

Relationship Marketing And Customer Loyalty In Mobile Telecommunication Industry In Nairobi, Kenya

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Relationship marketing is a strategy designed to build customer loyalty, interaction and customer long-term engagement through provision of information and open communication that suits customer needs. The broad objective of the study was to analyze the relationship between customer relationship marketing and customer loyalty in the mobile telecommunication industry in Nairobi, Kenya. The study employed a descriptive survey design. The population comprised individual customers of the four mobile telecommunication companies in Kenya. A sample size of 384 respondents was utilized. Proportionate stratified sampling method based market share of each company was used. Primary data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire while descriptive statistics and simple regression analysis was used to analyze the quantitative data. The findings were as follows, quality of a service is subjectively perceived by customers during the interactions with a firm and has critical impact on customers' evaluation of service quality; effective communication of pricing policies as well as flexible pricing for various services offered play a great role in customer loyalty; positive brand image makes it easier for a firm to convey its brand value to consumers and also generates favorable customer loyalty among people; Businesses operating in an intensely price based competitive environment, dependent on high economies of scale and with low levels of staff-customer interaction are bound to suffer shocks in their market positions and profitability, However large investments on relational strategies like building trust, commitment, communication and satisfaction can turnaround the shocks.

Key Words: Relationship, Marketing, Customer, Loyalty, Industry

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INTRODUCTION

As the competitive environment becomes more turbulent, the most important issue the sellers face is no longer to provide excellent, good quality products or services, but also to keep loyal customers who will contribute long-term profit to organizations (Tseng, 2007). To compete in such competitive and interactive marketplace, marketers must to look beyond the traditional 4Ps of marketing strategy for achieving competitive advantage. Therefore, relationship marketing among other marketing strategies has become an alternative means for organizations to build strong, ongoing associations with their customers (Andaleeb, 2006). The development of relationship marketing has received a lot of attention in both academia and practice in the last few decades. Indeed relational marketing began to dominate the marketing field in the last decade of the twentieth century (Egan, 2001). During this period, relationship marketing became a major trend having being adopted and practiced in marketing and management all over the world. The fundamental reason for both small and big companies to build relationships with customers is economic in nature with a view to survive in the global market where customers, have become highly sophisticated, educated, confident and informed (Cook, 2011). As CRM reaches into many parts of the business, it is critical for organizations to adopt a holistic approach which places CRM at the heart of the organization with customer orientated business processes and the integration of CRM systems (Girishankar 2009). Holistic approaches to CRM help organizations to coordinate and effectively maintain the growth of disparate customer

contact points or channels of communication. According to Newell (2009) CRM is a useful tool in terms of identifying the right customer groups and for helping to decide which customers to jettison. For Newell, jettisoning customers is necessary because of the high-maintenance, high cost involved in maintaining such relationships and the subsequent drain on an organization's profitability. State objective of the study here

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This section contain literature on social exchange theory which this study is anchored upon as well as theoretical and empirical literature of the relationship between relationship marketing and customer loyalty.

Social Exchange Theory

This study was anchored on Social exchange theory which posits that individuals are willing to maintain relationships because of the expectation that to do so will be rewarding. Individuals voluntarily sacrifice their self- benefits and contribute these benefits to other individuals with the expectation for more future gains. Thibaut and Kelly (1959) propose that whether an individual retains a relationship with another one depends on the comparison of current relationship, past experience and potential alternatives. The constant comparison of social and economic outcomes between a series of interactions with current partners and available alternatives determines the degree of an individual's commitment to the current relationship.

The theory is appropriate for this study because service encounters can be viewed as social exchanges with the interaction between

service provider and customer being a crucial component of satisfaction and providing a strong reason for continuing a relationship (Barnes, 2007). Social exchange theory attempts to account for the development, growth and even dissolution of social and business relationships. In other words, people (or business firms) evaluate their reward - cost ratio when deciding whether or not to maintain a relationship. Rewards and costs have been defined in terms of interpersonal (e.g. liking, familiarity, influence), personal (gratification linked to self esteem, ego, personality) and situational factors (aspects of the psychological environment such as a relationship formed to accomplish some task). In services context, considering the level of interpersonal contact needed to produce services, there is a range of psychological, relational and financial considerations that might act as a disincentive for a change of service providers.

Relationship Marketing and Customer Loyalty

The ultimate goal of RM is to bolster already strong relationships and convert indifferent customers into loyal ones (Ndubisi and Chan, 2005; Ndubisi, 2007). It is considered an effective strategy, not only for promoting loyalty and retaining customers, but is also crucial in moving target customers up the ladder of loyalty (Payne et al., 1995). RM brings stability and decreased uncertainty to the company by acting as a barrier to competitor entry and by keeping a stable and solid base of customers (Newell, 2009). For customers, close and long-term relationships yield three types of benefits: 1) psychological or social benefits (familiarity, friendship and information-sharing), 2) economic benefits

(discount or other money-saving benefits) and 3) customization benefits (tailor-made services/products), as noted by Otim and Grover (2006), Berry (1995), Relationship marketing orientation measures the extent to which a company engages in developing a long term relationship with its customers. Relationship marketing orientation is a multi-dimensional constructs consisting of five behavioral components: Trust; Commitment; Communications; Bonding, and Satisfaction.

Trust, which exists when one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity," is a central component in all relational exchanges (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). As Moorman (2005) argues, trust is important because it provides a basis for future collaborations. While service providers would like to work with a service provider whom they can trust, trust is not really the most important factor in shaping consumers loyalty. What consumers really want is value, which they define as the optimal combination of time, effort and cost savings given the benefits obtained (Woods, 2008).

Customers will be loyal to the mobile telecom companies if they trust that service providers will meet their needs and deliver the promise to them. Customers are likely to switch from one service provider to another in search for trustworthiness. According to earlier researchers like Berry (2010) are emphatic that in Telecom services, trust one of the basis for loyalty, and key contributor brand switching. If customers trust a company and share personal information, they will trust it to make recommendations about other products and services. Therefore; trust is

inversely related to self orientation (Buttle, 2004). Liu Yu (2008) defines commitment as the desire to continue with a relationship along with the willingness to work towards that continuance, and the expectation that the relationship will continue. Relationship commitment is a key aspect in building and maintaining business relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Ellis et al., 1993).

Relationship commitment is also an important component of relational exchanges. It is defined "as an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship" (Moorman et al, 2004). In marketing practice and research it is agreed that mutual commitment among partners in business relationships produces significant benefits for companies (Wetzls et al., 1998; Farrelly & Quester, 2003). Commitment is important to the study of relationships because it signals enduring stability at the conceptual level, and also serves as a reliable surrogate measure of long-term relationships at the operational and empirical level (Farrelly & Quester, 2003). Indeed, several relationship marketing studies have highlighted the importance of information exchanges in business relationships. In practice different methods of communicating have been used to develop customer satisfaction and loyalty these include; Word of mouth, telephone, written, through email and the internet (Woods 2008). Further, Communication as conceptualized by Mohr et al. (1996), comprises a combination of relationship building communication attributes which includes communication frequency, bi-directionality, formality, and influence activities.

Reciprocity is positioned as an important interpersonal form of stable marketing relationships. Indeed, it is suggested that reciprocity leads to personal well-being; thus providing an additional motivation, over and above economic incentives, to develop and maintain relationships (Simon et al 2007). Scholars like Houston et al., (1992), Ellis et al., (1993) have indicated reciprocity as a pertinent component of relationship marketing. They perceive reciprocity as a basis for the interference between exchange transactions and marketing activities. Sin et al., (2002) look at reciprocity as the dimension of relationship marketing that causes either party to provide favors or make allowances for the other in return for similar favors or allowances. In retail situations, reciprocity could take form of gift giving. A gift given to customers will result into customers returning the gift in form of loyalty to the organization. An organization that reciprocates to its customers therefore, is likely to make them loyal.

Another relationship mediator, Relationship satisfaction which is another relationship mediator, is described as a customer's affective or emotional state toward a relationship. Relationship satisfaction reflects exclusively the customer's satisfaction with the relationship and differs from the customer's satisfaction with the overall exchange (McDonald et al., 2002.) The focal point of marketing revolves around satisfying customer needs in a dynamic environment. Previous research indicates that relationship marketing offers retailers a means to make their customers satisfied (Bowen, 2003). Others perceive customer satisfaction as primarily an outcome of the interactive

relationship between the service provider and the customer (Aydin and Özer 2005). Where there is a network of mutual benefits as a result of long term relationships with its customers, a firm can add perceived value to its offerings, thereby satisfying customers (Chu, Kuo-Ming 2009). Value adding programmes include loyalty schemes, customer clubs and sales promotions (Francis, 2012)

METHODOLOGY

The research design, population of the study, sample size and sampling methods, data collection methods and data analysis used for the purpose of this study are discussed here below. The study employed a descriptive survey, the design was preferred because very large samples can be used, making the results statistically significant. The population of study comprised 2.4 million mobile users in Nairobi. Essar's mobile service provider Yu

brand with market share of 6.3 per cent, Orange Kenya's 10.8 per cent, Airtel Kenya, 22.9% and Safaricom 60% (Economic report 2012). A sample size of 384 respondents was arrived at by calculating the target population of 2.4million with a 95% confidence level and an error of 0.05. The study used two sampling techniques namely; simple random and stratified sampling techniques were used. Dividing the population into a series of relevant strata means that the sample is more likely to be representative (Saunders et al., 2007). The population was divided into four strata according to the 4 mobile service providers companies. The sampling points were the companies' care centers within Nairobi CBD. With a target sample of 384 respondents, a sample distribution per each company is based on the percentage market share of each company. Table 1 presents the summaries of sampling procedures and the total sample size.

Table 1: Sample distribution

Name of the company	Market share in %	Proportionate Sample
Safaricom	60	230
Airtel	22.9	88
Orange	10.8	41
Yu-Essar	6.3	24

Primary data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire which was administered by the researcher and research assistants. The sampling points were the companies' customer care centers within Nairobi CBD. The researcher sought permission from the management prior to

data collection exercise. Descriptive statistics technique was used to analyze the quantitative data while simple multiple regression was used to determine the relationship between the four elements of relationship marketing and customer loyalty.

RESULTS

Demographic data of the respondents showed that 56% were males and 44% were females. While 42 %of the respondents were between the age of 18 and 28 years of age, followed by those aged between 29-39years at 30%. Ages 40-50 and 51 years and above comprised of 13% and 10% respectively. Of the total respondents 51% indicated that they were connected to Safaricom Ltd, 24% were connected to Airtel Kenya, 16% were connected to Orange Telkom Kenya, and 10% were connected to Essar Yu.

Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty

The respondents were asked to describe their level of agreement with a number of statements in relation to Relationship between customer satisfaction and Customer Loyalty in mobile telecommunication industry in Nairobi. The statements are contained in table 2 below. Mean scores and standard deviation were computed for each statement and the findings presented here below.

Table 2: Satisfaction and customer loyalty

Satisfaction and customer loyalty	Mean	Std Dev
The company employees make sure that problems do not arise in business relationship	3.87	0.274
The company consistently meets customers' expectations	3.95	0.213
The company emphasizes customer satisfaction as opposed to rules and procedures	4.03	0.354
Customers are satisfied with the products/services from the company	4.21	0.258
The company has always responded to customers' needs	4.24	0.268
The company and all its service centers are easily accessible	4.36	0.364

From Table 2 above, the findings depict that the respondents agreed that with a number of statement namely the company and all its service centers are easily accessible with a mean score of 4.36, the company has always responded to customers' needs with a mean score of 4.24, customers are satisfied with the

products/services from the company with a mean score of 4.21, the company emphasizes customer satisfaction as opposed to rules and procedures with a mean score of 4.03, the company consistently meets customers' expectations with a mean score of 3.95, and the company employees make sure that

problems do not arise in business relationship with a mean score of 3.87. This confirms that satisfaction will influence the relative attitude of customers, their repurchase intentions and willingness to recommend the customer to other customers. Hence, customer satisfaction could be taken as a good predictor of future purchase behaviour, an indication of behavioural loyalty of the customer. Satisfied loyal customers generate profits because they are responsible for a large percentage of sales

and are less costly to develop than new customers. The low values of standard deviation indicated a consensus on statements regarding Satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Regression of Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty variable was regressed against the six variables of relationship marketing namely Trust, commitment, communication, satisfaction, word of mouth and reciprocity. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Regression Coefficients Results

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Co linearity statistics	
	B	Std Error				Beta	Tolerance
(Constant)	1.388	0.260		5.347	0.000		
Trust	0.138	0.058	0.116	2.363	0.019	.896	1.117
Commitment	0.150	0.056	0.096	2.016	0.045	.949	1.054
Communication	0.203	0.074	0.244	4.655	0.000	.781	1.280
Reciprocity	0.184	0.044	0.199	3.728	0.000	.754	1.327
Satisfaction	0.333	0.049	0.387	7.219	0.000	0.750	1.333
Word of mouth	0.162	0.056	0.143	2.896	0.004	.879	1.137

a Dependent Variable: Customer Loyalty

R Square = 0.525 F Statistic= 21.707

Adjusted R Square = 0.515 Sig F Square= 0.000

Predictors in the Model: (Constant), Reciprocity, Trust, Communication, Commitment, Satisfaction

The effects of the study variables on customer loyalty are shown in the Table 3 above; the R-

square 52.5% is adjusted for potential errors to 51.5%. This means that the joint effect of

trust, commitment, communication, Reciprocity, satisfaction and word of mouth, predict 51.5% of the variance in customer loyalty. However, the greatest predictor of the variation in relation to the magnitude of the Beta Coefficient is satisfaction (Beta =0.333, $t = 7.219$, $sig = 0.000$), followed by communication (Beta = 0.203, $t = 4.655$, $sig = 0.000$), reciprocity (Beta = 0.184, $t = 3.728$, $sig = 0.000$) and While trust takes the lowest (Beta =0.138, $t = 2.363$, $sig = 0.000$).

The F-Statistic (21.707, $sig = 0.000$) also shows that these variables are statistically significant predictors. This implies that all the variables were important in determining customer loyalty. A variable with very high tolerance contributes a lot of information to a model. In the regression output above all variables had very high tolerance. Trust, commitment, communication, satisfaction, and reciprocity are relatively important in creating customer loyalty, hence telecom companies must focus their attention on building, developing and sustaining long term relationship with their customers.

DISCUSSION

The positive relationship between service quality and customer loyalty indicates that when service quality increases, customer loyalty increases and vice versa. This is consistent with the findings of Ruyter et al. (1998), Boulding et al. (1993) and Brady and Cronin (2001) who suggested that high degree of service quality translates into loyalty. Loyalty of customers is expected to increase when customers' service quality expectations are met.

The positive relationship between price perception and customer loyalty also suggests that, customers who are happy about price offers are likely to stay connected to respective mobile operators. Thus, when price plans are favorable to customers, they remain loyal. On the other hand, as concluded by Peng and Wang (2006), customers may switch or change service provider if price offers are perceived not to be reasonable. Value offered found to be positively related to customer loyalty suggests that the promotional offers by service providers are worth the money and people wish to always participate in the promos offered by these operators. In other words, customers who are happy about value offered are likely to stay connected to respective mobile operators. As noted by Zeithaml (1988), customers will judge the value of consumption after contrasting benefits gained from products and services with their costs.

The positive relationship between brand image and customer loyalty implies that the two variables changes in the same direction. Increase in brand image may lead to increase in customer loyalty and vice versa. This consistent with Nguyen and Leblanc (2001) who demonstrated that corporate brand image relates positively with customer loyalty in three sectors (telecommunication, retailing and education). The study found out that companies must focus on those attributes of trust which consumers' base on to judge the trustworthiness of the services offered. This is concurrent with Fontenot et al (2004) who stated that, without serious trust from consumers, consumer loyalty will remain a myth than a reality amongst the business relationships.

If a firm is committed to a relationship with its customers, the customers are also likely to be committed to maintaining the relationship with that organisation, thereby becoming loyal to it. Relationship commitment is a key aspect in building and maintaining business relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Ndubisi (2007). The findings established that effectiveness of communication between the service provider and the consumer is very essential in influencing the trust that customers develop in the firm, their satisfaction with that firm and subsequently their loyalty to the firm. According to Sin et al (2005), effective and timely communication helps in formation of cooperation and trust in relationships and glues the customers to an organisation.

An organization that reciprocates to its customers is also likely to make them loyal. This in line with scholars like Hogan, (2004), Ndubisi (2007) who have indicated reciprocity as a pertinent component of relationship marketing. Finally customer satisfaction could be taken as a good predictor of future purchase behaviour, an indication of behavioural loyalty of the customer. Satisfied loyal customers generate profits because they are responsible for a large percentage of sales and are less costly to develop than new customers. This further echoes Leenders and Wierenga, (2008), who believes that the ultimate goal of customer satisfaction should be customer loyalty.

CONCLUSION

In general, this study looked at the relationship between customer relationship marketing and customer loyalty in the mobile telecommunication industry in Kenya. In

particular, the study examined the relationships between the study variables. All the relationships were significantly positively related. It is evident that from the study that relationship marketing when emphasized lead to repeat purchases and consumer loyalty.

This research concluded that businesses operating in an intensely price based competitive environment, dependent on high economies of scale and with low levels of staff-customer interaction are bound to suffer shocks in their market positions and profitability unless huge investments are made in more relational strategies like building trust, commitment, communication, reciprocity and satisfaction. The study further concluded that, the quality of a service is subjectively perceived by customers during the interactions with a firm and has critical impact on customers' evaluation of service quality. Effective communication of pricing policies as well as flexible pricing for various services offered play a great role in customer loyalty. The study further concluded that a positive brand image makes it easier for a firm to convey its brand value to consumers and also generates favorable customer loyalty. The study further concluded that customer satisfaction lead to customer loyalty. The study also concluded that there exist very high levels of customer loyalty in mobile telecommunication industry in Nairobi. Finally, the study found that Reliability has a direct effect on customer loyalty without necessarily using customer satisfaction as a conduit. The implication of this finding is that customers place a high premium on reliable mobile telecommunications services in Nairobi.

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