Impact of Service Quality on Customers' Satisfaction: Empirical evidence from telecom sector of Pakistan

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Abstract

The long term success of organizations depends on many factors. The service sector organizations need to strive through service quality. These organizations try to satisfy customers by providing best quality services. The following study examines the service quality of the mobile service providers and satisfaction of the customers' with this quality. The study focuses only the SMS service provided by telecom organizations. Service quality is measured using 5 dimensions and its relationship is determined with customer satisfaction. The data was collected from 331 youngsters who use the SMS service of any company. Correlation and regression analysis are used to analyze the data. Results and discussions are presented.

Keywords: Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Telecom Sector,

1. Introduction

Every organization strives for long term success. There are various factors that contribute to the success of organization. Organizations with huge profits can't be considered as strong organizations as profit making is only one function of organizations. Keeping abreast with all the stakeholders is requirement for every organization to be an effective and successful organization.

Out of all the stakeholders customers are considered to be the king now a day. Retaining and attracting new customers is triumph card for present world businesses.

Quality is considered to be main determinant of customers' satisfaction in both manufacturing and service quality. As this research is restricted to service sector and further to cellular industry, only those variables are taken that proved to be dimensions of service quality. The five dimensions identified as part of the construct service quality are; tangibles, empathy, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988). Henkel *et al.* (2006) found satisfied customers of telecom sector have high extent of usage and intentions to repurchase in future. Those firms expecting to create and sustain advantages over competitors in this market should be seeking to deliver a superior and service quality. In other words, those firms must be paying attention to and invest considerable amount on programs that help increase the service qualityjust in case they want to survive with their customers (Sattari *et al.* n.d.).

SMS (Short Messaging Service) is one of the most widely used services of telecom sector. There are numerous studies conducted on customer satisfaction in various parts of the world, but no study has been conducted on the particular issue in Pakistan. So this study discovers customers' satisfaction with SMS in Pakistani cellular companies. There are few players in cellular industry in Pakistan so competition in those companies is very stiff and firms can't compromise on even a single element of performance. Quality is the most distinctive element that determines the distinction in the companies' performance. This study investigates relation of service quality and satisfaction with the elements of service quality given by Parasuraman *et al.* (1988).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Importance of the Customers Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is now becoming a corporate level strategy (Rust and Zahorik, 1993). Various authors and researchers have discussed importance of customers' satisfaction. In the words of Drucker (1973) Customers satisfaction is the base for business success. Customers satisfaction is corner stone for relationship between marketing and management (Claycomb & Martin, 2002), and the source of competitive advantage for organizations (Anderson *et al.*, 1994). Empirically, researches support the concept that there is a positive relationship between customers' satisfaction and financial performance (Rust and Zahorik, 1993; Anderson *et al.*, 1994).

Telecom sector like other sectors is not exception to the rule. Henkel *et al.* (2006) found satisfied customers of telecom sector have high extent of usage and intentions to repurchase in future. Greater the level of satisfaction of customers greater will be repurchase chances of customers (Iqbal *et al.* 2008) and reduced customer whip (Henkel *et al*, 2006; Serenko & Turel, 2004). Iqbal *et al.* (2008) also found that the satisfied customers will also recommend others to use the service provider. Kim *et al*. (2004) found that customers' satisfaction leads them to use current service and creates loyal customers for future. The customers who are loyal reported to produce higher retention rates, tend to commit a higher contribution of their category spending for the firm, and are more likely to pursue others to be a part of customers of the firm. (Zeithaml, 2000, Keiningham, *et al.* 2007). HERMES newsletter (2005) found that satisfaction along with perceived service quality and service value creates positive intentions of customers for usage and retention of mobile network.

2.2 Service Quality and customer satisfaction

Quality is the overall experience which a customer perceives through interacting a product and services. Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) has captured the definition of quality as taken as a whole a judgment. "Service quality has been described as a form of attitude, related but not equivalent to satisfaction that results from the comparison of expectations with performance" (Bolton and Drew, 1991; Cronin Jr. and Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman *et al.* 1988; Shepherd, 1999). Quality had a long term impact on the satisfaction of customers (Omachanu *et al.* 2008). Atalik & Arslan (2009) found that creating value and offering quality of service offered to customer creates loyal customers.

Kandampully (1998) says that Service loyalty of firms leads to loyal customers. He further found that loyal services offered to customers fulfills both present and future needs of customers. Customers' loyalty and trust is gained by service provider's commitment to provision of services, quality of services. Dissatisfied customers have no bond of loyalty with the organization. In the words of Turel *et al.* (2007) adoption decision of usage is determined by price, social, emotional and quality provided by the service provider.

Service quality is viewed as impression of the customer about the relative inferiority/superiority of a service provider and its services (Bitner & Hubert 1994, Tsoukatos & Rand 2006).

Customers' satisfaction and service quality are interlinked and these create value for customer and help him to make decision whether the service justifies the cost of the service. All elements of customer satisfaction have direct bearing on customers' satisfaction and value of service (Chau & Kao, 2009). Some studies identified four dimensions of service quality i.e. customer services, navigation and visual design, system reliability, quality of contents and speed of the connection. A positive relationship was found between service quality and the satisfaction of the customers.

The scale for service quality had been observed and critically evaluated as it uses gap scores, measurement of expectations, positively and negatively worded items, the generalizability of its dimensions, and the defining of a baseline standard for good quality (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Brown, Churchill and Peter, 1992, Oliver 1993). Some researchers have combined both expectations and perceptions into a single measure in order to overcome these issues, and found that this outperforms the SERVQUAL scale in terms of both Validity and Reliability (Babakus & Boller, 1992; Brown *et al.* 1993; Dabholkar *et al.*, 2000). There are five specific dimensions of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988). Cavana et al. (2007) says that there are five dimensions of quality Assurance, Responsiveness, Empathy, Reliability and Convenience; these dimensions are considered as significantly for quality concept.

Kim *et al.* (2004) found that call quality, value added services and customer support play a significant role in building customer satisfaction for cellular service subscribers and they tend to keep using current service as the level of the customer satisfaction is high that leads to customer loyalty (Kim *et al.* 2004). (Baumann *et al.* 2006) found that affective attitude, empathy and customer satisfaction leads the customers towards further recommendation to other users. Responsiveness leads to short term retention while affective attitude and empathy has long term impact on customers' satisfaction and retention. Cavana *et al.* (2007) found that assurance, responsiveness, empathy have strong relation with service quality, similarly, but reliability and convenience were found to be relevant but not highly significant. Cronin and Taylor (1992) said that the service quality leads to customer satisfaction. Omachonu *et al.* (2008) also found that perceived service quality was positively related to customers' satisfaction in short terms, but expected quality was positively related in both short and long terms. Churchill (1979) has defined the term "Customer satisfaction" as consequence of comparison between reward and

price by acquiring it. Lai (2004) found positive relationship between tangibles, empathy and assurance and customers' satisfaction. Same findings were given by Cronin and Taylor (1992) in their research. Researches have suggested that there are two schools of thoughts regarding relation of service quality and customer satisfaction: first one says service quality is the ancestor of customer satisfaction (Antreas & Opoulos, 2003; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Spreng & MacKoy, 1996) and 2nd school of thought is of the view that customer satisfaction helps to develop perception of high quality (Bolton & Drew, 1991).Deng et al (n.d.) argues that out of the contributories of customers satisfaction perceived service quality is significant determinant of customers satisfaction. He also found that customer satisfaction enhances customer loyalty along with trust and switching cost. It is evident that in order to retain customers, customers should be satisfied through service quality (Brown & Gulycz, 2001).
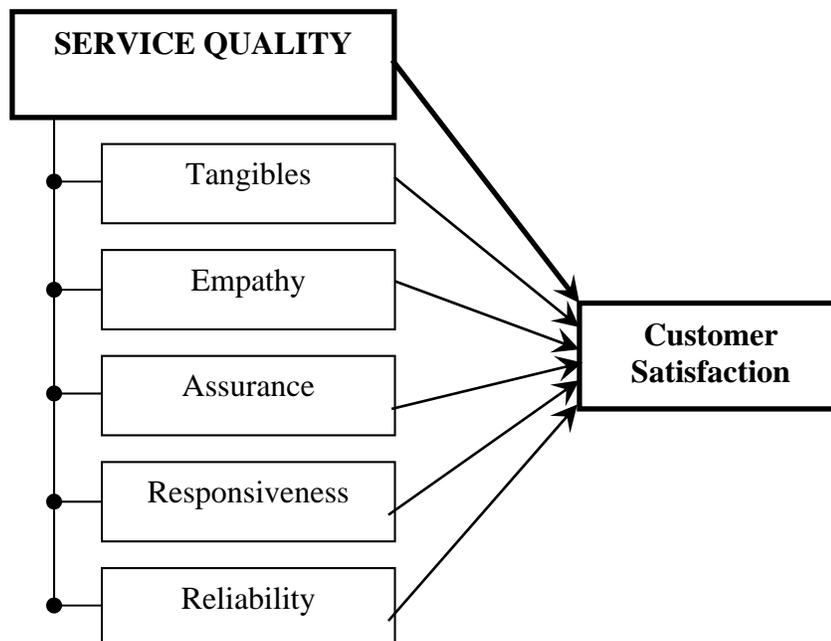
2.3 Customers' satisfaction

Service industry depends on continuous cycle of repurchase so retention of customers requires hard efforts by organizations (Anderson *et al.*, 1994). (Baumann *et al*. 2006) found that affective attitude, empathy and customer satisfaction leads the customers towards further recommendation to other users. Responsiveness leads to short term retention while affective attitude and empathy has long term impact on customers' satisfaction and retention. Chen (2008) says that perceived value of service and satisfaction with the service has significant positive effect on behavioral intentions of usage in future. Akbar & Parvez (2009) found that there is positive relation between customer satisfaction and loyalty of customer and leading to more favorable disposition of commitment to re-patronize. They also found that Customer satisfaction bridges between service quality and loyalty of customer. Mcdougall & Levesque (2000) found that there is a direct link between customer satisfaction and customer retention. Service quality can affect customers' intentions of usage through customers' satisfaction (Source not verified). Henkel *et al.* (2006) found satisfied customers of telecom sector have high extent of usage and intentions to repurchase in future. Cronin *et al.* (2000) found that service quality, service value, and satisfaction are all directly to customers intentions of usage. Patterson & Spreng (1997) found that satisfaction bridges between perceived value of service quality and intentions of usage. Melisidou & Theocharis (n.d.) found that satisfied customers not only stay as customers but create new businesses for the organization. Satisfied and loyal customers are source of higher

margins for organizations. Customer retention has lasting impact on the market share of the organization (steenkamp.1989). Canadian scholar Barnes (1997) emphasize that loyal customer would keep recommending to others which helps the organization to earn more customers.

Various other researchers, scholars and academicians have also commented on service quality and its impact on customer satisfaction and retention. Cöner and Güngör (2002) found the quality of service would leads to more loyal customer. Lai (2004) in his research in Singapore found that there is positive relationship between customer satisfaction and intentions of usage (retention). According to Fornell (1992) a satisfied consumer helps the firm to detain market share and to sustain it, creates customer loyalty, shrink consumer price sensitivity and lessen other operating cost. Similarly Jones and Sasser (1995) tied the satisfaction and loyalty together. Anderson *et al.* (2004) stated that quality leads to satisfied customers; Similarly Bolton & Drew (1991) found that the relationship by affirming that satisfaction situates influence on professed quality. Though Steenkamp (1989) mentioned quality as aid that retains the customer which assists to uphold share in the market; likewise Fornell (1992) acknowledged satisfaction program facilitate to retain customers. On the basis of above given literature following model and hypothesis can be drawn

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Hypothesis of the study

H$_1$ There is positive relationship between service quality and customers satisfaction

H1a   Tangibles are positively related with the customers' satisfaction

H1b   Empathy is positively correlated with the customers' satisfaction

H1c   Reliability is positively correlated to customers' satisfaction

H1d   Empathy is positively correlated to customers' satisfaction

H1e   Assurance is positively related with the customers' satisfaction

H2   Customers satisfaction is positively related with customers' retention

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Sample

In Pakistan majority of mobile users comprise youth. this research is also based on the data collected from the University students. The reason behind selection of university youth as sample is because it covers individuals covering major portion of mobile users and university students cover majority of youth and they are more vigilant and have great attraction for change and to retain these customers is difficult one. Youth pay more attention towards promotional advertisements of telecom companies. 400 students were selected from different universities and surveys questionnaire were personally administered. 331 questionnaires were received back having response rate of 82.75%.

4.2 Instrument and Measurement

To operationalize and measure the dimensions of customers' satisfaction the instrument was adopted from the research work of Lai (2004). It includes five dimensions of Tangibles, Responsiveness, Reliability, Empathy, and Assurance. Customer satisfaction and retention instrument were measured through the instrument of Yu *et al.* (2005). The survey questionnaire contained 25 questions, items including the personal demographics of the respondents like gender, age, area of belongingness, qualification where as remaining items were measured on 7 point Likert Scale.

4.3 Data Analysis

The research was conducted to measure the customers' satisfaction and customers' retentions regarding SMS in cellular companies of Pakistan. The Primary data was collected from the university students. The data was entered in Microsoft Excel 2007 and analyzed using SPSS 16.0. The results are as follows.

5. Results

The results regarding the issue are as follows.

Table 1: Mean and S.D for service quality, its dimensions and satisfaction

	Mean	Standard Deviation
SERVQUAL	4.8208	.71827
Tangibles	5.4003	1.15432
Empathy	3.3595	1.51529
Assurance	4.8520	1.20069
Responsiveness	5.0725	1.13993
Reliability	4.8741	1.05820
Satisfaction	5.2598	1.44249

The table shows the mean scores and standard deviation for the overall service quality and its dimensions. The mean score for satisfaction is also given. The instrument used a 7 point likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The mean score for service quality is 4.828 which indicates that respondents are slightly agree with the service quality of their SMS service providers. The scores on dimensions of service quality indicate that respondents are more satisfied on the 'tangibles' and 'responsiveness', moderately satisfied with two dimensions assurance and reliability, and less satisfied on the dimension 'empathy'. The satisfaction has a mean score 5.26 which indicates that overall people are slightly satisfied from their SMS service providers. The correlation between these dimensions is given below.

Table 2: Correlation between service quality, its dimensions, and satisfaction

		SERVQUAL	Tangibles	Empathy	Assurance	Responsiveness	Reliability
Tangibles	Pearson Correlation	.438[**]					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000					
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	-.058	-.086				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.290	.118				
Assurance	Pearson Correlation	.705[**]	.145[**]	-.253[**]			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.008	.000			
Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	.860[**]	.241[**]	-.323[**]	.539[**]		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		
Reliability	Pearson Correlation	.705[**]	.258[**]	-.119[*]	.394[**]	.479[**]	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.030	.000	.000	
Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.538[**]	.183[**]	-.236[**]	.425[**]	.521[**]	.435[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000

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

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation scores are presented within the table 2. Pearson correlation coefficient is applied to test the correlations. The table indicates the relationship between the overall services quality and customer satisfaction. The table also shows the relationship between the five dimensions of service quality with the satisfaction.

The results indicate that the overall service quality has a significant relationship with the customer satisfaction (r=0.538, p<0.01). This particular finding confirms the hypothesis H1 that the service quality has a positive and significant relationship with the customer satisfaction. The dimension 'tangibles' also shows a positive and significant relationship with the customer satisfaction (r=0.183, p<0.01). This particular finding confirms the hypothesis H1a that tangibles have a positive and significant relationship with the customer satisfaction. The dimension 'empathy' has strangely shown a negative and significant relationship with the customer satisfaction (r=-0.236, p<0.01). This particular finding does not confirm the hypothesis H1b that

empathy has a positive and significant relationship with the customer satisfaction. The dimension 'assurance' also shows a positive and significant relationship with the customer satisfaction (r=0.425, p<0.01). This particular finding confirms the hypothesis H1c that assurance has a positive and significant relationship with the customer satisfaction. The dimension 'responsiveness' also shows a positive and significant relationship with the customer satisfaction (r=0.521, p<0.01). This particular finding confirms the hypothesis H1d that responsiveness has a positive and significant relationship with the customer satisfaction. The dimension 'reliability' also shows a positive and significant relationship with the customer satisfaction (r=0.435, p<0.01). This particular finding confirms the hypothesis H1e that responsiveness has a positive and significant relationship with the customer satisfaction.

The stepwise regression was run to find out that whether the service quality is a predictor of the satisfaction of the customers. The results are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Regression Analysis (dependant variable 'satisfaction')

Regression	0.538
R^2	0.289
Adjusted R^2	0.287
Standard Error	1.217

F=134.004, Sig. F=.000

Table 3 explains that a relatively low percentage of the variation in satisfaction is explained by the variables entered in the equation (R-squared=28.9%, Adjusted R-squared=28.7%). Thus 28% variation in the satisfaction is explained by the service quality which is measured here using 5 dimensions. The F ratio is statistically significant as shown by the table 3. The other scores are given within table 4.

Table 4: Regression Analysis

Beta	S.E for Beta	t	Sig.
1.080	.093	.538	.000

Dependant variable, satisfaction

6. Discussions

The scores indicate that customers are slightly satisfied from the service quality of SMS service providers where tangibles and assurance score more than other dimensions and empathy has the lowest score. At the same time the correlations show that dimension empathy is negatively related with satisfaction while other four dimensions tangibles, assurance, responsiveness and reliability are positively related with the satisfaction. All the dimension have a significant relationship with the satisfaction of customers. The regression was run which indicated that the service quality predicts 28% change in satisfaction.

7. Future implementation of the study

As this study is conducted on only one service of cellular companies, its scope can be broaden and other services should also be included in the studies. This study is the first one of its nature in Pakistani scenario. This research provides a direction to the decision makers regarding the dimensions of service quality those require high level of attention.

8. Limitation of the study

This study is restricted to only one service (short messaging service) of cellular companies. Other services might provide different results.

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