

Customer Service Experience and Satisfaction in the Mobile Telecom Industry

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ABSTRACT

South Africa's mobile telecom industry serves a highly saturated market that is challenged by factors such as fierce competition, high inflation rates, and the detrimental effects of load shedding. Against this backdrop of intensifying challenges, it is concerning to note that customer service experience and satisfaction within the industry are also declining. Consequently, mobile telecom providers should adopt a value-added approach to customer service in an effort to differentiate them from other industry rivals.

This research, therefore, focuses on investigating mobile telecom customers' service quality experiences and satisfaction, with the goal of gauging the extent to which service quality influences customer satisfaction insofar as to propose effective approaches for amelioration.

The research utilised a quantitative descriptive research design to collect the empirical data using computer and self-administered questionnaires from 300 South African mobile telecom users. Non-probability convenience sampling was used to select respondents. A standard multiple regression analysis was conducted to uncover the influence of respondents' service quality experience on their satisfaction with their mobile telecom provider.

Based upon the results, it can be advised that to achieve customer satisfaction, mobile telecom providers should focus on providing reliable customer service, by ensuring that they fulfil their customer service promises, follow up with their customers, improve their complaints handling procedures, and ensure that customers' expectations are met. Mobile telecom providers should also be empathetic in their service delivery process, which can be achieved by offering personalised and/or customised services, informing customers of potential service interruptions, having employees available to assist customers (considering the customer's working and socialising hours), and keeping customers informed of their operating hours.

Keywords: Customer service; Service quality experience; Customer satisfaction; Mobile telecommunication



1 INTRODUCTION

The mobile telecom industry stands out as one of the fastest-growing industries worldwide (Kilaba & Manasseh, 2020:29). However, the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a considerable strain on SA's telecom infrastructure. With employees required to work remotely, the telecom industry had to increase its broadband capacity promptly. The industry is further challenged with the detrimental effects of load shedding – affecting service delivery, impeding reception, and increasing operational costs – which diminishes the profit margins of providers already competing in a highly saturated market (Deloitte, 2022:3). Consequently, the industry is faced with the challenge of overcoming various challenges which include, inter alia, network congestion, safeguarding customer information, constant technological advancements, and exponential growth (MarketLine, 2018:7).

Besides these challenges, the mobile telecoms industry is also subjected to changes in customers' preferences and behaviours (MarketLine, 2022:19). Against this backdrop of intensifying challenges, it is concerning to note that customer service in the telecom industry has been classified as “a highly negative area”, with unreliable and slow response rates driving one in every four service-related complaints (Deloitte, 2021:19). As a result of these changes, it is of prodigious importance for mobile telecom providers to ensure that they maintain their competitiveness. Jahan *et al.* (2019:76) mentioned that the competitive positions have developed among the mobile phone manufacturers through the varied marketing strategy and aggressive advertising. As competition has intensified, customer satisfaction becomes more and more important. Thus, the survival of any business lies in the relationship between the business and its customers with customer satisfaction playing a major role in attracting new customer and retaining current customers.

According to Adamu (2017:2), the customer forms the most essential asset of a business. If customer interactions are managed effectively (through quality customer service delivery), the business can benefit from the long-term implications of the satisfied customer. Customer satisfaction is a key performance indicator of business success and is instrumental in building loyalty, retaining customers, and increasing profits. Previous research established that customers' satisfaction (in service settings) is influenced by the quality of their service experiences (Bayad *et al.*, 2021; Ramamoorthy *et al.*, 2018). Existing literature (Afroz, 2019:145; Cant, 2018:40) asserts that, in order to understand customers' service experience, the five dimensions of service quality (i.e., tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) need to be considered. This is because if a customer of a mobile telecom business is satisfied with the quality of the service received, they will have a stronger inclination to engage with the provider and communicate positively about their experiences, ultimately enhancing the competitive advantage and sustainability of the business (Al Idrus *et al.*, 2021:933). As such, mobile telecom providers should evaluate their customer service insofar as to optimise customer satisfaction and differentiate themselves from rivals.

When a business wants to be successful and to gain a competitive advantage the identification of antecedents of customer satisfaction is indispensable (Leninkumar, 2019:62). Service providers of mobile telecoms in SA should concentrate on customer satisfaction and its antecedents to develop a base of loyal customers (Mudanganyi *et al.*, 2019:32). As such, mobile telecom providers should continuously assess their product and service offerings in order to improve their customers' satisfaction. In the modern business environment, service businesses (including mobile telecom providers) are faced with the challenge of continuously improving of the quality of service. Regardless of the industry, it is imperative that businesses recognise the important role that customers play in the value chain (Dejan, 2020:12). The primary product that is offered by mobile telecom providers relates to telecommunication services and as such investigating the quality of the customer service provided by these providers are necessary. Hence, this study focuses on investigating the quality of customer service, as experienced by customers in relation to their satisfaction with a mobile telecom provider.

2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Despite the growth of the mobile telecoms industry in South Africa, customer dissatisfaction with these service providers persists. This dissatisfaction is amplified by unsatisfactory customer service, an evolving market landscape, heightened competition and limited research addressing the industry's specific service quality and satisfaction concerns. Regardless of the fast-growing rate in the mobile telecoms industry in South Africa, comprehensive research on customer service and customer satisfaction lags, as limited research have been conducted since 2002 (Shava, 2021:70). Thus, to address the problem of customer dissatisfaction (resulting from unsatisfactory customer service), this research investigates mobile telecom customers' service quality experiences and satisfaction, with the goal of gauging the extent to which service quality influences customer satisfaction so that effective approaches for amelioration can be proposed.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Providing quality customer service is of vital importance for a mobile telecom provider, as it increases the service provider's profitability by ensuring that customer satisfaction is maximised (Hanaysha, 2016:679). The following literature discussion commences with an overview of mobile telecommunication in South Africa. Thereafter, insight into the concept of customer service is provided whereafter customers' service quality experience and satisfaction are discussed.

3.1 MOBILE TELECOMMUNICATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

In order to investigate customers' service quality experiences and their satisfaction with a mobile telecom provider, to propose effective approaches for the amelioration thereof, an overview of the mobile telecom industry is necessitated. The mobile telecom industry is concerned with the provision of communication services for mobile (i.e., cellular) devices (Lioudis, 2018). According to MarketLine (2018:11), these communication services can be segmented into voice and internet channels.

The mobile telecom industry faces further challenges such as a decline in revenues from the voice segment, fierce industry rivalry, technological advances, fluctuating market dynamics, reduced barriers of entry, and high inflation (MarketLine, 2018:7; Plunkett (2014:7-9).

However, amidst the above-mentioned challenges, certain opportunities do present itself in the industry, which includes a rise in income levels, increased digital literacy, an expansion of customer bases, an increase in revenue from the internet segment, and increased data usage (MarketLine, 2018:7-8). Additionally, competitiveness in the industry is centred around the implementation of a value-added approach to customer service (Viriri & Phiri, 2017:104), as mobile telecom providers aim to differentiate themselves by offering unique or additional value to customers. This value-added approach results in a highly innovative industry with fierce competition between the major role players (Abd-Elrahman, 2018:11; Dicey, 2018; Lioudis, 2018).

3.2 CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer service relates to the activities performed by a business to ensure that customers are satisfied after frequenting a mobile telecom provider's establishment (Investopedia, 2018). However, as mentioned by Levy *et al.* (2014:516), customer service is not solely responsible to aid customers during their visit to a store, but to also ensure that the customer's interaction is of high quality. Providing such a high-quality service to customers will not only satisfy their needs (Adamu, 2017:2), but will also form the basis of their expectations for future interactions (Khan & Fasih, 2014:332). Ultimately, allowing a mobile telecom provider to retain customers (Wang *et al.*, 2014:322). Accordingly, customer service is instrumental in the service interaction that a mobile telecom provider will offer to a customer, as the customer service offered will be evaluated with a customer's expectations of the service to be provided. In the

mobile telecom industry, nearly half of all customer complaints can be attributed to poor customer service (BrandsEye, 2019:1). Therefore, if a mobile telecom provider improves the customer service it offers, customer satisfaction will increase which will result in positive word-of-mouth, customer loyalty, and customer retention – all of which ultimately influences the profitability of a mobile telecom provider in a positive way (Achadinha, 2015:50; Booyesen, 2017:40).

3.3 SERVICE QUALITY EXPERIENCE

Service quality refers to the variance between a customer's expectation and their perception of the service after an interaction with a service provider (Ahmed *et al.*, 2014:310). The SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988:12), is the most popular method for assessing the quality of a service provided by focusing on comparing a customer's service experience with their prior expectations. To do so, the scale encompasses five dimensions relating to the service encounter, namely tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Neupane, 2015:14; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988:23).

Tangibility is concerned with the appearance of the mobile telecom provider's physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials (Bayad *et al.*, 2021:18). Reliability relates to the mobile telecom provider's ability to perform the service (as promised) dependably and accurately through delivery, service provisions, problem resolutions (e.g., network issues) and pricing (Ramya *et al.*, 2019:40). Responsiveness is concerned with the mobile telecom provider's state of readiness to settle issues that occurred during the service delivery process (e.g., billing errors), and the business' ability to provide fast service. Responding to customer requests are imperative since not doing so can result in a complaint. Hence, the ability of a business to ensure that it provides a service on time is a fundamental component of service quality (Bayad *et al.*, 2021:18). Assurance relates to the expertise of the service provider's employees when engaging with customers and includes parameters such as competence, courtesy, credibility, and security (Anetoh, 2022:126). Empathy refers to the caring, individualised attention provided to customers by the business when offering a service. Thus, this dimension encompasses the provision of personalised or individualised services (e.g., personalised contracts) to customers so that they are perceived to be unique and special to the business (Ramya *et al.*, 2019:40).

For business in the service industry, a focus on service quality will increase the business' competitive advantage as well as long-term profitability. Therefore, Al Idrus *et al.* (2021:935) stated that competitive advantage is a factor that must be considered when improving upon the quality of services offered. Service quality is imperative for service businesses as it enables them to compete effectively and efficiently in a market in order to differentiate themselves from their industry rivals (Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020:5). Offering high quality service will serve as a competitive advantage for a business, which will enable it to maintain the satisfaction of customers, ensure sustainability and to develop the capability to understand customers (Al Idrus *et al.*, 2021:933). Ramya *et al.* (2019:40) state that in highly competitive industries, especially the services industry, like the mobile telecom industry, the focus on delivering good service quality is essential for their survival and success.

3.4 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Leninkumar (2019:63) suggests that customer satisfaction refers to the "customer's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulted from the evaluation of their prior expectation and perceived performance." Accordingly, a customer's level of satisfaction (i.e., satisfaction or dissatisfaction) will be determined when comparing their experience of a service to their expectations thereof (Alam *et al.*, 2016:57). Hence, customer satisfaction will be attained when the service they experience match or surpass their prior expectations (De Meyer-Heydenrych *et al.*, 2017:6; Srivastava & Kaul, 2014:1029). According to Iacobucci (2018:185), if the expectations of a customer are not met with their experience, the customer will be dissatisfied with the interaction and perceive it as a low-quality service interaction. Consequently, customer satisfaction is of utmost importance for mobile telecom providers' survival and prosperity within the market and highly competitive industry (De Meyer-Heydenrych *et al.*, 2017:7).

5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

This research primarily focuses on determining mobile telecom customers' service quality experiences and satisfaction, and gauging the extent to which service quality influences customer satisfaction. Accordingly, the following secondary objectives are posited:

- To measure the service quality experienced by customers in the mobile telecom industry.
- To determine the extent to which the service quality dimensions influence customer satisfaction within the mobile telecom industry.

Based on the research objectives presented above, as well as the discussion pertaining to service quality and customer satisfaction, the following alternative hypotheses were proposed:

H_{1a}: The tangibility of the service quality experienced by a respondent has a positive and significant influence on the respondent's satisfaction with their mobile telecom provider.

H_{2a}: The reliability of the service quality experienced by a respondent has a positive and significant influence on the respondent's satisfaction with their mobile telecom provider.

H_{3a}: The responsiveness of the service quality experienced by a respondent has a positive and significant influence on the respondent's satisfaction with their mobile telecom provider.

H_{4a}: The assurance of the service quality experienced by a respondent has a positive and significant influence on the respondent's satisfaction with their mobile telecom provider.

H_{5a}: The empathy of the service quality experienced by a respondent has a positive and significant influence on the respondent's satisfaction with their mobile telecom provider.

6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative descriptive research design was used to collect the empirical data by using structured computer as well as self-administered questionnaires which comprised of a preamble (explaining the purpose of the research, respondents' rights, completion instructions, and a screening question), a socio-demographic section (to compile a sample profile), and a section measuring the constructs (i.e., service quality experiences and satisfaction). Service quality experience and customer satisfaction were measured on a labelled five-point Likert-type scale, and the items of the measurement sets were adapted from the validated research of Parasuraman *et al.* (1988:12) as well as Van Tonder and De Beer (2018:8) respectively. The response categories for service quality experiences (i.e., SERVQUAL) ranged from 1 (negative) to 5 (positive) whereas for customer satisfaction it ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The target population comprised of customers who have been using a mobile telecom provider's service for a minimum duration of six months. A non-probability convenience sampling method was used to draw a sample from the target respondents due to a lack of an available sample frame. Accordingly, respondents were selected due to their convenient location and ease of access. To ensure the quality and accuracy of data collection, a pilot study was conducted prior to the actual data collection. The results of the pilot study indicated that there were no errors or misunderstanding inherent in the questionnaire and data from the self-administered questionnaires were subsequently collected via mall-intercept and fieldworkers. Data from the computer-administered questionnaires were collected by sharing the hyperlink on social media pages. The final sample size consisted of 300 complete responses and results from the data collection was analysed with the SPSS and AMOS (version 27) statistical programmes.

The statistical analyses included reliability and validity testing, descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations, and inferential statistics (i.e., standard multiple regression). The standard multiple regression analysis was conducted to uncover the influence of the respondents' service quality experience on their satisfaction with their mobile telecom provider.

7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The questionnaire's preamble explained the nature of the research, how their data will be managed, and how their anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured during and after the data collection process. As part of data management, the coded responses were stored and used in aggregate form and was only accessible by the researchers. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the questionnaire did not contain any personal identifying questions. Accordingly, respondents were required to provide their informed consent before they could access the questionnaire. To further ensure that no ethical issues arose during the data collection, the research was submitted to an ethical committee and data collection commenced once the questionnaire was approved and an ethics number was obtained.

8 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion pertaining to the data analysed from the collected responses are presented in the following section.

8.1 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Since this research adapted scales from existing scales measuring service quality (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988:12), and customer satisfaction (Van Tonder & De Beer, 2018:8), the psychometric properties (i.e., validity and reliability) of the measurement's scales were established by the respective studies from which they were adapted, thereby confirming content (face) validity. In addition, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to determine construct validity as well as construct reliability of the measurement model's scales. The six constructs of the conceptual model were confirmed in the measurement model with the CFA and all the standardised factor loadings (see Table 1) were greater than the minimum recommended cut-off value of 0.50, as suggested by Hair *et al.* (2020:463). Table 1 also provides the average variance extracted (AVE) values for each construct and since all the values are above the 0.50 threshold, convergent validity is established. Furthermore, since the measurement model had good fit statistics ($\chi^2/df = 1.681$, CFI = 0.974, TLI = 0.970, RMSEA = 0.048), construct validity for the measurement scales were confirmed.

Indicia of reliability pertaining to the measurement scales were evident since construct reliability (CR) values and Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient values were above the lower limit of 0.70 as suggested by George and Mallery (2022:260). The results presented in Table 1 indicates that the research met the criteria for reliability and validity.

TABLE 1: CFA – FACTOR LOADINGS, AVE, CR, AND CRONBACH'S ALPHA

Constructs	Factor loadings	AVE	CR	Cronbach's α
Tangibles		0.552	0.712	0.869
The mobile provider has modern-looking equipment at its physical outlets (e.g., computers, furniture).	0.726			
The physical facilities of the mobile provider are visually appealing (e.g., building, entrance, layout).	0.760			
The employees working at the mobile provider's physical outlet are neat appearing (e.g., clothing, uniforms).	0.886			
Materials associated with the service provided by the mobile provider are visually appealing (e.g., forms, display boards, files).	0.786			
Reliability		0.741	0.935	0.934
When the mobile provider promises to do something by a certain time, it does so.	0.835			
The mobile provider shows a sincere interest when I have a problem.	0.884			
The mobile provider performs its service right the first time.	0.868			
The mobile provider delivers on its customer service promises.	0.890			
The mobile provider insists on error-free records.	0.825			
Responsiveness		0.736	0.918	0.917
The mobile provider informs me of the services that will be performed and when it will be performed.	0.845			
I receive prompt service from the mobile provider.	0.880			
The mobile provider's employees are always willing to help me.	0.883			
The mobile provider's employees are never too busy to respond to my requests.	0.823			
Assurance		0.792	0.938	0.938
The mobile provider's employees instil confidence in me.	0.889			
I feel safe in my transactions with the mobile provider.	0.878			
The mobile provider's employees are consistently polite to me.	0.898			
The mobile provider's employees are knowledgeable enough to answer my questions.	0.894			
Empathy		0.769	0.943	0.942
I receive individual attention from the mobile provider as a whole.	0.846			
The mobile provider has convenient operating hours.	0.857			
I receive special attention from the mobile provider's employees.	0.909			
The mobile provider's employees have my best interests at heart.	0.872			
The mobile provider's employees understand my specific needs.	0.898			
Satisfaction		0.797	0.940	0.940
I am always delighted with the customer service provided by my mobile provider.	0.884			
Overall, I am satisfied with the customer service provided by my mobile provider.	0.905			
I think I made the right decision to make use of my mobile provider.	0.880			
I feel good about using this mobile provider.	0.901			

8.2 DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

The following section presents the descriptive results for the secondary objectives and subsequent hypotheses.

8.2.1 Secondary objective 1: to measure the service quality experienced by customers in the mobile telecom industry

Table 2 presents the means (\bar{x}) and standard deviations (SD) for each of the constructs. Pertaining to customer's service quality experiences, respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement with the statements provided on a labelled five-point Likert-type scale, where 1 "Negative" and 5 "Positive". For customer satisfaction the scale endpoints were "1 = Strongly disagree" and "5 = Strongly agree".

TABLE 2: SERVICE QUALITY EXPERIENCES AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Dimension of service quality experiences	\bar{x}	SD
Tangibles	3.90	0.724
The mobile provider has modern-looking equipment at its physical outlets (e.g., computers, furniture).	3.83	0.888
The physical facilities of the mobile provider are visually appealing (e.g., building, entrance, layout).	3.99	0.894
The employees working at the mobile provider's physical outlet are neat appearing (e.g., clothing, uniforms).	3.87	0.906
Materials associated with the service provided by the mobile provider are visually appealing (e.g., forms, display boards, files).	3.91	0.931
Reliability	3.44	0.934
When the mobile provider promises to do something by a certain time, it does so.	3.41	1.089
The mobile provider shows a sincere interest when I have a problem.	3.37	1.133
The mobile provider performs its service right the first time.	3.48	1.093
The mobile provider delivers on its customer service promises.	3.55	1.070
The mobile provider insists on error-free records.	3.39	1.099
Responsiveness	3.61	0.901
The mobile provider informs me of the services that will be performed and when it will be performed.	3.71	1.082
I receive prompt service from the mobile provider.	3.71	1.034
The mobile provider's employees are always willing to help me.	3.59	1.073
The mobile provider's employees are never too busy to respond to my requests.	3.43	1.091
Assurance	3.60	0.900
The mobile provider's employees instil confidence in me.	3.38	1.077
I feel safe in my transactions with the mobile provider.	3.77	1.085
The mobile provider's employees are consistently polite to me.	3.67	1.076
The mobile provider's employees are knowledgeable enough to answer my questions.	3.59	1.089
Empathy	3.49	0.878
I receive individual attention from the mobile provider as a whole.	3.47	1.116
The mobile provider has convenient operating hours.	3.91	1.030
I receive special attention from the mobile provider's employees.	3.32	1.078
The mobile provider's employees have my best interests at heart.	3.44	1.115
The mobile provider's employees understand my specific needs.	3.46	1.089
Overall service quality experiences	3.60	0.765
Customer satisfaction item	\bar{x}	SD
I am always delighted with the customer service provided by my mobile provider.	3.40	0.995
Overall, I am satisfied with the customer service provided by my mobile provider.	3.61	1.007
I think I made the right decision to make use of my mobile provider.	3.72	1.071
I feel good about using this mobile provider.	3.78	1.063
Overall customer satisfaction	3.63	0.909

From Table 2, respondents indicated that they experienced the tangibility related to the service delivery process as adequate with a mean of 3.90 (SD = 0.724). Respondents agreed the most with the item "The physical facilities of the mobile provider are visually appealing (e.g., building, entrance, layout)" since a mean of 3.99 (SD = 0.894) was realised. The item with the lowest mean score (\bar{x} = 3.83; SD = 0.888) was "The mobile provider has modern-looking equipment at its physical outlets (e.g., computers, furniture)".

Respondents indicated that they experienced the reliability pertaining to the service delivery process offered by their mobile telecom provider as adequate with \bar{x} = 3.44 and SD = 0.934. The highest mean score (\bar{x} = 3.55; SD = 1.070) realised on the five-point Likert scale was "The mobile provider delivers on its customer service promises", and the item with the lowest mean score (\bar{x} = 3.37; SD = 1.133) was "The mobile provider shows a sincere interest when I have a problem".

Regarding the responsiveness of the service provided by their mobile telecom provider, respondents indicated that they experienced the dimension to be adequate ($\bar{x} = 3.61$; $SD = 0.901$). Two items “The mobile provider informs me of the services that will be performed and when it will be performed” and “I receive prompt service from the mobile provider” realised the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.71$) on the five-point Likert scale with a standard deviation of 1.082 and 1.034 respectively. The lowest scoring mean related to the item “The mobile provider’s employees are never too busy to respond to my requests” ($\bar{x} = 3.43$; $SD = 1.091$).

Concerning the assurance offered by the mobile telecom provider when providing a service to a customer, respondents experienced this dimension as adequate ($\bar{x} = 3.60$; $SD = 0.900$). The highest mean score related to the item “I feel safe in my transactions with the mobile provider” ($\bar{x} = 3.77$; $SD = 1.085$) whilst the lowest mean score was realised on the item “The mobile provider’s employees instil confidence in me” ($\bar{x} = 3.38$; $SD = 1.077$).

Pertaining to the mobile telecom provider’s empathy when delivering a service, respondents indicated that they experienced it to be adequate ($\bar{x} = 3.49$; $SD = 0.878$). In particular, the item that scored the highest mean was “The mobile provider has convenient operating hours” ($\bar{x} = 3.91$; $SD = 1.030$), and the item that scored the lowest mean was “I receive special attention from the mobile provider’s employees” ($\bar{x} = 3.32$; $SD = 1.078$).

Regarding the overall experience of the service quality offered by mobile telecom providers, respondents indicated that they perceived it to be adequate ($\bar{x} = 3.60$; $SD = 0.765$).

With reference to the satisfaction of customers with their mobile telecom provider, respondents were mostly neutral in the sense that they neither agreed nor disagreed with most of the items ($\bar{x} = 3.63$; $SD = 0.909$). Specifically, the item that realised the highest mean score was “I feel good about using this mobile provider” ($\bar{x} = 3.78$; $SD = 1.063$), and the item with the lowest mean score was “I am always delighted with the customer service provided by my mobile provider” ($\bar{x} = 3.40$; $SD = 0.995$).

8.2.2 Secondary objective 2: to determine the extent to which the dimensions of service quality influence customer satisfaction within the mobile telecom industry

To address secondary objective two, a standard multiple regression was performed. Before the standard multiple regression was performed, it was necessary to ensure that no assumption of regression was violated. Accordingly, the sample size (i.e., 300) was confirmed to be above the minimum requirement of 90 (for multiple regression), multicollinearity was absent, and homoscedasticity was below the cut-off limit of 1 as suggested by (Pallant, 2016:121-159). Since none of the assumptions regarding multiple regression were violated, the measurement model was evaluated (see Table 3) with customer satisfaction as the dependent variable and the five service quality dimensions as the independent variables (i.e., predictors). The evaluation indicates that the dimensions of service quality (i.e., independent variables) explain 38.5% ($R^2 = 0.385$) of the variance in customer satisfaction (i.e., the dependent variable). Furthermore, the results from the ANOVA indicated that the model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

TABLE 3: MODEL SUMMARY

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
1	0.621 ^a	0.385	0.375

a. Predictors: (constant), tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy dimensions of service quality experience.

b. Predictors: (constant), tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy dimensions of service quality experience.

Following the evaluation and significance of the model, it is necessary to determine which of the independent variables (i.e., service quality dimensions) predicts the dependent variable (i.e., customer satisfaction). Since statistical significance is established at an p-value of 0.05 or less. Consequently, Table 4 indicates that the constant is significant (p-value < 0.05). Moreover, the standardised regression weights (i.e., β -weights) and corresponding p-values indicate that only two service quality dimensions, namely reliability ($p = 0.001$; $\beta = 0.290$) and empathy ($p = 0.003$; $\beta = 0.256$) are predictors of customer satisfaction.

TABLE 4: COEFFICIENTS

Model	Variable	Standardised coefficient Beta-value	t	p-value
1	(Constant)		4.875	<0.001*
	Tangibility	0.047	0.786	0.432
	Reliability	0.290	3.348	0.001*
	Responsiveness	0.029	0.339	0.735
	Assurance	0.064	0.706	0.481
	Empathy	0.256	2.978	0.003*

* p-value < 0.05 is statistically significant.

a. Dependent variable: customer satisfaction.

With regards to H_4 formulated for this research, the following can thus be concluded:

- Concerning H_{1a} , the p-value realised ($p = 0.432$) is larger than 0.05, which signifies that tangibility of the service, as experienced by mobile telecom customers, had no statistically significant effect on customers' satisfaction. As such, H_{1a} is not supported.
- Relevant to H_{2a} , the reliability of the service delivered by a mobile telecom provider had a p-value of $p = 0.001$ which is smaller than 0.05 (statistical significance). This indicates that the reliability of a mobile telecom provider's service has a statistically significant and medium effect (β -weight = 0.290) on customers' satisfaction. Thus, H_{2a} is supported.
- Regarding H_{3a} , the p-value realised was ($p = 0.735$), which is larger than 0.05 – indicating that the responsiveness of a mobile telecom provider's service has no statistically significant effect on customers' satisfaction. Therefore, H_{3a} is not supported.
- Pertaining to H_{4a} , a p-value of ($p = 0.481$) was attained. This value is larger than 0.05, which indicates that the assurance offered by a mobile telecom provider when delivering a service has no statistically significant effect on customers' satisfaction. Consequently, H_{4a} is not supported.
- With regards to H_{5a} , the p-value was 0.003 which is smaller than 0.05. Accordingly, the p-value indicates that the empathy experienced by customer during the service delivery process offered by a mobile telecom provider has a statistically significant effect, albeit a medium effect (β -weight = 0.256) on customer satisfaction. H_{5a} is, therefore, supported.

9 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research can potentially be useful to managers in the mobile telecoms industry seeking to enhance the quality of the service that they offer to customers to ultimately maximise customer satisfaction. Accordingly, the following recommendations are suggested:

- The tangibility related to the service offered by a mobile telecom provider did not have a statistically significant effect on customers' satisfaction. However, customers perceived the equipment (e.g., computers, displays, furniture) of the mobile telecom provider at their physical outlets to be outmoded. Thus, mobile telecom providers can improve the tangibility of their service delivery by acquiring and utilising modern-looking equipment that are appealing to customers.
- The reliability of the service delivered by mobile telecom providers had a statistically significant, albeit a medium effect on customers' satisfaction. Therefore, customer satisfaction can be achieved when a mobile telecom provider ensure that they fulfil their customer service promises, follow up with their customers (during

and after a service encounter), improve their complaints handling procedure (by addressing service issues promptly and keeping customer informed about the status of their complaint/request), and ultimately ensure that customers' expectations are successfully met.

- Responsiveness, as a dimension of the service offered by mobile telecom providers, did not have a statistically significant effect on customers' satisfaction. However, customers did experience an impediment in the handling of their requests by employees of the mobile telecom provider. Mobile telecom providers should, therefore, ensure that they have an adequate number of employees available to assist customers in the service delivery process. Also, mobile telecom providers should assess the workload of the employees involved in the service delivery process to ensure that they can provide prompt assistance to customers.
- The assurance offered by the mobile telecom provider when offering a service did not have a statistically significant effect on their customers' satisfaction. However, customers did perceive a lack of confidence when engaging with the employees of the mobile telecom provider that were involved in the service delivery process. It is, therefore, recommended that mobile telecom providers should ensure that their employees involved in the service delivery process are knowledgeable about the business' products and that they are reassuring when engaging with customers.
- The empathy offered by mobile telecom providers during their service delivery had a statistically significant, albeit a medium effect on customers' satisfaction. Mobile telecom providers should also be more empathetic in their service delivery process by offering personalised and/or customised services, informing customers of potential service interruptions (ahead of time), having employees available to assist customers (taking into account the customer's working and socialising hours), and keeping customers informed of their operating hours.
- Although only two dimensions of service quality (i.e., reliability and empathy) influenced customer satisfaction, it is imperative that mobile telecom providers continue to offer tangible, responsive and assured service quality since customers experienced these dimensions to be adequate. Hence, by reducing the quality pertaining to these dimensions, customers will experience the service quality to be negative.
- Although customers were mostly neutral in the measuring of their satisfaction with their mobile telecom provider, most indicated that they were not always delighted with the service they received from their mobile telecom provider. Thus, mobile telecom providers can use customer satisfaction surveys on a regular basis in an effort to identify any service quality issues and rectify them before they influence a customer's satisfaction.

10 CONCLUSION

This research set out to investigate mobile telecom customers' service quality experiences and satisfaction, insofar as to gauge the extent to which service quality influence customer satisfaction. Therefore, the objectives of this study focused on (1) measuring customers' service quality experiences and satisfaction, and (2) determine the extent to which the dimensions of service quality influences customer satisfaction. Both objectives were achieved since the multiple regression indicated that two service quality dimensions, namely reliability and empathy had a statistically significant effect on customer satisfaction within the mobile telecom industry. Thus, to improve customer satisfaction in the industry, mobile telecom provider should focus on the reliability and empathy of their service offered to customers by implementing the recommendations provided. Mobile telecom providers can also gain more insight into customer service experiences and satisfaction by gathering data from a larger population and by utilising other research designs. Also, future research can focus more on why the reliability and empathy of the service experienced by customers are deemed more important for their satisfaction. In conclusion, mobile telecom providers still have a long way to go to satisfy their customers. Substandard customer service experience is a key challenge for the industry, as it prevents them from truly satisfying their customers and benefiting from the associated advantages.

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