Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction: A study of Mobile Phone Services in Samoa

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Abstract

This research paper seeks to investigate the level of service quality and customer satisfaction based on customers' experiences and perceptions in the mobile telecom industry in Samoa. The methodology employed for this research was highly quantitative using random sampling of 116 customers in the city of Apia and in the town of Salelologa Savaii. The findings show that customer satisfaction is positive whilst service quality variables highlighted that the actual experience of the customer on all the criterion denoted positive experiences.
Keywords: *mobile services, service quality, customer satisfaction, Samoa*

Introduction

A number of countries in the past few decades have experienced dramatic changes in the prominence of services and the role that the service sector plays in their economies (Edwards and Croker, 2001; Nankervis and Pearson, 2002; Sharma, 2002). This change has been further boosted due to the technological advances in the mobile phone industry, and mobile phone users are now demanding for affordable and reliable services that meet specific individual needs, lifestyle and preferences (Sigala, 2002). Mobile phone industry is of no exception. The provider of service should be able to deliver quality services and maintain customer satisfaction in terms of demonstrated solid responses, fast download speed and at decent pricing of products/services (Cell Phone Providers Review, 2020). The fastest growing mobile service provider in the Pacific Island countries in terms of acquisition is Digicel Company. Since its launch in the Pacific in 2006, the company is in operation within six countries, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Nauru, Vanuatu, Tonga and Samoa (www.digicelpacific.com). Given that there is lack of research on mobile sector in Samoa, this research seeks to investigate the level of service quality and customer satisfaction based on customers' experiences and perceptions in the mobile telecom industry in Samoa. This research provides a suggestion as to how the service provider targeted their marketing efforts and scarce economic resources in improving service provision, service quality and customer satisfaction. This research could inform policy making and operational service management. This study advances our understanding of the marketing strategies employed by mobile service provider such as Digicel and its effect on service quality and customer satisfaction.

Literature Review

Parasuman et al. (1985) cited in Huang et al. (2014) define service quality as the difference between the expected service prior to consumption and the perception of the customer after service consumption or the comprehensive judgement in relation to the superiority of a service relative to challenging offerings (Huang et al., 2014). In line with the above authors are Bitner and Hubbert (1994) cited in Jafarnejad and Shafie (2013) stating that it is the overall impression of the customer in relation to the organizations services inferiority or superiority. Service quality according to Zeithaml and Brittner (1996) is the delivery of superior service relative to the expectations of the customer (Jafarnejad and Shafie, 2013). Overall it seems like most authors have a common ground on their views of the phenomenon. Service quality is an evaluation or an assessment of the service provider by the customer in terms of their expectations of the service prior to consumption, and their perception after service consumption. Furthermore, attached to service quality are dimensions to measure and evaluate quality of service delivery. Parasuraman et al (1985) cited in Huang et al. (2014) offered ten measurement dimensions of service quality. These are tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, credibility, security, competence, courtesy, understanding, access, and communication (Huang et al.,

2014). Later on in Parasuraman et al. (1988) a modified SERVQUAL scale using the five major dimensions extracted from the previous ten were applied. Tangibility refers to the outer look of the service personnel and the hardware facilities of service. Reliability represents the right implementation of the promised service content. Responsiveness denotes the human resources intention to assist and help the customers in providing timely service. Assurance refers to the professional knowledge and skills of the service personnel and their ability to convey trust and confidence. The last one, empathy, refers to the individualised customer care that is provided by the service personnel for the customer (Jafarnejad and Shafie, 2013). The amendment to the SERVQUAL scale is seen as more significant in terms of reliability and validity and was presented as a method of quality measurement that can be applied to different service sectors.

Customer satisfaction on the other hand is the ability of the organization to delight the customer in terms of superior service delivery that is of high value to the end user. Customer satisfaction is critical to the success and sustainability of any business (Huang et al., 2014). Satisfied customers hardly switch which has the potential of increasing an organizations customer base and enhance the firm's reputation (Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2013). Raising the level of customer satisfaction has a direct impact on the market share that leads to improved profits, positive word of mouth and it lowers marketing expenditure (Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2013; Srivastava and Sharma, 2013). Cheng et al. (2011) argue that customer satisfaction must be prioritised over profit making. This is because satisfied customers will tend to re-purchase and bring in profit (Cheng et al., 2011). Customer satisfaction bridges the gap in an evaluation of the difference between prior expectations and the actual performance of a certain product or service. It is an appraisal of service attributes that triggers great level of overwhelming results. It also fulfils the necessity and desires of the customers' and has the probability of creating lasting relations (Oliver, 1999; Junaid-ul-Haq et al., 2013; Chang, 2006; Choi and Sheel, 2012). Deng et al. (2010) group satisfaction into 2 groups namely transaction specific i.e. satisfaction after a given service encounter and general satisfaction which arises as a result of an overall rating of the service or product in previous experiences.

Methodology

The collection of the data was done using a structured questionnaire which was administered in both islands of Upolu and Savaii in Samoa to the customers, who utilised the services of Digicel Samoa Limited. Random sampling of 116 customers in the city of Apia and in the town of Salelologa Savaii and mean values were used to compare the service quality and customer service levels as well as the percentage of the customers' satisfaction level.

Results and Discussion

Table 1.0 on page 4, represents the satisfaction level for each criterion. From the above table, most customers were satisfied with the service provision in terms of time taken for activation (62.1%) and reactivation due to non-payment of bills (20.7%). Even though most were satisfied, there were still customers with neutral response (6.9 & 12.1%) and those who were very dissatisfied (3.4 & 2.6%). For the billing related matters of the prepaid customers, a high number of customers which accounted for 40.7% were satisfied with the accuracy of charges. 25% had neutral response and those who were dissatisfied accounted for 13.9%, whilst 7.4% were very dissatisfied. On the other hand, post-paid customers on the same category were asked for their satisfaction in terms of timely delivery of bills, and more than half (66.7 %) of the respondents were satisfied. 12% of them were very satisfied which is good and a few were either, neutral (14.8%), dissatisfied (3.7%) or very dissatisfied (7.4%). It is also interesting to note that the percentage of very dissatisfied customers was higher than the percentage of dissatisfied ones. Majority (66.7%) were satisfied with the accuracy of the bills, and an equal distribution of percentage which is 7.4% of customers were very satisfied, dissatisfied and very dissatisfied, while 11.1% respondents were neutral. Satisfaction rate due to resolution process of billing complaints had come to an interesting finding as well, where an equal amount of customer's

percentage (40%) were split into neutral and satisfied while the 20% of customers are dissatisfied. 51.9% of the customers were satisfied with the clarity of the bills issued in relation to transparency and understanding, 14.8% were neutral in their responses while 7.4% were dissatisfied with 3.7% of customers who are very dissatisfied. Customer satisfaction level due to help service /customer care showed interesting findings compared to the previous sections. The ease of access to call centre showed that 35.8% were satisfied, 11.3% were very satisfied with almost the same percentage of 30.2% who were dissatisfied with 5.7% very dissatisfied. 17% of customers showed a neutral response. Almost the same rate of satisfaction was shown in the satisfaction level with the response time taken to answer call by customer care, whereas 39.6% were satisfied with 3.8% very satisfied. Customers who were dissatisfied accounted for 28.3% while 7.5% were very dissatisfied. 18.9% of customers were neutral in their response to this question. Satisfaction with the problem solving ability of customer care showed that 43.4% of customers were satisfied with 1.9% very satisfied compared to the 26.4% dissatisfied customers with 5.7% very dissatisfied. Neutral responses accounted for 22.6%. Customers who were satisfied with the time taken to resolve the complaint accounted for 35.8% with 7.5% were very satisfied. Dissatisfied customers accounted to 24.5% with 7.5% being very dissatisfied. Neutral responses accounted for 24.5% of the responses. Network performance criterion in terms of reliability and availability showed that 50.9% of customers were satisfied, 12.1% very satisfied with signal availability. Dissatisfied customers stood at 13.8%, with very dissatisfied at 6%. 17.2% showed a neutral response. Majority of the customers (59.5%) were satisfied, 12.9% very satisfied with the ability to make or receive calls easily while 2.6% were dissatisfied with 6% very dissatisfied. 19% of customers have had shown a neutral response to this question. Satisfaction due to voice quality when making calls showed that most people (54.3%) were satisfied compared to the dissatisfied customers (7.8%). Customer satisfaction with the availability of network signal showed that 47.4% were satisfied with 10.3% very satisfied. Customers with the neutral response accounted for 25%, and the customers who were dissatisfied were represented by 12.9% with 4.3% being very dissatisfied. Satisfaction with the restoration of network signal problems showed that 50.9% of customers were satisfied with 7.8% being very satisfied. Neutral responses stood at 27.6% while customers who were dissatisfied accounted to 10.3% with 3.4% being very dissatisfied. For the quality of supplementary/value added services, majority of the customers (50.8%) were satisfied while 35.6% showed a neutral response. 6.5% were dissatisfied with 3.4% being very dissatisfied. It was obvious from the findings in the study that the overall customer satisfaction for each criterion mentioned denoted a positive outcome for the mobile service provider in the Samoan community.

Table 1.0: Customer Satisfaction Level

CRITERIA:	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Missing Values	Mean	Std. Dev	Variance
SERVICE PROVISION:	%	%	%	%	%				
How satisfied with time taken for activation	3.4	10.3	6.9	62.1	17.2	87	3.79	0.978	0.956
How satisfied with time taken for reactivation due to non bill payment	2.6	6	12.1	20.7	6	62	4.79	1.466	2.148
BILLING RELATED-PREPAID CUSTOMER:									
How satisfied with accuracy of charges	7.4	13.9	25	40.7	12	8	3.33	1.144	1.308
BILLING RELATED-POST PAID CUSTOMER:									
How satisfied with the timely delivery of bills	7.4	3.7	14.8	66.7	7.4	89	3.63	0.967	0.934
How satisfied with accuracy of bills	7.4	7.4	11.1	66.7	7.4	89	3.59	1.010	1.020
How satisfied with the resolution process of billing complaints		20	40	40		111	3.20	0.837	0.700
How satisfied with the clarity of the bills issued in relation to transparency	3.7	7.4	14.8	51.9	18.5	90	3.63	1.214	1.473
HELP SERVICE/CUSTOMER CARE									
How satisfied with the ease of access of call centre	5.7	30.2	17	35.8	11.3	63	3.17	1.156	1.336
How satisfied with the response time taken to answer call by customer care	7.5	28.3	18.9	39.6	3.8	63	2.98	1.152	1.327
How satisfied with the problem solving ability of customer care	5.7	26.4	22.6	43.4	1.9	63	3.09	1.005	1.010
How satisfied with time taken to resolve the complain	7.5	24.5	24.5	35.8	7.5	63	3.11	1.103	1.218
NETWORK PERFORMANCE, RELIABILITY and AVAILABILITY									
How satisfied with signal availability	6	13.8	17.2	50.9	12.1	9	3.49	1.067	1.139
How satisfied with the ability to make or receive calls easily	6	2.6	19	59.5	12.9	0	3.71	0.942	0.887
How satisfied with the voice quality	1.7	7.8	25	54.3	11.2	0	3.66	0.845	0.715
MAINTAINABILITY:									
How satisfied with the availability of network (signal)	4.3	12.9	25	47.4	10.3	0	3.47	0.991	0.981
How satisfied with the restoration of network signal problems	3.4	10.3	27.6	50.9	7.8	0	3.49	0.909	0.826
How satisfied with the quality of supplementary/value added services	3.4	8.5	35.6	50.8	1.7	57	3.39	0.81	0.656

Table 2.0: Service Quality Dimensions – Perception Versus Expectation

	N	Mean	N	Mean
Reliability	116	26.3	116	21.4
Assurance	116	15.1	116	12.4
Empathy	116	15.3	116	12.1
Tangibles	116	19.9	116	15.7
Responsiveness	116	28.3	116	23.2

In terms of all the criterion of service quality as per table 2.0, ie: reliability of services, assurance, empathy, and tangibles it was noted that the actual experience of the customer on all the criterion was far above the expected mean level. The overall results showed that mean value for perception of service quality was 76.2 whilst the expectation from service quality was 61.31. This meant that overall service quality was positive.

Conclusion

Customers in the Samoan community perceive customer satisfaction and quality service in different ways. Digicel customers were mostly satisfied based on the results of the study, whilst on service quality as well. Advertisements, stability of the pricing, competency in service delivery, fast SMS, social bonding, personalised relationships timely response, quality of greetings, responding to customer queries were all the marketing strategies used which went a long way in ensuring better service provision which overall impacted positive experiences of the customer. This study has demonstrated that the manner in which the service operations and customer interaction is designed by a mobile service provider is the basis of strengthening customer relations which obviously then ties to the bottom line of the company. As a way forward, sampling can be extended to a larger number.

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