences client loyalty (revisit and word-of-mouth intentions). As a result, it's critical to look at the influence of a data security breach on the sequence of customer perceptions and behavioural results (service quality, satisfaction, revisit intentions and word-of-mouth). Thus, we posit the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between customer satisfaction in the information security of telecommunication firm's services and consumer brand choice in Bayelsa State.

#### **Service Availability and Customer Satisfaction**

Telecommunications service availability was evaluated at 88.3 percent in the most recent Area Development Corporate Survey. Today, telecommunications services have a far bigger influence on our lives and the areas we choose to live and work. Damage may grow and people may die if telecommunication services are absent during an incident. Crisis management businesses must understand their telecom service availability risks in order to avoid being caught off guard: they must do a risk assessment. In this sector, risk evaluation is difficult. Telecom services are made up of networks and services from a variety of competing organizations, making it difficult to gather accurate information about the network (Vriezolk, 2016). Even if all information were accessible, creating a risk model that included all physical components would be challenging due to its enormous complexity. Because telecommunications networks are constantly changing

and significant occurrences are uncommon, data for statistical analysis of incidents is difficult to come by (Vriezolk, 2016). Telecommunication firms place a premium on network coverage. Network Coverage and Customer Satisfaction have a positive relationship, with the wider the coverage, the more pleased consumers will be (Khan & Afsheen, 2012). As a result, customers who have low/poor network coverage and capacity are more likely to switch to a company that has extensive network coverage in their provision of strong consistent, non-dropping signals in all nooks and crannies of the country, which leads to customer loyalty. This is achieved by deploying adequate network infrastructures with high network capacity both in urban and rural areas extensively, thus obtaining extensive network coverage (Nwakanma, et al. 2018).

Thus, we posit the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between customer satisfaction in the service availability of telecommunication firm's services and consumer brand choice in Bayelsa State.

**Brand Preference:** Brand preference is a crucial phase in the decision-making process for consumers, since it involves components of choice. Consumers compare and rank different brands by focusing on their uniqueness in order to establish brand preference. Brand preference is defined as the degree to which a customer prefers the designed service provided by his or her current company over the designated service provided by other companies in his or her consideration set, with a consideration set referring to brands that a consumer would consider buying in the near future (Jin & Weber, 2013). According to Dadzie, and Boachie-Mensah (2011), a good grasp of the elements influencing brand preference is also necessary to guarantee that the company's branding activities are aligned with the demands of local dairy product customers.

Consumers of mobile telecom services are impacted by a variety of criteria when deciding between competing brands, according to existing research. According to Lui (2002), customer brand choice is influenced by two important factors: the consumer's attitude toward the mobile phone and the consumer's attitude toward the mobile telecom service provider. Consumer repurchase decisions, brand loyalty, and brand preference decisions appear to be shaped and guided by the brand. In the mobile telecom service industry, the brand not only identifies the service provider, but also explains why the client prefers it, as well as assuring the customer's choice and ensuring specified levels of product service quality. Inadvertently, the brand reveals the realities about mobile telecom operator services to the user,





which is crucial when making brand preference selections. In comparison to rival brands in their consideration set, Hellier et al., (2003) defined brand preference as the degree to which an individual customer favors, adores, and values the specified brand above all others.

The purpose of consumer behaviour research is to uncover patterns of customer attitudes that influence their decision to buy or ignore a product. (Matsatsinis, & Samaras, 2000). Consumers' choices for items or brands are influenced by a variety of variables. Some elements are product characteristics (pricing, durability), while others are customer characteristics (goals, attitudes, discretionary income) (Venkatraman, Clithero, Fitzsimons, & Huettel, 2012). Customer satisfaction is defined as the individual's perception of the performance of the product or service in relation to his or her expectations (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004). Schiffman, & Kanuk(2007) defined satisfaction as a person's expression of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a service outcome in relation to the expectations. If the performance falls below expectation, the customer is dissatisfied. If performance matches the expectations, the customer is satisfied. If the performance exceeds expectations, the customer is highly satisfied or delighted. With the fierce competition in the Nigerian telecoms market, operators need to watch switching behaviour of their customers. The telecoms market is a subscription market whereby consumers subscribe with no initial intention to switch and they are expected to remain loyal until some factors trigger them to switch (Oyeniyi & Abiodun, 2010).

#### **Empirical Review and Hypotheses Development**

Chang and Ming (2009) consider brand preference as a result of brand loyalty and brand equity, but Keller (2003) views brand preference as an antecedent of brand loyalty and brand equity. Brand preference and brand loyalty are used interchangeably by other authors (Rundle-Thiele and Mackay, 2001).

Lin (2002) makes a similar case for the importance of brand choice in product development: Despite its potential importance, particularly in dynamic markets where brand loyalty may be elusive and the best that brand managers can hope for is to continually promote and re-vitalize brand preference, brand preference has received relatively little attention, with research conducted across time, sector, and place.

PR is a marketing tactic used to alter customer views and acquire organizational support for organizations. It is perceived as an unbiased way of marketing communication (Tang, Morrison, Lehto, Kline, & Pearce, 2009). We employed event marketing as a stand-in for public relations in this study. The importance of event

marketing in shaping consumers' pre-purchase preferences for store brands should not be overlooked (Lahav, Mansfeld, & Avraham, 2013).

From the foregoing, it was hypothesised in the null form that;

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between customer satisfaction in the information security of telecommunication firm's services and consumer brand choice in Bayelsa State.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between customer satisfaction in the service availability of telecommunication firm's services and consumer brand choice in Bayelsa State.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

A cross sectional survey design was adopted to identify the determinants of choice of mobile service providers by users in Yenagoa– a Nigerian municipality. This choice was informed by the fact that the researcher did not have perfect control or manipulation over all the variables that could affect the study. The population cut across diverse groups, professions, institutions and age encompassing students' in educational institutions, market women, artisans, workers in private and public institutions, businessmen, traders and customers in marketplaces. From the telecoms data –Q3 2019, the total number of active voice and internet subscribers in Bayelsa state is 1,858,147, and this formed the population of the study. The sample size was adopted using Taro Yamen sample size determination techniques which were 400 at 0.05 level of significant. Following this result, the convenience sampling procedure was used to select the respondents.

#### **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

##### **Test of Hypotheses**

##### **Hypothesis one**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between customer satisfaction in the information security of telecommunication firm's services and consumer brand choice in Bayelsa State



**Table 1: Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between of the information security and customer satisfaction**  
**Correlations**

|                       |                 | Information security | customer satisfaction |
|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Spearman's rho        | Correlation     | 1.000                | .844                  |
|                       | Coefficient     |                      |                       |
|                       | Sig. (2-tailed) | .                    | .000                  |
|                       | N               | 382                  | 382                   |
|                       | Correlation     | .844                 | 1.000                 |
|                       | Coefficient     |                      |                       |
| customer satisfaction | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000                 | .                     |
|                       | N               | 382                  | 382                   |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Decision: Table 1 above reveals a Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.844 and probability value of 0.000 on the relationship between information security and customer satisfaction of telecommunication firm's services in Bayelsa State. This result indicates that there is a significant relationship between information security and customer satisfaction of telecommunication firm's services in Bayelsa State. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypotheses, because the PV (0.000) < 0.05 level of significance.

**H02:** There is no significant relationship between customer satisfaction in the service availability of telecommunication firm's services and consumer brand choice in Bayelsa State

**Table 2: Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between of service availability and customer satisfaction**  
**Correlations**

|                       |                 | service availability | customer satisfaction |
|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Spearman's rho        | Correlation     | 1.000                | .751                  |
|                       | Coefficient     |                      |                       |
|                       | Sig. (2-tailed) | .                    | .000                  |
|                       | N               | 382                  | 382                   |
|                       | Correlation     | .751                 | 1.000                 |
|                       | Coefficient     |                      |                       |
| customer satisfaction | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000                 | .                     |
|                       | N               | 382                  | 382                   |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Decision: Table 2 above reveals a Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.751 and probability value of 0.000 on the relationship between service availability of telecommunication firm's services and customer satisfaction in Bayelsa State. This result indicates that there is a high but positive significant relationship between service availability and customer satisfaction of telecommunication firm's services in Bayelsa State. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis, because the PV (0.001) < 0.05 level of significance.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Hypotheses (H01) and (H02) aimed at examining the significant relationship between customer quality perception and brand preference of telecommunication firm's services in Bayelsa State. The two hypotheses were tested using Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient analysis. The analysis revealed a significant relationship between information security and customer satisfaction of telecommunication firm's services in Bayelsa State (Rho= 0.844). Hypothesis two also revealed a positively significant relationship between Service Availability and customer satisfaction of telecommunication firm's services in Bayelsa State (Rho= 0.751). This implies that, service availability has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. This result supported the works of Khan and Afsheen,



(2012); Vriezolk, (2016); Nwakanma, et al. (2018); Akbaba, (2006); Reid and Bojanic, (2009); Zabkar et al., (2009); Zeithaml et al., (2006).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher therefore recommends that;

1. Telecommunication services should have assessment and incentive systems to guarantee that good performance is tracked and rewarded.
2. There is a need for a campaign to educate people in some parts of the state about the benefits of communication access in order to reduce local opposition to the installation of telecommunications infrastructure in those areas.
3. It is critical to include local governments in ongoing efforts to standardize and speed up the deployment of infrastructure, including rights of way, which are presently being negotiated at the federal level, in order to allow the required network growth.
4. Organizations should design programmes to measure service quality and customer perception on a regular basis in order to evaluate performance. This is in respect to how organization's performance fall short of, match or exceeds customer satisfaction, ability to influence customers intention to re-patronize and determine the major factor considered in choosing service providers as the dimensions may keep changing.
5. Telecommunication companies should take deliberate steps to improve service delivery as well as implement strategies that will attract new customers while retaining existing ones.
6. The telecommunication companies should also do frequent competition analyses to learn what their competitors are doing well so that they may improve, as well as guarantee that they receive enough consumer feedback.

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