RELATIONSHIP MARKETING AND ITS EFFECT ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY OF SELECTED MOBILE PHONE COMPANIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE

UDAMA, DENIS UDAMA
udamadenis@gmail.com
09057938703
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS EDUCATION
FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION OBUDU

&

ETENG FRIDAY EBRI.
friday4jesus2022@gmail.com
08039104509
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS EDUCATION
FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION OBUDU

ABSTRACT
Relationship marketing and its effect on customer loyalty of Selected Mobile Phone Companies in Cross River state using service quality and price value as measures to customer loyalty in telecommunication companies communicating in Cross River State. The study explores that, despite inadequate service to customers in the telecommunication industry, customers remain loyal. The methodology used was a survey research design, where cross sectional data was collected in a fair representation of the various mobile phone users and the senatorial constituency of Cross River State North, Central and South respectively were used in the research. The study used Pearson correlation, regression analysis, and reliability test, and variance inflation factor for analysis. Primary data was used for the study. The study found that all the dependents' variables of Service Quality and Price Value are significant to customer loyalty in the telecommunication companies in Cross River State. The study recommends the need for service providers to improve the quality of service given to its subscribers in the sense that all the mobile networks are not meeting the requirement or expectation of customers where they should enjoy more in terms of value for their money.

keywords: Relationship Marketing on Customer Loyalty of Selected Mobile Phone

Introduction

Organizations now aim all their effort not only at anticipating and satisfying their customers at a profit; but doing it more efficiently and effectively than the competition to attain set goals. With an increased understanding of the importance of customers' loyalty, firms are taking a more customer-centric approach to strategy formulation (Kotler & Armstrong 2014). Relationship marketing has received much attention in both academy and practice areas in the last few decades. Relationship marketing tactics thus approach to apply relationship marketing in practice. Effective customer-oriented relationship marketing tactics may help marketers to acquire customers, keep customers, and maximize customer profitability, and finally build up customer loyalty (Tseng, 2015).

Different authors, who have various academic background, make different contributions to the definition of relationship marketing. Berry's definition of relationship marketing is developed within services marketing and he defines relationship marketing as "attracting, maintaining and in multi service organizations- enhancing customer relationships" (Berry, 2013, p. 25). Berry's definition of relationship marketing emphasizes the importance of customer retention and the allocation of resources to keep existent customers as well as attract new customers (Gummesson, 2014a, pp. 242-243). Jackson's definition of relationship marketing, which is grounded in industrial marketing, defines the relationship marketing as "marketing oriented toward strong, lasting relationships with individual accounts" (Jackson, 2015. p. 2).

A comprehensive and widely used definition of relationship marketing is done by Grönroos (2019) and he explains relationship marketing as "identifying and establishing, maintaining, and enhancing relationships with customers and other stake holders, at a profit, so that the objective of all parties involved are met, and that is done by a mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises". The definition of Grönroos involves not only customer-supplier relationships but also includes relationships between stakeholders. Gummesson (2012b) argues that relationship marketing is fundamentally different from traditional marketing and that successful relationship marketing implementation requires new mindsets. Gummesson (2012b) presents the relationships, networks and interactions as the core value of the concept of relationship marketing.

The evolution of marketing started with the "simple trade era" in the ancient history, where people produced surplus good and then barter goods for other things they wanted (Brassington & Pettit, 2012). Then, organizations in the bid of searching for how best to, compete moved to the "marketing era" where companies replaced production orientation with a marketing orientation. Rather than trying to get customers to buy what the firm has produced, organizations try to produce what customers need. It was then realized that long-run competitiveness was more likely when organizations focus their activities on meeting customers' needs, satisfying their wants, and knowing where their loyalty is, rather than trying to sell everything they could produce. Not long ago, a new marketplace has emerged bringing with it a host of challenges never before encountered.

Also, Tseng, (2015), believes that as the competitive environment becomes more turbulent, the most important issue the sellers face is no longer to provide excellent, good quality products or services, but also to keep loyal customers who will contribute long-term profit to organizations. To compete in such overcrowded and interactive marketplace like the telecommunication industry in Nigeria and Cross River State in particular, marketers are forced to look beyond the traditional 4Ps of marketing strategy, (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion) which are no longer enough to be implemented for achieving competitive advantage. Therefore, relationship marketing has become an alternative means for organizations to build strong, ongoing associations with their customers. As part of marketing strategy, relationship marketing seeks to acquire and retain customers by providing good quality customer services and therefore has become one of the keys to success in acquiring strong competitiveness in the present markets, because of its implications for access to markets, generation of repeat purchase, creation of exit barriers, and the view that it benefits all parties (Andaleeb, 2007).

Nigerian Communication Commission (2015) posits that the Nigerian telecommunication industry is the fastest growing economy in Africa and among 10 fastest growing telecom in the world. Nigeria now stands as the largest mobile market with more than 148 million subscribers' and 47 million Nigerians have access to online internet service with a market penetration of around 75% in early 2014, becoming one of the most profitable industries in the country. The telecommunication industry delivers voice communications, data, graphics, and video at ever-increasing speeds. Telecommunication influences the country's economy and the telecommunication industry's revenue was estimated to at $25 billion in 2013. The competition is also becoming more and sharper. To obtain a sustainable competitive advantage, telecommunication firms are forced to make innovations and do the best for customer satisfaction. Due to this, customer relationship marketing plays an important role in the telecommunication industry. It demands a relationship-oriented strategy in marketing (Gronroos & Chukwu 2015).

According to NCC (2015), as of January 2014, Nigeria is had 162,719,517 connected GSM lines, of which 148,173,177 were active lines in Nigeria. However, following the successful boost and profit realization in the telecommunication (mobile phone service providers) sector recently, there has been fierce competition among the emergent mobile phone companies etc. and it is necessary and important for the managers of these companies to pursue more rigorously relationship marketing with their customers. This also requires that the mobile service providers develop beneficial relationships with their existing customers in order to retain large number of customers and spread these costs among them, thus reducing operating costs.

Chu, (2015), Posited that for a customer, loyalty is a positive attitude and behaviour related to the level of re-purchasing commitment to a brand in the future. Customer loyalty is central goal of relationship marketing, supported by numerous claims of how organization can benefit from loyal customers. Customer loyalty has been linked to customer profitability. It is both attitudinal and behavioural tendency to favour one brand over all others, whether due to satisfaction with the product or service, its convenience or performances or simply familiarity and comfort with the brand. Customer loyalty encourages consumers to stop more consistently, spend a greater share of wallet, and i feel positive about a shopping experience, helping attract consumers to familiar brands in the face competitive environment.

Aydin and Ozer, (2014) noted that despite these various works, there is still no universal agreement on the definition of loyalty. Thus, some authors are of the opinion that customer's loyalty has two dimensions. Customer loyalty has been generally divided into attitudinal loyalty and behavioral. Attitudinal loyalty describes customer's attitude toward loyalty by measuring customer preference, buying intention, supplier prioritization and recommendation willingness; on the other hand, behavioural loyalty relates to shares of purchase, purchasing frequency. There are evidences suggesting that stronger relationship commitment leads to buyers' repeat patronage.

Aminu, (2016) empirically investigates the effect of relationship marketing (RM) on customer loyalty in Nigerian banks. Four constructs (service quality, trust, complaint handling and customer satisfaction) were employed to measure RM, which is the independent variable of the study. All the constructs were significantly correlated with customer loyalty in Nigerian banks, meaning that the higher the level of service quality by the banks, the greater the trust customers have in their banks, the greater the ability of banks to resolve customers' complaints satisfactorily and the greater the level of customer satisfaction, the greater is their level of loyalty to their banks. In conclusion, investment on RM by banks pays off because it has effect on customer loyalty. Based on this conclusion, it was recommended that all banks in the country should develop and maintain long-term relationship with their customers to get their loyalty in turn.

Konate, (2016) Studied "How relationship marketing contributes to gaining customer loyalty to securities brokerage firm in the stock exchange" This study applied an inductive research approach to explore relationship marketing on firms in Thailand's financial services sector. More than one data collection methods were applied, including semi-structured interviews as the main collection method and participant observations in a supporting role. Qualitative content analysis and coding techniques were used for concluding the data. Study concluded that securities brokerage firms in Thailand implemented Relationship marketing practice but with differences in relationship marketing strategies, depending on the types of customers being targeted. The study identified the main factors impacting on customer loyalty to both local and international securities brokerage firms. Finally, the research confirmed that Relationship marketing had a demonstrable impact in gaining customer loyalty to securities brokerage firms in The Stock Exchange of Thailand.

Chin-Hung Liu and Wei-Shih Tsai, (2016) carried out a study tittled "The effects of service quality and lifestyle on consumer choice of channel types: The health food industry as an example" This study focuses on consumers of health foods in Taiwan as a research subject. The questionnaire survey was done by the sampling method. The collected data was analyzed by using statistical methods such as correlation analysis. The research findings are showing that Service quality has a significant and positive relationship with choice of channel types, Satisfaction of service quality in the aspects of personnel interaction and problem solving significantly influences consumer's choice of channel type, Both price and leisure f actors of lifestyle significantly affect consumer's choice of channel types, Some demographic variables may drastically influence consumer's choice of channel types and perception of service quality.

Omotayo, (2016) investigated the relationship and effect of sales promotion and customer loyalty. This was confirmed that there are positive relationships between sales promotion and customer loyalty. From the summary of the result, it can be concluded that as sales promotion expenditure increases so does the customer loyalty. Hypotheses one to three were confirmed from the data of this study. The study is more relevant as most previous study dealt with the impact of sales promotion in retail outlet while this study studied the impact of sales promotion in telecommunication sector. The results of the study enable us to make a number of conclusions. Most respondents are reluctant to provide personal information as such their evaluation of sales promotion is negative.

Similarly, Zhang and Feng (2015) carried out a study in Switzerland on how telecommunication service providers get to attract more customers, focus on building good relationship quality with customers, make customers satisfied and trust, and step by step obtain customer's loyalty, through relationship marketing tactics. An analytical model is developed as a guideline to test the relationships between relationship marketing tactics, relationship quality, Trust, satisfaction and customer loyalty. The findings show there's impact on customer loyalty indirectly via the customer satisfaction and trust. Brand image is positively and directly related to customer loyalty. However, switching costs is found to be less correlation with customer loyalty, as well as satisfaction and trust in Switzerland telecommunication industry.

Service quality has been found to have an influence on customer loyalty and benefit companies as it improves customer retention rate (Nsiah & Mensah, 2016). Service quality is described as the experience and judgment of service consumer about a company's excellence in the service delivery. In view of many researchers, perception of consumer influences his trust and satisfaction in the company.

Service quality may be achieved by understanding and improving operational processes, identifying problems quickly and systematically establishing valid and reliable service performances and measuring customer satisfaction and other performance outcome. Compared with physical products, Service is thought to be intangible, heterogeneous. produced and consumed simultaneously, unable to be kept in stock, etc. “A service is a process consisting of a series of more or less intangible activities that normally, but not necessarily always, take place in interactions between the customer and service employees and/or physical resources or goods and/or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems” (see Gronroos, 2019, p.46). This definition implied that service is a process where interactions between customer and service provider most often exist. Hence, in a service context, there are almost a relationship between customer and service provider; such relationship can be used as a basis for marketing (Gronroos, 2019). In order to retain loyal customer who will bring long-term profit to the firm, the key issue for service provider is to make use of this relationship in the way it manages customers by offering what the customer's needs and wants.

Customers might be satisfied when a firm provides better services than their prepurchase expectations. Customer trusts also emerge when customers perceive positive service quality from a firm, and believe the service firm would bring preferable outcomes for them. In mobile telecommunication industry which belongs to service industry, service quality is an important indicator to assess a service provider's performance. Offering a high-quality service is considered to be a visible way to create customers trust and satisfaction, as well as obtaining competitive advantages and building a long-term relationship with customers.

In a study of Patrick, Chenuos, Koskei, and Tuwey (2016), when companies communicate to their customers in timely way, is more successful in retaining customers than those with low communication effectiveness. Raza and Rehman (2012), also has same view, results show that service quality has a significant impact on satisfaction. It means that if service quality is high, satisfaction will increase. Quality is positively related to customer loyalty.

Price is an important determinant that will reflect the customers purchasing decision. Price competition in the mobile phone sector is becoming very intense, whereby it plays a vital role particularly for mobile phone service providers (Kollmann, 2009 & Reena, 2016). Price is determined by various factors including, willingness of the buyer to pay and accept mark-ups, the legal environment, intensity of competition, etc. Due to the importance of cost and service charges, customers are most likely to commit to a company that provides cheaper services (Mokhtar et al., 2016).

Consumer pays a certain monetary or financial value in order to get a service. Price has a significant impact on the consumers buying behaviour. Price perception may vary from individual to individual. Sometimes, higher price might effects negatively to the: consumer buying decision, (Peng and Wang, 2013).

Peng and Wang, (2013) posited that price is the monetary cost for a customer to buy products or services. It is the critical determinant that influences customer buying decision. Customers usually select their service providers strongly relying on perceived price. How much consumers are willing to pay differs due to their different needs and wants. Thus, the price perceptions to the same service products may differ among individuals. Higher pricing perceived by consumers might negatively influence their purchase probabilities. Price perception is also thought to be related to price searching. Consumers are likely to be attracted by perceived high-quality services at perceived competitive prices during the searching process.

Peng and Wang (2013) also posited that many researchers have pointed out that price perception influences customer satisfaction and trust. Customers often switch mainly due to some pricing issues, e.g. high price perceived, unfair or deceptive pricing practices. Therefore, in order to increase customer loyalty, it is essential for service firms to actively manage their customers' price perceptions, e.g. carrying out attractive pricing, offering reasonable prices mix, lower prices without decreasing quality.

Statement of the Problem

In today's highly competitive telecommunications industry, mobile phone companies are increasingly adopting relationship marketing strategies to build long-term interactions with customers and enhance loyalty. Relationship marketing focuses on elements such as trust, commitment, effective communication, and conflict handling, which have been identified as critical drivers of customer loyalty in the mobile service sector. Despite these efforts, customer loyalty remains a major challenge, particularly in developing markets like Nigeria where customers frequently switch between service providers due to service dissatisfaction, pricing issues, and promotional offers from competitors. In Cross River State, the presence of multiple mobile phone companies such as MTN, Airtel and Glo has intensified competition, leading to increased customer expectations regarding service quality and relationship management. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that many customers still exhibit low levels of loyalty, as reflected in frequent SIM swapping, multiple subscriptions, and inconsistent patronage. This raises concerns about the effectiveness of relationship marketing strategies employed by these companies.

Most Customers stay or stick to a particular network even when they are experiencing poor service rendered to them. I will not leave this network despite some challenges experienced with the network provider. Mobile phone companies always cash-in in such situations where customer loyalty is very strong. Although previous studies have established a positive relationship between relationship marketing and customer loyalty in Nigeria's telecommunication sector, there is limited empirical evidence focusing specifically on Cross River State. Furthermore, existing studies often generalize findings without considering regional differences in customer behavior, cultural influences, and service delivery challenges.

Therefore, the researcher seeks to examine the extent to which relationship marketing practices influence customer loyalty among selected mobile phone companies in Cross River State.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the relationship between relationship marketing and customer loyalty of mobile phone users in Cross River state. The specific objectives are:

i. Examine the effect of service quality on customer loyalty.
ii. Examine the effect of price value on customer loyalty.

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised with respect to the effect of relationship marketing on mobile phone customer loyalty on Cross River State.

i. What is the effect of service quality on customer loyalty?
ii. What is the effect of price value on customer loyalty?

Statement of Hypotheses

The follow hypotheses were tested in the study:

i. There is no significant effect of Service Quality on customer loyalty.
ii. There is no significant effect of Price Value on customer loyalty.

Research Design

The research design adopted for this study was survey research design. Specifically, it is a cross-sectional survey research. In survey research design, the researcher is interested in observing what is happening to sample subjects or variables without any attempt to manipulate or control them.

The population of the study comprises of all mobile phone active lines in Cross River State. There are 3.8million mobile phone active lines in Cross River State (NCC Report, 2015). These mobile active lines cut across all networks; MTN, Glo and Airtel. The sample size of the study is 400 mobile phones active lines in Cross River State and this was arrived at using the Yamane (1967) formula.

n = N / [1 + (Ne2)],

where: n is the sample size,

N is the population,

e is the error limit (0.05 on the basis of 95% confidence level)

n= 3,800,000/ [1 + 3,800,000 (0.052)]

n = 3,800,000/9501

n = 399.9 ~ 400.

This study adopts both stratified and purposive sampling techniques. The three Senatorial district of Cross River State represents the strata. The sample size is divided equally to ensure fair representation of each of the Zone. Thus, we have the following distribution: Sampling Senatorial district, North 133, South 134 and Centra 133 TOTAL 400. The convenience sampling draws the samples from each Senatorial district since each zone has more than one local government.

This study utilized primary data to achieve the set objectives of the study. The instrument used to collect data is the questionnaire. This was employed in order to collect data from the respondents. It was divided into six sections. Section A covered three items on the personal data of respondents which contained data on respondent's sex, marital status, and educational status. Section B was on construct to measure Service Quality, while section C contains constructs to measure Price Value. Measures for independent and dependent variables used a five-point Like-type response format, with “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree” as the anchors. The users recorded their assessment of the items on five-point Likert-type scales (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree).

The methods used for data analysis include tables, simple percentages, linear regression. To assess the relationship between marketing and customer loyalty, linear regression was also used. In addition, correlation was used to determine degree of such relationship.

Result

Table 1
Service Quality and Customer Loyalty

Coefficient	t -Statis	Probability
0.073	**1.089**	**0.277**

From the analysis, the correlation between the two has a coefficient value of 0.073, indicating that customers' loyalty has a positive effect on service quality and customer loyalty, with coefficient of 0.073 indicating a positive significant effect of service quality on customer loyalty (i.e an increase in service quality will lead to increase in customer loyalty) and statistical pvalue of 0.277 which is insignificant at 5% level of significance. This therefore signifies companies must consider service quality if they want their customer to remain loyalty. The p-value is insignificant at 5% level of significance which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis thereby accepting the alternative hypothesis which state that service quality has no significant effect on customers' loyalty. The result shows that service quality is positively related with customer loyalty, where the telecommunication or network providers are giving effective and quality service to its customers.

Table 2
Price Value and Customer Loyalty

Coefficient	t-Statistic	Probability
0.216	**0.088**	**0.015**

Here the analysis shows the relationship between the price value and customer loyalty has a high coefficient value of 0.216, indicating a positive correlation between the two, with a statistically significant p-value of 0.015. A positive relationship indicates that price influences customer loyalty in telecommunication companies in Nigeria and Cross River State. It also indicates how price value is sensitive to customers when money is involved. Any slight change in price upward or downward review, it will surely affect customer loyalty by 21%.

The study therefore rejects the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that price value has a significant effect on customers' loyalty. This finding is consistent with that of Peng and Wang, (2013), Cheng et al (2013) and Kim et al., 2013), customer often switch mainly due to some pricing issues, e.g. high price perceived, unfair or deceptive pricing practices.

Table 3
Multicollinearity Test Results

Variable	Collinearity Statistics		
	Tolerance Value		
(Constant)			
SvQ	0.531	1.883323	
Pval	0.289	3.455886	

Source: SPSS Output 2025

Table 3. above shows VIF of the variables are all consistently smaller than 10. It shows that there is absence of multicollinearity. Gujarati and Porter (2013) suggested that if VIF of a variable is more than 10, that variable is said to be highly collinear. Furthermore, the tolerance values are consistently lesser than 1, thus, supporting the fact that there is no multicollinearity between the independent variables.

Discussion of Findings

The study used performance variables like Service Quality and Price Value as the group of independent variables and Customer Loyalty as the dependent variable which is used to measure the performance of the network providers. After data analysis of the findings from the test, hypotheses shows that there is positive relationship between all the dependent variables of (service quality and price value) and the independent variable (customer loyalty).

The findings on the effect of service quality shows a positive significant on customer loyalty. This implies that, companies must improve on their service quality in other to retain customer loyalty. Again, this finding corroborates with the findings of Adeleke and Aminu (2017). In his findings, four variables were used to measure service quality. They include service quality, trust, complaint handling and customer satisfaction which showed significant positive relationship. The price value shows a positive effect also, which means it has a positive significant to customer loyalty. The findings implies that most consider price of their network in other to get the attention and loyalty of their customer. Wong (2014). Study in Hong Kong on switching cost to retain customer using internet banking showed a positive effect. In the outcome, it shows strong moderating effect on customer loyalty in internet banking users. Therefore, companies should maintain and continue to offer higher value to attract new customers and avoid the risk of customers leaving to competitors, that is, to sustain customer loyalty (Lee and Murphy, 2013).

Conclusion

Retaining customers in the service industry has become a major objective of relationship marketing. In this study, relationship marketing tactics are considered to be essential for building long-term relationship with customers in order to achieve mutual benefits of all parties. The study was conducted to exam the impact of relationship marketing tactics which are, service quality and price value on customer loyalty within mobile telecommunication industries in Nigeria. From the analysis, the study however concludes that there is a relationship between customer loyalty and the independent variables of service quality and price value.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Mobile phone company should improve their service quality to meet customer expectations because this will definitely lead to customer.
2. Prices of commodities should have its corresponding value to show.

Mobile phones company should place value to its customers spending to get services by increasing the time spend on calls and data usage with same or slight price increase will significantly retain and increase customer loyalty.

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