

SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN NIGERIAN MOBILE TELEPHONY

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ABSTRACT: *The Telecommunication industry in Nigeria has developed to be very competitive, as different Telecom companies jostle for the attention of subscribers. However, one of the key challenges confronting these companies is how they manage their service quality, which holds a great deal to customer satisfaction. It is against this backdrop that this research seeks to empirically measure how service quality/delivery impact on customer satisfaction of Mobile Telecommunication providers in Nigeria. The data used for this study were obtained using a structured survey questionnaire. The questions were close ended and used a 5 point Likert-scale. The sample consists of 532 mobile subscribers in Nigeria, using a simple random sampling technique spread across all the six geo-political zones in the country while a proportionate sampling approach was adopted by the researcher to give a fair representation to the service providers using the proportionality formula. The data obtained from the survey were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 20. The survey was restricted to subscribers using the four major GSM mobile phone operators. The research determined that a relationship exist between service quality/delivery and customer satisfaction, also between SERVQUAL reliability dimension and customer satisfaction and between customer satisfaction and switching intention among mobile phone users in Nigeria. The results have indicated that the two constructs (SQ and CS) are undeniably independent but are closely related and without a doubt, potential partners, implying that an increase in one is likely to cause a change in another. It is therefore recommended that with the ever-increasing influence of the Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC), and the continuous complying with is one major strategy that the companies must adopt to remain cost-effective.*

KEYWORDS: *Service quality, Customer satisfaction, Telecommunication, Mobile Telephony, Nigeria.*

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian Telecommunication industry has developed to be very competitive, as different Telecommunication companies jostle for the attention of subscribers. One of the key challenges confronting these Telecommunication companies is how they manage their service quality, which holds a great deal to customer satisfaction. Service quality and customer satisfaction are very essential in maintaining customer loyalty.

Having satisfied customers does not only hold the potential of increasing an organization's customer base, but also increases the use of more volatile customer mix and increase the firm's reputation (Alabar, 2012) According to Zeithaml (2000), Manusamy, Chellia, and Mun (2010), delivering high quality services is closely linked to profits, cost savings and market share. Since survival and growth of a firm's outcome is driven by customer loyalty, which in turn is driven by customer satisfaction and value (Nimako, 2012; Rust and Oliver, 1994), delivering quality service and customer satisfaction have been important goals and most perhaps, the pursuit for the expanding mobile telecom networks as well as regulators of the industry.

As the telecom companies become increasingly more customer-centric and are much interested not just on acquiring new customers, but more importantly, delighting and retaining existing customers. This has added more costs in attracting new customers than retaining existing ones. But it should be realized that, it is more profitable retaining an old customer who is more likely to repurchase or re-use a company's products/services and recommend them to others. Therefore retaining an existing customer becomes a product of customer loyalty and value which in turn is a function of the level of customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Reichheld, 1996).

Since the full liberalization of the sector in 2000 (Ndukwe, 2004), the industry has witnessed a tremendous increase in subscriber growth rate for all the mobile telecom operators. This growth trend could not be attributed to customer satisfaction alone; but fundamentally to the substantial growth in investment and expansion of network access during the past years. This seems a success story, and there are high hopes that the service quality delivered by the Mobile Telecommunication Networks in Nigeria meets customer expectations, or satisfaction. Since survival and growth of a firm's financial outcome is driven by customer loyalty which is in turn driven by customer satisfaction and value (Nimako, 2012; Rust and Oliver, 1994), delivering high quality service and customer satisfaction have been important goals and most perhaps, the pursuit for the expanding mobile telecom networks as well as regulators of the industry.

Though competition has been rife in the industry, the mobile telecommunication companies are continually improving upon the quality of their service delivery, with the influence of the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC). It is against this backdrop that, the study seeks to empirically assess/determine the degree of satisfaction customers get from the services provided by Nigerian mobile telecom providers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study framework will be based basically on customer satisfaction, service quality and a synopsis of mobile telephony in Nigeria.

Customer satisfaction (CS)

Customer satisfaction remains a key discourse among service marketing literature. Jani and Heesup (2011) define satisfaction as an emotional state resulting from a customer's interactions with a service provider over time. In examining the drivers of customer satisfaction Shankar, Smith and Rangaswamy (2002) identified two types of customer satisfaction, namely, service encounter satisfaction and overall customer satisfaction. Whereas overall customer satisfaction is relationship-specific, service encounter satisfaction is transaction-specific. This study will examine customer satisfaction and how it affects the loyalty of telecom services users in Nigeria. Overall satisfaction

refers to the cumulative effect of a set of transactions or discrete service encounters with the service provider over a period of time.

Even though the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty has been the focus of a good deal of previous research, the complexity inherent in the relationship continues to pose many unanswered questions. A customer's desire to remain loyal and purchase or use the services of an organisation in future is dependent on how satisfied the customer is (Shanka, 2012). Thus, a company's continued survival, existence and future growth is largely dependent on the value it places on customer loyalty through maintaining satisfied customers (Kim, Park and Jeong, 2012).

In today's competitive and dynamic market, the term customer satisfaction (CS) has received much attention and interest among scholars and practitioners. This perhaps can be traced to its importance as a key element of business strategy, and goal for all business activities (Anderson et al, 1994). Parker and Mathew (2001) identified two basic definitional approaches to the study of CS. The first approach defines CS as an outcome while the second approach views it as a process. It is however important to note that these two approaches are not mutually exclusive but complementary. As a process, CS is defined as *an evaluation between what was received and what was expected* (Johnson, 2001; Gustafsson, Johnson & Roos, 2005), *emphasizing the perceptual, evaluative and psychological processes that contribute to customer satisfaction* (Vavra, 1997).

The process definitions of satisfaction however, concentrate on the antecedents of satisfaction rather than satisfaction itself (Parker and Mathews, 2001). The outcome approach of the CS is defined as the end-state satisfaction resulting from the experience of consumption. This is a post- consumption state and can be an outcome that occurs without comparing expectations (Oliver, 1996). Parker and Mathews (2001) further expressed that attention has been focused on the nature of satisfaction of the outcome approach which include: *emotion, fulfillment and state*.

Gerpott, Rams and Schindler (2001) defined CS as an *"experience-based assessment made by the customer of how far his own expectations about the individual characteristics or the overall functionality of the services obtained from the provider have been fulfilled"*. In this instance, satisfaction is higher or lower with respect to the extent to which what was actually provided exceeds or falls short of what was expected

Rust and Oliver (1994) and Taylor and Baker (1994) identified several factors that precede customer satisfaction and suggested that these factors strongly influence the extent of customer satisfaction. Some of these antecedents include: Clear Understanding of Customer Needs and Expectations (Basic needs, Excitement needs and Expected needs) and perceived value. However in the telecom industry, previous research studies have suggested four factors, which are key drivers of the customer value of cellular services, which some are embedded in the above, while some are alien to them . These include: network quality, price, customer care, and personal benefits (Booz, Allen & Hamilton, 1995, Danaher & Rust, 1996; Bolton, 1998; Gerpott, 1998).

Service Quality (SQ)

The service quality concept has gained much attention from scholars and practitioners. According to Hessalmaldin 2007 "services include recognizable and necessary immovable activities which meet a need and its attachment to goods sale or other services is not of necessity, and a measure of the extent to which the service delivery meets customer's expectations"

He therefore classified quality as:

- a. **Product-Based:** in this respect, certain features and specifications of product are taken into account, which are measurable and at the same time representing the higher quality as well
- b. **Consumer-Based:** according to this basis, the consumer is the determinant of the quality of goods and services, based upon his vision, the types of goods and service that satisfies his needs, are in high quality.
- c. **Goods Specification-Based:** in this regard, the experts introduce specific features of a product or service and the closer the manufactured product to these features, the higher quality is considered.
- d. **Cost-Based:** this mainly emphasizes the element of price; on the basis of this viewpoint, the quality of the product would be based on its accepted price and logical cost.

In conceptualizing the basic service quality model, Parasuraman et al. (1990) identified 10 key determinants of service quality as perceived by the company and the consumer as: reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding/knowing the customer and tangibility.

They noted that discrepancy existed between the firm's and the customer's perceptions of the service quality delivered. In investigating this discrepancies the authors assert that service quality can be assessed by measuring the discrepancies or 'gaps' between what the customer expects and what the customer perceives and receives

The magnitude and direction of this gap, directly affects the service quality as perceived by consumers. They further noted that consumers would have perceptions of high service quality to the extent that their expectations are lower than the perceived service performance. On the basis of these arguments and several reviews, they developed the SERVQUAL scale that focused basically on the ten determinants of service quality. The scale is based on a difference score between customer expectations of service and their perceptions after receiving the service. Initially, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1990) focused on the ten determinants of service quality.

It was however reduced to five dimensions as: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In their discussion, they assert that the SERVQUAL scale deals with perceived quality and look specifically at service quality, not customer satisfaction. They stated that "perceived service quality is a global judgment or attitude concerning the superiority of service whereas satisfaction is related to specific transaction".

In the case of Nigerian mobile telecommunication services, customer loyalty is particularly significant, given the rising customer churn and multiple loyalty as the market develops and matures.

A Synopsis of Mobile Telephony in Nigeria (1999-2013)

Arguably, the mobile telephony industry is probably Nigeria's most vibrant and competitive sector after the petroleum industry. The advent of intensive digital Mobile telecommunication in Nigeria is traceable to 1999. Prior to 1999, telephone (landline, Thuraya, walkie-talkie, etc) was seen as one of the rare luxuries of the rich. In fact, it is reported that a former Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria once stated that "telephone is not for the poor". But the coming of mobile telecommunication operators changed the situation for the better as everyone can now access one or more.

Looking at the growth recorded in the Nigerian Telecommunication industry within the short period mobile communication started in Nigeria (1999-date), it is phenomenal. Nigeria is the largest and fastest growing mobile market in Africa and one of the fastest in the world (Ndukwe, 2004). The industry has witnessed a tremendous increase in subscriber growth rate for all the mobile telecom operators as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Subscriber Data

| <i>Month</i> | <i>No. of Subscribers</i> |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>February, 2013</i> | <i>116,601,637</i> |
| <i>January, 2013</i> | <i>114,502,968</i> |
| <i>December, 2012</i> | <i>113,195,951</i> |
| <i>November, 2012</i> | <i>110,348,131</i> |
| <i>October, 2012</i> | <i>109,499,882</i> |
| <i>September, 2012</i> | <i>107,367,095</i> |

Source: NCC, June 2013

This trend has been consistent since the introduction of mobile telephony in Nigeria. This growth trend could not be attributed to customer satisfaction alone; fundamentally to the substantial growth in investment and expansion of network access during the past years. This seems a success story, and there are high hopes that the service quality delivered by the Mobile Telecommunication Networks in Nigeria also meets customer expectations, or satisfaction

At the start, MTN, the first mobile telecommunication company in Nigeria was given license to operate followed by ECONET which metamorphosed into Vmobile, then Zain and at present Airtel and Globacom joined later. The last mobile telephony network but not the least is Etisalat. Apart from these four major telephony networks, there are also others that are regionally based. Figure 1 displays the most recent market share of the researched GSM operators in Nigeria

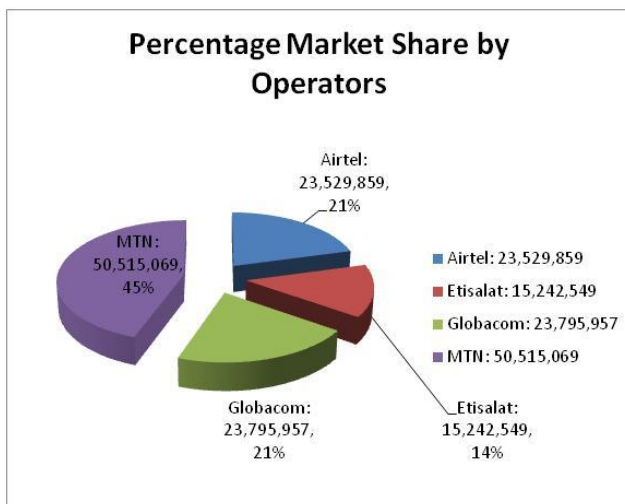


Figure 1 Percentage Market Share by Operators, (June, 2013)

Source: NCC, 2013

The telecommunication sector across the globe has been identified as one with generic effect on almost all other sectors of the economy (Adedeji, 2013). Its function in any economy is described as a strategic one aimed at promoting economic growth and as one that has linkages with other sectors.

Recently, the role of telecommunication infrastructure in enhancing economic growth has generated a lot of interesting discussions and debates. Arguments are that the development of a modern nation to its full potential in the contemporary world can never be attained without adequate telecommunications infrastructure; this implies that the development of telecommunication infrastructure will significantly boost economic growth and development. It is in view of this that most developed economies such as the U.S, Japan, UK and France have deregulated their telecommunication sectors to allow for more investments. The results they got were not just improved telecommunication capabilities, but also increased foreign investments, boom in private sector development, more employment opportunities and better education and training facilities. Nigeria is not an exception from this development, and table 2 below highlights the contribution of telecommunications industry to GDP from inception to 2013 (Adedeji, 2013).

Table2 Percentage Contribution of Telecoms Industry to GDP 2001-2013

| Year | 2001 | 2003 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
|------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Percentage | 0.62 | 1.06 | 1.53 | 1.91 | 2.31 | 2.92 | 3.66 | 4.56 | 5.67 | 7.05 | 8.53 |

Source: NCC, 2013

Table 2 shows a consistent increase since inception. The role of NCC in the growth journey of Nigerian telecommunications can never be down-played. The apex regulator of Nigerian telecommunications has been a strong influence in ensuring that telecom operators play according to the rules of best practice. One of such milestones is the introduction of the Mobile Number Portability (MNP) policy introduced in April, 2013. The MNP introduction holds a strong potential in changing the mobile telephony landscape in Nigeria.

MNP is simply the ability of mobile telephone subscribers to retain their phone numbers when changing from one mobile network provider to another, FinIntell (2013). MNP is currently available in over 50 countries, including Ghana, Morocco, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Pakistan, and Brazil.

The initiation of Mobile Number Portability in Nigeria comes as a relief to telecoms subscribers, who have been complaining about the poor quality of services being rendered by the service providers (Oketola and Okpara, 2013) It is believed that, the MNP will further expand the market place and make the deployment of new and enhanced telecoms services faster and more cost effective. They further argued that “Mobile Number Portability” will provide consumers with the option of choosing their network at any time, while retaining their numbers and this will give rise to healthy competition in the industry, enhance quality of service and improve service delivery to the consumers.

Based on the review, we therefore hypothesized that:

- (i) H_{01} There is no significant relationship between service delivery and overall customer tion of Mobile Telecommunication services in Nigeria.
- (ii) H_{02} . There is no significant relationship between SERVQUAL reliability service quality dimension and customer satisfaction.
- (iii) H_{03} There is no significant association between customer satisfaction and switching intention among customers of Mobile Telecommunication services in Nigeria

METHODOLOGY

The population consisted of individual customers of mobile telecommunication operators in Nigeria (MTN, Airtel, Globacom and Etisalat). The sample consists of 532 telecom subscribers. The data so collected was done in the six geo-political zones of the country, using a simple random sampling technique.

The sample size for this study was determined and computed using an equation developed by Yamane (1967:886).

$$\frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

out of 532 respondents, a proportionate sampling approach was adopted by the researcher to give a fair representation to the service providers using the proportionality formula by Adogbo and Ojo (2003). This technique was chosen because the population consists of mobile networks in Nigeria, each being a stratum

Thus,

$$Q = \frac{A}{N} \times \frac{n}{1}$$

The data obtained was captured and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 20. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to assess the relationship between the variables and test the research hypotheses. A reliability test for the SERVQUAL reliability dimension was performed using Cronbach's Alpha. The reliability analysis showed a value of 0.744 indicating an acceptable value.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3 Relationship between service delivery and overall customer satisfaction of Mobile Telecoms Networks in Nigeria

| Correlations | | |
|--------------|---------------------|--------|
| | Q2 | Q3 |
| Q2 | Pearson Correlation | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .388** |
| | N | .000 |
| Q3 | Pearson Correlation | .388** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 1 |
| | N | .000 |
| | N | 526 |
| | | 524 |
| | | 530 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

(Source: SPSS Output, 2013)

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between service delivery and overall customer satisfaction of Mobile Telecommunication service providers in Nigeria. There was a correlation between the two variables [$r = 0.388$, $n = 526$, $p = 0.000$]. Overall, there was a positive correlation between service delivery and overall customer satisfaction of Mobile

Telecommunication Networks in Nigeria. This indicates that if service delivery is good, the overall customer satisfaction will be high and vice versa.

The null hypothesis is therefore rejected based on the results.

Table 4: Link between SERVQUAL reliability of service quality and customer satisfaction

| Correlations | | Q3 | RL1 | RL2 | RL3 | RL4 | RL5 |
|--------------|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Q3 | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .616** | .562** | .482** | .584** | .352** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 530 | 526 | 524 | 526 | 524 | 352 |
| RL1 | Pearson Correlation | .616** | 1 | .594** | .465** | .511** | .385** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 526 | 528 | 522 | 526 | 524 | 354 |
| RL2 | Pearson Correlation | .562** | .594** | 1 | .373** | .573** | .343** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 524 | 522 | 524 | 524 | 524 | 350 |
| RL3 | Pearson Correlation | .482** | .465** | .373** | 1 | .531** | .329** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 526 | 526 | 524 | 528 | 526 | 354 |
| RL4 | Pearson Correlation | .584** | .511** | .573** | .531** | 1 | .318** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | | .000 |
| | N | 524 | 524 | 524 | 526 | 526 | 352 |
| RL5 | Pearson Correlation | .352** | .385** | .343** | .329** | .318** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | |
| | N | 352 | 354 | 350 | 354 | 352 | 354 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

(Source: SPSS Output, 2013)

A correlation for the data revealed that reliability SERVQUAL dimension and customer satisfaction were significantly related, R1 ($r = .62$, $N = 526$, $p < .01$, 2-tailed), R2 ($r = .56$, $N = 526$, $p < .01$, 2-tailed), R3 ($r = .48$, $N = 526$, $p < .01$, 2-tailed), R4 ($r = .58$, $N = 526$, $p < .01$, 2-tailed), R5 ($r = .35$, $N = 526$, $p < .01$, 2-tailed). Higher service reliability was associated with increased overall customer satisfaction.

Based on the analysis above, since the Sig. value for the various variables (Q3, R1, R2, R3, R4 and R5) is .000 which is less than .05, ($p < .05$), we can say that there is a significant positive correlation between reliability of service quality and customer satisfaction. The null hypothesis (H_0) is therefore rejected. Although, the strength of the relationship differs among different variables, they all reflect a moderate positive correlation. This is consistent with the findings of Ojo (2010) who investigated the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the Nigerian mobile telecommunication industry and Sharareh and Fauziah (2012) who investigated the relationship between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in the Australian Car Insurance Industry. The results reveal that service quality has effect on customer satisfaction and that there is a positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

As shown in

5 below, a high proportion (46%) reflecting 242 of the respondents expressed the desire to switch mobile service providers and 22% were not very sure (116). This illustrates how dissatisfied the subscribers are with the service delivery of mobile telecommunication networks in Nigeria.

Table 5:

Association between customer satisfaction and switching intention among customers of Mobile Telecommunication Networks in Nigeria

Correlations

| | | Q3 | Q4 |
|----|---------------------|---------|---------|
| Q3 | Pearson Correlation | 1 | -.129** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .003 |
| | N | 530 | 528 |
| Q4 | Pearson Correlation | -.129** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .003 | |
| | N | 528 | 530 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

(Source: SPSS Output, 2013)

A correlation for the data revealed that customer satisfaction and switching intention were significantly related (**Error! Reference source not found.**), $r = -.13$, $N = 530$, $p < .01$, 2-tailed. The analysis demonstrates a negative relationship between customer satisfaction and switching intention. Higher customer satisfaction was associated with lower switching intention and a lower customer satisfaction correlates with a higher switching intention among the subscribers.

The analysis indicated that the differences between Nigeria's four major mobile operators (MTN, Airtel, Globacom and Etisalat) were modest across all indicators for mobile telephony. MTN registered higher dissatisfaction scores (75%) on quality of calls to other competing mobile operators. Etisalat scored highest on issues concerning network reliability, but differences were also modest.

On the issue of charging, Globacom and Etisalat registered higher scores; Etisalat had the highest scores for the correct charging of calls 67.5%, closely followed by Globacom with 67.2%. On the issue of whether rates aligned with service providers' advertised rates, Etisalat scored highest with 59.9%, closely followed by Globacom on 57.5%. MTN was the lowest on both issues of charging; it scored 62.6% for the correctness of charging and 53.3% for whether the rates it charged agreed with charges as advertised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve customer satisfaction in the mobile telephony industry in Nigeria, the Mobile telephony service providers, as a matter of necessity, must focus on the following key areas as:

With the increased competition in the Nigerian Telecommunications industry and the ever-increasing influence of the Nigeria Telecommunications Commission (NCC), and continuous complying is one major strategy that the companies must adopt to remain profitable. Mobile telecom service providers should focus more attention on service quality because of its close knit relationship with customer satisfaction.

With the introduction of Mobile Number Portability (MNP) which permits subscribers to transfer to a better service provider while maintaining their existing mobile number, retaining customers should be a smarter option than attracting new customers since it is less expensive.

In view of the fact that an increase in how a company perform and complete its promised service quality with accuracy will lead to an increase in customer satisfaction, telecom service providers should focus on providing timely services. This can include: minimising call drop rates, fast tracking SMS/MMS delivery time, prompt customer care services and responding to customer complaints without delay.

Most of the time, customers don't necessarily only buy products and services, they also seek solutions to problems. Mobile telecom service providers must position and train their customer care representatives to provide prompt and spot-on solutions to customer complaints. This holds a key to maintaining loyalty and minimising switching.

CONCLUSION

The research was able to determine the relationship between service quality/delivery and customer satisfaction, SERVQUAL reliability dimension and customer satisfaction and the relationship between customer satisfaction and switching intention among mobile phone users in Nigeria. Based on the analysis conducted to test the various relationships, all three attributes had a significant relationship with customer satisfaction. Service delivery and reliability dimension of service quality had a positive relationship with customer satisfaction, indicating that an increase in one will lead to an increase in the other. This means that an excellent service delivery along with an increase in how a company perform and complete its promised service, quality and accuracy within the given set of requirements will lead to an increase in customer satisfaction. However, the analysis also indicated a negative correlation between switching intention and customer satisfaction. This signifies that customer dissatisfaction will increase the desire to switch service providers. The results make obvious that the respondents would likely stay with their telecom service providers as long as the companies are able to satisfy their changing needs and meet customer requirements beyond the customers' expectations. The results have indicated that the two constructs (CS and SQ) are indeed independent but are closely related and indeed, potential partners, implying that an increase in one is likely to lead to an increase in another and similarly, a decrease in one will lead to a decrease in another.

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