



## CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT IN THE NIGERIAN TELECOMMUNICATION INDUSTRY

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study examined “Customer Satisfaction and Complaints Management in the Telecommunication Industry in Nigeria”. Specifically, it aimed at finding out the extent to which customers are satisfied or dissatisfied with the services provided by mobile telecommunication operators and to find out the level of customer satisfaction with the ways telecommunication firms handle their complaints. To achieve the objectives of the study, five telecommunication firms were chosen. The research instrument (questionnaire) was administered on a total of five hundred (500) randomly selected customers of MTN, GLOBACOM, Airtel, 9mobile, and Multi-links. Data obtained were coded and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as the frequency tables, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and the t-test for the difference between two population means. The sampling technique used in the study was the multistage cluster sampling. The findings from the research revealed that the proportion of customers who are satisfied with the services provided by mobile telecommunication firms is the same as those that are dissatisfied. It was thus recommended that telecommunication service providers should take bold steps to improve on their services in order to enhance customer satisfaction as this is key to achieving growth and profitability.*

**KEYWORDS:** Customer Satisfaction, Complaints Management, Telecommunication Industry, Nigerian



## INTRODUCTION

Irrespective of how organizations strive to achieve service excellence, it is inevitable that sometimes there will be unhappy customers. This is why it is important to have a system in place to handle customers' complaints. Complaints offer businesses an opportunity to correct immediate problems. In addition, complaints frequently provide constructive ideas for improving products, adapting marketing practices, upgrading services, or modifying promotional materials and product information.

“While occasional problems with the services of an organization are, to some extent, inevitable, dissatisfied customers are not” (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). Companies can learn to recover from mistakes. A good recovery strategy can turn angry and frustrated customers into loyal ones. Recognizing the importance of responding fairly and efficiently to customer disappointment, many organizations have established effective and innovative systems for resolving consumers' complaints. Companies with a positive philosophy, who have a reputation for their ability to manage customers' complaints and are able to retain them, have a competitive edge (Kessler & Sheila, 2003).

Careful complaint management can save organizations' unwanted costs. For example, negative publicity from dissatisfied customers could lead to loss of revenue and necessitate additional investment in advertising to attract lost customers or replace them. Complaints and complaint trends tell an organization how to do its job better by alerting the management to problems that need prompt attention and correction. Furthermore, they indicate long-range opportunities for product/service innovation and problem prevention.

This study is concerned with the ways in which telecommunication organizations handle complaints in order to enhance customer satisfaction and retention.

### Statement of Problem

It appears that quite a large number of customers are dissatisfied with the services provided by Nigerian telecommunication operators and the result of this is the rising cases of complaints from these increasing numbers of dissatisfied clients. According to Adekeye (2008), poor voice quality, frequency of drop calls and frequent congestion at peak periods have been the bane of telecommunications services in the country. These failures combine to reduce customers' satisfaction and make them unable to receive value for money.

Notwithstanding the apparent prevalence and magnitude of this problem, there has been little or no systematic study of the phenomenon in Nigeria in order to determine the extent of customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and how service providers in the industry strive to cope with customers' complaints.

This research study was therefore conceived to specifically examine the extent to which customers are satisfied or dissatisfied by the services of the telecom service provider and to examine the level of customer satisfaction with the way telecommunication firms handle their complaints.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Concept of Customer Satisfaction

Berkman and Gilson (2016) stated that customer satisfaction is recognized as being of great importance to all commercial organizations because of its influence on repeat purchase behaviour and word-of-mouth recommendations. In general terms, customer satisfaction is seen as the essential determinant of business success (Moore et al., 1998). On the other hand, with the increase of competition, customer satisfaction has been identified as a determinant of market share, return on investment and cost reduction (Burch et al., 2015).

Nauman (2015) referred to several studies that found that it costs about five times as much in time, money and resources, to attract a new customer as it does to retain an existing customer. This creates the challenge of maintaining high levels of service, awareness of customer expectations and improvement in service and products. Satisfaction reinforces positive attitudes toward the product/service, leading to a greater likelihood that the same product/service will be purchased again and that dissatisfaction leads to negative product/service attitude and lessens the likelihood of using the product/service again (Assae, 2017).

### Dimensions of Customer Satisfaction

Sureshchanadar et al. (2012) emphasized in a study that customer satisfaction is a multi-dimensional construct as is quality. Taylor and Baker (2014) also concluded that service quality and customer satisfaction are separate constructs. Whilst satisfaction indicates the state of a customer's psyche, quality refers to the state of a business' resources and efforts. Whitely (2011) differentiated product and service quality by defining the former as "What you get" and the latter as "How you get it". This is in agreement with Gronroos' (1990) two-dimensional aspects of service quality (technical quality—the quality of what is delivered, and the functional quality—the quality of how the service is delivered). Though customer satisfaction could be seen as the outcome of the difference between customers' perception and expectation of service quality, it should not be forgotten that factors such as price, packaging and situational factors such as the service encounter would also influence satisfaction.

### Magnitude of Satisfaction

According to Kotler and Keller (2006), customer satisfaction does not only prevent customer complaints but more importantly, it is meeting and even exceeding customers' expectations. The point is that 'no complaints or dissatisfaction' is not synonymous with 'customer satisfaction'. This view has its roots in the motivation theory of Herzberg Fredrick (1968). The mere fact that things do not go wrong and customers do not complain does not mean that they are satisfied with the product or service received. Conversely, customers can be dissatisfied with some things about an organization but satisfied with the organization's product or service offerings. Satisfaction is therefore holistic or total (Kotler & Keller, 2006) and can be in different magnitudes since customers can be extremely/very dissatisfied or dissatisfied. In this study, satisfaction is defined in both negative and positive magnitudes, from very satisfied to very dissatisfied.



## Principle for an Effective Complaint Handling System

Having a customer focused system that is visible and accessible, with a demonstrated commitment from the organization's management, will help to solve a lot of customer related problems. Ombudsman (2010) highlighted the principle to include:

- 1. Customer Focused:** The organization should be committed to effective complaint handling and value feedback through complaints.
  - Organizations should be open to feedback and committed to seeking appropriate resolution of complaints and addressing policy and process inadequacies highlighted by them. This commitment should be communicated to all members of staff, stakeholders and clients, for example through documents such as values statements or customer service standards.
  - Organizations should have a clearly communicated complaint handling process and a management that values the benefits of an effective complaint handling system and supports the process.
- 2. Visibility:** Information about how and where to complain should be well publicized to customers, staff and other interested parties.
  - Information about how and where to complain should be well publicized through a variety of service delivery points including publications, websites, at offices and at front counters.
  - Front-line staff should be aware of the complaint handling process and the contact details of the organization's complaint handling officer(s).
  - The information about how to complain should identify any appropriate alternative external parties the complainant can go to with their complaint.
- 3. Accessibility:** The process of making a complaint and investigating it must be easy for complainants to access and understand.
  - Complaints should be handled at no charge and this should be made clear in information provided about the complaint handling process.
  - Information about the complaint process should be available in a variety of forms of communication, formats and languages appropriate to the needs of the customer.
  - Complaints and all supporting documents provided during a complaint resolution or investigation process should be accepted in a number of different ways including in person, over the phone, and in writing via email, fax and letter, and, where appropriate, access to translating and interpreting services for non-English speaking people should be provided.
  - Complaint handling systems should be accessible to members of the public who may require additional assistance such as indigenous Nigerians, children and young people, people living in regional and remote areas, people with disabilities and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.



## Responding to Complaints

"Complaints should be handled objectively and fairly with appropriate confidentiality, remedies should be provided where complaints are upheld and there must be a system for review for finalized complaints" (Ombudsman, 2010). Five steps were outlined which organizations must follow to respond to complaints:

**1. Responsiveness:** Complaints should be acknowledged in a timely manner, addressed promptly and according to order of urgency, and the complainant should be kept informed throughout the process.

- Guidance should be provided to the members of staff on how to respond to and prioritize complaints. They should be aware of internal complaint handling processes including how to assess complaints, which may be resolved quickly and those which require investigation.
- Complaints should be acknowledged promptly. Complainants and, if applicable, the person who is the subject of the complaint, should be kept informed of the progress and the outcome of the complaint.
- Complaints should be addressed promptly as matters of urgency and staff should be aware of any target timelines for resolving complaints.
- Complaint handling officers should be empowered to either resolve complaints or be aware of and have access to the person who has the authority to do so.
- Where appropriate, special arrangements for responding to particular client groups should be put in place, for example, indigenous Nigerians, children and young people, people living in regional and remote areas, people with disabilities and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Members of staff should be able to identify matters that may be of public interest disclosures and refer them to the appropriate process, and should refer any identified misconduct and corrupt behaviour to the Corruption and Crime Commission

**2. Objective and Fairness:** Complaints should be dealt with in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner. This will help to ensure that the complaint handling process is fair and reasonable. Unreasonable complainant conduct is not allowed to become a burden.

- Complaint handling officers should deal with all complaints on their merit in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner. They must ensure that any conflict of interest is declared.
- Complaint handling officers should ensure the complainant and, if applicable, the person who is the subject of the complaint, are given sufficient opportunities to present their position, to comment on any adverse findings and are provided with reasons for decisions on the outcome of the complaint.



- Complaint handling systems should have a review process in which the complaint handling officer's decision is reviewed by a suitably experienced colleague or superior before the complaint is finalized. There should also be an independent internal review or appeal process.
  - Officers receiving and handling complaints should receive appropriate guidance or training, including for dealing with unreasonable conduct by the complainant or the subject of the complaint.
- 3. Confidentiality:** Personal information related to complaints should be kept confidential.
- The personal information of the complainant and anyone who is the subject of a complaint should be kept confidential and only used for the purpose of addressing the complaint and any follow up action.
- 4. Remedy:** If a complaint is upheld, the organization should provide a remedy.
- Mechanisms should exist for enabling appropriate remedies to be provided when complaints are upheld and members of staff should be familiar with them.
  - Members of staff should be empowered to provide these remedies at the appropriate level, for example, some appropriate remedies may be provided by front-line staff.
  - Members of staff should be able to give the complainant reasons for decisions relating to remedies.
- 5. Review:** There should be opportunities for internal and external review and/or appeal about the organization's response to the complaint, and the complainants should be informed about these avenues.
- There should be an independent internal review or appeal process.

Details of external rights of review or appeal for unresolved complaints should be made available to complainants.

### **Complaints Investigation and Resolution Process**

Ombudsman (2010) is of the view that complaints should be dealt with promptly, courteously and in accordance with their urgency. The essential steps in investigating and resolving a complaint are:

1. **Assess the Complaint:** Clarify the issues of the complaint and what kind of resolution the complainant is seeking. If it is not a matter that can be handled by the complaints process, refer the complainant to a more appropriate process.
2. **Seek Resolution:** Where appropriate and possible, seek to achieve resolution. Where resolution is reached, document the agreed action. In this event, it may not be necessary to continue with the investigation unless there are systemic issues that require further examination outside the complaint process.
3. **Select the Appropriate Investigative Approach:** If the complaint is not resolved, determine what action is required, which may include options other than a formal



investigation. This can depend on factors such as statutory requirements which may apply to the nature of the issue and the likely outcome of the investigation. Where possible, complaints should be resolved without the need for a formal investigation.

4. **Plan the Investigation:** Define the issues to be investigated and develop an investigation plan.
5. **Ensure Proper Power and Authority:** Assess whether the complaint handling officer has the necessary powers to obtain evidence from relevant witnesses and to access relevant records. Ensure they have the authority to conduct the investigation, make a decision and resolve the complaint, or have access to a person who can make decisions and offer remedies.
6. **Obtain Evidence:** Carry out the investigation by gathering sufficient reliable information to enable the issue to be properly addressed by proving or disproving matters relevant to the issue being investigated taking into account all relevant information and no irrelevant information. At this stage, it may be necessary to refer any matters that may be misconduct or corruption to the Corruption and Crime Commission.
7. **Reconsider Resolution:** Consider whether resolution is now possible.
8. **Reporting and Recommendations:** Prepare a document setting out the complaint, how the investigation was conducted, relevant facts, conclusions, findings and recommendations. Recommendations could include remedies for the complainant, action to improve the organization's service delivery and action to address inappropriate conduct by an officer (e.g., through training, an appropriate disciplinary process or referral to an appropriate external authority).
9. **Decide on the Complaints and Action to Be Taken:** Refer the report to a person authorized to make a decision about the complaint and the action to be taken. After the decision is made, arrange implementation of the agreed action and follow up to confirm if the action occurs.
10. **Inform the Parties:** Upon completion of an investigation, the complainant (and, if applicable, the person who is the subject of the complaint) should be given:
  - Adequate reasons for any decision made
  - Any change or action that has resulted from the complaint
  - A remedy, where appropriate
  - Information on where to seek independent internal and external review.

#### **Possible Remedies That May Be Offered to Complainant**

- An apology
- Reconsideration of a decision
- Amending or retracting documentation (e.g., publications, media statements, web pages)



- An offer of non-financial assistance, as appropriate (e.g., providing information or contact details)
- Appropriate compensation for loss
- Changed policies or practices to prevent a recurrence
- Action to modify the behaviour of the staff member who the complaint was about, if applicable.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted the survey research design as necessary data for this study were elicited systematically from sampled customers of the five telecommunication companies: MTN, GLOBACOM, Airtel, 9mobile, and Multi-links.

The population of this study was made up of customers of telecommunication service providers in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State. The sample size consisted of 500 mobile telecommunications customers drawn from 5 out of the 12 wards in Oredo Local Government area of Edo State. These 500 sample respondents were chosen by selecting 10 streets randomly from each ward using the 2022 INEC register, which includes the name of Wards and the streets in each of the Local Government. Finally, simple random balloting was used to pick 10 houses in each of the 10 streets that represent each ward. Furthermore, a respondent was selected from each of the houses randomly chosen. This process was repeated till the 5 wards were covered. A total of 100 respondents were drawn from each ward, thereby making it a sample size of 500 respondents. Hence, the sampling technique for this study is the multistage cluster sampling.

The primary data for this study were collected using a questionnaire. The questions include those on personal background of the respondents, that is, age, gender, qualification, and sex. The other questions were drawn from the core subject matter of the research investigation (customers' satisfaction and complaints behaviour with respect to telecommunication services).

The question-response format of the questions in the core subject matter were of the five Likert-type scale with options ranging from Very Satisfied (5), Satisfied (4), through Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied (3), to Dissatisfied (2) and Very Dissatisfied (1). The questions, as is common with every Likert scale item, sought to ascertain the respondents' satisfaction and their perception of complaint management in the telecommunication industry. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 16 software was used to analyze the data collected. For quantitative analysis, descriptive and inferential statistics, which include frequency tables, means, standard deviation and percentages, were used to answer the research questions. Students' T-test and One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the hypothesis.





## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Complaints about the Services of Most Preferred Mobile Network

The results in table 1 show that the number of subscribers to MTN, Globacom, Airtel, 9mobile, and Multilinks who had complained about the services of their service providers were 234 (75.97%), 230 (79.86), 243 (83.51), 148 (78.72), and 29 (69.05) respectively. Their complaints bothered mainly on answer seizure rate, rate of prematurely terminated calls, and honesty in terms of billing (see Table 4.12).

**Table 1: Complaints about the services of Most Preferred Mobile Network**

	MTN	Globacom	Airtel	9mobile	Multilinks
Yes	234 (76%)	230 (80%)	243 (83.5%)	142 (78.%)	29 (69.1%)
No	74 (24%)	54 (20%)	48 (16.4%)	40 (22%)	13 (31.0%)
Total	308 (100%)	284 (100%)	291 (100%)	182 (100%)	100 (100%)

Source: Author's Fieldwork (2022)

**Table 2: Reasons for Complaint**

Reason for Complaint	MTN	Globacom	Airtel	9mobile	Multilinks
Answer seizure rate	41	53	46	22	6
Rate of prematurely terminated calls	65	69	72	38	8
Honesty in terms of Billing	128	108	125	82	15
Total	234	230	243	142	29

Source: Author's Fieldwork (2022)

**Table 3: Chi-Square Test for Relationship between Customers' Complaint and Their Most Preferred Network**

Test Statistic	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.6	4	0.07
Likelihood Ratio	8.4	4	0.08
Linear by Linear Association	0.095	1	0.08
Total Number of Valid Cases	1107		

Zero cells (0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.7.

The results in table 3 show that the Chi-square test was not significant since the asymptotic significant probability of 0.07 associated with the Chi-square statistic is not less than 0.05, the assumed level of significance. It is thus safe to conclude, at the 95% confidence level, that there is no relationship between customers' complaint status and their most preferred network.



### Extent of Satisfaction with Complaints Handling

The results in Table 4 reveal that out of 234 MTN subscribers who have complained about the services of their subscribed network, 111 (47.43%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the manner in which their complaints were handled while 84 (35.90%) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied and 39 (16.67%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. The corresponding figures for Globacom were 104 (45.21%), 89 (38.70%) and 37 (16.09%) for satisfied/very satisfied, dissatisfied/very dissatisfied and neither satisfied nor dissatisfied respectively; the figures for Airtel subscribers were 120 (49.38%), 83 (34.16%) and 40 (16.46%) for satisfied/very satisfied, dissatisfied/very dissatisfied and neither satisfied nor dissatisfied respectively; the figures for 9mobile were 69 (46.62), 65 (43.92) and 14 (9.46) for satisfied/very satisfied, dissatisfied/very dissatisfied, and neither satisfied nor dissatisfied respectively; while the figures for Multi-links were 14 (48.28%), 12 (41.38%) and 3 (10.34%) for satisfied/very satisfied, dissatisfied/very dissatisfied and neither satisfied nor dissatisfied respectively.

**Table 4: Extent of Satisfaction with Complaints Handling**

	MTN	Globacom	Airtel	9mobile	Multilinks
Very dissatisfied	25 (10.7%)	30 (13.04%)	28 (11.5%)	22 (14.9%)	5 (17.24%)
Dissatisfied	59 (25.2%)	59 (25.7%)	55 (22.6%)	43 (29.1%)	7 (24.14%)
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	39 (16.7%)	37 (16.1%)	40 (16.5%)	14 (9.5%)	3 (10.34%)
Satisfied	74 (31.6%)	69 (30%)	72 (29.6%)	40 (27%)	8 (27.59%)
Very satisfied	37 (15.8%)	35 (15.2%)	48 (19.8%)	29 (19.6)	6 (20.69%)
Total	234 (100%)	230 (100%)	243 (100%)	148 (100%)	29 (100%)
Satisfaction Index	3.17	3.09	3.23	3.07	3.10

**Table 5: Satisfied Vs Dissatisfied Customers**

#### Group Statistics

VAR00001	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
VAR0002 Satisfied	438	1.397	0.49	0.023
Dissatisfied	508	1.384	0.49	0.022



	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t.	df.	Sig. (2-tail)
Equal Variances Assumed	0.7	0.4	0.42	944	0.67
Equal Variances Not Assumed			0.42	921.9	0.67

	Mean Difference	Standard Error Difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
			Lower	Upper
Equal Variances Assumed	0.013	0.032	-0.049	0.076
Equal Variances Not Assumed	0.013	0.032	-0.049	0.076

The results in table 5 indicate that the total number of respondents who were either satisfied or dissatisfied with the services of their preferred networks was 946 (438+508), while 161 were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. The mean score obtained by respondents who were satisfied with the services of their most preferred network was 1.397 with a standard deviation of 0.49 and a standard error mean of 0.023. The corresponding values for respondents who were dissatisfied were 1.384, 0.49 and 0.022 for mean, standard deviation and standard error mean respectively, thus resulting in a mean difference of 0.0134. A t-test for equality of means revealed that this difference was not significant at the five percent (5%) level since the asymptotic significant probability associated with the t-test was 0.67, which is not less than 0.05. Consequently, the hypothesis is not rejected. We may thus conclude at the 95% confidence level that the proportion of customers who were satisfied with the services provided by the Nigerian telecom industry is the same as that which were dissatisfied (no difference between the two proportions).

## CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

The mean score obtained by respondents who were satisfied with the services of their most preferred network is 1.397 with a standard deviation of 0.49 and a standard error mean of 0.023. The corresponding values for respondents who were dissatisfied are 1.384, 0.49 and 0.022 for mean, standard deviation and standard error mean respectively, thus resulting in a mean difference of 0.0134. A t-test for equality of means revealed that this difference was not significant at the five percent (5%) level since the asymptotic significant probability associated with the t-test is 0.67, which is not less than 0.05. Consequently, the hypothesis is not rejected. We may thus conclude at the 95% confidence level that the proportion of customers who were satisfied with the services provided by the Nigerian telecom industry is the same as that which was dissatisfied (no difference between the two proportions).

Owing to the above, the proportion of customers who were dissatisfied can further be reduced significantly through conscious efforts at enhancing service quality by the management of the telecommunications service providers. Policy makers in government can also help to ensure



the realization of this objective by regulating the services of the service providers through the provision of minimum standards and insistence on compliance.

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