

## CUSTOMERS' PREFERENCE OF MOBILE PHONE SERVICE PROVIDERS IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *The objective of the study is to examine customers' preference for mobile phone service providers in Ekiti State. Survey research designed was adopted while a self developed structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Data was analysed using multiple regression analysis through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The significance levels were tested at 5%. Findings show that connectivity was considered most significant with customers' preference for mobile phone service providers in the state. Arising from finding, the study recommended that management of service providers should give more attention on improving their connectivity, relax their tariff rate and consistently scan the business environment to discover a particular marketing tool that gives desirable result. In ranking, the result shows that connectivity came first, followed by tariff rate and next was network coverage and finally quality of service.*

**KEYWORDS:** Customer's Preference, Mobile Phone Service Providers, Telecommunication, Connectivity, Tariff Rate

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### INTRODUCTION

The part mobile phone as a means of communication is playing in the life of individuals and organisations cannot be overemphasised, as such, hardly can anybody do without one cell phone or the other.

The origin of mobile phone services industry is recent and its growth in Nigerian market has been encouraging. Virtually all the adults and children own cell phone and many are using it as fashion object. Mobile phone services contribute significantly to the growth and development of the country whether industrial or emerging economy where they operate. In African markets (an emerging economy) for instance, the contribution to GDP was 4.2% in 2009 (Pyramid Research, 2010). Telecommunication has not only truly changed the economic life of the people, it has also lifted the standard of living of people, touched the heart of millions of people, and has assisted individuals and business people in making contacts and transactions. This is so because a significant number of the Nigerian population are already using the mobile phone services. For instance, Pyramid Research (2010) estimates that in 2009 the number of subscription was about 73million, and investments to the industry according to Juwah (2010) which was about \$50million in 1999 increased to \$18billion by the end of 2009. This robustness to return on investment of telecommunication business in Nigeria has attracted many business interests. The concept of marketing according to Assael (1998) deals with placing focus of any business people on the consumer who actually purchase what firms provide or produce. Therefore, the attitude of consumer must critically be taken into consideration in whatever market decision facing firms. This is because the

success and survival of firms depends on level of customer satisfaction. Since satisfied customer is a loyal customer, and a loyal customer is one who will prefer to maintain patronage of a service provider, there must exist many business practices of a particular provider not found in others. The big question for the individual operator is how to discover customers' needs, retain existing ones, reach out to new one with attractive packages and make them switch from their current service provider.

Studies such as Rajpourohit 2011, Oyatoye, Sulaimon, Adebisi, and Amole (2013), Tripathi and Singh (2012), Shah (2012), Olatokun and Nwonne (2012), Sathish, Kumar and Jeevanantham (2011) and Simsim, (2009) among others show that diverse reasons make customers choose particular mobile phone service providers. Therefore, this study focuses on examining why customers continue to show preference of a particular mobile phone service provider in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Ekiti State was created on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1996 out of Old Ondo State. It is situated in the heart of tropics, between Longitudes 4.5<sup>o</sup> east of the Greenwich Meridian and Latitudes 7.45<sup>o</sup> to 8.5<sup>o</sup> north of the Equator. The state is bounded in the north by Kwara and Kogi States, in the South and east by Ondo State and west by Osun State. It is composed of 16 Local Government areas with estimated population of about 2,384,212 million as at 2006 census. Notable towns among others are Ado-Ekiti, Ijero-Ekiti, Ikole-Ekiti, Iyin-Ekiti, Ilawe-Ekiti and Ikede-Ekiti. Ekiti People form one of the largest ethnic groups in Yorubaland. Ekitis speak Yoruba dialect known as Ekiti. Major occupations include farming and petty trading and the three main religious faiths are Christianity, Islam and Traditional.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The preferences of particular customer to specific mobile service provider depend largely on the level of satisfaction derived. Generally, satisfaction a customer derives from consuming a particular firm's product or service can be low, moderate, or above expectations, and either determines the choice of a particular customer in relating to one mobile phone service provider or others. Obviously, a service provider who is able not only to meet and exceed the expectation of customer in terms of satisfaction controls the lion share of the market and earn above normal profit. According to Rajpurohit and Vasita (2011), customer satisfaction is the level of a person's felt state resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance (outcome) in relation to the person's expectations. This means that satisfaction is the gap between what customer is currently enjoying as against its expectations. Adeleke and Aminu (2012) and Ogwo and Igwe (2012) studies of the determinants of customer loyalty and key factors influencing attitude to patronage in Nigeria's Global Systems Mobile (GSM) market identified four factors that influenced customers' satisfaction out of which service quality, customer service and corporate image were found to be significant while price was not significant because the value the users of mobile phone enjoy cannot be commensurate with their exchange value.

On the other hand, Butt and de Run (2009) study on modelling customer satisfaction in cellular phone services show that price and network coverage are the most influential factors and next on the rank was customer service and ease of usage. In the same vein, Ibok and George (2013) investigated customer satisfaction drive in the scramble for GSM brands in the Nigerian telecommunications industry. They indicated that network coverage was the most

influential factors that gives satisfaction to customers in GSM industry among other variables like call rate, promotion pack and call quality. From the study of Emerah, Oyedele and David (2013), it showed that courtesy and coverage area among other variables like customer care, call quality, billing cost were the only determinant of customers satisfaction in Nigerian telecommunications industry.

Implying from above, customers' satisfaction does not hang on a particular factor, mobile phone service providers need to find out what the constituents of customers' needs are and provide them. From the angle of Rajpurohit, *et al.*, (2011), call tariff and network coverage constitute major factors while customers opted for a particular mobile phone service providers. Their methodology includes both primary and secondary data, questionnaire, explanatory design and convenience random sampling. This was in consonance with Sathish, Kumar, Naveen and Jeevanantham (2011) and Oyatoye, Adebisi and Amole (2013) who upheld that call rate, network coverage and clarity of call play prominent role in the choice of customers for mobile phone service providers.

In another work, Olatokun and Nwonne (2012) revealed that by ranking, call rate is the most significant factor which is followed by service quality and service availability respectively. Furthermore, brand image was ranked the least factor that determines user's choice of mobile service providers in the Nigerian telecommunications market.

Hanif, Hafeez and Riaz (2010), in their study considered two variables (price fairness and customer services). Price fairness was considered the most important factor affecting customer satisfaction of the users of mobile phones ditto Simssim (200). The methodology was in consonance with aforementioned researchers.

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that call tariff, call rate, network coverage and clarity call are considered germane factors for customers' preference in their study area.

The outcome of Bhukya and Singh (2013) and Vaghela (2012) opposed the findings of aforementioned researchers. They were able to affirm in their ranking position that network coverage takes a lead followed by tariff plans and subsequently customer service. The methodology adopted include primary and secondary data questionnaire, convenience sampling technique while analysis was carried out through Chi-Square, SPSS Software and Simple percentage. Corroborating the above is Dadzie and Boachie-Mensah (2011) findings which show that network coverage was most significant to brand preference for mobile phone operator services in the Cape coast metropolis, followed by customer service and tariff respectively while brand image and brand communication ranked fifth and sixth factors.

Furthermore, Shah (2012) findings using explanatory research design, indicated that service quality and brand image, followed by service charge have been the most influential factors that stimulate consumer preferences for mobile service providers in the market. However, the findings of Adamu, Adeyosoye and Adewumi (n.d) and Mohammad, and Wajidi, (n.d) took a different position. In ranking, their studies showed that connectivity has the most influential capacity on consumer preferences for GSM network provider services in Nigeria and Quetta City than any other variables and this is followed by tariff and coverage respectively. This further demonstrated that there has been no consensus as to what actually lead to the customer's choice of a particular mobile phone service providers. From the literature, it can be rightly agreed upon that the customers' preference for particular mobile phone service provider varies by determinant variables from country to country, state to state and locality to

locality. While some researchers considered call rate, tariff or price as the most influential factors others do not.

### Research Hypotheses

- H0<sub>1</sub> Tariff (cost) does not influence customers' preference for mobile phone service providers
- H0<sub>2</sub> Availability of service does not influence customers' preference for mobile phone service providers
- H0<sub>3</sub> Quality of service delivery does influence customers' preference for mobile phone service providers
- H0<sub>4</sub> Connectivity does not influence customers' preference for mobile phone service providers

### METHODOLOGY

Survey research design was used in order to have a comprehensive overview of the variables under examination. Tariff, network coverage, quality service delivery and connectivity represent the independent variables (x); while customers' preference indicates dependent variable (y). Primary data was used while a self developed structured questionnaire was administered on the respondents. Five point Likert Scale ranging from 1 strongly disagreed, 2 disagreed, 3 undecided, 4 agreed and 5 strongly agreed was used to measure responses from respondents. Customers' preference was measured on tariff, net coverage, quality service and connectivity based on Rajpurohit, *et al.*, (2011), Bhukya, *et al.* (2013), Shah, (2012) and Adamu *et al.* (n.d) previous researched works. Multiple Regressions was used to analyse the strength associated among the variables. Hypotheses were tested at 5% level of significance.

### Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 140 respondents was drawn from the available mobile phone service providers operating in Ekiti state and questionnaires were administered on them. Out of these, 122 were filled and returned. Convenient sampling technique was used to select respondents from each of the service providers. The service providers include: Mtn, Glo, Etisalat, Visafone and Airtel.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1: Demographic variables distribution**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Rank in order of Preference</b>		
Mtn	42	34.42
Glo	28	22.95
Airtel	21	17.22
Etisalat	19	15.57
Visafone	12	9.84

<b>Average amount Spend</b>	12	9.83
Below 200	29	23.77
201-500	38	31.15
501-1000	43	35.25
Above 1000		
<b>Years of relationship</b>	15	12.29
Below 6months	33	27.05
6months-1year	31	25.41
1year-2years	43	35.25
2years and above		

Source: Field Survey 2013

Table 1, under ranking in order of preference for mobile service providers indicated that 34.42% opted for mtn, 22.95% for glo, 17.22% for airtel, 15.57% for etisalat and 9.84% for visafone. From the table, it can be affirmed that mtn was the choice of most of the customers in Ekiti state. Considering the average amount spent on recharge card, N1,000 and above have the highest value of 35.25% while 9.83% was considered the least value. These show that an average customers in the state used above N1,000 recharge card. Moreover, the years of relationship with any of the service providers show that customers with 2 years and above take the highest value of 35.25 while below 6 months have the least value. One can deduce that the longer relationship may be due to the satisfaction customers are derived from the service.

**Table 2 I choose my mobile service provider because of low tariff rate**

Valid	Frequency	Percentage (100)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagreed	14	11.48	11.48	11.48
Disagreed	17	13.93	13.93	25.41
Undecided	9	7.38	7.38	32.79
Agreed	59	48.36	48.36	81.15
Strongly Agreed	23	18.85	18.85	100
Total	122	100	100	

Source: Field Survey 2013

Table 2 shows the highest value of 48.36% agreed follow by strongly agreed value of 18.85% and undecided 7.38, next to this is 13.93% disagreed and 11.48% strongly agreed respectively. Considering the frequency table, it shows that customers' preference for mobile service actually based on the tariff rate in the state.

**Table 3: The network coverage prompted me to choose my mobile line.**

Valid	Frequency	Percentage (100)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagreed	6	4.92	4.92	4.92
Disagreed	8	6.56	6.56	11.48
Undecided	5	4.10	4.10	15.58

Agreed	64	52.46	52.46	68.04
Strongly Agreed	39	31.96	31.96	100
Total	122	100	100	

Source: Field Survey 2013

Table 3 indicates that customers in the state opted for the choice of their mobile cell phone because of availability of the network coverage. Looking at the table frequency, 52.46% the highest value agreed next is 31.96% strongly agreed, 4.92% strongly disagreed, 6.56% disagreed and 4.10% undecided respectively. One can deduce here that customers' preference for mobile service providers actually hang on the availability of the network coverage in the state capital.

**Table 4. Quality service of the mobile phone service providers propel me to opt for my mobile line**

Valid	Frequency	Percentage (100)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagreed	11	9.01	9.01	9.01
Disagreed	9	7.38	7.38	16.39
Undecided	7	5.74	5.74	22.13
Agreed	63	51.64	51.64	73.77
Strongly Agreed	32	26.23	26.23	100
Total	122	100	100	

Source: Field Survey 2013

The frequency analysis of table 4 revealed that 51.64% agreed, 26.23% strongly agreed, 9.01% strongly disagreed, 7.38% disagreed and 5.64% undecided. From the table analysis, it can be deduced that larger proportion of the customers' passion for mobiles service providers that give desirable or preferred satisfaction in term of their exchange value.

**Table 5 I opted for my mobile service providers because of their availability of efficient and effective connectivity.**

Valid	Frequency	Percentage (100)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagreed	12	9.84	9.84	9.84
Disagreed	9	7.38	7.38	17.22
Undecided	6	4.91	4.91	22.13
Agreed	62	50.82	50.82	72.95
Strongly Agreed	33	27.05	27.05	100
Total	122	100	100	

Source: Field Survey 2013

Table 5 revealed that customers with highest value of 50.82% agreed that the choice for their mobile service providers hang on reliable signal and next to this was 27.05% strongly agreed followed by 9.84% strongly disagreed, 7.38% disagreed and 4.91% undecided. The frequency result shows that ultimate reason of customers' preference for a particular service provider in the state capital was solely based on the strength of the network connectivity.

The analysis of regression result is in two folds. First, each of independent variable (i.e tariff rate, network coverage, quality of service and connectivity) was regress against the dependable variable of customers' preference. The second analysis of regression was carried out by taking the most significant dimension of each independent variable and regress them against the dependent variable i.e customers' preference. For regression tables, referred to appendis. From the first regression analysis on table 6 of tariff, rate was considered most significant with 0.000 at 5% with t value of 4.742 next to it is billing system with 0.000 at 5% significant level with t value of 4.031. While price package varieties product was considered insignificant with the value of 0.496 and 0.795 respectively at 5% level of significant. From the result analysis one can deduce that most customers opted for another service provider due to cost reduction of call rate.

Again, on table 7, the regression analysis result of network coverage indicate that effective signal was considered the most significant dimension with 0.000 at 5% level of significant with t value of 3.734. Next was ease credit loading and call clarity with 0.016 at 5% level of significant having t value of 2.442 and 0.042 at 5% level of significant with t value of 2.055. While coverage with the city and suburbs was not significant with 0.962 at 5% level of significant. From the result, it can be reasonably agreed upon that customers' preference for mobile service providers in most cases hang on the availability of service signal.

Another variable to be considered is quality of service on table 8. Under this, quick response to complaints with the highest t value of 3.096 and 0.002 at 5% was considered most significant. Next to this is reliable signal with value 0.007 at 5% level significant with t value of 2.755 while speed of solving problem and product/service varieties do not have any significant with value of 0.085 and 0.717 respectively at 5% level of significant. It can be deduced that the satisfaction customer derive from response to complaints and reliable signal dictate the customers' preference for mobile service providers.

From table 9, All dimension under the variable of connectivity were considered significant with value of 0.000 at 5% level of significant. While in t value ranking, internet facilities have the highest value of 6.813, quick delivery of sms 6.358, connectivity rate 5.700 and drop call 5.124. Considering the t value, one can deduce that availability of internet facilities prompt customers to switch over to another service provider

Moreover, table 10 revealed the robust result part of the regression analysis after regressing the most significant dimension of each of the independent variable i.e tariff, network coverage, quality service and connectivity against the dependent variable i.e customers' preference. From the result analysis, connectivity was considered the most significant with value of 0.000 at 5% level with highest t value of 5.403 next is tariff rate with value of 0.01 at 5% level of significant with t value of 3.387 while network coverage and quality of service were found insignificant with 0.556 and 0.666 at 5% respectively. In ranking, first to be considered is connectivity follow by tariff rate, next is network coverage and finally quality of service. This is consistent with Adamu, *et al* (n.d) and Mohammad, *et al* (n.d) research findings. The result further stressed that network coverage and quality of service with the value of 0.556 and 0.666 respectively were not significant with customers' preference for mobile phone service providers. One can rightly deduce from the result that customers in Ekiti state mostly Ado-Ekiti metropolis are particular about the high network connectivity than other variables factor. In a nut shell, availability of high network connectivity is considered the most determinant factor for chosen specific line of mobile phone service provider in the state.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

Looking at the communication business in Nigeria, particularly, Ekiti state it can be reasonably affirmed from the research study that customers in the state preferred mobile phone service providers with high connectivity at the expense of tariff rate, network coverage and quality of service. Therefore, service providers should concentrate more on giving high connectivity in order to maintain headship position of gaining the lion share of the market while working assiduously to improve on other variables.

### Recommendations

- i. It is recommended that mobile phone service providers should give more attention on improving their connectivity
- ii. Since reasonably number of customers in the state passion about low tariff rate therefore, concerted effort should be make by management to be flexible on the tariff
- iii. Management should consistently scan the business environment through listen to customers complaints or comments and comparison with competitors in the market to discover particular marketing tool that give desirable result.

### Implication of the Study to Management

Management can use the connectivity as a defensive and offensive marketing strategy to retain their customers while attracting competitors' customer. Another implication is that it revealed the specific strategy that can best be apply in Ekiti State since there is no consensus on specific factor influence customers' preference for mobile phone service providers.

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## APPENDIX 1

Table 6. Tariff rate

Model		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.818	.203		8.939	.000
	Rate	.170	.036	.386	4.742	.000
	Billing	.149	.037	.329	4.031	.000
	Affordance	.013	.048	.028	.260	.795
	Package	.033	.048	.072	.684	.496

a. Dependent Variable: Customers' Preference. Sig at 5%

Source: Author's computation from SPSS output.

Table 7. Network coverage

Model		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.786	.189		9.455	.000
	Signal	.146	.039	.307	3.734	.000
	Clarity	.102	.050	.214	2.055	.042
	Loading	.121	.050	.255	2.442	.016
	Suburbs	-.002	.043	-.004	-.047	.962

a. Dependent Variable: Customers' Preference. Sig at 5%

Source: Author's computation from SPSS output.

Table 8. Quality of service

Model		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.828	.222		8.243	.000
	Quickresponse	.131	.042	.260	3.096	.002
	Reliasig	.141	.051	.275	2.755	.007
	Solvprob	.087	.050	.173	1.736	.085
	Pdtvari	.017	.046	.031	.363	.717

a. Dependent Variable: Customers' Preference. Sig at 5%

Source: Author's computation from SPSS output.

**Table 9. Network connectivity**

Model		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>			t	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.549	.171		3.212	.002
	Connect	.210	.037	.376	5.700	.000
	Internet	.244	.036	.439	6.813	.000
	Quickdeli	.190	.030	.336	6.358	.000
	Dropcalls	.158	.031	.278	5.124	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customers' Preference. Sig at 5%

Source: Author's computation from SPSS output.

**Table 10. Combination of the variables**

Model		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>			t	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.729	.269		6.417	.000
	Tariff	.168	.050	.274	3.387	.001
	Netcoverage	.166	.281	.263	.590	.556
	Qualityservice	.118	.273	.193	.433	.666
	Connectivity	.275	.051	.441	5.403	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customers' preference. Sig at 5%

Source: Author's computation from SPSS output.