

Consumer Perception of GSM Service Quality by Networks' Providers in Kaduna Metropolis: A Comparative Examination

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Abstract

The Nigerian Global System for Mobile (GSM) telecommunication has witnessed rapid development in the last decade, following full deregulation and liberalization of the sector in 1999. The number of service providers as well as consumer subscription level has increased beyond imagination, thereby intensifying competition among the GSM service providers and increasing customers switching habit and defection rate among consumers. In this scenario, a defensive competitive strategy that is capable of keeping or retaining the existing GSM companies' consumers rather than an aggressive competitive strategy that seeks to attract new customers is much more effective. A key defensive strategy is the maintenance and improvement of GSM companies' service quality, as their satisfaction and patronage is likely to increase with perceived higher service quality. Thus, the prime objective of this study is to assess consumers' perceived service quality of GSM networks in Kaduna metropolis. A questionnaire instrument was used to generate data from 500 respondents that were chosen using purposive sampling method. The data was subsequently analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study found that perceived service quality of the GSM operators in Kaduna metropolis was high and satisfactory. However, the perceived service of Glo network is the highest, followed by Zain and then Mtn. Hence, the study recommended that GSM operators should strive to sustain their current level of service quality in the short run, but should also strive to improve its service quality components in the long run so that customers perception of their service quality will improve from high to very high, or from satisfactory to very satisfactory.

Keywords: GSM, Service Quality, Service Quality Dimensions, and SERVPERF

JEL Classification: O31, L15, L84, L86

1. Introduction

In a competitive service industry such as Nigerian Global System for Mobile (GSM) telecommunication industry, service quality could be used as a strategic tool by any GSM company to have a competitive edge. Alabede, Affrin and Idris (2011) stressed that Organizations operating in the private sector have long realized that customer satisfaction and continue patronage as well as loyalty is secured through high quality service. Asubonteng, McCleary and

Swan (1996) buttress that as quality of service rendered to customer increases, satisfaction with the service and intention to reuse the service equally increase, and vice versa.

Beside competition, the GSM companies have a responsibility of providing quality GSM services to their existing and prospective customers. However, it is observed that the GSM companies operating in Nigeria provide substandard services in terms of poor reception, poor connectivity, and excessive call rates as at year 2008 which have heightened customers' dissatisfaction and complaints. It has also been observed that each of the three GSM companies operating in Nigeria as at year 2008 strived to distinguish itself by providing better quality services though not in a sustainable manner but all in a bid to meet up with quality standards and attract or retain profitable customer.

Consumers are the best determinant of a service quality in any given industry (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985; Cronin and Talyor, 1992). Consequently, Rana (2009) measures the service quality of the educational sector in Pakistan using students' customers; Qin, Prybutok, Knipper and Hossain (2010) investigate the determinants of customer-perceived service quality in fast-food restaurants in U.S.A; Oyeniyi (2009) examines the service quality of General System for Mobile (GSM) in South-western Nigeria using students; and Abdullahi (2009) assessed the service quality of telecommunication industry in Abuja, Nigeria.

Since there are many GSM service providers in Nigeria, the quality of the GSM telecommunication services by different companies can hardly be the same. Consumers are likely to have differing or varying perceptions of the GSM service quality of the three major GSM service providers in Kaduna metropolis as at 2008. Thus, this study evaluates the service quality of the GSM companies operating in Kaduna metropolis through their customers. Specifically, the objectives of the study are twofold. First, the study assesses consumers' perception of GSM networks' service quality; and second, to identify the GSM company that has highest perceived service quality.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Service Quality

Suuroja (2003) observes that the traditional conceptualizations of service quality are based on the disconfirmation paradigm in which perceived quality is viewed as result of comparing particular performance with some kind of a standard. Based on this paradigm, Grönroos (1984_a) define service quality as the "outcome of an evaluation process, where the customers compare their expectations with the service they have received." In the same manner, Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) define service quality as "a function of the difference between expectation and performance along the quality dimensions."

According to Grzanic (2007), there are two basic approaches adopted in measuring quality service of a service firm: technical approach and non-technical approach. The technical approach are product/production oriented and emphasizes on standardization of services thereby impeding or minimizing the influence of the personnel that are directly involved in providing a service. This approach enhances efficiency but is contradictory to the aspirations of the consumers who expect service firms to treat them as individual people with marked personal tenderizes and expectations (Grzanic, 2007).

The non-technical approach is consumer oriented. Here, expectations are the basis for satisfaction. Hence, after consuming services, consumers usually compare their early expectations with experience or perception and the result can range from satisfaction to

dissatisfaction. In line with this approach, Green, Chakrabarty and Whitten (2007) contend that service quality is what the customer perceives while receiving services from the provider. Chakrabarty (2006) corroborates that service quality can be understood as how best an organization conforms to the requirements of its customers, and satisfies them in various aspects of the delivery of service.

2.2 Models and Dimensions of Service Quality

Service quality is not viewed in literature as a separate construct, but rather as an aggregate of several dimensions or components (Suuroja, 2003). But there is no general agreement either about the nature or content of the dimensions.

To Grönroos (1984_a), the customers' perceptions of the service process are divided into two dimensions: technical quality and functional quality. The former refers to the outcome dimension – what the customer receives, the latter has to do with the process dimension- how the service is taken care of and how the service provider functions. Image of a company at a local level, serves as a filter that influences quality perceptions either favourably, neutrally, or unfavourably, depending on whether the customer considers the service provider as good, neutral, or bad (Grönroos, 2000).

On the part of the Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991), service quality is in three dimension: physical quality, interactive quality, and corporate quality. The physical quality includes the physical environment and instruments (as tableware in restaurants); interactive quality is derive mainly from whether the service provider's interaction style fits in with the customer's participation style; while corporate quality is mainly the evaluation of corporate image. These dimensions can be considered as the basic source of quality in a service company.

According to Lovelock and Wirtz (2004), the most extensive research into quality is strongly user or consumer oriented. According to Lovelock and Wirtz (2004), Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (1996) identify ten criteria consumers use in evaluating service quality. These are Credibility (trustworthiness, believability, and honesty of the service provider); Security (the elimination of fear, danger, risk or doubt from the consumers); Access (making the service providers and equipment available, reachable and approachable); Communication (listening to consumers and keeping them informed in a language they can understand); Understanding the customer (striving to know customers and their needs); Tangibles (the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials); Reliability (ability of the company and its employees to perform the promised service dependably and accurately); Responsiveness (willingness of the service company employees to help customers and provide prompt service); Competence (the extent to which the company employees possess the required skills and knowledge to perform and deliver services to consumers); and Courtesy (politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of contact personnel).

In their subsequent research, Zeithaml *et al.* (1993) found a high degree of correlation among several of these variables and so consolidated them into five broad dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2004). Based on the above named five factors/dimensions, the researchers developed the 22-item SERVQUAL scale (Kotler and Keller, 2006). SERVQUAL is an instrument that measures service quality as a computable gap between customers' expectations about the service and their actual evaluation of that service in five dimensions (Suuroja, 2003). According to Palmer (2005), measures of services quality (via disconfirmation or SERVQUAL model) can be derived quite simply by subtracting expectation scores from perception scores. He added that the scores can be weighted

to reflect the relative importance of each aspect of service quality. Subsequently, the SERVQUAL result can be used to identify those components or facets of a service for which the company is particularly good or bad. It can also be used to monitor service quality over time, to compare performance with that of competitors, to compare performance between different branches within a company, or to measure customer satisfaction with a particular service industry generally. In addition, an organization or industry group can use the information collected using SERVQUAL model to improve its position by acting upon the result and seeking to surpass customers' expectations on continuous basis (Palmer, 2005). However, it could be argued that the expectation-perception results, along with demographic data, may facilitate effective customer or market segmentation. Palmer (2005) affirms that, by this approach, a service is deemed to be of high quality when consumers' expectations are confirmed by subsequent service delivery. The critiques of SERVQUAL model pointed out that expectation may not exist or be clear enough in the respondents' minds to act as a benchmark against which perception is assessed (see: Iacobucci *et al.*, 1995). Kahneman and Miller (1986) argue that expectations are only formed as a result of previous service encounters, thus, perception feed directly into expectations. There is also the practical difficulty in measuring customer's expectations. Palmer (2005:268) argues:

Ideally, expectations should be measured before a service has been consumed. However, in reality, this is often not practical, so researchers are likely to record expectations retrospectively. The danger here is that stated expectations may be influenced by subsequent performance of service delivery, making the retrospective measure of expectations fairly meaningless.

Owing to the aforementioned weaknesses of the SERVQUAL model, an alternative model Service Performance (SERVPERF) was propounded by Cronin and Taylor (1992). While using SERVPERF model, service quality is determined by simply asking customers to rate the performance of a service. In other words, SERVPERF lay emphasis on measuring service quality after it (a service) has been consumed by the customers.

Both SERVQUAL and SERVPERF models are generic measurement tools that can be applied across a broad spectrum of service industries. They have been applied in their original and modified form to different service fields: hotel (Grzinic, 2007), vehicle repairs (Miguel *et al.* 2007), telecommunication (Oyenyi, 2009), education (Rana, 2009), restaurants (Qin *et al.* 2010), banking (Padhy *et al.* 2009), and library (Satish, 2009).

Miguel, Terra da Silva, Chiosini and Schutzer (2007) captured several alternative models proposed by authors like Gronroos (1984_b); Bolton and Drew (1991); Cronin and Taylor (1992); and Teas (1993). These models are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Models for measuring service quality

Author	Model	Main Characteristics	Application
Gronroos (1984 _b)	There is no mathematical representation	Quality is function of expectations, outcome and image	Different types of services
Parasuraman, <i>et al.</i> (1985, 1988)	SERVQUAL ($Q_i = P_i - E_i$)	22-item scale using quality dimensions	Different types of services
Brown and Swartz (1989)	$Q_i = E_i - D_i$	Use 10 quality dimensions defined by Parasuraman <i>et al.</i> (1985)	Different types of services

Author	Model	Main Characteristics	Application
Bolton and Drew (1991)	Assessment model of service and value. There are many equations representing the model.	Use 4 dimensions developed by Parasuraman <i>et al.</i> (1988) and introduce the concept of value for quality assessment	Telephone services
Cronin and Taylor (1992)	SERFPERF $Q_i = P_i$	Use 5 quality dimensions defined by Parasuraman <i>et al.</i> (1988)	Different type of services
Teas (1993)	Model of ideal performance $Q_i = \sum w_i [P_i - I_i]$	Use 5 quality dimensions defined by Parasuraman <i>et al.</i> (1988)	Retail stores

Source: Miguel, P.A.C, Terra da Silva, M., Chiosini, E.L. and Schutzer, K. (2007).

2.3 Previous Studies

Studies committed to assessment of service quality of the private and public sectors or governmental organizations are handy. Nimsomboon and Nagata (2003) revealed in their study that all the attributes of service quality did not meet the users' expectation of a public university in Japan. Pillay (2004) empirically evaluated the service quality of an educational institution and found high expectations among students as against moderate perceptions, suggesting absence of service quality in the College. Satish (2009) measured the service quality of a public library in United Kingdom (UK) using SERVQUAL model and discovered that the library failed to match customers' experience with their anticipation and expectation in all dimensions, which portrays that service quality is severely lacking in the library.

An attempt to evaluate the service quality of public banks in Indian by Padhy and Swar (2009) revealed that the customers judge the reliability and responsiveness dimensions of service quality as poor. The study further revealed that both the rural and urban customers perceived the 'courtesy' dimension of the banks' service quality as poor, while the urban customers adjudged the 'tangibility' aspects of the public banks' service quality as superior. In their study, Talib and Ali (2007) established that the existence of service quality in the public sector is responsible for overall positive performance of local authorities in Malaysia.

3. Methodology

This study surveyed perceptions of consumers about the quality of service offered by GSM companies. The population of the study comprises of employees in the private and governmental organization within Kaduna metropolis; the employees constitute major subscribers and users of GSM products. The justification for using employee as the population of the study is the fact that employees are singular consumer group with sustainable income that influence regular patronage and subscription to different GSM services, which avail them the opportunities to assess the service quality of different GSM companies.

A closed-ended questionnaire containing SERVPERF scale adopted from Cronin and Taylor (1992) was designed and distributed to 500 employees working with private and public organizations within Kaduna metropolis; the employees were purposively sampled. The justification for using 500 employees is twofold: first, the workforce population of the organizations covered by the study was not officially released to the researcher which made it impossible to estimate sample size using a formula; second, related studies in Nigeria used fewer

sample size. Like the research conducted by Olukotun, Jame and Olorunfemi (2013) used purposive research design to sample 300 undergraduate and postgraduate students of Kogi State while investigating the impact of introducing GSM services in students' expenditure pattern. In examining factors influencing attitudes of patronage of GSM services, Ogwu and Sunny (2012) sampled 308 university lecturers in South-South Nigeria. Christen and Essien (2016) assessed customer satisfaction with GSM service quality in Cross River State using 300 sampled GSM subscribers. Similarly, Nwakanma, Udunwa, Anyiam, Nkwunna, Obasi and Bubagha (2018) sampled 378 subscribers of GSM in Imo State in a bid to determine factors influencing telecommunication subscribers' decision to port among network providers in Nigeria.

The SERVPERF scale was used in measuring service quality of each of the 3 GSM companies: Glo, Mtn and Zain. The SERVPERF measures services quality using 5 dimensions - reliability, tangibility, assurance, empathy and responsiveness – and 5 point Likert scale that ranges from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Each of the dimensions has series of questions raised under it and totaled 22 items for the five dimensions (see appendix).

The sampled GSM consumers that patronize any of the three GSM companies – Glo, Mtn or Zain – were identified. For those who subscribe to multiple GSM networks, only the network they use most frequently was considered. Finally, service quality index for Glo, Mtn and Zain was computed from the averages of the five (5) service quality dimensions as thus:

$$SQ \text{ index} = (Rb + Tg + As + En + Re) \div 5 \dots\dots\dots 1$$

Where:

SQ = Service quality

Rb = Reliability

Tg = Tangibility

As = Assurance

En = Empathy

Re = Responsiveness

Based on the suggestion of Cronin and Taylor (1992) and subsequent adoption by Fogarty, Catts and Follin (2000), Pervez (2005), and Grzinic (2007), the following criteria were employed in ascertaining state of service quality of the GSM companies:

1. Mean value of < 2.00 or 40% = poor service quality
2. Mean score of ≥ 2.00 (40%) but < 3.50 (70%) = moderate service quality
3. If sample mean is ≥ 3.50 but ≤ 5.00 , Rb, Tg, As, En, and Re (or SQ) is good, high or satisfactory

The Social Science Statistical Package (SPSS) version 17 was used to process the data descriptively. Both SERVQUAL and SERVPERF descriptive statistics inclined.

4. Results

The result of data analysis is presented under the following thematic headings:

4.1 Bio-data of the respondents

Out of 500 copies of questionnaire distributed, only 409 useable copies representing 81.8% were returned. All the returned copies of the instruments were found usable for data analysis.

The sex distribution of the respondents is 60.9% males and 39.1% females. Majority of the respondents (167 or 40.8%) are within the age group 28 – 37 years, followed by those in the age

group 18 – 27 years (97 or 23.7%), while 95 or 23.2% are within the age bracket 38 – 47 years. Fewer respondents amounting to 42 or 10.3% and 8 or 2% are within the age groups 48 – 57 years and 57 years and above, respectively.

As regards the marital status of the respondents, analysis revealed that 254 or 62.1% are married, 138 or 33.7% are single, 11 or 2.7% are widowed, while the remaining 6 or 1.5% are divorced. Furthermore, majority of the respondents (229 or 56%) have higher-level education (Bachelor, Masters or Ph.D degrees), 129 or 31.5% have medium-level education (NCE or ND), while 51 or 12.5% have low-level education (SSCE, NECO or NABTEB).

The respondents were also classified on the basis of income group. Results of the analysis revealed that majority of the respondents (257 or 62.8%) earned N50,000 or less monthly, followed by 112 or 27.4% who earned between N51,000 and N100,000 monthly. The respondents in the N101,000 - N150,000 earning bracket are 22 or 5.4%, while those earning N150,000 and above monthly are only 8 or 4.4%.

4.2 Consumers' patronage of GSM networks

In an attempt to classify respondents based on their patronage of GSM networks, data analysis revealed that majority of the respondents (215 or 52.6%) patronized MTN, followed by Zain (133 or 32.5%), and only 61 or 14.9 respondents patronized Glo (see appendix).

4.3 Perceived service quality of GSM networks

Table 2 shows that each of the service quality dimensions have sample grand mean greater than 3.50 for the Glo, Mtn and Zain GSM networks. Specifically, Glo, MTN and Zain network has a sample mean of 3.822, 3.629 and 3.719 respectively, which indicates that services quality for the three networks is good or satisfactory from the consumers' perception. However, the consumers' perception of the service quality of the 3 GSM networks are not the same; Glo network is perceived to have higher and better service quality than Zain, while both Glo and Zain networks exceed Mtn network in service quality. Overall, the service quality of the three GSM companies is 3.723 or 74%. This means that consumers' perception of GSM industry's service quality in Kaduna metropolis is good and satisfactory.

Table 2: Consumers Perception of Glo, Mtn and Zain Networks Service Quality

Service Quality Dimensions	GSM Networks			SQ Dimension (SUM)	SQ Dimension (Grand Mean)	Ranking
	Glo	MTN	Zain			
Reliability	3.866	3.57	3.672	11.106	3.702	4 th
Tangibility	3.813	3.773	3.795	11.381	3.794	2 nd
Assurance	3.898	3.723	3.775	11.396	3.799	1 st
Empathy	3.840	3.624	3.714	11.178	3.726	3 rd
Responsiveness	3.695	3.453	3.640	10.788	3.596	5 th
GSM SQ (sum)	19.112	18.143	18.594	55.849	18.617	
GSM NW SQ (Grand mean)	3.822	3.629	3.719	11.17	3.723*	
Ranking	1 st	3 rd	2 nd			

Source: Field Survey, 2008.

Furthermore, the reliability dimension is perceived to have the greatest quality (grand mean [GM] = 3.799 or 75.9%), followed by tangibility (GM = 3.794 or 75.8%), empathy (GM = 3.726 or

74.5%), reliability (GM = 3.702 or 74%), and responsiveness (GM = 3.596 or 71.9%). In sum, the dimensions of GSM service quality are rated 'satisfactory' (GM = 3.723 or 74%).

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The study examined the service quality of GSM networks in Kaduna metropolis. The study found that consumer perception of GSM networks' service quality in Kaduna metropolis is good and satisfactory. This result is apparently consistent with the findings of Abdullahi (2009) that consumer perception of service quality of GSM operators in Abuja metropolis is high. Similarly, Oyeniyi (2009) finds that consumers' perception of GSM and CDMA services in Ota exceeded their expectations, which confirms the possible existence of high service quality. In addition, a study by Pervez (2005) finds that consumers' perception of service quality of GrameePhone (a telecommunication company in Bangladesh) was high.

Comparatively, the consumers perceived the service quality of Glo network to be higher, followed by Zain, and then MTN. None the less, the consumers' patronize MTN network more than other networks perhaps because the company has the widest network coverage and they are the oldest in the market. Managing the widest network as well as largest number of consumers could explain the reasons why MTN is lagging behind by other networks in terms of service quality.

The study also established that each of the service quality dimensions – tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy - is rated 'satisfactory'. This result is similar to the findings of Oyeniyi (2009) that the assurance attribute of Glo and MTN networks was seen as having high service quality; the reliability attribute of MTN network has high service quality; and the reliability and responsiveness attributes of the GSM companies have high service quality.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Owing from the research findings, the study concluded that consumers' perception of the service quality of GSM telecommunications in Kaduna State is high and satisfactory. Their perception of Glo, MTN and Zain network service quality in the State was equally high and satisfactory. There was also high level of service quality perception for the reliability, tangibility, assurance, empathy, and responsiveness dimensions across the State.

Consequently, the following recommendations are made. First, the GSM operators should strive to sustain their current level of service quality in the short run, but should also strive to improve their service quality components in the long run so that customers perception of their service quality will improve from high to very high, or from satisfactory to very satisfactory. Palmer (2005) cautioned that maintaining the current customers' level of perceived quality is insufficient if their expectations have been raised over time. This suggests that, it is not good enough for the GSM operators to simply maintain their existing level of service quality, because consumers' expectations are likely to move on. Secondly, the companies should lay emphasis on improving the service quality of reliability and responsiveness dimensions because they have the least average score.

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Appendix 2: Profile of the respondents			
Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	249	60.9
	Female	160	39.1
	Total	409	100
Age group	18 – 27 years	97	23.7
	28 – 37 years	167	40.8
	38 - 47 years	95	23.2
	48 – 57 years	42	10.3
	57 years and above	8	2.0
	Total	409	100
	Marital status	Single	138
	Married	254	62.1
	Divorced	6	1.5
	Widowed	11	2.7
	Total	409	100
Geopolitical zone	North	327	80
	South	82	20
	Total	409	100
Highest educational qualification	Low-level edu. (SSCE/NECO/NABTEB)	51	12.5
	Medium-level edu. (NCE/ND)	129	31.5
	Higher-level edu. (Bachelor degree/Masters/PhD)	229	56.0
	Total	409	100
Income	Less than N50,000	257	62.8
	N51,000 - N100,000	112	27.4
	N101,000 – N150,000	22	5.4
	N150,000 and above	18	4.4
	Total	409	100
Sector	Private	292	71.4
	Public	117	28.6
	Total	409	100

Source: Field survey, 2009.