

Dynamics for Satisfaction with Telecom Services : A Pragmatic Investigation on Customers of Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

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Abstract

This research study was an effort to ascertain some implicit factors that influenced customer satisfaction in the Indian mobile service industry. Various satisfaction measures like communication services, network issues, technology, price, brand image, and customer care services were analyzed. With the introduction of Reliance Jio in December 2015, the Indian telecom market got distracted and stimulated in Madhya Pradesh as Jio offered various free communication services, lower data packs, and free voice calls without roaming. This step of Reliance Jio created a cold war among the mobile service provider firms and put immense pressure on competitors to offer similar services at comparatively lower prices. With the market moving forward, customer satisfaction has become mandatory for service providers to stay competitive in the market. This research study was exploratory in nature. Primary data were collected through a questionnaire from 500 mobile service users. Factor analysis was employed to analyze the data through SPSS 21.0 software, which was randomly collected from Bhopal (M.P.), India. Ten factors were identified out of 32 items of seven variables. The findings showed that diversity of plans and quality of network signals were two important foretellers of customer satisfaction in the mobile service industry.

Keywords : customer satisfaction, mobile service sector, customer loyalty, customer retention

Paper Submission Date : July 30, 2018 ; Paper sent back for Revision : April 15, 2019 ; Paper Acceptance Date : April 19, 2019

Success of the telecommunication industry depends on prudent efforts and feasible investments (Paulrajan & Rajkumar, 2011). At the present time, the services dynamic environment is considered as a main point in effective marketing. It is essential to design service products based on customers' needs and feasible prices. Price sensitivity of the customers is a significant factor that moderates customer satisfaction in the mobile telecom context (Rejikumar, 2016). Telecommunication service providers should look beyond price wars to keep their customers satisfied and loyal (John, 2011), but the rate of customer participation and also the time are important in service delivery. Service quality, free competition, and innovative technology have augmented competition and have extended the range of network services offered throughout the world. In order to improve service quality and in turn to increase customer satisfaction, firms should first focus on training employees regarding the marketing of products/services, which ultimately leads to effective external marketing.

Telecom service providers should also take efforts to increase job satisfaction of the employees, which results in delivery of high service quality (Rajeswari, Srinivasulu, & Thiyagarajan, 2016). Product (core services), promotion, and distribution have a higher impact on the level of customer satisfaction. Trust is also a major

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DOI: 10.17010/ijom/2019/v49/i5/144024

determinant of customer loyalty in the telecom market (Akpoyomare, Patrick, Salome, & Victor, 2014). This increase in telecom competency allows businesses to get advantage from the information revolt in numerous ways, such as restructuring their inventories, increasing efficiency, and identifying new markets. Perceived quality, perceived value, and corporate image are the driving forces for customer satisfaction (Nasser, Salleh, & Gelaidan, 2012). Mobile services have been recognized the world over for being more than a significant tool for socioeconomic progress. These are one of the key support services needed for the rapid development and transformation of various sectors of the economy. The economy becomes handicapped in the absence of a sound mobile network system.

The various sectors of the economy like banking, finance, hospitality, and other industries have grown up considerably in the past few years due to the growth of the mobile service sector. Moreover, certain recent developments in the mobile sector have really increased the expectations of the customers. Some of these developments include :

- ✎ The emergence of 4G services at cheaper prices,
- ✎ Mobile number portability,
- ✎ Network expansion in rural areas.

The main purpose of this study is to examine the key variables which have a strong influence on buyer satisfaction in the mobile service sector. Factors touching buyer satisfaction are strategic concerns for any department, organization, or country, and as a result, any business can establish a long run profitable relationship with clients through buyer satisfaction solely. By providing value-added services and effective pricing strategies, the telecom service providers can control consumer brand switching behavior and can retain the customers (Makwana, Sharma, & Arora, 2014). Customers remain more satisfied if telecom service providers improve the quality of services to customers along with value-added services and provide upcoming information about new offers and schemes (Makkar & Kumar, 2012).

There is no suspicion that the mobile industry is the pillar on which other business industries stand, and at the same time, it is seen that some mobile operators like BSNL, Aircel are also losing grip on their existing customers. It indicates something was missing in the approaches used by the companies for maintaining and acquiring existing as well as potential buyers. It is said that fulfilling the expectations of customers leads to satisfaction and loyalty of customers. Thus, this study uses a blend of measurement variables of the ECSI (European customer satisfaction index) & ACSI (American customer satisfaction index). Earlier researchers have not studied both the indexes to frame the measurement variables.

Review of Literature

Service quality is generally regarded as being a key factor in the creation of worth and in influencing customer satisfaction (Loke, Taiwo, Salim, & Downe, 2011). Also, service quality has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction (Ojo, 2010). In the present times, the service dynamic environment is considered as a main point in effective marketing. Customer satisfaction is an essential marketing concept since the last two or three decades. Buyer satisfaction is an extent of how products and services are offered by a business encounter as per customers' expectations. The Indian telecommunication industry has grown into a billion-dollar industry. In this highly competitive industry, it is not just doing somewhat right that matters, but it is also significant that a company does nothing wrong. Profit maximization is no longer the sole purpose of organizations as emphasis nowadays is on customer satisfaction. Therefore, it is important for every company to analyze the existing level of satisfaction of their customers so as to link the gaps between the expectations of the customers, and the products or services provided by the companies.

✍ **Customer Satisfaction :** Customer tastes and preferences keep on changing from time to time. This is the result of several factors like internal and external environmental factors (Naidu & Ponduri, 2015). Customer loyalty leads to higher profits (Khuhro, Azahr, Bhutto, & Sarki, 2011). Service operators often place a higher precedence on buyer satisfaction because it has been seen as a criterion to customer retention. Almossawi (2012) found an association between pleasure and retention. If retention is not managed, customer's loyalty may be lost (Omotayo & Joachim, 2008). Customer satisfaction is an individual emotion of either liking or discontent causing from the assessment of services offered by a business to an individual in relation to anticipations. A satisfied customer often stays faithful longer and is likely to call the services of firms in the future. Pricelist, quality of call, and services presented to the customers are vital in satisfaction of customers (Gill & Waqas, 2014). As a positive upshot of marketing activities, high customer pleasure leads to repeat visit to stores, repeat product or service acquisitions, and word-of-mouth advertising to relatives and friends, while low buyer satisfaction has been linked with complaining behavior. Value objectiveness, buyer services, and coverage are major factors, which have an effect on the buyer satisfaction (Khan & Afsheen, 2012).

Significance of the Study

In the past years, the mobile industry has shown an unexpected growth in India. This development was determined by substantial investment done by private and public telecom service providers and incredible network extension has been carried out by them.

(1) Significance for Mobile Service Providers and Customers : Retaining the customers is possible only if the customers are happy with the delivered services. Firms must formulate and implement their marketing and promotional tasks, activities, and programs in such a strategic way that they improve and encourage the customers' loyalty (Khurshid, 2013). The study measures the factors that are responsible for customer satisfaction of telecom services. The results of the research study will enable service operators to improve customer satisfaction by paying heed to the different factors of client satisfaction, which is further most important in cut throat market competition. It will help the organizations to increase the customer satisfaction and shape long term customer affiliation. It is important for telecom providers to continually access customer segments and identify the drivers of satisfaction so as to retain the profitable customers (Joshi, 2015).

(2) Significance for Strategy Makers & the Regulatory Authority : This research study intends to support the policy makers to adopt various policies related with regulation of the mobile service sector. TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India) has established the benchmark for mobile service quality. The results of the study will be beneficial for TRAI to understand what other factors must be considered to make customers happy at the time of formulating the policies. The results of the study may help TRAI to draw a fresh road map for enhancement of customer satisfaction in the context of mobile services.

Objectives of the Study

The present research paper attempts to achieve the following objectives :

- ✍ To know the factors that directly and indirectly affect customer satisfaction in the telecom service industry.
- ✍ To know the hidden factors that are responsible for customer satisfaction in the mobile service industry.

Research Methodology

(1) Research Design : This research examines the public sector and private sector mobile companies to understand the factors of customer satisfaction. This study undertook the design of exploratory and descriptive research.

(2) Sample Design : As per convenience, sample was collected from the population of Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh) in such a manner that a complete coverage could be made of both the urban and rural areas and also it was the target population of the research study.

(3) Sampling Technique : In the present study, simple random sampling (probability sampling) as well as judgmental sampling (non probability sampling) were used to collect data from respondents of Bhopal region.

(4) Sample Size : The population for the research work involved individuals who used mobile services in Bhopal region. In the present research study, the sample size was 500 respondents of Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh) region. The study was conducted from September 2017 - April 2018.

(5) Research Instrument : The instrument to measure dynamics of customer satisfaction of mobile users in Bhopal was a structured questionnaire. The first part of the structured questionnaire comprised of information of customers about their demographic aspects. The demographic profile taken for the study is depicted in the Table 1 with the components : age, gender, monthly income, educational qualification, profession, mobile service provider, and type of connection.

The second part of the questionnaire included questions about measurement scales (Table 2), that is, communication services, network services, technological services, competitive prices, brand image, customer care services, and expected services. The questions in the scale were sensibly chosen after systematic literature review. In the framework of the current study, a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions was used and responses were measured on a 5 - point Likert scale. Statements were measured on a scale of “*strongly disagree*” to “*strongly agree*” where the first had a score of 1 and the last, a score of 5.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Parameters		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	262	52.4
	Female	238	47.6
Age	Below 20 years	214	42.8
	21 - 40 years	165	33
	41 - 60 years	83	16.6
	Above 60 years	38	7.6
Educational Qualifications	Up to Higher Secondary	54	10.8
	Undergraduate	258	51.6
	Postgraduate	156	31.2
	Ph.D./C.A./Others	32	6.4
Profession	Student	186	37.2
	Own Business	82	16.4

	Service	208	41.6
	Others	24	4.8
Income	Below 20,000 INR	241	48.2
	20,001 - 40,000 INR	148	29.6
	40,001 - 60,000 INR	68	13.6
	Above 60,000 INR	43	8.6
Service Provider	Airtel	96	19.2
	Idea	102	20.4
	Vodafone	48	9.6
	Reliance Jio	197	39.4
	BSNL	27	5.4
	Tata Docomo	30	6.0
Type of Connection	Pre-paid	458	91.6
	Post paid	42	8.4

Table 2. Measurement Scales

S. No.	Variables	No. of Items
1	Communication Services	5 (COMS1, COMS2, COMS3, COMS5, COMS4)
2	Network Services	3 (NS1, NS2, NS3)
3	Technological Services	4 (TS1, TS2, TS3, TS4, TS5)
4	Competitive Prices	5 (CP1, CP2, CP3, CP4, CP5)
5	Brand Image	5 (BI1, BI2, BI3, BI4, BI5)
6	Customer Care Services	5 (CCS1, CCS2, CCS3, CCS4, CCS5)
7	Expected Services	5 (ES1, ES2, ES3, ES4, ES5)

Data Analysis and Results

(1) Statistical Tools & Techniques Used : In this research study, statistical tests such as reliability analysis and factor analysis were applied with the help of the SPSS Version 21, which lead into interpretations and analysis. The Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 depict the demographic profile, measurement scales, and reliability analysis, respectively.

(2) Factor Analysis : Factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to find out diverse determinants of customer satisfaction. The Table 4 shows that KMO test generated the value of .705, which is above the minimum desired value of .5. Kaiser and Rice (1974) in a study suggested the appropriate value of KMO as more than .6. Bartlett's test, which was used to check multivariate normality and whether correlation matrix was an identity matrix, this resulted into a significant value (p - value less than .05) which further displayed an appropriateness of data for using factor analysis.

The Table 5 shows the output generated by SPSS on extraction with principal component analysis method. Total variance explained (73.708%) of these 10 components is above than 60 %, which is the standard generally used in social science research.

Diversity of Plans (Table 6) was named as first factor since all the four questions of this factor somewhere directly or indirectly measured the multiplicity of plans of the telecom service providers. Geographical Network Coverage was named as the second factor since all the four questions of this factor somewhere directly or

Table 3. Reliability Analysis

S. No.	Variables	No. of Items	Cronbach's α
1	Communication Services	5 (COMS1, COMS2, COMS3, COMS5, COMS4)	0.802
2	Network Services	3 (NS1, NS2, NS3)	0.874
3	Technological Services	4 (TS1, TS2, TS3, TS4, TS5)	0.765
4	Competitive Prices	5 (CP1, CP2, CP3, CP4, CP5)	0.786
5	Brand Image	5 (BI1, BI2, BI3, BI4, BI5)	0.796
6	Customer Care Services	5 (CCS1, CCS2, CCS3, CCS4, CCS5)	0.780
7	Expected Services	5 (ES1, ES2, ES3, ES4, ES5)	0.821

Table 4. KMO and Bartlett's Test : Customer Satisfaction

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.705
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	9856.565
	Df	496
	Sig.	.000

Table 5. Total Variance Explained : Customer Satisfaction

Component	Initial Eigen values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.584	14.324	14.324	4.584	14.324	14.324	3.217	10.054	10.054
2	3.262	10.192	24.516	3.262	10.192	24.516	3.022	9.443	19.498
3	2.787	8.710	33.226	2.787	8.710	33.226	2.892	9.038	28.536
4	2.492	7.788	41.014	2.492	7.788	41.014	2.804	8.764	37.299
5	2.384	7.450	48.464	2.384	7.450	48.464	2.722	8.506	45.805
6	2.322	7.255	55.720	2.322	7.255	55.720	2.553	7.978	53.783
7	2.064	6.451	62.170	2.064	6.451	62.170	2.455	7.673	61.457
8	1.492	4.662	66.832	1.492	4.662	66.832	1.526	4.768	66.225
9	1.140	3.564	70.396	1.140	3.564	70.396	1.264	3.951	70.176
10	1.060	3.312	73.708	1.060	3.312	73.708	1.130	3.532	73.708
11	.971	3.035	76.743						
12	.860	2.687	79.430						
13	.740	2.312	81.742						
14	.703	2.197	83.939						
15	.562	1.755	85.695						
16	.509	1.591	87.285						
17	.489	1.530	88.815						
18	.453	1.415	90.229						
19	.400	1.249	91.479						
20	.360	1.126	92.604						
21	.321	1.003	93.607						
22	.309	.967	94.574						
23	.285	.892	95.466						

24	.268	.837	96.303
25	.234	.730	97.033
26	.201	.629	97.661
27	.181	.565	98.226
28	.162	.506	98.732
29	.145	.454	99.186
30	.133	.417	99.603
31	.119	.372	99.975
32	.008	.025	100.000

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 6. Factor Load Table

S. No.	Factor Name	Eigen Values		Item Converged	Factor Load
		Total	% of Variance		
1	Diversity of Plans	4.584	14.324	Flexibility to alter my existing plan. (ES1)	0.792
				Free data on data pack recharge. (ES2)	0.961
				Sound international calling plans. (ES3)	0.957
				Free national calling plans. (ES5)	0.842
2	Geographical Network	3.262	10.192	Call disconnection in the middle of conversation coverage. (COMS1)	0.751
				Disturbance free voice calling. (COMS2)	0.845
				Network in rural areas. (COMS3)	0.912
				Updated information regarding new plans, schemes, and promotional offers. (COMS5)	0.803
3	Loyal Customer Base	2.787	8.71	Sound Image (BI1)	0.755
				Using this network just because my friends/family to whom I trust, suggested me. (BI2)	0.791
				Influenced by the brand value. (BI3)	0.913
				Operator fulfills his social responsibilities. (BI5)	0.735
4	Trustworthiness	2.492	7.788	Transparent billing methods. (CP1)	0.727
				Fair call rate tariff. (CP2)	0.820
				Fair data pack tariff. (CP3)	0.864
				Operator does not add chargeable caller tunes without my consent. (CP5)	0.784
5	Staff Courtesy	2.384	7.45	Timely delivery of post-paid bills. (CCS1)	0.674
				Co-operative behavior of customer care representatives. (CCS2)	0.862
				Personal attention of customer care representatives. (CCS3)	0.86
				24*7 customer care services. (CCS5)	0.811

6	Technical Assistance	2.322	7.255	Data speed (TS1)	0.901
				Latest technology (TS2)	0.906
				User friendly apps (TS4)	0.855
7	Signal Quality	2.064	6.451	First attempt call connection. (NS1)	0.807
				Disturbance free network while roaming. (NS1)	0.925
				Minimum time to activate the new connection. (NS3)	0.932
8	Concreteness	1.492	4.662	Attractive and proper advertisement. (COMS4)	0.623
				Economical network (CP4)	0.673
				Opted just because endorsed by role model. (BI)	0.486
9	Assurance	1.14	3.564	Sufficient service outlets within the city. (CCS4)	0.89
10	Value Added Services	1.06	3.312	Roaming free data network in other states of India. (TS3)	0.302
				Free intra-state calling plans. (ES4)	0.869

indirectly reflected the network coverage area of the telecom service providers. Loyal Customer Base was named as the third factor since all the four questions of this factor somewhere directly or indirectly reflected the customer base of the telecom service providers. Trustworthiness was named as the fourth factor since all the four questions of this factor somewhere directly or indirectly reflected the reliability of the telecom service providers. Staff Courtesy was named as the fifth factor since all the three questions of this factor somewhere directly or indirectly replicated the staff's polite behavior of the telecom service providers. Technical Assistance was named as the sixth factor since all the three questions of this factor somewhere directly or indirectly measured the technical assistance provided by the telecom service providers. Signal Quality was named as the seventh factor since all the three questions of this factor somewhere directly or indirectly reflected the quality of signals of the telecom service providers. Concreteness was named as the eighth factor since all the three questions of this factor somewhere directly or indirectly measured the compactness of the telecom service providers. Assurance was named as the ninth factor since both the two questions of this factor somewhere directly or indirectly measured the assurance given by the telecom service providers. Value Added Services was named as the tenth factor since only a single question of this factor somewhere directly or indirectly measured the additional services given by the telecom service providers.

As per the age group of the mobile users, 42.8% of the respondents were below 20 years of age, 33% were in the age group of 21 - 40 years, 16.6% belonged to the 41 - 60 years age group, and 7.6% were above 60 years of age. It clarifies that the important age groups are groups 1 and 2 as these age groups are characterized by teenagers and youngsters, and they together constituted more than 75% of the respondents.

After analyzing the current market situation, we can infer that the Indian telecom sector is one of the flourishing sectors of the country. There are many market players who have established themselves in this tough competition. Reliance Jio with 39.4% market share is leading the way and Idea secured the number two position with 20.4% market share.

Managerial Implications

The 32 items of seven variables of customer satisfaction were taken for research and were analyzed by using factor analysis. Then we inferred that the variables which have the highest load in factor analysis are the variables which are of utmost importance for the customers. The following factors need to be taken care of by the managers of telecom companies while framing plans for customers :

- ✍ Sound international calling plans
- ✍ Disturbance free voice calling
- ✍ Network expansion in rural areas
- ✍ Brand value
- ✍ Fair data pack tariff
- ✍ Personal attention of customer care representatives
- ✍ Data speed
- ✍ Latest technology
- ✍ User friendly & updated apps
- ✍ Disturbance free network while roaming

Conclusion

Several research studies show that for any business, it is important to create customers and it is equally important to retain them with you. In a highly competitive marketplace, a company that has the best understanding of customers' needs will be able to respond more quickly to the changing circumstances. Customer satisfaction aims at increasing customer interface, customer value, customer involvement, and it also helps in tailoring products as per customers' needs. In the services sector, satisfaction plays a pivotal role in the success of any business. It helps the companies to differentiate their customers so that they can differentiate their offerings in order to develop a long term relationship with the customers, which increases customer loyalty.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

Research is an extensive work and it was not possible to cover all the aspects of research in this study ; hence, there are certain limitations which are mentioned below :

- ✍ Since the customers were of different backgrounds and had different tastes and preferences, so the feedback provided by the customers may be biased. The feedback may be directed by other factors and not necessarily based on the experience and quality of services. Word of mouth may play a key role in forming perceptions of customers towards different service providers. At the time of festivals, schemes and offers launched by different service providers raise the competition, which plays an important role in forming perceptions of customers.
- ✍ Telecom service providers who are operating in Bhopal are only included in this research study and the results cannot be generalized for pan - India customers. Scope is open for researchers by considering other companies operating in other parts of the country.
- ✍ This study deals with exploring customers' satisfaction in the mobile sector only and similar research can be done in other service domains and other measurement scales, which are not studied, can be considered for further research.

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